

# Chan Buddhism

Bodhidharma

*Outline of Practice*

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MANY roads lead to the Path (*Dao*), but basically there are only two: reason and practice. To enter by reason 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's shrouded by sensation and delusion. Those who turn from delusion back to reality, who meditate on walls, the absence of self and other, the oneness of mortal and sage, and who remain unmoved even by scriptures are in complete and unspoken agreement with reason. Without moving, without effort, they enter, we say, by reason.

To enter by practice refers to four all-inclusive practices: suffering injustice, adapting to conditions, seeking nothing, and practicing the Dharma.

First, suffering injustice. When those who search for the Path encounter adversity, they should think to themselves, "In countless ages gone by, I've 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'm punished by my past. Neither gods nor men 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 understanding you're in harmony with reason. And by suffering injustice you enter the Path.

Second, adapting to conditions. As mortals, we're ruled by conditions, not by ourselves. 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. 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 (*wu*). People of this world are deluded. They're always longing for something—always, in a word, seeking. But the wise wake up. They choose reason over custom. They fix their minds on the sublime and let their bodies change with the seasons. All phenomena are empty (*wu*). They



*Hui-neng cutting the bamboo. Liang K'ai, early 13<sup>th</sup> century.*

contain nothing worth desiring. Calamity forever alternates with Prosperity. To dwell in the three realms' is to dwell in a burning house. To have a body is to suffer. Does anyone with a body know peace? Those who understand this detach themselves from all that exists and stop imagining or seeking anything. The sutras say, "To seek is to suffer. To seek nothing is bliss." When you seek nothing, you're on the Path.

Fourth, practicing the Dharma. The Dharma is the truth that all natures are pure. By this truth, all appearances are empty (*wu*). Defilement and attachment, subject and object don't exist. The sutras say, "The Dharma includes no being because it's free from the impurity of being, and the Dharma includes no self because it's free from the impurity of self." Those wise enough to believe and understand this truth are bound to practice according to the Dharma. And since that which 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're able to help others and glorify the Way (*Dao*) of Enlightenment. And as with charity, they also practice the other virtues. But while practicing the six virtues to eliminate delusion, they practice nothing at all. This is what's meant by practicing the Dharma.

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#### *Bloodstream Sermon*

EVERYTHING that appears in the three realms comes from the mind. Hence buddhas of the past and future teach mind to mind without bothering about definitions!

*But if they don't define it, what do they mean by mind?*

You ask. That's your mind. I answer. That's my mind. If I had no mind, how could I answer? If you had no mind, how could you ask? That which asks is your mind. Through endless kalpas without beginning, whatever you do, wherever you are, that's your real mind, that's your real buddha. *This mind is the buddha* says the same thing. Beyond this mind you'll never find another buddha. To search for enlightenment or nirvana beyond this mind is impossible. The reality of your own self-nature, the absence of cause and effect, is what's meant by mind. Your mind is nirvana. You might think you can find a buddha or enlightenment somewhere beyond the mind, but such a place doesn't exist.

Trying to find a buddha or enlightenment is like trying to grab space. Space has a name but no form. It's not something you can pick up or put down. And you certainly can't grab it. Beyond this mind you'll never see a buddha. The buddha is a product of your mind. Why look for a buddha beyond this mind?

Buddhas of the past and future only talk about this mind. The mind is the buddha, and the buddha is the mind. Beyond the mind there's no buddha, and beyond the buddha there's no mind. If you think there's a buddha beyond the mind, where is he? There's no buddha beyond the mind, so why envision one? You can't know your real mind as long as you deceive yourself. As long as you're enthralled by a lifeless form, you're not free. If you don't believe me, deceiving yourself won't help. It's not the buddha's fault. People, though, are deluded. They're unaware that their own mind is the buddha. Otherwise they wouldn't look for a buddha outside the mind.

Buddhas don't save buddhas. If you use your mind to look for a buddha, you won't see the buddha. As long as you look for a buddha somewhere else, you'll never see that your own mind is the buddha. Don't use a buddha to worship a buddha. And don't use the mind to invoke a buddha. Buddhas don't recite sutras. Buddhas don't keep precepts. And buddhas don't break precepts. Buddhas don't keep or break anything. Buddhas don't do good or evil.

To find a buddha, you have to see your nature. Whoever sees his nature is a buddha. If you don't see your nature, invoking buddhas, reciting sutras, making offerings, and keeping precepts are all useless. Invoking buddhas results in good karma, reciting sutras results in a good memory; keeping precepts results in a good rebirth, and making offerings results in future blessings—but no buddha.

If you don't understand by yourself, you'll have to find a teacher to get to the bottom of life and death. But unless he sees his nature, such a person isn't a teacher. Even if he can recite the Twelffold Canon, he can't escape the Wheel of Birth and Death. He suffers in the three realms without hope of release.

Long ago, the monk Good Star was able to recite the entire Canon. But he didn't escape the Wheel, because he didn't see his nature. If this was the case with Good Star, then people nowadays who recite a few sutras or shastras and think it's the Dharma are fools. Unless you see your mind, reciting so much prose is useless.

To find a buddha all you have to do is see your nature. Your nature is the buddha. And the buddha is the person who's free: free of plans, free of cares. If you don't see your nature and run around all day looking somewhere else, you'll never find a buddha. The truth is, there's nothing to find. But to reach such an understanding you need a teacher and you need to struggle to make yourself understand. Life and death are important. Don't suffer them in vain. There's no advantage in deceiving yourself. Even if you have mountains of jewels and as many servants as there are grains of sand along the Ganges, you see them when your eyes are open. But what about when your eyes are shut? You should realize then that everything you see is like a dream or illusion.

If you don't find a teacher soon, you'll live this life in vain. It's true, you have the buddha-nature. But without the help of a teacher you'll never know it. Only one person in a million becomes enlightened without a teacher's help.

If, though, by the conjunction of conditions, someone understands what the Buddha meant, that person doesn't need a teacher. Such a person has a natural awareness superior to anything taught. But unless you're so blessed, study hard, and by means of instruction you'll understand.

People who don't understand and think they can do so without study are no different from those deluded souls who can't tell white from black. Falsely proclaiming the Buddhadharmā, such persons in fact blaspheme the Buddha and subvert the Dharma. They preach as if they were bringing rain. But theirs is the preaching of devils, not of buddhas. Their teacher is the King of Devils and their disciples are the Devil's minions. Deluded people who follow such instruction unwittingly sink deeper in the Sea of Birth and Death.

Unless they see their nature, how can people call themselves buddhas? They're liars who deceive others into entering the realm of devils. Unless they see their nature, their preaching of the Twelffold Canon is nothing but the preaching of devils. Their allegiance is to Mara, not to the Buddha. Unable to distinguish white from black, how can they escape birth and death?

Whoever sees his nature is a buddha; whoever doesn't is a mortal. But if you can find your buddha-nature apart from your mortal nature, where is it? Our mortal nature is our buddha-nature. Beyond this nature there's no buddha. The buddha is our nature. There's no buddha besides this nature. And there's no nature besides the buddha.

*But suppose I don't see my nature, can't I still attain enlightenment by invoking buddhas, reciting sutras, making offerings, observing precepts, practicing devotions, or doing good works?*

No, you can't.

*Why not?*

If you attain anything at all, it's conditional, it's karmic. It results in retribution. It turns the Wheel. And as long as you're subject to birth and death, you'll never attain enlightenment. To attain enlightenment you have to see your nature. Unless you see your nature, all this talk about cause and effect is nonsense. Buddhas don't

practice nonsense. A buddha is free of karma, free of cause and effect. To say he attains anything at all is to slander a buddha. What could he possibly attain? Even focusing on a mind, a power, an understanding, or a view is impossible for a buddha. A buddha isn't one-sided. The nature of his mind is basically empty (*wu*), neither pure nor impure. He's free of practice and realization. He's free of cause and effect.

A buddha doesn't observe precepts. A buddha doesn't do good or evil. A buddha isn't energetic or lazy. A buddha is someone who does nothing, someone who can't even focus his mind on a buddha. A buddha isn't a buddha. Don't think about buddhas. If you don't see what I'm talking about, you'll never know your own mind.

People who don't see their nature and imagine they can practice thoughtlessness all the time are liars and fools. They fall into endless space. They're like drunks. They can't tell good from evil. If you intend to cultivate such a practice, you have to see your nature before you can put an end to rational thought. To attain enlightenment without seeing your nature is impossible.

Still others commit all sorts of evil deeds, claiming karma doesn't exist. They erroneously maintain that since everything is empty (*wu*), committing evil isn't wrong. Such persons fall into a hell of endless darkness with no hope of release. Those who are wise hold no such conception.

*But if our every movement or state, whenever it occurs, is the mind, why don't we see this mind when a person's body dies?*

The mind is always present. You just don't see it.

*But if the mind is present, why don't I see it?*

Do you ever dream?

*Of course.*

When you dream, is that you?

*Yes, it's me.*

And is what you're doing and saying different from you?

*No, it isn't.*

But if it isn't, then this body is your real body. And this real body is your mind. And this mind, through endless kalpas without beginning, has never varied. It has never lived or died, appeared, or disappeared, increased or decreased. It's not pure or impure, good or evil, past or future. It's not true or false. It's not male or female. It doesn't appear as a monk or a layman, an elder or a novice, a sage or a fool, a buddha or a mortal. It strives for no realization and suffers no karma. It has no strength or form. It's like space. You can't possess it and you can't lose it. Its movements can't be blocked by mountains, rivers, or rock walls. Its unstoppable powers penetrate the Mountain of Five Skandhas and cross the River of Samsara. No karma can restrain this real body. But this mind is subtle and hard to see. It's not the same as the sensual mind. Everyone wants to see this mind, and those who move their hands and feet by its light are as many as the grains of sand along the Ganges, but when you ask them, they can't explain it. They're like puppets. It's theirs to use. Why don't they see it?

The Buddha said people are deluded. This is why when they act they fall into the River of Endless Rebirth. And when they try to get out, they only sink deeper. And all because they don't see their nature. If people weren't deluded, why would they ask about something right in front of them? Not one of them understands the movement of his own hands and feet. The Buddha wasn't mistaken. Deluded people don't know who they are. Something so hard to fathom is known by a buddha and no one else. Only the wise know this mind, this mind called dharma-nature, this mind called liberation. Neither life nor death can restrain this mind. Nothing can. It's also called the Unstoppable Tathagata, the Incomprehensible, the Sacred Self, the Immortal, the Great Sage. Its names vary but not its essence. Buddhas vary too, but none leaves his own mind.

The mind's capacity is limitless, and its manifestations are inexhaustible. Seeing forms with your eyes, hearing sounds with your ears, smelling odors with your nose, tasting flavors with your tongue, every movement or state is all your mind. At every moment, where language can't go, that's your mind.

The sutras say, "A tathagata's forms are endless. And so is his awareness." The endless variety of forms is due to the mind. Its ability to distinguish things, whatever their movement or state, is the mind's awareness. But the mind has no form and its awareness no limit. Hence it's said, "A tathagata's forms are endless. And so is his awareness."

A material body of the four elements is trouble. A material body is subject to birth and death. But the real body exists without existing, because a tathagata's real body never changes. The sutras say, "People should realize that the buddha-nature is something they have always had." Kashyapa only realized his own nature.

Our nature is the mind. And the mind is our nature. This nature is the same as the mind of all buddhas. Buddhas of the past and future only transmit this mind. Beyond this mind there's no buddha anywhere. But deluded people don't realize that their own mind is the buddha. They keep searching outside. They never stop invoking buddhas or worshipping buddhas and wondering *Where is the buddha?* Don't indulge in such illusions. Just know your mind. Beyond your mind there's no other buddha. The sutras say, "Everything that has form is an illusion." They also say, "Wherever you are, there's a buddha." Your mind is the buddha. Don't use a buddha to worship a buddha.

Even if a buddha or bodhisattva should suddenly appear before you, there's no need for reverence. This mind of ours is empty and contains no such form. Those who hold onto appearances are devils. They fall from the Path. Why worship illusions born of the mind? Those who worship don't know, and those who know don't worship. By worshipping you come under the spell of devils. I point this out because I'm afraid you're unaware of it. The basic nature of a buddha has no such form. Keep this in mind, even if something unusual should appear. Don't embrace it, and don't fear it, and don't doubt that your mind is basically pure. Where could there be room for any such form? Also, at the appearance of spirits, demons, or divine beings, conceive neither respect nor fear. Your mind is basically empty. All appearances are illusions. Don't hold on to appearances.

If you envision a buddha, a dharma, or a bodhisattva and conceive respect for them, you relegate yourself to the realm of mortals. If you seek direct understanding, don't hold on to any appearance whatsoever, and you'll succeed. I have no other advice. The sutras say, "All appearances are illusions." They have no fixed existence, no constant form. They're impermanent. Don't cling to appearances, and you'll be of one mind with the Buddha. The sutras say, "That which is free of all form is the buddha."

*But why shouldn't we worship buddhas and bodhisattvas?*

Devils and demons possess the power of manifestation. They can create the appearance of bodhisattvas in all sorts of guises. But they're false. None of them are buddhas. The buddha is your own mind. Don't misdirect your worship.

*Buddha* is Sanskrit for what you call *aware, miraculously aware*. Responding, perceiving, arching your brows, blinking your eyes, moving your hands and feet, it's all your miraculously aware nature. And this nature is the mind. And the mind is the buddha. And the buddha is the path. And the path (*Dao*) is zen (*chan*). But the word *zen* is one that remains a puzzle to both mortals and sages. Seeing your nature is zen. Unless you see your nature, it's not zen.

Even if you can explain thousands of sutras and shastras, unless you see your own nature yours is the teaching of a mortal, not a buddha. The true Way is sublime. It can't be expressed in language. Of what use are scriptures? But someone who sees his own nature finds the Way, even if he can't read a word. Someone who sees his nature is a buddha. And since a buddha's body is intrinsically pure and unsullied, and

everything he says is an expression of his mind, being basically empty, a buddha can't be found in words or anywhere in the Twelfefold Canon.

The Way is basically perfect. It doesn't require perfecting. The Way has no form or sound. It's subtle and hard to perceive. It's like when you drink water: you know how hot or cold it is, but you can't tell others. Of that which only a tathagata knows men and gods remain unaware. The awareness of mortals falls short. As long as they're attached to appearances, they're unaware that "their minds are empty. And by mistakenly clinging to the appearance of things they lose the Way.

If you know that everything comes from the mind, don't become attached. Once attached, you're unaware. But once you see your own nature, the entire Canon becomes so much prose. Its thousands of sutras and shastras only amount to a clear mind. Understanding comes in midsentence. What good are doctrines?

The ultimate Truth is beyond words. Doctrines are words. They're not the Way. The Way is wordless. Words are illusions. They're no different from things that appear in your dreams at night, be they palaces or carriages, forested parks or lakeside pavilions. Don't conceive any delight for such things. They're all cradles of rebirth. Keep this in mind when you approach death. Don't cling to appearances, and you'll break through all barriers. A moment's hesitation and you'll be under the spell of devils. Your real body is pure and impervious. But because of delusions you're unaware of it. And because of this you suffer karma in vain. Wherever you find delight, you find bondage. But once you awaken to your original body and mind, you're no longer bound by attachments.

Anyone who gives up the transcendent for the mundane, in any of its myriad forms, is a mortal. A buddha is someone who finds freedom in good fortune and bad. Such is his power that karma can't hold him. No matter what kind of karma, a buddha transforms it. Heaven and hell are nothing to him. But the awareness of a mortal is dim compared to that of a buddha, who penetrates everything, inside and out.

If you're not sure, don't act. Once you act, you wander through birth and death and regret having no refuge. Poverty and hardship are created by false thinking. To understand this mind you have to act without acting. Only then will you see things from a tathagata's perspective.

But when you first embark on the Path, your awareness won't be focused. You're likely to see all sorts of strange, dreamlike scenes. But you shouldn't doubt that all such scenes come from your own mind and nowhere else.

If, as in a dream, you see a light brighter than the sun, your remaining attachments will suddenly come to an end and the nature of reality will be revealed. Such an occurrence serves as the basis for enlightenment. But this is something only you know. You can't explain it to others.

Or if, while you're walking, standing, sitting, or lying in a quiet grove, you see a light, regardless of whether it's bright or dim, don't tell others and don't focus on it. It's the light of your own nature.

Or if, while you're walking, standing, sitting, or lying in the stillness and darkness of night, everything appears as though in daylight, don't be startled. It's your own mind about to reveal itself.

Or if, while you're dreaming at night, you see the moon and stars in all their clarity, it means the workings of your mind are about to end. But don't tell others. And if your dreams aren't clear, as if you were walking in the dark, it's because your mind is masked by cares. This too is something only you know.

If you see your nature, you don't need to read sutras or invoke buddhas. Erudition and knowledge are not only useless but also cloud your awareness. Doctrines are only for pointing to the mind. Once you see your mind, why pay attention to doctrines?

To go from mortal to buddha, you have to put an end to karma, nurture your awareness, and accept what life brings. If you're always getting angry, you'll turn your nature against the Way. There's no advantage in

deceiving yourself. Buddhas move freely through birth and death, appearing and disappearing at will. They can't be restrained by karma or overcome by devils.

Once mortals see their nature, all attachments end. Awareness isn't hidden. But you can only find it right now. It's only now. If you really want to find the Way, don't hold on to anything. Once you put an end to karma and nurture your awareness, any attachments that remain will come to an end. Understanding comes naturally. You don't have to make any effort. But fanatics don't understand what the Buddha meant. And the harder they try, the farther they get from the Sage's meaning. All day long they invoke buddhas and read sutras. But they remain blind to their own divine nature, and they don't escape the Wheel.

A buddha is an idle person. He doesn't run around after fortune and fame. What good are such things in the end? People who don't see their nature and think reading sutras, invoking buddhas, studying long and hard, practicing morning and night, never lying down, or acquiring knowledge is the Dharma, blaspheme the Dharma. Buddhas of the past and future only talk about seeing your nature. All practices are impermanent. Unless they see their nature, people who claim to have attained unexcelled, complete enlightenment (anuttara-samyak-sambodhi) are liars.

Among Shakyamuni's ten greatest disciples, Ananda was foremost in learning. But he didn't know the Buddha. All he did was study and memorize. Arhats don't know the Buddha. All they know are so many practices for realization, and they become trapped by cause and effect. Such is a mortal's karma: no escape from birth and death. By doing the opposite of what he intended, such people blaspheme the Buddha. Killing them would not be wrong. The sutras say, "Since icchantikas are incapable of belief, killing them would be blameless, whereas people who believe reach the state of buddhahood."

Unless you see your nature, you shouldn't go around criticizing the goodness of others. There's no advantage in deceiving yourself. Good and bad are distinct. Cause and effect are dear. Heaven and hell are right before your eyes. But fools don't believe and fall straight into a hell of endless darkness without even knowing it. What keeps them from believing is the heaviness of their karma. They're like blind people who don't believe there's such a thing as light. Even if you explain it to them, they still don't believe, because they're blind. How can they possibly distinguish light?

The same holds true for fools who end up among the lower orders of existence or among the poor and despised. They can't live and they can't die. And despite their sufferings, if you ask them, they say they're as happy as gods. All mortals, even those who think themselves wellborn, are likewise unaware. Because of the heaviness of their karma, such fools can't believe and can't get free.

People who see that their mind is the buddha don't need to shave their head. Laymen are buddhas too. Unless they see their nature, people who shave their head are simply fanatics.

*But since married laymen don't give up sex, how can they become buddhas?*

I only talk about seeing your nature. I don't talk about sex simply because you don't see your nature. Once you see your nature, sex is basically immaterial. It ends along with your delight in it. Even if some habits remain, they can't harm you, because your nature is essentially pure. Despite dwelling in a material body of four elements, your nature is basically pure. It can't be corrupted. Your real body is basically pure. It can't be corrupted. Your real body has no sensation, no hunger or thirst, no warmth or cold, no sickness, no love or attachment, no pleasure or pain, no good or bad, no shortness or length, no weakness or strength. Actually, there's nothing here. It's only because you cling to this material body that things like hunger and thirst, warmth and cold, and sickness appear.

Once you stop clinging and let things be, you'll be free, even of birth and death. You'll transform everything. You'll possess spiritual powers that can't be obstructed. And you'll be at peace wherever you are. If you doubt this, you'll never see through anything. You're better off doing nothing. Once you act, you can't

avoid the cycle of birth and death. But once you see your nature, you're a buddha even if you work as a butcher.

*But butchers create karma by slaughtering animals. How can they be buddhas?*

I only talk about seeing your nature. I don't talk about creating karma. Regardless of what we do, our karma has no hold on us. Through endless kalpas without beginning, it's only because people don't see their nature that they end up in hell. As long as a person creates karma, he keeps passing through birth and death. But once a person realizes his original nature, he stops creating karma. If he doesn't see his nature, invoking buddhas won't release him from his karma, regardless of whether or not he's a butcher. But once he sees his nature, all doubts vanish. Even a butcher's karma has no effect on such a person.

In India, the twenty-seven patriarchs only transmitted the imprint of the mind. And the only reason I've come to China is to transmit the instantaneous teaching of the Mahayana: *This mind is the buddha*. I don't talk about precepts, devotions or ascetic practices such as immersing yourself in water and fire, treading a wheel of knives, eating one meal a day, or never lying down. These are fanatical, provisional teachings. Once you recognize your moving, miraculously aware nature, yours is the mind of all buddhas. Buddhas of the past and future only talk about transmitting the mind. They teach nothing else. If someone understands this teaching, even if he's illiterate he's a buddha. If you don't see your own miraculously aware nature, you'll never find a buddha even if you break your body into atoms.

The buddha is your real body, your original mind. This mind has no form or characteristics, no cause or effect, no tendons or bones. It's like space. You can't hold it. It's not the mind of materialists or nihilists. Except for a tathagata, no one else—no mortal, no deluded being—can fathom it.

But this mind isn't somewhere outside the material body of four elements. Without this mind we can't move. The body has no awareness. Like a plant or stone, the body has no nature. So how does it move? It's the mind that moves.

Language and behavior, perception and conception are all functions of the moving mind. All motion is the mind's motion. Motion is its function. Apart from motion there's no mind, and apart from the mind there's no motion. But motion isn't the mind. And the mind isn't motion. Motion is basically mindless. And the mind is basically motionless. But motion doesn't exist without the mind. And the mind doesn't exist without motion. There's no mind for motion to exist apart from, and no motion for mind to exist apart from. Motion is the mind's function, and its function is its motion. Even so, the mind neither moves nor functions, because the essence of its functioning is emptiness and emptiness is essentially motionless. Motion is the same as the mind. And the mind is essentially motionless.

Hence the sutras tell us to move without moving, to travel without traveling, to see without seeing, to laugh without laughing, to hear without hearing, to know without knowing, to be happy without being happy, to walk without walking, to stand without standing. And the sutras say, "Go beyond language. Go beyond thought." Basically, seeing, hearing, and knowing are completely empty. Your anger, joy, or pain is like that of a puppet. You can search, but you won't find a thing.

According to the sutras, evil deeds result in hardships and good deeds result in blessings. Angry people go to hell and happy people go to heaven. But once you know that the nature of anger and joy is empty and you let them go, you free yourself from karma. If you don't see your nature, quoting sutras is no help. I could go on, but this brief sermon will have to do.

Red Pine, trans. *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma* (New York: North Point Press, 1987).



### *The Platform Sutra*

[This first selection recounts the story of how Hui-neng became the Sixth Patriarch of Ch'an Buddhism. Hui-neng, who is depicted as an illiterate, manual laborer from a barbarian village, ends up being the one who earns the Ancestor's robe and bowl (the sign of the Patriarch) in demonstrating the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) in his verse brilliantly expressing *śūnyatā*, the fundamental emptiness of all things.]

Once, when the Patriarch had arrived at Pao-un Monastery, Prefect Wei of Shao-chou and other officials went there to ask him to deliver public lectures on Buddhism in the hall of Ta-fan temple in the city [Canton].

In due course, there were assembled [in the lecture hall] Prefect Wei, government officials, and Confucian scholars, about thirty each, and *bhikshus*, *bhikshunis*, Taoists, and laymen to the number of about one thousand. After the patriarch had taken his seat, the congregation in a body paid him homage and asked him to preach on the fundamental laws of Buddhism, whereupon His Holiness delivered the following address:

Learned Audience, our essence of mind [literally, self-nature], which is the seed or kernel of enlightenment [*bodhi*], is pure by nature, and by making use of this mind alone we can reach buddhahood directly. Now let me tell you something about my own life and how I came into possession of the esoteric teaching of the Dhyana [*Ch'an*] school.

My father, a native of Fan-yang, was dismissed from his official post and banished to be a commoner in Hsin-chou in Kwangtung. I was unlucky in that my father died when I was very young, leaving my mother poor and miserable. We moved to Kuang-chou [Canton] and were then in very bad circumstances.

I was selling firewood in the market one day, when one of my customers ordered some to be brought to his shop. Upon delivery being made and payment received, I left the shop, outside of which I found a man reciting a sutra. As soon as I heard the text of this sutra my mind at once became enlightened. Thereupon I asked the man the name of the book he was reciting and was told that it was the *Diamond Sutra*. I further inquired whence he came and why he recited this particular sutra. He replied that he came from Tung-shan monastery in the Huang-mei district of Ch'i-chou; that the abbot in charge of this temple was Hung-jen, the fifth patriarch; that there were about one thousand disciples under him; and that when he went there to pay homage to the patriarch, he attended lectures on this sutra. He further told me that His Holiness used to encourage the laity as well as the monks to recite this scripture, as by doing so they might realize their own essence of mind, and thereby reach buddhahood directly.

It must be due to my good karma in past lives that I heard about this, and that I was given ten taels for the maintenance of my mother by a man who advised me to go to Huang-mei to interview the fifth patriarch. After arrangements had been made for her, I left for Huang-mei, which took me less than thirty days to reach. I then went to pay homage to the patriarch, and was asked where I came from and what I expected to get from him. I replied, "I am a commoner from Hsin-chou of Kwangtung. I have traveled far to pay you respect and I ask for nothing but buddhahood."

"You are a native of Kwangtung, a barbarian? How can you expect to be a buddha?"

I replied: "Although there are northern men and southern men, north and south make no difference to their buddhanature. A barbarian is different from Your Holiness physically, but there is no difference in our buddha-nature."

He was going to speak further to me, but the presence of other disciples made him stop short. He then ordered me to join the crowd to work.

"May I tell Your Holiness," said I, "that *prajna* [transcendental wisdom] often rises in my mind. When one does not go astray from one's own essence of mind, one may be called the 'field of merits.' I do not know what work Your Holiness would ask me to do."

"This barbarian is too-bright," he remarked. "Go to the stable and speak no more." I then withdrew myself to the backyard and was told by a lay brother to split firewood and to pound rice.

More than eight months after, the patriarch saw me one day and said, "I know your knowledge of Buddhism is very sound, but I have to refrain from speaking to you lest evildoers should do you harm. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir, I do," I replied: "To avoid people taking notice of me, I dare not go near your hall."

The patriarch one day assembled all his disciples and said to them, "The question of incessant rebirth is a momentous one. Day after day, instead of trying to free yourselves from this bitter sea of life and death, you seem to go after tainted merits only [i.e., merits that cause rebirth]. Yet merits will be of no help if your essence of mind is obscured. Go and seek for *prajna* in your own mind and then write me a stanza about it. He who understands what the essence of mind is will be given the robe [the insignia of the patriarchate] and the Dharma [i.e., the esoteric teaching of the Dhyana school], and I shall make him the sixth patriarch. Go away quickly. Delay not in writing the stanza, as deliberation is quite unnecessary and of no use. The man who has realized the essence of mind can speak of it at once, as soon as he is spoken to about it; and he cannot lose sight of it, even when engaged in battle."

Having received this instruction, the disciples withdrew and said to one another, "It is of no use for us to concentrate our mind to write the stanza and submit it to His Holiness, since the patriarchate is bound to be won by Shen-hsiu, our instructor. And if we write perfunctorily, it will only be a waste of energy." Upon hearing this, all of them made up their minds not to write and said, "Why should we take the trouble? Hereafter, we will simply follow our instructor, Shen-hsiu, wherever he goes, and look to him for guidance."

Meanwhile, Shen-hsiu reasoned thus with himself: "Considering that I am their teacher, none of them will take part in the competition. I wonder whether I should write a stanza and submit it to His Holiness. If I do not, how can the patriarch know how deep or superficial my knowledge is? If my object is to get the dharma, my motive is a pure one. If I were after the patriarchate, then it would be bad. In that case, my mind would be that of a worldling and my action would amount to robbing the patriarch's holy seat. But if I do not submit the stanza, I shall never have a chance of getting the dharma. A very difficult point to decide, indeed!"

In front of the patriarch's hall there were three corridors, the walls of which were to be painted by a court artist named Luchen with pictures from the *Lankavatara-sutra* depicting the transfiguration of the assembly, and with scenes showing the genealogy of the five patriarchs; for the information and veneration of the public.

When Shen-hsiu had composed his stanza he made several attempts to submit it to the patriarch, but as soon as he went near the hall his mind was so perturbed that he sweated all over. He could not screw up courage to submit it, although in the course of four days he made altogether thirteen attempts to do so.

Then he suggested to himself, "It would be better for me to write it on the wall of the corridor and let the patriarch see it for himself. If he approves it, I shall come out to pay homage, and tell him that it is done by me; but if he disapproves it, then I shall have wasted several years in this mountain in receiving homage from others that I by no means deserve! In that case, what progress have I made in learning Buddhism?"

At twelve o'clock that night he went secretly with a lamp to write the stanza on the wall of the south corridor, so that the patriarch might know what spiritual insight he had attained. The stanza read:

Our body is the bodhi tree,  
And our mind a mirror bright.  
Carefully we wipe them hour by hour,  
And let no dust alight.

As soon as he had written it he left at once for his room, so nobody knew what he had done. In his room he again pondered: "When the patriarch sees my stanza tomorrow and is pleased with it, I shall be ready for the dharma; but if he says that it is badly done, it will mean that I am unfit for the Dharma, owing to the misdeeds in previous lives that thickly becloud my mind. It is difficult to know what the patriarch will say about it!" In this vein he kept on thinking until dawn, as he could neither sleep nor sit at ease.

But the patriarch knew already that Shen-hsiu had not entered the door of enlightenment, and that he had not known the essence of mind.

In the morning, he sent for Lu-chen, the court artist, and went with him to the south corridor to have the walls there painted with pictures. By chance, he saw the stanza. "I am sorry to have troubled you to come so far," he said to the artist. "The walls need not be painted now, as the sutra says, 'All forms or phenomena are transient and illusive.' It will be better to leave the stanza here, so that people may study it and recite it. If they put its teaching into actual practice, they will be saved from the misery of being born in these evil realms of existence. The merit gained by one who practices it will be great indeed!"

He then ordered incense to be burned, and all his disciples to pay homage to it and to recite it, so that they might realize the essence of mind. After they had recited it, all of them exclaimed, "Well done!"

At midnight, the patriarch sent for Shen-hsiu to come to the hall, and asked him whether the stanza was written by him or not.

"It was, sir," replied Shen-hsiu. "I dare not be so vain as to expect to get the patriarchate, but I wish Your Holiness would kindly tell me whether my stanza shows the least grain of wisdom."

"Your stanza," replied the patriarch, "shows that you have not yet realized the essence of mind. So far you have reached the door of enlightenment, but you have not yet entered it. To seek for supreme enlightenment with such an understanding as yours can hardly be successful.

"To attain supreme enlightenment, one must be able to know spontaneously one's own nature or essence of mind, which is neither created nor can it be annihilated. From *kshana* to *kshana* [thought moment to thought moment], one should be able to realize the essence of mind all the time. All things will then be free from restraint [i.e., emancipated]. Once the *Tathata* [suchness, another name for the essence of mind] is known, one will be free from delusion forever; and in all circumstances one's mind is absolute truth. If you can see things in such a frame of mind you will have known the essence of mind, which is supreme enlightenment.

"You had better go back to think it over again for a couple of days, and then submit me another stanza. If your stanza shows that you have entered the door of enlightenment, I will transmit to you the robe and the Dharma."

Shen-hsiu made obeisance to the patriarch and left. For several days, he tried in vain to write another stanza. This upset his mind so much that he was as ill at ease as if he were in a nightmare, and he could find comfort neither in sitting nor in walking.

Two days after, it happened that a young boy who was passing by the room where I was pounding rice recited loudly the stanza written by Shen-hsiu. As soon as I heard it, I knew at once that the composer of it had not yet realized the essence of mind. For although I had not been taught about it at that time, I already had a general idea of it.

"What stanza is this?" I asked the boy.

"You barbarian," he replied, "don't you know about it? The patriarch told his disciples that the question of incessant rebirth was a momentous one, that those who wished to inherit his robe and dharma should write him a stanza, and that the one who had an understanding of the essence of mind would get them and be made the sixth patriarch. Elder Shen-hsiu wrote this formless stanza on the wall of the south corridor and the patriarch told us to recite it. He also said that those who put its teaching into actual practice would attain great merit, and be saved from the misery of being born in the evil realms of existence."

I told the boy that I wished to recite the stanza too, so that I might have an affinity with its teaching in future life. I also told him that although I had been pounding rice there for eight months I had never been to the hall, and that he would have to show me where the stanza was to enable me to make obeisance to it.

The boy took me there and I asked him to read it to me, as I am illiterate. A petty officer of the Chiang-chou district named Chang Tih-yung, who happened to be there, read it out to me. When he had finished reading I told him that I also had composed a stanza, and asked him to write it for me. "Extraordinary indeed," he exclaimed, "that you also can compose a stanza!"

"Don't despise a beginner," said I, "if you are a seeker of supreme enlightenment. You should know that the lowest class may have the sharpest wit, while the highest may be in want of intelligence. If you slight others, you commit a very great sin."

"Dictate your stanza," said he. "I will take it down for you. But do not forget to deliver me, should you succeed in getting the dharma!"

My stanza read:

There is no bodhi tree,  
Nor stand of a mirror bright.  
Since all is void,  
Where can the dust alight?

"When he had written this, all disciples and others who were present were greatly surprised. Filled with admiration, they said to one another, "How wonderful! No doubt we should not judge people by appearance. How can it be that for so long we have made a bodhisattva incarnate work for us?"

Seeing that the crowd was overwhelmed with amazement, the patriarch rubbed off the stanza with his shoe, lest jealous ones should do me injury. He expressed the opinion, which they took for granted, that the author of this stanza had also not yet realized the essence of mind.

Next day, the patriarch came secretly to the room where the rice was pounded. Seeing that I was working there with a stone pestle, he said to me, "A seeker of the path risks his life for the dharma. Should he not do so?" Then he asked, "Is the rice ready?"

"Ready long ago," I replied, "only waiting for the sieve." He knocked the mortar thrice with his stick and left.

Knowing what his message meant, in the third watch of the night I went to his room. Using the robe as a screen so that none could see us, he expounded the *Diamond Sutra* to me. When he came to the sentence, "One should use one's mind in such a way that it will be free from any attachment," I at once became thoroughly enlightened, and realized that all things in the universe are the essence of mind itself.

"Who would have thought," I said to the patriarch, "that the essence of mind is intrinsically pure! Who would have thought that the essence of mind is intrinsically free from becoming or annihilation! Who would have thought that the essence of mind is intrinsically self-sufficient! Who would have thought that the essence

of mind is intrinsically free from change! Who would have thought that all things are the manifestation of the essence of mind!"

Knowing that I had realized the essence of mind, the patriarch said, "For him who does not know his own mind there is no use learning Buddhism. On the other hand, if he knows his own mind and sees intuitively his own nature, he is a hero, a teacher of gods and men, a buddha."

Thus, to the knowledge of no one, the dharma was transmitted to me at midnight, and consequently I became the inheritor of the teaching of the Sudden school as well as of the robe and the begging bowl.

This selection taken from "The Enlightenment of Hui-neng," in *Entering the Stream: An Introduction to the Buddha and his Teachings*, Samuel Bercholz and Sherab Chodzin Kohn eds. (Boston: Shambala Press, 1993).

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[This second selection is from a later section of *The Platform Sutra*. Hui-neng is now the Sixth Patriarch and is giving a discourse on Ch'an meditation. One might detect a Daoist influence in Hui-neng's discourse. Through insight into the original nature of the mind one is able to attune to the Way. Hui-neng's emphasis on the importance of not understanding, of no-thought or non-thinking resonates with the Daoist concept of *wu-wei*.]

"Good friends, how then are meditation and wisdom alike? They are like the lamp and the light it gives forth. If there is a lamp there is light; if there is no lamp there is no light. The lamp is the substance of light; the light is the function of the lamp. Thus, although they have two names, in substance they are not two. Meditation and wisdom are also like this.

Good friends, in the Dharma there is no sudden or gradual, but among people some are keen and others dull. The deluded recommend the gradual method, the enlightened practice the sudden teaching. To understand the original mind . . . is to see into your own original nature. Once enlightened, there is from the outset no distinction between these two methods; those who are not enlightened will for long *kalpas* [eons] be caught in the cycle of transmigration.

"Good friends, in this teaching of mine, from ancient times up to the present, all have set up no-thought' as the main doctrine, nonform as the substance, and nonabiding as the basis. Nonform is to be separated from form even when associated with form. No-thought is not to think even when involved in thought. Nonabiding is the original nature of man.

"Successive thoughts do not stop; prior thoughts, present thoughts, and future thoughts follow one after the other without cessation. If one instant of thought is cut off, the Dharma-body separates from the physical body, and in the midst of successive thoughts there will be no place for attachment to anything. If one instant of thought clings, then successive thoughts cling; this is known as being fettered. If in all things successive thoughts do not cling, then you are unfettered. Therefore, non abiding is made the basis.

"Good friends, being outwardly separated from all forms, this is nonform. When you are separated from form, the substance of your nature is pure. Therefore, nonform is made the substance.

"To be unstained in all environments is called no-thought. If on the basis of your own thoughts you separate from environment, then, in regard to things, thoughts are not produced. If you stop thinking of the myriad things, and cast aside all thoughts, as soon as one instant of thought is cut off, you will be reborn in another realm. Students, take care! Don't rest in objective things and the subjective mind. [If you do so] it will be bad

enough that you yourself are in error, yet how much worse that you encourage others in their mistakes. The deluded man, however, does not himself see and slanders the teachings of the sutras. Therefore, no-thought is established as a doctrine. Because man in his delusion has thoughts in relation to his environment, heterodox ideas stemming from these thoughts arise, and passions and false views are produced from them. Therefore this teaching has established no-thought as a doctrine.

"Men of the world, separate yourselves from views; do not activate thoughts. If there were no thinking, then no-thought would have no place to exist. 'No' is the 'no' of what? 'Thought' means 'thinking' of what? 'No' is the separation from the dualism that produces the passions. 'Thought' means thinking of the original nature of the True Reality. True Reality is the substance of thoughts; thoughts are the function of True Reality. If you give rise to thoughts from your self-nature, then, although you see, hear, perceive, and know, you are not stained by the manifold environments, and are always free. The *Vimalakirti Sutra* says: 'Externally, while distinguishing well all the forms of the various dharmas, internally he stands firm within the First Principle.'

"Now that we know that this is so, what is it in this teaching that we call 'sitting in meditation' [*tso-ch'an*]? In this teaching 'sitting' means without any obstruction anywhere, outwardly and under all circumstances, not to activate thoughts. 'Meditation' is internally to see the original nature and not become confused.

"And what do we call Ch' an meditation [*ch'an-ting*]? Outwardly to exclude form is 'ch'an'; inwardly to be unconfused is meditation [*ting*]. Even though there is form on the outside, when internally the nature is not confused, then, from the outset, you are of yourself pure and of yourself in meditation. The very contact with circumstances itself causes confusion. Separation from form on the outside is 'ch'an'; being untouched on the inside is meditation [*ting*]. Being 'ch'an' externally and meditation [*ting*] internally, it is known as ch'an meditation [*ch'an-ting*]. The *Vimalakirti Sutra* says: 'At once, suddenly, you regain the original mind.' The *P'u-sa-chieh* says: 'From the outset your own nature is pure.'

"Good friends, see for yourselves the purity of your own natures, practice and accomplish for yourselves. Your own nature is the Dharmakāya and self-practice is the practice of Buddha; by self-accomplishment you may achieve the Buddha Way for yourselves.

The Master said: "Good friends, if you wish to practice, it is all right to do so as laymen; you don't have to be in a temple. If you are in a temple but do not practice, you are like the evil-minded people of the West. If you are a layman but do practice, you are practicing the good of the people of the East. Only I beg of you, practice purity yourselves; this then is the Western Land."

The prefect asked: "Master, how should we practice as laymen? I wish you would instruct us."

The Master said: "Good friends, I shall make a formless verse for you monks and laymen. When all of you recite it and practice according to it, then you will always be in the same place as I am. The verse says:

Proficiency in preaching and proficiency in the mind,  
 Are like the sun and empty space.  
 Handing down this sudden teaching alone,  
 Enter into the world and destroy erroneous doctrines.  
 Although in the teaching there is no sudden and gradual,  
 In delusion and awakening there is slowness and speed.  
 In studying the teaching of the sudden doctrine,  
 Ignorant persons cannot understand completely.  
 Although explanations are made in ten thousand ways,

If you combine them with the Principle, they become one.  
Within the dark home of the passions,  
The sun of wisdom must at all times shine.  
Erroneous [thoughts] come because of the passions;  
When correct [thoughts] come the passions are cast aside.  
Use neither the erroneous nor the correct,  
And with purity you will attain to complete nirvana.  
Although enlightenment [*bodhi*] is originally pure,  
Creating the mind that seeks it is then delusion.  
The pure nature exists in the midst of delusions,  
With correct [thoughts] alone remove the three obstacles.  
If people in this world practice the Way,  
There is nothing whatsoever to hinder them.  
If they always make clear the guilt within themselves,  
Then they will accord with the Way.  
All living things of themselves possess the Way;  
If you part from the Way and seek it elsewhere,  
Seek it you may but you will not find it,  
And in the end, indeed, you will be disappointed.  
If you aspire to attain the Way,  
Practice correctly; this the Way.  
If in yourselves you do not have the correct mind,  
You will be walking in darkness and will not see the Way.  
If you are a person who truly practices the Way,  
Do not look at the ignorance of the world,  
For if you see the wrong of people in the world,  
Being wrong yourself, *you* will be evil.  
The wrong in others is not your own crime,  
Your own wrong is of itself your crime.  
Only remove the wrong in your own mind,  
Crush the passions and destroy them.  
If you wish to convert an ignorant person,  
Then you must have expedients.  
Do not allow him to have doubts,  
Then enlightenment [*bodhi*] will appear.  
from the outset the Dharma has been in the world;  
Being in the world, it transcends the world.  
Hence do not seek the transcendental world outside,  
By discarding the present world itself.  
Erroneous views are of this world,  
Correct views transcend this world.  
If you smash completely the erroneous and the correct,  
[Then the nature of enlightenment (*bodhi*) will be revealed as it is].  
Just this is the Sudden Teaching;

Another name for it is the Mahāyāna.  
Having been deluded throughout a multitude of *kalpas*,  
One gains awakening within an instant.

The Master said: "Good friends, if all of you read this verse and practice in accordance with it, even if you are a thousand *li* away from me, you will always be in my presence. If you do not practice it, even if we are face to face, we will always be a thousand *li* apart. Each of you yourselves must practice. The Dharma doesn't wait for you.

"Let us disperse for a while. I am going-back to Mt. Ts' ao-ch'i. If any of you have great doubt, come to that mountain and I shall resolve that doubt for you and show you the Buddha-world as well."

All the officials, monks, and laymen who were sitting together bowed low before the Master, and there was none who did not sigh: "Wonderful, great awakening! "These are things we have never heard before. Who would have expected Ling-nan to be so fortunate as to have had a buddha born there!" The entire assembly dispersed.

This selection is from "Hui-Neng" in *The Roaring Stream: A New Zen Reader*, Nelson Foster and Jack Shoemaker, eds. (Hopewell, New Jersey: The Ecco Press, 1996).

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