

A dramatic sky with a sunburst breaking through dark, heavy clouds. The sun is positioned in the lower right quadrant, creating a bright glow and radiating light rays that illuminate the surrounding clouds. The clouds are dark and textured, with some lighter patches where the sun's light reaches them. The overall color palette is dominated by blues, greys, and whites, with a strong contrast between the dark clouds and the bright sun.

Chan Instructions

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Translated by Thomas Cleary

Introduction

The *Dhammapada*, an early collection of sayings attributed to the Buddha, begins with a statement of the central practical concern of Buddhism: “Everything has mind in the lead, has mind in the forefront, is made by mind. If one speaks or acts with a corrupt mind, misery will follow, as the wheel of a cart follows the foot of the ox. Everything has mind in the lead, has mind in the forefront, is made by mind. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness will follow, like a shadow that never leaves.”

Given this observation, purifying the mind is a primary purpose of Buddhist practice; the *Dhammapada* goes on, “The mind is restless, unsteady, hard to guard, hard to control. The wise one makes it straight, like a fletcher straightens an arrow. Let the wise one watch over the mind, so hard to perceive, so artful, alighting where it wishes; a watchfully protected mind brings happiness.”

Many methods of mastering the mind were adopted and developed by Buddhists over the ages, as were many methods of fostering and expressing its latent or attenuated faculties of communication and constructive creativity. With the massive importation of accumulated Buddhist literature into China over a

span of several centuries, the original organic evolution of teachings and practices became obscure, sparking attempts at systematization to clarify the relationship of different scriptures and the role of different doctrines in addressing a range of human needs and capacities. In time these efforts gave rise to what came to be known as schools of Buddhism.

The transmission of Buddhism to China was also complicated by the linguistic issues involved in translation of scriptures and treatises from Sanskrit to Chinese. These languages are grammatically very different, and so are the cultural contexts that gave rise to their conceptual constructs and the vocabularies used to represent them. Standard literary Chinese itself changed from dynasty to dynasty over the course of the centuries, and the development of distinctive Buddhist Chinese also produced considerable variation in structure and terminology. These factors eventually produced a type of Buddhist scholarship devoted to efforts to elucidate the overt meanings of texts on the basis of Chinese renderings without reference to the original Sanskrit. Literalists in this field were affected by longstanding habits of Confucian academics, while their interpretations of Buddhist

symbolism were liable to be obscured by the influence of ambient tendencies toward interest in the supernatural.

Emerging several hundred years after the introduction of Buddhism into China, what was to become known as the Chan school worked to surmount these obstacles to understanding by focusing on the practical problems of mental purification, treating the written teachings as specific expedients rather than sacred dogma, and following the mainstream Buddhist principle “rely on the meaning, not the word.” The original projection of Chan in China is associated with the scripture known as the *Lankavatara sutra*, which presents these principles of application:

“The teachings indicated in all the scriptures are appeasements for subjective imaginations of ignorant people, not disputation intended to establish ultimate knowledge as it is in reality. Therefore one should follow meaning, not adherence to the expression of teachings.”

“Ultimate truth is not a statement, nor is ultimate truth what is expressed by a statement.”

“The leading principle of the goal is distinguished by first-hand experience, beyond speech, imagination, and words, reaching the realm where there is no impulse, the inherent characteristic of arrival

at the stage of first-hand realization, excluding all the destructive forces of speculation and dogmatism.”

“The leading principle of instruction is discerning accommodation to people’s conditions.”

“The teachings are not literal, and yet Buddhas do not present them for no reason. They present them in consideration of mental construction. Without material to use, instruction in all the teachings would disappear. The great bodhisattvas should be free of obsession with the articulation of the recital of teaching. The recital of teaching has different meanings on account of the engagement of people’s mentalities.”

“Just as if someone points out something to someone with a finger, and the latter looks only at the fingertip, in the same way ignorant ordinary people, as if of infantile disposition, will go to their death adhering to the fingertip of meaning as articulated, and will not arrive at the ultimate meaning beyond the fingertip of expression. Just as the ignorant one fixated on the pointing fingertip does not apprehend the moon, so does one attached to the letter not know my truth.”

“As a physician prescribes the type of treatment according to the illness, and there is no division in the science but treatment is

distinguished by the type of illness, so do I teach the family of beings according to the afflictions with which they are troubled, after having ascertained the powers of beings' capacities.”

These principles are reflected throughout the recorded teachings of the classical era of Chan, but the transmission of the *Lankavatara sutra* faded out after several generations. According to *Biographies of Eminent Monks*, the founder of Chan in China, an Indian monk named Bodhidharma, recommended this scripture to his foremost successor Huike, but whenever Huike lectured on the teaching he would conclude by saying that “After four generations this scripture will turn into terminology and definition.” One reason for this may lie in the poor quality of the Chinese version they used, which could not be interpreted correctly without reference to Sanskrit.

According to the Song dynasty Buddhist writer Wang Rixiu, “Although Bodhidharma promoted that writing in the East, it was translated very obscurely, and is hard to read and hard to understand.” Born in a Brahmin family in India, Bodhidharma would have understood the original Sanskrit text and been able to transmit the meaning to Huike, but oral tradition evidently faded over time, and later Chinese commentators on this translation were unable to

elucidate problematic passages and confused critical terms. By the time of the fifth patriarch of Chan, the main scriptural reference for the teaching had shifted to the *Vajracchedika* or Diamond Cutter sutra.

The Diamond Cutter is one of the shorter texts of a corpus of scriptures on transcendent insight, a primary focus of Chan. Like the later *Lankavatara*, it emphasizes the practical nondogmatic character of Buddhism: “There is no fixed state called unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment, and there is no fixed doctrine for the Realized One to preach.” According to an account attributed to the famous sixth patriarch of Chan, he was moved to seek out the fifth patriarch, who was to become his teacher, after hearing this scripture being recited one day when he was selling firewood in a marketplace. The same narrative relates that when the fifth patriarch was expounding the Diamond Cutter to him, the future sixth patriarch had an overwhelming realization on hearing the passage, “Activate the mind without dwelling on anything.”

After the future sixth patriarch related his understanding that “inherent nature is originally intrinsically pure,” the story continues, the fifth patriarch summarized the essence of Chan for him in these terms: “If one does not discern the original mind, it is of no benefit to

study the teaching. If you discern your own original mind and see your own original essential nature, you are what they call a great man, a teacher of humans and celestials, a Buddha.”

The sixth patriarch eventually became a famous teacher, with many enlightened disciples. Based on his own experience, he maintained the possibility of sudden enlightenment, though the processes of preliminary preparation and post-enlightenment maturation might require prolonged practice. According to a story illustrating this, when the patriarch’s disciple Huairang first came to him, the patriarch asked him where he had come from. Huairang named the place he had come from, but then the patriarch asked, “What is it that has come thus?” After eight years of introspection, Huairang answered “To liken it to something would miss.” The patriarch asked, “Can it be cultivated and realized?” He said, “Cultivation and realization are not nonexistent, but if tainted they won’t succeed.” The patriarch said, “Just this not tainting is what all Buddhas keep in mind.”

Huairang’s foremost disciple Daoyi, usually known by his lay surname as Mazu, “Ancestor Ma,” became one of the foremost Chan masters in history, with more than one hundred enlightened successors. His story also illustrates the relationship between

gradual practice and sudden enlightenment. According to Chan records, Daoyi was in the habit of meditating all day long when Huairang discovered him and recognized his potential. He asked, “What are you aiming for by sitting in meditation?” Daoyi answered, “I’m aiming to become a Buddha.” Huairang then took a tile and began grinding it on a rock. Daoyi asked him why he was grinding the tile. Huairang told him he was polishing the tile to make a mirror. Daoyi asked, “How can you make a mirror by polishing a tile?” Huairang retorted, “Granted that grinding a tile won’t make a mirror, how can sitting in meditation make a Buddha?” Daoyi asked, “What would be right?” Huairang said, “It is like an ox pulling a cart; if the cart doesn’t move, should you hit the cart or hit the ox?” Daoyi had no reply. Huairang went on to say, “Are you trying to learn sitting meditation, or are you trying to learn sitting buddhahood? If you are learning sitting meditation, meditation is not sitting or reclining; if you are learning sitting buddhahood, buddhahood is not a fixed form. You should not grasp or reject things that do not abide. If you keep the Buddha seated, this is killing the Buddha; if you cling to the form of sitting, you do not attain the principle.”

Daoyi asked, “How should I apply my mind to attain formless absorption?” Huairang replied, “Your study of the teaching of the

mind ground is like planting seed; my explanation of the essentials of the teaching is like moisture from the sky. Your conditions are appropriate, so you will see the Way.” Daoyi asked, “If the Way has no formal characteristics, how can it be seen?” Huairang said, “The objective eye of the mind ground can see the Way. Formless absorption is also like this.” Daoyi said, “Does it have becoming and decay?” Huairang said, “If you see the Way in terms of becoming and decay, conglomeration and dissolution, that is not seeing the Way. Listen to my verse: *The ground of mind contains seeds; when moistened, they all sprout. The flower of absorption has no form; what decays and what becomes?*” Thus awakened, the episode concludes, Daoyi’s mind was transcendent; he attended Huairang for ten years, deepening his realization day by day.

Among Mazu’s many successors, perhaps the most historically important was Baizhang Huaihai (trad. 720-814), who is credited with the establishment of the model Chan community. He irritated a lot of monastics by instituting the rule of manual labor, encapsulated in his famous dictum, “A day without work is a day without eating.” The record of his teachings is one of the most extensive among those of the classical masters; he was very learned and quoted numerous scriptures in his talks, but emphasized the

importance of understanding the “living word” rather than grasping the “dead word.” He summarized the practical essence of all the teachings in three phases: detachment, not dwelling in detachment, and not making an understanding of not dwelling. When only one of these is taught, he warned, that “sends people to hell;” when all three are taught at once, however, he added, people “go to hell by themselves.” This refers to mental states, as is usual in Chan, and illustrates the psychological problems resulting from imbalanced or arbitrary practice.

Baizhang had thirty enlightened successors, but Chan annals are particularly rich in remnants of two offshoots of his school that came to be numbered among the so-called Five Houses of Chan. The earliest of these was known as the house of Gui-Yang, named after Baizhang’s successor Guishan (771-854) and Guishan’s great disciple Yangshan (813-890). Next was the house of Linji, named after the famous master Linji (d. 866), who succeeded to Baizhang’s distinguished spiritual heir Huangbo (d. 850).

Guishan was one of the few classical masters who left any writing of his own, a manual called *Admonitions* addressed various issues of Chan practice. In this work he emphasized the importance of disciplined conduct first, noting, “The Buddha first defined

precepts to begin to remove the veils of ignorance. With standards and refinements of conduct pure as ice and snow, the precepts rein and concentrate the minds of beginners in respect to what to stop, what to uphold, what to do, and what not to do. Their details reform every kind of crudity and decadence. How can you understand the supreme vehicle of complete meaning without having paid heed to moral principles?”

For those with adequate preparation and capacity, Guishan outlined the method of intensive meditation for sudden awakening in his *Admonitions* as well as in his speeches and dialogues. In his *Admonitions* he wrote, “If you want to study the Way by intensive mediation and make a sudden leap beyond expedient teachings, let your mind merge with the hidden harbor; investigate its subtleties, determine its most profound depths, and realize its true source.” More explicit instruction is given in a famous dialogue with Yangshan, who asked, “What is the abode of the real Buddha?” Guishan said, “Using the subtlety of thinking no thought, think back to the infinity of the flames of awareness. When thinking comes to an end, return to the source, where essence and manifestation are always there and phenomena and noumenon are undivided. The real Buddha is as such.”

When asked if there is any cultivation after sudden enlightenment, Guishan said, “If people awaken truly, realizing the fundamental, they know instinctively when it happens. The question of cultivation or not is two-sided. Suppose beginners have conditionally attained a moment of sudden awakening to inherent truth, but there are still longstanding habit energies that cannot as yet be cleared all at once. They must be taught to clear away streams of consciousness manifesting habitual activity. That is cultivation, but there cannot be a particular doctrine to have them practice or devote themselves to.”

Guishan also recommended scriptural study for those who were not yet ready for sudden awakening: “If there are people of average ability who are as yet unable to transcend all at once, let them concentrate on the teaching, closely investigating the scriptures and scrupulously looking into the inner meaning.”

Huangbo, who was already awakened when he met Baizhang, to whom he was directed by the woman who first opened his mind, is mainly known through two records of his speeches and dialogues, *Essentials of Transmission of Mind* and *The Wanling Record*. His introductory statements in the first named text provide a clear and concise summary of the central point of his teaching and

practice: “The Buddhas and all living beings are just one mind. There is nothing else. This mind, since beginningless time, has never been born and has never died. It is not blue, not yellow; it has no form, no appearance. It is not in the realm of existence or nonexistence. It does not count as new or old. It is not long, not short, not large, not small. It is beyond all limitation, quantification, terminology, tracks, traces, and relations. This very being is it; if you stir thoughts, you turn away. Like space, it has no boundaries and cannot be measured.

“Just this one mind is itself Buddha. Buddha and living beings are no different. However, living beings grasp appearances and seek outwardly. By seeking it they lose it: getting Buddha to seek Buddha, using mind to grasp mind, they never can get it in all their lives. They do not know that if they stop thoughts and forget cogitation, Buddha spontaneously becomes manifest.”

Huangbo’s eminent successor Linji also emphasized the inherent nature of buddhahood and warned against seeking outwardly or being influenced by opinions: “People who study Buddha’s teaching in the present time should seek real true perceptive understanding for now. If you attain real true perceptive understanding, you are not affected by birth and death, free to leave

or to stay. You don't need to seek anything extraordinary—the extraordinary will come of itself.

“Followers of the Way, past worthies since olden times all had ways to develop people; as for what I point out to people, it just requires that you do not take on the delusions of others. If you need to act, then act, with no further hesitation and doubt.

“When students today do not attain, where is the illness? The illness is in not trusting yourself, being turned around and changed by myriad objects, not attaining independence. If you can put to rest the mind that runs around seeking thought after thought, you will not be different from masters and Buddhas.”

“If you want to be no different from masters and Buddhas, just don't seek outside; the pure light in your mind at any given moment is the reality-body Buddha in your house. The nonconceptual light in your mind at any given moment is the reward-body Buddha in your house. The undifferentiated light in your mind at any given moment is the emanation-body Buddha in your house. These three kinds of body are you, the person now presently listening to the teaching. It is only by virtue of not running in search outside that you have these effective functions.”

According to the pan-Buddhist *Biographies of Eminent Monks*, the sayings of Linji were widely circulated, but Chan annals indicate that few of his successors are known to have produced heirs of their own. The fourth generation master Fengxue (896-973) is on record as expressing concern to his successor Shoushan that the lineage of Linji was in danger of dying out, explaining that though there were many students who were intelligent, there were few who had insight into essential nature. Shoushan's successor Fenyang (942-1024), who is said to have called on seventy-one teachers in his time, produced six great successors, and also collected and commented on a considerable body of Chan lore.

Four generations after Fenyang, the so-called East Mountain School of the great master Wuzu (1024-1104) produced three distinguished masters known as the Three Buddhas, after their honorific titles. Among them was the eminent Yuanwu (1063-1135), famed as the author of the *Blue Cliff Record*, a classic collection of commentaries on Chan cases and scriptural quotes used for meditation. Yuanwu also authored another collection of commentaries called *The Measuring Tap*, based on an earlier anthology called *The Cascade*. Yuanwu's letters, known as

Essentials of Mind, also became a highly prized source of Chan guidance.

The Chan master whose instructions are translated in this volume, known as Ying-an, was a disciple of Yuanwu and successor to Yuanwu's heir Huqiu. He traveled widely as a student before meeting Yuanwu, and had extensive knowledge of the conditions of Chan teaching in his time. After his enlightenment he was invited to teach at no less than thirteen monasteries, and gained such respect for his teaching that he was sought out even by former abbots.

According to *Precious Lessons from the Chan Communities*, the elder master Xuetang said that he respected Ying-an because he did not delight in gain or strive for fame, did not act agreeable and conciliatory for gain, did not put on a false face or use clever words, and was clearly enlightened and able to go or stay at will. According to his biographer, Ying-an was unremittingly diligent in his duties, still giving personal interviews when in his final illness. He passed away in 1163, in his sixty-first year.

To Chan man Hui

Bodhidharma came from the West and directly pointed to the human mind, to see essential nature and realize Buddhahood; this is undeniably direct and quintessential, but when seen with the true eye it is already way off—he had no choice but to temporarily make medicine for a dead horse. This very mind to which he pointed directly is just what the Buddha could not quite explain in forty-nine years of speaking in every way. It is extremely fine, extremely subtle—rarely does anyone attain this true bloodline. This mind cannot be transmitted—it is only self-realized and self-understood. When you get to where there is no confusion or enlightenment, it is just ordinary wearing clothes and eating food, without so much mystic understanding or ways of interpretation clogging your chest anymore, so you are clean and free.

An ancestral teacher said, “When uniformly equanimous, everything passes away of itself.” On then do you attain great capability; when you get to the border of life and death, you are profoundly still and silent, with no more change at all. Just being so, you are like a polar mountain— isn’t this essential?

In recent years, brethren who come to study may say they are traveling, but it is like pouring cold water on a rock—wherever

they go, they are just indulging in imagination and memorization, taking contention to be ordinary. They are truly pitiful. People who travel for the right reason are never like this; seeing how sages since time immemorial carried their bundles from community to company, associating with genuine teachers for ten or twenty years, they retreat into themselves, like cold ashes or dead trees, closely investigating the bit at the root of it all, the point of essential contact with reality. Only then can they let go, come what may. These are called patchrobed monks who have completed their task, eminent travelers.

If your state of mind is not thoroughly clear, how can you stop arousing and stirring thought twenty-four hours a day, all over the place, like a thousand waves, myriad breakers—how can you dissolve it away? Here, if you have no penetration to freedom, you are just an ignorant thief pilfering the food supply. This is what master Linji called blind bald soldiers. Robbing and thieving, they steal until their whole bodies are red bones; when suddenly their lives come to an end, all their usual cleverness and wit is of no use at all when the light of their eyes falls to the ground. Even if you have performed countless meritorious deeds over multiple lifetimes, so much the less your hope of transcending life and death. You just

attain human and celestial rewards, and then when the rewards end, as before there is no way out.

If you want to fathom the age of space, throughout the future, so your capability is inexhaustible, you should immediately let your mind be empty; if you can't thoroughly realize this path, you should take up your great longstanding vow, choose a genuine teacher, put down your baggage and spend the rest of your life investigating this case. Just beware of being inconsistent; your mouth may talk of studying Chan, but in your gut you won't do it at all. In this case, it is better to go back to the beginning and read the teachings sincerely, working on purification, so you won't lose your humanity in the future. This is what an ancient worthy was referring to when he said, "Talking ten feet is not as good as practicing an inch."

But now in monasteries all over those called teachers transmit the school of mind directly pointed out—after all, how is this mind transmitted? How can it be described? There has recently emerged a class of devil—in the teachings these are described as bad companions—each expounding different interpretations, claiming to benefit people. Some teach having people stop and rest, not thinking at all, quickly eliminating active thought as soon as it

occurs. Some teach people to be totally unconcerned, not even burning incense or performing prostrations. Some just have people rationally understand the ancients, just like a bumbling professor. Some refer to ancient adepts' holding forth with naked hearts and call it setting up schools. Some see students come and manage to say something that seems appropriate, then in half a day ask them about another saying; the students then speak further, and if they agree they immediately declare these brothers have an entry. But tell me, do these sorts of 'benefits' actually accord with direct pointing to mind? This is why master Fojian said, "Most teachers nowadays are indirectly pointing to mind and explaining nature to be Buddha."

The true bloodline of Linji, from Baizhang at Master Ma's shout down through the generations up till the present, not only realize the life root of the great ancestral teachers, but also thoroughly realize the life pulse of untold, inexpressible hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of incalculable Buddhas and masters, without the slightest deviation. Baizhang found Huangbo, Huangbo found Linji, Linji entrusted Sansheng, saying, "Who knew my treasury of the eye of truth would perish with this blind donkey?"

If you can see through this saying, how could there be any more “Linji Sect”?

Eminent Dehui, you have followed me dutiful to the path, rigorously pursuing the ancient way, tirelessly investigating the matter under the patch robe. This can truly be called travel that is not in vain. If you want to understand easily, at the arousal of mind and stirring of thought twenty-four hours a day, at this very stirring of thought be immediately open and empty so it cannot be grasped, like empty space, without even any form of empty space, outside and inside one, cognition and objects both disappearing, mystery and understanding both gone, past present and future equal. When you get to this state, you are what is called a free wayfarer beyond study and without contrivance. Then you must also know there is what Wuzu said.

Since the eminent has lit incense and made a sincere request, I have written this for his practice. 8/15/1141

Notes

Bodhidharma is traditionally considered the founder of Chan in China. According to Chan lore, his future successor Huike asked him, “My mind is not yet at ease; please set my mind at ease.” Bodhidharma said, “Bring me your mind and I will

set it at ease.” Huike said, “When I look for my mind, I cannot find it.”

Bodhidharma said, “I have set your mind at ease.” At this Huike awakened.

Fojian was one of the so-called Three Buddhas in the congregation of Wuzu; some of his sayings are found in *Zen Lessons*, sections 88 to 95.

Baizhang at Master Ma’s shout refers to a famous story of the interaction of master Baizhang Huaihai with his teacher Mazu, “Ancestor Ma,” one of the greatest Chan masters in history. After his first awakening, Baizhang went to see Master Ma again; as he stood by, Master Ma looked at the whisk on the corner of his seat. Baizhang said, “Do you identify with the function, or detach from the function?” Master Ma said, “Later on, when you open your lips, what will you use to help people?” Baizhang took the whisk and held it up; Master Ma said, “Do you identify with this function, or detach from this function?” Baizhang hung the whisk back where it had been before. Master Ma drew himself up and shouted so loud that Baizhang was deafened for three days. For sayings of Master Ma, see *Teachings of Zen*. For sayings of Baizhang, see *Introduction to Chan Buddhism*

For the teachings of Huangbo and Linji, see *Zen Mind, Buddha Mind*. Sansheng was one of Linji’s successors, and the compiler of Linji’s sayings.

“What Wuzu said”—Wuzu said, “It is as if an ox had passed through a window screen: its head, horns, and four hooves have all passed through; why can’t the tail pass through?” See *No Barrier: Unlocking the Zen Koan*, case 38, and *Essential Zen*.

To Chan man Xi

The old teachers since time immemorial, when they were first inspired to journey because they had not broken through “life” and “death” they went thousands of miles seeking true teachers to settle this matter definitively. For ten years, twenty years, they discarded all the idle miscellaneous curios of the world, keeping their minds on this. Never for a moment were they not immersed in this, yet still feared they’d veer off and fail to accomplish this task. Master Changqing was at Xuefeng and Xuansha, going back and forth for twenty years, wearing out six or seven sitting cushions—isn’t this a case of someone with great potential still unable to achieve thorough realization? When the ancients studied, they wouldn’t agree to minor accomplishment—if they couldn’t get there in their lifetime, that was that—they never presumed to assume mastery carelessly. Oh, it is really not easy! One day, seeing a blind rolled up, his mind opened up and the tub of lacquer broke, his root of life was severed. Thereupon he uttered a verse:

How wonderful! How wonderful!

Rolling up the blind, I see the whole world.

If anyone asks me what sect I understand,

I’ll pick up a whisk and hit him the moment he opens his mouth.

This is the mind to which Bodhidharma pointed directly—there is no more comprehension or understanding at all. Only thus can one be a Buddhist.

Whenever I see brethren working on meditation nowadays, if they are not in states of oblivion or excitement, they are sitting in a state of hypervigilance. When they are hypervigilant, hearing and seeing stimulate their hearts, and they take this for the ultimate state. Just give up the two extremes and put them in one place, constantly aware, so you open up and penetrate through—that is not beyond you.

In Chan communities these days there is a type of students who don't really practice themselves but love to hear teachers explaining Chan illnesses. When has Chan ever had any illness? It's just because of arbitrary understanding, taking strong memory for real truth, that no power is actually gained in study. Therefore when teachers use a bit of their own fodder, calling this dissolving sticking points and untying bonds to let students know their errors, instead they consume teachers' talks explaining illnesses, puffing up their chests, and taking this to be the ultimate state. They are truly pitiful. If you want this work to be easy to accomplish, just be consistent

moment to moment, pure, unified, genuine, and eventually you will naturally penetrate to the source of the teaching.

Notes

For Changqing, Xuefeng, and Xuansha, see *The Blue Cliff Record*, cases 5, 22, 51, 88, and 95.

For Xuansha, see also *The Five Houses of Zen* and *Teachings of Zen*.

To Fundraiser Chu of Guoqing monastery

Wayfarers since ancient times, painfully aware that life and death were not yet clear, established great will like metal or stone. Wherever they went they looked for genuine teachers to settle the one great matter before their parents gave birth to them. How would they willingly take it easy? They might spend twenty or thirty years destroying clinging to sense objects and extinguishing conceptual thought. In the midst of their diligent work, one day the tub of lacquer dropped, they lost the shadows before their eyes; in fact, their former implements of idolatry, spirits haunting plants and trees, all melted away and disintegrated, so everything was the scenery of their own original ground.

It is like a long sword up to the sky—who dares to look straight at it? If you look at it, it blinds you. That's why Linji shouted as soon as someone came through the gate, and Deshan caned people the minute they came through the door. Luzu would face the wall when he saw a monk; Judi would hold up a finger when he saw a monk. Since time immemorial, the Buddhas, the Patriarchs, and the old masters with eyes everywhere would totally present their own fodder face to face, like a sword that cuts off life. Anyone who knew pain from itch would immediately get the point. As for those with no

blood under the skin and no eyeballs, it's left until Maitreya comes down to be born to explain it all for them.

Notes

For teachings of Deshan, see *No Barrier: Unlocking the Zen Koan*, case 13, *The Blue Cliff Record* case 4, and *Teachings of Zen*.

For Luzu facing the wall, see *Book of Serenity* case 23.

For Judi holding up a finger, see *The Blue Cliff Record* case 19, *Book of Serenity* case 84, and *No Barrier* case 3.

Maitreya is the name of the Buddha of the future, supposed to be born on earth in the remote future.

To Chan man Zhun

In this school there is no Chan to explain, no Way to transmit; there is only a sword—whether Buddhas come, or Patriarchs come, or sages come, or ordinary people come, I pick it up and cut them down. Those who know how to flip under the sword blade are free to leave a community and enter a company, and take a poke at the old fellow on the meditation seat. If they see him slobbering, they pack up and leave right away. Isn't that sharp?

If you are as yet unable to realize thoroughly and bear up, still don't be hasty and careless—you should be very meticulous. Master Shending Yin said, "Study must be genuine study; enlightenment must be genuine enlightenment." The mighty king of death is not afraid of a lot of talk.

Without turning your back on the initial inspiration of your lifetime journey, devote yourself to following a genuine person for ten or twenty years—when suddenly you run into his poisonous hand, your forehead splits, your eyes drop, shadows end, and cleverness is gone; leaping with life, growling and baring your fangs like a lion king, you are free to go or stay, roaring independently. Is this not the mettle of a great man? When you do the work of a great man, only then are you to be called an exceptional hero.

Master Baiyun Duan said, “When you’ve realized enlightenment, you have to meet someone. If you don’t meet someone, you’re just a monkey without a tail—the moment you act out, people will laugh.” Not one in ten thousand believes deeply in this Way. This is truly pitiful.

Notes

For master Shending Yin, see *Teachings of Zen*.

For teachings of *master Baiyun Duan*, see *Zen Lessons*, numbers 29-34.

To Chan man Qing and brethren going to the battle front

Before Buddha had emerged from his mother's womb, he pierced the noses of everyone on earth with a broken string. Then when he came forth, he used this string. In talking loquaciously for forty-nine years, he also used this string. When he also said he'd never said a word in forty-nine years, he just used this string too. Finally, when he held up a flower, Kasyapa smiled, and he entrusted the treasury of the eye of the teaching to elder Kasyapa, he also just used this string. From the ordering of the lineage all the way to the present, cooking Buddhas and refining Patriarchs too has just used this string.

These days, look—no one knows how to pick up this string and use it. Even if there are any who can pick it up, it is like reaching out in the dark of night to grab something—even if they take hold of the thing, they don't know if it's blue, yellow, red, or white, long or short, big or small; it is not clear to them from the outset. Why? It's generally because their approach is not really right, making them blind and fatheaded. If their approach were right, they'd immediately see that the Buddhas of all times were talking about dreams, the six generations of patriarchs were talking about dreams, the old masters all over the land were talking about

dreams. When you dream you're seeing Buddha, you lose the broken string. Once you've lost it, what will you use, pray tell?

This little bit is like an iron net spread over the sky: those who can penetrate through it can go anywhere; those who cannot penetrate through it, though, beg their superiors for their lives.

Note

He never said a word in forty-nine years comes from the *Lankavatara sutra*, a key scripture said to have been used by the Chan founder Bodhidharma, emphasizing the nondogmatic nature of Buddha's teaching.

For the story of Buddha and Kasyapa, see *No Barrier* case 6.

To attendant Chong

The founding teacher came from the West and directly pointed to people's mind, so they could see essential nature and attain Buddhahood—in the school of patchrobed monks, this is like digging a hole in the ground and burying people alive. He had no choice but temporarily make medicine for a dead horse. To speak of the Buddhas, speak of the patriarchs, speak of the mind, speak of essential nature, is talk like substituting sweet fruit for bitter gourd. As for great people, they cut in two with one stroke of the sword, step back into themselves and before a single thought arises suddenly see through the original face, clearly illuminating the universe, penetrating where there is no space by being empty. Then they are no different from Shakyamuni Buddha. This is called the crowning absorption, the mass of raging flame, the diamond sword, the crouching lion, the drum painted with poison—it is referred to by all sorts of names. At such a time, who construes birth and death? Who construes going and coming? Who construes good and bad? Who construes opposition and conformity? Who construes right and wrong? Who construes heaven and hell? Who construes four kinds of birth and six courses of existence? The whole earth is the door of

liberation the whole body is the instrument of the true human with no status.

Haven't you seen how master Linji said, "In the mass of naked flesh is a true human with no status, always in the gates of your senses, going out and in. Those who have not yet witnessed it, look, look!" At that time a monk came forth; Linji got down from the Chan seat, grabbed him by the chest, and said, "Speak quickly, speak quickly!" The monk hesitated. Linji pushed him away and said, "The true human with no status—what a piece of crap!" This is the original tradition of Buddhism. Linji attained this state, like massive clouds raining, like a hundred thousand myriad thunder blasts, transforming to get through, beyond convention, his expression ever more elevated. Sansheng attained this state, harmonizing ever more strictly. Coming to Xinghua, Nanyuan, Shoushan, Fengxue, Fenyang, Ciming, Yangqi, Baiyun, Dongshan, and Yuanwu, they all attained Linji's succession, seeing through the original mind, refining their concentration. Truly it can be called the key of transmission outside doctrine, direct pointing, without contradiction. When old man Si-an first awakened the great aspiration and went traveling, he first went to Jiangshan and called on Chan master Yuanwu. Attaining this absorption, he remained

deeply concealed for twenty years, and no one found him out. That was because his whole experience of penetrating realization was extraordinary, beyond reckoning, and his practice was quiet and unobtrusive—he did not readily say anything in a hurry to be recognized by others. Around 1134 or 1135 this state was revealed, and his light illumined the world, like the sun rising in the sky. Those who had eyes saw his illumination was pure, without corruption, without adulteration. The mountains, rivers, and earth depend on this light to produce myriad things; the sun, moon, and stars depend on this light to illumine the darkness of ignorance; heaven and hell depend on this light to lodge good and bad; all animate creatures depend on this light to appear and disappear; patchrobed monks depend on this light to open up the great furnace and bellows, ply the tongs and hammer of the world to smash the nests of the sacred and profane and cut off the life root of Buddhas and Patriarchs. If the root of life is cut off, where that light comes from cannot be found.

Master Panshan said, “The mind-moon solitary and full, its light engulfs myriad forms. The light is not shining on objects, and objects are not abiding. When light and objects are both gone, then what is this?” Master Yunmen said, “The whole earth is light—what

do you call self? If you know the light, objects cannot be grasped—what crappy light and objects are there? Once light and objects cannot be found, then what is this?” How can students maintain a balance here? Those who have broken through the lacquer bucket will know the ultimate point of those two elders. Once you know the ultimate point of the two elders, tell me, is it in the light or not in the light? If you say it is in the light, yet Yunmen said, “What crappy light and objects are there?” If you say it is not in the light, yet Panshan said, “The light engulfs myriad objects.” That is why it is said that after you’ve broken through the lacquer bucket you need to meet someone. If you don’t meet anyone, when you get here you’ll lose the eye to penetrate barriers. If you break through the lacquer bucket, and have gone through the forge and bellows of a genuine master, like pure gold refined a hundred times, like a ferocious tiger with wings, like a golden-winged garuda swallowing dragons, only then are you considered a genuine heir of the Dharma king.

Notes

Comparatively little is reported of early successors of Linji’s lineage named here, with the exception of Fengxue, Fenyang, and Yuanwu. Xinghua is quoted in *The Blue Cliff Record*, case 10; Shoushan appears in *Book of Serenity*, cases 65 and 76, and in *No Barrier*, case 43. Fengxue, with whom the historical flourishing of

the Linji succession began, is cited in *The Blue Cliff Record*, cases 38 and 61.

Fenyang left an unusually extensive record, and is credited with the promotion of the case study method of Chan; some of his systematic studies of traditional lore can be found in an appendix to the translation of *The Blue Cliff Record*. Sayings of Yangqi can be found in *Zen Essence: the Science of Liberation*. Dongshan, “East Mountain,” here refers to Wuzu Fayan; his teachings are also cited in *Zen Essence*. Yuanwu, the commentator of the *Blue Cliff Record*, is one of the most famous masters of this lineage; his teachings can be found in *Zen Letters*, and in *Zen Lessons*, sections 80-87.

Panshan is cited in *The Blue Cliff Record*, case 37. Yunmen, one of the greatest masters of the classical era of Chan; one of the so-called Five Houses of Chan is named after him; he is cited in *The Blue Cliff Record*, cases 6, 14, 15, 27, 39, 47, 50, 54, 60, 62, 77, 83, 86, and 87; also in *Book of Serenity*, cases 11, 19, 31, 40, 78, 82, 92, and 99; and in *No Barrier*, cases 16, 21, and 48; a selection of his lectures can be found in *The Five Houses of Zen*.

The lacquer bucket or tub of lacquer is a traditional image for ignorance or inhibited awareness.

To supervisor of repair and construction Tong

In olden times master Dasui called on over seventy teachers, but there were only one or two who had great perception; the others all had accurate knowledge and vision. Xianglin met Yunmen and served as his attendant for eighteen years, recording whatever he said on a paper robe. Bringing up these two extremes, we are profoundly aware of how sincerely keen on truth the ancients were. When it comes to the brilliance of their penetration, they went way beyond any cage, barrier of potential, outside and inside, and subjective interpretation. As it is said, a lion king does not roar at random.

In recent times the Chan school is weak—wherein lies the illness? The illness is in the people concerned not trusting themselves. Now where does this illness come from? It comes from the causal ground not being correct. If the causal ground is not correct, even if you put yourself in a monastery you look upon the monastery as a way station. Even though you talk of studying Chan and learning Chan, you are like a duck hearing thunder. In the two cases I've mentioned you also see the difference between people today and people of old. In between, if there are any who can make corrections due to errors, only then will you know the profound debt

to the Buddhas and Founders is hard to repay; then you will know those two great Chan masters were not pretending.

Notes

Dasui appears in *The Blue Cliff Record*, case 29, and *Book of Serenity*, case 30.

Xianglin was one of the so-called Four Sages of Yunmen's school; his interaction with Yunmen is described in *The Blue Cliff Record*, in the commentary on case 6.

He is also cited in case 17.

To server Zhang

Genuine followers of the Way already have the seed wisdom of insight; as soon as they come forth, their spirit is strong and straightforward. At the first step they distinctly transcend, unlike the superficial. Generally, when they finally associate with true adepts, even with a single word or half a phrase they never prevaricate.

Nevertheless, this particular matter cannot be based on understanding and knowledge; how could worldly intelligence resemble it? This is why Luoshan said superior people know the message as soon as they cross the threshold; yet fearing the old fellow on the seat is sleeping, they still turn their heads and probe—if he is an adept, they hang up their pitcher and bowl for awhile. Then again, maybe the old fellow on the seat is asleep and hasn't awakened, his mouth slobbering; this is not a place to stay. Then they go lodge in the houses of lay people.

Observe how those people who had passed through revealed this state of affairs, directly causing all the patchrobed monks in the world to have nowhere to stay, and also did not let them keep on a pathway with nowhere to rest. This is what is called the method of driving off the plowman's ox and taking away the

hungry man's food. Truly, they only emerge infrequently. And how could they mix with the mud and water of people of the time and blind the eyes of students?

Note

Luoshan is cited in *Book of Serenity*, case 43.

To bell keeper Yuan

Before Shakyamuni Buddha, after the Great Mirror of Caoqi, ever since the great old adepts, accurate transmission and intimate accord were not beyond the responsible individuals actually being able to avoid obscuring the initial aspiration in action or repose, speech or silence, twenty-four hours a day. Under these conditions, when they directly saw the scenery of the original ground all at once, then they went together hand in hand with the Buddhas and Founders since time immemorial, having the very same experience, upholding the state that a thousand sages cannot approach, that myriad spirits have no access to look up to, the unique crowning attainment. Not only did they dissolve fixations and untie bonds for all people, they enabled all kinds of beings to each thoroughly realize the root basis, every one thoroughly clear, knowing accurately and seeing accurately. Isn't this a case of great people fulfilling the work of great people?

Linji said, "Twenty years ago, at my late teacher Huangbo's place, I asked three times just what the great meaning of Buddhism is, and three times got hit—it was like being brushed with mugwort. Now I'm thinking of getting another beating—who can administer it?" At that time a monk came forward and said, "I can do it." Linji picked

up his staff to hand to the monk; as the monk made to take it, Linji hit him. Observe how he revealed this great teaching, undeniably a different eye transcending religion. How can he be compared to the indulgence of the present day lot sticking to plants and trees, lone ghosts with no master, sitting inside the eighth consciousness? For them to try to assess the great dynamic and great function of those superior people is just like trying to burn the polar mountain with the 'fire' of a firefly.

This place has been deserted for years, but I too am thinking of getting beaten—who will do it? Suddenly elder Yuan comes forth saying he will do it; I just tell him, wait till you've finished molding the bell; then I'll hand the staff over to you.

Notes

The Great Mirror of Caoqi refers to Huineng, the famed Sixth Patriarch of Chan, revered as the founder of the so-called Southern School that dominated Chan history after his time. For his teachings, see *The Sutra of Hui-neng, Grand Master of Zen*.

The eighth consciousness is what is referred to in the *Lankavatara sutra* as the receptacle, translated in Chinese as the storehouse consciousness, where impressions are stored in the subconscious mind.

To supervisor of repair and construction Zhang

When great-uncle Foyan first took charge of Dragon Gate monastery, there were only remnants of a community and dilapidated buildings. Before a year had passed it was filled with outstanding people from all over the land. Within a few years the whole monastery was renovated, and the Way of East Mountain shook the whole land. Between the years 1127 to 1131 warfare razed the property of the people, destroying almost everything, but Dragon Gate survived. That was because this old man's insight and wisdom were excellent, and his practical vows were far-reaching—how could the fortunes of the world move him at all? In the old days he once said to his followers, “You repair and build for me, and I will teach Chan for you. I will exchange gold pellets for your clay pellets.” These are fine words, penetrating in principle and penetrating in fact, so-called interpenetration of principle and fact, comprehending all things without origin. Though he did not revile Buddhas and scold Patriarchs, how could Buddhas and Patriarchs blaze a trail before him? While he didn't cane or shout, how could caning and shouting perform his function?

You should know that great uncle Foyan's path could not be compared in magnitude with space itself; how could mysterious

marvel or sinking into silence measure it? Therefore if students can see through the clay pellet, then they know where the gold pellet is. If you can skillfully wield this razor-sharp sword of Linji, great achievement is not domineering. If you hesitate, you won't avoid wounding your own life.

Notes

An extensive record of Foyan's teachings can be found in *Instant Zen: Waking Up in the Present*. Some of his advice can also be found in *Zen Lessons*, sections 96-100. The Way of East Mountains refers to the school of Wuzu.

To fundraiser Zheng

Master Yantou said, “Generally, teaching should let three statements flow out from desirelessness. But these are theory—chewing away at it, chewing on it, when you want it to go it doesn’t go, when you want it to stay it doesn’t stay. Sometimes it just doesn’t go at all, sometimes it just doesn’t stay at all.” How true these words! Since ancient times Chan teachers with great perception all had something to say, whereby they overturned the heavens and shook the earth. Where they were inaccessible it was impossible to stay with them; where they were ordinary and factual, it was impossible to get ahold of them. In their going against and going along, it was impossible to see them.

This is called the grip of a patchrobed monk. My teacher’s teacher Yuanwu used to tell students, “If I have a statement to reach you, I get a beating; if I have no statement to reach you, you fall into hell on your own.” See how he had something to say—he was just like a golden winged garuda striking the sea and directly grabbing dragons to eat.

If those who occupy the chair as teachers do not have the eye to capture tigers and rhinos and distinguish dragons from snakes, they’ll be swallowed up by the awakened. Since it’s called

the school of the source, it's just like this. Have you not seen how when Mingzhao came to Elder Dan's place in Quan province, Dan said, "When studying, you should go where there is even one person; where there is even half a person, you should still go."

Mingzhao then asked, "Where one person is there, I don't question—what is it like where there is half a person?" Dan said nothing; later he sent an acolyte to question Mingzhao. Mingzhao said, "Do you want to recognize where half a person is? It's just someone playing with a ball of clay." I thought Mingzhao had seen an adept and must have a saying to startle people—how is it that he made a wild dog's cry? But tell me—where is the angle?

Notes

Yantou was one of the most extraordinary masters. He is cited in *The Blue Cliff Record*, case 66; *Book of Serenity*, cases 22 and 55; and *No Barrier*, case 13.

Mingzhao is cited in *The Blue Cliff Record*, case 48.

To missionaries Mou and Xian

The canonical teachings are not what Buddha taught; direct pointing to the human mind is not what great master Bodhidharma transmitted. But these two expressions trouble all the patchrobed ones in the world: seeking life, they cannot live; seeking death, they cannot die. Just as they are hesitating, when they are suddenly spun around by someone and cut in two with a single sword stroke, blood pours on the highest heaven—turning to take refuge in the Chan school, they are still folks slurping foot-washing water: they still haven't even dreamed of our predecessors' meaning.

Haven't you seen how Linji asked Huangbo the precise meaning of Buddhism three times and was beaten three times, sixty strokes of the staff? Xinghua studied with Linji for a long time, then finally saw Dajiao; when he was taking off his patch robe, he was suddenly greatly enlightened and personally saw the meaning of Linji getting beaten by Huangbo

If you want to succeed to the way of this school, there has never been any other technique, and no special mumbo-jumbo, just straightening the spine. When you get beyond, then you thread the nature and life of everyone in the world with a broken string—no one

slips out of the net. Isn't this a great person doing the work of great people?

To missionary Jian

The capacity of outstanding people in Chan communities is extraordinary. Wherever they go, they never communicate at random; even a single word they may utter, even half a phrase,, invariably has a reason. If they have some understanding that is not yet thorough, they accept correction from others. It is precision and clarity of knowledge that makes them that way. It is only the willfully blind who blabber at random, without question of right or wrong, only caring that people say they know how to give answers—they don't know this is business that squanders capital.

When Yangshan was with Baizhang, he was very loquacious; Baizhang said, "You'll meet someone later on." Subsequently he came to Guishan; Guishan said, "When you were with Baizhang you gave ten answers for every question—is that so?" Yangshan said, "I do not presume." Guishan said, "Say something beyond Buddhism." As Yangshan was about to open his mouth, he was driven out with shouts. Questioned like this three times, three times he was shouted out as he was about to answer. Yangshan hung his head and wept; he said, "My former teacher told me I'd meet someone later—that's what's happened today." Henceforth he became determined, and went into the mountains and

looked after oxen for four years. One day, Guishan went into the mountains and saw him sitting meditating under a tree. He poked him in the back with his staff; Yangshan turned his head. Guishan said, "Can you say yet?" Yangshan said, "Even if I can't say, still I won't borrow someone else's mouth." Guishan said, "You understand." This is what is called discerning the tune when the strings are set in motion, knowing it's autumn when the leaves fall.

As for Linji, when he was with Huangbo he was severely beaten three times; later when he appeared in the world he told the assembly, "When I was caned at my former teacher's place, it was like being brushed with a sprig of mugwort."

Whenever you bring up successors, it must be like those two great elders; only then is it possible to make the school flourish. But when Linji and Yangshan became enlightened, what was accomplished? If you can find out, I'll allow you've entered the Dharma door of the letter A.

Notes

The Gui-Yang school of Chan, one of the so-called Five Houses, was named after Guishan and Yangshan. For records of their teachings, see *The Five Houses of Zen*, and *The Blue Cliff Record*, cases 24, 34, 68, and 70; the *Book of Serenity*, cases 15, 26, 32, 37, 60, 77, and 90; *No Barrier*, case 40.

The Dharma door of the letter A is a term from Esoteric Buddhism. A is the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet; it is used in meditation, and is associated with a range of meanings, including the will for enlightenment, the gateway to the teachings, nonduality, the realm of reality, the nature of reality, freedom, and the body of reality.

To missionary Gan

The mind of people of the Way is straight as a harp string, like a long sword against the sky, wherever they are. Worldly wealth and status, extravagances, desires, and influences have no way to get in and act on them. Fame and profit, affirmation and negation, and all forms of life cannot entrap them. When you get to this state, this is when you take the life root of Buddha. Can it be achieved by the firm and strong practice and determination of just one or two lifetimes? It is only after accumulated ages of refinement, complete ripening of seed wisdom, until you've gone through diligent labors, that you can stride through the universe, walking alone transcendent.

In ancient times it was said there is not a single virtue that comes of laziness and negligence. It is also said you can only attain accomplishment through long endurance of diligent labor. These are true statements, statements that are not deceptive, not false.

If you actually pass through some day, then a thousand people, even ten thousand people, cannot hold you back, cannot call you back. Another time, another day, if you scold Buddhas and Founders atop a solitary peak, it won't be too much. How could it be alright to spend your days eating your fill, forming groups, making

gangs, talking about yellow, talking about black, without the slightest thought of turning awareness around and reflecting back?

Now of the four major elements of this body, the filthy matter of hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, marrow, and brains all return to earth; pus, blood, saliva, excrement, and urine all return to water; warmth returns to fire; movement returns to wind: when the four major elements separate, where will this present deceptive body be then? Focus intently here: if you deal with it as earth, water, fire, and wind, Buddha will never appear; if you don't deal with it as earth, water, fire, and wind, that's like taking a fish eye for a bright pearl. If you don't go into either path, that's no different from trying to satisfy hunger with a picture of a cake. Thirty blows I take myself—it has nothing to do with anyone else.

To manager of the fields Xi

Even a thousand sages cannot place the crowning dynamic. Knowing by thinking is secondary; knowing without thinking is tertiary. The key is in the individual directly bearing it, unloading previous learned understanding, and the duality of light and darkness, to reach the point of clean nakedness. Then it is further necessary to turn to the Other Side, killing Buddhas on seeing Buddhas, killing Patriarchs on seeing Patriarchs. In the school of patchrobed monks, this is still the work of servants and maids. Great people should not seek Chan, seek the Way, seek mysteries, seek marvels from the mouths of old monks on the edges of meditation seats; isn't it a mistake to stuff this into a stinking skin bag considering it the ultimate meaning?

Whenever Muzhou saw a monk, he said, "A done decision—I forgive you thirty blows." When Judi saw a monk, he'd raise a finger. When Bima saw a monk, he'd hold up a fish spear. And so on, to Xuansha's "Not yet through"—the experienced worthies since ancient times, without exception, gripped the painful place precisely. Like a great mass of fire, who would dare get near? Get near, and it will burn off your face. They were also like golden winged garuda birds striking the sea, directly seizing dragons and swallowing them,

without any struggle. Only when you have such spirit and are imbued with such excellence can it be called the work of a great man.

Don't just stick to the views and understanding of an old rat, sporting the light of your tongue, making the rounds of establishments, following people in approval when you see them express approval, following them in disapproval when seeing them express disapproval. This is truly pitiful.

One day Magu came to Zhangjing with his ringed staff; circling the meditation seat once, he shook his staff once and stood tall. Zhangjing said, "Right, right." He also took his staff and went to Nanquan, circled the meditation seat once, shook his staff, and stood tall. Nanquan said, "Wrong, wrong." Magu said, "Zhangjing said 'right'—why do you say 'wrong'?" Nanquan said, "Zhangjing was right—it's you that's wrong. This is whirled by the power of the wind—it eventually decays." When students get here, how do they distinguish black and white? If you successfully investigate thoroughly, good and bad are simply distinct of themselves.

Note

For commentaries on the story of Magu, see *The Blue Cliff Record*, case 31, and *Book of Serenity*, case 16.

To instructor-lecturer Yan

Before the great teacher Bodhidharma had even left India he was already much mistaken; since he could not hold still, eventually he sailed to Liang, went on to Wei, and revealed some information in nine years at Shaolin; calling it simple transmission of direct pointing, his failure was all the more extreme. But the fact is that he couldn't help but add error to error, meeting mind with mind; to begin with, there is no principle attained—what is realized is just experience of one's own original state.

But how do you explain this original state? Isn't mind without acquisition the original state? Isn't "mind is not Buddha, it is not a thing" the original state? Is "all so" the original state? Is "all not so" the original state? If you understand thus, this is just like carving dung to make a sandalwood statue—it will simply stink forever. Even if your eloquence is like a waterfall and your wit like lightning, it's like trying to hit the moon with a stick.

This person requires an enlightened person to know what it comes down to. But now saying "enlightenment" is a word for curing error. Since time immemorial the Buddhas and Founders have seen all people as drifting into error from ignorance, and drifting into various tendencies from error. Since they're mistaken at the outset,

they change faces, doing all sorts of acts; this is called following delusion and turning away from enlightenment. If you plant good roots early, and your mind opens up at the words of a good teacher, so you see through to your original face, that is called turning back from delusion to enter enlightenment.

However, when deluded, how has that ever diminished anything? When enlightened, how has that ever added anything? When deluded, you're deluded about the content of enlightenment, and when enlightened you're enlightened about the content of delusion. When delusion and enlightenment are penetrated and the root of birth and death is severed, it's like a single snowflake on a red-hot furnace—be it Buddhas, Founders, ordinary, holy, opposition, accord, good, bad, long, short, gain, loss, right, wrong, none can touch it; but in this place nothing can touch, you can deal with everything. It is like space containing all forms without any discrimination among objects. It is also like space being omnipresent, equally pervading all lands; every particle, every land, is all a door of great liberation. Buddhism and things of the world become one. This is the same as the body and mind as before you even intended to study Chan, but there is no more wrong knowledge and wrong understanding in your gut. This is what is meant by the

saying, “When enlightened, after all it’s the same as when not yet enlightened.” When you reach this realm, only then is it called a state free of doubt.

Also, I have personally instructed you that there are two kinds of not doubting. Seeing through the original state, reaching the point of ultimate great peace is of course it, and need not be mentioned; but there is still the risk of settling down there and remaining stuck to it. There is a kind of not doubting due to willful blindness, telling oneself there has never been any delusion, so there is no enlightenment now either. Then when questioned closely about the state where there is no delusion or enlightenment, after all one can’t go. Isn’t this not doubting due to willful blindness? This is the type known as burnt seed, spoiled sprouts, who cut off the life root of Buddhas, shed Buddha’s blood. How can you talk to them?

Since ancient times, old worthies’ investigation of this one great matter was not easygoing; it was thoroughgoing. How can that be compared to elders of the present time carrying the burden of what they’ve attained? What does this mean? There’s a type who stop when they’ve attained some perception, and don’t go to anyone to make sure; when people bring something up and set it before them, they cannot elucidate it and swallow it whole. Though they

say they don't doubt, after all there is something in their bellies they can't digest. This is the root of birth and death. There's a type who attain some perception, then sit stuck to their perception; not getting free of their perception, they just talk about mystery and marvel, setting out little pathways and calling this helping people. These are devils destroying the true school of Bodhidharma. There is a type who make effort till they reach a state of quietude, where body and mind are somewhat at ease; then they just sit in the state where there is no one. When they see people talking about good things, they get annoyed and retort, "In the path of Chan there is fundamentally nothing to explain; that's what Yunmen meant when he said everywhere is not clear and there is something before you." This sickness is most severe. There is a type who get some perception and become dissolute, negating Buddhas, negating Founders, negating the sages, going on totally nihilistic, stealing, fornicating, drinking alcohol and eating meat, calling this unimpeded Chan. They are the seed of hell. This is what Yongjia referred to as "attaining emptiness suddenly, ignoring cause and effect and becoming wild and dissolute, beckoning disaster." There is a type whose perception is sunk in silence. Simply eating up the community's food, they stick to the state they're in like possums

playing dead, waiting for enlightenment. These are clods of mud in tumbledown shacks in remote mountains and vast wastelands. These are called kings of inoperative knowledge; they just use up the donations of the faithful.

Actually, those who study as they should never have any such moorings; they have their own lives transcending religion with extraordinary vision. For example, the honorable Yanyang asked Zhaozhou, “When one doesn’t bring anything, then what?” Zhaozhou said, “Put it down.” Zhaozhou knew his ailment was here, so he reached out with a poisonous hand to remove the sweaty shirt sticking to his skin. Without this expedient, he couldn’t be saved. The honorable Yanyang didn’t get it, and asked, “Since I don’t bring anything, what should I put down?” Zhaozhou then said to him, “If you can’t put it down, carry it out.” This line is even harsher, even more than getting a painful caning. The ancient adepts since time immemorial practicing this undertaking penetrated to where there is not the slightest error; only then did they dare to occupy the position of being a guide and model for others. How can they be compared to the current gang who make a show of fame and profit, confusing and blinding people’s eyes?

I tell you directly, the expression used to help people must be something you have attained yourself. Of old it has been said, “Attaining it in your mind, accord with it in your ways.” Acting according to the occasion, you don’t expend energy—breaking out leaping with life left and right, everyone is in one’s net. You cannot say one case is helpful while another one is not. Avoid making this interpretation, not realizing that in a clear mirror on its stand beauty and ugliness are distinct of themselves.

Old Luoshan said, “Here I have just a sword; with the sword is the intent to cut up the body, and also a way to get out.” Since ancient times the old adepts acted out in countless different ways, but it all flowed forth from where they stood, adapting successfully beyond convention, killing and giving life freely. Yantou said, “If we talk in terms of combat, every individual’s power is in the pivotal place.” Isn’t this calm composure?

Notes

The story of Yongjia, known as “The Overnight Enlightened Guest,” appears in the seventh chapter of *The Sutra of Huineng*.

For commentary on the story of Yanyang, see *Book of Serenity*, case 57.

To missionary Da

Before Deshan had met someone, he stuffed his belly full of complications, which flowed in his eighty-four thousand pores and turned into sprites, each emanating countless psychic powers. Then when he met Longtan it was all useless. After that he knew he'd been wrong, and said, "From this day on I won't doubt what the old masters all over the land say." Truly, this matter has never been in intellectual knowledge or much learning. And it's not in clear calm. And it's not in perpetual sitting without lying down. And it's not in silent alertness. If you are someone there, you distinguish the tune as soon as the strings vibrate, know it's autumn when a leaf falls. But if you are not yet able to investigate to the end, you should be like Deshan meeting Longtan; only then can you enter the forge and be worked on with the tongs and hammer.

Note

The famous story of Deshan's encounter with Longtan is found in *The Blue Cliff Record*, in the commentary on case 4, and *No Barrier*, case 28.

To assembly leader Zheng going to Hao province to manage construction

Genuine followers of the Way only want to oppose birth and death when they go making inquiries. They never search for sayings from all over in old or new books; they just retreat into themselves and coolly keep intensely mindful at the root. Suddenly they lose their grip and stumble, suffering defeat—this is the end of the work of a lifetime study; when a solitary lamp shines alone; for the first time their vision has power, and they are like a polar mountain. Where is there any more coming and going of fear and trembling at birth and death?

Master Sixin asked Lu Zhi, “I hear tell you understand Chan, sir, and everywhere they approve you. Is this so?” Lu Zhi hesitated. Sixin said, “I have a question to ask you: when everything is burnt to ashes some day, then what?” Lu Zhi was flustered. Millions and millions of people leap here, but they can’t get a foothold. But tell me, where is the obscurity?

Bao-en one day asked assembly leader Zheng, “How is it when burnt to ashes?” Zheng replied, “Disturbing the spring wind ceaselessly.” In replying like this, did he understand or not? Those with the eye on top, try to judge this fellow.

Notes

For sayings of Sixin, see *Zen Lessons*, sections 127 to 133.

To missionary Fan

The twenty-eight patriarchs of India and six patriarchs of China all directly revealed the one crowning experience; nevertheless, because students are stymied by intellectual interpretation and mired in opinion and hearsay, they sit there on a ground of inevitable death and cannot clearly understand the source of the direct revelation of the patriarchs since time immemorial. This is why an ancient worthy said, “People who study the Way do not recognize reality because they still acknowledge the conscious spirit as before; the root of countless eons of birth and death, ignorant people call the original human being.” See how when those people who attained casually uttered a word or half a phrase it was inevitably beyond religion and convention; thus they had the capacity to bear up directly, fit to be descendants of the school of the source. Are these not great people of extraordinary character?

Nanquan said, “At eighteen I already knew how to make a living.” Zhaozhou said, “At eighteen I already knew how to break up the family and scatter the household.” In the discussions in the communities they say, “Staying mindful is called making a living; ‘No Buddha, no patriarchs’ is called breaking up the family and scattering the household.” Holding discussions like this is certainly of no

benefit; it is very harmful. If you want to understand the meaning of the two great elders, wait till I've changed my bones after thirty years and I'll explain for you.

Notes

For sayings of Nanquan and Zhaozhou, see *The Blue Cliff Record*, cases 2, 28, 30, 40, 41, 45, 52, 57, 58, 59, 63, 64, 69, 80, and 96; *Book of Serenity*, cases 9, 10, 18, 47, 63, 69, and 91; *No Barrier*, cases 1, 7, 11, 14, 19, 27, 31, 34, and 37.

To good friend Peng Daoqing

The correctness of self-management is in oneself; when you walk a thousand miles, what's important is the first step. For those skilled in these two, countless subtle meanings of a hundred thousand doctrines are fulfilled. Hence this is called the concentration of an inexhaustible treasury. It's also called the very body of space, and also called permanence, not passing away.

In the school of patchrobed monks, it is not so. Eyes looking southeast, mind is in the northwest. It cannot be sought by mindlessness, cannot be understood by mindfulness, cannot be reached by speech, cannot be mastered by silence. Unless the universal truth is clearly attained, how can one walk freely over the heads of a thousand sages?

Note

Eyes looking southeast, mind is in the northwest represents the exercise of "turning awareness around and reversing attention," maintaining awareness of awareness rather than following thoughts about external objects of sense.

To wayfarer Bao

The grip of the founding teachers has nothing to it at all; it's just because students approach too eagerly that they cannot see it. If you want to understand easily, just let there be no thought at all times and in all places, and you'll naturally accord with the Way. Once in accord with the Way, inside, outside, and in between cannot be found at all; you are immediately empty, stable, and utterly independent. This is what ancient worthies called not touching things in any state of mind, not staying anywhere step after step.

Observe how those transcendent people acted—when did they ever have the slightest course of ideas grasping and rejecting for people to abide by? Take Deshan, for example: whenever he saw monk come through the door, he'd whack him on the back. When Linji saw a monk, he'd shout right in his face. Whenever they'd show this to students, they only wanted them to know the ultimate, but recently there's a type who stick to it and forcibly act as the master; lonely souls with no master all call it kindness, a favor so great it's hard to repay. And if they let the first move go, they think it means knowing pain from itch. There are certainly many of such types, but I won't go on to cite them all. None of them know the empowerment of the two elders Deshan and Linji; they just uniformly

make assessments and indulge in feeling to figure them out.

Teachers and students approve each other, not only submerging themselves but also shaming the school of our predecessors. If you want to understand the clues of those two old men, just avoid chasing a clod like a mad dog.

Note

Chasing a clod like a mad dog—this is a traditional image of focus on a phenomenon without perceiving any cause or reason, as if someone throws a clod at a dog to drive it away, and the dog attacks the clod instead of the person who threw it.

To assembly leader Zhong

From holding up the flower on Vulture Peak and the direct pointing at Shaolin to the great flourishing of this path throughout the land after Caoqi, in every case it was outstanding types who successfully inherited and carried the responsibility—it was not those of inferior faculties rushing ahead who could maintain it. In general, those who kept up the school were altogether exceptional in everything they did and said, in action and repose, in speech and in silence. They were never willing to sink in stagnant water and consider this the ultimate.

In recent years the degeneration of this path has become more and more extreme. Even if there is one or a half who seem suitable at first, when they get to work they have no grip on it at all. That is because they are fundamentally unfree—they are just followers learning words. Look at the sayings of those great elders Huangbo, Linji, Xinghua, Dajiao, Nanquan, Fengxue, Shoushan, and Fenyang—did they make out a single device or a single state to be real truths to bind students who came to them? They usually took out the tongs and hammer of transcendence, and made the Buddhas and Patriarchs of time immemorial know there is something beyond; how could they be like the current blue and yellow, red and white

crew who randomly drag people into the weeds and blind their eyes? This is what the ancients meant by saying that once you've awakened you should meet someone.

Only those to whom the great truth is clear can know what this talk comes down to. Those who only see one side ultimately cannot abide by it. Therefore we mendicants have to actually practice—it cannot be figured out by worldly psychology. And it cannot be clearly realized by silent immobility. So it is said that silence is deception, while speech is slanderous. There is something else beyond; my mouth is too narrow to explain for you. If students of the Way do not meet someone, how can there be this talk?

Once you have penetrated this talk, then do you recognize a southerner reciting a poem about snow?

To Xu Guobao

The manner of the school of Chan has nothing to it at all; when it comes to taking it up, I don't say there is no one, just that there is not one in ten thousand. Even if there is one or a half, in most cases it is cultivated. When it is time to let go, they are like crabs in hot water. Why so? Because after all they have not met someone. Clear perception of inherent nature failing to penetrate is what eventually brings about this harm. In the rare case that they have planted seeds of wisdom deeply, they will never be confused by false teachers, and will be able to approach genuine masters of the school and settle the great issue of life and death. This is what an ancient worthy meant when he said the approach must be a genuine approach, and realization must be true realization. As the Sixth Patriarch said to Elder Ming, "Not thinking good, not thinking bad, at just such a time, what is your original face?" Ming got the message at these words. Then he asked the Sixth Patriarch, "Is there any meaning besides the secret meaning of the foregoing secret saying?" The Sixth Patriarch said, "What I've just said to you is not a secret; just turn your attention back to your own original face—the secret is in you."

Look at the Sixth Patriarch bringing out the key of Chan direct pointing—when was there ever the slightest ‘way of meditation’ or ‘doctrine of Buddha’ to deliver to people? He just brandished the diamond sword right away, not only severing the life root of Elder Ming, but causing the life root of everyone on earth to disintegrate. Is this not an example of a great man doing the work of great men?

So in general people who study the Way first of all should not memorize anything. This is the essential path into the Way. It is also said that you should be as if you were passing through a village where the wells are poisoned—don’t drink a single drop of water. The expedients of the ancients did not go beyond this—from here you go on to penetrate through to freedom from birth and death as the ultimate end. If there is any principle besides this, any other method, it is surely among the ninety-six kinds of Indian outsiders.

Note

The ninety-six kinds of Indian outsiders refers to the multitude of diverse schools of thought in India in the time of Buddha. They are called outsiders in the sense of attachment to dogmatic beliefs or fixed practices as ultimate truths.

To missionary Ji

Before the ancient Deshan had gone traveling, he looked on the whole land as empty; his attitude of superiority was overbearing. Then when he went south he first called on Longtan; when Longtan blew out the paper torch, his bucket of lacquer broke, and he said, “From now on I won’t doubt what everyone says.” Striding the earth, no one surpassed the restlessness of this elder; at a single hammer stroke he immediately penetrated the heights and depths, his perception no different from old Shakyamuni Buddha. Wasn’t he broadminded, unconcerned with trifles? In this way, for thirty years he just wielded a bare cane—if a Buddha came, he struck; if a Patriarch came, he struck. Essentially this is not the principle of blowing out the torch; even iron eyes with bronze pupils could not see through him. This is what is meant by the saying that the deeds of great men are not something generals or ministers can do.

In general, students need to have genuine accurate knowledge and perception; then they can be refined by the furnace and bellows. Still they might not be able to bear it, and eventually retreat from their aspiration on that account. How much the more so the willfully blind who don’t know what’s there—are they even worth talking about? Even if you have accurate knowledge and perception,

if you don't meet someone you'll still be confused by the thorns of views and not attain freedom. There is nothing worse than that disease. Generally students with some standing are often affected by this problem; if they are unable to get free, it becomes leakage.

If you actually have the will to be a descendant of Shakyamuni Buddha, you should definitely not form associations casually. You certainly need to clearly attain the great truth; then you will not fall into the webs of false teachers. Then you will be the best of people.

To missionary Wei

Wearers of the patchwork robe who really and truly participate in study stand out at all times, their six senses bare, unmoved by the stirrings of desires and influences as they deal with the world. They are not trapped by perception and cognition, nor do they abandon perception and cognition to seek anything, and they do not seek liberation in perception and cognition. Seeing through everything like this, clearly understanding like this, they are entirely independent, transcending subjective assessments of the holy and the ordinary, and yet do not dwell on a state of independence transcending subjective assessment of the holy and the ordinary. This is called being a wayfarer beyond convention.

After that you wield the diamond sword, and wherever you go when you see Buddhas you kill the Buddhas, when you see Patriarchs you kill the Patriarchs, when you see saints you kill the saints. This is what is called shedding Buddha's blood and breaking up the community.

There don't have to be many people like this—just find one or a half; that's enough to continue the life of wisdom of Buddhas and Patriarchs. The true lineage of Linji doesn't worry about being wiped out; in truth it did not come in vain. Therefore an ancient

worthy said, “Everyone wears out their straw sandals—just make sure you wear them all the way through.” Isn’t this the talk of a great person? How can this be compared to a type of ignoramus today, foggy and flighty, who sports weirdness, and occupies a teacher’s chair, falsely aggrandizing himself, and takes sayings of the past, judges them arbitrarily, and confuses the younger generation, doing hellish deeds? This is pitiful. Generally speaking, if study is ultimately not on the right basis, in the end you just become a derelict. Even if you associate with a Chan teacher, it is still selling fame to enjoy its advantages; there is no basis for clarifying the great matter at your feet. If the great matter is not clear, the causes and conditions of bad conduct come into play.

Therefore wise people reform when they’re mistaken and take to good, while fools are embarrassed by mistakes yet pursue what’s wrong. If you take to good, your virtue is renewed every day; if you pursue wrong, your evil keeps building up. The statements of saints and sages are clear; if you don’t observe their admonitions carefully, the roads of humanity and heaven will be cut off, and you’ll turn into an ass or a horse for sure. Haven’t you seen how Fenyang said, “If subjective assessments of ordinary and holy are not thoroughly eliminated, you won’t avoid entering into asses’ wombs or

horses' bellies"? Baiyun said, "Even if subjective assessments of ordinary and holy are all eliminated, you still won't escape entering into asses' wombs or horses' bellies." Although the two old fellows climb a high mountain hand in hand, they still don't get away from a bystander. A type of blind baldy will ask here, "Who is the bystander?" Then I won't let them off even if my staff breaks.

To server Chou

When Buddha shut himself in his room at Magadha, he couldn't save himself; when Vimalakirti kept silent at Vaisali, it turned into a lament. If you go on to speak of "No climbing up above, no self below, standing like a hundred thousand foot wall," this is still drawing the bow after the thief has gone. As for the rest, what a broken bowl of sand! If you only go on thus, so everything in every world is moldy, I'll let go and mingle with mud and water with you. But based on your present perception, ultimately what do you consider the ultimate rule? Clearly ten out of ten are eating leftover soup and spoiled food. Trying to find someone who sits on the tiger's head and holds the tiger's tail, it's like picking the moon out of the sky. So now I can only add error to error, grit my teeth, and try my luck weighing from the zero point of the scale, to find out what's what.

You are a genuine student of the Way, who has been with me for many years. Such people are truly not easy to find. Master Fahua Ju said, "Travelers do not pass the time sightseeing. What do they do it for? It is because the matter of life and death is important. The ancients since time immemorial would ask questions even of village temple keepers wherever they went. Younger students

nowadays stumble past time and again, unwilling to make extensive inquiries.” The statement of the ancient adept has a very deep meaning. If you can keep it in mind, then even in the heap of red dust, at the doorways of busy cities, are shortcuts to the superior person’s success.

Note

Vimalakirti’s silence comes from the scripture *Vimalakirti’s Advice*, and is featured as a case study in *The Blue Cliff Record*, case 84, and *Book of Serenity*, case 48. It is represented as his answer to the question of the teaching of nonduality.

To missionary Ri

For the old adepts of ancient times, the basis of asking about the Way was not comparison of winning and losing; they would certainly call on even a two-foot-tall boy if he had some strong point. In recent times members of the school may say they are traveling solely focused on orderly investigation of the great matter of death and life, but though they appear to be like the people of old, their consciousness of winning and losing is very serious. Since they have this affliction, they cannot clarify the aim of direct pointing.

It is like the case of expert archers. If they want to compare success and failure at the outset, there is no hope that they'll ever hit the bulls-eye. It is only after long practice regardless of success or failure that they can eventually hit the target. Study of the Way is also like this: if a single thought of winning and losing stays in your heart, then you are held back by winning and losing. In debate over winning and losing, nothing else is said—so if you win you're happy, and if you lose you're angry. This is an unfortunate production of this happiness and anger—that happiness and anger are the root of other and self. If you understand that the root of other and self originally comes from nowhere, then this is the gateway of the pure great liberation of the Realized.

So it is said that all truths are established on the basis of no dwelling. The master of Xiushan said, “Truths do not hide—they are always evident.” You ask yes or no, I answer right or wrong—just this is the essential way to cut off the flow of birth and death, the true eye on the crown of Buddhas and patriarchs.

Note

The master of Xiushan is featured in *Book of Serenity*, case 17.

To missionary Zheng

Clarifying the great matter of death and life is not a minor concern. It only lies in the person concerned having planted roots of wisdom deeply, and concentrating sincerely on study, to see what principle this is. First of all, don't define an understanding beforetime, yet don't make a principle of not understanding. It is just like learning archery; over a long period of time, when you reach the point where intent is exhausted and feelings forgotten, suddenly you hit the target. Then you also need to realize there is the subtlety of spontaneous accomplishment of going through the target.

When Yungai Peng called on the master of Yashan of Twin Springs, he was told to contemplate Baqiao's saying, "If you have a staff, I'll give you a staff; if you have no staff, I'll take the staff away." As Yungai was about to open his mouth, Yashan took the fire tong and shook it against his hand. Yungai was suddenly greatly enlightened.

Generally speaking, to be a teacher, if you don't have this great capacity beyond convention, beyond measure, beyond the crowd, time and again you'll roll on all fours in everybody's weeds; then you'll blind a lot of students' eyes.

Wasn't Yashan's shaking the fire tong against his hand as Yungai was about to open his mouth great capacity beyond convention, beyond measure, beyond the crowd? Fortunately there's no connection. If students want to understand the key, concentrate intensely. Time waits for no one.

Note

Commentaries on Baqiao's famous saying can be found in *No Barrier*, case 44.

To missionary Tong

The founding teacher revealed the key of direct pointing; it cannot be mastered by debate, discussion, or discourse. Only those of great faculties can clearly master it. Therefore the seasoned adepts since time immemorial, when not occupied by meetings and decisions, were genuine in their practice, without any waste of time, eventually becoming purely peaceful naturally. How could they be wrapped up in worldly illusions and passions? If you actually go on practicing this way, suddenly the moment will come when you turn awareness around and see through to your original face. Then you will see clearly where worldly passions and illusions, mountains, rivers, and earth, matter and emptiness, light and dark, noumenon and nature, mystery and marvel, each come from. Once you've attained clarity, you won't be trapped by anything mundane or transcendental. Immediately attaining unity, there will be no otherness twenty-four hours a day. An ancient even said, "When you call it *thus*, it has already changed."

Concentrate intensely on this; in this matter one cannot be too mature. The more you retreat, advance all the more; the more the obscurity, clarify all the more, until the great function dealing with situations has a way to come forth in every case. How could you let

students perish through literalism in vain, becoming a perpetual criminal in Buddhism? For example, a monk asked Hongjiao, “Where do mountains, rivers, and earth come from?” Hongjiao said, “From false thought.” The monk said, “Suppose I think up a piece of gold—then what?” Hongjiao stopped talking. The monk didn’t accept this. Yunmen heard this mentioned and said, “This is already a complication he can’t resolve. When he asked if he could think up a piece of gold, I’d hit him with a staff.” He was right, alright, but Yunmen was dripping blood; and he couldn’t get past Hongjiao’s silence at all. A type of blind fellow will say I am acting as the master for Hongjiao. Alas, there are so many of this ilk in recent years, they’re no longer lamented.

To missionary Zhang

When patchrobed monks leave a community and enter a company, they must have the unbreakable accurate eye on the crown, and not be led by false teachers into a nest of weeds to do wrong filling the skies. Then they are truly the best of people. If you actually travel like this, why worry that the task of travel will not get done? For this reason ancient worthies pushed aside the weeds looking for the way—how could they do it for the sake of enjoying the scenery, admiring the buildings and kitchens here, getting donations there? Their advantage was in being peaceable, only dealing with death and life as their chief concern.

You need to pass through the one special great matter of transcendence, until you reach the point where you have no leakage at all; then you need to turn to the Other Side where a thousand sages cannot get a grasp, where myriad spirits have no way to look up to from afar. At ease, free, like an idiot, like an imbecile, yet at the slightest provocation able to produce fire in water, only then can you succeed to the lineage of Linji. If you stick to the conventions and measures of a teacher's school, then when confronted by others you still won't avoid dying in a ghost cave; twenty-four moods of

fogginess and flutter will appear all at once. Where is the business of a great man then?

Therefore when successive masters emerged and brought up this essential key, it was only for this type. They never let themselves be dragged into groups of wild foxes. Observe how Linji and Deshan of old took advantage of an opportunity to show a state, like taking off a sweaty shirt sticking to the skin. As soon as thorns of views intruded, they immediately cut them off. Even that still didn't measure up to the task of time immemorial. How could they blindly make subjective comments at random?

For years students have all said that the descendants of Linji have a sharp and swift dynamic edge. This claim, still, is very strange. Aspiring to study, you have willingly traveled over a thousand miles to come to this congregation, hoping to penetrate the great matter of life and death. Unwilling to sit still, you're resolutely emulated the ancients, begging for the support of the congregation, continuing the outstanding list of Hongzhou. You've asked for a statement of the teaching, and I've written a general outline—beware of literal understanding, but don't understand this to mean there's nothing to say. When it comes to the great task here, I can't do it for you. As for minor matters, just deal with them yourself.

Note

Hongzhou was the location of the mountain called Baizhang, where the ancestor of the Linji lineage master Baizhang Huaihai taught.

To Chan man Wan

Aspiring wearers of the patch robe who betake themselves to large communities certainly want to penetrate the heights and depths of the matter at their feet, to clear up disgrace with the Buddhas and masters of time immemorial. Would they mount snail horns or fly heads and lose their own lives? Observe the unerring continuity of Linji, Deshan, Xinghua, Nanyuan, Fengxue, Shoushan, and Fenyang—they were guides for ten thousand generations of wearers of the patch robe. Even after the passage of several centuries, there has never been the slightest interruption of the achievement of wisdom and virtue, the running of dragons and tigers. A thousand people, ten thousand people, looking up, cannot reach; “They wouldn’t be trapped, didn’t turn their heads when called.” The ancient sages did not make arrangements; even now there is nowhere to place them. With every step they ascended into the mystery, not in the realm of wrong or right; the skill that pierces the target, the great tongs and hammer, who but those great elders would dare face? Coming to Ciming, Huanglong, Cuiyan, and Yangqi, the tone was all the more lofty, the resonance ever expanding. Since Yuanwu, descendants have covered the earth

everywhere. That is because “when the source is deep, the flow is long.”

Therefore mendicants of today should be keenly mindful of the lofty excellence of the manner of the school of the ancestors, and the greatness of their life-giving work. How dare they sit ignorantly, sleeping through the day, waking up three times? “The ancients had a lifelong worry”—this was nothing but worry that they hadn’t mastered the Way. Once the Way is mastered, then there is no trouble over lifetimes. Can this ever be described? Then you can show the one great fiction prior to the Seven Buddhas, on the other side of the prehistoric Buddha. Wuzu said all false statements and deceptive talk are small fictions; seeing the original face is a great fiction. Now then, are small fictions and great fiction one meaning or two meanings? Ponder this.

Note

Huanglong Huinan was considered the inspiration of the so-called Huanglong branch of the Linji succession. Some of his sayings can be found in *Zen Lessons*, sections 41-47.

To Chan man Xin

People who study the Way are to be strong and sharp, biting right through; as soon as you hesitate, you stick your head into the web of knowledge and opinion, producing angles, patterns, and discriminations—if you want to clearly understand the key of the direct pointing solely transmitted by Bodhidharma, you're far off.

Nanquan said to Zhaozhou, “The Way is not in the province of knowledge, nor is it in the province of unknowing. Knowing is false consciousness, unknowing is indifference. If you really arrive at the Way free of doubt, you are empty as space—how can you insist on affirmation or denial?” Observe that ancient's indication for the occasion: at first it was like sword after sword; then when he sums up he directly makes a commoner prime minister.

In case you are not yet versed in this tradition, you don't need to hit bricks, tap tiles, propitiate ghosts and burn money: just turn to where a single thought hasn't arisen, and immediately it will be like the bottom of a bucket falling out—you will see through the affairs of countless ages all at once. Once you're gotten this basic handle, you need to hold fast and not let go lightly. Why? There is still something ahead. This is the time to go looking for a genuine Chan master to be a challenging creditor, in hopes that you'll pass

through the barrier upward and pierce the nostrils of every patchrobed monk on earth. This is considered hard, it seems. Some day, having endured frost and dew, the fruit becomes ripe; then you can go hand in hand with Deshan and Linji and check the unresolved cases of old adepts of time immemorial, getting later students to personally acknowledge the provisional notes of their grandfathers, so every item is clear in all ways, definitely, without doubt. After that you inherit the family business, raise children, and enable your descendants to prosper. This is what is meant by the saying, "I originally had no ambitions; now this treasure has come of itself." Does this not bring happiness to everyday life?

But since Deshan and Linji lived hundreds of years ago, how could you want to go hand in hand with them? Try to tell me.

To Chan man Yuan

Generally speaking, people who go traveling build up the spirit to become Buddhas and masters, very much unlike commonplace clerics. This means they are above it all twenty-four hours a day, totally concentrated, undeniably inaccessible. This is what is meant by the saying, “First establish what is important, and minor matters cannot take it away.” Once you’ve mastered what’s important, what is minor will conform to what’s important, and what’s important will be like a minor matter. After that great and small will both disappear, completely merging with no boundary.

In the present time this is still a wild fox cave; it is still necessary to break through with a single hammer blow, penetrating the transcendental great potential and great function, loosing the burnt-tail tiger to roar the lion’s roar.

Since it is a burnt-tail tiger, why does it roar the lion’s roar? The three grades of sages have yet to understand this teaching; how can the saints of the ten stages master this school?

To Chan man Zuo

Since ancient times, people who embrace the Way have been as if ignorant; did they have a single saying or half a statement to give people to chew on? After they recognized them, others lamented that they didn't speak out, but when they spoke out they startled people. In recent years this path has become extremely desolate—even if there are those who set their minds on monastic communities, none of them have the right basis. Even if they cleave to teachers, they are quite devoid of mindfulness of the Way. From the very start they are no different from those who traipse over the landscape in the interest of name and fame. If they happen to get a handful of thatch to cover their heads, they don't know their place—they even act out crazily, trying to claim for themselves the state of greatness of the Buddhas. Covering for their personal folly, they claim to be transmitting the school of the Buddha mind. Indeed, how could the state of greatness of Buddhas admit of false claims? Those who travel with them have the heads of cowardly roebucks, the eyes of rats, the tails of scorpions, and the hearts of wolves; they ruin the teaching. Every one of them is like this; how can we not lament? Great-hearted wearers of the patch robe everywhere

should avoid them. As it is said, when you see what is not good, it is like reaching into boiling water.

To missionary Fa

An ancestral teacher said, “If the mind affirms something, it must deny something.” Who can clearly understand this statement but someone of superior faculties and great wisdom? One must fully use the present—only then can one penetrate the key to transcendence.

Linji met with three painful canings at Huangbo’s place—as it is said, “Attacking the unorthodox hurts, that’s all.” Even though he was enlightened at Dayu’s place, his oddity became more extreme. However, few will know the meaning of what I’m saying. Even if you listen with your nose and hear with your eyes, that still won’t do.

After Linji appeared in the world, he told the congregation, “All my life I’ve scolded Buddhas and rebuked Patriarchs, but I haven’t found the slightest bit of wrongfulness.” But tell me, where did the wrong for which he was caned by Huangbo go?

Whenever he saw a monk come through the door he immediately shouted, swift as a sharp sword up to the sky, dull as an iron hammerhead with no hole. If you call it a shout, the family style of Bodhidharma will be swept away at once; if you don’t call it a shout, you commit an offense.

To attendant Zong

Authentic students of the Way are just like prisoners as long as life and death aren't clarified. As long as they haven't gotten a final judgment, no matter what they're doing they cannot have any peace whatsoever. If you work like this there's no reason why the great matter of life and death will not be penetrated.

In years past, my teacher's teacher Yuanwu called on teachers everywhere, and there were none who did not approve his attainment. Eventually he met master Baiyun Yan, and when questioned to see where he was coming from, it turned out he hadn't done his own work after all; he was just a bellyful of vanity. Baiyun said to him, "What you're studying is Chan on lecturing chairs." Yuanwu didn't agree and left. When he came to Jinshan, he came down with a serious illness and nearly died. He thought about what he had studied, and found nothing at all of avail. As soon as he recovered, he went back to see Baiyun; hearing him quote the saying about "repeatedly calling the maid," he suddenly broke through the lacquer tub and only then realized his error.

Truly the relationship of teacher and apprentice is certainly not casual. Chan people of the present time have also been in monastic communities for many years, have gone to see teachers of

the school imbued with the Way, and have also suffered serious illnesses. Whether their minds are at ease or not, they all know for themselves; it's just that they are unwilling to let go.

This unwillingness to let go is of two kinds. One is when they do not meet genuine masters of the school when they first go traveling, and plunge into the fires of deviant false teachers, get poisoned by them, and then claim their task of travel is done. There is also another kind who may lodge in a monastic community and call it studying Chan, but really they don't have the right basis; they only appropriate what they've heard, and regurgitate it in a hurry to get the recognition of others, then approving themselves and merely claiming just this is it.

These two types are called fatal illnesses, unless they someday realize their error, and will come to let go of it at some point. But what is let go, after all? Just let go of the burden of other and self, gain and loss, affirmation and negation, Buddha and Dharma, mystery and marvel. As soon as you let go like this, you will feel physical and mental ease, outward and inward purity. At all times your heart will be empty, coolly going free at a glance; only then can you sincerely undergo refinement. If you just keep to the perspective you're realized as ultimate, you're no different from a

sprite haunting the wilds and woods. Those people of the Way who have escaped convention are far different; they are able to create wind and rouse the grass on contact, getting the resentment of people in the world and out of the world. Nothing is beyond this attainment. This is what is called the grip of a patchrobed monk.

Note

Repeatedly calling the maid refers to an image of a woman calling her maid over and over just to let her husband hear her voice and know she's there. The idea is that the overt content of a Chan presentation is not in itself the point, but a means of directing attention. This is why the *Lankavatara sutra* says that the Buddha never said a word; this is often quoted in Chan works to emphasize the point that there is no fixed doctrine or dogma to give to people.

To missionary Tong

In olden times, when Huangbo heard Baizhang tell of the deep meaning of his second meeting with Mazu, he unconsciously stuck out his tongue. Who but those born knowing it could possibly understand? This path went into effect throughout the land when it came to Linji; his successors and descendants all had the methods to kill people without blinking an eye. They looked for one or a half who would be future successors; even those who scolded Buddhas and upbraided Patriarchs were still considered immature—how much the more so those who mixed with mud and water and scattered dirt and sand, equating this with the eye of the school? This is no different from trying to compare the ripples in the puddle of an ox footprint to waves flooding the sky—is this possible?

People with will do not take the first step blindly. Over a long period of time they keep cool; one day the bottom falls out of the bucket, and the perennial matter suddenly appears. They are not confused by false teachers; they are totally impervious, so wind blowing cannot enter, water poured on cannot wet. How could there be any worry that they won't influence heaven and earth some day? Not only will they accord with the profound meaning of his second meeting with Mazu indicated by Baizhang; they will certainly be

outstanding savants. And how could they just “stop upon meeting a great wind”?

Note

Stop upon meeting a great wind refers to master Yangshan’s prediction of the future appearance of the great master Fengxue, with whom the lineage of Linji would begin to flourish. This story is recounted in the commentary to case 29 of *The Blue Cliff Record*.

To missionary Yi

When our ancestor Huairang first brought up Mazu's critical illness, he showed him the key to killing Buddhas, polishing a tile and hitting the cart. This is what is meant by the saying, "Curing illness doesn't take a donkey-load of medicine." So that habitual fixations and obsessions melt away, calm question and answer between father and son, with never the slightest leaking, was brighter than a thousand suns shining, suiting the occasion, in every respect transcending subjectivity and free from opinion. Reaching the state of leaving life and entering death, not doubting, there was finally none of the trouble of life and death, beginning and ending. After that he communicated this to Baizhang, Baizhang communicated it to Huangbo, Huangbo communicated it to Linji, and Linji communicated it to Sansheng. When Sansheng died, happily there was great peace. Would it be thought that Xinghua wouldn't hold back? At Dajiao's cane he saw through the meaning of Linji getting beaten by Huangbo. This elder was certainly an example of "If you hear things incorrectly, you'll call a bell a pitcher," an unusual one. Even up till now the old masters everywhere all use this to censure and praise. The sword that kills people, the sword that gives people

life—this was the dynamic edge of antiquity, and also the pivotal essential for people of the present.

Destroying demons and breaking down fixations cannot be dispensed with; in that context, one or a half with a clear mind will never be willing to sit in stagnant water, singing and humming with frogs and worms. The great ones perpetuate successive generations with methods of pulling out nails, extracting stakes, dissolving glue, and removing bonds. From the present day on they are determined to find someone who can't be knocked off balance to be an heir to Linji, causing the lineage to continue over myriad generations to be good fortune, to be auspicious, to be wind, to be thunder, to be clouds, to be rain, to be disaster, to be harm. And how could that be for naught!

Note

Huirang and Mazu—Chan master Huirang saw Mazu sitting in meditation every day, and asked him why he was doing that. Mazu said he aimed to become a Buddha. Huirang took a piece of tile and began polishing it; Mazu asked him why he was doing that, and Huirang said he was trying to make a mirror. Mazu asked, “How can you make a mirror by polishing a tile?” Huirang said, “Since polishing a tile can't make a mirror, how can sitting in meditation make a Buddha?” Mazu asked what would be right, and Huirang said, “it is like an ox

pulling a cart; if the cart doesn't move, do you hit the cart, or do you hit the ox?"

Mazu had no reply, so Huairang went on, "Are you practicing sitting meditation, or are you practicing sitting Buddhahood? If you are practicing sitting meditation, meditation is not sitting or reclining. If you are practicing sitting Buddhahood, Buddhahood is not a fixed form. You should not grasp or reject things that do not abide. If you seat Buddha, this is killing Buddha; if you cling to the form of sitting, you do not realize the inner reality."

To construction manager Ci

When great people want to cut off the road of birth and death, they must abandon everything they have hitherto treasured; then their six senses will naturally be clean and naked—one day they'll get a glimpse, and won't worry that the road of birth and death might not be cut off. If they do not make real true application basic, and want a lot of knowledge and a lot of interpretation, taking it to be the subtlety of independent attainment, instead they'll be blown colder and hotter by the wind of knowledge and interpretation, getting dizzier by the day. They bring this trouble on themselves; it's no one else's fault.

Generally speaking, in the accurate transmission of Chan, even if you have thoroughly awakened, and achieve balance to reach complete ending of leakage, and also can control wrong action, and accept flavorlessness, having gone through these several layers of barriers, you still haven't fulfilled your life's aim. You should know that when past masters brought out a dynamic and showed a state to remove entrapments and break up nests, they never had any doctrines at all to give people for them to construe as principles. Yet there was still the concern that people might some day mistakenly create rules to disturb students, supposing that the

true transmission of Chan must have such things, far from realizing that a swift hawk does not strike a sparrow in a cage.

To secretary Zong

The verbal teachings of Buddha and masters since antiquity are like tiles used to knock on a door; they had no choice but to avail themselves of these as ways to enter into noumenon. In recent years students do not take the design of the school as their basis, and instead consider the verbal teachings of Buddha and the masters to be ultimate rules. That is like ignoring a hundred thousand clear oceans and just recognizing a single bubble floating up. This is pitiful.

Ever since there have been masters, the continuous lineage of upholders of the school demonstrating means of direct pointing have never given people understanding; what they indicate just points out the individual's basic reality. If you are actually able to cut in two with one sword stroke when not a single thought has occurred, then when you come to the last day of the last month, when you let go over a precipice, the five desires and eight winds have no way to disturb you, and the nine states of being and four kinds of birth cannot take you in. This is what is called the work of great people—how can they even be mentioned at the same time as folks who count black beans?

Note

Folks who count black beans refers to literalist scholars.

Eight winds refer to gain and loss, vilification and praise, fame and censure, pain and pleasure.

To construction manager Gan

Someone learning the Way intending to master Chan just masters the Chan of a solitary lamp shining alone in the hall of nirvana. Don't set up a limit, determined to realize the Way by a certain time; that is laughable. This Chan has no sickness or pain—it's only important to step back with complete confidence, hang up your begging bowl, break your staff, stiffen your spine, be inwardly like wood or stone and outwardly like empty space. Once the tub of lacquer suddenly comes apart, the five clusters and eighteen elements will be clean, and you will at once be liberated from the four kinds of birth and nine realms of existence.

Having seen this highway, it is not yet the place to rest. Only when you get to where the great truth is completely clear can you distinguish true and false, wrong and right in every case. This is called unexcelled great independent spiritual sovereignty. After that, it makes no difference to you whether you stay in mountain forests or live in cities. This is what is meant by the saying, "When uniformly equanimous, everything ends of itself, as if vanishing." Isn't this the proper fodder in the school of patchrobed monks?

If your eye of the Way is not clear, and your strength insufficient, whatever circumstances you encounter you must grip

the rope firmly and not allow intrusion into people's crops. You should keep up the discipline everywhere, not worrying that your own great concern is not clarified.

A monk asked Yantou, "When you meet a ferocious tiger on the road, then what?" Yantou said, "Press." Yantou likes to put on pressure, alright, not knowing himself the result.

Note

Five clusters refer to mind and body; form, sensation, perception, cognition, and consciousness. *Eighteen elements* refer to the six senses, six fields of sense objects, and six sense consciousnesses.

To missionary Ren

Old Nan said, “To speak of marvel and talk of mystery is to be a traitor to great peace; beating and shouting is heroism in an era of chaos. Heroism and treason, beating and shouting, mystery and marvel, are all superfluous.” How true this saying is! Whenever masters of the school occupy the appropriate position and point out the fundamental truth, they should uphold it like this. This is called censuring and praising, the sword that kills, the sword that gives life, being a successor of Linji. If you don’t have this bit, you will not avoid blindly misconceiving deviant teachings and blinding people’s eyes. For this reason Sixin said, “It is like a dead man wielding a sharp sword cutting off a dead man’s head; bring it to me, and I’ll approve you.” This is what is meant by the saying that an expert archer hitting the target before he’s even drawn his bow is immature even then. Sharp people penetrate the bones and marrow as soon as they hear; why wait for the roundabout of an old monk in a chair repeatedly harping on it?

Generally speaking, if students think ahead and look behind, they’ll undoubtedly fall into a pit. The likes of Deshan and Linji appeared in the world exercising a single revelation, startling the heavens and shaking the earth. Coming to the school of patchrobed

monks, it doesn't amount to a laugh. It is just like, "Those who study are numerous as hairs on an ox; those who attain are rare as a unicorn horn."

Note

Sixin was Huanglong Sixin, distinguished successor of Huanglong Huinan ("Old Nan"). Some of his teachings appear in *Zen Lessons*, sections 127 to 133.

To Chan man Liang

In my school there is no Chan Way or Buddhism, no upwards or downwards, no pedantry, no gain or loss, victory or defeat. Although I have wearers of the patch robe gathered together, I just use an unbreakable cage and a bunch of chestnut thorns; those who try to leap out cannot forcibly leap out, no matter how hard they try, and those who try to swallow cannot forcibly swallow. It's just a matter of stepping back, and in a cool state suddenly attaining realization, like returning home successful. Only one or a half out of a thousand or ten thousand manage. Those among them whose bellies are hot can only look up to it jealously. Basically, when they look for where it comes from, they can't find it. It's just the inherent actuality present in every individual. So it's not imposition of a rule.

Therefore the old adepts since time immemorial have all shown this inherent actuality to those who come to study, only deeming it important that each individual concentrate intensely and take it on directly, entering deeply into the inner sanctum of past adepts. Linji's diamond sword, Deshan's last word, Yaoshan's single statement, Mimo's forked stick, Judi's finger, Xuefeng's rolling balls, Zhaozhou's test, the girl emerging from a trance, Lingyun's seeing

peach blossoms, Xuansha's "not finished"—these all have the same aim. If there is the slightest failure to reach it completely, then calamity arises.

Generally speaking, heroism is not in lament. Yantou said, "Those with keen faculties cut through with one bite." Who knows how much energy they save! After that, when they see Buddhas they kill the Buddhas, when they meet Patriarchs they kill the Patriarchs; and in the school of patchrobed monks these are still rank novices. Here, can followers of shadows and echoes even approach those free of convention and beyond measure? How about those who cut off the tongues of everyone on earth—do they have a place to establish themselves, or not? I ask all quarters to say something on their behalf.

Notes

Linji's diamond sword—Linji said, "When the sword of wisdom is drawn, there is not a single thing."

Deshan's last word—One day Deshan left the hall with his bowl in hand. He met (his disciple) Xuefeng, who asked him, "The bell and drum announcing the mealtime have not yet been sounded; where are you going with your bowl?"

Deshan immediately returned to his room. Xuefeng told Yantou about this. Yantou said, "Even the great Deshan does not know the last word." Hearing of this,

Deshan had an assistant summon Yantou, whom he asked, “You don’t agree with me?” Yantou secretly revealed what he meant, and Deshan dropped the subject. The next day Deshan gave a lecture that turned out to be very different from usual. Yantou went to the front of the communal hall, clapped and laughed and said, “How fortunate the old fellow understands the last word! After this no one in the world will be able to do anything to him.” Commentaries on this case can be found in *No Barrier*, case 13, *Book of Serenity*, case 55, and *The Blue Cliff Record*, case 51.

Yaoshan’s single statement—Yaoshan said, “I have one statement; I’ll tell you when a bull gives birth to a calf.”

Mimo’s forked stick—Master Mimo used to point a forked stick at anyone who came to question him.

Judi’s finger—Whenever Judi was asked a question, he would just raise a finger. Commentaries on this famous example can be found in *The Blue Cliff Record*, case 19; *Book of Serenity*, case 94; and *No Barrier*, case 3.

Xuefeng’s rolling balls—One day Xuefeng saw Xuansha coming and rolled out three wooden balls together. Xuansha made a smashing gesture; Xuefeng approved. This is cited in *The Blue Cliff Record*, verse and commentary on case 44.

Zhaozhou’s test—A monk asked a woman the way to the sacred mountain Taishan. The woman told him to go straight ahead. As he went off, the woman

said, “A fine monk—and so he goes!” When Zhaozhou was told about this, he said he’d go test the woman. He asked her the same question and got the same answer. He told his group, “I have checked out the woman of Taishan for you.” Commentaries on this case can be found in *No Barrier*, case 31; and *Book of Serenity*, case 10.

The girl emerging from a trance—A girl remained in a trance after an assembly of Buddhas had dispersed. The bodhisattva Manjusri, who symbolizes formless insight, asked Buddha how she could attain such a state. Buddha told him to rouse her and ask her himself. Manjusri was unable to rouse her. Buddha then summoned a bodhisattva named Ensnared Light, who roused her from her trance with a single finger snap. Commentary on this case can be found in *No Barrier*, case 42.

Lingyun’s seeing peach blossoms—After thirty years of meditation, Lingyun finally awakened one day on seeing a peach tree in bloom.

Xuansha’s “not finished”—When Xuansha heard of Lingyun’s awakening on seeing peach blossoms, he said that Lingyun was not through yet.

To Eminent Zhao

Buddha spent forty-nine years preaching a whole canon of pedantry, full of affirmations and denials, judgments and criticism. So without laboring anymore, when it came to the end, see how he had no summation, but held up a flower before a multitude, passing on his bequest. His fraud was not trivial. Then when Bodhidharma came from the West and directly pointed to the human mind to show its nature for realization of Buddhahood, after all when hearing something is not as it really is, one calls a bell a pot. Even if you have the spirit of a great man and are larger than life, radiating light and shaking the earth all the time wherever you are, you are all the more out of touch.

This bit has no sentimentality; painfully applying poisonous methods, it overturns conceptions of traditions passed on from teacher to disciple, transmission from mouth to ear of devices of Buddhas and Patriarchs from antiquity, mystic marvels and noumenal nature, like a snowflake on a red-hot furnace.

Basically, this is not “the scenery of the fundamental ground,” and it is not “the grip of a patchrobed monk.” If you go on to talk about Baizhang’s deafness, Linji’s threescore blows, Xinghua’s shedding the patchwork robe, Yunmen’s leg being broken, Xuefeng’s

rolling balls, Zhaozhou's testing, a dog having no Buddha-nature, a clear eyed man falling into a well, using those great elders' knocking bricks and hitting tiles, all the more you'll get messed up.

If you don't clearly understand this message, beware of taking it crudely. That is because Chan study has never involved any other technique but the need to let go and be uniformly mindless, to accord with the Way spontaneously. Recently there is a kind of goofball who doesn't comprehend method, either taking "standing like a wall ten miles high" to be noble, or taking plunging into silence and hearing nothing to be the ultimate rule, or regarding all speech and writing as adaptation. These types are truly pitiful.

But tell me, what about my perception?

This year, on the eighteenth day of the eighth month, clear light looks like it's pushing the ocean tide.

Notes

Baizhang's deafness, Linji's threescore blows, Xinghua's shedding the patchwork robe, Xuefeng's rolling ball, and Zhouzhou's testing have appeared before.

Yunmen's leg being broken is the story of Yunmen's enlightenment, recounted in *The Blue Cliff Record*, in the commentary on case 6; whenever his teacher Muzhou received potential students, he'd immediately challenge them, then push them out the door if they hesitated. He did the same to Yunmen; on Yunmen's

third attempt to get an audience with Muzhou, his foot was still in the door when Muzhou slammed it on him, breaking his leg. As he cried out in pain, Yunmen was suddenly enlightened.

A dog having no Buddha nature is the first case in *No Barrier*; a more complete version is found in *Book of Serenity*, case 18.

A clear-eyed man falling into a well—Baling said, “What is the Path? A clear-eyed man falls into a well.”

To workman Liaowu

Leaving home is the business of great people. Why approach a teacher only after shaving your head? When ancestor Lu was a workman, he sold firewood in the market place; hearing a customer reciting scripture stimulated his fundamental aspiration, and he called on Daman at Huangmei. They were in accord at their first meeting, and he concealed himself in the mill. When he heard the verse written by Shenxiu, he revealed his sword point somewhat. Having been given the robe, he went south. When he reached the Yu ridge, he used the original face not thinking of good or bad for the wayfarer of Mengshan to concentrate and realize the aim. Eventually he came to Fanyu and openly stated “The wind and the flag are not moving—movement comes from the mind,” startling those who heard.

Observe how that patriarch, from obscurity to prominence, pointed out the fundamental reality. There’s no other art, just mastery of one’s own mind. This is what it means to say, “Why wait to shave your head before seeing a teacher?”

Note

Ancestor Lu refers to the Sixth Patriarch of Chan, who was originally a woodcutter, later a lay workman in the community of the Fifth Patriarch at Huangmei. The

stories alluded to here are found in *The Sutra of Hui-neng, Grand master of Zen*.

To workman Liaoxin

Cutting off affection and leaving relations, one becomes a member of the family of the Realized One. Learning transcendent truth, one understands the characteristics of the world are themselves appearances of reality. This is what is meant by the statement, "These phenomena abide in the normative state; the features of the world are always there." I know this; do you know this? The key to working for Buddha is belaboring the body, painful to the bones, tirelessly over long years, attentive to the community, lying in the grass, sleeping in the frost, unwearied, until death. One who can carry this out is a genuine renunciant.

To patron Xu Jiangshi

Holding up a flower on Vulture Peak, directly pointing at Shaolin, midnight on Huangmei, confrontation on Dayu Ridge—since then, after Caoqi, this path has flourished greatly. In every case it is just the single revelation received and applied twenty-four hours a day on the crown of the present individual. It may be a Buddha, may be a Patriarch, may be Mr. Bao, may be the Twelve Faced Guanyin, may be the thirty-two responsive embodiments of Guanyin, may be the thousand hands and eyes of Guanyin. Going through all its transformations, space is its mouth, myriad forms are its tongue; for ever and ever, whatever is said of temporal manifestation according to kind, response to potential, according to sense, after all no one can find out its root. Is it only Mr. Bao who falls back three thousand miles? Even Buddha has no place to establish himself.

Even so, “this way will do; not this way will do too”—so and not so both hit the target. When it comes to old masters throughout the land sitting on chairs and revealing the fundamental truth, dissolving sticking points and removing bonds for all people, pulling out nails and extracting wedges, plying the tongs and hammer of transcendence to shatter the nests of patchrobed monks, one or a half among them with blood under their skin, when lightly poked by

an authentic person, immediately shed previous learned understanding, the bifurcation of light and dark, and stand out, with never any dualism whatever circumstance they encounter. With this will power they manifest exceptional appearances, some becoming officials, some becoming laymen, some becoming grandees, some becoming mendicants; in each case according with the mind they have attained, opening the door of universal liberation, enabling all types to know the existence of the marvelous, with complete clarity, the one extraordinary great matter of transcending life and departing from death, cutting off objects and obliterating traces. On reaching the state of great rest, great cessation, where leakage is entirely eliminated, the four kinds of birth, nine states of existence, five desires, and eight winds are suddenly cleared, causing every individual's crowning indestructible eye to be accurate, opening the gate of great charity, saving those who haven't been saved, responding to those who've gotten no response. Are these not great people with the extraordinary great method of turning iron into gold?

Notes

Mr. Bao was Baozhi (Pao Chih, also referred to as Master Chih), an eccentric illuminate represented as a contemporary of the founder of Chan. A number of writings attributed to him can be found in *The Zen Reader*

Guanyin is the Chinese version of Avalokitesvara, the supernal bodhisattva representing universal compassion. Guanyin is variously represented as having twelve faces, thirty-two embodiments, or a thousand hands and eyes, illustrating versatility of outreach.

To patron Deng Chengwu

Those of great faculties and great wisdom know the conclusion as soon as it's touched upon—and is it that only waving the arms and drumming the tongue is to be considered direction? Indeed, it only evokes a laugh from people with clear eyes. For this reason the twenty-eight patriarchs of India and six patriarchs of China just met mind to mind. From the outset there is no mind to be attained; but if you make a principle of no mind, then this is the same as having a certain mentality.

However, the teaching of mind is easy to understand but hard to clarify. Therefore an ancestral teacher said, “There is no mind, nothing to attain; talk of attainment does not clarify the truth. If you understand mind is not thought, only then do you understand mind and mental phenomena.” See how the ancestral teacher revealed the teaching of mind realized by Buddhas and masters since antiquity; is this mixing with mud and water, claiming to have attained what has not been attained? Even if wind blowing cannot get in, and water pouring cannot wet, there is still the risk of getting into lip service and falling into sloganeering. So this is followed up with a sharp poke to make one shed the marvel of realization of attainment, to reach the state where no one can trap you. And this is

still not yet expertise. It is further necessary to turn to the Other Side and activate the mechanism of transcendence, never hurting your hand on the point, making everyone on earth lively. Isn't this a great person fulfilling the work of great people?

If there is the slightest failure to reach this completely, you cannot avoid entering a nest of complications, forming herds and creating gangs, doing the work of hell, supposing the way of our Buddhas and Patriarchs to be just this.

Generally, study ultimately requires going to a master of the school imbued with the Way, enduring harsh methods, taking severe treatment, to penetrate through to the state of rest and peace. There unpleasant and pleasant conditions, delight and anger, sadness and happiness, the five desires and eight winds, are all a pure inconceivable door of great liberation. Then where can you go without benefit?

To Chan man Xun

Ancestor Yan of East Mountain said, “Brethren who come from all quarters each present their views and understanding; then when questioned closely, some call it understanding the Chan path, some don’t call it understanding the Chan path. In itself, what is inherent has nothing to it at all. The true tradition of Linji is not beyond this.” He also said, “People of the world who kill Buddhas, kill Patriarchs, and do hellish deeds can repent if they change their minds, but if Chan study does not attain its purpose, ultimately it turns into repudiation of wisdom, with no prospect of ever getting out.” Students should attend to these words, and take enlightenment as the rule. If they are the type who transmit learned understanding mouth to ear, this consequence is hard to avoid.

Our great ancestral teacher Baiyun said, “It is necessary to awaken; then after awakening it is necessary to meet someone.” You say that once you’re enlightened you come to rest—what’s the need to meet someone? Those who’ve met someone after awakening spontaneously have ways to succeed time and again when it comes to reaching out with expedients, not blinding people’s eyes. Those who have realized a dry turnip not only blind student’s

eyes, they're also prone to run afoul of their points themselves and hurt their own hands.

Also, in years past there was a dried turnip who licked his teeth and talked about this and that. But now there isn't even a dry one, let alone a moist one either. What to teach the ordained and the lay? When observed coolly at some point, it seemed like being mute. This is just laughable. It's very far from means of helping people.

To Chan man Zhen

The life of Chan, if one has not gotten there, is like walking on a sword mountain with sword trees—the hardships are manifold. Because of this, many Chan people lose heart and become mere derelicts. If everyday application is not ever more firm, practice is uncertain—even if you met Shakyamuni in person, even he could do nothing for you.

For this task you need to have the spirit of great people, immediately severing former learned understanding and the duality of light and dark. Just trust your feet at once to tread upon the living road of old, twenty-four hours a day, in the heap of red dust, in both adverse and convenient situations, penetrating above and below—it's all your own shortcut to success. How could you not arrive?

For example, Shikong asked Xitang, “Can you grasp the void?” Xitang said he could. Shikong asked him how, and Xitang grabbed at empty space with his hand.

Shikong said, “You don't know how to grasp the void.” Xitang asked him how to do it. Shikong grabbed Xitang's nose and pulled. Xitang cried out in pain and said, “You nearly pulled my nose off!” Shikong said, “This is how to grasp it.”

That ancient's attainment was beyond measure; when he used it, it was devastating. At a casual dig, he was like a huge ball of fire. Could he have so much garbage?

Even so, this is still calling a bell a pot.

To Chan man Hui

When Gautama Buddha was first born, he immediately said, “In the heavens above and on earth below, I alone am honored.” Later, Yunmen said, “If I had seen him at the time, I would have struck him dead with one blow and fed his flesh to the dogs, in the interest of peace on earth.” This means he brought along a bit of poison when he was born; Yunmen got poisoned by it, and immediately knew the outcome. Bringing it up, he applied it appropriately. He always used to indicate this to students.

Once you are a descendant of Buddha, you must understand the talk of our ancestors. Those who don't are all phonies.

One day Yunmen was carrying firewood during communal labor. Dumping it, he said, “The teachings of the whole canon just tell of this.” Observe how that ancient illustrated the crowning attainment, like lightning striking. Those with sharp faculties penetrate at first sight. If you still stand there and watch, sit there and listen, remaining in seeing and hearing, in the school of patchrobed monks that's “white clouds for ten thousand miles,” to say the least.

To missionary Ru

In olden times, Shuiliao asked Mazu, “What exactly was the intention of the coming from the West?” Mazu put his foot to his chest and pushed him down. Shuiliao was suddenly greatly enlightened. Getting up, he clapped and laughed and said, “How very marvelous! I’ve recognized the root source of a hundred thousand subtle meanings and countless teachings on just a single hair tip!” Observe how those outstanding people equally wore out their straw sandals to meet teachers, never stopping halfway or falling back. They worked with minds like iron and stone, reached the state of great rest, and suddenly arrow points met, like dragons finding water, like tigers taking to the mountains. Hence they were joyful, yet inaccessible. Ultimately it is just clearly seeing the original self-experienced manifest adamant true being, and not to be wondered at.

When this being is not yet clearly understood, it is thought to be earth, water, fire, and air, ignorance, illusion, and delusion. In recent generations there is a kind of guru who teaches students that there is something else outside of earth, water, fire, and air, ignorance, illusion, and delusion. This is truly pitiful. Even the ninety-six kinds of outsiders in India didn’t construct such a view.

Can genuine wayfarers hear or see this without their hearts being chilled and their hair standing on end? Latecomers to study should quickly distance themselves from this problem; then they can be descendants of the Realized One.

To missionary Shen

The livelihood of patchrobed monks is most direct, becoming a Buddha and a master right where you are, without exerting the slightest bit of energy. Because people who study the Way in recent times are too excessive in seeking, imagining there is some special principle, they simply misrepresent mental events, and are drawn into the arising and disappearing of phenomena by the workings of subjective consciousness, grasping phenomena that arise and disappear and construing them as ultimate states of peace and bliss. That is very much mistaken. This is why it is said, “Don’t explain reality with a state of mind that gets aroused and dies down.” It is like someone who makes false claims to royalty and gets himself executed. How much the more of spiritual royalty—how can it be usurped?

Truly the way of the school of ancient masters is strict—how could it admit of dependency and dawdling? It is only great people with power who can face danger without fright, and directly penetrate the basic truth at once. It is like a huge mass of fire—who dares to look straight at it?

Eminent Tai brings a begging bowl for Baizhang and seeks a statement

The quintessential point of the Buddhas and masters does not admit anything at all. When you suddenly step on this line, then there you can converse. In recent times seekers of the Way mostly hold their own views to be ultimate truth; they don't believe there is something better. As soon as they enter an authentic forge, then they search without seeing. Because they haven't met anyone, after all, their attainment is crude, and they sit in nests of gain and loss, apprehensive lest people disturb them, fearful of losing their Chan. Some say, "My view is altogether right; when elders say it's not, they're just using psychology to trap me and jerk me around. If I just hold still, I'll be alright." This is a mortal illness; it's surely not worth breaking out medicine. Students should avoid this altogether.

To Chan man Tan

The way of the Chan school just requires one to actually lose one's original face; only after that is it possible to enter in actively. Otherwise, everyone is a sprite cleaving to the grasses and trees. Deshan said, "I have been bringing up this matter for thirty years, but have never seen anyone who comes forth independent and free." Master Yuanjian said, "Even if one comes forth independent and free, this is still a sprite cleaving to the grasses and trees." Observe those two elders showing the essence of direct pointing; is there anything at all they give people to understand? Even the subtlety of self-realization, in the school of patchrobed monks, is still a shirt sticking to the skin. Only people of great attainment can approximate it.

The spiritual source not being obscured is a fine strategy for all time. When you enter this school, don't keep your mind on intellectual understanding. If there is the slightest subjective thought of ordinary or holy as yet not ended, you inevitably enter donkeys' wombs, horses' bellies. People of old hung a poisonous drum, just seeking someone who knew how to beat it. If you can beat it, you may uphold and extend the way of Chan.

To missionary Mou

The nature of vision is omnipresent, and so is the nature of hearing, clearly penetrating the ten directions, without inside or outside. Therefore it is said, “Going along with conditions without contrivance, action and stillness are always real.” Activity like this fulfills the function of true wisdom. For this reason, when Yantou first called on Deshan, he went up into the hall holding his sitting mat and looked around; Deshan said, “What are you doing?” Yantou shouted. Deshan said, “Where is my error?” Yantou said, “A double case.” Deshan said, “This monk bears some resemblance to a traveler.” So when the father is kind, the son is obedient. Nevertheless, his approach was not exactly right. If students can find out what’s going on here, they will know this action of the two old men fulfilled the function of true wisdom; the lofty manner of Chan has not yet died out!

Now when Yantou immediately shouted, was it reasonable to do so, or did he have a life apart? Chan folk in recent times, when this is brought up to question them, often swallow the date whole, and die in a nest of gain and loss. Our spiritual ancestor Baiyun said, “You need to have the eye to distinguish black and white. If you don’t have the eye to distinguish black and white, you will not

avoid presuming upon Buddha-nature and being uncertain of real being-as-is.” But what is the eye of black and white? A broken wooden ladle.

To missionary Dang

Students of the Way should not spend their lives useless sticking to grasses and trees, but tune the spirit to penetrate all the way through. Old Huanglong, before he met Ciming, had a bellyful of Chan and a mouth like a spinning wheel. Then when he met him he got free and went beyond. How great it was that the elder had the means to rise from a mortal illness!

Changqing called on Xuefeng and Xuansha, going back and forth for thirty years. It's not that he didn't thoroughly investigate the Way, but "if you haven't climbed the highest mountain, how can you consider the land small?" One day on seeing a blind rolled up he had a powerful insight, and uttered in verse, "How wonderful! How wonderful! On rolling up the blind, I see the whole world. If someone asks me what school I understand, I'll pick up a whisk and hit him as soon as he opens his mouth." Is this to be called climbing the highest mountain?

To missionary Min

The founding teacher came from the West specially expounding this matter, just valuing understanding outside words, directly penetrating top to bottom. Why would it depend on chanting morning and night on the corner of a meditation seat to be construed as Buddhism or the Chan path?

Yet it will not do to reject what is received from a teacher and seek on your own. Those who attain from seeking on their own are really followers of the ninety-six kinds of outsiders.

Changqing held up his staff and said, “If you know this, your task of study is finished.” Yunmen said, “If you know this, why not stop?” These two elders are both superior as far as superiority is concerned, and both inferior as far as inferiority is concerned. Their outreach is worthy of praise, but when it comes to profound talk entering principle, they still lack enlightenment.

To shrine keeper Zhao

The Great Way is even—originally there is no delusion or enlightenment. It is because sentient beings get confused, following illusions and getting excited, turning away from awareness and getting mixed up in objects, producing all sorts of discrimination, that there come to be four kinds of birth, six tendencies, and nine states of existence, causing them to drift in the waves of the triple world without cease.

If you are able, in the midst of that, to hear a good word or see a good act so that you realize in an instant where you were wrong, and immediately arrive directly at the immovable state of the Realized, this is called enlightenment.

But where do delusion and enlightenment come from to begin with? If you think they come from mind, mind is not mind of itself. If you think they come from illusion, illusion is not illusion of itself. So where are mind and illusion? You should know that space in the ten directions is born in your mind, like a snowflake dotting absolute clarity. If you see through in this way, you will know space in the ten directions cannot be grasped. So since space cannot be grasped, the height of the mountains, the depths of the oceans, small and large, long and short, stand out before your eyes—how

can they be removed? This is the step forward from a high cliff; as soon as you get self-protective, there is no way to complete the task under the patch robe. Think about this.

To missionary Yi

The master of East Temple said, “Mind is not Buddha, knowledge is not the path’—the sword is long gone by the time you mark the boat.” This is just like an expert archer not questioning whether he’ll hit the bulls eye or not, because the subtlety is in the shot being sure to hit before even intending to. So it is too for people who study the Way—if you want to clearly understand the great truth, you must be prepared with a body and mind like iron and stone; eventually you’ll naturally understand thoroughly and penetrate through to a state of great rest and great cessation, and won’t ask about life or death: when hearing of bodhi, nirvana, reality as is, or Buddha-nature, it’s just like wind going through the trees.

This bit, if you don’t break through, just stifles people. All day long like having killed without life ever being restored, this is arriving at a good state in doing the work; before long the lacquer tub will break, you’ll catch the pickpocket, you’ll bring on defeat, grasping and rejection won’t go on, you’ll break up the family and scatter the household, you’ll have no place to put a corpse.

After patchrobed monks have managed to reach this state, while it is indeed refreshing, if they don’t go to the tongs and hammer of a genuine master of the school, they’ll join the gang of those who

disregard cause and effect, and can never be brought back. Yongjia said, "On suddenly arriving at emptiness, if you disregard cause and effect, becoming crude and unrestrained, you summon calamity."

The harm to the school is not trivial. Have you not seen how a monk asked an ancient worthy, "How is it when there is nothing to look to above and no self below?" The ancient worthy said, "Put it down."

For rising from a fatal illness, nothing surpasses this.

To missionary Chun

The Buddhas and masters since time immemorial never had a single thought of becoming great. Only after dealing with the great matter of life and death does greatness come of itself. Only then is one considered a member of Buddha's family. If one has a single thought of hurriedly seeking to be a Buddha or a master, one is called a scorched sprout, spoiled seed, which will not grow anymore.

For years people who study the Way do not ask how to go about it when they meet venerable adepts; they just want people to say they have insight, so they'll be pleased. They hardly realize that those who are pleased are calling on the iron cudgel of the king of the underworld to beat their devilish bony asses. If you're the right sort of person, you just want someone to say "You're not there yet"—then you can have a discussion.

To Great Elder Yun of Yanshou

The masters of the school since ancient times were the people foremost in letting go. As soon as they showed up, they overturned the heavens and wrapped up the earth. Ultimately, how were they like this? It was just that they were after all single-mindedly correct—when false teachers, demons, and outsiders couldn't trap them, they had the spirit to transcend religion and go beyond convention, and didn't form random associations. When it came to worldly fluctuations, they didn't have any dependency at all; they only made life and death foremost, and when they made it foremost they didn't see that there was anything that died or didn't die.

This is what the ancients worked on. Here you definitely need penetrating clarity, expanding it and making it complete, after which you can endure harsh methods. When you reach the point where you can change in a thousand ways, transform in ten thousand ways, you still may not be able to find your brains; how much less if you are half in the darkness, half in light, half clear and half raining—if you want to walk alone in the universe then, you cannot.

When it comes to this attainment, from ancient times to the present the one or a half who have managed to penetrate it were like hawks catching sparrows, like falcons catching pigeons—what effort did it take? Looking back on what they had found out, what they had realized, what they had learned, what they had become immersed in, it just totally embarrassed them. That is how we know the masters of the school since time immemorial were foremost in letting go; only then did they get this handle that enabled them to overturn the heavens and wrap up the earth. So-called exceptional people who appear generations apart are not beyond this.

Followers of the Way in recent times don't work on the fundamental; they just value memorizing a lot in their guts to have something to say to government officials, supplying themselves with topics of conversation to be quick-witted, and call this the Way of Chan. This is a big lie. The grave consequences it calls could not be absolved even if a thousand Buddhas appeared in the world.

The fact is that the ancients never rationalized. They were uniformly simple, unseemly in a hundred ways, clumsy in a thousand; it's just that they were extraordinarily awake inside. That is because they focused solely on the Way. One day they suddenly bit through the five-colored rope, leaped out of the deep pit of

liberation, passed through beyond enlightenment and illusion, no doubt inexpressibly joyful.

In olden times National teacher Zhong taught students, “Body and mind are one; there is nothing else outside the body.” Yunmen said, “Where are mountains, rivers, and land?” See how he added a footnote far and away transcendent. With a single blow of the hammer he required you to walk calmly in the blue sky.

Even so, even if you do so, this is still lingering in the grass and sticking to the trees.

To Chan man Jiao

Enlightenment is beyond verbal explanation; there has never been anyone who gets it. Deshan said, “Our school has no statement, and not a single doctrine to give people.” Zhaozhou said, “I don’t like to hear the word ‘Buddha.’” See how they blew sand and rolled stones—already this is blinding people. If you go on to look for a way to live on a staff or seek a statement of success from a shout, that’s no different from looking for elephant tusks in the mouth of a rat.

That is why this one experience has always been preserved. It’s just a matter of not wasting any time twenty-four hours a day, working to reach where there’s no place to grasp, where there’s nowhere to lodge; then it’s necessary to let go and bring about empty stillness, clear and calm, and make it impossible for previous intellectual interpretation, rationalization, wrong knowledge, and wrong views to get into the act. This is the essential path into the Way. One day you will clearly understand what’s right at your feet, penetrate thoroughly and go free, and you won’t be turning your back on Shakyamuni Buddha’s painstaking care.

To Chan man Da

Genuine wearers of the patch robe nurture the spirit to transcend the present and go beyond the past; they embrace the heroism to become Buddhas and be masters. They directly determine to master life and death. When they reach the point where words are exhausted and reasoning ends, the barrier of death and life is escaped; it is like letting go over a ten thousand fathom cliff—how could they willingly be cautious? When they get to when the breath is cut off and the whole being is leaping with life, they see through the Chan masters of great perception since time immemorial, release their hands and feet, and exercise the superabundant ability that startles the crowd and moves the masses, like pearls rolling in a bowl, like a bowl rolling pearls. They reveal the path of living potential which even Buddhas and patriarchs did not bring out, like dragons finding water, like tigers in the mountains. They cut off lightning and sparks before the staff and shout are even employed, while responding universally with dynamic function; unavoidably the grasses bend when the wind blows. Even though they go through myriad transformation, a thousand changes, in reality they are profoundly calm, stable and silent, never depending on anything. They consistently bring up the essential to deal with the

highest potentials, not setting up steps. How could they dwell in the clusters and elements and call that the vehicle of the aim? Working outside of doctrine, they turn the critical screw, not allowing hesitation.

Even the raising of the flower on Vulture Peak, the direct pointing at Shaolin, the seal taken from Caoqi, are not beyond the very first thought. As for the crowning attainment, those who get it do not show their point, twenty-four hours a day; when they casually dance out, ten out of ten miss it. This is what an ancient worthy meant when he said, "This thing only I can know."

To Chan man Tan

In most ancient times, when the mind's eye of old patchrobed ones was not yet clear, they hurried to those imbued with the Way to correct it. One day their mind's eye cleared, and with the power of their original commitment they hid their tracks in mountain forests to work on plans for generation after generation, polishing their mental perception to make it reach complete maturity, free of even the slightest error. When they came into contact with objects, they looked upon them as like walls, tiles, and pebbles, with absolutely no thought of minding the world, like cosmic space, calm, stable, silent. They called this the indestructible true body, clean and naked, complete and beautiful.

After that, with effortless action, though they had no mind to respond to the world, their mind responding to the world was constant and uninterrupted; though they had no mind to save people, their mind saving people was beneficial and inexhaustible.

You should know that the old patchrobed ones of ancient times went to those who had the Way to make this correct; the refinement of their realization was as bright as ten suns shining together. How could this be taken up and carried out hastily?

To Xu Boshou, friend on the Way

The realm of the Buddhas and masters is boundlessly deep; it has certainly always been hard to find suitable people. If they do not have superior faculties and great wisdom, who can reach it? The key is in sincerity and certainty of faith all at once; after that you can get a look. When you get a look, you cannot seek intentionally, but do not understand mindlessly. And yet you cannot create a separate resolution apart from existence and nonexistence, but you cannot seek emancipation in existence or nonexistence either. If people who study the Way can just concentrate on this—only this is the key to what's being taught—over the long run there's no worry you won't see through.

Layman Pang asked great master Ma, “Who is not a companion of myriad things?” Master Ma said, “When you can drink up all the water of the West River in one gulp, then I'll tell you.” Layman Pang was greatly enlightened at these words. Then he said, “All in the ten directions are one assembly; each individual studies noncontrivance. This is the examination hall of Buddhas—minds empty, they go home successful.” Isn't this a shortcut to pass through birth and death, the spirit to break through an impassible

barrier? If you get into rationalization, then you join a gang of wild foxes.

Overall, if you are determined to clarify this matter, you need a decisive and intense will. Always make your six senses clean and naked twenty-four hours a day; and even in the red dust, in a busy city, in a wine shop, or in a tea house, it is like being in the effortless state of pure universal liberation, profoundly calm, stable, still, like a polar mountain. The five desires and eight winds cannot shake you, a thousand demons and myriad difficulties have no way to entrap you. Just this is the shortcut to empowerment, effective work, and entry into the Way. Directly investigating from right where you are, when you reach the stage of Buddhahood, only then will you see the fundamental reason for not wishing to become a Buddha.

The seasoned adepts since ancient times causing the sky to resound and the earth to tremble just used this bit. In Buddha and Patriarchs it is called the crowning Samadhi, in patchrobed monks it is called the handle of the founding teachers; among people of Pingjiang it's called determined reliance. You should know that the word "determined" is the gateway to marvels; if you can enter this gateway, that's enough.

Teachings requested by Widow Hu

The one road beyond is not male or female; just concentrate directly twenty-four hours a day to get a glimpse, and suddenly you will penetrate through—this is what you have been endowed with and using for countless ages. Present activities have never altered it at all—how could there be any principle besides?

Once you have faith in this great matter, then thoroughly let go and take advantage of good health just to make birth and death thoroughly clear. Won't that be pleasant?

Generally when human life reaches old age—and this time has come—one should leave household affairs to others to take care of, hoping to become light on your feet, free to go or stay when the time comes.

Teachings requested by daughters six and seven of the Hu family

An ancestral teacher said, “The mind is inherently the original mind; the original mind is not an existent phenomenon. If there are phenomena, there is the original mind; if it is not mind, it is not a fundamental reality.” If you want to see the subtle mind of the founding teachers, that is an extremely easy matter; just step back and bring it up and take it up energetically while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, while drinking tea and eating meals, while absorbed in conversation, while observing the afflictions of the world—then the mind understood by the founding teachers and the mind you yourself experience are not two, have no division, no distinction, no discontinuity; so its awesome light shines bright and you attain great freedom. Are you not then a real Wayfarer beyond convention?