

# Chan Buddhism



*The Sixth Patriarch Cutting the Bamboo,*  
Liang Kai (c. 1140-1210), Song Dynasty

## *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Ancestor*

THE SIXTH ANCESTOR, Dajian Huineng (638–713) is a preeminent figure of China's Zen heritage. The five traditional schools of Chinese Zen Buddhism all trace their origin through this famous master. The traditional story of Huineng's life reveals an iconoclastic personality whose defiance of religious convention sharpened the unique cultural flavor of Chinese Zen.

The main source of information about Huineng's life is a text of his teaching known as the *The Platform Sutra*. This work is traditionally regarded as a lecture by Huineng, recorded by his disciple, Fahai. The earliest extant copy of the work, found among papers taken from the Dunhuang caves, dates to about a century after Huineng lived. The legendary events of Huineng's life were central to political intrigues and factional religious struggles that occurred between the Northern and Southern schools of Zen during the eighth century. These facts, plus the dating of the Dunhuang manuscript, have cast some doubt on certain of the traditional stories about Huineng.

Despite the arguments surrounding the origin of the *The Platform Sutra*, this text of Huineng's teachings contains important and insightful material. From a traditional standpoint, the text expounds and supports the "sudden" nature of Zen enlightenment. Strictly speaking, this view does not recognize expedients such as chanting Buddha's name, reading sutras, etc., as being necessary to realize enlightenment.

There is scant solid evidence to support the traditional story of Huineng's life but his legend remains a cornerstone of Chinese religious culture. As told in the *The Platform Sutra*, Huineng lost his father at the age of three and was forced as a youngster to support his widowed mother by selling firewood in ancient Guangzhou City. He is said to have gained enlightenment instantly as he overheard someone reciting *The Diamond Sutra*. Resolving to follow the Dharma, he set off to seek out the Fifth Ancestor, Daman Hongren, who resided at Huangmei, a place near the Yangzi River hundreds of kilometers to the north. Upon their meeting, the Fifth Ancestor assigned Huineng to work in the kitchen.

Months later, Hongren invited the monks to each write a verse that would display his individual understanding of the Zen way. In the famous episode that followed, the head monk,

Shenxiu, purportedly wrote the following verse on a wall in the monastery:

*The body is the Tree of Wisdom,  
The mind but a bright mirror,  
At all times diligently polish it,  
To remain untainted by dust.*

According to the legend, Huineng, who was illiterate and had not yet gained ordination as a Zen monk, enlisted another monk's help to write his own verse upon the wall. It read:

*The Tree of Wisdom fundamentally does not exist,  
Nor is there a stand for the mirror,  
Originally, there is not a single thing,  
So where would dust alight?*

Upon reading Huineng's verse, Hongren recognized the author's profound level of spiritual realization. Afraid of the uproar that would result from bestowing authority on someone of such low status, Hongren is said to have met secretly with Huineng at night to pass him the traditional robe and bowl of succession, symbols of the mind-to-mind transmission of Zen. Hongren instructed Huineng to leave the monastery to avoid repercussions from the congregation. Thereafter, Huineng remained in obscurity for, by some accounts, sixteen years, before beginning to teach publicly.

The story cited above is the kernel inside more elaborate legends concerning Huineng's life and teaching. The legend's essence is of an individual, uncultured and unlettered, who injects a strong element of nonconformity into the traditional and structured religious hierarchy. If Bodhidharma's teaching of "directly pointing at mind" was misplaced among the more labored practices that later gained entry into the Zen tradition, the story of Huineng's life moved the scales back toward the First Ancestor's direct and simple teaching.

*The Platform Sutra* itself states that fundamentally there is no difference between "gradual" and "sudden" as they relate to enlightenment. However, the text also ascribes a lesser standing to the "gradual" idea, associating it with persons of "inferior ability."

A key part of *The Platform Sutra* involves an ordination ceremony. In it, Huineng introduces what he terms the "signless precepts," "signless penitence," and the "signless refuges." The idea of "signless" is here related to Huineng's emphasis on the nature of the mind as central to the Zen perspective, and punctuates this idea's importance in the tradition. Huineng focuses on thought and its contents as the arena fundamental to Zen practice and the place where genuine morality and penitence is practiced. Thus the monks in Huineng's ceremony are called on to say "All my former evil karma arising from ignorance, I fully confess and acknowledge, so that in a single moment it is extinguished, to not arise again forever. . . . Thoughts of former times, thoughts of the present, and thoughts of the future, all these will never again be carelessly defiled." Similarly, Huineng changes the "three refuges" taken by the monks in his ceremony. Buddhists take refuge in the "three jewels" of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—traditionally referring to the historical Buddha, his teachings, and the community of Buddhist followers; in the ceremony described in *The Platform Sutra* Huineng says, "Buddha is awakening, Dharma is rectitude, and Sangha is purity." Then he calls on the novitiates to take refuge in these three mental characteristics.

This emphasis on mental penitence as opposed to simply foreswearing sinful acts reflects a key component of how Zen remained independent and flourished in the "Southern school." By tilting the emphasis of the precepts toward mental penitence, *The Platform Sutra*, the "Treasure Text of the Zen Tradition," subtly changed the precepts to permit Buddhism to flourish in China's conditions. Huineng's Southern Zen has been termed the "Sixth Ancestor's Revolution." Undoubtedly, his synthesis of different streams of Mahayana Buddhism reflects the special insight of a talented and key historical figure.

China's Southern school Zen monks, in order to remain independent in their mountain monasteries far from the court, engaged in certain economic activities such as farming, which contradicted Buddhist admonitions against harming life and living only by *dana*, or donations. The evolution of the bodhisattva precepts, of which there were many versions, as well as the "signless precepts" of Huineng, reflected the adaption of Buddhism to Chinese society. By placing more emphasis on mental purity, ethical questions about not harming life and the related precepts were adapted in the practical conditions of China's Buddhist development.

Huineng resided as abbot at Baolin ("Precious Woods") Monastery near Shaozhou. According to tradition, he had twenty-six disciples. Among them were Nanyue Huairang and Qingyuan Xingsi, through whom all of the five most famous "houses" of the Southern school of Zen traced their ancestry to Huineng.

Many stories and legends about Huineng's life and teaching remain part of Zen lore. The events offered below are recorded in the Zen classic texts, *The Ancestral Hall Collection* and *The Platform Sutra*.

The monk Yin Zong expounded on the Buddhist sutras. One day during his lecture a storm came up. Seeing a banner waving in the wind, he asked his audience, "Is the wind moving or is the flag moving?"

Someone said, "The wind is moving."

Someone else said, "The flag is moving."

The two people held fast to their viewpoints and asked Yin Zong to say who was right. But Yin Zong had no way to decide, so he asked Huineng, who was standing nearby, to resolve the issue.

Huineng said, "Neither the wind nor the flag is moving."

Yin Zong said, "Then, what is it that is moving?"

Huineng said, "Your mind is moving,"

Those who would realize the practice of nonaction must arrive at the non-perception of the errors of people. This is nonmoving nature. Deluded people simply stop the movement of their bodies, but as soon as they open their mouths they are talking about peoples' rights and wrongs, and contradicting the Way.

In this school of Buddhism, what is it we call "sitting in Zen meditation"? In performing this practice no impediments exist. When no thoughts arise with respect to what is external, this is "sitting." When one calmly observes original nature, this is "Zen." So what is "sitting meditation?" Detachment from external things is "Zen." When internally the mind is composed, this is "*samadhi*." If one clings to external forms, then internally the mind is scattered and confused, If one is unattached to external forms, then internally the mind is composed. Original nature has self-purity and self-composure. It is only

when, through causation, some condition is encountered that confusion arises, Remaining apart from form one remains unperturbed, and samadhi is realized. Externally, Zen; internally, samadhi-together they are called "sitting Zen."

*The true thusness of self nature is the real Buddha,  
Perverse views and the three poisons are Mara,  
In times of delusion, Mara is in the room,  
When right views prevail then Buddha is in the hall,*

*If the three poisons are seen in one's nature,  
Then Mara there resides,  
Right views themselves root out the three poisons,  
Demons become buddhas and truth has no falsehoods. . .*

*If, in this life, you can realize the dharma gate of sudden awakening,  
Then you can personally see the World-Honored One.  
But if you do not grasp this, and go on seeking Buddha,  
Who knows when you may finally find true nature?*

*If you understand that you yourself have buddha nature,  
This is the pivotal cause for becoming a buddha,  
Those who don't look in their own minds, but seek Buddha externally,  
Just waste their effort and are ignorant,*

*The teaching of sudden awakening formerly was transmitted from India,  
To save the people of the world it must be practiced by everyone,  
Those of today who endeavor to offer the world the teachings of Buddhism,  
But know not this principle, are truly muddle-headed fools.*

When Huineng finished speaking these three verses, he said to his disciples, "Each of you practice this well. Today I say goodbye to you. After I die, don't mourn me in the usual manner of the world. If you receive other people's condolences, offerings, and observances, or [you wear] mourning clothes, then this is not the true school and you are not my disciples. You should act as though I were still in the world—sitting completely upright, not moving or resting, without creation or passing away, not going or coming, without positive or negative, not abiding or leaving, but just in solitary peace. This is the great way. After I die, just go on practicing as before, as though I were still here. When I am in the world and you go against my teaching, it is as though my life here as abbot were meaningless."

When he finished saying these words, at the third watch, Huineng suddenly died. He lived to the age of seventy-six.

[This selection from *The Platform Sutra* recounts the story of how Huineng became the Sixth Patriarch of Chan Buddhism. Huineng, 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.]

### *The Enlightenment of Huineng*

Once, when the Patriarch had arrived at Baolin Monastery, Prefect Wei of Shaozhou and other officials went there to ask him to deliver public lectures on Buddhism in the hall of Dafan 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 [*Chan*] school.

My father, a native of Fanyang, was dismissed from his official post and banished to be a commoner in Xinzhou in Kwangtung. I was unlucky in that my father died when I was very young, leaving my mother poor and miserable. We moved to Guangzhou [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 Dongshan monastery in the Huangmei district of Ch'i-chou; that the abbot in charge of this temple was Hongren, 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 Huangmei to interview the fifth patriarch. After arrangements had been made for her, I left for Huangmei, 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 Xinzhou 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 *prajñā* [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 *prajñā* 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 Shenxiu, 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, Shenxiu, wherever he goes, and look to him for guidance."

Meanwhile, Shenxiu 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 *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* 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 Shenxiu 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 Shenxiu had not entered the door of enlightenment, and that he had not known the essence of mind.

In the morning, he sent for Luchen, 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 Shenxiu to come to the hall, and asked him whether the stanza was written by him or not.

"It was, sir," replied Shenxiu. "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 *Tathātā* [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."

Shenxiu 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 Shenxiu. 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 Shenxiu 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 Jiangzhou district named Zang Diyong, 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 is adapted from:

*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 selection is from a later section of the *The Platform Sutra*. Huineng is now the Sixth Patriarch and is giving a discourse on Chan meditation. One might detect a Daoist influence in Huineng's discourse. Through insight into the original nature of the mind one is able to attune to the Way. Huineng's emphasis on the importance of not understanding, of no-thought or non-thinking resonates with the Daoist concept of *wuwei* (無為).]

"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 Vimalakīrti Sūtra* 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' [*Zuo-chan (zazen)*]? 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 [*chanding*]? Outwardly to exclude form is 'chan'; inwardly to be un confused is meditation [*ding*]. 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 'chan'; being untouched on the inside is meditation [*ding*]. Being 'chan' externally and meditation [*ding*] internally, it is known as chan meditation [*chanding*]. *The Vimalakirti Sutra* says: 'At once, suddenly, you regain the original mind.' *The P'u-sa-chieh (Scripture of the Way of the Bodhisattva)* 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-

mindful 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. Caoqi. 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 Lingnan to be so fortunate as to have had a buddha born there!' The entire assembly dispersed.

This selection is adapted from:

*The Roaring Stream: A New Zen Reader*, Nelson Foster and Jack Shoemaker, eds. (Hopewell, New Jersey: The Ecco Press, 1996).

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