



THE HIGH-FIDELITY TRANSMISSION OF BODHIDHARMA

**The Diamond Sword that Cuts the Knower
- A Technical Manual for No-Mind**

TRANSLATED BY SOH

THE HIGH-FIDELITY TRANSMISSION OF BODHIDHARMA: The Diamond Sword that
Cuts the Knower – A Technical Manual for No-Mind

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First English edition, 2026

ISBN-13: 978-X-XXXXXXXX-X-X (paperback)

ISBN-13: 978-X-XXXXXXXX-X-X (ebook)

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PREFACE: The High-Fidelity English Transmission of Bodhidharma

By Soh

The texts collected in this volume represent the foundational heartbeat of the Chan (Zen) tradition. Attributed to Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch of Chinese Chan, they mark the historical pivot where Buddhism in China shifted from a tradition of exegetical scholarship to one of direct, experiential realization.

However, bringing these texts into English presents a unique danger—a danger I call the "Trap of the Knower."

For decades, Western readers have been blessed with fluent, poetic translations of Bodhidharma. While these earlier works succeeded in making the text accessible, they often did so by smoothing over the jagged, paradoxical edge of Madhyamaka dialectics. In the pursuit of conversational flow, the radical negation of the subject is often lost. Where the original Chinese implies a spontaneous function without an agent—"seeing without a seer"—translators have frequently inserted the pronoun "I" or "Self," or utilized terms that imply an ultimate Real Self.

This is not merely a linguistic quibble; it is a soteriological error. To read Bodhidharma as teaching a "True Self" that stands apart as a silent witness is to fall into the very dualism he sought to destroy. The *Treatise on No-Mind* (*Wúxīn Lùn*) does not teach us to peel away thoughts to find a "Universal Knower" (or even a Universal Consciousness or Universal Mind, source, or substratum of the universe); it teaches us that the "Knower" is an illusion to begin with.

Why "High-Fidelity"?

This volume presents a "High-Fidelity" translation. My aim is not poetic license, but doctrinal precision.

- Where the text speaks of the "unobtainable" (*bù kě dé*), I have retained that specific ontological weight rather than reducing it to a psychological inability to "grasp."
- Where the text speaks of "Numinous Awareness" (*língjué*), I have avoided terms that suggest a magical power, pointing instead to the self-luminous capacity of mind.
- Where the text implies function without an agent, I have resisted the English grammatical habit of inserting a subject.

These translations are intended for practitioners. They are technical manuals for the realization of No-Mind or *Anatta* (No-Self) and the functioning of *Prajñā* (Wisdom). They demand that the reader stop looking for a "source" elsewhere or behind the display of reality and recognize that the display

itself—vivid, empty, and agentless—is none other than Mind and Mind is none other than the ongoing display.

A Note on the Texts

The works included here are drawn from two primary sources. The majority are found in the *Shaoshi liu men* (Six Gates of Shaoshi), preserved in the Taishō Canon (T2009). Additionally, the critical *Treatise on No-Mind* is drawn from the Dunhuang manuscripts and Taishō Volume 85 (No. 2831). Whether these texts were written by the historical Bodhidharma or compiled by early Chan communities in his name, they carry the undeniable seal of the "Sudden Teaching."

Soh

Awakening to Reality

INTRODUCTION: The Diamond Sword of Bodhidharma

When Bodhidharma arrived in China, traditionally dated to the 5th or 6th century, he did not come merely to add another scripture to the library of the scholastics. While tradition records that he handed the *Lankavatara Sutra* to his successor, his essential transmission was not a text to be analyzed, but a "mind-seal"—a direct pointing to the nature of reality that bypassed the accumulating layers of exegetical commentary. The texts in this collection are the "Diamond Sword" used to cut through the reification of the self, the world, and even the Dharma itself.

To read these texts effectively, we must first understand the figure of Bodhidharma—not just as a historical person, but as a teaching device—and the specific doctrinal errors he was antidoting.

I. History, Hagiography, and the "Wall-Gazing" Brahmin

Bodhidharma stands at the boundary where history dissolves into myth. Standard historical references describe him as a monk from the "Western Regions" (either Persia or South India) who arrived in China during the Liu Song or Liang dynasties. However, the Bodhidharma of *tradition*—the blue-eyed barbarian who crossed the Yangtze on a reed and sat facing a wall for nine years—is a figure constructed by centuries of Chan hagiography.

We should not view these legends as mere fabrications to be discarded. In Chan, biography is pedagogy. The image of Bodhidharma "Wall-Gazing" (*bìguān*) at the Shaolin Temple is not just a story about a man sitting in a cave; it is a visual metaphor for the state of mind required for entry into the Way: steep, stable, and immovable, cutting off all external entanglements.

As stated in the *Two Entries and Four Practices* (translated in this volume), Wall-Gazing is the method to "steadfastly abide," allowing the realization that "ordinary beings and sages are equal and one." It is the cessation of the seeking mind.

II. The Primal Transmission: Mahākāśyapa's Smile

To understand the "Direct Pointing" Bodhidharma brought to China, we must look back to the mythic origin of the Chan lineage itself—the assembly on Vulture Peak. It is said that Shakyamuni Buddha held up a flower before the assembly and remained silent. Only Mahākāśyapa broke into a smile.

Seeing this, the Buddha declared:

"I possess the Treasury of the Correct Dharma Eye, the wonderful heart-mind of Nirvana, the formless true form, the subtle Dharma gate, not established by written words, transmitted separately outside the teaching. I hand it over and entrust these encouraging words to Kashyapa."

The Eye of Immediacy

What actually happened in that moment? It was not a transaction of secret knowledge or intellectual dogma. The Buddha was referring to something very vibrant and alive—an instant illumination where all discursive thoughts and conceptual filters cease.

The smile of Mahākāśyapa was not the smile of a Self satisfied with its own existence. It was the smile of the True Mind of No-Mind—where one discovers the unfabricated, spontaneous Presence and pristine consciousness of one's own Mind, and through the dawning of prajna wisdom that pierces through false constructs of dualism and inherent existence, the duality of an apprehending subject and apprehended object collapses along with the very realization that this very Mind, empty of its own intrinsic existence, is not to be found elsewhere than all dynamic appearances. This transmission also awakens what we might call the "eye of immediacy": the capacity to penetrate discursive thoughts instantly and feel sound as sound, form as form, with one's entire being. It is a direct knowing without intermediary—too direct to have a subject-object gap, too short to have time, too simple to have thoughts. It is the eye that sees the whole of "flower" by *being* "flower", "sound" by *being* "sound." As the poet Basho suggests:

From the pine tree

Learn of the pine tree

And from the bamboo

of the bamboo.

Commenting on these lines, the Japanese philosopher Nishitani (1982) explains that Basho does not mean

That we should 'observe the pine tree carefully.' Still less does he mean for us to 'study the pine tree scientifically.' He means for us to enter the mode of being where the pine tree is the pine tree itself, and the bamboo is the bamboo itself, and from there to look at the pine tree and the bamboo. He calls on us to betake ourselves to the dimension where things become manifest in their suchness. (p. 128)

In the same vein, Zen Master Dogen advises: "You should not restrict yourselves to learning to see water from the viewpoints of human beings alone. Know that you must see water in the way water sees water" (Izutsu, 1972, p. 140).

The Maturation of Insight: From Presence to the Seal

While Bodhidharma's teaching is known as the "Sudden School," for the vast majority of practitioners, the lived unfolding of this "Mind" involves a maturation of insight. While Bodhidharma may not have explicitly broken his teaching into rigid stages, the realization of the "Wonderful Heart-Mind of Nirvana" generally implies two distinct aspects of awakening:

1. Apprehending the Mind (*Míngxīn*): The Initial Breakthrough

Throughout his texts, Bodhidharma emphasizes that without this primary recognition, all other efforts are futile. As he states in the *Bloodstream Sermon*: "If you do not recognize your own Mind, reciting idle texts is entirely useless." ¹

This is the realization of the "Host" or the "Watcher"—recognizing the "doubtless, luminously clear and vivid Presence" of one's true essence. It is the recovery of the subject before the realization of the emptiness of the subject.

To trigger this realization, the Chan tradition utilizes "Direct Pointing" and *gong'an* (koans) to cut through the conceptual mind.

- The Sixth Patriarch Hui-Neng asked: "When you are not thinking of anything good and anything bad, at that moment, what is your original face?"
- Similarly, my teacher John Tan (Thusness) often uses a potent modern inquiry: "Without thoughts, tell me what is your very mind right now?"

This question is not asking for a description. When a mutual friend replied to John Tan that their mind was "Void" or "Hollow," they were metaphorically "smacked." Why? Because they were offering a

concept of emptiness rather than the living reality of their own presence. As John Tan replied: "Everywhere you go, how can you miss it? Day in and day out, wherever and whenever there is, there 'you' are! How can 'you' distance yourself from 'yourself'?"

This stage requires dropping all "internet Buddhism," all theories of Madhyamaka, Zen or Dzogchen, and returning to the sheer simplicity of *being*. As John Tan advises:

"Don't relate, don't infer, don't think. Authenticating 'You' yourself requires nothing of that... What comes from the innermost depth of your own beingness is the wisdom of you yourself." (See: "*What is your very Mind right now?*" at Awakening to Reality

<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/11/what-is-your-very-mind-right-now.html>).

2. Seeing the Nature (*Jiànxìng*): The Maturation

Once the "Host" is found, one must go further. *Jiànxìng* is the realization that this Mind is "fundamentally empty of inherent, substantial existence."

It is not merely that the "Watcher" dissolves into the watching; it is the realization that the Watcher was never there to begin with. The Pure Presence is revealed not as a permanent soul, background or substratum, but as a dynamic, agentless functioning—luminous, yet ungraspable. One must find the subject (*Míngxīn*) before one can realize the emptiness of the subject and all objects (*Jiànxìng*).

Anatta is a Seal, Not a State

It is vital to understand that this second aspect—*Seeing Nature*—is not a "state" of dissolution that one enters and exits. As the masters have clarified, *Anatta* (No-Self) is a Dharma Seal—a truth that is "always already so."

In the first aspect, one might feel like an "artist in the zone" where the self temporarily disappears into the flow. But true *Seeing Nature* is the realization that there never was an artist. In cooking, there is only the activity of cooking; the universe sings together in the act, and no "chef" can be found behind it. This is not a transient peak experience; it is the ground of all experience. As the Buddha taught in the *Bahiya Sutta* (paraphrased): "In the seeing, there is just the seen, no seer." But this is not a stage to be attained; it is the nature of Reality at all times—though one could argue that, in a conventional sense, it is a "stage," insofar as it is a truth that must be personally realized and experienced, which is what makes the profound difference.

The Necessity of the First Glimpse

A crucial warning must be made here. In Chan literature, we often read that "Mind is mountains, rivers, and the great earth." However, before we can recognize sounds, mountains, and rivers as our own Radiance, it is crucial to first awaken clearly to what Mind truly is in its essence.

If our attention merely fixates on external sounds, mountains, and rivers—as deluded sentient beings habitually do—or if we merely verbally repeat "Mind is mountains and rivers" like a mantra, such practices offer little genuine help. In fact, they perpetuate fundamental ignorance. As the masters have noted, deluded beings remain unaware of the radiant essence of Mind because they identify themselves only with thoughts and perceptions. (See: Preface and Summary for my New Translation of Zen Master Huang Po's Teachings: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/04/essential-dharma-of-mind-transmission.html>)

Therefore, the primary step must be to turn the light backward and directly realize the essence of Mind as a non-conceptual, luminous Presence. One must have a "taste" of this bare Awareness—a direct, intuitive insight into the "I AM" or the sheer fact of Existence—before one can proceed further. Without clearly illuminating and tasting this Mind-essence, teachings on non-duality remain mere eloquent expressions without transformative power. One must find the subject before one can realize the emptiness of the subject.

The Student of High Capacity

This brings us back to Bodhidharma's mission. Why did he leave Emperor Wu? Because the Emperor, despite his vast material merit, lacked the "high capacity" required for this direct transmission. He was trapped in the conceptual "dung" of spiritual accounting.

Bodhidharma then traveled to Shaolin, where he sat in "Wall-Gazing" (*bìguān*) for nine years.

We must be careful here. It is often said he was "waiting" for a successor, and while this is true, we must not mistake this waiting for passive idleness. Bodhidharma's nine years of facing the wall represent the arduous necessity of practice. It is a testament that even for the one who holds the Mind-Seal, the actualization of that reality requires "solid, immovable sitting."

There is a dangerous tendency in modern Zen to assume that because "Mind is originally Buddha," no effort is required. This is the "wild fox Zen" of false freedom. To correct this, we look to the great Japanese master Dogen Zenji, who, seven centuries later, looked back at Bodhidharma's example to clarify the paradox: *If we are already enlightened, why do we practice?*

In his *Fukan Zazengi* (Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen), Dogen writes:

"The way is originally perfect and all-pervading. How could it be contingent on practice and realization? The true vehicle is self-sufficient. What need is there for special effort? Indeed, the whole body is free from dust. Who could believe in a means to brush it clean? It is never apart from this very place; what is the use of traveling around to practice?"

And yet, if there is a hairsbreadth deviation, it is like the gap between heaven and earth. If the least like or dislike arises, the mind is lost in confusion. Suppose you are confident in your understanding and rich in enlightenment, gaining the wisdom that knows at a glance, attaining the Way and clarifying the mind, arousing an aspiration to reach for the heavens. You are playing in the entranceway, but you are still short of the vital path of emancipation.

Consider the Buddha: although he was wise at birth, the traces of his six years of upright sitting can yet be seen. As for Bodhidharma, although he had received the mind-seal, his nine years of facing a wall is celebrated still. If even the ancient sages were like this, how can we today dispense with wholehearted practice?

Therefore, put aside the intellectual practice of investigating words and chasing phrases, and learn to take the backward step that turns the light and shines it inward. Body and mind of themselves will drop away, and your original face will manifest. If you want to realize such, get to work on such right now."

This is the true meaning of a "student of high capacity." It is not someone who is intellectually clever enough to skip the work. It is someone capable of the "backward step."

A student of high capacity does not need to build realizations conceptually step-by-step, but they must be ready to engage the path with their entire being. They are capable of "feeling" the non-dual, clarity, and non-arising nature of reality directly—not as a theory, but as a burning fact.

The transmission is "not established by written words" because explanations often contaminate the raw essence. Words are static; the "Wonderful Heart-Mind of Nirvana" is the dynamic, brilliant, vibrant and ungraspable functioning of reality itself—the "formless true form." Whether through a flower held aloft, a mind brought for pacification, or nine years of facing a wall, the aim is to taste this raw essence directly.

III. The Lankavatara Seal: Beyond Anti-Intellectualism

A common misunderstanding of Bodhidharma's teaching is that it promotes a form of "anti-intellectualism"—a rejection of scripture and study in favor of blind sitting or spontaneous behavior. This view often hinges on the famous slogan: "Not established by written words" (*bù lì wén zì*).

However, historical records paint a more nuanced picture. The early Chan community was not a group of illiterate iconoclasts, but a lineage deeply grounded in the *Lankavatara Sutra* (*Léngqié Jīng*).

The Four-Scroll Transmission

According to the *Further Biographies of Eminent Monks* (Xu Gaoseng Zhuan), when Bodhidharma transmitted the Dharma to Huike, he handed him a copy of the *Lankavatara Sutra* in four scrolls, saying:

"I observe that in this land of China, only this sutra is suitable. If you rely on it to practice, you will cross over to the world into salvation."

For several generations, the Bodhidharma lineage was actually known as the "Lankavatara School" (*Léngqié Zōng*). This sutra is a dense, philosophically rigorous text that details the nature of the "Storehouse Consciousness" (*Alaya-vijnana*) and the "Tatagathagarbha" (Buddha-Womb). It is hardly a text for the intellectually lazy.

"Not Established" Does Not Mean "Abandoned"

What, then, did Bodhidharma mean by "not established by written words"? He did not mean that words are useless. He meant that the Realization of the Way cannot be secured or validated by conceptual formulations.

As the *Lankavatara Sutra* itself teaches, words are like a finger pointing to the moon. The danger is not the finger itself, but the tendency to mistake the finger for the moon. In an era where Chinese Buddhism was dominated by scholastic exegesis—where monks spent lifetimes analyzing commentaries without ever tasting the fruit of practice—Bodhidharma's "Direct Pointing" was a necessary corrective.

He was not telling students to burn their books (that would come later, as a rhetorical device in more radical lineages). He was telling them that the map is not the territory. The *Lankavatara* served as a "seal"—a tool to verify that one's internal realization accorded with the Buddha's intent. It was the "Mind-Ground" verification.

The Middle Path of Study

Therefore, the "High-Fidelity" approach of this book follows Bodhidharma's actual example: we use words to cut through words. We use doctrine to dismantle doctrine.

- We study the "Three Natures" (imagined, dependent, perfected) not to build a philosophy, but to recognize how the mind constructs its own prison.

- We use the "Two Entries" (Principle and Practice) to ensure our insight can stand up in the marketplace, not just on the cushion.

Bodhidharma was not anti-intellectual; he was trans-intellectual. He demanded a wisdom that could function "before the parents were born" —a wisdom that uses the intellect as a servant rather than bowing to it as a master.

IV. The Two Foundational Koans

Two specific encounters define the Bodhidharma tradition. These are not merely historical anecdotes; they serve as the "emotional and philosophical grammar" for the texts you are about to read. They represent the two primary traps the practitioner must overcome: the Outer Trap of Form (Merit) and the Inner Trap of the Subject (The Reified Self).

1. Emperor Wu and the Nuance of "Not Knowing"

The Rejection of Spiritual Materialism and Dualistic Knowledge

After arriving in China, Bodhidharma traveled north to meet Emperor Wu of Liang. The Emperor was the archetype of the "pious self," viewing the Dharma as a transaction where good deeds produce spiritual currency. He expected praise; instead, he received a deconstruction of his entire worldview.

The *Jingde Chuandeng Lu* (Record of the Transmission of the Lamp) records the legendary exchange:

Emperor: "Since ascending the throne, I have built temples, transcribed sutras, and ordained monks beyond numbering. What merit does this hold?"

Bodhidharma: "Absolutely no merit."

Emperor: "Why is there no merit?"

Bodhidharma: "These are merely the small fruits of human and heavenly realms, causes that are still leaking [tainted]. Like a shadow following a form—though it seems to exist, it has no reality."

Emperor: "Then what is true merit?"

Bodhidharma: "Pure Wisdom is subtle and perfect; its essence is inherently empty and quiescent. Such merit cannot be sought through worldly means."

Emperor: "What, then, is the Holy Truth of the Ultimate Meaning?"

Bodhidharma: "Vast emptiness, nothing holy."

Emperor: "Who is this standing before Us?"

Bodhidharma: "Not knowing." (*Or: No knowing*)

The Emperor did not awaken. Bodhidharma knew their potentials did not accord. On the 19th of that month, he quietly departed.

Unpacking the Dialogue

The Emperor was shocked by this encounter. To understand why, and to understand the "High-Fidelity" view of this text, we must look at three subtle nuances in the Chinese narrative that standard translations often gloss over.

1. "Leaking" Causes vs. Pure Wisdom

When Bodhidharma rejects the Emperor's merit, he is not merely being humble. He is making a technical distinction between "Blessings" (*Punya*) and "Wisdom" (*Jñāna*). The Emperor's deeds are "leaking causes" (*yǒulòu*). In Buddhist doctrine, "leaking" (*asrava*) refers to actions that, while good, are still tainted by the self and keep one cycling within Samsara. True merit is "Pure Wisdom" (*Zhi*)—subtle, perfect, and empty—which cannot be calculated or sought by worldly means.

Important Note: The Two Accumulations

Having said that, it is crucial not to misunderstand Bodhidharma's critique as a rejection of wholesome action itself. Accumulating merits is still vitally important. In the broader Mahāyāna path, we speak of the Two Accumulations (*saṃbhāra-dvaya*):

1. The Accumulation of Merit (*puṇya-saṃbhāra*): This refers to virtuous actions (generosity, discipline, patience) performed within the realm of cause and effect. It provides the necessary fuel for the path—creating the stability, resources, and mental capacity required for deep practice.
2. The Accumulation of Wisdom (*jñāna-saṃbhāra*): This is the direct realization of Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and No-Self (*anātman*), which cuts the root of Samsara.

Both are necessary, like the two wings of a bird; without both, the path cannot take flight.

Bodhidharma was not telling the Emperor that building temples was "bad"; he was pointing out that merit sought as a possession, without liberating wisdom, remains "with outflows" (*sāsrava*). It is a "leaking" cause that results in a fortunate rebirth, but not liberation.

To understand why merit remains a critical foundation even for non-dual practitioners, I strongly recommend reading my article: [On the Importance of Merits](#).

2. The Trap of Holiness (*Shèng*)

Grasping for a foothold, the Emperor asked: "What then is the Holy Truth of ultimate meaning?" Note the nuance here: The Emperor used the term *Shèngdì* ("Holy" or "Noble" Truth). He was asking for a sacred principle to hold onto. Bodhidharma replied: "Vast emptiness, no holiness." (*Kuòrán wúshèng*) Bodhidharma explicitly negated the *Shèng* (Holiness). Reality is vast and open; it is not "holy" as opposed to "profane." By seeking holiness, the Emperor had already missed the Ultimate Meaning.

3. The Meaning of "Not Knowing" (*Bùshí*)

Finally, confused by a "Holy Monk" who claims there is "No Holiness," the Emperor asked: "Who is facing me?" Bodhidharma said: "Not knowing." (*Bùshí*)

Standard translations often render this as "I don't know," implying simple ignorance of one's identity. However, this misses the soteriological weight of the reply.

- *Shí* refers to *Vijñāna*—discriminatory consciousness that splits the world into subject and object.
- *Bùshí* implies "Non-cognizing" or "Not-Vijñāna."

Bodhidharma answered this way because, in the direct perception of reality, he does not conceive of a cognizer, a self, an identity, or a "Who" that is facing someone else. The Emperor asked for a Subject ("Who?"), and Bodhidharma pointed to the absence of any subject.

This radical stance is not a Chan invention; it grounds Bodhidharma directly in the earliest teachings of the Buddha. As stated in the *Kālakāra Sutta* (AN 4.24), the Awakened One sees and hears without creating a mental overlay of a "seer" or "hearer" behind the experience:

"Thus, monks, when the Tathāgata sees what is to be seen, he does not conceive the seen; he does not conceive the unseen; he does not conceive the to-be-seen; he does not conceive a seer.

When he hears what is to be heard, he does not conceive the heard; he does not conceive the unheard; he does not conceive the to-be-heard; he does not conceive a hearer. ...

When he cognizes what is to be cognized, he does not conceive the cognized; he does not conceive the uncognized; he does not conceive the to-be-cognized; he does not conceive a cognizer."

Bodhidharma was not offering a biography; he was offering a direct pointing. He was inviting the Emperor to step out of the dualistic mind (*Vijñāna*) and into the direct, non-dual realization (*Jñāna*) where no "Emperor" and no "Monk" can be found. He was trying to break the Emperor's view of "Self

vs. Other" into vast emptiness. But the Emperor did not accord with this insight. Realizing the lack of affinity, Bodhidharma left the court and crossed the Yangtze River.

2. Huike and the Seal of Agentless Action

The Collapse of the Internal Sufferer

Bodhidharma retreated to the Shaolin Monastery, where he sat in "Wall-Gazing" (*bìguān*) for nine years. He was waiting for a student of high capacity. Eventually, Huike arrived. Tradition tells us that to demonstrate his total earnestness, Huike stood in the freezing snow and eventually severed his own arm, presenting it to the Master. This dramatic act symbolizes the absolute resolve and uncompromising sincerity required to cut off the delusion and attachment to a self.

Bodhidharma finally asked what he sought.

Huike said: "My mind is anxious. Please pacify it."

Bodhidharma said: "Bring me your mind, and I will pacify it."

Huike turned his attention inward. He looked for the location, the shape, and the center of this anxiety. Finally, he realized the truth.

Huike said: "I have searched for my mind, but it is unobtainable." (*Mì xīn liǎo bù kě dé*)

Bodhidharma confirmed: "There. I have pacified your mind."

The Doctrinal Crux: Action Without an Agent

We must be very precise here to avoid a common "Nihilistic" misunderstanding. Some interpreters claim: "Huike realized there is no self, therefore there is no suffering and no action." This is false. This view falls into the fallacy of thinking that because the "agent" is gone, the "function" ceases.

Huike's realization was a penetration into the linguistic and cognitive error that splits reality into "Subject" and "Verb."

Our language habituates us to believe that actions must be initiated by things—that verbs require nouns. We say, "It rains," as if there is a mysterious "It" in the sky performing the action of raining. But looking deeply, we see that the "It" is a fiction. You do not need a "Rainer" to have rain. The rain *is* the falling.

Consider a flash of lightning. We say, "The lightning flashes," as if the lightning is the agent and the flash is its action. But is there a thing called "lightning" sitting behind the clouds, waiting to perform a

flash? No. The lightning *is* the flashing. If you take away the flash, you do not have "lightning" left over; you have nothing.

No Nouns Are Needed to Initiate Verbs

The same is true for "Mind" or "Awareness." We habitually treat Awareness as a background noun—a static screen or container that witnesses experience. But in the light of Bodhidharma's pointing, we see that "Awareness" is just like the word "weather"—a mere designation for the ongoing dynamic activities of the universe.

- Just as there is no "weather" apart from the wind blowing, the sun shining, and the rain falling...
- There is no "Mind" apart from the seen, the heard, the sensed.

When Bodhidharma commanded, "Bring me your mind," Huike turned inward to search for the Noun—the "Sufferer," the "Observer," "Thinker," the "owner" of the anxiety. He looked for the entity that claims to be "I."

But he found only happening (the "verb-ing"). He saw the flow of flashing thoughts, the burning of sensations, the movement of anxiety—but no seer, nor a "Captain" (doer) steering the ship.

He realized that there is no thinker behind the thinking—there is just the thinking, which is none other than just the vivid thought itself. There is no seer behind the seeing—there is just seeing, which is none other than the vivid sceneries. The famous dictum "I think, therefore I am", or the position that "I am" is the very delusion Bodhidharma destroys.

V. The Map of This Book

This anthology gathers the essential treatises attributed to this lineage. They can be read in three distinct modes: Study (for doctrinal clarity), Practice (for daily application), and Realization (for cutting through the subject).

1. The Treatise on No-Mind (Wúxīn Lùn)

Source: Dunhuang Manuscripts / Taishō 85 (No. 2831)

This is the philosophical core. It synthesizes Madhyamaka dialectics with Chan immediacy. It refutes the "Knower" using the metaphor of the Heavenly Drum—music that plays without a musician. It is the antidote to the view of a "Universal Self."

2. The Two Entries and Four Practices (Erru Sixing Lun)

Source: Shaoshi liu men / Taishō 2009

The most historically reliable text. It bridges absolute principle ("Entry by Principle") with daily conduct ("Entry by Practice"). It provides a cognitive framework for transmuting adversity and success into the path, ensuring that "emptiness" does not become an excuse for passivity.

3. The Bloodstream Sermon (Xuemaì Lun)

Source: Shaoshi liu men / Taishō 2009

The radical "Sudden Teaching." It is iconoclastic, warning that without "Seeing Nature" (Jiànxìng), all rituals and scripture study are in vain. Note: When this text speaks of "Mind," it refers to the immediate, non-dual functioning, not a metaphysical substance.

4. The Treatise on the Awakening of Nature (Wuxing Lun)

Source: Shaoshi liu men / Taishō 2009

This text collapses the distance between the "World" and the "Mind." It reveals that the Three Realms of Samsara are not external locations but are constituted entirely by Greed, Anger, and Delusion. To realize the nature of mind is to realize that the Three Realms have no independent existence. It points to the "Dharma Seal" of reality—that the nature of mind is always already quiescent, and liberation is not a change of location, but a change of vision.

5. The Dharma Gate of Pacifying the Mind (Anxin Famen)

Source: Shaoshi liu men / Taishō 2009

Focuses on the delusion of "direct perception." It challenges the idea that we see the world "as it is," arguing that what the ego takes as direct experience is often a dreamlike imputation.

6. The Treatise on Breaking Through Marks (Pò Xiàng Lùn)

Source: Shaoshi liu men / Taishō 2009

A manual on internalization. It takes the external forms of Buddhism (burning incense, casting images) and reveals them as metaphors for internal wisdom and discipline.

VI. Doctrinal Guardrails: How Not to Misread

Because these texts use the language of "Mind" (*Xin*) and "True Nature," they are susceptible to two major errors. As you read, keep these guardrails in mind:

Guardrail 1: Do Not Reify the "Knower"

When the text says "It is No-mind that knows," do not imagine a "Super-Self" hiding behind the curtain. There is no "Knower" separate from the knowing. The knowing is the phenomenon. The redness of the rose is the knowing of the redness. There is no witness standing apart from it.

Guardrail 2: Do Not Fall into Nihilism

Bodhidharma's rhetoric often negates "cause and effect" or "merit." This is a negation of inherent existence, not of conventional causality. As the Bloodstream Sermon warns, those who deny cause and effect while creating evil karma fall into hell. The "Sage" does not ignore karma; the Sage is not confused by karma. This is the difference between "Not Falling" (denial) and "Not Obscuring" (clarity), as taught in the famous Baizhang's Fox koan.

Guardrail 3: "Unobtainable" does not mean "I can't reach it"

I translate *bù kě dé* as "Unobtainable." This is the Chinese rendering of the Sanskrit *anupalabdha*. It does not mean "I am trying to grasp it but I can't." It means the object is unfindable because it has no inherent existence. It was never there to begin with.

VII. A Final Word

These treatises are not intended to be read as philosophy. They are *Dhāranīs* of sorts—codes meant to unlock a shift in view.

When the text says, "Motion is mind's function," do not intellectualize it as a theory of causality. Look at your own hand moving. Is there a "mover" separate from the movement? Or is there simply the spontaneous display of function?

Let this book be a mirror. Don't just read it; use it to *See Nature*.

The Lineage of the Mind-Seal

A Note on History and Hagiography

The lineage chart below represents the traditional genealogy of the Chan/Zen school as recorded in Song-dynasty compilations like the *Jingde Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* (1004 CE).

Historically, these lists evolved over centuries, serving to legitimize the school's claim of a "separate transmission outside the scriptures." For the practitioner, however, this list is not merely a historical

claim; it is a map of the transmission of Prajñā—the "Eye of Immediacy"—passing from mind to mind, unbroken by the conceptual intellect.

I. The Seven Ancient Buddhas

Chan tradition honors the Buddhas of the past, signifying that the Truth is timeless and not the invention of Shakyamuni.

1. Vipāśyin Buddha
2. Śikhin Buddha
3. Viśvabhū Buddha
4. Krakucchanda Buddha
5. Kanakamuni Buddha
6. Kāśyapa Buddha
7. Shakyamuni Buddha (The Historical Buddha)

II. The Twenty-Eight Indian Patriarchs

Tracing the "Silent Transmission" from the Flower Sermon at Vulture Peak.

1. Mahākāśyapa

(Receives the transmission of the "True Dharma Eye" via the Flower Sermon)

2. Ānanda
3. Śāṅkavāsa
4. Upagupta
5. Dhṛtaka
6. Miccaka
7. Vasumitra
8. Buddhanandi
9. Buddhamitra
10. Pārśva

11. Puṇyayaśas
12. Aśvaghōṣa
13. Kapimāla
14. Nāgārjuna

(Highlighted here because his Madhyamaka dialectic—the radical negation of inherent existence—provides the philosophical “bone structure” for Bodhidharma’s teaching of No-Mind.)

15. Kāṇadeva (Āryadeva)
16. Rāhulata
17. Saṅghanandi
18. Gayāśata
19. Kumāralāta
20. Jayatā
21. Vasubandhu
22. Manorhita
23. Haklena
24. Āryasiṃha
25. Basiasita
26. Puṇyamitra
27. Prajñātāra

(The teacher of Bodhidharma, who instructed him to travel East.)

III. The Six Chinese Patriarchs

The establishment of the lineage in the Land of Han.

28. Bodhidharma (The First Patriarch of China)

(The bridge between West and East. He transmitted the “Lankavatara Seal” of Mind-Only and the practice of Wall-Gazing.)

29. Dazu Huike (The Second Patriarch)

(Realized "Mind is Unobtainable." In early sources, the community following him was sometimes referred to as the "Lankavatara School" [Léngqié Zōng] due to their reliance on the Lankavatara Sutra.)

30. Jianzhi Sengcan (The Third Patriarch)

(Author of the Faith in Mind [Xinxin Ming].)

31. Dayi Daoxin (The Fourth Patriarch)

(Established the first settled monastic community for Chan.)

32. Daman Hongren (The Fifth Patriarch)

(The Master of East Mountain.)

33. Dajian Huineng (The Sixth Patriarch)

(The illiterate woodcutter who realized "Original Nature is fundamentally pure." With him, the "robe and bowl" transmission ceased, and the Dharma flowed into the "Five Houses" of classical Chan.)

The Flowering of the Five Houses

After the Sixth Patriarch, Dajian Huineng, the formal transmission of the patriarchal robe and bowl ceased, signifying that the Dharma could no longer be contained within a single lineage holder. Instead, the Chan stream burst its banks, dividing into multiple tributaries known as the "Five Houses" (*Wǔjiā*). These distinct lineages—Guiyang, Linji, Caodong, Yunmen, and Fayan—each developed unique pedagogical styles to suit different capacities.

While the Linji school became famous for its dynamic and jarring methods—using shouting, beating, and the probing interrogation of *gong'an* (koan) to shatter dualistic thinking—the Caodong school emphasized "Silent Illumination" (*Mòzhào*). This approach, later known as *shikantaza* ("just sitting") in Japan, focuses on the inherent radiance of the mind settling into its own non-abiding awareness without grasping for a result. Yet, despite these stylistic differences, all lineages shared the same "One Taste" of the Bodhidharma transmission: the direct realization of the empty and luminous nature of Mind which is No-Mind. This era, often called the "Golden Age of Chan," established the monastic codes and meditative technologies that would eventually carry the lamp of Chan to Korea (Seon), Japan (Zen), and Vietnam (Thiền), where these dual streams of dynamic inquiry and silent sitting continue to flow today.

[The Doctrine of No Mind by Bodhidharma \(无心论\)](#)

Soh



Also see:

[Way of Bodhi](#)

[Wishing Prayer for the Attainment of the Ultimate Mahamudra](#)

[Madhyamaka, Cittamātra, and the true intent of Maitreya and Asaṅga](#)

Translator (Soh)'s Commentary: The Treatise on No-Mind (Wúxīn Lùn)

Textual Note

The *Treatise on No-Mind* (*Wúxīn Lùn*; 無心論) is preserved among the Dunhuang manuscripts (e.g., Stein no. 5619) and is included in the Taishō Canon (Vol. 85, No. 2831). While traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma, modern scholarship treats the authorship as uncertain, suggesting it may be a product of the early Chan period (approx. 8th century). It represents a critical synthesis of Madhyamaka dialectics and early Chan "True Mind" terminology.

The Trap of the Knower (Negating the Subject)

The central theme of this text is the radical negation of the reified subject. A common trap for practitioners—and a frequent point of confusion in Western interpretations of Chan—is to mistake the negation of thoughts for the affirmation of a "Universal Knower" or "Witness Consciousness" (similar to the Atman of Advaita).

In that view, one peels away thoughts to arrive at a "True Self" that stands apart as the silent witness. However, this text explicitly rejects that duality. When the disciple asks, "*Who knows there is no mind?*" the text does not reply, "The True Self knows." It replies, "It is still No-mind that is able to know."

This implies the total collapse of the "Knower" as an entity. The text states:

"To enable your awakening to the Truth: Even if there is seeing, seeing all day long is essentially non-seeing; seeing is also No-mind. Hearing all day long is essentially non-hearing; hearing is also No-mind. Sensing all day long is essentially non-sensing; sensing is also No-mind. Cognizing all day long is essentially non-cognizing; cognizing is also No-mind. Functioning all day long, functioning is essentially non-functioning; functioning is also No-mind. Thus it is said: seeing, hearing, sensing, and cognizing are entirely No-mind."

This passage points to the realization that there is no "See-er" standing behind the seeing, nor even a reified field of "seeing" established apart from the seen. This insight corresponds directly to the [Two Stanzas of Anatta](#) often discussed in *Awakening to Reality*:

Stanza 1: There is thinking, no thinker. There is hearing, no hearer. There is seeing, no seer.

Stanza 2: In thinking, just thoughts. In hearing, just sounds. In seeing, just forms, shapes and colors.

Bodhidharma's assertion that "seeing is essentially non-seeing" (見由為無見) parallels the insight that we should not conceptualize or reify "seeing" as a substance or field for the display of experience.

Instead, there is only the spontaneous presence of the display itself. This is perfectly illustrated in the [following exchange between Geovani Geo and John Tan](#):

Geovani Geo: "We hear a sound. The immediate deeply inbuilt conditioning says, 'hearing'. But there is a fallacy there. There is only sound. Ultimately, no hearer and no hearing. The same with all other senses. A centralized, or expanded, or zero-dimensional inherent perceiver or aware-er is an illusion."

John Tan: "Very good. Means both stanza is clear. In hearing, no hearer. In hearing, only sound. No hearing."

Thus, the "No-mind" of Bodhidharma is not a blank void, but the seamless function free of the duality of "knower" and "known", and when the fixation on an apprehender and apprehended collapses in light of Prajñā (wisdom), it leaves only the vivid, self-luminous and empty self-display or spontaneous and self-knowing manifestation of *just the sound* or *just the sight*—function itself, devoid of a subjective agent, seer, hearer, etc.

Interdependence and the Rejection of Nihilism

The realization of No-Mind is not a descent into nothingness. "No-Mind" (Wúxīn) and "Unobtainable" do not imply a void of non-existence, but rather the lack of inherent existence.

This is most clearly expressed in the Disciple's moment of Great Awakening:

"He began to know that outside of mind there are no things, and outside of things there is no mind; in all behavior and action, he attained mastery."

Therefore, "No-Mind" is not a state to be created. No Mind is what is always already true. It has no existence of its own. No mind apart from phenomena, no phenomena apart from mind. Whether one is deluded or enlightened, the self is unfindable. The difference lies only in the realization. As the text states, *"It is only because sentient beings delusively grasp at having a mind... If one awakens to No-mind, then there are no afflictions, birth-and-death, or Nirvana whatsoever."*

Crucially, simply negating the self-construct without a direct taste of consciousness *as* appearance remains a merely conceptual understanding of *Anatta*. There is no genuine realization of No-Mind ("outside of things there is no mind") or Anatman (No-Self) without realizing that the radiance of Mind is all appearances ("outside of mind there are no things"). Although 'Mind' or 'Awareness' is negated, it is not to say there is nothing. Negating the Mind/Awareness/Presence (Absolute) is not to let Mind/Awareness remain at the abstract level.

When such transpersonal Mind/Awareness that exists only in la la land (as some formless transpersonal or universal background, source or substratum) is negated, the vivid radiance of presence are fully tasted in the transient appearances; zero gap and zero distance between presence and moment to moment of ordinary experiences and we realize separation has always only been conventional. Then mundane activities -- hearing, sitting, standing, seeing and sensing, become pristine and vibrant, natural and free.

Genuine realization is simultaneous: it penetrates the reification of the subject while authenticating Presence as the display itself, without a background. In other words, it realizes the total absence of an agent, while actualizing the Mind of Clear Light as the mountains, rivers, and the myriad things.

Both John Tan and I like this text by Bodhidharma. John Tan, who mentioned this text on numerous occasions, said in 2022, 'The emptiness is not easy to point out, only the clarity aspect. And I told you the anatta in ATR [Awakening to Reality] is unique in the sense that it points to presence... ..It is like 无心论 [the Doctrine of No-Mind by Bodhidharma].

The Inseparability of Awareness and Conditions

This highlights the insight of dependent origination: Mind has no independent existence separate from phenomena. It is not a "container" or a "mirror" that passively holds or reflects the world. Mind is the phenomena—seeing, hearing, sensing—yet it is empty of any fixed nature. Not only is it empty of an independent existence, one starts to see and feel this moment of arising as the exertion of all conditions.

As Bodhidharma states in the *Bloodstream Sermon*:

"With the condition of eyes, forms are seen; with the condition of ears, sounds are heard... every movement or state is all one's Mind."

We must be very precise here. Bodhidharma is not saying that there is a "Self" using the eyes to see. He is saying that "Seeing" arises through the convergence of conditions.

1. The Bell (Auditory Manifestation)

Consider the experience of hearing a bell.

- The Dualistic View: You feel that there is an "I" or an observer located inside the head, and a "Bell" (Object) located outside. The "I" acts as a mirror reflecting the sound.
- The View of Dependent Origination: There is no "I" listening. There is only the convergence of conditions—the bronze of the bell, the hardness of the striker, the vibration of the air, and the sensitivity of the ear drum.

The Realization: When these conditions meet, a burst of luminosity arises: Sound. That Sound *is* the Awareness. The bell, the stick, and the air are not "external objects"; they are the conditions for Mind to manifest as Sound. One must touch and feel the inseparability of Mind/Manifestation/Conditions: all conditions totally exerting as sound. As John Tan said, "One must lose all mind and body by feeling with entire mind and body this essence which is Mind (心). Yet Mind too is unobtainable/unfindable (不可得).. The purpose is not to deny Mind but rather not to place any limitations or duality so that Mind can fully manifest. Therefore without understanding 缘 (conditions), is to limit 心 (Mind). Without understanding 缘 (conditions), is to place limitation in its manifestations."

2. The Rainbow (Visual Manifestation)

To understand how this display is both "vividly apparent" yet "totally empty," my teacher John Tan offers the analogy of the Rainbow:

"Listening to someone tutoring about 'rainbow',

The teaching of science came to my mind.
The raindrops, the sunshine;
The light that enters and exits the droplets;
The reflection, refraction and light dispersion;
All these formed the rainbow.
But they missed the most important factor,
The radiance of our own mind."

Science can explain the physical conditions (raindrops, light, refraction), but it often misses the primary condition: The Mind itself.

However, do not mistake this "Radiance" for a spotlight coming from the subject. The "Radiance" is not separate from the colors. The Red, Orange, and Green are the Radiance.

As Juliette Paul elucidates:

"Rainbows need to have eyes in correct position, water droplets, light, radiant mind... Move slightly and rainbow is gone. Never came from anywhere, stayed anywhere, or went anywhere. The rainbow was insubstantial, but vividly displayed. All phenomena are like this."

This is the essence of Bodhidharma's teaching. The world you see is like that rainbow. It is insubstantial (empty of inherent existence) because if you remove one condition (the light, the rain, or the mind), it vanishes. Yet, right now, it is vividly displayed. Mind is not a blank screen *behind* the rainbow; Mind *is* the vivid, ungraspable display of the rainbow itself.

3. Thoughts (Mental Manifestation)

This applies equally to thoughts. We often view thoughts as "my" creation, but Zen Master Hong Wen Liang points out that thoughts are merely "natural physiological phenomena" arising through conditions, just like the weather.

"Even if you don't want it to come, it comes... Who knows how it is dependently arisen? ... Only after it has arrived do you know. Therefore, this is dependent origination; dependent origination fundamentally means there is no 'you'." — Hong Wen Liang

When we realize this, we stop trying to control the mind from the standpoint of an "I." We realize that every thought, every sound, and every visual color is the Dharma-nature manifesting perfectly and spontaneously according to conditions. It is as if the entire universe is giving its very best for this single

moment of "Hearing" or "Seeing" to arise. This is the dynamic, living Mind of Bodhidharma—not a static void, but the total exertion of the cosmos.

Function without Agency (The Heavenly Drum)

The text uses the metaphors of the Heavenly Drum and the Wish-fulfilling Gem to explain how action occurs without an actor. These objects perform functions (emitting sound, manifesting treasures) without agency, dictation or control by an internal agent. This is the ideal of *anābhoga* (effortless action): functioning perfectly without a "ghost in the machine."

Translation: The Treatise on No-Mind

(Taishō 85, No. 2831)

Now, the Supreme Principle is wordless; it is necessary to borrow words to reveal the Principle. The Great Way is signless; to guide the unrefined, form is displayed. Now, let us tentatively establish two persons to discuss the treatise on No-mind together.

Disciple: "Is there a mind or is there no mind?"

Teacher: "No-mind."

Disciple: "Since you say there is no mind, who can perform seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing? Who knows there is no mind?"

Teacher: "It is still No-mind that performs seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing. It is still No-mind that is able to know No-mind."

Disciple: "Since it is No-mind, it should define the absence of seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing. How can there be seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing?"

Teacher: "Though I am without mind, I am able to see, able to hear, able to sense, and able to know."

Disciple: "Since you are able to see, hear, sense, and know, that is precisely having a mind. How can you call it 'No-mind'?"

Teacher: "Simply that seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing is precisely No-mind. Where else, apart from seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing, is there a separate No-mind? I now fear you do not understand, so I will explain it for you, to enable your awakening to the Truth:

Seeing all day long is essentially non-seeing; seeing is also No-mind.

Hearing all day long is essentially non-hearing; hearing is also No-mind.

Sensing all day long is essentially non-sensing; sensing is also No-mind.

Cognizing all day long is essentially non-cognizing; cognizing is also No-mind.

Functioning all day long, functioning is essentially non-functioning; functioning is also No-mind.

Thus it is said: seeing, hearing, sensing, and cognizing are entirely No-mind."

Disciple: "How can one know that it is No-mind?"

Teacher: "You need only investigate carefully: what appearance does the mind make? Is that mind obtainable? Is it mind or is it not mind? Is it located inside, located outside, or located in between? If one investigates in these three locations, searching for the mind, it is completely unobtainable; even searching in all places, it is unobtainable. You should know this is precisely No-mind."

Disciple: "Since the teacher says that in all places there is always No-mind, it should define the absence of transgression and merit. Why do sentient beings undergo samsara in the six realms continuously without interruption?"

Teacher: "Sentient beings are confused and deluded; right within No-mind, they delusively give rise to a mind. They create various kinds of karma and delusively grasp at it as existing; this is sufficient to cause them to cycle through the six realms, with birth and death uninterrupted.

It is like a person in the dark seeing a tree stump as a ghost, or seeing a rope as a snake, and then giving rise to terror. The delusive grasping of sentient beings is also just like this. In no-mind, they falsely grasp at 'having mind,' produce manifold karmic actions, and truly there is none who does not transmigrate through the six paths. Such sentient beings, if they meet a great spiritual friend who teaches them to sit in meditation and awaken to No-mind, then all karmic obscurations are entirely extinguished, and birth and death are immediately severed. It is like in the darkness: as soon as the sunlight shines, the darkness is entirely gone. If one awakens to No-mind, the extinguishment of all transgressions is also just like this."

Disciple: "This disciple is dull-witted and my mind is still not clear. Examining all places, should the function of the six sense faculties be responsive?"

Teacher: "[Regarding] speech and various activities, afflictions and Bodhi, birth-and-death and Nirvana—is it definitely No-mind or not?^[2] It is definitely No-mind. It is only because sentient beings

delusively grasp at having a mind that there are all afflictions, birth-and-death, Bodhi, and Nirvana. If one awakens to No-mind, then there are no afflictions, birth-and-death, or Nirvana whatsoever.

Therefore, for those with a mind, the Tathāgata speaks of having birth and death; Bodhi is named in opposition to afflictions, and Nirvana is named in opposition to birth and death. These are all methods of counteraction. If there is no mind to be obtained, then afflictions and Bodhi are also unobtainable, and even birth-and-death and Nirvana are also unobtainable."

Disciple: "Since Bodhi and Nirvana are unobtainable, the past Buddhas all attained Bodhi; is this saying acceptable?"

Teacher: "It is merely attained through the words of worldly truth; in ultimate truth, there is really nothing obtainable. Therefore, the Vimalakīrti Sūtra says: 'Bodhi cannot be attained by the body, nor can it be attained by the mind.' Furthermore, the Diamond Sūtra says: 'There is not the slightest dharma obtainable.' The Buddhas and Tathāgatas simply attained through the unobtainable. You should know: if there is mind, then everything exists; if there is No-mind, everything is absent [of self-nature]."

Disciple: "Since the teacher says that in all places, it is entirely No-mind, wood and stone also have no mind; surely this is not the same as wood and stone?"

Teacher: "Though I abide in No-mind, this mind is not like wood or stone. Why is this? It is like the Heavenly Drum; although it is without a mind, it naturally produces various marvelous Dharmas to teach and transform sentient beings. Also, like the Wish-fulfilling Gem (Cintāmaṇi); although it is without a mind, it is naturally able to produce various transformational displays.

My No-mind is also just like this. Although completely without mind, it is perfectly able to awaken to and understand the true characteristics of all dharmas, is endowed with true prajñā [wisdom], possesses the mastery of the Three Bodies, and its responsive application is unhindered. Therefore, the Ratnakūṭa Sūtra says: 'To manifest activity with no mind and no intention.' How could this be the same as wood and stone? Now, 'No-mind' is precisely the True Mind, and the True Mind is precisely No-mind."

Disciple: "Now, within this mind, how does one engage in practice?"

Teacher: "Simply awaken to and understand in all matters that No-mind is precisely practice; there is no other separate practice. Therefore, know that No-mind is everything. Quiescent extinction is precisely No-mind."

The disciple thereupon suddenly experienced a Great Awakening. He began to know that outside of mind there are no things, and outside of things there is no mind; in all behavior and action, he attained mastery. He cut through the nets of doubt, and there were no further hindrances. He immediately rose to pay homage and inscribed [the meaning of] No-mind. Thus he made a verse, saying:

*The Spirit of Mind tends toward quiescence,
Without color, without form.
Looking at it, one does not see;
Listening to it, there is no sound.
Seemingly dark, yet not dark;
Like brightness, yet not bright.
Discarding it, it is not extinguished;
Taking it up, it is unborn.
In its greatness, it encompasses the Dharma-realm;
In its smallness, it enters a hair-tip without stopping.
Afflictions mix with it but do not muddy it;
Nirvana clarifies it but it does not become clear.
True Thusness fundamentally has no discrimination,
Yet is able to distinguish between the sentient and insentient.
Withdrawing it, nothing is established;
Dispersing it, it pervades all possessing spirit.
The Marvelous Spirit is not fathomed by knowledge;
Looking directly, it is cut off from practice.
When extinguished, one does not see its destruction;
When arising, one does not see its formation.
The Great Way, quiescent, is named 'Signless';
The ten thousand images, profound and obscure, are named 'Nameless'.
To operate with mastery like this
Is always the essence of No-mind.*

The teacher further announced: "Among all prajñās, the prajñā of No-mind is the highest. Therefore, the Vimalakīrti Sūtra says: 'With no mind, no intention, and no sensation or mental fabrication, one completely subdues the external paths.' Also, the Dharma Drum Sūtra says: 'If one knows that no mind is obtainable, then dharmas are unobtainable, transgression and merit are also unobtainable,

birth-and-death and Nirvana are also unobtainable, and even everything is entirely unobtainable. Unobtainable is also unobtainable."

Thus he made a verse, saying:

*In former days when confused, taken to be 'having a mind';
At that time, after awakening, entirely 'No-mind'.
Though No-mind, able to illuminate and function;
Illumination and function are constantly quiescent, precisely Thusness.*

Further saying:

*No-mind, no illumination, and also no function;
No illumination and no function is precisely the Unconditioned.
This is the True Dharma-realm of the Tathāgata,
Not the same as Bodhisattvas or Pratyekabuddhas.
The statement 'No-mind' implies the absence of a mind with delusory appearances.*

Disciple: "What is named 'Supreme' (Taishang)?"

Teacher: "'Tai' means great; 'Shang' means high. Because it exhausts the marvelous Principle of the highest height, it is called 'Supreme' (Taishang). Furthermore, 'Tai' signifies a position of pervasive peace.

Although the heavens of the Three Realms possess the longevity of the Yan-kang aeon^[3], their fortune ends, and thus they eventually cycle through the Six Realms; this is not sufficient to be considered 'Tai'.

Although the Bodhisattvas of the Ten Abodes have exited birth and death, the marvelous Principle is not yet ultimate; this is also not considered 'Tai'.

In the mind-practice of the Ten Abodes, regarding existence as delusory, one enters non-existence; further, one negates that non-existence, so that [the duality of] existence [and non-existence] is explicitly dispatched. However, if one does not forget the Middle Way, this is also not considered 'Tai'.

If one further forgets the Middle Way, and the three locations [inside, outside, and in between] are all exhausted, the position is entirely Marvelous Awakening. Although the Bodhisattva dispatches the three locations, if he cannot be without that 'Marvelousness', it is also not considered 'Tai'.

If one further forgets that 'Marvelousness', then the Buddha Way reaches the ultimate, and there is nothing remaining. With no remaining thought, there is no thinking or anxiety; both the delusory mind and wisdom eternally rest; awakening and illumination are both exhausted; it is quiescent and Unconditioned. This is named 'Tai'.

'Tai' has the meaning of the ultimate Principle; 'Shang' means unequalled. Therefore, it is called 'Supreme'. It is precisely another name for the Buddha Tathāgata."

End of the Treatise on No-Mind by the Great Master Bodhidharma.

[2] A gap exists in the Chinese text here in some recensions; translated from context.

[3] Yan-kang (延康): A term from Daoist cosmology indicating the final kalpa/aeon.

Comparative Notes: High-Fidelity vs. Earlier Translations (Urs App, 1995)

While Urs App's 1995 translation is a pioneering scholarly work that made this text accessible, this High-Fidelity translation diverges in key areas to correct subtle reifications of the self and to restore precise Madhyamaka terminology over Taoist-flavored renderings.

The Subjectless Function vs. The Inserted "I"

- Source: 见终日见 (Jiàn zhōngrì jiàn - literally: "See all day see")
- Urs App: "[I] see throughout the day... [I] hear all day long..."
- This Translation: "Even if there is seeing, seeing all day long is essentially non-seeing; seeing is also No-mind."
- Rationale: The original Chinese in this passage is grammatically subjectless, emphasizing the *function* rather than the *agent*. Inserting "[I]" (even in brackets) subtly reinforces the "Trap of the Knower"—the idea that there is a static "Self" performing the seeing. The High-Fidelity translation preserves the self-less, spontaneous nature of the function: seeing happens, but no "seer" is found.

Unobtainable vs. Grasped

- Source: 不可得 (Bù kě dé)
- Urs App: "Grasped" or "Attained" (e.g., "nothing at all can be grasped")
- This Translation: "Unobtainable."
- Rationale: *Bù kě dé* is the standard Chinese translation for the Sanskrit *Anupalabdha* (unfindability/unobtainability). This is a precise ontological statement: phenomena do not have an inherent essence that can be located. Translating it as "Grasped" shifts the meaning to a psychological act (the subject failing to hold something), whereas "Unobtainable" correctly points to the emptiness of the object itself.

The Unconditioned vs. Wuwei

- Source: 无为 (Wúwéi)
- Urs App: "Wuwei" (left untranslated/pinyin).
- This Translation: "The Unconditioned."
- Rationale: While *Wuwei* is a Taoist term for "non-action," in this specific Buddhist context (describing the "True Dharma-realm of the Tathāgata"), it corresponds to the Sanskrit *Asaṃskṛta*—the Unconditioned (that which is not created, compounded, or subject to birth and death). Leaving it as "Wuwei" keeps the reader in a Taoist framework; translating it as "Unconditioned" correctly places the text within the Buddhist soteriological framework of Nirvana.

Spirit of Mind vs. Mind

- Source: 心神 (Xīn Shén)
- Urs App: "Mind."
- This Translation: "Spirit of Mind."
- Rationale: The text explicitly uses *Shén* (Spirit/Divinity/Marvelous) in the verse ("The Spirit of Mind tends toward quiescence"). Urs App collapses this into simply "Mind." The High-Fidelity translation retains "Spirit" to capture the text's nuance regarding the luminous, marvelous, and unfathomable nature of this awareness, distinguishing it from the deluded conceptual mind.

Recursive Negation vs. Negation of Practice

- Source: 不可得亦不可得 (Bù kě dé yì bù kě dé)
- Urs App: "Not-grasping included!"
- This Translation: "Unobtainable is also unobtainable."
- Rationale: App's translation ("Not-grasping included") sounds like an instruction on how to practice (i.e., "don't even grasp at not-grasping"). The High-Fidelity translation captures the Madhyamaka logical collapse: even the concept of "emptiness" or "unobtainability" is itself empty and cannot be established as a foothold.

MAP OF THE TEXT: THE TWO ENTRIES (Er Ru)

The cognitive framework for bridging Absolute Truth with Relative Conduct.

I. Entry by Principle (Lǐ Rù)

The Path of Insight: Using the teaching to point to the Real, then relinquishing the pointer.

- The Means: Relying on the Teaching to awaken to the Principle (*jiè jiào wù zōng*).
- The Insight: Deeply believing that ordinary beings and sages share the same True Nature, but it is obscured by fleeting "adventitious dust" (false thoughts).
- The Method: Wall-Gazing (*Bìguān*). Steadfastly abiding in one's True Nature, realizing that "Self" and "Other," "Ordinary" and "Sage" are equal and one.
- The Result: Quiescent and non-active (*Wúwéi*). Making no distinction, relying on no written instruction, and silently according with the Truth.

II. Entry by Practice (Xíng Rù)

The Path of Conduct: The "Four Practices" used to transmute daily karma into the Path.

The Practice	Chinese Term	The Essence (High-Fidelity)
1. Repaying Grievances	<i>Bàoyuān Xíng</i> (報冤行)	Accepting Adversity. When suffering arises, realizing it is the ripening fruit of one's own past karma. Accepting it willingly, without hostility or grievance (<i>du wu yuan su</i>).
2. Adapting to Conditions	<i>Suíyuán Xíng</i> (隨緣行)	Non-Resistance. Realizing that success, failure, gain, and loss are born of conditions (<i>yuan</i>) and have no self-nature. The mind remains unmoved by the "winds of joy."

The Practice	Chinese Term	The Essence (High-Fidelity)
3. Seeking Nothing	<i>Wúsuǒqiú Xíng</i> (無所求行)	Ending Craving. Realizing that "Seeking is suffering; seeking nothing is bliss." The wise understand that the Triple World is a burning house and cease grasping for safety within it.
4. According with Dharma	<i>Chēngfǎ Xíng</i> (稱法行)	Embodying Emptiness. The "Dharma" here is the truth of intrinsic purity and No-Self (<i>Anātman</i>). The practice is to act (giving alms, teaching) with "Threefold Emptiness"—seeing no Giver, no Gift, and no Receiver.

[The Great Master Bodhidharma: The Outline of Contemplation on the Four Practices for Entering the Way of the Mahāyāna](#)

Soh

Original Chinese: <https://bookgb.bfn.org/books/0847.htm>

Note: The translator's commentary and notes (by Soh) are provided at the end of the text.

English Translation:

Attributed to the Patriarch Bodhidharma

Preface by Disciple Tanlin

The Dharma Master was a native of the Western Regions, from the Kingdom of Southern India, the third son of a Brahmin King. His spiritual wisdom was open and clear; upon hearing [the teachings], he understood everything. His ambition lay in the Mahāyāna path, so he discarded the white [lay clothes] to follow the black [monastic robes], continuing and prospering the Sage's lineage. With a mind merged in empty quiescence, he thoroughly understood worldly affairs; possessing clarity both internally and externally, his virtue surpassed the worldly standard. Lamenting that the Orthodox Teaching in the borderlands was declining, he subsequently crossed distant mountains and seas to travel and teach in Han and Wei. Those who had extinguished the mind all took refuge in faith; those who clung to views gave rise to slander. At that time, there were only Daoyu and Huike; although these two śramaṇas were younger in years, their outstanding wills were lofty and far-reaching. Fortunately meeting the Dharma Master, they served him for several years, reverently inquiring and asking for instruction, and were blessed to receive the Master's intention. The Dharma Master, moved by their refined sincerity, instructed them in the True Path: how to pacify the mind, how to initiate practice, how to accord with things, and how to apply expedient means. This is the Mahāyāna method of pacifying the mind, ensuring no error or confusion. How to pacify the mind: Wall-Gazing. How to initiate practice: The Four Practices. How to accord with things: Guarding against ridicule and suspicion. How to apply expedient means: Discarding attachment to them. This brief preface explains the origin [of this text].

Now, regarding entering the Way, there are many paths; but essentially speaking, they do not exceed two kinds. One is Entry by Principle; the second is Entry by Practice.

Entry by Principle means: awakening to the Fundamental Truth through the Teachings; deeply trusting that all sentient beings share the same one True Nature, but it is covered by adventitious dust and delusive thoughts, and thus cannot manifest clearly. If one abandons the false to return to the true, steadfastly abiding in Wall-Gazing, there is no self and no other, ordinary beings and sages are equal and one. Firmly abiding without shifting, never again following written teachings, this is to be implicitly in accord with Principle. Without having discrimination, quiescent and Unconditioned¹, this is named Entry by Principle.

Entry by Practice refers to the Four Practices; all other various practices are included within these. What are the four? First, the Practice of Facing Enmity; second, the Practice of According with Conditions; third, the Practice of No Seeking; fourth, the Practice of According with Dharma.

What is the Practice of Facing Enmity? It means that when a practitioner of the Way undergoes suffering, they should think to themselves: "In countless kalpas of the past, I abandoned the root to follow the branches, flowing and wandering through various existences, generating much enmity and hatred, causing infinite harm and violation." "Although I have committed no offense in the present,

this is the fruit of my past bad karma ripening; it is not something that can be bestowed by heaven or men." "I accept it with a willing heart, without any grievance or complaint." The Sūtra says: "When meeting suffering, do not worry." Why is this so? Because of penetrating understanding. When this mind arises, it corresponds with Principle; embodying enmity helps advance on the Way, therefore it is called the Practice of Facing Enmity.

Second, the Practice of According with Conditions: Sentient beings have no self; they are turned entirely by conditions and karma; suffering and happiness are received together, and all arise from conditions. If one obtains excellent rewards, honor, and such things, it is induced by past causes within me; I am only receiving it now, but when the condition is exhausted, it returns to nothing—what joy is there in this? Gain and loss follow conditions, but the mind has no increase or decrease; if one is unmoved by the wind of joy, implicitly according with the Way, it is therefore called the Practice of According with Conditions.

Third, the Practice of No Seeking: People of the world are perpetually lost, craving and attaching everywhere; this is named seeking. The wise awaken to the truth, and Principle is contrary to the mundane; they pacify the mind in non-action ¹, and while the physical form follows the turning of fate, [they know] the ten thousand existences are all empty, with nothing to desire or enjoy. Merit and Darkness ² always follow each other; living long in the Three Realms is like living in a burning house. Having a body is all suffering; who can attain peace? Thoroughly understanding this, one therefore abandons all existences, stopping thought and having no seeking. The Sūtra says: "To have seeking is all suffering; to have no seeking is immediate joy." Determining and knowing that no seeking is truly the practice of the Way, it is therefore called the Practice of No Seeking.

Fourth, the Practice of According with Dharma: The Principle of intrinsic purity is named Dharma. By this Principle, all characteristics are empty, without defilement and without attachment, without this and without that. The Sūtra says: "In the Dharma there are no sentient beings, because it is free from the defilement of sentient beings; in the Dharma there is no self, because it is free from the defilement of self." If the wise can believe and understand this Principle, they should practice in accordance with the Dharma. The Dharma Essence has no stinginess; regarding body, life, and wealth, one practices dāna [giving] without sparing. The mind has no reluctance; liberated in the three emptinesses, relying on nothing and attached to nothing, acting only to remove defilement. Acting to transform sentient beings without grasping at characteristics. This is self-practice, and it can also benefit others; it can also adorn the path of bodhi. Since dāna is like this, the other five [pāramitās] are also like this. To eliminate delusive thoughts, one practices the Six Perfections, yet there is nothing practiced; this is the Practice of According with Dharma.

The End of the Contemplation on the Four Practices by Grand Master Bodhidharma

Appendix: Stele Eulogy for Grand Master Bodhidharma [By] Xiao Yan, Emperor Wu of Liang Sitting on the Precious Sun on the peak of Mount Lankā. Amidst it, a golden figure draped in coarse cloth. His form is like the great earth, his Essence like the void. The mind holds vaiḍūrya, color like snow. Neither polished nor ground, eternally pure and bright. Parting clouds and rolling up mist, the mind is explicitly penetrating. Using the Pundarika flower to adorn the body. Following conditions and touching things, always joyous. Neither existing nor non-existing, neither going nor coming. Much learning and eloquence cannot explain it. Real indeed! Empty indeed! Apart from birth and existence. The great and the small, all conditions are cut off. In a kṣaṇa [instant], ascending to the mind of marvelous awakening. Leaping scales in the ocean of wisdom, rising above the former sages. By Principle, the Dharma water should flow eternally. How could one expect a temporary passage, only to return to temporary thirst? Within the dragon's pearl, the mind-lamp falls. The white-hair [ūrṇā] wisdom blade is chipped at the edge. The path of life suddenly ends, the wisdom eye closes. The Zen river halts its flow, the Dharma beam breaks. No going, no coming, no right, no wrong. This and that, form and Essence, the mind is shattered. Abiding here, departing here, all return to quiescence. Within quiescence, how could there ever be sobbing? Using this holding of hands to transmit the lamp. Birth and death, going and coming, are like a lightning flash. If one can have a sincere mind without doubt. The kalpa fire burns the lamp, yet it is not extinguished. The Dharma of the One Truth is fully available here. If not awakened to the path of delusion, here it is exhausted.

Translator's Commentary

Introduction This text, the *Two Entries and Four Practices (Erru Sixing Lun)*, is the document most reliably attributed to the historical Bodhidharma. It captures the seminal transition of Buddhism in China from a scholarly, exegetical tradition to the direct, experiential practice that would become Chan (Zen). The preface by Tanlin provides crucial biographical details, noting Bodhidharma's South Indian origins and his emphasis on "Wall-Gazing" (*bìguān*).

Translation Choices for Key Terminology

- Wall-Gazing (壁观 - Bìguān): I have retained the literal "Wall-Gazing." While some scholars interpret this metaphorically as "mind like a wall" (steep and stable), the literal translation preserves the iconic imagery associated with Bodhidharma sitting in the cave at Shaolin.

- Principle (理 - Lǐ): In this text, *Lǐ* is the counterpart to *Shì* (phenomena/practice). It refers to the absolute truth or the fundamental nature of reality. I have strictly used "Principle" to avoid the Western metaphysical baggage of "Noumenon" or the rationalist implication of "Reason."
- Essence (体 - Tǐ): I have translated *Tǐ* as "Essence" rather than "Substance" to adhere to Buddhist emptiness ontology, where the "body" of reality is not a physical substance but a nature of emptiness.
- Unconditioned / Non-action (无为 - Wúwéi): The translation distinguishes between the ontological and praxiological dimensions of this term. Where the text speaks of the Wall-Gazing mind as "quiescent and Unconditioned" (*jìrán wúwéi*), it refers to a state free from karmic formation. Later, where it instructs one to "pacify the mind in non-action" (*ānxīn wúwéi*), it refers to the functional attitude of the practitioner—acting without contrived effort.
- Characteristics (相 - Xiàng): In the section on "According with Dharma," *Xiàng* refers to the specific defining marks or signs of conceptualized entities. I have used "characteristics" to align with the *lakṣaṇa* (defining mark) terminology, emphasizing that the Dharma is empty of such definable boundaries.

Contextual and Doctrinal Explanations The text is structured around the "Two Entries": *Principle* (direct intuitive alignment with truth) and *Practice* (gradual cultivation through conduct). The "Entry by Principle" contains the famous instruction to "steadfastly abide" (*níng zhù*) in Wall-Gazing. This suggests a practice of stable, unwavering concentration that cuts through subject-object duality ("no self and no other"). The "Four Practices" are essentially a re-framing of daily life and suffering. They provide a cognitive framework for the practitioner to transmute adversity (Practice 1), success (Practice 2), and craving (Practice 3) into the path, culminating in the "Practice of According with Dharma" (Practice 4), which is the practice of emptiness itself—acting without the concept of an agent, action, or receiver (the Three Emptinesses).

Emperor Wu's Eulogy The eulogy is highly poetic and filled with paradoxes common to the Prajñāpāramitā literature ("Neither existing nor non-existing"). It reflects the profound respect the Emperor held for Bodhidharma, despite the legendary (and likely apocryphal) encounter where Bodhidharma allegedly told the Emperor he had "no merit." The verses here suggest a deep appreciation of the "One Truth" and the "Mind-lamp."

Bloodstream Sermon of Grand Master Bodhidharma

Soh

Chinese Original: <https://bookgb.bfn.org/books/0848.htm>

Note: The translator's commentary and notes (by Soh) are provided at the end of the text.

English Translation:

Bloodstream Sermon of Grand Master Bodhidharma

Preface to the Bloodstream Sermon of Grand Master Bodhidharma

Written by Ren Zhe, Vice Prefect of Jianchang Military Prefecture, Court Gentleman for Instruction, Grantee of the Crimson Robe and Fish Pouch.

The Mind of the primordial person possesses the Buddha-nature in full. Broadly observing the Zen teachings of various schools and all scriptural texts, and tracing them to their most appropriate principle, none fail to state that the fundamental True Buddha is within one's own nature.

Bodhidharma came from the West to point directly at the human mind, to See Nature and become Buddha; this implies that one's own True Buddha does not go beyond a single [instance of] nature.

People do not trust themselves, so they gallop outward to seek. They assume there is another special Buddha outside of the True Buddha of self-nature. Therefore, all Buddhas and Patriarchs expounded the Dharma essentials to make people awaken to their own fundamental True Buddha, not to rely on external seeking. Furthermore, because the various Dharma words are flooding and inconsistent, they conversely cause students to be confused about their fundamental nature, finding no place to enter realization.

Only this *Bloodstream Sermon* of Bodhidharma and the *Essentials of Transmitting the Mind* by Huangbo are the most ultimate discourses. They allow one to immediately verify one's own Buddha-nature, making it easy for people to understand. Compared to seeking teachers, visiting the Way, drilling into old papers, sitting in meditation (zazen), or traveling on foot, wildly wasting effort—[this text] is ten thousand times apart; this is no small assistance.

Preface by the Old Man Who Sees Solitude, Ren Zhe, in the Guiyou year of the Shaoxing era [1153 CE].

Bodhidharma's Bloodstream Sermon

Edited and carved by Śramaṇa Shi Zongjing of Huayan Temple in Yuzhou.

The Three Realms arise in confusion, yet all return to One Mind. The former Buddhas and later Buddhas transmit Mind with Mind; they do not establish written words.

Question: If they do not establish written words, what do they take as Mind?

Answer: You asking me—that is precisely your Mind. I answering you—that is precisely my Mind. If I had no Mind, how could I answer you? If you had no Mind, how could you question me? Questioning me is precisely your Mind. From beginningless vast kalpas ago, up to all moments of current activity and movement, in all places, everything is your Fundamental Mind, everything is your Fundamental Buddha. "Mind itself is Buddha" is also just like this.

Apart from this Mind, there is ultimately no other Buddha to be obtained. Leaving this Mind to seek Bodhi (Awakening) or Nirvana is without basis. The true reality of self-nature is neither cause nor effect. The Dharma is the meaning of Mind; one's own Mind is Nirvana. If you say there is a Buddha or Bodhi obtainable outside of Mind, there is no such place. Where are Buddha and Bodhi located? For example, if someone tries to grab empty space with their hand, can they get it? Empty space has only a name; it has no characteristics or shape. It cannot be grasped, it cannot be abandoned; one simply cannot catch hold of emptiness. Apart from this Mind, one will ultimately never see Buddha.

The Buddha is made by one's own Mind; why seek Buddha apart from this Mind? Former Buddhas and later Buddhas only spoke of this Mind. Mind itself is Buddha, Buddha itself is Mind; outside of Mind there is no Buddha, outside of Buddha there is no Mind. If you say there is a Buddha outside of Mind, where is the Buddha? Since there is no Buddha outside of Mind, why generate a Buddha-view? Passing down deception and confusion to one another, unable to deeply understand the Fundamental Mind, being seized by insentient things, one has no freedom.

If you do not believe, deceiving yourself is of no benefit. The Buddha has no errors or faults; sentient beings are upside-down, unaware and unknowing that one's own Mind is Buddha. If you know one's own Mind is Buddha, you should not seek Buddha outside of Mind. Buddha does not liberate Buddha; using mind to seek Buddha is not knowing Buddha. However, those who seek Buddha externally all do not know that one's own Mind is Buddha.

You also must not use Buddha to bow to Buddha; you must not use mind to recite "Buddha". Buddha does not chant sutras; Buddha does not keep precepts; Buddha does not violate precepts; Buddha has no keeping or violating; nor does [Buddha] create good or evil. If you wish to seek Buddha, you must See Nature; Seeing Nature is precisely Buddha. If you do not See Nature, reciting Buddha's name, chanting sutras, holding fasts, and keeping precepts are all of no benefit.

Reciting Buddha's name results in cause and effect; chanting sutras results in intelligence; keeping precepts results in birth in the heavens; practicing charity results in blessed rewards; but seeking Buddha is ultimately not obtained [this way]. If you do not understand clearly for yourself, you must visit a spiritual friend (*kalyāṇamitra*) to completely understand the root of birth and death. If he does not See Nature, he is not named a spiritual friend. If not like this, even if one can explain the Twelve Divisions of Scripture, one cannot avoid the cycle of birth and death, suffering in the Three Realms without a time of exit.

In the past there was the Bhikshu Good Star (Sunakṣatra); he could recite the Twelve Divisions of Scripture, yet he did not avoid the cycle of rebirth, because he did not See Nature. Since Good Star was like this, people today who lecture on three or five books of sutras and treatises considering it to be the Buddha-dharma are foolish people. If you do not recognize your own Mind, reciting idle texts is entirely useless. If you want to seek Buddha, you must directly See Nature. Nature is Buddha; the Buddha is a person of ease, a person of no-concerns and no-creation.

If you do not See Nature, all day long you remain confused, galloping outward to seek; seeking Buddha is fundamentally unobtainable. Although there is not a single thing to be obtained, if you seek to understand, you must also visit a spiritual friend; you must painstakingly seek to make your mind understand and resolve. The matter of birth and death is great; you must not pass it in vain; deceiving yourself is of no benefit. Even if you have piles of rare delicacies like mountains and family members like the sands of the Ganges, when your eyes open you see them; when your eyes close, do you still see them? Thus we know that conditioned appearances are like dreams and illusions.

If you do not urgently seek a teacher, you pass a lifetime in vain. Even though one innately possesses the Buddha-nature, if one does not rely on a teacher, one will ultimately not understand clearly. Those who awaken without a teacher are rare, one in ten thousand. If, by your own conditions, you meet and obtain the Sage's intent, then you do not need to visit a spiritual friend. This is knowing by birth; it transcends learning. If you have not yet awakened or understood, you must diligently and bitterly study; through the teaching, you will then obtain awakening. But if you already understand clearly (i.e., have awakened), then even without further 'study' you can still 'get it' (understand the essence of the teachings).

It is not like the lost people who cannot distinguish black from white, proclaiming false words as the Buddha's decree, slandering the Buddha and envying the Dharma. Classes like these speak dharma like rain, but it is all talk of Mara, not Buddha-speak. The teacher is King Mara; the disciples are the subjects of Mara; lost people allow him to command them, unknowingly falling into the ocean of birth and death.

However, people who do not See Nature falsely claim to be Buddhas. These sentient beings are great karmic offenders; they deceive all sentient beings, causing them to enter the realm of Mara. If one does not See Nature, explaining the Twelve Divisions of Scriptural Teaching is all talk of Mara. They are family members of the house of Mara, not disciples of the house of Buddha. Since they do not distinguish black from white, on what basis can they avoid birth and death?

If one Sees Nature, that is Buddha; if one does not See Nature, that is a sentient being. If one departs from the nature of sentient beings and says there is a separate Buddha-nature to be obtained, where is the Buddha now? The nature of sentient beings is precisely the Buddha-nature. Outside of Nature there is no Buddha; Buddha is precisely Nature; apart from this Nature, there is no Buddha to be obtained, and outside of Buddha there is no Nature to be obtained.

Question: If one does not See Nature, but recites Buddha's name, chants sutras, gives charity, holds precepts, is diligent, and widely generates blessings and benefits, can one become a Buddha?

Answer: One cannot.

Further Question: Why can one not?

Answer: Having a slight dharma to obtain is conditioned dharma; it is cause and effect; it is receiving rewards; it is the dharma of samsara; one does not avoid birth and death, so when will one attain the Buddha Way? Becoming Buddha requires Seeing Nature. If one does not See Nature, talk of cause and effect and such things is the dharma of outsiders. If it is a Buddha, he does not practice the dharma of outsiders. Buddha is a person without karma, without cause and effect; if there is a slight dharma to be obtained, it is all slandering the Buddha; on what basis can one attain [Buddha]?

But if there is abiding or attachment to One Mind, One Agent, One Comprehending or One Seeing, the Buddha does not allow it at all. Buddha has no keeping or violating [precepts]; the Mind-nature is fundamentally empty; it is neither defiled nor pure. All dharmas have no practice and no realization, no cause and no effect. Buddha does not keep precepts, Buddha does not practice good, Buddha does not commit evil, Buddha is not diligent, Buddha is not lazy; Buddha is a person of no-creation.

But if there is an abiding and attached mind, looking at Buddha, he does not allow it. Buddha is not Buddha; do not understand it as Buddha. If you do not see this meaning, at all times and in all places, everything is not understanding the Fundamental Mind. If you do not See Nature, and at all times intend to create "thoughts of no-creation," you are a great karmic offender, a deluded person, falling into blank emptiness; ignorant like a drunk person, not distinguishing good from bad. If you intend to practice the dharma of no-creation, you must first See Nature, and only then rest your mental conditions.

If one does not See Nature but attains the Buddha Way, there is no such place. There are people who deny cause and effect, blazing in creating evil karma, falsely saying the original is empty and creating evil has no fault; such people fall into the hell of Uninterrupted Darkness, with no time of exit forever. If one is a wise person, one should not make such a view.

Question: Since movement and activity at all times are all Fundamental Mind, when the physical body enters impermanence, why do we not see the Fundamental Mind?

Answer: The Fundamental Mind is always appearing before you; you just do not see it yourself.

Question: Since the Mind is present, why do I not see it?

The Master said: Have you ever dreamed?

Answer: I have dreamed.

Question: When you are dreaming, is that your own self or not?

Answer: It is my own self.

Further Question: Are your speech, movement, and activity separate from you or not separate?

Answer: Not separate.

The Master said: Since it is not separate, then this body is your fundamental Dharmakāya; this Dharmakāya is your Fundamental Mind. This Mind, from beginningless vast kalpas ago, is not separate from today; it has never had birth or death. It is not born and not extinguished. It does not increase and does not decrease; it is not defiled and not pure; it is not good and not evil; it does not come and does not go. It also has no right or wrong, no characteristics of male or female, no monk or layperson, no old or young, no sage and no ordinary; also no Buddha, also no sentient being, also no practice or realization, also no cause or effect, also no physical strength, also no characteristic or shape.

It is like empty space; it cannot be grasped, it cannot be abandoned; mountains, rivers, and stone walls cannot hinder it. It appears and disappears, comes and goes, with unhindered supernatural power; it penetrates the mountain of the five aggregates and crosses the river of birth and death. No karma whatsoever can restrain this Dharmakāya.

This Mind is subtle and marvelous, difficult to see; this Mind is not the same as the Mind of Form; this Mind is what everyone desires to see. Those who move their hands and move their feet within this Luminosity are like the sands of the Ganges, yet when asked about it, they can say nothing; they are just like wooden puppets. It is entirely for one's own use, so why do you not recognize it?

The Buddha said that all sentient beings are entirely lost people; because of this they create karma and fall into the river of birth and death; wanting to exit, they sink back in, simply because they do not See Nature. If sentient beings are not lost, why is it that when asked about the matter within, not a single person understands? One moves one's own hands and feet, so why does one not recognize it?

Therefore we know the words of the Sages are not mistaken; lost people cannot understand on their own. Therefore we know this is difficult to clarify; only the Buddha alone can understand this Dharma; the rest, humans, gods, and sentient beings, are entirely unclear.

If wisdom is clear, this Mind is named Dharma-nature, and also named Liberation. Life and death do not restrain it; all dharmas cannot restrain it; this is named the Great Self-Existent King Tathāgata. It is also named the Inconceivable; it is also named the Essence of the Sage; it is also named Long Life and No Death; it is also named the Great Immortal. Although the names are different, the Essence is the same one.

The various differentiations made by Sages are all not apart from one's own Mind. The Mind's capacity is vast and great; its responsive functioning is inexhaustible: in response to eyes, forms are seen; in response to ears, sounds are heard; in response to the nose, scents are smelled; in response to the tongue, flavors are known; up to movement and activity—all are one's own Mind. At all times, simply where the path of language is cut off, that is one's own Mind.

Therefore it is said: The Tathāgata's form is inexhaustible, and wisdom is also likewise. Form being inexhaustible is one's own Mind; the mind-consciousness is excellent at distinguishing everything; up to activity and functioning, all are wisdom. Mind has no shape or characteristics; wisdom is also inexhaustible. Therefore it is said: The Tathāgata's form is inexhaustible, and wisdom is also likewise.

The physical body of the four great elements is precisely affliction; the physical body has birth and destruction; the Dharmakāya is permanently abiding and has no place of abiding, because the Tathāgata's Dharmakāya is permanently unchanging. The Sutra says: Sentient beings should know, the Buddha-nature is inherently one's own. Kāśyapa just realized fundamental nature; fundamental nature is precisely Mind; Mind is precisely Nature; Nature is precisely this same Mind of all Buddhas. Former Buddhas and later Buddhas only transmitted this Mind; apart from this Mind, there is no Buddha to be obtained.

Upside-down sentient beings do not know one's own Mind is Buddha; they gallop outward to seek, busy all day long; reciting Buddha, bowing to Buddha—where is the Buddha? You should not make such views; simply know one's own Mind; outside of Mind there is utterly no other Buddha.

The Sutra says: Whatever has characteristics is all illusory. It also says: Wherever you are, there is a Buddha. one's own Mind is Buddha; you should not use Buddha to bow to Buddha. However, if

appearances of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas suddenly appear before you, you absolutely must not bow or pay respect. My Mind is empty and quiescent, fundamentally without such characteristics; if you grasp appearances, that is a demon; you fall entirely into deviant paths. If it is an illusion arising from the mind, you need not bow. Those who bow do not know; those who know do not bow; bowing is being seized by demons. Fearing students do not know, I therefore make this distinction.

Upon the fundamental Nature-essence of the Buddhas and Tathāgatas, there are absolutely no such characteristics; you must pay close attention. Even if there are strange states, you absolutely must not collect or seize them; also do not generate fear, do not be suspicious or confused; my Mind is inherently pure, where could there be such characteristics? Even appearances of devas, dragons, yakshas, ghosts, spirits, Indra, Brahma kings, and so forth—you also must not generate respect with your mind, nor should you fear; my Mind is inherently empty and quiescent; all appearances are delusion-views; simply do not grasp appearances. If you give rise to a Buddha-view or a Dharma-view, or appearances of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and generate respect, you fall into the position of sentient beings yourself.

If you wish to understand directly, simply do not grasp any characteristics and you will attain it; there are no other words. Therefore the Sutra says: Whatever has characteristics is all illusory. They all have no fixed reality; illusions have no fixed characteristic. They are impermanent dharmas; simply not grasping appearances matches the Sage's intent. Therefore the Sutra says: Separation from all characteristics is named all Buddhas.

Question: Why can one not bow to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas?

Answer: The Celestial Mara, Pāpiyān, and Asuras manifest supernatural powers; they can all make the appearances of Bodhisattvas. Various transformations are outsiders; they are totally not Buddha. Buddha is one's own Mind; do not bow by mistake. "Buddha" is a Western word; in this land, we say "Awakened Nature." "Awakened" is Numinous Awareness; responding to capacities and contacting things, raising the eyebrows and blinking the eyes, moving hands and moving feet—all are the nature of your own Numinous Awareness. Nature is precisely Mind, Mind is precisely Buddha, Buddha is precisely the Way, the Way is precisely Zen.

The single character for "Zen" is not fathomed by ordinary people or sages. It is also said: Seeing fundamental nature is Zen. If one does not see fundamental nature, it is not Zen. Even if one can explain a thousand sutras and ten thousand treatises, if one does not see fundamental nature, one is just an ordinary person; it is not the Buddha-dharma. The Ultimate Way is dark and deep; it cannot be understood by speech; how can canonical teachings reach it? Simply see fundamental nature; it is okay even if you do not know a single character. Seeing Nature is precisely Buddha; the Sage-body is

inherently pure, without defilement or filth. All verbal explanations are the Sage initiating functioning from the Mind. The Essence of functioning is inherently empty; names and speech still cannot reach it; how can the Twelve Divisions of Scripture attain it?

The Way is fundamentally perfectly accomplished; it does not use practice and realization. The Way is not sound or form; it is subtle, marvelous, and difficult to see. Like a person drinking water knows for himself whether it is cold or warm, it cannot be told to others. Only the Tathāgata can know; the rest, humans, devas, and other classes, are all unaware and unknowing. The wisdom of ordinary people does not reach it, so they have grasping at characteristics. Not understanding that one's own Mind is fundamentally empty and quiescent, falsely grasping appearances and all dharmas, one immediately falls into becoming an outsider. If one knows all dharmas are born from Mind, one should not have grasping; grasping is not knowing.

If one sees fundamental nature, the Twelve Divisions of Scripture are all idle words. A thousand sutras and ten thousand treatises are just to clarify the Mind; if immediately upon words you tally and understand, of what use is the teaching? The Ultimate Principle cuts off words; teaching is verbal vocabulary; it is truly not the Way. The Way is fundamentally without words; speech is illusion.

If in the night you dream of seeing pavilions, palaces, elephants, horses, and the like, or trees, thickets, pools, and pavilions—appearances like these—you must not give rise to a single thought of delight and attachment; they are all places of reincarnation (womb-entry); you must pay close attention. At the moment of approaching the end, do not grasp appearances, and you will eliminate hindrances. If a doubtful mind glances up, immediately you are seized by demons. The Dharmakāya is originally pure and without (karmic) 'reception.' But due to delusion, there is unawareness; so one mistakenly experiences karmic results, grows attached to pleasant feelings, and cannot be at ease (free).

Right now, if you realize the fundamental body and mind, you will not be dyed by habits. If one enters the ordinary from the sage, manifesting various mixed types, acting as a sentient being oneself, therefore the Sage is free in reverse and direct circumstances; no karma can restrain him. The Sage has achieved great awe-inspiring virtue for a long time; all species of karma are turned by the Sage; heaven and hell can do nothing to him. The spirit-consciousness of the ordinary person is dim and dark; not like the Sage, who is internally and externally thoroughly clear. If one has doubt, one does not act; if one acts, one wanders in birth and death; later facing regret, there is no place for rescue. Poverty, distress, and suffering are all born from delusional thinking; if one understands this Mind, pass it on to advise and encourage each other; simply act without acting, and you enter the Tathāgata's Knowledge and View.

For a person who has first aroused the intention (*bodhicitta*), spirit-consciousness is generally essentially unstable. If one frequently sees strange states in dreams, one should simply not doubt; they all arise from one's own mind, they do not come from outside. If in a dream you see brightness appearing, surpassing the sun disk, then residual habits are suddenly exhausted; this is seeing the nature of the Dharma-realm. If this matter occurs, it is the cause of achieving the Way. Only you know it yourself; it cannot be told to others.

Or if in a quiet grove, while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, the eye sees brightness, whether large or small, do not tell people, and also do not grasp it; this is also the Luminosity of self-nature. Or if in the quiet of night, in the dark, while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, the eye witnesses brightness differing no whit from daytime, do not be strange about it; it is all one's own Mind about to clarify and appear. Or if in a dream at night you see stars and moon clearly, this is also the various conditions of one's own Mind about to cease; also do not tell people. If dreams are confused and murky, like walking in darkness/shade, this is also one's own mind's afflictive hindrances being heavy; this too you know yourself.

If one Sees Nature, one need not read sutras or recite Buddha; wide learning and much knowledge are of no benefit; spirit-consciousness turns dull. Teachings are established only to point out the mind; if you recognize the mind, what need is there to consult the teachings? If one enters the sage from the ordinary, one must rest karma and nourish the spirit, passing the days according to one's lot. If there is much anger and hatred, causing Nature to turn against the Way, you cheat yourself with no benefit. The Sage appears and disappears freely within birth and death, hiding and revealing without fixity; no karma can restrain him. The Sage smashes heterodox demons; if all sentient beings simply See Nature, residual habits are suddenly extinguished. Spirit-consciousness is not dim; one must simply understand directly right now. If you want to truly understand the Way, do not grasp any dharmas; rest karma and nourish the spirit, and residual habits will also be exhausted. Naturally clear and white, it does not depend on exerting effort.

Outsiders do not understand the Buddha's intent; they exert effort the most. Violating the Sage's intent, all day long they rush about reciting Buddha and turning sutras; dimming the divine nature, they do not avoid the cycle of rebirth. Buddha is a person of leisure; what need is there to rush about widely seeking fame and profit? Of what use will it be later? But people who do not See Nature read sutras and recite Buddha, learning "diligence" for a long time; practicing the Way six times a day, sitting for long periods without lying down; widely studying and hearing much, considering this to be Buddha-dharma. Sentient beings such as this are all people who slander the Buddha-dharma.

Former Buddhas and later Buddhas only speak of Seeing Nature. All conditioned practices are impermanent. If one does not See Nature, yet falsely says "I have attained Anuttara-bodhi"

(Unsurpassed Awakening), this is a great karmic offender. Among the Ten Great Disciples, Ananda was number one in having heard much; regarding the Buddha he had no recognition, he only learned broad hearing (erudition). The Two Vehicles and outsiders all do not recognize Buddha; knowing numbers and practicing realization, they fall into cause and effect. This is the karmic retribution of sentient beings; they do not avoid birth and death; turning far away from the Buddha's intent, they are sentient beings who slander the Buddha; killing them has no fault.

The Sutra says: Icchantikas do not generate faith; killing them has no fault. If one has faith, this person is a person of the Buddha-position. If one does not See Nature, one should not arbitrarily slander the good [who do]; confusing oneself is of no benefit. Good and evil are distinct; cause and effect are clear. Heaven and hell are right before your eyes; foolish people do not believe, and manifest falling into the hell of darkness; also unaware and unknowing; only because karma is heavy, therefore they do not believe. Like a person without eyes does not believe the Dao has light; even if you tell him he does not believe; only because he is blind, on what basis can he distinguish sunlight? Foolish people are also like this. Now manifesting falling into mixed species of livestock, born in poverty and lowliness; seeking life they cannot get it, seeking death they cannot get it. Although receiving this suffering, if you ask them directly, they say "I am happy now," not different from heaven. Thus we know that all sentient beings take the place of birth as happiness; they are also unaware and unknowing. Evil people like this—only because karmic obstructions are heavy, therefore they cannot generate faith; they have no freedom [from karma].

If one sees one's own Mind is Buddha, one need not shave the beard and hair; a white-robed one [layperson] is also Buddha. If one does not See Nature, shaving the beard and hair, one is also an outsider.

Question: White-robed ones have wives and children, and lust is not removed; on what basis can they become Buddha?

Answer: I only speak of Seeing Nature, I do not speak of lust. It is only because you do not See Nature; if you just See Nature, lust is fundamentally empty and quiescent; it cuts off and removes itself naturally, and one also does not delight in or attach to it. Even if there are residual habits, they cannot cause harm. Why is this? Because Nature is fundamentally pure. Although dwelling in the physical body of the five aggregates, its Nature is fundamentally pure and cannot be defiled. The Dharmakāya fundamentally has no sensation; no hunger, no thirst, no cold, no heat, no sickness, no love, no family, no suffering, no joy, no good, no bad, no short, no long, no strong, no weak. Fundamentally there is not a single thing to be obtained. It is only because of grasping that there is this physical body; due to this there are appearances of hunger, thirst, cold, heat, sickness, and so forth.

If you do not grasp, you function with abandon. If within birth and death you obtain freedom, turning all dharmas, you are unobstructed like the supernatural powers of the Sage; there is no place you are not at peace. If the mind has doubt, you definitely will not pass through any states/environments. Not doing [evil] is best; if you do it, you do not avoid the cycle of birth and death. If one Sees Nature, a Chandala (outcaste/butcher) can also become Buddha.

Question: A Chandala creates karma by killing life; how can he become Buddha?

Answer: I only speak of Seeing Nature; I do not speak of creating karma. Even if he creates karma differently, all karma cannot restrain him. From beginningless vast kalpas ago, only because of not Seeing Nature, one falls into hell; therefore one creates karma and cycles in birth and death. From the moment of realizing fundamental nature, one ultimately does not create karma. If one does not See Nature, reciting Buddha does not avoid retribution, let alone killing life. If one Sees Nature, the doubtful mind is suddenly removed; killing life also can do nothing to him.

The Twenty-Seven Patriarchs from the Western Heaven only transmitted the Mind-seal. I have now come to this land to transmit only the Sudden Teaching of the Mahayana: Mind itself is Buddha. I do not speak of keeping precepts, diligence, or asceticism. Even entering water and fire, climbing upon sword-wheels, eating once a day, sitting long without lying down—these are all the conditioned dharmas of outsiders. If you recognize the nature of Numinous Awareness in activity and movement, you are the Mind of all Buddhas. Former Buddhas and later Buddhas only spoke of transmitting Mind; there is no other Dharma whatsoever. If you recognize this Dharma, an ordinary person who does not know a single character is also a Buddha. If you do not recognize the nature of your own Numinous Awareness, even if you smash your body into motes of dust, you will ultimately not find Buddha.

"Buddha" is also named Dharmakāya, also named Fundamental Mind. This Mind has no shape or characteristics, no cause and effect, no tendons or bones; it is like empty space; it cannot be grasped. It is not the same as material obstruction; it is not the same as outsiders. Apart from the Tathāgata alone who can understand this Mind, the rest—sentient beings and lost people—are not clear about it. This Mind is not apart from the physical body of the four great elements; if apart from this Mind, there is no ability to move. This body has no knowing, like grass, trees, tiles, and pebbles. The body is without nature; on what basis does it move?

If one's own Mind moves, up to language, activity, movement, seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing—all are the moving mind moving the function. Motion is the mind moving; motion is precisely its function. Outside of moving-function there is no mind; outside of mind there is no motion. Motion is not mind; mind is not motion. Motion fundamentally has no mind; mind fundamentally has no motion. Motion is not apart from mind; mind is not apart from motion. Motion has no mind to

separate from; mind has no motion to separate from; motion is mind's function; function is mind's motion. Motion is precisely mind's function; function is precisely mind's motion. Not moving, not functioning; the essence of function is fundamentally empty. Emptiness fundamentally has no motion; motion and function are the same as mind; mind fundamentally has no motion.

Therefore the Sutra says: Moving yet without anything moved; all day going and coming yet never having gone; all day seeing yet never having seen; all day laughing yet never having laughed; all day hearing yet never having heard; all day knowing yet never having known; all day happy yet never having been happy; all day walking yet never having walked; all day abiding yet never having abided.

Therefore the Sutra says: The path of language is cut off; the place of mental activity is extinguished; seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing are fundamentally perfectly quiescent. Even anger, happiness, pain, and itch—how are they different from a wooden puppet? It is only because searching for pain and itch results in them being unobtainable. Therefore the Sutra says: Evil karma results in bitter retribution; good karma results in good retribution. Not only does anger lead to falling into hell, and happiness lead to birth in heaven. If one knows the nature of anger and happiness is empty, and simply does not grasp, one is released from karma. If one does not See Nature, lecturing on sutras definitely has no basis; speaking is also inexhaustible. I have briefly marked the deviant and the correct like this; it does not reach one or two [percent of the reality].

The Ode says:

Mind, Mind, Mind—difficult to seek; When broad, it pervades the Dharma-realm; When narrow, it does not admit a needle. I fundamentally seek Mind, not Buddha; I fully know the Three Realms are empty, without a thing. If you wish to seek Buddha, simply seek Mind; Only this Mind, this Mind is Buddha. I fundamentally seek Mind, Mind holds itself; Seeking Mind is not obtained; wait for Mind to know. Buddha-nature is not obtained from outside the Mind; When thought arises, that is precisely the time of karmic offense arising.

The Gāthā says:

I originally came to this land, To transmit the Dharma and save lost sentient beings. One flower opens five petals; The bearing of fruit will form naturally.

End of Bloodstream Sermon of Grand Master Bodhidharma.

Translator (Soh)'s Commentary

Introduction

The *Bloodstream Sermon* (Xuemai Lun) is one of the four principal texts attributed to Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch of Chan (Zen). It represents a radical, iconoclastic turn in Buddhist literature. Unlike the gradualist approaches of the scholastic traditions, this text emphasizes *Jiànxìng* (Seeing Nature) as the singular, indispensable requirement for Buddhahood. It ruthlessly dismantles reliance on external forms—recitation, precepts, stupa building, and scripture study—if they are divorced from the direct realization of the Mind. The text serves as a "bloodline" or lineage certificate, asserting that the transmission of the Buddha-mind is the only authentic Buddhism.

Structural and Stylistic Choices

The translation maintains the "question and answer" format (Dialogue) which is crucial for the "direct pointing" style. I have used direct, sometimes abrupt English to mirror the forceful Chinese of the Tang/Song vernacular style used in the text. I have incorporated fluid phrasing from Red Pine where accurate (e.g., "seized by," "wooden puppet") while correcting his interpretative looseness regarding doctrinal terms.

Translation Choices - Contextual Explanations

- Spirit-Consciousness (Shénshí): This term refers to the transmigrating consciousness in Chinese folk Buddhism and early Chan. It is the functional aspect of the mind that wanders in samsara when deluded.
- Person of Non-action (Wúwéi Rén): The Buddha is described as a "person of *wúwéi*." Here, *wúwéi* is not just the ontological "unconditioned" but the Daoist-influenced functional style of "non-contrivance" or "effortlessness."

Contextual and Doctrinal Explanations

The Rhetoric of Ultimate Truth vs. The Reality of Karmic Ripening

The Bloodstream Sermon employs the radical rhetoric of the "Sudden Teaching." Statements such as "killing [icchantikas] has no fault" or "A Chandala (butcher) can become a Buddha" are intended to shatter dualistic grasping. However, a grave danger lies in erroneously interpreting these statements literally, or as a license for licentiousness or a denial of cause and effect (nihilism). The Buddha taught in the Neyyatha Sutta, "Monks, these two slander the Tathagata. Which two? He who explains a discourse whose meaning needs to be inferred as one whose meaning has already been fully drawn out. And he who explains a discourse whose meaning has already been fully drawn out as one whose meaning needs to be inferred. These are two who slander the Tathagata."

A note on 'killing icchantikas': Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra is textually layered and intentionally

uses shock / reversal rhetoric. Modern scholarship treats the Dharmakṣema “long” text as a conglomeration with strands that don’t perfectly harmonize. For example, while some statements seemingly suggest that icchantikas are hopeless beings that cannot be saved, the same scripture tradition later insists that in truth, icchantikas can be saved and will attain enlightenment in the future.

Furthermore, the same Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra states, “Noble son, do not say that! That youth was a magical emanation (māyā) and Vajrapāṇi, the king of the yakṣas, enacted that deed in order to extirpate and terrify those who denigrate the authentic Dharma, but it is not right to kill either those who denigrate the authentic Dharma or icchantikas. You should not take life which results in the accumulation of negative karma.”

Freedom from Karma: The Exclusive Domain of the Fully Awakened

Bodhidharma said in the [Treatise on the Awakening of Nature](#), “Sentient beings create karma; karma does not create sentient beings. Creating karma in this life, receiving retribution in the next life—there is no time of escape. Only the Perfected Person [i.e. Buddha] does not create any karma within this body, therefore he does not receive retribution. The sūtra says: “Creating no karma, one naturally attains the Way.”

It is a critical error to assume that a mere initial glimpse of the Nature (*Jiànxìng / Kensho*) grants immunity from karma. While the Nature itself is unconditioned, the practitioner who has “seen” it is not yet a fully perfected Buddha. They remain subject to the twin obscurations (afflictive and knowledge obscurations) to varying degrees, and the ripening of latent karmic tendencies.

True freedom from karma is not a property of the initial “Path” but of the final “Fruit.” It belongs strictly to the fully awakened Tathāgata who has completely exhausted the Two Obscurations (afflictive emotions and cognitive traces). For the vast majority of practitioners—even those with genuine initial insights—karma remains fully operative.

As the Mahayana Sutras and Zen Masters clarify, this complete freedom is exclusive to the Buddha:

- Lankavatara Sutra: “Karma does not attach to the Buddhas, because they have transcended all dualities. They are free from individualization and discrimination... they are beyond the triple world and are unattached to the consequences of deeds.”
- Mahāparinirvāṇa Sutra: “The Tathagata is beyond karma, birth, and death. Though he may appear to enter samsara, he does so out of compassion and is never tainted by its bonds.”

- Avatamsaka Sutra: "The deeds of the Buddha are free from any bondage of karma... His actions are not born of desire, not subject to consequence, and yet they benefit infinite beings."
- Zen Master Huangbo: "The Buddha is without karma. Karma belongs to the deluded mind. Enlightenment knows no karma, no rebirth."

The Inescapability of Ripening (Vipāka)

We must distinguish between creating new binding karma (which stops upon full awakening) and the ripening of old karma. The distinction between a Buddha and an ordinary being is not that the Buddha vanishes from the causal universe, but that the Buddha is free from the Three Poisons (Desire/Craving, Anger, Delusion) that drive the creation of new binding karma.

Even Shakyamuni Buddha, in his physical manifestation, experienced severe migraines due to the ripening of past karma, which persisted for the rest of his life following the Sākya clan's massacre. This demonstrates that while the Buddha's mind is liberated, the physical body remains subject to the unerring law of cause and effect. If this is so even for a Buddha, the claims that one is "untouched" while still embodied and not yet a full Buddha absolutely falls into the category of the "Nihilist View."

The Koan of Baizhang's Wild Fox: "Not Falling" vs. "Not Obscuring"

To understand Bodhidharma's assertion that the Nature is "free from cause and effect" without falling into error, one must look to the famous Chan Koan Case 2 of the Wumenguan (The Gateless Barrier), concerning Baizhang and the Wild Fox.

In this case, an elder monk was asked, "Is an accomplished cultivator subject to cause and effect?" He answered, "They do not fall into cause and effect" (*bù luò yīnguǒ*). For this answer—implying that enlightenment is an exemption from cosmic law—he was reborn as a wild fox for 500 lifetimes. He was only liberated when Master Baizhang corrected him with a single turning phrase: "They do not obscure cause and effect" (*bù mēi yīnguǒ*).

- "Not Falling" (*Bù luò*): This implies a denial of causality, a belief that the enlightened being sits outside the operation of karma. Master Dogen (in *Shobogenzo: Shinjin-inga*) critiques this as a "Great Wrong View" that leads to hellish states.
- "Not Obscuring" (*Bù mēi*): This means the enlightened being is perfectly clear about cause and effect. They are not confused (*mēi*) by it. They understand that while the Mind-ground is empty, the functioning of phenomena follows precise laws.

Therefore, when the *Bloodstream Sermon* speaks of being "free," it refers to the the full realization and embodiment of the Ultimate Nature of Mind. It does not give permission for unawakened or partially awakened students to ignore moral discipline. As Master Dogen concludes: "To say 'one does not fall into cause and effect' is to deny cause and effect... 'Not obscuring cause and effect' is clearly deep faith in cause and effect."

"To summarize, the principle of cause and effect is quite clear, and it is totally impersonal: those who fabricate evil will fall into a lower state, whereas those who practice good will rise to a higher state, and without the slightest disparity. If cause and effect had become null and void, Buddhas would never have appeared in the world and our Ancestral Master would not have come from the West. In short, it would be impossible for human beings to encounter a Buddha and hear the Dharma. The fundamental principle of cause and effect was not clear to Confucius or Lao-tzu. It has only been clarified and Transmitted by Buddha after Buddha and by Ancestor after Ancestor. Because the good fortune of those who are seeking to learn in these degenerate days of the Dharma is scant, they do not encounter a genuine Master or hear the authentic Dharma, and so they are not clear about cause and effect. If you deny causality as a result of this error, you will experience excessive misfortune, since you would be as ignorant as an ox or a horse. Even if you have not committed any evil act other than denying cause and effect, the poison of this view will immediately be terrible. Therefore, if you who are exploring the Matter through your training with a Master have put your heart that seeks awakening as the first and foremost matter, and therefore wish to repay the vast benevolence of the Buddhas and the Ancestors, you should swiftly clarify what causality really is." - Zen Master Dogen Zenji

(https://www.thezensite.com/ZenTeachings/Dogen_Teachings/Shobogenzo/088jinshiInga.pdf)

"Without the precepts, Zen is the work of the devil."

— Zen Master Dogen Zenji

Refuting the "One Agent" and the "First Cause" Heresy

"But if there is abiding or attachment to One Mind, One Agent, One Comprehending or One Seeing, the Buddha does not allow it at all."

— Bodhidharma

In this critical passage, Bodhidharma explicitly rejects the attachment to "One Mind" (一心) or "One Agent" (一能 - *Yi Neng*). This is a precise dismantling of the Substantialist / First Cause (第一因) view—the belief in a singular, permanent "Agent" or "Source" that generates reality.

The Meaning of "Néng" (能): Agent vs. Function

In Buddhist philosophy, the character Néng (能) is the active half of the dualistic pair *Néng-Suǒ* (能所 - Subject/Object or Agent/Patient).

- Néng: The Subject, the Agent, the "Knower," or the "Creator."
- Suǒ: The Object, the Sphere, the "Known," or the "Created."

When Bodhidharma warns against attaching to "One Agent," he is attacking the subtle delusion of establishing a "Cosmic Subject" or "Super-Self" (like the *Purusha* of Sāṃkhya or the *Brahman* of Vedanta) that stands behind phenomena and "acts" as their ultimate Source or creator. He is saying: do not reify the functioning of Mind into a static Agent.

Modern Relevance: The "First Cause" Error (Xiao Ping Shi)

This distinction is vital for navigating modern doctrinal deviations. For instance, the contemporary teacher Xiao Ping Shi (leader of the "True Enlightenment Practitioners Association" in Taiwan) has been critiqued by teachers (such as Ven. Da Zhao) for falling into this exact "One Agent / First Cause" error.

Xiao posits that the Tathāgatarbha (or Eighth Consciousness) is a literal, permanent entity that "creates" (能生 - *Néng Sheng*) the physical body and the universe. He views the True Mind as the Agent (Néng) and the universe as the Product (Suǒ). This is a classic monistic view (邪因外道 - *Heterodox Cause*), confusing the Buddhist *Alaya* (a storehouse of dependent seeds) with a Samkhya or Vedantic view of an Ultimate Source or the *Pradhāna* (Nature) of Sāṃkhya philosophy.

Ven. Da Zhao's Critique & Scriptural Evidence

As Ven. Da Zhao points out in his critique *Heterodox Cause: Xiao Ping Shi's "God-Making Movement"*, this view aligns with the "Twenty Kinds of Outsiders" refuted in the *Lankavatara Sutra* commentaries. He cites authoritative texts to refute this "One Agent" view:

- Abhidharma Kośa (Vol 6): *"One cause producing things is impossible"* (一因生法，決定無有).
- Avatamsaka Sutra (Vol 30): *"The nature of all dharmas is empty and quiescent; there is no single dharma that can create"* (無有一法能造作).

Dependent Origination as Non-Arising

Crucially, when Bodhidharma asserts that "Mind.. ...[has] no cause and effect," he is refuting the substantialist view of Inherent Production/Inherent Causation—the idea that something can arise by its own power or essence from a Self, Other, Both, or Causelessness—and not the valid relative principle of Dependent Origination itself. To understand this, we must look to the Eight Examples of Illusion (such as a mirage, a rainbow, or an echo).

True Dependent Origination reveals that phenomena are Non-Arisen (無生):

- The Rainbow: A rainbow depends on mist, light, and an observer. Because it is thoroughly dependent on these conditions, no independent "rainbow-entity" is ever truly born. It is a vivid appearance that is simultaneously empty of essence.
- The Drum Sound: When a drum is struck, a sound arises. But the sound is not inside the wood, the hide, or the stick. It does not "come" from anywhere. It is a dependent designation—a label applied to a confluence of conditions. Because no "sound-entity" can be found, the sound is "unborn" and "unceasing."

Bodhidharma points to this: Whatever dependently originates is empty of inherent existence. The "functioning" of the Sage is like a mirage or an echo—functioning clearly without an Agent, moving without a Mover, and arising without ever leaving the state of non-arising. Simultaneously, Bodhidharma does not deny The Causal Power of the Unreal, hence in that same text he asserts, "Good and evil are distinct; cause and effect are clear.", and "There are people who deny cause and effect, blazing in creating evil karma, falsely saying the original is empty and creating evil has no fault; such people fall into the hell of Uninterrupted Darkness, with no time of exit forever. If one is a wise person, one should not make such a view."

The Paradox of Motion and Mind — The Total Realization of *Anatta*

1. The Mutual Negation: Escaping the "Substantialist" Trap

This section contains the text's most critical dialectic for realizing Anatta (No-Self). When Bodhidharma says "Motion is mind's function," a student might fall into Substantialist Non-dualism—imagining "Mind" as a giant, static background screen or a "Source" that remains untouched while emitting functions like a radio emits waves.

Bodhidharma destroys this view with a rigorous mutual negation:

"Outside of moving-function there is no mind; outside of mind there is no motion. Motion has no mind to separate from; mind has no motion to separate from."

This reveals that "Mind" and "Motion" are not two things (a Hidden Source vs. a Visible Output). They are a single, non-dual occurrence.

- You cannot peel away the "Motion" to find a "Mind" hiding behind it.
- You cannot set aside "Mind" and find some mechanical "Motion" existing on its own.

2. The "Weather" Analogy: Dynamic Function without a Static Agent

To realize this is to cure the "disease of nouns." Our language tricks us into believing that for every action (verb), there must be a subject (noun) to initiate it. We say "The wind blows," implying "Wind" is an entity that decides to perform the act of "blowing."

But as [Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh points out](#), this is a grammatical fiction:

"If there is no blowing, there is no wind... We don't need a 'rainer,' we just need the rain. Raining and the rain are the same."

Similarly, "Mind" or "Awareness" is not a static container *in* which things happen. As clarified in contemporary discussions (e.g., via the *Awakening to Reality* blog), "Mind" is merely a label for dynamic activity, just like "Weather".

- No Lightning besides the Flash: You cannot have "lightning" sitting in the cloud waiting to perform a "flash." Lightning *is* the flashing.
- No Agent behind the Flash: The flash happens. It is self-luminous. There is no "flasher" behind it.

In the same way, there is no "Knower" behind the "Knowing," and no "Mover" behind the "Moving."

3. Nagarjuna's Logic: Refuting Both the Mover and the Movement

Bodhidharma's assertion that "Motion is not mind" and "Mind has no motion" echoes the rigorous analysis of Nagarjuna (in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Chapter 2). By asserting "Motion is not mind," Bodhidharma prevents the materialist error of reducing awareness to mere physical mechanics (Identity); conversely, by asserting "Outside of motion there is no mind," he destroys the eternalist delusion of a hidden "ghost in the machine" or separate Self (Difference). This rigorous double-negation collapses the entire Agent-Action structure, forcing the realization of Anatta: functioning appears vividly as a dependent designation, yet neither an inherent "Mover" nor an independent "Movement" can ever be established.

To fully realize *Anatta*, we must see through the metaphysical structure of "Agent" and "Action."

We habitually assume an inherent Mover (Self) initiates a Movement (Activity). Nagarjuna refutes this by exposing the logical absurdities that arise if we take these as real entities:

- The Error of the "Moving Mover" (The Doubling Fault): If we claim there is an inherently existing "Mover" who then performs the act of "moving," we commit a logical error. Why? Because to be defined as a "Mover," one must *already* possess motion. If this "Mover" then performs the action of moving, there would be two motions: one that makes him a "Mover" initially, and a second one that he performs. This is absurd.
- Mutual Dependence (No Independent Basis): Since an independent "Mover" cannot be established, perhaps the "Movement" itself is real? Nagarjuna argues that "Movement" is impossible to locate: it is not found in the path already passed, nor in the path not yet passed.
 - Without a "Mover," there is no "Movement" (who is moving?).
 - Without "Movement," there is no "Mover" (how are they defined?).
- Conclusion (Dependent Designation): Because neither the Mover nor the Movement can stand alone, they are revealed to be Dependent Designations (*prajñaptir upādāya*). They exist only as conceptual labels applied to a flow of conditions.

Crucial Two Truths Distinction: This is not a nihilistic denial that "walking happens." Walking conventionally occurs. It is a denial that a Reified Self (Svabhāva) initiates the walking. The structure of "Subject performs Verb" collapses into emptiness—dynamically appearing and functioning as all actions and appearances vividly without reifications and without a ghost in the machine.

4. Mind as Self-Luminosity: The Light of Knowing

If both the Agent and the Action are empty of inherent existence, what is happening? Is it just blank darkness?

No. The text says: "Motion is precisely mind's function."

This points to the realization that Mind is the self-luminosity of all appearances.

- The Mind is not a spotlight that shines *from* a subject *onto* an object.
- The appearances and dynamic functions (the moving hand, the sound of the bell, the arising thought) are themselves the brilliant light of knowingness. Crucially, the brilliant light of knowingness has no existence of itself apart from self-knowing appearances.

The "knowing" is not separate from the "known." The redness of a flower *is* the knowing of the redness, and no other knowing can be found beside that appearance. The sensation of walking *is* the knowing of walking, and no other knowing can be found beside that appearance. There is not the slightest hairbreadth's distinction between the scene and the seeing.

5. "Moving Yet Without Anything Moved"

This culminates in the Sutra quote: "All day going and coming yet never having gone."

This is the final seal of Anatta:

- Conventionally: There is the vivid appearance of walking, speaking, and eating.
- Ultimately: There is no "Walker" who traverses space, no "Speaker" who generates words, no "Thinker" who creates thoughts.

Because there is no fixed "Self" to travel from Point A to Point B, and because the "Mover" is empty of substance, even "Movement" itself is empty of substance. Thus, the Sage functions all day long yet "never moves." This is the total, agentless exertion of all dependent conditions—raining without a rainer, thinking without a thinker, moving without a mover.

Comparative Notes: High-Fidelity vs. Earlier Translations (e.g., Red Pine)

While Red Pine's translation is widely read for its conversational fluency, this High-Fidelity translation diverges in critical areas to restore the specific Mahāyāna technical terminology and the correct doctrinal classification of "Internal" vs. "External" practice.

Dharmakāya vs. Real Body

- Source: *Fāshēn* (法身).
- Red Pine: "Real body."
- This Translation: "Dharmakāya."
- Rationale: *Dharmakāya* is a specific technical term referring to the Buddha's complete knowledge of emptiness. Red Pine's choice of "Real Body" implies a substantial, inherent substrate (a "Real Self"), which risks sneaking a non-Buddhist Atman-view (Self-view) back into a text explicitly teaching No-Self or No-Mind. Translating it as "Real body" risks substantialism—implying a metaphysical essence, "True Self" or substratum that ultimately

exists underlying all phenomena, in contrast to the physical body. Retaining *Dharmakāya* preserves the link to the Trikāya (Three Bodies) doctrine essential to the text.

Outsiders vs. Fanatics

- Source: *Wàidào* (外道 - Skt. *Tīrthika*).
- Red Pine: "Fanatics."
- This Translation: "Outsiders" (or "Followers of Outer Paths").
- Rationale: The term *Wàidào* specifically refers to non-Buddhist practitioners who seek the Truth *outside* the Mind (e.g., through austerities, worship of deities, or metaphysics). Red Pine's choice of "Fanatics" implies that their error is one of *emotional intensity* or zealotry. The text's actual critique is doctrinal: their error is *external seeking*, regardless of how calm or "fanatical" they are.

Numinous Awareness vs. Miraculously Aware

- Source: *Língjué* (靈覺).
- Red Pine: "Miraculously aware."
- This Translation: "Numinous Awareness."
- Rationale: *Líng* (Numinous/Spiritual) refers to the intrinsic, efficacious, and self-illuminating potency of the Mind. "Miraculous" suggests a supernatural event or magic trick. "Numinous Awareness" better captures the Chan view of the Mind's natural, inherent capacity to know and sense without a dualistic knower.

Dharma of Outsiders vs. Nonsense

- Source: *Wàidào Fǎ* (外道法 - Dharma of Outer Paths).
- Red Pine: "All this talk about cause and effect is nonsense."
- This Translation: "Talk of cause and effect... is the dharma of outsiders."
- Rationale: The text reads *yīnguǒ děng yǔ, shì wàidào fǎ*. This does not dismiss karma as "nonsense" (a nihilistic error). Rather, it critiques the reliance on conditioned merit-making without "Seeing Nature."

- Early Buddhist Parallel: MN 117 distinguishes "Right View with effluents" (leading to wholesome karma/rebirth in higher realms) from "Noble Right View" (leading to liberation).
- Mahāyāna Parallel: The *Diamond Sūtra* contrasts giving while "abiding in marks" (limited merit) with giving without attachment (immeasurable merit).
- Bodhidharma asserts that practicing for karmic rewards without realizing the Nature keeps one "outside" the gate of liberation. Red Pine's "nonsense" is interpretive and risks misleading the reader into thinking the law of karma itself is false; "dharma of outsiders" accurately categorizes it as a provisional approach insufficient for Buddhahood if clung to as the final goal.

Seeing Nature vs. Seeing *Your* Nature

- Source: *Jiànxìng* (見性).
- Red Pine: "See your nature."
- This Translation: "See Nature" (or "Seeing Nature").
- Rationale: The original Chinese contains no possessive pronoun. While "your nature" is acceptable in conventional parlance, in a rigorous Chan context, inserting "your" creates a subtle doctrinal hazard. It risks reifying the Nature as a personal possession, an individual soul, or a property belonging to a "Self." By stripping away the unwarranted pronoun, "Seeing Nature" (Kenshō) correctly points to the realization of the empty, non-dual nature of reality, which is neither a personal ego nor a "Universal Consciousness," but simply the vivid, ungraspable functioning of Mind that is No-Mind (empty of inherent existence), without an agent, self/Self, center or subject.

Ichchantika vs. Incapable of Belief

- Source: *Yīchántí* (一闡提).
- Red Pine: "People who are incapable of belief."
- This Translation: "Ichchantika."
- Rationale: *Ichchantika* is a specific Mahāyāna soteriological category referring to beings whose "roots of merit" are severed. Glossing it merely as "people who can't believe" loses the weight of the scriptural reference (specifically to the *Nirvana Sutra*) regarding the gravity of slandering the Dharma.

Doctrinal Explanation

To understand why Bodhidharma calls the pursuit of karma "the dharma of outsiders" (*wàidào fǎ*), we must look at how Buddhist tradition distinguishes between practicing for merit (within Samsara) and practicing for liberation (Nirvana).

1. The Foundation: Pali Canon (MN 117)

The Buddha explicitly distinguishes two types of Right View. This provides a clear early Buddhist formulation of the distinction Chan later re-expresses.

- Mundane Right View (*Sāsava* - "With Effluents"): Affirmation of giving, offerings, and the fruits of karma. This is ethically indispensable and leads to merit/heaven, but it is still "siding with merit" and results in further becoming (acquisitions).
- Noble Right View (*Anāsava* - "Noble/Taintless"): The wisdom faculty that penetrates the Four Noble Truths. This is the "transcendent" factor of the path that cuts the root of suffering.

2. The Mahāyāna Parallel: "Abiding in Marks" vs. Ultimate Truth

Mahāyāna often re-expresses this distinction using the idioms of (i) conventional vs. ultimate truth and (ii) "abiding in marks" vs. non-abiding *prajñā*. Karma is affirmed conventionally, while ultimate insight cuts the reification of agent, action, and result.

Context	"Outsider" / Mundane Approach	"Seeing Nature" / Ultimate Approach
Diamond Sūtra	"Abiding in Marks" Practicing charity while reifying a "self," "person," or "living being."	"Non-Abiding" Practicing without attachment to forms or reification of the giver/gift/recipient.

Context	"Outsider" / Mundane Approach	"Seeing Nature" / Ultimate Approach
	<i>Result:</i> Finite merit (spiritually limited).	<i>Result:</i> Immeasurable merit.
Lankavatara Sūtra	<p>Conventional Teaching</p> <p>Teachings on karma and moral causality that rely on discriminative mind and words.</p>	<p>Self-Realization of Noble Wisdom</p> <p>The yogin's direct realization (<i>Āryajñāna</i>) that transcends discursiveness and dualistic views.</p>
Vimalakirti Sūtra	<p>"Bound Practice"</p> <p>Sitting in meditation while physically or mentally "abiding" in form or tranquility.</p>	<p>"True Sitting"</p> <p>Not manifesting body and mind in the triple world, yet not relinquishing the affairs of beings.</p>

The Bodhidharma Synthesis

When Bodhidharma says: *"Talk of cause and effect... is the dharma of outsiders,"* he is aligning with the Diamond Sūtra's critique of "Abiding in Marks."

To practice causality with attachment to a Self/Agent seeking rewards outside is to remain "outside" the Gate of Chan and the gate of liberation.

Red Pine's Error ("Nonsense"):

By translating Wàidào Fǎ as "nonsense," Red Pine implies the conventional teaching is false. It isn't false; it is simply a "lower" rung. As MN 117 clarifies, Mundane Right View is still "Right View"—it just doesn't lead out of Samsara on its own.

A Note on the Importance of Finding an Awakened Teacher

A very insightful Zen teacher Ven. Jinmyo Renge Sensei said, "Sometimes students really can't understand why they can't just sit at home, by themselves, without instruction. After all, the Buddha did that. Bodhidharma did that. May I point out that you are not the Buddha and you are not Bodhidharma. You're also not Einstein and you're not going to come up with anything like the theory of relativity – not without countless years of instruction and study and probably not even then. You're not Bach and so it is highly unlikely that you will write music like his, not without countless years of instruction and study. Sorry if this is the first time anyone's pointed this out, but things are not all equal, they're not all fair, we do not all have the same starting point and you are as you are, not as someone else is. Or was. Start from where you are and be willing to learn from others.

You might not like what I just said, but do you understand why I said it?

I once asked the Roshi about Teachers – if two people who had nothing in common Woke Up and became Teachers, would they somehow come to agree with each other about everything? He said 'No, but they would understand why the other was saying or doing what he or she was saying or doing.'"

- <https://wwzc.org/>

It should be pointed out that even Bodhidharma has a teacher. In the traditional Indian-patriarch lineage, Bodhidharma studies under Prajñātāra, who is presented as his teacher and the one who directs him to bring the Dharma eastward.

Explanation: The Nature of Realization and the Necessity of Cultivation

To "See Nature" is to realize the emptiness of the Agent, the threefold structure of subject-action-object, and the emptiness and non-arising of self and phenomena (twofold emptiness). This does not mean one enters a nihilistic void where actions have no consequences. Rather, it reveals that the Three Wheels (Agent, Action, and Result) are empty of inherent existence.

Once the Agent-Agency-Action paradigm is penetrated and seen as empty and unreal, karmic bondage—the wholesome and unwholesome actions underpinned by the three afflictive poisons of desire, aggression, and delusion, serving as the fuel and conditions for the compulsion to be reborn—starts to lose its foothold.

However, even after realizing emptiness, one does not immediately overcome the cycle of birth and death in samsara. Although self and phenomena, Agent-Agency-Action are realized to be empty, unobtainable, and non-arisen, and the conceptual view that binds one to the lower realms is severed; the full cessation of samsaric rebirth requires further cultivation.

Doctrinal Note: The Beginning, Not the End

It is critical to understand that realizing the emptiness of the Three Wheels and the non-arising of dharmas marks the entry into the path, not the completion of it. In the Mahāyāna map, this realization corresponds to the First Bhūmi (The Path of Seeing).

While the imputed view of a self—namely, apprehending the self as a singular, permanent, and independent entity—is cut here, deep-seated innate emotional habits and karmic momentum remain. Authentic Chan requires progressive refinement (*baoren*) to move from this initial insight toward full Buddhahood.

- First Bhūmi (Path of Seeing): Realization of Twofold Emptiness. The imputed self-view is cut, preventing rebirth in the Three Lower Realms, but innate emotional patterns and the general compulsion for samsaric rebirth persist.
- Eighth Bhūmi & Arahantship: The exhaustion of Afflictive Obscurations (Kleśāvaraṇa). While the Eighth Bhūmi Bodhisattva and the Arahant differ in their scope of wisdom regarding phenomena, they both share the complete eradication of afflictive emotions. All traces of grasping, desire, anger, fear, pride, anxiety, and all traces of the "I Am" conceit are eradicated. It is here that the compulsion to be reborn in Samsara is finally severed. The Arahant has finished their task of liberation; the Eighth Bhūmi Bodhisattva becomes "Immovable," no longer capable of sliding back into samsaric delusion, and proceeds toward full Buddhahood.
- Buddhahood: The exhaustion of Knowledge Obscurations (Jñeyāvaraṇa). The subtlest reifications of phenomena in terms of existence, non-existence, and duality are purified, resulting in Omniscience—a perfection of wisdom that exceeds even the realization of the Eighth Bhūmi.

(For a detailed reading on these stages, refer to the author's article: [*Buddhahood: The End of All Emotional/Mental Afflictions and Knowledge Obscurations*](#))

The Twin Obscurations

In Mahāyāna Buddhism two principal obscurations (Ch. 障, *zhàng*; Skt. *āvaraṇa*; Tib. *sgrib pa*) are distinguished—afflictive obscurations (Ch. 煩惱障, *fánnǎozhàng*; Skt. *klesāvaraṇa*; Tib. *nyön mongs kyi sgrib pa*) and knowledge obscurations (Ch. 所知障, *suǒzhīzhàng*; Skt. *jñeyāvaraṇa*; Tib. *ye shes kyi sgrib pa*)—each defined by its essence (*bhāva*), cause (*hetu*), and function (*varaṇa*).

Afflictive obscurations are the defiling emotions—passion (Ch. 貪, *tān*; Skt. *rāga*), aggression (Ch. 瞋, *chēn*; Skt. *dveṣa*), delusion (Ch. 癡, *chī*; Skt. *moha*), and the like—which arise from grasping at a self, agent or soul (Ch. 我執, *wǒzhí*; Skt. *ātma-grāha*; Tib. *bdag lta bu*) and block final liberation from saṃsāra.

Knowledge obscurations are the subtler veils of misperception—beginning with the classic three spheres (Ch. 三輪, *sānlún*) of subject, object, and action; extending to all notions of how phenomena arise, abide, and cease; to supposed inherent causes and effects; to misconceived characteristics (Ch. 取相, *qǔxiàng*; Skt. *lakṣaṇagrāha*); to dualistic divides of internality versus externality; and to extremes of existence versus nonexistence—each stemming from ascribing true, independent reality to phenomena (the “self of phenomena,” Ch. 法執, *fǎzhí*; Skt. *dharmātma-grāha*; Tib. *chos lta bu*) and thereby obscuring omniscience.

Although Śrāvaka (Ch. 聲聞, *shēngwén*) Arhat (Ch. 阿羅漢, *ālúohàn*) and Pratyekabuddha (Ch. 緣覺, *yuánjué*) practitioners likewise uproot the afflictive obscurations, entry into the eighth bhūmi (Ch. 地, *dì*) marks the first stage at which a bodhisattva (Ch. 菩薩, *púsà*) has eliminated all kleshas—putting them on par with arhats in that respect—yet they remain subject to the knowledge obscurations until full Buddhahood (Ch. 佛果, *fóguǒ*).

1. The Ultimate View: “One Leap Straight into the Tathāgata-Ground”

In the rhetoric of Chan/Zen, one often encounters statements that seem to promise that this initial realization is the totality of Buddhahood. A primary source for this view is the *Song of Enlightenment* (《證道歌》; *Zhengdao Ge*) by Yongjia Xuanjue (665–713 CE).

Yongjia is traditionally regarded as a Dharma heir of the Sixth Patriarch Huineng and is famous as the “One Night Enlightened Guest” (一宿覺), having received transmission and departed after a single night. In his *Song*, contrasting “merit with attachment” (which leads only to temporary heavenly rewards) with the “gate of the unconditioned real suchness” (無為實相門), he famously declares:

「爭似無為實相門，一超直入如來地。」

"How can it compare to the gate of the unconditioned real suchness?

One leap straight into the Tathāgata-ground."

The phrase is often cited in shorthand as *Yi chao ru ru lai di* (「一超入如來地」).

- 「一超」 means "a single leap" or "one bound" (bypassing step-by-step stages).
- 「直入」 means "straight in" or "directly enter."
- 「如來地」 (*Ru Lai Di*) refers literally to the "Tathāgata-ground," a standard technical term for the stage of full Buddhahood found in texts like the *Lankavatara Sutra*.

This line creates the impression that the moment of awakening is a singular leap that bypasses all stages. Bodhidharma's own *Doctrine of No-Mind* reinforces this absolute perspective:

"No-mind, no illumination, and also no function;

No illumination and no function is precisely the Unconditioned.

This is the True Dharma-realm of the Tathāgata,

Not the same as Bodhisattvas or Pratyekabuddhas.

The statement 'No-mind' implies the absence of a mind with delusory appearances."

When reading such texts, one might assume that the moment one awakens to the truth of No-Mind, one is immediately a fully awakened Buddha, identical to Shakyamuni.

2. The Reality: Sudden Awakening, Gradual Cultivation

However, mistaking the *nature* of the realization for the *full exhaustion* of obscurations is a grave error. While the nature of the mind is indeed the "Tathāgata-ground," the practitioner's capacity to embody that nature is usually obscured by habit energies.

There are historically rare cases of "Instant Realizers" (*cig car ba* in Tibetan traditions)—those of superior capacity who attain full Buddhahood the very moment they are introduced to the nature of mind—but these are exceptionally uncommon. As Kyle Dixon notes regarding the Tibetan equivalents of these traditions:

"Chigcharwas are fully realized during direct introduction, buddhahood. If you are saying there is mere recognition [ngo shes], and then there is further 'exhaustion' over time, that would not be indicative of a chigcharwa or 'sudden realizer.'"

Dixon further quotes the master Zhigpo Dutsi, who searched for such historical figures:

"Apart from Saraha in India and Ling Repa (founder of the Drukpa lineage) in Tibet, I have not found a single sudden realizer [cig car ba] even though I have searched far and wide."

The same principle applies to Zen. Even in the earliest days of Buddhism, there were those who attained complete liberation immediately after being pointed to no-self—such as Bahiya in the *Bahiya Sutta*, who awakened upon hearing the instruction: "*In the seen, there is just the seen, and no you in terms of that*" [paraphrased]. Yet, the vast majority of the Buddha's disciples still had to traverse gradual stages (Stream Entry to Arahantship) to fully uproot the fetters.

Therefore, for most of us, even if we have a sudden awakening, it must be followed by gradual practice to clear away the "Beginningless Habit-Energies" (*vasana*).

3. The Methodology: The Infant and the Ice

This dynamic is best explained by the Korean Seon (Zen) Master Chinul (Puril Bojo Guksa), who championed the framework of "Sudden Awakening, Gradual Cultivation" (頓悟漸修). In his *Secrets on Cultivating the Mind*, he writes:

"First let us take sudden awakening. When the ordinary man is deluded, he assumes that the four great elements are his body and the false thoughts are his mind. He does not know that his own nature is the true dharma-body; he does not know that his own numinous awareness is the true Buddha. He looks for the Buddha outside his mind. While he is thus wandering aimlessly, the entrance to the road might by chance be pointed out by a wise advisor.

If in one thought he then follows back the light [of his mind to its source] and sees his own original nature, he will discover that the ground of this nature is innately free of defilement, and that he himself is originally endowed with the non-outflow wisdom-nature which is not a hair's breadth different from that of all the Buddhas. Hence it is called sudden awakening.

Next let us consider gradual cultivation. Although he has awakened to the fact that his original nature is no different from that of the Buddhas, the beginningless habit-energies are extremely difficult to remove suddenly; and so he must continue to cultivate while relying on this awakening. Through this gradual permeation, his endeavors reach completion. He constantly nurtures the sacred embryo, and after a long time he becomes a saint. Hence it is called gradual cultivation.

This process can be compared to the maturation of a child. From the day of its birth, a baby is endowed with all the sense organs just like everyone else, but its strength is not yet fully developed. It is only after many months and years that it will finally become an adult."

To further illustrate this, Chinul quotes the Great Master Guifeng Zongmi using the analogy of ice and water:

「識冰池而全水，藉陽氣而鎔消。悟凡夫而即真，資法力而修習...」

"Although we know that the frozen pond is entirely water, the sun's heat is necessary to melt it. Although we awaken to the fact that an ordinary man is Buddha, the power of Dharma is necessary to permeate our cultivation. When the pond is melted, the water flows freely and can be used for irrigation and cleaning. When falsities are extinguished, the mind will be luminous and dynamic, and then its function of penetrating brightness will manifest."

4. Synthesis: The Ultimate vs. The Relative

How do we reconcile the "One Leap" of Yongjia with the "Gradual Melting" of Zongmi? We must understand the difference between the View (the Ultimate) and the Path (the Relative).

From the perspective of the Ultimate, the various stages (Bhumis) are empty designations, for the True Nature is beyond all gradation. While the gradual path maps out ten or more stages of Bodhisattva development to address the layers of obscuration, the Chan view is that once the nature of mind is realized, the path is simply a matter of maturation.

The True Nature is like the Sun—always shining, self-perfected, and complete from the very beginning. The obscurations (emotional and cognitive) are merely drifting Clouds. Whether these clouds dissipate slowly over aeons or vanish in a single gust of wind, the Sun itself has no "levels" or "stages." It does not get brighter as the clouds part; it was simply obscured and obstructed.

Therefore, in the One Vehicle (Ekayana), there is fundamentally only one "Bhumi"—precisely that "One Leap Straight into the Tathāgata-ground" (*Yi chao ru ru lai di* 「一超入如來地」) mentioned earlier. It depends entirely on whether one recognizes it or not. Once this Sun—the luminous and empty nature of mind—is discovered, the only task remaining is to allow the clouds to disperse. Zen Masters emphasize post-enlightenment cultivation not to "gain" something new, but to stabilize this recognition so that the Sun is no longer obstructed from full blossoming.

This crucial bridge between initial insight and final liberation has long been emphasized by the masters:

- Yuanwu Keqin warned: *"When you reach the point where feelings are ended, views are gone... you open up to Zen realization. After that it is also necessary to develop consistency... If there is the slightest fluctuation, there is no hope of transcending the world."*
- The Fifth Patriarch Hongren taught: *"Even though phenomena are essentially empty, it is necessary to preserve the basic true mind with perfect clarity."*
- Shido Bunan advised treating the realization *"as though you were raising an infant,"* nurturing it until the function is equal to the Buddhas.

As Kyle Dixon concludes regarding this necessary stabilization:

"Realization and insight are always sudden and immediate, but just as in other Buddhist systems, that knowledge is unstable and must be carefully cultivated from then on in order to eventually actualize Buddhahood."

Zen teacher Meido Moore said:

"...so it seems I agree with Krodha [Kyle Dixon]'s take.

From a practice standpoint, though, the crucial point is contained in the words, "one should just constantly activate correct views in one's own mind." This has nothing to do with theoretical certainty that defilements are empty and do not bind; it refers to the seamless, sustained upwelling of the unified samadhi/prajna. Departing from but then returning to this, again and again, describes the post-awakening practice to dissolve jikke*.

If one experiences departure from this samadhi, even for a moment, the path is not completed at all. If one does not know what is actually meant by that samadhi, then even with kensho the path is still barely begun in terms of actualization."

*Jikke is a Japanese term (traces/habit-energy, vasana in Sanskrit) that describes the deep-seated behavioral and cognitive patterns that persist even after one has had a glimpse of their true nature (kenshō). The post-awakening practice serves to remove these obstructions and embody realization more fully.

5. Scriptural Authority: The Origins of "Sudden Principle, Gradual Practice"

The necessity of post-awakening cultivation is famously encapsulated in the maxim: "Sudden awakening in principle; gradual cultivation in phenomena" (Ch. 理上頓悟，事上漸修; *lǐ shàng dùn wù, shì shàng jiàn xiū*).

While this phrasing is widely associated with later Zen exegesis, it is not an invention of the Zen patriarchs but a direct paraphrase of the Buddha's teaching in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Ch. 大佛頂首楞嚴經; *Dà Fódǐng Shǒuléngyán Jīng*). In Volume 10 (T0945, 卷第十), the sūtra provides the canonical bedrock for this view.

(Note: While modern scholarship treats the Śūraṅgama Sūtra as an East Asian composition and its authenticity was occasionally questioned by historical figures like Dōgen, it has nevertheless functioned as a foundational, authoritative text for the vast majority of the Chan tradition.)

理則頓悟，乘悟併銷；事非頓除，因次第盡。

(Textual Note: Variants often read 乘悟並消 or 併消)

"In principle, awakening is sudden; riding on this awakening, [delusions] simultaneously melt away. But in terms of phenomena, they are not removed suddenly; they are exhausted sequentially [through stages]."

This four-part structure provides the precise doctrinal nuance required to navigate the path:

1. "In principle, awakening is sudden" (Ch. 理則頓悟, *lǐ zé dùn wù*): "Principle" (*Li*) here refers to the Mind-ground, Suchness, or Buddha-nature. This nature is not assembled piece by piece; recognizing it is a singular, immediate "turning" or direct insight.
2. "Riding on this awakening, [delusions] simultaneously melt away" (Ch. 乘悟併銷, *chéng wù bìng xiāo*): Genuine insight collapses fundamental ignorance. In the specific context of the sūtra, this refers to the immediate loosening of the karmic "knots" of perception; the wrong view that a self exists is cut through immediately upon this realization.
3. "But phenomena are not removed suddenly" (Ch. 事非頓除, *shì fēi dùn chú*): "Phenomena" (*Shi*) refer to the "installed base" of conditioning—habit energies (*vasanas*), emotional reflexes, and karmic momentum. Even though the lights have been turned on, the machinery of karma is still spinning from past momentum.
4. "They are exhausted sequentially" (Ch. 因次第盡, *yīn cì dì jìn*): This doctrinal stance articulates the logic behind the later Chan emphasis on "protection and sustenance" (Ch. 保任; *bǎorèn*) and the "nurturing of the sacred embryo" (Ch. 長養聖胎; *zhǎngyǎng shèngtāi*)—the long process of stabilization that follows the initial breakthrough.

Historical Application in Zen

This scriptural authority was explicitly cited by the great Linji Chan master Dàhuì Zōnggǎo (Ch. 大慧宗杲; 1089–1163) during the Song Dynasty. In his instructions to the scholar-official Li Bing (李邴), Dàhuì quotes this specific passage to admonish that awakening must be followed by sustained practice (Ch. 悟後仍須修行; *wù hòu réng xū xiūxíng*), warning against the arrogance of assuming that initial insight equates to final completion.

The framework was further systematized by the Korean Seon master Chinul (Ch. 知訥; 1158–1210). In his seminal work, *Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Record with Personal Notes* (Ch. 修心訣; *Xiūxīnjue*), Chinul explicitly cites the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* and ties it to the analysis of the earlier Huayan-Chan patriarch Guifeng Zongmi (Ch. 圭峰宗密; 780–841):

如經云：理即頓悟，乘悟並消；事非頓除，因次第盡。故圭峰深明先悟後修之義...

"As the sūtra says: 'In principle, awakening is sudden... in terms of phenomena, they are not removed suddenly...' Therefore, Guifeng [Zongmi] deeply understood the meaning of 'First Awakening, then Cultivation'..."

Thus, the teaching of "Sudden Principle, Gradual Practice" is not a betrayal of the sudden teaching, but its necessary completion—ensuring that the sudden vision of the "Sun" is eventually matched by the total evaporation of the "Clouds."

[Bodhidharma's Treatise on the Awakening of Nature](#)

Soh

Chinese Original: <http://fo.sina.com.cn/o/2013-11-06/145014111.shtml>

Note: The translator's commentary and notes (by Soh) are provided at the end of the text.

Bodhidharma's Treatise on the Awakening of Nature

Authored by the (First Ch'an/Zen) Patriarch Bodhidharma

Edited and Carved by Śramaṇa Shi Zongjing of Huayan Monastery in Yuzhou

As for the Way, Quiescent Extinction is its Essence. As for Practice, detachment from characteristics is the central principle. Therefore, the sūtra says: "Quiescent Extinction is Bodhi, because it extinguishes all characteristics." Buddha means "Awakening." Because people possess an awakened mind and attain the Way of Bodhi, they are called Buddhas. The sūtra says: "To be detached from all characteristics is called 'all Buddhas'."

You should know that "having characteristics" is the characteristic of "no-characteristics." It cannot be seen by the eye; it can only be known by wisdom. If one hears this Dharma and gives rise to a single thought of faith, this person transcends the Three Realms by means of the Great Vehicle. The Three Realms are: Greed, Anger, and Delusion. Turning back Greed, Anger, and Delusion into Precepts, Concentration, and Wisdom is called transcending the Three Realms. However, Greed, Anger, and Delusion also have no real nature; they are only spoken of in relation to sentient beings.

If one can turn the illumination inward, one clearly sees that the nature of Greed, Anger, and Delusion is precisely the Buddha-nature. Apart from Greed, Anger, and Delusion, there is no other Buddha-nature. The sūtra says: "All Buddhas, from the very beginning, constantly dwell within the Three Poisons, nourishing the pure dharmas, and thus become World-Honored Ones." The Three Poisons are: Greed, Anger, and Delusion. When we speak of the Great Vehicle or the Supreme Vehicle, this is entirely the place where Bodhisattvas walk. There is nothing not ridden, yet nothing is ridden; all day long one rides, yet one has never ridden—this is the Buddha Vehicle.

The sūtra says: "No vehicle is the Buddha Vehicle." If a person knows that the six sense faculties are not real and the five aggregates are provisional names, and seeks for them throughout the entire body, they will certainly find no fixed location—one should know that this person understands the Buddha's words. The sūtra says: "The cave-dwelling of the five aggregates is called the meditation hall." To illuminate inward and open up understanding is the gate of the Great Vehicle. Is this not clear? Not recollecting any dharmas is called meditation [dhyāna-samādhi].

If one understands these words, then walking, standing, sitting, and lying down are all meditation. Knowing that the mind is empty is called seeing the Buddha. Why is this? The Buddhas of the ten directions are all free of mind; because they do not see [a fixed] mind, this is called seeing the Buddha. Relinquishing the body without stinginess is called Great Giving. Being separate from all motion and stillness is called Great Sitting Meditation. Why is this? Ordinary beings purely move; the Small Vehicle purely settles. That which transcends the sitting meditation of both ordinary beings and the Small Vehicle is called Great Sitting Meditation. If one comprehends this, all characteristics are naturally released without being sought, and all sicknesses are naturally cured without being treated; this is entirely the power of Great Meditation.

Generally, seeking Dharma by using the mind is delusion; not seeking Dharma by using the mind is awakening. Not attaching to written words is called liberation. Not being dyed by the six dusts is called protecting the Dharma. Departing from birth and death is called leaving home. Not receiving further existence is called attaining the Way. Not giving rise to false thoughts is called Nirvāṇa. Not dwelling in ignorance is Great Wisdom.

The place without afflictions is called Parinirvāṇa. The place without mental characteristics is called the Other Shore. When deluded, there is "this shore"; when awakened, there is no "this shore." Why is this? Because ordinary beings purely dwell in "this." If one awakens to the Supreme Vehicle, the mind does not dwell in "this," nor does it dwell in "that"; therefore, one can depart from both this and that shore. If one sees the Other Shore as different from this shore, this person's mind has not yet attained Zen stability. Afflictions are called "sentient beings"; awakening and understanding are called "Bodhi." They are neither one nor different; they are only separated by whether one is deluded or awakened. When deluded, there is a world to exit; when awakened, there is no world to exit. In the Dharma of equality, one does not see ordinary beings as different from sages.

The sūtra says: "As for the Dharma of equality, ordinary beings cannot enter it, and sages cannot practice it." The Dharma of equality is practiced only by Great Bodhisattvas and all Buddhas and Tathāgatas. If one sees life as different from death, or motion as different from stillness, these are all called inequality. To not see afflictions as different from Nirvāṇa is called equality. Why is this? Because afflictions and Nirvāṇa are of the same empty nature.

Therefore, people of the Small Vehicle falsely cut off afflictions and falsely enter Nirvāṇa, becoming stagnated by Nirvāṇa. The Bodhisattva knows that the nature of afflictions is empty; thus, without departing from emptiness, he is constantly in Nirvāṇa. As for Nirvāṇa: "Nir" means not arising; "Vāṇa" means not dying. Departing from birth and death is emerging into Parinirvāṇa. When the mind has no coming or going, one enters Nirvāṇa. You should know that Nirvāṇa is simply the Empty Mind. The reason Buddhas enter Nirvāṇa is that they abide in the place without false thoughts.

Bodhisattvas entering the site of the Way refers to the place without afflictions. The "empty leisure place" refers to the absence of Greed, Anger, and Delusion. Greed is the Desire Realm, Anger is the Form Realm, and Delusion is the Formless Realm. If a single thought arises in the mind, one enters the Three Realms; if a single thought is extinguished in the mind, one exits the Three Realms. Thus, knowing the arising and extinguishing of the Three Realms, and the existence or non-existence of the myriad dharmas, all depends on the One Mind. Whenever we speak of "one dharma," it resembles insentient things like broken tiles, stones, bamboo, or wood. If one knows that the mind is a provisional name and has no substantial essence, one immediately knows that one's own mind is explicitly neither existing nor non-existing. Why is this?

Ordinary beings purely give rise to mind; this is called "existence." The Small Vehicle purely extinguishes mind; this is called "non-existence." Bodhisattvas and Buddhas have never given rise to mind, nor have they ever extinguished mind; this is called "neither existing nor non-existing mind." This "neither existing nor non-existing mind" is called the Middle Way. Know that if one holds onto the mind to learn the Dharma, then both mind and Dharma are deluded. If one does not hold onto the mind to learn the Dharma, then both mind and Dharma are awakened. Generally, the deluded are deluded within awakening; the awakened are awakened within delusion. A person of Right View knows that the mind is empty and void, thus transcending both delusion and awakening. Only when there is no delusion or awakening is it called Right Understanding and Right View.

Form is not form of itself; it is form because of the mind. Mind is not mind of itself; it is mind because of form. Hence, we know that the two characteristics of mind and form arise and perish together. Existing implies existence within non-existence; non-existing implies non-existence within existence—this is called True View. As for True View: there is nothing it does not see, yet nothing is seen. It sees completely throughout the ten directions, yet it has never seen anything.

Why is this? Because there is nothing to be seen; because seeing is non-seeing; because seeing is not seeing. What ordinary beings see is all called false thought. If there is quiescence and no seeing, only then is it called True View. When mind and object face each other, seeing arises in the middle. If the mind does not rise internally, then the object is not born externally; when both object and mind are pure, this is called True View. When one understands like this, it is called Right View. Not seeing any dharmas is called attaining the Way; not understanding any dharmas is called understanding the Dharma. Why is this? Because seeing and not seeing are both not seen. Because understanding and not understanding are both not understood. The seeing of no-seeing is called True View. The understanding of no-understanding is called Great Understanding. As for Right View: it is not merely seeing the seeing, but also seeing the non-seeing. As for True Understanding: it is not merely understanding the understanding, but also understanding the non-understanding. Whenever there is something understood, it is all called non-understanding; only when there is nothing understood is it called Right Understanding.

Understanding and not understanding are both not understanding. The sūtra says: "Not discarding wisdom is called delusion." If one takes the mind as empty, both understanding and not understanding are true. If one takes the mind as existent, both understanding and not understanding are false. If one understands, the Dharma follows the person; if one does not understand, the person follows the Dharma. If the Dharma follows the person, then non-Dharma becomes Dharma. If the person follows the Dharma, then Dharma becomes non-Dharma. If the person follows the Dharma, then all dharmas are false; if the Dharma follows the person, then all dharmas are true. Therefore, the sage does not use

the mind to seek the Dharma, nor does he use the Dharma to seek the mind; he does not use the mind to seek the mind, nor does he use the Dharma to seek the Dharma. Thus, mind does not generate Dharma, and Dharma does not generate mind; mind and Dharma are both quiescent, therefore he is constantly in concentration [samādhi]. When the sentient being's mind arises, the Buddha Dharma is extinguished; when the sentient being's mind is extinguished, the Buddha Dharma is born. When the mind arises, the True Dharma is extinguished; when the mind is extinguished, the True Dharma is born. One who knows that all dharmas do not belong to each other is called a person who has attained the Way.

Knowing that the mind does not belong to any dharma, this person is constantly in the site of the Way. When deluded, there is karmic offense; when one understands, there is no karmic offense. Why is this? Because the nature of karmic offense is empty. If deluded, one sees karmic offense where there is no karmic offense; if one understands, then karmic offense is not karmic offense. Why is this? Because karmic offense has no location. The sūtra says: "All dharmas have no nature; do not doubt the true function; doubting creates karmic offense." Why is this? Karmic offense is born from doubt and confusion. If one makes this understanding, the karmic offenses of previous lives are immediately extinguished. When deluded, the six consciousnesses and five aggregates are all the dharma of afflictions and birth-and-death; when awakened, the six consciousnesses and five aggregates are all the dharma of Nirvāṇa and non-birth-and-death.

A practitioner of the Way does not seek the Way externally. Why is this? One knows that the mind is the Way. If one attains the mind, there is no mind to be attained; if one attains the Way, there is no Way to be attained. If one says the Way can be attained by using the mind to seek it, this is all called Wrong View. When deluded, there is Buddha and there is Dharma; when awakened, there is no Buddha and no Dharma. Why is this? Awakening itself is the Buddha Dharma. As for the practitioner of the Way: when the self is extinguished, the Way is accomplished. It is like a shell breaking the tree. This body of karmic retribution is born; thought after thought is impermanent; there is no fixed dharma. One only practices in accordance with thoughts; one must not loathe birth and death, nor love birth and death. But within every thought, one must not give rise to false thinking. Then, while living, one realizes the Nirvāṇa with Remainder; and at death, one enters the Patience of the Non-arising of Dharmas. When the eyes see form, do not be dyed by form; when the ears hear sound, do not be dyed by sound—this is all liberation. If the eyes do not attach to form, the eyes are a gate to Zen; if the ears do not attach to sound, the ears are a gate to Zen.

In sum: those who see the nature of form are always liberated; those who see the characteristics of form are always bound. Not being bound by afflictions is called liberation; there is no other liberation.

Those who observe form well—form does not give rise to mind, and mind does not give rise to form. Thus, both form and mind are pure.

When there are no false thoughts, one mind is one Buddha-land. When there are false thoughts, one mind is one hell. Sentient beings create false thoughts, generating mind from mind, thus they are constantly in hell. Bodhisattvas observe false thoughts and do not generate mind from mind, thus they are constantly in the Buddha-land. If one does not generate mind from mind, then every mind enters emptiness, and every thought returns to stillness. One goes from one Buddha-land to another Buddha-land. If one generates mind from mind, then every mind is not still, and every thought returns to motion. One goes from one hell, passing through another hell. If a single thought arises, there are the two karmas of good and evil, and there are heaven and hell. If a single thought does not arise, there are no two karmas of good and evil, nor are there heaven and hell.

As for the Essence, it is neither existing nor non-existing. In the ordinary, it exists; in the sage, it does not. The sage is without that mind; therefore, his chest is empty and open, equal in measure to the sky. What follows is all verification within the Great Way; it is not the realm of the Small Vehicle or ordinary beings.

When the mind attains Nirvāṇa, it does not see that there is a Nirvāṇa. Why? The mind is Nirvāṇa. If one sees Nirvāṇa outside the mind, this is called holding a Wrong View. All afflictions are the seed-mind of the Tathāgata. It is because of afflictions that one attains wisdom. One can only say afflictions give birth to the Tathāgata; one cannot say afflictions are the Tathāgata. Therefore, body and mind are the field; afflictions are the seeds; wisdom is the sprout; the Tathāgata is metaphorically the grain. The Buddha is in the mind like fragrance is in a tree. If afflictions are exhausted, the Buddha emerges from the mind; if decay is exhausted, fragrance emerges from the tree. Thus know that outside the tree there is no fragrance; outside the mind there is no Buddha. If there is fragrance outside the tree, it is another's fragrance; if there is a Buddha outside the mind, it is another's Buddha.

Having the Three Poisons in the mind is called a land of filth and evil. Being without the Three Poisons in the mind is called a land of purity. The sūtra says: "If the land is impure and filled with filth and evil, that the Buddhas and World-Honored Ones would appear within it—there is no such thing." "Impure, filth and evil" refers to ignorance and the Three Poisons. "Buddhas and World-Honored Ones" refers to the pure, awakened mind.

All speech is nothing other than Buddha Dharma. If one can be without "that which is spoken," then speaking all day is the Way. If one holds onto "that which is spoken," then being silent all day is not the Way. Therefore, the Tathāgata's speech does not rely on silence; silence does not rely on speech; yet speech does not depart from silence. Those who awaken to this speech and silence are all in Samādhi. If

one speaks knowing the time, speech is also liberation. If one is silent not knowing the time, silence is also bondage. Therefore, if speech is detached from characteristics, speech is called liberation. If silence attaches to characteristics, silence is bondage. As for written words, their fundamental nature is liberation. Written words cannot create bondage; bondage itself has never been in written words.

The Dharma has no high or low. If one sees high or low, it is not the Dharma. Non-Dharma is the raft; the Dharma is the raft for people. When a person rides the raft, they cross over non-Dharma, and that is the Dharma.

In worldly terms, there are men and women, rich and poor. In terms of the Way, there are no men or women, rich or poor. Thus, when the Heavenly Maiden awakened to the Way, she did not change her female form. When Channa understood the Truth, did he change his lowly title? This is because there is no distinction of male vs. female, noble vs. lowly—all share the same 'one mark' (一相). The Heavenly Maiden sought the female characteristic for twelve years and ultimately could not obtain it. Thus, know that seeking the male characteristic for twelve years is also unobtainable. "Twelve years" refers to the Twelve Entrances.

Apart from mind there is no Buddha; apart from Buddha there is no mind. It is like apart from water there is no ice; apart from ice there is no water. Generally, "departing from mind" does not mean staying far away from the mind; it only means not attaching to the characteristics of the mind. The sūtra says: "Not seeing characteristics is called seeing the Buddha." This is precisely departing from the characteristics of the mind. "Apart from Buddha there is no mind" means the Buddha emerges from the mind; the mind can generate the Buddha. However, while the Buddha is born from the mind, the mind has never been born from the Buddha. It is also like fish being born in water; water is not born from fish. Wishing to observe fish, before seeing the fish, one first sees the water. Wishing to observe the Buddha, before seeing the Buddha, one first sees the mind. Thus know that once one has seen the fish, one forgets the water; once one has seen the Buddha, one forgets the mind. If one does not forget the mind, one is still confused by the mind; if one does not forget the water, one is still deluded by the water.

Sentient beings and Bodhi are also like ice and water. Being burned by the Three Poisons is called "sentient being." Being purified by the Three Liberations is called "Bodhi." Being frozen by the Three Winters is called "ice." Being melted by the Three Summers is called "water." If one discards ice, there is no other water. If one discards sentient beings, there is no other Bodhi. Clearly know that the nature of ice is the nature of water; the nature of water is the nature of ice. The nature of sentient beings is the nature of Bodhi. Sentient beings and Bodhi are of the same nature. It is like *Wutou* (Monkshood) and *Fuzi* (Aconite)—they share a common root, but the seasons are different. Because of delusion regarding different states, there are the two names "sentient being" and "Bodhi." Therefore, when a

snake transforms into a dragon, it does not change its scales; when an ordinary being changes into a sage, he does not change his face. One only knows the mind—wisdom illuminates internally. As for the body—precepts are true externally.

Sentient beings liberate the Buddha; the Buddha liberates sentient beings. This is called equality. "Sentient beings liberate the Buddha" means afflictions generate awakening. "The Buddha liberates sentient beings" means awakening extinguishes afflictions. Thus know: it is not that there are no afflictions, and not that there is no awakening. Thus know: without afflictions, there is no means to generate awakening; without awakening, there is no means to extinguish afflictions. When deluded, the Buddha liberates sentient beings. When awakened, sentient beings liberate the Buddha. Why? Buddhas do not become Buddhas by themselves; it is entirely because of sentient beings that they are liberated. All Buddhas take Ignorance as their father and Greed-Love as their mother. Ignorance and Greed-Love are just other names for sentient beings. Sentient beings and Ignorance are like the left palm and the right palm; there is no difference.

When deluded, one is on this shore. When awakened, one is on the other shore. If one knows the mind is empty and does not see characteristics, then one departs from delusion and awakening. Since one departs from delusion and awakening, there is also no other shore. The Tathāgata is not on this shore, nor on the other shore, nor in the middle stream. The middle stream refers to people of the Small Vehicle. This shore refers to ordinary beings. The other shore is Bodhi.

The Buddha has Three Bodies: Transformation Body (Nirmāṇakāya), Reward Body (Saṃbhogakāya), and Dharma Body (Dharmakāya). The Transformation Body is also called the Response Body. If sentient beings constantly perform good deeds, that is the Transformation Body. When they manifest the practice of wisdom, that is the Reward Body. When they manifest awakening to the Unconditioned, that is the Dharma Body. Constantly manifesting flying through the ten directions and rescuing beings as appropriate is the Transformation Body Buddha. Cutting off confusion, which is attaining the Way in the Snowy Mountains, is the Reward Body Buddha. No speech, no talk, no doing, no attaining, clearly and eternally abiding, is the Dharma Body Buddha.

If we discuss the Ultimate Principle, there is not even one Buddha, how can there be three? These "Three Bodies" are spoken of only based on human wisdom. People have high, middle, and low capacities. People of low wisdom falsely seek merit power, and falsely see the Transformation Body Buddha. People of middle wisdom falsely cut off afflictions, and falsely see the Reward Body Buddha. People of high wisdom falsely witness Bodhi, and falsely see the Dharma Body Buddha. People of supreme wisdom internally illuminate perfect quiescence. They understand the mind is the Buddha. They do not depend on the mind to attain Buddha-wisdom. They know the Three Bodies and the myriad dharmas are all ungraspable and unspeakable. This is the liberated mind, accomplishing the

Great Way. The sūtra says: "The Buddha does not preach the Dharma, does not liberate sentient beings, and does not witness Bodhi." This is what it means.

Sentient beings create karma; karma does not create sentient beings. Creating karma in this life, receiving retribution in the next life—there is no time of escape. Only the Perfected Person does not create any karma within this body, therefore he does not receive retribution. The sūtra says: "Creating no karma, one naturally attains the Way." How could these be empty words? People can create karma; karma cannot create people. If a person creates karma, karma and the person are born together. If a person does not create karma, karma and the person are extinguished together. Thus know that karma is created by people; people are born from karma. If people do not create karma, then karma has no means to generate people. It is also like "A person can expand the Way; the Way cannot expand the person."

Ordinary beings of today often create karma and falsely say there is no retribution. How can they not suffer greatly? If one ignores the great suffering and arranges the former mind to create the retribution of the later mind, when will there be a time of escape? If the former mind does not create, then the later mind has no retribution. How then could one falsely see karmic retribution?

The sūtra says: "Although one believes there is a Buddha, if one says the Buddha practices austerities, this is called Wrong View. Although one believes there is a Buddha, if one says the Buddha has the retribution of 'metal spear' or 'horse wheat' (karmic debts), this is called incomplete faith. This is called an Icchantika." Understanding the Sage Dharma is called a Sage. Understanding the ordinary dharma is called an ordinary being. If one can simply discard ordinary dharma and approach Sage Dharma, then the ordinary being becomes a Sage.

Fools of the world only desire to seek the Sage far away; they do not believe that the mind of wisdom-understanding is the Sage. The sūtra says: "Among people of no wisdom, do not speak this sūtra." The sūtra says: "Mind is the Dharma." People of no wisdom do not believe that this mind understanding the Dharma constitutes the Sage. They only desire to seek learning far outside, admiring things like Buddha images, light, fragrance, and colors in the sky. They all fall into Wrong Views, lose their minds, and become insane.

The sūtra says: "If one sees all characteristics are not characteristics, one immediately sees the Tathāgata." The 84,000 Dharma gates all arise from the One Mind. If the characteristics of the mind are internally pure, like the empty space, one immediately departs from the 84,000 afflictions within the body and mind, which are the root of sickness. Ordinary beings worry about death while alive, and worry about hunger when full; all these are called Great Confusions. Therefore, the Sage does not plan for the past, does not worry about the future, and has no attachment to the present. Thought after

thought returns to the Way. If one has not yet awakened to this Great Principle, one must quickly seek the goodness of humans and heavens, so as not to lose both.

The Verse of Night Sitting says:

In the first watch, sitting upright in the lotus posture,

Spirit harmonious, solitary illumination, merging with the void.

For vast kalpas it has never been born or extinguished;

What need is there to extinguish arising and extinguishing until nothing remains?

All dharmas are entirely like illusions;

The fundamental nature is self-empty—what use is there in eliminating them?

If one recognizes that the nature of mind is not a form or image,

It is quiescent and unmoving, naturally Thusness.

In the second watch, condensing the spirit, it turns bright and pure;

Not giving rise to memories or thoughts, it is identical to the True Nature.

The myriad forest of appearances all return to emptiness;

Yet grasping at "existence" or "emptiness" is still a sickness.

All dharmas are fundamentally neither empty nor existing;

Ordinary beings falsely think, discussing wrong and right.

If one can keep the mind without duality,

Who would say that the immediate ordinary is not the sage?

In the third watch, the mind is pure, equal to the void;

Pervading the ten directions, nowhere does it not penetrate.

Mountains, rivers, and stone walls cannot obstruct it;

Worlds as numerous as Ganges sands are all within it.

The fundamental nature of the world is the nature of Thusness;

It is also without 'no-nature'—[this] is precisely interfusing all.

Not only can all Buddhas be like this;
All categories of sentient beings are exactly the same.
In the fourth watch, there is neither extinguishing nor arising;
Its measure is level with the void and the Dharma-realm.
No going, no coming, no rising, no extinguishing;
Neither existing nor non-existing, neither dark nor bright.
Not giving rise to any views is the Tathāgata's view;
With no name that can be named, this is the true Buddha Name.
Only the awakened ones should be able to recognize this;
Sentient beings who have not realized are just like the blind.
In the fifth watch, Prajñā illuminates without boundaries;
Without giving rise to a single thought, it passes through the three thousand worlds.
If you wish to see the equal nature of Thusness,
Be careful not to give rise to the mind—it is right before your eyes.
The marvelous principle is profound and mysterious, not fathomed by the mind;
No need to seek or chase it, causing extreme fatigue.
If you can be without thought, that is the true seeking;
If there is any further seeking, you still do not recognize it.
End of Great Master Bodhidharma's Treatise on the Awakening of Nature.

Translator's Commentary

Introduction: The Significance of the *Wuxing Lun*

The *Wuxing Lun* (Treatise on the Awakening of Nature) is a seminal text in the early Chan (Zen) canon. While tradition attributes this treatise to the First Patriarch, Bodhidharma, many modern scholars regard the *Wuxing Lun* as a later Tang-period Chan composition attributed to Bodhidharma to authorize a particular doctrinal idiom. Regardless of its precise authorship, the text captures the

quintessential "Wall-Gazing" (壁觀) spirit of the Patriarchs: a direct, diamond-like cutting through of ontological concepts. The text systematically deconstructs dualities—delusion vs. awakening, karmic offense vs. merit, and ordinary being vs. sage—pointing directly to the nature of reality here and now.

This translation adheres to a rigorous, doctrinal fidelity, treating the text not merely as poetic philosophy, but as a precise technical manual for the realization of the nature of Mind.

Philosophical Core: The Meaning of "Mind" vs. "Substance"

A common modern misreading—especially in popular Western "Zen" discourse—is to reify "Mind" (*Xin*, 心) as a metaphysical substrate: a "Universal Consciousness," a "Cosmic Soul," or an absolute ground akin to the Vedantic *Brahman*. The present treatise works against that move. Its *Xin* (Mind/Heart) points to the lived immediacy of unfabricated pristine consciousness, yet repeatedly denies any inherently existing entity called "Mind."

Consistent with the teaching of *anātman* (no-self), Bodhidharma's "Mind" does not point to a universal substratum that merges all beings into a single, reified metaphysical One reality. Rather, it points to the fundamental nature (本性) of awareness itself—a primordial, empty, and unborn gnosis (*jñāna*) that is the essential quality of each instance of consciousness.

Crucially, this "Mind" is not a standalone entity. It is empty of inherent existence (*wú zìxìng*). The text explicitly dismantles the substantialist view with this relational formulation:

"Form is not form of itself; it is form because of the mind. Mind is not mind of itself; it is mind because of form."

This passage highlights that Mind and form are dependently originated and dependently designated; they are neither the same nor different. Mind is not a background container serving as the context, substratum, or source for phenomena, nor does it "interact" with them as a separate agent. Rather, there is no mind apart from phenomena, and no phenomena apart from mind. As my dharma mentor John Tan noted regarding the realization of *Anatta* (No-Self):

"One must lose all mind and body by feeling with entire mind and body this essence which is Mind (心). Yet Mind too is unobtainable/unfindable (不可得).. The purpose is not to deny Mind but rather not to place any limitations or duality so that Mind can fully manifest. Therefore without understanding 缘 (conditions), is to limit 心 (Mind). Without understanding 缘 (conditions), is to place limitation in its manifestations. You must fully experience 心 (Mind) by realizing 无心 (No-Mind) and fully embrace the wisdom of 不可得 (ungraspable/unobtainable/unfindable)."

Bodhidharma echoes this precise insight throughout the text, stating: *"If one attains the mind, there is no mind to be attained,"* and further clarifying the non-dual nature of this realization: *"Existing implies existence within non-existence; non-existing implies non-existence within existence—this is called True View."*

The Doctrine of "No-Mind" (*Wuxin*): A Dharma Seal, Not a State

The text famously states: *"The Buddhas of the ten directions are all free of mind (wuxin); because they do not see [a fixed] mind, this is called seeing the Buddha."*

It is vital to understand that "No-Mind" (*Wuxin*) is not a meditative state to be attained, nor is it a psychological "flow" state (like an artist "in the zone") that one enters and exits. Rather, it is the realization of [Anatta \(No-Self\) as a Dharma Seal](#)—a truth that is always already so.

As my dharma mentor John Tan distinguishes regarding the nature of this wisdom:

"This 'Originally there never was any I' is wisdom and the dharma seal of anatta. It is neither an art like an artist in zone where self is dissolved into the flow of action nor is it a state to be achieved in the case of the taoist 'sit and forget' (坐忘) -- a state of no-mind... For example in cooking, there is no self that cooks, only the activity of cooking... Whether one appears clumsy or smooth in act of cooking doesn't matter... still there never was any 'I' in any moment of the activity. There is no entry or exit point in the wisdom of anatta."

Bodhidharma's teaching of *Wuxin* points precisely to this seal: Mind has no existence of its own. It is not that we *make* the mind empty; it is that we realize it *is* empty and has always been so. There is no "Mind" apart from the phenomena. Thus, "No-Mind" describes the reality that there is no background Knower, no "steersman," and no substantial Self behind experience. This truth applies equally to the sage and the ordinary being; the sage simply recognizes the seal, while the ordinary being assumes a "self" where there is none.

Translation Choices for Key Terminology

1. Quiescent Extinction (寂滅 - Jīmiè)

I have translated Jīmiè as "Quiescent Extinction" (or sometimes simply Quiescence). It should not be read as mere quietude, trance-like blankness, or the annihilation of things. In Mahāyāna usage, Jīmiè names the Nirvanic "mark" of dharmas: when seen with prajñā, phenomena are understood as unborn (anupāda) and empty of self-nature, so their "marks" or "characteristics" are already stilled—not because something has been smashed or erased, but because reification has ceased, and this is the true stilling of characteristics/marks.

This is why the *Lotus Sutra* (Expedient Means Chapter) can say that "All phenomena from the very beginning has always had the mark of quiescence" (諸法從本來，常自寂滅相). The mark of quiescence is not a later-produced state but the dharmas' real nature. In the same spirit, the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* warns that if one takes the five aggregates as truly arising-and-perishing, one becomes afraid of birth-and-death and falsely grasps Nirvana; the cure is seeing that the aggregates are by nature unborn, hence "originally Nirvana" (本來涅槃). In other words, *Jīmiè* is not 'the stopping of something that truly began' but the wisdom-recognition that what is grasped as arising and perishing is, in its self-nature, unborn—hence 'originally nirvāṇa'.

Thus, when Bodhidharma says "*Quiescence is the Essence*," he is describing the reality that phenomena are always already quiescent in their true nature (while appearing functionally). This is not a denial of conventional appearance and causal efficacy, but a denial of inherent 'marks' grasped as self-existent.

2. Appearances/Characteristics (相 - Xiàng)

Following the strict protocol:

- Appearances: Used when referring to the phenomenological display (e.g., "*detachment from appearances*").
- Characteristics: Used in ontological contexts (e.g., "*extinguishes all characteristics*").
- Signless: Used for the specific *Animitta* samādhi (e.g., "*having appearances is the appearance of no-appearance*").

3. Spirit (神 - Shén) vs. Mind (心 - Xīn)

In the prose, Xin is consistently "Mind." In the "Night Sitting Verses," the term Shen appears (e.g., "Spirit harmonious, solitary illumination"). I have translated this as "Spirit" in the sense of the mental faculty's radiant energy or functional awareness, distinguishing it from the ontological "Mind" (Xin).

4. The Three Realms & Three Poisons

The text proposes a psychological interpretation of cosmology: the Three Realms (Desire, Form, Formless) are identified directly with the Three Poisons (Greed, Anger, Delusion). The treatise shifts the focus from geography to the immediate dynamics of affliction and release in lived experience, placing liberation entirely within the immediate awareness of the practitioner.

Comparative Notes: High-Fidelity vs. Earlier Translations (e.g., Red Pine)

While Red Pine's translation ("Wake-up Sermon") is well-known for its accessibility and "Zen" flavor, this High-Fidelity translation diverges in several key areas to prioritize doctrinal precision over interpretive smoothing.

Quiescent Extinction vs. Detachment

- Source: *Jīmiè wéi tǐ* (寂滅為體).
- Red Pine: "The essence of the Way is detachment."
- This Translation: "As for the Way, Quiescent Extinction is its Essence."
- Rationale: *Jīmiè* (Skt. *Vyupāsama* or *Nirvāṇa*) refers to the extinction of reifications/characteristics/suffering. "Detachment" is a psychological attitude or method (*Lí*). Translating *Jīmiè* as "Detachment" confuses the *Fruit* (Nirvana) with the *Path* (Practice), and psychologizes a profound truth into the nature of mind and phenomena—unborn (*anutpāda*) and empty nature.

Dharma Body vs. Real Body

- Source: *Fǎshēn* (法身).
- Red Pine: "Real body."
- This Translation: "Dharma Body (Dharmakāya)."
- Rationale: *Dharmakāya* is a specific technical term referring to the Buddha's complete knowledge of emptiness. Red Pine's choice of "Real Body" implies a substantial, inherent substrate (a "Real Self"), which risks sneaking a non-Buddhist Atman-view (Self-view) back into a text explicitly teaching No-Self or No-Mind.

Female Characteristic vs. Sex

- Source: *Nǚ xiàng* (女相).
- Red Pine: "She didn't change her sex."
- This Translation: "She did not change her female form... sought the female characteristic."
- Rationale: The Goddess in the sutras does not change her biology ("sex"); she realizes that "femaleness" is merely a *mark* or *characteristic* (*xiàng*) with no inherent existence. Using the modern term "sex" biologicalizes the text; using "characteristic" preserves the core Mahāyāna insight that gender is a conceptual imputation, not an ultimate reality.

Aggregates vs. Shades

- Source: *Wǔ Yīn* (五陰).
- Red Pine: "Five shades."
- This Translation: "Five aggregates."
- Rationale: *Yīn* (Shadow/Covering) is an old Chinese translation for the Sanskrit *Skandha* (Heap/Aggregate). While "Shades" is poetic, "Aggregates" is the standard, recognized English terminology essential for understanding Buddhist psychology.

Conclusion

Master Bodhidharma's teaching in the *Wuxing Lun* challenges the practitioner to stop seeking externally. It demands a direct recognition that the "karmic offender" and the "sage" are both empty of self-nature, and that the luminous, empty/unobtainable nature of one's own awareness—right here, right now—is the only Buddha there is.

One stops seeking not because one has successfully suppressed thinking, but because one clearly sees the truth of one's nature so vividly that seeking becomes obsolete. There is nothing beyond the immediacy and directness of this Truth shining in plain view as all vivid appearances. As the verse declares: "*If you wish to see the equal nature of Thusness, be careful not to give rise to the mind—it is right before your eyes.*"

Seeking ceases because the "marvelous principle" is already fully apparent. Thus, the text concludes: "*If you can be without thought, that is the true seeking; If there is any further seeking, you still do not recognize it.*"

The Dharma Gate of Pacifying the Mind

Soh

Original Chinese: <https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/T2009>

Note: The translator's commentary and notes (by Soh) are provided at the end of the text.

English Translation:

The Dharma Gate of Pacifying the Mind

(Recorded in Zongjing lu 宗鏡錄 and Zhengfa yanzang 正法眼藏)

When deluded, people follow phenomena. When understanding, phenomena follow people. With understanding, consciousness encompasses form. With delusion, form encompasses consciousness.

As soon as there is mental discrimination and calculation, even what one takes as one's own direct perception (pratyakṣa) is entirely a dream. If the conscious mind is quiescent and extinguished with no place for a stirring thought, this is named True Awakening.

Question: What is the direct perception of one's own mind?

Answer: Seeing all phenomena as existing; existence does not exist of itself; one's own mind imputes it as existing. Seeing all phenomena as non-existent; non-existence is not non-existent of itself; one's own mind imputes it as non-existent.

So too with all phenomena: it is all one's own mind imputing them as existing, or one's own mind imputing them as non-existent.

Furthermore, if a person commits all manner of offenses, yet sees the Dharma King within themselves, they immediately attain liberation.

If one attains understanding through affairs, one's vigor is robust. If one sees the Dharma right within affairs, then everywhere one does not lose mindfulness. If one attains understanding through written words, one's vigor is weak.

One for whom affairs are precisely the Dharma [realizes that] deep within your various activities—jumping, staggering, or stumbling—none of it goes out of the Dharma-realm, nor does it enter the Dharma-realm. If one uses the Dharma-realm to enter the Dharma-realm, this is precisely a deluded

person. Whatever actions are performed, ultimately, they do not go out of the Mind of the Dharma-realm.

Why is this? Because the essence of mind is the Dharma-realm.

Question: Regarding the various branches of learning of worldly people, why do they not attain the Way?

Answer: Because they see a "self," they do not attain the Way. "Self" means "I."

The Perfected Person, encountering suffering, does not worry; encountering pleasure, does not rejoice. Because they do not see a "self." The reason one does not know suffering or pleasure is because, having forgotten the self, one attains to the Void. Since the "self" itself is already forgotten, what further thing is there that is not forgotten?

Question: Since all phenomena are empty, who practices the Way?

Answer: If there is a "who," one needs to practice the Way. If there is no "who," then one does not need to practice the Way. This "who" is the "I."

If there is no "I," encountering objects does not give rise to right and wrong. As for "right," the "I" makes it right of itself; the object is not [inherently] right. As for "wrong," the "I" makes it wrong of itself; the object is not [inherently] wrong.

Right within mind, there is no mind; this is called penetrating the Buddha Way. Right within objects, give rise to no views; this is named attaining the Way.

Encountering objects, one directly reaches and knows their original source. This person's Wisdom Eye is open. The wise rely on objects and do not rely on the self; thus, there is no grasping or rejecting, no going against or following along. The foolish rely on the self and do not rely on objects; thus, there is grasping and rejecting, going against and following along.

Not seeing a single object is named seeing the Way. Not practicing a single object is named practicing the Way.

Precisely where there is everywhere, there is nowhere; precisely where there is doing, there is the Dharma of non-doing. This is precisely seeing the Buddha.

If one sees marks (nimitta), then everywhere one sees ghosts. Because one grasps at marks, one falls into hell. Because one observes the Dharma, one attains liberation. If one sees the discrimination of recollected marks, one immediately undergoes such things as cauldrons of boiling water and furnaces of charcoal. One manifestly sees the characteristics of birth and death.

If one sees the nature of the Dharma-realm, which is precisely the nature of Nirvana, without the discrimination of memory and thought, this is precisely the nature of the Dharma-realm.

Mind is not form, therefore it is not existent. It functions but is not discarded, therefore it is not non-existent. It functions yet is always empty, therefore it is not existent. It is empty yet always functions, therefore it is not non-existent.

Thus, a verse says:

Mind, mind, mind, Hard to seek out. When broad, it pervades the Dharma-realm; When narrow, it does not admit a needle. I do not see evil and give rise to dislike, Nor do I observe good and diligently pursue it. I do not discard wisdom and approach foolishness, Nor do I embrace delusion and move towards enlightenment. Reaching the Great Way, exceeding measure; Penetrating the Buddha Mind, going beyond degrees. Not sharing the same orbit as ordinary beings or sages, Transcendent, we name such a one a Patriarch.

The Dharma Gate of Pacifying the Mind ends.

Translator's Commentary

Introduction The Anxin Famen (Dharma Gate of Pacifying the Mind) is a text attributed to Bodhidharma, preserved in the Shaoshi liumen (Six Gates of Shaoshi) collection. The title "Pacifying the Mind" (Anxin) alludes to the famous encounter where the Second Patriarch Huike asked Bodhidharma to pacify his anxious mind, to which Bodhidharma replied, "Bring me your mind, and I will pacify it." While this text shares thematic concerns with the Fourth Patriarch Daoxin's similarly titled Rudao anxin yao fangbian famen (Essential Expedient Dharma Gate for Entering the Way and Pacifying the Mind), they are distinct works.

This text emphasizes the direct realization of the nature of mind (citta) and the futility of seeking the Dharma outside of one's own immediate experience. It employs a dialectic style common to early Chan, moving between the negation of dualistic concepts (existence/non-existence, self/other) and the affirmation of the dynamic function of the empty mind.

Translation Choices & Contextual Explanations

- **Direct Perception (現量 - Xiànlìàng / Pratyakṣa):** In Buddhist epistemology, pratyakṣa refers to valid cognition derived from direct experience, free from conceptual construction. However, Chan texts often use technical terms more loosely than scholastic treatises. Here, the text deconstructs the "self's direct perception." Note that there is

a textual variant here: some editions read "direct perception of the body/self" (zìshēn) while others read "direct perception of the mind" (zìxīn). I have translated this to suggest that what the ego takes as its own direct, valid experience is actually a dreamlike imputation (parikalpita).

- Marks (Xiàng): In the section warning "If one sees marks...", I translated Xiàng as "marks" rather than "appearances" or "characteristics." The context describes a soteriological error—grasping at visual forms or conceptual signs which leads to "seeing ghosts" (delusion/hell). This aligns with the nimitta definition, where xiàng is the object of fixation. Conversely, when the text speaks of "characteristics of birth and death," it refers to lakṣaṇa (defining traits).
- "Dharma King": The phrase "sees the Dharma King within themselves" (zì jiàn jǐ zhī fǎ wáng) is translated to emphasize internal realization. While "Dharma King" is a common epithet for the Buddha, the context here suggests seeing one's own fundamental nature (Buddha-nature) rather than an external deity.
- Vigor (Qìlì): Translated as "Vigor" to capture the sense of energetic strength or vitality. The text makes a fascinating distinction between understanding gained through "affairs" (actual life practice), which generates strong vigor, and understanding gained through "text/letters," which results in weak vigor. This reflects the Chan emphasis on "experiencing circumstances to train the mind" (lì jìng liàn xīn).
- Daoist Terminology: The text employs terms like "Perfected Person" (Zhèrén) and "The Void" (Xūwú). These are Daoist terms often adopted in early Chan to bridge indigenous Chinese thought with Buddhist emptiness. I retained "Perfected Person" rather than standardizing it to "Arhat" to preserve this specific register.

Structural and Stylistic Choices The translation preserves the stark, repetitive structure of the Q&A sections to mirror the "hammering" effect of the original argument. The final verse is rendered line-for-line to maintain the rhythm and distinct imagery (the "needle" vs. "Dharma-realm").

[Treatise on Breaking Through Marks](#)

Soh

Chinese Original: <https://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hans/%E7%A0%B4%E7%9B%B8%E8%AE%BA>

Note: The translator's commentary and notes (by Soh) are provided at the end of the text.

Treatise on Breaking Through Marks Attributed to Bodhidharma

Treatise: If there is someone who intently seeks the Buddha Way, what method should they practice to be most economical and essential?

Response: Only the one method of contemplating the mind totally encompasses all methods; it is the most economical and essential.

Question: How can one method encompass all methods?

Response: Mind is the root of the ten thousand dharmas; all dharmas whatsoever are born only from the mind. If one can understand the mind, then the ten thousand dharmas are all complete within it. It is like a great tree: all the branches, twigs, flowers, and fruits depend entirely on the root. The planter of the tree preserves the root and the branches then begin to grow; the cutter of the tree removes the root and [the tree] will necessarily die. If one understands the mind in practicing the Way, one uses little effort yet easily succeeds. But if one practices without understanding the mind, one wastes effort to no benefit. Therefore, know that all good and evil come from one's own mind. Seeking anything apart from mind—there is ultimately no such place.

Question: Why is contemplating the mind called understanding?

Response: When Bodhisattva-Mahāsattvas practice deep *prajñāpāramitā*, they understand that the four great elements and the five aggregates are originally empty and devoid of self. They understand and see that the functioning of one's own mind has two differences. What are the two? First is the pure mind; second is the defiled mind. These two types of mind-dharmas are naturally present from the beginning. Although they arise based on the conjunction of conditions, they mutually depend on each other. The pure mind always delights in wholesome causes; the defiled essence constantly thinks of evil karma. If one is not stained by what is defiled, then one is called a sage; one subsequently is able to leave all suffering far behind and realize the bliss of Nirvana. If one falls into the defiled mind, creates karma, and is bound and covered by it, then one is named an ordinary being; one sinks into the Three Realms and undergoes various kinds of suffering. Why is this so? Because that defiled mind obstructs the Essence of Suchness. The *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* says: "Within the bodies of sentient beings there is the adamant Buddha-nature; like the orb of the sun, its essence is luminous, perfect, and full, vast and boundless. It is only covered by the heavy clouds of the five aggregates, like the light of a lamp inside a jar, unable to manifest." Also, the *Nirvana Sūtra* says: "All sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature; because they are covered by ignorance, they do not attain liberation." The Buddha-nature is simply the nature of awareness (*juéxìng*).

But if one is self-aware and makes others aware, with awareness and knowledge being bright and clear, this is called liberation. Therefore, know that all wholesome deeds take awareness as their root. Because of this root of awareness, the tree of all merits is subsequently able to manifest. The fruit-virtue of

Nirvana is accomplished through this. Contemplating the mind in this way can be named "understanding."

Question: You stated above that the Essence of Suchness and Buddha-nature, and all merits, take awareness as their root. I have not yet examined the mind of ignorance: what does it take as its root?

Response: The mind of ignorance, although it possesses eighty-four thousand afflictive passions and desires and a Ganges-sands number of evils, all takes the Three Poisons as its fundamental root. What are the Three Poisons? They are Greed, Anger, and Delusion. This mind of the Three Poisons is naturally able to possess all evils. It is like a great tree: although the root is one, the branches and leaves produced are boundless in number. From these Three Poisonous roots, within each single root, hundred-thousand-millions of evil karmas are born; they multiply beyond the former [metaphor] and cannot be illustrated by analogy. This mind of the Three Poisons responds and manifests through the six sense-roots within the fundamental essence; thus they are also named the Six Thieves, which are the six consciousnesses. Because these six consciousnesses go out and enter through the various sense-roots, greedily attaching to the ten thousand sensory environments, and are able to form evil karma that obstructs the Essence of Suchness, they are named the Six Thieves. All sentient beings are confused and disturbed in body and mind by these Three Poisons and Six Thieves. They sink into birth and death, cycle through the Six Destinies, and undergo all manner of suffering and affliction. It is like a river: because the small spring at the source flows incessantly, it is then able to overflow and surge as waves for ten thousand miles. If someone cuts off its fundamental source, then the multitude of currents all cease. Those who seek liberation can transform the Three Poisons into the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts, and transform the Six Thieves into the Six Pāramitās; naturally, they will eternally leave behind all suffering.

Question: The Six Destinies and the Three Realms are vast and boundless. If one only contemplates the mind, how can one avoid infinite suffering?

Response: The karmic retribution of the Three Realms is born only from the mind. If the mind is fundamentally absent, then within the Three Realms, one instantly exits the Three Realms. These Three Realms are simply the Three Poisons. Greed is the Realm of Desire; Anger is the Realm of Form; Delusion is the Realm of Formlessness. Therefore they are named the Three Realms. From these Three Poisons, the karma created is light or heavy, and the retribution received differs; it is divided into six places, hence they are named the Six Destinies.

Question: How are the light and heavy [karmas] divided into six?

Response: Sentient beings do not understand the correct cause; confused in mind, they practice goodness but have not escaped the Three Realms, so they are born into the Three Light Destinies.

What are the Three Light Destinies? Those who are confused in practicing the Ten Good Deeds and falsely seek happiness have not escaped the Realm of Greed; they are born into the Destiny of Gods. Those who are confused in upholding the Five Precepts and falsely give rise to love and hate have not escaped the Realm of Anger; they are born into the Destiny of Humans. Those who are confused in clinging to conditioned things and trust in deviant ways to seek blessings have not escaped the Realm of Delusion; they are born into the Destiny of Asuras. These three categories are named the Three Light Destinies. What are the Three Heavy Destinies? Those who indulge the mind of the Three Poisons and solely create evil karma fall into the Three Heavy Destinies. If the karma of greed is heavy, one falls into the Destiny of Hungry Ghosts. If the karma of anger is heavy, one falls into the Destiny of Hell Beings. If the karma of delusion is heavy, one falls into the Destiny of Animals. These three heavy ones, together with the previous three light ones, constitute the Six Destinies. Therefore, know that all suffering karma is born from one's own mind. If one can just encompass the mind and depart from all deviance and evil, the suffering of cycling through the Three Realms and Six Destinies will naturally be extinguished, and one will instantly attain liberation.

Question: As the Buddha said, "I endured infinite diligence and suffering for three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas before accomplishing the Buddha Way." Why do you now say that merely contemplating the mind and controlling the Three Poisons is named liberation?

Response: The words spoken by the Buddha are without falsehood. "Asaṃkhyeya kalpas" refers to the mind of the Three Poisons. In Sanskrit it is said as asaṃkhyeya; in the language of Han it is named "innumerable." Within this mind of the Three Poisons, there are evil thoughts as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. Within every single thought, all are one kalpa. Like this, they are as innumerable as the Ganges sands; therefore they are called the Three Great Asaṃkhyeyas. Since the nature of Suchness is covered by the Three Poisons, if one does not transcend that mind of the Three Great Ganges-Sands of poisonous evils, how can it be named liberation? Now, if one can transform the mind of the Three Poisons—greed, anger, and delusion—into the Three Liberations, this is then named crossing over the three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas. Sentient beings of the final age are foolish and dull-rooted; not understanding the Tathāgata's secret explanation of the three great asaṃkhyeyas, they subsequently say that attaining Buddhahood requires kalpas of dust appearing in the future. Does this not doubt and mislead practitioners, causing them to retreat from the Bodhi Way?

Question: Bodhisattva-Mahāsattvas accomplish the Buddha Way only by upholding the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts and practicing the Six Pāramitās. Now you tell students only to contemplate the mind and not to practice the precepts; how can they accomplish Buddhahood?

Response: The Three Cumulative Pure Precepts are simply the controlling of the mind of the Three Poisons. By controlling the Three Poisons, one accomplishes measureless clusters of goodness.

"Cluster" means a gathering. Because measureless good dharmas universally gather in the mind, they are named the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts. The Six Pāramitās are simply the purification of the six sense-roots. In Sanskrit it is named pāramitā; in the language of Han it is named "reaching the other shore." Because the six sense-roots are pure and not stained by the six dusts, this is exactly crossing the river of afflictions and arriving at the shore of Bodhi; therefore it is named the Six Pāramitās.

Question: As the sutras say, the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts are: the vow to cut off all evil, the vow to practice all good, and the vow to liberate all sentient beings. Now you only speak of controlling the mind of the Three Poisons; is there not a discrepancy in the meaning of the text?

Response: What the Buddha spoke is truthful speech. When Bodhisattva-Mahāsattvas practiced in the causal ground in the past, in order to counter the Three Poisons, they made Three Vows. Vowing to cut off all evil, they therefore constantly upheld the precepts, to counter the poison of greed. Vowing to practice all good, they therefore constantly practiced concentration, to counter the poison of anger. Vowing to liberate all sentient beings, they therefore constantly practiced wisdom, to counter the poison of delusion. Because they upheld these three kinds of pure dharmas—precepts, concentration, and wisdom—they were able to transcend those Three Poisons and accomplish the Buddha Way. The extinction of all evils is named "cutting off." Because one is able to uphold the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts, all goodness is fully present; this is named "practice." Because one is able to cut off evil and practice good, the ten thousand practices are accomplished, benefiting both self and others, universally saving the multitudes of beings; therefore it is named "liberation." Thus know that the precepts and practices one cultivates are not apart from the mind. If one's own mind is pure, then all Buddha Lands are completely pure. Therefore the sutra says: "If the mind is defiled, sentient beings are defiled; if the mind is pure, sentient beings are pure. Desiring to attain the Buddha Land, one should purify one's mind; as one's mind is pure, the Buddha Land is pure." The Three Cumulative Pure Precepts are naturally accomplished [therein].

Question: As the sutras say, the Six Pāramitās are also named the Six Crossings: namely Giving, Precepts, Patience, Diligence, Dhyāna-Concentration, and Wisdom. Now you say that the six sense-roots being pure is named pāramitā; how do these correlate? Furthermore, what is the meaning of the Six Crossings?

Response: Desiring to practice the Six Crossings, one should purify the six sense-roots and first subdue the Six Thieves. Being able to abandon the eye-thief and detach from all visual spheres is named Giving. Being able to forbid the ear-thief from indulging in those sound-dusts is named Precepts. Being able to subdue the nose-thief, remaining balanced and soft towards all smells and stenches, is named Patience. Being able to control the tongue-thief, not craving various tastes, but praising, chanting, and expounding [the Dharma], is named Diligence. Being able to subdue the body-thief,

remaining clear and still (zhànrán) and unmoved amidst all desires of touch, is named Dhyāna-Concentration. Being able to adjust the intent-thief, not according with ignorance but constantly practicing awareness and wisdom, is named Wisdom. The Six Crossings mean "transport." The Six Pāramitās are metaphorically like a ferry-boat; they are able to transport sentient beings to reach the other shore, hence they are named the Six Crossings.

Question: The sutra says: "When Śākyamuni Tathāgata was a Bodhisattva, he drank three dou and six sheng of milk porridge before he accomplished the Buddha Way." First owing to drinking milk, later realizing the Buddha-fruit—how can merely contemplating the mind result in liberation?

Response: That Buddhahood is achieved like this involves no false speech. It is certainly due to eating milk that he was then enabled to become a Buddha. Regarding "eating milk," there are two kinds. That which the Buddha ate was not the impure milk of the world; it was the pure Dharma-milk of Suchness. Three dou refers to the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts. Six sheng refers to the Six Pāramitās. When accomplishing the Buddha Way, it was by eating this kind of pure Dharma-milk that he then realized the Buddha-fruit. If one says the Tathāgata ate the mixed, impure, cow-stench milk of the world, is this not the height of slander and error? Suchness is the adamant, indestructible, outflow-free Dharmakāya; it has eternally left behind all suffering of the world. How could it need such impure milk to fill hunger and thirst? As the sutra says: "That cow does not live on the high plains, does not live in the damp lowlands, does not eat grain, wheat, chaff or bran, and does not herd with cows; the cow's body is the color of purple burnished gold." This "cow" refers to Vairocana Buddha. Because of great compassion and pity for all, from within the pure Essence of Dharma, he produces such subtle Dharma-milk of the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts and Six Pāramitās to nourish all those who seek liberation. If all sentient beings can drink this pure milk of such a truly pure cow, they will all attain Anuttarā-Samyak-Saṃbodhi.

Question: The sutras say that the Buddha told sentient beings to build saṅghārāmas (monasteries), cast images, burn incense, scatter flowers, light lamps, circumambulate the stupa practicing the Way throughout the six periods of the day and night, hold fast (fasting) and bow in worship, and that by these various merits they all accomplish the Buddha Way. If solely contemplating the mind totally encompasses all practices, then speaking of such matters would be empty [talk].

Response: The sutras spoken by the Buddha contain measureless expedient means. Because the roots of all sentient beings are dull and narrow/inferior, and they do not awaken to the profound meaning, he therefore provisionally used the conditioned to illustrate the unconditioned. If one does not practice the inner practice but only seeks outwardly, hoping to obtain blessings, there is no such possibility.

As for "saṅghārāma," it is Sanskrit from the Western Lands; in this land it translates as "Pure Ground." If one eternally removes the Three Poisons, constantly purifies the six sense-roots, and the body and mind are clear and still, inside and outside pure, this is named building a saṅghārāma.

As for "casting images," it simply means all sentient beings seeking the Buddha Way. The "casting" is the practice of various awakening practices; the "image" is the sublime marks of the Tathāgata's true countenance. How could it imply the casting of metal and copper merely to make things? Therefore, those who seek liberation take the body as the furnace, take the Dharma as the fire, take wisdom as the skilled craftsman, and take the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts and Six Pāramitās as the mold. They smelt and refine the Buddha-nature of Suchness within the body, causing it to pervade into the mold of all precepts and disciplines; practicing in accordance with the teaching, without a single omission or defect, they naturally accomplish the image of the true countenance. This refers to the ultimate, constantly abiding, subtle Form Body, not a conditioned dharma of decay and destruction. If someone seeks the Way but does not understand this casting of the true countenance, on what basis can they rashly speak of merit?

As for "burning incense," it is also not the incense of worldly characteristics; it is the incense of the unconditioned True Dharma. It fumigates all stenches, filth, ignorance, and evil karma, causing them all to vanish. There are five kinds of this True Dharma Incense. First is the Incense of Precepts: namely, being able to cut off all evils and practice all good. Second is the Incense of Concentration: namely, deeply believing in the Mahāyāna, with a mind that does not retreat. Third is the Incense of Wisdom: namely, constantly observing one's own body and mind inwardly. Fourth is the Incense of Liberation: namely, being able to cut off all bonds of ignorance. Fifth is the Incense of the Knowledge of Liberation: namely, keeping contemplation constantly bright, penetrating without obstruction. These five kinds of incense are named the supreme incense; nothing in the world compares to them. When the Buddha was in the world, he told all disciples to use the fire of wisdom to burn such priceless precious incense as an offering to the Buddhas of the ten directions. Sentient beings of the present time do not understand the Tathāgata's true meaning; they only use external fire to burn worldly incense of sandalwood and frankincense—which are material obstacles—hoping for blessings. How can this be obtained?

As for "scattering flowers," the meaning is also like this. It refers to constantly speaking the "flowers of merit" of the True Dharma, benefiting sentient beings, scattering and moistening everything, universally bestowing adornment upon the nature of Suchness. These flowers of merit are praised by the Buddha; they ultimately abide constantly and have no time of withering or falling. If there is someone who scatters such flowers, they obtain measureless blessings. If one says the Tathāgata told sentient beings to cut and clip silk brocades or harm plants and trees to serve as "scattering flowers,"

there is no such possibility. Why is this? Those who uphold pure precepts do not allow the violation of the myriad phenomena of heaven and earth; one who violates them by mistake still incurs a great karmic offense. How much more so for one who now intentionally destroys the pure precepts and harms the ten thousand things seeking a reward of blessings—desiring benefit but conversely causing harm? Can such a thing be?

Furthermore, "eternal lamp" refers to the Mind of Correct Awakening. Because awakening is bright and clear, it is compared to a lamp. Therefore, all those who seek liberation take the body as the lamp-stand and the mind as the lamp-wick; they increase all practices of precepts to serve as the adding of oil; and wisdom, bright and penetrating, is compared to the lamp-flame. One should light such a lamp of true Correct Awakening to shine through and break all darkness of ignorance and delusion. Being able to use this Dharma to explicitly open the way for others in turn—this is one lamp lighting a hundred thousand lamps; the lamps continue to be lit, lighting lamps inexhaustibly, hence it is called "eternal." In the past there was a Buddha named Dīpaṃkara (Burning Lamp); the meaning is also like this. Foolish sentient beings do not understand the Tathāgata's provisional explanation; solely practicing falsehood and attaching to the conditioned, they essentially burn lamps of worldly butter and oil to light up an empty room and call it relying on the teaching. Is this not absurd! Why is this? The Buddha released a single mark of light from between his eyebrows that was able to illuminate eighteen thousand worlds above. How could he borrow such lamps of butter and oil to serve as a benefit? Examine this principle; it should not be so!

Furthermore, "practicing the Way in the six periods" refers to the six sense-roots. Within all times, constantly practicing the Buddha Way, cultivating various awakening practices, and subduing the six sense-roots—never abandoning this for a long time—is named practicing the Way in the six periods.

As for "circumambulating the stupa and practicing the Way": the stupa is the body and mind. One should make awareness and wisdom circumambulate the body and mind, thought after thought without stopping; this is named circumambulating the stupa. All sages of the past practiced this path and attained Nirvana. People of the present generation do not understand this principle; they never practice inwardly but only cling to seeking outwardly. Taking the physical body of material obstacles, they circumambulate worldly stupas, running day and night, tiring themselves in vain, without a single benefit to their true nature.

Furthermore, as for "holding fast" (observing the fast/zhai), one must understand the intent; if one does not reach this principle, one wastes effort in vain. "Fast" (zhai) means "to align" (qi); it refers to aligning the body and mind straightforwardly, not allowing them to be scattered or disordered. "Holding" means "to protect"; it refers to protecting the various practices of precepts in accordance with the Dharma. One must outwardly prohibit the six sense-desires and inwardly control the Three

Poisons, diligently observing and scrutinizing, purifying the body and mind. Understanding this meaning is named "holding the fast." Furthermore, for "holding the fast," there are five kinds of food. First is the Food of Dharma-Joy: namely, relying on and upholding the True Dharma, and delighting in practicing it. Second is the Food of the Bliss of Dhyāna: namely, inside and outside being clear and still, with body and mind joyful and happy. Third is the Food of Mindfulness: namely, constantly being mindful of the Buddhas, with mind and mouth corresponding. Fourth is the Food of Vows: namely, while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, constantly seeking wholesome vows. Fifth is the Food of Liberation: namely, the mind being constantly pure and not stained by vulgar dusts. These five kinds of food are named "fasting food." If there is someone who does not eat these five kinds of pure food but says they are "holding the fast," there is no such possibility. Breaking only the food of ignorance—if one touches it even slightly, it is named "breaking the fast." If there is a break, how can one obtain blessings? There are lost people in the world who do not awaken to this principle; their bodies and minds are unrestrained, they commit all evils, indulge their passions in greed and desire, and do not generate shame. They merely cut off external food and call it "holding the fast"; this is certainly not the case.

Furthermore, regarding "worship" (bowing), it should be done according to the Dharma. One must be inwardly clear about the Principle-Essence; affairs follow provisional changes. The Principle has its distinct functioning/manifestation (xingcang); understanding this meaning is then named acting according to Dharma. Now, "worship" (li) means reverence; "bowing" (bai) means subduing. That is, revering the True Nature and subduing ignorance is named "worship." If evil emotions are eternally extinguished and good thoughts are constantly present, even if one does not manifest the [physical] mark, it is named worship. That mark is the mark of the Dharma. The World-Honored One, desiring to make ordinary people express a humble mind, also established [physical] worship; thus one must bend the external body to demonstrate internal reverence. Raising the external elucidates the internal; nature and characteristics correspond. If one does not practice the Principle-Dharma and only clings to seeking outwardly—internally indulging in anger and delusion and constantly creating evil karma, while outwardly vainly laboring the physical form, pretending to manifest an imposing demeanor—one has no shame before the sages and merely deceives ordinary people. One will not escape cyclic existence; how can this accomplish merit!

Question: As the Sutra on the Bathhouse (Wenshi Jing) says, bathing the assembly of monks yields measureless blessings. This relies on a material method for merit to begin to be accomplished; how can viewing the mind correspond to this?

Response: "Bathing the assembly of monks" is not a worldly conditioned matter. When the World-Honored One spoke the Sutra on the Bathhouse for the disciples, he desired to make them receive and

uphold the method of washing and bathing. Therefore he provisionally used worldly matters to illustrate the True Principle (Zhēnzōng), implicitly speaking of the merit of the Seven Offerings. The items are seven; what are the seven? First is pure water; second is burning fire; third is bath beans; fourth is willow twigs; fifth is pure ash; sixth is oil/ointment; seventh is inner garments. He raised these seven items to illustrate seven Dharmas. All sentient beings, by means of these seven Dharmas, bathe and adorn themselves, and are able to remove the dirt and filth of the ignorance of the Three Poisonous Minds. The Seven Dharmas are: First, pure precepts washing away transgressions and errors, just as pure water washes away various dusts and dirt. Second, wisdom observing inside and outside, just as burning fire is able to warm the pure water. Third, discrimination selecting and discarding all evils, just as bath beans are able to clean away grime and grease. Fourth, truthfully cutting off all false thinking, just as chewing willow twigs is able to purify breath/mouth odor. Fifth, correct faith that is decisive and without doubt, just as pure ash rubbed on the body can ward off various winds. Sixth, softness and patience, just as oil and ointment penetrate and moisten the skin. Seventh, shame and repentance for various evil deeds, just as inner garments cover the ugly body. The above seven Dharmas are the secret meaning within the sutra; they were all spoken by the Tathāgata specifically for those of the Mahāyāna with sharp roots, not for ordinary beings of shallow wisdom and inferior capacity. Therefore, people today are unable to understand and awaken. That "bathhouse" is simply the body. So one lights the fire of wisdom, warms the soup of pure precepts, and bathes the Buddha-nature of Suchness within the body. Receiving and upholding the seven Dharmas to adorn oneself—at that time, the Bhikshus of keen intelligence and high wisdom all awakened to the Sacred Intent; practicing as it was said, their merit was accomplished and they all ascended to the Sacred Fruit. Sentient beings of the present time cannot fathom the matter; they use worldly water to wash a physical body of material obstacles and call themselves followers of the sutra—is this not erroneous? Furthermore, the Buddha-nature of Suchness is not the dust and filth of common physical affliction; it is originally without characteristics (wúxiàng); how could one use material water to wash an unconditioned body? The matter does not correspond; how can one awaken to the Way? If one desires the body to attain purity, one should contemplate that this body is originally born from the impurity of greed and desire; it is a concretion of stench and filth, full inside and out. If one washes this body seeking purity, it is like washing a moat; only when the moat is exhausted will it be pure. Examining it by this, one clearly knows that washing the external body is not what the Buddha spoke of.

Question: As the sutra says, if one is mindful of the Buddha (niànfó) with a sincere mind, one will necessarily attain rebirth in the Pure Land of the West. Since through this one gate one should accomplish Buddhahood, why borrow "contemplating the mind" to seek liberation?

Response: Regarding "mindfulness of Buddha" (niànfó), one must be mindful correctly (zhèngniàn); understanding the meaning is correct, not understanding the meaning is deviant. With correct mindfulness, one necessarily attains rebirth; with deviant mindfulness, how can one reach the Beyond? "Buddha" means awareness; it refers to being aware and scrutinizing body and mind, not allowing evil to arise. "Nian" (Mindfulness) means recollection; it refers to recollecting and upholding the practice of precepts, not forgetting diligence and diligent practice. Understanding this meaning is named "Nian." Therefore, know that Nian lies in the mind, not in words. Because of the trap one seeks the fish; obtaining the fish, one forgets the trap. Because of words one seeks the meaning; obtaining the meaning, one forgets the words. Since one speaks the name of "Mindfulness of Buddha," one must know the Way of Mindfulness of Buddha. If the mind lacks reality and the mouth recites an empty name, while the Three Poisons gather inside and the self and personhood (rénwǒ) fill the chest, receiving the mind of ignorance and not seeing the Buddha—one wastes effort in vain. Moreover, regarding "reciting" (sòng) and "mindfulness" (niàn), the meanings and principles are widely different. Located in the mouth, it is called reciting. Located in the mind, it is called mindfulness. Therefore, know that mindfulness arises from the mind; it is named the gate of awakening practice. Reciting lies in the mouth; it is simply the characteristic of sound. Clinging to characteristics to seek the Principle is ultimately without possibility. Therefore, know that what the sages of the past practiced was not external speech; they only inferred [everything] to the mind. Mind is instantly the source of all goodness; Mind is instantly the king of ten thousand virtues. The constant bliss of Nirvana is born from the resting of the mind. Cycling through the Three Realms also arises from the mind. Mind is the door of leaving the world; Mind is the ford of liberation. Knowing the door, how can one worry that it is difficult to accomplish? Knowing the ford, why grieve about not arriving? I privately see that those of shallow knowledge in the present time only know service to characteristics as merit. They widely waste wealth and treasure, injure many creatures of water and land, falsely build images and stupas, and vainly employ human labor. Piling wood and layering mud, painting blue and coloring green, they exhaust their minds and empty their strength, harming themselves and misleading others. Not understanding shame, how could they ever awaken? Seeing the conditioned, they are diligently attached; speaking of the signless, they are dull and confused. Greedily desiring the small petty mercies of the present life, how can they realize the great suffering of the future? Cultivating and learning like this, they tire themselves in vain, turning their backs on the correct and returning to the deviant, lying about obtaining blessings. But if one can encompass the mind and illuminate inwardly, with awareness and contemplation clearly bright externally; cutting off the Three Poisons and eternally causing them to perish; closing the Six Thieves and not allowing them to invade and disturb; Then naturally, merits as numerous as Ganges sands and various adornments and countless Dharma-gates will be accomplished one by one. Transcending the ordinary and realizing the sacred is right before one's eyes,

not far away. Awakening lies in an instant; why bother with white hair [of old age]? The True Gate is hidden and secret; how can it be fully described? Briefly narrating the contemplation of mind, I detail a small part of it, and speak a verse:

I originally seek the mind, the mind holds itself; Seeking the mind, it is not obtained; one waits for the mind to know. The Buddha-nature is not obtained from outside the mind; The time the mind arises is precisely the time karmic offense arises.

I originally seek the mind, not the Buddha; Understanding that the Three Realms are empty and without things. If one desires to seek the Buddha, one should only seek the mind; Just this mind, this very mind, this mind is the Buddha.

Translator (Soh)'s Commentary

Introduction

The *Pò Xiàng Lùn* (*Treatise on Breaking Through Marks*), traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma, is a seminal text of the early Chan tradition (likely associated with the Northern School). Its primary rhetorical strategy is the systematic internalization of Buddhist practice. The interlocutor (Questioner) constantly proposes conventional, external forms of merit-making—building stupas, burning incense, bathing monks, reciting the Buddha's name. The Master (Bodhidharma) consistently deconstructs these "marks" (*xiàng* / *nimitta*) and reinterprets them as metaphors for the cultivation of the mind. This text serves as a "breakthrough" guide, shattering the reliance on conditioned phenomena (*yǒuwéi*) to reveal the unconditioned (*wúwéi*) nature of awareness.

Translation Choices & Contextual Explanations

1. Characteristics vs. Marks (Xiàng)

The term Xiàng is polysemous. I have translated it primarily as "Marks" in the context of rituals and external forms (e.g., "burning incense is not the incense of worldly marks"), where it corresponds to *nimitta* (signs of validity, ritual forms, objects of grasping). However, I use "Characteristics" when the text discusses the defining features (*lakṣaṇa*) of an entity (e.g., "characteristics of the true nature"). The title *Breaking Through Marks* was chosen because the text explicitly targets the soteriological error of attachment to external signs.

2. Mind (Xīn) and Awareness (Jué)

The text revolves around *Guān Xīn* (Contemplating the Mind). *Xīn* here is not the discursive intellect or psychological ego, but the *Tǐ* (Essence)—the "Adamantine Buddha-nature." I have translated *Jué* as

"Awareness" or "Awakening" depending on context. Where the text states "Buddha-nature is simply the nature of awareness" (Juéxìng), it collapses the distance between the practitioner and the goal.

"Awareness" is preferred here to emphasize the immediate, cognitive presence of the nature, rather than a static, distant state of "Enlightenment."

3. The Radical Re-mapping of Cosmology

A distinctive feature of this text is its psychological reductionism. The Three Realms (Desire, Form, Formless) are not physical locations but states of Greed, Anger, and Delusion. The "Three Asamkhyeya Kalpas" are not eons of time but the "innumerable" evil thoughts of the Three Poisons. I have maintained the literal force of these assertions. Where the source says "The Three Realms are the Three Poisons," I did not soften it to "correspond to," preserving the text's non-dual impact.

4. Bathing and the "Seven Dharmas"

The section on the Bathhouse Sutra is a masterclass in metaphor. The "bath beans" (ancient soap made from ground beans) become "discrimination" (selecting/discarding), and "inner garments" become "shame/repentance." I have glossed the literal items (willow twigs, bath beans) to ensure the modern reader understands the base metaphor before grasping the Dharma-significance.

5. Niànfó: Mindfulness vs. Recitation

The text rigorously distinguishes between Mindfulness (Niàn - mental recollection) and Recitation (Sòng - oral repetition). This distinction is crucial in early Chan, which viewed oral recitation without mental clarity as "wasting effort." I translated Niàn as "Mindfulness" to preserve the etymological link to memory/keeping in mind (smṛti), and Sòng as "Reciting" to emphasize the physical act of sound production.

Comparative Notes: High-Fidelity vs. Earlier Translations (e.g., Red Pine)

While Red Pine's translation is well-known for its accessibility and "Zen" flavor, this High-Fidelity translation diverges in several key areas to prioritize doctrinal precision and metaphoric integrity:

- Dharma-Milk vs. Dharma-Talk
 - Source: *Fǎ Rǔ* (法乳).
 - Red Pine: "Pure Dharma-talk."
 - This Translation: "Pure Dharma-milk."

- Rationale: The text relies on an extended metaphor involving a "Cow" (Vairocana Buddha). A cow produces milk, not "talk." Rendering it as "talk" breaks the metaphor and ignores the literal Chinese character *Rǔ* (Milk).
- Willow Twigs vs. Willow Catkins
 - Source: *Yáng Zhī* (杨枝).
 - Red Pine: "Willow catkins."
 - This Translation: "Willow twigs."
 - Rationale: In ancient Indian and Chinese hygiene, the willow branch (chew-stick) was the standard toothbrush (*dantakāṣṭha*). "Catkins" (the fuzzy flowers) serve no cleaning function. The metaphor relies on the *cleansing* action of the twig to represent "cutting off false thinking."
- Aggregates vs. Shades
 - Source: *Wǔ Yīn* (五阴).
 - Red Pine: "Five shades."
 - This Translation: "Five aggregates."
 - Rationale: While "shades" is a poetic rendering of *Yīn* (Shadow/Yin), "Aggregates" is the standard, recognized English translation for the Buddhist term *Skandha*. Using "shades" risks obscuring the standard doctrinal framework for the reader.
- Essence vs. Real Self
 - Source: *Zhēn Rú Tǐ* (真如体).
 - Red Pine: "Real self."
 - This Translation: "Essence of Suchness."
 - Rationale: Inserting "Self" (Atman) into a text explicitly teaching *Anātman* (No-Self) and titled "Breaking Through Marks" is textually inaccurate and doctrinally confusing. *Zhēn Rú* literally means True Suchness, and *Tǐ* refers to the fundamental essence or nature of Mind and all phenomena, which is vividly clear and radiant but empty of inherent existence, and not a substantial "Self." "Essence of Suchness" preserves the ontological nuance without injecting Vedantic terminology which is nowhere to be found in the original Chinese text.

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The display itself is the transmission.**