

THE ZEN (CH'AN) SCHOOL

Fundamentally perfect wisdom has no tree.
Nor has the bright mirror any stand.
Buddha-nature is forever clear and pure.
Where is there any dust?

Another verse, which says:

The mind is the tree of perfect wisdom.
The body is the stand of a bright mirror.
The bright mirror is originally clear and pure.
Where has it been defiled by any dust?

Monks in the hall were all surprised at these verses. I, however, went back to the rice-pounding area. The Fifth Patriarch suddenly realized that I alone had the good knowledge and understanding of the basic idea, but he was afraid lest the rest learn it. He therefore told them, "He does not understand perfectly after all."

9. The Fifth Patriarch waited till midnight, called me to come to the hall, and expounded the *Diamond Scripture*. As soon as I heard this, I understood. That night the Law was imparted to me without anyone's knowing it, and thus the method of sudden enlightenment and the robe were transmitted to me. "You are now the Sixth Patriarch. This robe is the testimony of transmission from generation to generation. As to the Law, it is to be transmitted from mind to mind. Let people achieve enlightenment through their own effort."

The Fifth Patriarch said, "Hui-neng, from the very beginning, in the transmission of the Law one's life is as delicate as hanging by a thread. If you remain here, someone might harm you. You must leave quickly."

Comment. The praise of the *Diamond Scripture* may conflict with the doctrine of total rejection of literature enunciated below. The important point, however, is that before Hui-neng, the most important scripture in Zen was the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra* (Scripture about [the Buddha] Entering into Laṅka).²³ Hui-neng praised the *Diamond Scripture* instead. This in itself was a revolt.

12. Then I came and stayed in this place (the Canton region) and associated with government officials, disciples who have renounced their families, and lay folk. This, after all, was due to causes operating over many long periods of time. The doctrine has been handed down from past sages; it is not my own wisdom. Those who wish to hear the teachings of past sages must purify their hearts. Having heard them, they

²³ English translation by Suzuki, *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. Laṅka is an island south of India, popularly identified with Ceylon.

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must vow to rid themselves of delusions and thereby to become enlightened as²⁴ the former sages. (This is the method described below.)²⁵

Great Master Hui-neng declared, "Good and learned friends, perfect wisdom is inherent in all people. It is only because they are deluded in their minds that they cannot attain enlightenment by themselves. They must seek the help of good and learned friends of high standing to show them the way to see [their own] nature. Good and learned friends, as soon as one is enlightened, he attains wisdom."

13. "Good and learned friends, calmness (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) are the foundations of my method.²⁶ First of all, do not be deceived into thinking that the two are different. They are one substance and not two. Calmness is the substance of wisdom and wisdom is the function of calmness. Whenever wisdom is at work, calmness is within it. Whenever calmness is at work, wisdom is within it. Good and learned friends, the meaning here is that [calmness and] wisdom are identified. Seekers of the Way, arouse your minds. Do not say that wisdom follows²⁷ calmness or vice versa, or that the two are different. To hold such a view [would imply that] the dharmas (elements of existence) possess two different characters. In the case of those whose words are good but whose hearts are not good, wisdom and calmness are not identified. But in the case of those whose hearts and words are both good and in whom the internal and the external are one, calmness and wisdom are identified. Self-enlightenment and practice do not consist in argument. If one is concerned about which comes first, he is a [deluded]²⁸ person. If he is not freed from the consideration of victory or defeat, he will produce the dharmas as real entities²⁹ and cannot be free from the Four Characters [of coming into existence, remaining in the same state, change, and going out of existence]."

Comment. This spirit of synthesis is characteristic of the Southern School. We have already seen this synthetic character of the mind in Hua-yen and T'ien-t'ai. In fact, this goes back to early Taoism and Neo-Taoism, and it is no wonder that Zen writers employed many Taoist and Neo-Taoist terms, such as "substance" and "function" and "original substance." Shen-hui as a youth studied the *Lao Tzu* and *Chuang Tzu*.

²⁴ Read *yü* (in) as *ju* (as). The popular (Ming Canon) version, sec. 2, has *ju*.
²⁵ Original note in the text.

²⁶ This is *fa-men* in Chinese. See above, ch. 24, n.13.

²⁷ Read *fa* (start) as *hou* (afterward).

²⁸ Insertion following Suzuki and Kudo. See n.17.

²⁹ The popular version, sec. 4, has "self dharma," that is, the dharma of self, instead of dharma-self, or dharmas and the self. In this case the four characters become those of a self, a human being, a being among men, and a being with a definite span of life.

16. "Good and learned friends, in method there is no distinction between sudden enlightenment and gradual enlightenment. Among men, however, some are intelligent and others are stupid. Those who are deluded understand gradually, while the enlightened achieve understanding suddenly. But when they know their own minds, then they see their own nature, and there is no difference in their enlightenment. Without enlightenment, they remain forever bound in transmigration."

17. "Good and learned friends, in this method of mine, from the very beginning, whether in the sudden-enlightenment or gradual-enlightenment tradition, absence-of-thought has been instituted as the main doctrine, absence-of-characters as the substance, and nonattachment as the foundation. What is meant by absence-of-characters? Absence-of-characters means to be free from characters while in the midst of them. Absence-of-thought means not to be carried away by thought in the process of thought. Nonattachment is man's original nature. Thought after thought goes on without remaining. Past, present, and future thoughts continue without termination. But if we cut off and terminate thought one instant, the dharma-body (Law-body or spiritual body)³⁰ is freed from the physical body. At no time should a single instant of thought be attached to any dharma. If one single instant of thought is attached to anything, then every thought will be attached. That is bondage. But if in regard to dharmas no thought is attached to anything, that is freedom. [This is] the meaning of having nonattachment as the foundation.

"Good and learned friends, to be free from all characters means the absence of characters. Only if we can be free from characters will the substance of our nature be pure. That is the meaning of taking the absence-of-character as the substance.

"Absence-of-thought means not to be defiled by external objects.³¹ It is to free our thoughts from external objects and not to have thoughts arise over dharmas. But do not³² stop thinking about everything and eliminate all thought. As soon as thought stops, one dies³³ and is reborn elsewhere. Take heed of this, followers of the Way. If³⁴ one does not think³⁵ over the meaning of the Law and becomes mistaken himself, that is excusable. How much worse is it to encourage others to be

³⁰ See below, n.44.

³¹ Or spheres of objects. See above, ch. 23, n.8.

³² The popular version, sec. 4, has "if merely" instead of "don't", which makes the sentence say the opposite.

³³ Read *wu* (no) as *ssu* (die), following the popular version, sec. 4.

³⁴ Reading *mo* (none) as *jo* (if), following *ibid*.

³⁵ Read *hsi* (stop) as *ssu* (to think), following Suzuki and Kuda.

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[mistaken]! Deluded, he does not realize that he is so, and he even blasphemes the scripture and the Law! That is the reason why absence-of-thought is instituted as the doctrine. Because people who are deluded have thoughts about the spheres of objects, perverse views arise³⁶ in them, and all sorts of afflictions resulting from passions and erroneous thoughts are produced.

Comment. The doctrine of the absence of thought is no cult of unconsciousness. Nor is it a Zen invention. It goes back to Taoism, Neo-Taoism, and the Early Seven Schools of Buddhism, all of which taught "having no mind of one's own," that is, having no mental attachment which would keep the mind in bondage.

"However, this school has instituted absence-of-thought as the doctrine. When people of the world are free from erroneous views, no thoughts will arise. If there are no thoughts, there will not even be an 'absence-of-thought.' Absence means absence of what? Thought means thought of what? Absence-of-thought means freedom from the character of the duality (existence or nonexistence of characters) and from all afflictions resulting from passions. [Thought means thought of the true nature of True Thusness (True Reality).]³⁷ True Thusness is the substance of thought and thought is the function of True Thusness. It is the self-nature that gives rise to thought. Therefore in spite of the functioning of seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing, self-nature is not defiled by the many spheres of objects and always remains free and at ease. As the *Wei-mo-chieh* [*so-shuo*] *ching* (Scripture Spoken by Vimalakīrti) says, "Externally it skillfully differentiates the various dharma-characters while internally it abides immovably in the First Principle."³⁸

18. "Good and learned friends, according to this method sitting in meditation is at bottom neither looking at³⁹ the mind nor looking at purity. Nor do we say that there should be imperturbability.⁴⁰ Suppose we say to look at the mind. The mind is at bottom false. Since being false is the same as being illusory, there is nothing to look at. Suppose we say to look at purity. Man's nature is originally pure. It is by false thoughts that True Thusness is obscured. Our original nature is pure as long as it is free from false thoughts. If one does not realize that his own nature is originally pure and makes up his mind to look at purity, he is

³⁶ Read *ch'ü* (go) as *ch'i* (arise), following *ibid.*

³⁷ See ch. 24, n.19. Insertion according to the popular version, sec. 4.

³⁸ *Vimalakīrtinirdēsa sūtra*, sec. 1, TSD, 14:537. The words "externally" and "internally" do not appear in the original scripture.

³⁹ Read *chao* (to attach) as *k'an* (to look at). The reason is obvious from what follows.

⁴⁰ This interpretation accords with the sense in the popular version, sec. 5.

creating a false purity. Such purity has no objective existence. Hence we know that what is looked at is false. Purity has neither physical form nor character, but some people set up characters of purity and say that this is the object of our task. People who take this view hinder their own original nature and become bound by purity. If those who cultivate imperturbability would ignore people's mistakes and defects, their nature would not be perturbed. Deluded people may not be perturbed physically themselves, but whenever they speak, they criticize others and thus violate the Way. Thus looking at the mind or at purity causes a hindrance to the Way."

19. "Now, this being the case, in this method, what is meant by sitting in meditation? In this method, to sit means to be free from all obstacles, and externally not to allow thoughts to rise from the mind⁴¹ over any sphere of objects. To meditate means to realize the imperturbability of one's original nature. What is meant by meditation and calmness? Meditation means to be free from all characters externally; calmness means to be unperturbed internally. If there are characters outside and the inner mind is not disturbed, one's original nature is naturally pure and calm. It is only because of the spheres of objects that there is contact, and contact leads to perturbation. There is calmness when one is free from characters and is not perturbed. There is meditation when one is externally free from characters, and there is calmness when one is internally undisturbed. Meditation and calmness mean that external meditation is attained and internal calmness is achieved. The *Wei-mo-chieh* [*so-shuo*] *ching* says, 'Immediately we become completely clear and recover our original mind.'⁴² The *P'u-sa chieh ching* (Scripture of Disciplines for Bodhisattvahood) says, 'We are originally pure in our self-nature.'⁴³ Good and learned friends, realize that your self-nature is naturally pure. Cultivate and achieve for yourselves the Law-body of your self-nature. Follow the Way of the Buddha yourselves. Act and achieve Buddhahood for yourselves."

20. "Good and learned friends, you must all go through the experience yourselves and receive the discipline that frees you from the attachment to differentiated characters. Follow me at the same time and repeat my slogans. They will enable you, good and learned friends, to see that the Three Bodies⁴⁴ of the Buddha are within you: 'We take

⁴¹ Read *shang* (up) as *hsin* (mind), according to the popular version, sec. 5.

⁴² Sec. 3, TSD, 14:541.

⁴³ The scripture is part of sec. 10 of the *Brahmajāla sūtra* (*Fan-wang ching*, or *Brahma-net Scripture*). See TSD, 24:1003.

⁴⁴ Buddhism conceives a Buddha to have a threefold body, namely, the Law-body or spiritual body (*Dharmakāya*), the Reward-body or Enjoyment-body (*Sambhogakāya*), and the Transformation-body or body of incarnation (*Nir-*

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refuge in the pure Law-body of the Buddha with our own physical bodies. We take refuge in the Myriad Transformation-body with our own physical bodies. We take refuge in the Perfect Reward-body with our own physical bodies.' (The above is to be chanted three times.)⁴⁵ The physical body is like an inn and cannot be spoken of as a refuge. It has always been the case that the Three Bodies lie in one's own nature. Everyone has them, yet because they are deluded they do not see, and they seek the Three [Bodies] of the Tathāgata (Thus-come Buddha)⁴⁶ externally, without realizing that the Three Bodies are inherent in one's own physical body. Good and learned friends, listen to your good friend. If you, good and learned friends, now see in your own physical bodies the self-nature that involves the Three Bodies of the Buddha, these Three Bodies will arise from your nature.

Comment. The doctrine of "becoming a Buddha in this very body" is a far cry from the original Indian idea that the body is a hindrance to freedom. One cannot help recalling that the Confucianists have always regarded the body as a gift from parents and as such it is a sacred trust and therefore to be well taken care of, and that for centuries the Taoists religion had tried in many ways, including medicine, diets, exercise, sex technique, and breath control, to make the body suitable for everlasting life on earth. These are some of the roots that make Zen essentially Chinese.

"What is meant by the Pure [Law]⁴⁷ of the Buddha? Good and learned friends, our nature is originally pure. All dharmas lie in this self-nature. If we think of all kinds of evil deeds, we will practice evil. If we think of all kinds of good deeds, we will do good. Thus we know that all dharmas lie in one's self-nature. Self-nature is always pure, just as the sun and moon are always shining. It is only when they are obscured by clouds that there is brightness above but darkness below and the sun, the moon, and the stars cannot be seen. But when suddenly a gentle wind blows and scatters all clouds and fog, all phenomena are abundantly spread out before us, all appearing together. The purity of people's

mānakāya). The Law-body is the Buddha-body in its self-nature, the body of the Dharma or truth, the body of reality, the body of principle. This "body" has no bodily existence. It is identical with truth. In various schools it is identical with the Realm of Dharma (*Dharmadhātu*), Buddha-nature, or the Storehouse of the "Thus-come" (*Tathāgatagarbha*). The Reward-body is the person embodied with real insight, enjoying his own enlightenment or that of others. The Transformation-body is a body variously appearing to save people. The three bodies are three in one, are possessed of all Buddhas, and are potential to all men.

⁴⁵ Original note in the text.

⁴⁶ See above, ch. 20, n.41.

⁴⁷ This word has been added according to the popular version, sec. 6.

nature is comparable to the clear sky, their wisdom comparable to the sun, and sagacity comparable to the moon. Their sagacity and wisdom are always shining. It is only because externally people are attached to spheres of objects⁴⁸ that erroneous thoughts, like floating clouds, cover the self-nature so that it is not clear. Therefore when they meet a good and learned friend who reveals to them the true method and scatters delusions and falsehood, then they are thoroughly illumined both internally and externally, and all dharmas reveal the free and easy character in their own nature. This is called the Pure Law-body. By taking refuge ourselves is meant to remove evil deeds. This is called taking refuge.

"What is meant by the Myriad Transformation-body? When there is no thought, one's nature is empty of differentiated characters and is tranquil, but when there is thought, that is self-transformation. When one thinks of evil dharmas, the transformation becomes hell, but when one thinks of good dharmas, the transformation becomes Paradise. What is poisonous and harmful is transformed into beasts. What is compassionate is transformed into bodhisattvas.⁴⁹ What is sagacious and wise is transformed into the higher realm. What is ignorant and deluded is transformed into the lower region. The transformations of self-nature are many,⁵⁰ but deluded people do not know this themselves. If one has a single good thought, sagacity and wisdom arise.

"What is meant by the Perfect Reward-body? One light can illuminate the darkness of a thousand years, and one bit of wisdom can destroy the ignorance of ten thousand years. Never mind looking back to the past; always consider the future, and always make future thoughts good. This is called the Reward-body. The reward of one evil thought will remove⁵¹ the good of a thousand years, and the reward of one good thought will destroy the evil of a thousand years. At all times make the next thought a good one. This is called the Reward-body. Thinking on the basis of the Law-body is the same as the Transformation-body, and making every thought good is the same as the Reward-body. Achieving enlightenment oneself and practicing [the Law] oneself is called taking refuge. Skin and flesh constitute the physical body. It is an inn and cannot be spoken⁵² of as a refuge. If a person understands the Three Bodies, he will recognize my basic idea."

30. "All scriptures and writings, both Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, and

⁴⁸ Read *k'an-ching* (see reverence) as *chao-ching* (attach to sphere), according to Suzuki and Kuda, and also Ui, p. 130.

⁴⁹ A bodhisattva is one who is strongly determined to seek enlightenment and salvation for all.

⁵⁰ Read *ming* (name) as *to* (much), according to Suzuki and Kuda.

⁵¹ Read *hsin* (mind) as *wang* (to destroy), according to Suzuki and Kuda.

⁵² Read *tsai* (in) as *yen* (saying), according to TSD, 48:140.

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the twelve sections of the scriptures are provided for [men].⁵³ It is because man possesses the nature of wisdom that these were instituted. If there were no men in the world, there would naturally not be any dharmas.⁵⁴ We know, therefore, that dharmas exist because of man and that there are all these scriptures because there are people to preach them.

"The reason is that among men some are wise and others are stupid. The stupid are inferior, whereas the wise are superior. The deluded consult the wise and the wise explain the Law to the stupid and enable them to understand and to open up their minds.⁵⁵ When deluded people understand and open up their minds, they are no longer different from the superior and the wise. Hence we know that without enlightenment, a Buddha is no different from other living beings. With enlightenment, even in a single instant of thought, all living beings become the same as a Buddha. Hence we know that all dharmas are immanent in one's mind and person. Why not seek in one's own mind the sudden realization of the original nature of True Thusness? The *P'u-sa chieh ching* says, 'We are originally pure in our self-nature. If we understand our minds and see our nature, we shall achieve Buddhahood ourselves.'⁵⁶ [And the *Wei-mo-chieh (so-shuo) ching* says] 'Immediately we become completely clear and recover our original mind.'⁵⁷

31. "Good and learned friends, when I was at Priest Hung-jen's place, I understood immediately as soon as I heard him, and suddenly realized the original nature of True Thusness. For this reason I propagate this doctrine so that it will prevail among later generations and seekers of the Way will be able to achieve perfect wisdom through sudden enlightenment, each to see his own mind, and to become suddenly enlightened through his own original nature. If they are not able to enlighten themselves, they should seek good and learned friends of high standing to show them the way to see their nature.

"What is meant by a good and learned friend of high standing? A good and learned friend of high standing is one who can explain to people the very best method and can directly show them the correct way. That is a good and learned friend of high standing. That is a great cause. That is to [say],⁵⁸ he will teach and direct people so they can see their own nature. For all good dharmas arise because of him. [The wisdom] of the past, present, and future Buddhas as well as

⁵³ Insertion according to *ibid*.

⁵⁴ This reading follows the popular version.

⁵⁵ Read *jan* (infected) as *hsin* (mind), to conform with the sentence that follows.

⁵⁶ See n.43.

⁵⁷ See n.42.

⁵⁸ Read *wei* (to act) as *wei* (to say), according to the popular version, sec. 2.

the twelve sections of the scripture are all immanent in human nature. It originally possesses them to the fullest extent. Those who cannot enlighten themselves should have good and learned friends to show them the way to see their nature. Those who can enlighten themselves, however, need not depend on good and learned friends. If they seek outside for good and learned friends and hope for emancipation, they will get nowhere. Understanding coming from the good and learned friend inside a person's own mind, however, will lead him to emancipation. But if one's own mind is perverse and deluded, [full of] erroneous thoughts and perversions, even if good and learned friends from the outside offer instructions, no salvation can be attained.⁵⁹ If you have not been able to enlighten yourselves, you should arouse your wisdom illuminatingly to examine [facts and principles]. Then in an instant all erroneous thoughts will vanish. This is your true and really good and learned friend, who as soon as he is enlightened immediately realizes Buddhahood."

B. THE RECORDED CONVERSATIONS OF SHEN-HUI⁶⁰

The priest (Shen-hui) said, "There are mundane mysteries and also supramundane mysteries. When a commoner suddenly becomes a sovereign, for example, it is mundane mystery. If in the first stage of one's spiritual progress which consists of ten beliefs,⁶¹ in one's initial resolve to seek perfect wisdom, an instant of thought corresponds with truth, one will immediately achieve Buddhahood. This is supramundane mystery. It is in accord with principle. What is there to wonder about? This clarifies the mystery of sudden enlightenment." (p. 100)

The priest said, "The resolve [to seek perfect wisdom] may be sudden or gradual, and delusion and enlightenment may be slow or rapid. Delusion may continue for infinitely long periods, but enlightenment takes but a moment. This principle is difficult to understand. Let me first give an analogy and then clarify the principle, and then you may perhaps understand through this example. Suppose there are individual strands of light green silk each consisting of numerous threads. If they are twisted to become a rope and are placed on a board, one cut with a sharp sword will sever all threads at the same time. Although the

⁵⁹ This clause is added according to *ibid.*

⁶⁰ These are from the "Recorded Sayings" in the *Shen-hui Ho-shang i-chi* (Surviving Works of Priest Shen-hui), ed. by Hu Shih, Shanghai, 1930. For a French translation, see Bibliography.

⁶¹ There are 52 grades, divided into six stages, toward Buddhahood. The first stage consists of ten grades, namely, faith, unforgetfulness, serious effort, wisdom, calmness, non-retrogression, protection of the Law, the mind to reflect the light of the Buddha, discipline, and free will. Ordinarily one has to go through all six stages before achieving Buddhahood.

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⁶⁴ *Saddharm*
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