

TRANSLATIONS

Musō Kokushi's *Dialogues in a Dream*

SELECTIONS

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Introduction

Dialogues in a Dream (*Muchū mondō* 夢中間答) is one of the best-known Zen texts in Japan. It records an exchange between two leaders of the early Muromachi period: Musō Kokushi (1275–1351), a refined Zen master, and Ashikaga Tadayoshi (1304–1352), a hardened military ruler. Tadayoshi, brother to the *shōgun*, Ashikaga Takauji, was both the patron and the student of Musō. At intervals he would question the master regarding the teachings of Zen Buddhism.

Their dialogues were compiled (possibly by Musō himself) in mixed-*kana*, the more informal style of classical Japanese. An afterword states Musō's intention to address lay practitioners as well as monks. The book's 1344 publication makes it one of Japan's very first *kana* texts printed by wood-block, an indication of the esteem it was accorded at the time.

A prolonged exchange on the subtleties of Buddhist thought and practice might suggest an era of stability. Yet this was a period of political upheaval in Japan: the traumatic transition from the Kamakura-based military government to the new Ashikaga shogunate in Kyoto. Through his personal relationship with the successive possessors of power, Musō was repeatedly in the midst of the turbulence.

Japanese Zen was also at a turning-point. After a century and a half of acculturation, the Zen institution was moving from reliance on emigré Chinese monks toward recognition of native Japanese masters. This shift was the beginning of Zen's mature phase, during which a national network of Zen monasteries gave Zen public prominence over other sects of Japanese Buddhism.

Musō was conspicuous in many realms. In public affairs, he was a shaper of government policy toward Buddhism, trusted by emperors and both shogunates.

In aesthetics, he was a pioneer of Zen-style landscape gardening, a prolific poet, and an accomplished calligrapher. As a Zen master, he headed one major monastery and founded another; he is credited with 13,145 disciples, an unprecedented figure. Musō was pivotal in transforming Zen from an unproven, foreign movement into a powerful native institution.

Musō Soseki (his name as a monk) was born November 1, 1275, in Ise province.¹ At age nine, he was initiated into the Shingon sect of Buddhism, and at eighteen, he traveled to Nara to receive the Buddhist precepts on the ordination platform of Tōdaiji. His spiritual aspirations not fulfilled by Shingon, Musō began practicing Zen when he was twenty-four, under the emigré Chinese master I-shan I-ning (1247–1317). Upon I-shan's arrival in Japan in 1297, he had been suspected of being a Mongol spy, but he soon became one of the leading masters of Sung-style Zen under the patronage of the Hōjō regents. When I-shan administered an examination requiring the ability to compose Chinese verse, Musō was ranked in the highest category.

After three years with I-shan, Musō sought out another distinguished Zen master, Kōhō Kennichi (1241–1316), the abbot of Manjuji in Kamakura. But his initial confrontation with Kōhō impelled him to move on again, to a secluded hermitage in the provinces. During a three-year period of solitary zazen far from the metropolitan monasteries, Musō was engaged in an intense self-questioning, fueled by the enigmatic and seemingly brusque responses of both I-shan and Kōhō during their encounters with the young monk. Both masters used certain koans in their teaching, but there is no record that Musō had been assigned one particular koan to resolve in his zazen.

After a deep insight which he knew lacked the impact of genuine awakening, Musō left his retreat to revisit Kōhō in Kamakura. At a hut where he stopped en route, he did zazen outdoors until after midnight, and then went inside to go to bed. In the darkness he reached out to support himself against a wall, but he misjudged its location and stumbled to the floor. He laughed in surprise, and in that instant experienced a great awakening. As tradition prescribed, Musō composed a verse:

For years I dug in the earth searching for a blue sky,
 Burdening myself with obstacle after obstacle.
 Then one dark night I kicked a piece of tile,
 And, unthinking, smashed the bones of emptiness.

Returning to Kōhō, Musō was tested and then given the robe that had be-

¹ The chronology of Musō's life, compiled by his disciple Shun'oku Myōha, is found in Takakusu Junjirō et al., eds., *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan, 1924–32), vol. 80, pp. 482–493; hereafter cited as *Taishō daizōkyō*.

longed to Kōhō's principal teacher, signifying Kōhō's sanction of Musō as a Dharma heir.

The combination of the aristocratic Japanese master Kōhō and the emigré Chinese master I-shan gave Musō impeccable credentials. Though he lived close to nature for many years in a succession of isolated mountain hermitages, he was soon swept up in the political currents of the age. The Hōjō regents in Kamakura accepted him as their teacher in 1320. Emperor Go-Daigo then wrested him from Kamakura to Kyoto in 1325, appointing him abbot of Nanzenji. Musō was later drawn back to Kamakura. When Go-Daigo assumed power in his own name in 1333, he recalled Musō to Kyoto, offered himself as a disciple, and granted Musō the title of Kokushi—National Master. After the Ashikaga brothers overthrew Go-Daigo, they in turn summoned the sixty-three-year-old master, receiving from him the Buddhist precepts and a Buddhist name. A decade of partnership followed. *Dialogues in a Dream* appeared at the peak of Musō's prestige, three years before his appointment as head of a major new Zen monastery, Tenryūji.

Musō died quietly on September 30, 1351, at the age of seventy-seven. In his final months, he realized a long-standing wish by inaugurating a huge thousand-seat meditation hall at Tenryūji. When he administered the precepts for the last time, 2,500 are said to have attended the ceremony. Until the day of his death he was offering individual instruction to his students.



The pioneers of Japanese Rinzai Zen inherited a Chinese doctrinal rivalry between two Zen styles: *kyōgebetsuden* 教外別傳 "a separate transmission outside doctrine", and *kyōzen'itchi* 教禪一致 "the union of doctrine and Zen." (The *kyō* 教 in each expression signifies the Buddha's teachings recorded in the sutras, as well as the "doctrinal" schools—any Buddhist schools besides Zen). Musō was identified with *kyōzen'itchi*, and his contemporary Daitō Kokushi (Shūhō Myōchō, 1282–1338) was a proponent of *kyōgebetsuden*. As present-day Rinzai Zen represents the triumph of Daitō's descendants, the estimations of Musō and his style of Zen have declined commensurately.

No record of a meeting between Musō and Daitō has been found. Often cited instead is an entry in the diary of the twenty-eight-year-old retired Emperor Hanazono, a student of Daitō.² In the tenth month of 1325, Hanazono reports a conversation with Daitō about a meeting between Musō and Emperor Go-Daigo.

² Nakatsuka Eijirō et al., *Shinkishū* (Tokyo: Ressei Zenshū Hensaikai, 1917), vol. 2, pp. 275–276.

Lamenting Musō's great influence, Hanazono condemns his Zen style as "still bound by the rope of doctrine."³

These opinions cannot be taken as a reliable report of Daitō's own sentiments. Hanazono's imperial line rivaled the line of Emperor Go-Daigo (Musō's patron), and his understanding of Zen was not yet mature.⁴ Though Daitō does use the "rope of doctrine" phrase elsewhere, he does not directly criticize Musō in his writings. Musō states his own position on the relationship between Zen and doctrine in the dialogues translated here, especially numbers 15 and 80.

The text used for the present translation is Satō Taishun, ed., *Muchū mondō* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1935). The editor consulted six earlier versions of the work. The following portions have been selected in an attempt to offer a representative sample of Musō's thought. Eight dialogues are translated completely, one is abridged. Headings have been added.

³ In a Buddhist metaphor, the Buddha's teachings save beings as a fishnet gathers fish. The "rope" which pulls in the net is considered an expedient or secondary device by Hanazono.

⁴ Grammatical ambiguities further complicate the interpretation of the diary passage. See Yanagida Seizan, *Musō*, *Nihon no Zen goroku*, vol. 7 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1977), pp. 34–36, and Tamamura Takeji, *Musō Kokushi* (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1958), pp. 129–131.

Musō Kokushi's *Dialogues in a Dream*

DIALOGUE 1: Good Fortune

Question: The Buddha's great compassion removes the sufferings of all beings and brings them pleasure. Why, then, does Buddhist teaching restrain people from seeking good fortune?

Answer: Seeking good fortune in the world, some people engage in farming and trade, some maneuver to make money in business, some propagate their skills as artists or artisans, and some serve in public office. Though their occupations are different, their aims are the same. They exert themselves, body and mind, throughout their lives, but one can see from their condition that they do not receive good fortune commensurate with their hopes.

Occasionally, these people may get what they seek, enjoying momentary pleasure. Yet their possessions are sometimes burned by fire, swept away by water, robbed by thieves, or plundered by officials. Even if some avoid misfortune their entire lives, when their life-span is exhausted, their good fortune does not follow them. The greater the good fortune, the more numerous the transgressions, so they fall into an evil path in the next life. Are insignificant gains worth a loss as great as this?

Poverty in this life is karmic retribution for greediness in a former life. Ignorant of this principle, some people think that they are deprived because their plans for getting along in the world are inferior. Unless there have been the good deeds in a former life which create good fortune, one cannot increase one's share of fortune even if one learns various ways of getting along in the world and behaves accordingly. Again, one must understand that people are not deprived because they do not skillfully manage their affairs. Rather, their management of affairs is poor precisely because their share of fortune is meager.

Some people are bitter toward their superiors, considering themselves deprived because they do not receive benefits due them. Others become incensed because they feel cheated of land that is properly theirs. Such people are not deprived because their lands were taken or they failed to

receive benefits. With a karma of poverty, they do not even receive benefits or land they supposedly deserve.

However, if they just cast away the desirous mind that seeks good fortune, then they would naturally receive good fortune in abundance. This is why Buddhist teaching restrains people from seeking good fortune. Buddhism's injunction against seeking good fortune should not be construed as an endorsement of poverty.

Long ago in India there was a wealthy man named Sudatta,¹ whose karma of good fortune waned in his old age and whose means of achieving prosperity were exhausted. For some years there had not been anyone in his household except himself and his wife. Though his wealth was gone, he still had many empty warehouses. One day, looking inside a warehouse on the chance of finding something, he came across a sandalwood crown of a pillar. He exchanged this for four measures of rice, reckoning joyfully that this much rice would surely supply sustenance for two or three days.

Sudatta left his home on some other business. Soon after, the Buddha's disciple Śāriputra arrived at Sudatta's house on his mendicant rounds. Sudatta's wife took one measure of rice from the four and humbly offered it to the monk. Then Maudgalyāyana and Māhākāśyapa arrived seeking alms, and Sudatta's wife offered them two measures of rice. Only one measure remained. Just as she was thinking, "We still have enough rice for a day," the Buddha arrived. Unable to withhold anything, she at once offered him the remaining rice.

Sadly, Sudatta's wife reflected, "Sudatta is still away, but when he returns home tired, what shall I do? Though there will be future opportunities to give offerings to the Buddhist monks, I gave away all four measures of rice at a time when our existence is so tenuous. Sudatta may scold me." Feeling miserable, she lay down and cried. At that point, Sudatta returned home. Seeing his wife in tears, he asked her to explain. She described what had happened. After hearing the story Sudatta said, "For the sake of the Three Treasures one should not begrudge even one's own life. Even if we were now facing death from starvation, how could we hold onto things as if they were meant only for us?" He expressed admiration for her wonderful generosity.

¹ The historical Sudatta bought the garden of Prince Jeta and built the Jetavana Vihara there for the Buddha and his followers. The source of Musō's story is the *Storehouse of Various Jewels Sutra* (*Taiśhō daizōkyō*, vol. 4, p. 459).

Later, when he tried to search through the empty warehouses in the hope of again discovering something as valuable as the pillar-crown, Sudatta found the doors of the warehouses blocked shut. Suspicious, he broke the doors down and saw that each of the warehouses was replete with rice, coins, silk cloth, gold, silver, and various other kinds of treasure, as before. Sudatta again became a wealthy man, and his household gathered together once more.

Sudatta's good fortune did not return a second time because the Buddha somehow granted it in return for four measures of rice. It came from the minds of Sudatta and his wife, pure and free of selfish desires. If people are free of desires in this way, limitless good fortune and virtue will immediately be theirs, even if this be the age of the decline of the Dharma. Though one may not be naturally endowed with this kind of mind, one can overturn the mind which seeks insignificant gains and emulate the mind of Sudatta and his wife. Then, how could one fail to achieve true benefits, as they did?

Those who do not put Sudatta's example into practice—hoping only to enjoy pleasure as great as his and seeking good fortune through selfish desires—will fail to receive any genuine gains in this life and will become hungry ghosts in a future life.

DIALOGUE 12: Practicing for Others

Question: If one has not liberated oneself, one should not be able to lead others to liberation. Is it proper, then, to leave oneself aside and instead exercise virtue⁶ for the sake of all beings?

Answer: Living beings are submerged in birth-and-death because they are attached to a self and seek fame and profit for this self, thus creating various forms of bad karma. If one just forgets this self and rouses the intention to benefit all living beings, a great compassion arises within and imperceptibly unites with Buddha-mind. Then, even though one is not exercising virtue for oneself, one soon becomes perfectly endowed with boundless virtue. And, even though one is not seeking the Buddha-way for oneself, the Buddha-way is quickly realized.

⁶ *zengon* 善根; literally, roots of goodness. In Mahayana Buddhism, the merit of one's own practice may be turned over to others, especially to further their progress toward enlightenment.

Those who seek liberation only for themselves possess a Hinayana mind. Even if they were able to exercise virtue unsparingly, they would still be incapable of attaining Buddhahood for themselves. How much less could they lead others to liberation!

Among practitioners who rouse the mind of a bodhisattva, there is a difference between those who excel in wisdom and those who excel in compassion. One who vows to first save all living beings before he himself attains the Buddha-way is a bodhisattva who excels in compassion. One who aims to attain the Buddha-way himself first, in order to save all living beings afterward, is a bodhisattva who excels in wisdom.

The aspiration of a bodhisattva who excels in wisdom bears some resemblance to the aspirations of the two types of Hinayana practitioners. Yet his mind is that of a bodhisattva because it is for the purpose of saving all beings that he first seeks Buddhahood for himself. Though there is a distinction between bodhisattvas who excel in compassion or wisdom, they aspire equally to the salvation of all beings. They are alike in that everything they do is directed toward the benefit of all living beings.

DIALOGUE 15: Benefiting Others

Question: In the Shingon sect there are *kaji*⁷ rituals to banish the suffering and misfortune of living beings. Why do some people criticize Zen as lacking this means to banish suffering?

Answer: Esoteric Buddhism teaches that ordinary people and sages in all ten realms,⁸ without changing their status, are fully Mahāvairocana Buddha. There is thus no fundamental distinction between the wise and the foolish, the noble and the base, nor between calamity and good fortune, pain and pleasure. What is there to pray for, what is there to seek? However, as an expedient means to guide those people who have not yet pene-

⁷ A *kaji* 加持 ceremony involves symbolic finger twinings, prescribed movements with various implements, and mystical formulas. As Musō alludes below, different types of *kaji* were used to prolong life, banish evil spirits, increase wealth, and so on. Musō distinguished between *kaji* which are a degenerate form of petitionary prayer and genuine *kaji*, in which the devotee strives for enlightenment by bringing his body, speech, and mind into correspondence with Buddha.

⁸ The six realms of conditioned existence and the four levels of Buddhahood.

trated this deep truth, esotericism reveals *siddhi*⁹ with a material aspect.¹⁰ Zen leaves expedient means of this type to the doctrinal schools and teaches the Original Nature¹¹ directly.

Attaining the Original Nature, one knows that birth and death fundamentally have no aspect at all. This is true longevity. Not seeing any aspect of misfortune or calamity is the truest guarantee of security. To free oneself from any aspect of poverty or fortune is the genuine increase of benefits. When there is no one to despise as an enemy, this is real mastery over malignant forces. No separation between liking and disliking is surely the profoundest kind of love and respect. One cannot criticize Zen as lacking the means to banish suffering or misfortune if one believes the truth of Original Nature.

Shingon *kaji* rituals and ordinary *kaji*-style prayers to avoid disaster or increase wealth are all expedient devices to guide foolish persons. Every living being completely embodies the six great elements¹² and the four Shingon mandalas,¹³ in no way separate or distinct from Mahāvairocana Buddha. In order to make this truth clear to those who do not know it, the Buddha offered the three esoteric *kaji* of body, speech, and mind, as expedient means. These are the genuine *kaji*.

These days people still have faith in the esoteric verbal formulas, but rare indeed is the aspiration to penetrate the innermost secret teachings, pass through the true *kaji* gate, and actualize the principle of attaining Buddhahood in this very body. Instead, people devote themselves exclusively to worldly prayers. Even though the venerable monks who must uphold the esoteric tradition do not consider these prayers to be their proper purpose, they are compelled to direct their ceremonies and secret practices to worldly ends. There are also Shingon priests, ignorant of the inner teachings of esotericism, who construe these worldly activities as

⁹ Here, the mysterious power of enlightenment.

¹⁰ *sō* 相 (Skt., *lakṣaṇa*, *nimitta*). Generally, aspect is the falsely perceived character of something, whether tangible or intangible. To see no aspect of a given phenomenon is to perceive its essential nature, which is empty. Yet Musō also uses the term "true aspect," identified as the Middle Way.

¹¹ *honbun* 本分. Man's fundamental mind; literally, his natural "share." The expression appears in the Chinese collections of Zen koans. Musō elaborates in dialogues 62 and 63 below.

¹² The Shingon elements are earth, water, fire, air, space, and mind.

¹³ Circular diagrams portraying different aspects of the universe; specifically, the Mahā, Samaya, Dharma, and Karma Mandalas.

their proper vocation. They seem to be praying for patrons and soliciting donations in order to advance their own fame and gain.

This is why esotericism has gradually declined and changed into something resembling the methods of the yin-yang teachers. Conscientious Shingon masters also lament this state of affairs. Nonetheless, there is still some merit to be found in present-day esotericism, by virtue of these expedient practices it has introduced.

When Zen devotees request that prayers be offered in Zen temples concerning matters that are not even of grave concern to the state, it is a karmic cause for the downfall of the Zen Dharma. In so doing, they are burdened with transgressive karma, and their prayers have no effect. However, if they request that the Zen monks make their school prosper by devoting themselves solely to zazen, if they ask the monks about the correct practice of the Way for themselves as well, and if they intensify their will to truly awaken to the teaching of the Patriarchs, then the Three Treasures will surely have compassion on them, and all the Buddhas will heed them. Even if they do not reach the point of awakening to the Way and obtaining the Dharma, they will undoubtedly receive benefits equal to the fulfillment of any worldly prayers.

In the Kamakura period, the Zen disciple Hōjō Tokiyori¹⁴ revered the Zen Dharma and built Kenchōji. At that time, the first abbot of Kenchōji, Zen master Lan-hsi Tao-lung,¹⁵ exhorted those who joined the assembly as Zen monks to devote themselves exclusively to zazen. Monks who studied sutras, commentaries, or the records of Zen masters he censured as "monks without the mind of the Way." How much more reproachable are monks who pursue worldly fame and gain! People who believe in Zen, not only monks but laymen and their families as well, must wholeheartedly strive to awaken to the Original Nature.

Later, several other great Zen masters came in succession from Sung China, including Wu-an P'u-ning, Ta-hsiu Cheng-nien, and Wu-hsueh Tsu-yüan.¹⁶ They, too, admonished monks and laymen that there was

¹⁴ Hōjō Tokiyori (1226–1263), the fifth Hōjō regent. Musō uses his Zen name, Saimyōji.

¹⁵ Lan-hsi Tao-lung (Rankei Dōryū, Daikaku Zenji, 1213–1278) arrived in Japan in 1247.

¹⁶ Wu-an P'u-ning (Gottan Funei, 1197–1276), Ta-hsiu Cheng-nien (Daikyū Shōnen, 1215–1289), and Wu-hsueh Tsu-yüan (Mugaku Sogen, 1226–1286). Wu-hsueh, who arrived in Japan in 1279, was the principal teacher of Musō's teacher Kōhō Kennichi.

nothing more critical than penetrating the Original Nature. The faith of lay practitioners was as great as that of monks, as demonstrated by the Zen disciple Hōjō Tokimune.¹⁷ In the Kōan period [1278–87], the world was in an uproar because the Mongols were invading. The lay disciple Tokimune, however, remained composed, and every day he summoned Zen master Wu-hsüeh Tsu-yüan, then head of Kenchōji, or various experienced Zen monks, and they would speak about matters of Dharma. This attitude was so praiseworthy that it was noted in Wu-hsüeh's *Discourses*. Later, Tokimune built Engakuji, continuing to foster the prosperity of the Zen school. Isn't this the reason why the Mongols did not destroy our country? The world was kept secure during the two generations of father and son, and both men are reported to have died in an exemplary manner. . . .

DIALOGUE 29: Deluded Thinking

Question: What is deluded thinking?

Answer: Thinking that there is a distinction between the Pure Land and the realm of defilement, between delusion and satori, between ordinary men and sages is deluded thinking. Thinking that there is no distinction between sages and ordinary men, or between purity and defilement, is also deluded thinking. To think that in the Buddha-dharma there is a distinction between Mahayana and Hinayana, the expedient teaching and the real teaching, the exoteric and the esoteric, Zen and the doctrinal schools, is also deluded thinking. To think that the Buddha-dharma is one taste, universal, without degrees of excellence, is also deluded thinking.

The belief that walking, standing, sitting, and reclining, or seeing, hearing, thinking, and knowing, are all the Buddha-dharma is deluded thinking. The belief that there is a Buddha-dharma separate from your every action is also deluded thinking. To see the myriad things as having real existence is the deluded thinking of the ordinary person. The view that all the myriad things are impermanent is the delusion of Hinayana. The false views that all things are imperishable or that all things perish completely, free of causation, are the deluded thinking of non-Buddhist teachings.

¹⁷ Hōjō Tokimune (1251–1284), Tokiyori's son and the regent during the two attempts made by the Mongols to invade Japan. Musō uses his Zen name, Hōkōji.

Those who know that phenomena are as empty as a mirage and those who have awakened to the Middle Way as the true aspect of things have the deluded thinking of bodhisattvas. Not knowing that there is a separate transmission outside the sutras and being attached to doctrine is the deluded thinking of doctrinal school monks. Thinking that there is a Dharma gate superior to doctrine called 'a separate transmission outside the sutras' is the deluded thinking of Zen practitioners.

If you consider this teaching plausible and then conclude that all thinking is deluded thinking, this again is deluded thinking. In former times, National Master Wu-yeh used only one phrase throughout his life in answering the questions of students: "Don't be deluded!"¹⁸ If one sees through this one phrase, the wisdom and virtue of one's fundamental existence will suddenly become manifest.

DIALOGUE 46: Who Inquires?

Question: An ancient said, "The true practitioner of the Way does not speak of the right or wrong of others."¹⁹ I believe this statement, but thoughts of right and wrong still tend to arise when I confront monks and laymen. What can I do to remedy this?

Answer: To say that the true practitioner of the Way does not speak of the right or wrong of others is not to say that though right and wrong in fact exist, he doesn't talk about them. Since he sees no aspect of self-and-other, he has no right and wrong to espouse. The Third Patriarch of Zen said, "In the Dharma-realm of thusness, there is neither self nor other."²⁰ The *Bodhisattva Creation Sutra* states, "Dharma-nature is like the vast ocean; one cannot say it contains right or wrong."

For those who have not realized this truth, an aspect of self-and-other remains. As long as there is an aspect of self-and-other, how can there not be perceptions of right and wrong? If one sees distinctions of right

¹⁸ Wu-yeh (n.d.) was a disciple of Ma-tsu Tao-i (709–788). His famous answer is found in *The Transmission of the Lamp*, Sung-shih Tao-yüan, ed., *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu (Keitoku dentō roku)*, Taipei: Hsin-wen-feng Ch'upan, rev. ed., 1979, ch. 8, p. 132; hereafter cited as *Transmission of the Lamp*.

¹⁹ A similar statement is found in the *Dharmapada (Taishō daizōkyō, vol. 85, p. 1432)*.

²⁰ *Affirming Faith in Mind*, by Seng-ts'an (d. 606) (*Transmission of the Lamp*, ch. 13, p. 626).

and wrong, even if no words to that effect escape one's mouth, one is not a true practitioner of the Way. Therefore, Mahayana practitioners, rather than trying not to speak of the right or wrong of others, should just look deeply into themselves to see who it is that makes these judgements.

The *Total Enlightenment Sutra* states, "They construe the four elements²¹ as their bodily aspect; they construe the shadows cast on the mind by the six dusts²² as their mental aspect." The meaning of this sutra passage is that what the ordinary person takes to be his self is not the true self. If what one takes to be the self is mistaken, then what one takes to be others will also miss the mark. If self-and-other is not real, how can one speak of right and wrong?

There are people commonly considered practitioners of the Way who do not say anything about the right or wrong of others. Yet in their own minds they are categorizing the goodness or evil in others, judging the character of others as discerning or dull, discussing the degree of depth in others' understanding, or comparing the correctness of others' practice. That kind of person cannot advance directly towards unsurpassed enlightenment. This is why I urge you not to entertain any views of right and wrong.

Though one may shed all thoughts of right and wrong and see no aspect of self-and-other, if one has not yet perceived the Original Face before one's parents were born, one cannot be called a true practitioner of the Way. You must turn inward and illumine your own mind! Who is it that separates self and other, mind and body, that produces the thoughts of right and wrong, gain and loss?

In the past, Nan-yüeh called upon the Sixth Patriarch of Zen.²³ The Patriarch saw him approach and asked, "What has come here?" Nan-yüeh was unable to answer, and he withdrew. Eight years later Nan-yüeh first experienced deep satori. He paid a second visit to the Sixth Patriarch and answered the original question: "If you call it something, you've already missed the mark."²⁴ The Sixth Patriarch then confirmed Nan-yüeh's

²¹ In Indian thought, the four elements are earth, water, fire, and air.

²² The six dusts are colors, sounds, smells, tastes, textures, and dharmas. (Dharmas are the objects of thought, the sixth sense.) The implication of "dust" is that deluded perceptions sully an originally pure mind.

²³ Nan-yüeh Huai-jang (677-744) was a disciple of Hui-neng (638-713), the Sixth Patriarch of Zen.

²⁴ *Transmission of the Lamp*, ch. 5, p. 92.

enlightenment. The first time Master Nan-yüeh called upon the Sixth Patriarch, the Patriarch's question did not trigger any deep insight. Though he may appear foolish, Nan-yüeh's bafflement and his departure are evidence of his astuteness. Had he not acted in this way, he would have been unable to attain great satori even if he lived a thousand lifetimes.

These days, when foolish people come to inquire about the Buddha-dharma, I may ask them, "Who has come to inquire about the Buddha-dharma?" Some respond out of their usual deluded thinking and introduce themselves as So-and-so. Some wonder if they should perhaps try to investigate who has asked about Buddhism. Some, interpreting the matter according to the saying that one's own mind is Buddha, raise their eyebrows, blink their eyes, wave their hands, or clench their fists.

Then there are others who clutch a fixed notion that the discriminating mind is without real substance and separate from all forms. These people attempt to apply this belief to Nan-yüeh's answer, "If you call it something, you've already missed the mark," and they reply with the line, "Above, there is nothing to scale; below, the self is cut off."²⁵ Some, presuming that any kind of question-and-answer would be an external affair, give a loud shout. Some, supposing that real Zen is apart from any of these judgements, shake their sleeves and depart. People who go on like this will never be able to attain great awakening even by the time Maitreya, Buddha of the future, makes his appearance in the world.

Each time the great Zen master of Po-chang concluded a discourse on the Dharma in the main hall, he would call out, "Everyone!" Hearing this, everybody would look around. Po-chang then demanded, "What is that?"²⁶ "Po-chang's discourse-ending words," as they were called at the time, were not meant to teach the essentials of practice or determine people's understanding. What, then, was his intention? If you understand it right off, your ignorance that has persisted over long ages will be extinguished in an instant.

In former times, there was a follower of the doctrinal schools called Eminent Scholar Liang. His knowledge of the sutras and commentaries was extensive, he had mastered their significance, and he had been ex-

²⁵ An answer given by Yün-men Wen-yen (Ummon Bun'en, 862-949) in *The Record of Yün-men* (*Taishō daizōkyō*, vol. 47, no. 1988).

²⁶ *kore nan zo* これ何ぞ. Though this question is aimed at a person, the word "who" is avoided. In Chinese the question leaves the subject unspecified, besides using "what" rather than "who" (*shih shih-mo* 是什麼) (*Transmission of the Lamp*, ch. 6, pp. 116-117).

pounding the Dharma to students for many years. One day, Liang called upon Zen master Ma-tsu, and they engaged in various questions and answers. Scholar Liang's views did not accord with Ma-tsu's, and he took his leave. Ma-tsu suddenly called out, "Eminent Scholar!" Liang turned his head. Ma-tsu prodded, "What is that?" At once, Liang experienced a great awakening.²⁷

Though he had thoroughly mastered the doctrinal meaning of the sutras and commentaries years before, Liang still had not achieved enlightenment. Why did Ma-tsu's one phrase, "What is that?" precipitate his satori? It is important to grasp that what Liang realized in his enlightenment is not found in the principles of the sutras. Those who struggle their entire lives to understand the Buddha-way intellectually should instead spend their time probing it directly, amidst the arising and passing of thoughts—whether walking, standing, sitting, or reclining. Practicing like this, how could they fail to achieve an awakening, as did Nan-yüeh or Scholar Liang?

Those who discuss the right and wrong of others and pursue only worldly fame and profit spend their whole lives in vain. Can they be said to be deserving of the precious human body they have received?

DIALOGUE 62: The Field of Original Nature (I)

Question: Is what the sutras call "Buddha-nature" or "mind-ground" different from what Zen calls "the field²⁸ of Original Nature"?

Answer: "Mind-ground" or "Buddha-nature" in the doctrinal schools, and in any of the fully revealed Mahayana teachings, is not different from Original Nature. Nonetheless, the doctrinal schools say that the instant a deluded notion arises, Buddhas and sentient beings are provisionally

²⁷ *Transmission of the Lamp*, ch. 8, pp. 138–139. After his confrontation with Ma-tsu, Liang withdrew to the mountains and was not heard from again. The story of Liang deeply affected Musō, who commissioned a painting of a scene from Liang's life for his final hermitage in Kyoto, Saihōji.

²⁸ Though the "field" of Original Nature is formless, *denchi* 田地 is literally a rice-field. Drawing from common experience, Musō uses the term as a metaphor for Original Nature's role as the source of all things. (Similarly, masters nourish disciples with the "grass" or "fodder" of Original Nature in the Chinese koan collections.) Besides "field," Musō also refers to the "principle," "great wisdom," "other shore," and "practice" of Original Nature.

separated, and they discuss mind or Buddha-nature in this fashion. This teaching differs from Zen's field of Original Nature, which is antecedent to any separation between sentient beings and Buddhas.

Once a person awakens to the field of Original Nature, he sees that the Buddha-nature, mind, *tathāgata-garbha*,²⁹ thusness, or Dharma-nature discussed by the doctrinal schools, as well as what ordinary men perceive as the great earth, mountains, rivers, grass, tiles, or stones, are all the field of Original Nature. Yet there is no need to accord special value to the name "field of Original Nature."

DIALOGUE 63: The Field of Original Nature (II)

Question: Though it is said that all men are fully endowed with the field of Original Nature and that it is completely realized in each individual, its form has never been seen. Where is it found? Could it be in the body or the mind? Or is the body-mind in its totality the field of Original Nature? Or is it somewhere else, apart from the body-mind?

Answer: An ancient has said, "The truth is not apart from this very place, always full to overflowing. But when you search for it you understand that it cannot be seen."³⁰ The field of Original Nature is not within the body-mind, nor is it outside the body-mind. And to say the entire body-mind is the place of Original Nature also misses the mark. It is not all sentient beings and non-sentient beings, nor is it the wisdom of Buddhas and sages. Yet everything is produced by it—the wisdom of Buddhas and sages, the body-mind of all beings, the countries of the world, and so on. Therefore, it is provisionally called the field of Original Nature.

The *Diamond Sutra* states that all Buddhas and their supreme perfect enlightenments arise from this Sutra.³¹ This Diamond prajna-wisdom is the field of Original Nature. The *Total Enlightenment Sutra* declares that

²⁹ The womb of all created things.

³⁰ *Song of Enlightenment (Cheng-tao ko)*, by Yung-chia Hsüan-chüeh (665–713) (*Taishō daizōkyō*, vol. 48, p. 396). Cf. the interpretation of this verse by Kajitani Sōnin et al., *Shinjinmei Shōdōka*, Zen no goroku, vol. 16 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1974), pp. 70–72.

³¹ Cf. Edward Conze, trans., *Buddhist Wisdom Books* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 40.

purity, truth, awakening, nirvana, and the various *pāramitās*³² all flow from total enlightenment. This total enlightenment is the field of Original Nature. The *Lotus Samadhi Sutra* says that the Thirty-seven Worthies³³ reside in the castle of mind. The castle of mind is likewise the field of Original Nature. Vairocana Buddha, Vajrasattva, and all the other Thirty-seven Worthies discussed in esotericism live in this castle of mind. The wondrous truth of thusness, all Buddhas, and all bodhisattvas rely upon the field of Original Nature. Therefore, how could any living being, any pure or defiled realm, be apart from it?

DIALOGUE 80: Zen and Doctrine

Question: The Buddha expounded the Dharma in two ways. In his adapted teachings, he accommodated his words to the capacities of his listeners. In his direct teachings, he expressed his fundamental meaning. Doesn't the Zen school consider the adapted teachings a means comparable to the calling of Hsiao-yü [by her mistress]?³⁴

Answer: To describe the Buddha's teachings as "adapted" or "direct" and to establish the fixed contents of each category is the exegesis of the doctrinal schools. When Zen masters reverently take up the Buddha's teaching, they may call something "adapted" or "direct," independent of any fixed categories. In Zen everything is a means comparable to the calling of Hsiao-yü. The master's explanation of Buddhist teaching given today using direct words will be given tomorrow using adapted words. Not limited to direct and adapted words, a master will also use expressions

³² The six "perfections": charity, morality, patience, exertion, concentration, and prajna-wisdom.

³³ In the Diamond-realm (Skt., *Vajradhātu*) mandala of esoteric Buddhism, the thirty-seven Buddhas and bodhisattvas each symbolize a virtue or type of practice.

³⁴ Hsiao-yü is the name of a servant in a Chinese tale about two young lovers, told by Musō in dialogue 77. The suitor secretly approaches the maiden's house. She signals to him that she is aware of his presence by calling out instructions to her servant, such as, "Please raise the screens." The maiden's intention is not apparent in her words to Hsiao-yü, yet the two lovers understand each other perfectly.

Musō refers to the Buddha's lifetime of teaching, and to his own Zen teaching, as "a means of calling Hsiao-yü." This story was told by master Wu-tsu Fa-yen (d. 1104) when asked to describe his Zen. It is cited by Ta-hui Tsung-kao (1089-1163) in *The Arsenal of Ta-hui* (*Taishō daizōkyō*, vol. 47, p. 946).

that are superficial or profound, deluded or truthful, and so on. An ancient has said, "The doctrines of Zen are not the same as those of the doctrinal schools, in which the length of one foot is always one foot, and the length of two feet is always two feet."

The Buddha did not call himself only a man of doctrine, nor did he call himself only a man of Zen.³⁵ Nor did he separate his teachings into a doctrine portion and a Zen portion, because Buddha's inner realization cannot be equated with either of them. The differences between Zen and doctrine come about when this inner realization mysteriously functions to accord with the needs of disciples. The *Vimalakirti Sutra* says, "When the Buddha teaches the Dharma with a single sound, every sentient being understands according to its own kind."

During the Buddha's lifetime, there was no separation between Zen monks and monks of the doctrine. The division between Zen and doctrine first appeared after the Buddha's passing, as did the division between "revealed" and "hidden" teachings within the doctrinal schools, and the divisions between the five houses³⁶ of Zen. The people of great wisdom and virtue who inherited and furthered the Buddha's teaching became either masters of doctrine or patriarchs of Zen. In order to convey the Buddha's teaching of Original Nature, they each devised expedient means adapted to the capacities and natural desires of individuals. Extending their hands to all, these masters aimed to help others break through their inverted biases and attachments, transcend the dualistic breach between Zen and doctrine, and attain the deity of their Original Nature.

The fundamental intention of genuine doctrinal school masters is thus not bounded by doctrine, and the fundamental intention of clear-eyed Zen masters is not found within Zen. Yet these masters must adjust their speech to their listeners in order to teach, just as [the maiden had to] summon Hsiao-yü [in order to communicate to her suitor]. In this age of the decline of the Dharma, there are practitioners of Zen and of the doctrinal schools who place their prejudices first. These people sink into the sea of pro and con, obscuring the fundamental intention of Buddhas and patriarchs.

³⁵ Here the character *zen* 禪 refers to dhyana-meditation as well as the Zen school, just as *kyō* 教 refers to the sutras and the doctrinal schools. The double connotation of each term is sacrificed in translation to maintain the parallelism of the passage.

³⁶ The Wei-wang, Yün-men, Ts'ao-tung, Fa-yen, and Lin-chi branches of Chinese Zen.

The *Sutra of Resolving Doubts During the Counterfeit Dharma* states, "To read a sutra's words in merely a literal manner is to harm all Buddhas in the three worlds."³⁷ Clear-eyed Zen masters do not equip themselves with a stock of invariable doctrines. They simply seize upon a teaching in response to the moment, giving their tongues free rein. Zen masters do not hole up in any fixed position. When people ask about Zen, the master may answer with the words of Confucius, Mencius, Lao-tzu, or Chuang-tzu. Or he may expound the teachings of the doctrinal schools. On other occasions he will answer with popular proverbs, or draw attention to something close at hand. Then again, he may use his stick, shout loudly, raise a finger, or wave a fist. These are the methods of Zen masters, the unfettered vitality of Zen. Those who have not yet reached this realm cannot fathom it through the senses and intellect alone.

DIALOGUE 93: Dharma Teaching

Question: Master, how do you truly teach people the Dharma?

Answer: In Silla the sun shines brightly at midnight.³⁸

³⁷ The three worlds are the past, the present, and the future.

³⁸ The kingdom of Silla unified the Korean peninsula in AD 668. This answer is one of several in *Dialogues in a Dream* which influenced the great Nō playwright and theorist Zeami (1363–1443). See Yasuraoka Kōsaku, "Musō to Zeami," *Kaishaku to kanshō*, vol. 14 (March 1949), pp. 15–20.