

ON THE ENDEAVOR OF THE WAY

ALL BUDDHA TATHAGATAS,* who individually transmit inconceivable dharma, actualizing supreme, perfect enlightenment, have a wondrous way, unsurpassed and unconditioned. Only buddhas transmit it to buddhas without veering off; receptive samadhi* is its mark. Sitting upright, practicing Zen, is the authentic gate to free yourself in the unconfined realm of this samadhi.

Although this inconceivable dharma is abundant in each person, it is not actualized without practice, and it is not experienced without realization. When you release it, it fills your hand—how could it be limited to one or many? When you speak it, it fills your mouth—it is not bounded by length or width.

All buddhas continuously abide in this dharma and do not leave traces of consciousness where they are. Sentient beings* continuously move about in this dharma, but where they are is not clear in their consciousness.

The concentrated endeavor of the way I am speaking of allows all things to come forth in realization to practice beyondness* in the path of letting go. Passing through the barrier [of dualism] and dropping off limitations in this way, how could you be hindered by nodes in bamboo or knots in wood [concepts and theories]?

After the thought of enlightenment arose, I began to search

for dharma, visiting teachers at various places in our country. Then, I met priest Myozen,* of the Kennin Monastery, with whom I trained for nine years, and thus I learned a little about the teaching of the Rinzai School.* Priest Myozen alone, as a senior disciple of ancestor Eisai,* correctly transmitted the unsurpassable buddha-dharma; no one can be compared with him.

Later, I went to Great Song China, visited masters on both sides of the Zhe River, and heard the teachings of the Five Houses.* Finally, I became a student of Zen master Rujing* of Taibo Peak* and completed my life's quest of the great matter.

Then, at the beginning of the Shaoding Era [1228–1233 CE] of Great Song, I came back to Japan with the vision of spreading the teaching and saving sentient beings—a heavy burden on my shoulders. And yet I have put aside the hope of having the teaching prevail everywhere until the time of rising opportunity. For the time being I wander about like a cloud or a water-weed, studying the wind of the ancient sages.

Yet, there may be true students who are not concerned with fame and gain, who allow their thought of enlightenment to guide them and earnestly desire to practice the buddha way. They may be misguided by incapable teachers and obstructed from the correct understanding, and intoxicated in confusion they may sink into the realm of delusion for a long time. How can they nourish the correct seed of prajna* and encounter the moment of attaining the way? Because I am wandering about, which mountain or river can they call on?

Because of my concern for them, I would like to record the standards of Zen monasteries that I personally saw and heard in Great Song, as well as the profound principle that has been transmitted by my master. I wish to leave for students of the way the authentic teaching of the buddha's house. This is indeed the

The great master Shakyamuni entrusted dharma to Mahakasyapa* at the assembly on Vulture Peak*; it was then correctly

transmitted from ancestor to ancestor down to the venerable Bodhidharma. Bodhidharma went to China and entrusted dharma to the great master Huike*; this was the beginning of dharma transmission* in the eastern country. In this way, by direct transmission, it reached Huineng,* the Sixth Ancestor, Zen Master Dajian. Then the authentic buddha-dharma spread in China, and the teaching that is not concerned with concepts and theories took form.

At that time there were two outstanding disciples of the Sixth Ancestor: Nanyue Huairang* and Qingyuan Xingsi.* They both equally received the buddha's seal, as guiding masters of human beings and devas.* Their two lineages spread, and later the Five Gates opened: the Fayan School,* the Guiyang School,* the Caodong School,* the Yunmen School,* and the Linji School.* At present in Great Song China, only the Linji School prospers throughout the country. But in spite of their different styles, each of the Five Houses holds the seal of the buddha mind.

In China after the Later Han Dynasty [25–220 CE], the teachings of Buddhist scriptures were introduced and spread all over the land, but there was no conclusive teaching as yet. When Bodhidharma came from India [527 CE], the root of twining vines was immediately cut off and the pure, single buddha-dharma spread. We should hope that it will be like this in our country.

Now, all ancestors and all buddhas who uphold buddha-dharma have made it the true path of unfolding enlightenment to sit upright practicing in the midst of receptive samadhi. Those who attained enlightenment in India and China followed in this way. Thus, teachers and disciples personally transmitted this excellent method as the essence of the teaching.

In the authentic tradition of our heritage, it is said that this directly transmitted, straightforward buddha-dharma is the unsurpassable of the unsurpassable. From the first time you meet a master, without depending on incense offering, bowing, chanting buddha names, repentance, or reading scriptures, just wholeheartedly sit, and thus drop away body and mind.

When even for a moment you sit upright in samadhi expressing the buddha's seal in the three activities [body, speech, and thought], the whole phenomenal world becomes the buddha's seal and the entire sky turns into enlightenment. Accordingly, all buddha tathagatas increase dharma bliss, the original source, and renew their magnificence in the awakening of the way. Furthermore, all beings in the phenomenal world of the ten directions* and the six paths,* including the three lower paths,* at once obtain pure body and mind, realize the state of great emancipation, and manifest the original face. At this moment all things actualize correct awakening; myriad objects partake of the buddha body;* and sitting upright, a king under the bodhi tree,* they leap beyond the boundary of awakening. Immediately, all things turn the unsurpassably great dharma wheel* and expound the profound wisdom, ultimate and unconditioned.

This broad awakening comes back to you and a path opens up to help you invisibly. Thus, in zazen you invariably drop away body and mind, cut through fragmented concepts and thoughts from the past, and realize essential buddha-dharma. You cultivate buddha activity at innumerable practice places of buddha tathagatas everywhere, provide the opportunity for everyone to engage in ongoing buddhahood, and vigorously uplift the dharma of going beyond buddha.

Because earth, grass, trees, walls, tiles, and pebbles of the phenomenal world in the ten directions all engage in buddha activity, those who receive the benefits of wind and water are inconceivably helped by the buddha's transformation, splendid and unthinkable, and intimately manifest enlightenment. Those who receive these benefits of water and fire widely engage in cultivating the buddha's teaching based on original realization.* Because of this, all those who live with you and speak with you also receive immeasurable buddha virtue and extensively unfold the endless, unremitting, unthinkable, unnameable buddha-dharma throughout the entire phenomenal world.

All this, however, does not appear within perception. Because

it is unconstructedness in stillness, it is immediate realization. If practice and realization* were two things, as it appears to an ordinary person, each could be recognized separately. But what can be met with recognition is not realization itself, because realization is not reached with a discriminating mind. In stillness, mind and object merge in realization and go beyond enlightenment. Nevertheless, in the state of receptive samadhi, without disturbing its quality or moving a single particle, you engage the vast buddha activity, the extremely profound and subtle buddha transformation.

Grasses, trees, and lands that are embraced by this way of transformation together radiate a great light and endlessly expound the inconceivable, profound dharma. Grass, trees, and walls bring forth the teaching for all beings—common people as well as sages—and they in accord extend this dharma for the sake of grasses, trees, and walls. Thus, the realm of self-awakening and awakening others invariably holds the mark of realization with nothing lacking, and realization itself is manifested without ceasing for a moment.

This being so, the zazen of even one person at one moment imperceptibly accords with all things and fully resonates through all time. Thus in the past, future, and present of the limitless universe, this zazen carries on the buddha's transformation endlessly. Each moment of zazen is equally wholeness of practice, equally wholeness of realization.

This is so not only while sitting. A hammer strikes emptiness before and after its exquisite sound permeates everywhere. How can it be limited to this time and space? Myriad beings all manifest original practice, original face; it is impossible to measure. Even if all buddhas of the ten directions, as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges, exert their strength and with the buddha wisdom try to measure the merit of one person's zazen, they will not be able to fully comprehend it.

Question 1: We have now heard that the merit of zazen is lofty and great. But an ignorant person may be doubtful and say,

“There are many gates for buddha-dharma. Why do you recommend zazen exclusively?”

Answer: Because this is the front gate for buddha-dharma.

Question 2: Why do you regard zazen alone as the front gate?

Answer: The great master Shakyamuni correctly transmitted this splendid method of attaining the way and all buddha tathagatas of the past, future, and present attain the way by practicing zazen. For this reason it has been transmitted as the front gate. Furthermore, all ancestors in India and China attained the way by practicing zazen. Thus, I now teach this front gate to human beings and devas.

Question 3: We understand that you have studied the path of the buddha ancestors and correctly transmit the tathagatas' excellent method. This is beyond the reach of ordinary thought. However, reading sutras* or chanting buddha's name must be a cause of enlightenment. How can zazen, just sitting uselessly doing nothing, be depended upon for attaining enlightenment?

Answer: If you think that the samadhi of all buddhas, their unsurpassable great method, is just sitting uselessly doing nothing, you malign the Great Vehicle.* Such misunderstanding is like saying there is no water when you are in the middle of the ocean. Just now, all buddhas sit serenely at ease in receptive samadhi. Is this not the actualization of vast merit? What a pity that your eye* is not yet open, that your mind is still intoxicated!

The realm of all buddhas is inconceivable. It cannot be reached by intellect—much less can those who have no trust or lack wisdom know it. Only those who have the great capacity of genuine trust can enter this realm. Those who have no trust are unable to accept it, however much they hear it. Even at the assembly on Vulture Peak, there were those who were told by Shakyamuni Buddha, “You may leave if you wish.”

When genuine trust arises, practice and study with a teacher. If it does not, wait for a while. It is regrettable if you have not received the beneficence of the buddha-dharma.

Also, what do you understand of the merit attained by reading sutras, chanting buddha's name, and so on? It is futile to think that just moving the tongue and making a sound is meritorious Buddhist activity. If you regard these as the buddha-dharma, it will be further and further away.

Actually, the meaning of studying sutras is that if you understand and follow the rules of practice for sudden or gradual realization taught by the buddha, you will unmistakably attain enlightenment. In studying sutras you should not expend thoughts in the vain hope that they will be helpful for attaining realization.

To attempt to reach the buddha way by chanting buddha's name thousands of times is like foolishly trying to go south while heading north or to fit a square peg into a round hole. To be consumed with words and letters while ignorant of the way of practice is like a physician forgetting how to prescribe medicine—what use can it be? People who chant all the time are just like frogs croaking day and night in spring fields; their effort will be of no use whatsoever. Even worse off are those deluded by fame and gain who cannot give up such practices, because their acquisitiveness is so deep. Such people existed in the past; are there not even more today? What a pity, indeed!

Just understand that when a master who has attained the way with a clear mind correctly transmits to a student who has merged with realization, then the inconceivable dharma of the Seven Original Buddhas,* in its essence, is actualized and maintained. This cannot be known by those who study words. Therefore, set aside your doubt, practice zazen under a correct teacher, and actualize buddhas' receptive samadhi.

Question 4: The Lotus School* and the Avatamsaka School,* which have been transmitted to Japan, both expound the ultimate

of Mahayana teaching. Furthermore, the teaching of the Mantra School* was directly transmitted by Vairochana* Tathagata to Vajrasattva,* and its lineage from teacher to disciple since then has not been disturbed. This teaching expounds "Mind itself is buddha,"* and "Everyone's mind becomes buddha." They also advocate the correct enlightenment of the Five Buddhas* within one sitting, instead of practice through many eons. It is regarded as the supreme buddha-dharma. What extraordinary aspect of the practice you mention makes you recommend it, disregarding the practice of other schools?

Answer: You should know that in the buddha's house we do not discuss superiority or inferiority of the teaching, nor do we concern ourselves with the depth or shallowness of the dharma, but only with the genuineness of practice.

There are those who, attracted by grass, flowers, mountains, and waters, flow into the buddha way; and there are those who, grasping soil, rocks, sand, and pebbles, uphold the buddha's seal. Although the boundless words of the buddha permeate myriad things, the turning of the great dharma wheel is contained inside a single particle of dust. In this sense the phrase "Mind itself is buddha" is the moon reflected on water, and the teaching, "Sitting itself is becoming buddha" is a reflection in the mirror. Do not be concerned with the splendor of the words. By showing the buddha ancestors' excellent way of direct transmission, I am just recommending the practice of the immediate realization of enlightenment, hoping that you will become a true practitioner of the way.

For the transmission of buddha-dharma, the teacher should be a person who has merged with realization. Scholars concerned with words and letters cannot do it; this would be like the blind leading the blind.

Those within the gate of the buddha ancestors' correct transmission venerate an accomplished adept who has attained the way and merged with realization and entrust this master with the

upholding of buddha-dharma. Accordingly, when spirit beings of the visible and invisible realms come to pay homage, or when arhats* who have attained the fruits of realization come to inquire about the dharma, this master will not fail to clarify the means to illumine their mind-ground.* This is not known in other teachings. Buddha's disciples should study the buddha-dharma alone.

You should know that fundamentally you do not lack unsurpassed enlightenment, and you are replete with it continuously. But you may not realize it, and be in the habit of arousing discriminatory views, and regard them as real. Without noticing, you miss the great way and your efforts will be fruitless. Such discriminatory views create flowers of emptiness.

You may imagine the twelfefold causation of rebirth,* or the twenty-five existences,* and have such views as the Three or Five Vehicles,* and whether the buddha exists or not. But do not take up these views and regard them as the correct way of practicing buddha-dharma.

Instead, sit zazen wholeheartedly, conform to the buddha seal, and let go of all things. Then, leaping beyond the boundary of delusion and enlightenment, free from the paths of ordinary and sacred, unconstrained by ordinary thinking, immediately wander at ease, enriched with great enlightenment. When you practice in this way, how can those who are concerned with the traps and snares of words and letters be compared with you?

Question 5: Among the three learnings,* there is the practice of samadhi, and among the six perfections, there is the perfection of dhyana.* Both of these have been studied by all bodhisattvas from the moment of arousing the thought of enlightenment, and both are practiced by the clever and dull. The zazen you speak of seems to be something like this. Why do you say that zazen alone contains the true teaching of the Tathagata?*

Answer: Your question arises because the treasury of the true dharma eye, the single great matter* of the Tathagata, the unsur-

passable great dharma, has been named the Zen [Dhyana] School.* You should know that the name "Zen [Chan] School" appeared in China and spread eastward. It was not heard of in India. When the great master Bodhidharma sat facing the wall at the Shaolin Monastery on Mt. Song for nine years, neither monks nor laypeople knew the buddha's true teaching, so they called him the Brahman who concentrated on zazen. Subsequently, all buddha ancestors of every generation always devoted themselves to zazen. Heedless laypeople who saw them, without knowing the truth, informally called them the Zazen School. Later, the word *za*—sitting—was dropped, and nowadays it is called the Zen School.

The meaning of this teaching has been made clear through the discourses of our ancestors. Do not identify zazen with the dhyana or samadhi of the six perfections or the three learnings.

The authenticity of the transmission of this buddha-dharma is unhidden through all time. Long ago, at the assembly on Vulture Peak, the Tathagata entrusted venerable Mahakashyapa alone with the unsurpassable great teaching, the treasury of the true dharma eye, the wondrous heart of nirvana.* This event was witnessed by devas in the heavenly world; do not doubt it. The buddha-dharma is protected by these devas and its merit does not decrease.

You should know that the practice of zazen is the complete path of buddha-dharma and nothing can be compared with it.

Question 6: Why, among the four bodily presences* taught in the buddha's house, do you emphasize sitting alone, recommend Zen samadhi, and expound entry into realization?

Answer: It is impossible to know completely the methods by which all buddhas from the past practiced and entered realization, one after another. It is hard to know, but if you look into it, all buddhas are engaged in zazen as the source of realization. Don't look for anything else.

An ancestor said, extolling it, "Zazen is the dharma gate of enjoyment and ease." Thus, we know that sitting practice, among the four bodily presences, is the way of enjoyment and ease. Thus, it is not merely the practice of one or two buddhas, but all buddha ancestors have practiced in this way.

Question 7: Although it is clear that those who have not yet realized buddha-dharma should practice zazen and attain realization, for those who have already understood the buddha's correct teaching, what should they expect from zazen?

Answer: Although we should not talk about dreams with careless people, nor give a boat-pole to a woodcutter, nevertheless I will give instruction about this.

To suppose that practice and realization are not one is a view of those outside the way; in buddha-dharma they are inseparable. Because practice within realization* occurs at the moment of practice, the practice of beginner's mind is itself the entire original realization.

When giving instruction for zazen practice, we say that you should not have any expectation for realization outside of practice, because this is the immediate original realization. Because this is the realization of practice, there is no boundary in realization. Because this is the practice of realization, there is no beginning in practice.

In this way, Shakyamuni Tathagata and venerable Mahakashyapa were both fulfilled by practice within realization; great master Bodhidharma and Huineng—ancestor Dajian—were drawn in and turned by practice within realization. The ancient way of abiding in buddha-dharma has always been like this.

Practice just here is not apart from realization. Fortunately, each one of us has individually inherited this wondrous practice-realization; each beginner's endeavor of the way brings forth original realization in the realm of the unconstructed. To cultivate this

realization, which is inseparable from practice, buddha ancestors always caution you not to be lax in practice. Release this wondrous practice and original realization fills your hands. Liberate original realization and wondrous practice is upheld throughout your body.

As I personally saw in Great Song, the Zen monasteries in various places all had meditation halls, where five to six hundred, or even up to two thousand monks, practiced zazen day and night. When I asked the abbots* of these monasteries, masters who had inherited the seal of buddha mind, about the essential meaning of buddha-dharma, I was told that practice and realization are not two different things.

Therefore, I recommend to students who are already studying with a teacher, as well as all those distinguished people who seek for the truth of buddha-dharma, to practice zazen and endeavor in the way under the guidance of an authentic teacher, and investigate the teaching of the buddha ancestors without distinguishing between beginning or advanced, and without being concerned with ordinary or sacred.

An ancient ancestor once said, "It is not that there is no practice and no realization, it is just that they cannot be divided." It has also been said, "One who sees the way practices the way." Understand that practice is endeavor in the midst of attaining the way.

Question 8: In the past various teachers went to Tang China and became transmitters of the dharma and spread the scriptural teaching widely throughout Japan. Why did they ignore a practice such as you have described and introduce only scriptural teaching?

Answer: The reason these ancient teachers did not introduce this dharma is that the time was not yet ripe.

Question 9: Did those masters in ancient times understand this dharma?

Answer: If they had understood it, it would have spread.

Question 10: One master said:

Do not grieve over birth and death.* There is an immediate way to be free from birth and death, namely, to know the principle that the nature of mind is permanent. It means that because this body is already alive, it will eventually die, but the mind-nature will not perish. You should recognize that mind-nature exists within your body and is not affected by birth and death. This is the inherent nature. The body is a temporary form; it dies here and is born there and is not fixed. Mind is permanent; it does not change through past, future, or present.

To understand this is to be free from birth and death. If you understand this principle, you become free from ordinary birth and death and enter the ocean of mind-nature when your body perishes. When you flow into the ocean of mind-nature, you attain wondrous virtue comparable to all buddha tathagatas. Even though you realize this now, because your body is formed as a result of deluded actions in past lives, you are not the same as all sages. If you do not recognize this principle, you will go around in birth and death forever. Therefore, you should hasten to understand that mind-nature is permanent. If you just spend your whole life leisurely sitting, what can you expect?

Does such a statement as this accord with the path of all buddhas and ancestors?

Answer: The view you have mentioned is not at all the buddha-dharma, but rather the view of Senika,* an outsider, who said:

There is a soul* in one's body, and this soul, on encountering conditions, recognizes good and bad, right

and wrong. To discern aching and itching, or to know pain and pleasure, is also this soul's capacity. However, when the body is destroyed the soul comes out and is born in another world. So it appears to be dead here, but because there is birth in another place, it is permanent without dying.

To follow this view and regard it as the buddha's teaching is more foolish than grasping a piece of stone and regarding it as gold. Such shameful ignorance cannot be compared to anything. National Teacher Huizhong* of Great Tang criticized this deeply. To take up the mistaken view that mind is permanent and forms perish, while regarding this as equal to the wondrous teaching of all buddhas, or to create the causes of birth and death while wishing to be apart from birth and death—is this not foolish? It is most pitiable. Just understand it as the mistaken view of someone outside the way and do not listen to it.

As I cannot refrain from being sympathetic, let me disabuse you of your mistaken view. In buddha-dharma it is always taught that body and mind are not separate, and that nature and characteristics are not two. This has been known throughout India and China, so there is no room for mistake. In fact, from the perspective of permanence, all things are permanent; body and mind are not separate. From the perspective of cessation, all things cease; nature and characteristics cannot be divided. How can you say body perishes but mind is permanent? Is it not against the authentic principle? Furthermore, you should understand that birth-and-death is itself nirvana. Nirvana is not realized outside of birth-and-death. Even if you think that mind is permanent apart from the body and mistakenly assume that the buddha's wisdom is separate from birth-and-death, the mind of this assumption still arises and perishes momentarily and is not permanent. Is it not truly ephemeral?

You should know that the teaching of the oneness of body and mind is always being expounded in the buddha-dharma.

How then can mind alone leave the body and not cease when the body ceases? If body and mind are inseparable sometimes and not inseparable at other times, the buddha's teaching would be false. To think that birth-and-death must be rejected is the mistake of ignoring buddha-dharma. You must refrain from this.

The so-called dharma gate of the whole reality of mind-nature in buddha-dharma includes the entire phenomenal world, without separating nature from characteristics or birth from death. Nothing, not even bodhi* or nirvana, is outside of mind-nature. All things and all phenomena are just one mind; nothing is excluded or unrelated. It is taught that all dharma gates are equally one mind, and there is no differentiation. This is the Buddhist understanding of mind-nature. How can you differentiate this into body and mind and separate birth-and-death and nirvana? Already you are buddha's child. Do not listen to the tongues of madmen, quoting an outsider's view.

Question 11: Should those who are entirely engaged in zazen strictly follow the precepts?

Answer: Holding to the precepts and pure actions is the rule of the Zen Gate and the teaching of buddha ancestors. Even those who have not yet received the precepts or have broken the precepts can still receive the benefit of zazen.

Question 12: Is it all right for those who practice zazen also to engage in chanting mantras* or in the practice of shamatha [calming the mind] and vipashyana [analytical introspection]?

Answer: When I was in China and inquired of masters about the essence of the teaching, I was told that none of the ancestors who correctly transmitted the buddha's seal in India and China in the past or present had ever engaged in such a combination of practices. Indeed, without devoting yourself to one thing, you cannot penetrate the one wisdom.

Question 13: Should zazen be practiced by laymen and laywomen, or should it be practiced by home-leavers* alone?

Answer: The ancestors say, "In understanding buddha-dharma, men and women, noble and common people, are not distinguished."

Question 14: Home-leavers are free from various involvements and do not have hindrances in zazen in pursuit of the way. How can members of the laity, who are variously occupied, practice single-mindedly and accord with unconstructed buddha-dharma?

Answer: Buddha ancestors, out of their kindness, have opened the wide gate of compassion in order to let all sentient beings enter realization. Who among humans and heavenly beings cannot enter?

If you look back to ancient times, the examples are many. To begin with, Emperors Dai* and Shun* had many obligations on the throne; nevertheless, they practiced zazen in pursuit of the way and penetrated the great way of buddha ancestors. Ministers Li* and Fang* both closely served their emperors, but they practiced zazen, pursued the way, and entered realization in the great way of buddha ancestors.

This just depends on whether you have the willingness or not. It does not matter whether you are a layperson or home-leaver. Those who can discern excellence invariably come to this practice. Those who regard worldly affairs as a hindrance to buddha-dharma think only that there is no buddha-dharma in the secular world; they do not understand that there is no secular world in buddha-dharma.

Recently, there was a high official of Great Song, Minister Feng,* who was an adept in the ancestors' way. He once wrote a poem concerning his view of practice:

I enjoy zazen between my official duties,
and seldom sleep lying on a bed.

Although I appear to be a minister,
I'm known as a Buddhist elder throughout the country.

Although he was busy in his official duties, he attained the way because he had a deep intention toward the buddha way. When considering someone like him, reflect on yourself and illuminate the present with the past.

In Song China, kings and ministers, officials and common people, men and women grounded their intention on the ancestors' way. Both warriors and literary people aroused the intention to practice Zen and study the way. Among those who pursued this intention, many of them illuminated their mind-ground. From this, we understand that worldly duties do not hinder the buddha-dharma.

When the true buddha-dharma is spread widely in the nation, the rule of the monarch is peaceful because all buddhas and devas protect it unceasingly. If the rule is peaceful, the buddha-dharma gains eminence.

When Shakyamuni Buddha was alive, even those who previously had committed serious crimes or had mistaken views attained the way. In the assemblies of the ancestors, hunters and woodcutters attained enlightenment. As it was so for them at that time, it is so for anyone now. Just seek the teaching of an authentic master.

Question 15: Can we attain realization if we practice, even in this last age of decline?

Answer: In the scriptural schools they explain various categories, but in the true Mahayana* teachings, dharma is not divided into periods of truth, imitation, and decline. Instead, it is taught that everyone attains the way by practice. Particularly, in this correctly transmitted teaching of zazen, you are fulfilled with the treasure you already have, entering dharma and leaving bondage behind. Those who practice know whether realization is attained or not, just as those who drink water know whether it is hot or cold.

Question 16: Someone once said:

In buddha-dharma, if you comprehend the meaning of "Mind itself is buddha," that will be sufficient without any chanting of sutras or practicing the buddha way. To know that "buddha-dharma originally lies in the self" is the completion of attaining the way. Other than this, you need not seek from anyone else.

Why should you be troubled with practicing zazen and pursuing the way?

Answer: This statement is entirely groundless. If what you say were true, then whoever has a mind would immediately understand the meaning of buddha-dharma. You should know that buddha-dharma is realized by giving up the view of self and other.

If the understanding of "Self itself is buddha" were the attaining of the way, Shakyamuni Buddha would not have taken the trouble to elucidate the way. Let me illuminate this with an excellent case of an ancient master:

Once a monk called Director Xuanze* was in the assembly of Zen master Fayan.* Fayan asked him, "Director Xuanze, how long have you been in my community?"

Xuanze said, "I have been studying with you for three years."

The master said, "You are a recent member of the community. Why don't you ask me about buddha-dharma?"

Xuanze said, "I cannot deceive you, sir. When I was studying with Zen Master Qingfeng,* I mastered the state of ease and joy in buddha-dharma."

The master said, "With what words did you enter this understanding?"

Xuanze said, "When I asked Qingfeng, 'What is the self of a Zen student?' he said, 'The fire god is here to look for fire.'"

Fayan said, "That is a good statement. But I'm afraid you did not understand it."

Xuanze said, "The fire god belongs to fire. So, I understood that fire looks for fire and self looks for self."

The master said, "Indeed, you did not understand. If buddha-dharma were like that, it would not have been transmitted until now."

Then Xuanze was distressed and left the monastery. But on his way he said to himself, "The master is a renowned teacher in this country, a great leader of five hundred monks. His criticism of my fault ought to have some point."

He went back to Fayan, apologized, and said, "What is the self of a Zen student?"

Fayan said, "The fire god is here to look for fire."

Upon hearing this statement, Xuanze had a great realization of buddha-dharma.

In this way we know that mere recognition of "Self itself is buddha" is not penetrating buddha-dharma. If the understanding of "Self itself is buddha" were buddha-dharma, Fayan would not have given such criticism or guidance. Just inquire about the rules of practice as soon as you meet the master, single-mindedly practice *zazen*, and pursue the way, without leaving a half-understanding in your mind. Then the excellent art of buddha-dharma will not be in vain.

Question 17: We have heard that in India and China there have been people in the past and present who realized the way on hearing the sound of bamboo being struck, or who understood the mind when seeing the color of blossoms. Great master Shakyamuni was awakened to the way when he saw the morning star, and venerable Ananda understood the dharma when a banner-pole fell down. Furthermore, after the Sixth Ancestor in China among the Five Houses, there were many who realized the mind-ground with one word or half a phrase. Not all of them necessarily practiced *zazen* in pursuit of the way; is this not so?

Answer: Of those who clarified the mind upon seeing a form, or who realized the way upon hearing a sound, not one had any

discriminative thinking regarding the endeavor of the way or attached to self other than their original self.

Question 18: People in India and China by nature are refined. As they are in the center of civilization, when buddha-dharma is taught to them, they can immediately enter it. In our country since ancient times, people have been bereft of compassionate wisdom, and it is difficult for the right seed of *prajna* to be nourished. This is because we are uncivilized. Is it not regrettable? Thus, home-leavers in our country are inferior to even the laity in those great countries. Our entire nation is foolish and narrow-minded, and we are deeply attached to visible merit and are fond of worldly values. If such people do *zazen*, can they immediately realize buddha-dharma?

Answer: What you say is correct. Among people in our own country, compassionate wisdom does not yet prevail, and their nature is rather coarse. Even if the correct dharma is explained to them, its nectar becomes poisonous. Many easily pursue fame and gain, and it is difficult for them to be free from delusion.

However, entering into realization of buddha-dharma does not require the worldly wisdom of humans and devas as a boat for fleeing the world. When the Buddha was alive, someone realized the four fruits of attainment* when he was hit by a ball; another understood the great way by wearing a robe in jest. They were both ignorant people, like beasts, but with the aid of genuine trust they were able to be free from delusion. A laywoman serving food to an ignorant old monk, who was sitting in silence, was enlightened. This did not depend upon wisdom, scripture, words, or speech; it was only brought about by genuine trust.

Now, Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching has been spread in the billion worlds* for about two thousand years.¹ Those countries are

1. Recent scholarship indicates that Shakyamuni lived in the fifth century BCE, about 1,600 to 1,700 years before Dogen's time.

not necessarily the countries of compassionate wisdom, and the people are not necessarily sharp and intelligent. However, the Tathagata's true dharma in essence has a great inconceivable meritorious power and spreads throughout those countries when the time is ripe.

If you practice with genuine trust, you will attain the way, regardless of being sharp or dull. Do not think that buddha-dharma cannot be understood in this country because this is not a country of compassionate wisdom and people are foolish. In fact all people have the seed of prajna in abundance; it is only that they have rarely realized it and have not yet fully received buddha-dharma.

This exchange of questions and answers may have been rather confusing; a number of times flowers of emptiness were made to bloom. However, because the meaning of zazen in pursuit of the way has not been transmitted in this country, those who wish to know about it may be regretful. Therefore, for the sake of those who wish to practice, I have recorded some of the essential teachings of the clear-eyed teachers, which I acquired in China. Beyond this, guidelines for practice places and regulations for monasteries are more than I can mention now. They should not be presented casually.

Our country lies to the east of the dragon ocean, far from China, but the Buddha's teaching was transmitted eastward to Japan, about the time of Emperors Kimmei* and Yomei.* This is the good fortune of our people, yet the philosophy and rituals have been entangled, and authentic practice was not established. Now, if you make patched robes and mended bowls your whole life, build a grass-roofed hut near a mossy cliff or white rock, and practice sitting upright, you immediately go beyond buddha and directly master the great matter of your life's study. This is the admonition of Dragon Fang* [Longya], the transmitted way of practice of Mt. Rooster-foot [where Mahakashyapa practiced]. Concerning the method of zazen, I would refer you to "Recom-

mending Zazen to All People," which I wrote during the Karoku Era [1225-1227 CE].

Although a king's edict is needed for spreading dharma in the country, if we think of the Buddha entrusting the dharma to kings and ministers on Vulture Peak, all the kings and ministers who have appeared in the billion worlds are born because of their wish from a previous birth to protect and guard buddha-dharma. Where this teaching prevails, is there any place that is not a buddha land? Thus, spreading the way of buddha ancestors does not depend upon place or circumstance. Just consider today as the beginning.

I have written this to leave for people of excellence who aspire for buddha-dharma and for true students who, wandering like water-weeds, seek the way.

Mid-autumn day [the fifteenth day of the eighth month] in the third year of the Kanki Era [1231], by Dogen, who has transmitted dharma from Song China.

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