

ZEN BATTLES



MODERN COMMENTARY ON THE
TEACHINGS OF MASTER LINJI

THICH NHAT HANH

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CHAPTER ONE

THE PERSON WITH NOTHING TO DO

“As I see it, there isn’t so much to do.
Just be ordinary—put on your robes, eat your food,
and pass the time doing nothing.”

—MASTER LINJI, TEACHING 18

You may be a student of Master Linji, even if you don't know his name. If you practice to live more fully and happily in the present moment, then you are a student of Master Linji. In the Zen tradition, his spirit is in everything we're taught and everything we do.

Master Linji lived during the Tang dynasty in China. He was born in western Shandong province, just south of the Huang Ho (Yellow) River, sometime between 810 and 815. When he was still young, he left his family and traveled north to study with Zen Patriarch Huangbo in his monastery near Hongzhou in Jiangxi province, just south of the Yangzi River. It was a time of political instability in China. There was government repression of Buddhism, which culminated in a decree, issued in 845 by the emperor Tang Wu Zong, ordering all monks and nuns to disrobe and return to lay life. Many temples and statues were destroyed, particularly in the cities. Monasteries in outlying areas were less affected.

After several years, the young Linji was sent by his teacher to study briefly with the reclusive monk Dayu, after which time he returned to live with the monks at Patriarch Huangbo's temple. Later he had his own temple in Zhengzhou, Hebei province, where he taught in his signature direct and dramatic style. As was the custom in China at the time, he took his name, Linji, from the name of the mountain on which he lived and taught. He resided there until he passed away in 867. He never wrote down his teachings, but his students recorded and compiled them in *The Record of Master Linji*.

As a young monk, Linji studied diligently and gained a deep and extensive knowledge of the Tripitaka, the three baskets of the Buddhist teachings: the sutras, commentaries, and *vinaya* (monastic precepts). He noticed that although many monks studied very diligently, their studies didn't influence their understanding and transformation. They appeared to be seeking knowledge only to increase their fame or position in the temple. So Master Linji let go of his studies in order to follow true Zen practice.

Many of us have spent our whole lives learning, questioning, and searching. But even on the path of enlightenment, if all we do is study, we're wasting our time and that of our teacher. This doesn't mean we shouldn't study; study and practice help each other. But what's important is not the goal we're seeking—even if that goal is enlightenment—but living each moment of our daily lives truly and fully.

Master Linji had a solid knowledge of the Buddhist canon, but his teaching method was based on his confidence that human beings need only to wake up to their true nature and live as ordinary people. Master Linji didn't call himself a Zen master. He called himself a "good spiritual friend," someone who could help others on the path. Master Linji called those who had insight to teach, "the host," and the student, the one who comes to learn, "the guest."

In Master Linji's time, some Buddhist terms were used so often they became meaningless. People chewed on words like "liberation" and "enlightenment" until they lost their power. It's no different today. People use words that tire our ears. We hear the words "freedom" and "security" on talk radio, television, and in the newspaper so often that they've lost their effectiveness. When words are overused, even the most beautiful words can lose their true meaning. For example, the word "love" is a wonderful word. When we like to eat hamburgers, we say, "I love hamburgers." So what's left of the deeper meaning of the word "love"?

It's the same with Buddhist words. Someone may be able to speak beautifully about compassion, wisdom, or nonself, but this doesn't necessarily help others. And the speaker may still have a big self

or treat others badly. His eloquent speech may be only empty words. We can get tired of all these words, even the word “Buddha.” So to wake people up, Master Linji invented new terms and new ways of saying things that would respond to the needs of his time.

For example, Master Linji invented the term the “businessless person,” the person who has nothing to do and nowhere to go. This was his ideal example of what a person could be. In Theravada Buddhism, the ideal person was the *arhat*, someone who practiced to attain enlightenment. In Mahayana Buddhism, the ideal person was the bodhisattva, a compassionate being who, on the path of enlightenment, helped others.

According to Master Linji, the businessless person is someone who doesn’t run after enlightenment or grasp at anything, even if that thing is the Buddha. This person has simply stopped. She is no longer caught by anything, even theories or teachings. The businessless person is the true person inside each one of us. This is the essential teaching of Master Linji.

When we learn to stop and be truly alive in the present moment, we are in touch with what’s going on within and around us. We aren’t carried away by the past, the future, our thinking, ideas, emotions, and projects. Often we think that our ideas about things are the reality of that thing. Our notion of the Buddha may be just an idea and may be far from reality. The Buddha outside ourselves was a human being who was born, lived, and died. For us to seek such a Buddha would be to seek a shadow, a ghost Buddha, and at some point our idea of Buddha would become an obstacle for us.

Master Linji said that when we meet the ghost Buddha, we should cut off his head. Whether we’re looking inside or outside ourselves, we need to cut off the head of whatever we meet, and abandon the views and ideas we have about things, including our ideas about Buddhism and Buddhist teachings. Buddhist teachings are not exalted words and scriptures existing outside us, sitting on a high shelf in the temple, but are medicine for our ills. Buddhist teachings are skillful means to cure our ignorance, craving, and anger, as well as our habit of seeking things outside and not having confidence in ourselves.

Insight can’t be found in sutras, commentaries, or Dharma talks. Liberation and awakened understanding can’t be found by devoting ourselves to the study of the Buddhist scriptures. This is like hoping to find fresh water in dry bones. Returning to the present moment, using our clear mind that exists right here and now, we can be in touch with liberation and enlightenment, as well as with the Buddha and all his disciples as living realities right in this moment.

The person who has nothing to do doesn’t need to put on airs or leave any trace behind. The true person is an active participant, engaged in her environment while remaining unoppressed by it. Although all phenomena are going through the various appearances of birth, abiding, changing, and dying, the true person doesn’t become a victim of sadness, happiness, love, or hate. She lives in awareness as an ordinary person, whether standing, walking, lying down, or sitting. She doesn’t act a part, even the part of a great Zen master. This is what Master Linji means by “Be sovereign wherever you are and use that place as your seat of awakening.”

We may wonder, “If a person has no direction, isn’t yearning to realize an ideal, and doesn’t have an aim in life, then who will help living beings be liberated, who will rescue those who are drowning in the ocean of suffering?” A Buddha is a person who has no more business to do and isn’t looking for anything. In doing nothing, in simply stopping, we can live freely and be true to ourselves, and our liberation will contribute to the liberation of all beings.

CHAPTER TWO



HOW TO READ THE RECORD OF FASTER LINJI

Master Linji taught in order to shake things up. He wanted to smash obstacles, heal sickness, and undo fetters. Reading his words is like taking a very strong medicine. Most of us tend to think that if we take vitamins or tonics, we'll feel healthier. But sometimes, rather than taking anything more into our bodies, we need to clean them out. That's when we need a good dose of the teachings of Master Linji. They aren't vitamins—they're laxatives.

When we've accumulated so much knowledge inside, we don't have the capacity to digest it. It's like when we eat too much food, we can't digest it and we become constipated. When we don't understand what we've learned and can't apply it in our practice, in our daily lives, then our knowledge can block our bodies and minds. But you don't have to wait until you're constipated to benefit from Master Linji's teachings; prevention is better than a cure.

Master Linji didn't want to present deep and wonderful ideas for us to study and debate. We don't come to the teachings of Master Linji looking for some absolute truth or hoping to discover difficult concepts and mystical ideas. All teaching devices are first and foremost words, mere designations. Master Linji calls them "empty terms" or "-isms." They aren't objective realities. Master Linji doesn't want us to see his words as a golden framework or a jade ruler to study and worship. He tells us his words are only drawings made in empty space.

The purpose of Master Linji's work is to help us cease all our seeking and come back to ourselves in the present moment. That's where we can find everything we're looking for, whether it's Buddha, perfect understanding, peace, or liberation.

Begin by reading the teachings themselves before reading the commentary or the practices. On the first reading, you don't need a guide. It will be like walking into a museum for the first time and responding to the paintings before reading the catalog or taking the tour. Simply read the teachings as stories and observe what you see and feel; allow them to wash out your old notions of what a true person is, who the Buddha is, and what the teachings are. When we learn the works of Master Linji, we should imagine a teacher standing in front of us and shouting: "Don't come to me seeking something. The enlightenment, happiness, stability, and freedom you seek are already inside you."

It may work best to think of these teachings as poems. If we don't understand them at first, it's okay. These words, in and of themselves, aren't wisdom. Master Linji offered them as a tool to open and begin to probe the wisdom in our own hearts. The teachings are like a shovel that helps us dig for a buried treasure.

The Record of Master Linji is divided into two parts: Zen Battles and Evening Talks. The teachings that Master Linji gave in the morning, the Zen Battles, were given in the form of questions and answers. In the afternoon or evening, he would give explanation teachings, sharing the Dharma and telling stories. I recommend you read the Evening Talks (Teachings 10–23) first, even though they're presented second, because the Evening Talks give principal ideas that can guide your practice. These teachings will also help you better understand the Zen Battles, which often read like riddles.

The Zen Battles are skits. One role is the teacher, the "host." The other role is the student, the "guest." The host is the one who knows what's going on and the guest is the one who comes to learn. Sometimes they switch roles: the guest plays the role of the host, and the host plays the role of the guest. Sometimes both play the guest or the host.

In the time of Master Linji, a Zen student would step up and face the Zen master in order to ask a question and to find out from the master if his understanding was ripe yet. This required a certain bravery on the part of the student. Sometimes there would be victory, sometimes defeat. Sometimes the battles would lead to destruction. Sometimes both guest and host would be victorious.

Master Linji wasn't trying to defeat his students in these battles; he was trying to defeat their tendency to engage in excessive thinking and rationalizing. For Master Linji, thinking was not awakened understanding. So these weren't long battles. The Zen master didn't need to sit and talk for a long time. The student had to say only one thing and the Zen master would know his mind. The student needed to give rise to only one thought to go in the wrong direction. Whether or not he understood would be determined in that very instant. If he went in the wrong direction, he would lose.

In school, when we want to ask a question, we remain seated and put up our hand. We use our head, our intellect, to ask a question in order to get a bit of knowledge in return. But Zen isn't like that. Here our aim isn't to find out and store up knowledge about Buddhism; it's to ask the right question, the question that has the capacity to destroy our obstacles. If we don't have that question, it's better not to come forward. Our question should be something that can tear apart the veil of ignorance and liberate us. Maybe it can teach our teacher and the whole community, too. This is what Master Linji is looking for when he asks, "Is there any warrior who is willing to step out onto the battlefield?"

After reading the Evening Talks and the Zen Battles, look at the commentary and the complementary material in the back that offers concrete methods for practice. The commentaries will give you a second opportunity to see something in the teachings. The practices will give you ways to apply the teachings in your daily life. Even though the true person is the person with nothing to do and nowhere to go, doing nothing and going nowhere takes a lot of joyful practice!

CHAPTER THREE



THE RECORD OF MASTER LINJI

[1]

The prefect, whose name was Wang, along with other officials, invited the Zen master to ascend the Dharma seat. When he had stepped up he said, "Today, although unwillingly, I have followed the custom and taken my seat up here. If I were to speak in a formal way, setting down the great achievements of the Zen school, I wouldn't be able to open my mouth and you wouldn't know where to find a foothold. However, because today the prefect has made his request so many times, how can I continue to hide the essential teachings of the Zen school? So if there is any warrior who is willing to step out onto the battlefield, he should request to come and face the Sangha in order to prove himself in a couple of points.

A monk stepped forward and asked, "What is the chief meaning of the Buddhadharma?" The monk prostrated. The master said, "This monk has the ability to speak."

Another person asked, "To which tradition does the song that the master sings belong, and of what branch of Zen is he a continuation?" The master replied, "In the past, when I was still with Master Huangbo, I asked a question three times and was beaten three times." The monk stopped to think. The master gave a shout. Then he beat him and said, "Monk, don't hope to drive a stake into empty space."

A senior monk asked, "There is no reason why the teachings of the Three Vehicles and the Twelve Divisions should not make our Buddha nature shine out, is there?" The master said, "You have not yet dug up the weeds of your mind's garden." The senior monk said, "There is no reason why the Buddha would have deceived people." The master asked, "Where is Buddha?" The senior monk was unable to reply. The master said, "You wanted to fool this old monk in the presence of the prefect, did you? Leave, leave! Make room for others to ask questions." The Zen master said, "The banquet of the Dharma is being given today for a great cause. Is there anyone else who wants to ask or say anything more? Come out here quickly. I will let you know in advance that you only need to open your mouth and the communication is lost. Why? Have you heard the Buddha say that the Dharma is not caught in words and concepts: it does not arise from a cause and it does not arise from conditions? Because you do not yet have confidence in yourself, all we have today is a few odd words spoken here and there, whose only function is to block the way of the prefect and the other officials and eclipse your Buddha nature ever more. It would be better to withdraw."

Then the master shouted out and said, "For those whose faith is weak, to have spent a whole day bandying words like this is of no use. You have been standing a long time; your legs must be tired. Farewell for the time being."

[2]

There was a time the master went to Hefu. The prefect named Wang invited the master to be seated on the Dharma throne. The venerable Magu stepped out and asked, "Of all the thousand eyes and thousand arms of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, which is the chief eye?"

The master said, "Of all thousand eyes and thousand arms of the Bodhisattva of Compassion,

which is the chief eye? Speak quickly!” Magu pulled the Zen master down from the throne and sat himself there. The Zen master came close and said, “You don’t understand.” Magu was perplexed. The master pulled Magu down and then sat on the throne himself. Magu left the Dharma Hall. The Zen master came down from the throne.

[3]

One day the Zen master came into the Dharma Hall and said, “On this lump of red flesh is a real person of no position who comes in and out right before your face. Whoever has not seen that person should look carefully. Have a good look!” At that point a monk came up and asked, “What is that real person of no position?” The master stepped down from the meditation platform, took hold of the monk and said, “Speak, speak! What is that real person with no position?” The monk was perplexed. The master let go of him and said, “The real person with no position is no more than dry excrement on a stick.” Having spoken, he went back to his room immediately.

[4]

The master had just come into the Dharma Hall and a monk came out and prostrated. The master yelled. The monk said, “Please, Upadhyaya, do not test me.” The master asked, “Tell me, monk, where did the sound of that shout fall?” The monk shouted forthwith.

Another monk came up and asked, “What is the essential teaching of the Buddhadharma?” The master yelled. The monk prostrated. The master asked, “Where does the weakness lie?” The monk said, “If one offends again, it will not be forgiven.” The master immediately shouted.

That day, as soon as the masters of the two meditation halls saw each other, they shouted at the same time. A monk asked the master, “In this case, is there a proper guest and host?” The master said, “The guest and the host are clear.” And then he added, “Noble Sangha, if you want to know the principle of the four relations of guest and host, then go and ask the two masters of the meditation halls.” Having spoken, he stepped down.

The Zen master came into the Dharma Hall and a monk asked, “What is the main idea of the Buddhadharma?” The master raised his duster. The monk shouted and was beaten once by the master.

[5]

Another monk came up and asked, “What is the main idea of the Buddhadharma?” The Zen master raised his duster again. The monk shouted. The master also shouted. The monk faltered and the Zen master beat him forthwith.

The Zen master then said, “Noble Sangha, when the Dharma is at stake, someone does not fear for their body or their life. Twenty years ago, I was still staying at the monastery of the former master Huangbo. Three times I asked him about the essential idea of the Buddhadharma and three times he bequeathed a beating upon me, rather as if he were rubbing my head with a branch of artemisia. Today I still feel some nostalgia for the day he beat me. Is there anyone here who could come up and help me relive that moment?” At that point a monk came up from his place and said, “I could do it.”

The master took his stick and gave it to the monk. The monk hesitated when he received the stick. The master immediately beat him.

[6]

The master came into the Dharma Hall, and a monk asked, “What is the story about the sharp tip of the sword blade?” The master said, “It’s not safe! It’s not safe!” The monk was hesitant; he was beaten straight away.

Another person asked, “In the case of the lay practitioner Shi Shi hulling rice: at the moment when he forgot to press down his foot on the pestle-shaft, where did he go?” The Zen master said: “He drowned in a deep spring.”

The Zen master continued, “I do not let down anyone who comes to me. I always know where that person is coming from. If someone comes with a certain stance, then he has lost himself. If someone comes without a particular stance, it is as if he has tied himself up without any rope.

“Never, at any time, carelessly deliberate and make judgments. Whether you have understood or failed to understand, you are wrong. I say this straight out. If people talk about my behavior, let them talk. You have been standing a long time. You must be tired. We shall meet again soon.”

[7]

The master came into the Dharma Hall and said, “Someone is standing on a towering peak alone. There is no path from the peak. Someone else is standing at the crossroads but cannot advance. Of these two, who will come first and who after? Do not pretend to be Vimalakirti or play the role of the great master Fu. Farewell.”

[8]

The master came into the Dharma Hall and said, “There is someone who is always on the Way but has never left home. There is also someone who has left home but is not on the Way. Out of these two, which is worthy of the offerings of gods and humans?” Having said this, he immediately stepped down.

[9]

The master came into the Dharma Hall.

A monk asked, “What is the first sentence?”

The master replied, “When the seal of the Three Essentials is removed, the red stamp is clear. There is no hesitation—host and guest can be distinguished.”

“What is the second sentence?”

“The wonderful explanation is not obstructed, has no obstacles, in replying to the question. The realization of the skillful means does not divide the stream.”

“What about the third sentence?”

“Look at the puppets performing. There is someone pulling the strings inside.”

The master also said, “Each sentence must have three wonderful entrances. Each wonderful entrance must have the Three Essentials. There have to be skillful means and function. How do you understand this?”

Having spoken, he stepped down.

[10]

During an evening session the master opened with the following explanation, “Sometimes it is necessary to eliminate the person but not to eliminate the person’s circumstances. Sometimes it is necessary to eliminate the person’s circumstances but not the person. Sometimes it is necessary to eliminate both the person and their circumstances. Sometimes you eliminate neither the person nor their circumstances.”

After that a monk asked, “What does it mean to eliminate the person but not the object of the person’s perceptions?” The master replied, “The sun rises, making the Earth an embroidery. The child’s hair hangs down, white as silk threads.”

The monk asked, “Then what is meant by eliminating the person’s object and not the person?” The master replied, “The king’s commands are relayed to every part of the world. The officers on the frontier have dispersed the clouds of smoke.”

The monk asked, “Then what does it mean to eliminate both the person and the object?” The master replied, “The two districts of Bun and Phan are not in communication. The people are isolated in their own world.”

The monk asked, “What is meant by eliminating neither the person nor the object?” The master replied, “The king steps into the jeweled palace. Old men in the countryside are singing.”

[11]

The master taught: “In these times, whoever studies the Buddhadharma needs right view. Once there is right view, birth and death can no longer touch you. At that point, whether you stay or go, you do so as a free person. You do not need to go in search of the transcendent, but the transcendent will seek you out.

“Friends on the Path, the virtuous monks of old have all offered human beings a path of liberation. The place of this mountain monk is just to encourage you not to allow people to delude you. My advice should be enacted immediately. Do not be indecisive or doubting.

“If people of our own time are not able to realize the fruits of the practice, why is that? It is because they do not have the virtue of self-confidence. Because you do not have the virtue of self-confidence, you are always preoccupied, in a hurry to run after myriad kinds of objects outside yourselves, and then you are turned around in circles by these objects and lose all your freedom.

“If you are able to put an end to the thinking that chases after external objects, you will see that there is no difference between you yourselves and our teacher, the Buddha. Do you want to know who our teacher, the Buddha, is? The Buddha is you yourselves who are standing before me, listening to me teach the Dharma. The practitioner who does not have enough self-confidence will always direct

his attention to what is external and wander around and around looking for something. Even if he does find something, that object is just a beautiful form of writing and words. It is not the living mind of the master. Good monks, do not make this mistake! If in this present moment you are not able to meet the Buddha in person, then for countless lives to come you will have to be reborn in the three realms of *samsara*, always searching for something to grasp hold of that will make you feel comfortable, continually being born in the womb of an ox or ass.

“My friends, as far as the insight of this mountain monk goes, there is no difference between you and Shakyamuni Buddha. Today, in every ordinary daily activity you do, do you feel you lack anything? Is there any moment when the six miraculous beams of light do not shine out? Anyone who has that insight will be a person who has nothing to do throughout his life.

“Venerable monks, in the three realms there is nothing secure. These realms are like a house on fire. They are not the place to make your lifelong home. At every moment impermanence, like a demon, is there to put out its hand and take your life, making no distinction between the young and the old, the noble and the lowly.

“If you want to be no different from the Buddha, our teacher, do not run after things outside of you. Every movement of your mind that is able to shine out the light of purity is the Dharma body of the Buddha who is right here in your home. The light of nondiscrimination, which arises in one moment of recollection, is the glorious retribution body of the Buddha right here in your home. The light of nondiscrimination that arises from every moment of recollection is the transformation body of the Buddha, which is right in your home. These three bodies are not different from you who are standing in front of me listening to the Dharma. This wonderful function can only be possible when you do not direct your energy to chasing after something outside of yourself.

“Having become reliant on scholars who study and write commentaries on the *sutras* and *shastras*, people go in search of the three bodies as absolute standards outside of themselves.* According to me, it is not like that. These three bodies they talk about are just names and words. They can also become three places of refuge that people become attached to and caught in. A teacher of old has said, ‘Three bodies are established in dependence on the true meaning. The Buddha lands are commented on in dependence on the original nature.’ Therefore, the bodies and the lands in terms of the Dharma nature are clearly just reflections of light.

“Venerable monks, you should know that the reflections that people hold on to and play around with are the source of Buddhas. As far as the speaker is concerned, every place is a place of arrival, every place is true home for the practitioner.

“Your body made of the four elements does not know how to speak about or listen to the Dharma. Your spleen, stomach, liver, and gallbladder cannot talk about or listen to the Dharma. So what is it that knows how to talk about and listen to the Dharma? It is the bright clarity, which has not the slightest outer form, standing in front of us here. That is what knows how to speak about and listen to the Dharma. If you are able to see that, you are no different from the Buddha and the masters. The thing is to maintain that insight constantly, do not allow it to be interrupted; whenever your eyes are in contact with it, you will be able to see it.

“Only because emotional attachment arises, is understanding obstructed. Because perceptions are changing, the form of the true nature changes. That is why there is rebirth in the three realms and we have to undergo so many kinds of suffering. According to my way of seeing, there is nothing that is not deep and wonderful, there is nothing that is not liberated.

“My friends, consciousness has no form; it passes freely through the Ten Directions. In the eyes it is called sight, in the ears it is called hearing, in the nose it is called scent, in the mouth it is called conversation, in the hands it is called holding, in the feet running and jumping. All of these arise from one shining light which is divided into six functions working together in harmony. Whenever wrong thinking does not arise, there is liberation. What do I mean by that? It is only because you have not been able to put an end to seeking that you fall into traps that the ancient ones have spread out for you.

“My friends, try and apply my insight. Sit still and cut off the heads of every retribution and transformation body of the Buddha. See that all bodhisattvas in the ten bodhisattva stages, all the fully awakened and wonderful awakened ones, are just like shackles coming to imprison you. Arhats and self-enlightened ones are like the latrine pit. Awakening (*bodhi*) and *nirvana* are tethering posts for mules. Why? Because you have not been able to realize clear understanding of the emptiness of three incalculably long *kalpas* (eons), you run into the obstacles that you are presently experiencing. If you practiced correctly the true teachings, it would not be like that. You just need to use these favorable circumstances to put an end to your past karma. Put on your robe as a free person. When it is necessary to walk, walk. When it is necessary to sit, sit. Do not for a moment yearn for Buddhahood.

“Why? Men of old have said, ‘If you want to find the Buddha by making the practice hard labor, Buddha will become the retribution that holds you in the cycle of birth and death.’ Venerable monks, time is very precious. You should stop the mind, which is always wandering around, running to the neighbor’s house to study Zen, to learn the Way, looking for a sentence, looking for words, seeking the masters, seeking the Buddha, seeking a good spiritual friend. Do not take this mistaken direction. You need to look into yourselves. A teacher of old said Yajnadatta thought he had lost his head, but when his mind was able to stop searching, he was able to achieve the state of having nothing to do right away.

“Venerable monks, you should live your lives in a very natural way. Do not put on airs. There are a number of shaved heads who are not able to distinguish good from bad. They say they see spirits and demons. They point to the East and the West, and they pray for rain and for sunshine. This group will surely have to repay what they have borrowed, and one day before the judge of the dead, Yama, they will swallow lumps of molten iron. And those of good families who are deluded by this group of wild fox spirits will also have to pay the debt of the rice they have eaten. There is no way they can avoid it.”

[12]

The master gave an explanatory exposition to the Sangha as follows:

“My friends, the thing you need to discover is right view. You should act freely in the world in order not to be deluded by the words of the group of spirits. Having nothing to do is the basis of a noble person. The most noble person is the person who has nothing to do. The only thing you should avoid is thinking about what you are going to do. All you need to do is to be an ordinary person, to be sovereign wherever you are and use that place as your seat of awakening. If you keep thinking about and calculating how to direct your search to what lies outside of you, you have made a great mistake.

“Do not search for Buddha. Buddha is just an empty term. Do you know who is the one who is searching? The masters and the Buddhas of the three times have only ever sought the Dharma. In the present you look into Zen and study the Way in order to seek the Dharma. If you realize the Dharma,

then everything is resolved. If you have not yet realized it, you continue to be reborn in the five destinies. What is Dharma? Dharma is the Dharma of the mind. The mind does not have another form; it passes freely in the Ten Directions. It performs its wonderful function right before your eyes. Because people do not have enough confidence in the mind, they mistake it for terms and phrases. They look for the Buddha's teaching in words and writings. Because of this, they are as far from the Dharma as the sky is from the Earth.

“My friends, if I teach the Dharma, what is the Dharma that I teach? I speak of the Dharma of the earth-mind to help people penetrate the holy and the profane, the pure and the defiled, the true and the conventional. However, the true and the conventional, the sacred and the profane within you cannot be described in terms and concepts of sacred, profane, true, and conventional. The profane, sacred, conventional, and true never refer to themselves as profane, sacred, conventional, and true.

“My friends, if you can grasp the essence of this, apply it straightaway. Do not become attached to terms. I call this the wonderful principle.

“The Dharma of this mountain monk is very different from the Dharma of people who are attached to the world. Even if Manjushri and Samantabhadra were to appear before me in their different manifestations and ask about the Dharma, as soon as they opened their mouths and said ‘Reverend Master,’ I would be able to scent them out. I would just sit still here and if anyone were to come to see me, I would immediately take their pulse and know them. Why? Because my way of looking is different—outwardly, I am not caught in sacred and profane; inwardly, I do not rely on basic principles. Therefore my way of looking cuts right through; there is no room for doubt.”

[13]

The master gave an opening talk:

“My friends, in the practice of the Buddhadharma there is no need for hard work. The principles are: not to try to be anyone special, and to have nothing to do. If you put on your robe, eat your meal, urinate, defecate, and rest when you are tired, the foolish ones will laugh, but the wise ones will understand. The teachers of old say, ‘If you direct your practice to the outer form, you are just a group of foolish people.’ You should be sovereign according to where you find yourself; be the true person wherever you are, not allowing the conditions around you to pull you away. Thus, even if your habit energies have been built up over one thousand years, or you have committed the five inexpiable crimes, they will all become the ocean of liberation.

“Most of those who study the path of Buddhism in our own time do not understand the Dharma. They are like goats who eat whatever is given them; they cannot distinguish master from servant, guest from host. People like that enter on the path of practice with the wrong motivation; they are always ready to enter places of noise and disturbance. You cannot call them true monks. In fact they are worldly people. True monks must have right view in their daily life, which is the ability to distinguish Buddha from Mara, true from false, sacred from profane. Only when people have this ability can they be called true renouncers of the household life. If they cannot distinguish Mara from Buddha, they just renounce one household in order to enter another. They can be called living beings who are making karma but not those who have renounced the household. In our own time there is a phenomenon called Buddha-Mara, an entity in which Mara and Buddha cannot be distinguished, like when milk and water are mixed together. It is said that from such a mixture the King of Geese can drink just the milk. My

Dharma friends with good eyes, according to me, should topple both Buddha and Mara. If they still have the tendency to love the sacred and hate the profane, they will continue to drown in the ocean of birth and death for a long time.”

[14]

Someone asked, “What is Buddha and what is Mara?” The master replied, “If there remains in your mind a single notion of doubt, that is Mara. If you arrive at understanding the unborn nature of all that is and know that the mind is a magic show, that there is no object, no phenomenon that has a real existence, then wherever you are there is purity, and that is Buddha. Nevertheless people generally think that Buddha and Mara are two different worlds: the one pure and the other defiled. As I see things, Buddha is not, living beings are not, the past is not, neither is the present. If you realize the truth, you realize it directly. You do not need to take time to realize it. You do not need to cultivate, you do not need to realize, there is no gain, no loss. At no other time can there be any teaching other than this. If there were a teaching other than this, I would say it was only a dream, a magic show. That is all I wish to say.

“My friends, all of you are sitting listening to the Dharma in the present moment. You are all the clear original nature; not one of you is obstructed; you can all penetrate the Ten Directions. You can roam freely in the three realms. Each one of you can freely enter every realm without obstruction. Each one can, in the blink of an eyelid, penetrate the Dharma realms. If you meet the Buddha, you speak to the Buddha; if you meet the master, you speak to the master; if you meet an arhat, you speak to the arhat; if you meet a hungry ghost, you speak to the hungry ghost. You can enjoy traveling in every land, teaching living beings and not seeing for one moment that you are not at home. Everywhere is pure, the light of clarity illumines the Ten Directions, and you see the oneness of all that is.

“My friends, if today you want to be the great gentleman, you have to realize the truth of the fact that there never has been anything to do. It is only because your confidence is immature that you continue seeking at every moment. You remove your head and then go looking for it, and you cannot stop yourself seeking.

“Imagine bodhisattvas of complete and sudden enlightenment manifesting and entering the Dharma realms. They turn towards the Pure Land. They dislike the profane and love the sacred. If there were such bodhisattvas, they would still be subject to grasping and aversion. The idea of pure and defiled would still be in their minds. According to the insight of the Meditation school, it is not like this. Understanding is now in this moment; you do not have to wait for another opportunity. What I maintain is that everything is taking place. Medicine, and the sickness which it is to cure, have to go together at the same time, because medicine and the sickness have to correspond to each other. Apart from that, there is not something other that we call truth. If you can see that, you are truly one who has gone forth, worthy of receiving material offerings equivalent to 10,000 gold coins every day.

“My friends, do not allow fake elders here and there to stamp the stamp of realization on you without rhyme or reason and then go spreading the news, ‘I have Zen, I have understood what is meant by the Way,’ and then give an eloquent discourse which flows on constantly like a waterfall, but whose only function is to create the karma which leads to hell. Someone who practices the true path does not need to scratch around, picking out the faults of the world. All he needs is to realize right

view instantly. Only realization of perfect right insight can be seen as success.”

[15]

Someone asked, “What is right view?”

The master replied, “Right view is the ability to see the nature of becoming, abiding, ceasing, and emptiness in all phenomena whether you are entering the sacred or the profane, the pure or the defiled, when you are entering the lands of the Buddhas anywhere, the palaces of Sukhavati or the Dharma realms of Vairocana. Right view is to see the mark of no coming and no going, unborn and undying in the Buddha’s arising in the world, becoming enlightened, turning the wheel of the Dharma, and entering nirvana. Right view is to see in a penetrating way the mark of emptiness of all phenomena. You see that nothing is real in the way you thought it was when you enter the Dharma realms of the unborn, travel for your enjoyment in the Buddha lands, and enter the Avatamsaka realm. Right view is to see that the person who does not need a place to rely on as he listens to the Dharma is indeed the mother of all Buddhas. Why? Because all Buddhas are born from the place of non-reliance. If you are able to awaken to the state of having nowhere to go back to, you will see that the nature of the Buddha is non-attainment. To see that is right view.

“The practitioners who do not understand continue to be caught in words and phrases and obstructed by terms such as holy, profane, etc., so that they cannot open their wisdom eyes and therefore cannot see the real nature of things clearly. The Twelve Divisions of the teachings were only devised to show clearly that real nature. Practitioners who do not understand bend in the direction of words, mistakenly searching for insight therein. That attitude of seeking a place to hold to and rely on, makes us fall into the cycle of cause and effect and prevents us from leaving the cycle of birth and death in the three realms.

“If you wish to roam in birth and death as a free person, you should recognize who it is who is listening to the Dharma here. Although that person has no form, no distinguishing sign, no basis, no origin, and no place of abode, he is living, infinitely active, and able to display tens of thousands of wonderful functions, and all those functions have the nature of non-abiding.

“On the other hand, the more you look for something, the farther away you are from it, the more you are off the mark. This is called the wonderful mystery.

“My friends, do not identify yourselves with this illusory friend, the body, because sooner or later it has to be returned to the hands of the demon impermanence. In this world, what is it you need to turn toward in order to find liberation? All you need is a bowl of brown rice, a mantle of cloth, and apart from this you should give all your psychological force and time to find the good spiritual friend. Do not waste your days and hours following various pleasures. Time is precious, life is impermanent, the four great elements (*mahabhuta*) and the four signs (birth, abiding, changing, ceasing) are driving you on. You must recognize right away the signless nature of these four so as not to be pulled around by your surroundings.”

[16]

Someone asked, “What are the four signless circumstances?”

The master replied: “A moment of ignorance (doubt) arises, then you are obstructed by the earth element. A moment of craving arises; you are obstructed by water. A moment of anger arises; you are obstructed by fire. A moment of the joy of excitement arises; you are obstructed by wind.

“If you have this insight, you will not be pulled along by your surroundings. Wherever you are, you will be able to make good use of your surroundings. Rising in the east, you go down in the west. Rising in the south, you come down in the north. Rising in the center, you come down at the periphery. Rising from the periphery, you come down at the center. You walk on water as on earth, and on the earth as on the water.

“How is this possible? It is possible because you have seen that the four great elements are a dream, a magic display.

“My friends, the person who is sitting here listening to the Dharma is not the four elements in your body. That person can make good use of the four elements, but the four elements do not make use of him or her. With this insight, whether the practitioner goes or abides, he or she is a free person. As far as I see it, we should not feel aversion for anything (or be attracted to anything). You like the sacred and dislike the profane, is that not so?

“Sacred is just the word ‘sacred.’ Pilgrims climb the Wutai Mountain to find Manjushri. That is in error. How can Manjushri be on Wutai Shan? Do you want to make the acquaintance of Manjushri? Manjushri is the wonderful function you see before your eyes. It has always been there. There is no doubt about it. That is the living Manjushri. The light of nondiscrimination that shines in all directions in every moment of recollection is the true Samantabhadra Bodhisattva who appears in that light. Every moment of recollection that is not bound, which is free in all places, is the meditative concentration of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.

“These three bodhisattvas take turns at being host and friend. When one manifests, they all manifest. One is all three and all three are one. Only when you see that can you really study the sutras of the Path.”

[17]

The master spoke to the group:

“Someone who is training in the Path in our times needs to have self-confidence and not go looking for Buddha outside of himself. To seek for something outside means that finally you become caught in the object of your search and cannot distinguish right from wrong. People say there is Buddha, there are masters, but they are just referring to traces left in the scriptural canon. If someone presents a sentence or a word from the sutras, whether it is in a concealed or obvious way, they immediately pose questions based on doubt, they search in the heavens and the Earth, and look for someone to consult. The more they crave something, the more obscure it becomes. The true great gentleman is someone who does not discuss master and servant, what is right and what is wrong, beauty and talent. He does not spend his whole time discussing. As for this monk, if someone comes, whether monastic or layperson, he is able to see through to that person’s source and recognize that all the sounds, expressions, writings that he uses are illusory dreams. He also sees the true person in that person, the true person obstructed by surrounding sense objects. This way of looking is the wonderful goal of the Buddha. The Buddha world never proclaims itself to be the Buddha world. The practitioner of the Path who practices without relying on anyone by grasping, is able to witness this

Buddha world. If anyone comes and asks me about the Buddha, I will display in response a pure world. If the person wants to ask me about what is a bodhisattva, I will display in response a compassionate world; if someone wants to ask me about bodhi, awakening, I shall display in response a world of wonderful purity. If someone wants to ask me about nirvana, I shall display in response a world where all notions are silenced. There can be hundreds of thousands of different worlds, but the person is not different. Therefore, we can, in response to the question, manifest a form, just as the moon reflects in water.

“My friends in the practice, if you wish to realize suchness, you have to become a great gentleman. If, on the other hand, you continue to be spineless and compromise, you will never realize it. You are like a cracked pot; you cannot hold the life-giving nectar. If you want to be a great Dharma instrument, you have to be determined not to allow others to deceive you. At every point you should assume sovereignty of yourself. Wherever you stand, you should be your true person. You do not allow yourself to be influenced by those who come to you. Just a moment of doubt is Mara who has entered you. As far as a bodhisattva is concerned, doubt is an opportunity for the Mara of birth and death. When an object of sense perception arises, look deeply. Have confidence in the wonderful function that is present in your mind and then you will see there is nothing to do. Every thought you have has the function of giving rise to the three realms and, as a result of that, there will be the six objects of sense in accord with whichever realm you are in. In your daily function of responding to your surroundings, what do you lack? In an instant you can enter an impure or pure realm, the palace of Maitreya or the Lands of the Three Eyes. You can travel at your leisure to any place and see the emptiness of designations.”

[18]

Someone asked: “What are the Lands of the Three Eyes?”

The master replied: “You and I enter the Land of Wonderful Purity, we wear the robe of purity, speak about the Buddha’s Dharma body or *dharmakaya*. Then we enter the Land of No-Discrimination, wear the robe of nondiscrimination and talk about the Buddha’s retribution body (*sambhogakaya*). Then we enter the Land of Liberation, wear the robe of bright clarity and talk about the Buddha’s transformation body (*nirmanakaya*). All these Lands of the Three Eyes manifest in dependence on their true nature or on the meaning of the word used to describe them. According to the sutras and commentaries, the Dharma body is the base, and the retribution and transformation bodies are the effect.

“As far as I see, the Dharma body does not know how to give a Dharma talk. That is why teachers of old said: ‘The bodies are established dependent on the meaning of the word; the lands are discussed based on the true nature.’ It means that the bodies are established in accordance with the meaning people give to the words. The lands are there only as far as their own nature allows. The body of the Dharma nature and the lands of the Dharma nature are clearly objects that can be established. All lands are the same—they are established in dependence upon meaning and nature. They are all yellow leaves and empty fists, which people use to deceive children. All are prickly pears and thorny water chestnuts; all are like trying to find fresh water in dry bones. Dharma is not outside the mind, nor is it inside. So what are you looking for?

“Everywhere people talk about the spiritual path, saying, if you make an effort in the practice, you

will realize the practice. Make no mistake, even though you have realizations in the practice, that is only the cause and effect of action in the cycle of birth and death. If you say that you practice the six *paramitas* and the 100,000 virtuous actions, I still see that as the production of action as cause and effect. Seeking the Buddha and seeking the Dharma is to produce action, which can lead to the hell realms. Seeking the bodhisattva fruit is the same. Studying the sutra and the Path is also creating action as cause and effect. Buddha and the masters have nothing to do. As far as they are concerned, whether there are afflictions and there is action or whether there are no afflictions and no action, it is purified karma.

“There are a group of blind shaved-heads who, having eaten their fill, sit down to practice meditation. They take hold of thought and do not allow it to arise. They cannot bear noise but like quiet. The way they practice is no different from non-Buddhists. A master said: ‘Those who practice concentrating their mind to contemplate stillness, then take the mind to contemplate outside the mind, or collect the mind inwardly, or stop the mind in order to enter *samadhi* (concentration), are all doing something and not yet practicing having nothing to do.’

“As for you who are here to listen to the Dharma, what should you do so that your person can practice, realize the fruits of the practice, and be a beautiful person? Your person is not able to practice, realize, or become beautiful. If you can teach someone to become beautiful, then everything can become beautiful. Do not be mistaken!

“My friends, if you hold to the words of the Zen masters and say that they constitute the true Path, if you say these masters are good spiritual friends of inconceivable capacities, and if at the same time you think your own mind is so profane you can’t dare to estimate them, then truly you are blind. You will carry this prejudiced complex with you all your life. You cannot see what your own eyes could show you. You are like young donkeys standing on ice, trembling with fear. You say: ‘I would not dare speak ill of these good spiritual friends for fear of producing the action of wrong speech.’ My friends, only when someone is a great spiritual friend does he dare speak ill of Buddha and the masters, find fault with life, boycott the teachings of the Tripitaka, scold others as you scold children, and discover in any circumstances, favorable or unfavorable, the true person. Thus, for the past twelve years, looking back over my life I cannot discover anything—even though it be as small as a mustard seed—of the nature of karmic retribution. The Zen masters you usually meet are like brides who have just come to their husbands’ homes, always fearful that they will be driven out of the monastery, and have nothing to eat. That is why they cannot have peace or joy. The elders who are in the vanguard, in the past as now, have not been believed by anyone. They have been driven out and then realized to be valuable. If wherever you go people immediately have faith in you, what will you ever be able to do? As soon as the lion roars, the skull of the jackal splits.

“My friends, everywhere people say there is a Path to be practiced, a Dharma to be realized. What is the Dharma that is to be realized, the Path that is to be practiced? In your present daily life, what do you lack? What needs to be maintained? The monks who have just been born do not understand this deeply, so they are always running after a bunch of fox spirits. They allow these spirits to boast of things that bind others. They say: ‘The principle and the practice have to correspond to each other, and then, by guarding the three actions, you can become Buddha.’ They keep chewing over ideas like this. They are like drizzle in the springtime.

“The virtuous men of old taught: ‘If on your way you meet someone who has realized the Path, the best thing is not to talk about the practice with them.’

“For the same reason someone has said: ‘If you have an intention to practice the Way, the Way will not allow you to practice; all kinds of wrong circumstances will compete to arise. Once the sword of wisdom flashes forth, not a thing remains. Because as long as the light has not appeared, the darkness appears as the light.’

“That is why the ancients said: ‘The Way is the ordinary mind.’

“Monks, what are you looking for? In the present moment you are standing before me, listening to the Dharma. It is luminous and clear. You do not need to depend on anything and since you lack nothing, you have nothing to search for. As I see it, there isn’t so much to do. Just be ordinary—put on your robes, eat your food, and pass the time doing nothing.

“If you want nothing to stand between you and the Buddhas and masters, you have to see this. Do not doubt anymore, do not be mistaken anymore. If you can maintain this insight, you are living masters. If you cannot maintain this insight, then there will be a difference between nature and appearance. When the mind does maintain this insight, nature and appearance are not two different things.”

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Someone asked: “What is meant by the the mind maintaining this insight?”

The master replied: “By asking the question, you already discriminate and make nature separate from appearance.

“My friends, do not be mistaken. All phenomena, whether mundane or supramundane, are without a self-nature. They are all unborn and that is why they are mere designations, empty names. The name ‘mere designation’ itself is empty. Why do you take the name for the truth? If you do, you are mistaken.

“Even if you say that phenomena exist, they only exist as manifestations that arise in dependence on each other, which is called *paratantra*. This is true of awakening (bodhi) and also of nirvana. The knowledge of objects, the bodhisattvas and Buddhas are also like that. What are you looking for in these Buddha fields that manifest dependent on other factors? The Three Vehicles and the Twelve Divisions of the teachings are just toilet paper (shit-wiping sticks). The Buddha is an illusory body. The masters are old *bhikshus*.^{*} As for you, you are the offspring of your mother. If you go in search of the Buddha, your soul will be sucked up by Mara-Buddha. If you go in search of the masters, you will be tied up by the Mara-masters. The more you seek, the more you will suffer. The best thing is to have nothing to do. There are a group of monks with shaved heads who say to students of the way: ‘Buddha is the ultimate aim. You have to practice for three great *asamkhyā kalpas* to realize fruition of the practice and become Buddha.’

“My friends, if you say that Buddha is the ultimate aim, then why after only eighty years did the Buddha have to lie on his side between two sala trees in the forest at the city of Kushinagar and die? Where is the Buddha now? We should see clearly that Buddha was born and died, as we ourselves do. If you say that Buddha is distinguished by the thirty-two marks and the eighty auspicious signs, you have to say that the Chakravartin is also Buddha. Therefore, you should know that everything is illusory. An ancestral teacher said: ‘The Tathagata appeared in bodily form, because he wanted to do as the world expects. Fearing that people would give rise to theories of nihilism, and as an expedient, he used mere designations. As an expedient, we talk of the thirty-two marks. The eighty signs are also

just empty sounds. The body is not awakened nature. The signless is the true form.’

“You say that the six inestimable miraculous powers belong to the Buddha. In that case, the gods, the spirits, the *ashuras* and hungry ghosts of great strength who also have the six miraculous powers must also be Buddha. Friends, do not be mistaken. When the army of ashuras was defeated in battle by the army of the god Indra, together with 8,400 followers, they entered a tube in a lotus root to hide. That was a miracle, but you cannot say that ashuras are Buddhas or the Holy Ones. According to me, all these miracles are karmic retribution and depend on causes and conditions to arise.

“The six miracles of the Buddha are very different—Buddha enters the world of colors and forms but is not deceived by them, enters the world of sounds, smell, taste, and touch and is not deceived by them, enters the world of objects of mind but is not deceived by them—because the Buddha has arrived at the insight that the six objects of sense all manifest the empty nature. They cannot bind the practitioner who is not caught in them.

“Practitioners of our own time who still have impurities in the five *skandhas* can still realize the miracle of walking on Earth.

“Friends, true Buddha has no form; true Dharma has no sign.

“Why do you rely on illusions to create clay models that you then grasp onto? If you manage to grasp onto anything, all it is is a fox spirit. It is not the true Buddha, it is only the insight of a heretic. A true practitioner does not grasp Buddha, bodhisattva, or arhat. He does not grasp at what is called most beautiful and good in the three realms. He knows how to live alone in freedom. He is not constrained by anything. Even if Earth and heaven were turned upside down, I should not be obstructed by any feeling of doubt. Even if the Buddhas in the Ten Directions were to appear before my eyes, I should not give rise to any feeling of delight. Even if the hell realms and the three unwholesome destinies were to appear before my eyes, I should not give rise to feelings of fear. Why is that? It is because I have seen the empty nature of all phenomena. When they manifest, they are said to exist. When they fail to manifest, they are said not to exist. All three realms arise from the mind. All that exists arises in consciousness. That is why all are illusory dreams, imaginary specks falling before the eyes. Why should we make ourselves tired, running after them?

“Only your true person who is here listening to the Dharma at this moment can go into fire and not be burned, go into water and not be swept away, go into the hell realms and the three unwholesome destinies like someone going on an excursion in a park. He can enter the worlds of hungry ghosts and animals without having to endure the retribution of these worlds. Why is that so? Because he does not discriminate against anything. If you still love the holy and hate the profane, then you will continue to drift and sink in the ocean of birth and death. Afflictions arise in the mind. If there is no mind, how can the afflictions bind us? If you do not waste your time in discrimination, are not caught in signs, then automatically you realize the fruits of the Path in an instant.

“If you keep roaming around running after someone to learn the practice from, even if you study for numberless eons, in the end you will still be coming and going in the world of birth and death. You will not be equal to the person who has nothing to do when he enters the temple and sits down in the lotus position.

“My friends on the Path, suppose a student comes from elsewhere to learn about the Path. After host and guest have seen each other, the guest says something to sound out the good spiritual friend who is sitting before him. The guest flings a dangerous sentence into the corner of the mouth of the good spiritual friend. The idea lying behind this is, ‘Teacher, do you understand?’ If the spiritual

friend knows that this is only an object, he will take hold of it immediately and throw it into the lake. The student will regain his ordinary self and ask the good spiritual friend to say something. The spiritual friend will continue to do as he has already done and cut off the student's desire to search for something. At that point the student will say, 'Teacher, you are truly first class, truly wise, a great spiritual friend.' And the spiritual friend will say, 'My friend, you have absolutely no ability to distinguish the good from the bad.'

"Or the good spiritual friend will bring out an object and trifle with it in front of the student. The student is able to recognize that it is an object and does not let himself fall into the trap of that object, and from being a guest he becomes the host. The good spiritual friend now appears as only half a body and the student yells. In return the good spiritual friend uses words and expressions in a hundred different ways to put down the student. But the student may say, 'This bald monk does not know how to distinguish good from bad.' The spiritual friend immediately praises the student, 'You're really a true practitioner.'

"There are teachers here who are not able to distinguish wrong from right when students come and ask about bodhi, nirvana, and the three bodies; these blind elders immediately try to explain. When they are criticized by the students they immediately take up the cane and beat them saying, 'You want to learn the practice but you don't know good manners!' You should not be angry with them because, although they are called teacher, they do not have the eye of understanding.

"There are a number of bald monks who do not know what good and bad are. They show the east and point to the west. They like rain and they like sunshine. They praise these lanterns as beautiful and those pillars as pretty. Look at them and see how many hairs are left in their eyebrows. There is good reason for them losing their eyebrows. The student does not understand, so his wisdom is carried away by his infatuation for his teacher. Such teachers are nothing but a bunch of fox spirits. True students of the Dharma chortle in disdain, saying that this group of blind bald-headed monks creates confusion and deludes people.

"Friends, young monks and nuns have to study and practice. When young I devoted myself to studying the vinaya and fine manners every day. I researched, sought to understand, and consulted countless sutras and commentaries. After a while I realized that they were just expedients to help people, presented in theoretical terms. So once and for all I threw them all away in order to go and consult great teachers and practice meditation. Fortunately, I met superior spiritual friends, so I had the eyes of the Dharma, which allowed me to see clearly and recognize the great teachers on this Earth and those who were fake. The insight was not with me from the time my mother gave me birth, but came about through polishing, refining, training, experience, and investigation, and then one day I broke through to the truth.

"My friends, if you wish to have correct insight into the truth, do not allow others to deceive you. Whatever comes to you, either from the outside or within, you should kill it immediately. If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha. If you meet the master or an arhat, kill him. If you meet your parents, kill your parents. Only then can you be liberated. Do not allow things to bind you, and you will be free and at ease.

"Among students who have come here from the four quarters, there has not been a single one who has not brought along with him an attachment to something or other. If this mountain monk is able to recognize that object of attachment, he will beat it straight away. If they describe this object with their hands, I shall beat their hands. If they describe it with their mouth, I shall beat their mouth. If they

describe it with their eyes, I shall hit them on the eyes. Until now no one who has come has been able to prove that they have independence and freedom. They are all caught in traps that have been laid by the teachers of old. I myself do not have a single Dharma to give you. All I can do is help cure your sickness and undo the knots that bind you.

“All you students who come from different places, try not to be dependent on anything. I want to tell you something. For these last fifteen years I have not met a person. I have just met spirits who live in bamboo or wood, grasses and leaves. They are fox spirits who are gnawing in a disordered fashion on heaps of dung. They are truly a bunch of blind men. They just squander the offerings that are given to them by donors in all parts. They say, ‘We are young monks who have left the home life.’ Their insight is no richer than this.

“What I want to tell you is that there is no Buddha, no Dharma, no practice, no realization. What is it that you are looking for in other people? What is it that you lack? Do not be like blind men. It is as though you want to put another head on top of the head you already have. My friends, at this very moment your own wonderful function is no different from the wonderful function of the masters and the Buddhas. It is only because you lack confidence that you are looking for something outside of you. Make no mistake, there is no Dharma outside of you for you to run after, there is no Dharma within to attain. It would be better to listen to my words, take a rest and practice having nothing to do. If something has arisen, do not try to make it continue. If something has not arisen, do not try to make it arise. This action is more valuable than ten years’ pilgrimage.

“According to my insight, there is nothing you need to do. You just need to live as ordinary people. Wear your robe, eat your food. As day follows day, be a person who has nothing to do. The students who come here from the four quarters all think they are people intent on finding Buddha, Dharma, liberation, escape from the three realms. Foolish people. If you leave the three realms, where will you go? Buddha and master are just verbal expressions that people bind themselves up in. Do you know what the three realms are? They are the ground of your own mind; they are the people sitting here at this moment to hear the Dharma. If you give rise to a desiring thought, that is the desire realm. If you give rise to anger, that is the form realm. If you give rise to a moment of doubt, that is the formless realm. These different states of mind are the tables, chairs, mats, and beds of your own house. The three realms never say, ‘We are the three realms.’ You yourselves who are present have the clear light that can illumine and reflect everything that is, you are the ones who want to measure the world and to give each of the three realms a name.

“Monks! This body, these four elements here, are impermanent, including the spleen, stomach, liver, gallbladder, hair, teeth, nails. When you look into yourself, all you see is the emptiness of each part. When you can stop every idea in your mind, that is bodhi, awakening. If the ideas have not yet stopped, that is darkness. Darkness does not have a dwelling place, has no beginning and no end. If you cannot stop your mind, you will climb the tree of non-awakening, enter the six destinies, the four ways of being born, and you will have a fur coat and horns. If you are able to stop, you will immediately arrive in the realm of the pure Dharma body. When you arrive at the state of not a single notion arising, you are able to climb the bodhi trees, and you can perform the miracle of being able to appear wherever needed in the three realms. You can use the transformation body, which arises from the mind. You can experience Dharma joy and the bliss of meditation. A halo will begin to shine from your body. When you think of what to wear, one hundred thousand lengths of brocade are available; when you think of what to eat, one hundred delicacies are all there. You will never suffer from

serious illness. Bodhi, awakening, has no dwelling place and therefore is called unattainable.

“My friends, as great men, what more do you have to doubt? The wonderful function that is happening in the present moment—who is performing it? Take hold of that and use it, and do not be caught in words. This is called the mysterious principle. Whoever has this insight no longer is obstructed by an obstacle. The people of old said, ‘The mind changes in accord with ten thousand objects, and what is strange about this change?’ You should allow this change to happen in order to recognize your true nature. Once recognized, you will be free of excited joy and anxiety.

“My friends, according to the insight of the Meditation (Ch’an/Zen) school, birth and death follow each other.

“We should give our whole heart and mind when we consult with a good spiritual friend. When host and guest meet, words will pass between them. The master may respond by manifesting different forms, or use his whole person to face the guest. Or sometimes he may use expedient means such as joy or anger, or show half his person, or sit on the back of a lion or an elephant king. If the student is genuine, he could shout or hold out a trap in front of the good spiritual friend. If the host is not able to recognize the object he is presented and falls into the trap, he will rely on that trap in order to invent all kinds of clay models. Then the student could give another shout. If the good spiritual friend is still not able to let go, then we have a case of difficult-to-cure disease. It is called a case of the guest examining the host.

“Or, for example, the good spiritual friend offers nothing. He waits for the student to offer something and then snatches it away. The student may be robbed of all he wished to offer but keeps resisting and would rather die than let go. This is called a case of host examines guest.

“Or, for example, the student stands in front of the good spiritual friend and offers purity as an object. The good spiritual friend recognizes this object, takes hold of it, and throws it into a deep pit. The student says: ‘What a great teacher you are!’ The good spiritual friend replies: ‘Heavens above, you cannot tell good from bad!’ The student prostrates. This case is called the host examines the host.

“Or the student presents, before the good spiritual friend, a person in shackles. When the good spiritual friend sees this, he brings in more shackles and binds them on to the student. The student is overjoyed and can no longer distinguish who is guest and who is host. This case is called guest examining guest.

“Venerable monks, what I have just said is simply to help you recognize devils and wrong paths and distinguish right from wrong.

“Friends, the truth is hard to discover. The Buddhadharma is very deep and mysterious. Nevertheless, we can go into this territory in order to attain insight. Day after day I sit here teaching and giving beatings, but hardly anyone in my group of students is inclined to take much notice. One thousand times, ten thousand times they keep treading in dark places, unable to recognize anything independently with clarity and distinction. Because they lack the virtue of self-confidence they keep looking for insight, wisdom, and the written word. Half their life has gone, and still they rely on someone else and keep carrying around their corpse like a heavy burden as they move around in this world of men. Sooner or later they will have to pay the price of the shoes they have worn.

“Monks, there are students who, when they hear me say that there is nothing outside for them to seek after, misunderstand and begin to look for something within. They sit immovably in meditation, face turned to the wall, their tongues glued to the roof of their mouths. They say this is the Dharma door taught by the Buddha or the master. What a great mistake. If you say that when the sense object is

calm and immovable it is the Path, you have taken ignorance as your master. A teacher of old said, 'Silent calm is a deep black pit, a fearful state.' If on the other hand you think movement is the Path, then, are the plants which move out there in the breeze, the Path? Movement is the air element, stillness is the earth element, and both stillness and movement are without self-nature. If you look for it in movement, it will take up its position in stillness. If you look for it in stillness, it will take up its position in motion, just like a fish in the stream, splashing the waves as it leaps up.

"Monks, motion and stillness are just two situations. The practitioner who is not caught in them can use both motion and stillness beneficially.

"When students come, I use three ways of determining in order to deal with three kinds of aptitude. If a student with less than average aptitude comes, I remove the object but I do not remove his way of practice. If a student with higher than average aptitude comes, I will remove both the object and his way of practice. If someone with sharp and keen aptitude comes, I will remove neither the object nor the way of practice nor the subject. If a person with extraordinary insight comes, I face him with my whole person and do not put him into any category.

"Monks, in the case of the last person, the Dharma power of the student can withstand any wind, and the speed of this Dharma power is greater than that of a spark of flint or a flash of lightning. This student only needs to blink and the mutual relationship is lost, he only needs to give rise to one idea and he goes in the wrong direction. Whether he understands or not is determined only in that very instant.

"Monks, carrying your bowl, your bag, and a length of intestine full of excrement, you approach a teacher asking for Buddhadharma. Do you know who the person who comes asking is? He is vital, alive, not attached to any root. If you try to drive him in, he will not go in. If you try to push him out, he will not go out. The more you run after him, the farther away he will be from you. If you do not seek him, he will be standing there before your eyes. The sound of his voice is resounding right in your ears. If you do not have sufficient confidence in this, then this life is lived to no purpose.

"Friends, in an instant we can enter the Avatamsaka realm or the realm of Buddha Vairocana. We can enter all the realms of liberation, miracles, purity. We can enter the Dharma realm, the world of defilement and that of purity, that of profanity and that of holiness, the realm of hungry ghosts or of animals. Nowhere will you be able to find the thing called birth and death. There is nothing but empty words, illusory specks falling before your eyes. They are not worth searching for with hard labor. When we see that, we shall be able to let go of all attainment and failure, right and wrong.

"My friends, my way of seeing the Buddhadharma comes from the Upadhyaya Magu, Danxia, Daoyi, Lushan, and Shitou. The transmission of the school of practice has spread widely among people, but because no one has enough confidence to receive it, everyone keeps slandering it. Although the intention of Master Daoyi is so simple and straightforward, all 350 students who came to learn it were unable to grasp it. Although Master Lushan was a free person and completely authentic, able to grasp when it is necessary to conform and when it is necessary to go against the grain, his disciples remained confused, unable to fathom the borders of his awakened understanding. The same was true of Master Danxia; he played with a pearl. Sometimes he hid it and sometimes he showed it; he reprimanded every student who came to him. The action of Master Magu is as bitter as the bark of the *Berberis asiatica* tree. No one can ever come near him. Master Shitou's secret was to look for people on the tip of an arrow. This made everyone afraid.

"As for the behavior of this mountain monk, it is real production and real destruction. I play with

spiritual transformations. I am able to penetrate all kinds of circumstances, and wherever I am I am able to preserve the practice of ‘nothing to do.’ The object is not able to remove my true person. If anyone comes looking for me, I go outside to look at them. The visitor does not know me. I immediately put on a robe of which I have many kinds. The student sees the robe and gives rise to some idea or other. He is immediately caught in my words and phrases. What a shame for the bald monk who is blind and does not have the eyes to see. He mistakes the robe for me. He says that I am yellow or blue or white or red. Seeing this, I take off my clothes and manifest my purity. When the student sees this, he is very joyful and full of longing. Then I take off this robe of purity as well. Now he is really afraid; confused and losing his head, he runs away, saying, ‘Why are you stark naked?’ I then say to him, ‘Do you know the person in me who is wearing the clothes?’ He will suddenly turn around and recognize me.

“Monks, do not be caught in clothes. Robes are motionless, there has to be a person to wear the clothes. There are the clothes of purity, of awakening, of nirvana, of master, of Buddha.

“Monks, these things are just sounds, expressions, and words. They are just changing manifestations, like different clothes. They are made possible by the air which comes up from the *qihai* acupoint below the navel and makes the jaws clack together producing phrases and ideas. You should know clearly that they are just magic tricks.

“Monks, action on the outside produces sounds and speech. Action on the inside is mind giving rise to ideas. They are all just different kinds of clothes. Why do you perceive these clothes as true insight? If you continue in this way, even if you pass through millions of lifetimes as monks, you will achieve nothing more than putting on successive new sets of clothes. This is not the miraculous penetration of the truth, but a passing through different sets of clothes. You will not go beyond birth and death; you will not be equal to the one who has nothing to do. ‘Meeting each other they do not recognize each other. They do not know the name of their interlocutor.’

“In our time, monks are not able to realize the Path because they confuse words and expressions with insight. They just note down things that have been said, the words of some old men who have passed away, in a huge notebook that they hide away in three or four layers of cloth covers. They do not allow anyone to look at it and they say that what is written down there is ‘the mysterious principle;’ then they hide it away and guard it with great care. A huge mistake! Group of blind men, in this heap of dried bones, how can they find a drop of cool water? There is another group, that does not know what is good and what is bad. They extract from the teachings mystical phrases that they subject to reasoning and turn into literature and dogma. It is like putting excrement into the mouth, spitting it out, and placing it into the mouths of others. It is no different from worldly people playing Chinese whispers. Their life goes past, wasted, but they continue to say, ‘We are monks who have left the home life!’

“When some people come to consult about the Buddhadharma, their mouths are closed, they have not a word to say. They open their eyes as vacant and black as smoke holes. Their mouths droop downward like a carrying pole hung with a load on each end. Even if Maitreya Buddha were to be born right now, people like this would be driven to another world or down to the hell realms to inherit their retribution of suffering.

“Monks, what do you hope to find as you roam around the world until the soles of your feet are worn flat? Where is the Buddha you are looking for, the Path you want to realize, the Dharma you want to attain? The Buddha with the beautiful marks whom you are looking for is not one bit like you.

If you want to know your own original mind, you must see that Buddha and realize that you are not united with each other, neither are you apart from each other.

“Dear friends, the true Buddha does not have a form, an image. The true Path does not have substance, the true Dharma does not have an outer sign. All these three fit together and become one. Those who cannot see this are still subject to birth and death because their consciousness still operates according to the accumulation of past action, karma.”

[20]

A monk asked, “Please, will the venerable master explain what is true Buddha, true Dharma, true Path?”

The master replied, “True Buddha is our pure mind. True Dharma is the light of the body. The true Path is the unobstructed pure light that shines in all directions. All these are one. All these are mere designations with no real existence. Someone who trains in the Path correctly has to maintain right mindfulness constantly of these three objects. The First Patriarch, Bodhidharma, came here from India with only one intention: to find a person who was not deluded by others. Finally, he met Huike, the Second Patriarch. By using just one phrase he was able to help Patriarch Huike break through to enlightenment and see that the daily practice he had been engaged in before was of no use. According to my insight, we are not other than the masters and the Buddha. If you are able to understand the first sentence, you are the teacher of the masters and the Buddha, and if you do not understand until the second sentence, you can still be the teacher of gods and men. However, if you only understand at the third sentence, you cannot even save yourself, let alone hope to be a teacher of people.”

[21]

A monk asked, “What was Bodhidharma’s intention in coming here?” The master replied, “If he had an intention, he would not even be able to save himself, let alone bring others to the shore of awakening.”

A monk asked, “If he had no intention, how could the Second Patriarch have attained awakening?” The master replied, “Attainment is non-attainment.” A monk asked, “If attainment is without attaining, how can ‘without attaining’ have any meaning?” The master replied, “It was because Huike went looking for mind everywhere and could not stop, that Bodhidharma said, ‘Good heavens, what a gentleman! How come you keep looking for a head when you have a head already?’ When we hear that sentence and are able to shine the light on our mind, we never go in search of anything anymore. We know that our body and our mind are no different from the body and mind of the masters and the Buddha, and right away we can realize the state of having nothing more to do. That is what can be called realization of the teachings.

“Monks, this time because I am reluctant to speak, what I say is not elegant or refined. Please do not misunderstand me because of that. As far as I see it, there really is no Path for me to teach you about. If you need to do something, do it. If not, give yourself a rest.

“People everywhere say that the 10,000 practices of the six *paramitas* are the Buddhadharma. However, I say that they are only expedients used as adornments and ways of doing the Buddha’s

work. They are not the Buddhadharma. Therefore, if actions such as eating only before midday, keeping the precepts, and carrying a bowl of oil so as not to spill a drop are not able to make your Dharma eye bright and clear, you will, in the end, have to pay the price of the food you have received. Why?

Having entered the path, he did not penetrate the principle.

He was born again in samsara to pay for donations he had received.

When the businessman reaches eighty-one, the dead tree grows fungus.

“Even if you were to live alone on a solitary peak, eating only one meal a day, sitting in meditation all night, never lying down, practicing diligently for twelve hours of the day, all you are doing is creating more karma. Even if you were to give away cities and states, wives and children, your hands, eyes, brain, elephants, houses, the seven precious gems, until you had no more, these offerings in the end will do no more than bring trouble to your body and mind. Their retribution will be one of suffering. Someone who makes offerings like this is not equal to the person who has nothing to do, and who knows how to be simple and unconfused. Even though a bodhisattva who has ascended the ten bodhisattva levels gave all his heart and mind to discovering the traces of someone who has nothing to do, he would not be able to find him. The reason that such a person is praised by the gods and his feet are held aloft by the earth spirits and he is commended by the Buddhas of the Ten Directions, is what? Because people like that, in this very moment, are sitting listening to the Dharma and not leaving any trace of themselves behind.”

[22]

A monk asked: “‘The Buddha of the Surpassing Understanding of Great Penetration sat for ten kalpas in the place of enlightenment and the Buddhadharma did not reveal itself to him and he was not able to realize the Buddha’s path.’ What does this sentence mean?”

“The master replied: ‘Great Penetration’ means that everywhere we are able to realize the truth that all phenomena are without self-nature or their own sign. ‘Surpassing Understanding’ means wherever we are, we do not have a moment of doubt and nowhere do we see that we have realized any practice. ‘Buddha’ means the purity of the mind; the clear light of that purity understands thoroughly the Dharma realms. ‘Sat for ten kalpas in the place of enlightenment’ means the practice of the ten paramitas. ‘The Buddhadharma did not reveal itself to him’ means that the Buddha is unborn, the Dharma is undying, so how can they reveal themselves to him? ‘He was not able to realize the Buddha’s path’ means that Buddha does not need to become Buddha. The teachers of old say, ‘Buddha is always in the world but is not polluted by the phenomena of the world.’ My friends, if you wish to become Buddha, do not be a slave to all phenomena that are. When mind arises, the objects of mind arise. When the mind does not arise, the objects of mind do not arise. When thought does not arise, all the phenomena that are cannot harm us.

“As far as the mundane world and the supramundane world are concerned, there is no Buddha and no Dharma. They do not really exist in this moment and they will not cease to exist in the future. Whatever you talk of as really existing is just words, chapters, and phrases. All they are able to do is

guide infants. Skillful means are devised as medicines to heal sickness. The display of words and phrases is part of these skillful means. It is you who are present here in this moment with your living perceptions of sight and hearing clear as a torch flame illuminating all around—you are the ones who display all the words and phases.

“Monks, only when you commit the five unpardonable offenses will you be liberated.”

[23]

Someone asked, “What are the five unpardonable offenses?”

The master replied, “The five unpardonable offenses are patricide, matricide, causing a Buddha to bleed, causing a schism in the Sangha, and burning sacred scriptures and images. ‘Father’ in this case means ignorance. If you stop searching, even if only for an instant, the production and destruction of phenomena is like a sound sending out its echo into empty space; if you, in every circumstance, can have nothing to do, that is called slaying the Father, ignorance. ‘Mother’ is greed. If as you enter the desire realm in order to seek the object of your desire, you are able, even for an instant, to see that all phenomena are empty, and if in any place at all you remain unattached, that is called slaying the Mother, greed. ‘Buddha’ here means being caught in discriminatory ideas. If you enter the pure Dharma realms and do not give rise to any discriminatory ideas, even if only for an instant, if wherever you go you maintain nondiscrimination, then you are causing the Buddha of mental construction to bleed. The Sangha here is the attachment to the idea of afflictions and the object of refuge. If you realize the insight that all the afflictions and internal formations are empty and have no place of refuge, even if for just a moment, you have destroyed the Sangha of afflictions, internal formations, and dependence. The ‘scriptures and images’ here are ideas about causes and conditions, the mind, and the objects of mind. If you for only a moment are able to see the emptiness of causes and conditions, mind, and objects of mind, you have burned the scriptures and images of concepts, mind, and objects of mind.

“Monks! If you can do this, you will no longer be caught in the terms ‘profane and sacred.’

“Monks, in every idea you have, you are accustomed to looking at an empty hand or a pointing finger and assuming it to be truth. You rely on the object of the senses in order to conjure up deceptive phenomena that do not have a real existence. You have an inferiority complex and so you just cringe and draw back, maintaining, ‘I’m just a profane person while he is one of the saints.’ Bald-headed fools! Why are you running in such haste looking for death by covering your hearts in lion skins and crying out like jackals? You are true gentlemen, so why can you not exhale the strong character of true gentlemen? You have no confidence in what already can be found in your house and go looking for it in someone else’s house. Why do you keep falling into the trap of the terminology of teachers of old? When finished with taking refuge in yin, you rely on yang. In the end you are not able to achieve anything of yourselves. Whatever circumstances you come across, you cling to. Whatever object you encounter, you grasp. Whatever you are in touch with deceives you. You yourselves have no standard of perception.

“Friends, do not be caught in the words of the mountain monk. Why? Because the words I speak have no firm foundation. They are just drawings, drawn only once in space, even though the images have color and shape. My friends, do not make Buddha into the absolute criterion. As far as I am concerned, the idea we have of Buddha is like the latrine pit, and in that sense, bodhisattvas and

arhats are just people who put you in chains. That is why there is the phenomenon of Manjushri bringing a sword to kill Gautama, and Angulimala coming with a knife to cut off the Shakyani's head.

“Friends, Buddha is not something that you can grasp, nor are the teachings of the Three Vehicles, the five natures, sudden enlightenment, complete enlightenment, the historical and the ultimate dimensions. They are all nothing but medicines and diseases that arise together and are used as antidotes to each other. They are not real objects that truly exist. Even if there were something real, it would only be a trap that appeared to be real, a temporary manifestation, the form of a contract for the public to use for the time being. It is only a matter of words.

“Friends, there are a number of monks who practice the daily practice of turning inwards, thinking that they are aspiring to the supramundane dharmas. They are wrong! If you aspire to Buddha, you lose Buddha. If you aspire to the Way, you lose the Way. If you aspire to be the master you lose the master. Monks, do not commit this mistake! I do not need you to give a good explanation of the sutras or the shastras. I do not need you to be the king or high dignitary. I do not need you to be so eloquent, speaking nonstop, like a torrent of water. Nor do I need you to become wonderfully penetrating and wise. I just need you to have correct insight into the way things are.

“Even if you are able to teach about a hundred sutras and shastras you are not equal to the ordinary everyday monk who lives as a person who always has nothing to do. Teaching sutras and shastras in an eloquent way will just make you arrogant about your own achievement and deprecatory of others. That is just the state of mind of the ashuras who are only interested in who is being victorious over others.

“Ignorance and egotistical disputing only develop the retribution that leads to hell. Bhikshu Sunaksatra was very fluent in teaching the Twelve Divisions of the teachings but still had to go to the hell realms and was not able to remain on the Earth. The best thing is having nothing to do and an end of all seeking. When hungry you should eat, when sleepy, close your eyes. Foolish people may laugh at you but the wise will understand.

“Friends, do not go in search of things described in words. It will only make your mind more agitated, your intellect more weary, and your lungs will have to inhale drafts of cold air, all to no purpose. It's far better to be able to see for only an instant that all phenomena that arise from causes and conditions are unborn, and go beyond the bodhisattvas who are authorities in the teachings of the Three Vehicles.

“Monks, do not remain in a state of hesitation, letting days and months pass. In the past, when I had not yet seen the Way of practice clearly, I was still in dark obscurity. I did not dare waste any time in idleness; a quantity of hot blood in me was always pushing me to wander around looking for someone to learn about the Path from. Thanks to the power of understanding that I received later on, I am now able to sit here and talk to you. I advise you not to waste your time over food, clothes, and honors. To meet a good spiritual friend is something very rare, as rare as seeing the udumbara flower open.* People come here from all directions because they have heard about the old monk Linji. They intend, as soon as they find me, to test me by asking questions that will set a trap for me in order to lure me into giving a teaching; but they have failed. When this old monk displays his whole person in order to expose the effect, they sit there with eyes blank and mouths dumb as fish, utterly confused as to how to answer me. Let me tell you this: ‘The ass is not able to withstand being trampled on by the dragon-elephant.’

“People like this have been everywhere, pointing to themselves and slapping their ribs, saying

they have understood Zen and the path of practice. Sooner or later they come here too, sometimes two of them, sometimes three at a time. Once they are here, they discover that, after all, they have nothing to flaunt. Oh dear! They keep taking their body and mind all over the place in order to flap their lips, deceiving the village people. They should look out for the day when they have to eat molten iron. They are not true monks. In fact they are being driven into the ashura realm.

“The true meaning of the Path is not the use of reasoning and debating in order to give your own teachings a high position and convince people who follow different spiritual paths. The Buddhas and the masters succeed each other in this spirit and they do not have any other aim. If they establish teachings and practices, these teachings belong to the sphere of models of education. They lead people into the domain of the Three Vehicles, the five natures and the retribution of being born as gods or men. The teachings and practice of the complete and sudden enlightenment are not like this. The boy Sudhana never asked questions as part of any search.

“Monks, do not use your mind in the wrong way. The great ocean will never receive a corpse. If, carrying the heavy load of your psyche in search of something, you wander everywhere in the world of men, it will only make a further obstacle to your being able to see directly into your own mind. If the sun is not occluded by clouds, then it can shine everywhere in the vault of the heavens. If the eyes are not rubbed, the illusory specks will not fall in the space in front of you.

“My friends, if you want to live in the spirit of the Dharma, you just need to put an end to doubts. Expanded, it is vast enough to embrace all the Dharma realms. Contracted, it is not too small to be gathered in one strand of hair. It shines out on its own and has never lacked anything. A man of old said, ‘To say that it is something is not correct.’ You should look into it for yourselves to see if it is any different from this. I could keep on talking without end but the important thing is that you make the effort yourselves. I wish you goodbye.”

* *Sutras* are the recorded oral teachings of the historical Buddha. *Shastras* are commentaries on the sutras or on other treatises or texts concerning Buddhist teachings.

* A *bhikshu* is a fully-ordained Buddhist monk. A *bhikshuni* is a fully-ordained Buddhist nun.

* The udumbara flower opens once every 3,000 years, and is often used as a metaphor for how rarely a Buddha appears in the world.

CHAPTER FOUR



COMMENTARY ON THE RECORD OF MASTER LINJI



ZEN BATTLES



COMMENTARY 1

The Prefect Wang often came to study the Path with the Master Linji, bringing with him other politicians, intellectuals, and advisors. He invited the Zen master to ascend the Dharma seat, which means he invited him to give a teaching. You might be able to picture this. All the monks stood while the prefect and his attendants sat. That was the way things were done; only the honored guests were allowed to sit.

When the master had stepped up, he said, “Today, although unwillingly, I have followed the custom and taken my seat up here.” With this he was saying, “I don’t want to do it, I don’t want to get up on the Dharma throne and play the role of a Zen master. I don’t like it. But because people expect it of me, I have to do it.”

Why didn’t Master Linji want to give a Dharma talk? Maybe he felt he couldn’t satisfy the expectations of those present. It’s not that he didn’t have the capacity or intelligence to do it, but he knew that the prefect and his attendants were waiting, expecting things that he couldn’t give them. They wanted knowledge about the Buddhadharma, how to attain enlightenment. And the master knew no matter how much they studied and listened to his teachings, it couldn’t transform their afflictions—their craving, anger, and hatred. So giving them more knowledge was not something he wanted to do.

Master Linji agreed to ascend the seat and teach, but he didn’t teach in the manner people were expecting. He didn’t want to satisfy their expectations; he knew it would be useless. So he didn’t speak formally about the great achievements of the Zen school. He knew that what the audience was seeking couldn’t be realized through words and concepts. If he offered knowledge when knowledge was expected, he’d leave the realm of the Zen master, of the “good spiritual friend.” The Dharma isn’t a matter of lecturing—if you want to gain knowledge from lectures and books, you can go to a university or a Buddhist institute and get a PhD in Buddhist studies. But in the temple, in the practice center, this isn’t what we offer. The Dharma is a matter of breathing, walking, eating, and living every moment in peace and joy. Master Linji knew if he opened his mouth to speak, his words would not help. So all he could do was sit there and smile. But if he continued like this, they wouldn’t know where to find a foothold, and the prefect had made his request so many times! How could the master not speak?

He asked if there was any warrior willing to step out onto the battlefield, to begin a Zen battle, a conversation between master and student. Maybe from this confrontation will come a spark that will set alight and burn the veil of ignorance in our hearts. This is a show of strength between master and student. Maybe there will be destruction. Maybe both will be victorious.

A very brave monk stepped forward and asked, “What is the principal meaning of the Buddhadharma?” He wanted to know what is the essence, the heart, the cream of the Buddha’s teachings. Perhaps this monk had studied Buddhism for many years and could give beautiful talks on the essence of the Buddhadharma, but he’s still confused and didn’t know the real essence of Buddhism. Who is that monk? Are you that monk?

Any Zen practitioner who knows a bit about Buddhism could answer the monk’s question. We could say Buddhism is a way to help us live with awareness, peace, and joy in the present moment. This helps us to have concentration, insight, the capacity to be deeply in touch and to understand the

no-birth no-death nature of reality. In this way, we can go beyond our grief, fear, and anxiety.

We could say all of that and it would be correct. But would it benefit anyone? When the person we're speaking to leaves the Dharma Hall, can he or she actually put it into practice and apply it in his life? Sometimes we put all our heart into answering a question, and though it's clear the other person has listened, he's only received it as an idea and has not really understood. We've put all our heart into trying to present some matter, but that person hasn't understood even a little bit. And when they stand up to ask another question, we feel a kind of despair—we feel we've failed.

So we can understand if perhaps Master Linji has had enough of this kind of thing. In response to the monk's question, the master gave a shout. The shout was like a sword cutting off the head of the question, cutting off our tendency to look for answers with the intellect alone and to store up knowledge. The shout conveys many things: "Do you really need another definition of Buddhism to compare with the definitions you already have? Will it help you? I'm not someone who sells definitions. Don't try to buy these things from me. I'm not a merchant. Do you understand?" In response, the monk prostrated. We don't know whether he has understood or not. We don't know how he was afterward. That prostration may have been awakening, it may have been fear; we can't know.

Then the master said, "This monk has the ability to speak." This was very compassionate of Master Linji. It's as if someone came up to us and sang us a song a little bit out of tune and we said, "That's quite nice," just to give him some encouragement.

Another monk came forward and asked, "To which tradition does the song the master sings belong, and of what branch of Zen is he a continuation?" This monk was focused on the roots and branches of the Dharma doors, the source of the teachings and practice of Master Linji. He was asking for Master Linji's credentials. People want to identify and label you so they can place you somewhere they already have set in their mind. "What kind of Buddhism do you practice? Do you belong to the Vipassana school or the Linji school, the Pure Land school, or the Soto school? Oh, I know all about that."

We have these labels in little piles in our mind and we take them out and stick them on things. That's our habit. We like to be able to say, "This is an American. That is a Dutch person. This is a Mexican person." We put the label on as if we know what we mean by Mexican, American, or Dutch. This is a Communist, this is a Republican, this is a capitalist. In fact, the label has no meaning. "This is a person I love, this is a person I hate." When we put a label on, we can't see the person. If someone labels you as a "terrorist," he may shoot you. But if he sees that you are a human being who has his own suffering, who has children and a wife to look after, he won't be able to shoot you. It's only when he gives you a label that he can say, "You're a terrorist; your presence isn't needed in this world; if you weren't in the world, it would be a more beautiful place." It's all a matter of putting a label on a person. And when you see the real human being, you can't assign a label anymore. We give labels only in order to praise or to destroy. We have a great bagful of labels—we don't even know where they came from. And when we stick them onto people, we cut ourselves off from those people, and we can no longer know who they really are. Master Linji was looking for the real person, not the label. He was saying, "Don't do that, my child. Don't affix labels to people. If you want to learn anything, you have to stop your habit of labeling. Allow yourself the freedom to be in touch with the human being." This monk thought if he knew what branch of Zen the master belonged to, he would understand the Zen master better.

Master Linji replied, "In the past, when I was still with Master Huangbo, I asked a question three

times and was beaten three times.” I love Master Linji when I read this sentence, not because he’d been beaten, but because of his skillful answer. He could have asked the monk, “Do you want a beating?” In principle, the monk deserved to be beaten for asking that kind of question, since he was just looking for an explanation in words and terms. But Master Linji was very kind. He said, “In the past, I did what you’ve just done, and I was beaten for it.” The monk stopped to think. He didn’t get it. He was still trying to figure out the answer with his head instead of his heart. Master Linji’s reply should have exploded some kind of insight in the monk. But it failed, because the monk continued to think.

Next, the master gave a shout. His first weapon, a very light, very gentle sentence, hadn’t worked. So he tried a second weapon, something stronger. He gave a shout to stop the monk from thinking. When the monk still hadn’t understood, the master beat him to wake him up. First he tried a kind, gentle answer; then a shout; then a blow. They all failed.

To whom does this failure belong? There are many conversations that fail like this between Zen master and Zen student. If we read this conversation with intelligence, we can do better than the monk who asked the question. The questioner is here, sitting amongst us. This didn’t just happen in the ninth century, it happens every day. The teacher helps us three times and three times we fail to get it. If we are able to see the compassion of Master Linji, we can see his compassion is very great.

When the master beat the monk, he said, “Monk, don’t hope to drive a stake into empty space.” If you want to tie up a horse or a cow, you have to find a place into which it’s possible to drive a stake. It’s the same when you want to put up your tent. You can’t drive a stake into water or air; you have to put it into the earth. If you’re looking for a solid base in the field of abstract concepts, it’s like putting a stake in empty space. Your tent won’t stand up.

Master Linji was next asked by a senior monk, “There is no reason why the teaching of the Three Vehicles and the Twelve Divisions should not make our Buddha nature shine out, is there?”* He asked this because as a senior monk he was a Dharma teacher, and teaching requires that we have confidence in the Dharma, faith that the teachings can help our Buddha nature shine out. If the monk didn’t have this confidence, he wouldn’t be able to teach. Also no one would buy a ticket to come to the Dharma Hall if they didn’t have the faith that the Dharma talk would help their own Buddha nature to shine out. So both the audience and the Dharma teacher have to have the confidence that the teachings will make their Buddha nature shine. This is very reasonable.

When the master replied, “You have not yet dug up the weeds of your mind’s garden,” he was telling the monk, “You may be able to teach fluently about the Three Vehicles and the Twelve Divisions of the Buddha’s teachings, but all your afflictions, your illusions, your anger, suspicion, doubt, and jealousy are just the same. So what are you teaching about? Your teachings have nothing to do with the happiness of your own life. You haven’t yet gotten down to the practice of breathing, taking steps in mindfulness, recognizing your mental formations and liberating yourself from them.* Your mind, your mental formations, is the garden you have to look after. But it’s full of weeds. How can the Buddha nature shine out? You’ve been teaching about the Buddha nature for thirty years, but it hasn’t made any difference.”

If the monk had some awakening, Master Linji’s single sentence would have been enough to wake him up. But the monk continued, “There is no reason why the Buddha would have deceived people.” This monk was really stubborn. There’s no reason the Buddha would have been selling false goods and deceiving people; the Buddha taught the Dharma for forty-five years and the words he taught are

written down clearly in the Tripitaka, the three baskets of the teachings. So the master asked, “Where is Buddha?” Is Buddha a reality outside of you, or is he inside you? What do you know about Buddha to say that the Buddha would have deceived people? There’s a famous Zen koan: “Who is the one reciting the Buddha’s name?” Who is the one reciting the sutra? Who is the one sitting in meditation? These questions are an invitation to discover who we are when we are reciting the name of the Buddha. These questions help us find our own true face. This koan also plays the important role of bridging the Pure Land school and Zen Buddhism. In Zen we usually don’t recite the name of the Buddha. The person who created this koan saw that Pure Land practitioners could practice Zen and Zen practitioners could practice Pure Land; this koan can be used by both schools.

The master’s question is to help us discover our own nature. We think that we know who we are. We think we know who the Buddha is. When the master asked, “Where is Buddha?” he was saying, “You don’t know who you are, you don’t know who Buddha is; this is something you have to discover. When you know who you are, you know who the Buddha is. When you know who Buddha is, you know who you are. Finding yourself, you find the Buddha. Finding the Buddha, you find yourself.” Buddha isn’t a reality outside of us for us to go and look for. When the master asked, “Where is Buddha?” he was also asking, “Do you know anything about the Buddha to be able to say this? If you think you know who the Buddha is, you are wrong.” With his question, he cut the head off of the monk’s question. The student could no longer function in the domain of thinking and words; the master had cut off that path of thought. What more could the student say? He was unable to reply.

So the master said, “You wanted to fool this old monk in the presence of the prefect, did you? You wanted to play in the realm of thinking? Leave, leave! Make room for others to ask questions.” The monk had wanted to show off his knowledge about the Buddhadharma, but Master Linji’s response was, “You’re wasting my time and that of everyone.”

Then the master said, “The banquet of the Dharma is being given today for a great cause. Is there anyone else who wants to ask or say anything more? Come out here quickly. I will let you know in advance that you only need to open your mouth and the communication is lost. Why? Have you heard the Buddha say that the Dharma isn’t caught in words and concepts, it does not arise from a cause and it does not arise from conditions?”

The politician didn’t have much time and he wanted a good feast, but wasn’t getting the most delicious dishes. Yet no one dared to come out; everybody was afraid.

The lectures and discussions we have are not the Dharma, because the Dharma is not caught in words and concepts and it doesn’t arise from causes and conditions. As soon as we have the intention to speak, the truth is lost because we’re relying on words. The Dharma isn’t something to go in search of and discover. It’s already there. It’s a truth that either manifests in that moment or it doesn’t.

Do we have confidence in ourselves, confidence in our Buddha nature? If we have confidence, we don’t have to look for it in paths of knowledge and concepts. If we see the Buddha as someone outside ourselves, and we feel that we are worth nothing, then we will not be successful. The basis of our success is confidence in ourselves. If we see ourselves as someone who simply receives the Dharma, the wisdom from outside, then we won’t be successful. Everything that’s happened is because we don’t have confidence in ourselves. All we’ve been able to say today are a few words here and there, a few parasitic vines climbing and covering up the trunk of the beautiful tree, “whose only function is to block the way of the prefect and the other officials and eclipse your Buddha nature ever more. It would be better to withdraw.”

So this Dharma discussion seems to have been a failure. But we have the benefit of time and space. Today we can see things in the discussion that perhaps the people present missed, so we can do better. We can be successful because we are there with the master, and the master is shouting and waking us up. And we're lucky to be sitting down; remember the monks at the time all had to stand up. Master Linji's last shout was, "For those whose confidence is weak, to have spent a whole day bandying words like this is of no use. You have been standing a long time; your legs must be tired. Farewell."

COMMENTARY 2

The Zen master went to Hefu, where the prefect named Wang invited him to teach. One of the master's senior disciples, the venerable monk Magu, stepped out and asked a question about the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. "Of all the thousand eyes and thousand arms of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, which is the chief eye?"*

Master Linji replied, "Of all the thousand eyes and thousand arms of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, which is the chief eye? Speak quickly!" The monk pulled the master down from the podium and went up to sit there himself. The Zen master came close and said, "You don't understand." At this the Venerable Magu hesitated. The master then pulled the monk down and took his seat again on the Dharma throne. The venerable monk left the Dharma Hall and the Zen master came down from the Dharma seat.

When the Zen master said, "You don't understand," he was really asking, "How are you? Is everything okay with you?"

When we read this conversation, we are in the situation, not standing outside of it. Are we the Venerable Magu? Are we Zen Master Linji? From the ninth century to the twenty-first century, many people have read these words. But have they been able to understand them? Each of the 10,000 eyes and hands of the bodhisattva is equally important. Avalokiteshvara has 10,000 eyes in order to see very far and 10,000 hands in order to help the different beings in different situations at the same time.

Instead of answering the monk's initial question, the Zen master repeated it and said, "Speak quickly," meaning, "speak without thinking," so the monk could find the answer himself and not rely on another person. "Speak quickly! Speak quickly!" the Zen master said. "Don't let your thinking mind answer, or you won't see anything. You have the Buddha within you; you have the wisdom within you. Why do you ask me? If I answer, you will only get caught in my words."

The wisdom is within us. Why don't we go back to ourselves to discover it? Why do we search through words and views? Why do we look for wisdom in another person? We must have confidence that the wisdom is within us. This is why the master turns the question back on the monk who asked it. Most of us are lazy; we like to find someone to ask. Of course the monk believes his teacher has wisdom, but when a teacher answers, it's from his own wisdom. No matter how many times someone explains something to you, the only way you can truly gain wisdom is by learning it for yourself. And answering requires using words that the student can get caught in. Everybody has to cross the bridge in order to know. As parents and teachers, we often have this experience. We love our children and we want to transmit our experiences to them so they can learn, but our experiences are just vague ideas to our children. Children see that the fire is so beautiful, but it's only when they touch the fire and get burned that they understand its heat. No matter how much we love our children and want to

transmit our knowledge, we can't transmit it with words.

Asking a question back is a skillful means used by many Zen masters. Another person's answer contains their terminology and views, but when we can answer ourselves, our understanding is more certain. We should not always seek answers from another person—even if that person loves us, they cannot give us answers. There may be times when someone asks us a question and it's appropriate for us to use this method, and the other person will thank us.

When Master Linji repeated the monk's question back to him, he was changing roles. He was essentially saying, "Now you're the host and I'm the guest." So the Venerable Magu pulled the Zen master down and went up and sat on the podium. This is Zen language for, "Fine, if I'm the host and you're the guest then I have to sit in the host's position." But because the monk hesitated, he lost his direction and Master Linji pulled Magu down because he failed as the host.

The Venerable Magu hesitated. By thinking, he used his intellect instead of his instinct, and that was his failure. Master Linji pulled the Venerable Magu down from the podium and took his place, putting the monk back in the role of the guest and himself back in the role of the host. So it was a failure, and the monk left, followed by the Zen master. As students, we can be put in the position of the host. But from this position of host, we can easily again become the guest.

The Zen master uses innumerable skillful means to help the student, including turning a question around. Speak quickly—don't allow your thinking mind to begin working. Speak quickly so you don't have time to use reason and logic, and in that way the answer cannot come from your ideas and views.

COMMENTARY 3

The Zen master comes to the Dharma Hall and says, "On this lump of red flesh is a real person of no position who comes in and out right before your face. Whoever has not seen that person should look carefully. Have a good look!" Some teachings happen when a monk asks the master a question or when someone invites the master to teach. In this teaching the master spoke spontaneously, of his own initiative. He gave us a koan, a topic for our meditation, an object for our looking deeply.

The word "position" is often understood to mean our status in society. In this case it also means our exact location in space and time. If we were on a boat, lost at sea, we could pinpoint our longitude and latitude to find our location. But the true person without position can't be located in time and space. This doesn't mean the true person isn't there, it's just that the true person can't be grasped. We try using the categories of time and space, coming and going, birth and death to grasp the true person. We can take hold of a rabbit, we can take hold of a cat, but we can't take hold of the true person. The Buddha can't be grasped.

The Venerable Anuradha, a disciple of the Buddha, was once approached by a group of monks from other traditions who were trying to grasp the Tathagata by putting him in one of four categories: being; nonbeing; both being and nonbeing; neither being nor nonbeing.* Their question was, "Venerable Anuradha, the Tathagata is often praised for having reached the highest fruit of awakening. He must have explained his understanding of these four propositions to you: after death, the Tathagata continues to exist; after death, the Tathagata ceases to exist; after death, the Tathagata both continues and ceases to exist; after death, the Tathagata neither continues nor ceases to exist. Please tell us which of these propositions is true."

The Venerable Anuradha replied, “Friends, the Tathagata, the World-Honored One, has never proposed or spoken about these four propositions.” When the recluses had gone, the Venerable Anuradha thought, “If recluses continue to ask me these questions, how should I answer so as to speak the truth and not misrepresent the teachings of the Buddha?” Then Anuradha went to where the Buddha was staying, bowed to the Buddha, spoke words of greeting, and then told the Buddha what had happened.

The Buddha asked him, “What do you think, Anuradha? Can you find the Tathagata in form?”

“No, World-Honored One.”

“Can you find the Tathagata outside of form?”

“No, World-Honored One.”

“Can you find the Tathagata in feelings, perceptions, mental formations, or consciousness?”

“No, World-Honored One.”

“Well then, Anuradha, do you think that the Tathagata transcends form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness?”

“No, World-Honored One.”

“Anuradha, if you cannot find the Tathagata even while he is still alive, can you find the Tathagata within the four propositions?”

“No, World-Honored One.”

“Quite so, Anuradha.”*

The Buddha was smiling and saying, “I’m still sitting here and yet you can’t find me. The true nature of the Buddha cannot be grasped.” And Master Linji was saying the same thing. This pile of flesh here, with blood, bone, and marrow, is not the true person.

In thirteenth-century Vietnam, King Tran Thai Tong wrote a poem about this teaching:

The true person without position

lies on the pile of red flesh.

The pink color and the white color of the flesh and of the bones

may trick us.

He is saying that the colors of our flesh may fool us into believing that we are this body. We see our flesh and we identify with our bodies. If somebody says our body isn’t so beautiful, then we have the complex that we aren’t beautiful. Our moods fluctuate and we identify ourselves with these feelings. When we’re sad, we say, “I’m sad.” When we’re happy, we say, “I’m happy.” But our true person is not those things, nor is it something outside of them.

We have our true person, but we don’t live with our true person, we don’t recognize our true person. We only live with the things we think are our true person. We live our whole life in this ignorance, thinking our feelings and our flesh are the sum total of our true person. Our true person has no position, is not inside or outside, is not tricked by birth and death, by coming and going, by having or not having, by what we do or don’t do. Whether we play chess, stay in bed all day, or meditate all night, this is not our true person.

Our true person can’t be found by means of our intellect, our reasoning. On this pile of red flesh there’s a true person. Anyone who hasn’t seen this person: look carefully. Live mindfully. Our true

person is our own miraculous Buddha, present in our wonderful relationship with all things. Our Buddha is not our five skandhas, the five things that make up a human being: form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness; these are not our true person. We are the clouds, the sky, all our ancestors and descendants. Our true person is a wonder. And when we can see this, we are well. We still have our ups and downs, but we don't identify ourselves with them, we know we are more than that. Our great success as practitioners is to realize our true person.

The monk who asked Master Linji, "What is that real person of no position?" was saying that he needed another definition. The master felt sorry for him, so he walked down, took hold him, and didn't let him get away. He said, "Speak, speak!" as if to say, "Who is the person of no position? Why do you have to ask me?" Perhaps the Zen master shook him a little bit, so as not to allow him to think. And, as in the previous teaching, the guest hesitated. That hesitation is death. By repeating the question back to the monk, Master Linji gave him a lifeline, a second chance. But if the person doesn't grab hold, the Zen master lets go. Zen has a method and a language that doesn't use the medium of thinking and reasoning.

The Zen master then said, "The real person with no position is no more than dry excrement on a stick." This teaching is very famous, perhaps because of the dry fecal matter! In those days, people didn't have bathrooms. They'd just go out onto the mountain and do their business and after a time it would dry out. Scholars still aren't sure if the phrase "a stick of dry fecal matter" means the fecal matter dries and becomes very hard like a stick or that the monks there used sticks as toilet paper. The Zen master expressed his disappointment but at the same time used an image opposite of the one we have of the true person. We tend to think of a true person as pure and noble, someone extraordinary, so the Zen master uses this image of a dry piece of fecal matter or dried excrement on a stick to neutralize our view. If we have a set view about what our true person is, then that view has no more value than a piece of dry fecal matter.

COMMENTARY 4

The Zen master ascended the Dharma seat and a monk came up and prostrated and didn't ask anything. Maybe he had a question, maybe not. But something motivated him to step out. In response, the Zen master shouted, confronting the monk to see what was in his mind. Perhaps the monk went up there just to be seen but had no special question. Perhaps Master Linji's shout made the monk consider his motivation. Perhaps it confused him; he hadn't said anything and yet he had been shouted at. So he said, "Please, Upadhyaya, don't test me." Maybe he didn't feel he had enough strength to deal with the spiritual power of the master.

The Zen master asked, "Tell me, monk, where did the sound of that shout fall?" That is, what effect did it have? And the monk shouted back. He was in the position of a guest, a learner, and he roared back to play the role of a host.

Another monk came up and asked, "What is the essential teaching of the Buddhadharma?" When we have an opportunity to ask a Zen master a question and we don't know what question to ask, then we can ask that question. It may not be the question that's important, but the chance to be in contact with our teacher so that our teacher can look into our minds and shine light into our minds to help us to see the path more clearly.

A similar question commonly asked of a Zen master is: "What was Bodhidharma's intention in

coming to China from India?”* Recently, I proposed an answer: “Mind your own business!” What does the purpose of the master coming to China from India have to do with you? Why don’t you do walking meditation; why don’t you breathe? “Mind your own business” would be an economical answer. It saves us a lot of time.

The Zen master’s shout was also an economical answer. Perhaps his shout meant, “Why do you ask that question; what good does it do you?” Perhaps that shout helped the student see the moment of being in contact with the teacher as a valuable opportunity not to be wasted by asking about external knowledge. Why not go on the path of direct experience?

The monk prostrated. That prostration may have meant he understood, but it may not have. So the Zen master asked, “Where does the weakness lie?” meaning, “Why did I shout at you? Can you tell me?” And the monk replied, “If one offends again, it will not be forgiven,” meaning he wouldn’t ask such a useless question the next time. The Zen master shouts again. The monk is focused already on “the next time” and is not in the present moment.

Then a monk came to the Zen master and told him that when the two head monks of the meditation halls in the east and west met, they shouted simultaneously. He asked the master, “In this case, is there a proper guest and host?” The Zen master said, “The guest and host are clear. Great Community, if you want to know about the principle of the four relations of guest and host, then go and ask the two masters of the meditation halls.” Having spoken, he stepped down.

Traditionally, the west hall was for the monks and the east hall was for guests. The master said to go ask the monks involved because they would know firsthand. The four situations of guest and host, the four ways of interaction, are methods of helping others in the tradition of Master Linji. The host knows what’s going on and the guest comes to learn. And there are times when the guest plays the role of a host and the host plays the role of the guest. In this example, in which both monks yelled at the same time, who was the host and who was the guest? Perhaps, in that moment, both were either host or guest, or the two were host and guest. According to the method of Master Linji, we have to distinguish who’s the host and who’s the guest. In all these Zen dialogues we need to know who is who.

In the final part of the teaching, the Zen master went to the Dharma Hall where a monk asked, “What is the main idea of the Buddhadharma?” The Zen master waved his duster. The monk shouted and the Zen master hit him. Raising the duster was the Zen master’s first answer, which the questioner responded to by shouting. The blow was the master’s second and final answer.

COMMENTARY 5

Another monk came up and asked, “What is the main idea of the Buddhadharma?” The Zen master raised his duster, the monk shouted, and Master Linji shouted. In the previous teaching, when the Zen master raised the duster, the monk shouted and got hit. But in this teaching, the Zen master shouted. He responded differently in these two situations. This is something that can be helpful to us, because often we try to figure out how to behave by reading clues outside of ourselves. We think: if we do something like this, the Zen master will respond like that. But it isn’t mechanical like that. Each answer depends on the particular situation, the person who is asking in that moment, and the person who is responding.

Why was the monk hit when he hesitated? His hesitation meant he was confused, that he didn’t

understand the intention of the teacher. The blow was like a pole the teacher extended to the student to pull him to the other shore. If the student used his intellect to respond, he would lose hold of the pole and drown. Understanding and wisdom don't come from thinking and reasoning, but from direct experience.

The Zen master said, "Noble Sangha, when the Dharma is at stake, someone does not fear for their body or their life." The person who really wants to know the truth isn't afraid to die and is not afraid of suffering.

Master Linji continues, "Twenty years ago, I was still staying at the monastery of the former master Huangbo. Three times I asked him about the essential idea of the Buddhadharma and three times he bequeathed a beating upon me, rather as if he were rubbing my head with a branch of artemisia. Is there anyone here who could come up and help me relive that moment?"

Master Linji is referring to an incident in his youth when, as a novice monk, he was pressured by a senior monk to go up and ask his teacher a question even though he really didn't have one in mind. So he went up and asked the perennial question about the essence of the Buddhadharma. The first time he asked, his teacher hit him with a cane. He asked two more times and was hit two more times. Another monk, noticing Linji's frustration, said to the Zen master, "That novice Linji seems to be very wholehearted and intelligent; he may be a Dharma instrument in the future. Next time, perhaps you can say something to him and give him some encouragement."

So the teacher asked Linji, "Where are you going?"

Linji answered, "I'm not sure; I don't know."

His teacher directed him to go study with the Venerable Dayu.

The Venerable Dayu asked him, "Why did you leave your master to come here?"

Linji answered, "I have lived with my master for a few years now. When I went to ask him a question, he hit me three times. I feel so discouraged."

The Venerable Dayu said, "Your master's compassion is so great but you don't see it. You're so ignorant, so naive."

Thanks to Master Dayu, he understood and he said, "Ah, I see. As it turns out, there's not much in the teaching of my teacher, Master Huangbo."

The Venerable Dayu sighed. "Such a child! You just complained that you didn't understand, you were discouraged, and now you dare to say that."

Then Linji hit the Venerable Dayu three times! Why would he hit that person who had showed him the way, who had helped him understand more clearly? We would have to say that those three hits were out of compassion.

After the three blows, the Venerable Dayu said, "I have nothing to do with this, okay? You are the disciple of that monk." Although it doesn't look like it to us, it was very loving of Dayu to send Linji back to his original teacher, because he saw that Linji still had a lot he could learn. Dayu sent Linji back to Huangbo, his original teacher. When he returned, Master Huangbo asked him where he'd been and why he came back. Linji told him the whole story and then said, "When Dayu told me to return to you, I understood your compassion, your essential teaching." Master Huangbo was pleased by this and said, "Although I do not know Dayu, he sees me clearly."

And Linji said, "Oh, you don't need to go meet him, you can meet him right away." Then he hit his teacher three times. He had realized that when Huangbo hit him, it was out of love, not anger. In Vietnamese, there's a proverb that says, "When you love, you use the cane. When you hate, you use

your sweet kind words.” So he realized that his teacher loved him a lot and that when he hit him, his love was so gentle it was as though he touched him lightly on the head with a branch of artemisia.

After recounting this story, Master Linji asked, “Is there anyone here who could come up and help me relive that moment?” A monk went up and said, “I could do it.” So the Zen master gave him the cane, but the monk hesitated. He wasn’t capable of hitting his teacher three times, so the Zen master hit him. Does this mean the teacher was clearer in his love for his student than the student was in his love for the teacher? How differently we read this teaching if we think of each blow as an act of love!

Many of us, both monastics and laypeople, learn about the Buddhadharma without anything changing in our life. Our personality remains exactly the same because we cannot digest and apply what we’ve learned. What we’ve learned doesn’t help us and so we can’t help anyone. Zen doesn’t travel along a path of learning through writing and words; it relies on direct transmission between teacher and student.

COMMENTARY 6

When the monk asked Master Linji, “What is the story about the tip of the sword blade?” he was referring to Manjushri’s sword of wisdom that cuts through illusion. Master Linji answered, “It’s not safe! It’s not safe!” and beat the monk when he hesitated.

Poor monk! He didn’t have a chance. Many of us are like this monk. We expect one answer, the one that doesn’t challenge our thinking, and when we are given a different one, we don’t know how to respond. When the host says something that the guest is not expecting, the guest freezes.

Many of us listen to Dharma talks like this. We listen to our loved ones like this as well. We are listening out for something we can agree with and goes along with our usual way of thinking. That is not really listening at all.

There is a famous koan: “Who is the one who is recollecting the Buddha?” Suppose the teacher instead says: “Who is the Buddha you are recollecting?” We don’t know what to make of this sentence. Even though the other person may be speaking our same language, the words sound unfamiliar because we are not used to thinking this way. We think we are sure we know who the Buddha is even though we accept that we do not exactly know who we ourselves are. But the poor monk who went out onto the battlefield before Master Linji was given a second chance. His beating may have been a way for him to break through what he didn’t understand.

After this beating, another monk, undeterred, came forward and asked about the lay practitioner Shi Shi. Shi Shi had been a monk, a contemporary of Master Linji, but because of the persecution of Buddhist monks in the Tang era, the Emperor had forced Shi Shi to take off his robes and return to lay life. Still he didn’t leave the monastic life altogether. He worked in the kitchen of Master Linji’s monastery.

While pounding rice, his foot slipped from the pedal on the pestle shaft. That was a moment of forgetfulness, a moment of mindlessness. Because of this, Master Linji answered, “He drowned in a deep spring.”

Where do we go when we are forgetful? Never mind. We shouldn’t worry too much about moments of forgetfulness. After all, we can always return to ourselves and become mindful again. And that mindless moment can help us appreciate the other moments when we are mindful. These mindful moments become even more wonderful.

To be forgetful for a moment does not mean that you have to be forgetful forever. We don't have to be that hard on ourselves. If we are, we will decide that this mindfulness stuff is too hard and we will give up. But many wonderful moments of practice still lie ahead. We can practice just being aware of our forgetfulness without judging it or reacting to it. In that way, there will be many other enlightened and wonderful moments.

We don't need to criticize ourselves or others for moments of forgetfulness. We don't even need to try to improve ourselves. All we need is to be in the moment, for the next one will be quite different. That is why Master Linji continually reminds his students not to seek anything. The present moment has all that we need.

When a student comes to a Zen master seeking approval, or for that matter seeking anything, he is already lost. Master Linji knows this. He can see straight away what his students are trying to attain and, out of compassion, doesn't give the guest any chance to continue this line of seeking. If he lets them continue striving, he is only letting them continue to waste beautiful present moments. Shouting, interrupting, and beating are his way of not betraying the student who has come with trust and that the master can help.

The Vietnamese Zen teacher of eleventh-century Vietnam, Abbess Dieu Nhan, composed a poem just before she passed away:

*Birth, sickness, old age and death
Have always been a normal part of life.
If your desire is to escape from them
You just tie yourself up more.
It is ignorant to seek Buddha
Or meditation practice outside yourself.*

Meditation and Buddha are not objects to be searched for.

Why waste more time talking about the ineffable?

Master Linji taught that if we already have a set idea, or we know we don't have an idea but we are searching for one, we are just wasting time, losing beautiful moments. If we hold on to ideas about the ineffable, it will only bind us further.

COMMENTARY 7

There's only one statement in this teaching, and it contains a question. This Dharma talk probably took less than one minute. I don't know what the Sangha did with the rest of their time!

A person stood on the peak of a lone mountain with no other peak nearby to jump to. He had no way out. Another person stood in the middle of a crossroads. He was completely confused; he didn't know which direction to take, and so he couldn't advance or retreat. He was in the same situation as the first person. The Zen master asked those in the Dharma Hall, "Of these two, who will come first and who after?" Then he stepped down from the podium and returned to his room.

We've all been in this situation. It's very dangerous when there's no place to advance or retreat. We might feel as if we're going to die. There is no way out and we're frozen. How do we survive?

The Master warns us not to be like Master Fu or Vimalakirti, two very eloquent lay Buddhist practitioners. He warns us not to try and talk or think our way out of our predicament.

So how do we escape? We can't. All we can do in the situation is surrender and be in the moment completely without trying to pretend we know the way out. In this contradiction, we find the truth. Once we surrender to the situation, we see the Path. Where before we were caught, now we are liberated.

COMMENTARY 8

The Zen master went into the Dharma Hall and spoke for about twenty seconds; he wasn't wasting time. Maybe he was saving time for working meditation!

He spoke of someone who had never left home but was always on the Way. Who was this person? He also spoke of someone who had left home but who wasn't on the Path. This can be said of many monastics. A monk or a nun leaves their home and family behind and renounces all previous attachments to become a free person. At least in form, a monastic is on the Path, whereas in content, he may not have left the house yet. Even though he wears the robe of a monk and his head is shaved, he may not have given up reaching for worldly, material, and emotional comforts. But a person living the life of a layperson who has left the house has, in essence, become a monastic. That means their mind is quiet; they have let go of everything.

Between these two people, which one deserves to receive offerings from gods and humans? This teaching is very short, but it's very deep. It's enough to make us look at ourselves and ask whether we have left our home. How can we leave the house of afflictions, passion, desires, hatred, resentment, and ignorance?

In the previous teaching, Master Linji talked about the traveler on the peak of a lone mountain who couldn't figure out how to advance or retreat. If we struggle, we become more stuck. We tend to think, "I have to do something." But the more we do, the more we sink into the mud.

According to the Buddha, every situation has a way out. When the Buddha sat under the bodhi tree, he was stuck. He didn't know what else to do but sit and do nothing. And that is the first answer—to do nothing, just sit still. This is very difficult. We feel we are sitting on hot coals of resentment, hatred, and despair.

The Buddha teaches us that we have to master ourselves first. Before we can act, we have to cool these coals beneath us. To succeed doesn't mean triumphing over the one who causes us to suffer, but over our own ignorance and resentment. No matter what has been done to us or how we've been wronged, we're always responsible for at least fifty percent of our suffering, perhaps more.

If we come and kneel down in front of the Buddha with our suffering, we will hear the Buddha say, "You are one who deserves to be loved." If we sit still, breathe, and continue to listen, the Buddha will tell us, "Your children also deserve to be loved." And if we sit and continue to listen, we will hear, "The person you fought with also deserves to be loved."

If we can listen to the Buddha, then we'll be able to prostrate, to touch the earth, and say, "I will live in such a way as to increase my ability to love each and every human being. Only then do I deserve to be a student of the Buddha."

The Path isn't a dream. It isn't a wish. The Path is concrete practice. And it will save our life. It will save our children. If we are on the Path, then from within us a stream of compassion and loving

kindness rises and our suffering eases. If we have that insight and compassion, then the peak of the mountain becomes a very comfortable place. We don't have to go anywhere. The solution doesn't lie in some other place. If we can't succeed in this moment, then we won't succeed tomorrow. If we can't find happiness on that lone mountain peak, then we won't find happiness in the valley below, either.

COMMENTARY 9

A monk asked Master Linji, "What is the first sentence?" Master Linji replied, "When the seal of the Three Essentials is removed, the red stamp is clear. There is no hesitation; host and guest can be distinguished."

The Three Essentials of Zen practice are: studying the Dharma, Zen precepts, and Zen practice. Master Linji is saying that the first sentence in an interview with the Zen master is your only real chance. Good luck! If you miss that chance, it's not the end of the world. So don't tear your hair or beat your chest about it.

The student then asks, "What is the second sentence?" And Master Linji replies, "The wonderful explanation is not obstructed, has no obstacles, in replying to the question. The realization of the skillful means does not divide the stream."

If the master has to use a second sentence, there is a second chance, but it is not a real chance like the first sentence. So the student shouldn't spend too much time on it. Don't focus on trying again and again.

Yet the student keeps asking. "What about the third sentence?" he wants to know. And the master must be feeling compassion because he answers him again. He says, "Look at the puppets performing. There is someone pulling the strings inside." This time he is just consoling the student. If you have to ask three times and the master answers you three times, it's like a consolation prize. The master has love and doesn't give up on his student. Real love of the teacher for his disciple is not pity.

Many of us get discouraged in our practice. We think we are not good enough at it or that we don't have enough information. In these times, it's not as if we think we know the answer. We don't need to be shaken out of our complacency. Rather, we are despondent and we need some encouragement in order to continue in a new way.

The final paragraph goes on to explain how the three sentences are really one; there is no difference between them. Master Linji teaches, "Each sentence must have three wonderful entrances. Each wonderful entrance must have the Three Essentials. There have to be skillful means and function. How do you understand this?" Then, having asked this question, Master Linji steps down and leaves the hall.

This final paragraph is different than the rest of the Record of Master Linji. It reminds us that Master Linji didn't write any of these words down. He spoke them and his students recorded them. Perhaps one of his students, concerned that his teachings weren't clear enough, added this later.

Master Linji is explaining the Dharma in a very abstract and theoretical way in this last paragraph. This sounds like more of the traditional way that Zen masters taught at the time that wasn't very effective. Master Linji wasn't the type to give lectures in the style of a university professor. He didn't want to tell people any set truth. Instead, he was really hoping to shake people up so they could experience for their own selves the beauty of just being in the present moment.

Sometimes we all look for answers outside of ourselves but even if we hear them and even if the teacher's explanation is very elegant and "right" by academic standards, we can't learn from it.

We need to experience things for ourselves in order to understand them. That is why Master Linji returns again and again to the idea that there is nothing we need to attain and strive for. Being fully present is enough to occupy us our whole lives.



EVENING TALKS



COMMENTARY 10

This part of the teaching is called “The Four Ways to Help People” or “The Four Arrangements.” Each arrangement is a different way of responding to a student. The arrangement you use to respond depends on the situation and the level of practice of the student. The four arrangements are: removing the subject without removing the object; removing the object without removing the subject; removing both the subject and object; removing neither the subject nor the object.

The First Arrangement

A monk asked, “What does it mean to eliminate the person but not the object of the person’s perceptions?” He is asking how we can remove the subject (the person) without removing the object. The master replied, “The sun rises, making the Earth an embroidery. / The child’s hair hangs down, white as silk threads.”

We tend to focus on the object and call it reality. We don’t notice how our mind intervenes in our perception. In philosophy this is called “naïve realism.” For example, we see the flower as an independent reality. Sometimes, it’s best to let people new to practicing Buddhism continue with this kind of thinking. For example, if someone asks us, “Why is there so much suffering in my life?” and we want to respond using the first arrangement, we wouldn’t say, “Your mind gives rise to these feelings of suffering.” Instead, we’d focus on the concrete objects in their life that are causing them suffering and help them to better understand those objects of their perception.

The master was not saying that focusing on the object is a bad thing. The spring sunlight, flowers blooming, and green trees create a landscape that looks like embroidery. This is an object of perception and it’s a beautiful thing to focus on. Meanwhile, there’s a little child playing in the sun, and the hair of this child is like white silk. In ancient China, a child’s hair was always black. So the master was pointing out that contradictions arise when we focus on the object without the subject. That is, if we don’t consider the role of our mind, and just focus on what we see as the independent reality around us, there will be contradictions.

The Vietnamese poet Nguyen Du said, “When a person is sad, the scenery is never happy.” How we are feeling determines how we see the world. Why are some people able to experience happiness when they look at the moon and see its beauty, while others see the same moon as sad or depressing? This question can’t be answered unless both the subject and object are taken into account.

The Second Arrangement

The monk asked, “Then what is meant by eliminating the object and not the person?” He is asking about removing the object without removing the subject. This is called manifestation. From this point of view, everything is made by the mind. This is the point of view of Buddhist psychology. The master replied, “The king’s commands are relayed to every part of the world. The officers on the frontier have dispersed the clouds of smoke.”

Everything we see, feel, and hear is a manifestation of our consciousness. In this case, we bring the question back to our minds. The things we see, hear, and feel cause us to suffer, cause us to be carried away. However, they aren't independent realities outside of us; they're created by our minds. So with this arrangement, we come back to the mind in order to look at it and do not acknowledge the objects outside the mind as real. We take the reality of the object away so that the person can return to his or her consciousness.

To illustrate this point, Master Linji used the example of the entire country being put on alert even though soldiers at the frontier couldn't see smoke or dust—the signs of war. Master Linji lived in northwest China, not far from the frontier where groups were always invading and threatening the safety of the country; so this image of smoke and dust was practical and real for him, one he had seen and experienced. The soldiers would climb to the top of the fort to scan the horizon. Flying dust would indicate an invading army and smoke signals would be sent indicating danger. They would burn dry wolf dung because it made very black smoke. The smoke could be seen at the next fort, ten or twenty kilometers away, and they in turn would send a smoke signal to the next fort, and so on from fort to fort until the news reached the king's palace.

In Master Linji's answer there is a contradiction. On the one hand, everyone is ordered to be prepared for war; on the other hand, there are no signs of war. So to say that there's only the mind and there's no object of mind is also not correct. You can't have the mind without having the object of mind. Mind and object of mind arise together. If there's no object, there can't be the subject, the mind. And if there's no mind, how can there be the object? The subject and object always exist together. When we say, "I see," we have to be seeing something. When we say that we hear, we are hearing something. When we say we are thinking, then we're thinking about something. So subject and object are inseparable.

Depending on the situation, we use this way of seeing—either taking away the object or the subject—as a tool in our own practice as well as in guiding another person.

The Third Arrangement

The monk asked, "Then what does it mean to eliminate both the person and the object?" In this case, both the subject and the object are removed. The master replied, "The two districts of Bun and Phan aren't in communication. The people are isolated in their own world."

Master Linji used another image of war and isolation in which contact had been cut off between two districts at the frontier. The people of each district were isolated in their own worlds. They couldn't send news or receive orders from the central government. There was no contact with reality. The person was sitting on the mountain, lost in his meditation, not knowing what was happening to him and to the environment surrounding him. In this third arrangement, both subject and object are removed. There can be no perception when the subject and the object of perception aren't there. What we think is real is in truth not real, not there. And what we call the mind, the source of all things, also doesn't exist. How can there be the mind without the objects of mind, the things? And how can there be objects of mind without the mind itself?

This is not a good state to be in permanently. It was dangerous for the two districts to have no communication with each other. But for the moment, taking away both the subject and object can help us see things differently. An example of this is when we enter a very deep meditation, a deep

concentration called the state of no perception and no non-perception. After being in this state of concentration, we may be revived and see things more clearly.

The Fourth Arrangement

The monk asked, “What is meant by eliminating neither the person nor the object?” In this case, both subject and object are active. The master replied, “The king steps into the jeweled palace. Old men in the countryside are singing.”

This is the fourth case, removing neither the subject nor the object. The image evokes peace after a time of war. The king meets with his followers and ascends the throne. Everywhere in the countryside ordinary people are singing. Even the old men go out into the street to sing with the children. This is the reestablishment of the relationship between the subject and the object. There’s no longer any separation between them. Both subject and object are there, but we’re not caught in looking only at subject or object as in the first or second case, nor are we caught in the nihilism of the third case.

In Zen circles, people say: “Before I became a practitioner, I saw mountains as mountains and rivers as rivers. When I began to practice, I no longer saw mountains as mountains and rivers as rivers; I began to see their interbeing nature. After I attained the Path, I again saw mountains as mountains and rivers as rivers, but now my view is clearer, my understanding is brighter. I’m no longer caught in the view that the mountain is only the mountain and the river is only the river. Now I really see them, I see their true nature.”

Ordinary people tend to be caught by the object of the mind, and practitioners of the Path tend to be caught by the mind itself. When both the mind and the object are removed, once both the mind and the objects of the mind are overcome, then there is the true Dharma. Taking away the object is easy, but taking away the mind is very difficult. It’s easy for us to say that there are no objects of mind and that there is only the mind. But to say too that there is not the mind is very difficult, because we’re afraid of falling into nothingness. People don’t dare let go of the mind, they grasp onto the mind. They can let go of the objects of the mind, but they don’t dare to let go of the mind. Why? We’re afraid of falling into a place where we think there will be nothing to feel, to touch, to pick up, afraid we’ll have nothing left. But emptiness doesn’t mean nothingness. Emptiness is the first true Dharma world. The first true Dharma world is the fourth arrangement and it’s a return to realism, but a realism that doesn’t deny the subject or the object but rather sees their interdependent nature.

COMMENTARY 11

In this teaching, Master Linji tells us we have to come back to ourselves and have confidence in ourselves. We shouldn’t beg for crumbs from others, including from the Buddhas, the masters, spiritual teachers, the sutras, and other scriptures. The things we’re looking for aren’t in these places. This appears frequently in Master Linji’s teachings, but is especially clear here. If we search for something outside ourselves we will never find it. We have, within us, all the seeds of Buddhahood. The Buddha and the masters don’t belong to the past, the future, or another place. They are here with us in this present moment.

Master Linji asked, “Do you want to know who our teacher, the Buddha, is? The Buddha is you yourselves who are standing before me, listening to me teach the Dharma.” That statement is very revolutionary. Our true person is the Buddha and the master, and that true person is right inside us. All the Buddhas and all the worlds talked about in the sutras are products of our mind, of consciousness. We shouldn’t look for them in space, and we can’t find them in time. We can only find them in our own consciousness. When learning the sutras and the commentaries, when listening to the Dharma, we have to maintain our freedom. When we’re pulled, excited, and lured by images that people present to us, we lose ourselves.

“Friends on the Path, the virtuous monks of old have all offered human beings a path of liberation. The place of this mountain monk is just to encourage you not to allow people to delude you. My advice should be enacted immediately. Don’t be indecisive or doubting.”

When Master Linji addressed the audience as “Friends on the Path,” he meant they were his fellow practitioners, people going together on the same path, like a flowing river. When he said, “this mountain monk,” he was referring to himself. Buddhist teachers of the past have shown us Dharma doors, skillful means to help us to find a way out of suffering. But if we don’t understand these well-intended teachings, we may be caught in them, in words and ideas, and then these teachings can become a hindrance.

There are teachers who worry that if they speak the truth they’ll lose their followers and their temple. They fear that if they don’t do and say what the followers want, they won’t be able to pay the telephone and electricity bills and they’ll have nowhere to live and practice. This situation existed in China during Linji’s time and it exists today in Europe, the United States, and in other countries. But Master Linji was unlike other teachers. He had the courage to speak the truth that was in his heart; he only wanted to be the true person.

The Venerable Manh Giac wrote a poem about reading the Diamond Sutra. * Here are two lines from that poem:

*There is no longer the Diamond Sutra.
The Zen door disappears and I am without words.
To tease him, I rewrote the lines like this:
We are kicked out of the temple.
Our mouths are stiff and we can’t say anything.*

What these poems are saying is that if we let ourselves be misled by others, we lose ourselves. We shouldn’t run after anything or anyone, even a Zen master. All the things we learn and listen to must have the capacity to bring us back to ourselves and increase our capacity to be free, to be happy, to be solid.

We may hear this teaching and understand it. But we may still be weak and hesitant and think, “Oh, tomorrow or the next day I’ll arrange things so I can have freedom.” But a river never stops flowing; if we hesitate, we’ll never have freedom. If we’ve understood the teaching, we have to put it into practice right away.

Master Linji said of the Buddhist practitioners of his time that if they couldn’t reach enlightenment, it was because they didn’t have confidence. Nowadays, just as in ninth-century China,

we rush after things outside, and then feel manipulated and controlled by the situations we've gotten ourselves into. If we are able to stop those ideas of seeking and running after something, then we'll see there's no difference between us and the masters, us and the Buddha.

We perform ceremonies such as touching the earth, lighting incense, or being in touch with a statue on an altar, to maintain and renew our confidence in ourselves. We must pay respect and touch the earth in front of the Buddha in such a way that we see that the one who bows and the one who is bowed to are one. We pay our respects to the Buddha in such a way that the faith in our capacity to be enlightened, to be happy, is strengthened and grows every day.

In Buddhist scripture, it says that the Buddha has three bodies. So we get lost in the words "three bodies," and we search for this and that body, never touching the peace, the liberation, and the greatness that is the Buddha alive in ourselves. The three Buddha bodies are the Dharma body, the retribution body, and the transformation body. The Buddha has thousands of transformation bodies, and if we aren't careful, we look for these bodies everywhere but in ourselves. We seek these things, not realizing that they are only products of the mind's imagination. Some of us call the creator Almighty; we see him as someone outside of ourselves who has all the power. If we believe in that image, then we believe that after we die we'll go to the Kingdom of God and sit at the foot of the Almighty. We think He is in a higher place with the power to attain whatever He wants. We think we are sitting down here in a very low place.

In Buddhism it's the same. We imagine the World-Honored One surrounded by limitless light and innumerable bodhisattvas. This Buddha has the thirty-two auspicious signs and the eighty special characteristics, and thousands of retribution bodies, transformation bodies, and Dharma bodies. Where do we go to find a Buddha? To find God? We can't find them in beautiful images and literature. The people who wrote down the Bible and the people who wrote down the Mahayana sutras were artists. They used images to express their insights.

Master Linji said, "If in this present moment you aren't able to meet the Buddha in person, then for countless lives to come you will have to be reborn in the three realms of samsara, always searching for something to grasp hold of that will make you feel comfortable, continually being born in the womb of an ox or ass."

Right in this moment we are listening to the Dharma, and the Buddha is sitting with us, sitting inside us. In this moment, if we can't touch the Buddha, then we shouldn't talk about the future. Only the present moment is real. If we lose this present moment, then we can't get in touch with the Buddha, and for thousands of lifetimes we will continue in the circle of samsara: being conceived, being born, and dying as humans or other beings.

All the Buddha worlds are contained in this present moment, and we can be in touch with them easily, and that is a miraculous power. To access this miraculous power, all we need to do is listen to a bell of mindfulness and let it bring us fully into the present moment. When we hear the bell, we let go of all thinking, return to the breath, and get in touch with limitless time and space, in touch with the past, the present, and all the worlds. There are no Buddhas that we can't get in touch with in that moment.

Master Linji asked, "Today, in every ordinary daily activity you do, do you feel you lack anything? Is there any moment when the six miraculous beams of light do not shine out?" The six miraculous lights are our sense consciousnesses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and thinking. In our consciousness, the shining mind manifests. If we use these six miraculous lights skillfully, then we

are the Buddhas. It means that in each moment of our daily life, we need to shine the light of mindfulness. We see something and we know what we're seeing, we listen to something and we know that we're hearing. When we look, we look like the Buddha. When we smell, we smell like the Buddha. When we touch, we touch like the Buddha. When we think, we think like the Buddha. If in each moment our six miraculous powers are radiating, then we will have nothing to do. We will become what Master Linji called the "businessless person." This is the spirit of the Buddha's teaching of aimlessness, *apranihita*, one of the three doors of liberation.

Master Linji taught, "The three realms aren't secure. These realms are like a house on fire. They aren't the place to make your lifelong home. At every moment, impermanence, like a demon, is there to put out its hand and take your life, making no distinction between the young and the old, the noble and the lowly."

The three worlds of desire, form, and non-form are without peace. They're like a burning house, not a place we should get too comfortable or stay too long. The burning house is an image from the Lotus Sutra. The demon of impermanence is death. His hand is holding a scythe, and in each moment it destroys without distinguishing between young and old. How do we escape the house on fire?

Master Linji taught, "If you want to be no different from the Buddha, our teacher, do not run after things outside of you. Every instant your mind is able to shine out the light of purity is the Dharma body of the Buddha who is right here in your home. The light of nondiscrimination that arises from every moment of recollection is the transformation body of the Buddha that is right in your home. These three bodies are not different from you who are standing in front of me listening to the Dharma. This wonderful function can only be possible when you do not direct your energy to chasing after something outside of yourself."

If we don't want to be different from the Buddha, then let each of our thoughts give rise to the pure light that is the Dharma body of the Buddha right in our own house. The light of nondiscrimination rising from our own mind is the retribution body of the Buddha. The light of nondiscrimination rising with each thought of our mind is the transformation body of the Buddha. The Dharma body is the *dharmakaya*, the manifestation of the Buddha in different forms. Each of those manifestations is a transformation body of the Buddha, the *nirmanakaya*. The retribution body, *sambhogakaya*, is the beautiful body of the Buddha that comes about because of the way he lived his life.

Each of these bodies, each of us, is beautiful. When the tree is just sprouting it is beautiful. And when it grows up and spreads out it is beautiful. When it is green, it is beautiful. When the autumn arrives and it yellows, it is also beautiful. And when the winter comes and the leaves fall, it's also beautiful. Each day our body of retribution reveals its beauties, and we can enjoy that. The retribution body is also called the enjoyment body. Others can enjoy and benefit from it as well. The leaf is beautiful, and because the leaf is beautiful, we get pleasure from looking at it.

The three bodies are beautiful, wholesome, and perfect. We seek these absolute standards for us because we feel ourselves to be imperfect as we are. In the poem "Looking for the Tathagata" I wrote:

*Because I was so hungry, so thirsty,
because I wanted to find the image of you
who is forever perfect.*

The distance between us isn't farther than the flash of a thought. And when we can find ourselves, we find that perfect image.

Master Linji taught, "A teacher of old has said, 'The Three Bodies are established in dependence on the true meaning. The Buddha lands are commented on in dependence on the original nature. Therefore, the bodies and the lands in terms of the Dharma nature are clearly just reflections of light.' Therefore, in terms of the Dharma, both the Three Bodies and the Pure Lands are just reflected light."

Here Master Linji is saying that the Three Bodies are ways of expounding the true meaning of things and the Buddha lands are ways of revealing the true nature; and both of them are just reflections of the clear light of the mind.

We use the sign or the appearance of enlightenment to create three bodies. And we use the true nature, the nature of the Dharma, to create the land. When we talk about the Three Bodies of the Buddha, we're talking about their true nature. And when we talk about the Buddha lands, we're talking about their true nature. The Three Bodies and the Buddha lands have the same nature.

The Earth gives rise to human beings—men or women, we are all children of the Earth. Shakyamuni Buddha is a child of this planet Earth, just as all of us are children of this Earth. Shakyamuni Buddha is the body, and this planet Earth is the Pure Land. From the aspect of the true nature, both the body and the land are one. Our bodies depend on the land, the earth, in order to manifest. We're born from the earth and when we die we return to the earth so that we can be reborn. Master Linji is saying that those three bodies of the Buddha aren't anything different than you who are standing in front of me listening to the Dharma.

The person who can play with this reflection is the root of all the Buddhas. That person can be us, if we know that the Buddha and the Pure Land are just reflections of ourselves. We say, "I have arrived. I am home." Anywhere is the home of the one who practices. We go out to work; we have arrived. We return to our homes; we have also arrived. We go on walking meditation; we arrive in every step.

Master Linji taught, "Your body made of the four elements doesn't know how to speak about or listen to the Dharma. Your spleen, stomach, liver, and gallbladder cannot talk about or listen to the Dharma. So what is it that knows how to talk about and listen to the Dharma? It is the bright clarity that has not the slightest outer form standing in front of us here

"The thing is to maintain that insight constantly; do not allow it to be interrupted; whenever your eyes are in contact with it, you will be able to see it."

The four elements are earth, water, fire, and air. Master Linji is saying that although we are made of the four elements, we shouldn't be caught in believing they are all we are. And just as we are not only the four elements of our body, we are also not the four elements of our mind, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. If there is no body, then the mind can't manifest. And if there is no mind, then the body can't manifest. The body and mind depend on and take refuge in each other in order to manifest, just like the right hand and the left hand.

Master Linji taught, "Only because emotional attachment arises, understanding is obstructed. Because perceptions are changing, the form of the true nature changes. That is why there is rebirth in the three realms and we have to undergo so many kinds of sufferings

"Consciousness has no form; it passes freely through the Ten Directions. In the eyes it is called sight; in the ears it is called hearing; in the nose it is called scent; in the mouth it is called conversation; in the hands it is called holding; and in the feet running and jumping. All of these arise

from one shining light, which is divided into six functions working together in harmony. Whenever wrong thinking does not arise, there is liberation.”

Master Linji was referring to the Surangama Sutra when he said that the one bright shining mind is divided into six consciousnesses. The bright shining mind manifests as six miraculous beams of light. If we let that light shine, then we are the Buddha. But if we let this shining light be covered by our afflictions of greed, ignorance, and hatred, then we are ordinary living beings.

The ancient teachers wanted to help human beings, so they gave us skillful means to help us practice. But we get caught in those skillful means. For example, to help us touch the Buddha in ourselves, they created the Buddha statue. And they created the temple and put the Buddha statue in the temple. Now we go into the temple and prostrate in front of the Buddha statue. But if we think that the Buddha is only in the temple, then we are caught.

Similarly, ancient teachers gave us the sutras and the teachings to help us study and practice. But if we think of them as absolutes, then we’ve lost everything. For example, we say we should do walking meditation, that it brings about wellness. But if we do walking meditation because we think we should, making slow and exaggerated steps, then it just looks funny and doesn’t help us feel happier.

Master Linji taught, “Sit still and cut off the head of every retribution and transformation body of the Buddha.” Who would dare to say things like that? A long time ago, two Zen masters were on a mountain doing sitting meditation together on the rocks. After the sitting meditation, they had a conversation. One of them said, “I’m liberated from all signs and appearances; I have reached signlessness.” The other one doubted the first. So when the one who’d said he was free from signs left to go down and urinate, the other monk, using a piece of chalk, wrote the word Phat, which means Buddha, on the rock where the other had been sitting. When he came back to the rock and saw the word Buddha, he didn’t dare sit down on it. The second monk laughed and said, “You see? You’re still caught by the sign—you haven’t reached signlessness.”

Master Linji was reminding us that the transformation and retribution bodies of the Buddha are established in dependence on the true and aren’t objective realities. A Zen master can break the Buddha statue into pieces to help the Zen students to see that the Buddha isn’t made of copper and of clay. We aren’t killing the true Buddha; we’re killing our view of the Buddha so the true Buddha has the opportunity to manifest.

Master Linji taught, “All the fully awakened and wonderful awakened ones are just like shackles coming to imprison you. Arhats and self-enlightened ones are like the latrine pit. Awakening and nirvana are tethering posts for mules. Why? Because you have not been able to realize a clear understanding of the emptiness of three incalculably long kalpas, you run into the obstacles which you are presently experiencing. . . . When it is necessary to walk, walk. When it is necessary to sit, sit. Don’t for a moment yearn for Buddhahood.”

This is reminiscent of the story of the prodigal son in the Lotus Sutra. He’d left home and become a wanderer begging for food. Many years later, without realizing it, he returned to his homeland. He came to where his father lived, but he didn’t recognize his father, who had become wealthy in the son’s absence. The son wouldn’t believe that this was his father and so his father said nothing. The son worked for his father in the lowest position possible, gathering garbage. Slowly the father gave his son higher and higher positions. Then the rich man revealed the truth to his son and the son was able to accept his paternity.

TEN STEPS TO ENLIGHTENMENT

We are the children of the Buddha, so we are Buddhas ourselves, whatever our beliefs, but we don't necessarily feel like it. We often feel confused and stuck. The Buddha suggested ten steps or stages, called *bhumis*, that we could go through until we finally reach what he calls the Dharma Cloud and become a bodhisattva, a fully enlightened being. Each of these ten steps is a different practice, parallel to the ten skillful ways a parent can use to bring a child up gradually. We are already Buddhas, but because we lack confidence, we don't believe this.

The first bhumi, the first step toward our full freedom, is the stage of joy, *mudita*. The sign that you are on the way to becoming a bodhisattva is that you have a lot of joy. Looking at your face, at your behavior, people know that you have a lot of joy. That is one sign that you are a bodhisattva.

The second step is purity. This means that all the impurities in your mind and your body are already transformed. When you look at your negative energies and you are able to transform them, then you are entering into the second stage of a bodhisattva. You are distanced from the negative energy in you.

Then you can arrive at the third step, which is emanating light. When you are mindful and your mind is far away from all the negative energies, then you emanate a lot of light, freshness, solidity, and freedom. When you see someone who practices mindfulness really beautifully, it is as though that person is emanating light.

At the fourth stage, your insight, your wisdom, starts to be enlightened. Your deep vision, your deep insight, starts to be illuminated and it makes all your ignorance, confusion, negative desires, and cravings disappear. The Venerable Master Tang Hoi used to say: "Zen means burning all your afflictions."

Now we arrive at the fifth stage, winning against all difficulties. In your path there are always difficulties, but you can transcend all these difficulties, the difficulties that are inside and those that are outside. If you have difficulties, you don't care. Some difficulties are caused by your parents, your friends, and the negative situation of your body, your health. You transcend all. Every time a difficulty arises, you overcome it.

The sixth stage is dwelling deeply in the present moment, one hundred percent in the present moment. You see the Pure Land in you and around you, and at the same time you see all the difficulties of life. But you aren't shaken by them. You know that this is life. You look deeply and gently; you try to overcome and transform it to the best of your ability.

The seventh stage is: you go very far in the direction of saving people. After being in practice for a few weeks, we might think, "I know everything: breathing in, breathing out, and walking in mindfulness; that I know, that's enough. So I don't need to go far." But we want to go far; we don't feel satisfied with just a bit of learning and practice.

The eighth bhumi is immobility. This means very deep stability. You are very stable; you are not shaken by anything. Even an earthquake will not shake you. Any big afflictions cannot affect you. Any craving, attraction cannot shake you. You arrive at a stage where nothing can shake you: anger, money, temptation of sex, or fame; nothing can shake you, nothing can tempt you.

When you arrive at the ninth stage you are totally master of your mind. You act, you speak, you do everything in an effortless, beautiful way. When you open your mouth, it's only beautiful speech; when you act, it's only beautiful action. When you do anything, it is always naturally in a beautiful

way.

And then you arrive at the tenth stage, the Dharma Cloud stage. It's called that because you are as free as a cloud. Whenever you are joyful, you stop. When there are some difficulties, you transform. When something tempts you, you will not be tempted. There is no effort, just being.

SKILLFUL MEANS

Buddhist terminologies such as arhat and the periods of practice are all just descriptions, skillful means. The ancient teachers give us images and terminologies such as these to help us practice. We hear such things as: "we are independent," "we are free," "we are citizens," "we are strong," "we will continue to go forward," and we consume these phrases and think they are enough. But all of these things are only words. If we live only by means of words and images, and by worshiping things outside us, then we aren't in contact with the truth.

Walking meditation, sitting meditation, or listening to the bell are all means to practice in order to reach peace, joy, and liberation. But if we are doing these things and we don't feel happy, it means that all of these things are just forms and words. They don't benefit us at all and we in turn can't benefit others. When we listen to the bell we are quiet, and we breathe in and out, but we don't have any peace or joy. We have to stay quiet because other people are quiet, but in our silence there is no mindfulness, concentration, insight, peace, or joy at all. Then what is the bell? The bell is the latrine. The bell is the pole used to tie up the donkey. We can put on our clothes with freedom. When we need to walk, then we walk. When we need to sit, we sit. And we don't spend another minute wishing for the fruit of Buddhahood.

Zen Master Mazu Daoyi, the grandfather teacher of Master Linji, said, "We should only use the conditions that help disintegrate the old karmas. We sit in order to transform old karmas. We don't want to create more accidents, more traumas, and more new actions. Instead, our current enlightenment can transform and dissipate the traumas we have created in the past. At the same time, we can keep from creating new traumas."

I translate this as meaning: the new dangers, the new actions that we just created, will be the dangers for our future. This means that there is no Dharma that is the highest enlightenment—so don't wish for it.

If we work very hard at Buddhahood, the Buddha will foreshadow birth and death. If the wave works hard to seek water, it will only get tired, and it will only create more birth and death, because the wave is already the water. It doesn't have to work hard anymore. It doesn't have to fear going up and going down.

In my last trip to the United States, a friend requested that I write a calligraphy for him of the phrase "Resting with God." I wrote it for him because it embodied the realization that God is here; he isn't an old man with a beard sitting high above us. God is here, is our true nature, our suchness, just as the water is the suchness of the wave. And if the wave knows how to take refuge in water, if it knows to believe in the water, then the wave loses all of its fears, sadness, and jealousy. If we take refuge in our true nature then we aren't afraid anymore of gaining, of losing, of having, of not having, of living, of dying, of being, and nonbeing.

Time is valuable. Let's stop the running mind—running to the neighbor's house to study Zen, to study the Path, to seek the phrase, to seek the words, to pray to the Buddha, to pray to the master, to

find the ones who know goodness. In the Surangama Sutra, the Buddha told of a young man who had a mental illness. One day, he became very frightened because he imagined that his head was no longer on his neck, so he ran around looking for his head. We are also like this young man, Yajñadatta. We have the Buddha and the Buddha lands inside us and still we seek.

Master Linji asked his students to go back and reflect. He is referencing the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch. This story is about how the Sixth Patriarch Huineng was working in the kitchen of the Dong Chan Temple grinding rice with a mortar and pestle when the Fifth Patriarch, Hongren, came to the kitchen and knocked on the mortar three times. Patriarch Huineng understood this to mean that at the beginning of the third watch of the night he should go to the private room of the Fifth Patriarch to meet him and receive the Dharma. The Fifth Patriarch wanted it to be a surreptitious Dharma transmission, because he was afraid the Sangha would be jealous. Shenxiu was the eldest student of the Fifth Patriarch. He was talented and a good disciple and everyone had assumed he would receive the transmission, but the robe and bowl were transmitted to Huineng.

We only have the account of the students of Huineng to tell us what happened. But at that time in China, Buddhism was under attack—temples were being destroyed, monks were killed, records were lost, and eventually the Northern school of Chinese Buddhism died out. Buddhism was safer in the south, where Huineng had originally come from and the place to which he returned after he'd received the transmission. His Dharma brother, Shenxiu, stayed at the root temple and he may also have received the transmission from the Fifth Patriarch. According to the Southern school, Huineng is the only Sixth Patriarch, but it's possible we have two—one of the Northern school and one of the Southern school.

Master Linji taught, “Venerable monks, you should live your lives in a very natural way. Do not put on airs. There are a number of shaved heads who are not able to distinguish good from bad. They say they see spirits and demons. They point to the East and the West and they pray for rain and for sunshine. This group will surely have to repay what they have borrowed, and one day before the judge of the dead, Yama, they will swallow lumps of molten iron. And those of good families who are deluded by this group of wild fox spirits will also have to pay the debt of the rice they have eaten. There is no way they can avoid it.”

Yama is the king of hell. He judges the dead and chooses their punishment based on their offenses. Master Linji invoked him in his frustration with monks who pretended to know more than they did. At this time, near the end of the Tang dynasty, there was also increased corruption in some monasteries. So Master Linji used language that was particularly harsh and strong to remind the monks in clear terms that the only role of a practitioner is to live simply, as an ordinary person, and not to put on airs. This is still a fundamental challenge for us today.

COMMENTARY 12

Master Linji is warning those friends on the path, those who sincerely are trying to live the Dharma, not to be fooled by the demons, the bald-headed people wearing monk's robes, living in the temple and prostrating in front of the Buddha, while still craving wealth and personal gain.

The words of the ninth century are a little bit different from those of the twenty-first century, but they have the same meaning. We say, “Be yourself. Don't try to be someone else.” Master Linji said, “Try to be an ordinary person. An ordinary person is already wonderful.”

Practice is not hard labor. When we work too hard at anything, whether it is business or enlightenment, then we can't stop in order to see all the wonders of life inside and around us. The Prajñaparamita Heart Sutra says this clearly, "No attainment, no realization," because you already are what you want to be. There is nothing to attain. Stop. Don't do anything. It may look like we aren't going anywhere, but in fact we're deeply in the present moment and we're able to touch the ultimate dimension.

Our ordinary mind is already the Path. If we keep thinking about going outside and finding something in our neighbor's house, then we're already mistaken. Do we know who the Buddha is? Do we know who we are? We may have an idea about ourselves, but our idea is not yet who we really are. We haven't yet found our true being.

The word "Buddha" is just a word. We may think Master Linji is saying, "Don't seek the Buddha; instead seek the Dharma." But this is also dangerous because we also have names and words that conjure an image of the Dharma and not its true nature. Dharma is the Dharma of the mind. Mind is without form, it pervades the Ten Directions, and it's manifesting its activity right in front of us. What we're looking for is so different from the reality, as different as the earth from the sky. Our mind is like a painter, creating a facsimile of the true reality.

Ultimate reality only seems difficult because as soon as we try to explain it, we're already discriminating, and so we lose the essence of the ultimate, which is nondiscrimination. Our minds have a tendency to discriminate. Our mind divides the world into subject and object. I am different from you, the father is different from the children, the clouds are different from the streams.

The mind is like a sharp knife that cuts reality into separate pieces. We say, "I love this, I hate that; I like this, I dislike that. I love the Buddha, I hate Mara."* We love beauty, we hate ugliness; we love life, we hate death. But death and life inter-are. In every minute, every second, many of our cells are dying and many new cells are being born. So death and birth are only two sides of one reality. When dualistic thinking isn't there, everything becomes clear. This is expressed in lines from a poem attributed to the Third Patriarch, Sengcan:

*The great path, the absolute truth isn't anything difficult.
It's only difficult because there's discrimination.
We just need not to love or hate,
then naturally it will become very clear.*

Dharma talks aren't the truth. The true Dharma exists in the mind of the students as seeds and the Dharma talks are just like a little cloud that releases rain and causes the seeds in the mind of the practitioners to sprout and manifest. Dharma teachers can't transmit the truth any more than a parent can fully transmit his experiences to his child. The more a parent scolds a child, the more the child becomes blocked. The best a parent can do is be like the rain cloud and nourish the seeds of wisdom in the child. When the child grows up and trips over difficulties and has his own experience, then the wisdom that was watered will manifest.

Master Linji taught, "I speak of the Dharma of the earth-mind to help people penetrate the holy and the profane, the pure and the defiled, the true and the conventional. However, the true and the conventional, the sacred and the profane within you cannot be described in terms and concepts of

sacred, profane, true, and conventional. The profane, sacred, conventional, and true never refer to themselves as profane, sacred, conventional, and true.”

Even though we have the ultimate, the ordinary, the holy, and the profane inside us, we shouldn't use these words because their truth is something very different. When we think of Paris, we have an idea, a view about Paris and words to describe Paris. But Paris is very different from the view and the words that we have. Perhaps we went shopping in Paris for a few days and so we think we know it. There are those who have lived ten, twenty years in Paris and not discovered all the truth of the city. We shouldn't mistake the word and the idea for the truth.

If we can grasp this key, this essence, then we should apply it immediately into our daily life. We're poor, but we think that we're prosperous. We're slaves but we think we're masters. We're the continuation of all our ancestors, but we think we're alone. We shouldn't get caught in words and terminologies.

Master Linji taught, “The Dharma of this mountain monk is very different from the Dharma of people who are attached to the world. Even if Manjushri and Samantabhadra were to appear before me in their different manifestations and ask about the Dharma, as soon as they opened their mouths and said ‘Reverend Master,’ I would be able to scent them out.”

He is saying he can look at someone and know who they are. Based on outside appearances, I don't discriminate between ordinary and holy. Just because a monk has the name Manjushri, the name of the bodhisattva of great wisdom, it doesn't mean he is holy. Just because a woman has a common ordinary name, I don't think she's unholy.

Often, even before people open their mouths, we discriminate. A French person is sitting in front of us and right away we have some idea about what it means to be French. We don't allow the reality of that person to be revealed to us. If we know someone is a Catholic priest or a Buddhist monk, right away we have an idea what this means about this person. Many people disguise themselves as the Bodhisattva Manjushri or the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. If we rid ourselves of discrimination, then we can't be tricked.

When we study Buddhism, we look for a teacher and we believe that the teacher has wisdom. We have to believe that the teacher is holy and other people are ordinary in order for us to be able to follow that teacher. The teacher puts on the robe of holiness and we believe he immediately becomes holy. That is the place that kills us. It's a kind of death when we run away from the ordinary toward what we think is holy. We run away from ourselves.

Master Linji can't be tricked anymore because he no longer discriminates between the sacred and the profane. A person appears before him and whether that person claims to be a bodhisattva or an ordinary person, Master Linji will see his true nature.

COMMENTARY 13

Buddhism should not be hard work. If we do sitting or walking meditation and we exert too much effort, that isn't the Buddhadharma. If, while we're eating, we try not to speak and we try to pick up food in a very correct way with the spoon, then we're working too hard. We should still practice mindful manners. Master Linji isn't saying we should be unmindful, just that we should live our lives with as much relaxation as possible.

If we want to put on the robe, then we put on the robe. If we want to eat our meals, then we eat our meals. If we want to defecate, then we defecate. If we want to urinate, then we can urinate. If we're tired, then we can rest. We don't need to listen to the Dharma talk. We don't need to go to Dharma discussion. Master Linji referred to a poem written by a student of the Seventh Patriarch of the Northern school of Zen Buddhism, Puji, that reads: "If we direct ourselves outward for our daily practice, then we're all ignorant. The ignorant can laugh at me. But the one with insight, with understanding, will understand me."

Wherever we go, we can be the master of our situation. Suppose an older sister or brother is bothering us. We may be tempted to think it's their fault that we suffer. But we can instead take the initiative and decide that we can help our sibling and ourselves. "You should be sovereign according to where you find yourself; be the true person wherever you are, not allowing the conditions to pull you away." Wherever we are, our true self is present. We don't stand before a crowd pretending to be dignified and then, when we're alone, become forgetful. Rather, whether we're alone or with others, we're still our true selves. Whether we're defecating or giving a Dharma talk, we're the same person.

I knew a Thai practitioner who had lost respect for her teacher. When asked why, she told a story about how one day her teacher, after looking around and thinking no one was looking, kicked a dog. Often he was very compassionate, but that day for whatever reason, he kicked the dog and his student saw this. Perhaps he had something irritating on his mind and therefore he kicked the dog. But the thing that upset the student the most was how, before he kicked the dog, he looked around to see if anybody was watching.

If we can be our true selves, then even if in this or a past life we committed one of the five offenses that cause eternal hell—killing our father, killing our mother, killing an arhat, causing a Buddha to bleed, and causing the Sangha to be divided—we will still be liberated.

The master taught, "Most of those who study the path of Buddhism in our own time do not understand the Dharma. They are like goats who will eat whatever is given them; they cannot distinguish master from servant, guest from host. People like that enter on the path of practice with the wrong motivation; they are always ready to enter places of noise and disturbance . . . True monks must have right view in their daily life, which is able to distinguish Buddha from Mara, true from false, sacred from profane. Only when people have this ability can they be called true renunciators of the household life. If they cannot distinguish Mara from Buddha, they just renounce one household in order to enter another. They can be called living beings who are making karma but not those who have renounced the household. In our own time there is a phenomenon called Buddha-Mara, an entity in which Mara and Buddha cannot be distinguished, like when milk and water are mixed together. It is said that from such a mixture the King of Geese can drink just the milk. My Dharma friends with good eyes, according to me, should topple both Buddha and Mara. If they still have the tendency to love the

sacred and hate the profane, they will continue to drown in the ocean of birth and death for a long time.”

Some Buddhist seekers are like the goat who will eat whatever it comes across. The goat will eat whatever its mouth touches. We study Japanese Zen; we study Tibetan Buddhism; we study the southern transmission, the northern transmission; we study mindfulness; and we study Vipassana. We will chew whatever we come across; we have no discernment.

Master Linji is referring to a Mahayana story in which even when milk and water had been mixed together, the King of Geese could drink milk and leave the water, even though the two seemed to have become indistinguishable from each other, just like Buddha and Mara. Garbage and flowers depend on each other to grow. Night and day depend on each other to establish themselves. This is the wisdom of nondiscrimination.

COMMENTARY 14

We need to look deeply into the difference between Buddha and Mara, the difference between goodness and evil. Mara symbolizes something that is illusory, treacherous, and causes suffering, while Buddha represents something good, wholesome, bright, and happy.

This is similar to the Christian tradition’s use of God and Satan as two opposing forces with human beings standing in the middle. Some Christian traditions, particularly Orthodox traditions, believe: “We are one with God and not two separate realities.” But then, does that also mean we are not Satan?

The universe and the person who creates the universe are not two different entities. Some Christian theologians say that God is the ground of being. This is quite close to Buddhism. But then Buddhism asks the question, “If God is the ground of being, then what is the ground of nonbeing?” In the first statement there’s still discrimination between being and nonbeing. If we discriminate, then the distinction between Buddha and Mara, God and Satan, continues to exist. If God is the foundation of being, then is Satan the foundation of nonbeing?

Are we forced to follow one side and fight against the other, or do we have another way? Of course, this question is related to our mind more than to the reality of the object. We think that in reality there are two opposing forces, Mara and Buddha, or God and Satan. But Master Linji’s teaching method here was to remove the object. There is no Buddha and there is no Mara.

We may think we have to recite mantras to chase away Mara so that we can have security. But we’re just like an artist who has sculpted a statue and now is afraid of that statue, and so he worships it. Mara isn’t an objective reality. Mara is a product of the mind. The master says, “In your mind, when there is a doubt, then that is Mara.” Buddha is also just a product of the mind. After we’ve created Buddha, we prostrate before it. So why do we follow the path of Buddhism if there is no Buddha to follow? Why take refuge in the Three Jewels—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha? Because we find refuge in these things in ourselves, in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha within us. The master learned this from the Sixth Patriarch.

When Master Linji said, “Cut off all the heads of the transformation bodies and retribution bodies,” he was referring to the Prajñaparamita sutra called The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines. In the first chapter of the sutra, there’s a magician standing at a crossroads, cutting off the head of each person he sees. The mind is a magician and the whole living world is a magic show; even

nirvana is like a magical illusion, a dream.

All dharmas, whether they're a table or chair, a puff of cloud or the sun, appear as if they have a birth and a death. When we look deeply, we see their true nature. Our minds recognize eight categories of ideas: birth, death; being, nonbeing; coming, going; same, different. We think that the true nature of all things fits into these categories. But in truth there is no object, there's no phenomenon that's truly outside of the mind. Everywhere is the silencing of ideas, and that is the Buddha.

Silencing here means not having the eight mental categories of birth, death, and so on. We often think of Buddha and Mara as representing the world of purity and the world of impurity. But they're not two different things, just as the Buddha and living beings aren't two different things. Buddha and Mara aren't really opposing each other any more than the left hand opposes the right.

Suppose there's a play about a hero and a thief, and the thief says, "I don't want to play the thief anymore; now I want to play the hero." They can switch roles. The thief was playing the role of the garbage and now he plays the role of the flower. But a flower without garbage can never be a flower.

Master Linji taught, "There is no before and there is no today." The historical Buddha was born 2,600 years ago and we think if we'd been born in the time of the Buddha, how lucky we'd be! But of course the Buddha is just as present today as he was then. The Buddha isn't conditioned by time. We, too, don't need to be conditioned by time; we don't need ten or twenty years before we can become a Buddha. It isn't about accumulating practice over the years. We can become Buddha in this very moment.

There's a song that we sing called "Looking for Each Other" that conveys this idea. It's about seeking the Tathagata:

*Blessed One, I've dreamed of drinking dewdrops
that sparkle with the light of far-off galaxies.
I've left footprints on celestial mountains,
and screamed from the depths of Avici Hell,
exhausted and crazed with despair
because I was so hungry, so thirsty.
For millions of lifetimes,
I've longed to see you,
but didn't know where to look.*

I wanted to find the image of you who is forever perfect, as if you existed as a reality outside of me. We've sought the Tathagata, we've crossed deserts, oceans, we've gone to mountain peaks and died alone in the desert, we've tried to hide all the teardrops in our heart, we've gone through many difficulties because we want to seek him, we want to find the Tathagata. But in that process of seeking, suddenly our heart has a vision and we feel that since beginningless time, the Buddha, the World-Honored One, and I have been one, that the distance between us is no more than the flash of a thought in the mind.

Yet, I've always felt your presence with a mysterious certainty.

*I know that for thousands of lifetimes,
You and I have been one,
And the distance between us is only a flash of thought.*

Master Linji taught, “You are all the clear original nature; not one of you is obstructed; you can all penetrate the Ten Directions. You can roam freely in the three realms. Each one of you can freely enter every realm without obstruction. Each one can, in the blink of an eyelid, penetrate the Dharma realms. If you meet the Buddha, you speak to the Buddha; if you meet the master, you speak to the master; if you meet an arhat, you speak to the arhat; if you meet a hungry ghost, you speak to the hungry ghost.* You can enjoy traveling in every land, teaching living beings and not seeing for one moment that you are not at home. Everywhere is pure; the light of clarity illumines the Ten Directions and you see the oneness of all that is.”

Everyone is free to enter all the worlds without obstruction. Becoming Buddhas, entering the worlds in the Ten Directions, can take place right in the present moment. If we want to enter the world of the hungry ghosts, we can do that right away. If we want to enter the world of the Buddhas and the bodhisattvas, we can. If we want to enter the past, we can enter the past. If we want to enter the future, we can do that immediately. If we want to meet the Buddha Kashyapa, we can meet the Buddha Mahakashyapa immediately in the present moment. If we want to meet the Buddha Maitreya, the Buddha of the future, then we can also meet him immediately. That future rests right in the present. If we want to be in touch with our great-grandchildren who have not yet been born, we can be in touch with them right here and right now.

Where is our father, mother, grandfather, and grandmother? Right here. Where is our Pure Land? It lies right there. In Buddhism there are two terms: *lokadhatu*, the phenomenal world, and *dharmadhatu*, the noumenal world. *Lokadhatu* is the world of discrimination, in which we live our daily life. In this world, the father can only be the father; he can't be the son or the daughter. In this world, the puff of cloud can only be a puff of cloud; it can't be the cup of tea. In the world of the *dharmadhatu*, the father lies inside the child and the child is inside the father. We're in the Buddha, the Buddha is inside us. Garbage is inside the flower, and the flower is in the garbage.

These two worlds manifest depending on our consciousness. If we know how to manipulate our consciousness, then we can create anything. Our own power is even quicker than the computer or the telephone. In the blink of an eye, we can enter the world of the *dharmadhatu*. The theoretical physicist David Bohm used equivalent terms: “the implicate order” and “the explicate order.” In the *lokadhatu* everything is outside of everything else. In the implicate order, any element, no matter how small, contains within itself the totality of its universe. Every element contains the mind, and the mind contains every element. This is the world of the *dharmadhatu*.

Master Linji taught, “It is only because your confidence is immature that you continue seeking at every moment. You remove your head and then go looking for it, and you can't stop yourself seeking.”

Often we put an object in front of ourselves to chase after. That object may be nirvana, or God, or it may be material wealth. We get tired running after this object of our seeking. Master Linji knew that his listeners had received the teaching on non-attainment, but that for them it was still only an idea. That's why he created other words to wake people up and restore their confidence in their own Buddha nature. All we have to do is stop. When we stop, we can have happiness. Our true nature is no different than the true nature of the great beings.

“Dear friends on the Path, nowadays if you want to be the great gentleman, you have to realize the truth of the fact that there never has been anything to do.” If we want to be a true person, don’t do anything, don’t even be the Buddha. Master Linji used the term “gentleman,” but this is also true for gentlewomen. Anyone can be this great person. We ourselves are already miraculous, and we don’t want to exchange this miracle with another miracle, this wonder with another wonder. When we don’t want to become something else anymore, that is confidence. Sometimes this word is translated as faith, but it is better translated as confidence. We need to have confidence in the truth that we’re a wonder and we contain the all.

“Imagine bodhisattvas of complete and sudden enlightenment manifesting and entering the Dharma realms. They turn toward the Pure Land. They dislike the profane and love the sacred. If there were such bodhisattvas, they would still be subject to grasping and aversion. The idea of pure and defiled would still be in their minds. According to the insight of the Meditation school, it is not like this.* Understanding is now in this moment; you do not have to wait for another opportunity. What I maintain is that everything is taking place. Medicine and the sickness which it is to cure, have to go together at the same time, because medicine and the sickness have to correspond to each other. Apart from that, there is not something other that we call truth. If you can see that, you are truly one who has gone forth, worthy of receiving material offerings equivalent to 10,000 gold coins every day.”

Sudden enlightenment is like instant noodles or instant coffee. We want it and we can have it right away. I want enlightenment and I want it right away, without waiting. We want sudden enlightenment, we want to look for the dharmadhatu and leave the world of suffering. We direct ourselves toward the Pure Land, and hate this ordinary world. We “dislike the profane and love the sacred.” In the sutra The Heart of the Prajñāparamita, it says there isn’t anything that is defiled, and there is nothing that is immaculate. We call one side sacred, and the other side profane.

Illness and medicine need to correspond to each other in order for the medicine to work. If there is a Pure Land, then the Pure Land is only a medicine. If there is nirvana, then nirvana is also just a medicine. If there’s the Buddha, the Buddha is also just a medicine. All of these cures are to remedy the illnesses that are taking place in the present moment, the sickness, fear, and doubt that we all suffer from. All the things that people have created in the Bible, the Qur’an, and the Buddhist scriptures are various medicines, various skillful means that can treat our illness.

Our suffering only exists in the present moment. We worry that in the future we’ll be old, we’ll be sick, and we’ll die. But those things aren’t real. We have to cut off the heads of those things because they are demons that cause us to lose the present moment and lose our life.

“Do not allow fake elders here and there to stamp the stamp of realization on you without rhyme or reason and then go spreading the news, ‘I have Zen, I have understood what is meant by the Way,’ and then give an eloquent discourse that flows on constantly like a waterfall, but whose only function is to create the karma which leads to hell. . . . Only realization of perfect right insight can be seen as success.”

Fake elders are those who pretend to teach for personal gain. They don’t have the insight or experience to teach, but because they want respect, fame, or profit of some kind, they talk as if they do have insight. How will we know if we’ve received the Dharma? It’s not because we have a special robe or clothing. “The Buddha’s work,” all the things we think of as “beneficial to living beings,” were called the karma of hell by Master Linji.

When the master said we shouldn’t go and dig in the mistakes of the world, he was quoting the

Platform Sutra. If we go around talking about the mistakes and shortcomings of others, then we have to talk day and night, and still we couldn't catch up with it. The mistakes of the world are endless. Twenty-four hours a day, day after day, wouldn't be enough time to list them all. We have to use our time in order to talk about what is truly beneficial.

COMMENTARY 15

A student asked what is meant by right view. Master Linji answered, "Right view is the ability to see the nature of becoming, abiding, ceasing, and emptiness in all phenomena whether you are entering the sacred or the profane, the pure or the defiled, when you are entering the lands of the Buddhas anywhere, the palaces of Sukhavati or the Dharma realms of Vairocana."*

These places exist right inside us and around us. We don't even need to buy a plane ticket. If we don't go to these places, it's because we aren't used to going there. And when we do go into these worlds, then we are able to see the truth of the four phenomena: becoming, abiding, ceasing, and emptiness. They can also be called: manifestation, dwelling, disintegration, and nonbeing.

These signs don't cause us to suffer and they are not responsible for our happiness. If we can look at our mother, our father, our children, and our teachers, and see their true nature, the nature of no-birth, no-dwelling, no-disintegration, and no death, then we will have right view.

When we touch one wave, we are in touch with all the other waves. This wave is continued by the next wave. A wave pretends to appear, it pretends to dwell, it pretends to disintegrate, and it pretends to disappear. Becoming, abiding, ceasing, and emptiness are just four false signs. If we can see the true nature of the four signs as empty, then we can enter the dwelling places of the bodhisattvas. This is Master Linji's first definition of right view.

This is his second definition: "Right view is to see the mark of no coming, no going, unborn and undying in the Buddha's arising in the world, becoming enlightened, turning the wheel of the Dharma, and entering nirvana."

When the child Siddhartha was born, people had a celebration, and this is manifestation, becoming. When Siddhartha grew into a young man who went to look for the Path and became the Buddha, this is called dwelling, abiding. When Siddhartha was sick with his last illness and lay between the two sala trees, this is disintegration, ceasing. When Siddhartha entered nirvana, we cremated him and we cried; this is nonbeing, emptiness. These four things don't cause us to be happy or to be sad, they are only the four kinds of manifestation. If we see this, then we have right view.

Master Linji gave a third definition of right view: "You see clearly that nothing is real in the way you thought it was when you enter the Dharma realms of the unborn, travel for your enjoyment in the Buddha lands, and enter the Avatamsaka realm." When you enter the Dharma world of no-birth and no-death, you roam in all the Buddha lands and enter the Flower Treasury World.

Imagine a treasury filled with nothing but flowers. The Avatamsaka Sutra, also called the Flower Garland Sutra, uses the image of a world that is like a lotus with a thousand petals, a world of flower banks. If we look deeply into one petal, then we see another thousand petals in that petal.

During the Tang dynasty, the Venerable Fayen went to teach the Avatamsaka Sutra to the queen. To help her see the world of flowers, he made an octagonal stupa of glass. He brought the queen into that place and let her stand in the middle and she lit a candle. He pointed out to her the image of that candle in the surrounding mirrors. When she saw the image of the candle in one mirror, then the

venerable told the queen to turn in another direction, and she also saw the candle reflected in the other mirror. The one candle kept reflecting back and forth in all the mirrors. This is called conditioned co-arising or interdependent origination.

The Avatamsaka Sutra also tells us about the young monk Sudhana who, at ten years of age, went to learn the Dharma from fifty-three different teachers. One of them directed him to Mahamaya, the mother of the Buddha. He went to look for the mother of the Buddha, but he couldn't find her. Someone told him, "Young one, don't look. If you look, you won't find her. Sit still, practice breathing, and you'll have a better chance." So Sudhana sat down to practice stopping and looking deeply. Suddenly he saw that from the earth a beautiful flower came up with a thousand petals. What was even more wonderful, more miraculous was that Sudhana was sitting on one of the petals. And when he looked deeply into that petal, he saw that he was sitting on one petal of a lotus flower with a thousand petals. When Sudhana looked up, he saw the queen who was sitting on another lotus flower with a thousand petals, and she was smiling to him. If we don't go looking, then we will not run out of breath and we will see that the queen is always there. Sudhana bowed his head to pay respect to Mahamaya.

The Buddha's mother said, "Dear Sudhana, when I was pregnant with Siddhartha I was very happy because I knew that in me there was the Buddha. To be the mother of the Buddha is an immeasurable happiness. I had so much lightness, so much freedom and happiness." When we have the Buddha inside us, then we can see that we have everything. The mother of the Buddha said, "I wanted him to be free and comfortable inside me. And at that moment thousands of bodhisattvas of the Ten Directions flew to me and said, 'We want to visit Siddhartha. Please allow us to go into your womb in order to meet Siddhartha.' I didn't have a chance to answer because they had already entered my womb. I wasn't even sure if Siddhartha had enough space to move in there, but now I see that there's enough room for thousands of bodhisattvas.

"Dear Sudhana, at that time I realized that if there were thousands, millions of bodhisattvas who wanted to go into my womb with Siddhartha, there would be space for them. Because the very small contains the very great, and the one contains the all. I have been the mother of all the Buddhas in the past. I am the mother of all the Buddhas in the present. And I will be the mother of all the Buddhas in the future."

These images were created in order to teach us about right view and the layers of interdependent origination. We don't need to be a mother or a queen to see this. Just as we are, we can have innumerable Buddhas inside us. We just have to live our daily life in such a way as to give the innumerable Buddhas a chance to manifest. If we live full of worries, jealousy, and suffering, then we close up the space within us.

Master Linji gave the fourth definition of right view: "Right view is to see that the person who does not need a place to rely on as he listens to the Dharma is indeed the mother of all Buddhas. Why? Because all Buddhas are born from the place of non-reliance."

The mind of the person with right view isn't caught in the form, the sound, the smell, the taste, the touch, and the Dharma. Right view is to see that the person isn't attached to an external place of refuge. The last words of Vietnamese Zen Master Van Hanh to his disciples were, "Are you taking refuge in something? Are you depending on something? I take refuge in the place in which there is no need to take refuge."* All the Buddhas manifest from the place of no-refuge, no-dependence. All the Buddhas manifest in a place of nonattachment; they are free from ideologies and doctrines, even those

teachings that were presented by the Buddhas before them. These teachings might be skillful means, but they are the shells and not the core.

As long as we're still hanging on to something, as long as we're still attached to something, then we can't be free. If we can be awakened, then we see that the true nature of the Buddha is also non-attainment. If we can see that nonattachment is non-attainment, then we have right view.

Master Linji taught, "The practitioners who do not understand continue to be caught in words and phrases and obstructed by terms such as holy, profane, etc., so that they cannot open their wisdom eyes and therefore can't see the real nature of things clearly. The Twelve Divisions, the twelve forms, of the Buddha's teachings were only devised to show clearly that real nature. Practitioners who do not understand, lean in the direction of words, mistakenly searching for insight therein. That attitude of seeking a place to hold to and rely on makes us fall into the cycle of cause and effect and prevents us from leaving the cycle of birth and death in the three realms."

The Twelve Divisions of the Buddha's teaching are: verse, prose, predictions, verse summaries, interdependent origination, similes, spontaneous utterances, quotations, stories of previous births, wonderful occurrences, detailed commentaries, and clarifications with definitions. The teachings, whatever their form, have the capacity to enliven the seeds of wisdom that are already in us. A sutra is only a supporting condition to manifest our own wisdom. If we remember that, then we won't be caught.

Master Linji said very clearly that learning a sutra or doing sitting meditation in the spirit of attachment would just create more karma, and not free us from the circle of cause and effect, birth and death.

Master Linji taught, "If you wish to roam in birth and death as a free person, you should recognize who it is who is listening to the Dharma here. Although that person has no form, no distinguishing sign, no basis, no origin, no place of abode, he is living, infinitely active, and able to display tens of thousands of wonderful functions, and all those functions have the nature of non-abiding."

If we can walk back and forth, going freely in birth and death, then we aren't victimized by birth and death anymore. They have no pull on us anymore. If we want to be free and roam in birth and death, then we have to recognize ourselves. We are wearing many layers of coats. All of these layers of coats cover the true person.

Our aim as practitioners is to find our true person. When we're enlightened, we see our true person, and we aren't fooled by the coats that others wear.

Our true person is truly without form, without sign, without basis or foundation, and is not created by causes and conditions. But our true person is very alive. Right in this moment that person is present and we have to be able to recognize that person. That person can do miracles. That true person can be in touch with the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of all of the worlds right in this moment. That person can create the skillful means to help people overcome their suffering.

In the Sutra of 100 Examples that is found in the Chinese canon, there is a story about a young man who was ill. The doctor prescribed a kind of bird that was supposed to cure his illness. After the doctor left, the young man kept calling out the name of the bird over and over again, as if reciting the Buddha's name. He did this for two weeks, and his illness continued. He thought that just saying the bird's name was enough, but the doctor had given him the name so that the sick man would go look for the bird and bring it home to make a soup from it.

A friend came to visit the young man and saw him sitting there repeating the bird's name over and

over. The friend asked, “What are you doing?” And the young man said, “The doctor told me that the bird would cure me.” And the friend said, “Fool, you are caught in the word.” The friend got a piece of paper and a pen and drew a picture of a bird and pointed to it. “Eat this bird,” he said, “and then you’ll be cured of your illness.” So when the friend left, the sick young man got out scissors and cut out the paper bird and chewed it up.

He saw that he was still not cured, and so he paid people to draw over thirty more birds, and he chewed and swallowed them. Still, he was not healed. The word “bird” and the drawing are just like the Buddha’s teachings, supposedly skillful means to help us get at a truth. But because we are caught in the skillful means, we aren’t able to see the ultimate. The Buddha said, the truth is like the moon, and all of my teachings are like the finger pointing to the moon. The finger is only to point to the moon.

One day a person came along and saw the young man eating the pieces of paper. He asked him, “What are you doing? Why are you drawing birds and cutting them out? Do you plan to decorate your house to celebrate the new year?” The young man answered, “No, I cut these birds to eat them because the medicine man told me I have to eat these birds in order to be healed.”

Out of compassion, this friend took the young man’s hand and went to the market with him and pointed to the real bird, and said, “This is the bird, and you have to buy it and cook it and eat it.” The friend stayed and watched as the young man killed, cooked, and ate the bird. Then the friend left and that person was healed.

This friend did something very simple, but a clear teaching like this is a miracle. The Buddha said the miracle of teaching is the highest miracle because it can help others overcome suffering. In my pocket I carry a box of matches, a candle, and six pebbles. I can perform miracles with them when I teach. But if someone rummages in my pocket and takes my box of matches, candle, and pebbles so that they can worship them at home, they won’t find any miracles in them. The miracle is not in the objects itself but in the teaching, the skillful means.

Master Linji taught, “My friends, do not identify yourselves with this illusory friend, the body, because sooner or later it has to be returned to the hands of the demon impermanence. In this world, what is it you need to turn toward in order to find liberation? All you need is a bowl of brown rice, a mantle of cloth, and apart from this you should give all your psychological force and time to find the good spiritual friend. Do not waste your days and hours following various pleasures. Time is precious; life is impermanent; the four great elements, mahabhuta, and the four signs (birth, abiding, changing, ceasing) are driving you on. You must recognize right away the signless nature of these four so as not to be pulled around by your surroundings.”

This illusory friend is the five skandhas: form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. We identify with these things and if they disintegrate then we also disintegrate. The first wrong view is that we are the five skandhas. This body is me. These feelings are me. These perceptions are me. These mental formations are me. And this consciousness is me. The second view is that we are different from the five skandhas, but they belong to us, like our shoes or our car. The third view is called mutually containing. We believe that the self is in the five skandhas, and the five skandhas are in the self. We aren’t the five skandhas, the five skandhas aren’t us, but we contain each other. In the fourth view, we’re not the five skandhas, but we are also not not the five skandhas. In the Abhidharma literature, the commentaries on the sutras, the four views of the self have been discussed a lot. But here we only need to know that we should not identify ourselves with the illusory friend, the

five skandhas.

Master Linji wanted to warn us and point out to us that our true person isn't the five skandhas. He didn't want us to be caught in the first view, but he also didn't want us to be caught in the second view, because the five skandhas contain the true nature of impermanence. Take the example of a cloud. A cloud at first seems to have birth and death. It manifests and disintegrates. But when the cloud isn't there, it isn't dead. It has become rain.

When we identify with the five skandhas, we feel discomfort. The four elements of earth, air, fire, and water cause our bodies to feel uncomfortable. Birth, old age, sickness, and death make us suffer.

We love something and we are attached to its form and think it is going to change and die, and this makes us suffer. A flower can manifest; it's born, it dwells, it stays with us for three or five weeks, and then it begins to change and the flowers begin to wilt gradually. At some point the whole flower wilts, droops down, and dies. We love a chrysanthemum, but we have to see the chrysanthemum outside of birth, dwelling, changing, and death. When it manifests, we smile and we enjoy that. But when it is in hiding, we don't cry or feel sad. We say, "Next year I will see you again."

This sentiment is expressed in a poem by Zen Patriarch Huyen Quang who loved the chrysanthemum flower. He was the Third Master of the Bamboo Forest school in Vietnam. He lived in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries at Con Son Temple in the north of Vietnam, where he planted chrysanthemums in all the gardens around the temple:

*On the path to Tuong Hu's house, the bamboos are
swaying, singing with the wind.
The garden of Tay Ho is beautified with plum blossoms.
I don't have the same taste as these two.
In my garden there are chrysanthemums blooming everywhere.
A thousand rivers aren't enough to freshen the old heart.
All the poetry about the plum blossoms is still not enough.
This old white head keeps enjoying the chrysanthemums.
Each time a chrysanthemum blossoms, my heart quickens and flutters.
I let go of my position, of my fame in the world.
I've let go of everything.*

*Doing sitting meditation for a long time, the cold penetrates the bed.
Living in the mountain, the year has passed without a calendar.
But when I see the chrysanthemum blossoms
I know it's the ninth of September; each year the
chrysanthemum blooms at just the right time.
The wonderful wind, the clear moon, contain this deep meaning.
I laugh at those who don't see the miracle, the wonder of the flowers.
When the young girls go home, their hair is full of the flowers they have plucked.
The person is on the balcony and the flowers are in the garden.
Sitting there without worry, I enjoy, I observe the smoke of the incense,
and naturally the person and the flower become one.
In the mist of all the colors and fragrances, the*

*chrysanthemum manifests, white or yellow depending on the weather.
When all the other flowers have fallen and crowded the yard,
at the eastern fence the chrysanthemums have not yet wilted.*

The chrysanthemums have the four signs of birth, dwelling, changing, and destruction. But the Zen master is able to see through those four signs and know that they will continue. He sits and observes the flowers with the clear mind of a true person until there is no distance between the flower and himself.

COMMENTARY 16

Master Linji made up the expression “signlessness of the four objects of mind.” The four signs are the four great elements: earth, water, fire, and air. He used the image of earth to speak about all the obstacles caused by our ignorance and doubts. Whenever we have a wrong perception, it’s as if there’s a huge rock in front of us that we can’t get around, and that obstacle is symbolized by the earth. Water represents the obstacle that is caused by craving or sensual desire. Water has the capacity to pull us very far away and sensual desire pulls us like a strong current. Fire represents the obstacle of anger because anger has the capacity to burn. Air and wind represent the obstacle of excitement because wind whips us about and pulls us away from our own calmness and contentment. This excitement and joy is very different from the happiness that we experience because of the positive elements of our practice. Rather than real happiness, this is the joy, the rush, that becomes a craving because of our addiction to the adrenaline of excitement.

If we have the insight into the empty nature of the four elements, they are no longer obstacles and we can take refuge in them. Then the four elements become “signless”: we maintain our freedom and, as Master Linji said, we make good use of our surroundings. When we aren’t pressured by a situation, the fire can’t burn us, and we can use the fire to cook rice and warm the house. When the water can’t drown us, we can use it to wash and to water the vegetables in the garden. When the earth doesn’t corner us, it can become the foundation of a house or a garden. When the wind isn’t an obstruction, we can use the wind to dry our clothes or fly a kite.

Master Linji taught, “Rising in the east, you go down in the west. Rising in the south, you come down in the north. Rising in the center, you come down at the periphery. Rising from the periphery, you come down at the center. You walk on water as on earth, and on the earth as on the water.”

This is the miraculous power we possess when we are no longer caught in signs. Walking on water is like walking on earth. Walking on earth is like walking on water. How can that be? When we can see the empty nature of the four great elements, we are no longer afraid of them. When we know their true nature, we can take refuge in earth, water, fire, and wind, and they cannot obstruct us. Instead of fearing the water, we can ride the waves. In the Great Prajñāparamita Sutra, Taisho 122, it says, “If we can see the true nature of emptiness of the six great elements then we can be our own masters and we can manifest miraculous power.”

Sometimes we speak of four elements, sometimes of six. The two others are space and consciousness. Master Linji said that the person sitting here to listen to the Dharma isn’t made up of these four or six elements. The four great elements are just the conditions to manifest our bright mind.

The warmth of summer helps the manifestation of the wonderful sunflowers, but sunflowers still exist when it's not summer. The sunflower wilts, but it doesn't die. It spreads its seeds in order to manifest again.

So every one of us has a body, feelings, perceptions, and we should enjoy them and use them, just as the sunflower reaches toward the sun. But we aren't controlled by these things. We aren't only our four great elements. Knowing this, whether we stay or go, we're still free from attachments.

So according to Master Linji, we should not hate or love anything, because these two attitudes keep us attached to our body, feelings, and perceptions. If we love the sacred and we hate the ordinary, then we're not free. It is only the realization of interdependence that can stop us from running after love and away from hate. In the hateful person there's also a lovable person. And if we know the Way, the hateful thing will become the lovable thing. And in that lovable person there is the hateful thing, and if we aren't skillful then that hateful thing will become dominant, and the lovable person will no longer be lovely.

This happens all the time in the world. A young couple wants nothing more than to be together forever. They look at each other and see only their love and the other person's beauty. Then they marry and soon they are only watering the hate in each other. They can't stand to look at each other and wonder how the other person could look so ugly.

Holiness is only the word "holiness." And when we say the word "holiness," we eliminate everything that isn't holy, like the ordinary. If there is no ordinary, how can there be holiness? Therefore, any words, even words like "holiness," "beautiful," and "Buddha" eliminate part of the true nature of the thing in describing it. In the Manifestation Only school of Buddhist psychology, this is called elimination. When we say a name out loud, it is as if we are slashing a knife into reality and cutting it into small pieces. We aren't able to see the close relationship between phenomena.

Master Linji taught, "Pilgrims climb the Wutai Mountain to find Manjushri. That is in error. How can Manjushri be on Wutai Shan? Do you want to make the acquaintance of Manjushri? Manjushri is the wonderful function you see before your eyes. It has always been there. There is no doubt about it. That is the living Manjushri. The light of nondiscrimination that shines in all directions in every moment of recollection is the true Samantabhadra Bodhisattva that appears in that light. Every moment of recollection that is not bound, which is free in all places is the meditative concentration of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara."

There are practitioners who climb Mount Wutai in order to find the bodhisattva Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Great Understanding. Many people go up there and think that they've met the bodhisattva Manjushri in the form of an old man or a young child sitting or riding on the back of an ox. But that means that Manjushri isn't present on other mountains, such as Pu Tuo Shan, and that the mountain Pu Tuo Shan only has the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, and that the mountain Emei Shan only has the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, and that the mountain Jiu Hua Shan only has the bodhisattva Kshitigarbha.

The first time I went to Wutai Shan together with a number of brothers and sisters, I asked the monk who was taking care of the temple at the top of the mountain, "Are you Manjushri?"

Wutai Shan doesn't have Manjushri. That's what Master Linji said. Therefore, we shouldn't waste our money on a plane ticket. Once we land at the airport we have to hire a car and drive for a long time in order to reach Mount Wutai, wasting money, wasting time. If we want to know Manjushri, then just look right in front of our eyes. The wonderful function before us, our shining

mind, can be in touch with the buddhas and bodhisattvas, with ourselves, with the blue sky and white clouds. We know that we're sitting there. We're present in a wonderful way in this moment, and that is Manjushri.

Master Linji taught, "The light of nondiscrimination that shines in all directions in every moment of recollection is the true Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, which appears in that light." This is talking about Emei Shan, the mountain of Samantabhadra, who is the bodhisattva of spiritual practice. Whenever there is the wisdom of nondiscrimination, of non-exclusion, then in that moment Samantabhadra is present. That is the definition of Samantabhadra. Samantabhadra means the nondiscriminating light of each thought of the mind, the real Samantabhadra.

Master Linji taught, "Every moment of recollection that isn't bound, which is free in all places, is the meditative concentration of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara." Avalokiteshvara is the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Not being bound means not being enslaved. In each thought, we can untie ourselves. We are tied up in so many ways. And who is tying us up? We are tying ourselves up. There is a line in the Vietnamese epic poem, "The Story of Kieu" that says, "We carry this love and deliberately bind ourselves to it." We are tying ourselves up at every moment, and we can also be free at every moment in every place. This freedom is the true nature of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, the concentration of Avalokiteshvara. Because Avalokiteshvara in Chinese, Guan Yin, also has the name Guan Zizai, "looking into freedom." Freedom only requires looking deeply, and we can see that nothing need bind us. We untie the ropes and there is Avalokiteshvara.

Master Linji taught, "These three bodhisattvas take turns at being host and friend. When one manifests, they all manifest. One is all three and all three are one. Only when you see that can you really study the sutras of the Path."

Manjushri is great understanding, Samantabhadra is nondiscrimination, and Avalokiteshvara is the insight of freedom. Those three things, understanding, nondiscrimination, and freedom, take turns being the master and being the friend. If one is the master, then the other two are friends. And when the friend becomes the master, then the master becomes the friend. These three things come as a trio. As long as there is Avalokiteshvara, then there is Samantabhadra and there is Manjushri. And if there is Manjushri, then there are Samantabhadra and Avalokiteshvara. One is three and three is one.

COMMENTARY 17

Without confidence, we can't walk on the path of freedom. There's a Winnie the Pooh story, "In Which Pooh and Piglet Go Hunting and Nearly Catch a Woozle," that illustrates this.* Pooh is walking on the snow, and without realizing it, he's going in a circle. When he comes back to his starting point and sees his first set of footprints, he wonders, "Whose footprints are those in the snow?" Then he follows the footsteps to find out, and as a result, more sets of footprints appear, mystifying Pooh even more.

When somebody tells us a new idea, our tendency is to doubt it immediately. We look at the sky and the earth, and we look for somebody to consult. And the more we consult, the more unclear it becomes. Because each person puts out an idea and every idea is wrong. Everyone's idea is the object of his view, the object of his mind, and is not the reality.

Imagine two waves talking to each other. One says, "I hear that our true nature is water. How are we going to look for it?" Of course there is nowhere for them to go and look. We might want to read

this commentary in order to understand the “truth” of what Master Linji was saying, but perhaps the master wasn’t saying anything, but was speaking to pry open the wisdom in our own hearts.

Master Linji taught, “The true great gentleman is someone who does not discuss master and servant, what is right and what is wrong, beauty and talent. He does not spend his whole time discussing. As for this monk, if someone comes, whether monastic or layperson, he is able to see through to that person’s source and recognize that all the sounds, expressions, writings that he uses are illusory dreams.”

There is a Chinese proverb that says, “If you win, you are regarded as king; if you lose, you are regarded as a bandit.” So whether we’re called “king” or “bandit” is just because of the conditions and circumstances of that particular moment. The king and the bandit aren’t the true nature of reality. We spend so much time talking and discussing things like this that can change in a moment. We can lose the whole of our human life in unnecessary discussion. Master Linji was saying that when he saw someone, he just looked at them with bright eyes. He didn’t worry himself with whether their title was “king” or “bandit.”

When we come to a teacher, we bring with us the many faces that we have put on ourselves. We present ourselves to our teacher, but we don’t present our real person, we present the collection of clothing that we have gathered in the past. We bring our knowledge, perceptions, and the image of ourselves that we want to introduce to our teacher. But we can only introduce the cosmetics that we have put on. But Master Linji was saying he looked at each person to see their true self. He was able to see the shell and also the core.

In Chinese there is a word, *cheng*, that means to ride, and it also means vehicle. When we ride a bicycle or car to a house, whether that bicycle or car is luxurious or old, we leave it outside the door and we go in with only our person. We use the vehicle to ride in, but we aren’t caught in it. We have to use words to communicate, but these words are just vehicles for our ideas; they are not the absolute truth. We ride on the objects of our view in order to go forward, but we don’t get caught in the objects of view.

Master Linji taught, “The Buddha world never proclaims itself to be the Buddha world. The practitioner of the Path who practices without relying on anyone by grasping is able to witness this Buddha world. If anyone comes and asks me about the Buddha, I will display in response a pure world. If the person wants to ask me about what is a bodhisattva, I will display in response a compassionate world; if someone wants to ask me about bodhi, awakening, I shall display in response a world of wonderful purity. If someone wants to ask me about nirvana, I shall display in response a world where all notions are silenced. There can be hundreds of thousands of different worlds, but the person is not different. Therefore, we can, in response to the question, manifest a form, just as the moon reflects in water.”

One day, King Thanh Thai, who ruled in Vietnam from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century, came to visit the Venerable Cuong Ky at the temple Tu Hieu in Hue. It was about 2:30 in the afternoon. The monks were resting before their three o’clock meeting. In the kitchen there was a basket of boiled yams ready for them to eat.

The king left his carriage far away on the road and asked his followers to remain there, and he alone walked through the gate and entered the temple. It was completely quiet, with no one passing by him. The king enjoyed that very much, because in his palace it wasn’t like that. The king went alone up the steps from the pond and walked past the hall. He went into the room and resting place of the

high venerable, and the door wasn't locked so the king walked in. He saw that the high venerable was sitting with his back very upright. Just a few minutes ago, someone from the kitchen had brought the high venerable a fresh bowl of tea and a yam, the same food that the rest of the community would be eating. The king sat down below the venerable and put his hand on his teacher's thigh.

The high venerable had a very interesting physical trait. When he got old, his upper eyelids drooped down and he couldn't see at all. Whenever there was a guest, he had to pull up his upper eyelid in order to see that person. It was good like that, because in life there are many treacherous complicated things, and those two eyelids drooped down like two screens. The venerable felt that somebody was placing a hand on his thigh, and his attendant wouldn't do that, so he said, "Who's that?" And the king said, "This is Thanh Thai." And at that moment the venerable knew, so he didn't have to open his eyes.

"Is that the king? Please, your majesty, enjoy sitting here a bit." Then in a very natural way the venerable broke the boiled yam into two and invited the king to eat half, and he ate half. The king wanted to find a real person, and the Venerable Cuong Ky lived with his real person. The position, the fame, and the power didn't make him lose his real person. This is a true story.

The king came and didn't want to bring his robes, his hat, his position, his fame, and his power as king. He came as a real person, and he was greeted by Zen Master Cuong Ky as a real person, and the two of them met with each other as humans. It was very beautiful, because both of them were free.

Master Linji taught, "My friends in the practice, if you wish to realize suchness, you have to become a great gentleman. If, on the other hand, you continue to be spineless and compromise, you will never realize it. You are like a cracked pot; you cannot hold the life-giving nectar. If you want to be a great Dharma instrument, you have to be determined not to allow others to deceive you. At every point you should assume sovereignty of yourself. Wherever you stand you should be your true person. You do not allow yourself to be influenced by those who come to you. Just a moment of doubt is Mara who has entered you. As far as a bodhisattva is concerned, doubt is an opportunity for the Mara of birth and death. When an object of perception arises, look deeply. Have confidence in the wonderful function that is present in your mind, and then you will see there is nothing to do. Every thought you have has the function of giving rise to the three realms and, as a result of that, there will be the six objects of sense in accord with whichever realm you are in. In your daily function of response to your surroundings, what do you lack? In an instant you can enter an impure or pure realm, the palace of Maitreya or the countries of the Three Eyes. You can travel at your leisure to any place and only see the emptiness of designation."

Often, we live a life of compromise so that there's peace in the house. We buy a small peace so that we can get through the day. And if we live like that then we aren't a great person, but a cracked vase, unable to contain the rice soup. If we want to be a great Dharma instrument, then we have to be determined not to let other people trick us.

Master Linji exhorted us to be the masters of our own situation, but that doesn't mean we need to fight and suppress others, but rather to be the masters of ourselves. Suppose we have a friend who is quick to anger. We can think there is something wrong with him, and try and suppress his anger. We can think that because he is raising his voice we have to raise ours. Or we can be the master of ourselves in that situation, feeling real compassion for the other person's difficulties.

Sometimes it's not a person in the moment but a person in the past who we think is the master of our situation. We say that we are behaving a certain way because of something our parents or

someone else did to us as a child. But each person has their own karma and each person is the master of their own situation in the moment, not a slave to others, past or present.

The true person doesn't go looking for an outside master. We are in charge of our own destiny and we have to be responsible for each of our words, thoughts, and actions. Mindfulness will help. Then we realize, "I'm thinking like this; I'm responsible for these thoughts. I've spoken like that; I'm responsible for my words. I'm doing this, and I'm responsible for this action." We have to know that each word, each thought, and each of our actions carries our signature. We are responsible for it and that is called being in charge of ourselves.

Wherever we stand, wherever we sit, we are the true person. We are masters of ourselves and wherever we are, we are ourselves. We only need to live these eight words, and it's enough to make us Master Linji's student, worthy to be his continuation: "Wherever we are, we are our true person." Write these words and hang them somewhere to remind yourself.

COMMENTARY 18

What is the realm of the Three Eyes? In the Buddhist dictionary there are three kinds of eyes and five kinds of eyes. The three kinds of eyes are: fleshly eyes; heavenly eyes, eyes that can see very far, and that can see the things that are hidden; and the eye of wisdom or insight, the eye that can see the depth of reality. And here the master used the Three Eyes according to his own meaning, his own terminology, not at all in the way they are generally used in the sutras and commentaries. We go into the realm of wonderful tranquility, put on the robe of purity and talk about the Dharma body of the Buddha.

If we want to enter the Dharma body of the Buddha, then we have to put on the coat of purity and go into the realm of wonderful purity. The Dharma body of the Buddha doesn't have the shape of a human being, even though we call it the body. But its sign isn't that of a human being. Not only does the Buddha have a dharmakaya, a Dharma body, but each one of us also has this dharmakaya. The dharmakaya of the Buddha is first of all his "teaching body." Before the Buddha entered nirvana, he said, "When the Tathagata enters nirvana, only this fleshly body disintegrates, and the Dharma body of the Tathagata will remain with you forever."

The Buddha has a Dharma body that is very great, big, and bright. Each one of us is a child of the Buddha and we also have a Dharma body. But if we study and practice improperly or without diligence, our Dharma body is weak. When we breathe and walk with mindfulness, then our Dharma body is very powerful. When we have a very deep understanding about the teaching, an understanding that manifests in our daily life; that is called the radiant Dharma body. In the morning when we wake up to go to sitting meditation, we are rested, fresh, and that is why we say the Dharma body radiates in the early morning. Then we work and we eat too much and so we get tired. Therefore, in the evening our Dharma body becomes unclear.

Our fleshly body has the shape of a human being, but our Dharma body doesn't necessarily have the shape of a human being. The Dharma body of the Buddha is something that is real and that we can be in touch with in our daily lives. If we want to be in touch with the Dharma body of the Buddha, then we have to put on the robe of purity and walk into the realm of wonderful tranquility.

When our Dharma body is radiating and we are in touch with the Dharma body, then our robe becomes the robe of purity. And the place we're taking steps is the world of wonderful purity. This

world doesn't exist outside of us. The Dharma body is accessible; we can be in touch with it right in the present moment.

Then we go into the world of nondiscrimination, put on the robe of nondiscrimination, and talk about the sambhogakaya, the retribution body of the Buddha. This could be in the form of a human being, but it's a very beautiful person, beautiful because there is the Dharma body in them, radiating, and making this person beautiful. If we have the Dharma body, then naturally our being becomes beautiful. We can see this for ourselves in the faces of those who have their Dharma bodies. What makes us beautiful is the Dharma, the precepts, the mindful manners, our deep understanding about the teaching and the manifestation of that teaching, and the Dharma in our way of walking, speaking, and smiling.

Every person has a retribution body right now, not just when they die. Whether our retribution body is beautiful or not depends on whether or not we have stability. If we want to be in touch with our retribution body as well as in touch with the retribution body of the Buddha, then first of all we have to enter the world of nondiscrimination and put on the robe of nondiscrimination. It means that our retribution body is beautiful because we can see with our eye of nondiscrimination.

Then we enter the realm of the world of liberation, put on the coat of radiating light, and talk about the nirmanakaya, the transformation body of the Buddha. The transformation body of the Buddha is also something we can be in touch with. It's present in the present moment. The transformation body of the Buddha is the body that is doing the helping work. We can help in many different ways, as a teacher, as a child, or as a niece or nephew or friend. And each time we do this helping work, we are using a different transformation body. In the Lotus Sutra, it says the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara can manifest in many different transformation bodies. If she needs to be a monastic to help, then she will appear as a monastic to help. And if she can help best in the form of a layperson, then she will use the form of a layperson.

We can help in the role of an older brother or sister, a teacher, a younger brother or sister, or a friend. If it's necessary to make a very mean face in order to help, then the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara will appear with the face of the devil, as long as it helps. If we need to be the politician, then we can manifest as a politician. All these forms are transformation bodies of the Buddha. We can help in the role of a teacher. We can also help in the form of a student, an older or younger brother or sister. And when we have the essence, the substance of liberation, we put on the coat of light and we can use our many transformation bodies. We can write a letter full of loving kindness, full of compassion, and send it to somebody, to father, to mother, to a younger sibling, and that letter is our transformation body. It can go very far. It can go into prisons to help people there. It can go to cloisters and help the people who are there.

Each one of us can have many transformation bodies to send out to help, right in this moment. It's not 100,000 lifetimes later when we become a Buddha that we have these three bodies. All of us right in the present moment have these three bodies of nondiscrimination, of wonderful purity, and of liberation.

Master Linji taught, "As far as I see, the Dharma body doesn't know how to give a Dharma talk. That is why teachers of old said: 'The bodies are established dependent on the meaning of the word; the lands are discussed basing on the true nature.'" The meaning is based on language and ideas, on our tendency to discriminate and make distinctions. These meanings manifest from our own consciousness. The lands are there only as far as their own nature allows. The body of the Dharma

nature and the lands of the Dharma nature are clearly objects that can be established. The Three Eyes and the Three Bodies are creations of our mind. Our mind makes a distinction between the three bodies, but the Dharma body never says, “I am the Dharma body.” And the retribution body never says, “I am the retribution body.”

All lands are the same—they are established in dependence upon meaning and nature. They are all yellow leaves and empty fists, which people use to deceive children. All are prickly pears and thorny water chestnuts; all are like trying to find fresh water in dry bones. Dharma is not outside the mind, nor is it inside. So what are you looking for?”

The Dharma body knows not only how to give the teaching in the human language, but the Dharma body also can give the teaching in other languages. In the beginning the meaning of Dharma body was “teaching body,” the teaching and the wonderful manifestation of the teaching. Later, in Mahayana Buddhism, Dharma body came to also have the meaning of wonderful reality because the Dharma body of the Buddha manifests in beautiful things, such as the clear moon, the violet bamboo, and the yellow flowers. All of the wonders of the world within us and around us are manifestations of the Dharma body. If we look deeply, we see that the rushing water, the wind in the trees, and the singing bird are also giving the Dharma teachings. We can see this in the Amitabha Sutra: “In the song of the birds people can hear teachings on different Dharma doors such as the Five Faculties, the Five Powers, the Seven Factors of Awakening, and the Eightfold Noble Path.” Therefore, it is the Dharma body that gives the teaching. The Dharma body teaches, but it teaches with its own wonderful language. “The flower stands still by the fence, smiling its wonderful smile.”*

The Great Nirvana Sutra gives this teaching using the image of the yellow leaf and the empty fist. In the sutra, a group of children were crying. An adult came along with a handful of yellow leaves and said, “Don’t cry anymore. I’ll give you a pile of gold.” So the person gave the children a handful of yellow leaves, and the children thought they were real pieces of gold. They were so happy and they stopped crying. We are the same way. We very much need the Three Bodies and the Buddha’s realms. We need a place for us to be in peace, a place where there is no suffering. So the masters gave us the Three Bodies and the Buddha realms. And so we stopped crying. They’re very skillful in that way.

But the Master Linji said that the empty fist and the yellow leaves are things that people used to trick young children. We are those who are easily tricked. The masters tricked us with their skillful means. When we throw a piece of dry bone to a dog, the dog will run after it hoping to find something sweet in it. But there is nothing in there. Outside of the mind there is no Dharma; this is the teaching of the Avatamsaka Sutra.

But not only outside the mind is there no Dharma. Inside the mind there is also no Dharma. Because the mind is neither outside nor inside. Everything manifests from our mind and because of the mind.

Master Linji taught, “Everywhere people talk about the spiritual path, saying, if you make an effort in the practice, you will realize the practice. Make no mistake, even though you have realizations in the practice that’s only the cause and effect of action in the cycle of birth and death.”

Everywhere people talk about the Path. If there’s practice then there’s attainment. Don’t be mistaken. Even if you attain the Path, or the fruit of the practice, that’s only the karma of birth and death. Non-attainment means that there’s nothing we don’t have now that we’ll have in the future.

In India there are temples carved into rocky mountains, for example the Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra state, in west-central India. Ajanta has over twenty caves carved into a stone mountain.

In these cave temples there are Buddha statues, there are Buddha halls, and there are living quarters. I went in and lay on a bed made of rock that the monks used to lie on in the second century. Next to the bed on the left hand side there was a hole where, in the old days, the monks used to put their alms bowl and their sanghati robe. I lay in there on a very hot afternoon, and it was very cool.

That temple was carved out of the already existing rocky mountain. Nothing was brought from outside. We are like this. Dharma body, retribution body, transformation body, understanding, wisdom, loving kindness, and compassion—all of these things are already in us. We only need to remove some of the rock—not to throw it away, but only to see what is already there. There is no essence of holiness that we have to seek and there is also no substance or essence of the ordinary that we have to destroy. Flower and garbage are interdependent.

Master Linji taught, “If you say that you practice the six paramitas and the 100,000 virtuous actions, I still see that as the production of action as cause and effect. Seeking the Buddha and seeking the Dharma is to produce action that can lead to the hell realms. Seeking the bodhisattva fruit is the same. Studying the sutra and the Path is also creating action as cause and effect. The Buddha and the masters have nothing to do. As far as they are concerned, whether there are afflictions and there is action, or whether there are no afflictions and no action, it is purified karma.”

We may say that we practice 100,000 actions or the six paramitas, but we are still creating karma.* Praying to the Buddha creates the karma of hell. Making requests of the bodhisattva is the same way. Learning the sutras and the teaching also creates this karma. The Buddhas and masters are businessless people. Buddhas and masters are those who don't seek. And if they seek they aren't Buddhas and masters. If we seek, then the more we seek, the farther away we are from the Buddha and the masters. This was Master Linji's logic. If buddhas and bodhisattvas are businessless people and if we want to be near bodhisattvas and buddhas, then we have to be businessless like them.

Master Linji taught, “There is a group of blind shaved-heads who, having eaten their fill, sit down to practice meditation. They take hold of thought and do not allow it to arise. They cannot bear noise but like quiet. The way they practice is no different from non-Buddhists. A master said: ‘Those who practice concentrating their mind to contemplate stillness, then take the mind to contemplate outside the mind, or collect the mind inwardly, or stop the mind to enter samadhi, are all doing something and not yet practicing having nothing to do.’”

Master Linji was talking about monks with their bald heads and blind eyes. What a pity! After they are full, then they sit down to practice meditation. They stay quiet so they think they are practicing Buddhism, but they aren't.

Buddhism isn't sitting still in order to look for complete silence, like a rabbit that climbs down into a hole in order to be at peace. Many of us practice like rabbits. We do sitting meditation in order to find a hiding place so that we can be at peace, and we don't attain anything. It doesn't help us to open ourselves and to liberate ourselves. That hour of sitting meditation is only for climbing into a hole to hide. And when we sit for a while, we feel sleepy.

Sleepiness is a big habit in monasteries. We force our bodies to sit a lot, but the quality of these sittings doesn't get you anywhere. It's just like sitting in a dark cave. Master Linji saw this and he scolded, saying, “You do it like that and it isn't at all useful.” Sitting like that and hating noise and preferring stillness isn't the Buddhadharm.

Master Linji taught, “As for you who are here to listen to the Dharma, what should you do so that your person can practice, realize the fruits of the practice, and be a beautiful person? Your person is

not able to practice, to realize, or become beautiful. If you can teach someone to become beautiful, then everything can become beautiful. Do not be mistaken!”

The Zen master was saying: You, the people who are sitting there listening to me speak about the Dharma because you hope to find your true person who is able to practice, you don't need to do any of these things. You are wonderful just as you are. Enjoy yourself. You are wonders of life, yet you think you are nothing. You suffer, and you look for something that you think you don't have. But you contain the whole cosmos. You contain all the wonders, the most wonderful things of the earth and the sky. And if you can't see that, then you aren't happy, you don't have enlightenment. And you sit there listening to me giving the teaching so that you will know how your person can practice, can attain, can be beautiful, can beautify yourself—but your person can't practice, can't attain, can't be adorned or be beautified. This means that you are already so beautiful, you can't be more beautiful than that.

This is a teaching from the Sutra in Forty-Two Chapters: “My practice is the non-practice practice, my attainment is to attain non-attainment.” The master was echoing this thought. We don't need to practice, because to practice is to attain, and we don't lack anything that we need to attain. We don't need to be beautified because we are already so beautiful. The rose is already perfect. If we put cosmetics on the rose, it would be very funny. The cloud is already perfect. If we use dye to make the cloud red, it would be useless. That green leaf is already perfect, and you are already perfect—a man, a woman—we are already perfect. Why do we have to feel so poor? We are already a person who doesn't need to seek or do anything anymore, a businessless person. There are so many businessmen and businesswomen, and so we practice in order to become non-businessmen and non-businesswomen.

Master Linji taught, “My friends, if you hold to the words of the Zen masters and say that they constitute the true Path, if you say these masters are good spiritual friends of inconceivable capacities, and if at the same time you think your own mind is so profane you can't dare to estimate them, then truly you are blind. You will carry this prejudiced complex with you all your life. You can't see what your own eyes could show you.”

The Master was saying not to trust those people who call themselves Zen masters but who are using their power or reputation to force us to follow. And if we believe in them, then we are selling our seeds. Farmers have to keep their seeds so they can plant the next time, and if they sell those seeds then they won't have anything to plant to feed themselves. So if we believe in those fake Zen masters or Dharma teachers then we are selling the seeds we need in order to eat.

We have two eyes. We may think we use them, but we trust blindly. We trust this person and that person, and we don't know how to use our own eyes. We have the eyes of the Buddha, the eyes of the Dharma, but we mistreat them. We close our eyes, we feel around, and we follow the guidance of others who lack insight. Those others aren't necessarily blind either. They also have bright eyes of the Buddha and the Dharma, but they don't open them and use them. Don't have the complex that we're nothing or we're bad.

Master Linji taught, “You are like young donkeys standing on ice, trembling with fear. You say: ‘I would not dare speak ill of these good spiritual friends for fear of producing wrong speech action.’ My friends, only when someone is a great spiritual friend does he dare speak ill of the Buddha and the masters, find fault with life, boycott the teachings of the Tripitaka, scold others as you scold children, and discover in any circumstances, favorable or unfavorable, the true person.”

Master Linji was scolding the fake Zen masters. All of us are putting on fake robes, whether these

robes are of nirvana, of liberation, or of forgiveness in order to trick each other. Meanwhile, we can't see our true nature. It's been so covered up with adornments. The Buddha has also been camouflaged. We put a halo on him and give him very long earlobes. We make up the thirty-two marks and the eighty auspicious signs to cover up the true person of the Buddha.

Master Linji taught, "Thus, for the past twelve years, looking back over my life I can't discover anything—even though it be as small as a mustard seed—of the nature of karmic retribution. The Zen masters you usually meet are like brides who have just come to their husbands' homes, always fearful that they will be driven out of the monastery and have nothing to eat. That is why they cannot have peace or joy. The elders who are in the vanguard, in the past as now, have not been believed by anyone. They have been driven out and then realized to be valuable. If wherever you go people immediately have faith in you, what will you ever be able to do? As soon as the lion roars, the skull of the jackal splits."

Master Linji began by saying that over the past twelve years, he had sat very still and created no karma. He said this first, to preface that he was about to say something that would make others uncomfortable. Then he said that some Zen masters are like a new bride who feels afraid in the home of her mother-in-law. The mother-in-law has the power to kick the bride out of the house, so the bride doesn't dare to speak the truth. These supposed Zen masters just say what people want to hear so people will keep coming to their temple. These masters have their own temples, but they have to use various tricks to attract people so they have enough money to pay the electric bill, the water bill, the telephone bill, this bill and that bill. They are the daughter-in-law of everyone.

These masters are constantly afraid that they will be kicked out of the temple. So they don't have peace, and they don't have happiness. And if Zen masters are without peace and happiness, then how can they be Zen masters? All day long they only worry about business. The practice and guiding Buddhist practitioners also become a business. Their aim is to guarantee themselves a place to live and have money to pay the bills. What a waste.

Throughout history, people who've had revolutionary ideas and dared to speak the truth have not been trusted and have been sent away. It's better to be shooed away than to always be believed. If you are always believed, you're only saying what people want to hear, not what they need to hear.

Master Linji taught, "My friends, everywhere people say there is a Path to be practiced, a Dharma to be realized. What is the Dharma that is to be realized, the Path that is to be practiced? In your present daily life, what do you lack? What needs to be maintained? The monks who have just been born do not understand this deeply, so they are always running after a bunch of fox spirits. They allow these spirits to boast of things that bind others. They say: 'The principle and the practice have to correspond to each other, and then, by guarding the three actions, you can become Buddha.' They keep chewing over ideas like this. They are like drizzle in the springtime."

Everywhere people say that there is a Path to practice and there is a Dharma to realize, to witness. When I was fourteen years old, I learned this line from the Sutra in Forty-Two Chapters: "The Dharma that I teach is to practice the non-practice practice and to cultivate non-cultivation." There is no path for us to practice; there is no fruit for us to realize. This is a teaching of non-attainment.

Master Linji was talking to the young monks who were still chasing enlightenment, running after wild foxes. There is an old Chinese tale about a wild fox who turns into an evil spirit who enchants people with stories until they're unable to have clear thoughts.

Master Linji taught, “The virtuous men of old taught: ‘If on your way you meet someone who has realized the Path, the best thing is not to talk about the practice with them.’

“For the same reason someone has said: ‘If you have an intention to practice the Way, the Way will not allow you to practice; all kinds of wrong circumstances will compete to arise. Once the sword of wisdom flashes forth, not a thing remains. Because as long as the light has not appeared, the darkness appears as the light.’

“That is why the ancients said: ‘The Way is the ordinary mind.’”

In the Record of the Lamp Transmission we have the teachings and stories of the great Zen masters. Master Linji must have read this record. In this book there is a line, “In the light there is the darkness. Lightness and darkness aren’t two separate entities.” The ordinary mind is the Path.

If we meet someone who has realized the Path, above all, don’t talk to them. If we have the intention to practice the Path, the Path will not allow us to practice it. If people have an idea that they’re going to practice the Path, then that path is no longer the Path. The Path doesn’t work anymore. If we’re committed to a certain path, even if it’s a path of nonattachment, then we have wrong view. But when we pick up the sword of wisdom and we’re able to let go of the path, we see that in the darkness is the light and in the light is the darkness. In the son there is the father, and in the father there is the son.

Imagine we’re going from New York to Boston. Every step we take has both New York and Boston in it. If we turn around and go back toward New York, it’s the same. And with each new step, the step that was in front becomes the step behind. Everything has to play its role in space and time and then plays another role afterwards. We play the role of disciple and then the role of teacher, of the guest and then of host.

Master Linji taught, “Monks, what are you looking for? In the present moment you are standing before me listening to the Dharma. It is luminous and clear. You do not need to depend on anything and since you lack nothing, you have nothing to search for.

“If you want nothing to stand between you and the buddhas and masters, you have to see this. Do not doubt anymore; do not be mistaken anymore. If you can maintain this insight, you are living masters. If you cannot maintain this insight, then there will be a difference between nature and appearance. When the mind does maintain this insight, nature and appearance are not two different things.”

We have to maintain, moment to moment, the insight that there is no discrimination between subject and object. If we can maintain this, then we become a living incarnation of the ancient teachers. When we lose the awakened understanding of non-attainment, we return to the mind of discrimination.

Master Linji said that if even for just one instant we can sit without discrimination, then we can be happy. If instead we sit in meditation without insight, we are like a tree without fruit. Similarly, if we are doing walking meditation and we take 700 steps and only one step is taken in mindfulness, then that is good already. One minute of mindfulness can be continued for another minute of mindfulness.

We can help each other have these moments of insight. The other day as I walked through the kitchen, I saw someone cleaning vegetables and I asked, “What are you doing?” I was playing the role of a spiritual friend. Even though it was obvious that they were washing vegetables, I asked the question to wake the person up to how happy they could be, just washing the vegetables. If we aren’t doing something with joy, that moment is wasted.

On the buses in New York and many other cities there's the sound of a bell that rings when people signal they want to get off at a certain stop. If we're mindful, this bell on the bus is the same bell that we hear in the meditation hall, inviting us to the present moment. We have to think of creative ways to remind ourselves to stay in mindfulness. Then we will be better able to be good spiritual friends to our loved ones, helping them to stay in the present moment as well.

COMMENTARY 19

The Master divided dharmas into two kinds, mundane dharmas and the supramundane. The mundane dharmas are the worldly things that we usually drown in. The supramundane are those that take us out of drowning and bondage. If we look at supramundane dharmas with the eyes of awakening, they don't appear to be any different from the mundane dharmas. Like when we are having a cup of tea, the action of drinking tea in forgetfulness makes drinking tea a mundane dharma. But if we drink with mindfulness, drinking tea becomes supramundane and it can take us beyond the realm of birth and death.

Dharmas don't have their own self-nature. They're like an onion, and when we peel all the different layers, we find there is no separate core. "Onion" is just a name, a mere designation, empty of any independent content. An onion is a manifestation and it is formed by many causes and conditions coming together, such as earth, sun, rain taking refuge in each other. They are paratantra, relying on each other.

There was a meditation student who asked his teacher, "Where should we look for the world of no-birth and no-death? Should we look beyond birth and death?" And the meditation master answered, "You will find it in the midst of birth and death." Bodhi, awakening, is like the onion. We think we run away from our suffering toward awakening, but if there wasn't suffering, there wouldn't be awakening from suffering.

Master Linji told us that "the Three Vehicles and the Twelve Divisions of the teachings are just toilet paper." Someone asked the Eminent Master Tue Trung, a Zen master in the line of Master Linji in thirteenth-century Vietnam: "What is the pure Dharma body?" And Master Tue Trung replied: "The urine of the horse and the pile of excrement from the water buffalo."

It's quite true that the Buddha's body is an illusion. There isn't anything solid in it that continues forever. If we look for the Buddha, our soul will be sucked up by the ghost Buddha. Were we born from our mother? If so, then we have the roots that we need and everything else that we need within ourselves. Why do we need to look for another mother? Our mother is already inside us.

A student once told me, crying, "I don't know who my father is. Everyone else has a mother and father. I suffer very much and I can never be as happy as people who know their mothers and fathers."

I replied, "Why do you say you don't have a father? You wouldn't be sitting here if you didn't have a father. Don't think that having your father sitting in front of you would make you happy. Many people have their fathers and they suffer all the time. Your father is in every cell of your body. You can be in touch with him at every moment."

The idea of the perfect father, the ghost father, sucks up our soul. The true father, the true mother are always available to us. The Buddha is right there, waiting for us.

Master Linji asked, "If you say that Buddha is the ultimate aim, then why after only eighty years did the Buddha have to lie on his side between two sala trees and die?" The Diamond Sutra says

there were thirty-two marks and eighty auspicious signs of the Buddha. But in fact the Chakravartin, the world king, also has these same signs. Master Linji was taking words from the sutra and turning them upside down to break through our ignorance.

Sometimes water has the outer appearance of cloud. And when the cloud becomes rain, the outer form of the cloud is lost. When it becomes snow, the outer form of the rain becomes the outer form of snow. If we're caught in the outer form, we aren't able to see the true nature of water. In the Diamond Sutra, it says the Tathagata appeared as the signs of the body because he agreed to follow the way of the world. Fearing that people will have the wrong view of annihilation, he temporarily uses mere designation. The thirty-two marks and the eighty auspicious signs are just his skillful means to help us. If we understand they're mere signs, then we can be in touch with the true Buddha.

Master Linji taught, "You say that the six inestimable miraculous powers belong to the Buddha. In that case, the gods, the spirits, the ashuras and hungry ghosts of great strength who also have the six miraculous powers must also be Buddha. Friends, do not be mistaken. When the army of ashuras was defeated in battle by the army of the god Indra together with 8,400 followers, they entered a hole in a lotus root to hide. That was a miracle, but you cannot say that ashuras are Buddhas or the Holy Ones. According to me, all these miracles are karmic retribution and depend on causes and conditions to arise.

"The six miracles of the Buddha are very different—Buddha enters the world of colors and forms but is not deceived by them, enters the world of sounds, smell, taste, and touch and is not deceived by them, enters the world of objects of mind but is not deceived by them—because the Buddha has arrived at the insight that the six objects of sense all manifest the empty nature. They cannot bind the practitioner who is not caught in them.

"Practitioners of our own time who still have impurities in the five skandhas can still realize the miracle of walking on Earth."

The ashuras are angry demons that usually fight with the Hindu god Indra. Master Linji wasn't saying he believed in miracles. He was referring to the story of the famous layman Pang who lived in the eighth century and who spent his time in the monastery walking, chopping wood, and cleaning. He said, "The miracle is how you apply things. This is called the wonderful application." The real miracle is that we can carry water home, we can chop the wood for the fire—everything is a miracle. All these things are miracles, brought about by karma (action) and interdependence.

The miracles that the Buddha performs are very different. The Buddha goes into the form world but he isn't confused by the form world. He goes into the world of sound, but he isn't deceived by the world of sound. He goes into the world of scent but he isn't deceived by the world of scent. He goes into the world of taste but he isn't deceived by the world of taste. He goes into the world of touch, but he isn't deceived by the world of touch. He goes into the world of dharmas, but he isn't deceived by objects of mind.

Although we carry in us the demon, that is, the impermanence of the five skandhas, we're able to perform the miracle of walking on the Earth. This is the true miracle, not to walk on air or water, but to walk on Earth. If we're walking on this Earth as a free person, then we can live as the Buddha. For the true Buddha has no outward appearance. The true Dharma has no sign.

Master Linji taught, "Only your true person who is here listening to the Dharma at this moment can go into fire and not be burned, go into water and not be swept away, go into the hell realms and the three unwholesome destinies like someone going on an excursion in a park. He can enter the worlds

of hungry ghosts and animals without having to endure the retribution of these worlds. Why is that so? Because he does not discriminate against anything. If you still love the holy and hate the profane, then you will continue to drift and sink in the ocean of birth and death. Afflictions arise in the mind. If there is no mind, how can the afflictions bind us? If you do not waste your time in discrimination, are not caught in signs, then automatically you realize the fruits of the Path in an instant.”

Fire can't burn and water can't drown the true person. Eyes don't discriminate nature from the appearance. In the Record of the Lamp Transmission, it says: “Afflictions come from the mind” If there's no mind, then how can the afflictions bind us if our mind isn't there? Don't make yourself tired by the hard labor of discrimination. If you aren't caught in the outer form, then quite naturally you'll realize the Path in a flash, in an instant.”

Master Linji's method of teaching was one of destruction. He took the ideas in our minds and broke them in whatever way he could. He may have used part of a sutra, or he may have turned the sutra upside down, using whatever was sharp and would wake us up. He picked up the bamboo in order to fight against the raiders on the border, as the king did. He used the shout.

King Tran Thai Tong was a Zen master in thirteenth-century Vietnam. He had received the teachings of Master Linji and he wrote this poem:

*I just came to the outer gate and I heard the shout.
It awoke me from my dream.
The sound of spring thunder has just broken out.
And everywhere the grasses and the plants spring up.*

The function of the shout is to destroy, to break through and usher in the Spring, the time of awakening and of happiness.

Master Linji taught, “If you keep roaming around running after someone to learn the practice from, even if you study for numberless eons, in the end you will still be coming and going in the world of birth and death. You will not be equal to the person who has nothing to do when he enters the temple and sits down in the lotus position.”

This means: don't go from monastery to monastery. Just stay where you are. Don't run looking for someone to learn the practice from. He's not saying we can't go anywhere. We can go. We can go anywhere. But we mustn't be looking for something outside of us.

People go to therapists because they think they have a mental illness and that the therapist has some knowledge that will cure them and bring them peace. But if Master Linji were our therapist, he'd say, “Your body and spirit have the ability to heal. You have to return to yourself and take refuge in these elements so they can manifest and do their work.”

Siddhartha went on a search to find the Path. He practiced with a number of teachers. But in the end he had to return to himself, and at the foot of the bodhi tree he was able to discover his own path. We can go to a monastery or a beautiful island for retreat and healing, as long we know that the healing is within us and the place is just the condition that allows the healing to manifest. Don't ascribe special healing powers to the place. When we stop running around, we'll be a lot happier.

When we want to run away and find something else, Master Linji would tell us, “Wherever you go, you will just find yourself.” We will just meet the difficulties, the loneliness, the sadness, and the suffering we already know. Nothing is equal to sitting there, returning to ourselves, finding the

elements of happiness, enlightenment, and liberation right here in our own body and mind.

THE FOUR ARRANGEMENTS OF GUEST AND HOST

Master Linji taught, “When host and guest meet, words will pass between them. The master may respond by manifesting different forms, or use his whole person to face the guest. Or sometimes he may use expedient means such as joy or anger, or show half his person, or sit on the back of a lion or an elephant king. If the student is genuine, he could shout or hold out a trap in front of the good spiritual friend. If the host is not able to recognize the object he is presented with and falls into the trap, he will rely on that trap in order to invent all kinds of clay models. Then the student could give another shout. If the good spiritual friend is still not able to let go, then we have a case of difficult-to-cure disease. It is called a case of the guest examining the host.

“Or, for example, the good spiritual friend offers nothing. He waits for the student to offer something and then snatches it away. The student may be robbed of all he wished to offer but keeps resisting and would rather die than let go. This is called a case of host examining guest.

“Or, for example, the student stands in front of the good spiritual friend and offers purity as an object. The good spiritual friend recognizes this object, takes hold of it and throws it into a deep pit. The student says: ‘What a great teacher you are!’ The good spiritual friend replies: ‘Heavens above, you cannot tell good from bad!’ The student prostrates. This case is called the host examines the host.

“Or the student presents a person in shackles before the good spiritual friend. When the good spiritual friend sees this, he brings in more shackles and binds them onto the student. The student is overjoyed and can no longer distinguish who is guest and who is host. This case is called guest examining guest.

“Venerable monks, what I have just said is simply to help you recognize devils and wrong paths and distinguish right from wrong.”

This section was added to the the Record after Master Linji had passed away. It lays out the four different kinds of relationships between guest and host. These are similar to the different ways that a healer works with a patient. The first is to look deeply and simply observe. We can learn a lot about someone just by observing. When the other person comes in, shuts the door, and sits down, we know a lot already. The Zen masters say they just need to look at a novice and they know how many months he has been in the temple. The second step in healing is to listen. When somebody comes and asks a question, just one sentence can reveal their mind. The third is to ask questions. The fourth is to diagnose and prescribe.

Each of the relationships of guest and host has its purpose. If we’re a good teacher, sometimes we have to use our whole person, our whole body to deal with the person who has come. We have to use the skillful means appropriate to the situation. It’s like the famous Zen koan when the practitioner asks, “Does the dog have the Buddha nature?” and the teacher says, “No.” The teacher is using expedient means. In principle, all living beings have Buddha nature. But because the practitioner is caught in the idea that all living beings have Buddha nature, the teacher says no, so that the practitioner has the chance to give up his preconceived notions. It’s not a matter of whether it’s the truth or not the truth. It’s a device to help the practitioner not get caught.

Similarly, we show different emotions depending on what the student needs. We can show our sadness to our disciple when our disciple has done something wrong. We’re not really sad but we

show it to the disciple so that she will learn. “I don’t think I can continue to live if you keep acting like that.”

The First Arrangement

After a host and guest have seen each other, the guest says something to sound out the good spiritual friend who is sitting before him. The good spiritual friend here means the host, the teacher, and the student is the guest. The guest flings a dangerous sentence into the corner of the mouth of the good spiritual friend. The student has learned something already and is very proud of what he has learned. He wants to say, “I am someone, I am something. I haven’t come here with two empty hands. I’m not worth nothing. My teacher has to know that I have some value.”

The student comes with a preconceived idea, and he brings it out and tests his teacher, “Do you understand this?” This is the object, the obstacle. And the teacher has to either remove the object, remove the subject, remove neither or both. A real teacher can recognize that this is just boasting on the part of the guest. And the method of taking hold of it and throwing it into the garbage pit could be a smile or a yell. If the teacher is effective, the student will regain his ordinary self and ask the good spiritual friend to say something. “Have you got something, teacher, that I can rely on?”

Or perhaps the spiritual friend doesn’t produce anything, but he just waits for the student to produce something and then he removes it. The student can have everything he wants to say removed, but he still doesn’t react, he just holds on to it and even if he were to die he wouldn’t let go. This is a situation in which the student brings out many things and everything he brings out is removed, thrown into the rubbish heap, but the student doesn’t learn, he doesn’t want to be defeated, so he just continues bringing up more and more. There are people like that. This is the case when the host analyzes the guest. In this case the host remains the host and the guest can’t profit anything from the host. This is the case when the doctor analyzes the patient. This is the situation that arises most often.

A good spiritual friend will continue to do as he’s already done and cut off the student’s desire to search for something. The teacher has already removed the student’s sickness, but the student is asking for more sickness. As the good spiritual friend, we help the other person to let go of all this and we won’t let him get sick again. The student might come to revere the teacher and this is dangerous, because reverence for the teacher is just another trap the student can get stuck in.

The Second Arrangement

In this example, it’s the host, the teacher, who gives the object, and not the guest. The student is able to recognize it is only an object and doesn’t let himself fall into the trap. So the student then becomes the host. For every moment he doesn’t allow himself to be deceived, he’s the host.

The good spiritual friend only shows part of himself, not his whole self, to the student. This has two meanings. The first is that, in the right circumstance, the student doesn’t need to see everything that the teacher sees. We just give the other person a little bit of our light so they can see for themselves. In the second meaning, showing half of the self, means the teacher is showing something that only the person asking the question can understand. Observers won’t get what we are doing, because only the participant can see it.

When listening to a Dharma talk, some practitioners think their teacher is talking directly to them. “Why are you talking just to me? Only I have that problem; no one else does.” This is showing half your person. And in response a good student might “shout or hold out a trap in front of the good spiritual friend.” The student sees clearly that this half body isn’t authentic, isn’t true. When the student lets go of thinking the teacher knows everything, then the guest becomes the host. Here, the disciple is shining light on the teacher.

The Third Arrangement

In this case, the student stands before the spiritual friend and brings out a pure object. It means, “I haven’t got anything for you to remove. I’m not caught in the object. I don’t have any problem.” The spiritual friend recognizes this object. He takes hold of it and he throws it into the rubbish pit. And the student says, “You are a great teacher.” And then the good spiritual friend replies, “Oh dear, you don’t know anything about what is good and what is bad.” The spiritual friend doesn’t fall into the trap. He’s a great teacher and the student comes to learn from him. The student doesn’t have what the teacher has. But the teacher says, “Oh, you shouldn’t say that. You don’t know the difference between what is good and what is bad.” And the student then touches the earth. This is the case when the host analyzes the host. It means both the host and guest are the host, they are both master of the situation. The host in the guest is revealed. Another example of this arrangement is the case of the two head monks of the two meditation halls who, when they meet, shout at the same time.

The Fourth Arrangement

The student presents himself before the good spiritual friend like someone who is wearing shackles. He says, “I have read so many books on Buddhism. I have read all the secret teachings. I’ve read about the Theravada, the Tibetan, the Japanese traditions—I’ve read it all.” Here comes someone who is wearing shackles. The spiritual friend sees this and he throws it all away. Then he adds on more shackles, more fetters. And the student is so happy! This case is called the case of guest looking at guest; no one is successful in this case.

Master Linji taught, “There are a number of bald monks who do not know what good and bad are. They show the east and point to the west. They like rain and they like sunshine. They praise these lanterns as beautiful and those pillars as pretty. Look at them and see how many hairs are left in their eyebrows. There is good reason for them losing their eyebrows. The student does not understand, so his wisdom is carried away by his infatuation for his teacher. Such teachers are nothing but a bunch of fox spirits. True students of the Dharma chortle in disdain, saying that this group of blind bald-headed monks creates confusion and deludes people.”

Who are these monks? They eat the rice that is offered to them, but they don’t practice. The eyebrows represent their merit; their merit has fallen out. They’ve traded their wisdom for infatuation. A true student of the Dharma won’t have faith in them.

Master Linji taught, “Friends, young monks and nuns have to study and practice. I myself when young devoted myself to studying the vinaya and fine manners every day. I researched, sought to understand, and consulted countless sutras and commentaries. After a while I realized that they were

just expedients to help people, presented in theoretical terms. So once and for all I threw them all away in order to go and consult great teachers and practice meditation. Fortunately, I met superior spiritual friends, so I had the eyes of the Dharma that allowed me to see clearly and recognize the great teachers on this Earth and those who were fake. The insight was not with me from the time my mother gave me birth, but came about through polishing, refining, training, experience, and investigation and then one day I broke through to the truth.”

This section seems at first to contradict what Master Linji taught before when he was speaking about sudden enlightenment and taught that awakening can come very suddenly, right in this moment. We don't need months and years of study if we use our six sense organs and see the Buddha land in the present moment.

But in this section, he says that enlightenment also comes with patience and studying. Here we see the awakening of Master Linji and how it came about. He'd already studied the sutras and commentaries, and had thought he could find awakening there. But then he woke up and saw that enlightenment is not in the sutras but in his mind. But he also saw that his study of the sutras could be useful. Instead of using his studies to become a scholar or the leader of a congregation, he used what he'd learned to break through obstacles and heal others. Whether study is beneficial or not depends on our motivation. We shouldn't seek knowledge for its own sake or to go after degrees. We may have studied medicine, sciences, or sociology in order to get a job, a degree, or a place in society, and now we think these studies are of no benefit. But if we live in the present moment and we practice well, everything we've learned in the past can be useful, and our knowledge can help ourselves and others.

Knowledge is useful too if we simply enjoy it. There's a story that one day, a young Linji went into the monastery and found his teacher reading a sutra. Linji laughed and said, “I thought you were a holy enlightened one. Why are you still chewing on black beans?” Linji was joking with his teacher as though to say, “I thought you were already enlightened, and there you are reading the sutra.” But the young Linji could see that his teacher was reading the sutra for fun, because he enjoyed reading the sutra, and not to become an enlightened person or to teach it to his students the next day. So disciple and teacher play with each other like two good friends. Sometimes the teacher jokes, sometimes the disciple jokes with his teacher like that.

Master Linji was telling us not to think that becoming a person with nothing to do means being lazy! We still need to study and practice; we just need to do so with a joyful spirit. There's no real distinction between sudden and gradual enlightenment. The truth lies in the right Path, the right way of practice.

Master Linji taught, “My friends, if you wish to have correct insight into the truth, do not allow others to deceive you. Whatever comes to you, either from the outside or within, you should slay it immediately. If you meet the Buddha, you should slay the Buddha; if you meet the master, an arhat, your parents, or relatives, you should slay them. Only thus can you be liberated. Do not allow things to bind you, and you will be free and at ease.”

We have to have understanding independent of others. When we say “correct insight,” we mean the insight that it is in accord with reality. False perceptions exist and they come from within us and sometimes they are influenced by other people. For instance, Plum Village, where I live in France, is a reality. There are people who like it, who say how beautiful it is. There are people who hate it and say it's a terrible place. Neither is the reality.

When a young man loves a young woman, he produces an image of her. He loves this object of his perceptions more than he loves the woman. He might say, "I'd rather die than marry someone else." Whom do we love? Do we love God? Buddha? Do we love the real Buddha, or do we love an image of the Buddha which we have created? We could be like that naive young man who loves the girl. We don't know who the Buddha is. We make an image of the Buddha and we love that image. We create an image of God and we love that image of God.

If we're caught in our perceptions, we'll draw a beautiful picture of the girl we love. But once we've married her, we'll know what she is like; after a few years we'll be in touch with the reality. The image will slowly disintegrate. We may be angry. But the young woman didn't deceive us; we deceived ourselves.

In Vietnam and China, people who come to Buddhist temples often bring offerings of bananas. Sometimes they offer papaya, sometimes mango. I knew a young monk who, when he was still a small boy in Vietnam, thought the Buddha was someone who sat on the altar and never stepped down and who really liked fruit, especially bananas. He'd never seen the Buddha eat a banana; he thought maybe he ate when no one was around. So one night he sneaked out of the house and went to the temple to see the Buddha eat a banana. Hour after hour passed while the young boy waited for the Buddha to put out his hand and pick up a banana. But he never was able to see the Buddha eating a banana.

After that, the little monk was taught that Buddha was just a statue. He was told that the Buddha wasn't in the temple, but was in the western direction, very far away. And he said, "Why is the Buddha so far away? Why isn't the Buddha nearby?"

We might laugh at the young boy, but many of us are like this. We pray for God or the Buddha to help us with a new job or an unfaithful partner. We pray for little things that will make our lives easier. We may pray, "If tomorrow we have a picnic, please may there be sunshine." But at the same time, the farmers are praying, "Oh we haven't had rain for so long. The wheat will die. Please let there be rain." Whom should God satisfy? We have this image of who the Buddha is and we have to cut off the head of that image.

Master Linji said, "If you meet the Buddha, slay the Buddha. If you meet your parents, slay your parents." These are words that shake the whole world. It's rather terrible in China or any country to say, "When you meet your parents, slay them." But it's not that Buddhism isn't concerned with filial piety. With awakened understanding we can see that our mother and father are present in every cell of our body. We can't take our mother or our father out of us. We are just their continuation.

There are young people who are angry with their parents, and they announce: "I don't want to have anything to do with my father. I don't want to have anything to do with my mother." It means that we have a view of our parents that makes us suffer a great deal.

There are people who are angry with their fathers. They come to the temple, meet the teacher, and they think the teacher is their father, so they are angry with their teacher at the same time as well as their father. We should slay all these apparitions, because they are just our own misperceptions.

Above all, liberation is liberation from wrong perceptions. Most of us start with a wrong view about our own selves and this leads us to wrong views about others, which leads to so much suffering.

Master Linji taught, "Among students who have come here from the four quarters, there has not been a single one who has not brought along with him an attachment to something or other. If this

mountain monk is able to recognize that object of attachment, he will beat it straight away. If they describe this object with their hands, I shall beat their hands. If they describe it with their mouth, I shall beat their mouth. If they describe it with their eyes, I shall hit them on the eyes. Until now no one who has come has been able to prove that they have independence and freedom. They are all caught in traps that have been laid by the teachers of old. I myself do not have a single Dharma to give you. All I can do is help cure your sickness and undo the knots that bind you.

“All you students who come from different places, try not to be dependent on anything. I want to tell you something. For these last fifteen years, I have not met a person. I have just met spirits who live in bamboo or wood, grasses and leaves. They are fox spirits who are gnawing in a disordered fashion on heaps of dung. They are truly a bunch of blind men. They just squander the offerings that are given to them by donors in all parts. They say, ‘We are young monks who have left the home life.’ Their insight is no richer than this.”

If we read Master Linji’s teachings looking for mystical ideals that we can store up for ourselves, we won’t find them. All he was doing was using his teachings as a hammer to break the shackles and chains that bind us, and as a sword to cut the knots that tie us. That’s why he said that in all his years of teaching, he’d never met a person. By “person,” he meant a free person. It wasn’t that they didn’t want to study and learn the practice. They did, but they didn’t know how to do it, because they had been deceived. Day after day, year after year, they had been running, they had been looking for knowledge about this and that.

The best thing people who want to follow the path of liberation can do is “leave the home life.” This means to let go. Some monastics may think they have done this, but in fact they’ve gone around collecting things such as knowledge and attachments.

Master Linji taught, “What I want to tell you is that there is no Buddha, no Dharma, no practice, no realization. What is it that you are looking for in other people? What is it that you lack? Do not be like blind men. It is as though you want to put another head on top of the head you already have. My friends, at this very moment your own wonderful function is no different from the wonderful function of the masters and the Buddhas. It is only because you lack confidence that you are looking for something outside of you. Make no mistake, there is no Dharma outside of you for you to run after, there is no Dharma within to attain. It would be better to listen to my words, take a rest, and practice having nothing to do. If something has arisen, do not try to make it continue. If something has not arisen, do not try to make it arise. This action is more valuable than ten years’ pilgrimage.”

If we see the Buddha as something solid outside ourselves, it’s better to have no Buddha. If we see the Dharma like that, it’s better to have no Dharma. If we are sitting in the Dharma Hall thinking that the statue of the Buddha is the Buddha, it’s better to come outside and look at the autumn leaf. We’re more likely to see the Buddha there.

Rather than following a master’s words, it would be better if we just took a rest. To rest means to stop running after things. If we can sit still and keep wrong perceptions from rising within us, it’s more valuable than ten years of walking from here to there, looking for a teacher to learn the Dharma.

Master Linji taught, “According to my insight, there is nothing you need to do. You just need to live as ordinary people. Wear your robe; eat your food. As day follows day, be a person who has nothing to do. The students who come here from the four quarters all think they are people intent on finding Buddha, Dharma, liberation, escape from the three realms. Foolish people. If you leave the three realms, where will you go? Buddha and master are just verbal expressions, which people bind

themselves up in. Do you know what the three realms are? They are the ground of your own mind, they are the people sitting here at this moment to hear the Dharma. If you give rise to a desiring thought, that is the desire realm. If you give rise to anger, that is the form realm. If you give rise to a moment of doubt, that is the formless realm. These different states of mind are the tables, chairs, mats, and beds of your own house. The three realms never say, 'We are the three realms.' You yourselves who are present have the clear light that can illumine and reflect everything that is; you are the ones who want to measure the world and to give each of the three realms a name."

The master is chiding people who think they can go outside the three realms of desire, pure form, and formlessness. But where will they go? If we leave our planet, where will we go? Some people say there is the Kingdom of God. If we think we can get there if we leave this place behind, that is foolish. From the time the Buddha entered *mahaparinirvana* until now, perhaps no one has spoken as simply as Master Linji when he asked, "If you leave the three realms, where will you go?"* If the fish wants to leave the water, it will die. If we leave the three realms, we can't live.

We're like fish living in the water and asking, where is the water? If we let a desire rise within us, that is the desire realm. If we give rise to anger, that is the form realm. If we give rise to a moment of doubt, that is the formless realm. The three realms are made of craving, anger, and ignorance. So we're in the three realms when we have craving. When we have compassion, love, and understanding, then we're no longer in the three realms, we're in the Pure Land. No gas or plane ticket are needed to take us there.

The Milky Way doesn't say, "I am the Milky Way." It is the Milky Way. In reality, the wonderful reality is life. We are that wonderful reality. We ourselves are present here with a clear light that can illuminate and reflect everything as it is.

Master Linji taught, "Monks! This body, these four elements here, are impermanent, including the spleen, stomach, liver, gallbladder, hair, teeth, nails. When you look into yourself, all you see is the emptiness of each part. When you can stop every idea in your mind, that is bodhi, awakening. If the ideas have not yet stopped, that is darkness. Darkness does not have a dwelling place, has no beginning and no end. If you cannot stop your mind, you will climb the tree of non-awakening, enter the six destinies, the four ways of being born, you will have a fur coat and horns. If you are able to stop, you will immediately arrive in the realm of the pure Dharma body. When you arrive at the state of not a single notion arising, you are able to climb the bodhi trees, and you can perform the miracle of being able to appear wherever needed in the three realms. You can use the transformation body, which arises from the mind. You can experience Dharma joy and the bliss of meditation. A halo will begin to shine from your body. When you think of what to wear, one hundred thousand lengths of brocade are available; when you think of what to eat, one hundred delicacies are all there. You will never suffer from serious illness. Bodhi, awakening, has no dwelling place and therefore is called unattainable."

The four elements of earth, water, fire, and air are both inside and outside our body. The earth element represents solidity; the air element represents fluidity; fire represents warmth, heat; and water represents the penetration of liquid. The reason these elements are able to exist within our body is because they also exist outside of our body.

In *The Sun My Heart*, I wrote that we think we have a heart in our body and if that heart ceases to work, we will die.* But we also have a heart outside of our body, the sun. If that sun was to go out, we would also die. In our chest, we have two lungs. Outside us, the forest provides oxygen for us to

breathe and so it is also our lungs.

Most large cities have parks. Without them, there wouldn't be enough oxygen to breathe. The park is the lungs of the city. Without the lungs outside, we can't have the lungs inside. The blood that flows through our veins is like a river. Outside us there are streams and rivers. So we see that our body isn't just in our body. We see our body outside of our body.

The Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness teaches us that the practice of looking deeply has four objects of our meditation, and the first is the body.^{**} Then we look deeply into our feelings, our emotions. And then the mind, our perceptions. The fourth object is the object of our mind. The mind is the capacity to perceive and the object of our mind is the things that are perceived, such as the clouds, the sky, the plants, the living beings, and our own person. The first of these practices, looking deeply into our body alone, is enough for us to be able to see everything, because our body also includes our feelings and our mind.

When we look deeply, we see that all our ideas about our bodies and about our minds are inaccurate. We have to practice no ideas. "No ideas" doesn't mean to stop thinking and perceiving. Rather we have to go beyond ideas and not get caught in perceptions of permanence and of a separate self. When we can stop every idea in our mind, that is awakening. "No ideas" can also be translated as "emptiness." When we can see the emptiness of each thing, then we get to the place where there is no idea. And awakening doesn't lie far; it lies within our perception. There's a Chinese saying: "If you stop the idea in your mind, that is the bodhi tree."

There are two worlds and we can choose which one we want to live in, the world of awakening or the world of ignorance. If we haven't yet stopped our ideas, we live in ignorance. Ignorance doesn't have a dwelling place. It has no beginning and no end. If we live in the world of awakening, we will be happy in our daily life. Why don't we do it?

There are ten realms of existence. The first one is the Buddha realm, the second is the bodhisattva realm, the ninth is the realm of the preta, the hungry ghosts, and the tenth is the hell realm. It's like a television. Whatever button we press, we'll get that channel. We can choose. If we want to be a hungry ghost, we can be a hungry ghost now. Nobody will stop us. If we want to be the Buddha sitting on the lotus, nobody will stop us. There's no obstacle. We have so many opportunities in our daily life to be the Buddha sitting on the lotus, and yet we don't do it. The house of the Buddha has so much room and yet we don't live in it. We just sleep outside.

There are four ways of being born. We can be born from eggs, from the womb, from moisture, or by metamorphosis. If we live in ignorance, we'll be born in the realms of suffering in the present moment. But if we have awakening we immediately arrive in the realm of the pure Dharma body.

If we have freedom, we can miraculously transform our body to go into the three realms without being caught in anything. We can use our minds to cause transformation bodies to arise. This is the term "the mind gives rise to the body." We are able to realize Dharma joy, the joy that comes from the practice, joy in the true Dharma. Don't just eat rice or spaghetti. It's not enough. Every day we have to eat the joy of the Dharma and the joy of meditation. In the Chinese liturgy for offering rice, there are the words, "When we eat this food, we vow that all beings will have the joy of meditation and of the Dharma as their food."

So every day we have to ask ourselves, "Do we have enough of the food of joy?" Otherwise we are like someone dying of thirst on the bank of the river. The hungry ghost can't take the food that's available because its throat is as small as the eye of a needle. We have the food of joy available to us

in every moment, so why aren't we nourishing ourselves with more of it?

Master Linji taught, "Friends, the truth is hard to discover. The Buddhadharma is very deep and mysterious. Nevertheless, we can go into this territory in order to attain insight. Day after day I sit here teaching and giving beatings, but hardly anyone in my group of students is inclined to take much notice. One thousand times, ten thousand times, they keep treading in dark places, unable to recognize anything independently with clarity and distinction. Because they lack the virtue of self-confidence, they keep looking for insight, wisdom, and the written word. Half their life has gone, and still they rely on someone else and keep carrying around their corpse like a heavy burden as they move around in this world of men. Sooner or later they will have to pay the price of the shoes they have worn."

There are pilgrims who are searching for the Dharma. They think maybe the Dalai Lama has it, or maybe Thich Nhat Hanh, or maybe some other teacher. People squeeze on the bus with fifty other people to go from one temple to another. Master Linji said these people are carrying their corpses as they walk without knowing it. They live but they weren't really living. They are like dead people. Sooner or later, they'll have to pay the price of the shoes they've worn out.

In *The Stranger*, Albert Camus writes about Meursault, a Frenchman who grew up in Algeria. He went to his mother's funeral, but he didn't cry or feel any sadness. Later, he shot a man who accosted him and was put in prison and condemned to death. Finally, as he was lying on his back in his jail cell, twenty-four hours before facing the guillotine, he saw a square of blue sky through a window, and he was able to see the blue sky for first time. He lay very still and just breathed, seeing the sky as the most infinitely wonderful thing. He saw his own presence, his own body in the blue sky.

While Meursault was lying there, someone knocked on the cell door. It was a priest who wanted to come in and perform the last rites. Meursault didn't want to let the priest in, because the time left to him was so precious. If he let the priest in, it would be a waste of this time, so he didn't want to see him. He knew the priest couldn't help him. And he saw that he was truly living, truly alive, and that the priest lived like a dead person, carrying his corpse with him. Meursault's words were: "Living as he did, like a corpse, he couldn't even be sure of being alive."

Albert Camus was a twentieth-century atheist. Master Linji was a ninth-century Buddhist, but they used very much the same imagery. Nearly all of us are carrying our corpse as we walk around. We're not truly alive; we're not truly awake.

It's very easy if we want to wake up and be a living person. In Christianity, they have the concept of resurrection. In Buddhism, resurrection is a practice, not a ceremony. When we hear the bell, we can be resurrected. A single breath or step can resurrect us.

As we look around us, we can see if we're among the living or among the dead. We may be right next to someone, but they don't notice us, because they're carried away by their memories, their anger, or their sadness. Each moment can be a moment of resurrection, but they aren't there to experience it.

Master Linji taught, "Monks, there are students who, when they hear me say that there is nothing outside for them to seek after, misunderstand and begin to look for something within. They sit immovably in meditation, face turned to the wall, their tongue glued to the roof of their mouth. They say this is the Dharma door taught by the Buddha or the master. What a great mistake. If you say that when the object of sense is calm and immovable it is the Path, you have taken ignorance as your master. A teacher of old said, 'Silent calm is a deep black pit, a fearful state.' If on the other hand you

think movement is the Path, then are the plants that move out there in the breeze the Path? Movement is the air element, stillness is the earth element, and both stillness and movement are without self-nature. If you look for it in movement, it will take up its position in stillness. If you look for it in stillness, it will take up its position in motion, just like a fish in the stream, splashing the waves as it leaps up.”

Master Linji used an image of a fish swimming in a stream. This is taken from a gatha of Vasubandhu that appears in a work entitled A Discussion for the Demonstration of Action. * When the fish jumps, it creates ripples. Although the ripples appear outside the fish, they were created by the fish.

During Master Linji’s era, the later Tang dynasty, the tendency of Buddhist practitioners to study, do research, and discuss theories was overly emphasized. Both koan practice and stillness meditation came about to oppose that tendency, calling people to spend less time in studying, theorizing, and listening to lectures, so they’d have more time to practice; this movement advocated no use of scriptures or any other writings. It’s the transmission from heart to heart, without the need to say anything. Buddhist practitioners, whether Vietnamese, Chinese, or American, have the tendency to talk too much, to theorize too much; they dry out their saliva, while they make no attempt to practice. Therefore, meditation was a reaction calling for no more talking, no more theorizing, no more intellectualizing and instead, using our mind, our alaya consciousness for contemplation. It isn’t that the intellect can’t help.

There are two main schools of Zen meditation. One uses koan practice and the other still sitting. In the koan method, we have a riddle in the form of a sentence or verse that we keep with us and meditate on. In the silent meditation school, we sit still and pay attention to our breath and look deeply into ourselves in silence. In koan practice, the breakthrough comes from solving the koan, the object of our search. But there’s not a rigid line between these two forms of practice.

In contrast, there are students who, when they hear that there is nothing outside for them to seek, misunderstand and begin to look for something within. They sit immovably in meditation, face turned to the wall, their tongue glued to the roof of their mouth. They say this is the Dharma door taught by the Buddha, or the master. What a great mistake. Master Linji said, “If you say that when the object of sense is calm and immovable it is the Path, you have taken ignorance as your master.” If we are sitting only to sit still in meditation, thinking that awakened understanding will arise, in fact we are sitting in a deep black pit. There is no benefit to this kind of meditation. It’s better to play outside than to sit like that.

Master Linji didn’t want his disciples to be caught in the theories of either school of meditation. He called this “trying to find fresh water in dry bones.” Both movement and stillness don’t have substance; they don’t have a true nature. If we look for it in movement, it will take up its position in stillness. If we look for it in stillness, it will take up its position in motion. It’s like the fish in the stream splashing the waves as it leaps up. There are fish that go against the stream; in places where there are waterfalls the fish have to jump very high and that churns up the water. All the movement and the stillness come from our own mind. The practitioner who isn’t relying on these two methods can use both motion and stillness without being caught in them.

Master Linji taught, “When students come, I use three ways of determining in order to deal with three kinds of aptitude. If a student with less than average aptitude comes, I remove the object but I do not remove his way of practice. If a student with higher than average aptitude comes, I will remove both the object and his way of practice. If someone with sharp and keen aptitude comes, I will

remove neither the object nor the way of practice nor the subject. If a person with extraordinary insight comes, I face him with my whole person and do not put him into any category.

“Monks, in the case of the last person, the Dharma power of the student can withstand any wind, and the speed of this Dharma power is greater than that of a spark of flint or a flash of lightning. This student only needs to blink and the mutual relationship is lost; he only needs to give rise to one idea and he goes in the wrong direction. Whether he understands or not is determined only in that very instant.”

If there’s a student who comes and asks, “Master, does the dog have Buddha nature?” and the master says no, this is the first kind of aptitude, removing the object. Because the student has learned that all living beings have Buddha nature, he thinks this is deep knowledge important in its own right. The student just wants to prove he has studied. He’s learned the lesson by heart and if the teacher says, “Yes you’re right,” then he’ll be caught in it even more. So the teacher has to say, “No.” This is removing the object but not the way of practice.

In the second method, used with a student of higher than average aptitude, the teacher removes both the object and his way of practice. The student has enough strength to be able to have the practice removed from him; he will not fall into despair. With someone of less than average aptitude, if we were to remove his way of practice, he wouldn’t practice anymore.

In the third situation, the student has a very sharp and keen aptitude, and the teacher doesn’t remove anything as far as that person’s concerned. That person’s not caught; it’s very easy. If a person with extraordinary insight comes, the teacher doesn’t hide anything at all. This person is a spiritual friend. We might say there are four categories here, but the student as the spiritual friend doesn’t lie in any category.

The spiritual friend is someone who understands us. If I come into the kitchen while you’re cutting carrots and I ask what you’re doing, of course I can see you’re cutting carrots. So if you just smile, then perhaps you’re my spiritual friend. But if you answer, “Oh Thay, I’m cutting carrots,” then that’s not being the spiritual friend of the teacher. This awakened understanding is quicker than lightning, quicker than the spark that comes from flint. In the past before we had matches, one way of starting a fire was to strike pieces of flint together. The spark comes very quickly but it can also go quickly. In the time it takes to blink, we can lose the mutual relationship and communication between the master and the student.

Master Linji taught, “Monks, carrying your bowl, your bag, and a length of intestine full of excrement, you approach a teacher asking for Buddhadharma. Do you know who the person who comes asking is? He is vital, alive, not attached to any root. If you try to drive him in, he will not go in. If you try to push him out, he will not go out. The more you run after him, the farther away he will be from you. If you do not seek him, he will be standing there before your eyes. The sound of his voice is resounding right in your ears. If you do not have sufficient confidence in this, then this life is lived to no purpose.”

The thing we’re looking for is right there. We are the Buddha; we are the Dharma; we have our wonderful function. We have our life. Yet we’re going around looking for things. At any moment we have the capacity and opportunity to be in touch with the wonderful things of the universe, to be free, and have peace and joy. But we don’t do it, because we think we’re worth nothing. We are the Buddha and our life is worth living fully. We have to keep reminding ourselves of this.

Master Linji taught, “My friends, my way of seeing the Buddhadharma comes from the Upadhyaya

Magu, Danxia, Daoyi, Lushan, and Shitou. The transmission of the school of practice has spread widely among people, but because no one has enough confidence to receive it, everyone keeps slandering it. Although the intention of Master Daoyi is so simple and straightforward, all 350 students who came to learn it were unable to grasp it. Although Master Lushan was a free person and completely authentic, able to grasp when it is necessary to conform and when it is necessary to go against the grain, his disciples remained confused, unable to fathom the borders of his awakened understanding. The same was true of Master Danxia; he played with a pearl. Sometimes he hid it and sometimes he showed it; he reprimanded every student who came to him. The action of Master Magu is as bitter as the bark of the *Berberis asiatica* (barberry) tree. No one can ever come near him. Master Shitou's secret was to look for people on the tip of an arrow. This made everyone afraid."

There is a story about Mazu Daoyi, Master Linji's grandfather teacher, who was a bright and powerful Zen master. In the Prajna Temple, Master Daoyi sat in meditation day and night; many nights, he didn't sleep. One day, Master Nanyue came to see this diligent master who sat still day after day. Nanyue picked up a tile and began to polish it intently. Mazu asked, "What are you doing?" Nanyue answered, "I'm making a mirror." Mazu said, "How do you think you can make a mirror by polishing a tile?" Nanyue replied, "And you, Mazu, how do you think you can become a Buddha by sitting in meditation?" Mazu was shocked, surprised, and awakened. He replied, "If the oxcart doesn't move, would you beat the ox or beat the cart?"

If we say that sitting is meditation and that not sitting isn't meditation, that's wrong view. Deep looking can be in sitting meditation, in walking meditation, in working meditation, or in driving meditation too. So don't think that if we don't sit it's not good, or if we do sit it's good.

Master Mazu Daoyi was the first master who shouted. One day he shouted so loud that Baizhang lost his hearing for three days. So the shout of the master was transmitted to the grandchildren and became a skillful teaching method, like the stick, but we use these skillful means with deep insight, and not for the sake of the form. There were many students of Master Linji who used the shout a lot but who didn't have much insight. Then one day the master called all his students together and said, "Don't imitate me." If we can't distinguish between the inside and the surrounding, then we can't distinguish who is the host, who is the guest, and then we shout, and it gets ridiculous. Don't shout unless you have true insight.

Master Linji taught, "I play with spiritual transformations. I am able to penetrate all kinds of circumstances, and wherever I am, I am able to preserve the practice of 'nothing to do.' The object is not able to remove my true person. If anyone comes looking for me, I go outside to look at them. The visitor does not know me. I immediately put on a robe, of which I have many kinds. The student sees the robe and gives rise to some idea or other. He is immediately caught in my words and phrases. What a shame for the bald monk who is blind and does not have the eyes to see. He mistakes the robe for me. He says that I am yellow or blue or white or red. Seeing this, I take off my clothes and manifest my purity. When the student sees this, he is very joyful and full of longing. Then I take off this robe of purity as well. Now he is really afraid; confused and losing his head, he runs away, saying, 'Why are you stark naked?' I then say to him 'Do you know the person in me who is wearing the clothes?' He will suddenly turn around and recognize me.

"Monks, do not be caught in clothes. Robes are motionless; there has to be a person to wear the clothes. There are the clothes of purity, of awakening, of nirvana, of master, of Buddha.

"Monks, these things are just sounds, expressions, and words. They are just changing

manifestations, like different clothes. They are made possible by the air that comes up from the qihai acupoint below the navel and makes the jaws clack together producing phrases and ideas. You should know clearly that they are just magic tricks.

“Monks, action on the outside produces sounds and speech. Action on the inside is mind giving rise to ideas. They are all just different kinds of clothes. Why do you perceive these clothes as true insight? If you continue in this way, even if you pass through millions of lifetimes as monks, you will achieve nothing more than putting on successive new sets of clothes. This is not the miraculous penetration of the truth, but a passing through different sets of clothes. You will not go beyond birth and death; you will not be equal to the one who has nothing to do. ‘Meeting each other, they don’t recognize each other. They don’t know the name of their interlocutor.’”

When we hear something and we’re attracted by it, we get pulled away by the five desires. If we’re pulled by all the wonderful ideas like Buddha and Dharma, we’re still being pulled by a ghost. Master Linji was saying our teacher is just a robe, a student is just a robe, a monastic is a robe, and a layperson is a robe. These roles are just clothes we wear, not who we are.

One day in Vietnam in 1951, a policeman came to my temple because someone had reported that a monk there had very revolutionary ideas that might even be treasonous. He was searching for me and found me wearing the very poor robe of a novice. He said, “I want to see Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh.” I said, “Please take a seat.”

I went up and put on my beautiful monk’s robe and came back down and said, “Dear friend, I am Thich Nhat Hanh.” When I wore the novice robe, he wasn’t sure I was Thich Nhat Hanh. When I put on the bhikshu robe, he was more sure. That man looked at me and he was a little bit amused. I felt pity for that man because he had been caught in the color of my robe and mistook my robe for me. “Robe” is just a word. We can use it to destroy the idea or view in which the other person is caught.

Although it was written many years later, we can see this part of Linji’s teaching in Hans Christian Andersen’s 1837 fable of “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” That old king was so in love with having beautiful clothes that when a tailor told him he was making him the most beautiful outfit out of the most amazing cloth, the king believed him, even though he couldn’t see any such outfit. He believed it so much, he even went out parading in his “new clothes,” completely naked. Only a child dared to say what everyone was thinking: “The emperor has no clothes!”

Dear friends, don’t be caught by a robe. The robe is removable. Our true person remains. There are the robes of no-birth, the robes of Buddha, the robes of teacher and of student. There is energy coming from the vital point below our navel, where our breath is deepest, but it’s not the true person. Why do we take the robe for the true insight? If we continue like that, we’ll spend life after life, countless lives, changing from one robe to another.

Master Linji taught, “In our time, monks are not able to realize the Path because they confuse words and expressions with insight. They just note down things that have been said, the words of some old men who have passed away, in a huge notebook, which they hide away in three or four layers of cloth covers. They do not allow anyone to look at it and they say that what is written down there is ‘the mysterious principle,’ then they hide it away and guard it with great care. A huge mistake! Group of blind men, in this heap of dried bones how can they find a drop of cool water?”

Knowledge is different from insight. Master Linji was surrounded by people who knew a lot about the teachings of the Buddha. They knew the sutras by heart and could go on about the Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths. But that’s not true insight. All these mysterious, very deep ideas,

there's nothing in them if we don't use them to help break the confusion inside us. All these words and theories are just dry bones, without a fresh drop of juice. The true juice, the true beauty is in us.

One day I sat on a panel in Amsterdam. There were many intellectuals, many respected theologians and priests. One theologian stood up and asked me about a sentence in Lotus in a Sea of Fire, a book I'd written in 1967.* This was twenty years later. I looked at him and said, "I never wrote that book." He was very shocked. But the truth was, I was a living being in front of him and he was interested in a phantom from twenty years ago. Twenty years ago, the situation in Vietnam and in the world was very different.

Zhaozhou was a famous Zen master of ninth-century China and a spiritual grandchild of Mazu Daoyi. One day one of his students asked, "What was the aim of Bodhidharma coming to China?" And Zhaozhou told the questioner, "Look at the cypress in the courtyard." It's just like my answer to the theologian. Because you're a practitioner, you walk across the courtyard many times a day. Every time you cross, you see the cypress, but you see it like a phantom. You aren't deeply in touch with the reality of the cypress. If you can't be in touch with that reality, how can you know the aim of Bodhidharma or any of the other masters?

If someone were to ask Master Linji what the main idea of Buddhism is, he might answer, "Did you have breakfast?" When the student said yes, the teacher might say, "Then go wash the dishes." Having breakfast is a living reality; we have to live deeply our breakfast eating. And if we've finished our breakfast, we live deeply our washing the dishes instead of trying to find the meaning in things that are so far away.

Master Linji taught, "There is another group, that doesn't know what is good and what is bad. They extract from the teachings mystical phrases, which they subject to reasoning and turn into literature and dogma. It is like putting excrement into the mouth, spitting it out, and placing it into the mouths of others. It is no different from worldly people playing Chinese whispers. Their life goes past wasted but they continue to say, 'We are monks who have left the home life!'"

"When some people come to consult about the Buddhadharma, their mouths are closed, they have not a word to say. They open their eyes as vacant and black as smoke holes. Their mouths droop downwards like a carrying pole hung with a load on each end. Even if Maitreya Buddha were to be born right now, people like this would be driven to another world or down to the hell realms to inherit their retribution of suffering.

"Monks, what do you hope to find as you roam around the world until the soles of your feet are worn flat? Where is the Buddha you are looking for, the Path you want to realize, the Dharma you want to attain? The Buddha with the beautiful marks whom you are looking for is not one bit like you. If you want to know your own original mind, you must see that Buddha and realize that you are not united with each other, neither are you apart from each other."

In the game of Chinese whispers, like the game called "telephone" in the United States, one person whispers a sentence in someone's ear, then that person whispers it to a third, then the third to a fourth and so on until the last person says it aloud, and it becomes a completely different sentence. Master Linji was saying that if we take the words of a sutra and transform them into rigid academic truths, then we're really just playing telephone, even if we think we've "left the home life" and become a monastic.

If somebody comes and asks us a very deep question about the Buddhadharma, it's because she's suffering and is asking for help to resolve her difficulties. Master Linji was reprimanding those

monks who couldn't answer this person because they had no true compassion and experience. Their eyes were as vacant as black chimney holes and their mouth a sack of bones. He was saying these monks spend so much time searching for some external truth, the soles of their feet are flat. If they only stopped this posturing and searching, they would see the Buddha right there. The Buddha is our peace, our love, our own understanding.

COMMENTARY 20

Zen master, please explain to us: “What is the true Buddha? What is the true Dharma? What is the true Path?” This question asks about the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Way. “The Way,” in Sanskrit, is a very important word in Chinese spiritual and cultural traditions. The word “Way” or *marga* here doesn't only mean the Path, but it also means the absolute truth. Thus, it is also the Dharma and the means of seeing absolute reality.

Master Linji had said that the true Way is without form, the true Dharma is without sign, and the true Buddha is without appearance. But now there is the disciple turning around and asking, “What is the true Buddha? What is the true Dharma? What is the true Path?”

Master Linji replied kindly. There were a hundred different ways he could have explained his answer, but he said, “True Buddha is our pure mind. True Dharma is the light of the body. The true Path is nondiscrimination, it's the unobstructed pure light, which shines in all directions. The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Way are one. They are conventional designations with no real separate existence.”

We talk about the Three Jewels, but in truth, they are one. We look into the Buddha, and we see the Dharma and the Sangha. If the Dharma and the Sangha aren't present, then the Buddha isn't really the Buddha. When we look into the Dharma, we see the Buddha and the Sangha. Therefore, without the Buddha and the Sangha, there can't be the Dharma. We can't separate them, but they have separate names, conventional designations, *prajñapti*.

“Conventional designation” means a term we use temporarily, for convenience. The word “child” is a noun we use, but to say “child” doesn't mean we don't see the ancestors and the descendants in the child. When we say “child,” we must be able to see the father and the mother; only then can we truly see the child. But we use the word “child” so we don't confuse ourselves in the moment.

We have to maintain mindfulness about the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Way simultaneously. Whatever we look at, we can see the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Way. We see that these three things aren't separated from each other.

In the beginning of this teaching, Master Linji made three statements: “True Buddha is our pure mind. True Dharma is the light of the body. The true Path is the unobstructed pure light, which shines in all directions.” For those whose level of practice is sharp, already ripe, then the first statement already awakens them; they are able to realize the absolute truth, and that is the first statement, transmitted from heart to heart. Language has no more need to carry any meaning, any idea, any example, or any intention. One shout, one hit, or one word already unleashes the other person. That is the first statement; the fruit is ripe, and it only needs to be picked.

If we understand only after the second statement, we can still become teachers of humans and gods. The second statement is a skillful means, a symbol, an example to help open up the other person's understanding. The teacher creates the skillful means to help the other person to see her mind

and to become liberated from it. Thanks to the skillful means, the other person may be awakened and realize something, even though that isn't the first and highest level. Still, that person can be a teacher of others. However, if we understand only when it gets to the third statement, then we can't even save ourselves, let alone use the teachings to help others. We don't yet have successful experience with the practice. Master Linji taught, "Bodhidharma Patriarch came here from India with only one intention: to find a person who was not deluded by others." The Master didn't look for the Buddha, he only came and looked for a person. Perhaps Bodhidharma only came to visit, and there was no specific intention. We keep saying that Bodhidharma came with this or that intention, but these are our projections.

The First Patriarch, Bodhidharma, was seated in meditation in a cave when the monk Huike came. He stood in front of the cave day after day, even though it was extremely cold outside. Finally, the Bodhidharma felt sorry for him and asked, “What did you come for? What are you standing there for?” The monk Huike answered, “I came here to ask you to calm my mind.” The master said, “Where is your mind? Bring it out. I’ll calm it for you.” The monk answered, “I can’t find it. I can’t bring it out.” The master said, “Then I have calmed your mind!” Upon hearing this, Huike was awakened, and he saw clearly that all the effort he’d put in his practice had been useless. One statement was enough to awaken Huike.

If when we hear this statement, we know how to bring light to reflect upon our mind, and we’re not seeking anything anymore; we realize that our bodies and minds are no different from the bodies and minds of the Buddha and the great masters. In that very moment, we become the businessless person. This is called attaining the teaching or non-attainment. It means we already have the teaching our teacher is transmitting. Our teacher just points it out to us. Our teacher opens our eyes and we see we don’t need to look outside or to run anymore.

COMMENTARY 21

In Master Linji’s time, the two most commonly asked questions in Buddhism were, “What was Bodhidharma’s intention in coming from the West?” and “What is the essence of Buddhism?” When we didn’t know what to ask, we asked these questions. When the teacher was kind, he explained it to us. Sometimes he would beat us.

The question about Bodhidharma’s intention in coming from the West can be explained in several ways, depending on the situation and on the questioner. A teacher who is able to look deeply can see our level of practice right away. Master Linji’s answer that day was: “If he’d had an intention, he wouldn’t even have been able to save himself, let alone bring others to the shore of awakening.” If Bodhidharma went from India to China with the intention of spreading the teaching, or persuading the king, or building a temple, then that intention was already a flaw. To have an intention is to have something to pursue. When there’s pursuit, we have an aim. As long as we have an aim, then we can’t even save ourselves, let alone save others.

When asked, “Why did Bodhidharma go to the East?” one Zen master answered, “When did he ever go?” This answer is also wonderful. It removed the subject.

A student asked Master Linji, “If he had no intention, how could the Second Patriarch have attained awakening?” The master answered, “Attainment is non-attainment.” The master was very patient in answering one question after another. He was so gentle; there was no beating, no martial arts.

Someone else asked yet another question, “If attainment is without attaining, how can ‘without attaining’ have any meaning?”

The Zen master replied: “It was because Huike went looking for the mind everywhere and could not stop that Bodhidharma said, ‘Good heavens, what a gentleman! How come you keep looking for a head when you have a head already?’” Here Master Linji is explaining Bodhidharma’s answer to Huike: “Where is your mind? Bring it out. I’ll calm it for you.”

Then Master Linji apologized, saying it’s deplorable that he has to shout and scold. Although he shouted fire, there was compassion in his heart. He was telling the monks to follow their hearts.

Whatever we see as beneficial for our body and mind, bringing transformation, happiness, and community, then do it. Everything, whether cooking, washing dishes, washing clothes, or sitting meditation, should be done in the spirit of nourishing and healing, or we shouldn't do it at all.

Master Linji taught, "People everywhere say that the 10,000 practices of the six paramitas are the Buddhadharma. However, I say that they are only expedients used as adornments and ways of doing Buddha's work. They are not the Buddhadharma." Many people like to do Buddhist work. They organize ceremonies and retreats. We believe that we do these things for the Dharma, but indeed, we may do them because we like the excitement.

Master Linji taught, "Therefore if actions such as eating only before midday, keeping the precepts, and carrying a bowl of oil so as not to spill a drop are not to make your Dharma eye bright and clear, you will, in the end, have to pay the price of the food you have received." It doesn't matter how much we maintain these practices if we do it out of obligation or rigidity. We eat, but the food isn't digested. Only when these practices bring about happiness, peace, and purification for us and others are they practices of the Buddhadharma.

Holding a bowl of oil in such a way that it doesn't spill one drop is an image that comes from a story the Buddha told. A prisoner on death row was ordered to carry a bowl full of oil without spilling a drop. He was to walk through a city where there was a great celebration. Everyone was dancing and putting up lanterns and flowers. This prisoner had to focus all of his attention on the bowl of oil as he walked from one place to another. Behind him was a guard, with sword unsheathed, ready to behead the prisoner if a drop of oil was spilled. Thus, although there were many beautiful and joyful scenes, and there were many colors and sounds, this prisoner was not allowed to pay attention to them.

If that prisoner wanted not to lose a drop of oil, thus his head, then he had to be extremely mindful. But this is an image of being mindful about only one object. If we do that, and we aren't happy, and there is no liberation or enlightenment, then it doesn't matter how diligent we are, we are still a prisoner. The practice must have content as well as form. It has to bring us happiness; then we will not be in debt.

If all of these things aren't capable of illuminating our Dharma eye, then they're useless. In the end, we'll still have to pay for the food we've eaten.

Zen Master Muso Soseki of fourteenth-century Japan was the founding abbot of the Tenryuji Monastery in Kyoto and was teacher and advisor to both the shogun and the emperor. He made the following statement:

I have three kinds of disciples:

The first kind are those who are strongly determined to sever all bondage. They have one-pointed mind for looking into their weaknesses. These are disciples of the superior level.

The second kind are those who don't invest all of their energy into practicing. They only use their dispersed mind to read and learn from sutras and books (they think that they can gain wisdom from their studies, so they study a lot, but they don't practice much). These are disciples of the second level.

The third kind are those who only ask for blessings and grace from the Buddhas and masters. They cover their own bright mind.

These are three kinds of disciples that I have. Besides that, there are those with polluted minds, who study just to gain knowledge and become scholars. They are called the bald-headed ones who are outside the tradition. They have no right to join the monastic Sangha, even at the lowest level, let alone the kind of people that are gluttonous, sleep-craved, lazy, cowardly, not participating in the practice schedule; they aren't even worthy to be called parasites. I forbid them to claim themselves as my students. I forbid them to go into the temple or the monastery. They can't even stay temporarily, let alone become permanent residents. Don't think that I lack compassion and inclusiveness for saying this. I say this so that they see their mistakes and begin anew, in order to become healthy trees in the garden of the masters.

This quote has been quite helpful for me. If it's helpful for us in illuminating our Dharma eye, then use it. If not, throw it away. It is useless.

Master Linji taught:

Having entered the Path, he didn't penetrate the principle.
He was born again in samsara to pay for donations he had received.
When the businessman reaches eighty-one, the dead tree grows fungus.

In the book *Record of the Lamp Transmission*, published in 1004, there's a story about a rich man who made frequent offerings to a monk. However, that monk didn't practice properly, so he was in debt to the rich man. Eventually, the monk died. The rich man was already in his eighties when a strange mushroom sprouted in his garden and each time he harvested it, another mushroom sprouted in its place. The rich man could eat the mushroom year after year. One day, a Zen master came to visit, and the rich man asked him about that strange mushroom. The master asked him, "In the past, did you used to make offerings to a monk? That monk has now been reincarnated as a mushroom to repay you."

Master Linji taught, "Even if you were to live alone on a solitary peak, eating only one meal a day, sitting in meditation all night, never lying down, practicing diligently for twelve hours of the day, all you are doing is creating more karma.

"Even if you were to give away cities and states, wives and children, your hand, eyes, brain, elephants, houses, the seven precious gems, until you had no more, these offerings in the end will do no more than bring trouble to your body and mind. Their retribution will be one of suffering. Someone who makes offerings like this is not equal to the person who has nothing to do, and who knows how to be simple and unconfused. Even though a bodhisattva who has ascended the ten bodhisattva levels gives all his heart and mind to discovering the traces of someone who has nothing to do, he would not be able find him."

We tend to think that if we work hard now, we'll be wealthier later. But it's not wise to work hard today in order to be happy tomorrow. Our practice is to practice steadily, diligently, but joyfully, happily in every moment. Practicing shouldn't be hard labor.

Sacrificing ourselves now will only bring pain to our bodies and our minds. Master Linji's words refer to the Lotus Sutra: "Even if you were to give away cities and states, wives and children, your hands, eyes, brain, elephants, houses, the seven precious gems, until you had no more, these offerings in the end will do no more than bring trouble to your body and mind." He was saying that nonattachment is not about giving away things. It's about not doing anything. The businessless person does everything without leaving any mark. He lives in a joyful, relaxed way, achieving a lot without aiming for anything.

There's a Vietnamese poet who said, "If you're born as a human being, you must create some fame among these mountains and rivers." This is the more traditional view, that we have to strive to distinguish ourselves in some way. Master Linji was saying the opposite. If we cultivate the spirit of aimlessness, we will be fresh and free, like the rose. But if the rose wishes to become a lotus, she will no longer be happy. A rose doesn't need to become a lotus. A rose should just be a rose, and deeply manifest all her beauty and fragrance in the present moment.

One day the thirteenth-century Vietnamese Zen master Tue Trung was at a big meal where both vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes were served. When he served himself from one of the non-vegetarian dishes, his sister asked, "You're a Zen master, but you're eating non-vegetarian food. How can you become a Buddha?" He responded, "I don't need to become Buddha, and Buddha doesn't need to become me."

Master Linji taught, "The reason that such a person is praised by the gods and his feet are held aloft by the earth spirits and he is commended by the Buddhas of the Ten Directions, is what? Because people like that, in this very moment, are sitting listening to the Dharma and not leaving any trace of themselves behind."

Wherever such a person goes, she is praised by the gods and the earth welcomes her steps. Why? Because that person is free, dwelling deeply in the present moment, not caught in ideas of self, leaving no mark, and having no need for the recognition or praise of others. Even the greatest bodhisattva who has gone through all the stages on the way to enlightenment might not be able to track this person down. The businessless person may have realized a lot, but leaves behind no trace of his realization.

COMMENTARY 22

This teaching begins with a quote from the seventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra: "The Buddha of the Surpassing Understanding of Great Penetration sat for ten kalpas in the place of enlightenment and the Buddhadharma did not reveal itself to him and he was not able to realize the Buddha's path." A monk asked Master Linji, "What does this sentence mean?"

The master replied: "'Great Penetration' means that everywhere we are able to realize the truth that all phenomena are without self-nature or their own sign. 'Surpassing understanding' means wherever we are, we do not have a moment of doubt and nowhere do we see that we have realized any practice. 'Buddha' means the purity of the mind; the clear light of that purity understands thoroughly the Dharma realms. 'Sat for ten eons in the place of enlightenment' means the practice of the ten paramitas.* 'The Buddhadharma did not reveal itself to him' means that the Buddha is unborn, the Dharma is undying, so how can they reveal themselves to him? 'He was not able to realize the Buddha's path' means that Buddha does not need to become Buddha. The teachers of old say,

‘Buddha is always in the world but is not polluted by the phenomena of the world.’”

We have to ask ourselves, “What does it mean that we sit in the practice center doing sitting meditation for ten kalpas and still we cannot see the Buddhadharma?” The Buddha here is called Great Penetration because he can penetrate everywhere and leave no mark or sign. Even form is already a sign. Formless means we’re not caught by form. Practicing formlessness means we see the cloud in the snow and in the rain. No sign is equivalent to no-nature, which means without self-nature, that is, having come together from many causes and conditions.

Master Linji taught that if we wait for the Buddhadharma to present itself to us, we can wait for a long time and we won’t attain anything. If we expect something, we’ll look too hard, and we won’t obtain anything. A Buddha doesn’t expect to become Buddha. He just stops running, goes back to his body and mind unity, and touches life deeply. He doesn’t expect to become a Buddha. We may be Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or athiest, but if we can bring our minds back to the present moment and sit in freedom, free of all our attachments, then we are a Buddha. The Buddha ate mindfully to be happy, to enjoy his food, and to dwell in the present moment. He didn’t do it in order to become a Buddha. We are the same: we sit, we eat mindfully because we enjoy it, not to become a Buddha.

Master Linji quoted the sutra, Taisho 357 in the Chinese canon of the Tripitaka, when he said, “Buddha is always in the world but is not polluted by the phenomena of the world.” Sometimes the example of the lotus is used to illustrate this. The lotus grows from the mud but the lotus is very fragrant, very pure. The Buddha stays in the world but isn’t stained by the dust of the world.

If we’re a free person, we aren’t conditioned by things around us. We just smile to them and we make our path. Our surroundings are like a mirror. If we smile, the mirror smiles. If we cry, the mirror cries. If we’re angry, then the situation becomes angry. But even if the situation looks angry, if we’re able to smile, then the surroundings smile with us. So the surroundings are coming from our mind.

Master Linji taught, “When mind arises, the objects of mind arise. When the mind does not arise, the objects of mind do not arise. When thought does not arise, all the phenomena that are cannot harm us.

“As far as the mundane world and the supramundane world are concerned, there is no Buddha and no Dharma. They do not really exist in this moment and they will not cease to exist in the future. Whatever you talk of as really existing is just words, chapters, and phrases. All they are able to do is guide infants. Skillful means are devised as medicines to heal sickness. The display of words and phrases is part of these skillful means. It is you who are present here in this moment with your living perceptions of sight and hearing clear as a torch flame illuminating all around—you are the ones who display all the words and phrases.”

When mind doesn’t arise, nothing can arise, everything disappears. Outside in the world, there’s no Buddha, but there’s also no Dharma. In the world where we live, there are many hindrances and much bondage. In the world of bondage, there’s no Buddha and no Dharma, and in the world without bondage there’s no Buddha and no Dharma either. These sentences have the taste of the middle way teaching, which helps us to transcend the two extremes: existing and nonexisting. We said before that all the dharmas don’t really exist. To say they exist is not correct, but to say they don’t exist is also not correct.

Dharmas exist only as a result of many causes and conditions coming together. No Buddha means that there’s no Buddha outside of us. When people are caught in despair and hatred, it’s because they

have no understanding. Understanding is the light. Wherever understanding goes, the darkness disappears. There were ancient kings who demanded that when they died, their physicians and their wives be killed and buried with them. This was very cruel, but all this cruelty was because of ignorance. Such violence and cruelty would disappear right away if people understood that they didn't have a separate self. This corpse is dead, but our love, our care, our achievements continue in our children, in our friends, and in many people around us, and we are no longer dead. All our beauty continues to live.

There's a chapter in the Lotus Sutra in which it says that the Tathagata shed a huge light and in this light we can see a lotus with one thousand petals, and each petal has a bodhisattva who sits there. And everywhere in the air are a lot of lotuses. Do we think that's true? If we say, "Yes, all these things that were described in the Lotus Sutra exist," then we would be admonished by Master Linji.

The Mahayana sutras are full of magical beings and occurrences. There were people who wanted to inject magic into the Original sutras, the sutras taught by Shakyamuni while he was alive. The way they did this was by giving the Buddha superhuman powers. Perhaps they thought this would show how great the Buddha was. But I think it only distracts from his real greatness. For example, there's a story about how a drunk elephant tried to attack the Buddha. People who wanted to give the story a magical interpretation said the Buddha lifted up his hand and on each finger a lion appeared and made the elephant so afraid that it ran away. In my book, *Old Path White Clouds*, I tried to restore the truth and changed the story.* I said that when the drunk elephant was about to hit the Buddha, the Buddha remained very calm. He realized, "If I make the scream of the king of elephants it will help this elephant to be awakened and it won't be drunk anymore." So he screamed like the elephant king, and the elephant kneeled down. That isn't magical power, this is our calm, peaceful energy; it can work like magic.

Master Linji was cautioning us to not get caught up in the magic of the sutras. He said that all the words in the sutras were just written to guide little children. They are just a skillful means to help heal our illnesses, our suffering. But if we're caught by the writings and the words, we can't go far. You are here, present in this very moment. The radiance is in you, the clear mind is in you, and the light is in you.

COMMENTARY 23

The roots of this teaching on the five heinous crimes are in a chapter in the Vimalakirti Sutra. The five worst actions we can commit in this life are the crimes of killing our father, killing our mother, shedding the blood of a Buddha, destroying the harmony of the Sangha, and burning scriptures and images. Master Linji said we have to create the karma of the five heinous crimes before we can be liberated. These five crimes are the most terrible actions, and liberation is the most beautiful thing. So the teaching is that we have to hit the bottom of suffering in order to obtain the highest liberation.

The father that Master Linji said we should we kill is ignorance. The mother is coveting, greed. It's because of the father, ignorance, and the mother, covetousness, that we can't be liberated, so we have to kill that ignorance and craving. If we can stop even for a brief moment the discrimination between arising and extinguishing, then we can kill that ignorance. Ignorance has caused us a lot of suffering, so why not kill that ignorance? If we have a single thought in our mind that's free of craving, then we can kill that craving and covetousness.

Even if we're carried away by a stream of misery and cruelty, if we have a single thought of stopping discrimination and craving, this can be a safe boat for us. When we're carried away by our thoughts or actions, sometimes invoking the name of Manjushri, Samantabhadra, or Avalokiteshvara will focus our mind and free us. We can spend a whole day at work or a whole car trip in forgetfulness, but if we have just a single moment of concentration, we're already killing the father of forgetfulness and the mother of covetousness. We might have thought Master Linji was cruel, but this teaching is very compassionate.

At the end of the Satipatthana Sutta, the Sutra on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Buddha says that if we practice the four foundations of mindfulness, we will be liberated. Then he says, even if we practice for only seven days, we can be liberated. That is, if we diligently practice the four foundations of mindfulness and the sixteen exercises on breathing from the Anapanasati Sutra, the Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing, we will be liberated.* He goes on to say we don't even need seven days; we can practice three days and we will be liberated. Then he says, if we can't practice for three days, if we can practice only one night and one day, we will be liberated. Then, if we can't practice one night and one day, we can practice for just one hour, even one minute; one minute of mindfulness, and we can be liberated.

After killing the father of ignorance and the mother of craving, Master Linji said we should kill the Buddha. He taught, "As far as I am concerned, the idea we have of Buddha is like the latrine pit, and in that sense, bodhisattvas and arhats are just people who put you in chains. That is why there is the phenomenon of Manjushri bringing a sword to kill Gautama, and Angulimala coming with a knife to cut off the Shakyani's head."

"Gautama" (Siddhartha Gautama) is the birth name and "Shakya" the family name of the Buddha. The "Buddha" here is our attachment to discriminating thoughts. When we're caught in thoughts of discrimination, we can't see the real Buddha. We see that statue in clay or metal, and we're attached to that and we think it's the Buddha. We have to kill all our wrong perceptions about the Buddha in order to be in touch with the reality of the true Buddha. We can't kill a Buddha with a grenade or with guns; we can only kill the Buddha by means of the sword of great understanding.

In the Ratnakuta Sutra, the Treasury of Jewels Sutra, there is a passage about five hundred bodhisattvas who have practiced so well that they have reached the four states of meditation and have arrived at the five magical penetrations. However, these five hundred bodhisattvas are still blocked, caught by their perceptions, so they're unable to see their previous lives and get the deepest insight. Some are able to see their previous lives, and they know that in those lives they've killed their father and their mother, and have shed the blood of a Buddha. They're full of guilt complexes and feel they'll never be liberated. In the past we too have hurt the people we love. And because of our guilt complex, we feel we can't be liberated. We continue to hurt others and this feeds our guilt; this guilt is always with us on a deep level.

In the sutra, the Buddha looked deeply and saw that the guilt in the bodhisattvas had become an obstacle to their liberation. The Buddha looked at Manjushri Bodhisattva who knew this meant he had to use the sword of understanding. Manjushri took out his sword and brought it down near the Buddha. It looked like he was going to kill the Buddha. But it was only a playful gesture, a way to teach the five hundred bodhisattvas.

When Manjushri was about to use the sword, the Buddha said, "No, no, no, don't kill me yet. If you want to kill me, you have to learn the way to kill. You have to look deeply and see that there is no

self, no human being, no living being; only then can you kill the Buddha.” Only those who see beings as having a separate self, who see other people as different from themselves, only such people can kill. But if you see the principle of interdependence, that there is no self, no human being, no living being who is separate from humans and other living beings. So how can you can kill Buddha? With this demonstration, five hundred bodhisattvas could see that there was no Buddha, no living beings; it was only ignorance that had to be killed.

When Master Linji said we should kill our father, our mother, the Buddha, he wanted us to kill our wrong perception of our father, our mother, and the Buddha. If we hate our father, we have to kill that perception of a bad father in order to be in touch with the wonderful father. If we hate our mother, we have to kill our wrong perception of mother so we can have a chance to be in touch with the wonderful reality of our mother.

We see others as hurting us and being cruel to us. But there’s no such thing as a separate living being. We and the person we kill are not separate. So we can’t kill. We can only kill a wrong perception about him or her. The person we’re about to kill isn’t separate from us.

The story of Angulimala illustrates this very well. Angulimala was a murderer in the city of Shravasti. When there was news that Angulimala had appeared in the city, everybody was terrified. A group of fifty policemen went into the forest to look for him and none of them ever came back. The king, Pasenadi, mobilized the whole army with the hope of capturing Angulimala. The people of Shravasti had only the image of Angulimala as the killer. To them, Angulimala was a villain without the capacity to understand and to love. Everyone, except one person, agreed that if they met Angulimala, they had to destroy him. This one person believed that inside Angulimala, there were still good seeds. This person was the Buddha.

One morning the Buddha picked up his alms bowl and got ready to go into Shravasti to beg for food. A Buddhist practitioner invited the Buddha into his home saying, “World-Honored One, going on the almsround today is very dangerous, because Angulimala is in the city. Please stay here, and I’ll offer you food. You can rest in my house. I’ll keep listening for the news, and when I know it’s safe, I’ll let you know so you can to return to the Anathapandika Monastery.”

The Buddha replied: “Don’t worry. Nothing will happen. However, if I meet Angulimala, I also have ways to protect myself. Perhaps I can even help him.”

Angulimala had killed many people. Each time he killed someone, he cut a finger from the body, pierced a hole through it, and strung it on his “finger-necklace.” The word “mala” in “Angulimala” means “necklace.” It is said that on that morning his necklace had ninety-nine fingers and he wanted to kill one more person so it would have an even hundred.

The Buddha was walking, holding his alms bowl, making each step peacefully, when he heard heavy running steps behind him. He knew it was Angulimala pursuing him, but he continued to walk calmly.

Angulimala called out: “Monk, stop!” The Buddha continued to walk at the same relaxed pace. Upon seeing this, Angulimala raised his voice again: “Stop! Monk, stop!” The Buddha continued to walk in the same way.

Angulimala was confused. It had always been the case that when he raised his voice, people would be so terrified they’d become immobilized. Why was this monk so relaxed? How could he remain non-fearful?

Angulimala ran faster to catch up with this monk and see who he was, and how he dared to ignore

Angulimala's command. Within seconds, he'd caught up with the Buddha and said, "Why is it that when I tell you to stop, you don't stop?"

In his calm and gentle voice, the Buddha said, "Angulimala, I have stopped for a long time. It is you who have not stopped!"

Have we ever seen a more spectacular sword movement than the one the Buddha just made?

"What do you mean?" Angulimala asked the Buddha. "You are clearly walking, and you say that you have stopped. I don't understand. Explain it to me."

The Buddha calmly replied, "Angulimala, on the path of creating unwholesome actions, I have stopped for many lifetimes. However, on the path of creating unwholesome actions, you are still continuing. You should stop."

That statement shook Angulimala to the core. The Buddha stopped walking. Angulimala also stopped. They looked at each other. The Buddha looked directly at Angulimala and said, "Do you know, everyone is afraid of suffering. Everyone wants to live and fears to die. We have to know how to love others."

Angulimala yelled out, "No one loves me in this life. Why do I have to love them? The human race is most evil. I want to destroy the whole human race to satisfy my anger."

The Buddha said, "Angulimala, I know that you've suffered very much. Life has mistreated you. People have been unkind to you. However, you should know that hatred only causes us further suffering. Only love can bring happiness to life."

Angulimala screamed, "Love? Who is the one that can love? Show me!" The Buddha remained compassionate, "Have you ever met a bhikshu or a *bhikshuni*? These monks and nuns not only respect the lives of human beings, but they also respect the lives of all other animals and plants and minerals. If you meet a bhikshu or a bhikshuni, you would realize that love is something real. When there is love in our hearts, we will not suffer anymore. Hatred is a fire that burns us and this world. Turn around. Leave violence, and come back to the path of understanding and love."

The Buddha's words were full of compassion, generated from his heart. Angulimala was an intelligent person, but he had been buried by his hatred. Meeting a person like the Buddha and listening to his words, the seed of understanding in Angulimala was watered. He said, "I've heard about a lovely monk called Gautama. Are you Gautama?"

The Buddha replied, "Yes, I am Gautama."

Angulimala said, "Gautama, it is too late now. Even if I wanted to repent, even if I wanted to leave the path of violence and hatred and follow the path of love, it would be too late anyway. I have no way out, because I have committed too many crimes."

The Buddha was quiet. Then he said, "Angulimala, if you truly want to transform and leave the path of violence, I'll protect you. If you want, I'll accept you into my monastic community. You'll become a monk. You'll practice loving kindness and compassion, and you'll become a new person. You will start your life anew."

Upon hearing the Buddha's words, Angulimala threw his sword to the ground, knelt down, and joined his palms to request to be the Buddha's disciple. At that time, the Venerable Shariputra and others were just walking up to the scene. Seeing that the Buddha was standing there without injury, and Angulimala was kneeling at his feet, the monks were very happy.

The Buddha asked them, "Venerable Shariputra, Venerable Ananda, do you have an extra monk's robe with you? Let us perform an ordination ceremony for Angulimala right here."

The Buddha and his disciples encircled Angulimala and shaved his hair. They put his robes on. The Buddha instructed the Venerable Shariputra and others to take Angulimala back to the monastery and teach the new monk how to hold his alms bowl, how to sit, how to stand, how to walk, and how to breathe mindfully.

Angulimala and the Buddha had engaged in a spectacular sword duel. Angulimala had the sword of violence and hatred. The Buddha had the sword of wisdom and compassion. We see which sword triumphed.

When we stick onto someone the label of “killer,” then we can point the gun and shoot that person without hesitation. However, if we can still see that this is a person, we can never pull the trigger. In order to kill someone, we have to talk ourselves into believing that there is no goodness left in this person. The Buddha’s sword, first of all, is to cut off this view.

During the Vietnam War, I was part of something called the School of Youth for Social Service, training young monastics and laymen and laywomen to do social work. In the School of Youth for Social Service we had the view that all Vietnamese people are brothers and sisters. The aim of the school was to cultivate love and compassion, to accept and to embrace both sides. However, in the situation of war, we met a lot of difficulties. Because if we didn’t follow one side, they would suspect that we were following the other side. The anticommunist side suspected that we followed the communists. The communist side suspected that we followed the anticommunists. There were many people, including many young men and young women, killed because of that view.

One night, a group of people with weapons came to the camp of five of our students who were doing social work in a nearby village. They took the five social workers to the shore of the Saigon River and asked them if they were from the School of Youth for Social Service. When the students said, “Yes,” one of the armed people said, “We’re sorry! We have orders to shoot you.” And they shot all five people on the riverbank. Only one survived to tell this story. These young men and women had pure hearts. They left behind a life of material comforts to go to train to go into poor neighborhoods and villages to help the people and the nation. Why were they ruthlessly killed?

We must use the sword of understanding to put an end to the images, views, notions, and labels—whether these labels are Buddha, Mara, Christ, or Satan. All of these labels have to be cut off. In the name of Jesus Christ, people have destroyed and killed. In the name of Buddha, people can also destroy and kill. If Buddha and Christ are only our own views of them, then they can be something much more harmful than the latrine pit. A latrine is something useful, but our views can bring us to fanaticism. They can destroy human beings. They can destroy love.

The story of Angulimala shows that if we change direction, and go in the direction of understanding and love, this world will have hope. After the ordination, Angulimala became a great monk, practicing diligently and transforming very quickly. Thus, his fellow practitioners gave him a new name, “Ahimsaka,” meaning “nonviolence.”

One day Ahimsaka came back from his almsround crying. He approached the Buddha, and the Buddha asked, “Why are you crying?” Ahimsaka replied, “Respected teacher, on my way begging for food, I met a woman in labor. She was in such great pain and distress, she couldn’t give birth to her child. She asked me to bring my heart of loving kindness and compassion to pray for her, but I didn’t know how to do this effectively. I saw someone about to die and I couldn’t do anything for her, so I’m suffering tremendously.”

The Buddha said, “Venerable Ahimsaka, you go back to that woman and say to her: ‘Since I was

born until now, I've never harmed anyone. Thanks to this merit, you can give birth to your child safely.” The monk Ahimsaka cried out, “World-Honored One, I can't say that! Since I was born, I have killed many people.” The Buddha said, “No! I'm not talking about the birth of your physical body. Go and tell the woman that since the day I was born into the right Dharma until now, I've never harmed any living thing, even a worm or an ant. In the name of this merit, I wish that you give birth to your child safely.” As soon as the Buddha finished his sentence, Ahimsaka ran back to the woman and said this to her. She gave birth to her child with ease.

Another day, Ahimsaka came crawling back to the monastery from his almsround beaten and bloody. Someone had recognized him as the infamous Angulimala, and he had used a cane to beat him mercilessly. Ahimsaka was practicing nonviolence, so he didn't fight back. Many parts of his body were swollen and bleeding. The Buddha saw Ahimsaka in that state and asked some monks to carry him into the hut and tended his wounds. While the monks were using salt water to wash Angulimala's wounds and bandaging them, the Buddha said, “Try to bear it, my child. This is the final fruit from your past action that you have to endure, before you become an arhat.”

When we change direction, we're born again for the second time. We have to allow Angulimala a chance to be born a second time. We have to be soldiers, capable of using the powerful sword of understanding to sever all the illusions and wrong perceptions that we have. Let us destroy and remove all the labels that we want to attach to each other in order to destroy each other.

When Master Linji urged us to kill the Sangha, he meant our attachment to our idea that there's something on which we can depend. Klesha means afflictions. Samyojana means internal knot. Such a knot develops over time. When we feel hurt, if we don't know how to practice with it and let it go, a little knot begins to form in our store consciousness. Then when we're hurt the second and third time, the knot gets bigger. That big knot has the ability to push us to act and speak in ways that cause a lot of damage. It pushes us to behave in strange ways, violent ways, and we make others and ourselves suffer. If we have many knots in our store consciousness, we will always behave in unskillful ways, because we can't be in control of our behavior.

One day our brother might say something to hurt us, creating a knot of hurt that we keep in our store consciousness. Another day our sister hurts us, and a second knot is added to the first. Each time we get hurt, the knot of hurt and anger grows. And one day when somebody says just one little thing, we shout back at them in a violent way.

When we practice mindfulness, we have to be aware every time we are hurt. We have to look deeply in order to understand and let it go. When we look deeply into one little hurt, we understand, and we release. We can release it on our own, or we can come to the other person and kindly explain how we feel or ask them why they said what they did. In this way, we can undo all the knots.

A knot may be made of doubt or hurt. But besides the knots of suffering, there are also knots that are sweet. When somebody says something nice to us, we feel happy. We become attached to them saying this nice thing. Falling in love is also a sweet internal formation. A negative internal formation makes us suffer, and a sweet internal formation makes us lose our liberty; they are both internal knots. All these knots push us to behave in strange and unexpected ways. But if we have one second of freedom from all these knots, we'll feel free and we can destroy the Sangha of afflictions. Our internal knots and dependency are like a “gang” that we have to destroy.

Master Linji taught that we also have to kill our ideas and misperceptions about scriptures and sacred images. We can invoke the name of the Buddha or chant lines from the Lotus Sutra for our

whole life, but if we aren't open-minded, we'll never touch the lotus in ourselves. We can say the name of the Buddha, *Namo Buddhaya*, but we aren't touching the Buddha in us at all.

A long time ago I read a story in a magazine about a woman who invoked the name of the Buddha very diligently every day, yet she was still very cruel and verbally abusive to all the neighbors. Once when she lost a chicken, she climbed up on the roof of her house to shout at people. She said, "I've lost a chicken; are you responsible for that?" Yet she recited the name of the Buddha every day. So one day at the time when she was about to chant, a man stood in front of her house and called her name. She answered, saying, "It's time for me to chant." Then she invited the bell very loudly as if to say, "I'm inviting the bell, I'm practicing Buddhism, I'm chanting." But he pretended not to hear and he called her name again. Again she invited the bell very loudly as if to say, "Don't disturb me, I'm recollecting the name of the Buddha, I'm doing spiritual practice." And then she continued to chant.

The neighbor called her name more and more loudly until finally she threw down the bell, came out to her gate and said, "You! What are you doing? You are destroying my serenity." And he said, "I only called your name forty or fifty times, and you're so angry. But you've called the name of the Buddha thousands of times, so he must be very angry." It's fine to invoke the name of the Buddha, but don't be caught by rites and rituals.

We're used to seeing the open hand or the finger pointing to the moon and thinking that this is the truth. But we only follow the finger in order to see the truth, the moon. We imagine the teachings are something so deep and mysterious, and we say, "Oh, the teachings are so wonderful, and I am nothing, I have no value at all."

"Bald-headed fools!" Master Linji scolded the monks. We say that we are disciples of the Buddha, but we utter unkind words, the words of the jackal. We are a lion, a liberated person, but we utter the words of someone who feels he has no value at all. We follow whatever spiritual teacher crosses our path. We are like a goat, eating everything. Don't mistake words for the truth. Master Linji said that his teachings are like a painting in empty space. It may be colorful but it's temporary; don't bring it home to worship.

Master Linji taught, "Friends, Buddha isn't something you can grasp, nor are the teachings of the Three Vehicles, the five natures, sudden enlightenment, complete enlightenment, the historical and the ultimate dimensions. They are all nothing but medicines and diseases that arise together and are used as antidotes to each other. They aren't real objects that truly exist. Even if there were something real, it would only be a trap that appeared to be real, a temporary manifestation, the form of a contract for the public to use for the time being. It is only a matter of words."

The Three Vehicles, the five natures, sudden enlightenment are only a means, the medicines to help us to heal. If there's no sickness, we don't need medicine. If we have no disease but we take the medicine, we may become ill. So when somebody proposes some teaching, we have to see whether or not it's the one we need. Suffering has thousands of faces. And the teaching has thousands of doors. We don't need to kneel down and try and go through all 84,000 doors ourselves. Each door is there to help us, but we have to be intelligent and choose the door that can help us. Master Linji offered us so many ways to wake up. One of them may be just the way we need.

* The Twelve Divisions of the teachings are listed on page 155.

* Mental formations (*cittasamskara*) are the manifestations and processes of the mind. They are the contents of the mind as well as the mind itself.

* In paintings and statues this bodhisattva is often depicted as having many arms, symbolizing the many forms of action the bodhisattva is

capable of taking. In the palm of each hand is an eye, which means that there is wisdom behind each action of the bodhisattva. The eye sees and understands the situation so the bodhisattva knows what skillful means are appropriate to use. In some depictions, each hand holds a different tool.

* Tathagata means one who comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. It's a name the Buddha used when referring to himself.

* From the Anuradha Sutra (Samyutta Nikaya 22.86). See Thich Nhat Hanh, *Chanting from the Heart* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2006), 289.

* Bodhidharma (470–543) was the First Patriarch of Zen Buddhism in China. He had been a monk in southern India and came to China in the first half of the sixth century.

* The Venerable Manh Giac was a student monk in Hue at the same time as the author. He was the author of many Zen poems. He later came to the U.S. where he led the congregation of the Vietnamese Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles. He passed away in early 2007.

* Mara is the tempter, the Evil One, the killer, the opposite of the Buddha nature in each person; sometimes personalized as a deity. Mara is the obstacles to our practice that arise in our own minds.

* Hungry ghosts (*preta*) are restless wandering spirits, beings without faith or belief who ceaselessly crave without satisfaction.

* The English word “meditation” is a translation of the Sanskrit *dhyana* (Japanese *zen*, from Chinese *ch'an*). The Meditation school emerged in China in the seventh century and emphasized meditation as the practice that leads to enlightenment.

* Sukhavati, the Land of Great Happiness, lies in the west and is the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha who has taken a vow to save all beings. Vairocana is the Buddha of the ultimate dimension, the personification of the Dharmakaya, the true and ultimate reality.

* Master Van Hanh was national teacher and advisor to Ly Thai To, the first king of the Ly dynasty (1010–1225).

* A. A. Milne, *The World of Pooh* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1957). chapter 3.

* From the poem “The Dahlia” by the Vietnamese poet Vu Hoang Chuong.

* The six paramitas are the practices of perfection cultivated by the bodhisattvas. They are: *dana* (generosity), *shila* (precepts), *kshanti* (forbearance, inclusiveness), *virya* (energy), *dhyana* (meditation), *prajña* (understanding).

* *Mahaparinirvana* refers to the death of the Buddha in his earthly form.

* Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Sun My Heart* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1988, 2010).

** For sutra and commentaries see Thich Nhat Hanh, *Transformation and Healing* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1990, 2006).

* A Discussion for the Demonstration of Action, in Stefan Anacker, *Seven Works of Vasubandhu* (Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984).

* Thich Nhat Hanh, *Lotus in a Sea of Fire* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1967).

* The ten paramitas are the six (see page 179) plus *upaya* (skillful means), *pranidhana* (aspiration), *bala* (spiritual power), and *jñana* (wisdom).

* Thich Nhat Hanh, *Old Path White Clouds* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1991).

* For sutra and commentaries, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *Breathe, You Are Alive!* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1996, 2008).

CHAPTER FIVE



PRACTICES BASED ON THE RECORD OF MASTER LINJI

Master Linji taught that each one of us has a bright and shining mind. If we can find our way back to that bright mind, then we can be as the Buddha and the bodhisattvas are. When our shining mind is dulled, that means it's covered by afflictions. With the practice of mindfulness we can restore our bright mind. Our mind is a garden, and our garden has been ignored for a long time. The soil is hard, and brambles and wild grasses are growing everywhere. To practice is to come back and care for our garden. We are the gardener, our mind is the earth, and in the soil there are good seeds.

When we want to train a wild horse to pull a cart or carry a rider, one method we use is to put a rope around its neck so we can hold the horse. The horse will struggle, but it can't get free. Slowly, the horse calms down and we can train it to become useful. Our mind is the same way. Our mind is the wild horse and the practice of mindfulness is the reins that hold it so it can be tamed gradually and we can master it. We have many methods for grasping and holding on to the mind. The first method is mindful breathing—mindfulness of the in-breath and the out-breath. There's also the practice of mindful walking in which we maintain awareness of the breath and the steps. If we practice for a few weeks, we'll see the situation change. We have to practice continuously and not just superficially. It can't be done half-heartedly. We have to be determined to grasp our mind. A period of continuous diligent practice will surely lead to transformation.

If we don't return to the mind, take hold and master it, we cause suffering to ourselves and those around us. Mastering our mind brings great benefit and happiness. To master the mind, we first of all have to grasp the body. The body and the mind go together. The breath belongs to the body, just as the two feet and legs belong to the body. If we can grasp the breath and be in touch with the breath and the steps, then we'll slowly get hold of the mind. The mind contains the body and the body contains the mind. Don't think this practice takes too much time. We can practice in all our daily activities. When we drive to the market, cook a meal, or wash the dishes, we can practice getting hold of the mind.

Using *gathas* in our practice makes it easy and enjoyable. Gathas are Zen poems that we can memorize and recite silently to ourselves as we practice mindfulness of breathing. Gathas are simple and can be used to accompany any activity.

Taking Refuge in the Island of Self

*Breathing in, I go back
to the island of myself.
There are beautiful trees,
there is water, there are birds.
There is sunshine and fresh air.
Breathing out, I feel safe.*

This is a wonderful gatha. We can use it when our mind is confused, when we don't know the right thing to do, when we're in a dangerous situation or beginning to panic. When we come back to the breath, breathe mindfully, and recite this gatha, our mind will be calmed immediately. Once we feel stable, we'll be able to see clearly what we should and should not do in order to improve the

situation.

Coming back to take refuge in the island of self is the teaching the Buddha gave when he was eighty years old.* He knew that after he entered nirvana there would be many disciples, both monastic and lay, who would feel lonely and that they'd lost their place of refuge. So he taught that inside us there's an island where we can take refuge. When we feel lost, lonely, sad, hesitant, and in despair, when we don't know what the correct thing to do is, we can come back to that island and have safety. That island is our stable mind. That island is not a place outside us. One breath can bring us back to that island immediately. In each person there are the seeds of stability, freedom, and non-fear. It's these seeds that make a place of refuge for us and protect us. When we take refuge in our island, we're taking refuge in something real, not in some abstract idea or a vague notion about the future. We can use this gatha when we do sitting meditation or walking meditation. Whether we're sitting, standing, walking, or lying down, we can practice coming back to take refuge. Breathing in, we can say, "coming back to take refuge." Breathing out we can say, "in the island of myself." We can say,

*Coming back to take refuge
in the island of myself.*

Or we can say:

*Coming back,
taking refuge.
The island
of myself.*

Breathing In, Breathing Out

*Breathing in, breathing out,
I am blooming as a flower.
I am fresh as the dew.
I am solid as the mountain.
I am firm as the earth.
I am water reflecting
what is real, what is true.
I am space, I am free.*

*Buddha is my mindfulness
shining near, shining far.
Dharma is my breathing
guarding body and mind.
Sangha is my skandhas,
working in harmony.
Taking refuge in myself,
coming back to myself,*

I am free.

This is another gatha for taking refuge. When we come back to our island, what will we meet? First, we will meet the Buddha—“mindfulness is the Buddha, shining near and far.” Buddha is neither outside of us nor something abstract. Buddha is mindfulness. Outside of mindfulness, we can't have the Buddha. When someone breathes in and out with awareness, they give rise to the energy of mindfulness. Without the substance of mindfulness, the Buddha cannot be called Buddha; therefore mindfulness is the Buddha. So when we come back to our island, we will meet the Buddha immediately. We breathe in and know that we're breathing in. We take a step and we know that we're taking a step. Mindfulness is the light. When we drink water and we know we're drinking water, that's the light. When we drink water without knowing we're drinking water, that's darkness. Mindfulness means to recognize what's happening, and that recognition is the shining light. When there's light shining, we aren't afraid anymore.

“Dharma is my breathing, guarding body and mind.” When a person breathes in with awareness and breathes out with awareness, this is called mindfulness of breathing. This isn't our usual way of breathing. Every day, all of us breathe in and breathe out without stopping. But that isn't the Dharma. When we breathe in and know that we're breathing in, when we breathe out and know that we're breathing out, that is the Dharma. This isn't the spoken or written Dharma, but the true living Dharma. The living Buddha is mindfulness and the living Dharma is mindfulness of breathing. When there's mindfulness of breathing, this living Dharma can protect our body and mind. When we're frightened, startled, when we've received bad news, when we're about to go crazy, then we come back to the breath and practice this gatha. We breathe in and breathe out with mindfulness. Then that in-breath and out-breath will bring us into a state of safety.

“Sangha is my skandhas working in harmony.” The five skandhas are the members of the Sangha in our body. When we practice mindfulness of breathing, the breath begins to regulate and harmonize our five skandhas by recognizing and embracing the body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. Our skandhas may be dispersed, opposed to one another, or in chaos. With mindful breathing, the living Dharma, the five skandhas begin to come together in a harmonious rhythm, a harmonious state. In just five or ten minutes, that harmony will bring about peace and stability of the body and the mind. We come back to take refuge in the Three Jewels and use their strength to protect us. The Three Jewels are not only Buddhist, they're universal. They aren't objects of worship or devotion, but real energies. In one of his previous lives, when the Buddha was still looking for the Path, he met a demon who said, “I know a gatha about the true Dharma, but I'll only read it to you if you agree to let me eat you afterward.” And the body of the previous life of the Buddha said, “Yes, if you tell me that right Dharma, then I will allow you to eat me.” And it was this gatha on taking refuge that the Buddha learned. So this gatha is worth us exchanging our life to hear it.

This gatha is valuable in all situations. No matter how difficult, chaotic, upside-down the situation is, if we know how to come back to the breath and practice this gatha, then we'll have security. But we don't have to wait until there's a real difficulty to use this gatha; we can use it at any time during the day. We can practice this gatha while we're eating; we can chew with the rhythm of this gatha. If we chew for the entire length of the gatha, the food will become very soft in our mouth, and it will be easily digested. Instead of talking about this and that while we eat, thinking about this or that person's business, thinking about this or that place, we just dwell in this gatha while we eat. I

have eaten so many times with this gatha. It's very enjoyable.

We can also enjoy using this gatha for walking meditation. In walking meditation, we slow down and become mindful of each step. When we walk alone we can do very slow walking meditation. How slowly? That depends on us, but there must be enough time in each step for us to live deeply, thoroughly. In each step we see that we have returned, that we have come back, that we are taking refuge, that we are truly on our own island, and that we are deeply in touch with reality. Until we're in touch with this inside, we won't lift up the other leg. It's like when we press a seal onto a piece of paper. We press it down firmly, strongly, at all angles, so the ink can imprint on the paper properly, completely; then we lift the seal. Our steps are the same way. When we aren't completely with the present moment, our walking has the characteristic of being chased by a ghost. When we do walking meditation by ourselves, we have the opportunity to walk as slowly as we want so we can properly imprint our seal. When we walk together with the Sangha, we might walk at a more ordinary pace.

We can use the words "now" and "here" as meditation words. We take a step and say "now." We don't just say the word. We have to be in touch with the now, and then we can take another step and say "here," like the seal imprinting itself on the paper. Only when we're satisfied do we take another step. And if we're unable to be in touch with it, then we just let it be like that until we can be in touch. Only when we're able to be truly in touch, deeply and stably, do we take the next step. During those steps, our mind is completely under our observation. The rope of the mind is tied properly, but it's very pleasant. We can walk alone in an oak grove or along a busy street. We can practice all we want. With each step like that, we step into reality and not a dream.

In, Out, Deep, Slow

In,

Out,

Deep,

Slow,

Calm,

Ease,

Smile,

Release.

Present moment,

Wonderful moment.

This gatha is also valuable for holding the mind. This is a very simple gatha that we can practice at any time in the day, in sitting as well as walking meditation. "In, out" means "Breathing in, I know that I'm breathing in. Breathing out, I know that I'm breathing out." "In, out" is just a short way of saying it. When we breathe in, we know that the in-breath is happening; our mind doesn't think about other things; our mind holds on to the breath. Holding on to the breath, grasping the breath, means having control over the mind. The mind doesn't run anymore. The mindful breath is a rope that holds on to the mind, and by practicing this one line we can take hold of the mind. "Breathing in, here is my in-breath." We recognize the in-breath as the in-breath. When I'm breathing in, I know that I'm breathing in and when I'm breathing out, I know that I'm breathing out.

This gatha is based on the first four exercises taught by the Buddha in the Anapansati Sutra, the Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing. “Deep, Slow” means “the in-breath has become deep, the out-breath has become slow.” If we practice awareness of our in- and out-breath for one or two minutes, then we’ve already succeeded, and naturally the in-breath will have become deeper and the out-breath will have become slower. It’s not that I am breathing in and trying to make my in-breath become deeper—this is something we should never force. Before we practice, the in-breath and the out-breath are short and shallow. But when we practice even for half a minute or a minute, then the in-breath becomes lighter, deeper, calmer, slower, and there begins to be space and calm in the body and the mind. When there’s calmness and lightness in the breath then there will also be lightness, calmness in the body and in the mind. The breath is the medium connecting the body and the mind. Breathing in, I feel a sense of well-being.

“Breathing in, my mind is calmed. Breathing out, I feel at ease. Breathing in, I smile. Breathing out, I release. Dwelling in the present moment, I know it is a wonderful moment.” We have only one moment to live, and that is the present moment. If we come back to the present moment we’ll be in contact with innumerable wonders in us and around us. I guarantee that after a few weeks of practicing this gatha, you’ll see a transformation.

When we have a strong feeling, we can practice this gatha and the feeling will be calmed; this is called calming the mind. Practicing this gatha will bring about relaxation of the body and the mind. The mind can’t be relaxed if the body isn’t relaxed and vice versa. This gatha can be practiced in any position—when we’re sitting, standing, lying down, or walking. This gatha is no less valuable than a koan. It’s worth more than a thousand blocks of gold.

We can use this gatha with walking meditation. In walking meditation, we match the steps to the breath. If, for example, we’re taking three steps during each in-breath, we say, “In, in, in.” And if for each out-breath we’re taking three steps, we say, “Out, out, out.” After we’ve practiced with “In, Out” for some time, we go on to “Deep, deep, deep,” “Slow, slow, slow.” We have to truly experience the “In, Out” and the “Deep, Slow.” We breathe with our two feet.

Of course it’s possible not to use any gatha at all and we can still step into reality and dwell in mindfulness in each step. But when our mind is still a wild horse, we need to use a rope to pull the mind back. But the rope is very pleasant. When a horse is already trained, we don’t need to use the rope anymore. When we have practiced well, each step becomes a seal on the land of peace and freedom. With each step, we dwell in mindfulness, and we leave the seal of our peace and happiness on the land.

Here Is the Pure Land

*Here is the Pure Land,
The Pure Land is here.
I smile in mindfulness
and dwell in the present moment.
Buddha is the autumn leaf,
Dharma is the floating cloud,
Sangha is everywhere,
My true home is here.
Breathing in, the flowers bloom.*

*Breathing out, the bamboo sways.
My mind is free.
I enjoy every moment.*

This gatha is good to use with walking meditation when you are taking four steps for each in-breath and four steps for each out-breath. This gatha can bring us a lot of happiness.

If in the present moment we can't be in touch with the Pure Land, then we can't hope that in the future there will be a Pure Land. If we can be in touch with the Pure Land in the present moment, then with certainty there will be the Pure Land in the future. The wonders that we come back to be in touch with in the present moment, all of them belong to the Pure Land. Our own body belongs to the Pure Land; it is something wonderful, miraculous like the Pure Land. The Pure Land isn't something that's outside of our body and mind. How and what do you use to step into the Pure Land? Mindfulness, because mindfulness dispels oblivion. It dispels chaos and it brings about wisdom and understanding. Understanding and wisdom allow us to have insight and to know that in the present moment we're living a wonderful moment in the Pure Land that's in and around us.

"I smile in mindfulness and dwell in the present moment." This isn't a social or coquettish smile, but it's a smile of mindfulness. Why do we smile? Because life is so wonderful. There needs to be only one light breath, and all the miracles manifest. The birds are singing, the pines are singing, the flowers are blooming; the blue sky and the white clouds are all there. Living like this is truly the art of living, and we can do it now.

Right now we can be in touch with the Three Jewels. Practicing this gatha is also taking refuge. The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are inside us and everywhere around us, in the leaves and the clouds. The Sangha isn't just human beings, but also the trees, the birds, the stream. Our true home is the present moment, right here and right now. We don't need to look for happiness anywhere else. The swaying bamboo and the flowers blooming are all the wonders of life. Breathing in and out like this, our mind is free, not attached, not in bondage to anything.

We can use this gatha when we eat. We don't seek a Pure Land and happiness somewhere else. We have the chance to sit and eat in mindfulness. We're also eating with the Buddha and the original Sangha. They're not in the past; they're present with us right now. The Buddha is mindfulness, so there is no moment that we cannot spend with the Buddha.

I Have Arrived, I Am Home

*I have arrived,
I am home
In the here,
In the now.
I am solid,
I am free.
In the ultimate
I dwell.*

When we practice this gatha, happiness can be there right away. If we don't have happiness, it's

because we haven't succeeded in arriving and coming home. Once we have arrived, once we've come home, then we're successful, and we have happiness right away. To be solid and free means we have stability and we're not pulled away by the past or the future; we have freedom. Stability and freedom are the two characteristics of happiness and of nirvana. Coming back to take refuge means coming back to the present moment and taking refuge in the island of self. This island is our mindfulness, our breathing, and our steps. Mindfulness of our breath and our steps is something very concrete that we can take refuge in.

Please write these eight words and hang them somewhere you will see them: "Wherever you are, you are your true person." You can write them on a small piece of paper, the size of a credit card, that you put in your wallet to take out as a reminder. If you can practice these eight words, you are worthy of being Master Linji's student and his continuation. Master Linji taught us that we have to use our bright shining mind to come back to the present moment and enter the world of the ultimate, the realm of the Buddha, the Pure Land. With mindful breathing, mindful walking, and these gathas to help us come back to our true self, we can be the businessless person with nothing to do but hold the hand of the Buddha and roam.

* The Discourse on Taking Refuge in Oneself, in Thich Nhat Hanh *Chanting from the Heart* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2007).



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