

HUANGBO'S TRANSMISSION OF THE MIND

Introduction

The final text in this collection is a record of a series of talks given by Huangbo 黃檗 in the fall of 842 in Jiangxi province, where people still pronounce the character 禪 *zen*, as they did in the Tang, instead of the modern Mandarin *chan*. Considering Huangbo's fame in the annals of Zen, it's surprising we know so little about him. But we do know something. For example, he was born just west of Fuzhou 福州, the capital of the southern coastal province of Fujian, but we don't know when. My guess is around 765, if not a few years earlier. We also know he became a monk when he was young. Fifteen was typical, so he probably became a novice around 780, and three years later he would have been ordained. This happened at Wanfu Monastery 萬福寺, forty kilometers south of Fuzhou. He received his ordination name Xiyun 希運 there, and he also acquired the name by which he has been known ever since. Huangbo was the name of a hill next to the monastery, and it was covered with Amur cork trees, *huang-bo* in Chinese.

Like most young monks, following his ordination Huangbo would have begun looking for a teacher. He began by traveling north along the coast to the Buddhist center of Tiantaishan, which Yongjia visited a century earlier. Ironically, that would have been the same time Cold Mountain 寒山 was writing poems on the walls of the monasteries there. But Huangbo didn't stay long. He kept traveling and eventually made his way to the capital of Chang'an 長安. Finding the right teacher never comes easy, but while he was in Chang'an, Huangbo met a laywoman who suggested the person he was looking for was Mazu 馬祖. Mazu was the dharma heir of the Sixth Patriarch's dharma heir, Huairang, and he was living in Jiangxi 江西 province at Baofeng Monastery 寶峰寺, a thousand kilometers to the southeast. By the time Huangbo got there, Mazu had died. Since Mazu's death occurred in the second month of 788, Huangbo must have arrived no later than that summer. Although Mazu was gone, his dharma heir,

Huaihai 懷海, was living nearby, at Baizhang Monastery 百丈寺, and that was where Huangbo went next—a mere two days' walk away.

Huangbo was said to be seven feet tall and to have a bulging forehead. When he arrived at Baizhang, Huaihai said, “Magnificent! Imposing! Where have you come from?” Huangbo replied, “Magnificent! Imposing! I have come from the mountains.” And that was how Huangbo met his teacher.

Like Mazu, Huaihai built his monastery at the edge of a mountain basin and established the same kind of agricultural commune that began with the Fourth Patriarch. Huaihai's most-quoted saying was, “a day with no work is a day with no food” 一日不作，一日不食. He was also known for coming up with a set of “pure rules” 清規 to govern life in these mountain monasteries, where residents often numbered in the thousands.

Having found his teacher, Huangbo remained there. Zen annals are full of his exchanges with Huaihai, or Baizhang as he was better known, as well as with his own dharma heirs, among them Linji 臨濟, who became the founder of one of Zen's two most famous lineages.

After Huaihai died in 814, Huangbo remained at Baizhang, or at least in the area. He was still there in 842 when an official named Pei Xiu 裴休 invited him to Zhongling County 鍾陵縣, east of the provincial capital of Nanchang 南昌. Pei was serving as magistrate and was a student of Zen himself, and this was not the first time the two men met. At some point, he compiled his understanding of Zen into a book and gave it to Huangbo to read. Huangbo didn't look at it. He put it down and asked Pei whether he understood. Pei admitted he didn't, and Huangbo told him the true teaching can't be found in words, much less in a book. The next time they met was in the fall of 842 in Zhongling. Huangbo gave daily talks there over the course of two months at the city's Longxing Monastery 龍興寺, and Pei Xiu recorded what he said.

After Huangbo returned to the mountains, Pei arranged to have a monastery built for him on another mountain, a long day's walk from Baizhang. It was finished in 846 and named Guangtang Monastery 廣唐寺. Two years later, Pei Xiu invited Huangbo to Wanling 宛陵 (modern Xuancheng 宣城), another post where he was serving. It was five hundred kilometers away, but despite ill health, Huangbo

agreed to come, and Pei Xiu once more recorded Huangbo's talks—which he later published as the Wanling Record.

Afterward, Huangbo returned to Guangtang Monastery, and he died there two years later in 850. Not long after that, Pei Xiu became prime minister and asked the court to bestow on Huangbo the name Duanji 斷際, "Boundary Breaker." Pei also sent the notes he had compiled in Zhongling and in Wanling to Huangbo's dharma heirs still living at Guangtang Temple to make sure what he had recorded was accurate. He published the edited manuscript of the Zhongling set of talks in 857 under the title *Transmission of the Mind* 傳心法要.

The following account begins with Huangbo's classic description of the mind, followed by what appear to be excerpts from the talks he gave there, and finally by his answers to questions posed by Pei Xiu and others present at what was apparently a meditation retreat. It was, and still is, common for Zen monasteries to conduct 49-day retreats twice a year. And it was, and still is, common for a brief daily talk to be given by the abbot or, in this case, a visiting Zen master.

This has always been my favorite Zen text. It was when I first read John Blofeld's English translation, and it has continued to be ever since I learned to read the Chinese. An older Zen friend I don't have. In 1999, I managed to find Pei Xiu's grave in Hunan 湖南 not far from where Huangbo's dharma brother, Guishan 潯山, lived and taught. Thinking about the karmic connections that made it possible for such a text as this to find its way into my life, I lit some incense at Pei Xiu's ransacked grave and thanked him. And now this is yours.

Transmission of the Mind

1. The Master told Xiu, “Buddhas and beings are just this one mind and nothing else. From time without beginning, this mind has never been born or destroyed, it isn’t blue or yellow, it has no form or characteristics, it isn’t subject to existence or non-existence, it doesn’t qualify as new or old, it isn’t long or short, it isn’t big or small. It exceeds all limits, descriptions, imitations, or comparisons. It’s right here, in this body. If you think about it, you’ve missed it. Like space, it has no borders and can’t be measured. Just this one mind, this is the buddha. There is no difference between a buddha and a being. But beings are attached to appearances and search outside themselves. And their searching leads them further astray. Sending a buddha to find a buddha, using the mind to grasp the mind, they could wear themselves out for kalpas without end, and they still wouldn’t find it. They don’t realize that if they stopped thinking and worrying about it, the buddha would appear before them. This mind is a buddha. A buddha is a being. When it’s a being, this mind doesn’t shrink, and when it’s a buddha, this mind doesn’t expand.

2. “As for the six paramitas and ten thousand practices and meritorious deeds as countless as the sands of the Ganges, they are already here. You don’t need to add them through cultivation. When conditions are present, practice. When conditions end, stop. If you aren’t convinced this is the buddha, and you prefer to practice while attached to appearances in order to achieve some result, this is a delusion and contrary to the Way. This mind is the buddha. There is no other buddha. Moreover, there is no other mind. This mind is clear and pure. Like space, it is devoid of even the slightest characteristic. If you try to think or reason about it, you distort the reality of things and become attached to appearances. From time without beginning, there has never been a buddha attached to appearances. Cultivating the six paramitas and ten thousand practices in hopes of becoming a buddha involves stages. From time

without beginning, there has never been a buddha of stages. Just realize that there is not the slightest thing to attain other than one mind. This is the real buddha. There is no difference between the one mind of a buddha or a being.

3. “Like space, it is free of any mixture or decay. Like the wheel of the sun, it illuminates the four quarters. When the sun rises, and its light fills the world, space doesn’t become brighter. And when the sun sets, and darkness covers the world, space doesn’t become darker. The states of light and darkness alternate with each other, but the nature of space remains completely unchanged. The minds of buddhas and beings are also like this. Anyone who conceives of a buddha as having the attributes of purity, light, or liberation or who conceives of a being as having the attributes of impurity, darkness, or endless rebirth will never attain enlightenment even in the course of as many kalpas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges. This is because they are attached to appearances. Other than this one mind there is not the slightest thing you can find. This mind is the buddha. People who study the Way nowadays aren’t aware of the reality of this mind. Instead they create a mind in addition to the mind and look for a buddha somewhere else. Practices that involve attachment to appearances are evil teachings, not the path to enlightenment.

4. “Honoring the buddhas of the ten directions doesn’t compare with honoring a single practitioner with no mind. And how so? Because a person with no mind has no mind at all, only the body of reality itself. Inside, it’s like wood or stone. It doesn’t move or waver. Outside, it’s like space. Nothing blocks or impedes it. It includes no subject or object, no direction or location, no characteristic or appearance, no acquisition or loss. All those who are searching for something and who are unwilling to accept this teaching fear falling into a void and having nothing to cling to. Seeing a precipice, they turn back. For the most part, theirs is an endless quest for conceptual knowledge. This is why those who seek conceptual knowledge are as countless as fur and those who realize the Way like horns.

5. “Manjusri represents principles. Samantabhadra³²⁵ represents practices.³²⁶ Principles mean principles that are truly empty and without barriers. Practices mean practices that are free of form and are inexhaustible. Avalokitesvara represents great compassion, and

Mahasthama represents great knowledge.³²⁷ Vimalakirti means Pure Name. “Pure” refers to his nature. “Name” refers to his attributes. Because his nature and attributes didn’t differ, he was called Pure Name. What these great bodhisattvas demonstrate is something all beings possess that is never separate from the one mind. What they did was to realize this. Students of the Way nowadays don’t wake up to what is inside their own minds. Instead, they cling to appearances and grasp at objects outside their minds and turn their backs on the Way.

“The sand of the Ganges, the Buddha said of this sand, when buddhas and bodhisattvas, or Sakra and Brahma, or any of the gods walk on it, the sand feels no joy. And when oxen and sheep or insects and bugs trample or crawl on it, the sand feels no anger. Regarding jewels or treasures or perfume, the sand has no desire. Regarding feces or urine or filth, the sand has no aversion.³²⁸

6. “This mind is the mind of no mind. It is free from appearances of any kind and doesn’t differ for beings or buddhas. If you can just be free of conceptions, you’re done. You students of the Way who don’t get free of conceptions right now, even were you to practice for countless kalpas, you would never reach the Way. As long as you are tied to the meritorious practices of the Three Vehicles,³²⁹ you can’t get free. But realizing this mind can be fast or slow. Some get free of conceptions as soon as they hear this teaching. Some work their way through the ten beliefs, the ten periods, the ten practices, and the ten transfers of merit³³⁰ before they achieve no mind. Some go through the ten stages³³¹ before they achieve no mind. Regardless of whether it takes longer or shorter, once they achieve no mind, there is nothing more to practice or realize. Actually, although there is nothing to achieve, it isn’t really nothing. If you realize it in the space of a single thought or after the ten stages, the achievement is exactly the same. There is no difference as to its depth, only kalpas of wasted hardship.

7. “Doing evil and doing good both involve attachment to appearances. Doing evil while attached to appearances, you suffer the endless round of existence in vain. Doing good while attached to appearances, you suffer fatigue in vain. Neither compares with understanding this teaching the moment you hear it. This teaching is

the mind. Outside of the mind there is no teaching. This mind is the teaching. Outside of the teaching there is no mind. The mind itself is no mind, but it is also not no mind. If you treat the mind as no mind, the mind turns into an entity. Understand this in silence, that's all. Stop thinking. This is why it is said "when the path of language is severed, the workings of the mind end."³³² This mind is the original pure buddha. Everyone possesses it. Everything that wriggles or stirs shares one and the same body as the buddhas. It is only because of false distinctions that we create different kinds of karma.

8. "In addition to your original buddhahood, there is nothing else. It is completely empty and utterly quiescent, wonderfully clear and at peace, that is all. As you become more deeply aware of it, all at once, there it is, perfect and complete and lacking nothing. Even if you spent three infinitely long kalpas devoting yourself to your practice and going through all the stages, and then suddenly you realized it, you will have only realized your own original buddhahood to which you will have added nothing. And you will look upon your achievements during those kalpas as nothing but conjured scenes in a dream. That is why the Tathagata said, "In attaining unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, I attained nothing at all. If I had attained anything, Dipamkara Buddha would not have made his prophecy." He also said, "There is nothing in this that is different or not the same. Thus is it called 'enlightenment.'"³³³ This original pure mind, whether for beings or buddhas, or for the mountains or rivers of the world, or for those with form or no form,³³⁴ it fills the realms of the ten directions equally and includes neither self nor other.

9. "This original, pure mind never stops illuminating everything with its own perfect light. People don't realize this and just think what they perceive or know is the mind. Because what they perceive or know is covered up, they don't see their perfectly clear original body. If they could suddenly have no mind, their original body would appear like the wheel of the sun rising in space and illuminating the ten directions, and it would no longer be obstructed. Thus, those of you who study the Way see only what you perceive or know as taking place. If you were to get rid of what you perceive or know, the pathways of your mind would be cut off and would have no place to enter. You only regard what you perceive or know as your mind. But

your mind is neither part of what you perceive or know, nor is it separate from what you perceive or know. Don't create ideas about what you perceive or know, and don't think about what you perceive or know, and don't search for a mind apart from what you perceive or know. But don't forsake what you perceive or know in order to get something. It isn't there, and it isn't somewhere else. It doesn't stay still, and it doesn't appear. Go where you will, there is nowhere that isn't the place of enlightenment.

10. “When people hear about the Way and that buddhas transmit the Dharma of the mind, they think that in addition to the mind, there is a Dharma that they can realize or obtain. And they use the mind to search for the Dharma, unaware that the mind is the Dharma, and that the Dharma is the mind. You can't use the mind to find the mind. You can spend a million kalpas, but the day will never come when you find it. Better to have no mind right now. This is the Dharma. It is like the wrestler who went searching for the pearl between his brows³³⁵ and searched everywhere in the ten directions without finding it, until a wise man pointed it out, and he found it where it had been all the time. Thus, you students of the Way are blind to your own minds. Not realizing the mind is the buddha, you look somewhere else. You perform meritorious works and go through the stages of realization and spend kalpas in your quest without ever achieving your goal. Better to have no mind right now and finally realize nothing at all exists, nothing is attained, there are no aids or stages, and there is no subject or object. As long as you don't create delusions, you will realize enlightenment. And when you do, you will merely realize the buddha of your own mind and that all your meritorious work over the course of kalpas was a waste of effort. Just like when the wrestler found the pearl, it was the pearl that had been between his brows the whole time and had nothing to do with his effort of looking elsewhere. Thus the Buddha said, “In unexcelled, perfect enlightenment I actually attained nothing at all.” Afraid that people wouldn't believe this, he cited what is seen by the five eyes and what is expressed by the five kinds of speech.³³⁶ What is true and not false³³⁷ is the highest truth.

11. “Students of the Way, don't doubt that the four elements³³⁸ comprise the body and that the four elements include no self or

master—and thus this body has no self or master, or that the five skandhas make up the mind and that the five skandhas include no self or master—and thus this mind has no self or master, or that the combinations of the six sense organs, six sense objects, and six forms of consciousness appear and disappear and that these eighteen sensory elements are empty—and thus everything is empty. There is only your original, perfectly pure mind.

12. “There is perception-based eating and wisdom-based eating. When the body of four elements is tormented by pangs of hunger, and you accordingly give it food without becoming attached to greed, this is what is meant by wisdom-based eating. Indulging the desire to taste and creating illusory distinctions merely to please the mouth and not feeling sated, this is called perception-based eating.

13. “Sravakas awaken due to hearing. That is why they are called *sravakas* (hearers). But they don’t understand their own minds and add conceptions to the teachings they hear. Whether they hear about enlightenment and nirvana because of supernatural powers or auspicious appearances, or they are moved by sermons, they spend three infinitely-long kalpas practicing before they succeed in becoming buddhas. Since they all belong to the sravaka path, they are called sravaka buddhas. To understand instantly that your own mind is already the buddha and that there is nothing to attain and no practice to perform, this is the Supreme Way. This is the *bhutatahata*³³⁹ buddha. I worry only that when those of you who study the Way think something exists you might separate yourselves from the Way. When thought after thought includes no form, and when thought after thought includes no effort, this is the buddha. If those of you who study the Way want to become buddhas, you don’t need to study any teachings of the buddhas. Just study seeking nothing and being attached to nothing. When you don’t seek, your mind doesn’t arise. When you aren’t attached, your mind doesn’t cease. What neither arises nor ceases is the buddha. The eighty-four thousand teachings for dealing with the eighty-four thousand afflictions are only devices for leading people to the gate. There aren’t really any teachings. Letting go is the teaching. Those who know how to let go are buddhas. Just let go of your afflictions. There are no teachings to realize.

14. “If you students of the Way want to know the key, just keep from becoming attached to anything regarding the mind. To say the buddha’s real dharma body is like space is a metaphor. The dharma body is space, and space is the dharma body. Most people think the dharma body fills space or that space contains the dharma body. They don’t realize that the dharma body is space and space is the dharma body. If someone contends space exists, then space isn’t the dharma body. Or if someone contends the dharma body exists, then the dharma body isn’t space. Don’t create a conception of space. Space is the dharma body. And don’t create a conception of the dharma body. The dharma body is space. There are no differences between space and the dharma body. There are no differences between buddhas and beings. There are no differences between samsara and nirvana. There are no differences between affliction and enlightenment. Whatever is free of all appearances, that is a buddha. Ordinary people grasp objects. Practitioners grasp the mind. When objects and mind are both forgotten, that is the true Dharma. Forgetting objects is easier. Forgetting the mind is harder. People aren’t willing to forget the mind. They are afraid that if they fall into emptiness there won’t be anything to grab hold of. They are unaware that emptiness isn’t empty. It is simply the realm of the one true Dharma. Since time without beginning, this miraculously aware nature is as old as space. It has never been born and never been destroyed. It has never existed and never not existed. It has never been defiled and never been purified. It has never been disturbed and never been stilled. It has never been young and never been old. It has no direction or location, no inside or outside, no measurement or dimension, no shape or appearance, no color or form, no voice or sound. It can’t be found and can’t be sought. It can’t be known by means of wisdom and can’t be grasped by means of language. It can’t be understood as an object and can’t be obtained by effort. Buddhas and bodhisattvas and everything that wriggles or moves or possesses life share this great nirvana nature. This nature is the mind, and the mind is the buddha, and the buddha is the Dharma. Any thought separate from what is real is a delusion. You can’t use the mind to look for the mind. You can’t use the buddha to look for the buddha. You can’t use the Dharma to look for the Dharma.

Therefore, you students of the Way, right now, don't think. Understand in silence, that is all. Try to think, and you will miss it. Use the mind to transmit the mind. This is the correct view. Don't chase something outside. To mistake something outside your mind is to mistake a thief for your child.

15. "It is because there is greed, anger, and ignorance that we teach morality, meditation, and wisdom. If there were no affliction, how could there be enlightenment? Thus, the patriarch said, 'All the teachings of the buddhas have been for getting rid of states of mind. If we didn't have any states of mind, what would all the teachings be for?'³⁴⁰ Beyond our original, pure buddha, there is nothing else to add. It is like space. Even if you tried to decorate it with countless jewels, none of them would stay. Our buddha nature is the same as space. Even if you tried to adorn it with measureless merit and wisdom, none of it would stay. It would only distract you from your own nature and make it harder for you to see. According to those who teach states of mind,³⁴¹ all things depend on this mind for their establishment. When external conditions are present, they exist. When external conditions aren't present, they don't exist. But you can't add the idea of external conditions to this pure nature of yours. What they call the mirror of meditation and wisdom uses graduated stages of stilling and awakening regarding what we perceive or know, which they conceive in terms of external conditions. But it is a provisional teaching meant for someone of lesser capacity. If what you want is to realize things for yourself, you can't hold such views. They all involve external conditions that either exist or don't exist or whose nonexistence rests on their existence. As long as you don't view anything as existing or not existing, this is seeing the Dharma."

16. On the first day of the ninth month, the Master told Xiu, "From the time the great teacher Bodhidharma arrived in China, he talked only about one mind and transmitted only one teaching. He used a buddha to transmit a buddha and spoke of no other buddha. He used a teaching to transmit a teaching and spoke of no other teaching. The teaching was the teaching that can't be spoken. The buddha was the buddha that can't be grasped. It was the original pure mind. This was all he did. Anything else would have been, in truth, not true. *Prajna* means wisdom. This wisdom is your own

formless mind. Ordinary people don't seek the Way. They only indulge their six desires and follow the six paths of existence.³⁴² Once students of the Way think about birth and death, they fall in among maras.³⁴³ Once they think about views, they fall in among heretics. Seeing something born, they seek to destroy it and fall in among sravakas. Not seeing anything born and only seeing something destroyed, they fall in among pratyekabuddhas.³⁴⁴ But what isn't born isn't destroyed. Don't think in terms of dualities. Get rid of likes and dislikes. Everything is just this one mind. It is only later that you get Buddhism.

17. "Most people think in terms of the objects they want. Their minds focus on what they like or dislike. If you want to be free of objects, forget the mind. When you forget the mind, objects are empty. When objects are empty, the mind is gone. If you don't forget your mind and only get rid of objects, you will never get rid of them and only become further confused. Thus, since the ten thousand things are only the mind, and the mind can't be found, why look for it? Those who study prajna don't see anything attainable. They stop thinking about the Three Vehicles³⁴⁵ and focus on the one truth that can neither be realized nor be attained. If someone were to say they can realize something or attain something, that would be the height of arrogance. Those who gathered their robes and walked out of the Lotus assembly were such people.³⁴⁶ This is why the Buddha said, 'Regarding enlightenment, I did not attain anything at all.' He simply understood.

18. "If someone is approaching death, and they see that the five skandhas are empty, that the four elements include no self, that their real mind has no form, that nothing comes or goes, that their nature didn't appear when they were born and won't disappear when they die, and they are perfectly and completely at peace, and their mind and the world are one reality, if they can just do this, they will suddenly realize they are no longer tied to the past, the present, or the future but are free from time, and they won't have the slightest inclination to be reborn. Even if they see buddhas with the most wonderful attributes coming to welcome them and all manner of things appearing before them, they will have no thought of going with them. Or if they see all kinds of terrible things appearing before

them, they won't have any thought of alarm or fear. If they just forget their mind and become one with the realm of the Dharma, they will be free. This is the key."

19. On the eighth day of the tenth month, the Master told Xiu, "What the Illusory City refers to are the two awakenings of the Two Vehicles and the ten-stage path.³⁴⁷ These are all provisional, accessible teachings and form the Illusory City.³⁴⁸ What the Place of Treasures refers to is your real mind, the treasure of your original buddha nature. This treasure can't be imagined or created. It includes no buddhas or beings, no subject or object. If you ask, "where is this city," it is an illusory city, or "where is the Place of Treasures," the Place of Treasures isn't a place you can point to. If it had a direction or a location, it wouldn't be the true Place of Treasures. That is why it is merely said to be nearby. It can't be expressed in quantitative terms. It can only be understood right now.

20. Icchantikas³⁴⁹ refer to those with insufficient belief. They include beings on any of the six paths of existence and also followers of the Two Vehicles who don't believe in the fruit of enlightenment. Icchantikas include all those whose good roots have been severed. Bodhisattvas who deeply believe in the Dharma but who don't believe that beings and the buddhas of the greater and lesser vehicles share the same dharma nature are called icchantikas with good roots. Most of those who become aware as the result of oral teachings are called sravakas, while those who become aware because of contemplating causes and conditions are called pratyekabuddhas. And those who become buddhas despite not becoming aware of their own minds are called sravaka buddhas. Most students of the Way achieve awareness by means of instruction. They don't achieve awareness by means of their minds. Even after practicing for kalpas, they still aren't buddhas. Those who don't achieve awareness by means of their minds but by means of instruction emphasize doctrine and ignore their minds. They become proficient at chasing rocks³⁵⁰ and forget about their minds. If you just understand your own mind, you don't need to look for the Dharma. The mind is the Dharma.

21. For most people, their minds are covered up by external states and their understanding covered up by details. They keep trying to

get rid of external states in order to still their minds, and they set details aside in order to preserve their understanding. They don't realize it is their mind that covers up external states and their understanding that covers up details. If they would just let their minds be empty, external states would be empty. If they would just let their understanding be still, details would be still. Don't misuse the mind. Most people aren't willing to empty their mind. They are afraid of falling into a void. They don't know their mind is already empty. Foolish people get rid of things, not the mind. The wise get rid of the mind, not things.

22. Bodhisattvas' minds are like space. They let everything go, and neither do they desire, nor are they attached to any blessing or merit they might thereby create. But there are three kinds of letting go. Letting the body and the mind go—everything inside and outside, until it's all like space, and there's nothing to grab hold of, and responding to things according to the situation, and letting subject and object go—this is the highest kind of letting go. Cultivating the Way and performing acts of charity on the one hand and letting it go and having no expectations on the other hand, this is the middle kind of letting go. Performing all manner of good deeds but expecting something in return, then hearing the Dharma and understanding that what they do is empty and no longer engaging in it, this is the lowest kind of letting go. The highest kind of letting go is like having a burning torch before you. You will never lose your way again. The middle kind of letting go is like having a burning torch to one side. One side is bright but the other is dark. The lowest kind of letting go is like having a burning torch behind you. You don't see the pitfalls.

23. Thus, the minds of bodhisattvas are like space. They let everything go. Unable to find a past thought, they let go of the past. Unable to find a present thought, they let go of the present. Unable to find a future thought, they let go of the future. What we call the three periods of time, they let them all go. Ever since the Tathagata passed on the Dharma to Kasyapa,³⁵¹ one mind has been used to imprint another mind so that minds don't differ. If the imprint was made on emptiness, the imprint wouldn't result in an impression. If the imprint was made on an object, the imprint wouldn't result in a teaching. Hence, we use the mind to imprint the mind so that minds

don't differ. What performs the imprinting and what is imprinted are both hard to comprehend. Thus, those who attain this are few. However, their minds are no mind and their attainments no attainment.

24. Buddhas have three bodies. Their dharma body refers to the teaching that our self-nature is perfectly empty. The reward body³⁵² refers to the teaching that everything is pure. The transformation body³⁵³ refers to the teaching of the six paramitas and ten thousand practices. The dharma to which the dharma body refers cannot be found in language, sound, appearance, or writing. There is nothing to be described and nothing to be realized. Its self-nature is simply and completely empty. Hence, it is said, 'When there is no dharma that can be spoken, this is called speaking the Dharma.'³⁵⁴ The reward body and the transformation body both depend on conditions for their appearance. The dharma that is spoken, and to which the sense organs respond according to circumstances, and which is used for instruction, is not the real dharma. Hence, it is said that the reward body is neither the real buddha nor the one that speaks the Dharma.

25. What is said to be shared is one perfect clarity³⁵⁵ divided into six combinations. The perfect clarity is one mind. The six combinations refer to the six sense organs. Each of these six sense organs combine with sensations: eyes combine with form, ears combine with sound, the nose combines with scent, the tongue combines with flavor, the body combines with touch, and the intellect combines with concepts. Between them, they produce six forms of consciousness, making eighteen elements altogether. If you understand that these eighteen elements contain nothing at all and are six combinations tied together to form one perfect clarity—this one perfect clarity being the mind, although you students of the Way all know this, you can't help conceptualizing the one perfect clarity and six combinations. Thus, you have become entangled by these dharmas and don't understand your own minds.

26. When the Tathagata appeared in the world he wanted to teach the true teaching of the One Vehicle. But people would not have believed and would have responded by slandering him, and they would have fallen into the sea of suffering. Yet if he didn't say

anything, he would have been guilty of being miserly and would not have spread the Way for the benefit of beings everywhere. And so he devised the expedient teaching that there are the Three Vehicles. There are the greater and lesser vehicles because attainments are deeper or shallower. But neither of these is the original Dharma, so he therefore spoke the teaching that there was only the One Vehicle and that the other two were not real. But because he had never been able to reveal the teaching of one mind, he called Kasyapa to share his teacher's seat and entrusted him alone with the wordless teaching of one mind—this single teaching that was to be practiced separately and that would lead anyone able to understand it to the land of buddhas.”

27. A man asked, “What is the Way, and how do we follow it?”

The Master said, “What sort of thing is this Way that you want to follow?”

The man asked, “What do the masters of the different lineages pass down about ‘practicing Zen’ and ‘studying the Way’?”

The Master said, “Words used to attract dull minds are unreliable.”

The man asked, “If their words are for attracting those with dull minds, I can't help wonder what teaching they use to attract those who are intelligent.”

The Master said, “If someone is intelligent, why would they look for anyone else to follow? If they can't find anything for themselves, how are they going to find something that suits them somewhere else? Don't pay attention to what a teaching says or how a teaching appears.”

The man said, “If that is so, then we shouldn't seek anything?”

The Master said, “That would save you a lot of trouble.”

The man said, “But in that case we would have to quit doing everything. We can't just do nothing.”

The Master said, “Who says to do nothing? And what is it you're seeking?”

The man said, “If we shouldn't seek anything, why do you say don't quit?”

The Master said, “If you don't seek anything, you can rest. Who told you to quit? Do you see the space before your eyes? How can

you make it quit?"

The man said "If this teaching was understandable, wouldn't it be the same as space?"

The Master said, "I have been talking to you about space morning and night, how it is the same and different. I have been saying this as an expedient. But you have turned it into a conception."

The man said, "But shouldn't we create conceptions when we deal with others?"

The Master said, "I have never stopped you. But conceptions are connected to feelings, and once feelings arise wisdom is blocked."

The man said, "Then we shouldn't let feelings arise?"

The Master said, "If you don't give rise to feelings, who will say if you are right?"

The man asked, "To the questions I have just asked, why has the Master answered with word traps?"

The Master said, "Because you are someone who doesn't understand language. What traps are you talking about?"

28. Someone else said, "Up until now, it would seem a lot of words have been spoken, but all of them combative, with no real Dharma being taught to anyone."

The Master said, "There are no contradictions to the real Dharma. But the question you just posed created one. What is this real Dharma you're looking for?"

The man said, "If my question created a contradiction, what about what the Master said?"

The Master said, "Look at your own face in the mirror. Don't be concerned with others. You're like a dog. When it sees something move, it barks. But it pays no attention to the wind that blows the plants and trees."

29. "Ever since this Zen teaching of ours was passed down, it has never taught people to acquire conceptual knowledge. It merely uses the phrase 'study the Way' to arouse people's interest. But the Way can't be studied. When you're emotionally focused on conceptual learning you end up losing the Way. The Way has no location. As for what we mean by the Mahayana mind, this mind isn't inside or outside or anywhere in between. In truth, it doesn't have a location."

The main thing is not to create conceptions—meaning these labels of yours. You can apply your labels all you want, but the mind has no location. This Way is pristine. Originally it had no name. But because people weren't aware of it and were misguided by their feelings, buddhas appeared and taught them how to break through them. Afraid people wouldn't understand, they created the provisional name, the 'Way.' But you can't hold on to the name and form conceptions. Thus it was said, 'Once you catch the fish, forget the trap.'³⁵⁶ Our body and mind find the Way on their own. Because people recognize the mind and reach the source, they are called sramanas. The goal of sramanas³⁵⁷ is achieved when they stop thinking, not by studying.

30. If you are going to use your mind to go in search of the mind, or you just plan to learn about it at a neighbor's house, when will you ever succeed? People's minds were sharp in ancient times. As soon as they heard a single teaching, they stopped studying. That is why they were referred to 'as idle followers of the Way, not studying, not busy.'³⁵⁸ People nowadays just want to acquire more conceptual knowledge. They search everywhere for the meaning of words and call this 'practice.' They don't realize that more conceptual knowledge just builds bigger walls. They know only to keep giving a child more milk to drink.³⁵⁹ Whether the child can digest it or not is something they know nothing about. Students of the Three Vehicles are all like this. They suffer from indigestion—the indigestible part being their 'conceptual knowledge.' It's all poison, and they are all bound for another birth and death. In the realm of reality there is no such thing. Thus it was said, 'There is no such sword in my imperial treasury.'³⁶⁰ You have to put aside all the conceptual knowledge you have previously acquired until you are empty and free of discriminations. This is the empty tathagata-garbha. In the tathagata-garbha³⁶¹ not even a speck of dust can exist. It was to break through existence that the King of the Dharma appeared in the world and said, 'When I was with Dipamkara Buddha, I didn't attain anything at all.'³⁶² These words are meant for getting rid of your labels and conceptual knowledge. Only someone who dissolves all traces of anything inside and outside and who has nothing left to hold on to is someone who has nothing to do. All the teachings of the Three

Vehicles are merely medicines meant for certain conditions. They were prescribed when appropriate and intended to be temporary. Thus, they varied. If you can just understand this, you won't be confused. The main thing is not to hold on to the words of a certain teaching spoken for a certain situation and turn them into conceptions. And why is this so? The truth is that there was no fixed teaching the Tathagata could teach. And so, this school of ours doesn't discuss such matters. Just learn how to still your mind and stop. There is no need to think about what comes before or after."

31. Someone asked, "You have consistently said, 'This mind is the buddha.' But you haven't explained which mind is the buddha."

The Master said, "How many minds do you have?"

The person said, "Either it is the ordinary mind that's the buddha, or it's the enlightened mind that's the buddha."³⁶³

The Master said, "Where are these ordinary or enlightened minds of yours?"

The person said, "The Three Vehicles say there are ordinary and enlightened ones. How can the Master say they don't exist?"

The Master said, "The Three Vehicles clearly state that ordinary and enlightened minds are delusions. But you still don't understand and insist they exist. To consider something empty to be full, is that not a delusion? It's because of delusions that you can't find the mind. Just get rid of your ordinary and enlightened states. Beyond the mind there is no other buddha. When the Patriarch came from the West, he pointed directly at people's entire bodies as being the buddha. You still don't see it. Clinging to the ordinary and the enlightened, you go looking somewhere outside and still can't find the mind. That is why I'm telling you 'this mind is the buddha.' But once a thought or feeling appears, you head off in another direction. That hasn't changed since time without beginning. Nor has the teaching we call 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment' changed."

The same person asked, "What is the meaning of the Master's use of the word 'this'?"

The Master said, "What meaning are you looking for? Once there's a meaning, it's different from 'this mind.'"

The person said, "You just said 'that hasn't changed since time without beginning.' What do you mean?"

The Master said, "It's just because you're searching for it, it's different from you. If you didn't search for it, how would it be different?"

The person said, "Since it's not different, why refer to it as 'this'?"

The Master said, "If you didn't distinguish the ordinary and the enlightened, who would say 'this' to you? If 'this' wasn't 'this mind,' there wouldn't be any 'mind.' If you let both 'mind' and 'this' go, where do you plan on searching then?"

32. Someone asked, "Since delusions can block our mind, what do you suggest we use to get rid of delusions?"

The Master said, "Creating delusions to get rid of delusions results in more delusions. Delusions have no basis. They only exist because people distinguish them. Once the distinctions between ordinary and enlightened are gone, there are naturally no longer any delusions to deal with. How can you drive them off? You won't find the slightest thing to grab hold of. This is the meaning of 'I will give up my two arms and become a buddha.'"³⁶⁴

The person asked, "If there is nothing to grab hold of, how is it passed on?"

The Master said, "It is passed on mind to mind."

The person said, "If the mind passes something on, why do you say there is no mind?"

The Master said, "You can't find anything called 'passing on the mind.' Once you understand this mind, there is no mind, and there is no Dharma."

The person said, "If there is no mind and no Dharma, what constitutes passing it on?"

The Master said, "When you hear about passing on the mind, you imagine something is attained. This is why the patriarch said, 'Understanding the nature of the mind / is surely beyond the range of thought / for nothing at all is attained / and those who do don't say.'³⁶⁵ To tell you how to understand this would be beyond me."

33. Someone asked, "Even if it just resembles the empty space before my eyes, isn't that still an object? How can I see the mind without pointing at something?"

The Master said, "What mind am I telling you to see as an object? Even if you could see it, it would just be the mind reflecting

an object. When someone uses a mirror to reflect their face, even if it is clear enough to see their eyebrows, it is still just an image. What does it have to do with you?"

The person said, "If there is no means to reflect it, how can we ever see it?"

The Master said, "Once you involve means, you necessarily have to include something else. When will that ever end? Don't you see the person talking to you, holding his hands out to give you nothing at all, tiring himself out insulting you thousands of times?"

The person said, "And does that person see the reflection is also nothing?"

The Master said, "If it is nothing, why is it reflecting you? Don't go around talking in your sleep with your eyes wide open."

The Master said, "Knowing a hundred different things doesn't compare to not looking for anything. Nothing is more important. A person of the Way is someone free of concerns. In truth, there aren't any other kinds of mind or anything else meaningful to talk about. Since we are done, you may as well leave."

34. Someone asked, "What is conventional truth?"

The Master said, "Why do you want to talk about tangled vines? When something is already clear, why do you want to drag in questions and answers?" Just be free of all thoughts. That is what is called 'karma-free wisdom.' Every day whether you are walking, or standing, or sitting, or lying down, or when you are speaking, as long as you don't become attached to conditioned things, whatever you talk about or look at will be free of karma.

"Today, as this Dharma-ending age proceeds, most of you who study the Way of Zen are attached to sounds and forms. Why don't your minds share the same empty space as my mind, or be like a dead tree or a rock, or like cold ashes or a dead fire? If they did, maybe we would have the beginning of a connection. Otherwise, when your days here end, you will be tortured by Yama.³⁶⁶ If you just stay away from what exists or doesn't exist, your mind will be like the sun in the sky, whose light shines by itself without trying to shine, and not because it's trying to conserve its power. When you reach this place where you have no place to rest, that is when you will do what buddhas do, which is to 'give rise to the mind without dwelling

anywhere.’³⁶⁷ This is your pure dharma body, which is called *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*.³⁶⁸ If you don’t understand this, even if you acquire a great deal of knowledge, and you become an ascetic, and you wear hemp and eat fruit, unless you see your mind, these are all mistaken paths and sure to make you a member of Mara’s minions. What use are such practices? Master Zhigong³⁶⁹ said, ‘A buddha is the creation of your own mind. How can you find one in words?’ Even if you occupy your mind by studying the three virtues, the four fruits, and the ten stages,³⁷⁰ you are just an ordinary person sitting among sages and not seeing the Way. All practices are impermanent and samsaric.³⁷¹ ‘Its momentum spent an arrow falls to earth / resulting in another disappointing life / unlike the door to the real and unconditioned / once you step through you’re in the buddha realm.’³⁷² Because you are not that kind of person, you have to study the conceptual knowledge of schools established by people in the past. Zhigong said, ‘Unless you meet an uncommonly wise teacher, taking the dharma medicine of the Mahayana is useless.’

35. “If, beginning today, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, you just study no mind, sooner or later you will get it. But because you lack the strength, you can’t make a sudden leap. You might need three years, five years, maybe ten years to find an opening before you understand by yourself. But since you can’t do this, you feel the need to use your mind to study Zen or study the Way. But what does this have to do with the Dharma of the Buddha? Therefore, it is said that everything the Tathagata taught was for converting people, like using yellow leaves as gold to stop a child from crying.³⁷³ It is certainly not real. Anyone who finds something real isn’t a student of mine. And what would that have to do with their original body. Thus, the sutra says, ‘Because I didn’t obtain anything at all, it is called unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.’³⁷⁴ If you understood this, you would know that the Way of the Buddha and the Way of Mara are both wrong. The place that has always been pure and clear isn’t square or round, big or small, long or short. It is free of karma and conditions, delusion and realization. If you truly look, you will see that nothing is there. There are no beings or buddhas. All the worlds in the universe are bubbles in the sea and all the sages mere flashes of lightning. None of them compare to the dharma body of

the true mind. From ancient times until now, whether for a buddha or a patriarch, it doesn't lack the slightest thing. Once you understand such things, you need to work even harder for the rest of your life. When you breathe out, there is no guarantee you will breathe in again."

36. Someone asked, "Since the Sixth Patriarch didn't understand the sutras, why was he given the robe and made the Patriarch? Master Shenxiu was the senior instructor of five hundred monks. He was their precept teacher and lectured on thirty-two different sutras and texts. Why wasn't he given the robe?"

The Master said, "Because of his mind. His was a conditional teaching. He thought realization depended on how you practiced. That was why the Fifth Patriarch gave it to the Sixth Patriarch. It was because at that time the Sixth Patriarch had an unspoken understanding and so he received the profound teaching of the Tathagata in secret and was given the Dharma. Have you not heard it said, 'The original teaching of the teaching is no teaching / the teaching of no teaching is the teaching / now that I am giving you no teaching / how could the teaching of the teaching be a teaching?'³⁷⁵ Only if you understand this can you be called someone who has 'left home'³⁷⁶ or someone who loves to practice. If you don't believe this, why did Master Ming chase the Sixth Patriarch all the way to Dayu Ridge?³⁷⁷ The Sixth Patriarch asked him, 'What have you come here for? Are you here for the robe or here for the Dharma.' Master Ming said, 'I'm not here for the robe. I've come only for the Dharma.' The Sixth Patriarch said, 'Collect your thoughts. Don't think about anything good or bad.' Once Ming did as he was told, the Sixth Patriarch said, 'While you are not thinking about anything good or anything bad, at this moment, show me your original face before your parents gave birth to you.' Ming suddenly understood without another word. He bowed and said, 'It is like when someone drinks water and finally knows whether it is hot or cold. I spent thirty years at the Fifth Patriarch's assembly in vain. Today I finally understand what I did wrong.' The Sixth Patriarch said, 'So it is.'³⁷⁸ At this point, Ming finally understood that the Patriarch coming from the West to point directly at people's minds so they could see their nature and become buddhas was not just so many words. How could you not

have heard what Ananda asked Kasyapa? He said, ‘When the Bhagavan transmitted the golden robe to you, did he transmit anything else?’ Kasyapa addressed Ananda, and Ananda answered, ‘Yes?’ Kasyapa said, ‘Knock down the flagpole at the monastery gate!’³⁷⁹ This became the motto of the patriarchs. Even though Ananda served as the Buddha’s attendant for thirty years, because his wisdom was merely based on what he had heard, the Buddha scolded him, ‘Studying wisdom for a thousand days doesn’t compare to studying the Way for a single day. Unless you study the Way, even a drop of water is hard to digest.’”

Someone asked, “How can we avoid regressing?”

The Master said, “Just eat all day without touching a grain of rice, and walk all day without touching the ground, and while doing this, remain free of self and other. Don’t avoid anything all day long, and don’t be confused by what happens around you. Only then can you finally be called your own master. Also, at all times and with every thought, don’t pay attention to appearances or to the past, the present, or the future. Since the past doesn’t go, and the present doesn’t stay, and the future doesn’t come, sit there quietly and let things change without getting in the way. Only then can you be called a liberated person. Work hard. Of the tens of thousands who study this teaching, only four or five get it. If you don’t think this is important, your day of reckoning will come. Thus, I am telling you to get to work. Instead of suffering countless more lifetimes of misfortune, you need to understand this life.

325. These two bodhisattvas represent wisdom and skillful means, respectively. Manjusri is depicted riding a lion and Samantabhadra riding an elephant.

326. This usage comes from Bodhidharma’s *Principles and Practice*.

327. Both welcome devotees to Amita Buddha’s Western Paradise.

328. This paragraph is paraphrased from the Lankavatara LXXXV, where the Ganges’ sand is used as a metaphor for the incomparable aspects of a buddha.

329. Referring to the practices of sravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas.

330. Referring to the first forty of the fifty-two stages of the bodhisattva path.

331. Referring to the ten stages that follow the previous forty.

332. Quoted from the Bodhisattva Adornment Sutra 菩薩纓絡經.

333. Quotes are from Kumarajiva’s translation of the Diamond Sutra 17 & 23.

334. In the Diamond Sutra 3, the vow to liberate all beings lists all those in the realm of form as well as those in the formless realm.

335. This wrestler wore a pearl between his brows for good luck. During a match, he butted another boxer with his head, and the force drove the pearl beneath his skin. Afterward, all he felt was a bump. Thinking he had lost his pearl, he went searching for it. (Nirvana Sutra 7)
336. The five eyes are listed in the Diamond Sutra 18, and the five kinds of speech in section 14 of the same sutra.
337. Quoted from the Diamond Sutra 14.
338. Water, earth, wind, and fire.
339. Sanskrit for “what is real.”
340. Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 attributed this quote to Huineng, but it is not part of any of our editions of the Platform Sutra.
341. Referring to the Tiantai approach to meditation and spiritual progress.
342. Gods, humans, animals, beings in hell, hungry ghosts, and asuras.
343. Those who distract practitioners.
344. Those who seek only their own enlightenment.
345. The Buddha teaches the Three Vehicles in the Lotus Sutra, which he then replaces with the One Vehicle.
346. In the Lotus Sutra 2, some of the monks got up and left, thinking the Buddha’s teaching was heretical.
347. The Two Vehicles refer to those for sravakas and pratyekabuddhas. The ten stages and their two forms of enlightenment refer to the bodhisattva path.
348. In the Lotus Sutra 7, the Buddha creates an Illusory City where those whom he is leading to the Place of Treasures can rest.
349. At some point Buddhists wondered whether everyone could be enlightened and came up with this category for those beyond the pale. The Sanskrit *icchantika*, meaning “pleasure seekers,” is from *icchatva* “desire.”
350. As an example of foolishness, in the Nirvana Sutra 6, the Buddha cites the example of dogs chasing the rocks people throw at them instead of the people who throw the rocks.
351. As a result, Kasyapa became the First Patriarch of Zen.
352. The *sambhoga-kaya*, which in the Diamond Sutra is the “body of merit.”
353. The *nirmana-kaya* or manifestation body, the one people see.
354. This Diamond Sutra quote is from Kumarajiva’s Chinese (21).
355. What is shared refers to mind-to-mind transmission. “Perfect clarity” is a term used for the mind in the Surangama Sutra 6.
356. Zhuangzi 26.11.
357. A general term for monks or any spiritual seeker.
358. This is the first line of Yongjia’s *Song of Enlightenment*.
359. A story in the Nirvana Sutra in which a mother asks the Buddha why her child is sick.
360. In the Nirvana Sutra 8, a man describes a sword the prince once possessed before the prince fled the kingdom. When the prince finally returns and hears the descriptions, he can’t help but laugh.

361. The original and transformed state of the eighth, or alaya, consciousness. See the Lankavatara Sutra XXVIII and LXXXII.
362. Huangbo's favorite refrain, quoted from the Diamond Sutra 17.
363. Referring to Nagarjuna's Two Truths: conventional and ultimate.
364. This is the origin of Medicine King Buddha 藥王佛 (Lotus Sutra 23).
365. In the *Chuandenglu* 2, this poem is attributed to the twenty-third Indian patriarch of Zen, Haklenayasas.
366. Yama is the lord of the underworld and in charge of all its hells.
367. Quoted from Kumarajiva's translation of the Diamond Sutra 4.
368. Sanskrit for "unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."
369. Zhigong 志公 was a famous Chinese monk of the Nanjing area and is noted for having prophesied Bodhidharma's arrival at Emperor Wu's court.
370. These refer to the three preparatory stages of virtuous practice, the four stages of the sravaka path, and the ten stages of the bodhisattva path.
371. That is, they lead to further rebirth.
372. Quoted from Yongjia's *Song of Enlightenment*, verse 24.
373. Referring to a story regarding expedients in the Nirvana Sutra 20.
374. Again, from the Diamond Sutra 4.
375. Poem spoken by Sakyamuni upon transmitting the Dharma to Kasyapa, Zen's First Patriarch—recorded in the *Chuandenglu* 1.
376. The Chinese word for becoming a monk is *chu-jia* 出家 "to leave home."
377. In the Platform Sutra 11, Huishun 惠順 chased Huineng and finally caught up to him at Dayu Ridge. He didn't want the robe, only the teaching. Some editions give the man's name as Huiming 惠明.
378. This account doesn't appear in the early Dunhuang copies of the Platform Sutra but in the Song-dynasty Records of Eminent Monks 宋高僧傳, compiled in 988, and in later editions of the Platform Sutra.
379. Let all concepts go, including ideas associated with a spiritual life.