



SHAMBHALA DRAGON EDITIONS

THE FIVE HOUSES OF ZEN



Thomas Cleary

“One of the foremost contemporary translators of classical Buddhist and Taoist literature, Cleary has made another valuable body of work available to Western readers with this collection of writings and teachings of some of the great Zen masters of China from the ninth and tenth centuries. The Five Houses of Zen that arose at that time were not actually separate schools or branches but instead represented distinctive styles of teaching carried out by certain Chinese Zen masters and perpetuated by their students. Cleary’s introduction provides useful historical information on the development of Zen in China during the T’ang Dynasty (619–906). His translations shine with clarity and express the insights of these great teachers with beauty and understanding.”

—Elizabeth Salt, *Library Journal*

ABOUT THE BOOK

For all its emphasis on the direct experience of insight without reliance on the products of the intellect, the Zen tradition has created a huge body of writings. Of this vast literature, the writings associated with the so-called Five Houses of Zen are widely considered to be preeminent. These Five Houses—which arose in China during the ninth and tenth centuries, often referred to as the Golden Age of Zen—were not schools or sects but styles of Zen teaching represented by some of the most outstanding masters in Zen history. The writings of these great Zen teachers are presented here, many translated for the first time. These include:

- The sayings of Pai-chang, famous for his Zen dictum “A day without work, a day without food”
- Selections from Kuei-shan’s collection of Zen admonitions, considered essential reading by numerous Buddhist teachers
- Sun-chi’s unique discussion of the inner meaning of the circular symbol in Zen teaching
- Sayings of Huang-po from *The Essential Method of Transmission of Mind*
- Excerpts from *The Record of Lin-chi*, a great classical text of Zen literature
- Ts’ao-shan’s presentation of the famous teaching device known as the Five Ranks
- Selections of poetry from the *Cascade Collection* by Hsueh-tou, renowned for his poetic commentaries on the classic *Blue Cliff Record*
- Yung-ming’s teachings on how to balance the two basic aspects of meditation: concentration and insight

THOMAS CLEARY holds a PhD in East Asian Languages and Civilizations from Harvard University and a JD from the University of California, Berkeley, Boalt Hall School of Law. He is the translator of over fifty volumes of Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, and Islamic texts from Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese, Pali, and Arabic.

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WHEN BUDDHISM TOOK ROOT in China after the end of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–219 CE), it triggered the release of enormous waves of creative energy from a people who had been spiritually imprisoned for centuries. For four hundred years the mainstream Chinese culture had been kept within the suffocating confines of narrow-minded Confucian orthodoxy, imposed by the ruling house of Han as part of its handle on political power.

Not the least of the effects of Buddhism on China was the development of Taoism, China's native spiritual tradition, in highly elaborated religious and literary formats emulating the extraordinarily rich intellectual and aesthetic expressiveness of Buddhism. Yet even with the rapid expansion of Taoism, the more internationalized China of the post-Han centuries found Buddhist teaching immensely attractive, and the two religions grew side by side in the lively syncretic culture evolving in the new China.

While Buddhist literature and learning expanded the minds of the Chinese intelligentsia, Buddhist adepts took an active role in the resettlement and reconstruction of war-torn territories in the aftermath of the breakup of the old order. As relatively local and short-lived dynasties rose and fell over the following centuries, eventually Chinese warlords emulated their central Asian counterparts and began adopting Buddhism as a kind of state religion.

In contrast to Confucianism, Buddhism was an international religion, without ethnic or cultural bias. Like Druidism in pre-Roman Europe, in addition to being a repository of many kinds of knowledge, Buddhism served as a medium for international cultural and diplomatic exchange throughout most of Asia, even—perhaps especially—in times when warfare ravaged the world at large.

There was, naturally, a drawback to the flourishing of Buddhist religion in China. As a Zen saying goes, "One gain, one loss." Having become well established, well funded, and well thought of, Buddhism came to attract many idlers and many greedy and ambitious poseurs. Some sought material support, some sought intellectual diversion, some sought political power. The abundance of ritual, literature, and organizational methods that Buddhism offered was intoxicating to many Chinese aristocrats and warlords.

A result of the bewildering volume and variety of Buddhist literature pouring into China from south and central Asia was the development of schools of Chinese Buddhism based either on certain important texts or on certain arrangements of the whole body of canonical teachings. This process was already beginning by the early fifth century, and by the end of the sixth century the first syncretic school, T'ien-t'ai, had absorbed a number of earlier schools that had been more limited in scope.

The next three centuries saw the most distinctive and most sophisticated stage of evolution, not only of Chinese Buddhism but of Chinese culture as a whole. This was the age of the T'ang dynasty (619–906), the zenith of the civilization and the greatest expression of its complex genius.

T'ang culture was highly stimulated by the vigorous policies of the Empress Wu Tse-t'ien (r. 684–701), a highly accomplished individual who promoted Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism to enrich the spiritual resources of the entire civilization. Discussion and debate among the three ways of thought were promoted, in order to discourage complacency under state sponsorship and bring out the best in each of the philosophies.

It was during the T'ang dynasty that the Buddhist schools of Pure Land, T'ien-t'ai, Hua-yen, Che

yen (Mantra), and Ch'an (Zen) were given their definitive expression by the great masters of the age. The Pure Land school was taken to new heights of mystic experience by the ecstatic writings of Shao-tao; the T'ien-t'ai meditation exercises were elaborately facilitated in the technical commentaries of Chan-jan; the Hua-yen universe was brilliantly illuminated in the essays of Fa-hsiang; the secrets of Tantric Buddhism were encapsulated in the esoteric art of Huikuo; and the inner mind of Ch'an or Zen Buddhism was straightforwardly revealed in the lectures of Hui-neng.

Certain hallmarks distinguished Zen from other schools. One of the most evident of these is the greater diversity of Zen expression, which is rooted in the fact that classical Zen was stricter observance of the Mahayana Buddhist axiom that particular systems cannot be fixed as universal prescriptions for everyone's enlightenment. While Zen and other schools of Buddhism share a vast range of teachings, their modes and methods of expedient selection, organization, and presentation differ greatly.

To be practical, approaches and methods have to be adjusted to the needs and capacities of communities and individuals. This is not a Zen idea but is basic to Buddhism as a whole. Buddhist principles and practices vary over a wide spectrum for this reason, and their breadth and flexibility were also reflected in the custom of original Zen teachers to encourage and stimulate direct individual experience and avoid dogmatic cliché.

In accord with its pragmatic nature, Zen interpretation of Buddhist scripture dropped mythological thinking in favor of analogical thinking. Buddhist scriptures were not treated by Zen adepts as holy writ that was necessarily regarded as literally true, but as compendia of potentially useful ideas, outlooks, and exercises, commonly couched in sometimes dazzling symbolic language. Insisting on understanding the scriptures in practical terms, not just reciting them piously, the leading masters of Zen interpreted Buddhist symbolism by a special kind of structural analysis based on aspects and phases of Buddhist experiences of awakening and awareness. This discipline was also applied to the growing body of special Zen lore, particularly stories and poems.

Because of its nature and history, there is no fixed curriculum and no standard textbook of genuine classical Zen. Most of the material that would be required for a real history of Zen does not actually exist. This is part of the original teaching of Zen, which has to be experienced personally to be understood and whose masters consequently spoke to the needs of others and did not talk much about themselves.

Although there is no fixed canon as such in Zen, some writings and remnants of classical teaching have been preserved. Parts of this lore were used in various ways from time to time in Zen revival and an immense secondary literature of interpretation and elaboration also came into being, parts of which were picked up in yet later movements and revivals. This eventually resulted in extremely convoluted, indeed involuted, literary mannerisms, which contributed to the decline and demise of experiential illuminist Zen.

Within the vast body of recognized Zen literature emanating from countless teachers and schools appearing and disappearing over the centuries, the work that stands out preeminently as the mother lode of classical examples of Zen is that which is associated with the so-called Five Houses of Zen. Historically represented by several groups of outstanding Zen teachers, the Five Houses arose in China during the ninth and tenth centuries.

The Five Houses were not sects or schools, but later they came to be thought of that way. Although the grand masters of the Five Houses were eminent teachers, and the theoretical concept of the Houses seems to center around their teachings, in fact virtually nothing is known of the inner or outer lives of these individuals, and no organizations can actually be traced to them. In short, the original Houses were not institutionalized, their teachings were not dogmatized, and their guides and exemplars were not idolized.

The Five Houses of Classical Zen, in order of historical emergence, were the Kuei-Yang, named after the masters Kuei-shan Ling-yu (771–854) and Yang-shan Hui-chi (813–890); the Lin-chi, named after the master Lin-chi I-hsuan (d. 866); the Ts'ao-Tung, named after the masters Tung-shan Liang-chieh (807–869) and Ts'ao-shan Pen-chi (840–901); the Yun-men, named after the master Yun-men Wen-yen (d. 949); and the Fa-yen, named after the master Fa-yen Wen-i (885–958).

The present collection of teachings from the Five Houses of Zen begins with sayings of Pai-chang Huai-hai (720–814), who was the teacher of Kuei-shan Ling-yu of the House of Kuei-Yang. Also a direct forerunner of the House of Lin-chi, Paichang is credited with the early Zen rule “A day without work, a day without food,” which fostered independence from secular patronage. Pai-chang’s sayings are strongly infused with scriptural Buddhist teachings, and this characteristic also marks the subsequent works of the masters of the Kuei-Yang and Lin-chi Houses.

Following Pai-chang’s sayings are extracts from the *Admonitions* of Kuei-shan, one of the earliest Zen writings. During the Sung dynasty (960–1278), this work was incorporated into a popular primer of Buddhism and subsequently was made the object of much study and commentary. Oral transmitted sayings of Kuei-shan and his successor Yang-shan appear in many classical anthologies of Zen works, and numerous dialogues between them are used as examples in major collections of teaching stories.

Relatively little is known or recorded of later masters of the House of Kuei-Yang, which returned to quiescence after a few generations. An exception to this is found in a rare record of the work of Sun-chi, a successor of Yang-shan, who came from Korea and whose sayings are found only in the *Annales of the Halls of the Ancestors*, an early Zen collection lost in China but preserved (and apparently augmented) in Korea.

This material is particularly valuable in that it contains the most extensive and most clearly explained usages of circular symbols, for which the House of Kuei-Yang is said to have been famous. Yang-shan is supposed to have inherited a unique book of symbols from an ancient master. To avoid attachment to the concrete, Yang-shan burned this book but later made a copy from memory to return to the master from whom he received it. Nothing more is known of this system, except for fragments appearing here and there. Sun-chi’s explanations clarify the mystery of the circular symbols to some degree, particularly in demonstrating the connection between scriptural Buddhism and Zen.

After the Kuei-Yang, the next of the Five Houses of Zen was the Lin-chi. The selection of material presented here begins with extracts from *Essential Method of Transmission of Mind* by Huang-po (d. 850), who was the Zen teacher of Lin-chi, after whom the House is named. Huang-po is said to have been enlightened by nature, but he is also considered a Zen successor of the great Pai-chang.

Huang-po’s sayings are followed by excerpts from the *Lin-chi Lu*, or “Record of Lin-chi,” one of the most extensive collections of lectures and dialogues of an individual teacher to be made during the classical period of Zen. Reflecting the spirit of Pai-chang and Huang-po in his teaching, Lin-chi further refined some of their formal didactic constructs and also perfected the use of shock techniques to stimulate direct perceptual breakthrough outside of conventional thought patterns.

The Lin-chi House of Zen declined almost immediately and was nearly extinct after the fourth generation. It was revived by a sixth-generation master who studied with more than seventy teachers of Zen, including representatives of all the existing Houses as well as other Zen lineages. This revival of Lin-chi Zen was brought to its greatest level of sophistication in the tenth generation by the Zen master Yuan-wu (1063–1135), whose famous *Essentials of Mind* also became a Zen classic. Extracts of this work are presented here.

The Ts’ao-Tung House of Zen arose at more or less the same time as the Kuei-Yang and Lin-chi Houses. The records of the masters of this House were scattered, and little remains but some dialogues and a few compositions attributed to Tung-shan and Ts’ao-shan. The selection presented here begins with

sayings of Tung-shan's predecessors Yao-shan (745–828) and Yun-yen (781–841). The teaching embodied in Tung-shan's famed *Song of Focusing the Precious Mirror*, given here in translation, said to have originated with Yao-shan and been transmitted to Tung-shan by Yun-yen.

The House of Ts'ao-Tung is particularly known for the teaching device of the Five Ranks, said to have been extracted from Yao-shan's teaching by Tung-shan and refined by his successor Ts'ao-shan. The present collection includes Ts'ao-shan's most remarkable exposition of this device, which primarily illustrates the integration of absolute and relative perspectives in Zen experience, extending its use to structural analysis of Zen sayings and stories to define the states and stages of realization they represent.

The Ts'ao-Tung school died out after the passing of the last of the sixth-generation masters but was revived by a seventh-generation master of the House of Lin-chi, who had been entrusted with the Ts'ao-Tung teaching methods by the last living master. A subsequent revival of the Ts'ao-Tung House of Zen ultimately climaxed in the teachings of Hung-chih (1091–1157), who turned out to be one of the greatest Zen writers of all time, in both poetry and prose. Selections from Hung-chih's remarkable writings cap this chapter on the Ts'ao-Tung House of Zen.

The fourth of the Five Houses is named after Yun-men, who studied with a disciple of Huang-pai and attained enlightenment before meeting Hsueh-feng, who is traditionally regarded as his main Zen teacher. Hsueh-feng himself studied with Tung-shan of the House of Ts'ao-Tung Zen, and Yun-men later associated with Tung-shan's successor Ts'ao-shan. After completing his studies with Hsueh-feng, Yun-men also spent time with a successor of Kuei-shan of the House of Kuei-Yang Zen. Thus the Yun-men House of Zen had spiritual connections with each of the older Houses.

The selection of materials on Yun-men Zen presented here begins with sayings of Hsueh-feng (822–908), who was the teacher of Yun-men and of many other distinguished Zen masters of the age. Hsueh-feng attained his first Zen realization at the age of eighteen, but he did not reach complete Zen enlightenment until he was forty-five and is traditionally held up as a prime illustration of the proverb, "A good vessel takes a long time to complete." He subsequently attracted many followers and is said to have had fifteen hundred disciples. By the time he died, he had more than fifty enlightened successors already teaching Zen.

Yun-men, after whom the House is named, was one of the most brilliant and abstruse of all the classical masters. His talks include numerous examples of quotations and variations of existing Zen lore, and meditation on Zen stories and sayings was clearly one of the methods of his school. Tradition has it, nevertheless, that Yun-men forbade his followers to record his own words, so that they could not memorize sayings at the expense of direct experience of reality. The record we nonetheless have of Yun-men, more extensive than that of other original masters of the Five Houses, is said to have been surreptitiously written down by a longtime disciple on a robe made of paper. Such robes were sometimes worn by monks as an exercise in remembrance of the perishability of things. This anthology presents several of Yun-men's lectures, in which he gives orientation for Zen studies in relatively straightforward terms.

Yun-men had sixty-one enlightened disciples, but little is known of most of them. In the next generation, however, a successor of one of his disciples emerged as a leading writer and intellectual of his time as well as a distinguished Zen master. This was the great master Ming-chiao (1008–1072), who wrote extensively on secular subjects as well as religious and spiritual themes. Ming-chiao had many contacts among the Confucian intelligentsia, and he played a powerful role in the Zen influence on the emergence and development of Sung dynasty neo-Confucianism. Several of Ming-chiao's lucid essays on psychology and spirituality are presented here in the materials on the Yun-men House of Zen.

In the next, fourth, generation of this Zen House, another giant arose, the eminent Hsueh-tou, who

was also a great writer and an outstanding poet. Traditionally regarded as the reviver of the House of Yun-men, Hsueh-tou is particularly famous as the author of the poetic commentaries on Zen stories of the classic collection *Blue Cliff Record*. Another collection of poetry is also attributed to Hsueh-tou as well as an anthology of Zen stories with his own prose comments, the *Cascade Collection*, selections of which are presented here to cap the section on Yunmen Zen.

The last of the Five Houses of Zen was the Fa-yen. One of the earliest collections of classical Zen lore refers to this House as a revival of the Zen school of Hsuan-sha (835–908), one of the most redoubtable masters of the T'ang dynasty. Originally a fisherman, Hsuan-sha became an apprentice and colleague of the great Zen master Hsueh-feng, already mentioned as the forerunner of the Yunmen House.

The selection of materials presented here on the Fa-yen House of Zen begins with sayings of Hsuan-sha and his successor Kuei-ch'en, who was the teacher of Zen master Fa-yen. This is followed by the complete text of Fa-yen's classic composition *Ten Guidelines for Zen Schools*, in which the great master—who is said to have had a thousand disciples and more than sixty enlightened successors—analyzes the deterioration of contemporary Zen teaching and practice vis-à-vis the fundamental principles and original ideals of Zen.

Among Fa-yen's many spiritual heirs were numerous distinguished Zen masters, including a National Teacher of Koryo, unified Korea, where this House was to have a great impact. Another of his outstanding successors, a National Teacher of the Latter Han dynasty in post-T'ang China, was instrumental in the restoration and revival of the T'ien-t'ai school of Buddhism, one of the mother houses of ancient Zen. This master was in turn succeeded by the illustrious Yung-ming Yen-shou (905–976), who is also considered a patriarch of Pure Land Buddhism.

Yen-shou revitalized the study of pan-Buddhism in the Zen context and the study of Zen in the pan-Buddhism context. He was probably the most prolific Zen author of all time, especially noted for his hundred-volume compendium *Source Mirror Record*, in which he synthesizes the whole range of exoteric Buddhist doctrine, quoting extensively from more than three hundred classical sources.

This anthology of materials from the Five Houses of Zen closes with two selections from the work of Yen-shou of the House of Fa-yen. First is a summary critique of more than one hundred cultural deviations of Zen, following on the work of Fa-yen and others along these lines. This is followed by an instructive work on balancing the two basic aspects of meditation, commonly referred to as cessation and contemplation (or stopping and seeing) in the context of causative practice, and as concentration and insight (or stability and wisdom) in the context of effective realization. This is one of the most valuable guides to Zen meditation to be found among the literature of the Five Houses.

The House of

KUEI-YANG



Sayings

IT IS NECESSARY to distinguish language referring to absolute truth from language referring to relative truth. It is necessary to distinguish general statements from particular statements. It is necessary to distinguish the language of a complete teaching from the language of an incomplete teaching.

The complete teaching deals with purity; the incomplete teaching deals with impurity. The incomplete teaching explains the defilement in impure things in order to eliminate the profane; the complete teaching explains the defilement in pure things in order to eliminate the sacred.

Before Buddha had expounded the elementary teachings, people had no vision, so they needed someone to refine them. If you are speaking to unhearing worldlings, you need to teach them to get over their attachments, live a disciplined life, practice meditation, and develop insight. But it is not appropriate to speak in this way to people beyond measure.

People in the process of self-purification have already willingly accepted discipline in full. They possess the power of discipline, concentration, and insight; therefore to preach to them in this way is called speaking at the wrong time, because it is not appropriate to the occasion. It is also called suggestive talk.

People in the process of purification must be told of the defilement in pure things. They must be taught to detach from all things, existent or nonexistent. They must be taught to detach from a cultivation and experience and even to detach from detachment.

The process of purification is to strip away influences of habit. If people in the process of purification cannot get rid of the diseases of greed and hatred, they are also unhearing worldlings and still have to be taught to practice meditation and cultivate insight.



The two lesser vehicles put an end to the diseases of greed and hatred, removing them completely, yet dwell in desirelessness and consider that correct. This is the formless realm; this is obstructing the light of complete enlightenment, shedding the blood of Buddha. Here too it is still necessary to practice meditation and develop insight further.



You have to distinguish references to purity and impurity. There are many names for impure things—greed, hatred, infatuation, and so on. There are also many names for pure things—enlightenment, nirvana, liberation, and so on. Yet even in the very midst of these twin streams, purity and impurity—in the midst of standards of profanity and holiness, in the midst of forms, sounds, smells, taste, feelings, and things, in the midst of worldly things and transmundane phenomena—the immediate mirroring awareness should not get fixated on anything at all.



Once you are free of obsession and fixation, if you abide in non-attachment and consider that correct, ~~this is the elementary good. This is abiding in the subdued mind. This is what a disciple is.~~ You are attached to the means and will not let go of it. This is the way of the two lesser vehicles. This is the result of meditation.

Once you are no longer grasping, and yet do not dwell in nonattachment either, this is the intermediate good. This is the Half Word Teaching. This is still the formless realm; although you avoid being trapped in the way of the two lesser vehicles and avoid being trapped by bedevilment, this is still a meditation sickness. This is the bondage of enlightening beings.

Once you no longer dwell in nonattachment and do not even make an understanding of nonabiding, this is the final good. This is the Full Word Teaching. You avoid being trapped in the formless realm, avoid being trapped in meditation sickness, avoid being trapped in the way of enlightening beings, and avoid being trapped by bedevilment.



Because of barriers of knowledge, barriers of state, and barriers of action, seeing your own buddha nature is like seeing color at night. As it is said, in the stage of buddhahood, two kinds of ignorance are stopped: the ignorance of subtle knowledge and the ignorance of extremely subtle knowledge.

If you can pass through the three phases of beginning, intermediate, and final goodness, you will not be constrained by them. Buddhist teachings liken this to a deer leaping three times to get out of a net. Then you are called an enlightened one beyond confinement; nothing can capture or bind you. You are one of the buddhas succeeding to the Lamp Buddha. This is the supreme vehicle, the highest knowledge; this is standing on the Way of enlightenment. You are now a buddha, with enlightened nature; you are a guide, able to employ an unobstructed influence. This is unimpeded illumination.



After enlightenment, you will be able to use causality of virtue and knowledge freely; this is building a car to carry causality. In life, you are not stayed by life; in death, you are not obstructed by death. Even though you are within the clusters of mental and physical elements, it is as if a door had opened up, so you are not inhibited by these clusters of mental and physical elements. You are free to leave or to remain, going out and entering without difficulty. If you can be like this, there is no question of stages or steps, of superior or inferior; everything, even down to the bodies of ants, is all the land of pure marvel. It is inconceivable.



The foregoing is still just talk for the purpose of untying bonds. As scripture says, “They themselves are whole; don’t injure them.” Even terms like *Buddha* and *enlightening beings* are injuries. As long as you speak of anything at all, whether it exists or not, it is all injury. “Whether it exists or not refers to all things.



Enlightening beings of the tenth stage are still in the river of impure streams; they create a teaching of a pure stream, defining characteristics of purity and explaining the afflictions of impurity.



In ancient times, the ten great disciples of Buddha all had their individuality and characteristic condition; one by one they had their errors explained away by the Guide. In the four stages of meditation and eight concentrations, even the likes of saints dwell in absorption for as long as eight thousand eons; clinging dependently to what they practice, they are intoxicated by the wine of pure things.

Therefore, disciples may hear the teaching of the Enlightened One but are not able to conceive the spirit of the supreme Way. That is why it is said that people who cut off roots of goodness have no buddha nature. A scripture says this is called the deep pit of liberation, a fearsome place; if the mirror retreats for an instant, it goes to hell like an arrow shot.



We cannot speak only in terms of retreating or not retreating, since supernal enlightening beings like Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, and Mahasthamaprapta come back to the stage of stream-entering by mingling with various kinds of people in order to guide them. We cannot say that they have retreated or regressed; all we can say at such times is that they have entered the stream.

As long as the immediate mirroring awareness is not concerned by anything at all, whether it exists or not, and can pass through the three stages and all things, pleasant or unpleasant, then even if you hear of a hundred, a thousand, or even a hundred million buddhas appearing in the world, it is as if you had not heard. And yet you do not dwell in not hearing, and you do not make an understanding of nondwelling. Then you cannot be said to retreat; measurements and calculations do not apply to you. This is what is meant by the saying that Buddha is always in the world without being habituated to things of the world.



To say the Buddha turns the Wheel of the Teaching and then retreats is to slander the Enlightened One, the Teaching, and the Community. To say the Buddha does not turn the Wheel of the Teaching and does not retreat is also to slander the Enlightened One, the Teaching, and the Community. As Shen Chao wrote, "The Way of enlightenment cannot be measured; it is so high that there is nothing above it, so vast that it cannot be limited, so profound that it is bottomless, so deep that it cannot be fathomed. Even to speak of it is like setting up a target, inviting an arrow."



When we speak of mirroring awareness, even this is not really right. Discern the pure by way of the impure. If you say the immediate mirroring awareness is right, or else that there is something beyond mirroring awareness, this is all delusion. If you keep dwelling in immediate mirroring awareness, this is also tantamount to delusion; this is what is called the mistake of naturalism.

If you say immediate mirroring awareness is your own Buddha, these are words of measurement and words of calculation; they are like the crying of a jackal. This is being stuck at the gate, like being stuck in glue.

Originally you did not acknowledge that innate knowing and awareness are your own Buddha, and so you went running elsewhere to seek Buddha. Therefore you needed a teacher to tell you about innate knowing and awareness, as a medicine to cure this disease of frantic outward seeking.

Once you no longer seek outwardly, this disease is cured, and it is necessary to remove the medicine. If you cling fixedly to innate knowing awareness, this is a Zen sickness, characteristic of a fanatical follower. It is like water turned to ice: all the ice is water, but it cannot be used to quench thirst. This is a mortal illness, before which ordinary physicians are helpless.



There has never been such a thing as “Buddha,” so do not understand it as Buddha. “Buddha” is the medicine for emotional people; if you have no disease, you should not take medicine. When medicine and disease are both dissolved, it is like pure water; buddhahood is like a sweet herb mixed in the water, or like honey mixed in the water, most sweet and delicious. And yet the pure water itself is not affected.



It is not that there is nothing there, because it has always been there. This truth is originally present to everyone. All the buddhas and enlightening beings may be called people pointing out a treasure. Fundamentally, it is not a thing; you don’t need to know or understand it; you don’t need to affirm or deny it. Just stop dualism; stop suppositions of being and nonbeing, of neither being nor nonbeing.

When there are no traces of either extreme, then there is neither lack nor sufficiency; this is not profane or holy, not light or dark. This is not having knowledge, yet it is not lacking knowledge. It is not bondage and not liberation. It is not any name or category at all. Why is this not true speech? How can you carve and polish emptiness to make an image of Buddha? How can you say that emptiness is blue, yellow, red, or white?



It is said, “Reality has no comparison, because there is nothing to which it may be likened; the body of reality is not constructed and does not fall within the scope of any category.” That is why it is said, “The reality of the enlightened is nameless and cannot be expressed in speech; it is impossible to tar in the empty door of truth as it really is.” Just as insects can alight anywhere but on the flames of fire, the minds of emotional people can form relations to anything except transcendent insight.



When you visit teachers, seeking some knowledge or understanding, this is the demon of teachers because it gives rise to talk and opinion.

If you take the four universal vows, promising to rescue all living beings before attaining buddhahood yourself, this is the demon of the knowledge of the way of enlightening beings, because the vow is never given up.

If you fast and discipline yourself, practice meditation, and cultivate insight, these are afflicted virtues. Even if you manifest attainment of complete, perfect enlightenment and rescue innumerable people, enabling them to attain individual enlightenment, this is the demon of virtues, since it arouses greed and attachment.

If you are completely undefiled by greed in the midst of all things, so that your aware essence exists alone, dwelling in extremely deep absorption without ever rising or progressing further, this is the demon of concentration, because you will be permanently addicted to enjoying it until you reach

ultimate extinction, desireless, quiescent, and still. This is still demon work.

If your insight cannot shed so many demon webs, then even if you can understand a hundred books of knowledge, all of it is dregs of hell. If you seek to be like Buddha, there is no way for you to be so



Now when you hear me tell you not to be attached to anything at all, whether good or bad, existent or nonexistent, you immediately take that to be falling into a void. You don't realize that abandoning the root to pursue the branches is falling into a void. Seeking buddhahood, seeking enlightenment, seeking anything at all, whether it exists or not, is abandoning the root to pursue the branches.

For now, eat simple food to sustain life, wear old clothing to keep off the cold, and when thirsty scoop up water to drink. Beyond this, if you harbor no thought of concern with anything at all, whether it is there or not, then you will in time have your share of ease and clarity.



Good teachers do not cling to being or nonbeing, having abandoned all kinds of demonic suggestion. When they speak, they do not entangle or bind others. Whatever they say, they do not call it their teacher's explanation; like echoes in a valley, their words fill the land faultlessly. They are worthy of trust and association.

If anyone should say, "I am capable of explaining, I am able to understand; I am the teacher, you are the disciples," this is the same as demonic suggestion and pointless talk. Once you have actually seen the existence of the Way, to say, "This is Buddha, this is not Buddha, this is enlightenment, this is extinction, this is liberation," and so on is to pointlessly express partial knowledge. To lift a finger and say, "This is Zen! This is Tao!" is to utter words that entangle and bind others endlessly. This only increases the ties of seekers. And there are still errors of speech even when they are unspoken.



Be master of mind; don't be mastered by mind. In the incomplete teaching, there is a teacher, there is a guide; in the complete teaching, there is no teacher, and doctrine is not the master. If you are still unable to resort to the mystic mirror, then for the time being resort to the complete teaching, and you will yet have some familiarity with it. As for the incomplete teaching, it is suitable only for unhearing worldlings.

For now, do not depend on anything at all, whether it is there or not; and do not dwell on not depending on anything, and also do not make an understanding of not depending or dwelling, either. This is called great wisdom.



Only a buddha is a great teacher, because there is no second person. The rest are all called outsiders, and what they say is demonic suggestion.

Right now, the point is to explain away dualism. Do not be affected by greed for anything at all, whether it is there or not. As far as untying bonds is concerned, there are no special words or statements to teach people.

If you say there are some particular statements to teach people, or that there is some particular doctrine to give people, this is heresy and demonic suggestion.



You must distinguish complete and incomplete teachings, prohibitive and nonprohibitive words, living and dead words, expressions of healing and sickness, negative and positive metaphors, and generalizing and particularizing expressions.

To say that it is possible to attain buddhahood by cultivation, that there is practice and there is realization, that this mind is enlightened, that the mind itself is Buddha, is Buddha's teaching. This is the incomplete teaching. These are nonprohibitive words, generalizing expressions, words of a one-pound or one-ounce burden. These words are concerned with weeding out impure things. These are words of positive metaphor. These are dead words. These are words for ordinary people.

To say that it is not possible to attain buddhahood by cultivation, that there is no cultivation and no realization, that it is neither mind nor Buddha, is also Buddha's teaching. These are words of the complete teaching, prohibitive words, particularizing words, words of a ten-thousand-pound burden, words of negative metaphor and negative instruction, words concerned with weeding out pure things. These are words for someone of rank in the Way. These are living words.

As long as there are verbal formulations, from entry into the stream all the way up to the tenth stage of enlightenment, everything is in the category of defilement by the dust of doctrine. As long as there are verbal formulations, everything is in the realm of affliction and trouble. As long as there are verbal formulations, everything belongs to the incomplete teaching.

The complete teaching is obedience; the incomplete teaching is transgression. At the stage of buddhahood, there is neither obedience nor transgression; neither the complete nor the incomplete teachings are admitted.



Discern the ground by way of the sprouts; discern the pure by way of the impure. Just be aware, mirrorlike, right now. If you assess mirroring awareness from the standpoint of purity, it is not pure, but absence of mirroring awareness is not pure either, nor is it impure. Nor is it holy or unholy. It is not, furthermore, a matter of seeing the impurity of the water and talking about the problems of impurity in water. If the water were pure, nothing could be said; in fact, speech would defile the water.



If there is a questionless question, there is also speechless explanation. A buddha does not explain truth for the sake of buddhas. In the world of reality where everything is equally suchness, there is no Buddha; no one rescues living beings. A buddha does not remain in buddhahood; this is called the realm of blessings.



You must distinguish host and guest words. If you are affected by greed for anything at all, whether it is there or not, you will be confused and disturbed by everything. Your own mind then becomes the king of demons, and its perceptive functions are in the category of deluding demons.

If your immediate mirroring awareness does not dwell on anything, existent or nonexistent, mundane or transcendent; and yet does not make an understanding of nondwelling and does not even dwell in the absence of understanding, then your own mind is Buddha, and its perceptive functions are in the category of enlightening beings. Master of all mental conditions, its perceptive functions are

the realm of passing phenomena.

~~It is like waves telling of water; it illumines myriad forms without effort. If you can perceive calmly, you will penetrate the hidden essence and penetrate all time. As it is said, "When psychology has no influence on perception, the ultimate power remains, serving as a guide in all places."~~



People's natural consciousness is sticky, because they have not trodden the steps to enlightenment. They have stuck fast to various things for a long time. Even as they partake of the hidden essence, they cannot use it as medicine. Even as they hear words beyond conception, they cannot believe completely.

This is why Gautama Buddha spent forty-nine days in silent contemplation under the tree where he was enlightened. Wisdom is obscure, difficult to explain; there is nothing to which it may be likened.

To say people have buddha nature is to slander the buddhas, their Teaching, and their Communities. To say people have no buddha nature is also to slander the buddhas, their Teaching, and the Communities.

To say there is buddha nature is called slander by attachment. To say there is no buddha nature is called slander by falsehood. As it is said, to say buddha nature exists is slander by presumption, and to say it does not exist is slander by repudiation; to say buddha nature both exists and does not exist is slander by contradiction, and to say buddha nature neither exists nor does not exist is slander by meaningless argument.

Admonitions

AS LONG AS YOU are subject to a life bound by force of habit, you are not free from the burden of the body. The physical being given you by your parents has come into existence through the interdependence of many conditions; while the basic elements thus sustain you, they are always at odds with one another.

Impermanence, aging, and illness do not give people a set time. One may be alive in the morning then dead at night, changing worlds in an instant. We are like the spring frost, like the morning dew, suddenly gone. How can a tree growing on a cliff or a vine hanging into a well last forever? Time is passing every moment; how can you be complacent and waste it, seeing that the afterlife is but a breath away?



Inwardly strive to develop the capacity of mindfulness; outwardly spread the virtue of uncontentiousness. Shed the world of dust to seek emancipation.



Over the ages you have followed objects, never once turning back to look within. Time slips away; months and years are wasted.



The Buddha first defined precepts to begin to remove the veils of ignorance. With standards and refinements of conduct pure as ice and snow, the precepts rein and concentrate the minds of beginners in respect to what to stop, what to uphold, what to do, and what not to do. Their details reform every kind of crudity and decadence.

How can you understand the supreme vehicle of complete meaning without having paid heed to moral principles? Beware of spending a lifetime in vain; later regrets are useless.



If you have never taken the principles of the teachings to heart, you have no basis for awakening to the hidden path. As you advance in years and grow old, your vanity will not allow you to associate with worthy companions; you know only arrogance and complacency.



Dawdling in the human world eventually produces dullness and coarseness. Unawares, you become

weak and senile; encountering events, you face a wall. When younger people ask you questions, you have nothing to say that will guide them. And even if you have something to say, it has nothing to do with the scriptures. Yet when you are treated without respect, you immediately denounce the impoliteness of the younger generation. Angry thoughts flare up, and your words afflict everyone.

One day you will lie in sickness, flat on your back with myriad pains oppressing you. Thinking and pondering from morning to night, your heart will be full of fear and dread. The road ahead is vague and boundless; you do not know where you will go.

Here you will finally know to repent of your errors, but what is the use of trying to dig a well when you're already thirsty? You will regret not having prepared earlier, now that it is late and your faults are so many.

When it is time to go, you shake apart, terrified and trembling. The cage broken, the sparrow flies. Consciousness follows what you have done, like a man burdened with debts, dragged away first by the strongest. The threads of mind, frayed and diffused, tend to fall to whatever is most pressing.

The murderous demon of impermanence does not stop moment to moment. Life cannot be extended; time is unreliable. No one in any realm of being can escape this. Subjection to physical existence has gone on in this way for untold ages.



Our regret is that we were all born in an era of imitation. The age of saints is distant, and Buddhism is decadent. Most people are lazy.



If you pass your whole life half asleep, what can you rely on?



If you only want to sit still with folded hands and do not value even a moment of time, if you do not work diligently at your tasks, then you have no basis for accomplishment. How can you pass a whole life in vain?



When you speak, let it concern the scriptures; in discussion, follow your study of the ancients. Be upright and noble of demeanor, with a lofty and serene spirit.

On a long journey, it is essential to go with good companions; purify your eyes and ears again and again. When you stay somewhere, choose your company; listen to what you have not heard time and again. This is the basis of the saying, "It was my parents who bore me; it was my companions who raised me."

Companionship with the good is like walking through dew and mist; although they do not drench your clothing, in time it becomes imbued with moisture. Familiarity with evil increases false knowledge and views, creating evil day and night. You experience consequences right away, and after death you sink. Once you have lost human life, you will not return ever again, even in ten thousand eons. True words may offend the ear, but do they not impress the heart? If you cleanse the mind and cultivate virtue, conceal your tracks and hide your name, preserve the fundamental and purify the spirit, then the clamor will cease.



If you want to study the Way by intensive meditation and make a sudden leap beyond expedient teachings, let your mind merge with the hidden harbor; investigate its subtleties, determine its most profound depths, and realize its true source.



When you suddenly awaken to the true basis, this is the stairway leading out of materialism. This shatters the twenty-five domains of being in the three realms of existence. Know that everything inside and outside, is all unreal. Arising from transformations of mind, all things are mere provisional names; don't set your mind on them. As long as feelings do not stick to things, how can things hinder people? Leaving them to the all-pervasive flow of reality, do not cut them off, yet do not continue them either. When you hear sound and see form, all is normal; whether in the relative world or in the transcendental absolute, appropriate function is not lacking.



If there are people of middling ability who are as yet unable to transcend all at once, let them concentrate upon the teaching, closely investigating the scriptures and scrupulously looking into their inner meaning.



Have you not heard it said, "The vine that clings to the pine climbs to the heights; only based on the most excellent foundation may there be widespread wealth"? Carefully cultivate frugality and self-control. Do not vainly be remiss, and do not go too far. Then in all worlds and every life there will be sublime cause and effect.



Cease conceptualization; forget about objects; do not be a partner to the dusts. When the mind is empty, objects are quiescent. Assert mastery; do not follow human sentimentality. The entanglement of the results of actions are impossible to avoid. When the voice is gentle, the echo corresponds; when the figure is upright, the shadow is straight. Cause and effect are perfectly clear; have you no concern?



This illusory body,
this house of dreams:
appearances in emptiness.
There has never been a beginning;
how could an end be determined?
Appearing here, disappearing there,
rising and sinking,
worn and exhausted,

never able to escape the cycle,
~~when will there ever be rest?~~

Lusting for the world,
body-mind and the causal nexus
compound the substance of life.
From birth to old age,
nothing is gained;
subjection to delusion comes
from fundamental ignorance.
Take heed that time is passing;
we cannot count on a moment.
If you go through this life in vain,
the coming world will be obstructed.
Going from illusion to illusion
is all due to indulgent senses;
they come and go through mundane routines,
crawling through the triplex world.
Call on enlightened teachers without delay;
approach those of lofty virtue.
Analyze and understand body and mind;
clear away the brambles.
The world is inherently evanescent, empty;
how can conditions oppress you?
Plumb the essence of truth,
with enlightenment as your guide.
Let go of mind and objects both;
do not recall, or recollect.
With the senses free of care,
activity and rest are peaceful, quiet;
with the unified mind unaroused,
myriad things all rest.

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