Lectures on The Blue Cliff Record

Writings of Master Yuanyin

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Preface

Today I begin lecturing on the Chan koans in the Blue Cliff Record. This is a record of Chan sayings. Perhaps someone may ask: “We practice the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma, not the Chan school. Why, then, speak about koans of the Chan tradition?” It is because the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma and the Chan school spring from the same source; though their approaches differ, they accomplish the same work. The Chan of the Chan school is not the chan of meditative absorption.

Meditative absorption is divided into the four dhyānas and eight absorptions; it is a gradual method. The Chan school, however, was transmitted by Patriarch Bodhidharma. It is called Patriarchal Chan, a complete and sudden dharma gate that directly points to the mind and enables one to see one’s nature and attain Buddhahood. It is not a gradual method of proceeding step by step. The Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma that we practice likewise brings a direct breakthrough into one’s original nature and a thorough realization of it.

It is not a form-based esoteric practice that proceeds indirectly, first attaining realization through visualization or contemplation of forms and then breaking through forms to see one’s nature. Thus it is “taking Chan as its essence and Esoteric Buddhism as its function”: it uses Esoteric Dharma to realize Chan. Why is this

necessary? Because the Chan school directly guides only those of the highest capacities; those of middling and lesser capacities find it difficult to receive.

In its earliest days, the Chan school had no such thing as investigating a huatou (critical phrase). It directly pointed to the nature here and now, enabling one to see one's nature and attain Buddhahood; there was no need to investigate a fixed critical phrase. Such fixed phrases include: "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" "Before your parents were born, what was your Original Face?" "Who is it that drags this corpse about?" and "What is the place from which all Buddhas arise? East Mountain walks upon the water." These, and so forth, are huatou.

They simply responded to the questioner's words in context, pointed out an entryway for that person, and enabled him to recognize it for himself on the spot.

For example, a student came to consult a patriarch and asked, "What is Buddha?" The patriarch directly pointed out, "This very mind is Buddha!" Or he might say, "Speaking face-to-face like this—if this is not Buddha, who is?" Or perhaps, "I fear you would not believe me if I told you." The student said, "If the master speaks the truth, how would this student dare not believe it?" The master replied, "You yourself are it!" Upon hearing this, the student who had asked the question awakened and accepted it.

Still other masters, when asked, "What is Buddha?" would call out the questioner's name. Once he answered, the master would directly show him: "This very thing is it; there is nothing else!" The questioner would awaken at those words. See how swift and direct this is! Early Chan was all like this: directly pointing to the nature and enabling Buddhahood.

Again, after the Sixth Patriarch received the robe and bowl and left Huangmei, many people pursued him in order to seize them. One of them was named Huiming. Before leaving home, he had been a general; skilled in martial arts, he ran faster than the others and was the first to catch up with the Sixth Patriarch.

At that point, the Sixth Patriarch thought: "This robe and bowl are tokens of the Dharma—material proof indicating that one has received the mind Dharma. How could they be seized by force?" He therefore placed the robe and bowl on a large rock and hid himself in the grass, to see how Huiming would deal with them.

When Huiming arrived and saw the robe and bowl on the rock, he thought, "Now they can be taken with a simple reach; the patriarchal seat will be ours." Yet when he tried to lift them, he could not move them. Why could he not move them? There are many different accounts. Some say that the robe and bowl were tokens of Dharma transmission. Since Huiming had not received the Dharma, the Dharma-protecting spirits did not permit him to take them.

Others say that this was not the case. Huiming himself knew that the robe and bowl signified Dharma transmission and could not be seized by force. Since he had not yet received the Dharma, even if he had taken them by force, he would have possessed only their outward appearance; moreover, it would have been an evil act. Ashamed in his heart, he was no longer able to lift them. Although the explanations differ, the fundamental point is that a token of the Dharma cannot be seized by force.

Huiming therefore repented and said, “I have come for the Dharma, not for the robe.” The Sixth Patriarch then emerged and said to him, “You have come for the Dharma; I shall explain the Dharma to you: do not think of good, and do not think of evil—that is, do not think of what is good, nor of what is bad.”

All our thoughts turn only around these two sides: good and evil, beauty and ugliness. Once we leave these two sides, deluded thoughts can no longer proceed. Therefore the Sixth Patriarch said: do not think of what is good, and do not think of what is bad. In other words, he told him not to stir a thought.

Thus Huiming remained for a long while—without a single movement of thought. At this critical moment, the Sixth Patriarch instructed him: “At just such a time, what is Senior Monk Ming’s Original Face?” Put differently, when not a single thought arises, what is that clear and distinct spiritual knowing? If it is not your Original Face, what else could it be? Everyone may test this for themselves here and now.

When not a single thought arises—when the preceding thought has ceased and the following thought has not yet arisen—are we unconscious like wood or stone? Clearly not. When not a single thought arises, the mind is clear and distinct. For example, when everyone in this room has no thought arising and the mind abides nowhere, every object lies within each person’s field of vision, perfectly clear, like a mirror reflecting things, without the least discrimination.

But suppose the mind abides somewhere: “What is this? It is an umbrella! And further, is it a nylon umbrella or an automatic umbrella?” Once a thought arises and the mind becomes attached, one sees only this object and no longer sees the other things.

When the mind abides nowhere and is open and empty, when one sees everything and yet seems not to see anything, who is it that illumines clearly and without abiding, like a mirror? At this critical moment, the practitioner turns the light inward for a single look and exerts himself with full vigor; then the true eye suddenly opens.

Therefore the Sixth Patriarch instructed Huiming: when not a single thought arises and yet there is clear, distinct knowing, who is it that illumines clearly and without abiding? This was equivalent to telling him that the undifferentiating spiritual

radiance was his Original Face. At that time there was nothing else besides this, and so Huiming awakened immediately. Chan is so direct and straightforward. Among all the major schools, Chan alone is called the school of the lineage, for its swiftness and simplicity cannot be matched by the other schools.

Later generations, however, held differing views. Concerning the two characters "that one" in the Sixth Patriarch's instruction, "What is Senior Monk Ming's Original Face?" some saw it one way and some another, and various interpretations arose.

Some say that "that one" is a question, asking Huiming which one is your Original Face when not a single thought arises—equivalent to the English "what." Others say that "that one" is a direct pointing: it directly indicates to Huiming that the spiritual radiance present when not a single thought arises is your Original Face—equivalent to the English "that."

In the Chan school, many people have engaged in literary disputes over these two characters. Each claims to be right and refuses to yield. In fact, there is no need for such disputes.

If, under the Sixth Patriarch's direct instruction, you immediately open the true eye and understand that this state in which not a single thought arises, yet there is clear and distinct knowing, is your Original Face—because at that moment there is nothing besides your own intrinsic nature—then, accepting it yourself without further doubt, this is direct pointing.

Conversely, if you do not know and ask in confusion, "Ah, which one is it that does not give rise to a single thought?" Or you may speculate that this Original Face must have some sort of appearance: when not a single thought arises, there is indeed clear and distinct knowing, but there is no thing there—how can this be it? Surely there must be something mysterious and extraordinary. Is it not said that the Dharma-nature body possesses immeasurable merit and virtue,

boundless wondrous functioning, and vast spiritual powers? Why do I now have no spiritual powers at all? Perhaps this is not it. Then, 'Which one is my Original Face?' In this way, it becomes a question.

In truth, our Buddha-nature is supremely wondrous, fully endowed with all capacities, and possesses immeasurable merit and virtue. Yet when you have only just seen your intrinsic nature, you are like an infant who has just left the womb and entered the world.

Can such an infant function? Can it eat and dress itself? Can it do things? Clearly, it can do none of these. Thus, one who has only just seen one's nature possesses merely the bare dharmakāya (Dharma body), without anything mysterious or

extraordinary. One must wait for the infant to grow up—that is, one must pass through a period of concealing one's light, nurturing oneself, safeguarding, and fostering growth. After all one's old habitual tendencies have been eliminated and one has grown into an adult, wondrous functioning can arise and spiritual powers can manifest. Therefore, in cultivating the Way, one must know the proper sequence; one awakening does not mean that all is finished. First one must recognize it, then safeguard and sustain it; only afterward can one gradually attain complete fulfillment.

Our purpose in lecturing on the Blue Cliff Record is to enable those who practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma first to break through to their original nature. After seeing their intrinsic nature, they must further safeguard it and allow it to grow strong. They must not be satisfied with a little. Do not think, "I have already had a breakthrough and seen the Way, so that is enough."

There is still a very long way to go. One has only just reached the threshold of the dharmakāya and cannot yet save oneself. One must proceed from the stage of seeing the Way, through the stage of cultivating the Way, to the stage of realizing the Way, passing through these three stages before attaining complete fulfillment. For example, the Caodong school teaches the Five Ranks of Lord and Minister, and it too speaks of these three stages.

The Linji school teaches the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials, likewise referring to these three stages. Even the Guiyang school, with its ninety-six circular symbols, does not go beyond these three stages. For there has never been a naturally born Śākyamuni. Look at the history of Śākyamuni Buddha: he too cultivated the Way over many lives and countless kalpas before realizing the Way; he did not attain completion in a single awakening. Therefore, after seeing the Way, in addition to being certain and free of doubt, we must safeguard it continuously and closely, allowing it to grow strong. We cannot stop with a single awakening. Thus, the purpose of lecturing on the Blue Cliff Record is to draw on the methods and experiences of the ancients in their practice and urge everyone to continue applying themselves.

Why is it called the Blue Cliff Record? During the Song dynasty, there was Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin, a great master and eminent writer of the Chan school. He lived on Jia Mountain in Yizhou, now Hunan. On the mountain was a rock about the size of an abbot's chamber, called Blue Cliff Rock, and his own quarters were accordingly named Blue Cliff. In summer, he lectured to his students on Chan koans, encouraging them to practice diligently. The students recorded these lectures, and when they were compiled into a book, it was called the Blue Cliff Record.

Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin lectured on the basis of Master Xuedou's one hundred koans in Verses on the Ancients.

Verses on the Ancients praises the causes and conditions through which the ancients awakened to the Way, the states of their realization, and the subtle and profound meanings in their questions, answers, and sayings. At the knots, confusions, and errors in the koans, it points out the crucial places for students; moreover, it sometimes reveals a different skillful perspective, praising its own realizations from another angle and supplementing what the earlier masters left incomplete.

A koan is an authoritative instruction handed down by the Buddhas and patriarchs of old, the orthodox command of the Chan school, by which delusion and awakening, heterodoxy and orthodoxy, are discerned. It is like the case files and legal ordinances of a public court—that is, the laws by which courts today decide cases—used to judge right and wrong, and is supremely venerable, stringent, and inviolable. Originally, ultimate principle transcends speech; only because people are deluded is it necessary to borrow words in order to reveal the Way.

Moreover, the encounters of questions and answers between the patriarchs served only to determine delusion or awakening, birth and death. Later generations called these instructions and encounter dialogues koans, using them to compare with their own practice.

It is like looking in a mirror to see whether one's cultivation and realization are adequate, and whether they accord with those of the ancients. If there is any discrepancy in one's practice, one draws nourishment from them for cultivation and realization; those who have not yet reached the ultimate are enabled, through verification, to unfold prajñā and advance ever higher.

Chan Master Xuedou took one hundred koans concerning the circumstances in which the patriarchs of old awakened to the Way and composed verses in praise of them. Like our writing poetry, he brought out the knots, confusions, and profound subtleties within these koans, so that later generations could more readily draw nourishment from them, open the true eye, and directly realize their original nature.

Yet after they had been set forth in verse, their meaning remained very profound and obscure, not easily understood by ordinary people. Therefore Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin further illuminated them indirectly, offering comments and appreciations from various angles.

He expounded them on three levels. First comes the introductory instruction: before each koan, he says certain important words relevant to it. Next, he presents the koan and comments on and analyzes it, distinguishing and expounding its profound

points. Finally, he comments on and appreciates Chan Master Xuedou's verses on the ancient cases. This enables later generations to understand their profound meaning deeply and without error, and thereby practice tirelessly and penetrate their inner mysteries. For this reason, it has traditionally been called the foremost book of the Chan school.

Today I will explain this Blue Cliff Record to help you in your practice, using the Chan school's teachings to assist fellow practitioners of heart esotericism in directly realizing the source of mind. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma is formless esoteric practice and directly reveals one's true nature. It differs from the form-based esoteric practices of the Yellow and Red traditions, yet shares a marvelous affinity with the Chan school; thus people call it Chan-Esoteric Buddhism.

In form-based esoteric practice, one must first abide in forms and cultivate them. Only after the forms have been successfully cultivated can they be dissolved into emptiness, allowing one to see one's true nature; this means crossing one additional threshold beyond ours. Thus formless esoteric practice is not the same as form-based esoteric practice. Although our Mind-Seal practice differs somewhat from Chan, the essential meaning of the Buddhadharma that it teaches and the state it realizes are exactly the same as those of Chan.

When practice reaches its end, there is no need to recite mantras, no need to visualize, and nothing at all to do. One simply remains so open and level, so immediately complete: with an even mind, all traces quietly vanish. When cold, put on clothes; when hungry, eat. This practice is both ordinary and very profound.

Someone may ask, "Putting on clothes and eating are all there is? Who cannot put on clothes? Who cannot eat? Does that mean everyone is a Buddha?" I cannot help smiling and replying: Not only is everyone a Buddha; all sentient beings possess the Tathāgata's wisdom and virtuous attributes. It is only regrettable that people do not know or recognize this, but merely roll about amid sounds and forms.

When putting on clothes, they do not simply put on clothes, but fuss and choose: which style is good, which fabric is good, what is fashionable, and what is out of date. When eating, they likewise do not simply eat, but choose the finest and richest foods: which dishes taste good and which do not. Those who eat meat even complain that dead animals are not fresh enough and that only live ones are fresh. In this way, they create karma and undergo its retribution.

They bury the splendid, naturally genuine Buddha within the cycle of rebirth in the six realms. Is that not regrettable? If our minds are empty and non-abiding—if we eat porridge when there is porridge and rice when there is rice, allow things to unfold in accordance with conditions, remain free and unrestrained, abide neither in emptiness nor in existence—then we realize the great Way of non-contrivance.

Therefore Pang Lingzhao, the daughter of Layman Pang, said: “When hungry, eat; when tired, sleep.”

These are the words of one who has truly arrived home. Before this, her parents had each composed a verse. Layman Pang first said: “Hard, hard, hard—spreading ten loads of sesame oil over a tree.” This means that studying Buddhism and cultivating the Way are exceedingly difficult, like trying to spread sesame oil over a tree. Can one spread it on? As soon as it is spread on, the oil runs down.

Why is it difficult? Because practitioners have become habituated, throughout innumerable kalpas and lives, to clinging to appearances. Whenever they encounter something, their minds stick to it. When they meet favorable circumstances, they laugh with delight; when they meet adverse circumstances, they are deeply troubled and distressed.

In truth, all circumstances are false, without any real basis, and empty. Worldly people do not know this, but take them to be real and pursue them, clinging without letting go. It is like walking through a thicket of thorns while wrapped in cotton wadding: touch something to the east and it sticks; touch something to the west and it sticks as well.

Therefore it is said that learning the Way is “hard, hard, hard”—extremely hard indeed. But is it truly hard? No. Why? Because we are originally Buddhas; it is not a matter of turning ordinary beings into Buddhas. So long as you are not deluded by false external circumstances, your mind constantly clear and alert, and your intent never fixed on anything, you become a Buddha. Thus the Sixth Patriarch said: “The preceding thought, deluded, is an ordinary being; the succeeding thought, awakened, is a Buddha.”

It happens very quickly. Therefore Old Lady Pang said: “Easy, easy, easy—the meaning of the Western coming is atop every blade of grass!” This means that studying Buddhism and cultivating the Way involve no difficulty at all; they are exceedingly easy. “Every blade of grass” represents all things, and “atop” all things means being free from all things.

When one is within things yet free from things, what remains? The empty, non-abiding mind is the fundamental meaning of the Western coming. This is also what the Diamond Sūtra says: “If one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathāgata.”

Do not cling to appearances. See apart from appearances, and every affair and every thing is the great Way. What difficulty is there? Therefore, for us to study Buddhism and realize the Way is not difficult. Do not be afraid, for we are originally Buddhas. So long as you let go and do not cling to appearances, what else is this

clear and distinct single thought of pure spiritual radiance but Buddha? Thus Buddha-nature is not elsewhere; it is shining before all of you. Yet Layman Pang and Old Lady Pang, one saying “difficult” and the other “easy,” both still had something in which they abided and had not reached the ultimate.

For our true wisdom does not establish a single dharma and is utterly bare. To say it is difficult is wrong, and to say it is easy is also wrong. Therefore their daughter Pang Lingzhao said: “Neither difficult nor easy—when hungry, eat; when tired, sleep!” This sweeps away the traces of difficult and easy and returns to non-abiding. When you are hungry, eat; when tired, sleep. That is all.

To let go freely, at ease, and peacefully enjoy what comes is to be the naturally genuine Buddha. Some people say that once one has realized the Way, one need no longer eat or sleep; if one still eats and sleeps, perhaps one has not yet realized the Way. This is mistaken.

So long as, when eating, we do not conceive of ourselves as eating—eating all day without biting down on a single grain of rice—and, when sleeping, do not conceive of ourselves as sleeping, then even if we sleep with a loud snore, we remain clear and distinctly aware, rather than being confused by delusive dreams. Only one oneself knows this. Hence it is said, “Like a person drinking water, one knows for oneself whether it is cold or warm,” and “Whether one has realized the Way or not, one knows for oneself.”

It is not by constantly sitting without sleeping that one realizes the Way. The Sixth Patriarch put it well: “While alive, one sits and does not lie down; when dead, one lies down and cannot sit.” When you are alive, you sit and do not sleep; when you die, you fall there and cannot sit.

“What merit or fault can there be in a stinking skeleton?” What merit or fault belongs to this foul skin bag? If merit and fault are to be established, they lie in the mind, not in the body. When merit and fault have both fallen away, one is at ease everywhere; that is Buddha. But if one is constrained everywhere and clings to appearances, one merely invites one’s own suffering and is not Buddha. Thus to become a Buddha is to become a living Buddha, capable of wondrous functioning and of receiving genuine benefit. One cannot realize the Way merely by sitting there without moving; sitting behind a dark mountain cannot bring realization of the Way.

My purpose in explaining these koans today is to help you use the ancients’ processes of practice and circumstances of awakening to the Way as a comparison, thereby verifying your own strength in practice. From them, identify your gaps, draw on their experience and lessons, and use them to improve yourselves, advancing from the side of the dharmakāya toward complete realization of bodhi. They are

therefore of great help to us. Now I will explain the first koan, entitled “The First Principle of the Noble Truths.”

Case One: The First Principle of the Noble Truths

In Buddhism, there are the principles of “ultimate truth” and “conventional truth.” Truth means reality. Ultimate truth elucidates emptiness, while conventional truth elucidates existence; the nonduality of ultimate and conventional truth is the supreme truth of the First Principle. This is the most profound and subtle point of the doctrinal schools. In their meticulous study of doctrine, these schools divide the teachings into five categories: first, the Hīnayāna; second, the Mahāyāna.

The Mahāyāna is further divided into the Beginning, Final, Sudden, and Perfect teachings, making five teachings altogether.

The Hīnayāna expounds existence: there are dharmas to cultivate, a path to attain, and nirvāṇa to realize. The Beginning Teaching of the Mahāyāna proceeds from existence into emptiness; it is the beginning of the gradual teachings of the Mahāyāna, explaining that all is empty, but not yet revealing that all sentient beings fully possess Buddha-nature. The Final Teaching of the Mahāyāna is the completion of the gradual teachings. It expounds the principle of suchness (tathatā) arising through conditions and advocates that all can become Buddhas, elucidating the meaning of neither emptiness nor existence. The Mahāyāna

Sudden Teaching takes sudden penetration of principle and immediate realization of the mind as its teaching; this is the meaning of both emptiness and existence. The Perfect Teaching of the Mahāyāna encompasses all things and perfectly integrates all virtues. It is neither emptiness nor existence, neither existence nor emptiness: “When speaking of existence, not even the finest hair is established; when speaking of emptiness, it pervades the entire dharma realm.” When doctrinal teachers discuss teachings and doctrines, they first explain ultimate truth and conventional truth—that is, the meaning of emptiness and existence.

Only at the end do they discuss the truth of the First Principle, the highest teaching: emptiness, too, is unobtainable; existence, too, is unobtainable; it is neither emptiness nor existence, and yet both emptiness and existence. Therefore, this is the highest principle of the doctrinal schools. This was the question Emperor Wu of Liang asked Master Bodhidharma in this koan, and the compiler used it as this koan’s title.

When Patriarch Bodhidharma came to China, the first person he went to see was Emperor Wu of Liang.

Emperor Wu of Liang was China's first emperor to believe in Buddhism. He was Xiao He's twenty-fifth-generation descendant—Xiao He having been prime minister to Liu Bang, the founding emperor of the Han dynasty—and his name was Xiao Yan. He ordained many people as monastics, built stupas and temples, and commissioned images covered with gold. He himself donned the kāṣāya, ascended the seat, and lectured on the Scripture of the Radiance of Prajñā. People called him the Emperor of the Buddha Heart.

Thus Bodhidharma first went to see him. But Emperor Wu was not a person of the very highest capacity, whereas the Chan school accepts only those of the highest capacity. Those of middling or lesser capacity find it difficult to accept, for Chan relies wholly on one's own exceptionally strong wisdom to open one's intrinsic nature. Those of lesser capacity find it difficult to awaken upon hearing a single utterance.

The emperor asked, "What is the supreme truth of the First Principle?" Bodhidharma said, "Vast emptiness—nothing holy!"

As soon as Emperor Wu met Bodhidharma, he raised this most subtle and ultimate question of the doctrinal teachings: What is the supreme truth of the First Principle? He wished to test Bodhidharma and see whether this holy monk would answer correctly. Little did he know that the monks of the world could not escape the confines of ordinary and holy, ultimate and conventional. Yet in the hands of a great master, with a gentle squeeze, all of it is shattered without remainder.

Bodhidharma immediately replied, "Vast emptiness—nothing holy!" If we can apprehend this statement, we may return home and sit securely: eat when hungry, sleep when tired, and freely enjoy its use, without having to distinguish right from wrong or discuss this and that. But if this is not yet so, please listen to these entangling words.

"Vast" means being like empty space: broad and boundless, clear, empty, numinously aware, unmoving and unshaken. This hints that our mind-nature is like empty space—vast, empty, lucid, and thoroughly open. "Nothing holy" means that within this numinous clarity and openness, like empty space, there is not a single thing. Naturally, there is neither holy nor ordinary.

But pay close attention: although there is nothing at all, who is it that knows there is nothing? Master Bodhidharma skillfully laid this wondrously luminous true mind—beyond description or comparison—completely before Emperor Wu. Alas, it was like making alluring eyes at a blind man. The emperor knew only how to discuss doctrine, speaking of the ordinary and the holy, without understanding mind-nature.

He did not know who it was that spoke of nothing, or who it was that spoke of existence, and so he missed it right before his eyes. Chan masters are like experts skilled in wielding the great sword: with one light sweep, they cut through at the root all the entanglements in your mind concerning ordinary and holy, ultimate and conventional, and directly point you to see your nature.

All sentient beings inherently possess the wisdom and virtuous attributes of the Tathāgata; they fail to recognize them only because they are deluded by sounds and forms. If one can truly let go of everything and not be carried along by sounds, forms, and material appearances, this wondrously luminous true mind is like the vastness of great empty space. Where could there be holy or ordinary? Precisely when there is nothing at all and the sense faculties and their objects fall away, turn the light inward with a single glance, rouse yourself with all your strength, and you will see the original.

Those among you who have opened the original through Chan practice know that, when practice reaches a certain point and it suddenly breaks with a snap and bursts apart with a bang, opening the original, the body and mind within and the world without all vanish together without remainder. Where then are holy beings—Buddhas and bodhisattvas? And where are ordinary beings—Zhang San and Li Si? Although there is nothing at all, it is not like wood or stone; it is clear and distinct.

Who is it that knows there is nothing? It is precisely the wondrously luminous true mind indicated by Patriarch Bodhidharma when he said to Emperor Wu, "Vast emptiness—nothing holy!" If we cling to appearances and retain notions of holy and ordinary in our minds, we cannot see the Way. Only by leaving appearances and views behind can we see the Way.

But Chan masters cannot, like us, go on endlessly spinning such entangling words. They merely point something out to you at the crucial juncture; if you can awaken immediately and take it up, that is enough. If, even after they point it out, you still do not know, you have failed not only the teacher but also yourself. Little do you realize that our intrinsic nature is vast and without things; it contains not a single thing.

Though not a single thing is present, it is clear and distinct, unlike wood or stone. This is the wondrously luminous true mind. In practicing the Dharma, never cling to appearances or imagine that there is anything to be gained. If you seek anything—marvels, mysteries, spiritual powers, and the like—you are utterly mistaken. Especially when one first sees one's nature, it is the unadorned dharmakāya.

"Unadorned" means without colors or embellishment; there is nothing mysterious or extraordinary about it. Never suppose, because no spiritual powers have appeared, that it is not the dharmakāya, and thereby miss the precious opportunity to see your nature.

At the very moment of opening, there is nothing seen, nothing heard, and nowhere to abide: there is only lucid, solitary illumination, with not a single thing present. This is the most critical, hair-trigger moment. If students fail to catch it in a flash and miss this scene, all their effort is wasted. Thus we say that, even if the divisions of past and future are cut off—that is, the preceding thought has ceased and the following thought has not yet arisen, in that moment of true emptiness—you do not

necessarily see your nature. Why? If at that moment you fail to recognize it and miss this scene, would not all your previous efforts be lost? If at that moment you seize it in one grasp . . . Ah, you may ask: what is it that is seized? Do you grasp it with your hand? No. There is no hand here, nor is there any thing—what could you grasp? This "grasping" means that, at that fleeting, hair-trigger moment, the numinous light flashes forth and one intuitively comprehends and awakens.

In the Chan school, this is called a sudden "hū!" One turns around and directly assumes it in its very presence: this is recognizing one's intrinsic nature and awakening. Never imagine that there is some thing that has been captured or grasped; that would be a mistaken understanding.

Thus, when Patriarch Bodhidharma said, "Vast emptiness—nothing holy," he wanted Emperor Wu to leap beyond the old confines of existence and nonexistence, ordinary and holy, and immediately see his nature. But Emperor Wu? He was one who clung to appearances. "You say 'vast emptiness—nothing holy.' If even holiness does not exist, does that not fall into emptiness? Yet people call you a holy man. How can you say that even holy people do not exist?"

The emperor then asked, "Who is it that stands before me?" Bodhidharma said, "I do not know."

Emperor Wu fixed his attention on the word "holy" and overlooked the two most important words, "vast emptiness." He therefore went on to ask, "Who is it that stands before me?" He thought he had now grasped the crucial point: "You say there is 'nothing holy'; then who is standing before me? People call you a holy man. If there is no holiness, then who are you? Let us see how you answer this!"

This question has two meanings: first, who is standing before me? Second, who is speaking with me? Emperor Wu's original intent was only the first meaning: who is standing before me? But in the Chan school it is not taken this way; rather, it takes the second meaning, asking who it is that can converse. It is like our present Chan inquiries: "Who is reciting the Buddha's name? Who is dragging this corpse? Who is speaking? And who is listening?" This "who" carries weight. Though it seems to be a question, it directly points you to see your nature.

This question is not so easy to answer. Unless one has realized one's true nature, one cannot help but have one's eyes fixed and hands and feet at a loss, not knowing where to turn. But Patriarch Bodhidharma was a great master. Knowing full well that this was a first-level question about meaning, he treated a dead horse as though it were alive and forcibly answered it as a second-level question about meaning: "I do not know."

"I do not know." Patriarch Bodhidharma's reply has truly perplexed people throughout the world. You are an awakened master—how can you say that you do not know? Do you really not know, or do you only pretend not to know? No, no. To fix one's attention on knowing or not knowing is mistaken in either case.

One Chan master put it well: "The gap-toothed barbarian monk brought a clay pellet to the land of China to compete in treasures. Illuminated by the precious radiance of Emperor Wu's pearl-like question, 'Who are you?', he was forced to retreat thirty miles and hastily said, 'I do not know.'" These two words, "do not know," are like a needle hidden in cotton: squeeze it, and it pricks your hand.

On the surface, it seems to mean that he did not know; in fact, it directly points to the true mind, responding to the "who" that asks who he is.

Does this that can ask and answer have any appearance that can be seen? Is there a duality of subject and object? Without appearance, without subject and object, who could know whom? At the moment we open the original, body, mind, and world are all absent; there is only empty luminosity. There are no material forms and no two things standing in opposition. Who could know whom? For example, when two people face each other, there is a distinction between knowing and not knowing. But now there is only the one absolute true mind, without an object to distinguish; therefore he said, "I do not know."

This "I do not know" weighs as heavily as a thousand jun. If you understand it, you awaken immediately; if you carelessly take it merely as knowing or not knowing, you have let it slip by.

Perhaps someone may say, "Knowing is correct, is it not? Knowing means knowing Buddha-nature!" No. At the very moment of opening, no thought can arise. At that time subject and object both vanish, and there is nothing at all. If a thought of knowing arises, you are deluded by its shadow and lose the precious opportunity for awakening.

Moreover, since intrinsic nature is without form and without sound, what is there to recognize? Going a step further, one who has thoroughly awakened empties all things; the mind abides nowhere, and even seeing is no seeing. If one still holds something to be weighty and clings to nature, it becomes a fixed pattern. In the

Chan school, this is called “falling into sainthood”; one is then no longer a person who has seen one’s nature.

For example, after Chan Master Lingyun awakened upon seeing peach blossoms in bloom, Hong Juefan praised him in verse: “Lingyun saw once and did not see again!” Why did he not see again? It was because Patriarch Lingyun had practiced Chan for thirty years without awakening.

One spring, when the peach blossoms were at their finest, he opened the mountain gate and suddenly saw countless clusters of peach blossoms blazing in full bloom, like a vast sea of incense and flowers. At that very moment, body and mind fell away, all worldly consciousness vanished, and his Original Face opened forth completely. He recited this verse: “For thirty years I sought a sword master; how many times have fallen leaves gone, and branches sprouted anew? Since first seeing the peach blossoms, I have never again had any doubt.”

See how earnestly the people of old applied themselves: for thirty years, as if for a single day, they diligently investigated. Once the time and conditions arrived, a single touch set everything off; the mysterious gate and the lock of consciousness opened, and they directly realized their original nature.

If people today could likewise cultivate diligently and untiringly, why should they worry that they could not attain accomplishment in this very life? Later, Xuansha commented: “Very fitting indeed, very fitting indeed—but I dare guarantee, my old brother, that you have not yet awakened thoroughly.” Why did he say that Lingyun had not awakened thoroughly? Because there still remained a “seeing” and a lack of doubt. The tail had not yet been cleared away; therefore, the awakening was not thorough.

This teaches those investigating and studying Chan that, at the time of awakening, they should only reach spiritual knowing and must not abide in “nature.” Later, Hong Juefan came to Lingyun’s rescue, saying: “Lingyun saw once and did not see again; on every red and white branch, no flowers cling.” This means that after the first seeing, he no longer clung to “seeing.” Although red and white peach blossoms appeared before him, he no longer clung to the view of peach blossoms.

That is, he no longer clung to nature and erased the traces of awakening. This is the broad and open-hearted bearing of one who has seen one’s nature: abiding nowhere. Thus Patriarch Bodhidharma said, “I do not know,” telling him that the true mind contains no thing—how could there be opposites? Here there is no one who knows anyone else.

The emperor did not understand, so Bodhidharma crossed the river and went to Wei.

Although Emperor Wu of Liang believed in Buddhism, his capacity for prajñā was poor. He did not know that Bodhidharma was pointing the way for him, and instead thought that Patriarch Bodhidharma truly did not know him and had no special ability. Thus "the emperor did not understand." When words do not meet, even half a sentence is too much; so he ignored Bodhidharma and returned to his inner palace. As for Patriarch Bodhidharma, if you ignore me, there is nothing I can do to liberate you.

The Chan school is intended for people of the highest capacities, who must awaken immediately rather than receive drawn-out and rambling instruction. When, within two or three exchanges of question and answer, the words did not accord, Bodhidharma had no choice but to seek another way. Thus, "Bodhidharma crossed the river and went to Wei." Is there not the story of Bodhidharma "crossing the river on a single reed"? Standing on a reed, he crossed the river to the state of Wei.

Later, the emperor raised the matter with Master Zhigong. Zhigong asked, "Does Your Majesty still recognize this man?" The emperor replied, "I do not know."

Emperor Wu of Liang returned to his inner palace and asked Baozhi. Before Emperor Wu stood two great masters: Lay Master Fu and Chan Master Baozhi. Both had descended from the Tuṣita Heaven to liberate Emperor Wu of Liang. The emperor then told Baozhi of this koan—the dialogue with Patriarch Bodhidharma.

Zhigong then asked Emperor Wu of Liang, "Do you still recognize Bodhidharma?" The emperor replied, "I do not know."

Here Emperor Wu of Liang likewise said that he did not know. Is this the same as, or different from, Patriarch Bodhidharma's "I do not know"? Do you all know? There is much to consider here. Patriarch Bodhidharma's "I do not know" was not a matter of knowing or not knowing; it presented the living, vibrant true mind to you in its entirety, pointing you toward seeing your nature at once. Emperor Wu of Liang's "I do not know," however, merely meant not knowing in the ordinary worldly sense.

But if, in the Chan school, you are asked whether these two "I do not know" statements are the same or different, and you answer as above, you will receive a blow from the stick. How should you answer? This mouth born of my parents will never tell you!

Zhigong said, "This is the great being Avalokiteśvara, transmitting the Buddha's Mind-Seal."

Zhigong said that this Bodhidharma was the great being Avalokiteśvara, who had come to transmit the Buddha's Mind-Seal. The Buddha's Mind-Seal is our own intrinsic nature; mind seals mind, enabling you to see your nature immediately.

There is no need to be like us today, practicing some method or sitting through so many meditation sessions. He need only say one sentence, touch the crucial point, and cause you at once to open the true eye and clearly see your intrinsic nature. This is direct entry, very swift indeed. But in this Dharma-ending age, practitioners' capacities have grown dull, like a blade that is no longer sharp. Do not speak of one touch: even a thousand or ten thousand touches cannot open them up.

To open the true eye is to open prajñā. This is urgently necessary in every school; without wisdom, one can never realize the Way.

Perhaps someone may say that the Pure Land school does not require this. That is not so. If it did not, why would Pure Land practitioners recite "Mahāprajñāpāramitā" at the end of every service? Without wisdom, how can one see through all worldly forms, let go of this world, and attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land? Many Pure Land practitioners fail to be reborn in the West at the end of life precisely because they lack wisdom. Unable to see through this Sahā world, where they were born, where they have eaten and lived, and where all their family and friends are, they cannot let it go, cannot bear to leave it, and therefore cannot depart.

If one understands that all wives, wealth, children, rank, and emolument are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows, and can let them go, then of a thousand who cultivate, a thousand will go; of ten thousand who cultivate, ten thousand will go.

Zhigong said that the great being Avalokiteśvara transmitted the Buddha's Mind-Seal. Avalokiteśvara is supremely compassionate, hearing cries everywhere and rescuing beings from suffering, bestowing blessings on all sentient beings so that they may leave suffering and attain happiness. Because this bodhisattva has deep affinities with the sentient beings of this world, when Śākyamuni Buddha was approaching parinirvāṇa, he entrusted Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva with caring for the sentient beings of the Sahā world, so that all might be spared suffering.

The Universal Gateway Chapter of the Lotus Sūtra proclaims the bodhisattva's greatness, profound vows, compassion, lofty virtues, and deep spiritual power. When everyone invokes "Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva" . . . not only can all kinds of obstacles, calamities, and disasters vanish completely, but even various unfavorable circumstances can be dispelled. We must strive diligently in cultivation and not disappoint the grace of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Having attained realization, we must further proclaim and teach the Dharma on behalf of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, guide later learners, revive the Buddhadharma, and enable everyone to leave the sea of suffering.

The emperor regretted this and sent an envoy to invite him back.

When Emperor Wu of Liang heard Chan Master Zhigong say that this was Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who had come to transmit the Buddha's Mind-Seal, he realized that he had failed to recognize him, treated him negligently, and let him leave. The emperor deeply regretted his improper conduct and his disrespect toward Bodhidharma, which had caused him to depart quietly. He therefore wished to send an envoy to invite Patriarch Bodhidharma back.

Zhigong said, "Do not say that Your Majesty might send an envoy to invite him; even if the whole country went to invite him, he still would not return!"

Baozhi said, "Not to mention Your Majesty sending one envoy to invite Patriarch Bodhidharma back: even if you mobilized the entire country to invite him, Patriarch Bodhidharma would not return."

Why was this? Because Patriarch Bodhidharma came to transmit the Buddha's Mind-Seal and liberate sentient beings with affinities; he did not come to receive your offerings. If your capacity is unsuitable, you lack the good fortune to receive the Dharma treasure of the Chan gate. As the Chan school says: "If one is not a kindred spirit, listening is futile."

Nor did he need fame. It was enough if he could find even one or half a person of awakening to receive the Dharma and continue the Buddha-seed in its flourishing. Thus Patriarch Bodhidharma was one who "would not remain in a cage and would not turn back when called." He would never return. After crossing the river to Wei, Patriarch Bodhidharma lived at Shaolin Monastery on Mount Song, facing the wall for nine years. He obtained Master Shenguang, who thoroughly awakened to the source of mind, and transmitted the Dharma to him.

There were many others under his name, but they obtained only the skin, flesh, and bones of Chan; they could not obtain its marrow. Therefore Patriarch Bodhidharma transmitted the Dharma only to Shenguang, making him the Second Patriarch.

Bodhidharma had originally thought that Emperor Wu of Liang, a Chinese emperor who believed in Buddhism, probably possessed considerable capacity. Who would have known that this emperor was inadequate? He attended only to names and appearances, was not a person of the highest capacity, and could not receive the transmission. Therefore Bodhidharma left without farewell.

Then, if studying Chan is so difficult, would not the Buddha-seed be cut off in this Dharma-ending age? No. Even in the Dharma-ending age, there are people with the capacity for the true Dharma. Among the vast multitude of the Buddha's disciples, there are many people of the highest capacities. So long as those with aspiration promote and spread it, the Chan gate will flourish.

Because the great compassionate power of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas bestows its blessings, so long as one has deep faith and does not slacken, morning and evening devoted to this, absorbed in this through ease and hardship, and continually presses forward, the day will naturally come when the water flows into its channel.

But if you remain here full of doubts, wondering, “Can I do it? Will the Buddhas and bodhisattvas bless me? Perhaps my karmic obstacles are too heavy for success?” . . . then things go wrong. Once doubt arises, your strength is insufficient; your practice becomes halting, and you cannot courageously press straight ahead and struggle to the end to complete the arduous and great task.

So long as our faith is strong, and we do not fear the distance of the road or its dangers and obstacles, but throw our whole strength into advancing vigorously, we will certainly overcome all difficulties and realize the great Way. As said above, after awakening to the Way, one does not simply stop after a single awakening. One must carefully safeguard and nurture it, removing habitual tendencies completely. Only when, like an infant growing into an adult, this maturation has occurred can one let go freely and move unimpededly through emptiness.

At the time of initial awakening, it will not do to fail to safeguard it. How is it safeguarded? On the one hand, sit in meditation to cultivate samādhi; on the other, temper and nurture it amid daily affairs. Abide neither in emptiness nor in existence; accord with conditions in all things; undertake any work, yet while doing it, do not cling to doing it, with no mind of liking or disliking.

As the Chan school says: “Within mind, retain no affair; in affairs, have no clinging mind!” One may be busy all day while having no affair in the mind; with no affair in the mind, there is no obstacle to being busy all day. But if, while doing things, you are carried away by things, that will not do. Quickly draw yourself back and let go; be diligent in awareness and discerning in training. If your power of self-awareness is insufficient, then meditate more.

Why is this so? Because seated meditation can cultivate the power of samādhi, enabling you to remain masterful and strong amid circumstances. If you do not meditate, your samādhi power will be insufficient. When you train amid circumstances, you will become muddled as soon as confusion arises, be dragged along by circumstances, and fall into delusion after awakening. That will not do. This is the most crucial point.

Furthermore, when one has just opened to one's original nature, there is nothing extraordinary about it. Practitioners often fail to recognize it, thinking that because there is nothing miraculous about it, it cannot be intrinsic nature; thus they overlook it and let it pass by. They do not realize that this numinous, wondrous true mind is

the absolute, wondrous essence that is utterly bare and does not establish a single dharma. At the first seeing of one's nature, habitual defilements still remain; there is only the pure dharmakāya, with nothing at all.

Only after recognizing it must the practitioner diligently temper themselves, until the deluded habits accumulated through beginningless kalpas are exhausted; only then can its wondrous functions manifest. Therefore, practitioners must understand the stages of practice clearly. Never, because spiritual powers have not temporarily appeared, fail to dare to accept this realization and thereby miss the excellent opportunity for awakening. Still less should you, through not recognizing it yourself, pass error on as truth and harm others. In fact, awakening and seeing one's nature are not difficult, for this wondrous, luminous true mind is not elsewhere: all day long, it shines from the face of each person, without the slightest separation. People merely overlook and fail to recognize it because they are deluded by appearances and attached to circumstances.

Fu Dashi says in his Song of Transmitting the Mind: "Each night I embrace the Buddha as I sleep; each morning we rise together. In rising and sitting, we constantly accompany one another; in speech and silence, we abide together. We are not apart by the slightest fraction, like a body and its shadow." See how plainly and clearly this is expressed. Awaken from here, and how joyous and carefree you will be. If you seek elsewhere, even if you wait until Maitreya Buddha descends into the world, you will find no such place.

Someone may say: "Chan Master Yong of Baoning once said, 'Many have gained a sudden insight from this verse, but quite a few have also misunderstood it.' Chan Master Xuansha likewise commented on this verse: 'That great Fu Dashi recognized only the clearly aware and numinously responsive.' Might there be something wrong or imprecise about this verse?"

I could not help laughing as I replied: This verse is so intimate, plain, and clear that even persons of the lowest capacities can awaken upon hearing it. If they can understand from it, why should there be any error? And where does the error lie? Yong of Baoning did not point this out, leaving later generations with many doubts. I may as well set it forth now, to dispel your doubts.

The error does not lie in the verse, but in the rashness of those who understand it, imagining that this very capacity to speak, expound the Way, raise one's hands, and move one's feet is one's own innate Buddha.

It is like those who misunderstand the incisive passage in the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment: "To know illusion is to depart from it; no expedient means are required. To depart from illusion is enlightenment; there are no gradual stages either." They suppose that awakening means becoming a Buddha, and that there is

no further need to exert themselves in refined cultivation, diligently remove deluded habits, preserve the original truth, and attain the ultimate ground of immovability.

They do not realize that this is only initial awakening, not original awakening. They must still rely upon original awakening and practice diligently and arduously. Like a child relying on its mother, child and mother must join and merge into one before great awakening is attained.

How could one be satisfied with so little, presume oneself right, leave old habits unchanged, and act recklessly according to one's inclinations—clinging to circumstances and abiding in appearances—thereby causing a fine innate Buddha still to fall into rebirth in the six realms? Would that not be a great mistake and a grievous injustice? As for the "clearly aware and numinously responsive" spoken of by Chan Master Xuansha: this wondrous, luminous true mind is originally clearly aware and numinously responsive. It is not a matter of deliberately setting one's mind to become clearly aware and numinously responsive.

If there is the slightest intentional effort, it is already wrong. It is like a bright mirror hung high: it naturally illuminates clearly; it does not illuminate because one exerts effort or does not exert effort, or because one intends or does not intend it. You need only be natural and spontaneous, without expending the slightest effort, completely present and ready-made, allowing it to function freely. Do not abide in or cling to it, nor take hold of it. It is not that one must forcibly kill off or obliterate this clear awareness and numinous responsiveness.

Moreover, no matter how hard you try to strike or grind away this clear awareness and numinous responsiveness, you cannot kill it or obliterate it. Indeed, the more you strike and grind, the more clearly aware and numinously responsive it becomes. Nor should you seek some principle apart from this clear awareness and numinous responsiveness.

Those who have practiced for many years without awakening have all been deceived by themselves: they imagine that the manifestation of spiritual powers is what matters, not realizing that so-called spiritual powers are simply one's everyday functioning.

If this were not spiritual power, how could one speak or work? How could one dress and eat? How could one laugh, jest, grow angry, or scold? Its wondrous functions are present everywhere, yet people do not know it. They insist on something extraordinary and thus bring needless frustration upon themselves. Is this not pitiable suffering? Some do not recognize it themselves and are content merely to bob up and down in the sea of suffering; that would be one thing. But they also harm others, saying that one who has not manifested spiritual powers has not awakened, and that an awakened person possesses all six supernormal powers.

How could they know the sequence in which realization of the Way comes first and the manifestation of spiritual powers later? The Mahāvairocana Sūtra says: “When a bodhisattva abides at this stage [that is, the stage of seeing the Way] and practices diligently, before long all five supernormal powers will manifest together.” After realizing the Way, one must still undergo further tempering and exhaust the deluded habits of countless kalpas and lives before spiritual powers can manifest.

Therefore, we practitioners must not abandon ourselves in despair. When it first opens before us and we recognize it, we should unhesitatingly acknowledge it as our own nature. Do not be confused by spiritual powers or extraordinary phenomena. Then diligently preserve and nurture it, thoroughly remove deluded habits, and before long spiritual powers will naturally manifest greatly. Because practitioners’ capacities differ, there are also those who develop powers before awakening, though such people are not often seen today.

Some people today possess unusual abilities and spiritual powers without having practiced. These are spiritual powers acquired as karmic retribution; they are temporary and gradually disappear afterward. The spiritual powers spoken of in Buddhism have several kinds: those acquired as karmic retribution, through cultivation, through realization, and through reliance on external aid.

Powers acquired through cultivation arise from specializing in one method to cultivate one particular power; Esoteric Buddhism has many methods for cultivating spiritual powers. Powers acquired through reliance depend on external assistance, such as that of spirits, ghosts, or demons. But none of these is ultimate. When one’s last breath does not come, they are gone; they are of no use. One remains in the cycle of birth and death and does not leave the sea of suffering.

Only powers acquired through realization are genuine spiritual powers. These arise when those who have seen their nature undergo tempering amid circumstances, exhaust their habitual tendencies, and restore the functions of their intrinsic nature. They are inexhaustible spiritual powers that will never be obliterated. Yet, although their wondrous functioning is boundless, one does not cling to such functions, and all day long appears almost foolish or dull. This is what is meant by great wisdom seeming like foolishness.

Later, Chan Master Xuedou composed this verse on this Chan koan: “The holy truth is vast and empty—how could it be discerned? Who is there before me? He still says he does not know! Because of this, he secretly crossed the river; how could thorny brambles not arise? Though the whole country pursues him, he will not return; through a thousand ages and ten thousand ages, they vainly remember him. Do not remember him: how could the pure breeze covering the earth have any limit?” The

master looked around to his left and right and said, “Is the Patriarch still here?” He answered himself, “Yes! Call him here to wash this old monk’s feet.”

Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin said: “In general, verses on ancient cases merely speak of Chan by a roundabout route: they bring up the main outline of an old case and render judgment according to the facts.”

In Xuedou’s verse on this Chan koan, he begins with: “The holy truth is vast and empty—how could it be discerned?” This explains that the One True Dharma Realm —the holy truth, vast as a clear sky stretching ten thousand miles without a cloud— is the absolute true mind, utterly bare and not establishing a single dharma. How could it allow you to calculate and deliberate, distinguish right from wrong, or discern gain from loss? Here, even eyes of iron and pupils of bronze cannot grope their way to it. How could it be fathomed and discerned through discriminatory consciousness? Yunmen said: “When Chan investigation reaches its critical point, it is like sparks struck from stone or a flash of lightning: it does not fall into mental contrivance, consciousness, emotional dust, or conceptual thought.”

By the time one begins to calculate, the pigeon has already flown past Silla—now called Korea. Therefore Xuedou said, how could Chan monks throughout the land discern it?

“Who is there before me? He still says he does not know.” Here Xuedou repeatedly points the way for people. Above, he says that the holy truth is vast and empty, that not a single dharma is established, and that it is the absolute wondrous essence without an opposite. Since it is an absolute wondrous essence, who is there to know, and who is there to be known? Xuedou’s emphasis here is meant to prevent people from missing “vast and empty,” and he reminds everyone: “He still says he does not know.”

The words “still says” warn the assembly that within vast emptiness there is not even holiness. Is there still knowing or not knowing? Chan Master Baiyun Duan once composed a verse: “Ordinarily, one arrow brings down one eagle; to shoot another arrow is already excessive.” This is where the ancients showed their anxious, grandmotherly concern for others: repeatedly pointing the way for people, they did not begrudge falling bodily into the weeds. By this point, the entire Chan koan has already been fully versified.

But out of compassion, Xuedou further versified the events of this Chan koan: “Because of this, he secretly crossed the river; how could thorny brambles not arise?” Bodhidharma came to free people from clinging and bondage and to cut away thorny brambles. Why, then, does he speak of producing brambles? This is because not only do practitioners debate the rights and wrongs, gains and losses of this case in profusion; even today, the great number of those who investigate the

mystery all seek to discern its gains and losses. Thus Yuanwu Keqin said: “Right now, beneath everyone’s feet, the grass is already several yards deep.”

“Through a thousand ages and ten thousand ages, they vainly remember him.” Yes, ever since this Chan koan spread, those within the Way have all lamented Emperor Wu of Liang and longed for Bodhidharma. After Bodhidharma’s passing, Emperor Wu personally composed an inscription for his stele: “Alas! Seeing him, yet not seeing him; encountering him, yet not encountering him. Now and anciently, I resent it and grieve over it!” Yuanwu Keqin commented: “Far too unmanly! Do you all know?” He also said: “Where is Bodhidharma? Do you all see him? Once you fall into deliberation, you have already missed it.”

Xuedou feared that people would cling to emotional views, so he turned the topic around and revealed his own understanding for later generations: “Do not remember him: how could the pure breeze covering the earth have any limit?” If you recognize the ground on which you stand beneath your own feet, then at every moment you walk hand in hand with Bodhidharma and Xuedou. Why engage in searching thoughts and recollections? This wondrous, luminous true mind is not elsewhere; it shines from the face of each person. It is utterly ordinary.

It is like the pure breeze that blankets heaven and earth: everyone is touched by it, everyone is nurtured by it, and everyone accomplishes all kinds of undertakings through it. What is there that is lofty and unreachable, or a summit that must be scaled?

Finally, Xuedou feared that people would become attached to the Patriarch and rely upon him, rather than reflect upon themselves and stand on their own. To cling here is like a divine turtle dragging its tail and sweeping away its own tracks. So, as a further expedient for guiding people, he looked to his left and right and asked: “Is the Patriarch still here?” He answered himself: “Yes!” Then he himself said: “Call him here to wash this old monk’s feet!” Why did Chan Master Xuedou so diminish the Patriarch’s august radiance?

Because this wondrous, luminous true mind is wisdom without a teacher, without reliance, without anything known, and without name or form. What could you call it? As soon as anything is established or anything is clung to, you have already missed it.

Furthermore, above heaven and below heaven, there is not a single thing that is not its manifestation; there is not a single dharma that does not stand by relying on it. Do you call it a patriarch? Can you attain it by clinging here? A monk once asked Huangbo, “Are there any Chan masters in the Great Tang Empire?” Huangbo said, “I do not say there is no Chan; it is only that there are no masters.” This is precisely the meaning.

We practitioners should draw a lesson from this koan. First, one must know that it is there; one must then safeguard it continuously and closely—this is the initial good. Next, one must let it be and not hold on to it—this is the middle good. Finally, even the thought of deliberately not guarding the mind is gone—this is the final good. I hope you will all cherish this!

Case Two: Zhaozhou—The Great Way Is Not Difficult

In the previous lecture, I gave an expansive explanation of the first koan—"the supreme truth of the Noble Truths." The explanation has been given, but Chan is not found in words and letters. You must penetrate beyond doctrinal meanings and conceptual labels and directly realize your own mind. What, then, is the fundamental purport of the Chan school? How did the patriarchs skillfully guide people? How should we ourselves realize it? If you still have not understood, then listen as I untangle a second knot of entanglement—Zhaozhou's "The Supreme Way Is Not Difficult."

Zhaozhou was a renowned Chan master of great virtue in the late Tang dynasty, a master of great stature. He did not discuss abstruse mysteries or subtle wonders, speak of expedient devices and states, or employ blows and shouts. He simply used ordinary language concerning the matter at hand to guide people, with sayings such as "the cypress tree in the courtyard," "a dog has no Buddha-nature," and "go drink tea." In this way, he received those who came to him and formed the distinctive "house style of Zhaozhou."

Such sayings appear ordinary and unremarkable, yet their implications are profound and far-reaching. They are like needles concealed in cotton: one cannot touch or grasp them, for at a touch or grasp they injure the body and prick the hand. This old master could handle matters freely and naturally in every direction, whether going against or with the current. This was because all calculating had been exhausted in him, and he had reached complete maturity; only then could he turn from richness to plainness.

When we study Chan and cultivate the Way, we must first have a basis for awakening, and the key to such awakening lies in the guidance of a good spiritual friend. Chan Master Zhaozhou was no exception. While studying under Chan Master Nanquan, he once asked Nanquan, "What is the Way?" Nanquan instructed him, "Ordinary mind is the Way." The three words "ordinary mind" refer to the ordinary activities of daily life; this is where the great Way is found.

Otherwise, when a single breath does not return and the body still remains, how could it cease to speak, laugh, and move? Layman Pang said in his verse on awakening: "There is nothing special in daily affairs … I simply live in harmony with

myself. Spiritual powers and wondrous functioning are carrying water and hauling firewood." Thus, laughing, joking, becoming angry, scolding, clearing one's throat, and moving one's arms are all wondrous functions of the true mind. People are merely deluded by forms and appearances and do not know this themselves.

Taking the words literally, ping means "not crooked," and chang means "unbroken." If a Chan practitioner's mind can remain straight and unbent at all times, responding continuously and appropriately in every situation, then the luminosity and freely functioning wondrous activity manifested in that very state may also be called the Way. This explanation is passable, but it is not the orthodox teaching of the Chan school.

But where is this Way? Can it be realized through some method? Therefore, Zhaozhou again asked, "Can one still move toward it?" Nanquan replied, "The very intention to move toward it is already a deviation!" This means that if the mind forms an intention or moves toward some object, it turns away from the Way. How then can one awaken to the Way? The great Way is formless, and the great sound is scarcely heard. There is nothing toward which one can intend or which one can seize. When thoughts cease, it shines clearly before one; when a thought arises, it is obscured by shadows. Therefore, there is nowhere to move toward.

Unfortunately, many people who study Buddhism and practice the Dharma fall into just such intention and seeking. When reading sutras or listening to teachings, they believe that there is some real dharma to be attained; when practicing diligently, they believe that there is some sacred state to be acquired. Busily seeking an objective in every direction, they labor in vain. Is this not unjust suffering? In truth, the Way is originally complete and ready at hand; it does not belong to cultivation or realization, and it is nondual for everyone. It depends only on whether you are deluded by forms and appearances. Thus the ancient masters said: "The Way lies in awakening, not in practice."

Then, if one does not use thought to form intentions, how can one know that it is the Way? Therefore Zhaozhou again asked, "If one does not intend, how can one know that it is the Way?"

Nanquan replied: "The Way does not belong to knowing, nor does it belong to not knowing. Knowing is deluded awareness; not knowing is indeterminate ignorance. If you truly reach the Way beyond doubt, it is like the vast emptiness—open, expansive, and unobstructed. How could one forcibly establish right and wrong?"

The great Way is empty and expansive, like space itself: not establishing a single dharma, utterly bare, lucidly clear, and boundlessly wondrous in function. To know is to put another head on top of one's head, completely distorting one's original face; not to know is to be like wood or stone, incapable of wondrous functioning.

From the standpoint of the Chan school, “not belonging to knowing” means that the official road admits not even a needle; “not belonging to not knowing” means that a private passage admits carriages and horses. Since neither knowing nor not knowing offers any place to stand, why speak of Way or no Way, Buddha or no Buddha, right and wrong, gain and loss?

Under Nanquan’s instruction, Zhaozhou awakened to the principle of Chan. Those of us who study Buddhism and practice the Dharma should be the same: clarify the mind through principle, reveal principle through the mind, and respond to conditions everywhere and at all times with ordinary mind. Then the Way is right there within it.

Before discussing the koan, let us first consider the introductory instruction of Patriarch Yuanwu Keqin:

“Heaven and earth are narrow; the sun, moon, and stars are all dark at once.”

Heaven and earth are the sky and the ground, and they are manifestations of a single thought of mind. “Heaven and earth are narrow” means that our mind-capacity is narrow. Those of us who study Buddhism must have broad mind-capacity in order to remain unattached amid affairs and enter the Way with ease. If one’s mind-capacity is narrow, one is constantly entangled with things, unable to let go or empty them out, and thus fails to accord with the Way.

A person’s breadth of mind is of great importance to success or failure in cultivating the Way. Many people who do not practice the Dharma do not even know to have faith in Buddhism. Yet they are ordinarily open-hearted and unrestrained, generous and ardent, delight in doing good, and commit no evils. When the time of death approaches, they too can know in advance when it will come, arrange their final affairs clearly, and depart freely and unhurriedly.

Conversely, some people who have faith in Buddhism and practice the Dharma are not only unable to know in advance when death will come; they instead weep bitterly in sorrow and cannot bear to leave.

Why is this? The former have broad minds: generous and open-hearted, able to take things up and let them go. Although they do not believe in Buddhism, they accord with the Way; like still water giving rise to light, their minds are clear and wisdom arises. Thus, they can know in advance when death will come. The latter, however, have narrow minds, calculating everywhere and holding every matter in their hearts without being able to let it go. Although they believe in Buddhism, recite the Buddha’s name, observe a vegetarian diet, and sit in meditation, their minds lack clarity and wisdom does not arise.

How can they then know in advance when death will come and attain rebirth with ease? People with narrow minds cannot even know in advance when death will come, much less realize the Way and attain Buddhahood. Thus it is said, “Heaven and earth are narrow; the sun, moon, and stars are all dark at once”—everything is finished. Yuanwu Keqin then said:

“Even if blows fall like raindrops and shouts rumble like thunder, they still cannot serve the matter of the highest vehicle of the Chan school.”

Even if people with narrow minds encounter an enlightened teacher who uses blows like raindrops and shouts like thunder to free them from their predicament, they still cannot undertake the matter of the highest vehicle of the Chan school—they will not awaken.

Why is this? Deshan’s blows and Linji’s shouts are celebrated methods by which the Chan school guides people; they can enable students to realize the mind under a blow and grasp the essential meaning under a shout. Since they have such wondrous efficacy, why can they not serve the matter of the highest vehicle of the Chan school? It is because students with narrow minds keep every matter fixed in their hearts, where it cannot be uprooted. No matter how blows and shouts are used to free them from their predicament, it is of no avail.

For example, we say that karmic obstacles are originally empty. In the Chan hall, you may seem to accept and acknowledge that “karmic obstacles are originally like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water; they are not real entities,” and your mind becomes relaxed. But when some people leave the Chan hall and encounter unpleasant circumstances, their minds inevitably grow heavy again, and they feel that their karmic obstacles have become serious.

This is because their minds abide too strongly in appearances and their attachment is too heavy. Although they have received a slight perfuming by prajñā in the Chan hall, it cannot move the old root of attachment. They remain obstructed by this karma that has no real existence. They do not realize that so-called karmic obstacles are simply the mind stirring, abiding in appearances, creating karma, and undergoing karmic retribution.

Yet all phenomenal appearances are wondrous functions manifested by the true mind; they are all shadows and have no substance whatsoever. The Diamond Sūtra says: “All conditioned dharmas are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows.” Where are there any real things? Since objects and circumstances cannot be obtained, why foolishly cling to them? When the mind is empty and circumstances vanish, karmic obstacles have nowhere to stand. The Chan school says: “Once realized, karmic obstacles are originally empty.” Conversely, if you cling to them as

truly existent and refuse to let go, it becomes: “Without realization, one must repay one’s past debts,” and karmic obstacles become layer upon layer.

For example, when a person is ill and fixes the mind on the illness, they feel pain here and itching there, suffering as though they were about to die. But if you let go and do not keep the illness in mind, pain and itching are merely what they are; in daily life, it is only like carrying one more burden. Then the mind becomes much more settled, and the illness is more easily cured.

There were two patients with cancer. One was cheerful and broad-minded, did not keep the illness in mind, and continued to live and work happily; the illness gradually improved instead. The other grieved, worried, and suffered day and night, and soon died. From this we can see that all clinging, defilement, and attachment are nothing but seeking suffering and trouble for oneself.

From the standpoint of the Way, the body itself does not truly exist—so where could illness come from? One does not even carry a burden. As it is said: when ill, do not conceive of yourself as ill; when eating, do not conceive of yourself as eating; when dressing, do not conceive of yourself as dressing. Nothing can be obtained. Do not concern yourself with it. Then what karmic obstacles could there be? Therefore, we must at all times keep the mind empty and non-abiding; only then can we truly realize the great Way of non-contrivance.

In practicing the Dharma, we proceed from the conditioned to non-contrivance and must pass through the sixth, seventh, and eighth bhūmis. Only upon reaching the eighth bhūmi does one truly enter the stage of non-contrivance. At the seventh bhūmi, although one realizes non-contrivance, there still remains an idea of non-contrivance, so it is not genuine non-contrivance. Only at the eighth bhūmi, when even the influence of non-contrivance has vanished, is one truly unmoved. Therefore, the eighth bhūmi is also called the Immovable Ground.

Those of us who study Buddhism should not cling to anything, but keep the mind empty and non-abiding. Without seeking breadth, mind-capacity naturally becomes broad; without seeking awakening and seeing one’s true nature, one naturally awakens and sees one’s true nature. Only in this way can one undertake the great matter of the highest vehicle of the Chan school.

Otherwise, one merely remembers sayings and phrases, seeks the abstruse and the marvelous, keeps matters in one’s heart, and cannot let go. How, then, can one open this mysterious gateway and the lock of consciousness and see one’s true nature? Therefore Patriarch Yuanwu Keqin said that once your mind-capacity becomes narrow, even if patriarchs stand before you, raining blows and shouts upon you in rapid succession, it will be useless. Your attachment is too deep and your entanglement too great; even the patriarchs can do nothing.

Whatever school of practice we follow—Pure Land, Chan, or Esoteric Buddhism—we must let everything go. Without letting go, one cannot succeed in the practice. Perhaps someone will say that those who recite the Buddha's name have Amitābha Buddha to guide them to rebirth, so there is no need to let go.

Is that so? If those who recite the Buddha's name have not severed the root of attachment and cannot let go of the wives, wealth, children, emoluments, fame, success, and riches of this Sahā world, can they still attain rebirth? I fear that, however great the Buddha's power may be, he cannot guide them to rebirth! Why? Because the mooring rope of your stinking dung-boat is tightly fastened to a stake on the shore—attached to the Sahā world. Though it has motive power—the Buddha's power—how can it move?! From this we can see that only by letting go of everything and applying oneself single-mindedly can one attain anything. It is not something that can be achieved through opportunism or clever shortcuts.

Yuanwu Keqin then further instructed:

"Even the Buddhas of the three times can only know it for themselves."

This Way is such that even the Buddhas of the three times can only know it for themselves and cannot put it into words. It is like a mute person dreaming, unable to tell others about it. Our Original Face has nothing with which it can be compared, nor is there any object resembling it; therefore, it cannot be explained to others and can only be known for oneself. The Chan school says, "At the summit of Mount Sumeru, there is no room for discussion!" Thus, though the Buddhas of the three times have mouths, they find it difficult to speak.

In the future, you need not ask others what realm is encountered upon opening the Original Face. Amitābha Buddha! This knowing awareness that is without knowledge cannot be depicted; how could one explain it to you? Even if you encounter someone with clear insight, they can only hint at it indirectly, setting off the clouds to reveal the moon, and seal mind with mind. If your mind is not yet clear, you will not understand even if it is explained. As the Chan school says: When you meet a swordsman on the road, you must present a sword; do not offer a poem to one who is not a poet.

If you say that you see something, then you are seeing ghosts, not seeing the Way. The Diamond Sūtra states this very clearly: "All appearances are illusory." Seeing Buddhas or seeing light is not it; whatever is seen is not true seeing. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra explains it even more clearly: "When seeing sees seeing, that seeing is not true seeing; seeing still stands apart from seeing, and seeing cannot reach it."

Anything that is seen is not it. Therefore, in the future do not inquire of others. Instead, apply yourselves and open the Original Face; realize and know it for

yourselves, and then you will not be misled by others. After opening it, however, it is permissible to seek verification from one who has gone through it.

Before this, inquiring about others is most harmful. First, one looks at what experiences others have in order to judge whether they have awakened, recklessly drawing conclusions. Second, one wrongly increases one's views, imagining that awakening is some particular experience and wishing to gain some insight into it oneself. Once this view arises, not only will one gain no insight, but one will be unable even to enter samādhi.

For the very thought of wanting to gain some insight is deluded mind. With deluded thoughts arising in profusion, can one still enter samādhi? Third, when others have experiences, one asks, "Why do I have none?" One becomes inwardly anxious and distressed, unable to sit at ease; or one resigns oneself to inferiority, makes no effort to advance, grieves and sighs, and lacks strength in practice. Worse still, one may become jealous of others and slander them. That is even more harmful.

What form does the One True Dharma Realm have? It is truly difficult to say. Thus, when the Buddhas of the three times reach this point, there is no place for them to speak. They can only know it for themselves, like a person drinking water who alone knows whether it is cold or warm.

"The patriarchs of successive generations cannot fully bring it forth."

The great patriarchs of every age have been unable to depict this matter in its entirety and show it to you. Language cannot reach it, thought cannot encompass it, and there is no place to begin speaking. The moment one speaks, there is something to which one clings, and it is no longer the One True Dharma Realm of true emptiness and non-abiding.

As Chan Master Zhaozhou said: "I do not like to hear even the word 'Buddha'!" Not even Buddha is established; this may truly be called a clean and thorough eradication.

Yet later generations pointed out: "There is still the dislike!" This shows that the wondrous presence of true emptiness, utterly free of appearances, is like empty space: no one can get hold of it. How, then, can it be raised up and presented? No matter how you speak, horizontally or vertically, or how pearl-like your splendid phrases may be, you can only present half of it, never reveal it in full.

Yet if one encounters a person of keen awakening who grasps the meaning upon hearing the words, that person can expand a half-presentation into a full presentation. Otherwise, even a full presentation will decline into a half-presentation. Chan Master Wuzu Yan once told a scholar that a somewhat erotic

poem came quite close: “Again and again I call little Yu, though there is nothing to do; I only want my beloved to recognize my voice!” The scholar stared in bewilderment and did not understand. Yuanwu Keqin, who heard this while standing nearby, stepped out of the abbot’s quarters and happened to hear a rooster crowing at noon. He was suddenly greatly awakened and said, “Is this not ‘voice’?!” Thus, whether it is a half-presentation or a full presentation depends entirely on the individual’s own transformation; the patriarchs cannot do the work in one’s stead.

“The entire Tripiṭaka cannot explain or annotate it.”

The scriptures of the Tripiṭaka and twelve divisions likewise cannot explain it. This is like a skilled painter being unable to paint a lofty and untrammeled artistic realm. The Chan school has a technical expression: Such elegance cannot be painted.

This boundless elegance and magnificent scene—where could one begin to paint it, and how could one depict it? One can only use an indistinct, cloud-setting-and-moon-revealing manner to give a rough outline, leaving you to awaken to it for yourself.

For example, “Morning light lies deep within the green shade” is used as a metaphor for the natural genuineness hidden within the mountain’s form. Even if you invited Wang Wei, a master painter of landscapes, to paint this faint dawn light—the true mind—hidden deep within the green shade, he would have no way to take up his brush.

Another famous Chan line says: “A move is wondrous only when the chess game reaches its desperate point; the plum’s fragrance grows purer in the cold.” How could such a clear, lofty, and untrammeled realm be depicted, apart from being inwardly understood by oneself? Thus, even the entire Tripiṭaka cannot annotate it at this point.

At the final gathering on Vulture Peak, the World-Honored One held up a flower to show the assembly, transmitting this intransmissible secret. Yet humans and devas were utterly at a loss, with no entry into it. Fortunately, Mahākāśyapa smiled when his face broke into a smile, and mind sealed mind. Only then could this mind-lamp of the special transmission outside the teachings—illuminating the great thousandfold world and shining through the ages—be passed down unbroken from generation to generation to the present. This teaching without words and this explanation without annotation are themselves the most vast and profound of all teachings and explanations.

“Even clear-eyed monastics cannot save themselves. How, at this point, can one seek instruction?”

Prajñā is like a great mass of fire: touch it and you are scorched. Even one of clear insight cannot rely on it or grasp it; this is what is meant by being unable to save oneself. Thus, the great Way seems visible but unreachable, with no way to begin. Yet the Way values turning the light inward and shifting the pivot; one must not burrow into a dead end. An ancient poem says: When mountains and waters are exhausted, one suspects there is no road; amid dark willows and bright flowers, another village appears.

Where is this other village amid dark willows and bright flowers? It is where one relinquishes one's life and turns one's gaze back with a smile that gives rise to a hundred charms. An ancient worthy said: "In what cannot be obtained, thus obtain; where there is nothing to grasp, thus grasp." So long as one does not fear sacrifice and courageously presses forward, one will naturally obtain the pearl beneath the chin of the black dragon.

Although this is so, this Way cannot be expressed in words and cannot be transmitted. How, then, can younger students seek instruction from it and benefit? As stated above, although this wondrous mind of nirvāṇa cannot be depicted, one may open a small fissure and reveal a little of its scenery, speaking provisionally and expediently so that those of keen awakening may have an entry. Therefore, great-resolve bodhisattvas do not begrudge descending wholly into the weeds, pointing east and speaking west in order to teach and benefit sentient beings, rather than attending to saving themselves. This is another aspect of being unable to save oneself. But once there is something to which one clings—once one considers oneself extraordinary and superior to others, able to teach and transform sentient beings—then one truly cannot transcend birth and death.

Furthermore, even if we have truly awakened at the level of principle to the Original Face, if we do not continuously and seamlessly safeguard realization, and do not rely on the dharmakāya to strive upward and train diligently, eliminating our habitual tendencies and perfectly realizing our original nature, then, although our dharma eye may be fairly bright, we still cannot save ourselves. For at this time, although the delusions of views may be ended, the delusions of thought have not yet been exhausted. Upon seeing desirable objects, we still cannot remain wholly unmoved; therefore, at the shore of birth and death, we still do not attain freedom.

Chan Master Longya said: "Those who study the Way must first have a basis for awakening; competing in crossing is like racing dragon boats. Though it is an old pavilion and an idle stretch of land, only after winning once may one rest!" This teaches us that after awakening to the Way, we must still press forward with all our strength as in a dragon-boat race, diligently eliminating habitual tendencies and completely restoring the luminosity of our intrinsic nature. Only then is the great work of crossing the bitter sea of birth and death complete.

Master Yinguang repeatedly said: “Pure Land practice is good; the Pure Land is dependable. Though the Chan school is good, it is dangerous.” He feared that we might awaken to a few principles, deem ourselves right, and fail to diligently eliminate habitual tendencies. Then, when encountering circumstances, the mind will arise, and birth and death will still remain unresolved. In this matter of whether birth and death are transcended or not, falsification is of no use.

If you lie and deceive others, it is useless: you deceive only yourself, not others. Therefore, we should cultivate diligently and arduously, diligently eliminate habitual tendencies, and never treat the matter lightly or be satisfied with little. If you cannot do this, it would be better to recite the Buddha’s name and seek rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. This is spoken from the standpoint of the Pure Land school.

According to the Chan school, if we have truly opened the Original Face and seen our true nature, then the true seed has been planted. Even if the matter is not resolved in this life, when we emerge in the next life, upon hearing one thing we will awaken to a thousand, and will penetrate it completely on the spot.

When we first begin cultivating the Way, we should make a great vow: “In order to lead sentient beings out of the sea of suffering, I will not fear hardship or the length of the road. I shall certainly attain Buddhahood and liberate sentient beings widely!” If we deeply plant this seed of bodhicitta, it will never disappear and will exert great power life after life. This is what is meant by the inconceivability of the power of vows. Therefore, even those who, after seeing their true nature, have the deepest habitual tendencies will at most be reborn seven times in the heavens and return seven times among humans; then birth and death will be finished.

Each person has that person’s past vows and should cultivate according to their own capacities; one cannot apply a single measure to everyone. Therefore, if you do not fear birth and death, you may roll in the ocean of karma, passing through birth and death while benefiting yourself and others. If you are afraid, then seek rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. The Buddha taught different dharmas to sentient beings of differing capacities; there is no fixed dharma. Each should cultivate the practice that accords with their own aspirations, without forcing themselves.

Yuanwu Keqin finally instructed:

“To utter the word ‘Buddha’ is to drag in mud and water; to utter the word ‘Chan’ is to cover one’s face with shame.”

To utter the single word Buddha is already a defilement, for it is utterly bare and does not establish a single dharma. How could there be names such as Buddha or bodhisattva? Thus, if one utters the word Buddha in the Chan hall, one must carry

three loads of water to clean the Chan hall. To utter the word Chan is likewise to become bound by Chan. The Original Face is clear, empty, vast, and penetrating, with nothing gained and nothing lost; how could it have such idle names?

If you feel that you have attained something and that there is some Chan to be had, you ought to be filled with shame and alarm. Why? Because you have not yet truly become empty and pure; there is still something before you, and so you cannot accord with the Way. Those who have truly arrived home are dazed and simple all day long: no Buddha, no Chan—not even a "no." They simply eat when hungry and sleep when tired.

If there is still a Buddha or Chan, you must sweep it clean away. Only then are you "a carefree person of the Way, beyond learning and contrivance." Since Buddha cannot be obtained, nor can Chan be found, what past, present, or future remains, and what east, south, west, or north? Once one has truly awakened thoroughly to emptiness and purity, time and space are all empty words.

Last time we discussed a koan: one person said that having a Buddha in cultivation was most intimate, while another said that having no Buddha was most intimate. In truth, neither having a Buddha nor having no Buddha is right; both remain attached to the presence or absence of Buddha and do not escape having a point of attachment. If you entertain the thought, "I practice Chan, realize the Way, open up my original nature, and see my intrinsic nature," how ashamed and mortified you ought to be!

"Those long engaged in practice need not be told; beginners and later students must investigate it directly."

"Those long engaged in practice" refers to people who have practiced Chan for a long time, broken through to their intrinsic nature, and thoroughly safeguarded their realization. Their great matter is already complete; why would they need us to chatter on? Yet beginners and later students who have only just entered the gate and have not seen the Way must genuinely investigate and inquire, exert themselves diligently, and strive for realization. What should they investigate? Please consider the koan below.

Zhaozhou instructed the assembly, saying: "The supreme Way is not difficult; it only dislikes choosing and rejecting. As soon as there are words, there is choosing and rejecting; there is understanding. This old monk does not abide in understanding. Do you still cherish and safeguard it?"

One day, Zhaozhou ascended the hall and instructed the assembly: "The supreme Way is not difficult; it only dislikes choosing and rejecting." These two lines are the opening words of the Faith in Mind Inscription by the Third Patriarch, Master

Sengcan. The Faith in Mind Inscription says: “The supreme Way is not difficult; it only dislikes choosing and rejecting. Simply do not hate or love, and it will be clear and open.”

This tells us with complete openness and clarity that there is nothing difficult about realizing the supreme and unsurpassed great Way. We need only refrain from discriminating and choosing amid our daily activities; do not love or hate, grasp or reject. Respond with a direct mind, abide nowhere, and the great Way is right before us. Chan Master Zhaozhou regularly used these two lines to instruct the assembly and point everyone directly to the Way.

From this it would seem that studying the Way is quite easy and presents no difficulty. We need only have the courage to sacrifice the empty name and false gain of the world, relinquish our habitual attachment to illusory circumstances, and thereby become free on the spot. For we are originally Buddhas. We have merely become deluded by forms and attached to worldly objects, thereby obscuring the luminosity and wondrous functioning of our intrinsic nature and falling into the condition of ordinary beings. Thus, there is no need to exert ourselves in search of it, much less seek it outside ourselves.

All sentient beings are originally Buddhas, yet painfully fail to recognize this. They pursue external objects, create karma and undergo karmic retribution, and vainly suffer the birth and death of the six realms of rebirth. Is this not unjust? If, in our daily lives, we do not choose or discriminate, nor love or hate, grasp or reject; if we let go of every mind of craving and attachment, dress according to circumstances, eat as things come, and keep the mind utterly empty and naked, without establishing a single dharma—then we are living Buddhas. Thus it is said that cultivation of the Way is not difficult.

Since cultivation of the Way is so easy, why does everyone say it is difficult? It is difficult only because people are unwilling to let go. If everyone were willing to let go, each would be a Buddha complete and ready as they are, with no need to seek anything outside. Ordinary worldly people need not be discussed, but even the great number of Buddhist practitioners and Chan students are deluded by spiritual powers and wondrous functioning without knowing it.

In fact, knowing cold and warmth, hunger and fullness, length and shortness—these are already spiritual powers and wondrous functioning. There is no need to seek something else. If this were not the functioning of the true mind, then, as stated above, when a single breath fails to come, could you still function freely? What is called shen means wondrous functioning without limit; tong means the absence of obstruction.

Our numinous and wondrous true mind can do all things and is blocked by nothing; therefore it is called spiritual power. Its present limitations arise because habitual tendencies have not yet been exhausted. It is like dark clouds obscuring the sun, preventing its rays from shining forth fully. Once habitual defilements are eliminated and the dark clouds disperse, the rays naturally shine forth fully and wondrous functioning naturally unfolds completely. Thus, the key to our practice is to let go of everything and abide nowhere.

Therefore, Master Sengcan begins by saying: “The supreme Way is not difficult; it only dislikes choosing and rejecting.” If we keep these eight characters of the two lines in our hearts at every moment, remain alert in every circumstance, and do not engage in discrimination, grasping, or rejection, realization of the Way will not be difficult. Conversely, if we shrink back from difficulty or seek some other mystery, difficulty will only be compounded.

Layman Pang said: “Difficult, difficult, difficult—like spreading ten loads of sesame seeds atop a tree!” This describes the difficulty of cultivating the Way when one does not know the key and is unwilling to press forward bravely with wholehearted resolve. Pang’s wife replied: “Easy, easy, easy—the meaning of the Patriarch’s coming from the West is atop every blade of grass.” Every affair and thing is the wondrous functioning of the true mind, complete and ready at hand; it can be picked up wherever one looks. It is extremely easy—what difficulty is there?

Cultivating the Way is like making a revolution: it is a revolution against one’s own life, not against the lives of others. One must overthrow the life that clings to material desires. Wang Yangming spoke of “investigating things and extending knowledge”; this means removing the selfishness of material desires so as to bring forth innate knowing—that is, to reveal the true mind. The crucial reason practitioners are unwilling to revolutionize themselves and instead shield their clinging minds is that they cannot let go.

If you cling to something and refuse to let it go, can you preserve it? Everyone must die. If you do not let go now, you will still have to let go in the end. Rather than being unwilling to relinquish things at the last moment but forced to do so, becoming a ghost guarding wealth, it is better to be wise and let go of everything now, becoming a person of the Way who has transcended birth and death.

Some people, foolish beyond measure, even place the things they cherished in life inside their coffins. What use is that? Can they take them away? It merely arouses the covetousness of petty thieves, leading them to dig up graves and rob tombs. Such foolish acts are truly both pitiable and laughable. We should now possess the wisdom to let go of everything early on and enjoy ease and freedom. Why seek

affliction for ourselves by clinging and refusing to let go, only to become resentful ghosts caught in the six realms of rebirth, unable to end birth and death?

Chan Master Zhaozhou then said: “As soon as there are words, there is choosing and rejecting; there is understanding.” Why did he say this? Because when we speak, we either discuss who is right and who is wrong, or distinguish what is long and what is short. Some old ladies recite the Buddha’s name while talking about how bad their daughters-in-law are and how good their daughters are. This, of course, need not be discussed.

Even those of us who practice the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate likewise argue that this teaching is good and that teaching is not; that so-and-so has awakened while so-and-so has not. Is this not also making trouble where there is none, choosing and rejecting? In truth, all dharmas are equal, without high or low; all are good.

What is called “not good” is really a matter of suitability. Just as different illnesses require different medicines, one cannot rigidly practice only one method. All sentient beings inherently possess Buddha-nature; as long as they practice the Dharma well, all can awaken.

Do not choose and reject, nor abide in any state—for example, seeing light, seeing a Buddha, or seeming to have some object before you that cannot be pushed away or left behind. However good such states may seem, they are all false appearances, always states of the skandhas, and must not be grasped. The true state is a state of no state; yet to settle upon a state of no state is still choosing, rejecting, and abiding. Those who have truly realized the Way have no state to attain and nothing to say.

Ancient worthies said: “Raise the mind and you are already wrong; stir a thought and you have already gone astray.” They also said: “Whenever there are words, there is no real meaning.” What is being said now is only speech that, out of necessity, falls into duality and multiplicity. This is why Chan Master Zhaozhou said, “As soon as there are words, there is choosing and rejecting.”

Then what is wrong with understanding? Must it too be negated? What worldly people call understanding is merely worldly cleverness and eloquence, the exercise of petty cleverness. These are acquired discriminations of consciousness that shift with circumstances, not the great wisdom of innate prajñā. Even in worldly terms, indulging in petty cleverness is not a good thing.

Did Zheng Banqiao not have the famous saying, “It is hard to be muddle-headed”? It teaches people not to flaunt their cleverness or compete to surpass others, but to be patient and yield to others, so as to avoid provoking trouble. For practitioners, petty cleverness is an even greater taboo. Once one indulges in it, one cannot practice honestly and wholeheartedly; instead, one tries tricks, looks for shortcuts,

and goes through the motions. One may even claim to have attained what one has not attained, or call wrong what is right, thereby ruining one's own bright prospects of awakening to the Way. This is precisely the fault of practitioners who have worked for many years without realizing the Way.

Furthermore, the more clever one is in worldly knowledge, and the more one knows, the worse it becomes. For the more views and knowledge one has, the stronger the discriminations of consciousness become; attachment to dharmas correspondingly deepens and becomes harder to remove. Even if one can later eliminate attachment to self, because of the obstruction of what is known, one cannot eliminate attachment to dharmas. Thus the Pure Land school also says that only those of great wisdom or great simplicity can succeed in Buddha-recitation. This is the reason.

Long ago, Confucius asked Laozi about the Way, and Laozi said, "Smash your cleverness!" Was he not likewise teaching Confucius to relinquish worldly cleverness and eloquence before he could enter the Way? Therefore, to enter the Way, one must certainly negate "understanding" and leave the mind utterly empty; only then can the great wisdom of prajñā arise. Those whose mind cultivation has reached completion do not contend with the world. Dazed and simple all day long, how could they discuss who is right and who is wrong? Hence the master said, "This old monk does not abide in understanding."

In saying this, the master was so deeply compassionate that he did not begrudge getting entangled in words, earnestly teaching for the sake of others. Yet even this "understanding" of which he speaks is not established. It may seem that everything has been cut off cleanly, without the slightest taint of attachment, but as soon as there are words, there is a point of attachment. To say that one does not abide in "understanding" is precisely to retain an "understanding." If there truly were no "understanding," what would there be to say about abiding or not abiding?

The first words of the Heart Sūtra are "Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva." It is generally said that this is another name for Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. But the Heart Sūtra teaches practitioners the work of the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate; it does not refer exclusively to any particular bodhisattva, but broadly to great bodhisattvas who realize the Way through the method of contemplating the mind.

"Contemplate" means contemplation; "self" means intrinsic nature, not the physical body; and "abide" means to remain at the original ground.

This means that, at the outset of practice, one must at all times and in all places contemplate one's own intrinsic nature, abiding in the original ground without shifting. As practice gradually matures, "contemplation" is no longer needed, and the "self" remains unwavering in the original ground. Going a step further, even the

“self” is no longer needed: self and other merge into one, and the “self” naturally vanishes. Finally, as practice deepens, one is transformed from one into zero: nowhere present, yet present everywhere; even “being present” finds nowhere to stand. Now the master says, “not within clarity,” which precisely indicates that there is still somewhere to abide, leaving many openings exposed. Yuanwu commented, “The thief has already revealed himself!” There is good reason for this.

Thus, these words contain an opening of emptiness and have already invited a challenge. The following question, “Do you still cherish and protect it?” exposes him even more completely.

The Sixth Patriarch said, “Originally there is not a single thing; where could dust alight?” Since there is not a single thing, what is there to protect and cherish? To instruct people now to protect and cherish something—is that not attachment to an object, inviting others to scrutinize it? Therefore Yuanwu commented, “Defeated! Just right for another pressing challenge!” Could the old master himself not have known this? Could he have failed to examine himself and thus brought suffering upon himself? No. A great Chan master moves freely in every direction, gathering in and releasing at will. He is not afraid to thrust himself into a tiger’s jaws and offer himself to be bitten, for he has his own means of liberation in danger and his own opportunity to find life in desperate circumstances.

Otherwise, how could one speak of vast spiritual powers and boundless wondrous functioning? Please read on, and the matter will become clear.

At that time a monk came forward and asked, “Since it is not within clarity, what is there to protect and cherish?”

Sure enough, the master who would press the charge had arrived. He seized your arm—where could you go? Once a practitioner has reached the state of utter purity and nakedness, where there is nothing at all “known,” what remains to be safeguarded? What remains to be cherished? For most people, this would be inescapable and unanswerable. But in the hands of a great Chan master, there is naturally the ability to turn about and breathe freely, transforming danger into safety.

Zhaozhou said, “I too do not know.”

Wonderful! He seems to have reached a dead end, yet he takes a step back into vast openness. Yuanwu commented, “Retreat three thousand!” Is this praise or criticism? Do you all know?

Having heard this, do not mistakenly think that the old master was finished here, overwhelmed by the monk’s question. Even Yuanwu said, “Retreat three thousand,”

so perhaps he had conceded defeat and had no choice but to confess, “I too do not know.” If so, you have been deceived by Zhaozhou and Yuanwu. His “do not know” means that here there is neither a knower nor anything known—utterly bare, not establishing a single dharma. There is nothing at all; what could I possibly tell you? Furthermore, intrinsic nature is itself spiritual knowing. To add “knowing” to it would be like putting a head atop one’s head, utterly altering one’s appearance. Thus even knowing must be eradicated.

Regarding the word “know,” Master Shenhui once said, “The single word ‘know’ is the gateway to all wonders.” He taught everyone to recognize this spiritual knowing that gives rise to awareness of hunger and cold. It is the Buddha-nature of us human beings. So long as one protects it continuously and closely, without clinging to objects or emotions—knowing yet without knowing, without knowing yet knowing—one realizes the Way.

Later patriarchs saw that many Chan practitioners had become attached to this “knowing” and fallen into a fixed pattern. In order to rescue people from their entanglement, they changed the saying to: “The single word ‘know’ is the gateway to all calamities.” From this we can see that whether it becomes misfortune or blessing, wisdom or folly, does not lie in speech or writing, but in whether the individual truly understands and realizes it.

The monk said, “Since the Reverend does not know, why do you say that it is not within clarity?”

This monk too was an accomplished person, for he knew Zhaozhou’s intent. Yet by saying this, he exposed an even graver flaw. Having gained the advantage, he would not yield; how could he allow Zhaozhou to evade the issue? He pressed him, asking, “Since the Reverend does not know, why do you say that it is not within clarity?” This challenge was no small matter. Without considerable grounding, one could not have posed it; it made a reply exceedingly difficult. Yuanwu commented, “He is driven up a tree!” This shows how difficult it was to turn away and evade the challenge.

Indeed! If you have reached the point where there is neither a knower nor anything known, why say that it is not within clarity? To say “not within clarity” is itself to know something, is it not? If you know something while claiming that there is nothing known, is that not self-contradictory?

If this question were put to you, you would truly be left speechless. But take note: so-called not knowing does not mean being genuinely muddled and knowing nothing at all, unable to distinguish right from wrong or long from short. Would that still be a Buddha or bodhisattva? Did not the Sixth Patriarch say to Yongjia, “You have deeply realized the meaning of the unborn”?

Yongjia said, “How can the unborn have any meaning?” The Patriarch replied, “Without meaning, who could make distinctions?” Yongjia said, “Making distinctions is not meaning either.” Thus, not knowing is knowing without knowing; without knowing, there is nothing not known.

Not knowing means non-abiding and nonattachment to appearances: in every matter there is no clinging or defilement, and once it has passed, it is over. Nothing not known means knowing every matter: mountains are mountains, water is water, long is long, and short is short. Though distinctions are made, one does not become attached to them. It is like empty space containing the myriad forms, without obstruction or hindrance; it is not a dead state of knowing nothing and possessing nothing.

When the Sixth Patriarch spoke of “Originally there is not a single thing,” later patriarchs feared that people would misunderstand and become attached to inert emptiness. They therefore added: “Within not a single thing lies an inexhaustible treasury; there are flowers, a moon, and towers.” Intrinsic nature has boundless spiritual functioning and inexhaustible wondrous subtlety; it is not dull and insentient. If it were a dead emptiness, without the functioning of appearances or any awareness, what value would Buddhism have? Could it have continued down to the present day?

This monk did not fail to understand this principle. First, he wished to meet Master Zhaozhou face-to-face; second, he wished to bring the subtle and hidden points of practice into clear view, so that they might be passed down to later generations as a model. Therefore, at this critical juncture, he seized Zhaozhou’s opening of emptiness and pressed him to speak the final word.

Zhaozhou said, “Having obtained the answer to your question, bow and withdraw!”

The master had his own means of remaining undaunted in danger and overturning heaven and earth. At the very moment when evasion seemed impossible and he appeared about to be pinned down, he could skillfully avoid the point of attack and pass through calmly and effortlessly. What kind of practice is this? Without reaching complete maturity, could one possess such nimble and graceful skill? Truly remarkable! Even Yuanwu could not help praising him: “This old thief is fortunate to have this one move!” What move was it? Do you all know? Bah! Even after it has been pointed out, you still do not know!

At this point: “Clouds disperse and waters flow away; people are still, and heaven and earth are empty.” The message is exhausted, and the great matter is complete; there is no need to ask further. Thus the master said: after offering your thanks, go back and rest. This wordless speaking is the final word! Yet those who do not understand all say that Zhaozhou gave no answer. Is that not an injustice?

In the assembly of the Fifth Patriarch Yan, a monk once requested instruction from the Fifth Patriarch: “What is the final word?” The Patriarch said, “Your senior fellow knows the final word. Go ask him.”

The monk asked his senior fellow. Just as the latter was returning from an outing in the mountains, the monk was drawing water to wash his feet and came forward to ask, “What is the final word?” His senior fellow hooked up water with his foot, splashed it in the monk’s face, and rebuked him, “What final word?!” The monk tearfully complained to the Patriarch, who said, “I told you that he knew the final word!” At those words, the monk attained great awakening. Look! How humorous and ingenious this final word is! How swiftly and lightly the monk awakened! Chan is precisely this agile and incisive; truly, other traditions cannot compare. Do you all understand?

The monk who asked questions in this koan was no ordinary person. He possessed great talent capable of ordering heaven and earth, dared to stroke the tiger’s whiskers, and engaged the great master in a Dharma battle. It was brilliantly conducted and thoroughly concluded, and we have gained no small benefit from it.

Reading koans is like looking in a mirror: see what stage your own practice has reached and whether it differs from that of the ancients. If there is any deviation, correct it promptly. If your practice has not yet reached that point and you cannot understand, that too does not matter. Simply follow the koan’s instructions, set your course straight, and aim in the right direction. When your practice eventually matures, you will naturally accord with it and will not go astray.

From the splendid Dharma battle in this koan, the teachings we have received may be summarized as follows:

First, realizing the Way is not difficult. One need only recognize that all objects and circumstances are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water: unobtainable and not to be grasped. Let the mind become spacious and empty, without the slightest clinging or abiding. Never indulge in love and hate, grasping and rejecting.

Second, in practice one must be able to gather in and release. In daily activity, one must apply this flexibly rather than rigidly; reflect upon oneself at all times and turn the light back everywhere.

Third, after seeing the Way, one must safeguard realization continuously and closely, without neglecting it. Yet even in this work of safeguarding realization, one must not abide anywhere. One cannot safeguard merely for the sake of safeguarding; one must remain flexible, as though safeguarding yet not safeguarding. When safeguarding realization has fully matured, safeguarding itself is

no more, and letting be is no longer seen. When Lingxun visited Guizong after awakening, he asked, “How should I safeguard realization?” Guizong replied, “A single speck in the eye, and flowers in empty space fall everywhere.” That is to say, if there is an idea of safeguarding realization, it is like a speck in the eye and is no longer right.

Fourth, although there is not knowing, one must not fall into a blank, unresponsive state, dead and motionless. For example, the garden steward asked Liangshan, “What should one do when it is difficult to guard against the thief in one’s own house?” Liangshan said, “Recognizing it means you are not wronged!” The steward pressed further, “What should one do after recognizing it?” Liangshan said, “Demote it to the land of the unborn.” The steward asked again, “Could this be the place of settling one’s body and establishing one’s life?” Liangshan said, “Dead water does not harbor dragons.” To die there without moving is utter ruin.

The discussion of the koan is complete. Now please consider Chan Master Xuedou’s verse:

The supreme Way is not difficult; it lies at the source of words and speech.

One has many forms; two has no duality.

At the horizon, the sun rises and the moon sets; before the railing, the mountains are deep and the waters cold.

When the skull’s consciousness is exhausted, what joy can remain? The dragon’s chant from the withered tree has not yet faded.

Difficult, difficult! Discrimination and clarity—see for yourself!

At the beginning, Chan Master Xuedou points out that the supreme Way is not difficult. He then says that it lies at the source of words and speech, teaching us not to regard the great Way as distant or awakening as difficult. It is not elsewhere; it is right before us—at the source of words and speech—that is, before language takes form, before a single thought arises. If at that moment you turn the light inward for a single glance and ask, “What is this?” then awaken sharply on the spot, you will realize the Way. There is nothing difficult about it.

This phrase, “speech is proper and words are proper,” seems to have another level of meaning: namely, that the words “the supreme Way is not difficult” are absolutely true and entirely correct. Yet, in order to accord with Chan opportunities, it is more appropriate to adopt the former explanation.

Long ago, a master investigated the huatou, “What was my Original Face before my parents were born?” for many years but was unable to awaken. Later he

encountered a great virtuous teacher and asked him compassionately to give him an expedient instruction.

The great teacher asked, “What huatou are you investigating?” He replied, “I am investigating: What was my Original Face before my parents were born?” The teacher said, “You are investigating too far away. You should look closer at hand.” He asked, “How should I look closer at hand?” The teacher said, “Do not look to before your parents were born. You must look at what this is before a single thought arises.” At these words, the Chan practitioner attained great awakening.

All of you sitting here, please look: What is this before a single thought arises? It shines from each person’s face, brightly illuminating everything without the slightest attachment. It is without knowing or seeing, yet it is not like wood or stone. What is it? Direct your full energy right here—this is awakening to the Way. Thus it is said, “The supreme Way is not difficult; speech is proper and words are proper.”

Next it says: “One has many forms; two are not two different things.” Why is it said that one has many forms, while two are not two different things? One is the single true mind; two refers to the endlessly changing forms and appearances. All the myriad differing appearances are manifested by the one true mind in a single thought; therefore, two are not two different things. The one true mind has boundless wondrous functioning and can give rise to all phenomena; therefore, one has many forms.

As the saying goes, “One is all; all is one.” This is its meaning. Those who truly realize the Way forget both mind and circumstances; they become continuous and undivided. Every point is the Way, and every thing is wholly true. Such people have truly entered the dharma gate of nonduality.

Since “one has many forms, and two are not two different things,” and all has become continuous and undivided, all under heaven is at peace and there is nothing more to be done. Practitioners have utterly relinquished calculation and discrimination; all return to simplicity and truth, wholly according with what is natural. Thus it is said: “At heaven’s edge, the sun rises and the moon sets; before the railing, the mountains are deep and the water cold.” When the sun rises in the sky, the moon sets in the west; beyond the gate, the deeper and higher the mountains, the colder the water becomes.

Such utterly uncontrived and wholly natural scenes are precisely the wondrous functioning without contrivance of practitioners whose minds are empty and non-abiding, and who live in accordance with conditions. Yuanwu said, “How can practitioners attain steadiness? When the wind comes, the trees move; when waves come, the boats rise. Spring brings growth, summer maturity, autumn harvest, and winter storage. With an even mind, all distinctions fall away of themselves.” Is this

not simply following what is natural, with no contrivance? When practitioners reach this point, you may call heaven earth and earth heaven, yet speech is proper and words are proper; there is nothing that is not so. Next:

When the skull's discriminating consciousness is exhausted, where can joy remain? The dragon sings in a dead tree, and its resonance has not yet faded.

These two lines weave together phrases from ancient koans concerning inquiry into the Way, in praise of this koan's teaching: "knowing yet without knowing; without knowing, yet knowing all." Once, a monk asked Chan Master Xiangyan, "What is the Way?" Xiangyan said, "A dragon sings in a dead tree." The monk further asked, "What is a person in the Way?" Xiangyan said, "Eyes in a skull."

The monk did not awaken and put the question to Shishuang: "What does it mean for a dragon to sing in a dead tree?" Shishuang said, "It still carries joy." The monk asked, "What are eyes in a skull?" Shishuang said, "It still carries consciousness." The monk still did not awaken, so he again asked Caoshan, "What does it mean for a dragon to sing in a dead tree?" Caoshan said, "The bloodline has not been cut off."

The monk asked, "What are eyes in a skull?" Caoshan said, "It cannot be exhausted." The monk asked, "Who can hear it?" Caoshan said, "Throughout the whole earth, there is not one person who does not hear it." The monk asked, "May I ask what line or verse the dragon's singing is?" Caoshan said, "I do not know what line or verse it is; all who hear it are undone." He further composed this verse: "The dragon sings in a dead tree: this is truly seeing the Way. When consciousness in the skull is exhausted, the eyes first become bright. When joy and consciousness are exhausted, not a trace remains. How can the person concerned distinguish purity amid defilement?"

The dragon singing in a dead tree and the eyes in a skull spoken of in this koan symbolize the great Way of true emptiness and wondrous presence: wordless, yet leaving nothing unsaid; without consciousness, yet leaving nothing unrecognized. Interwoven with the teachings of Chan Masters Shishuang and Caoshan, they yield layer upon layer of prajñā flavor and inexhaustible vistas. Their meaning may be briefly analyzed as follows:

1. Non-speaking is true speaking, and non-hearing is true hearing; non-knowing is true knowing, and non-seeing is right seeing.

2. Once one speaks of dragon singing and skull-eyes, there are words within wordlessness and consciousness within non-consciousness. It is like getting sand in one's eyes; this is not clear vision.

3. Although the great Way is vast and open, without sound or trace, without speech or consciousness, it is not insentient like wood or stone; rather, its wondrous functioning is boundless.

4. Those newly awakened to the Way cannot be entirely without joy; hence first-bhūmi bodhisattvas are said to abide on the Ground of Joy. At this time, habitual defilements have not yet been exhausted, and deluded consciousness still remains.

5. After awakening to the Way, if one falls into a sacred state and becomes attached to a fixed pattern, one has likewise not cut it off completely.

6. At the summit of the wondrously lofty peak, not even a needle can be admitted and no discussion is permitted. Yet on the second peak, in order to guide beginning practitioners, there is no harm in allowing carts and horses to pass privately and giving a slight glimpse of the scenery.

Because these many meanings are involved, Shishuang and Caoshan spoke of “still carrying joy,” “the bloodline has not been cut off,” and “it cannot be exhausted.”

Xuedou was greatly talented. Stringing together these phrases from inquiries into the Way in order to praise this koan was indeed the work of a masterful spiritual thief. When the skull’s discriminating deluded consciousness has been exhausted, what joy or sorrow can remain? The dragon singing in a dead tree—insentient beings expounding the Dharma—is blazing speech, ceaseless speech, which cannot be exhausted. In this way, it is ingeniously joined with this koan’s purport: though it is not within what is plainly evident, it is not without speaking or without knowing.

Concerning insentient beings expounding the Dharma, Chan Master Dongshan once visited Master Guishan and asked, “I recently heard that National Teacher Zhong of Nanyang spoke of insentient beings expounding the Dharma, but I have not penetrated its subtle meaning.” Guishan said, “Venerable, do you still remember it?” Dongshan said, “I remember it.” Guishan said, “Try reciting it once.” After Dongshan had recited it, Guishan said, “I also have it here, but rarely encounter someone capable of receiving it.”

Dongshan said, “I do not understand. I beg the Master to instruct me.” Guishan raised his whisk and said, “Do you understand?” (Who is it that raises the whisk? Is this not wordless speech—the Dharma expounded by the insentient?) Dongshan said, “I do not understand.” (What a pity! He let the opportunity pass.) Later, Dongshan visited Yunyan and asked, “When insentient beings expound the Dharma, who can hear it?” Yunyan said, “Insentient beings can hear it.”

(How wondrous! When delusion is exhausted and emotional attachment has vanished, what person is this?) Dongshan asked, “Can the venerable monk hear it?”

Yunyan said, “If I could hear it, you would not hear me expounding the Dharma.” This statement is rather obscure and seems to require a brief explanation:

1. If I could hear it, there would not only be a hearer and what is heard, but also a dharma. So long as subject and object stand opposed and the view of dharmas has not been removed, one is not a person of the Way. How, then, could one occupy the master’s seat and expound the Dharma?

2. If I could hear it, I would be the same as the insentient. For the insentient, not speaking is true speaking; it is not speech expressed in words.

3. If I could hear it, I would be equal to all the sages. Yet the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya of the sages are not the true Buddha, nor are they the one who teaches the Dharma. As I am now speaking to you, I do not abide as an ordinary being, and sainthood too is unattainable.

Chan Master Dongshan said, “Why can I not hear it?” Yunyan again raised his whisk and asked, “Do you hear it?” Dongshan said, “I do not hear it.”

(He was still not fully awake.) Yunyan said, “Even when I expound the Dharma, you still do not hear it; how much less would you hear insentient beings expounding the Dharma?” Dongshan asked, “What scriptural teaching does the Dharma expounded by insentient beings accord with?” Yunyan said, “Have you not seen the Amitābha Sūtra, which says, ‘The waters, birds, and forests all recite the Buddha and recite the Dharma’?” At this, Dongshan had an insight. (He was already very late.) He then composed this verse: “How very wondrous, how very wondrous! Insentient beings expounding the Dharma is inconceivable. If one listens with the ears, one will never understand; only by hearing sound at the place of seeing can one know.”

This true speaking of the insentient and the wordless cannot be attained through hearing with the ears. Therefore Caoshan said, “I do not know what line or verse it is, yet all who hear it lose their lives.” Do you worthy people present recognize, amid the confused realm of dust before you, the mysterious and profound great Way that transcends speech and cuts off hearing—the purity amid defilement?

Insentient beings expounding the Dharma is not so difficult to understand. When one investigates the profound principle to its most subtle point, it cannot be expressed in words; one can only comprehend it directly in one’s mind. Are not worldly matters, when they reach the subtle and marvelous, likewise a case of “two hearts linked by a single flash of understanding” and “at such a moment, silence surpasses speech”? This is the annotation for “only by hearing sound at the place of seeing can one know.”

Chan Master Baizhang once said, “Only when all language, mountains, rivers, and the great earth are each turned back to oneself is it accomplished.” After Xuedou had finished praising the koan, he too finally turned it back to oneself, saying to others: “Difficult, difficult! If you discriminate clearly, see for yourself!”

Laywoman Pang said, “Easy, easy, easy—the meaning of the Patriarch’s coming from the West is atop every blade of grass!” Does not this verse likewise begin by saying, “The supreme Way is not difficult; speech is proper and words are proper”? The direct-pointing sayings of patriarchs throughout the ages that reveal one’s true nature are even more numerous than can be counted. Is not awakening to the Way very easy? Why, then, is it also called difficult? Awakening to the Way cannot be achieved merely by empty talk; it must accord with actual circumstances. There are indeed difficulties involved. Let us briefly enumerate ten of them:

1. It is difficult to arouse a sense of doubt, and difficult to still deluded thoughts. If one investigates Chan without arousing a sense of doubt, there will be no day of awakening. One should firmly hold to a huatou that cannot be penetrated—one can neither spit it out nor swallow it down—and investigate it with all one’s strength, until one does not know one is walking while walking, nor know one is sitting while sitting. Only then can one accord with it. In mantra recitation and Buddha-recitation, one must have the mind recite and the ears hear, pressing forward with all one’s strength, so that deluded thoughts are dissolved invisibly.

2. The great Way is right before one’s eyes, yet students do not recognize it. An ancient worthy said, “Precisely because it is so intimate, one is delayed in recognizing it.” These are no empty words.

3. The clever drift into written words and empty talk, neglecting actual cultivation; while the honest often die under the words of a saying. This is why the tradition of this school does not flourish.

4. It is difficult to distinguish the genuine from the false. Xuansha said, “People studying the Way do not recognize the true, only because from time without beginning they have recognized the spirit-consciousness. This is the root of birth and death through measureless kalpas, yet foolish people call it their original person.” People act within discriminating consciousness and claim to have awakened to the Way; this is especially prevalent today.

5. Dead water does not harbor dragons. Students often delight in abiding in meditative appearances, fall into a blank, unresponsive state, and sit in a ghost cave without knowing it.

6. One becomes attached to meditative appearances and takes them to be attainment. Students may occasionally encounter a sacred state in samādhi, regard

it as attainment, cling to it without letting go, and perish beneath that state. Those who cling to “bliss,” for example, cannot leave the desire realm; those who cling to “luminosity” cannot leave the form realm; those who cling to “emptiness” cannot leave the formless realm; and so forth.

VII. Confusing practice with realization of the Way. Many students do not understand the difference between practice and realizing the Way. They mistakenly take the manifestation of some spiritual power or the free flow of the channels and energies to be realization of the Way; conversely, they think that without these, there is no realization. They do not know that, however great one’s spiritual powers and however good one’s practice, if one does not recognize the true mind, one will ultimately have somewhere to fall, will be unable to transcend birth and death, and certainly will not have realized the Way.

VIII. Arrogance and impatience are difficult to overcome. Before realizing the Way, students are often eager for quick success and fail through impatience; after realizing the Way, they fail through arrogance born of delight. Impatience easily leads to collapse, while arrogance easily leads to madness. Both are major taboos for students and should therefore be eliminated without delay. Yet students often fail to notice them, or protect their own shortcomings and pay them no heed. Thus, many begin diligently but end in laziness, or become wildly arrogant and unrestrained. Is this not one of the key reasons why there are many practitioners today but few who realize the Way?

IX. It is difficult to safeguard realization diligently and eliminate habitual tendencies. To eradicate at once the old habits of attachment to appearances accumulated over countless lives and kalpas is certainly no easy matter. As the saying goes, “Rivers and mountains are easy to change; habitual tendencies are hard to shift.” Without constant awareness, cherishing one’s original true nature, and diligent self-transformation, it is truly difficult for there ever to be a day when they are completely purified. Yet students often rest content with a little attainment, thinking that one awakening is enough, and do not undertake self-transformation. Not only can they then make no further progress toward differentiated wisdom, but they also run the danger of falling into “delusion after awakening.” How can one fail to be cautious?

X. It is difficult to perfect the realization of non-abiding. Many students mistakenly think that the natural Buddha which can speak eloquently, cough, and move its arms is their very self, and that they have already arrived home. If they were to apply themselves further, they think, that would be attachment to dharmas. They do not realize that this is only initial awakening, not original awakening. They must still rely on it to accord with original awakening and practice diligently before they can achieve great awakening. Others become attached to the essence of nature and

abide in the state of realization. Without realizing it, they fall into the realm of sagehood and do not leave their old rut. All these are grave faults that prevent the complete realization of bodhi.

All these are major difficulties in the course of practice: a difference of a hair's breadth can lead to an error of a thousand miles. There are also other, relatively minor details, which need not be enumerated one by one. Because there are so many such difficulties, Xuedou said: “Examine and distinguish them clearly; see for yourself.”

“Choose clearly and see for yourself.” He urged everyone to examine themselves and see where they stand: Are they discriminating and choosing among this dharma, that person, and some affair, or sitting in their understanding and flaunting their discriminating consciousness? Are they attached to some state of the aggregates and complacently pleased with themselves, or manipulating vital spirits and pursuing the mysteries of spiritual powers? Have they become arrogant and self-satisfied, falling into madness, or have they fallen into emptiness, bliss, and luminosity as their occupation? … You must look carefully for yourself and must not be muddleheaded and vague. Please examine yourselves. If there is any deviation, correct it promptly, lest you enter a mountain of treasures only to return empty-handed and waste an entire lifetime. That would indeed be most fortunate.

Case Three: Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha

Teaching is the Buddha’s mouth; Chan is the Buddha’s mind. The Chan school is the orthodox lineage of the Buddhadharma, a genuine transmission originating with our fundamental teacher, Śākyamuni Buddha. At the assembly on Vulture Peak, Śākyamuni Buddha held up a flower, and Venerable Kāśyapa smiled. The Buddha said: “I possess the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa, the true reality of no appearance, and the subtle Dharma gate—a special transmission outside the teachings, not established in words and letters—which I entrust to Mahākāśyapa.”

Therefore, Venerable Kāśyapa became the first patriarch. The transmission was then passed down successively until it reached Venerable Bodhidharma, the twenty-eighth patriarch. This is known as the “four sevens of the Western Land” (for four times seven equals twenty-eight). At that time, civilization in our country was flourishing, people’s wholesome roots had matured, and their conditions for liberation were ripe. Thus Bodhidharma was moved to cross the sea from the west and became the first patriarch in the Eastern Land.

He first met Emperor Wu of Liang (see the earlier discussion of “the highest meaning of the noble truth”), but the emperor did not resonate with him. He therefore

crossed the river into Wei, faced a wall for nine years, encountered Master Shenguang, and transmitted the Dharma to him as the second patriarch. The transmission was subsequently passed down until it reached Master Huineng, the sixth patriarch. This is known as the “two threes of the Eastern Land” (for two times three equals six). After the Sixth Patriarch, the lamp was divided and transmitted through several lines, principally two great branches: one through Qingyuan Xingsi and the other through Nanyue Huairang. The “Master Ma” in this koan was a Dharma heir of Chan Master Nanyue Huairang.

Chan Master Mazu Daoyi of Jiangxi, whose lay surname was Ma and who was commonly known as “Master Ma,” practiced with great diligence in his early years, doing nothing but sitting in meditation. Chan Master Huairang knew that he was a vessel for the Dharma and asked him what he hoped to attain by meditating. He replied, “I seek to become a Buddha.”

Chan Master Huairang then took a brick and began grinding it where Mazu was meditating. Scrape! Scrape! The noise annoyed Mazu and disrupted his meditation. Mazu rose from his seat and asked, “What are you grinding that brick for?” Chan Master Huairang replied, “I am going to grind it into a mirror.”

Mazu said, “Can a brick be ground into a mirror?” Chan Master Huairang had been waiting for just this question and immediately turned it back on him: “If grinding a brick cannot make a mirror, how can sitting in meditation make a Buddha?” This question was no small matter; it instantly jolted Mazu awake from his deluded dream. Sitting in meditation alone is not sufficient for practice and realization. One meditates to work at eliminating deluded thoughts, but one must also temper oneself amid all kinds of circumstances and wear away habitual tendencies.

Sitting in meditation alone cannot eliminate habitual tendencies completely. One must temper oneself amid all kinds of favorable and adverse circumstances before habitual tendencies can be fully removed.

Moreover, if one relies solely on sitting meditation and deadens the mind, entering the cessation of feeling and perception, not only will one fail to become a Buddha, but one may instead become like earth, wood, gold, or stone. Mazu’s faculties were exceptionally sharp. As soon as he heard these words, he recognized his error and asked Chan Master Huairang, “Then what should I do?” Chan Master Huairang was a master of great ability, with extraordinary methods for inspiring students. He asked Mazu in return, “If an ox is pulling a cart and the cart will not move, should one strike the cart or strike the ox?”

What was Chan Master Huairang getting at? Why did he ask this? The cart is a metaphor for the body; the ox is a metaphor for Buddha-nature. If you wish to practice and become a Buddha, you must realize Buddha-nature. Confining the body

there without moving is like striking the cart. The nature of mind is the ox: only when the mind moves does the body move. One must cultivate the mind. (Someone interjected, “Oh! Then one should strike the ox.”

) Ha! Your answer, “strike the ox,” is also wrong. If there is an ox that can be struck, you have already fallen to one side. Have you still not understood the earlier koan: “When the skull’s consciousness is exhausted, where can joy abide? The dragon’s chant in the withered tree has not yet died away.”?

(Someone asked, “Then how should one answer?” The elder said, “How was the question asked?” The person asked, “Strike the cart or strike the ox?” The elder sternly shouted, “I’ll strike you!”) There is a set of “Verses on the Oxherding Pictures,” illustrated with both images and text, which describes the process of safeguarding realization in practice. After finding the ox (a metaphor for seeing one’s true nature), its temperament is still wild (a metaphor for heavy habitual tendencies). One must still hold the reins tight, raise the whip high, and watch over it carefully (a metaphor for eliminating habitual tendencies and safeguarding realization). Only when, in the end, there is neither person nor ox can the task truly be said to be complete.

Through Chan Master Huairang’s inspiration and instruction, Mazu experienced great awakening at these very words, and his mind became free and transcendent. From then on, he followed Chan Master Huairang and attended him constantly for as long as nine years, receiving the Mind-Seal deeply. Later, he entered the world to teach the Dharma and liberate sentient beings. His Dharma assemblies flourished, and more than eighty wise teachers emerged among his disciples, spreading throughout the land.

As early as the time when Chan Master Huairang was following the Sixth Patriarch, the Sixth Patriarch told him: “Prajñātāra of the West—the teacher of Patriarch Bodhidharma and the twenty-seventh patriarch of the Western Land—prophesied that beneath your feet a colt would appear and trample the people of the world to death.” To “trample the people of the world to death” means to cultivate very many great wise teachers who would instruct and transform the world. The “Master Ma” in this koan is this Chan Master Mazu.

Master Ma was unwell.

To be unwell means to be ill. You may find it strange that such an eminent great patriarch as Mazu, who had already awakened and realized the Way, could still become ill. In fact, illness is karmic obstruction: karma created long ago in past lives. Everyone, to a greater or lesser extent, inevitably creates some karma.

Therefore, even great patriarchs who have awakened cannot entirely avoid becoming ill. But awakening is like waking from a great dream: all that one has done

in the past and present is like dream, illusion, bubble, and shadow—utterly unobtainable. Even if the body suffers grave illness, because the mind is empty and does not regard it as illness, one is not distressed by it.

If our bodies become ill, we should not dwell on the illness at every moment. If we are not distressed by illness, karmic obstacles will immediately disintegrate and melt away. But if you keep thinking about your illness all the time, then you will suffer terribly. Those who have awakened and realized the Way do not place illness in their minds. You may see that they are ill, but they themselves are as if they were not ill at all.

In his later years, Chan Master Ciming suffered a stroke, and even his mouth became crooked. His attendant stamped his feet anxiously: “What are we to do? All your life you have reviled Buddhas and cursed patriarchs; now you are receiving your retribution, aren’t you?” The Chan master said, “Do not worry. I will straighten it for you.” As he spoke, he pushed his mouth with his hand, and it became straight, as though he had never been ill. When karmic obstacles reach a patriarch, they are like ice melting in hot soup.

Karmic obstacles are like debts. For a patriarch, if they must be repaid, they are repaid; if they need not be repaid, they are not repaid. Even when repaying them, he does not think of repayment; even when not repaying them, he does not think of nonrepayment. Mazu was a great patriarch. Others saw him as ill, but he himself did not conceive of illness. He had no great suffering and no unease.

The monastery steward asked, “How has your health been recently, Venerable?”

The monastery steward is the monastic responsible for managing the affairs of a monastery. Heshang is a transliteration from Sanskrit; in Chinese it means a personal teacher, one’s closest and most honored teacher. The steward came to inquire after Mazu: “How has your health been recently?”

The great master said, “Sun-faced Buddha, moon-faced Buddha.”

Sun-faced refers to daytime, and moon-faced refers to nighttime. Day and night are both Buddha; that is, daytime and nighttime are the same. Being ill is like this, and not being ill is like this. Illness and non-illness are both the same.

Buddha means awakening. One must awaken to the fact that all things are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows, utterly unobtainable. Awakening has the sense of illumination; one must always apply the mind in contemplation and must not be negligent. When we speak, walk, or work in ordinary life, these are all functions of Buddha-nature. We must practice continuously and seamlessly,

contemplating and safeguarding it. We must not let the mind arise in response to circumstances or abide in attachments.

When healthy, do not conceive of health; when ill, do not conceive of illness; when dressing, do not conceive of dressing; when eating, do not conceive of eating. Practice continuously and seamlessly in this way, letting the mind become utterly empty, pure, open, and unconstrained. How could one then fear failing to realize the Way? Those who practice Pure Land recite Amitābha Buddha's name tens of thousands of times each day, keeping their minds on Amitābha Buddha and leaving no leisure for deluded thoughts to arise. For those who investigate Chan, what is valuable is arousing a sense of doubt.

Once the sense of doubt arises, deluded thoughts naturally do not arise. For us who practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, the mantra continues without interruption during meditation sessions, and off the cushion we maintain continuous and seamless contemplation, attending to this mind on all sides and not allowing it to run outward. Thus all can attain realization. Chan, Esoteric Buddhism, and Pure Land are all teachings spoken by the Buddha. In returning to the source, there are not two roads; expedient means have many gates, but realization is the same. One must not say that this Dharma is good and that Dharma is bad. Sectarian views, dividing rivers and drinking their waters separately, harm both others and oneself. One should instead be "sun-faced Buddha, moon-faced Buddha."

This koan is just that simple. What follows is Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin's commentary on this koan:

If the patriarch had not met him through the fundamental matter, how could the radiance of this Way have been attained?

The patriarch refers to Master Ma. The fundamental matter means never departing from one's own nature at any moment. To meet someone with one's original, free, accommodating, and natural true mind is to point students toward realizing the mind and seeing their true nature at every moment.

If one were instead to instruct students at every moment through appearances, constantly becoming attached to spiritual powers and leading people onto a wrong path, how could the radiance of this Way be attained? How could one be "sun-faced Buddha, moon-faced Buddha" and not be overwhelmed by the demon of illness? We too, in cultivating the Way, should meet all things through the fundamental matter at every moment, without attachment to circumstances, appearances, or spiritual powers.

We must examine ourselves at two ends to see whether our practice has improved: when we are afflicted and when we are delighted.

When affliction comes and the mind suffers greatly, can those who recite the Buddha's name refrain from forgetting it? Can Chan practitioners raise the huatou? Can we who practice heart esotericism still meditate in accordance with the Dharma and maintain continuous and seamless contemplation? When joyful events come—promotion, wealth, praise, and respect from others—we become overjoyed. At once we cannot recall the Buddha's name, cannot raise the huatou, and forget meditation and contemplation. Swept along by circumstances, how can we realize the Way? In practice, one should remain unmoved by the eight worldly winds.

Among the eight worldly winds, four are favorable circumstances and four are adverse circumstances. Adverse circumstances are coarse, while favorable circumstances are subtle. The coarse are easier to notice, but the subtle are not easy to handle. You should examine yourselves from these two ends: "sun-faced Buddha, moon-faced Buddha." Joy is Buddha, and affliction is also Buddha. Whether one has genuine practice is seen precisely here.

In this koan, if one knows where it lands, one can stride alone through the crimson heavens. If one does not know where it lands, one will often take a mistaken path before the cliff of withered trees.

To "know where it lands" is to understand what Mazu meant by saying, "sun-faced Buddha, moon-faced Buddha." The crimson heavens are the bright and splendid sky, a metaphor for the luminosity of the mind-ground.

Walking alone in the crimson sky is like walking alone through the sky as radiant as a rainbow, free of deluded thoughts and attachments. The mind-capacity is like empty space: favorable circumstances cannot be grasped, adverse circumstances cannot be grasped, health cannot be grasped, illness cannot be grasped, comfort cannot be grasped, and suffering cannot be grasped. To be so free and at ease is what is meant by "cutting off afflictions and attaining great freedom."

Could one not attain "walking alone in the crimson sky"? If one does not know where to land, and cannot understand the meaning of "Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha," one will often end up sitting in "withered-wood Chan." That is a side path: one cultivates dead samādhi, and, if one does not turn back, will eventually become like earth, wood, metal, or stone.

When a person of true substance reaches this point, they must have the skill to "drive away the plowman's ox and snatch the hungry man's food." Only then can one see how Master Ma guided people.

A plowman is a farmer who cultivates the land. In the past, farmers used oxen to plow; if one drove away his ox, he could no longer plow. A hungry person is about to eat because his stomach is empty; if one snatches away his food, he cannot eat.

“Hands and feet” means skillful means. What kind of skillful means are these? They are the Chan school’s “fierce tongs and hammers”—the killing sword in the saying, “a sword that kills and a sword that gives life.” Such means make you die completely and then come alive again. They remove all your deluded thoughts and all ordinary emotional attachments, leaving not a trace. You must die completely; unless you die completely, you cannot revive.

If, before one has died completely, one is lightly permitted to revive—that is, if a student is rashly certified as having realized the Way—the result will inevitably be “half green and half yellow.” This is called “medicinal mercury”: it is not true gold; when it encounters fire, it vanishes, and when it encounters circumstances, it collapses. How could it withstand birth and death? When we practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, at the point where the sense faculties and their objects fall away, body and mind burst apart, as though heaven were collapsing and earth were crumbling. Do not be afraid; this is the power of the practice.

The moment one is afraid, one retreats. If one does not die completely, and body, mind, and world do not dissolve into emptiness, one cannot see one’s true nature. As the proverb says: “Without a bone-chilling winter, how could plum blossoms send forth such fragrance?” After we have undergone this period of arduous practice, died a great death and come greatly alive, we will be peaceful and at ease when the time of death comes.

If you are unwilling to practice diligently now, you will suffer greatly when death comes. Moreover, you will be unable to be your own master and will return to the cycle of rebirth in the six realms. I urge you all to practice well. Endure a little pain in your hands and legs; your efforts will not be wasted. In the future, you will attain great freedom, great peace and joy, and great ease.

Nowadays many people speak of “Master Ma’s receiving the monastery director,” and fortunately it has nothing to do with the matter.

“Receiving” means guiding or leading someone onward. Nowadays many people say that when Master Ma spoke of “Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha,” he was guiding the monastery director to realize the Way. This is all wild speculation, gratuitously producing all sorts of theories; it is entirely deluded thinking. Chan is Chan because it is natural and at ease, following what is natural, utterly bare and unstained by a single speck of dust.

Whether there is a dharma, a guiding reception, or a Buddha to be attained, none of it is relevant. Such “clever” people would be better off knowing fewer theories; the more theories they know, the more they obstruct themselves. Yesterday several lay practitioners from Rui'an came to discuss Chan with me. I asked them what huatou

they were investigating. Not one of them was investigating a huatou; they were all studying the doctrinal principles of the Chan school.

What use is there in studying written words and doctrinal principles? It is all deluded thinking. It is better to take up a huatou and investigate it, cutting off deluded thoughts; then attainment comes more easily. Pure Land practice is the same: do not indulge in deluded thoughts, but recite the Buddha's name with single-minded concentration.

One "clever" person criticized Buddha-recitation. He said, "Suppose a child keeps calling, 'Mama, Mama.' Wouldn't the mother become annoyed? You recite 'Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha' all day long—wouldn't Amitābha Buddha be annoyed to death as well?" The person who says this seems very clever and to understand the principles very well, but this is not true cleverness; it is entirely deluded thinking.

First, he does not know that a Buddha differs from an ordinary being. A Buddha responds without contriving mind; how could there be afflictions? Second, he does not know the point of Buddha-recitation. Buddha-recitation is not merely calling out "Amitābha Buddha"; it relies on the Buddha's name to cleanse and transform the mind, subtly redirecting deluded thoughts so that the mind becomes empty and pure. Mind itself is the land, and the land is mind itself; as one's mind becomes pure, the Buddha-land becomes pure. With time and deep practice, one will surely be reborn in the Pure Land of Utmost Bliss and personally see Amitābha Buddha. What use is there in the plausible but mistaken theories propounded by "clever" people? They are not as good as an old man or old woman who single-mindedly recites the Buddha's name.

Therefore Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin said, "Fortunately, it has nothing to do with the matter." "Having nothing to do with it" means being unrelated and wholly irrelevant.

Nowadays, many among the assembly misunderstand it. They stare with wide eyes and say, "It is right here! The left eye is the Sun-Faced Buddha, and the right eye is the Moon-Faced Buddha." What has that to do with it? Not even in the year of the donkey would one dream of it! They merely let the matter of the ancient worthies slip by.

"The assembly" refers to the community of Chan students. "Misunderstand" means to understand wrongly. They open their eyes wide and say, "Chan is right here: the 'Sun-Faced Buddha' is the left eye, and the 'Moon-Faced Buddha' is the right eye."

This is all mistaken understanding and utter nonsense! It seems that not only today, but since ancient times, there have been such people. They do not genuinely investigate and practice; in investigating Chan they do not arouse a sense of doubt,

do not apply effort, and merely indulge in deluded thoughts and talk of principles. Therefore Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin said: What has that to do with it? Not even in the year of the donkey would one dream of it! They merely let the matter of the ancient worthies slip by.

To let the matter of the ancient worthies slip by means to fall into discriminating consciousness and miss the opportunity to awaken to the Way oneself through the conditions provided by the ancient masters. At this point, someone will inevitably ask, “Is Chan not found in everyday activity? Is not every function the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature? Why say that it is not?” Yes, all daily activities are functions of Buddha-nature. But one must not take them to be something real or abide in them. As soon as one abides in anything, it becomes a fixed pattern, and then it is no longer so.

When Master Ma spoke in this way, what was his intention?

This understanding is not right, nor is that understanding right. Then when Master Ma said, “Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha,” what exactly was his intention? Where exactly was his intention? Do you good people understand? Even if you asked Yuanwu, he could not open his mouth!

Some say, “Bring a bowl of Pingwei Powder.” What handle is there to grasp? At this point, how can one attain stability?

Pingwei Powder was a common medicine in the past, used to treat stomach ailments. Some people merely seek verbal cleverness. Instead of honestly investigating Chan, they collect Chan sayings and imitate the repartee of Chan encounters. Seeing Master Ma say, “Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha,” they offer a line of their own: “Bring the master a bowl of Pingwei Powder to drink.” This fault of failing to accord with the true meaning while randomly making clever Chan replies is the worst.

Therefore Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin said, “What handle is there to grasp?” For example, a porcelain pot has a handle attached to its side; in ancient times this was called a “grasping nose.” Without a handle, there is nothing to seize or feel for. This metaphorically means that one has not found the true meaning and has no foothold. Such people are merely verbally slick; inwardly, they are in great disorder and not at all stable. Therefore Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin said, “How can one attain stability?”

Therefore it is said: “The path that goes beyond cannot be transmitted even by a thousand sages; practitioners weary their bodies like monkeys grasping at reflections.”

Recognizing one's original nature only brings one to the threshold of the dharmakāya. One must urgently safeguard realization continuously and seamlessly, contemplate at all times, refrain from following thoughts when they arise, and have nothing to attain and nothing to seek. Only by remaining clearly and singly luminous throughout the day and night can one enter right abiding in the dharmakāya. One must go still further: even this single luminosity cannot be grasped. Only by directly realizing the sambhogakāya (reward body) and nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body) can one perfectly fulfill Buddhahood.

"The path that goes beyond" refers to what lies beyond the dharmakāya. This cannot be transmitted even by a thousand sages. Why can it not be transmitted? Because there is no way to transmit it. It is not an object that I can hand over to you and thereby transmit. What lies beyond the dharmakāya can only be directly realized and awakened to by oneself: one must let go completely and break through the bottom of the bucket. Others cannot exert any force on one's behalf.

Pure Land practice is the same. It is not that the Buddha pulls you into the Pure Land. Your mind is like a pool of water: when its surface is still—symbolizing freedom from deluded thoughts and attachments—the moon in the sky—symbolizing the Buddha—is clearly reflected in the water. If you have the Buddha in your mind, you will certainly enter into responsive communion with the Buddha. This is called receiving the Buddha's guidance.

"Practitioners weary their bodies": practitioners refers to those who cultivate, and body refers to the physical body; to weary the body is to make it very fatigued. When Master Ma was young, he simply kept sitting in meditation; this was what it meant for practitioners to weary their bodies. "Like monkeys grasping at reflections"—it is like monkeys trying to scoop up the moon. Everyone surely knows the story of monkeys scooping up the moon.

"High atop a mountain peak, a solitary moon shines upon a cold pool." The moon in the water is bright and sparkling, beautiful to behold.

A group of monkeys hang from a tree, one linked to another, reaching downward to scoop up the moon in the water. Could they possibly scoop it up? "There is no moon in the water; the moon is in the blue sky." In fact, there is no need to scoop it up at all. The moon has always hung perfectly well in the sky, and the monkeys have always been happily bathed in moonlight. This is much like riding a horse while looking for a horse. A brick cannot be polished into a mirror, nor can the moon in water be scooped up. Therefore Chan Master Huairang pointed out to Master Ma: if polishing a brick cannot make a mirror, how can sitting in meditation make one a Buddha?

Some people seek promotion and wealth, stopping at nothing—even killing people or taking lives and doing evil. Money, status, reputation, and saving face are all reflections of the moon in water: they are utterly unobtainable. When one breath fails to return, one cannot take even the slightest bit of them along. Is it not like "monkeys grasping at reflections" to pursue them by any means whatsoever? In the end, "Nothing can be taken with us; only our karma follows us," and one must undergo the dreadful retribution of one's karma.

This "Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha" is exceedingly difficult to perceive. Even Xuedou found it difficult to praise in verse. Yet because he saw through it completely, he devoted the work of his whole life to pointing it out. Do you wish to see Xuedou? Look to the passage below:

Chan Master Xuedou Chongxian was the fourth patriarch of the Yunmen school. Chan Master Xuefeng's disciple Yunmen Wenyan founded the Yunmen school. Wenyan transmitted it to Xianglin Chengyuan, Chengyuan transmitted it to Zhimeng Guangzuo, and Guangzuo transmitted it to Xuedou Chongxian. Master Xuedou selected one hundred koans, and, to inspire students to break through, wrote a verse after each koan. This is the One Hundred Cases with Verses on the Ancients.

Later, Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin of the Linji school, in order to further inspire students, explained the Hundred Cases with Verse Commentary item by item. His students recorded these explanations and compiled them into a book—the Blue Cliff Record, which we are now discussing.

Chan Master Yuanwu said: This koan of "Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha" is exceedingly difficult to penetrate (indeed, extremely difficult to see through). Even Chan Master Xuedou found it difficult to compose a verse at this point. Yet he saw through it and awakened thoroughly; exerting all the effort of his life, he pointed directly to it and provided commentary on the koan. Do you wish to see the level of Chan Master Xuedou? Please read on.

What follows is Chan Master Xuedou's verse on this koan:

Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha—what are the Five Emperors and Three Sovereigns?

The Five Emperors and Three Sovereigns have become historical traces of the past, fleeting as clouds and smoke before the eyes, utterly unobtainable. Yet Buddha-nature neither arises nor ceases, is neither defiled nor pure, neither increases nor decreases; it endures throughout countless ages and remains unchanged through all vicissitudes. Once, while Chan Master Yuangui of Mount Song was sitting in meditation, he saw an emperor of extraordinarily majestic appearance approach, followed by an imposing retinue.

The Chan master asked why he had come. The emperor said, “Do you not even recognize me?” The Chan master said, “I see Buddhas and sentient beings as equal. Why should I regard you differently?” The emperor said, “I am the deity of Mount Yue. I hold the great power over human life and death: I can cause people to live, and I can cause them to die. How can you view me in an ordinary way?” The Chan master said, “As for me,”

“I have never been born. Can you cause one who is unborn to die? As I see it, the body and empty space are nondual, and you and I are nondual. Can you destroy empty space and yourself? Even if you could destroy empty space and yourself, I neither arise nor cease. You have not yet realized this ‘I’; how then could you make me be born or make me die?” This “I” of which the Chan master spoke is the dharmakāya—the nature realized by realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature. It is originally neither arising nor ceasing.

This deity of Mount Yue had exceptionally sharp faculties and was able to know the ultimate destination upon hearing these words. Previously, he had not known of the dharmakāya’s unborn and undying nature, but after the Chan master’s instruction, he suddenly understood. He bowed to the Chan master and said respectfully, “I am more upright and wiser than other deities, yet I never knew that your wisdom was still more vast. Please transmit the true precepts to me, so that I too may attain liberation.”

Therefore, when Chan Master Xuedou composed a verse on “Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha,” he directly added this annotation: “What are the Five Emperors and Three Sovereigns?” Emperor Shenzong of the Song dynasty considered this line inappropriate, saying that the verse “satirized the state,” and consequently did not permit the Hundred Cases with Verse Commentary to be included in the Buddhist canon. This shows how considerable the emperor’s self-interest was.

Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dynasty was an enlightened ruler of his age. He believed in Buddhism, upheld the Three Jewels, restored old monasteries, and widely promoted the Buddhadharma. Before becoming emperor, he was suspected by Emperor Wuzong, so he feigned death and fled. He took tonsure under Chan Master Xiangyan and became a novice monk.

Chan Master Xiangyan inscribed the following poem for the waterfall at Mount Lu: “Piercing clouds and passing through stone, it does not shrink from toil; only because the ground is distant does one know its source is high.” The novice casually added two lines: “How could streams and ravines hold it back? In the end, it returns to the great ocean and becomes its waves.” He had his heart set on becoming

emperor. Later, the novice went to study Chan with Chan Master Qi'an of Yanguan. At that time, Chan Master Huangbo Xiyun was serving there as head seat.

Seeing Chan Master Huangbo bowing to the Buddha, the novice said, "One should not seek through Buddha, seek through Dharma, or seek through Saṅgha. For what, then, does the venerable bow?" The Chan master said, "One should not seek through Buddha, seek through Dharma, or seek through Saṅgha; yet one always bows in this way." The Chan master was free and untrammeled: he did not conceive of himself as bowing to the Buddha, yet he constantly bowed.

The novice said, "What use is bowing?" These words had already fallen into annihilationist emptiness; this too was attachment to appearances—attachment to the appearance of non-dharma. The Chan master struck him with his palm. He said, "Too rough!" He did not awaken under this blow, but instead said that the Chan master was too violent. The Chan master said, "What sort of place is this, for you to speak of roughness and refinement?" He then struck him twice more.

Later, when the novice became emperor, he still had not forgotten this incident. After Chan Master Huangbo passed away, Emperor Xuanzong bestowed on him the posthumous title "Chan Master Coarse Conduct." Pei Xiu, the prime minister, was an inner disciple of Chan Master Huangbo. Knowing the story of the three blows, he memorialized the emperor: "The three blows severed the three divisions of time for Your Majesty." Since Emperor Xuanzong was, after all, an emperor who believed in Buddhism, he changed the posthumous title to "Chan Master Severing the Divisions."

Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang was a renowned Buddhist emperor, yet he was still so self-interested; how much more so Emperor Shenzong of the Song? Emperor Shenzong merely thought that "this verse satirizes the state," without knowing that the phrase "What are the Five Emperors and Three Sovereigns?" had long existed and was simply borrowed and cited by Chan Master Xuedou.

Long ago, Chan Master Chanyue wrote a poem, "Inscribed for a Young Nobleman": "In splendid embroidered garments, a falcon held in hand, he strolls idly, with an arrogant and careless air. He knows nothing of the hardships of farming; what are the Five Emperors and Three Sovereigns to him?" A falcon is a bird of prey even fiercer than an eagle. Fans made from falcon feathers were exceptionally precious.

Look at this young nobleman: dressed in bright and splendid clothes, idly waving a falcon-feather fan in his hand, he wanders about with a distracted expression. Not only does he fail to attend to proper pursuits, but he is also unlearned and inept. He knows neither the hardship of farmers cultivating the land nor anything at all about history; he does not know what the "Five Emperors and Three Sovereigns" are—what are the Five Emperors and Three Sovereigns?

Chan Master Xuedou cited this line of poetry, invested it with a new meaning, and directly used it to comment on “Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha.” The single line, “What are the Five Emperors and Three Sovereigns?” fully comments on this koan. But where does Chan Master Xuedou’s intent lie? Do you wish to see Xuedou’s intent? You must step back, sever attachment to self, and eliminate the discriminations of consciousness.

Long ago, Layman Fayuan asked Attendant Po of Xingyang, “When Sāgara emerges from the sea and heaven and earth shake, what is it like to present it face-to-face?” Sāgara is the name of the sea dragon king. “Presenting it face-to-face” metaphorically refers to one’s intrinsic nature clearly appearing before one, and also to two people who have seen their nature questioning and answering each other face-to-face. When one’s intrinsic nature clearly appears, it is like the dragon king emerging from the sea, causing heaven and earth to quake.

“Now that the two of us are presenting it face-to-face, how should we speak a word of directly realized intrinsic nature?” Po said, “When the king of golden-winged birds fills the cosmos, who among them can stand forth?” Golden-winged birds feed on dragons; their king is the king among birds, and takes dragon kings as a snack. “Fills the cosmos” means that it is soaring and wheeling throughout the universe.

You use “the dragon king emerging from the sea” as a metaphor; I answer with “the king of golden-winged birds fills the cosmos.” At such a time, who would dare to stand forth? Is there still any “presenting it face-to-face”? Is there still anything that can be brought forth for verification? In the preceding koan, we spoke of “When skull-consciousness is exhausted, what joy can remain? The dragon’s cry in the withered tree has not yet died away.” If joy still remains, then the discriminations of consciousness have not yet been entirely eliminated.

The sound of the dragon’s cry still remains within the withered tree; it has not yet been completely extinguished. At this point, Layman Fayuan was still not fully awake and said, “If someone suddenly stands forth, then what?” He was still clinging to the state of seeing one’s nature, falling into light and shadow without realizing it. Po said, “Like a falcon seizing a dove—if you do not believe it, only when it is tested before the skull will you know what is genuine.”

A dove is a small bird. Genuine seeing of one’s nature must sweep away all discriminations of consciousness, as easily as a fierce falcon catches a dove.

I have already given you the metaphors of “the golden-winged bird eating the dragon” and “the cosmos containing the sea,” yet you still do not believe? Do you still insist on standing forth? If you continue to cling to the concept of “seeing one’s nature”—which is precisely discrimination by consciousness—then, when the critical juncture of birth and death appears before you, your genuineness or falsity will be

tested. Fayuan said, “In that case, I lower myself before you and step back three paces.”

At this point Layman Fayuan drew back. This shows that he missed it before his very face and had not seized it in one grasp. Here one must attain “Above heaven and below heaven, I alone am honored.” To answer him with “Above heaven and below heaven, I alone am honored,” one must also “beat it to death and feed it to the dogs.” Only this is called “seizing it in one grasp,” and only this counts as truly repaying the Buddha’s kindness.

Unless one realizes this point, one cannot comprehend the true meaning of “Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha.” Po said, “Little turtle beneath Mount Sumeru’s seat, do not wait until you are again struck on the head and turn back!” Mount Sumeru is enormous. On its slopes are the heavens of the Four Heavenly Kings, and at its summit is the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. Taking Mount Sumeru as one’s seat is a metaphor for the dharmakāya’s vastness and boundlessness.

Beneath Mount Sumeru is a little turtle that repeatedly sticks out its head; the moment its head is tapped, it immediately draws back. Everyone, what does this saying by Attendant Po of Xingyang—a place name—metaphorically mean? I think you should all understand. Thus, the single line “What are the Five Emperors and Three Sovereigns?” exhausts the verse on “Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha.” What follows is Chan Master Xuedou’s account of the inner course of his arduous cultivation:

For twenty years I endured hardship; for you, how many times did I descend into the azure dragon’s cave?

The “you” spoken of here refers to the “nature” of realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature: the dharmakāya among the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya; the “original” of thoroughly awakening to one’s original nature. We have just discussed the breadth of heart of Chan Master Yuangui of Mount Song in order to inspire everyone toward a correct understanding of transcending birth and death.

Without thoroughly awakening to one’s original nature, how could one’s breadth of heart be so great? How could one be so free and at ease? In order to thoroughly awaken to his original nature, Chan Master Xuedou Chongxian underwent every hardship and cultivated arduously for twenty years. He risked life and death time and again, all for this—for this “you.” Beneath the chin of the black dragon is a pearl of extraordinary value.

Chan Master Xuedou used the black dragon’s pearl as a metaphor for this “you.”

To descend into the azure dragon's cave and pluck the pearl from beneath its chin is even more arduous than pulling hairs from a tiger's mouth. What strength of will and what perseverance it requires! But we, after practicing for only a year, cry out in misery: "Oh! Why is there still no news? Perhaps this Dharma is ineffective. Let us change to another practice."

If this is the case, then even when Maitreya Buddha descends into the world, there will still be no end to it. When the Second Patriarch went to see the First Patriarch, the snow was waist-deep. Patriarch Bodhidharma sat motionless in his cave, and the Second Patriarch did not dare speak. He simply stood outside the cave and waited. The snow fell heavily and buried him up to the waist. What tremendous perseverance! "The blade of a precious sword is sharpened by grinding; the fragrance of plum blossoms comes from bitter cold." If you can endure such hardship and possess such perseverance, good news will come to you, and fruition will be brought to perfection.

In cultivating any dharma gate, one must be able to endure hardship and sustain a long-term resolve. To cultivate Pure Land practice, one must remain with the Buddha's name over the long term; to investigate Chan, one must remain with the huatou over the long term. There are many Chan koans: choose one that you cannot penetrate and keep it in your mind over the long term, like a hen brooding her eggs, never leaving it even for a moment.

Although Chan Master Sanfeng had already recognized his original nature, he still could not penetrate the koan of "Deshan Carrying His Bowl." The koan goes as follows: Chan Master Deshan had two outstanding disciples. The elder disciple was Yantou Quanhuo, and the younger was Xuefeng Yicun. At that time, Chan Master Xuefeng served as the kitchen steward among the assembly, preparing meals for everyone.

One day, the meal was ready rather late. Deshan carried his bowl to eat. When Xuefeng saw his master coming, he said, "The bell has not rung, and the drum has not sounded. Where are you going with your bowl?" Deshan said nothing, lowered his head, and returned to the abbot's quarters.

Before long, Yantou arrived. Xuefeng told him what had just happened, and Yantou said, "The great and little Deshan have not understood the final word!" Great Deshan referred to Chan Master Deshan, and little Deshan to Chan Master Xuefeng. By this, he meant that neither master nor junior disciple had thoroughly penetrated the "final word."

When Deshan learned of this, he summoned Yantou and asked, "You do not approve of this old monk?" In other words, "You do not acknowledge me?" Yantou secretly and quietly conveyed its meaning to Deshan. The next day, when Chan

Master Deshan ascended the hall to teach, he was different from usual. Hearing him, Yantou clapped his hands and laughed loudly: “It is fortunate that the old fellow in the abbot’s hall understands the final word. Henceforth, no one under heaven will be able to do anything with him. Still, he has only three years left to live.” Thereafter, Deshan indeed passed away three years later.

Chan Master Sanfeng could not penetrate this koan. Could it be that the master was inadequate? Did he have to be told by his disciple? What meaning did Yantou secretly convey? He said three years, and Deshan lived for three years—was he giving Deshan a prophecy? He could not penetrate any of these many questions.

If you cannot penetrate it, then investigate it! Sanfeng investigated until his “head and face were both swollen”—his head and face truly became swollen. Persisting in this way for a long time, with his sense of doubt unbroken and every hardship endured, he encountered the right circumstance and condition, and good news was about to come. One day, Chan Master Sanfeng went to the rear courtyard and heard the sound of bamboo being split. “Crack!” In that instant, he experienced a sudden breakthrough.

In our cultivation, we cannot practice the Yellow School for a while, then the Red School for a while, and then switch to Buddha-recitation or Chan investigation. If we keep changing our minds upon seeing something different, we will accomplish nothing. Whatever dharma gate we cultivate, we should persevere in it. We should be like Chan Master Xuedou, remaining the same for twenty years, unafraid of hardship and suffering: “For twenty years I have endured bitter toil, entering the blue dragon’s caves again and again for your sake.”

What an injustice—and yet it is worth recounting.

“Injustice” means being wronged. Wronged indeed! But why is it an injustice? Ah! It is because we were originally Buddhas.

We did not know this at first, and for its sake we underwent every hardship, cultivating and cultivating. Then—ah! So that is how it is! This matter has absolutely nothing to do with arduous cultivation; all that effort was originally in vain! Everyone, I told you from the very beginning that Buddha-nature is always shining before you. It is only that you yourself refuse to acknowledge and assume it. Refusing to assume it means having deluded thoughts and attachments.

When Śākyamuni Buddha attained the Way upon seeing the morning star, he said: “How extraordinary! All sentient beings possess the wisdom and virtuous characteristics of the Tathāgata, but because of deluded thoughts and attachments, they cannot realize them.” As long as we let go of deluded thoughts and attachments, we are Buddhas right here and now. What need is there for “For

twenty years I have endured bitter toil, entering the blue dragon's caves again and again for your sake"? Is that not being wronged? That is why it is called an injustice!

"Worth recounting" means that it is also worth speaking of. This hardship was not endured in vain; it is worth mentioning. Why? Because one has understood the source of the universe and life, transcended every bondage, is no longer constrained by birth and death, and moves freely and at ease, with nothing that cannot be overcome. There are three different circumstances in which we cultivate the Way and see our true nature:

1. Investigating Chan or reciting the Buddha's name for several decades.

2. Cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma for three years.

3. Receiving direct pointing and seeing one's true nature immediately.

The intrinsic nature realized in these three ways is the same, but the strength of its functioning differs. The first has the greatest strength, and the third the least. In the third case, it is attained easily and without effort, so one does not know to cherish and safeguard it. One often treats it lightly, cannot retain it, and drifts away. One may even take it for something ordinary and, because spiritual powers have not manifested, begin to doubt.

Such a person does not know that this ordinary mind—the lucid knowing in which not a single thought arises and all is clearly discerned—is Buddha. Instead, he constantly pursues spiritual powers. He does not realize that spiritual powers are branches and leaves, whereas awakening to the Way is the root. Once the root has been obtained, one need only continuously and meticulously clear away habitual tendencies; spiritual powers will arise of themselves without being sought.

Thus one misses it right before one's eyes. Such a person is like the pampered and dissolute young master mentioned earlier: inheriting the family estate with ease, he does not know to protect and preserve it, and carelessly squanders it.

He is also like the foolish young master described in the Lotus Sūtra, who does not know his own nobility and wanders the streets begging. Is that not an injustice? In the first case, that of investigating Chan or reciting the Buddha's name, realization is not easily attained. One undergoes every hardship, passes through life and death again and again, and only sees one's true nature after decades of sustained training. Therefore, one's strength is great: when circumstances arise, one is not confused; one can penetrate all favorable and adverse circumstances and is not defiled by birth and death.

Clear-eyed patch-robed monks, do not take this lightly.

A clear-eyed patch-robed monk is one who has thoroughly awakened to the original nature. Having thoroughly awakened to the original nature, one can see through everything and is not bound by anything; this is called “having an eye at the crown of one’s head.” Having thoroughly awakened to the original nature, one can skillfully observe circumstances and potential and use extraordinary means to inspire students; this is called “having a talisman behind one’s elbow.”

Even if you are a clear-eyed patch-robed monk with an eye at the crown of your head and a talisman behind your elbow, when you reach the point of “Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha; what are the Five Emperors and Three Sovereigns?” you must not lightly pass it by (“taking lightly” means lightly passing it by). You must be extremely careful! “Clear-eyed patch-robed monks, do not take this lightly” is the final line of Xuedou’s verse. Why does he say this? If one is not careful, would one not become what is called

“a second Fayuan Gong”—that is, one with a muddled Buddha-nature and an indiscriminate suchness? How could such a person contend with birth and death? After Fayuan Gong had described the realm of seeing one’s true nature, “presenting it face-to-face,” Attendant Pou’s words, “The king of golden-winged birds fills the universe; who among them can stand forth?” were intended to awaken Fayuan Gong so that he would not cling to the luminous images of “heaven and earth shake, presenting it face-to-face.”

Fayuan Gong said, “If one suddenly encounters someone who stands forth, then what?” He was in fact still clinging to the luminous images. “You do not believe the falcon seizing the dove; only when tested before the skull will you know what is true.” This pointed out the gravity of birth and death and added another hammer-and-tongs blow. “In that case, bend at the chest and retreat three steps.”

Fayuan Gong had no choice but to let go of the luminous images—he should have let them go in the preceding statement; by this point he was already far too late—yet he fell again into conceptual thought. This is truly so: whether advancing or retreating, it is hard to escape obstruction; putting down the luminous images, one picks up a cloth bag; with mind upon mind, one still fabricates strangeness. How can one be free and at ease at the gateway of birth and death? At the very point of “Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha” and “what are the Five Emperors and Three Sovereigns?” one truly cannot take things lightly. Therefore it is said: “Only by being careful can one succeed.” Take care!

Case Four: Deshan Questions Again with His Staff

We have already discussed three koans. From them we can see that the great patriarchs who realized the Way were broad-minded and open, utterly bare and

pure, without the slightest hindrance or attachment. It is like clouds dispersing from the vast sky, revealing the clear blue heavens: boundless light shines throughout the lands of the ten directions.

At just such a time, throughout past and present and the ten directions above and below, you may roam freely at will. At every time and in every place, all is equal and unobstructed. How could there be barriers between good and bad, right and wrong, being and nonbeing, correct and incorrect? Yet if one slightly inclines in a direction or makes the least choice or rejection, one becomes obstructed. Thus it is said, “Under the clear sky and bright sun, do not point east and gesture west.” This is called “holding fast.”

When Chan practitioners meet, they face one another in speech or silence, presenting themselves directly face-to-face. When masters meet, at such a time and in such circumstances, how could they recklessly trade Chan repartee or talk nonsense? Their responses must fit together like a box and its lid, answering one another in accordance with the occasion. They may raise a fist or hold up a whisk; they may jest, laugh, shout, or scold; they may speak or remain silent, move or be still—each has its proper place. Like arrowheads meeting, it is exactly right. Thus it is said, “According to the time and conditions, one must also prescribe medicine in response to the illness.” This is called “letting go.”

What is meant by “in public office, not even a needle may be admitted” is “holding fast.” How could you be allowed to point east and gesture west, making a fool of yourself? What is meant by “private passageways accommodate carts and horses” requires “letting go”; otherwise, one loses an eye. But how does one let go? How does one hold fast? Where should one let go? When must one hold fast? Is letting go better, or holding fast? Please consider Case Four of the Blue Cliff Record, “Deshan’s Question-and-Answer with His Bundle under His Arm”:

Deshan arrived at Guishan. Carrying his bundle under his arm, he entered the Dharma Hall, walked from east to west and from west to east, looked about, and said, “Nothing! Nothing!” Then he left. (Xuedou added the comment: “Seen through!”)

“Deshan’s stick and Linji’s shout” are renowned throughout the Chan world. Deshan and Linji, two great Chan masters, were eminent patriarchs whose sticks and shouts went hand in hand in the Chan school. Chan Master Deshan Xuanjian, whose lay surname was Zhou, left home at the age of twenty. He studied the Vinaya Piṭaka in depth and thoroughly understood the essential purport of the scriptures on nature and characteristics.

He had formerly lectured on the Diamond Sūtra in Sichuan and was then known as “Zhou of the Diamond Sūtra.” He wrote a commentary on the Diamond Sūtra entitled Qinglong Commentary Notes. He heard that the Chan school in the south

advocated “seeing one’s nature and becoming a Buddha,” suddenly awakening to one’s original nature and being a Buddha right then and there. He considered this “the teaching of demons.”

According to the doctrinal teachings, one must spend a thousand kalpas learning the Buddha’s deportment and ten thousand kalpas learning the Buddha’s subtle practices before becoming a Buddha. Yet these demon disciples in the south dared to say that the mind itself is Buddha! So he roused himself, shouldered his Qinglong Commentary Notes, and headed straight for the south to refute these demon disciples. When he reached Lizhou, he saw an old woman selling fried rice cakes by the roadside.

Fried rice cakes were a food of that time, resembling today’s glutinous-rice dumplings. As he was hungry from traveling, he set down his load and wished to buy some cakes for a snack. The old woman asked what he was carrying. He replied that it was the Qinglong Commentary Notes, an explanation of the Diamond Sūtra.

The old woman said, “I have a question for you. If you can answer it, I will give you some cakes as a snack. If you cannot answer it, please buy them elsewhere.” Deshan said, “Very well. Ask your question.” The old woman said, “The Diamond Sūtra says: ‘The past mind cannot be obtained, the present mind cannot be obtained, and the future mind cannot be obtained.’”

“Venerable sir, which mind do you wish to refresh?” Deshan was skilled at expounding the Diamond Sūtra and had believed that he understood its profound meaning, that no question could stump him. Yet he was brought up short by an old woman’s question. He could only stare blankly, unable to answer. The old woman then directed him to seek instruction from Chan Master Longtan Chongxin, who lived nearby.

When Deshan arrived at Chan Master Longtan’s place, he said as soon as he entered, “I had long admired Longtan, but now that I have come to Longtan, I see neither a pond nor a dragon.” Monk Longtan emerged from behind a screen and said, “You have personally arrived at Longtan.”

Everyone, how could “seeing neither a pond nor a dragon” be “personally arriving at Longtan”? This was a means of guiding him. The Diamond Sūtra says, “If one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathāgata.” If one saw a pond or a dragon, one would be attached to appearances. Seeing neither pond nor dragon is precisely to be free from appearances and see one’s true nature.

Moreover, our Buddha-nature is originally free from appearances: “To be free from all appearances is called all Buddhas.” Chan Master Longtan was speaking with a double meaning. But Zhou of the Diamond Sūtra was coarse-minded at the time and

did not immediately enter into accord with it. He merely bowed in courtesy and withdrew.

That evening, Deshan entered the master's room to seek instruction. Being skilled in expounding the Diamond Sūtra, he spoke at length about its principles, while Chan Master Longtan merely responded with "yes, yes" to humor him. It grew very late, and Monk Longtan said, "The night is deep. Go down and rest." Deshan bade him farewell, lifted the curtain, and went out.

Seeing that it was pitch-dark outside, so dark that he could not see his hand before his face, he returned and said, "It is dark outside." Chan Master Longtan rolled up a piece of paper as a candle, lit it, and handed it to Deshan. Just as Deshan received it, Chan Master Longtan suddenly blew out the flame. Deshan suddenly awakened profoundly and immediately bowed to Chan Master Longtan.

How could blowing out a candle enable one to realize the Way? What principle is involved here? If you cannot penetrate this, go home and investigate it carefully. Monk Longtan said, "What have you seen that you bow?" Deshan replied, "From this day forward, I shall no longer doubt the words of the old masters throughout the land!"

The next day, Chan Master Longtan ascended the Dharma seat and said: "Among you is a fellow whose teeth are like sword-trees and whose mouth is like a basin of blood. A single blow cannot make him turn back. (Beginning with the old woman, he had already received two or three blows!) One day he will stand upon a solitary peak and uphold my Way."

Deshan piled the Qinglong Commentary Notes before the Dharma Hall, raised a torch, and said, "Exhausting all subtle arguments is like placing a single hair in empty space; exhausting all the world's clever devices is like casting a drop of water into a vast ocean." From such language, one can see Chan Master Deshan's literary brilliance. The Qinglong Commentary Notes must certainly have been written with extravagant eloquence.

Empty space and the vast ocean symbolize Buddha-nature; subtle arguments are abstruse speculations, while clever devices symbolize intelligence and wisdom. Even if one exhausts all subtle speculation, it is only like placing a hair in empty space. Even if one exhausts all worldly intelligence and ingenuity, it is only like casting a drop of water into the ocean. Buddha-nature is so vast and boundless.

Chan Master Deshan actually consigned the Qinglong Commentary Notes, written with his heart's blood, to the flames. After realizing the Way through "blowing out the candle," he heard that Guishan's Dharma influence was lofty and that fifteen

hundred people studied under him. He therefore wished for a meeting between masters and went to visit Guishan.

Chan Master Guishan Lingyou was the founder of the Guiyang school, a Dharma son of Chan Master Baizhang and a Dharma grandson of Chan Master Mazu. Among Baizhang's disciples was a mendicant named Sima, skilled in geomancy. He told Chan Master Baizhang that in Hunan there was a mountain called Dawei whose fengshui was excellent, a place fit for a great spiritual teacher with fifteen hundred followers.

At that time, Chan Master Lingyou served as steward of provisions under Baizhang. Chan Master Baizhang therefore sent him to reside on Mount Dawei. The mountain was steep and remote, with scarcely any trace of human habitation. Chan Master Lingyou kept company with apes and monkeys and gathered acorns and chestnuts to relieve his hunger. He lived there for six or seven years, but no one came up the mountain.

Chan Master Lingyou thought, "I live here in order to benefit students. Now that no one comes or goes, why should I remain here as one who seeks liberation only for himself?" So he left his grass hut and prepared to go down the mountain elsewhere. At the mountain entrance, he saw many wolves, insects, tigers, and leopards blocking his path. Chan Master Lingyou said, "You need not stop me."

"If I have an affinity with this mountain, then each of you should disperse. If I have no affinity with it, you need not move. I shall walk forward, and you may eat me as you please." As soon as he finished speaking, the wolves, insects, tigers, and leopards scattered in all directions. Chan Master Guishan then returned to his hut. Less than a year later, Venerable Lan'an led more than ten monks from Chan Master Baizhang's place to assist Chan Master Guishan.

Thereafter, the residents at the foot of the mountain gradually learned of him and helped build a monastery. Students also gradually increased in number. Not only did local officials lend their support, but even the prime minister Pei Xiu went up the mountain to inquire into the Dharma. Before long, it had become a great practice center with fifteen hundred members.

When Deshan arrived at Guishan, he carried his bundle under his arm into the Dharma Hall. A bundle was the luggage carried by a traveling monk; carrying it under one's arm meant holding this luggage. Without even untying his bundle, he entered the Dharma Hall with it on his back. He walked from east to west and from west to east.

Why did he walk back and forth? In the bearing of a Chan practitioner, every gesture and movement expounds the Dharma; one need not speak for it to be Dharma

teaching. Looking around, he said, “Nothing! Nothing!” Looking around means looking here and there. Nothing! Nothing! There is nothing at all in your Dharma Hall; even my walking back and forth does not exist. In this way, he was demonstrating that he had completely realized the Way.

Having said this, he left the Dharma Hall before everyone’s eyes. Xuedou commented here, “Seen through!” To see through means to discern the whole course of someone’s conduct.

Everyone, did Deshan see through Guishan? Did Guishan see through Deshan? Or did Xuedou see through both of them? Tell me: can you also see through Xuedou? Whenever one adds a comment, it has a tail. Here Xuedou has already exposed himself amid the grass! One who truly sees the Way establishes not a single dharma, is utterly bare, naked and pure; only then does one accord with one’s true nature.

If you retain an idea of “seeing through,” the fox’s tail is exposed. Chan Master Guishan was a great master. He sat unmoving and paid no attention to Deshan, waiting to see what tricks he had. This is the point at which “in public office, not even a needle may be admitted.” Any little trick here is neither fully green nor fully yellow; if anything remains, one is not thorough. In the first round of Dharma combat, Deshan suffered a defeat.

When Deshan reached the entrance, he nevertheless said, “I must not be careless.” He then composed himself with full deportment and entered again to meet Guishan. As Guishan sat there, Deshan lifted his sitting cloth and said, “Reverend!” Guishan made as if to take up his whisk. Deshan then gave a shout, brushed his sleeves, and left. (Xuedou added the comment: “Seen through!”) With his back to the Dharma Hall, Deshan put on his straw sandals and departed.

Deshan walked to the door, but then said, “This will not do either—one must not be hasty.” He could not simply leave carelessly after losing the encounter; he wanted to return and regain the ground. To possess dignified deportment is to observe proper conduct and be courteous. Guishan was the founding patriarch of a whole mountain; when a visitor arrived, he should prostrate and pay homage to the patriarch.

A sitting cloth was a square piece of fabric, made to certain specifications, used exclusively by monastics. It was spread beneath one during meditation and used as a kneeling mat during prostrations. Guishan was seated in the Dharma Hall. After Deshan had completed his prostrations according to the rules, he picked up his sitting cloth and said, “Reverend.” Deshan wished to provoke Guishan verbally, to make him respond; he wanted to draw him into the trap.

Guishan was about to take up the fly-whisk—a fly-whisk is a whisk for brushing away dust—to strike him with it. If you return to regain the ground, provoke someone with words, and try to draw him into a trap, then you deserve a beating. Deshan immediately gave a shout. Deshan was quick indeed! You want to take up the fly-whisk and strike me, so I will shout at you first. Without waiting to be struck, he flicked his sleeve and left.

There was also a reason for the shout: "You still have that there! You still want to take up the fly-whisk!" This was a reversal of host and guest. When accomplished Chan adepts meet, they respond to the occasion with such reversals; otherwise, they become stuck on one side. Chan Master Xuedou added the comment here, "Seen through!" Everyone, then who saw through whom? Deshan turned his back on the Dharma Hall, put on his straw sandals, and left. In the second round of the Dharma contest, Deshan gained the advantage. Had Guishan been defeated? Guishan was a great Chan adept; he had his own way of emerging.

That evening, Guishan asked the head-seat monk, "Where is the newcomer who arrived earlier?" The head-seat monk said, "He turned his back on the Dharma Hall, put on his straw sandals, and went out." Guishan said, "In the future, this fellow will build a grass hut atop a solitary peak, where he will scold the Buddha and curse the patriarchs." (Xuedou added the comment: "Frost upon snow!")

Guishan was in no hurry. Only slowly, when evening came, did he ask the head-seat monk, "Where is the newcomer from earlier?" The head-seat monk said, "He turned his back on the Dharma Hall, put on his straw sandals, and left." Guishan said, "In the future, this fellow will build a grass hut atop a solitary peak, where he will scold the Buddha and curse the patriarchs.

There was a barb in Guishan's words: You saw me reach for the fly-whisk and hurriedly gave a shout; having gained the advantage, you hurried away. Your fox's tail has long since been exposed. It is like "the divine turtle dragging its tail": it sweeps away its tracks, yet leaves behind the traces of sweeping.

Chan Master Guishan was a great adept. Unhurriedly, he waited until evening, lightly seized this fox's tail, and thereby concluded the third round of this Dharma contest and brought this koan to completion. Later, Chan Master Deshan carried a great staff in hand, sat firmly on solitary peaks, scolded the Buddha and cursed the patriarchs, and struck like wind and rain; yet he never escaped Guishan's calm and unhurried remark. Therefore, Xuedou added the comment here: "Frost upon snow." Below is Chan Master Xuedou's verse on this koan:

First, seen through; second, seen through—frost upon snow, he nearly fell.

This koan may be divided into three parts: first, “seen through”; second, “seen through”; and “frost upon snow.”

“First, seen through” refers to Deshan stirring up trouble where there was no wind and raising a heap of bones on level ground. He wished to “have an encounter between adepts” with Guishan, to provoke a Dharma contest and exchange their realizations. But Chan Master Guishan sat firmly as if on a fishing terrace and was not moved by him, so Deshan had no choice but to return defeated.

In those days, there was a hermitage master below Mount Nanquan. Someone told him, “Recently, Venerable Nanquan has been gathering people on the mountain to teach the Dharma. Why do you not go and pay him a visit?” The hermitage master said, “Not only would I not go for Venerable Nanquan; even if a thousand Buddhas appeared in the world, I would not go.” It seemed that he was already very assured, able to remain unmoved by all circumstances.

When Chan Master Nanquan heard of this, he sent his disciple Chan Master Zhaozhou to test whether it was genuine. When Zhaozhou met the hermitage master, he prostrated, but the master did not even look at him. Zhaozhou then walked from east to west and from west to east, much as Deshan had done, but the hermitage master still did not look at him.

Zhaozhou had no recourse. He pulled down the curtain at the door and said, “The grass-bandit has been utterly defeated!” This meant: You have lost the encounter; you do not dare speak. But the hermitage master still ignored him. Zhaozhou was completely at a loss and could only leave in embarrassment—how similar this was to Deshan’s crushing defeat in the first round.

After Zhaozhou returned defeated to the mountain, he told Nanquan what had happened. Nanquan said, “I have always had doubts about this fellow.” He wanted to test him personally, and regain the ground as well. The next day, Chan Master Nanquan took a novice monk, a pot of tea, and three bowls to the hermitage. Setting them on the ground, he said, “Yesterday’s one, yesterday’s one.”

The hermitage master said, “What is ‘yesterday’s one’?” The hermitage master had taken the bait. How similar this was to Deshan’s provoking Guishan into taking up the fly-whisk. Nanquan patted the novice on the back and said, “You tricked me into coming, you tricked me into coming.” Then he flicked his sleeve and returned.

“Second, seen through” refers to Deshan’s refusal to accept defeat. He wanted to return and regain the ground. After prostrating, he called out, “Reverend,” provoking Guishan to take up the fly-whisk and strike him. Relying on his youth, quick eye, quick tongue, and nimble feet, he gave a shout and left. He gained the advantage and won the second round.

Once pleased with himself, he could not press on further. So he turned his back on the Dharma Hall, put on his straw sandals, and hurried down the mountain. How perilous! Had his eye, tongue, and feet not all been quick, the fly-whisk would have struck his body. This is the “he nearly fell” in Xuedou’s verse. Chan Master Xuedou composed the three sections as one continuous verse, placing “he nearly fell” at the end of the line. Thus its structure is clear, and it is also sonorous when recited. This shows that Chan Master Xuedou not only had penetrating insight but also possessed considerable literary talent.

“Frost upon snow” refers to Chan Master Guishan’s exceptional steadiness. Unhurried and unflustered, even after the thief had passed, he could draw his bow and still hit the mark exactly. He waited slowly until evening before asking the head-seat monk, and then calmly commented on Deshan before the assembly. If he had not been a spiritual guide to fifteen hundred people, how could he have possessed such skill? Chan Master Guishan was no ordinary person: he founded the Weiyang school and was a founding patriarch of great stature. That Chan Master Deshan could gain any advantage from such a person was already quite remarkable.

When the Flying Cavalry General entered the land of the Xiongnu, how many could escape whole a second time?

The Flying Cavalry General refers to Li Guang, the “Flying General” of Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty. Li Guang was highly skilled in martial arts, brave and adept in battle, and especially expert at mounted archery. Once, while leading his men on patrol near the foot of a mountain, he saw in the distance what appeared to be a fierce tiger crouching in the grass. He quickly drew his bow, set an arrow to it, and shot at the tiger.

He possessed the skill of shooting through a willow leaf from a hundred paces, and his arrows never missed; naturally, he hit it. But when he approached the grass and looked carefully, it was not a tiger at all, but a great stone. The arrow had penetrated the stone, its feathers protruding outside. When he tried to pull it out by hand, he could not. Li Guang found this quite strange. When he shot at the stone again, the arrow would not penetrate it at all.

The power of mind is inconceivable, as in the case of Kumārajīva lifting a cauldron. When Kumārajīva was young, he went with his mother to worship the Buddha at a monastery. Seeing a great iron cauldron, he went over and lifted it. Afterward, he found this strange and thought, “How could I, at such a young age, lift so heavy an iron cauldron?” When he tried again, he could not lift it. Once the mind gives rise to discrimination, its strength is inadequate. If there is no discriminating mind, spiritual powers manifest. Lifting a cauldron or shooting through stone is then nothing extraordinary—whoosh! An arrow can shoot straight into a stone.

The land of the Xiongnu refers to the territory of the Xiongnu. To enter it was to penetrate deep into Xiongnu-occupied territory. Once, Li Guang was ordered to leave Yanmen Pass to resist the Xiongnu. Their leader, the Chanyu, arranged ambushes in successive layers. Outnumbered, Li Guang was captured alive. Feigning severe injury and death, he was placed in a net slung between two horses.

Li Guang secretly glimpsed a Xiongnu soldier nearby riding a fine horse. Suddenly he leapt onto that horse, pushed the soldier to the ground, seized his bow and arrows, and galloped southward. The Xiongnu gave chase, but Li Guang's arrows never missed. He shot back the pursuing riders and escaped safely. How many generals could possess such skill in escaping from the brink of death? Hence the line: "How many could escape whole a second time?"

"When the Flying Cavalry General entered the land of the Xiongnu, how many could escape whole a second time?" is a metaphor for Chan Master Deshan. Unwilling to lose the Dharma contest, he returned for another encounter and, relying on his nimble hands and quick perception, gained the advantage. It was like the Flying General Li Guang escaping from mortal danger.

He hurried away, but was not let off; atop a solitary peak, he sits amid the grass. Ha!

"He hurried away" means that, after Chan Master Deshan gained the advantage, he put on his straw sandals and left, hurrying down the mountain. "But was not let off" means that Chan Master Guishan did not let him off. Only slowly, when evening came, he commented on him: "In the future, this fellow will build a grass hut atop a solitary peak, where he will scold the Buddha and curse the patriarchs." He said that Deshan would later "sit amid the grass atop a solitary peak."

Why say "sit amid the grass"? This is called "descending into the weeds for the sake of others." Opening a Dharma hall, teaching the Dharma, guiding the assembly, spreading the Dharma, and benefiting living beings—all this is descending into the weeds. Originally, there is nothing at all, yet you still hold morning Dharma talks and conduct evening interviews.

Giving a morning Dharma talk means delivering a general teaching to the assembly, an instruction applicable to all. Conducting evening interviews means offering individual guidance in the evening, since each person's circumstances differ. Evening interviews are also called "requesting instruction": one asks one's teacher for guidance in order to make progress. To guide the assembly, one must speak. One speaks this way and that way, but in the end it is all empty talk. Wherever there are words, there is no real meaning. True meaning does not lie in words; true Buddha-nature is inexpressible and beyond conception. To point east and gesture west, talking and talking—is this not descending into the weeds?

Ha! Originally, the seas are calm, the rivers clear, and the world at peace. Why are you there pointing east and gesturing west, making all manner of comments?

Chan Master Xuedou's verse ends here. What follows is Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin's commentary on the verse:

Xuedou composed verses on one hundred koans, presenting each one after burning incense; therefore, they became widely circulated in the world.

Chan Master Xuedou composed verses for The Hundred Cases with Verse, painstakingly analyzing the crucial points and the obscure places in the koans. Drawing on his own realization, he guided the assembly; hence it is said that he "brought forth each case while burning incense." He offered them to the assembly as one makes offerings to the Buddha. Thus the work became widely practiced and broadly circulated.

At that time, The Hundred Cases with Verse swept through Chan circles, and students of the Chan school eagerly studied and investigated it. Yet Emperor Shenzong of the Song would not permit it to be included in the canon; he would not allow The Hundred Cases with Verse to be collected in the Buddhist canon. He believed that the phrase, "What are the Five Emperors and Three Sovereigns?" (see the preceding koan, "Sun-Face Buddha, Moon-Face Buddha") was "satirizing the state," ridiculing the nation and showing no regard for its emperor. He was not a practitioner and was excessively self-centered. Yet he could not prevent The Hundred Cases with Verse from becoming widely practiced and circulated.

One must also be skilled in literary composition, penetrate the koan, and work it over until thoroughly familiar with it before setting brush to paper. Why is this so? Dragons and snakes are easy to distinguish, but patch-robed monks are hard to deceive.

Chan Master Xuedou Chongxian not only possessed a high level of literary learning and wrote superb prose, but also had penetrating insight and thoroughly understood koans. Able to turn and twist them this way and that, he used the brushstroke that puts the pupils in a painted dragon's eyes to lay fully bare that which does not fall within language and does not depend on thought. Only after repeatedly weighing and refining the matter until he was thoroughly familiar with it did he set brush to paper and compose verses.

Why was this so? Because "dragons and snakes are easy to distinguish, but patch-robed monks are hard to deceive." Dragons symbolize those who are awakened, and snakes those who are not. It is comparatively easy to distinguish awakening from non-awakening, but composing verses necessarily uses language and words,

whereas Buddha-nature does not fall within language and has nothing to do with letters.

To use “words” to evoke that which is “wordless”—how could that be easy? If one mishandles it, one falls into it oneself. How then could one deceive clear-eyed, awakened Chan monks? It is like wielding the precious sword Tai’e: one must not only wield it with complete, nimble perfection, but must never damage its edge or injure one’s hand.

Xuedou penetrated this koan and, at its knotty and difficult turns, added three lines, gathering them into a verse. Frost upon snow—he nearly fell into danger.

Chan Master Xuedou had penetrated the “Deshan’s Bundle and Reply” koan and added three lines at its turning point. “Its knotty and difficult turns” refers to the intricate and complex transitions in the koan. The three lines are two instances of “Seen through!” and one of “Frost upon snow.” “Gathering them into a verse” means joining these three lines into a single verse in one breath: “Seen through once, seen through twice—frost upon snow, he nearly fell.”

Now, what was Deshan like? He was like Li Guang, who was naturally skilled in archery and was appointed Flying Cavalry General by the Son of Heaven. Having penetrated deep into the enemy camp, he was captured alive by the Chanyu. At the time, Guang was wounded and ill. He was placed between two horses, bound in a net, and laid there.

Guang then feigned death. Glancing aside, he saw a Hu youth riding a fine horse. Guang leapt onto the horse, pushed the youth off, seized his bow and arrows, and whipped the horse southward. Drawing his bow, he shot back the pursuing riders, and thus escaped. This man possessed such skill: he found life in the midst of death. Xuedou invokes this in his verse to compare it to Deshan’s returning for another encounter and still managing to leap free. Look at the people of old: in seeing, speaking, acting, and applying, they possessed a heroic spirit. Only one with the capacity to kill without blinking an eye may become a Buddha on the spot; one who can become a Buddha on the spot naturally has the capacity to kill without blinking an eye. Only then does one have a share in freedom and ease.

To kill without blinking an eye means to kill your deluded feelings, your consciousness’s calculating and conjecturing, and your mind of grasping and rejecting. When these have all been killed off and the deluded mind has died completely, it comes alive again, thereby saving your dharmakāya wisdom-life. In former days, when Chan Master Yunmen went to visit Chan Master Muzhou, Muzhou saw him arrive and immediately shut the door.

Yunmen knocked outside the door. Muzhou asked, “What do you want?” Yunmen said, “My own matter is not yet clear. I beg the Master for instruction.” Muzhou opened the door, took one look at him, and immediately shut it again. This went on for three days. On the third day, as soon as Muzhou opened the door, Yunmen jumped inside.

Muzhou still would not let Yunmen off. Seizing him by the collar, he said, “Speak! Speak!” Yunmen hesitated—meaning that he considered what to say—and Muzhou abruptly shoved him out. With a bang, he shut the door, crushing one of Yunmen’s feet. Yunmen was in excruciating pain; in that instant, his deluded thoughts suddenly became empty, and he experienced a great awakening.

This is how formidable the method of killing without blinking an eye can be. People nowadays become dissatisfied if one speaks even a little harshly to them. How can they accord with the Way? If one can sincerely and wholeheartedly apply oneself as the people of old did, what difficulty is there in realizing the Way in this very life? If we truly resolve to apply ourselves, it is enough to find vegetables with their roots sweet and plain cloth garments warm; there is no need for excessive desires.

If one remains busy and restless, seeking outwardly, then when death comes, one cannot take anything away. This is called “playing with discriminating consciousness”; it is creating karma of birth and death. I urge you all: you are originally Buddhas. At all times, contemplate and illuminate; do not cling to appearances. Mind and circumstances are both unobtainable. When the spiritual light shines alone, far transcending the sense faculties and their objects, one can be carefree and at ease—only then does one have a share in freedom and ease.

Nowadays, when some people are questioned, they initially seem to have the bearing of patch-robed monks. Press them just slightly, however, and their waists break into sections, their thighs into pieces; they are scattered into seven parts and eight fragments, with not the slightest continuity anywhere. Therefore the people of old said, “Continuity, too, is most difficult.” Look at Deshan and Guishan: how could their understanding have been such fragmentary, piecemeal stuff? And how many can attain such complete mastery?

In the Song dynasty, when you questioned people, they initially displayed a little of the bearing of patch-robed monks, as though they were awakened. But if you continued questioning and pressed them only slightly, their waists broke into sections and their thighs into pieces; they fell into scattered fragments and no longer resembled human beings.

There were still such people in the Song dynasty; what of today? This is called “frog Chan: it can make only one jump.” Therefore the people of old said, “Continuity, too, is most difficult.” To avoid being obstructed by language, to be like a gourd floating

on water that turns whenever it is pressed, and to respond precisely as appropriate —this is called “continuity.”

To attain this is by no means easy. Now let us raise a koan of an ancient master and see the continuity of the ancients. Under Chan Master Liangshan Yuanguan there was a garden steward who managed the vegetable garden and grew vegetables for the community. He was an awakened person. One day, a monk went to provoke him, wanting him to reveal something.

He said to him, “Why don’t you go ask the head monk? Ask him a question or two and form an affinity.”

The garden steward said, “Unless I do not go ask him, if I do go ask him, I shall make the head monk get down from his Chan seat and stand on the ground!” The next day, Chan Master Liangshan ascended the hall. The garden steward stepped forward and asked, “What should one do when the house thief is hard to guard against?” That is, when deluded thoughts are flying about and cannot be brought under control, how should one deal with them? Liangshan said, “To recognize it is not to be wronged.”

This means that since you already know that deluded thoughts are flying about, you need not heed them. Let them arise and cease by themselves; do not follow them. To follow them is to wander astray, while to suppress them is “pressing down grass with a stone.” Neither will do. Following them and suppressing them are both wasted effort. Recognize them clearly and do not follow them; then your effort is not wasted.

The garden steward said, “What after recognizing it?” Once one has recognized it clearly, how should one deal with these deluded thoughts? Liangshan said, “Cast them into the land of the unborn!” Originally they are unborn: what appears to be there is in fact absent. Simply do not heed them. Over time, deluded thoughts will naturally cease to arise. This is what it means to cast them into the land of the unborn.

The garden steward said, “Is that their place of settling body and establishing life?” That is, is the non-arising of deluded thoughts the place of settling body and establishing life? Is that ultimate? Liangshan said, “Dead water does not harbor dragons.” This means that to remain fixed in a state where thoughts do not arise is to take a wrong path. Dead samādhi is like a stagnant pool: it harbors no dragons—it is of no use.

The garden steward said, “What is the dragon in living water?” Liangshan said, “It raises waves without making breakers.” One may do anything at all: this is “raising waves.” Yet one remains wholly free of obstruction, without retaining the slightest

thing in one's mind. Once it is done, it is as though it had not been done. This is "without making breakers."

The garden steward continued, "What if a pool suddenly overturns and a mountain collapses?" A pool overturning and a mountain collapsing—such enormous waves! That is, what if one suddenly erupts in anger? Liangshan indeed descended from the Dharma seat, seized the garden steward, and said, "Venerable one! Do not let the corners of this old monk's robe get wet."

An outburst of anger is merely "the heart of a bodhisattva with the face of a rākṣasa": it only frightens the other person and educates others, without the least anger in one's heart. Though it may seem to have the force of a pool overturning and a mountain collapsing, it has not even wetted the corner of the robe. Look at the ancients: in each question and answer, their continuity was precisely appropriate, like arrowpoints meeting. Without penetrating insight, how could this be possible?

"Hurry past!"—Deshan gave a shout and went out, just as Li Guang, after being captured, devised a plan, shot and killed a barbarian general with one arrow, and escaped from the enemy camp. In composing his verse to this point, Xuedou displayed great skill. Deshan turned his back on the Dharma hall, put on his straw sandals, and went out, seeming to have gained the advantage. Yet he did not realize that this old man still had not let him get away.

Xuedou says, "He did not let him off." That evening, Guishan asked the head monk, "Where is the newcomer who arrived earlier?" The head monk said, "He turned his back on the Dharma hall, put on his straw sandals, and went out." Guishan said, "One day this fellow will build a grass hut on the summit of a solitary peak and revile Buddhas and curse patriarchs." When had he ever been let off? How extraordinary! At this point, why does Xuedou say, "Sitting amid the grass atop a solitary peak"? He then gives another shout. Tell me, where does it land? Investigate for another thirty years!

"Ho!" is the shout that Chan Master Xuedou gives after the verse. Where does this shout land? Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin has finished his commentary, and I too should finish explaining this koan. Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin does not truly mean that you should spend another thirty years investigating where "Ho!" lands. It is an exhortation, urging you to see at the very moment you see, without dragging things out. Have you all seen?

(Zhenwei gives a shout.) Investigate!

Case Seventy-Five: Wūjiù Can Take It Thus

Let us first discuss the introductory remarks that Patriarch Yuanwu Keqin gave before this koan:

The precious sword with its numinous edge is ever manifest before us: it can kill people, and it can also bring people to life.

“The precious sword with its numinous edge” is a metaphor for buddha-nature and its wondrous functioning. Chan Master Linji said: “At times, a shout is like the precious sword of the Vajra King; at times, a shout is like a lion crouching on the ground; at times, a shout is like a probing pole brushing the grass; at times, a shout does not function as a shout.” The precious sword with its numinous edge here is the precious sword of the Vajra King.

Vajra is exceptionally hard: it can damage every object, yet cannot be damaged by any object. The Vajra King is the king among vajras and is incomparably firm. One can imagine how sharp such a precious sword must be; hence it is called a “numinous edge.” This is a metaphor for great patriarchs who have realized the Way: their wisdom is boundless, and with this sword of wisdom they can cut through all deluded thoughts and attachments. Not only do they cut through their own deluded thoughts and attachments; through skillful means of instructing students, they can also cut through the deluded thoughts and attachments of others.

“Ever manifest before us”: “ever” means uninterrupted. Chan Master Xianglin Chengyuan said, “It took this old monk forty years to become continuous and undivided.” “Become continuous and undivided” means without interruption. It took him forty years to attain this “ever,” showing how steadfast the practitioners of old were in their efforts.

Most people today lack perseverance. They cannot keep their minds on practice day after day for decades, so although there are many practitioners, few realize the Way. Some say, “This is the age of Dharma decline; no one can realize the Way any longer.” They do not understand that the age of the true Dharma and the age of Dharma decline exist only in the human mind. If you are steadfast and do not fear hardship and suffering, that is the true Dharma.

If you lack perseverance, keep changing your mind, and retreat when difficulties arise, that is the age of Dharma decline. It is not that no one at all can realize the Way now. Even in an age without a Buddha, when there is no teaching of the Buddhadharma, pratyekabuddhas still appear in the world. How much more so now, in an age with a Buddha, when the Buddhadharma still exists! So long as you are steadfast and do not fear hardship and suffering—whether you practice Buddha-recitation, investigate Chan, or cultivate Esoteric Buddhism—and persist for decades as though each day were the same, why fear that you will not realize the

Way? You too will surely have “the precious sword with its numinous edge, ever manifest before you.”

The precious sword with its numinous edge—our buddha-nature—always shines before each person’s very face; it is never hidden. Every action and gesture, every cough and movement of the arm, is its wondrous functioning and its manifestation. Therefore it is said to be ever manifest before us.

“It can kill people, and it can also bring people to life.” To kill people means to eliminate the deluded thoughts and attachments of oneself and one’s students, and to eliminate the ingrained habit of giving rise to thoughts in response to circumstances. When these are eliminated, buddha-nature shines forth clearly before one.

Buddha-nature is naturally and inherently complete; it is not obtained from outside. Yet, because we give rise to thoughts in response to circumstances, falsely cling and falsely grasp, create karma through delusion, and undergo retribution because of karma, birth after birth continues without cease. We revolve through the six realms, our heads emerging and submerging, with no prospect of release. When the habitual tendencies of false clinging and false grasping are eliminated, buddha-nature is inherently present and complete. This is the “killing sword.”

When deluded attachment is first removed, a single thought becomes empty and numinous, the mind is level like a mirror, and the whole body is at ease. At this point, one can very easily become attached to this state. If one remains fixed in it, this is “Dead water does not harbor dragons”; one cannot give rise to boundless wondrous functioning. Thus, at this point one must “bring people to life.” Bringing people to life means stirring students who abide in dead samādhi into activity and removing their inverted deluded attachments. Where deluded thoughts cease, bodhi appears before one. To give rise to every kind of wondrous functioning without grasping or rejecting is to be a great living Buddha. This is the “life-giving sword.”

This passage means that so long as our minds are empty and non-abiding, unchanging while according with conditions and according with conditions while remaining unchanged, whatever we take up at hand is wondrous functioning. We can both remove deluded thoughts and attachments (“killing people”) and bring forth all manner of wondrous functioning to benefit living beings; at the same time, we can serve as examples for others and lead them into the Way (“bringing people to life”). When killing people, we never “damage the edge or cut the hand,” leaving lingering attachments like broken lotus roots still joined by threads. When bringing people to life, we never fall into “nests and dens” or spin interminable complications. Why can this be done with such ease and freedom, so adeptly in both bestowing and

taking away? Because “the precious sword with its numinous edge is ever manifest before us.”

There and here, they gain together and lose together.

When a good spiritual friend and a student meet face-to-face, if both have clear eyes, they are necessarily alike on both sides. Although their sharp exchanges shift and even host and guest exchange places, both are freely turning, like a gourd floating on water that turns whenever it is pressed; they do not become fixed on words. This is what is meant by “gaining together.”

The monk from Dingzhou and Master Wujiu in this koan are like this. This is what Chan Master Linji called “host seeing host.” If it is “guest seeing host,” “host seeing guest,” or even “guest seeing guest,” it is not so.

Guest seeing host means that a clear-eyed student encounters a blind “good spiritual friend.” Host seeing guest means that the student has a fixed position and, though instructed by a good spiritual friend, stubbornly refuses to let go. Guest seeing guest means that both are blind fellows. Needless to say, guest seeing guest is “losing together”; even guest seeing host and host seeing guest are “losing together”—the two jointly lose the central principle of the Chan school.

Why is this so? “To teach profound Dharma to beings who are not vessels for it is the bodhisattva’s error.” Such a person does not have the capacity to enter into the profound Buddhadharma, yet out of bodhisattva compassion you insist on teaching that person profound Dharma and directly point out their true nature. They cannot enter into it; even if you exhaust yourself in adapting to them, what use is that? A cow must eat grass, but it must eat it itself. Is it not a mistake to force the cow’s head down to the grass? Therefore it is called the bodhisattva’s error. Below is a koan of “host seeing guest”:

A monk asked Chan Master Baizhang, “I come to a master holding an uncut jade; I ask the master to appraise it.” Uncut jade is stone containing jade; when its stony matter is removed, it becomes precious jade worth a fortune. He used uncut jade as a metaphor for buddha-nature. This monk had some realization and had come seeking verification. Chan Master Baizhang said, “Last night, a tiger on South Mountain bit a great insect.”

Have you all heard the koan, “The boys Bing and Ding come seeking fire”? Bing and Ding inherently belong to fire, yet they come seeking fire; this is a metaphor for how you are originally a Buddha, yet seek a Buddha. But this must be realized in actual practice, with no obstruction in any matter, before it can be called having one’s heels firmly on the ground. If it is not realized in actual practice and is merely understood intellectually, one is fixed on words, and it is of no use.

We must not stray too far here by discussing the koan of “the boys Bing and Ding come seeking fire.” You need only know that a tiger is a great insect, and that “a tiger biting a great insect” has the same import as “the boys Bing and Ding come seeking fire.” The monk had come seeking verification. Who is it that seeks? What is to be verified? Therefore Baizhang used “a tiger biting a great insect” as a metaphor.

The monk said, “It does not deviate from the true meaning. Why do you not further offer skillful means?” The first half of this statement was all right, but he dragged along a tail in the latter half, and thereby it became entirely distorted.

Since it did not deviate from the true meaning, what further skillful means was there to offer? Chan Master Baizhang replied, “You fellow who steals a bell while covering your ears!” I used “a tiger biting a great insect” as a metaphor and had already appraised the uncut jade you held. If you had truly reached the point of no doubt, had this not already verified you? “It does not deviate from the true meaning” was also a good reply. But if I were to “further offer skillful means” and say that you had realized the mind,

or seen your true nature and awakened, would that not be putting a head on top of your head? When one has truly reached the point of no doubt, illumination itself is mind and seeing itself is nature; what need is there to speak further of realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature? When even “delusion” cannot be found, how could there still be a concept of “awakening”? It was not that this monk had no realization, but that he had fallen into concepts and could not penetrate thoroughly; he still wanted the patriarch to offer further skillful means and affirm him.

He could not affirm himself, but still wanted the patriarch to appraise this “uncut jade” of his and to acknowledge it. Was he not deceiving himself? How much this resembles stealing a bell while covering one’s ears! Thus Chan Master Baizhang answered, “You fellow who steals a bell while covering your ears!” Yet the monk was still not awake, and said, “If I do not encounter a physician who can appraise it, it remains the same as firewood in a wilderness hut.”

The physician is one who can distinguish medicinal herbs from firewood. He meant that if Chan Master Baizhang did not “further offer skillful means” and acknowledge him, then his “uncut jade” would remain no different from the firewood in a dilapidated house in the wild, with no value at all. Chan Master Baizhang then struck him.

Chan Master Baizhang was a master of great caliber. His staff embodied the patience of non-arising: he wished to strike away the monk’s concepts, rescue him, and enable him to penetrate thoroughly. Having received the blow, the monk cried out loudly, “Heavens! Heavens!” He even seemed rather like one who had

thoroughly penetrated under the staff. Chan Master Baizhang said, “You have been allowed far too much talk.”

This means: I struck you because you were too talkative. One sentence—“It does not deviate from the true meaning”—was enough; yet you wanted me to “further offer skillful means,” and wanted to induce me, too, into excessive talk and thereby make me exhaust myself in adapting to you. If, at this moment, the monk had shaken off all his attachments completely, he could have gone on utterly bare and spotless, at ease and free.

Who would have thought that he would still cling rigidly to such concepts as seeing one’s true nature and verification? Instead, he said, “Rare indeed to encounter one who understands me!” Then he flicked his sleeves and departed. After he left, Chan Master Baizhang said, “Baizhang has lost half today.” There were two people, each losing half. The monk had fallen into concepts without knowing it; even the blow did not awaken him, so he lost one half. Chan Master Baizhang skillfully instructed him and did not hesitate to use the staff, yet it did not take effect, so he lost the other half. Although Chan Master Baizhang’s Dharma eye was penetratingly clear, he was drawn into losing half by this monk. Is this not “losing together”?

Another meaning of “there and here, they gain together and lose together” is this: when two clear-eyed persons meet in sharp exchange, what they gain, they gain together—opening out the suchness of non-abiding; what they lose, they lose together—casting off the entanglements of abiding. Although their sharp exchanges shift and host and guest exchange places, the two remain a seamless whole, neither two nor different.

In their give-and-take, their tension and release, they accord with the subtle purport beyond words amid laughter, play, anger, and scolding; between raising a fist and holding up a whisk, they reveal the formless fundamental essence. With neither there nor here, neither gain nor loss, they vividly bring out the bright and numinous mind—unhindered, unbound, free and at ease. How could a fellow who steals a bell while covering his ears ever dream of this?

If one wishes to uphold it, one may freely uphold it; if one wishes to lay it flat, one may freely lay it flat.

Ti means upholding the patriarchal seal at its lofty summit; chi means grasping the crucial pass. Together, tichi means “not even an official tolerates a needle”: all appearances are illusory; whatever is expressed in words has no real meaning. As it is said, “A single speck in the eye, and flowers in empty space fall everywhere”; it is like “a mosquito climbing an iron ox”—there is nowhere for you to sink your teeth! At this point, why still distinguish delusion from awakening, or divide host from guest? At this point, one “does not fall into host and guest.”

Ping means level and straight; zhan means spreading out. Pingzhan is not as precipitous as tichi: when there are no words, words may nonetheless be used, using words to accord with wordlessness; where there are no appearances, appearances need not be obstructed, using appearances to reveal the appearance-free. This is "private passage for carriages and horses." As it is said, "Ordinary mind is the Way; the straightforward mind is the place of practice." Whether speaking horizontally or vertically, it is like peaks turning and paths winding; they illuminate one another like jeweled pearls in Indra's net. Thus it is called "reciprocal interaction." How could one cling rigidly to a single word or phrase, a single time or place, a single person or thing? At this point, one "is not bound by reciprocal interaction."

Those who have thoroughly awakened to their original nature meet one another in terms of their proper task. If "upholding and grasping" is called for, then however they may uphold and grasp, they will not fall into "having a tenet to take as a tenet." If "level spreading" is called for, then however they may spread things out, they will not lose the essential principle. This is what is meant by: "If upholding and grasping are wanted, let there simply be upholding and grasping; if level spreading is wanted, let there simply be level spreading." This is because they "do not fall into host and guest, and are not bound by reciprocal interaction."

But tell me: what is it like when one does not fall into host and guest and is not bound by reciprocal interaction? Try raising an example.

Then what is it like when one does not fall into host and guest and is not bound by reciprocal interaction? Let us cite a koan and consider it. What follows is the koan, "Wujiu can handle it thus."

A monk came from the assembly of the Reverend Dingzhou to Wujiu.

The Reverend Dingzhou was a Dharma grandson of Master Shenxiu. This monk came from the Reverend Dingzhou's assembly and was Dingzhou's disciple. Earlier, we discussed Master Ma's koan of the "Sun-Faced Buddha and Moon-Faced Buddha." Master Ma was a Dharma grandson of the Sixth Patriarch. Reverend Wujiu was Master Ma's disciple. Master Shenxiu and the Sixth Patriarch were both disciples of Master Hongren, the Fifth Patriarch.

According to the Dharma-lineage transmission of the Chan school, the monk who came from Dingzhou and Reverend Wujiu belonged to the same generation. You have all read the Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch. When the Fifth Patriarch was preparing to transmit the Dharma, he instructed his disciples each to compose a verse. Whoever's verse accorded in meaning with the essential principle of Chan would receive the Dharma transmission and robe and become the Sixth Patriarch.

Shenxiu's verse was: "The body is the bodhi tree; the mind is like a bright mirror stand. At all times, diligently wipe it clean; do not let it gather dust." The stages of gradual cultivation—realizing one's original nature, contemplative awareness, and safeguarding realization—are plainly evident.

In response to this verse, the Sixth Patriarch, Master Huineng, composed: "Bodhi originally has no tree; the bright mirror is not a stand. Originally there is not a single thing—where could dust alight?" Not establishing a single dharma, being so immediately: the untrammeled quality of sudden awakening is already apparent. When the First Patriarch, Bodhidharma, crossed the sea from the west, what he transmitted was the "Patriarchal Chan" of sudden awakening, which does not require gradual cultivation.

Therefore, although Shenxiu was then the head seat under the Fifth Patriarch and could lecture on the Dharma to the assembly in the Fifth Patriarch's stead, the Fifth Patriarch did not transmit the robe and Dharma to him. Instead, he transmitted them to Huineng, who had not yet left home and held very little status within the assembly.

After the Sixth Patriarch, Master Huineng, received the Dharma, he returned to Lingnan and concealed his light among a band of hunters for fifteen years. Only then did he emerge to teach the Dharma and transmit the Dharma gate of sudden awakening. This became known as the Southern school, or "Southern Sudden Awakening." Master Shenxiu's teaching seat flourished greatly for a time and became known as the Northern school, or "Northern Gradual Cultivation."

Later, the Northern school rapidly declined, and the Chan school came to consist almost entirely of the Southern school's transmission. Nevertheless, what Shenxiu transmitted was also the Chan Dharma lineage, and the Northern school too produced capable people. The monk from Dingzhou in this koan was one such capable person from the Northern school.

Sudden awakening without gradual cultivation will not do either. With sudden awakening one has only ascended to the first bhūmi and must continue advancing through the second and third bhūmis, until the tenth bhūmi is complete. Is not Buddha-recitation, Chan investigation, Esoteric practice, and other cultivation before awakening gradual cultivation? And is true cultivation after awakening not gradual cultivation as well? Therefore, some say that Master Shenxiu had two bright eyes, whereas the Sixth Patriarch had the single eye of Maheśvara.

Wujiu asked, "How does the Dharma Way at Dingzhou compare with this place?" The monk said, "No different."

Reverend Wujiu asked the monk what Dharma the Reverend Dingzhou taught and whether it was the same as here. The monk replied, “No different”—there is no difference from here. The Reverend Dingzhou was also an heir of Chan; there is no difference in the essential principle of Chan. At first hearing, this answer seems very good, but in fact it already has somewhere to land—there is still a “no different”!

Let us cite another similar koan. Chan Master Xuefeng Yicun labored diligently for the Way. He went three times to Touzi and nine times to Dongshan, received the Dharma from Deshan Xuanjian, and later realized the Way on Mount Ao. He became a great spiritual teacher to fifteen hundred people. In Chan, “one flower opens into five petals,” meaning that there are five schools. His later descendants founded the Yunmen and Fayan schools.

Chan Master Xuefeng was a truly remarkable great patriarch of Chan. Once he asked a visiting monk, “Where have you come from?” The monk replied, “I have recently left central Zhejiang.” Xuefeng then asked, “Did you come by boat or by land?” That is, did you come by water in a boat, or overland by road? The monk replied, “I have traversed neither route.”

“Neither of these two routes has anything to do with me.” This monk seemed to understand the thrust of the encounter and was not a literal-minded fellow.

Chan Master Xuefeng said, “Then how did you get here?” The monk said, “What obstruction is there?” What interval or distinction is there? This closely resembles the “no different” of the monk from Dingzhou in the present koan. Chan Master Xuefeng then struck him, and the monk ran away after receiving the blow.

Ten years later, the monk came again. Chan Master Xuefeng again asked him, “Where have you come from?” He answered, “Hunan.” Xuefeng then asked, “How far apart are Hunan and this place?” He answered, “Not separated.” This has the same import as the exchange ten years earlier.

Chan Master Xuefeng raised his whisk and asked, “Are you still not separated from this?” What did this question mean? The essential principle of Chan is utterly bare and clean, not establishing a single dharma. Because students unconsciously fall into reflections and shadows, into concepts, once there is somewhere to land, there is obstruction and distinction.

Therefore it is said: “If even a single thread remains hanging, it cannot be called liberation.” This tested whether he still had somewhere to land. The monk answered, “If there were separation, I could not have arrived here.” If there were an obstruction, I would not have come here. He was plainly emphasizing nonseparation, yet unconsciously fell into “not separated.” Chan Master Xuefeng struck him again, and again he ran away.

Later, this monk too established a teaching seat, and whenever he met people he cursed Chan Master Xuefeng. One of his fellow practitioners paid him a special visit because of this and asked, “What words did Xuefeng say that make you curse him so?” The monk then recounted the foregoing koan of “not separated.” His fellow practitioner sharply criticized him and exposed where he had fallen into “not separated.” Thereafter, the monk often wept in grief. In the middle of the night, he would frequently burn incense, bow in repentance, and face in the direction of Xuefeng’s teaching seat.

In modern times there was a Chan master named Wuqiong, a monk at Jinshan Monastery in Zhenjiang whose awakening was formally acknowledged. He once undertook a “birth-and-death retreat” in Chengdu, Sichuan.

Someone cited the foregoing koan of “not separated” and asked Chan Master Wuqiong, “Where was this monk’s error?” Wuqiong replied, “His error lay in ‘not separated’!” As long as there is still a “not separated,” something has not been completely dissolved. If you acknowledge his “not separated,” that is “guest looking at guest.” It is precisely at such a moment that clear-eyed patriarchs employ the staff or shout.

If he is truly thorough, he will surely have a turning point—as did the monk from Dingzhou in this koan. If he is not thorough, he will surely die beneath the staff—as did the monk in the koan of “not separated.” At such a time, the staff and shout are exceptionally skillful means: in a single stroke, they test what is genuine and what is false.

Let us tell another ancient koan that took place across the river from Hanyang. Someone asked, “What is it like before an ancient mirror has been polished?” This means: what is the realm like before awakening? In fact, if one has truly penetrated it thoroughly, there are no such obstructions or distinctions as delusion and awakening, before awakening and after awakening.

It should extend horizontally throughout the ten directions and vertically exhaust the three divisions of time: neither different nor separated, a seamless whole. The answer was, “Hanyang is not far from here.” This answer is not thorough.

Though it is not far, it is still separated by a river, and this “one river” is a “heavenly moat”! The Chan recorded sayings called “encounter words” are the lively, immediate manifestation of Buddha-nature. They do not cling in the slightest to the old masters’ fixed patterns; in the present instant, they cut off the student’s tangled discursive thinking and guide the student to accord with Buddha-nature.

The monk in the koan of “not separated” clung to “not separated,” while the person who questioned Chan Master Wuqiong clung to the koan. When Wuqiong answered,

“His error lay in ‘not separated,’” if the questioner had been quick and perceptive, he could have penetrated this koan immediately.

Furthermore, how could the questioner be brought to sudden accord with his own Buddha-nature? Someone cited to Acharya Dayu the koan in which Chan Master Wuqiong answered, “His error lay in ‘not separated.’” Master Dayu changed the reply to: “The error lies in asking!” This directly cut off the questioner’s tangled discursive thinking.

If one can break through beneath Master Dayu’s words, one may indeed be a spirited fellow, and from then on “the heavenly moat becomes an open thoroughfare.” If one cannot break through, then even if one later establishes a teaching seat, one can only “bewitch the sons and daughters of good families.” “No different” and “not separated” must mean truly without discrimination and without obstruction. If distinctions such as delusion and awakening, before awakening and after awakening still remain, one has long since been “separated.”

Wujiu said, “If there is no difference, then turn around and go back there.” He then struck him. The monk said, “The staff has eyes; you must not strike people carelessly.”

The monk from Dingzhou answered, “No different.” Reverend Wujiu said: if there is no difference, you need not have come to me; just return to where you came from. Having said this, he raised his staff and struck. Reverend Wujiu was employing the staff precisely at the critical point; without this, it would have been difficult for the monk to turn himself around. But this monk was a clear-eyed person; he had his own turning point.

He said, “The staff has eyes at its tip; one must not strike people carelessly.” The patriarch’s staff is not used lightly; it must have eyes to see the other person clearly. One cannot carelessly raise the staff and strike. What he meant was: “I am an awakened person—how can you so lightly raise your staff and strike me? You must not strike people blindly.”

Wujiu said, “Today I have struck one.” He then struck him three more times. The monk thereupon went out.

Master Wujiu said, “Today I have indeed struck one.” Having said this, he struck him three more times. “Did you not say, ‘One must not strike people carelessly’? My striking you today was not careless; I struck right on target.” Master Wujiu was here exercising uncompromising authority—what is called “a single bar of iron for a thousand or ten thousand miles.” You said that one must not strike you blindly, because you are a person of the Way. Yet being a person of the Way still leaves something there; today I intend to strike away this very notion of being a person of

the Way. “The king of garuḍas rules the cosmos—who here can stand forth?” This is not to be violated.

When discussing the koan “Sun-Face Buddha, Moon-Face Buddha,” we mentioned this saying. It was spoken by Xingyang Pou, the attendant, to Master Fayuan. This occurred when Fayuan was young. Later, Master Fayuan attained great accomplishment and became an extraordinary great master of his generation.

Yuanlugong was Chan Master Fushan Fayuan. He profoundly understood the essential principles of both the Linji and Caodong schools. He inherited the Dharma of Chan Master Guisheng of Yexian, of the Linji school, and spent many years under Chan Master Dayang Jingxuan (Mingan) of the Caodong school. Master Mingan had two exceptionally free and penetrating disciples: Xingyang Qingpou, namely Attendant Pou, and Fuyan Shencheng.

Unfortunately, both died young. Consequently, in his later years Master Mingan said, “As for the Caodong school, none but Yuan and Jue can carry it on.” Yuan was Fushan Fayuan, and Jue was Langya Huijue. Chan Master Langya was a Dharma heir of Fenyang Shanzhao and likewise belonged to the Linji school. He too spent time under Master Mingan and deeply understood the essential principles of the Caodong school.

When Master Mingan was eighty years old, he lamented that no one could continue the Caodong Dharma seat. He therefore entrusted the tokens of Dharma transmission to Master Fayuan and asked him to help seek out a qualified successor to the Caodong school.

Many years after Master Mingan passed away, Master Fayuan discovered a qualified person who deeply accorded with the Caodong school’s essential principles: Touzi Yiqing. Chan Master Fushan Fayuan was a venerable Chan master. The “Nine Belts,” renowned throughout Chan circles, was composed by Fushan.

We should not stray too far from our subject here. But because, in our earlier discussion of “Sun-Face Buddha, Moon-Face Buddha,” we mentioned a koan from Master Fayuan’s youth, we have raised the matter again so that you may gain a more complete understanding of him. Consider Chan Master Zhaozhou, known as an “ancient Buddha” and a celebrated great master in the history of Chan, indeed in the history of Buddhism. Yet when he was young and studied the Way under Master Nanquan, he was unable to test the hermitage master at the foot of the mountain. To break through under the sharp edge of uncompromising authority is truly no easy matter.

When Master Wujiu exercised uncompromising authority, the monk from Dingzhou in this koan did not respond as Master Fayuan had in his youth: “If one suddenly

encounters someone who stands forth, then what?" At this point the monk simply went out. This was precisely the manner of one with clear eyes: going out signified "letting it pass."

You think I am caught in concepts such as awakening and realizing the Way, and so you wish to exercise uncompromising authority. But I already know that you are a clear-eyed patriarch. If I were to continue wrangling—as did the monk in the koan "Baizhang Loses Half"—would that not prove your words correct? To go out and "let it pass" at this moment was exactly timely.

The koan could have concluded perfectly here, yet Master Wujiu still would not let him go. Why? Because the monk seemed to be "propping up the gate and supporting the household." Whether he still clung to concepts such as awakening and realizing the Way had not yet been tested, so Wujiu had to test him further.

If he still fell into concepts, then he had not "come down to what is real." The Diamond Sūtra says: "If an arhat thinks, 'I have attained arhatship,' then he is attached to self, person, sentient being, and life span." Everyone, could one still be an arhat while clinging to self, person, sentient being, and life span? An arhat does not give rise to such a thought; he does not think in this way. Not entertaining thoughts of awakening or realizing the Way is what it means to "come down to what is real."

Wujiu said, "So there is someone to receive an undeserved blow after all." The monk turned around and said, "But the handle of the ladle is in the master's hand."

Master Wujiu wished to test him further, so he said, "So there is someone after all to receive an undeserved blow!" Only a muddleheaded fellow receives an undeserved blow—being struck without even knowing what it means. If this monk had nothing further to say, that would show that he was not a person of clear eyes. If he did have something further to say, Wujiu would thereby draw him back in.

This monk was skilled at turning around and speaking freely. He did not argue with Master Wujiu, but merely turned around lightly and said, "But the handle of the ladle is in the master's hand." Because you are the patriarch here, the authority to take or give, to kill or enliven, is in your hands; therefore I must submit to your disposal. What he meant was: if the two of us exchanged positions, you too would have no choice but to receive an undeserved blow.

Wujiu said, "If you want it, this mountain monk will give it back to you." The monk stepped forward, seized the staff from Wujiu's hand, and struck Wujiu three times.

Master Wujiu was a great master, daring to thrust himself into a tiger's mouth and let it bite him. He said, "If you want the handle of the ladle, I will give this staff back

to you." Did you not say that, because the handle was in my hand, you had no choice but to receive an undeserved blow? Very well, then—I will give you the handle and see how you deal with it.

The monk was not at all polite. "You give it to me, and I too know how to use it." He seized the staff from Master Wujiu's hand and struck Wujiu three times. This is called "the interchange of host and guest." Originally, Master Wujiu was the host and the visiting monk from Dingzhou was the guest; now the visiting monk was the host and Wujiu the guest. Had Wujiu not been such a great master, he would not have dared lightly to hand the staff to a guest. Had the monk from Dingzhou not been such a clear-eyed person, he would not have dared rashly seize the staff and strike the master of the mountain.

Wujiu said, "An undeserved blow! An undeserved blow!" The monk said, "There is someone to receive it."

Having received the blows, Master Wujiu said, "An undeserved blow! An undeserved blow!" "Your staff has no eyes; you strike people blindly. The blows you administer are undeserved blows." The monk from Dingzhou said, "There is someone to receive it." Once you say they are undeserved blows, there is something to seize upon; and where there is something to seize upon, there should be a blow. Striking you was exactly right; it was not undeserved.

Wujiu said, "Carelessly, I have struck a fellow." The monk then bowed.

Master Wujiu said, "Carelessly, I have struck a fellow." Today he had encountered a true fellow and struck a person of clear eyes. Does this mean that Wujiu struck the visiting monk on target, or that the visiting monk struck Wujiu on target? No matter who struck whom on target, Master Wujiu was praising himself. If I had no eyes, how could I strike a person of clear eyes such as you? If you were a muddleheaded fellow, then even if my Dharma eye were perfectly clear, we would both have lost. Fortunately, you are not a muddleheaded fellow. You dared to seize the staff and strike me, and you too struck a person of clear eyes on target.

The Dingzhou monk's bow, however, was not a straightforward yielding, nor was it "letting it pass." This move was most poisonous; it was what is called "the device for trapping a tiger." You are a great spiritual teacher capable of striking a clear-eyed person on target—there is something to seize upon there. You have exposed such an obvious opening, and I can now scratch precisely where it itches: you are a great spiritual teacher, so I bow to you. If Master Wujiu had then "taken his seat"—sitting firmly and receiving the bow—he would have been pinned to death by this monk. Do not forget that the handle of the ladle was now in the monk's hand.

Wujiu said, “So the monk goes off in this manner.” The monk burst out laughing and left.

Master Wujiu had his own way of turning around, and he addressed this monk as “Venerable.” In Chan monasteries, not just anyone can bear the title “Venerable”; only a great patriarch presiding over a practice center is fit to assume it. You bow to me, intending to use the opportunity to pin me to death, but I can see through the sharpness of your move. Now the handle of the ladle is still in your hand, yet you bow to me—so you are simply going off in this manner?

The monk from Dingzhou burst out laughing and left. Only this was a straightforward yielding, only this was “letting it pass.” I know the sharpness of your move, and you know the sharpness of mine—how amusing! This practice center is yours, and you should indeed sit here; you are fully worthy of it. Now I return the handle of the ladle to you. It is better that I go out. His laughing departure brought this koan to a perfect conclusion.

Wujiu said, “Can you bear it? Can you bear it?”

The Song of Enlightenment says: “How could I dare decline the labor of receiving the four kinds of offerings? Even ten thousand taels of gold I can bear.” To “bear it” means to be able to receive it. If one can bear it, then “once it is realized, karmic obstacles are originally empty”; if one cannot bear it, then “if it is not yet realized, one must repay past debts.” A great patriarch is not someone whom one can strike lightly. If one “cannot bear it,” the offense of striking a great patriarch is boundless. Let us now cite a koan about one who could not bear it:

Chan Master Cizhao Yuncong received Dharma transmission from Shoushan Shennian and was a great master of the Linji school. While he was abbot of the Shimen practice center in Xiangzhou, the prefect of Xiangzhou, seeking to vent a private grudge, had him arrested, whipped, and humiliated. After he was released, the monastics came out of the monastery to welcome him and met him on the road.

The head-seat monk hurried forward, made an inquiry, and said, “The prefect has wrongfully humiliated the Venerable in this way . . .” Master Cizhao pointed to the ground and said, “A heap of bones rises from level ground!” This meant that there had originally been no trouble; the prefect had deliberately sought one. Yet where the Chan master pointed, a mound of earth actually surged up from the level ground.

When the prefect heard that earth had surged from level ground, he was terrified. Yet he did not know to repent, and instead sent men to level the mound. Soon after it was leveled, the earth surged up again, just as it had before. Later, the prefect’s

entire family died tragically in Xiangzhou. Such retribution was only the immediate retribution; the karmic result after death was too dreadful to describe.

Chan Master Wujiu praised the visiting monk from Dingzhou, saying that he "could handle it so well." This was not merely praise for the monk; it was also self-praise: If I were not able to see clearly into the other person, how would I dare so readily hand him the ladle handle? Looking over the great Dharma teachers who preside over practice centers, how many would dare, as I do, to put themselves across a tiger's jaws and let it bite? This koan ends here. What follows is Chan Master Xuedou's verse on this koan:

To summon is easy; to dismiss is hard. Examine carefully the encounter in which host and guest exchange positions.

Some people are skilled at handling snakes. By blowing an instrument called a "piaozi," which produces a special sound, they can summon the snakes. Summoning them is easy, but sending them away is difficult. Only an expert who possesses the means to dismiss snakes can send them away. As the saying goes, "It is easy to invite spirits, but hard to send them away."

When I came to Wenzhou this time, I met someone on the boat. He said that his father also cultivated a path. I asked him, "What path does your father cultivate?" He replied, "He draws a numinous talisman; whichever spirit he summons, that spirit comes."

(It turned out that he was a practitioner of a non-Buddhist path.) Once, he summoned Sun Wukong. Whenever someone passed the doorway, that person would involuntarily enter and begin turning somersaults—again and again, without stopping. This would not do. They wanted to send Sun Wukong away, but could not. His father was terrified and never dared summon him again.

Later, his father's teacher said, "Once you have summoned one to perform a task, you must send it away afterward. If you summon Sun Wukong's teacher, Sun Wukong will leave." Sun Wukong's teacher was Subhūti. If one drew a numinous talisman of Subhūti and burned it, Sun Wukong could be sent away. Everyone, these are all spirits, ghosts, and demons, falsely assuming the names of Sun Wukong and Subhūti. Yet this too is a case of "to summon is easy; to dismiss is hard." They even dare impersonate the names of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Do not believe them.

"To summon is easy; to dismiss is hard" is a metaphor: it is easy to hand him the staff, but difficult to reclaim the ladle handle and send him away.

"Examine carefully the encounter in which host and guest exchange positions." The encounter in which host and guest exchange positions means just that: one moment

Wujiu is the host and the visiting monk is the guest; the next moment the visiting monk is the host and Wujiu is the guest. Each is ever-turning, like a gourd floating on water: press it, and it turns.

“Examine carefully”: we must look carefully! We must observe how they give rise to functioning and learn from this, lest we be left speechless when questioned later. For example, the old woman who sold fried cakes asked Deshan (see Case Four, “Deshan’s Question-and-Answer While Carrying His Bundle”): “The Diamond Sūtra says that the past mind cannot be obtained, the present mind cannot be obtained, and the future mind cannot be obtained.”

“Which mind does the venerable intend to refresh?” How should he have answered? Tell me. (Someone replied, “I do not know.”) You do not know? Then you cannot have a snack! The old woman had already said, “If you can answer, I shall offer you fried cakes as a snack; if you cannot answer, go elsewhere to buy them.” If he answered, “I do not know,” he might as well have gone elsewhere to buy them directly.

The reply should be one in which “box and lid fit together,” like a box and its lid, which fit perfectly when closed. If donkey-head does not match horse-mouth, that is a case of “box and lid not fitting.” Since the three minds are all unobtainable, they should naturally be contemplated as one. When the old woman asked, “Which mind do you intend to refresh?” he could have answered her lightly, “You know, and I know; it cannot be told for others to know.”

After that, the old woman could not say that she did not know. If she said she did not know, he could immediately give her the remark: “So I thought, so I thought! As it turns out, as it turns out!” Nor could she say that she knew, for prajñā is without knowing. The old woman wished to make an offering, while Deshan was the recipient. If the recipient is quick and perceptive, the giver remains the guest throughout.

After realizing one’s true nature, the sharp exchanges of Chan dialogue are merely wondrous functioning; it depends on whether you are quick-witted. If someone asks you something and you have to think before answering, that will not do. If the mind is truly empty and there is really nothing in it, the reply comes straight from the mouth, without the need for thought. Of course, giving rise to functioning also requires a process of learning and training. Everyone should “examine carefully” this koan before us concerning “the encounter in which host and guest exchange positions.”

Though the kalpa-stone be firm, it can still be worn away; if one stood in the depths of the vast ocean, it would have to run dry.

What is a “kalpa-stone”? A kalpa is a unit of time in Buddhism. How long is a kalpa? It may be calculated by means of this “kalpa-stone.” A kalpa-stone is an exceptionally solid rock, one yojana thick—a yojana being forty li—and eighty-four thousand yojanas in both length and width. It is far larger than our earth.

Every five hundred years, a celestial being descends and brushes the kalpa-stone once with a sleeve, continuing until the great solid rock has been entirely worn away. The garments of celestial beings are exceedingly soft and weigh only six zhu. Twenty-four zhu equal one liang, so four celestial garments weigh only one liang. With such a soft sleeve, brushing it only once every five hundred years, this kalpa-stone—far larger than the earth—would eventually be ground away. Can one imagine how long that would take? Such a length of time is one kalpa, called the “kalpa of a light robe brushing a stone.”

“Though the kalpa-stone be firm, it can still be worn away”: although the kalpa-stone is solid, it can still be polished away by the soft celestial robe weighing six zhu; it will still perish. But the sharp encounter in which Chan Master Wujiu and the visiting monk from Dingzhou exchange the roles of host and guest cannot possibly be destroyed. It cannot be exhausted through a thousand ages or ten thousand ages.

The “pivot” is Buddha-nature, and the “edge” is wondrous functioning. This is the great pivot and great functioning of Buddha-nature; how could it be damaged? “If one stood in the depths of the vast ocean, it would have to run dry.” The vast ocean is the boundless sea: its great waves surge mightily, its white breakers tower to the sky; vast and dim, boundless and immeasurable, it stretches without limit into the distance. An ordinary person who arrived there would be drowned.

But if Chan Master Wujiu and the visiting monk from Dingzhou were to stand in that great ocean, even its waters would have to dry up. The kalpa-stone and the ocean are used as metaphors to praise the sharp encounter in which the two exchange host and guest. This line is plainly praise. The next line appears to be criticism, but at its core it offers still further praise: old Wujiu and the monk from Dingzhou truly were outstanding figures of their age, eminent monastics of exceptional distinction.

Old Wujiu, old Wujiu—what sort of man are you? How utterly uncalled-for to hand him the ladle handle!

Old Wujiu, old Wujiu! What are you saying here? How great are your abilities? How dare you give the ladle handle to another person? What you did was far too careless, far too wrong, far too uncalled-for! This walking staff was used by the Buddhas of the three times and by the patriarchs of every generation. It is used to strike away students’ attachments and clinging, enabling them to recognize their own Original Face. How could you hand this over to someone so lightly? Fortunately, the visiting

monk from Dingzhou understood how to lay things level and struck you only three times, lightly.

Even if he had encountered a rash fellow, one who feels for bones in empty space and raises thunder on level ground, and handed the walking staff to him, should that fellow have entangled him in wild and unreasonable dispute, old Wujiu could still easily turn danger into safety and avert peril, because a genuine master has his own way of making an exit.

Generally speaking, of course, one should not lightly hand a walking staff over to another person. Yet in doing things, we must consider the person involved; we must see what kind of person the other is. If one is a vessel of the Dharma, entrust it; if not, do not entrust it. Chan Master Wujiu's Dharma eye was clear and penetrating. Having accurately recognized the other person, he boldly handed him the ladle handle, and thus this timeless masterpiece was performed.

If one should entrust it but does not, drawing back timidly, then the latter half of this koan would not exist. "To summon is easy; to dismiss is hard. Examine carefully the encounter in which host and guest exchange positions." Is this not precisely where Chan Master Xuedou discerned its brilliance? "Though the kalpa-stone be firm, it can still be worn away; if one stood in the depths of the vast ocean, it would have to run dry!"

Case Seventy-Six: Danxia Asks a Monk About Having the Eye

Chan Master Danxia Tianran of Dengzhou was a renowned great Chan master of the Tang dynasty. The lamp records contain no account of the year of his birth or his lay surname; thus Patriarch Yuanwu Keqin said that he was "of unknown origin." In his youth, Master Danxia studied Confucianism, was well read in the Five Classics and Four Books, and thoroughly understood the teachings of Confucius and Mencius.

One day, as he was traveling to Chang'an, the capital, to sit for the civil-service examinations, he had a dream at an inn along the way. He dreamed that the room was filled with white light. He sought out a diviner—that is, a fortune-teller—to interpret the auspicious or inauspicious portent of this dream of "white light filling the room." The diviner told him that it was "an auspicious sign of understanding emptiness."

Xiang means auspicious. This was a good dream, an auspicious omen. What auspicious omen was it? An auspicious omen of "understanding emptiness." Understanding emptiness means being able to awaken to and thoroughly comprehend the Mahāyāna teaching of emptiness in Buddhism. This was

tantamount to telling him that, if he studied and practiced the Buddhadharma, he would certainly attain great accomplishment.

After hearing this, he happened to meet a “Chan practitioner”—that is, a student of the Chan school of Buddhism. The Chan practitioner asked him, “Where are you going, sir?” In other words, where were you headed? He replied, “To be selected for office.” He was going to take the civil-service examinations; if he passed, he could be selected to fill a vacancy and become an official.

The Chan practitioner said, “How can being selected for office compare with being selected as a Buddha!” How could becoming an official compare with becoming a Buddha? Official rank and fame are but momentary splendor, passing clouds and smoke that cannot endure in the world. Cultivating the Way and becoming a Buddha, however, can endure throughout past and present, unchanged through all the vicissitudes of time.

To be a good official, one must exhaust one’s talents and wisdom for the good governance of the country, for the people’s peace, security, and happiness, and for national prosperity and strength. Even so, one can benefit only so many people and bring them only limited benefit. This is far beyond comparison with the benefit to sentient beings that comes from cultivating the Way and becoming a Buddha.

Once one cultivates and becomes a Buddha, one can liberate immeasurable, boundless sentient beings and “cause them all to enter nirvāṇa without remainder and thereby be liberated.” One enables them all to attain complete liberation and forever leave the bitter ocean of birth and death. Thus, how can being selected for office compare with being selected as a Buddha? Becoming an official requires “selection,” and studying Buddhism also requires “selection”: both involve choosing the best from among the best.

A Buddhist practice center is a place for selecting Buddhas: “Those from the ten directions gather together; each studies non-contrivance. This is a place for selecting Buddhas; when the mind is empty, one returns having passed the examination.” It is a matter of seeing who applies themselves diligently and without cease, and who can cultivate until the mind is empty and abides nowhere. Such a person may be selected to become a Buddha, awaken, and realize the Way. There must indeed be a selection.

Therefore, everyone practicing the Dharma must advance with courageous vigor and must not be lax. Suppose one has obtained a method of practice but then drifts along idly and lazily, practicing today and stopping tomorrow. How could one realize the Way in this manner? The practice center is a place for selecting Buddhas. If you do not apply yourself, you will not be selected. You must strive diligently and truly

realize that the mind is empty and abides nowhere before you are worthy of selection.

At the inn, Danxia suddenly dreamed of white light filling the room. Having heard the diviner's explanation of "an auspicious sign of understanding emptiness," and then received the Chan practitioner's encouragement that "being selected for office cannot compare with being selected as a Buddha," he was deeply moved. Thereupon, he resolved to abandon an official career and study Buddhism and cultivate the Way.

He asked the Chan practitioner, "Where should one go to be selected as a Buddha?" That is, where should one go to study Buddhism and cultivate the Way? The Chan practitioner replied, "At present, Master Ma is teaching in Jiangxi. There is a place for selecting Buddhas; you may go there." Master Mazu was then teaching the Dharma in Jiangxi and liberating sentient beings.

Master Ma was a great Chan master of that time. His practice center was a place for selecting Buddhas, and Danxia could go there. Without the slightest hesitation, Danxia went straight to Jiangxi and hurried to Master Ma's practice center. When he met Master Ma, he said nothing; instead, he held up the ends of his headcloth with both hands for Master Ma to see.

A headcloth was a kind of head covering worn by men in ancient times. Its ends were the folded corners where it was wrapped around the head. Ordinarily, when someone first arrived, they would introduce themselves—who they were, where they had come from, and why they had come.

Danxia did not do this. As soon as he saw Master Ma, he held up the ends of his headcloth with both hands, already revealing a sharp and direct Chan style of "revealing speech through silence." Looking over the causes and conditions of Danxia's pursuit of the Way—the dream of "white light filling the room," his encounter with the diviner and the Chan practitioner—one may certainly say that Buddhas and bodhisattvas had guided him. Yet at a single prompting he awakened, and at a single nudge he turned around, resolutely abandoning an official career. Was not that clean-cut, decisive manner, without the least hesitation or entanglement, the bearing of one who had returned again?

Master Ma carefully looked over this young man holding up the ends of his headcloth with both hands. Seeing that he was suited to Chan Master Shitou, he said to him, "I am not your teacher. Go to Shitou of Nanyue." After the Sixth Patriarch, the lamps of the Chan school were divided and transmitted in succession through the two lineages of Qingyuan Xingsi and Nanyue Huairang.

Chan Masters Xingsi and Huairang were both disciples of the Sixth Patriarch. Chan Master Shitou Xiqian inherited the Dharma from Qingyuan Xingsi, while Chan Master Mazu Daoyi inherited the Dharma from Nanyue Huairang. Master Shitou's Chan responses were lofty and incisive, often leaving people unable to grasp their meaning, whereas Master Ma's Chan style was comparatively gentle and even.

Each person's awakening has its own causes and conditions. Those suited to lofty and incisive methods are guided by lofty and incisive methods; those suited to gentler methods are guided by gentler methods. Danxia was suited to Shitou, whereas the celebrated layman Pang Yun was suited to Master Ma.

Layman Pang initially studied Chan with Shitou. He asked Chan Master Shitou, "Who is the one who does not take the myriad dharmas as companions?" All things are dharmas, and all things have appearances. Not taking such things with appearances as one's companions is to transcend the myriad dharmas. What kind of state is this? It was quite a profound question, utterly absolute.

On hearing this question, Chan Master Shitou covered Pang's mouth with his hand. Who is it that cannot speak? Where there is language, there is thought; once one falls into language or thought, it is no longer it. When Chan Master Shitou covered his mouth, Layman Pang suddenly had an awakening, but it was not yet complete.

Later, Layman Pang went to consult Master Ma and asked the same question—if his realization had been complete, he would not have needed to ask again—"Who is the one who does not take the myriad dharmas as companions?" Master Ma said, "When you can drink up the waters of the West River in a single gulp, I will tell you." The West River is a major river in Jiangxi Province. When you can drink all its water dry in one gulp, only then will I tell you.

If you cannot drink up the waters of the West River in a single gulp, I will not tell you. This does not fall into language: once it is spoken, it is no longer it. Layman Pang attained great awakening at these words; he immediately realized it completely and suddenly grasped the profound purport. Once awakened, he further gave rise to wondrous function. Then it was no longer merely a matter of drinking up the West River in one gulp: "The depths of the vast ocean would be dry in an instant!"

Chan Master Wutai Yinfeng, renowned for his remarkable spiritual powers, had the lay surname Deng. The lamp records call him Deng Yinfeng, and he was a disciple of Mazu. In his early years, while studying Chan with Mazu, he also wished to go and consult Shitou. Mazu told him, "The road to Shitou is slippery!" Chan Master Shitou's responses were lofty and incisive; you might not be able to grasp their meaning and could slip and fall.

Deng Yinfeng said, “With pole and pack at my side, I make a performance wherever I go.” He was quite unconcerned. Arriving at Shitou’s place, he circled Shitou’s Chan seat once, struck the staff in his hand on the ground, and asked Shitou, “What is the essential purport?” Shitou replied, “Vast sky! Vast sky!” Deng Yinfeng could make neither head nor tail of it, so he ran back to ask Mazu.

Mazu said, “Go ask him again. When he gives an answer, then make two hissing sounds.” Deng Yinfeng ran again to Shitou. Just as before, he circled once, struck his staff on the ground, and asked, “What is the essential purport?” This time Chan Master Shitou did not reply, “Vast sky!” Instead, he forestalled him by making two hissing sounds. Deng Yinfeng could no longer hiss in return, and again ran back to ask Mazu.

Mazu said, “I told you that the road to Shitou is slippery!” I had already told you that the road to Shitou was slippery. He acted before you; his Chan response is exceedingly swift, and you might not be suited to him. Deng Yinfeng was not suited to Shitou, whereas Danxia was precisely suited to him. Thus Mazu did not approve of Deng Yinfeng’s consulting Shitou, but directed Danxia to go to Chan Master Shitou. Master Ma was indeed skilled at discerning people’s causes and conditions.

When Danxia arrived at Chan Master Shitou’s place, he again held up the ends of his headcloth with both hands. Chan Master Shitou said, “Go to the rice-pounding shed.” When the Sixth Patriarch first met the Fifth Patriarch, the Fifth Patriarch likewise said, “Go to the rice-pounding shed,” and the Sixth Patriarch then went to the rear courtyard to split firewood and pound rice. On hearing Shitou’s words, Danxia bowed in thanks and thereafter lived the life of farming and Chan practice together with the community.

He lived there in this way for three years, and Danxia realized the Way. One day, Chan Master Shitou told everyone, “Tomorrow we shall clear the grass in front of the Buddha hall.” The next day, the community all took out spades, hoes, and other tools, preparing to clear the grass. Only Chan Master Danxia acted differently: he brought a basin of water, washed his head clean, and came before Chan Master Shitou and knelt down.

It turned out that “clearing the grass in front of the hall” meant shaving off their hair: Shitou was going to ordain them. Danxia recognized Chan Master Shitou’s Chan response. When Shitou saw him act in this way, his face broke into a smile. He shaved Danxia’s head and ordained him as a monastic. He then began to expound the precepts to him, but Danxia “covered his ears and went out”: he covered his ears rather than listen, and ran out the door.

What did this mean? Danxia’s Chan response was steep and sharp, like a sheer cliff rising a thousand fathoms; the first signs had already appeared when he held up the

ends of his headcloth with both hands. If he had then said, “I have no greed, anger, or ignorance, so why should I need precepts, samādhi, and wisdom?” it would have become mere preaching rather than Chan activity. Chan Master Danxia covered his ears and went out—this was precisely a Chan master’s manner of action. It spared how many words; this was truly silence surpassing speech.

Everyone, ask yourselves: Do greed, anger, and ignorance still remain? If you say they do, intrinsic nature is neither defiled nor pure; where could greed, anger, and ignorance come from? If you say they do not, why did the Buddha teach the cultivation of precepts, samādhi, and wisdom? Please offer a word here. (After a long pause.) If someone were suddenly to give a shout, cover their ears, and walk out, I would laugh heartily and leave the seat.

After Danxia ran off, he again went to Master Ma in Jiangxi. Without first paying respects to Mazu, he went straight to the monks’ hall. The hall contained an image of the holy monk—an arhat monk—and Danxia sat there astride the neck of the image of the holy monk.

All the monks were greatly startled. “How can this man be so lacking in decorum? How dare he sit on the head of a holy monk?” They hurriedly went to report it to Mazu. When Mazu came and saw him, he said, “My son, Tianran.” This is my child, a descendant of the Chan school; his Buddha-nature is innocent and natural, and accords with the Way.

Danxia hurriedly jumped down and bowed to Chan Master Mazu, saying, “Thank you, Master, for bestowing a Dharma name upon me.” Thanking his master for giving him the name Tianran, he took “Tianran” as his Dharma name. Thus he came to be called Tianran. This is how Chan Master Danxia Tianran received his name.

We have now introduced the principal figure in this koan—Chan Master Danxia Tianran. Let us now explain the koan itself:

Danxia asked a monk, “Where have you come from?” The monk said, “From down the mountain.”

A monk came to consult Danxia. Chan Master Danxia asked him, “Where have you come from?” At first hearing, this question seems quite ordinary: Did he come from Wenzhou or Liangzhou? Where had he come from? Yet when Chan patriarchs guide students, not a single word departs from the fundamental meaning of Buddha-nature. He was asking: From where does one come in birth, and to where does one go in death? That was the source from which he was asking about.

The monk’s reply also rather resembled that of one with clear eyes. He did not name the place from which he had come—whether it was the realm of Shama or the Five-

Horse River—but replied, “From down the mountain.” This answer had some substance to it. He seemed to be an accomplished practitioner, as though he meant to test the host and see whether the host’s Dharma eye was clear and penetrating. If the host’s Dharma eye were unclear, it would indeed be difficult to respond.

Yet Danxia was an exceptionally thoroughgoing great patriarch. He naturally had extraordinary means and would not be stumped by this question. On hearing that the monk did not reveal the place from which he had come, Danxia thought: He seems to be an accomplished practitioner. I shall test him further to see whether he truly has clear eyes. Danxia intended to distinguish whether the visiting monk was genuine or not.

Danxia said, “Have you eaten?” The monk said, “I have eaten.”

Danxia asked the visiting monk, “Have you eaten?” The monk replied, “I have eaten.” Oh no! Beneath the qilin hide, a horse’s hoof has been exposed: this monk was originally a muddleheaded fellow. Yet one cannot say so with certainty. Some deliberately expose a flaw and dare to offer themselves to the tiger’s jaws for the other person to bite. If the other person cannot seize it, then he does not have clear eyes.

Chan Master Xuefeng was skilled in using this kind of method. A monk under Xuefeng went to consult Chan Master Lingyun and asked him, “What is it like before the Buddha appears in the world?” Lingyun raised his whisk. He then asked, “What is it like after the Buddha appears in the world?” Lingyun again raised his whisk.

The Buddha appears in the world for the one great cause and condition: to enable sentient beings to open, reveal, awaken to, and enter the Buddha’s knowledge and vision—that is, to enable everyone to realize the mind and see their true nature, awakening to the suchness Buddha-nature inherently present in their own minds. “Before the Buddha appears in the world” refers to not yet realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature; “after the Buddha appears in the world” refers to after realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature.

Lingyun raised his whisk in response to both questions, cutting things off cleanly and completely, thereby showing that awakening and non-awakening are nondual. This brings out the fact that innocent Buddha-nature neither increases in awakening nor diminishes in delusion. He swept away attachment to concepts such as realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, awakening, and realizing the Way: not establishing a single dharma, utterly bare. Only such thoroughness can be called truly realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature.

But this monk could not enter into it directly. Undoubtedly, he was stuck on concepts such as awakening and realizing the Way and could not break free. He ran

back, returning to Xuefeng. Xuefeng said, “Have you returned so soon?” You have come back far too quickly! What is this all about? The monk said that when he went there, he asked about the Buddhadharma but did not attain accord with it, and so he returned.

Xuefeng asked him, “What did you ask about?” The monk then recounted how Lingyun had raised the whisk in response to his questions. Xuefeng understood where the monk was stuck and said to him, “Ask me, and I will tell you.” The monk then asked, “What is it like before the Buddha appears in the world?” Xuefeng raised his whisk. The monk again asked, “What is it like after the Buddha appears in the world?” Xuefeng put down his whisk.

Some say that Xuefeng answered well: raising the whisk signifies clinging to things and refusing to let them go, while putting down the whisk signifies being able to let everything go. This theory sounds plausible, but it is the same error committed by the monk. What is meant by “letting go”? When there is nothing to let go of, that is genuine letting go; only then has one truly broken free.

If there is still something that can be let go of, one plainly has not broken free and cannot be said to have truly let go. Xuefeng’s raising and lowering of the whisk struck precisely at this monk’s sore spot. Had the monk been able to awaken on the spot, and say as Xuansha did, “The old master’s heels have not yet touched the ground,” he could have gone freely and at ease.

Xuefeng once instructed the assembly: “If the world is one foot wide, the ancient mirror is one foot wide; if the world is one zhang wide, the ancient mirror is one zhang wide.” Pointing to the brazier, Xuansha asked Xuefeng, “How wide is the brazier?” Xuefeng answered, “As wide as the ancient mirror.” Xuansha said, “The old master’s heels have not yet touched the ground!”

“If the world is one foot wide, the ancient mirror is one foot wide; if the world is one zhang wide, the ancient mirror is one zhang wide.” Xuefeng used the ancient mirror as a metaphor for innocent Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature and the world are originally nondual.

After the Heart Sūtra says, “Form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form,” it fears that students may regard form and emptiness as two things that are “not different,” or identical. It therefore immediately says, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form,” directly pointing to nonduality. The world and the ancient mirror here have the same meaning: the world is the ancient mirror, and the ancient mirror is the world.

Xuansha’s question, “How wide is the brazier?” was a question meant to test the host: to see whether he would fall on the side of the ancient mirror or on the side of

the world. To fall on either side is not nonduality. Xuefeng was not afraid of falling on the side of the ancient mirror and directly answered, “As wide as the ancient mirror.” Xuefeng was a great spiritual teacher with fifteen hundred disciples.

When the single flower of the Chan school blossomed into five petals, it divided into five schools; from among his disciples emerged the Yunmen and Fayan schools. Could he possibly have failed to know that he was falling on the side of the ancient mirror? Xuefeng had his own deeper intention. His methods of propagating the Dharma differed from those of his Dharma brother Yantou. Yantou excelled in using fierce tongs and hammers; no one in the world could fathom him or get their teeth into him. Even his master Deshan could do nothing with him.

Xuefeng, however, was unafraid of falling entirely into the weeds; he dared to offer himself for students to bite and chew. Only those who dared to bite, and could bite firmly, were worthy of receiving transmission. Thus Yantou said, “Although Xuefeng and I were born from the same branch, we do not die from the same branch.” This means that although they both opened to their original nature under Deshan (being born from the same branch, referring to essence), their methods of functioning differed (not dying from the same branch.

This refers to characteristics and function). Xuefeng was unafraid of falling on the side of the ancient mirror because he was deliberately exposing a flaw. Your question, “How wide is the brazier?” may have been intended to test the host, or it may have been asked in confusion. I deliberately fall on the side of the ancient mirror to see whether you can call me to account. If you can, that is exactly what I intend; if you cannot, then you deserve a blow. Xuansha could call him to account. With the single phrase, “Your heels have not yet touched the ground,” he bit squarely into the point. He was indeed Xuefeng’s outstanding disciple.

Xuefeng’s raising and lowering of the whisk deliberately fell on the two sides as well, testing whether this monk could call him to account. Sadly, the monk could not; he even thought that Xuefeng’s answer was correct and bowed. Xuefeng then struck him—struck this confused fellow! I had deliberately shown you an error, but you could not call me to account.

Having received the blow, the monk still did not understand. Later, he went to ask Xuansha. Xuansha said, “Do you wish to understand? Let me give you an analogy. Suppose a man sells a garden plot and concludes the contract for its east, west, south, and north boundaries all at once, but the tree at its center still belongs to me.”

Xuansha was very skilled at using analogies. Concluding the contract for the east, west, south, and north boundaries all at once symbolizes being able to let go of everything else; the tree at the center still belonging to me symbolizes being unable

to let go of concepts such as awakening and realizing the Way. Can that count as genuine letting go? If one cannot let go, one cannot be said to have awakened or realized the Way. No cultivation is true cultivation; no attainment is true attainment; no realization is true realization!

Danxia asked, “Have you eaten?” The monk answered, “I have eaten.” Was this monk a muddleheaded fellow, or was one with clear eyes deliberately exposing a flaw? Danxia certainly would not let him off lightly. Please read on:

Danxia said, “Does the person who brought you your food have eyes?” The monk had no reply.

Does the person who brought you food to eat have eyes? It is proper to make offerings of food to one with clear eyes. But you are a muddleheaded fellow who understands nothing. To offer you food—that is, to expound the Dharma to you—would that not be blindness? The monk had no reply: he had nothing to say. Alas! He truly was a muddleheaded fellow.

Patriarch Yuanwu Keqin commented here: “Indeed, he could not get away. If this monk had been an accomplished practitioner, he would have said to him, ‘They are just like the eyes of the venerable monk!’” Having no reply would not do; he could not “get away.”

If this monk had been one with clear eyes, when Danxia asked, “Does the person who brought you your food have eyes?” he would have directly replied: Not only does he have eyes, but they are no different from yours! Let us see how you, Danxia, would respond. Danxia certainly would not have left matters there, and a timeless masterpiece worthy of serving as a model for later generations would have unfolded. But this monk merely blinked his eyes and had “no reply”; he was not one with clear eyes.

Some say: Giving is the first of the six perfections. Giving food to others is precisely the practice of giving, so how can one distinguish between having eyes and not having eyes? Very well—let us see what the Sūtra in Forty-Two Sections Spoken by the Buddha says. Chapter Eleven of that sūtra states:

The Buddha said: “Feeding one hundred evil people is not as good as feeding one good person. Feeding one thousand good people is not as good as feeding one person who keeps the five precepts. Feeding ten thousand people who keep the five precepts is not as good as feeding one srotāpanna. Feeding one million srotāpannas is not as good as feeding one sakadāgāmin. Feeding ten million sakadāgāmins is not as good as feeding one anāgāmin. Feeding one hundred million anāgāmins is not as good as feeding one arhat. Feeding one billion arhats is not as good as feeding one pratyekabuddha. Feeding ten billion pratyekabuddhas is not as good as feeding all

Buddhas of the three times. Feeding one trillion Buddhas of the three times is not as good as feeding one who is without thought, without abiding, without cultivation, and without realization."

The Sutra in Forty-Two Sections was among the earliest scriptures transmitted to China. Some say that it is a Hīnayāna scripture. In the preceding passage, Mahāyāna bodhisattvas are indeed not listed between pratyekabuddhas and the Buddhas of the three times. Yet whether one speaks of the goat cart, deer cart, or ox cart, in the end they are all the great white ox cart. Whether it is the śrāvaka vehicle, the pratyekabuddha vehicle, or the bodhisattva vehicle, they all ultimately return to the One Buddha Vehicle.

"Feeding a hundred evil people" means giving food to a hundred evil people to eat. … This passage is very easy to understand and needs no further explanation. As for "one who has no thought, no abiding, no practice, and no realization," it clearly already reveals the One Mark of ultimate reality of the Mahāyāna. Ultimate reality is markless; being markless, it is not without marks.

Next, let us consider the following koan:

Changqing asked Baofu, "One who gives food to others has a share in repaying kindness. Why does he not possess the eye?"

Chan worthies such as Changqing, Baofu, Xuansha, and Yunmen were all outstanding disciples of Chan Master Xuefeng Yicun. Changqing was Chan Master Changqing Huileng, and Baofu was Chan Master Baofu Congzhan. The two studied together under Xuefeng, were deeply congenial, and often discussed the koans of the ancients together.

One day, they began discussing the koan of Danxia asking a monk whether he possessed the eye. Changqing asked Baofu, "One who gives food to others has a share in repaying kindness. Why does he not possess the eye?" The teachings say, "Above, repay the four weighty kindnesses; below, relieve the suffering of the three lower realms." One of these four weighty kindnesses is the kindness of the Three Jewels. The Three Jewels are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the saṅgha.

Is not making offerings to the saṅgha a way of repaying kindness? Offerings are the "four requisites." What are the four? Food and drink, clothing, bedding, and medicine. Giving food to others to eat … making an offering of food to monastics—is this not repaying the kindness of the Three Jewels? Thus it is said that one has a share in repaying kindness. But why say that he does not possess the eye?

Changqing did not ask Baofu because he himself did not know why one did not possess the eye. Discussing the koans of the ancients is not merely a matter of

discussing particular events or judging the ancients' rights and wrongs, strengths and weaknesses. Rather, one uses a koan as an occasion to correct one's own and others' views, thereby opening the true eye of prajñā in the present.

By questioning Baofu in this way, Changqing used the koan of Danxia asking a monk whether he possessed the eye as a huatou to test Baofu's understanding and see whether he remained at all times inseparable from his own nature. Chan Master Zhaozhou once said that, when this old monk traveled on pilgrimage, apart from the two daily meals of gruel and rice, which were occasions of mixed-up mental activity, there was no other occasion of mental activity.

If this is not so, one is far removed indeed! To have no "mixed-up mental activity" at all times and in all places is to remain inseparable from one's own nature at all times and in all places. By safeguarding realization with such continuous care and nurturing the embryo of sagehood, one naturally attains the dharmakāya's proper abiding. Then, from beyond the dharmakāya, one gives rise to immeasurable and boundless wondrous functioning, expounding eighty-four thousand dharma gates where originally not a single dharma exists, and liberating immeasurable and boundless sentient beings where originally no sentient beings exist.

When Chan Master Zhaozhou was more than one hundred years old, the King of Yan and the King of Zhao arrived together at Zhaozhou's monastery. Zhaozhou remained seated upright and did not rise. The King of Yan suddenly asked, "Which is more exalted: the human king or the Dharma King?" Originally, the King of Yan had led troops to attack the King of Zhao and seize his territory.

Someone skilled at observing atmospheric signs memorialized the King of Yan: "A sage dwells at Zhaozhou; if you go to war, you will surely not prevail." Thus the two kings of Yan and Zhao turned weapons of war into jade and silk, and met at a banquet.

The King of Yan asked the King of Zhao, "In Zhao's land of gold, who is the superior person?" That is, on this land under your jurisdiction, precious as gold, who is the great bodhisattva accomplished in practice? The King of Zhao replied, "There is a master who lectures on the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, whose discipline and conduct are lofty and solitary. Whenever there is a severe drought, everyone asks him to go to Mount Wutai to pray. Before the master has returned, sweet rain pours down in torrents."

The King of Yan said, "I fear that is not altogether excellent." The King of Zhao then said, "One hundred and twenty li from here is Guanyin Monastery at Zhaozhou, where there is a Chan master advanced in years and eminent in attainment, whose Dharma eye is clear." The King of Yan said, "Could this be the portent?" The King of

Yan truly possessed the eye: he did not prize the efficacy of prayers for rain, but rather the clarity of the Dharma eye.

He and the King of Zhao came to Zhaozhou's monastery. Seeing the Chan master seated upright without rising, he suddenly asked, "Which is more exalted: the human king or the Dharma King?" This was a question to test the master, to determine whether Chan Master Zhaozhou truly had a clear Dharma eye. Chan Master Zhaozhou said, "Among human kings, the human king is supreme; among Dharma Kings, the Dharma King is supreme."

This reply vividly revealed the Buddha-nature of suchness—the markless dharmakāya. Chan Master Zhaozhou laid Buddha-nature entirely before him. Buddha-nature is supremely exalted among human kings and also supremely exalted among Dharma Kings—indeed, "Above heaven and below heaven, I alone am honored." The King of Yan was deeply impressed. Thereafter, both kings took Chan Master Zhaozhou as their teacher and observed the rites of disciples.

In fact, Changqing knew that if one falls into such concepts as making offerings and repaying kindness, and cannot realize the emptiness of the threefold wheel, then at most it is merely a wholesome deed that gains blessings in the human and deva realms. Even if one evokes the response of "a hundred birds carrying flowers and white apes offering fruit," this does not necessarily mean that one's Dharma eye is clear. Yet he deliberately questioned Baofu in order to test whether Baofu would go astray and whether his heels were firmly planted on the ground.

Baofu said, "The giver and the receiver are both blind fellows!"

Changqing attempted to ensnare Baofu with concepts such as making offerings and repaying kindness, but Baofu had his own way of escape. Excellent, Baofu! "The giver and the receiver are both blind fellows!" This answer was crisp and decisive. The giver is the person who "gives food to others to eat," while the receiver is the monk who "has eaten the food."

The receiver was a muddleheaded fellow who merely blinked in silence. The giver, unable to see that his Dharma eye was unclear, still offered him food to eat. Both were blind fellows. If one is to make offerings, one should make them to a clear-eyed person.

What use is there in making offerings to a "lacquer bucket"? Long ago, there was an old woman who built a hermitage and supported a monk practicing within it for twenty years. She regularly had a girl of sixteen deliver his meals—was this not giving food to others to eat and having a share in repaying kindness?

One day, the old woman instructed the girl delivering the meal that, after taking him the food, she should embrace the monk and ask him, “What about at just such a time?” She wanted to see what he would say. The expression “just such” had long been current in Chan circles; “at just such a time” means the time when Buddha-nature is luminously present before one.

The old woman wished to test whether the monk’s heels were firmly planted on the ground, whether he would still go astray, and whether he could penetrate the circumstance of a woman’s beauty appearing before him. The girl obeyed her instructions. The monk said, “A withered tree leans against a cold cliff; through three winters, there is no warmth.”

Held fast by a girl of sixteen, he was like a withered tree leaning against an icy cliff: not the slightest fire of desire arose, as though it were the bitter cold of deep winter, without any warmth. This monk could “sit with a woman in his lap without becoming disordered,” and his character might be called noble; yet he had gone wrong on the path of practice. His Dharma eye was unclear, and he cultivated dead samādhi.

When, at “just such a time,” the Buddha-nature of suchness shines forth luminously, how could it be “a withered tree leans against a cold cliff; through three winters, there is no warmth”? Moreover, “a withered tree leans against a cold cliff; through three winters, there is no warmth” was only his own state. He attended only to himself. Faced with a woman behaving so before him, he did not offer her guidance to awaken her. When had sentient beings ever entered his heart?

Hīnayāna sages have extinguished their former karma, established the pure conduct, and completed what had to be done; they abide in the city of nirvāṇa and do not undergo further existence.

Mahāyāna bodhisattvas have deep and unwavering faith, earnest vows that do not retreat, and ceaseless diligent practice; they cross the ocean of birth and death in order broadly to liberate sentient beings.

In the eyes of Mahāyāna bodhisattvas, śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are also worldly people; the Śūraṅgama Sūtra even includes them among the fifty kinds of “skandha demons.” Therefore, when the girl returned and told the old woman, the old woman rebuked the monk: “For twenty years I have supported nothing but a worldly fellow!” She immediately drove him away and burned down the hermitage. This old woman was not blind.

Changqing said, “If he fully brought forth his capacity, would he still be a blind fellow?”

To fully bring forth one's capacity means to bring forth its full functioning—the so-called great capacity and great functioning. Great capacity is Buddha-nature, and great functioning is the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature. Danxia said, "Does the person who brought you food to eat still possess the eye?" Patriarch Yuanwu commented here: "Although this is relying on power to bully someone, it is also deciding the case on the basis of the evidence."

If this monk had been a clear-eyed person, he would have seized upon Danxia's "relying on power to bully someone" and given Danxia a sharp challenge. But he was not a clear-eyed person and was actually "speechless"; thus Danxia could be said to have "decided the case on the basis of the evidence." Under "speechless," Patriarch Yuanwu commented: "Indeed, he could not get away."

If this monk had been a master, he would have said to him, "They are the same as the venerable's eyes!" If the monk could have responded in this way, that would have been "fully bringing forth his capacity." Changqing meant: if this monk had not been "speechless," but had fully brought forth the great capacity and great functioning of Buddha-nature, could he still be called a "blind fellow"?

The Chan school directly points to the mind: see one's nature and become a Buddha. Utterly bare and wholly pure, not establishing a single dharma—how could it establish "fully bringing forth one's capacity"? Without realizing it, Changqing had fallen into "fully bringing forth one's capacity." He could see clearly and let go of such teaching-school concepts as making offerings and repaying kindness, but he could not see clearly or let go of the entanglements of the Chan school, such as fully bringing forth one's capacity and possessing the eye.

Therefore, Patriarch Yuanwu commented here: "What good and evil do you recognize? You still refuse to yield! What bowl are you seeking?" He further remarked, "Had this mountain monk been there at the time, when he said, 'If he fully brought forth his capacity, would he still be a blind fellow?' I would simply have said to him: 'Blind!'" If one's understanding is not thorough and one falls into concepts such as existence and nonexistence, right and wrong, correct and incorrect, fully bringing forth one's capacity or not, possessing the eye or not, and cannot transcend them, this greatly violates nonduality. That is attachment and stagnation; it is "still refusing to yield."

If one "has even a single thread remaining hanging" and refuses to yield, one will unknowingly seek a bowl to hold out. Therefore Patriarch Yuanwu Keqin directly called him blind!

Now let us see how Baofu answered.

Baofu said, "Can you say that I am blind?"

Baofu's meaning was: "Did I not tell you, 'The giver and the receiver are both blind fellows'?" I am thus fully endowed with the eye and recognize that these concepts are empty in themselves. I have already "exhausted his capacity"; surely you should not call me blind. How forceful it would have been to answer with a single word, "Blind," as Yuanwu did, leaving an inexhaustible aftertaste. Baofu's reply was altogether too weak and powerless.

There are appropriate and inappropriate ways of speaking. Once he became weak in this way, his response was inappropriate. He fell into "not becoming blind" without realizing it. His meaning was: I have already "exhausted the capacity," and therefore "have not become blind."

Patriarch Yuanwu Keqin appended this comment here: "Both are fellows in the weeds—dragon's head, snake's tail! … They are both masters; why is there no village ahead and no inn behind?" Changqing fell into "exhausting the capacity," while Baofu fell into "not becoming blind." Both had fallen entirely into the weeds, so Yuanwu said that they were both "fellows in the weeds."

In their two questions and two answers, the first question and answer were very good, but the latter question and answer fell into the weeds.

Is this not "a dragon's head and a snake's tail"? Yet both were outstanding disciples of Xuefeng, both were masters, both were people with clear eyes. Why, when they came to this point, did both question and answer depart from the Buddha-nature—having "no village ahead and no inn behind"? After awakening, when one puts it into function, every utterance must not depart from the fundamental meaning of Buddha-nature. Yet this usually requires a process of refinement; cases like Danxia's, in which one reaches the mark all at once, are rarely seen.

Changqing and Baofu often discussed the koans of the ancients as a way of refining themselves. Yet as soon as there was any deviation, it would be seized upon by one with clear eyes. Chan Master Xuedou seized upon their "exhausting the capacity without becoming blind" in composing this verse on the koan. The following is Chan Master Xuedou's verse:

Exhausting the capacity without becoming blind—pressing a cow's head down to make it eat grass!

This monk blinked his eyes and was "speechless," showing that he had never recognized the lively, natural, spontaneous Buddha-nature. He was certainly a "blind fellow." Can you exhaust the capacity on his behalf? If the cow will not eat grass, what use is there in forcibly pressing down its head? Pressing down the cow's head cannot take the place of the cow's eating grass for itself. This monk is a "blind

fellow"; even if you exhaust the capacity for him, you still cannot say that he has "not become blind."

Patriarch Yuanwu commented on this verse as follows:

Changqing said, "When he has exhausted his capacity, does he still become blind?" Baofu said, "Can you call me blind?" It is just like pressing a cow's head down to make it eat grass. One must wait for it to eat by itself; how could one press down its head and make it eat? When Xuedou composed the verse in this way, he naturally perceived Danxia's intent.

What was Danxia's intent? It may be explained in three parts:

First, he asked the monk, "Where have you come from?" This was asking him, "From where does birth come?" in order to test his source. One could answer this question with "Just so," "One cannot altogether have no place of coming," or "It is not difficult to know the place of coming." These three answers all mean the same thing: they present the spontaneous Buddha-nature in its entirety.

These three sentences are precisely Patriarch Yuanwu's appended comments on this line. Had the monk answered in this way, the meaning would already have been perfectly clear, and Chan Master Danxia would not have needed to test him further. But the monk answered, "From down the mountain," which was not very clear. Perhaps he was concealing the truth in order to get past Danxia, or perhaps he was simply muddled and did not understand.

Therefore, Patriarch Yuanwu appended this comment here: "He has passed through your belly wearing straw sandals. He simply does not understand." This comment expresses both possibilities: concealing the truth in order to get past someone, and being muddled and not understanding. If the monk was concealing the truth and secretly hiding a sharp device, then he had "passed through your belly wearing straw sandals." If he was a muddled fellow, then he "did not understand."

Because this monk could not withstand the later test, he was judged to be one who "simply does not understand." Patriarch Yuanwu then appended: "There is an echo in his words; he conceals his coming within them. One knows whether he is yellow or green." Yellow symbolizes maturity, and green symbolizes immaturity.

If this monk had been mature, his single reply, "From down the mountain," would have contained "an echo in his words," secretly implying the source of "From where does birth come?" and carrying a hook intended to lure Danxia in. If he had not been mature, then Danxia had seen through him. Because the monk later stood blinking and "speechless," Patriarch Yuanwu said, "One knows whether he is yellow or green."

Second, Danxia went on to ask, “Have you eaten?” This was a further test of him. Had the monk been quick-witted, he would not have taken the bait. Unfortunately, he was a muddled fellow, and this question was like a pail of foul water poured directly over his head. Patriarch Yuanwu appended this comment: “The first ladle of foul water is poured! Why was this necessary?” He then answered himself: “The balancing star of the scale. One must know the truth of the matter.”

Why did Chan Master Danxia have to ask in this way? This was precisely where Danxia was steady and meticulous; it was the balancing star of the scale. One had to rely on it to test the visiting monk and discover what he was ultimately like. Yet the monk answered, “I have eaten,” and so he took the bait.

Still, this is not certain. If he had deliberately exposed a flaw in order to turn around and lure Danxia in, he could also have answered this way. But unfortunately, he later stood blinking and “speechless”; he truly was a muddled fellow. Therefore, Patriarch Yuanwu appended: “Sure enough, he has run into a bare pillar. Yet someone else has pierced his nostrils. He turns out to be an iron hammer without a hole.” A bare pillar is a wooden post supporting a roof beam; an iron hammer without a hole means someone who fails to grasp the point. This unquestionably judges the monk to be lacking the eye.

Third, Danxia said: “Does the person who brought you food to eat also possess the eye?” This was the second ladle of foul water poured by Danxia.

If the visiting monk had been a person with clear eyes, the first two questions and answers could still have proceeded as above. But here he would have seized upon Danxia’s weakness: you still retain the notion of “possessing the eye,” which clearly shows that you have not swept away the traces of “awakening”! Thus, after saying, “Although this is using one’s position to bully another, it is also deciding the case on the evidence,” Patriarch Yuanwu appended: “At that moment, he should have overturned the Chan seat! What was the point of doing this for no reason?” If the monk had truly overturned the Chan seat at that moment, Danxia would not have let the matter rest; he might have picked up his staff and struck him.

A person with clear eyes would not have feared his staff either, but would have caught it in passing. Then the two of them would have “seized each other and entered the abbot’s quarters,” like Linji and Magu. Not only would the two have laughed heartily together from the depths of their hearts at that very moment, but they would also have left later generations an enduring masterpiece of profound inspiration. But alas, the monk was “speechless.” Was it unjust to call him “lacking the eye”?

“When Xuedou composed the verse in this way, he naturally perceived Danxia’s intent.” Danxia’s sharp devices were steep and severe, and Danxia’s intent was not

so easy to perceive. Patriarch Yuanwu's words, "perceived Danxia's intent," are extremely high praise for Chan Master Xuedou.

Next, let us continue with Xuedou's verse:

The patriarchs of four times seven and two times three: when they bring forth the precious vessel, it becomes a fault.

"Four times seven" is twenty-eight, referring to the twenty-eight patriarchs from the first patriarch, Venerable Kāśyapa, to the twenty-eighth patriarch, Venerable Bodhidharma. This was the single line of authentic transmission of Śākyamuni Buddha in India. "Two times three" is six, referring to the six patriarchs from the First Patriarch, Master Bodhidharma, to the Sixth Patriarch, Master Huineng. This was the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye transmitted through six generations in China. The patriarchs of four times seven and two times three broadly refers to the great patriarchs with clear eyes throughout the orthodox Buddhist tradition—the Chan school.

The precious vessel refers to the Dharma treasure of "direct pointing to the mind, seeing one's nature, and becoming a Buddha," the unsurpassed Dharma gate of sudden awakening. A fault means an error. The Buddhas and patriarchs transmitted the precious vessel of sudden awakening from generation to generation. Why did it instead become a fault? Let us look at Patriarch Yuanwu's commentary on this verse:

It not only entangles Changqing; it even buries at once the twenty-eight patriarchs of India and the six patriarchs of this land. Old Śākyamuni expounded the great treasury of teachings for forty-nine years, and in the end transmitted only this precious vessel. Yongjia said: "It is not an empty thing marked by outward form; it is the personal trace of the Tathāgata's precious staff." If one adopts Baofu's understanding, then when the precious vessel is brought forth, it all becomes a fault.

Changqing said, "When he has exhausted his capacity, does he still become blind?" If Baofu had answered with the single word "Blind," it would have been clean and decisive. Not a single dharma is established: this would have been genuine self-confirmation. It would also have brought out that Changqing's question did not fall into "exhausting the capacity," but became words for testing the other person.

Yet Baofu answered, "Can you call me blind?" He fell entirely into the weeds, falling into "not becoming blind," and thereby entangled Changqing in falling into "exhausting the capacity." This did not merely entangle Changqing alone; it buried altogether the twenty-eight generations of patriarchs in India and the six generations of patriarchs in China, because this unsurpassed great Dharma had been transmitted by them generation after generation.

When the World-Honored Śākyamuni manifested in the human world, he transmitted the Buddha-mind seal. For forty-nine years he expounded the Dharma and delivered sūtras in more than three hundred assemblies. Whether speaking horizontally, vertically, or in tangled ways, all of it served only to set off the moon amid the clouds; he never spoke directly of this maṇi jewel itself. Finally, at the assembly on Vulture Peak, the World-Honored One held up a flower and Kāśyapa smiled. Only then was this maṇi jewel of "direct pointing to the mind, seeing one's nature, and becoming a Buddha" transmitted.

Where is this precious jewel? I tell you: it is right here! They transmitted it generation after generation; yet when they brought forth the precious vessel, it instead became a fault—all because their descendants were unworthy. How could this not cause profound grief and indignation? Patriarch Yuanwu appended: "All the people of the great earth take turns beating their breasts. Give me back my staff! You have entangled this mountain monk too, so that he cannot show his head."

Everyone, if we conduct ourselves poorly, we will bring disrepute upon our forebears. We are descendants of Śākyamuni Buddha and must be upright in conduct and upright in speech. Our words and actions are exceedingly important.

At all times and in all places, we should be upright and selfless. Every word we speak should not depart from the fundamental meaning of Buddha-nature; in our actions, we should act without contrivance and yet leave nothing undone. We should be open-hearted, honorable and forthright, genuine and not hypocritical. Then others will not slander us. Not only will we avoid entangling our forebears, but we will enable the unsurpassed great Dharma transmitted by them to flourish.

Nowadays, some people call themselves Buddhists but set a poor example, thereby inviting this unpleasant saying: "If you seek a black-hearted person, look among those who eat vegetarian food and speak of the Way." What a transgression, what a transgression! They entangle the Buddhas and patriarchs!

The fault is profound, with nowhere to seek it; heaven and humankind alike sink together!

If the fault is slight, there may still be a remedy. But if the fault is grave, it is serious indeed—where then can one seek buddha-nature? Not only will one be unable to recognize buddha-nature or attain liberation; even the blessings of the human and heavenly realms will be buried—heaven and earth alike will sink on dry land! Yet, when it comes to extolling the great matter of the patriarchs, even blessings in the human and heavenly realms are a fault.

How can one be without fault? Let us look at Patriarch Yuanwu's commentary:

“This cannot be explained to you. Simply sit quietly and examine it within his words. Since the fault is grave, why is there nowhere to seek? This is no small fault: it causes the great matter of the patriarchs to sink altogether on dry land.”

It is not merely that the blessings of the human and heavenly realms are buried; the great matter of the patriarchs, too, “sinks altogether on dry land.” Can such a fault still be called slight? Hence it is said, “This is no small fault.”

Yet, since it is a “grave fault,” why is it also said that there is “nowhere to seek”? This does not merely mean that there is nowhere to seek buddha-nature. Where would you seek this “fault”? Thus: “This cannot be explained to you. Simply sit quietly and examine it within his words.” Let us now see how Patriarch Yuanwu examines it within the words.

To “grave fault,” he adds the comment: “Exceedingly grave! Patch-robed monks throughout the world cannot jump free of it.” Then, with a sudden turn of the brush, he asks, “Tell me: how grave is it?” Everyone, can we too make a turning here and leap free from where “one cannot jump free”? If not, then continue reading below.

To “nowhere to seek,” Patriarch Yuanwu adds: “It is beneath your heels! Yet you cannot feel your way to it.” This points out to the student before him: What is beneath your heels? Since it is beneath your heels, why can you not feel your way to it? If you were able just now to turn yourself around and leap free, these two questions would not be questions at all. If you cannot leap free, then you have surely died beneath the words.

Therefore, to “heaven and earth alike sink on dry land,” Patriarch Yuanwu adds: “Patch-robed monks throughout the world are all buried in one pit! Is there anyone still alive?” Patriarch Yuanwu’s compassionate concern is so earnest that, even at this point, he refuses to stop. He again offers this guidance: “Let go of one move.”

“Heaven above! Heaven above!” Whatever the patriarch says, the student clings to; this is because the student’s habitual tendency to cling to objects with the mind is too deep. Can you “let go of one move” and recognize it beneath your heels, in what is closest at hand? If you can recognize it, then: “Heaven above! Heaven above! So this is how it is!” If you cannot recognize it, then: “Heaven above! Heaven above! How pitiable, how pitiable!”

The Song of Enlightenment says: “Practicing Chan amid desires requires the power of insight; like a lotus growing in fire, it is never destroyed. Yongshi committed grave offenses, awakened to the unborn, and became a Buddha long ago—he is still present today. The lion’s roar, the fearless teaching, deeply laments the ignorant and obstinate. They know only that grave offenses obstruct bodhi; they do not see the Tathāgata’s revealed secret key. Two bhikshus committed sexual misconduct

and killing; Upāli's firefly-like light only increased their knots of guilt. The great Vimalakīrti suddenly removed their doubts, just as the blazing sun melts frost and snow." At this point, can you let go of one move, turn yourself around and leap free, and recognize it without doubt?!

(After a long pause, he strikes the table once.) Heaven above! Heaven above!