

The Mind Dharma of the Sixth Patriarch

by
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Day One
Dharma of Teachings, Dharma of Mind

Morning Talk

The Dharma of Teachings

All human problems originate in the mind. The activities of our mind lead to actions that have consequences, and all this results in suffering as well as happiness. When we experience suffering and happiness, we respond with actions that create more suffering and more happiness. When we are unhappy we seek happiness, and when we find happiness we fear losing it. For example, when we are sick or events are not going well for us, unless we are master of our own mind, it will be adversely influenced. According to internal and external conditions, our mind will fluctuate between happiness and unhappiness. This is vexation.

Recognizing this, the Buddha taught us that the activities of the mind lead to more suffering than it does to happiness. No external power other than our own mind causes this. What the Buddha taught is not shallow idealism but truths that stress how causes and conditions affect our experience. These causes and conditions result from our acts of body, speech, and mind in this as well many previous lives. All these activities create consequences, resulting in the body we now have and the environment we now experience. Therefore, our present circumstances originate in and are rooted in the mind. This is a broad description of karma.

When we clearly understand how our mind creates the conditions that manifest in our life, we can also understand how this mind also created what we call the 'self.' While having this self can be said to be good, it is not absolutely good because our life has many imperfections, and we often feel dissatisfied and insecure. Therefore, we practice Chan in order to solve this fundamental problem: that our mind is the cause of our own suffering. Chan helps us use our own mind-power to avoid being adversely influenced by the body and the environment, and thus create less karma. To fully accomplish this is called being enlightened, or seeing one's self-nature.

Chan, indeed, all of Buddhism, is based on this theory of how the mind creates its own suffering, and how one can practice the Dharma — what the Buddha taught — to relieve suffering. This theory we can call the Dharma of the Teachings and it consists basically of methods for training the mind to cease the causes and conditions for suffering. Without this theory as a basis, Chan practice would be meaningless. Chan is training the mind to ultimately realize the Dharma

of Mind. To realize the Mind Dharma, you first hear the Dharma of the Teachings, and then you practice accordingly.

If you can attain the Mind Dharma without practicing the methods of Chan, you don't need the Dharma of the Teachings. Otherwise, you need the Dharma of Teachings to practice towards realizing the Dharma of Mind.

Here is a story that illustrates the meaning of Mind Dharma. In the sixth century C.E., the twenty-eighth generation disciple of the Buddha, the Indian monk Bodhidharma, went to China to spread the Dharma. He traveled from south to north without attracting many disciples. When he arrived at Pine Mountain in Hunan Province, he meditated for nine years facing a wall in a cave. Finally a young monk named Huike came and offered himself as a disciple, but Bodhidharma declined his offer. It was cold and snowing, and Huike just stood outside of the cave hoping that Bodhidharma would accept him. When the snow had reached Huike's knees, Bodhidharma looked out and saw Huike still standing there. According to legend, Bodhidharma also saw that Huike had cut off one of his arms to demonstrate his sincerity. Convinced that Huike was sincere, Bodhidharma asked him what he wanted to know.

Huike replied, "Master, can you put my mind at peace?"

Bodhidharma answered, "Show me your mind and I will put it at peace."

Huike had been standing in the snow for a long time, and by then had no wandering thoughts. His attachment to any sense of self was also gone. So when he looked into his mind to find it, he could not.

He told Bodhidharma, "I can't find my mind."

Bodhidharma replied, "There, I have already put your mind at peace."

Upon hearing these words Huike immediately attained the Mind Dharma, that is to say, he was enlightened. When Bodhidharma asked Huike's to find his mind, Huike could not because he no longer had a self-center. Originally, his dependent and resisting mind was seeking to escape vexations. Now, he no longer had a mind that depended on Bodhidharma to give him a solution. Not finding his resisting, dependent, and seeking mind, all of which are the mind of the 'self,' his enlightened mind manifested. It is not that Bodhidharma gave him something concrete and tangible; rather, he helped Huike look inside his own mind to discover no-mind. This no-mind is also called the mind of wisdom, and it was this Dharma of Mind that Bodhidharma transmitted to Huike and to generations of Chan followers.

Afternoon Talk

Abiding Nowhere, Give Rise to Mind

As we use it, the term ‘no-mind’ describes a mind in which there is no attachment or self-centeredness whatsoever; a mind in which there is no dependence, no resistance, and no expectation. This is a mind without craving, anger, doubt, and jealousy, without the emotions rise up when we are insecure and seek safety, or when we are unhappy and seek happiness. If we can put down these negative mind-states, then it is possible for wisdom to arise. This arising of the mind of wisdom is also called enlightenment, or ‘seeing self-nature.’ Seeing self-nature means seeing one’s own buddha-nature, which is that of emptiness. This means that the self that we take to be inherent in our being is in fact without enduring characteristics. A Chinese phrase to describe enlightenment is “to illumine the mind and see the nature.”

Here is another story about Mind Dharma. Master Huineng, who was later recognized as the Sixth Patriarch of Chan, was still a woodcutter when he walked past a house, and by chance heard someone within reciting lines from the *Diamond Sutra*. He heard these words that affected him greatly: “Abiding nowhere, give rise to mind.” These words made a deep impression on Huineng. Abiding nowhere means that while the mind has a function, it should not fixate on any phenomena. Rather, it should reflect phenomena like a mirror, without being affected by them. A mirror will reflect objects in front of it but when the objects move away the mirror no longer reflects them. In other words, to the mirror the reflections are ‘non-abiding.’ Furthermore, in a very high-quality mirror, the reflections will appear without distortion. So, abiding nowhere means one should be aware of the vexations of the mind but not attach to them. “Give rise to mind” refers to a mind that is without attachment, but still functions as wisdom.

Huineng was so moved by these words that he asked the man who was chanting them where he could find someone who could teach him the sutra. The man told him to visit Master Hongren, who had a deep knowledge of the *Diamond Sutra*. However, when Huineng arrived at Hongren’s monastery, the master merely sent Huineng to the kitchen to mill rice. And when Hongren taught the Dharma to the other monks, Huineng was not allowed to listen.

This situation, in which Huineng was depending on Hongren to give him teaching, was similar to Huike at first depending on Bodhidharma. However, Hongren knew that Huineng had the capacity to discover the Mind Dharma for himself. Since the Mind Dharma cannot be transmitted, Hongren’s method was to let Huineng discover the Mind Dharma by himself. And indeed, Huineng succeeded in finding it himself. But originally, Huineng thought that non-abiding meant not having vexations and that wisdom was something tangible. After eight months in the kitchen he discovered no-mind, and realized that vexation and

wisdom were themselves empty. At that point, Master Hongren gave transmission to Huineng, making him his Dharma heir.

In keeping with the idea of non-abiding, I urge you to please put down all thoughts of the past and the future, and just remain in the present. Be aware of your body and the environment around you but do not be influenced by either. Do not allow them to create extra thoughts in your mind. Your only thought is to focus on your method. If you are walking, just walk. If you are counting your breath, just count the breath. If you are using the *huatou*, that is your exclusive focus. If you are contemplating the breath, just contemplate the breath. Whatever your body is doing in the present moment, be present with that; otherwise you will not be able to put down the present.

Evening Talk

Huineng's Verse on No-form

Tonight I will begin commenting on a brief excerpt on *wuxiang*, or 'no-form,' from Master Huineng's *Platform Sutra*.

Mastery of the teachings and mastery of mind are like the sun in the empty sky. Only by transmitting the Dharma of seeing the nature can one emerge into the world and shatter erroneous doctrines. Although in the Dharma itself there is no sudden or gradual in confusion and enlightenment there is slowness and speed. Yet this gateway into seeing the nature cannot be fully comprehended by the ignorant. Although myriad teachings abound combined with principle they are ultimately one. Within the dark abode of vexations one should continually give rise to the sun of wisdom. When erroneous mind-states come, vexations arrive; when the correct comes, the vexations are removed.

- Translation by Master Sheng Yen and Douglas Gildow

According to the belief in Shakyamuni Buddha's time, to be fully liberated meant becoming an arhat by transcending the birth-and-death cycle of samsara, and entering nirvana. Typically this could only be done if one was a monk or nun. But to Huineng, anyone who practiced in accordance with the principle of no-form could be liberated. Liberation meant that one no longer has vexations and is no longer influenced by the environment, but one also remains in the world to help others. This is the way of the bodhisattva — liberation does not require ordination nor does one not need to leave this world.

Let us look at the idea of form in relation to time as well as space. In the temporal aspect, every thought that we have is a form that relates to the past, present, or future. On retreat, we practice dropping thoughts of past and future and just keeping our mind in the present, with the ultimate goal of dropping even thoughts in the present mind.

In the spatial aspect, forms relate to oneself ('I' or 'me') and to others ('they' or 'them'). In other words, all sentient beings are forms. We should understand that anything we perceive is constantly changing, impermanent and without inherent self-nature. Self, others, and sentient beings are all objects of perception and likewise impermanent.

So, the temporal aspect of form relates to thoughts of past, present, and future, and the spatial aspect relates to self and other sentient beings. Nevertheless, the forms in time and space are completely interlinked and it is impossible to draw a firm line between the two. But all forms in time and space are impermanent, which means that they are empty of self-nature and ultimately formless.

The words from the *Diamond Sutra*, "abiding nowhere, give rise to mind," means that one must realize — not just know intellectually — that forms in time are transient and ultimately lack self-nature. Likewise, spatial forms are also in flux, impermanent, and lack self-nature. For these reasons, one does not abide in forms of time or space, and does not cling to them.

"Give rise to mind," refers to the spontaneous arising of wisdom when we do not cling to forms. But wisdom itself is a form, so one does not abide in it either, and one does not attach to it. Instead, one goes beyond wisdom to realize no-mind. This no-mind is the no-form, or formlessness, that Huineng speaks of in the *Platform Sutra*.

Mastery of Teachings, Mastery of Mind

Let's now look at the first line of Huineng's verse:

Mastery of the teachings and mastery of mind are like the sun in
the empty sky.

In this line the Chinese *shoutong* has been translated as "*mastery of the teachings*," and *xintong*, as "*mastery of [one's] mind*." So, from this interpretation, *shoutong* means mastery of the Dharma of the Teachings, and *xintong* means mastery of the Mind Dharma. However, to have mastery of either, you must actually experience the Mind Dharma.

If you can directly master the Mind Dharma, there is no need to study the Dharma of the Teachings. Otherwise, one should begin with the Dharma of Teachings to ultimately realize the Mind Dharma. At that time you will see that the Dharma of the Teachings and the Mind Dharma are one and the same. In other

words, we use the language and concepts of the teachings to reach what is ultimately beyond language and concepts.

So far, have I been talking about Dharma of the Teachings or of the Mind Dharma, or both? Well, the answer is that so long as we use language and concepts, we can only talk about the Dharma of the Teachings. The Chan School has a saying, “No reliance on words and scriptures.” In other words, Chan does not recommend relying solely on the Dharma of Teachings. But the curious fact is that the Chan patriarchs and masters left behind more teachings than any other school of Buddhism. For thirty years, I have been all over the world saying that the Mind Dharma cannot be spoken. And yet the purpose of all of this writing and teaching is to teach people not to rely on words.

Realizing No-Form

In Chan, daily life itself is practice and the early masters did not encourage practitioners to do much seated meditation. Huineng himself did not do sitting meditation and neither did some of his famous disciples, such as Huairang and Xingyen. There is a story in which Huairang one day observed his disciple Mazu sitting in meditation all day long. Huairang took a brick and sat next to Mazu and started to polish the brick. After some time, Mazu became curious and asked Huairang, “Why are you polishing that brick?”

Huairang said, “I am making a mirror.”

Mazu said, “You can’t make a mirror by polishing a brick!”

Huairang replied, “Well, what are you doing when you sit?”

Mazu replied, “I am sitting so I can become a buddha.”

Huairang replied, “Well, if I can’t make a mirror by polishing a brick, neither can you become a buddha by sitting.”

Mazu asked, “What should I do then?”

Huairang replied, “When the ox refuses to pull its cart, do you whip the ox or the cart?”

Mazu replied, “Of course, I would whip the ox.”

And Huairang said, “It is the mind which attains buddhahood. If you cannot let go of mind, then you cannot attain buddhahood simply by sitting. One must put down the mind.”

When Mazu heard this and was able to put down his mind, he became enlightened. Until then, he had been working on his body instead of his mind. In other words, he finally learned to whip the ox rather than the cart. Simply by dropping mind, Mazu naturally attained enlightenment. From this story we can infer that in the early Chan School, seated meditation was not emphasized. This is not to say that we do not use our body at all. We use the body as a tool for

practice, but sitting meditation is not the whole of practice. If sitting meditation simply turns into an exercise in training our legs, then it is useless. But if we use the body as a tool for training our mind it can be very useful.

Those who don't sit at all and those who are overly attached to sitting are both incorrect. When we have the proper attitude sitting is a relatively easy way to stabilize our confused minds. Therefore, sitting is still important. If, however, during regular daily life you can maintain a calm and stable mind, then, when sufficient causes and conditions mature, one can attain enlightenment that way. However, a precondition for this path to enlightenment is to have a clear understanding of emptiness, no-self, and no-mind. Without this understanding, even with a calm and stable mind, one cannot become enlightened.

To realize no-mind and no-form, one must have a clear and continual awareness of mind and forms. Before one can do that, one must start with a stable mind. With a busy and confused mind, one does not know what mind itself is, and one does not know what the so-called forms of time and forms of space are. Merely conceptual knowledge of emptiness, no-self, and no-mind is of limited use. It is only knowledge, not real experience.

Daily life *is* practice. However, because most people's minds are confused, there is a need for places like Chan halls for meditating. Most people are unable in their daily life to stabilize and calm their mind or perceive the true emptiness of forms. While there is no doubt that sudden enlightenment is attainable, most people need to use the gradual approach. However, even in gradual practice, there is a precondition to train the mind so that it can be known and be put down.

Day Two Training the Ox-mind

Morning Talk

Let Go of All Forms, Let Affairs Come to Rest

To practice well, we must learn to relax. When we cannot relax our body, we also find it difficult to relax our mind. If we have expectations, then we're seeking something. If we have fear, we're rejecting something or we lack security. This results in nervousness and tension. Being unsatisfied and having cravings means we have a seeking mind, and that will make us nervous. We can see therefore that relaxation is not just concerned with the muscles; it also involves our thoughts, concepts, and emotions. We have to put them all down to fully relax. When we can do that all the time, we will have no more vexations and we will be on the path of liberation.

After learning how to relax, you should apply two rules in your practice. The first is: "Let go of all forms." 'Forms' can be understood generally as phenomena or objects of perception. So, letting go of all forms means realizing formlessness. So, please let go of all forms. The second rule is: "Let all affairs come to rest." This means putting down all mental and bodily concerns.

If you can do this completely you will realize no-mind. At this point, in a way of speaking, you have nothing to do; there is nothing good or bad, important or unimportant, to do for yourself or others. At this time you are truly relaxed and you have been able to put down everything. Please keep reminding yourself to apply these two rules.

"Let go of all forms; let all affairs come to rest."

When you are vexed, when you feel pain, fear, or any kind of unease, you can repeat these rules like a mantra and remind yourself of their meaning. If you do that your attitude and mental situation will change. So, to realize the formless Dharma, the first step is to let go of forms. One by one let go of forms, beginning with wandering thoughts, especially thoughts of past and future. Put down thinking about past and future and stay only in the present. If you are doing sitting meditation, your mind should be only on sitting. The same applies to working, walking, eating, drinking, exercising, chanting, or doing prostrations. Experience these activities fully, the sensations that come with them, and be aware of your mental reactions in the process. If you can let go of the past and the future and put your mind totally in the present, you have at least relinquished the forms of time.

Silent Illumination

After you have relaxed body and mind and your mood becomes stable, you can practice silent illumination. Begin by simply being aware of your whole body sitting in meditation. Pay no attention to specific parts of the body. Be aware that you are meditating but do not verbalize, "I am meditating." Just maintain a general awareness of the body, not thinking about it; just sitting there. When you can do this, you are already practicing silent illumination.

After practicing total body awareness, paying no attention to the parts of the body, at some point you may no longer be aware of the body. At this point, take your surroundings as the object of meditation. However, do not focus on any particular sights or sounds. If you continue in this way, eventually you will no longer even be aware of the environment. You are now in samadhi but do not attach to it. The advice to let go of all forms and let all affairs come to rest applies to samadhi as well.

To summarize, to practice silent illumination, first relax the mind and body and simply experience the breath going in and out. Then put your awareness on the total body just sitting there, paying no attention to any parts. When the burden of the body disappears, take your surroundings as the object of meditation. Not paying attention on any special sights or sounds, eventually the environment itself will disappear. At this point we are just aware that we are meditating; we are in samadhi. The next step is to relinquish the bliss of samadhi. When you can let go of attachment to samadhi, then it is possible to realize enlightenment.

In this practice, one may experience these stages or one may not. Do not focus too much on this process as being in stages and do not be too anxious about letting go of samadhi. If you discover yourself stuck in the same place, just let go of the thought and move on. The main thing is to let go of all forms and let all affairs come to rest. Just begin with the first step of letting go. When you are fully doing silent illumination, you are already illuminating, and when your mind is not distracted by anything outside or inside, that is silence. This is silent illumination.

Afternoon Talk

More on Silent Illumination

While practicing silent illumination you may become aware that you cannot feel a certain part of your body. It is because you have not been paying attention to that part and as a result, are not aware of sensations from it. This is a good sign and means you have put down awareness of that part of the body. If you have no awareness of your entire body, again do not worry. If you wish you may move a bit and then return your awareness of your body just sitting there.

Another way to deal with the loss of feeling in part or all of the body is to just continue experiencing the self in meditation; just realizing you are still sitting there meditating. You can then shift your attention to the environment, taking it and your body as one entity. If you meditate in this way after losing sensations in the body, you will not feel isolated or have any sense of loss. You will still be aware of the environment and your state of mind will be expansive and bright.

At this stage in which your body and the environment are unified, do not focus on any one kind of sound to listen for. If you do not hear any sounds, do not search for them. Some sounds will be loud and others soft, some interesting, others boring. Do not select among them; just have a generalized awareness of sounds. If your eyes are open, you will see there are people around you, that there is a floor in front of you and a ceiling above, but do not look at anything in particular. Just be aware that these phenomena are there. Gradually and naturally, if you continue practicing in this way, the environment will also disappear.

Generally, unless we are ill or have strong sensations in the body such as pain, numbness, itching, or soreness, we are not aware of sensations in our body. Other situations in which we would be more aware of our body include hunger or exhaustion. Otherwise, when everything is going smoothly, we are rarely aware of our bodies; we just use our bodies without feeling burdened by it. Our mind is also like this. If our minds are without wandering thoughts that bother, stimulate, or tempt us, then generally we are not so aware of our mind. This is also the case when we have no reason to fear anything.

Likewise, the environment, which in a sense is our extended body; is where our body is located and continues to exist. If everything is going smoothly in the environment, we do not think about it much, almost as if it did not exist. On the other hand, if for instance, we are in a place that we want to leave and cannot, we are more acutely aware of our environment. This would also be the case if we want to sleep and there are noises, if we want to do something but are not allowed to, if we feel cold and have no covering. In situations like these where the environment causes us problems, we are more aware of it.

If our surroundings lead us to have temptations or to have fear, we will also be aware of the environment, but if we are in a very peaceful, stable environment we tend to forget it. This is common in daily life, like a fish happily swimming in water, not aware that it needs the water to survive. That is why we choose a stable, quiet, and simple environment for holding Chan retreats. Our schedule is fixed, and we have rules so that we do not bother or interfere with other people. It is a comfortable environment in which adverse weather conditions do not influence us, and people from outside will not bother us. This allows us to practice peaceably. Beginners need an environment that is very conducive to meditation,

one that does not impinge on our minds too much. This enables us to let our mind become unified with its environment. When there are conflicts between the environment and our mind, we are unable to unify mind and environment.

There is a story about a practitioner living where he thought there were too many people and too much noise, so he ran off to the mountains to find a quiet place to meditate. When he got to the mountains he found that the wind made a lot of noise, the brooks bubbled all the time and worst of all, great numbers of insects were constantly buzzing and chirping. So he found a cave where he thought he could finally meditate in peace and quiet, but when he started to meditate he became aware of the sounds of his own breathing and the thumping of his heartbeat. He could feel very strongly the sensation of his blood circulating his veins. He finally concluded that there was no place in the world where it was possible to practice, so he gave up, returned to the city, and told everyone that all this talk about spiritual practice was a deception. Spiritual practice, he said, was not possible in this world. So, what was the problem with this person? Was he right about practice being impossible?

This practitioner let the environment influence him too much. In the term *mozha* which is Chinese for ‘silent illumination,’ the word ‘silent’ means letting go of things that could otherwise influence your mind, and ‘illumination’ means being clearly aware of everything that is happening. One has to learn to let go of things.

Evening Talk

Magpies and Ox

Instead of being steadfast like an ox most people’s mind is more like a flock of chirping magpies. Which one out of this flock of magpies is your self? Most people would not know if it be any single one or all collectively. For most, the magpies of the mind are out of control. Instead, if our mind is disciplined like an ox, we can then train it and eventually even drop it. For most of us the mind is only occasionally an ox, and some perhaps have never seen their ox-mind.

If you are chatting instead of practicing, is your mind that of a magpie or an ox? Ask yourself whether you prefer the mind of a magpie-mind or of an ox-mind. Remind yourself, “If I’m not like an ox, I am just wasting my time here.” If someone tries to chat with you, tell yourself, “Here come the magpies again. I really want to be an ox, so I won’t flock with magpies.” I asked you to let go of all forms, and let all affairs come to rest. So, we’ll have to repeat this again.

“Let go of all forms, and let all affairs come to rest.”

Now that everyone certainly knows these phrases, please don't chat and don't listen to people who chat.

Like the Sun in an Empty Sky

In the first line from our text, “mastery of the teachings” refers to the language and concepts of the Dharma, and “mastery of the mind” refers to the Mind Dharma, or enlightenment. Mastery of the teachings and mastery of mind are ultimately one and the same, and for one who has attained this state, the mind is like “the sun in an empty sky.” The sun represents buddha-nature or emptiness, and just as nothing can obstruct emptiness, in an empty sky nothing obstructs the brilliance of the sun. There is not actually a thing called buddha-nature. However, in realizing emptiness one uses the functions of wisdom and compassion to shine [the light of Dharma] on all the sentient beings. Just as the sun can illuminate everything, the functions of wisdom and compassion can also influence all beings. Huineng's sun is thus an analogy of the functions of wisdom and compassion.

Since there is no obstruction to emptiness, we speak of the empty sky whose lack of obstructions can be called silence. The arising of this sun-like wisdom and compassion through realizing emptiness is called illumination. We can say therefore, that this line describes realization in silent illumination. On one hand, the sky is unobstructed — this is silence; on other hand, the sun is shining on all beings — this is illumination. When illumination is developed to its highest point, silence will necessarily be present. The reverse is also true: when silence is at its deepest level, illumination will also be present.

Day Three

Prajna and Emptiness

Morning Talk

The *Huatou* Method

The *huatou* method of the Chan School comes from what is called a *gong'an*, or *koan* in Japanese. *Gong'an* literally means a 'public case' and in the Chan tradition, it is a story about an enlightenment encounter between a master and a disciple. The *huatou* is usually a key word or key phrase that is extracted from the *gong'an*. I will give you an example of the difference between a *gong'an* and a *huatou*.

In the Tang Dynasty around the 8th century C.E., a disciple asked Chan Master Zhaozhou, "Master, I have heard that all sentient beings have buddha-nature. Please tell me, does a dog have buddha-nature?" Zhaozhou replied, "*Wu*," meaning 'not,' or 'without.' And so, as this famous 'public case' was used to investigate Chan, the word "*wu*" became a *huatou*. The entire story is the *gong'an*, and this one word, '*wu*' taken from the *gong'an*, is the *huatou*.

This *gong'an* about Master Zhaozhou is very strange. Since Buddhists believe that all sentient beings have buddha-nature, why did Zhaozhou reply that a dog does not have buddha-nature? It's like a mystery story, and it seems illogical. To resolve this mystery is the reason we need to investigate the *gong'an* about Zhaozhou. If, instead of investigating the whole story, we try to resolve the mystery by asking the simple question, "What is *wu*?" or just "*Wu*?" the question becomes a *huatou*.

Here is a famous *gong'an* about another great Chan master named Xiangyan. One day, Xiangyan addressed the assembly of monks saying, "It is like a person hanging by his teeth from a high branch of a tree. He cannot reach out to grasp a bough and his feet rest on nothing but air. Below him someone asks, 'What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West?' Out of respect, he must answer the question, but if he does, he will fall. What should he do?" If you were this person hanging from a branch by your teeth, with nothing to support you, and someone asks you that question, you know that whatever you say will probably be wrong. If you keep your mouth shut that is also disrespectful. What would you do?

When a disciple asked for the answer, Xiangyan said, "Get up the tree now!"

The disciple replied, "I'm already up there."

Xiangyan said, "Then say something."

The disciple said, "If I say something I will fall."

Xiangyan said, “You’ve already fallen.”

From this incident, we can investigate either the whole *gong’an* or we can investigate a *huatou*. In the *gong’an* method we would investigate the meaning of the whole story; in the *huatou* method we would investigate one word or phrase from the story. The *huatou* in this case would be, “What is the meaning of Xiangyan saying ‘get up the tree now’?”

If we believe that we have had many past lives, we can ask about what happened even before our life began: “What was my original face before birth-and-death began?” This original face is another term for called buddha-nature. So, we originally have buddha-nature but somehow once we enter the birth-and-death cycle, we are no longer aware of our buddha-nature. So we ask, “What was my original face before I was born?” So, in *huatou* practice we just investigate a word or phrase, not the entire *gong’an*.

As Buddhists, we do not believe in the existence of a separate soul. We believe that after death the body is just a corpse. There is no soul attached to it. Why is it not a corpse when we are alive? The reason is because there is an ‘I’ or a ‘self’ using the body; therefore it becomes a person. So, based on this idea we have the *huatou*, “Who is dragging this corpse around?” The question, “The myriad things return to one; where does the one return to?” is another *huatou*.

Afternoon Talk

Practicing *Huatou*

I have introduced several *huatou*’s that you may use. The first one is “*Wu*.” The second one is “What is the meaning of Xiangyan’s telling his disciple to climb a tree?” The third is “What is my original face before I was born?” And the fourth is, “Who is dragging this corpse around?” The fifth is, “The myriad things return to one; where does the one return to?” If you want to practice a *huatou*, just choose whichever you might find useful. If you want something very simple, then I suggest “What is *wu*?” or simply, “*Wu*?”

While you are asking the *huatou*, disregard any answers that come up because they will be based on concepts and will be incorrect. If you try to analyze it instead of just asking you will just get a headache. Your task is not to think about the answer to the question, but just to continue asking and allow the *huatou* to answer itself. While asking the *huatou*, you will have wandering thoughts and answers will arise in your mind. When you become aware of that, remember the admonition: “Let go of all forms and let all affairs come to rest.” Return to the *huatou* and focus all your attention on just asking the *huatou*. After asking just two or three times something may pop into your mind and you may think you

have a great discovery: “Wow! Great! I’ve solved this *huatou*!” That would just be an incorrect thought.

If you practice *huatou* the way it should be practiced, you will eventually do it in your sleep. At a later stage you will not even have the *huatou* as a question; you will just be in a state of mind called “the great doubt” that really wants to know the answer. But to progress to that level your practice must be continuous, without a gap, cascading like a waterfall. While it is your hope to practice in this manner, at the beginning it is quite difficult and you will have many wandering thoughts.

There are three points to bear in mind: first, do not try to combine *huatou* with any form of breath observation, since that may make you confused. Second, your mind should be relaxed. Third, your body must not be tense in any part. You are not using your breath, your brain, or your body to investigate the *huatou*. Rather, you are just asking the *huatou*, with a sincere desire to know the answer.

Evening Talk

Prajna and Emptiness

The intention in realizing no-form is not to deny the existence of forms, but to remind oneself not to cling to them, whether they are spiritual, material, mental, or environmental forms. Samadhi and enlightenment are also forms we should not cling to. Anything that is a concept, that has shape, structure, and is expressible in language, anything that can be thought of and experienced — all of these are objects of perception and can be called ‘forms.’ These forms have existence and we are not denying that. It is a matter of not seeking and grasping after them because they are ultimately impermanent, unstable, and unreliable.

Only if we can attain no-mind, or formlessness, can we become enlightened and thereby generate wisdom. For lack of a better word, we translate the Sanskrit ‘prajna’ as ‘wisdom.’ However, the English ‘wisdom’ does not have quite the same meaning as ‘prajna.’ Prajna is the wisdom of knowing formlessness, or the wisdom of having seen one’s self-nature.’ In other words, it is the realization of the mind Dharma, the experience of the emptiness of self and phenomena. People who are conventionally called wise may not necessarily have this same wisdom in the Buddhist sense.

We can explain the generation of prajna with the phrase from the *Diamond Sutra*, “Abiding nowhere, give rise to mind.” To “abide nowhere,” means not clinging to, not relying on, not seeking, and not rejecting forms. Still, as long as we live we must deal with phenomena. When we are hungry we need to eat; when we are cold we need covering; when we are sick we need healing; when there’s a fire we need to put it out. We still do whatever is needed according to the

situation. “Give rise to mind,” refers to wisdom that responds according to the needs of phenomena, not self-interest. This wisdom functions consciously without clinging to phenomena, as in ordinary consciousness.

The wisdom of such a mind is what we call *prajna* in Buddhism. What really is this wisdom, or *prajna*? I have a definition for wisdom that says three things that it is *not*: wisdom is not knowledge or scholarly attainment; it is not logical thinking, and it is not life experience. Wisdom is a state of mind devoid of selfishness and of all volition to cause harm to self or others. It is an attitude that does not take the self as the center of all perceptions.

Only if we have this *prajna* can we see emptiness and remove vexations and realize formlessness. If we have an incorrect understanding of formlessness, emptiness, or wisdom, then it is likely that one of two situations may arise: one is thinking we are enlightened when we are not, and the other is the fear of becoming enlightened.

I’m going to tell two stories that will illustrate what I mean. The first is about a graduate student who attended one of my Chan retreats in Taiwan. When he returned home, he gave away all of his belongings. Those things that nobody wanted, he just threw away. He stopped eating, stopped drinking, stopped reading, and everyone around him thought that this was very strange. When they asked him what was going on, he said, “I have seen emptiness. Since everything is empty, everything is impermanent. Since everything is empty, why would I want anything? Since everything is impermanent, my life is impermanent. My present life and my next life are all the same, so it really doesn’t matter if I live a few days longer or not. It’s all the same.”

When his family learned of his situation, first, they sent him to a mental clinic and second, they came to me: “What have you done to our son? What happened during your retreat? You must have some problems, perhaps you are a demon!” Here’s what happened. This young man had only listened to my talks about impermanence and emptiness. He started contemplating emptiness immediately. When I gave other discourses, he viewed everything I said as likewise empty and impermanent, and did not hear anything else I said, much less understand. This resulted in his bringing upon himself various illusions and delusions and he even thought he was enlightened. But he did not tell me he thought he was enlightened, so when he went home he had all these problems.

It is the same right here. If you just hear me talk about emptiness and impermanence and you do not hear anything else, when you go home you might have some problems. Although I say that we should observe the emptiness and impermanence of things, I use this as a method whereby we can release attachment and let go of clinging. Myself, I still eat, I drink, and I work.

The second story also occurred on retreat, this time in America. A student listened to my lectures on no-form, emptiness, and non-attachment. After hearing these teachings, including teachings on dropping one's self-centered mind, he continued practicing. On the third day he had a long meditation session, not moving for more than two hours. When he came to an interview I asked him, "How is your meditation going, what have you seen?"

He said, "I really want to go home now."

I asked him why. He said, "I'm afraid that when I go home, I will no longer recognize my parents. In addition, I am especially concerned that I will not even recognize my girlfriend. We are waiting to get married. Even if I could accept this condition, it would be far too cruel to my girlfriend. Therefore, I want to stop meditating now."

I asked him, "What really happened during that session?"

He said, "I had such a great session, it was such a fantastic session, I almost got enlightened. And I got afraid that if I got enlightened, if I had a real understanding of no-form I would no longer recognize my parents and I would no longer want my girlfriend. So I want to go home."

I asked him, "Well, look at me. Is it the case that I don't recognize anyone? Actually I have quite a good memory, and I recognize all of my students."

He replied, "Well that's because you are a monk. I have no intention of becoming a monk."

What really happened with this young person? It seems that he had been using his method really well, that his body was no longer a burden for him. And also, the environment around him temporarily seemed to disappear. He was so immersed in the method that he temporarily forgot who he was. We can be like this if, for example, we continuously use a *huatou* without any break. We can be so immersed in the method that nothing else seems to remain. When his mind slipped from the method, he thought, "Who am I? And what are these things around me?" He temporarily forgot who he was, and he forgot the names of the things. This caused him great fear. Other than this falling off the method and giving rise to fear, he was practicing very well. His mind had become unified with the method. He practiced like water running down a waterfall, continuously and without interval. Temporarily forgetting himself and the things around him, he became afraid that if he became enlightened, it would get even worse.

After I explained to this young person his situation, I told him to not be afraid of enlightenment, formlessness, or emptiness. I told him that actually he was quite far from realizing emptiness. It's just that he had been using the method very well, continuously, sticking close to the method. He was using it so that each moment was connected to the next like the links in a chain. However, he was still very far

from enlightenment. With such close and continuous practice, he could enter samadhi, but he was not even close to becoming enlightened.

I told him not to go home. I said, “If you really became enlightened, not only will you not forget your parents, you will be even nicer to them. You will also be nicer to your girlfriend because you will have more compassion for her; you won’t behave selfishly. You’ll be acting for the sake of other people not to possess or extract things from them. This kind of love is called compassion and the people you interact with will feel even safer. You will have fewer vexations and troubles and so will the people around you. So I told him, “Wouldn’t this be even better?” and convinced him not to go home.

These stories illustrate two situations: one is the delusion that one is already enlightened and the other is the fear of becoming enlightened. I hope none of you here have these confusions and problems.

This relates to the next line in the verse on formlessness by Huineng that goes:

Only by transmitting the Dharma of seeing the nature can one emerge into the world and shatter erroneous doctrines.

What we call “the Dharma of seeing the nature,” is actually realizing buddha-nature, or emptiness. Only through this Dharma can one fully deal with vexations and become free of deluded views, free from wrong views, free from clinging and a self-centered mind. Through this realization, which is the same as formlessness, one can shatter these erroneous doctrines. In this verse, “erroneous doctrines” means clinging to wrong and distorted views and understandings. All the delusions we cling to can be called erroneous doctrines, and in these two stories I have just told, the protagonists could be said to hold erroneous doctrines.

I have spoken about two Chan methods — silent illumination and *huatou* — but the principles behind them are identical. Whether you use one or the other, it can still be useful. If you are using another method than these two, continue it if you can at least stabilize your mind. The main thing is not to let your mind become like a flock of magpies but more like an ox. How many magpies have you seen today? Has your mind been full of wandering thoughts that pull you away continuously? Even if you do not chat, if you cling to wandering thoughts, you are still like a magpie. I don’t believe that anyone has not seen at least a single magpie. There have probably been many magpies flying around in your minds.

If you are continuously on the method, then you should have seen the ox, meaning your mind has been calm and stable at least part of the time. However, if you rejoice too much the ox will instantly transform into a magpie. Has anyone *not* seen at least a single ox today? If you are using the method correctly and still haven’t seen the ox, you must be simultaneously indulging in wandering thoughts.

Russian translator: He [referring to a student] said, “I saw an ox when he walked past me.”

Sheng Yen: Of course it should be walking, if it wasn't walking it would be a dead [or sleeping] ox. [Laughter] Please keep looking for your ox.

Day Four

Sudden and Gradual Enlightenment

Morning Talk

Stages of *Huatou* Practice

Should you ask the *huatou* like a question, or should you just recite it like a mantra? To clarify I will explain the different stages of *huatou* practice. The first stage is *reciting*, or simply repeating, the *huatou*. Initially our minds are confused and full of wandering thoughts. At this stage we can just recite the *huatou* over and over to ourselves. We don't really have much feeling for the *huatou*, we just tell ourselves we have this job to do so we just keep repeating the *huatou*.

The second stage is *asking* the *huatou*. At this stage we have truly developed interest in the *huatou*, and we want to know the answer to it, so we keep asking the *huatou* over and over. At this second stage of asking the *huatou*, you still repeat it, but in addition, you have truly developed interest in knowing the answer. But you still have to repeat the phrase.

The third stage is *investigating* the *huatou*. This stage occurs after the doubt mass arises. This is not ordinary doubt, but an overwhelming desire to find the answer to the *huatou*. One no longer has scattered thoughts and one is fully absorbed in investigating the *huatou*. In this state you are not aware of the taste of food, you hear me speak but are not really listening. You are completely absorbed in and surrounded by the *huatou* — it is your whole life. In other words, you have become the *huatou*. Whether eating, sleeping, walking, or doing any other activity, you are fully into the *huatou*. It is your own little universe.

The fourth stage is *watching* the *huatou*. Although one has attained enlightenment, one still has vexations. Enlightenment does not necessarily mean one has severed all vexations; it simply means that one has seen one's buddha-nature. But some time after the experience, vexations usually return. Therefore, after enlightenment you must continue to watch the *huatou*. Until one realizes full enlightenment, vexations will not be completely severed. Therefore, one needs to keep watching the *huatou* and never leave it.

Afternoon Talk

Samadhi

Samadhi is not just a mental phenomenon; it involves the body as well. Especially at the beginning, the body element in samadhi is strong. The consistent use of a

meditation method can change the scattered mind to a concentrated one. As wandering thoughts decrease, the mental energy needed to focus will also decrease. Then from a concentrated mind you can reach unified mind. This is possible even without using a method like silent illumination or *huatou*.

When we speak of unified mind, that means both body and mind have unified. This is the result of using the method quite well. Whether this leads to samadhi can depend on whether one is tense or relaxed. Perhaps one has been anxious, even mixing breathing with other methods and using the body to unify in a tense way. In such a case one's body will feel smaller and smaller because one is tense and the body feels like it is collapsing. Eventually one feels cool, then cold, and then extremely uncomfortable. In this situation the scattered mind will rise again. This kind of unification of body and mind is unhealthy and will not lead to samadhi. Regardless of which method you use, your mind should not be nervous.

If however, one can unify body and mind in a relaxed way, and one is very proficient in the method, the burden of the body drops away. One will then experience happiness. One is said to feel 'lightness and ease' — lightness as a sensation of the body and ease as a feeling in the mind. Some people mistake this feeling of lightness and ease as enlightenment, but they have merely unified their body and mind in a proper way. In our ox metaphor, at this stage one not only has seen the ox but one has begun to train it.

When our body and mind are thus correctly unified, we can then enter samadhi. Initially, we can enter the sequential steps to samadhi as taught in the early Buddhist schools, or we can unify with the environment in accordance with the Chan Mahayana methods. Since we are practicing sudden enlightenment, at this point we do not cultivate sequential samadhi. Instead, we observe the environment as our body. As we do this, the environment may also disappear. So as both body and the environment disappear, all that remains is our mind fixed on the method.

At this point the method becomes effortless. We are like a rider who does not think of himself as riding the horse, and the horse is not aware that it is being ridden — the two are unified. We want to be like this jockey and enter the Mahayana samadhi in which we forget the environment while still using the method. This unification of body, mind, and environment is a samadhi that can be reached through silent illumination.

If we are using the *huatou* method, after giving rise to a sense of doubt we may then develop a 'great ball of doubt.' At that point our whole life is absorbed by the *huatou*. We may no longer be asking the *huatou* with the words in our mind but we are seeking the answer to it; we have this strong aspiration to find the answer. At this point our practice is powerful and continuous, without break. At

such a point, a practitioner walks, eats, and sleeps, but is completely absorbed by the *huatou*, is inside the *huatou*. This is also a form of samadhi. The early Buddhist samadhi is more like a concentration that is limited to one's own body. The samadhi achieved through silent illumination and *huatou* is one in which body, mind, and environment are all unified.

The basic early Buddhist methods of attaining samadhi are the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and the Five Methods for Stilling the Mind. The Four Foundations consist of mindfulness of body, mindfulness of sensations, mindfulness of mind, and mindfulness of dharmas [mental phenomena]. When one is successful in such contemplations, one may enter samadhi. In Chan, one does not cultivate sequential samadhi in the sense of the four foundations. The enlightenment that is sought is sudden. In the Mahayana samadhi, after one's body and mind are unified, one also unifies with the environment. As in the saying, "let go of all forms," one also relinquishes samadhi, for it too is a form. One continues to do this throughout one's life, in all activities — dropping or letting go all forms, including that of samadhi.

I'd like to share with you stories about two Chan masters from modern China. The first is about the great Master Xuyun, or Empty Cloud, the teacher of my teacher. As was the custom in China, he traveled to different monasteries to practice. On one of his travels, he was investigating a *huatou*, and developed the great doubt. Walking along the banks of the Yangtze River, he was so deeply absorbed in his *huatou* that he fell in. Three days later, a fisherman pulled Empty Cloud out of the river with a large net. Seeing that he was a monk, some fishermen carried him off to the monastery. The monks rang a hand chime in his ears and he finally woke up and said, "What are you all doing here?"

Anyway, Empty Cloud was like a fish in the river for three days. Because he was unified with the environment, he did not know that he was in the water. He was not afraid nor did he drown. This was not an enlightenment experience for Empty Cloud, but a deep samadhi state. Even today in India, there are yogis who can be buried under the ground for dozens of hours, and they can be exhumed and still be okay. However, when this happened to Empty Cloud it was an accident. He was not performing some kind of stunt.

The next story is of the Chan Master Laigu, who was practicing *huatou* in a monastery. Eventually, he decided that life in the monastery was not for him, so he took his meditation cushion and his alms bowl and started wandering. When he was hungry he would beg for food. He did not always know where he was, but just kept wandering. At night he would sleep wherever he could find a place. As he walked, ate, and slept, he continued to investigate his *huatou*. Occasionally, when he got tired he would do sitting meditation and continue his *huatou*. His

entire life was engulfed by it. Because he was so deep inside the *huatou*, he was unaware of whom he had met, where he had been, and how many days he had been wandering.

Both Laiguo and Xuyun later achieved great enlightenment because they cultivated and held the great doubt mass for a long time. As the Chan saying goes, “Great doubt, great enlightenment; small doubt, small enlightenment; no doubt, no enlightenment.” These are examples of practitioners using the *huatou* method to achieve samadhi. In one case, Xuyun fell in the river and floated around in samadhi; in the other case, Laiguo walked around living a normal life in a state of samadhi.

A third story, this one about entering samadhi while practicing silent illumination. Master Hanshan [not to be confused with the Tang dynasty poet of the same name] lived in the sixteenth century, during the Ming dynasty. In front of his monastery was a small stream over which there was a bridge. One day he sat on the bridge to rest. He looked at the water and listened to the sound of it as it flowed under the bridge. Sitting on the bridge, he forgot himself. One full day and night passed. The next day someone saw him sitting there and spoke to him. At this point, Hanshan became aware of his surroundings again, and said, “I just sat down a moment ago!” He had forgotten his body and was fully absorbed in observing the sights and sounds of the stream. He had unified with his environment and had entered samadhi, not realizing a full day had passed.

Direct Contemplation

[Note: the following lecture takes place outdoors.]

We will now practice direct contemplation. Direct contemplation is not intuition. With intuition, we come to a conclusion, or we have an idea about something. However, intuition is subjective — our minds are confused and we put our subjective ideas into the situation. In contrast, direct contemplation is completely objective — you do not contemplate based on past experience or ideas, you just observe. Whatever you see, you see; whatever you hear, you hear. That’s all. There are two ways to use direct contemplation: you either select an object for observation or you can be unselective. You can look at something and confine your observation to that one thing and nothing else. Or you can select a field of vision and visually contemplate everything in that field of vision, without selecting any special object. The entire field of vision becomes your object of contemplation. Or, you can select a certain sound to listen to and confine your observation to that one sound. Or you can contemplate all the sounds that you hear without focusing on any specific sound.

Whether your method is selective or not, whether contemplating visual objects or sounds, there are three things you should *not* do in direct contemplation. First, do not name the object that you contemplate; second, do not describe it; and third, do not compare it with anything, either in the present or the past. Once again, this is not intuition because unlike intuition, you do not put any subjective ideas into your observation. I repeat, do not name the object, do not describe it, and do not compare it. The object you observe is just what it is, just the object-in-and-of-itself. The reasons for the three rules is because naming, describing, and comparing arise from our knowledge and past experience and are hence subjective. What you are observing then is not the thing-in-itself, but something coming out of your cognitive associations.

One more note: if you choose to observe by looking, do not mix this in with observing sounds, unless the thing that you're looking at and listening to is the same. For instance, if you're looking at water, then you can also listen to the water. But if you are listening to an airplane flying by, then you should not also simultaneously visually contemplate water.

Find a comfortable spot, wherever you like, within this area. Once you select a spot, do not move. You can assume any posture you like, standing, sitting, or lying down. Then select some sound or object to observe. You can start now, but remember: no naming, no describing, and no comparing. For now, everyone should just do direct contemplation. If you are practicing *huatou*, do not use it for this exercise. For now, I suggest you limit yourself to one object because it is relatively difficult to observe everything in one's field of vision. If you do that you are more likely to have wandering thoughts. Let's just try it that way, and not ask more questions for now. Just practice.

[They practice direct contemplation.]

Sheng Yen: For most people, it is difficult to continually observe one object for fifteen minutes without naming, describing, or comparing. It is easier to do this just for a few seconds or for a few minutes, but it is possible to do it for fifteen minutes or more. How many of you were able to maintain focus on a visual or sound object for at least one minute without naming, describing, or comparing?

That is very good. Normally when we observe things, we do so subjectively. We are not acting like mirrors that just reflect. Regardless of which meditation method we use, *huatou* or silent illumination, we want to put down our subjective ideas. For instance, when using *huatou*, we don't analyze it with subjective thinking. Direct contemplation still involves forms, but it is a preliminary step to entering the formless. Some may think that even an infant can do direct contemplation, but this would be incorrect. An infant's faculties for observation

are undeveloped. It is simply ignorant; it is not doing direct contemplation. If you can practice this method very well, you can apply it in daily life. When you are doing something, do just *that* and not anything else. This will reduce the amount of mental fluctuation you experience in daily life.

Now it's time to eat. Eating is just eating; so we will just eat.

Evening Talk

Sudden and Gradual Enlightenment

Let's continue with Huineng's verse on formlessness:

Although in the Dharma itself there is no sudden or gradual in confusion and enlightenment there is slowness and speed.

The Mind Dharma is not connected with sudden or gradual enlightenment, because it is not in any way linked to practice. But as the verse says, "...in confusion and enlightenment, there is slowness or speed." A confused person will not see the formless mind at all, but an enlightened person will experience no-form right away.

The Dharma of Teachings can be followed by practice, its purpose being for us to attain the Dharma of Mind. We should perhaps say 'discover' instead of 'attain,' because the Dharma of Mind pre-exists in us; it cannot be explained, nor can it really be 'attained' by practice. This Dharma is always there, fully present. It is just that we don't know that we have this no-mind, this mind of wisdom. The Dharma of Mind is unconnected to ideas of sudden and gradual, but the Dharma of the Teachings can be connected to sudden and gradual. That is to say, some teachings can be for sudden enlightenment and others are directed towards gradual enlightenment.

In the *Platform Sutra* formlessness refers to the Dharma of Mind, but the verse doesn't actually teach us concrete methods for achieving it. Rather, it describes the Dharma of Mind and indicates that we need to drop attachment in order to see this Dharma. All of the methods for dropping attachments are the Dharma of Teachings, which allow us to move away from, and then to drop this confused mind. We do this through understanding the causes of confused mind and also through continuously practicing a method. Through the Dharma of the Teachings, first we see that we do have a confused mind, that our self-centeredness is very strongly rooted, and we learn how to put this mind down. If we succeed in doing so we will be able to see the Dharma of Mind. From there we become enlightened and we will be able to realize no-form. Everything I have been describing thus far

has been the Dharma of the Teachings. Without it, we wouldn't know that we have a confused mind, we wouldn't know how to drop it, and we wouldn't have the means to perceive formlessness. If the Mind Dharma is inexpressible, how can I teach it? I cannot teach the Mind Dharma, I can only talk of the Dharma of Teachings. The Dharma of formlessness cannot be spoken.

A disciple asked his master, "What did Bodhidharma bring with him when he came to China?" The teacher replied, "Bodhidharma didn't bring anything." The disciple was rather confused: "Well if he didn't bring anything, why did he bother coming?" What was it that Bodhidharma went to China to tell people they already had? I tell people that they already have this Mind Dharma, that everyone has this mind of wisdom, formlessness, and no-self. Do I teach methods for discovering the Dharma of Mind? No, I teach how to practice putting down vexations, letting go of clinging. If you do that, the Dharma of Mind will naturally arise. Perhaps it is better to say wisdom 'appears.' 'Arises,' may sound like we originally don't have it. So, when we drop the vexations, wisdom appears. What I said tonight is very important because you all have this Dharma of Mind, and some of you were not sure you did. I hope this matter is clarified.

Day Five

No Gateway to Mind Dharma

Morning Talk

Emptiness

We can speak of two kinds of emptiness: the emptiness of the Dharma of Teachings and the emptiness of the Dharma of Mind. The emptiness of the Dharma of Teachings can be understood through analysis and logic. The Emptiness of the Dharma of Mind, however, can only be realized through actual experience. There is a real experience of this second kind but not all so-called experiences of emptiness are genuine.

Many students of Indian or Buddhist philosophy think they fully understand emptiness. Actually, what they understand is merely a part of the emptiness of the Dharma of Teachings. One can arrive at a shallow understanding of emptiness of the Dharma of Teachings by analyzing the components of the body and mind, which in Buddhism are called the five skandhas. In Sanskrit, skandha means 'aggregate' or 'heap.' These five skandhas include the material and the mental aggregates; they constitute our life, our being, and what we think of as our 'self.' They are phenomenal components organized in time and space through causes and conditions.

In arriving at emptiness through analysis, we look at each skandha and see that none contains an inherent 'self.' We see that what we call our 'self' is a composite of these five factors, none of which is a self-entity. Also, we find no self outside of the skandhas. The skandhas fall into three groups: first is the material skandha of form, then there are three mental skandhas — sensation, perception, and volition. The fifth skandha is the spiritual component, consciousness. When we are born, we have a complete existence consisting of physical, mental, and spiritual components, but after we die only consciousness remains. To repeat, as we analyze the five skandhas, we conclude that what we call the 'self' is composed of these skandhas, none of which has self-nature. Since all material and mental components are inherently changing, each skandha itself is empty of inherent nature. We conclude that that the 'self,' being made up of the five aggregates, is also impermanent and empty.

Can we say that the 'self' that is comprised of the five skandhas actually exists? Yes, in a sense we can, but this is not what Buddhism considers real existence. This 'self' that we get at birth is comprised of physical, mental, and

spiritual components, but when we die only the component of consciousness remains. Consciousness, in and of itself, does not create karma; it does not think, rather it's just a mental entity. In order to practice one needs a body. Consciousness alone cannot do spiritual practice and it cannot attain liberation. Since the self is composed of these five aggregates and is also impermanent, we say that our self is 'false,' or we can say it is 'provisional.' This is also called 'no-self.'

Thus, through analysis, we can view emptiness from two aspects: first, we see that the self is composed of the five aggregates and therefore has no inherent self-nature. The second aspect is seeing the emptiness of inherent nature — that everything is without a nature of its own. The emptiness of inherent nature means that not just the self but also each of the five skandhas is individually empty. To clarify, if something has inherent nature, then it would never change, being an ultimate reality. Therefore, anything that changes is empty of inherent nature.

Once a Westerner, seeing that I was a monk came up to me and asked, "Master, what is reality?" My response was, "I don't know." He looked extremely disappointed and forlorn: "Why don't you know this?" I answered, "Because there is no thing called reality, so how could I know it?"

The emptiness that is arrived at through logic is a kind of dialectic but different from Western ideas of dialectic. It is the dialectic of the Madhyamaka philosophy of Buddhism. When we apply this special dialectic we find that there is no left, no right, no middle, no front, no back, no past, no future, no present, neither good nor evil. However, this dialectic does not give rise to a passive or negative view of the world; it affirms the existence of causes and conditions but denies the existence of inherent nature. Things are said to lack inherent nature because logical analysis shows that they do not. Therefore, the conclusion is that things are inherently empty.

The viewpoint of the Madhyamaka after such logical analysis is called a position of affirming emptiness. It is not a neutral viewpoint, not a kind of middle between two extremes, because one cannot affirm any place and one cannot affirm the middle either.

Let's try to make it less abstract: there is a 'left' that arises from causes and conditions; there is a 'right' also made up of causes and conditions; and there is a 'middle' also made up of causes and conditions. Everything is just causes and conditions, whether it's to the left, to the right, or to the center. Why do we not take a stand anywhere, why don't we affirm any position? We don't affirm any position because each place is without inherent nature. The goal of such logic is not to explain things, but to remind us not to cling to things because everything is

changing. Everything exists because of causes and conditions and lacks inherent nature.

Afternoon Talk

Emptiness of the Dharma of Mind

Now I will talk about the emptiness of the Dharma of Mind. I will begin with a story from the *Platform Sutra* of the Sixth Patriarch, Huineng. When he was still at Huangmei, the monastery of Fifth Patriarch Hongren, Huineng worked in the kitchen milling rice. As a method for finding his Dharma heir, Hongren, who was the abbot, asked the monks to write a verse expressing their own understanding of Dharma. None of the monks were willing to do this except the head monk, Shenxiu, who, when the other monks were asleep, wrote a verse on the wall in the Chan hall. It went like this:

The body is a bodhi tree,
The mind is a bright mirror.
Always diligently polish the mirror,
And do not let dust collect.

“The body is a bodhi tree” means that we use the body as the foundation through which we cultivate enlightenment. The second line “The mind is a bright mirror,” means that the mind is like a mirror that reflects what is in front of it without adding any self-centered view. If you can imagine it, the mind is like a circular mirror that can reflect everything around it, in 360 degrees. The meaning of the third line, “Always diligently polish the mirror” is that we should be diligent in using Dharma methods to dissipate or eliminate vexations and wandering thoughts. The fourth line “And do not let dust collect” says that one should work hard to train the mind so that it does not permit vexations to stain our clear, mirror-like mind.

So, please everyone take a guess. Does this poem express a realization of formlessness? Does it demonstrate a true understanding of the Dharma of Mind? Yes or no?

Audience: No.

But does this poem express something good? Yes, of course it does. Practitioners need to behave like this. In any case, according to the *Platform Sutra*, at this time, Huineng had already realized the Dharma of Mind when he heard someone quote from the *Diamond Sutra*. Because he was illiterate, Huineng

asked one of the monks to read him Shenxiu's verse on the wall. That night, after hearing Shenxiu's verse, Huineng had someone help him to write the following lines on the wall, next to Shenxiu's verse.

Huineng's poem went like this:

Bodhi is originally without a tree,
The mirror is also without a stand.
Originally there is not a single thing.
Where is there a place for dust to collect?

“Originally there is not a single thing,” means that there are no real substantial forms, called ‘bodhi,’ ‘buddha-nature.’ or ‘emptiness.’ Huineng is saying that bodhi is not a substantial thing. People often think that enlightenment is an experience in which we can feel a certain thing, or discover exactly what this ‘thing,’ enlightenment, is. This is an incorrect view because enlightenment, or seeing the nature, is an experience of emptiness. It is the experience of phenomena as being empty and insubstantial. Most Eastern and Western philosophies and religions believe in a highest or ultimate reality to which they give names such as oneness or God. Actually, we enter this oneness when we experience unified mind in meditation. In the West it may be called oneness, but according to the Chan Dharma, we need to put down or let go this unified mind. We do not want to think of this unified mind as the highest or ultimate truth. But how do we get to what is highest truth? We have to drop everything, and then we will come to the point of formlessness or non-attachment to all forms. Forms are products of causes and conditions. As such they are changing and non-substantial. They still exist; it is just that the enlightened mind does not abide in them.

This idea of formlessness is different from theories that postulate an original substance or an original cause. In contrast, Buddhadharma advocates the idea that everything arises because of causes and conditions, and is therefore empty, or formless. Now, let's compare the emptiness of the Dharma of the Teachings with the emptiness that is actualized in the Dharma of Mind. The emptiness of the Dharma of Teachings is arrived at through logical deduction or analysis, and in both cases we are using the mind to reach understanding.

On the other hand, to have an actual realization of emptiness we use methods such as silent illumination or *huatou*, and when our mind reaches a unified state we want to put down this unified mind. However, we cannot just put down the unified mind at will; we need to repeatedly use our methods, again and again. When conditions in our practice mature and we encounter some kind of acute stimulus — certain sounds, words, or sights — all doubts and questions may

suddenly disappear. Or perhaps we are suddenly able to put down our already stabilized mind, and all thoughts instantly disintegrate and shatter. It is as if we have just broken through a silk cocoon in which we have been confined. Not only has the cocoon disappeared but the silkworm has also disappeared. We are free of all burdens. Everything still exists but there is no self; that is to say, there is no clinging and vexations associated with our 'self.' This emptiness is reached through spiritual practice, and is different from the emptiness reached through analysis or logic.

When seeing the nature, one realizes that all phenomena are insubstantial and that the self has always been non-existent. At this time one is able to put down all attachments. However, sooner or later, depending on the person and the depth of the experience, one's self-centeredness and attachments will return. Therefore, it is extremely important for the individual to continue using methods of practice. For example, if one is in the stage of watching the *huatou*, and if one continues to practice at this level, it is possible to have similar experiences, and one's realization will become deeper and deeper. Not all people however, are able to repeat the experience like this. Regardless of whether one can repeat it or not, the experience of seeing the nature is extremely valuable. Although one still has self-centeredness, many vexations will have been eliminated. Having experienced putting down one's mind, one will also develop a high degree of self-confidence and never again lose one's spiritual practice. This experience is like suddenly seeing light for the first time. Although the light will fade or disappear, the individual will still know what that light is, because he or she has actually seen it. Something like this happens when someone experiences seeing the nature or emptiness. A shallow experience of enlightenment can be called seeing the nature, while a deeper experience of enlightenment can be called liberation.

There is also the case where someone has some kind of an experience and mistakenly believes they are enlightened. For instance, while using the method they eventually reach a point where they have no wandering thoughts. It may even seem for a time that there is no sense of self, and they also experience a feeling of being in infinite space. In this outer space, there is no sun, no moon, and no earth, just space. They may think that this is an experience of emptiness, but actually this is just samadhi, a relatively shallow samadhi, one in a series of stages of samadhi.

There are also people who, while practicing meditation or engaged in daily life, have very strong concentration, and suddenly time and space as well as the method all drop away. These people are using their brain in a very tense way, and suddenly they enter a vast, empty space that could be filled with light, or even without light. They may think that they have experienced emptiness. But actually, this is just a case where the practitioner's mind may have become unstable due to

too much tenseness in the practice. It is not an experience of emptiness or enlightenment. So, it is essential that we relax our minds and bodies as we use our method.

We have talked about the experience of emptiness via the Mind Dharma, in which one uses a practice method to realize emptiness, or formlessness. By using the practice method, one learns to let go of the self and realizes this emptiness. Are there people who are able to actualize emptiness without using a method? Yes, but they are extremely rare.

Evening Talk

What Good Is Enlightenment?

To be practicing for the sake of other people might sound very strange, yet because we are contemplating emptiness, it would also be strange to be practicing for ourselves. So, are we just wasting time here? It is very strange that some of you are still here. [Laughter] And Sascha even has talked about inviting me here for a third time. If I come again, would you want to participate? Actually practice is not for the sake of anything. You practice just to practice. These past two days I have talked about emptiness, about enlightenment, seeing the nature, and such things. We have said that after enlightenment, one realizes no-mind, no-self, and no-form. With all these negations, what can we say is the good of enlightenment?

To answer this, we should remember the line from the *Diamond Sutra*, “Abiding nowhere, give rise to mind.” Abiding nowhere means seeing one’s self-nature. It means not clinging to form, allowing the wisdom of no-self to arise. As this wisdom appears, compassion will also appear along with it. This union of wisdom and compassion is called bodhi-mind, or bodhicitta — the wisdom of no-self plus non-discriminating compassion. So, bodhi-mind is not limited to just wisdom, as people may think.

Previously, we said that wisdom, or prajna, is not three things: it is not knowledge, it is not logic, and it is not experience. Rather, wisdom is the attitude of no-self. We can also speak of three things that compassion is not: it is not ordinary sympathy, it is not fixed on any object, and it is not seeking goals. We can say that compassion is not the same as love. Through compassion, one helps all sentient beings without discriminating between one and the other and one gives benefit impartially to all sentient beings. Again, compassion has no fixed recipient and because it is formless, it has no goal in mind — one is not compassionate in order to get something. Compassion is helping sentient beings in just the right way for each individual.

Many people superstitiously or erroneously believe that after enlightenment, they would have nothing else to do; that practice is all over with. They think that enlightenment is fantastically wonderful, and they also hope that other people can accept or confirm that they have seen the nature. But if, at the time of supposed enlightenment, no wisdom or compassion arises, if these qualities of bodhi-mind do not arise, then this is not actual enlightenment. It is a false experience. So, if you have such an experience, you can look into it to see if such qualities have arisen. However, I emphasize that you should still consult a qualified teacher who can recognize an enlightenment experience.

I have said that seeing buddha-nature is not the same as enlightenment. After seeing the nature, for several days one will be full of wisdom and compassion, and vexations will not arise, and one's self-centeredness will not be so strong. But after some time, vexations will return. However, one's confidence will be quite strong, and one will develop a strong sense of humility. This humility exists because one realizes that one still has a long distance to liberation, and an even longer journey to buddhahood. So, one will be very humble and will not be arrogant about this achievement. But one has great confidence that one will one day become liberated. Yet, one still has many problems, so one is still for the time being humble and not arrogant.

From what I have seen, the great practitioners in different spiritual systems are all very humble. They all will think that they have insufficient practice and insufficient attainment. Although the Chan masters sometimes used methods such as striking, shouting, and scolding, it is not done out of arrogance. These are just methods which when used in the right way, can give a disciple just the right kind of help. The great Tibetan lamas that I have met, practitioners of high spiritual attainment, are still quite humble. But there are some practitioners who have had a little experience in samadhi, have not really seen the nature, and yet behave arrogantly. This arrogance is a manifestation of their vexations.

Recently I met a great lama, who was the incarnation of Tsongkapa, the great Tibetan teacher. I asked him, "You must be the reincarnation of Tsongkapa, the teacher of the First Dalai Lama. According to belief, this also means you are the avatar of Maitreya Buddha."

He said, "Well, you know, that is what people believe. I am just a practitioner. It is just that Tibetans believe that I am the emanation body of Maitreya and the teacher of the First Dalai Lama."

Then I asked him, "Does this mean you are not actually the reincarnation of Tsongkapa?"

He replied, "That's the belief. I can't deny this belief, either."

I said, "Are you Maitreya?"

And he said, “Well, I practice the methods of Maitreya.”

So, he wouldn't affirm that he actually was Maitreya. He just considered himself a practitioner and one who learned from Maitreya.

It was the same way with the current Dalai Lama. When I asked him, “Everyone believes that you are an emanation body (nirmanakaya) of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva. Are you Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva?”

Then he said, “I am a little bhikshu (monk) who every day makes many prostrations to the Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva.”

So, as we look at people with great spiritual achievements, such as the enlightened Chan patriarchs and Chan masters, most of them were very much like ordinary monks, in fact, more humble than the average monk. They would not go around thinking, “I'm enlightened, so I'm different from everyone else.” They saw themselves as the same as other people. The difference is that they saw the world in a different way. They did not impose labels onto the world such as good, bad, good and evil, having thoughts such as, “I like this, I don't like that.”

In the world they see, if they see a sick person, they will try to help the person get treatment; if they see the hungry, they try to help out and give food; if there is war, they know that war is a very cruel thing and they hope to avoid war. If a fire breaks out, then, they also will try to find a way to extinguish the fire. However, in the midst of all these activities, their minds do not fluctuate.

So, they would not have extremes of love and hatred, and they won't have all kinds of fears, anxieties, jealousies, and doubts. They just do whatever is necessary. This is indicative of their wisdom and compassion, of their bodhi-mind, their bodhicitta.

Dharma Gateway

Let's continue with the next line in Huineng's verse:

Yet this gateway into seeing the nature cannot be fully
comprehended by
the ignorant.

I have talked a lot about emptiness and wisdom and realization, but at the same time we can also say there is no real gateway to such wisdom, to such knowledge of the Dharma, because for the enlightened the Dharma of Mind is already present before them. There's no gate involved and as for the foolish, they cannot even see the gate. So, for both types of people, it seems there really isn't any kind of gate; and this gate is something like a doctrine or method. It's also called a Dharma gateway. That is the meaning of this gateway — an entranceway into the truth, perhaps, is a way to translate it.

Some may think that practice is the gateway to seeing one's nature, but practice is actually a direct way to see the nature. We just practice dropping the self and phenomena and letting go of all forms. In particular, we have to let go of the unified mind. Some people cling to unified mind. They feel that since they are unified with the universe, they no longer have a self. While they may no longer have the individual self, they have still taken the universe as their self. There is still an existent self that is at one with a limitless universe. At this stage they are not yet enlightened and need to abandon this state of mind.

In *huatou* practice this stage of unified mind occurs with the raising of a great doubt mass. In silent illumination, this occurs when one feels one with the environment and also when the environment itself seems to disappear. So, it seems we have two unified minds here, but this is correct. The difference is that in the first instance, one is not yet in samadhi, but both stages are considered unified mind. So, that's it for tonight. Please, everyone try to practice diligently because we only have one day left.

Day Six

Bodhi-mind and Renunciation

Morning Talk

The Four Great Vows

After giving rise to Dharma of Mind, or bodhi-mind, one realizes wisdom and compassion. Wisdom consists in knowing how to help sentient beings and compassion is intending to deliver them from suffering. To attain bodhi-mind, however, we must first renounce our own vexations. Renunciation allows us to let go of forms and let all affairs come to rest. Therefore, bodhi-mind and renunciation are inseparably linked. Liberation is not just departing from one's own vexations; it is also the hope and intention to help other sentient beings find liberation as well. But first, we need renunciation to help us to depart from vexations.

How do we cultivate bodhi-mind and renunciation? One way is to make the Four Great Vows, as we do every morning.

I vow to deliver innumerable sentient beings.

I vow to cut off endless vexations.

I vow to pursue limitless approaches to Dharma.

I vow to attain supreme buddhahood.

The first vow, to save sentient beings, exemplifies bodhi-mind. The second vow, to cut off vexations, is renunciation. The third vow, to learn Dharma approaches, is using the Dharma of the Teachings to develop the bodhi-mind and renunciation. And if we practice the teachings, we will ultimately realize the fourth vow, to attain buddhahood. To help everyone remember, we should now recite the Four Great Vows.

When we can let go of vexations, we will create less bad karma for ourselves and thus experience lighter karmic retribution. How do we create bad karma? We do it by hurting others with our actions and our words. Therefore, to avoid the effects of karma, it is best to renounce actions and speech that harm oneself as well as others. To help us renounce, we adhere to the precepts and practice samadhi. The precepts restrain our bodily and verbal behavior and samadhi restrains our mental afflictions. When we practice samadhi, the environment will not tempt us so much and our mind will be more stable. As a result we do not cause as many problems for ourselves and for others. So, precepts and samadhi are precisely the methods for cultivating renunciation.

The five basic precepts regulate our bodily and verbal behavior and following them will prevent us from causing harm to other beings and to society. The first precept is not to kill, and this includes not doing violence to others. The second precept is not to steal other people's property or possessions. The third precept is not to engage in sexual relations outside of one's spouse. The fourth precept, not to lie, also includes no vulgar speech, no slandering, and no idle gossip. This last category is linked to samadhi, because if you talk about meaningless things, your mind is likely to be scattered. The fifth precept is not to intoxicants and drugs. In some cultures it is difficult not to take alcohol at all, but if you're doing spiritual practice it is best not to drink because it impairs your ability to hold up the other four precepts.

There is story of a layman in Shakyamuni Buddha's time had a drinking habit but was otherwise an upright person. One day he was very thirsty and saw a bowl of water on a table. He drank it before realizing that it was alcohol and became drunk. He then forgot about the precept and drank even more. He next wanted some food so he captured a chicken wandering on his property, killed it, and ate it. As it turned out it was a neighbor's chicken. The neighbor's wife came to this man's house to ask if he had seen the chicken. He told her he had not and then forced himself on her. The wife ran home and told her husband about what happened and he went to the authorities. He also went to Shakyamuni Buddha's and complained, "Look at what your disciple has done."

So this man, starting with one drink, broke the precept against drinking, against stealing, against killing, against lying, and against sexual misconduct. So, even if drinking may seem harmless, it can have very negative consequences.

Afternoon Talk

Confirmation and Dharma Transmission

I have introduced the methods of Chan in a very brief but systematic way. I have described the basic practices of Chan, and also the two main methods of the two major schools: the silent illumination of the Caodong School and the *huatou* of the Linji (Jap., Rinzai) School. Furthermore, I have talked about seeing one's self-nature and what that involves. I have outlined this all rather clearly. You are all excellent students with a great ability to understand the Dharma. Although we speak different languages, you have been very good at absorbing the teachings.

During personal interview someone here asked me about confirmation and Dharma transmission. I would like to explain these two issues. Confirmation of an

enlightenment experience involves the Dharma of the Mind, but the master and the disciple should know each other and discuss the experience and their minds should be in accord. It is like two hands coming together perfectly. The minds of the two people should somehow match and it is only under these conditions that the master will give this confirmation. I should add that the master might know a little bit more about whether there is a matching of minds than the disciple. This matching or tallying between master and the disciple can be also likened to an imprint of one's hand. If you make an imprint in plaster of your hand and the other person's hand fits perfectly into this imprint, this would be a metaphor for a tallying, or matching of minds.

The process by which a master gives confirmation to a disciple is called *yinke* in Chinese Chan and *inka* in Japanese Zen. The ordinary meaning of this word is 'confirmation,' in the sense of a seal of approval. You may have seen seal stampings on Chinese paintings. So it's like your stamping this seal and saying, "This confirms your experience." It is also called *xinyin*, or mind-seal. However, if you have a teacher who is not enlightened — though he or she may believe so — the disciple who receives such a seal may not be genuinely enlightened either, and neither will be the future teachers in the line.

When I was 28, one of my teachers helped me to see self-nature. But it was not until I was about 42 that I received confirmation from my lineage master. Around that time, I returned to Taiwan from America and told my teacher that I was teaching meditation in the United States. He said, "Well, I guess you need my confirmation now." That was how I got *yinke*. But I do not really care whether I have this confirmation or not and I really don't have a personal need for it. Either way, I know that I am not yet liberated and I have to keep working hard.

As for transmission, what it mainly means is that the disciple has received permission to teach the Dharma from his or her lineage master. It is not necessarily a measure of one's level of enlightenment. So, transmission is basically permission from one's teacher to teach the Dharma. Please be clear, only the Dharma of Teachings can be transmitted. Dharma of Mind can never be transmitted. However, even when transmitting the Dharma of the Teachings, it is best if the disciple has at least seen the nature. It is not an essential condition to teach but it is much preferable if the disciple has seen the nature. A teacher who has not seen self-nature can still teach the methods and principles of Buddhism but will not be able to confirm a disciple. If a teacher has not seen the nature but one of his or her students has, this is of course a good thing. However, a problem can occur if students try to confirm their own experience. In principle a practitioner can know whether they have seen the nature but in actual practice they should not confirm themselves. If the disciple has no vexations, has a

compassionate vow, and has bodhi-mind, then the disciple can know that. But in practice, without an enlightened teacher confirming a disciple, anyone who thinks they are enlightened can go around acting like it and saying so. As a result there would be too many false teachers.

Thus, there is a more advanced transmission in which a disciple is given permission not only to teach the Dharma but also to confirm others. There should be four criteria for such a transmission. First of all the disciple should have seen their self-nature. Second, the disciple should have a great compassionate vow, in other words, aroused bodhicitta. Third, the disciple should have a mind of renunciation, which means being pure in behavior. Fourth, the disciple practices very diligently, especially the three studies of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. Of course, as a precondition, even necessary to seeing self-nature, the disciple must hold correct views of the Buddhadharma. Without this, one may be able to achieve unified mind but one cannot experience self-nature.

Maybe all of this isn't very important, or people are not so interested in this issue.

Or, maybe many are interested but find it not all that important at this point. I recommend that you not think too much about enlightenment and transmission. Instead, use your practice, energy, and vows, and channel that into the method. You should also help and encourage others to study the Dharma. What is most important is to use the Dharma of the Teachings to help in your personal relations. This is what the teachings of the Dharma can be used for and that is more important than getting confirmed. What is the use of being confirmed if one can't manage one's own life? In fact, other people will look at this person and say, "Is this the way Chan practitioners are?" Such a person will cause damage to Buddhism. This is actually because this person lacks wisdom and compassion.

We have time for one question.

Question: What is nirvana?

Sheng Yen: Nirvana is a state that can be described as perfect quiescence. In this state, there is no arising and no extinguishing, no birth and no death. There is also a distinction between the nirvana of a shravaka, and the nirvana of a buddha. In the case of the shravaka, one passes into nirvana and does not have another birth. In the nirvana of a buddha, the buddha is diffused throughout all worlds and all time. At the same time, we cannot say this occurs *within* time and space. Otherwise that buddha would just be an ordinary person. So, a buddha who enters nirvana is diffused *throughout* time and space but cannot be said to be *in* time and space.

Whether one achieves the nirvana of a shravaka (arhat) or a buddha, both nirvanas have two aspects. The first aspect is, after having achieved nirvana there

is a period of time in which this shravaka or buddha is still in the world but vexations neither arise nor pass away. There are simply no more vexations for this shravaka or buddha.

But for both the shravaka and the buddha, there comes a time when the physical body dies, and after this the shravaka or buddha will enter the nirvana in which there is no birth or death, in other words, has left behind samsara. After transcending samsara, the shravaka has left time and space, and remains in nirvana. But after nirvana, a buddha may enter at any time into any space in order to help sentient beings. To distinguish these two nirvanas, we can say that the shravaka's nirvana is simply called 'nirvana,' and the Buddha's nirvana is called 'mahanirvana,' meaning 'great nirvana.'

This concludes my lectures for this retreat. I've talked about a very large scope of things, from our existence in the world of birth and death, to a stage when birth and death cease to exist. So it is interesting that we got this question at the very end. It was a good question to have come up at this time.

Glossary

C = Chinese, J = Japanese, S = Sanskrit

Arhat: (S., lit. ‘noble one’ or ‘worthy one’) In Buddhism, an arhat is one who has completed the course of practice and has attained full liberation from samsara, the cycle of birth and death. Referred to as ‘one who has no more to learn,’ the arhat has become liberated from all desires and defilements, and has attained nirvana. As such, the arhat is no longer subject to rebirth and death. See **Bodhisattva, Nirvana, Samsara.**

Bodhicitta: (S., lit. ‘awakened mind,’ or ‘bodhi-mind’) Bodhicitta is a central idea in Mahayana Buddhism, with various meanings: 1) the altruistic mind of enlightenment which aspires to Buddhahood for the sake of helping sentient beings; 2) the genuine actualization of enlightenment, awakening to the true nature of reality and the loftiness of Buddhahood; 3) selfless action. Arousing bodhicitta (bodhi-mind) is the first step in establishing oneself on the bodhisattva path. This last meaning, selfless action, is very important but often overlooked. See **Bodhisattva.**

Bodhi-mind: See **Bodhicitta.**

Bodhisattva: (S., lit. ‘awakened being’ or ‘enlightened being’) The bodhisattva is the model ideal of the Mahayana School of Buddhism, one who practices for the sake of sentient beings, as opposed to practicing for one’s own liberation. In this sense, the bodhisattva path is contrasted with that of the arhat. See **Arhat, Bodhicitta, Four Great Vows.**

Buddhadharma: (S., lit. ‘truth of the Buddha’) Collectively, the Dharma teachings of the Buddha. The Dharma should not be understood as a fixed set of doctrines. Thus the Buddha said, "The Dharma has no fixed Dharma." Essentially, the Buddha taught in response to the different dispositions of sentient beings.

Caodong: (J., Soto) School of Chinese Buddhism. The school was named after its two founders, Master Cao-shan and Master Dong-shan, hence the name Caodong. The Caodong School emphasizes the practice of silent illumination (J., *shikantaza*), although practices such as *gong’an* and *huatou* were also common. Along with the Linji (J., Rinzai) the Caodong (J., Soto) School one of the two major surviving schools of Chan/Zen Buddhism.

Dharma: (S., ‘truth’ or ‘law’) See **Buddhadharma**.

Diamond Sutra: (S., *Vajrachedika Sutra*, lit. ‘diamond-cutter sutra’) One of the major sutras, itself being part of the longer *Prajnaparamita Sutra*. Its basic teaching is the illusory nature of phenomena, i.e., that all experience, whether of oneself or others, is essentially lacking in true selfhood. To realize this in actual experience is to experience ‘emptiness,’ the beginning of true enlightenment.

Five Skandhas: (S., lit. ‘five heaps’ or ‘five aggregates’) The five skandhas, or aggregates, are the constituents of the sentient being’s experience of the world. They are form, sensation, perception, volition, and consciousness. The first skandha, form, is the material component; the other four are mental in nature. Operating together, the five skandhas create the illusion of separate existence and the notion of self or ego.

Four Great Vows: The Four Great Vows of the bodhisattva are:

I vow to save all sentient beings.

I vow to cut off all vexations.

I vow to master all approaches to the Dharma.

I vow to achieve supreme buddhahood.

See **Bodhisattva**.

Gong’an: (C., lit. ‘public case’, J., koan) A saying or anecdote from the records of the Chan masters that is used as a means of investigating the nature of enlightened mind (*t’san chan*). The purpose of the exercise is to focus the mind and create a ‘mass of doubt,’ to the point that all attachments and dualistic thinking are dropped, and the practitioner experiences a breakthrough – the direct perception of Buddhist ‘emptiness.’ In Chan, *gong’an* practice is closely associated with the practice of *huatou*. See **Huatou**.

Huatou: (C., lit. ‘head of a thought,’ J., wato) Meditation practice of the Chan school in which the practitioner deeply investigates a question, such as “Who am I?” or “Who is it that asks?” in order to raise the doubt mass that can lead to a breakthrough and enlightenment. The method can only be penetrated if the practitioner abandons conceptual and discriminating mind while practicing the *huatou*. In Chan, *huatou* practice is closely associated with the practice of *gong’an*. See **Gong’an**

Koan: (J.) Japanese transliteration of the Chinese ‘*gong’an*.’ See **Gong’an**.

Nirvana: (S., lit. ‘extinction’) Nirvana is the state of having overcome all mental defilements, and being liberated from the cycle of birth and death (samsara). Correspondingly, nirvana is the state of being free from karma, the chain of cause and effect. See **Samsara**.

Patriarch: In the context of Chan/Zen Buddhism, ‘patriarch’ is an honorific referring to one of the six teachers considered to be the founders of the Chan/Zen tradition. Beginning with the Indian monk Bodhidharma (d. 536?), the other five are Chinese. In order of transmission, they are: Huike (487-593), Sengcan (d. 506), Daoxin (580-651), Hongren (602-675), and Huineng (638-713).

Platform Sutra: The record of the sayings and teachings of the sixth patriarch of Chan, Huineng.

Prajna: (S., loosely, ‘wisdom’) The wisdom of enlightenment, that which transcends thoughts, language, and discrimination. It is the wisdom derived from seeing into emptiness.

Prajnaparamita: (S., lit. ‘wisdom that reaches the other shore,’ i.e., transcendent wisdom) In addition to meaning ‘transcendent wisdom,’ the term also refers to the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*, a series of some forty Mahayana sutras on the central topic of prajna, or wisdom. Today, the best-known sutras from the set are the *Heart Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra*.

Samadhi: (S., lit. ‘make firm’) In general, samadhi refers to a state of meditative absorption in which one’s mind has reached a degree of concentration where the sense of time is foreshortened or even temporarily lost. Someone in samadhi for hours, upon coming out of samadhi, may think only a few moments had passed. There are many levels of samadhi from shallow to deep enlightenment. In Buddhism, samadhi is not equated with enlightenment so long as the meditator still entertains a sense of self.

Samsara: (S., lit. ‘journeying’) The relentless cycle of birth and death and suffering in which ordinary, unenlightened sentient beings are deeply entangled. There are three realms within samsara: the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm. To transcend samsara is to enter nirvana, although to the thoroughly enlightened, samsara and nirvana are not different realms—they are one and the same. See **Nirvana**.

Sentient Beings: The term ‘sentient being’ is not restricted to human beings, but includes all living things that are capable of sensation, and therefore, suffering.

Shravaka: (S., lit. “sound-hearer”) One who has become spontaneously enlightened as a result of hearing the Buddha’s teaching.

Silent Illumination: Method of Chan meditation based on putting one’s total awareness on the one’s body ‘just sitting’ in meditation, with the goal of realizing supreme calming of the mind, and insight as to the nature of ‘things as they are.’

Skandha: See **Five Skandhas**.

Sutra: (S., lit. ‘thread’) In Buddhism, ‘sutra’ refers to any of the sermons attributed to Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha. Collectively, the sutras are one part of the tripitaka, the three-part Basket of Teachings, of which the other two are the vinaya (codes of conduct) and the abhidharma (Buddhist psychology and philosophy). A correlative term, ‘sastra’ refers to commentaries or expositions of the sutras.