

I

ON THE ENDEAVOR OF THE WAY

Bendowa

ALL BUDDHA TATHAGATAS who individually transmit inconceivable dharma, actualizing unsurpassable, complete enlightenment, have a wondrous art, supreme and unconditioned. Receptive samadhi is its mark; only buddhas transmit it to buddhas without veering off. Sitting upright, practicing Zen, is the authentic gate to free yourself in the unconfined realm of this samadhi.

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

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

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

After the aspiration for enlightenment arose, I began to search for dharma, visiting teachers at various places in our country. Then I met priest Myozen, of the Kennin Monastery, with whom I trained for nine years, and thus I learned a little about the teaching of the Rinzai School. Priest Myozen alone, as a senior disciple of ancestor Eisai, authentically received transmission of the unsurpassable buddha dharma from him; no one can be compared with him.

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

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

There may be true students who are not concerned with fame and gain who allow their aspiration for enlightenment to guide them and earnestly desire to practice the buddha way. They may be misguided by incapable teachers and obstructed from the correct understanding; intoxicated in confusion, they may sink into the realm of delusion for a long time. How can they nourish the correct seed of prajna and encounter the time of attaining the way? Since I am wandering about, which mountain or river can they call on? Because of my concern for them, I would like to record the standards of Zen monasteries that I personally saw and heard in Great Song, as well as the profound principle that has been transmitted by my master. I wish to leave for students of the way the authentic teaching of the buddha house. This is indeed the essence:

The great master Shakyamuni entrusted dharma to Mahakashyapa at the assembly on Vulture Peak; it was then authentically transmitted from ancestor to ancestor down to Venerable Bodhidharma. Bodhidharma went to China and entrusted dharma to the great master Huike; this was the beginning of dharma transmission in the eastern country. In this way, by

direct transmission, it reached Huineng, the Sixth Ancestor, Zen Master Dajian. Then the authentic buddha dharma spread in China, and the teaching that is not concerned with concepts and theories took form.

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

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

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

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

When even for a moment you sit upright in samadhi expressing the buddha mudra [form] in the three activities [body, speech, and thought], the whole world of phenomena becomes the buddha mudra and the entire sky turns into enlightenment. Accordingly, all buddha tathagatas increase dharma bliss, the original source, and renew their magnificence in the awakening of the way. Furthermore, all beings in the world of phenomena in the ten directions and the six paths, including the three lower paths, at once obtain pure body and mind, realize the state of great emancipation, and manifest the original face. At this moment, all

things actualize true awakening; myriad objects partake of the buddha body; and sitting upright, a glorious one under the bodhi tree, you immediately leap beyond the boundary of awakening. Then, you turn the unsurpassably great dharma wheel and expound the profound wisdom, ultimate and unconditioned.

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

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

All this, however, does not appear within perception. Because it is unconstructedness in stillness, it is immediate realization. If practice and realization were two things, as it appears to an ordinary person, each could be recognized separately. But what can be met with recognition is not realization itself, because realization is not reached with a discriminating mind.

In stillness, mind and object merge in realization and go beyond enlightenment. Thus, in the state of receptive *samadhi*, without disturbing its quality or moving a single particle, you engage the vast buddha activity, the extremely profound and subtle buddha transformation.

Grasses, trees, and lands that are embraced by this way of transformation together radiate a great light and endlessly expound the inconceivable, profound dharma. Grass, trees, and walls bring forth the teaching to all beings, including common people and sages; all beings in response

extend this dharma to grass, trees, and walls. Thus, the realm of self-awakening and awakening others invariably holds the mark of realization with nothing lacking, and realization itself is manifested without ceasing for a moment.

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

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

Question 1: We have now heard that the merit of zazen is lofty and great. But an ignorant person may be doubtful and say, "There are many gates for buddha dharma. Why do you recommend zazen exclusively?"

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

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

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

Question 3: We understand that you have studied the path of the buddha ancestors and authentically transmit the tathagatas' excellent art. This is beyond the reach of ordinary thought. However, reading sutras or chanting buddha's name must be causes and conditions of

enlightenment. How can zazen, just sitting uselessly doing nothing, be depended upon for attaining enlightenment?

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

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

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

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

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

To attempt to reach the buddha way by chanting buddha’s name thousands of times is like foolishly trying to go south while heading north, or to fit a square peg into a round hole. To be consumed with words and letters while ignorant of the way of practice is like a physician forgetting how to prescribe medicine; what use can it be? People who chant all the time are just like frogs croaking day and night in spring fields; their effort will be of no use whatsoever. Even worse off are those deluded by fame and gain who cannot give up such

practices, because their acquisitiveness is so deep. Such people existed in the past; are there not even more today? What a pity, indeed!

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

Question 4: The Lotus School and the Avatamsaka School, which have been transmitted to Japan, both expound the ultimate of Mahayana teaching. Furthermore, the teaching of the Mantra School was directly transmitted by Vairochana Tathagata to Vajrasattva, and its lineage from teacher to disciple since then has not been interrupted. This teaching expounds “Mind itself is buddha,” and “Everyone’s mind becomes buddha.” They also advocate the authentic enlightenment of the Five Buddhas within one sitting, instead of practice through many eons. It is regarded as the supreme buddha dharma. What extraordinary aspect of the practice you mention makes you recommend it, disregarding the practice of other schools?

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

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

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

Those within the gate of the buddha ancestors' authentic transmission venerate an accomplished adept who has attained the way and merged with realization, and entrust this master with the upholding of buddha dharma. Accordingly, when spirit beings of the visible and invisible realms come to pay homage, or when arhats who have attained the fruits of realization come to inquire about the dharma, this master will not fail to clarify the means to illumine their mind-ground. This is not known in other teachings. Buddha's disciples should study the buddha dharma alone.

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

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

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

Question 5: Among the three learnings there is the practice of samadhi, and among the six practices there is the practice of dhyana. Both of these have been studied by all bodhisattvas from the moment of arousing the aspiration for enlightenment, and both are practiced by the clever and dull. The zazen you speak of seems to be something

like this. Why do you say that the true teaching of the Tathagata is contained in it?

Answer: Your question arises because the treasury of the true dharma eye, the single great matter of the Tathagata, the unsurpassable great dharma, has been named the Zen [Dhyana] School. You should know that the name “Zen [Chan] School” appeared in China and spread eastward. It was not heard of in India. When the great master Bodhidharma sat facing the wall at the Shaolin Temple on Mount Song for nine years, neither monks nor laypeople knew the Buddha’s true teaching, so they called him the Brahman who concentrated on zazen. Subsequently, all buddha ancestors of every generation always devoted themselves to zazen. Heedless laypeople who saw them, without knowing the truth, informally called them the Zazen School. Later the word *za*—sitting—was dropped, and nowadays it is called the Zen School.

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

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

Know that the practice of zazen is the complete path of buddha dharma, and nothing can be compared to it.

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

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

Extolling it, an ancestor said [in the *Guidelines for Zen Monasteries*], “Zazen is the dharma gate of enjoyment and ease.” Thus, we know that sitting practice, among the four bodily presences, is the way of enjoyment and ease. Furthermore, it is not merely the practice of one or two buddhas, but all buddha ancestors practiced in this way.

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

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

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

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

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

Practice just here is not apart from realization. Fortunately, each one of us has individually inherited this wondrous practice; each beginner’s endeavor of the way brings forth original realization in the realm of the unconstructed. Know that in order not to divide this realization, which is inseparable from practice, buddha ancestors always caution you not to be lax in your practice. Release this wondrous practice and original realization fills your hands. Liberate original realization and wondrous practice is upheld throughout your body.

As I personally saw in Great Song, the Zen monasteries in various places all had meditation halls where five to six hundred, or even

up to two thousand monks, practiced zazen day and night. When I asked the abbots of these monasteries, masters who had inherited the seal [authentic experience] of buddha mind, about the essential meaning of buddha dharma, I was told that practice and realization are not two different things.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Question 10: One master said:

Do not grieve over birth [life] and death. There is an immediate way to be free from birth and death, namely, to know the principle that the nature of mind is permanent.

It [the principle] means that because this body is already alive, it will eventually die, but the mind-nature will not perish. You should recognize that mind-nature exists within your body and is not affected by birth and death. This is the inherent nature. The body is

a temporary form; it dies here and is born there, and is not fixed. Mind is permanent; it does not change through the past, future, or present.

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

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

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

There is a soul in one's body, and this soul, on encountering conditions, recognizes good and bad, right and wrong. To discern aching and itching, or to know pain and pleasure, is also this soul's capacity. However, when the body is destroyed, the soul comes out and is born in another world. So it appears to be dead here, but since there is birth in another place, it is permanent without dying.

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

As I cannot refrain from being sympathetic, let me disabuse you of your mistaken view. In buddha dharma it is always taught that body and mind are not separate, and that essence and characteristics are not two. This has been known throughout India and China, so there is no room for mistake.

In fact, from the perspective of permanence, all things are permanent; body and mind are not separate. From the perspective of cessation, all things cease; essence and characteristics cannot be divided. How can you say body perishes but mind is permanent? Is it not against the authentic principle? Furthermore, you should understand that birth-and-death is itself nirvana. Nirvana is not realized outside of birth-and-death. Even if you think that mind is permanent apart from the body, and mistakenly assume that buddha wisdom is separate from birth-and-death, the mind of this assumption still arises and perishes momentarily and is not permanent. Is it not truly ephemeral?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Question 13: Should zazen be practiced by lay men and women, or should it be practiced solely by home leavers?

Answer: The ancestors say, “In understanding buddha dharma, men and women, nobles and commoners, are not distinguished.”

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

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

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

This just depends on whether you have the willingness or not. It does not matter whether you are a layperson or a home leaver. Those

who can discern excellence invariably come to trust in this practice. Those who regard worldly affairs as a hindrance to buddha dharma think only that there is no buddha dharma in the secular world; they do not understand that there is no secular world in buddha dharma.

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

I enjoy zazen between my official duties
and seldom sleep lying on a bed.
Although I appear to be a minister,
I'm known as a Buddhist elder
throughout the country.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Question 16: Someone once said:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fayan said, “You are a recent member of the community. Why don’t you ask me about buddha dharma?”

Xuanze said, “I cannot deceive you, sir. When I was studying with Zen Master Qingfeng [Baizhao Zhiyuan], I mastered the state of ease and joy in buddha dharma.”

Fayan said, “With what words did you enter this understanding?”

Xuanze said, “When I asked Qingfeng, ‘What is the self of a Zen student?’ he said, ‘The fire spirits are here to look for fire.’”

Fayan said, “That is a good statement. But I’m afraid you did not understand it.”

Xuanze said, “The fire spirits belong to fire. So I understood that fire looks for fire and self looks for self.”

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

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

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

Fayan said, “The fire spirits are here to look for fire.”

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

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

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

Answer: Of those who clarified the mind upon seeing a form, or who realized the way upon hearing a sound, not one had any intellectual thinking regarding the endeavor of the way and not one was concerned about their self other than their original self.

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

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

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

Now, Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching has been spread in the billion worlds for about two thousand years. Those countries are not necessarily the countries of compassionate wisdom, and the people are not necessarily sharp and intelligent. However, the Tathagata's true dharma in essence has a great inconceivable meritorious power, and spreads in those countries when the time is ripe.

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

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

Our country lies to the east of the dragon ocean, far from China, but the Buddha's teaching was transmitted eastward to Japan, about the time of Emperors Kimmei and Yomei. This is the good fortune of our people, yet the philosophy and rituals have been entangled, and authentic practice was not established. Now, if you make patched robes and mended bowls your whole life, build a thatched-roofed hut near a mossy cliff or white rock, and practice sitting upright, you immediately go beyond buddha and directly master the great matter of your life's study. This is the admonition of Dragon Fang [Longya], the transmitted way of practice of Mount Rooster-Foot [where Mahakashyapa practiced]. Concerning the method of zazen, I would refer you to "Recommending Zazen to All People," which I wrote during the Karoku Era [1225–1227].

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

I have written this to leave for people of excellence who aspire to

practice buddha dharma and for true students who wander like water-weeds, seeking the way.

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