

THE ZEN TEACHING OF HUANG PO

ON THE TRANSMISSION OF MIND

TRANSLATED BY JOHN BLOFELD



The Zen Teaching of Huang Po

On The Transmission of Mind

Translated by John Blofeld

This historical text from the direct teaching of the Zen master, Huang Po, allows the Western reader to gain an understanding of Zen from the original source, one of the key works in its teachings; it also offers deepening and often startling insights into the rich treasures of Eastern thought.

Huang Po, also known as Hsi Yun, is believed to have died as late as 850 A.D. He is regarded in a sense as the founder of the great Lin Chi sect. He lived below the Vulture Peak on Mount Huang Po, in the district of Kao An. Like most Zen masters, Huang Po taught in parables which were delivered as sermons, anecdotes, and dialogues. These have been collected here to present the teachings of the Master himself. He compares the mind to the sun travelling through the sky, sending forth light uncontaminated by the finest particle of dust. For those who have discovered the nature of Reality, he says, there is nothing old or new, concepts become meaningless and reason leads to error.

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The Zen Teaching of Huang Po

ON THE TRANSMISSION OF MIND

*Being the Teaching of the Zen Master
Huang Po as recorded by the scholar
P'ei Hsiu of the T'ang Dynasty*

Rendered into English by
JOHN BLOFELD
(Chu Ch'an)

*A complete translation of the Huang Po Chu'an Hsiu
Fa Yao, including the previously unpublished Wan Ling
Record containing dialogues, sermons, and anecdotes*

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P'EI HSIU'S PREFACE

The great Zen Master Hsi Yün lived below the Vulture Peak on Mount Huang Po,¹ in the district of Kao An which forms part of the prefecture of Hung Chou.² He was third in the direct line of descent from Hui Nêng,³ the Sixth Patriarch, and the pupil of a fellow-disciple of Hui Hai. Holding in esteem only the intuitive method of the Highest Vehicle, which cannot be communicated in words, he taught nothing but the doctrine of the One Mind; holding that there is nothing else to teach, in that both mind and substance are void and that the chain of causation is motionless. Mind is like the sun journeying through the sky and emitting glorious light uncontaminated by the finest particle of dust. To those who have realized the nature of Reality, there is nothing old or new, and conceptions of shallowness and depth are meaningless. Those who speak of it do not attempt to explain it, establish no sects and open no doors or windows. That which is before you is it. Begin to reason about it and you will at once fall into error. Only when you have understood this will you perceive your oneness with the original Buddha-nature. Therefore his words were simple, his reasoning direct, his way of life exalted and his habits unlike the habits of other men.

¹ From which he takes his posthumous name.

² In the modern province of Kiangsi.

³ Wei Lang.

P'EI HSIU'S PREFACE

Disciples hastened to him from all quarters, looking up to him as to a lofty mountain, and through their contact with him awoke to Reality. Of the crowds which flocked to see him, there were always more than a thousand with him at a time.

In the second year of Hui Ch'ang (A.D. 843), when I was in charge of the district of Chung Lin, I welcomed him on his coming to that city from the mountain where he resided. We stayed together in the Lung Hsing Monastery where, day and night, I questioned him about the Way. Moreover, in the second year of T'ai Chung (A.D. 849), while governing the district of Wan Ling, I again had occasion to welcome him ceremoniously to the place where I was stationed. This time we stayed quietly at the K'ai Yuan Monastery, where also I studied under him day and night. After leaving him, I recorded what I had learnt and, though able to set down only about a fifth of it, I esteem it as a direct transmission of the Doctrine. At first I was diffident about publishing what I had written; but now, fearing that these vital and penetrating teachings will be lost to future generations, I have done so. Moreover, I gave the manuscript to the monks T'ai Chou and Fa Chien, requesting them to return to the Kuang T'ang Monastery on the old mountain¹ and to ask the elder monks there how far it agrees with what they themselves used frequently to hear in the past.

Written on the eighth day of the tenth moon of the eleventh year of T'ai Chung (A.D. 858) of the T'ang Dynasty.

¹ Mount Huang Po.

PART ONE

THE CHÜN CHOU RECORD OF THE
ZEN MASTER HUANG PO (TUAN CHI)

*A collection of sermons and dialogues recorded by P'ei Hsiu while
in the city of Chün Chou*

1. The Master said to me: All the Buddhas and all sentient beings are nothing but the One Mind, beside which nothing exists. This Mind, which is without beginning, is unborn¹ and indestructible. It is not green nor yellow, and has neither form nor appearance. It does not belong to the categories of things which exist or do not exist, nor can it be thought of in terms of new or old. It is neither long nor short, big nor small, for it transcends all limits, measures, names, traces and comparisons. It is that which you see before you—begin to reason about it and you at once fall into error. It is like the boundless void which cannot be fathomed or measured. The One Mind alone is the Buddha, and there is no distinction between the Buddha and sentient things, but that sentient beings are attached to forms and so seek externally for Buddhahood. By their very seeking they lose it, for that is using the Buddha to seek for the Buddha and using mind to grasp Mind. Even

¹ Unborn, not in the sense of eternity, for this allows contrast with its opposite; but unborn in the sense that it belongs to no categories admitting of alteration or antithesis.

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though they do their utmost for a full aeon, they will not be able to attain to it. They do not know that, if they put a stop to conceptual thought and forget their anxiety, the Buddha will appear before them, for this Mind is the Buddha and the Buddha is all living beings. It is not the less for being manifested in ordinary beings, nor is it greater for being manifested in the Buddhas.

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2. As to performing the six pāramitās¹ and vast numbers of similar practices, or gaining merits as countless as the sands of the Ganges, since you are fundamentally complete in every respect, you should not try to supplement that perfection by such meaningless practices. When there is occasion for them, perform them; and, when the occasion is passed, remain quiescent. If you are not absolutely convinced that the Mind is the Buddha, and if you are attached to forms, practices and meritorious performances, your way of thinking is false and quite incompatible with the Way. The Mind is the Buddha, nor are there any other Buddhas or any other mind. It is bright and spotless as the void, having no form or appearance whatever. To make use of your minds to think conceptually is to leave the substance and attach yourselves to form. The Ever-Existent Buddha is not a Buddha of form or attachment. To practise the six pāramitās and a myriad similar practices with the intention of becoming a Buddha thereby is to advance by stages, but the Ever-Existent Buddha is not a Buddha of stages. Only awake to the One Mind, and there is nothing whatsoever to be attained. This is the REAL Buddha. The

¹ Charity, morality, patience under affliction, zealous application, right control of mind and the application of the highest wisdom.

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Buddha and all sentient beings are the One Mind and nothing else.

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3. Mind is like the void in which there is no confusion or evil, as when the sun wheels through it shining upon the four corners of the world. For, when the sun rises and illuminates the whole earth, the void gains not in brilliance; and, when the sun sets, the void does not darken. The phenomena of light and dark alternate with each other, but the nature of the void remains unchanged. So it is with the Mind of the Buddha and of sentient beings. If you look upon the Buddha as presenting a pure, bright or Enlightened appearance, or upon sentient beings as presenting a foul, dark or mortal-seeming appearance, these conceptions resulting from attachment to form will keep you from supreme knowledge, even after the passing of as many aeons as there are sands in the Ganges. There is only the One Mind and not a particle of anything else on which to lay hold, for this Mind is the Buddha. If you students of the Way do not awake to this Mind substance, you will overlay Mind with conceptual thought, you will seek the Buddha outside yourselves, and you will remain attached to forms, pious practices and so on, all of which are harmful and not at all the way to supreme knowledge.

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4. Making offerings to all the Buddhas of the universe is not equal to making offerings to one follower of the Way who has eliminated conceptual thought. Why? Because such a one forms no concepts whatever. The substance of the Absolute is inwardly like wood or stone, in that it is

motionless, and outwardly like the void, in that it is without bounds or obstructions. It is neither subjective nor objective, has no specific location, is formless, and cannot vanish. Those who hasten towards it dare not enter, fearing to hurtle down through the void with nothing to cling to or to stay their fall. So they look to the brink and retreat. This refers to all those who seek such a goal through cognition. Thus, those who seek the goal through cognition are like the fur (*many*), while those who obtain intuitive knowledge of the Way are like the horns (*few*).¹

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5. Mañjuśrī represents fundamental law and Samantabhadra, activity. By the former is meant the law of the real and unbounded void, and by the latter the inexhaustible activities beyond the sphere of form. Avalokiteśvara represents boundless compassion; Mahāsthāma, great wisdom, and Vimalakīrti, spotless name.² Spotless refers to the real nature of things, while name means form; yet form is really one with real nature, hence the combined term 'spotless name'.³ All the qualities typified by the great Bodhisattvas are inherent in men and are not to be separated from the One Mind. Awake to it, and it is there. You students of the Way who do not awake to this in your own

¹ Compare this with Professor Suzuki's: 'That which is known as mind in discursive reasoning is no-mind, though without this Mind cannot be reached.'

² This abstract notion of the Bodhisattvas, regarded by some sects as individual spiritual entities, is shared by some Buddhists outside the Zen Sect.

³ Zen teaches that, though the phenomenal world based on sensory experience has only relative existence, it is wrong to regard it as something separate from the One Mind. It is the One Mind wrongly apprehended. As the Hṛdaya Sūtra says: 'Form is not different from void, void from form; form is void and void is form.'

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minds, and who are attached to appearances or who seek for something objective outside your own minds, have all turned your backs on the Way. The sands of the Ganges! The Buddha said of these sands: 'If all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas with Indra and all the gods walk across them, the sands do not rejoice; and, if oxen, sheep, reptiles and insects tread upon them, the sands are not angered. For jewels and perfumes they have no longing, and for the stinking filth of manure and urine they have no loathing.'

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6. This Mind is no mind of conceptual thought and it is completely detached from form. So Buddhas and sentient beings do not differ at all. If you can only rid yourselves of conceptual thought, you will have accomplished everything. But if you students of the Way do not rid yourselves of conceptual thought in a flash, even though you strive for aeon after aeon, you will never accomplish it. Enmeshed in the meritorious practices of the Three Vehicles, you will be unable to attain Enlightenment. Nevertheless, the realization of the One Mind may come after a shorter or a longer period. There are those who, upon hearing this teaching, rid themselves of conceptual thought in a flash. There are others who do this after following through the Ten Beliefs, the Ten Stages, the Ten Activities and the Ten Bestowals of Merit. Yet others accomplish it after passing through the Ten Stages of a Bodhisattva's Progress.¹ But

¹ These various categories of ten are all part of the doctrine as taught by certain other sects. Huang Po wishes to make it clear that, though these may be useful in preparing the ground, the mind must in any case take a sudden leap, and that having passed through these stages in nowise constitutes partial Enlightenment.

whether they transcend conceptual thought by a longer or a shorter way, the result is a state of BEING; there is no pious practising and no action of realizing. That there is nothing which can be attained is not idle talk; it is the truth. Moreover, whether you accomplish your aim in a single flash of thought or after going through the Ten Stages of a Bodhisattva's Progress, the achievement will be the same; for this state of being admits of no degrees, so the latter method merely entails aeons of unnecessary suffering and toil.¹

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7. The building up of good and evil both involve attachment to form.² Those who, being attached to form, do evil have to undergo various incarnations unnecessarily; while those who, being attached to form, do good, subject themselves to toil and privation equally to no purpose. In either case it is better to achieve sudden self-realization and to grasp the fundamental Dharma. This Dharma is Mind, beyond which there is no Dharma; and this Mind is the Dharma, beyond which there is no mind. Mind in itself is not mind, yet neither is it no-mind. To say that Mind is no-mind implies something existent.³ Let there be a silent understanding and no more. Away with all thinking and explaining. Then we may say that the Way of Words has

¹ Merit, however excellent in itself, has nothing to do with Enlightenment.

² According to Zen, virtuous actions should be performed by adepts, but not with a view to accumulating merit and not as a means to Enlightenment. The door should remain perfectly unattached to the actions and to their results.

³ In other words, Mind is an arbitrary term for something that cannot properly be expressed in words.

been cut off and movements of the mind eliminated. This Mind is the pure Buddha-Source inherent in all men. All wriggling beings possessed of sentient life and all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are of this one substance and do not differ. Differences arise from wrong-thinking only and lead to the creation of all kinds of karma.¹

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8. Our original Buddha-Nature is, in highest truth, devoid of any atom of objectivity. It is void, omnipresent, silent, pure; it is glorious and mysterious peaceful joy—and that is all. Enter deeply into it by awaking to it yourself. That which is before you is it, in all its fullness, utterly complete. There is naught beside. Even if you go through all the stages of a Bodhisattva's progress towards Buddhahood, one by one; when at last, in a single flash, you attain to full realization, you will only be realizing the Buddha-Nature which has been with you all the time; and by all the foregoing stages you will have added to it nothing at all.² You will come to look upon those aeons of work and achievement as no better than unreal actions performed in a dream. That is why the Tathāgata said: 'I truly attained nothing from complete, unexcelled Enlightenment. Had there been anything attained, Dīpamkara Buddha would not have

¹ Karma, even good karma, leads to rebirth and prolongs the wanderings of the supposedly individual entity; for when good karma has worked itself out in consequent enjoyment, the 'individual' is as far from understanding the One Mind as ever.

² Enlightenment must come in a flash, whether you have passed through the preliminary stages or not, so the latter can well be dispensed with, except that, for reasons unconnected with Enlightenment, Zen requires of adepts an attitude of kindness and helpfulness towards all living creatures.

made the prophecy concerning me.¹ He also said: 'This Dharma is absolutely without distinctions, neither high nor low, and its name is Bodhi.' It is pure Mind, which is the source of everything and which, whether appearing as sentient beings or as Buddhas, as the rivers and mountains of the world which has form, as that which is formless, or as penetrating the whole universe, is absolutely without distinctions, there being no such entities as selfness and otherness.

* * *

9. This pure Mind, the source of everything, shines forever and on all with the brilliance of its own perfection. But the people of the world do not awake to it, regarding only that which sees, hears, feels and knows as mind. Blinded by their own sight, hearing, feeling and knowing, they do not perceive the spiritual brilliance of the source-substance. If they would only eliminate all conceptual thought in a flash, that source-substance would manifest itself like the sun ascending through the void and illuminating the whole universe without hindrance or bounds. Therefore, if you students of the Way seek to progress through seeing, hearing, feeling and knowing, when you are deprived of your perceptions, your way to Mind will be cut off and you will find nowhere to enter. Only realize that, though real Mind

¹ This quotation refers to the Diamond Sūtra, as do many of the others either directly or indirectly. Dipaṃkara Buddha, during a former life of Gautama Buddha, prophesied that he would one day attain to Buddhahood. Huang Po means that the prophecy would not have been made if Dipaṃkara Buddha had supposed that Gautama Buddha's Enlightenment would lead to the actual attainment of something he had not already *been* from the very first; for then Enlightenment would not have led to Buddhahood, which implies a voidness of all distinctions such as attainer, attained, non-attainer and non-attained.

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is expressed in these perceptions, it neither forms part of them nor is separate from them. You should not start REASONING from these perceptions, nor allow them to give rise to conceptual thought; yet nor should you seek the One Mind apart from them or abandon them in your pursuit of the Dharma. Do not keep them nor abandon them nor dwell in them nor cleave to them. Above, below and around you, all is spontaneously existing, for there is nowhere which is outside the Buddha-Mind. x

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10. When the people of the world hear it said that the Buddhas transmit the Doctrine of the Mind, they suppose that there is something to be attained or realized apart from Mind, and thereupon they use Mind to seek the Dharma, not knowing that Mind and the object of their search are one. Mind cannot be used to seek something from Mind; for then, after the passing of millions of aeons, the day of success will still not have dawned. Such a method is not to be compared with suddenly eliminating conceptual thought, which is the fundamental Dharma. Suppose a warrior, forgetting that he was already wearing his pearl on his forehead, were to seek for it elsewhere, he could travel the whole world without finding it. But if someone who knew what was wrong were to point it out to him, the warrior would immediately realize that the pearl had been there all the time. So, if you students of the Way are mistaken about your own real Mind, not recognizing that it is the Buddha, you will consequently look for him elsewhere, indulging in various achievements and practices and expecting to attain realization by such graduated practices.

But, even after aeons of diligent searching, you will not be able to attain to the Way. These methods cannot be compared to the sudden elimination of conceptual thought, in the certain knowledge that there is nothing at all which has absolute existence, nothing on which to lay hold, nothing on which to rely, nothing in which to abide, nothing subjective or objective. It is by preventing the rise of conceptual thought that you will realize Bodhi; and, when you do, you will just be realizing the Buddha who has always existed in your own Mind! Aeons of striving will prove to be so much wasted effort; just as, when the warrior found his pearl, he merely discovered what had been hanging on his forehead all the time; and just as his finding of it had nothing to do with his efforts to discover it elsewhere. Therefore the Buddha said: 'I truly attained nothing from complete, unexcelled Enlightenment.' It was for fear that people would not believe this that he drew upon what is seen with the five sorts of vision and spoken with the five kinds of speech. So this quotation is by no means empty talk, but expresses the highest truth.

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11. Students of the Way should be sure that the four elements composing the body do not constitute the 'self', that the 'self' is not an entity; and that it can be deduced from this that the body is neither 'self' nor entity. Moreover, the five aggregates composing the mind (*in the common sense*) do not constitute either a 'self' or an entity; hence, it can be deduced that the (*so-called individual*) mind is neither 'self' nor entity. The six sense organs (*including the brain*) which, together with their six types of perception and the

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six kinds of objects of perception, constitute the sensory world, must be understood in the same way. Those eighteen aspects of sense are separately and together void. There is only Mind-Source, limitless in extent and of absolute purity.

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12. Thus, there is sensual eating and wise eating. When the body composed of the four elements suffers the pangs of hunger and accordingly you provide it with food, but without greed, that is called wise eating. On the other hand, if you gluttonously delight in purity and flavour, you are permitting the distinctions which arise from wrong thinking. Merely seeking to gratify the organ of taste without realizing when you have taken enough is called sensual eating.¹

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13. Śrāvakas reach Enlightenment by hearing the Dharma, so they are called Śrāvakas.² Śrāvakas do not comprehend their own mind, but allow concepts to arise from listening to the doctrine. Whether they hear of the existence of Bodhi and Nirvāṇa through supernormal powers or good fortune or preaching, they will attain to Buddhahood only

¹ This is a simple example of the wrong use of the six senses. Of course we must use them for dealing with the world as it affects our daily lives, but our employment of them should be limited to what is strictly necessary for our wellbeing.

² Huang Po sometimes stretches this term to apply to Hīnayānists in general. The literal meaning of its Chinese equivalent is 'those who hear' and Huang Po implies that Hīnayānists pay too much attention to the literal meaning of the Scriptures, instead of seeking intuitive knowledge through eliminating conceptual thought. Those able to apply the latter method have no need of scriptures.

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after three aeons of infinitely long duration. All these belong to the way of the Śrāvakas, so they are called Śrāvaka-Buddhas. But to awaken suddenly to the fact that your own Mind is the Buddha, that there is nothing to be attained or a single action to be performed—this is the Supreme Way; this is really to be as a Buddha. It is only to be feared that you students of the Way, by the coming into existence of a single thought, may raise a barrier between yourselves and the Way. From thought-instant to thought-instant, no FORM; from thought-instant to thought-instant, no ACTIVITY—that is to be a Buddha! If you students of the Way wish to become Buddhas, you need study no doctrines whatever, but learn only how to avoid seeking for and attaching yourselves to anything. Where nothing is sought this implies Mind unborn; where no attachment exists, this implies Mind not destroyed; and that which is neither born nor destroyed is the Buddha. The eighty-four thousand methods for countering the eighty-four thousand forms of delusion are merely figures of speech for drawing people towards the Gate. In fact, none of them have real existence. Relinquishment of everything is the Dharma, and he who understands this is a Buddha, but the relinquishment of ALL delusions leaves no Dharma on which to lay hold.¹

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14. If you students of the Way desire knowledge of this great mystery, only avoid attachment to any single thing

¹ Buddhists of most sects are taught to relinquish sensual attachments and to cling singlemindedly to the Dharma. Huang Po goes further in showing that any form of attachment, even attachment to the Dharma, leads us away from the truth.

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beyond Mind. To say that the real Dharmakāya of the Buddha¹ resembles the Void is another way of saying that the Dharmakāya is the Void and that the Void is the Dharmakāya. People often claim that the Dharmakāya is in the Void and that the Void contains the Dharmakāya, not realizing that they are one and the same. But if you define the Void as something existing, then it is not the Dharmakāya; and if you define the Dharmakāya as something existing, then it is not the Void. Only refrain from any objective conception of the Void; then it is the Dharmakāya: and, if only you refrain from any objective conception of the Dharmakāya, why, then it is the Void. These two do not differ from each other, nor is there any difference between sentient beings and Buddhas, or between saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa, or between delusion and Bodhi. When all such forms are abandoned, there is the Buddha. Ordinary people look to their surroundings, while followers of the Way look to Mind, but the true Dharma is to forget them both. The former is easy enough, the latter very difficult. Men are afraid to forget their minds, fearing to fall through the Void with nothing to stay their fall. They do not know that the Void is not really void, but the realm of the real Dharma. This spiritually enlightening nature is without beginning, as ancient as the Void, subject neither to birth nor to destruction, neither existing nor not existing, neither impure nor pure, neither clamorous nor silent, neither old nor young, occupying no space, having neither inside nor outside, size nor form, colour nor sound. It cannot be looked for or sought, comprehended by wisdom or knowledge, explained in words, contacted materially or reached by meritorious achievement. All the Buddhas and

¹ The highest of the three Bodies, synonymous with the Absolute.

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Bodhisattvas, together with all wriggling things possessed of life, share in this great Nirvāṇic nature. This nature is Mind; Mind is the Buddha, and the Buddha is the Dharma. Any thought apart from this truth is entirely a wrong thought. You cannot use Mind to seek Mind, the Buddha to seek the Buddha, or the Dharma to seek the Dharma. So you students of the Way should immediately refrain from conceptual thought. Let a tacit understanding be all! Any mental process must lead to error. There is just a transmission of Mind with Mind. This is the proper view to hold. Be careful not to look outwards to material surroundings. To mistake material surroundings for Mind is to mistake a thief for your son.¹

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15. It is only in contradistinction to greed, anger and ignorance that abstinence, calm and wisdom exist. Without illusion, how could there be Enlightenment? Therefore Bodhidharma said: 'The Buddha enunciated all Dharmas in order to eliminate every vestige of conceptual thinking. If I refrained entirely from conceptual thought, what would be the use of all the Dharmas?' Attach yourselves to nothing beyond the pure Buddha-Nature which is the original source of all things. Suppose you were to adorn the Void with countless jewels, how could they remain in position? The Buddha-Nature is like the Void; though you were to adorn it with inestimable merit and wisdom, how could

¹ There is a story of a man who mistook a thief for his long-lost son and, giving him a warm welcome, enabled the latter to sneak away with most of his possessions. Those who place reliance on material things are in danger of losing that most valuable of all possessions—the key to the riddle of life which unlocks Nirvāṇa's gate.

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they remain there?¹ They would only serve to conceal its original Nature and to render it invisible.

That which is called the Doctrine of Mental Origins (*followed by certain other sects*) postulates that all things are built up in Mind and that they manifest themselves upon contact with external environment, ceasing to be manifest when that environment is not present. But it is wrong to conceive of an environment separate from the pure, unvarying nature of all things.²

That which is called the Mirror of Concentration and Wisdom (*another reference to non-Zen Mahāyāna doctrine*) requires the use of sight, hearing, feeling and cognition, which lead to successive states of calm and agitation. But these involve conceptions based on environmental objects; they are temporary expedients appertaining to one of the lower categories of 'roots of goodness'.³ And this category of 'roots of goodness' merely enables people to understand what is said to them. If you wish to experience Enlightenment yourselves, you must not indulge in such conceptions. They are all environmental Dharmas concerning things which are and things which are not, based on existence and non-existence. If only you will avoid concepts of existence and non-existence in regard to absolutely everything, you will then perceive THE DHARMA.

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¹ Other Buddhist sects attach great importance to the acquisition of merit and wisdom, but this implies a dualistic conception of reality which Zen considers an insuperable obstacle to realization of the One Mind.

² This constitutes a warning against another type of dualism.

³ Roots of goodness are believed by some Mahāyānaists to be 'Enlightenment-potentials' of varying degrees of strength with which individuals are reborn in accordance with the varying merits gained in former lives.

16. On the first day of the ninth moon, the Master said to me: From the time when the Great Master Bodhidharma arrived in China, he spoke only of the One Mind and transmitted only the one Dharma. He used the Buddha to transmit the Buddha, never speaking of any other Buddha. He used the Dharma to transmit the Dharma, never speaking of any other Dharma. That Dharma was the wordless Dharma, and that Buddha was the intangible Buddha, since they were in fact that Pure Mind which is the source of all things. This is the only truth; all else is false. Prajñā is wisdom; wisdom is the formless original Mind-Source. Ordinary people do not seek the Way, but merely indulge their six senses which lead them back into the six realms of existence. A student of the Way, by allowing himself a single saṃsāric thought, falls among devils. If he permits himself a single thought leading to differential perception, he falls into heresy. To hold that there is something born and to try to eliminate it, that is to fall among the Śrāvakas.¹ To hold that things are not born but capable of destruction is to fall among the Pratyekas.² Nothing is born, nothing is destroyed. Away with your dualism, your likes and dislikes. Every single thing is just the One Mind. When you have perceived this, you will have mounted the Chariot of the Buddhas.

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17. Ordinary people all indulge in conceptual thought

¹ Huang Po, according to his usual custom, is using the word Śrāvaka to mean Hīnayānist. Hīnayānists are dualists in that they seek to overcome their saṃsāric life in order to enter Nirvāṇa; while Zen perceives that Saṃsāra is no other than Nirvāṇa.

² Huang Po customarily uses or misuses this word to mean the Mādhyamikists or followers of the Middle Vehicle.

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based on environmental phenomena, hence they feel desire and hatred. To eliminate environmental phenomena, just put an end to your conceptual thinking. When this ceases, environmental phenomena are void; and when these are void, thought ceases. But if you try to eliminate environment without first putting a stop to conceptual thought, you will not succeed, but merely increase its power to disturb you. Thus all things are naught but Mind—intangible Mind; so what can you hope to attain? Those who are students of Prajñā¹ hold that there is nothing tangible whatever, so they cease thinking of the Three Vehicles.² There is only the one reality, neither to be realized nor attained. To say 'I am able to realize something' or 'I am able to attain something' is to place yourself among the arrogant. The men who flapped their garments and left the meeting as mentioned in the Lotus Sūtra were just such people.³ Therefore the Buddha said: 'I truly obtained nothing from Enlightenment.' There is just a mysterious tacit understanding and no more.

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18. If an ordinary man, when he is about to die, could only see the five elements of consciousness as void; the four physical elements as not constituting an 'I'; the real Mind as formless and neither coming nor going; his nature as something neither commencing at his birth nor perishing at his death, but as whole and motionless in its very depths; his Mind and environmental objects as one—if he could really accomplish this, he would receive Enlightenment in

¹ Here used to mean Wisdom in the sense of Zen.

² I.e. the Three Great Schools teaching gradual Enlightenment.

³ These people thought they had understood and were smugly self-satisfied.

a flash. He would no longer be entangled by the Triple World; he would be a World-Transcendor. He would be without even the faintest tendency towards rebirth. If he should behold the glorious sight of all the Buddhas coming to welcome him, surrounded by every kind of gorgeous manifestation, he would feel no desire to approach them. If he should behold all sorts of horrific forms surrounding him, he would experience no terror. He would just be himself, oblivious of conceptual thought and one with the Absolute. He would have attained the state of unconditioned being. This, then, is the fundamental principle.¹

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19. On the eighth day of the tenth moon, the Master said to me: That which is called the City of Illusion contains the Two Vehicles, the Ten Stages of a Bodhisattva's Progress, and the two forms of Full Enlightenment.² All of them are powerful teachings for arousing people's interest, but they still belong to the City of Illusion.³ That which is called the Place of Precious Things is the real Mind, the original Buddha-Essence, the treasure of our own real Nature. These jewels cannot be measured or accumulated. Yet since there are neither Buddha nor sentient beings, neither subject nor object, where can there be a City of Precious

¹ This paragraph is, perhaps, one of the finest expositions of Zen teaching, for it encompasses in a few words almost the entire scope of that vast and penetrating wisdom.

² Including the form which leads to the awakening of others.

³ The City of Illusion is a term taken from the Lotus Sūtra and here implies temporary or incomplete Nirvāna. From the point of view of Zen, all the teachings of the many sects based on a belief in gradual Enlightenment are likely to lead their followers to the City of Illusion, because all of them apparently subscribe to some form or other of dualism.

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Things? If you ask, 'Well, so much for the City of Illusion, but where is the Place of Precious Things?', it is a place to which no directions can be given. For, if it could be pointed out, it would be a place existing in space; hence, it could not be the real Place of Precious Things. All we can say is that it is close by. It cannot be exactly described, but when you have a tacit understanding of its substance, it is there.

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20. Icchantikas are those with beliefs which are incomplete. All beings within the six realms of existence, including those who follow Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, if they do not believe in their potential Buddhahood, are accordingly called Icchantikas with cut-off roots of goodness. Bodhisattvas¹ who believe deeply in the Buddha-Dharma, without accepting the division into Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, but who do not realize the one Nature of Buddhas and sentient beings, are accordingly called Icchantikas with roots of goodness. Those who are Enlightened largely through hearing the spoken doctrine are termed Śrāvakas (*hearers*). Those Enlightened through perception of the law of karma are called Pratyeka-Buddhas.² Those who become Buddhas, but not from Enlightenment occurring in their own minds, are called Hearer-Buddhas. Most students of the Way are Enlightened through the Dharma which is taught in words and not through the Dharma of Mind. Even after successive aeons of effort, they will not become attuned to the original Buddha-Essence. For those who

¹ Here meaning Buddhists.

² Commonly meaning those Buddhas who do not interest themselves in the Enlightenment of others.

* are not Enlightened from within their own Mind, but from hearing the Dharma which is taught in words, make light of Mind and attach importance to doctrine, so they advance only step by step, neglecting their original Mind. Thus, if only you have a tacit understanding of Mind, you will not need to search for any Dharma, for then Mind is the Dharma.¹

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21. People are often hindered by environmental phenomena from perceiving Mind, and by individual events from perceiving underlying principles; so they often try to escape from environmental phenomena in order to still their minds, or to obscure events in order to retain their grasp of principles. They do not realize that this is merely to obscure phenomena with Mind, events with principles. Just let your minds become void and environmental phenomena will void themselves; let principles cease to stir and events will cease stirring of themselves.² Do not employ Mind in this perverted way.

Many people are afraid to empty their minds lest they may plunge into the Void. They do not know that their own Mind is the void. The ignorant eschew phenomena but not thought; the wise eschew thought but not phenomena.³

* * *

¹ Most of this paragraph is intended to make it clear that, though Buddhism of the gradual school does produce results, they take long to attain and are at least incomplete compared with results obtained through Zen.

² To FORCE the mind to blot out phenomena shows ignorance of the identity of the one with the other.

³ This profound teaching is aimed partly at those Buddhists who practise a form of meditation which aims at temporarily blotting out the material world.

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22. The Bodhisattva's mind is like the void, for he relinquishes everything and does not even desire to accumulate merits. There are three kinds of relinquishment. When everything inside and outside, bodily and mental, has been relinquished; when, as in the Void, no attachments are left; when all action is dictated purely by place and circumstance; when subjectivity and objectivity are forgotten—that is the highest form of relinquishment. When, on the one hand, the Way is followed by the performance of virtuous acts; while, on the other, relinquishment of merit takes place and no hope of reward is entertained—that is the medium form of relinquishment. When all sorts of virtuous actions are performed in the hope of reward by those who, nevertheless, know of the Void by hearing the Dharma and who are therefore unattached—that is the lowest form of relinquishment. The first is like a blazing torch held to the front which makes it impossible to mistake the path; the second is like a blazing torch held to one side, so that it is sometimes light and sometimes dark; the third is like a blazing torch held behind, so that pitfalls in front are not seen.¹

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23. Thus, the mind of the Bodhisattva is like the Void and everything is relinquished by it. When thoughts of the past cannot be taken hold of, that is relinquishment of the past. When thoughts of the present cannot be taken hold of, that is relinquishment of the present. When thoughts of the future cannot be taken hold of, that is relinquishment of

¹ These three types of relinquishment probably refer obliquely to Zen, Mahāyāna and Hinayāna respectively.

the future. This is called utter relinquishment of Triple Time. Since the Tathāgata entrusted Kāśyapa with the Dharma until now, Mind has been transmitted with Mind, and these Minds have been identical. A transmission of Void cannot be made through words. A transmission in concrete terms cannot be the Dharma. Thus Mind is transmitted with Mind and these Minds do not differ. Transmitting and receiving transmission are both a most difficult kind of mysterious understanding, so that few indeed have been able to receive it. In fact, however, Mind is not Mind and transmission is not really transmission.¹

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24. A Buddha has three bodies. By the Dharmakāya is meant the Dharma of the omnipresent voidness of the real self-existent Nature of everything. By the Sambhogakāya is meant the Dharma of the underlying universal purity of things. By the Nirmāṇakāya is meant the Dharmas of the six practices leading to Nirvāṇa and all other such devices. The Dharma of the Dharmakāya cannot be sought through speech or hearing or the written word. There is nothing which can be said or made evident. There is just the omnipresent voidness of the real self-existent Nature of everything, and no more. Therefore, saying that there is no Dharma to be explained in words is called preaching the Dharma. The Sambhogakāya and the Nirmāṇakāya both respond with appearances suited to particular circumstances. Spoken Dharmas which respond to events through the senses and in all sorts of guises are none of them the real Dharma. So it is said that the Sambhogakāya or the

¹ This is a reminder that ALL terms used in Zen are mere makeshifts.

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Nirmaṇakāya is not a real Buddha or preacher of the Dharma.¹

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25. The term unity refers to a homogeneous spiritual brilliance which separates into six harmoniously blended 'elements'. The homogeneous spiritual brilliance is the One Mind, while the six harmoniously blended 'elements' are the six sense organs. These six sense organs become severally united with objects that defile them—the eyes with form, the ear with sound, the nose with smell, the tongue with taste, the body with touch, and the thinking mind with entities. Between these organs and their objects arise the six sensory perceptions, making eighteen sense-realms in all. If you understand that these eighteen realms have no objective existence, you will bind the six harmoniously blended 'elements' into a single spiritual brilliance—a single spiritual brilliance which is the One Mind. All students of the Way know this, but cannot avoid forming concepts of 'a single spiritual brilliance' and 'the six harmoniously blended elements'. Accordingly they are chained to entities and fail to achieve a tacit understanding of original Mind.²

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¹ As usual, Huang Po is using familiar Sanskrit terms in a way peculiar to himself. Usually, the Dharmakāya means the highest aspect of a Buddha, i.e. as one with the Absolute; the Sambhogakāya is the glorified Body of a Buddha in his supramundane existence; and the Nirmaṇakāya may be any of the various transformations in which a Buddha appears in the world. In Zen, the first is absolute truth in unimaginable and perfect form, the second is the highest concept of absolute truth of which unenlightened human beings are capable—an underlying purity and unity; the third represents the various methods by which we hope to obtain perception of absolute truth.

² This points to those people who are capable of understanding the doctrine intelligently but who have not yet entirely succeeded in throwing off the burden of concepts.

26. When the Tathāgata manifested himself in this world, he wished to preach a single Vehicle of Truth. But people would not have believed him and, by scoffing at him, would have become immersed in the sea of sorrow (*saṃsāra*). On the other hand, if he had said nothing at all, that would have been selfishness, and he would not have been able to diffuse knowledge of the mysterious Way for the benefit of sentient beings. So he adopted the expedient of preaching that there are Three Vehicles. As, however, these Vehicles are relatively greater and lesser, unavoidably there are shallow teachings and profound teachings—none of them being the original Dharma. So it is said that there is only a One-Vehicle Way; if there were more, they could not be real. Besides there is absolutely no way of describing the Dharma of the One Mind. Therefore the Tathāgata called Kāśyapa to come and sit with him on the Seat of Proclaiming the Law, separately entrusting to him the Wordless Dharma of the One Mind. This branchless Dharma was to be separately practised; and those who should be tacitly Enlightened would arrive at the state of Buddhahood.¹

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27. Q: What is the Way and how must it be followed?

A: What sort of THING do you suppose the Way to be, that you should wish to FOLLOW it?

Q: What instructions have the Masters everywhere given for dhyāna-practice and the study of the Dharma?

¹ This passage demonstrates that Huang Po himself accepted the traditional origin of the Zen Sect; but, as I have pointed out in the introduction, the truth of this tradition does not affect the validity of the teaching one way or the other, since Huang Po is surely speaking from a direct experience of the One Mind.

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A: Words used to attract the dull of wit are not to be relied on.

Q: If those teachings were meant for the dull-witted, I have yet to hear what Dharma has been taught to those of really high capacity.

A: If they are really men of high capacity, where could they find people to follow? If they seek from within themselves, they will find nothing tangible; how much less can they find a Dharma worthy of their attention elsewhere! Do not look to what is called the Dharma by preachers, for what sort of Dharma could that be?

Q: If that is so, should we not seek for anything at all?

A: By conceding this, you would save yourself a lot of mental effort.

Q: But in this way everything would be eliminated. There cannot just be nothing.

A: Who called it nothing? Who was this fellow? But you wanted to SEEK for something.

Q: Since there is no need to seek, why do you also say that not everything is eliminated?

A: Not to seek is to rest tranquil. Who told you to eliminate anything? Look at the void in front of your eyes. How can you produce it or eliminate it?

Q: If I could reach this Dharma, would it be like the void?

A: Morning and night I have explained to you that the Void is both One and Manifold. I said this as a temporary expedient, but you are building up concepts from it.

Q: Do you mean that we should not form concepts as human beings normally do?

A: I have not prevented you; but concepts are related to the senses; and, when feeling takes place, wisdom is shut out.

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Q: Then should we avoid any feeling in relation to the Dharma?

A: Where no feeling arises, who can say that you are right?

Q: Why do you speak as though I was mistaken in all the questions I have asked Your Reverence?

A: You are a man who doesn't understand what is said to him. What is all this about being mistaken?¹

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28. Q: Up to now, you have refuted everything which has been said. You have done nothing to point out the true Dharma to us.

A: In the true Dharma there is no confusion, but you produce confusion by such questions. What sort of 'true Dharma' can you go seeking for?

Q: Since the confusion arises from my questions, what will Your Reverence's answer be?

A: Observe things as they are and don't pay attention to other people. There are some people just like mad dogs barking at everything that moves, even barking when the wind stirs among the grass and leaves.²

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29. Regarding this Zen Doctrine of ours, since it was first transmitted, it has never taught that men should seek for learning or form concepts. 'Studying the Way' is just a figure of speech. It is a method of arousing people's interest

¹ Huang Po is obviously trying to help his questioner break away from the habit of thinking in terms of concepts and logical categories. To do this, he is obliged to make his questioner seem wrong, whatever he asks. We are reminded of the Buddha who, when questioned about such things as existence and non-existence, would reply: 'Not this, not this.'

² Such people mistake motions taking place within their minds for external independently moving objects.

in the early stages of their development. In fact, the Way is not something which can be studied. Study leads to the retention of concepts and so the Way is entirely misunderstood. Moreover, the Way is not something specially existing; it is called the Mahāyāna Mind—Mind which is not to be found inside, outside or in the middle. Truly it is not located anywhere. The first step is to refrain from knowledge-based concepts. This implies that if you were to follow the empirical method to the utmost limit, on reaching that limit you would still be unable to locate Mind. The way is spiritual Truth and was originally without name or title. It was only because people ignorantly sought for it empirically that the Buddhas appeared and taught them to eradicate this method of approach. Fearing that nobody would understand, they selected the name 'Way'. You must not allow this name to lead you into forming a mental concept of a road. So it is said 'When the fish is caught we pay no more attention to the trap.' When body and mind achieve spontaneity, the Way is reached and Mind is understood. A śramana¹ is so called because he has penetrated to the original source of all things. The fruit of attaining the śramana stage is gained by putting an end to all anxiety; it does not come from book-learning.²

¹ Commonly, the word for 'monk'.

² This passage has a strong Taoist flavour. The quotation is from Chuang Tzû, and the word Tao (Way) is used throughout. Zen and Taoism have so much in common that some have been led to believe that the former is a sort of Taoism in Buddhist disguise; but, as both sects employ much the same theory and practice, it may be that the similarity is because the teachers of both sects are speaking from the same transcendental experience of Reality. The present text is written in a highly condensed form and includes sermons delivered on many different occasions. It is not improbable that paragraphs 29 and 30 are a summary of a sermon delivered to an audience including one or more distinguished Taoist scholars, especially as the opening sentence gives the impression that the Master was addressing newcomers to Zen.

30. If you now set about using your minds to seek Mind, listening to the teaching of others, and hoping to reach the goal through mere learning, when will you ever succeed? Some of the ancients had sharp minds; they no sooner heard the Doctrine proclaimed than they hastened to discard all learning. So they were called 'Sages who, abandoning learning, have come to rest in spontaneity'.¹ In these days people only seek to stuff themselves with knowledge and deductions, seeking everywhere for book-knowledge and calling this 'Dharma-practice'.² They do not know that so much knowledge and deduction have just the contrary effect of piling up obstacles. Merely acquiring a lot of knowledge makes you like a child who gives himself indigestion by gobbling too much curds. Those who study the Way according to the Three Vehicles are all like this. All you can call them is people who suffer from indigestion. When so-called knowledge and deductions are not digested, they become poisons, for they belong only to the plane of saṃsāra. In the Absolute, there is nothing at all of this kind. So it is said: 'In the armoury of my sovereign, there is no Sword of Thusness'. All the concepts you have formed in the past must be discarded and replaced by void. Where dualism ceases, there is the Void of the Womb of Tathāgatas. The term 'Womb of Tathāgatas' implies that not the smallest hairsbreadth of anything can exist there. That is why the Dharma Rāja (*the Buddha*), who broke down the notion of objective existence, manifested himself in this

¹ This passage contains another famous Taoist term—WU WEI, sometimes mistranslated 'non-action'. In fact, it means no calculated action, nothing but spontaneous actions required to meet the demands of the passing moment.

² Literacy is by no means essential to the mastery of Zen. The *Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation* makes the same point.

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world, and that is why he said: 'When I was with Dīpaṃkara Buddha there was not a particle of anything for me to attain.' This saying is intended just to void your sense-based knowledge and deductions. Only he who restrains every vestige of empiricism and ceases to rely upon anything can become a perfectly tranquil man. The canonical teachings of the Three Vehicles are just remedies for temporary needs. They were taught to meet such needs and so are of temporary value and differ one from another. If only this could be understood, there would be no more doubts about it. Above all it is essential not to select some particular teaching suited to a certain occasion, and, being impressed by its forming part of the written canon, regard it as an immutable concept. Why so? Because in truth there is no unalterable Dharma which the Tathāgata could have preached. People of our sect would never argue that there could be such a thing. We just know how to put all mental activity to rest and thus achieve tranquillity. We certainly do not begin by thinking things out and end up in perplexity.

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31. Q: From all you have just said, Mind is the Buddha; but it is not clear as to what sort of mind is meant by this 'Mind which is the Buddha'.

A: How many minds have you got?

Q: But is the Buddha the ordinary mind or the Enlightened mind?

A: Where on earth do you keep your 'ordinary mind' and your 'Enlightened mind'?

Q: In the teaching of the Three Vehicles it is stated that there are both. Why does Your Reverence deny it?

A: In the teaching of the Three Vehicles it is clearly explained that the ordinary and Enlightened minds are illusions. You don't understand. All this clinging to the idea of things existing is to mistake vacuity for the truth. How can such conceptions not be illusory? Being illusory, they hide Mind from you. If you would only rid yourselves of the concepts of ordinary and Enlightened, you would find that there is no other Buddha than the Buddha in your own Mind. When Bodhidharma came from the West, he just pointed out that the substance of which all men are composed is the Buddha. You people go on misunderstanding; you hold to concepts such as 'ordinary' and 'Enlightened', directing your thoughts outwards where they gallop about like horses! All this amounts to beclouding your own minds! So I tell you Mind is the Buddha. As soon as thought or sensation arises, you fall into dualism. Beginningless time and the present moment are the same. There is no this and no that. To understand this truth is called compete and unexcelled Enlightenment.

Q: Upon what Doctrine (*Dharma-principles*) does Your Reverence base these words?

A: Why seek a doctrine? As soon as you have a doctrine, you fall into dualistic thought.

Q: Just now you said that the beginningless past and the present are the same. What do you mean by that?

A: It is just because of your SEEKING that you make a difference between them. If you were to stop seeking, how could there be any difference between them?

Q: If they are not different, why did you employ separate terms for them?

A: If you hadn't mentioned ordinary and Enlightened, who would have bothered to say such things? Just as those

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categories have no real existence, so Mind is not really 'mind'. And, as both Mind and those categories are really illusions, wherever can you hope to find anything?

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32. Q: Illusion can hide from us our own mind, but up to now you have not taught us how to get rid of illusion.

A: The arising and the elimination of illusion are both illusory. Illusion is not something rooted in Reality; it exists because of your dualistic thinking. If you will only cease to indulge in opposed concepts such as 'ordinary' and 'Enlightened', illusion will cease of itself. And then if you still want to destroy it wherever it may be, you will find that there is not a hairsbreadth left of anything on which to lay hold. This is the meaning of: 'I will let go with both hands, for then I shall certainly discover the Buddha in my Mind.'

Q: If there is nothing on which to lay hold, how is the Dharma to be transmitted?

A: It is a transmission of Mind with Mind.

Q: If Mind is used for transmission, why do you say that Mind too does not exist?

A: Obtaining no Dharma whatever is called Mind transmission. The understanding of this Mind implies no Mind and no Dharma.

Q: If there is no Mind and no Dharma, what is meant by transmission?

A: You hear people speak of Mind transmission and then you talk of something to be received. So Bodhidharma said:

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The nature of the Mind when understood,
No human speech can compass or disclose.
Enlightenment is naught to be attained,
And he that gains it does not say he knows.

If I were to make this clear to you, I doubt if you could stand up to it.

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33. Q: Surely the void stretching out in front of our eyes is objective. Then aren't you pointing to something objective and seeing Mind in it?

A: What sort of mind could I tell you to see in an objective environment? Even if you could see it, it would only be Mind reflected in an objective sphere. You would be like a man looking at his face in a mirror; though you could distinguish your features in it clearly, you would still be looking at a mere reflection. What bearing has this on the affair that brought you to me?

Q: If we do not see by means of reflections, when shall we see at all?

A: So long as you are concerned with 'by means of', you will always be depending on something false. When will you ever succeed in understanding? Instead of observing those who tell you to open wide both your hands like one who has nothing to lose, you waste your strength bragging about all sorts of things.

Q: To those who understand, even reflections are nothing?

A: If solid things do not exist, how much the less can we make use of reflections. Don't go about babbling like a dreamer with his eyes open (*like a sleepwalker*).

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Stepping into the public hall, His Reverence said: Having many sorts of knowledge cannot compare with giving up SEEKING for anything, which is the best of all things. Mind is not of several kinds and there is no Doctrine which can be put into words. As there is no more to be said, the assembly is dismissed!

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34. Q: What is meant by relative truth?¹

A: What would you do with such a parasitical plant as that? Reality is perfect purity; why base a discussion on false terms? To be absolutely without concepts is called the Wisdom of Dispassion. Every day, whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down, and in all your speech, remain detached from everything within the sphere of phenomena. Whether you speak or merely blink an eye, let it be done with complete dispassion. Now we are getting towards the end of the third period of five hundred years since the time of the Buddha, and most students of Zen cling to all sorts of sounds and forms. Why do they not copy me by letting each thought go as though it were nothing, or as though it were a piece of rotten wood, a stone, or the cold ashes of a dead fire? Or else, by just making whatever slight response is suited to each occasion? If you do not act thus, when you reach the end of your days here, you will be tortured by Yama.² You must get away from the doctrines of existence and non-existence, for Mind is like the sun, forever in the void, shining spontaneously, shining without

¹ Literally 'worldly truth' no doubt used in the sense of 'truths' applicable to the apparently objective sphere of daily life.

² The King of Hell—here used figuratively.

intending to shine. This is not something which you can accomplish without effort, but when you reach the point of clinging to nothing whatever, you will be acting as the Buddhas act. This will indeed be acting in accordance with the saying: 'Develop a mind which rests on no thing whatever.'¹ For this is your pure Dharmakāya, which is called supreme perfect Enlightenment. If you cannot understand this, though you gain profound knowledge from your studies, though you make the most painful efforts and practise the most stringent austerities, you will still fail to know your own mind. All your effort will have been misdirected and you will certainly join the family of Māra.² What advantage can you gain from this sort of practice? As Chih Kung³ once said: 'The Buddha is really the creation of your own Mind. How, then, can he be sought through scriptures?' Though you study how to attain the Three Grades of Bodhisattvahood, the Four Grades of Sainthood, and the Ten Stages of a Bodhisattva's Progress to Enlightenment until your mind is full of them, you will merely be balancing yourself between 'ordinary' and 'Enlightened'. Not to see that all METHODS of following the Way are ephemeral is saṃsāric Dharma.

Its strength once spent, the arrow falls to earth.
You build up lives which won't fulfil your hopes.
How far below the Transcendental Gate
From which one leap will gain the Buddha's realm!⁴

¹ A famous quotation from the Diamond Sūtra.

² Prince of Devils—here used figuratively.

³ A famous sixth-century monk.

⁴ This verse is from the 'Song of Enlightenment' attributed to Yung Chia, a seven-century monk. This fascinating work has been translated in full by Dr. Walter Liebenthal and published in the *Journal of Oriental Studies of the Catholic University of Peiping*, Vol. VI, 1941.

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It is because you are not that sort of man that you insist on a thorough study of the methods established by people of old for gaining knowledge on the conceptual level. Chih Kung also said: 'If you do not meet a transcendental teacher, you will have swallowed the Mahāyāna medicine in vain!'

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35. If you would spend all your time—walking, standing, sitting or lying down—learning to halt the concept-forming activities of your own mind, you could be sure of ultimately attaining the goal. Since your strength is insufficient, you might not be able to transcend saṃsāra by a single leap; but, after five or ten years, you would surely have made a good beginning and be able to make further progress spontaneously. It is because you are not that sort of man that you feel obliged to employ your mind 'studying dhyāna' and 'studying the Way'. What has all that got to do with Buddhism? So it is said that all the Tathāgata taught was just to convert people; it was like pretending yellow leaves are real gold just to stop the flow of a child's tears; it must by no means be regarded as though it were ultimate truth. If you take it for truth, you are no member of our sect; and what bearing can it have on your original substance? So the sūtra says: 'What is called supreme perfect wisdom implies that there is really nothing whatever to be attained.' If you are also able to understand this, you will realize that the Way of the Buddhas and the Way of devils are equally wide of the mark. The original pure, glistening universe is neither square nor round, big nor small; it is without any such distinctions as long and short,

it is beyond attachment and activity, ignorance and Enlightenment. You must see clearly that there is really nothing at all—no humans and no Buddhas. The great chiliocosms, numberless as grains of sand, are mere bubbles. All wisdom and all holiness are but streaks of lightning. None of them have the reality of Mind. The Dharmakāya, from ancient times until today, together with the Buddhas and Patriarchs, is One. How can it lack a single hair of anything? Even if you understand this, you must make the most strenuous efforts. Throughout this life, you can never be certain of living long enough to take another breath.¹

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36. Q: The Sixth Patriarch was illiterate. How is it that he was handed the robe which elevated him to that office? Elder Shên Hsiu (*a rival candidate*) occupied a position above five hundred others and, as a teaching monk, he was able to expound thirty-two volumes of sūtras. Why did he not receive the robe?

A: Because he still indulged in conceptual thought—in a dharma of activity. To him 'as you practise, so shall you attain' was a reality. So the Fifth Patriarch made the transmission to Hui Nêng (*Wei Lang*). At that very moment, the latter attained a tacit understanding and received in silence the profoundest thought of the Tathāgata. That is why the Dharma was transmitted to him. You do not see that THE FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINE OF THE DHARMA IS THAT THERE ARE NO DHARMAS, YET THAT THIS DOCTRINE OF NO-DHARMA

¹ Buddhists believe that it is a rare and difficult thing to be born a human being; and, as Enlightenment can only be attained from the human state, it is a matter of great urgency that we should press forward. Otherwise, the unique opportunity may be lost for many aeons.

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IS IN ITSELF A DHARMA; AND NOW THAT THE NO-DHARMA DOCTRINE HAS BEEN TRANSMITTED, HOW CAN THE DOCTRINE OF THE DHARMA BE A DHARMA?¹ Whoever understands the meaning of this deserves to be called a monk, one skilled at 'Dharma-practice'. If you do not believe this, you must explain the following story. 'The Elder Wei Ming climbed to the summit of the Ta Yü Mountain to visit the Sixth Patriarch. The latter asked him why he had come. Was it for the robe or for the Dharma? The Elder Wei Ming answered that he had not come for the robe, but only for the Dharma; whereupon the Sixth Patriarch said: "Perhaps you will concentrate your thoughts for a moment and avoid thinking in terms of good and evil." Ming did as he was told, and the Sixth Patriarch continued: "While you are not thinking of good and not thinking of evil, just at this very moment, return to what you were before your father and mother were born." Even as the words were spoken, Ming arrived at a sudden tacit understanding. Accordingly he bowed to the ground and said: "I am like a man drinking water who knows in himself how cool it is. I have lived with the Fifth Patriarch and his disciples for thirty years, but it is only today that I am able to banish the mistakes in my former way of thinking." The Sixth Patriarch replied: "Just so. Now at last you understand why, when the

¹ This passage has puzzled many a Chinese scholar. I am not sure that this translation conveys the meaning very well, but at least I have simplified the wording by using 'doctrine' as well as 'dharma'. In the original, the same word is used for both. A word-for-word translation would run something like this: 'Dharma original Dharma not Dharma, not Dharma Dharma also Dharma, now transmit not Dharma Dharma, Dharma Dharma how-can be Dharma.' I have closely followed a rendering made for me some years ago by Mr. I. T. Pun, a famous Buddhist scholar resident in Hongkong. He admits that this version merely represents his own opinion, but it seems to me the best possible. In my previous published translation I failed lamentably.

PART TWO

THE WAN LING RECORD OF THE
ZEN MASTER HUANG PO (TUAN CHI)

*A collection of dialogues, sermons and anecdotes recorded by P'ei
Hsiu during his tenure of the prefecture of Wan Ling*

1. Once I put this question to the Master. How many of the four or five hundred persons gathered here on this mountain have fully understood Your Reverence's teaching?

The Master answered: Their number cannot be known. Why? Because my Way is through Mind-awakening. How can it be conveyed in words? Speech only produces some effect when it falls on the uninstructed ears of children.

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2. Q: What is the Buddha?¹

A: Mind is the Buddha, while the cessation of conceptual thought is the Way. Once you stop arousing concepts and thinking in terms of existence and non-existence, long and short, other and self, active and passive, and suchlike, you will find that your Mind is intrinsically the Buddha, that the Buddha is intrinsically Mind, and that Mind resembles a void.² Therefore is it written that 'the true Dharmakāya'³

¹ The Absolute.

² Meaning intangible, not a mere negation.

³ The Absolute Body of a Buddha.

resembles a void'. Seek for naught besides this, else your search must end in sorrow. Though you perform the six pāramitās¹ for as many aeons as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, adding also all the other sorts of activities for gaining Enlightenment, YOU WILL STILL FALL SHORT OF THE GOAL. Why? Because these are karma-forming activities and, when the good karma they produce has been exhausted, you will be born again in the ephemeral world. Therefore is it also written: 'The Samboghkāya² is not a real Buddha, nor a real teacher of the Dharma.'³ Only come to know the nature of your own Mind, in which there is no self and no other, and you will in fact be a Buddha!

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3. Q: Allowing that the Enlightened man who achieves the cessation of conceptual thought is Buddha, would not an ignorant man, on ceasing to think conceptually, lose himself in oblivion?

A: There ARE no Enlightened men or ignorant men, and there is no oblivion. Yet, though basically everything is without objective existence, you must not come to think in terms of anything non-existent; and though things are not non-existent, you must not form a concept of anything existing. For 'existence' and 'non-existence' are both empirical concepts no better than illusions. Therefore it is written: 'Whatever the senses apprehend resembles an

¹ Charity, morality, patience under affliction, zealous application, right control of the mind, and the application of highest wisdom.

² Buddha's Body of Bliss.

³ This means that the idealized or heavenly form of a Buddha, to whom the Unenlightened pray, is unreal in that he is regarded as an entity and therefore as apart from the One Mind.

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illusion, including everything ranging from mental concepts to living beings.' Our Founder¹ preached to his disciples naught but total abstraction leading to elimination of sense-perception. In this total abstraction does the Way of the Buddhas flourish; while from discrimination between this and that a host of demons blazes forth!

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4. Q: If Mind and the Buddha² are intrinsically one, should we continue to practise the six pāramitās and the other orthodox means of gaining Enlightenment?

A: Enlightenment springs from Mind, regardless of your practice of the six pāramitās and the rest. All such practices are merely expedients for handling 'concrete' matters when dealing with the problems of daily life. Even Enlightenment, the Absolute, Reality, Sudden Attainment, the Dharmakāya and all the others down to the Ten Stages of Progress, the Four Rewards of virtuous and wise living and the State of Holiness and Wisdom are—every one of them—mere concepts for helping us through saṃsāra; they have nothing to do with the real Buddha-Mind. Since Mind is the Buddha, the ideal way of attainment is to cultivate that Buddha-Mind. Only avoid conceptual thoughts, which lead to becoming and cessation, to the afflictions of the sentient world and all the rest; then you will have no need of methods of Enlightenment and suchlike. Therefore is it written:

All the Buddha's teachings just had this single object—
To carry us beyond the stage of thought.
Now, if I accomplish cessation of my thinking,
What use to me the Dharmas Buddha taught?

¹ Bodhidharma.

² Absolute.

From Gautama Buddha down through the whole line of patriarchs to Bodhidharma, none preached aught besides the One Mind, otherwise known as the Sole Vehicle of Liberation. Hence, though you search throughout the whole universe, you will never find another vehicle. Nowhere has this teaching leaves or branches; its one quality is eternal truth. Hence it is a teaching hard to accept. When Bodhidharma came to China and reached the Kingdoms of Liang and Wei, only the Venerable Master Ko gained a silent insight into our own Mind; as soon as it was explained to him, he understood that Mind is the Buddha, and that individual mind and body are nothing. This teaching is called the Great Way. The very nature of the Great Way is voidness of opposition. Bodhidharma firmly believed in being ONE WITH THE REAL 'SUBSTANCE' OF THE UNIVERSE IN THIS LIFE! Mind and that 'substance' do not differ one jot—that 'substance' is Mind. They cannot possibly be separated. It was for this revelation that he earned the title of Patriarch of our sect, and therefore is it written: 'The moment of realizing the unity of Mind and the "substance" which constitutes reality may truly be said to baffle description.'

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5. Q: Does the Buddha really liberate sentient beings?¹

A: There are in reality no sentient beings to be delivered by the Tathāgata. If even self has no objective existence, how much less has other-than-self! Thus, neither Buddha nor sentient beings exist objectively.

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¹ From saṃsāra—the endless round of birth and death.

6. Q: Yet it is recorded that 'Whosoever possesses the thirty-two characteristic signs of a Buddha is able to deliver sentient beings'. How can you deny it?

A: Anything possessing ANY signs is illusory. It is by perceiving that all signs are no signs that you perceive the Tathāgata.¹ 'Buddha' and 'sentient beings' are both your own false conceptions. It is because you do not know real Mind that you delude yourselves with such objective concepts. If you WILL conceive of a Buddha, YOU WILL BE OBSTRUCTED BY THAT BUDDHA!!! And when you conceive of sentient beings, you will be obstructed by those beings. All such dualistic concepts as 'ignorant' and 'Enlightened', 'pure' and 'impure', are obstructions. It is because your minds are hindered by them that the Wheel of the Law must be turned.² Just as apes spend their time throwing things away and picking them up again unceasingly, so it is with you and your learning. All you need is to give up your 'learning', your 'ignorant' and 'Enlightened', 'pure' and 'impure', 'great' and 'little', your 'attachment' and 'activity'. Such things are mere conveniences, mere ornaments within the One Mind. I hear you have studied the sūtras of the twelve divisions of the Three Vehicles. They are all mere empirical concepts. Really you must give them up!

So just discard all you have acquired as being no better than a bed spread for you when you were sick. Only when you have abandoned all perceptions, there being nothing objective to perceive; only when phenomena obstruct you no longer; only when you have rid yourself of the whole gamut of dualistic concepts of the 'ignorant' and 'En-

¹ Buddha.

² I.e. that the relative truths of orthodox Buddhism must be taught.

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the existence of the Thirty-Two Characteristic Signs of a Buddha, or of the Eighty Excellencies whereby people have been ferried over?¹

A: The Thirty-Two Signs are signs,² and whatever has form is illusory. The Eighty Excellencies belong to the sphere of matter; but whoever perceives a self in matter is travelling the wrong path; he cannot comprehend the Tathāgata thus.

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8. Q: Does the essential substance of the Buddha differ at all from that of sentient beings or are they identical?

A: Essential substance partakes neither of identity nor difference. If you accept the orthodox teachings of the Three Vehicles of Buddhism, discriminating between the Buddha-Nature and the nature of sentient beings, you will create for yourself Three Vehicle karma, and identities and differences will result. But if you accept the Buddha-Vehicle, which is the doctrine transmitted by Bodhi-dharma, you will not speak of such things; you will merely point to the One Mind which is without identity or difference, without cause or effect.³ Therefore is it written: 'There is only the way of the One Vehicle; there is neither a second nor a third, except for those ways employed by the Buddha as purely relative expedients (*upāya*) for the liberation of beings lost in delusion.'

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¹ From *saṃsāra* to *Nirvāṇa*.

² I.e. forms.

³ It is not Huang Po's intention to deny the validity of karmic law as it applies to the ephemeral world of *saṃsāra*.

9. Q: Why was the Bodhisattva of Infinite Extent unable to view the sacred sign on the crown of the Buddha's head?¹

A: There was really nothing for him to see. Why? The Bodhisattva of Infinite Extent was the Tathāgata; it follows that the need to look did not arise. The parable is intended to prevent your conceiving of the Buddha and of sentient beings as entities and thereby falling into the error of spacial separateness. It is a warning against conceiving of entities as existing or not existing and thereby falling into the error of special separateness, and against conceiving of individuals as ignorant or Enlightened and thereby falling into that same error. Only one entirely liberated from concepts can possess a body of infinite extent. All conceptual thinking is called erroneous belief. The upholders of such false doctrines delight in a multiplicity of concepts, but the Bodhisattva remains unmoved amid a whole host of them. 'Tathāgata' means the THUSNESS of all phenomena. Therefore it is written: 'Maitreya is THUS; saints and sages are THUS.' THUSNESS consists in not being subject to becoming or to destruction; THUSNESS consists in not being seen and in not being heard. The crown of the Tathāgata's head is a concept of perfection, but it is also no-perfection-to-be-conceived. So do not fall into conceiving of perfection objectively. It follows that the Buddhakāya² is above all activity:³ therefore must you beware of discriminating between the myriads of separate forms.

The ephemeral may be likened to mere emptiness;⁴ the

¹ It is clear that this question was asked by somebody not present during the previous discussions.

² Absolute.

³ I.e. activity in production of form.

⁴ Flux.

Great Void is perfection wherein is neither lack nor superfluity, a uniform quiescence in which all activity is stilled.¹ Do not argue that there may be other regions lying outside the Great Void, for such an argument would inevitably lead to discrimination. Therefore is it written: 'Perfection² is a deep sea of wisdom; saṃsāra³ is like a whirling chaos.'

When we talk of the knowledge 'I' may gain, the learning 'I' may achieve, 'my' intuitive understanding, 'my' deliverance from rebirth, and 'my' moral way of living, our successes make these concepts seem pleasant to us, but our failures make them appear deplorable. What is the use of all that? I advise you to remain uniformly quiescent and above all activity. Do not deceive yourselves with conceptual thinking, and do not look anywhere for the truth, for all that is needed is to refrain from allowing concepts to arise. It is obvious that mental concepts and external perceptions are equally misleading, and that the Way of the Buddhas⁴ is as dangerous to you as the way of demons. Thus, when Mañjuśrī temporarily entered into dualism, he found himself dwarfed by two iron mountains which made egress impossible. But Mañjuśrī⁵ had true understanding, while Samantabhadra⁶ possessed only ephemeral knowledge. Nevertheless, when true understanding and

¹ A distinction is here made between 'void' in the sense of flux where all forms are seen in dissolution, and the Great Void which overspreads, penetrates and is all. When the scientists speak of the stuff of the world as mind-stuff, it is probable that they are speaking of the flux, for the Great Void can hardly have been deduced from laws governing the ephemeral world of transitory phenomena. Compared with the Great Void, 'mind-stuff' is a relatively substantial concept!

² Nirvāṇa.

³ The transient universe.

⁴ If conceived objectively.

⁵ The personification of Ultimate Wisdom.

⁶ The personification of Love and Action.

ephemeral knowledge are properly integrated, it will be found that they no longer exist. There is only the One Mind, Mind which is neither Buddha nor sentient beings, for it contains no such dualism. As soon as you conceive of the Buddha, you are forced to conceive of sentient beings, or of concepts and no-concepts, of vital and trivial ones, which will surely imprison you between those two iron mountains.

On account of the obstacles created by dualistic reasoning, Bodhidharma merely pointed to the original Mind and substance of us all as being in fact the Buddha. He offered no false means of self-perfecting oneself; he belonged to no school of gradual attainment. His doctrine admits of no such attributes as light and dark. Since it¹ is not light, lo there is no light; since it is not dark, lo there is no dark! Hence it follows that there is no Darkness,² nor End of Darkness.³ Whosoever enters the gateway of our sect must deal with everything solely by means of the intellect.⁴ This sort of perception is known as the Dharma; as the Dharma is perceived, we speak of Buddha; while perceiving that in fact there are no Dharma and no Buddha is called entering the Sangha, who are otherwise known as 'monks dwelling above all activity'; and the whole sequence may be called the Triratna or Three Jewels in one Substance.⁵

¹ Truth.

² Avidyā or primordial ignorance.

³ Enlightenment.

⁴ Here, 'intellect' stands for MANAS, the highest faculty of the human mind by which a man rises from conceptual thought to intuitive knowledge.

⁵ Huang Po is juggling with the most sacred of Buddhist terms, perhaps causing some of his hearers to stiffen with disapproval, but clearly in the hope of shocking them into a deeper understanding of truth. The terse humour with which he cloaks his underlying sincerity is lost in the translation.

THE ZEN TEACHING OF HUANG PO

There's never been a single thing;
Then where's defiling dust to cling?
If you can reach the heart of this,
Why talk of transcendental bliss?¹

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11. Q: If 'there's never been a single thing', can we speak of phenomena as non-existent?

A: 'Non-existent' is just as wrong as its opposite. Bodhi means having no concept of existence or non-existence.

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12. Q: What is the Buddha?²

A: Your Mind is the Buddha. The Buddha is Mind. Mind and Buddha are indivisible. Therefore it is written: 'That which is Mind is the Buddha; if it is other than Mind, it is certainly other than Buddha.'

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13. Q: If our own Mind is the Buddha, how did Bodhidharma transmit his doctrine when he came from India?

A: When he came from India, he transmitted only Mind-Buddha. He just pointed to the truth that the minds

¹ This famous poem of Hui Neng is intended to refute the view that Mind is a mirror to be cleansed of the defiling dust of phenomena, passion and other illusions, for this view leads to dualism, besides implying a certain degree of objectivity in the nature of mind. The dust and the mirror are one intangible unity.

² The questioner seems to be a newcomer.

of all of you have from the very first been identical with the Buddha, and in no way separate from each other. That is why we call him our Patriarch. Whoever has an instant understanding of this truth suddenly transcends the whole hierarchy of saints and adepts belonging to any of the Three Vehicles. You have always been one with the Buddha, so do not pretend you can ATTAIN to this oneness by various practices.¹

14. Q: If that is so, what Dharma do all the Buddhas teach when they manifest themselves in the world?

A: When all the Buddhas manifest themselves in the world, they proclaim nothing but the One Mind. Thus, Gautama Buddha silently transmitted to Mahākāśyapa the doctrine that the One Mind, which is the substance of all things, is co-extensive with the Void and fills the entire world of phenomena. This is called the Law of All the Buddhas. Discuss it as you may, how can you even hope to approach the truth through words? Nor can it be perceived either subjectively or objectively. So full understanding can come to you only through an inexpressible mystery. The approach to it is called the Gateway of the Stillness beyond all Activity. If you wish to understand, know that a sudden comprehension comes when the mind has been purged of all the clutter of conceptual and discriminatory thought-activity. Those who seek the truth by means of intellect and learning only get further and further away from it. Not till your thoughts cease all their branching here and there, not till you abandon all thoughts of seeking for something, not till your

¹ We cannot BECOME what we have always been; we can only become intuitively aware of our original state, previously hidden from us by the clouds of māyā.

mind is motionless as wood or stone, will you be on the right road to the Gate.¹

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15. Q: At this very moment, all sorts of erroneous thoughts are constantly flowing through our minds. How can you speak of our having none?

A: Error has no substance; it is entirely the product of your own thinking. If you know that Mind is the Buddha and that Mind is fundamentally without error, whenever thoughts arise, you will be fully convinced that THEY are responsible for errors. If you could prevent all conceptual movements of thought and still your thinking-processes, naturally there would be no error left in you. Therefore is it said: 'When thoughts arise, then do all things arise. When thoughts vanish, then do all things vanish.'

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16. Q: At this moment, while erroneous thoughts are arising in my mind, where is the Buddha?²

A: At this moment you are conscious of those erroneous

¹ These words recall the admonitions of so many mystics—Buddhist, Christian, Hindu or Sufi—who have committed their experience to words. What Huang Po calls the total abandonment of Hsin—mind, thought, perceptions, concepts and the rest—implies the utter surrender of self insisted on by Sufi and Christian mystics. Indeed, in paragraph 28 he used the very words: 'LET THE SELF PERISH UTTERLY'. Such striking unanimity of expression by mystics widely separated in time and space can hardly be attributed to coincidence. No several persons entirely unacquainted with one another could produce such closely similar accounts of purely imaginary journeys. Hence one is led to suppose that what they describe is real. This seems to have been Aldous Huxley's view when he compiled that valuable work *The Perennial Philosophy*.

² Is the One Mind then no longer present in me?

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thoughts. Well, your consciousness is the Buddha! Perhaps you can understand that, were you but free of these delusory mental processes, there would then be no 'Buddha'. Why so? Because when you allow a movement of your mind to result in a concept of the Buddha, you are bringing into existence an objective being capable of being Enlightened. Similarly, any concept of sentient beings in need of deliverance CREATES such beings as objects of your thoughts. All intellectual processes and movements of thought result from your concepts.¹ If you were to refrain from conceptualizing altogether, where could the Buddha continue to exist? You are in the same predicament as Mañjuśrī who, as soon as he permitted himself to conceive of the Buddha as an objective entity, was dwarfed and hemmed in on all sides by those two iron mountains.

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17. Q: At the moment of Enlightenment, where is the Buddha?

A: Whence does your question proceed? Whence does your consciousness arise? When speech is silenced, all movement stilled, every sight and sound vanished—THEN is the Buddha's work of deliverance truly going forward! Then, where will you seek the Buddha? You cannot place a head upon your head, or lips upon your lips; rather, you should just refrain from every kind of dualistic distinction.² Hills are hills. Water is water. Monks are monks. Laymen are laymen. But these mountains, these rivers, the whole world

¹ Which bring the corresponding thought objects into existence.

² Since we are the Buddha, to seek him elsewhere is to place a head upon our head.

itself, together with sun, moon and stars—not one of them exists outside your minds! The vast chiliocosm exists only within you, so where else can the various categories of phenomena possibly be found? Outside Mind, there is nothing. The green hills which everywhere meet your gaze and that void sky that you see glistening above the earth—not a hairsbreadth of any of them exists outside the concepts you have formed for yourself! So it is that every single sight and sound is but the Buddha's Eye of Wisdom.¹

Phenomena do not arise independently but rely upon environment.² And it is their appearing as objects which necessitates all sorts of individualized knowledge. You may talk the whole day through, yet what has been said? You may listen from dawn till dusk, yet what will you have heard? Thus, though Gautama Buddha preached for forty-nine years, in truth no word was spoken.³

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18. Q: Assuming all this is so, what particular state is connoted by the word Bodhi?⁴

A: Bodhi is no state. The Buddha did not attain to it. Sentient beings do not lack it. It cannot be reached with the body nor sought with the mind. All sentient beings ARE ALREADY of one form with Bodhi.

¹ The Buddha's Eye of Wisdom commonly means the eye with which he perceives the true unity of all things. Huang Po, however, does not say 'perceived by the Eye', but uses the phrase 'is the Eye', thereby identifying see-er and seen.

² I.e. the mental environment created by us.

³ Words belong to the realm of flux and illusion. The truth is beyond words, a silent and profound experience. The Buddha spoke of relative means. Viewed absolutely, no word was spoken.

⁴ Enlightenment or Supreme Wisdom.

19. Q: But how does one 'Attain to the Bodhi-Mind'?

A: Bodhi is not something to be attained.¹ If, at this very moment, you could convince yourselves of its unattainability, being certain indeed that nothing at all can ever be attained, you would already be Bodhi-minded. Since Bodhi is not a state, it is nothing for you to attain. And therefore is it written of Gautama Buddha: 'While I was yet in the realm of Dīpaṃkara Buddha, there was not a grain of anything to be attained by me. It was then that Dīpaṃkara Buddha made his prophecy that I, too, should become a Buddha.' If you know positively that all sentient beings are already one with Bodhi, you will cease thinking of Bodhi as something to be attained. You may recently have heard others talking about this 'attaining of the Bodhi-Mind', but this may be called an intellectual way of driving the Buddha away! By following this method, you only APPEAR to achieve Buddhahood; if you were to spend aeon upon aeon in that way, you would only achieve the Sambhogakāya and Nirmāṇakāya. What connection would all that have with your original and real Buddha-Nature?² Therefore is it written: 'Seeking outside for a Buddha possessed of form has nothing to do with you.'

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20. Q: If we have always been one with the Buddha (*Absolute*), why are there nevertheless beings who come into

¹ Perceived, grasped, entered, realized, conceived, etc.

² I.e. you would achieve the physical and spiritual aspects of a Buddha, which an Enlightened One bears within the various realms of transitory existence, but you would lack the Dharmakāya, the aspect of a Buddha as identical with the Absolute.

existence through the four kinds of birth and enter the six states of existence, each with the characteristic form and appearance of its kind?

A: The essential Buddha-Substance is a perfect whole, without superfluity or lack. It permeates the six states of existence and yet is everywhere perfectly whole. Thus, every single one of the myriads of phenomena in the universe is the Buddha (*Absolute*). This substance may be likened to a quantity of quicksilver which, being scattered in all directions, everywhere re-forms into perfect wholes. When undispersed, it is of one piece, the one comprising the whole and the whole comprising the one. The various forms and appearances, on the other hand, may be likened to dwellings. Just as one abandons a stable in favour of a house, so one exchanges a physical body for a heavenly body, and so on up to the planes of Pratyeka-Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. But all alike are things sought by you or abandoned by you; hence the differences between them. How is it possible that the original and essential nature of the universe should be subject to this differentiation?

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21. Q: How do the Buddhas, out of their vast mercy and compassion, preach the Dharma (*Law*) to sentient beings?

A: We speak of their mercy and compassion as vast just because it is beyond causality (*and therefore infinite*). By mercy is really meant not conceiving of a Buddha to be Enlightened, while compassion really means not conceiving of sentient beings to be delivered.¹

¹ The Zen Masters, in their single-minded desire to lead their disciples beyond the realm of dualism, would have them abandon even the

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In reality, their Dharma is neither preached in words nor otherwise signified; and those who listen neither hear nor attain. It is as though an imaginary teacher had preached to imaginary people. As regards all these dharmas (*teachings*), if, for the sake of the Way, I speak to you from my deeper knowledge and lead you forward, you will certainly be able to understand what I say; and, as to mercy and compassion, if for your sakes I take to thinking things out and studying other people's concepts—in neither case will you have reached a true perception of the real nature of your own Mind from WITHIN YOURSELVES. So, in the end, these things will be of no help at all.

This is
the
mercy.

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22. Q: What is the meaning of 'zealous application'?²

A: The most completely successful form of zealous application is the absence from your minds of all such distinctions as 'my body', 'my mind'. As soon as you begin to seek for something outside your own Mind, you are like Kalirāja bent on hunting.³ But when you prevent your minds from going on travels outside themselves, you are already a kṣānti-rishi. NO BODIES AND NO MINDS—that is the Way of the Buddhas!

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notion of compassion as such, since it leads to the dualistic concept of its opposite. By Zen adepts compassion must be practised as a matter of course and without giving rise to the least feeling of self-satisfaction. Still less may it be practised as a means of gaining some heavenly or earthly reward.

² One of the six pāramitās.

³ Kalirāja is said to have sliced up some sages, including a former incarnation of Gautama Buddha. The latter bore this piecemeal dismemberment with the equanimity of a kṣānti-rishi, one who practises the pāramitā of uncomplaining patience in affliction.

23. Q: If I follow this Way, and refrain from intellectual processes and conceptual thinking, shall I be certain of attaining the goal?

A: Such non-intellection is following the Way! Why this talk of attaining and not attaining? The matter is thus—by thinking of something you create an entity and by thinking of nothing you create another. Let such erroneous thinking perish utterly, and then nothing will remain for you to go seeking!

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24. Q: What is meant by 'Transcending the Three Worlds'? (*Of desire, form and formlessness.*)¹

A: Transcending the Three Worlds connotes rising beyond the dualism of good and evil. Buddhas appear in the world in order to make an end of desire, of form and of formless phenomena. For you also the Three Worlds will vanish if you can reach the state beyond thought. On the other hand, if you still cling to the notion that something, even if it be as small as the hundredth part of a grain, might exist objectively, then even a perfect mastery of the entire Mahāyāna Canon will fail to give you victory over the Three Worlds. Only when every one of those tiny fragments is seen to be nothing can the Mahāyāna achieve this victory for you.²

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¹ The formless world is far other than the Great Void, being one of the three states or worlds constituting saṃsāra.

² I.e. even atoms have no objective existence—whether atoms of matter or those atoms of consciousness in which certain Buddhist metaphysicians believed.

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25. One day, after taking his seat in the great hall, the Master began as follows. Since Mind is the Buddha (*Absolute*), it embraces all things, from the Buddhas (*Enlightened Beings*) at one extreme to the meanest of belly-crawling reptiles or insects at the other. All these alike share the Buddha-Nature and all are of the substance of the One Mind. So, after his arrival from the West, Bodhidharma transmitted naught but the Dharma of the One Mind. He pointed directly to the truth that all sentient beings have always been of one substance with the Buddha. He did not follow any of those mistaken 'methods of attainment'. And if you could only achieve this comprehension of your own Mind, thereby discovering your real nature, there would assuredly be nothing for you to seek, either.

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26. Q: How, then, does a man accomplish this comprehension of his own Mind?

A: That which asked the question is your own Mind; but if you were to remain quiescent and to refrain from the smallest mental activity, its substance would be seen as a void—you would find it formless, occupying no point in space and falling neither into the category of existence nor into that of non-existence. Because it is imperceptible, Bodhidharma said: 'Mind, which is our real nature, is the unbegotten and indestructible Womb; in response to circumstances, it transforms itself into phenomena. For the sake of convenience, we speak of Mind as the intelligence; but when it does not respond to circumstances,¹ it cannot be spoken of in such dualistic terms as existence or non-

¹ And so rests from creating objects.

existence. Besides, even when engaged in creating objects in response to causality, it is still imperceptible. If you know this and rest tranquilly in nothingness—then you are indeed following the Way of the Buddhas. Therefore does the sūtra say: 'Develop a mind which rests on no thing whatever.'

Every one of the sentient beings bound to the wheel of alternating life and death is re-created from the karma of his own desires! Endlessly their hearts remain bound to the six states of existence, thereby involving them in all sorts of sorrow and pain. Ch'ing Ming¹ says: 'There are people with minds like those of apes who are very hard to teach; people who need all sorts of precepts and doctrines with which to force their hearts into submission.' And so when thoughts arise, all sorts of dharmas² follow, but they vanish with thought's cessation. We can see from this that every sort of dharma is but a creation of Mind. And all kinds of beings—humans, devas, sufferers in hell, asuras and all comprised within the six forms of life—each one of them is Mind-created. If only you would learn how to achieve a state of non-intellection, immediately the chain of causation would snap.

Give up those erroneous thoughts leading to false distinctions! There is no 'self' and no 'other'. There is no 'wrong desire', no 'anger', no 'hatred', no 'love', no 'victory', no 'failure'. Only renounce the error of intellectual or conceptual thought-processes and your nature will exhibit its pristine purity—for this alone is the way to attain Enlightenment, to observe the Dharma (*Law*), to become a Buddha and all the rest. Unless you understand this, the

¹ A famous lay-disciple.

² Doctrines, precepts, concepts, things.

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whole of your great learning, your painful efforts to advance, your austerities of diet and clothing, will not help you to a knowledge of your own Mind. All such practices must be termed fallacious, for any of them will lead to your rebirth among 'demons'—enemies of the truth—or among the crude nature spirits. What end is served by pursuits like those? Chih Kung says: 'Our bodies are the creations of our own minds.' But how can one expect to gain such knowledge from books? If only you could comprehend the nature of your own Mind and put an end to discriminatory thought, there would naturally be no room for even a grain of error to arise. Ch'ing Ming expressed this in a verse:

Just spread out a mat
For reclining quite flat—
When thought's tied to a bed
Like a sick man growing worse.
All karma will cease
And all fancies disperse.
THAT's what is meant by Bodhi!

As it is, so long as your mind is subject to the slightest movement of thought, you will remain engulfed in the error of taking 'ignorant' and 'Enlightened' for separate states; this error will persist regardless of your vast knowledge of the Mahāyāna or of your ability to pass through the 'Four Grades of Sainthood' and the 'Ten Stages of Progress Leading to Enlightenment'. For all these pursuits belong to what is ephemeral; even the most strenuous of your efforts is doomed to fail, just as an arrow shot never so high into the air must inevitably fall spent to the ground. So,

in spite of them, you are certain to find yourselves back on the wheel of life and death. Indulging in such practices implies your failure to understand the Buddha's real meaning. Surely the endurance of so much unnecessary suffering is nothing but a gigantic error, isn't it? Chih Kung says elsewhere: 'If you do not meet with a teacher able to transcend the worlds, you will go on swallowing the medicine of the Mahāyāna Dharma quite in vain.'

Were you now to practise keeping your minds motionless at all times, whether walking, standing, sitting or lying; concentrating entirely upon the goal of no thought-creation, no duality, no reliance on others and no attachments; just allowing all things to take their course the whole day long, as though you were too ill to bother; unknown to the world; innocent of any urge to be known or unknown to others; with your minds like blocks of stone that mend no holes—then all the Dharmas¹ would penetrate your understanding through and through. In a little while you would find yourselves firmly unattached. Thus, for the first time in your lives, you would discover your reactions to phenomena decreasing and, ultimately, you would pass beyond the Triple World; and people would say that a Buddha had appeared in the world. Pure and passionless knowledge² implies putting an end to the ceaseless flow of thoughts and images, for in that way you stop creating the karma that leads to rebirth—whether as gods or men or as sufferers in hell.

Once every sort of mental process has ceased, not a particle of karma is formed. Then, even in this life, your minds and bodies become those of a being completely

¹ Laws of Existence or Universal Laws.

² Enlightenment.

liberated. Supposing that this does not result in freeing you immediately from further rebirths, at the very least you will be assured of rebirth in accordance with your own wishes. The sūtra declares: 'Bodhisattvas are re-embodied into whatsoever forms they desire.' But were they suddenly to lose the power of keeping their minds free from conceptual thought, attachment to form would drag them back into the phenomenal world, and each of those forms would create for them a demon's karma!

With the practices of the Pure Land Buddhists it is also thus, for all these practices are productive of karma; hence, we may call them Buddha-hindrances! As they would obstruct your Mind, the chain of causation would also grapple you fast, dragging you back into the state of those as yet unliberated.¹

Hence all dharmas such as those purporting to lead to the attainment of Bodhi possess no reality. The words of Gautama Buddha were intended merely as efficacious expedients for leading men out of the darkness of worse ignorance. It was as though one pretended yellow leaves were gold to stop the flow of a child's tears. Samyak-Sambodhi² is another name for the realization that there are no valid Dharmas. Once you understand this, of what use are such trifles to you? According harmoniously with

¹ The Pure Land Sect advocates utter reliance upon Amida, Buddha of Boundless Light and Life, holding that perfect faith will ensure rebirth in a paradise where preparation for final Enlightenment follows under ideal conditions. Zen Buddhists, on the contrary, often claim that reliance on Amida Buddha is the negation of that self-reliance which Gautama Buddha taught to be the only sure path. Nevertheless, the Pure Land doctrine PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD is not truly opposed to Zen, since the real meaning of Amida is the Buddha-Substance innate in man, and rebirth into his paradise implies the awakening of the individual's mind to its Oneness with the Buddha-Substance.

² Supreme Knowledge.

the conditions of your present lives, you should go on, as opportunities arise, reducing the store of old karma laid up in previous lives; and above all, you must avoid building up a fresh store of retribution for yourselves!

Mind is filled with radiant clarity, so cast away the darkness of your old concepts. Ch'ing Ming says: 'Rid yourselves of everything.' The sentence in the Lotus Sūtra concerning a whole twenty years spent in the shovelling away of manure symbolizes the necessity of driving from your minds whatever tends to the formation of concepts. In another passage, the same sūtra identifies the pile of dung which has to be carted away with metaphysics and sophistry. Thus the 'Womb of the Tathāgatas' is intrinsically a voidness and silence containing no individualized dharmas of any sort or kind. And therefore says the sūtra: 'The entire realms of all the Buddhas are equally void.'¹

Though others may talk of the Way of the Buddhas as something to be reached by various pious practices and by sūtra-study, you must have nothing to do with such ideas. A perception, sudden as blinking, that subject and object are one, will lead to a deeply mysterious wordless understanding; and by this understanding will you awake to the truth of Zen. When you happen upon someone who has no understanding, you must claim to know nothing. He may be delighted by his discovery of some 'way to Enlightenment'; yet if you allow yourselves to be persuaded by him, you will experience no delight at all, but suffer both sorrow and disappointment. What have such thoughts as his to do with the study of Zen? Even if you do obtain from him some trifling 'method', it will only be a thought-

¹ The implication is that the Western Paradise of Amida Buddha is as void as the rest of them.

constructed dharma having nothing to do with Zen. Thus, Bodhidharma sat rapt in meditation before a wall; he did not seek to lead people into having opinions. Therefore it is written: 'To put out of mind even the principle from which action springs is the true teaching of the Buddhas, while dualism belongs to the sphere of demons.'

Your true nature is something never lost to you even in moments of delusion, nor is it gained at the moment of Enlightenment. It is the Nature of the Bhūtatathatā. In it is neither delusion nor right understanding. It fills the Void everywhere and is intrinsically of the substance of the One Mind. How, then, can your mind-created objects exist outside the Void? The Void is fundamentally without spacial dimensions, passions, activities, delusions or right understanding. You must clearly understand that in it there are no things, no men and no Buddhas; for this Void contains not the smallest hairsbreadth of anything that can be viewed spacially; it depends on nothing and is attached to nothing. It is all-pervading, spotless beauty; it is the self-existent and uncreated Absolute. Then how can it even be a matter for discussion that the REAL Buddha has no mouth and preaches no Dharma, or that REAL hearing requires no ears, for who could hear it? Ah, it is a jewel beyond all price!¹

¹ This passage, in which the Master comes as near as possible to describing the indescribable, using terms as 'all-pervading spotless beauty', should be sufficient answer to those critics of Buddhist 'pessimism' who suppose that the doctrine of śūnyatā or voidness equates Nirvāna with total extinction.

(Continued from front flap)

Nowhere is the use of paradox in Zen illustrated better than in the teachings of Huang Po, who shows how the experience of intuitive knowledge which reveals to a man what he really is, cannot be communicated by words. With the help of these paradoxes, beautifully and simply presented in this collection, Huang Po could set his disciples on the right path. It is in this fashion that the Zen master leads his listener into the truth, often by a single phrase designed to destroy his particular demon of ignorance.

Many of the dialogues recorded in *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po* took place in public assembly, generally with hundreds of the Master's followers in attendance. This text is remarkable for its purity of thought and speech. John Blofeld's translation reflects his deep understanding of Zen and gives it a crystal clear presentation. In addition, there are an introduction and explanatory notes that make this original and revered text even more valuable to the contemporary reader.

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