

## CHAPTER 8



# The Self in Chinese Buddhism

*"Flowers in the air"*

**B**uddhism came to China in the first century CE through contacts along the Silk Road. By the beginning of the sixth century it had grown to rival Daoism as one of China's leading religions. Philosophers of the Consciousness-Only School, influenced by idealist forms of Buddhism from India, argue that there is nothing independent of consciousness and that there is no such thing as a mind or self. There are only mental entities—*dharmas*—that are objects of consciousness and out of which we construct the world of experience. This no-self view shapes the attitude toward the self characteristic of Zen Buddhism, a highly influential Buddhist school starting in the ninth century.

### 8.1 CHINESE BUDDHISM: THE CONSCIOUSNESS-ONLY SCHOOL

Early Buddhist texts spell out a no-soul doctrine. They argue that, when we introspect, we find no self. We become aware only of particular thoughts, sensations, desires, and other mental states. The self cannot be identified with any object, part, or aspect of it nor with any combination of them.

The Chinese Consciousness-Only school develops this tradition. Xuanzang (Hsüan-tsang, 596–664 CE) was born to a Buddhist family near the end of the fifth century. He entered a Buddhist monastery at 13; at 22, he began traveling to monasteries throughout China to study various doctrines. He then left China, against imperial order, to study in India for sixteen years. He spent much of his time at Nalanda University, one of the world's first universities—established in 450 CE and devastated in

1193 by Muslim invaders—which in the seventh century had an extensive library, about 2,000 faculty members, and 10,000 students from as far away as Korea, Indonesia, and Turkey.

At 49, Xuanzang returned to China with 657 Buddhist works previously unavailable there. The emperor, despite Xuanzang's disobedience, gave him a grand welcome and supported him and a large group of assistants. The emperor commissioned from them the largest translation project in Chinese history. When Xuanzang died at age 68, the emperor canceled all his meetings for three days to mourn.

Most of the texts Xuanzang and his assistants translated were of the Yogachara school of Buddhist idealism. Dharmapala (439–507 CE) wrote commentaries on the early Indian Yogacarin Vasabandhu that exerted great influence on Xuanzang's *Treatise on the Establishment of the Doctrine of Consciousness-Only*, which, together with the notes of his student Kwei Zhi (K'uei-chi), articulate a Chinese version of Buddhist idealism.

Xuanzang analyzes the mind into eight consciousnesses: the five senses (sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch), a sense-center consciousness that coordinates the senses and forms concepts, a thought-center consciousness that wills and reasons, and storehouse consciousness, that is, roughly, memory, which serves as a mental warehouse storing materials for later use. All eight are in constant flux. Storehouse consciousness receives sensations and thoughts from other consciousnesses and emits "manifestations," that is, memories, associations, and other thoughts. Thought-center consciousness interacts with storehouse consciousness, using its materials for purposes of intellectual deliberation. Sense-center consciousness combines the five senses into a coherent picture of the external world.

Laws of cause and effect govern these interactions. Objects (*dharma*s, here meaning not duties but objects of thought) are constructions from these eight forms of consciousness. Some *dharma*s—for example, qualities—are purely illusory or imaginary and do not exist. Some depend on other *dharma*s and so exist only temporarily. Some, finally, have their own independent natures and truly exist. Their "perfect reality" is the ultimate reality revealed in *nirvana* experience.

Xuanzang advocates the no-soul doctrine: "The self and *dharma*s are merely constructions based on false ideas and have no reality of their own." Why? "Because neither the real self nor the real *dharma* is possible."

Xuanzang critiques theories of the self that treat it as unified. Where is this unified self? There are only three possible answers. It may be universal, "as extensive as empty space," that is, existing outside the bounds of any particular body. It may be coextensive with the body. Or it may be within the body.

Suppose that the self (or soul) is transcendental, existing outside the bounds of any particular body. Then its interaction with the body becomes inexplicable. And we lack any compelling way to individuate selves: Why should we count people as different selves when they have different bodies? Why can't this old man and that young girl have or be the same self?

Suppose that the self is coextensive with the body. Aristotle, who construes the soul as the form of the body, might have sympathy with such a view. But Xuanzang finds it to be "like child's play." Say Jones gains weight. Does his soul expand? Say he cuts his hair; does he lose part of himself? Moreover, if the soul is coextensive with the body, it is divisible. But how, then, can it be *one* self?

Finally, suppose that the self is within the body. (For example, suppose one identifies the self with the brain, or the nervous system, or neural impulses.) Xuanzang finds it implausible that a small part of the body could cause the entire body to move. Moreover, he worries that the self, on this view, is neither one nor eternal, for there is no unity—on all these options, the self is divisible—and, being material, perishes. And if there is no unity, there is no self.

To summarize these arguments: If mind is separate from body, it cannot interact with the body. If mind is part or whole of the body, it lacks unity, and there is no self.

Next, consider the view that the self is an aggregate of matter, sensation, thought, disposition, and/or consciousness. Again, the self would be neither one nor eternal. The senses, furthermore, can be restricted (as by wearing a blindfold) or injured without changing who a person is. Thoughts and sensations are not continuous, but the self is. A person in a deep, dreamless sleep hardly ceases to exist. In general, all the components—matter, sensation, thought, etc.—depend on external causes. But the self does not. If the cat hadn't walked into the room, Smith would not have thought about feeding it. But we do not want to say that, if her cat hadn't walked into the room, she wouldn't have been herself.

Xuanzang raises other objections. Thought is *intentional*, in the sense that it is about things. A thought is a thought *of* something. But matter isn't *of* anything. So thought isn't matter. The self can take things as its objects; matter cannot. So the self cannot simply be matter.

### 8.1.1 Xuanzang, from *The Treatise on the Establishment of the Doctrine of Consciousness-Only*

#### 1. The Nonexistence of the Self

1. Because the ideas of the self (*atman*) and *dhar-mas* are [constructions produced by causes and therefore] false,

Their characters of all kinds arise.

These characters are [constructions] based on the transformations of consciousness, which are of three kinds.

2a. They are the consciousness (the eighth, or storehouse, consciousness) whose fruits

(retribution) ripen at later times, the consciousness (the seventh or thought-center consciousness) that deliberates, and the consciousness (the sense-center consciousness and the five-sense consciousness) that discriminates spheres of objects.

The *Treatise* says:

Both the world and sacred doctrines declare that the self and *dhar-mas* are merely constructions based on false ideas and have no reality of their own. ... On what basis are [the self and *dhar-mas*] produced? Their characters are all constructions

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Source: Hsüan-tsang, *The Treatise on the Establishment of the Doctrine of Consciousness-Only*, from Wing-Tsit Chan (ed.), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963, 1991 renewed PUP. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

based on the evolution and transformation of consciousness. . . .

How do we know that there is really no sphere of objects but only inner consciousness which produces what seem to be the external spheres of objects? Because neither the real self nor the real *dharma* is possible.

Why is the real self impossible? Theories of the self held by the various schools may be reduced to three kinds. The first holds that the substance of the self is eternal, universal, and as extensive as empty space. It acts anywhere and as a consequence enjoys happiness or suffers sorrow. The second holds that although the substance of the self is eternal, its extension is indeterminate, because it expands or contracts according to the size of the body. The third holds that the substance of the self is eternal and infinitesimal like an atom, lying deeply and moving around within the body and thus acts.

The first theory is contrary to reason. Why? If it is held that the self is eternal, universal, and as extensive as empty space, it should not enjoy happiness or suffer sorrow along with the body. Furthermore, being eternal and universal, it should be motionless. How can it act along with the body? Again, is the self so conceived the same or different among all sentient beings? If it is the same, when one being acts, receives the fruits of action, or achieves salvation, all beings should do the same. But this would of course be a great mistake. If it is different, then the selves of all sentient beings would universally penetrate one another and their substance would be mixed, and since the field of abode of all selves is the same, the acts of one being or the fruits of action received by him should be the act or fruits of all beings. If it is said that action and fruits belong to each being separately and there would not be the mistake just described, such a contention is also contrary to reason, because action, fruits, and body are identified with all selves and it is unreasonable for them to belong to one self but not to another. When one is saved, all should be saved, for the Dharma (truth)

practiced and realized would be identical with all selves.

The second theory is also contrary to reason. Why? If in substance the self always remains in the same state, it should not expand or contract along with the body. If it expands or contracts like wind in a bag or a pipe, it is not always remaining in the same state. Furthermore, if the self follows the body, it would be divisible. How can it be held that the substance of the self is one? What this school says is like child's play.

The last theory is also contrary to reason. Why? Since the self is infinitesimal like an atom, how can it cause the whole big body to move? If it is said that although it is small it goes through the body like a whirling wheel of fire so that the whole body seems to move, then the self so conceived is neither one nor eternal, for what comes and goes is neither eternal nor one.

Furthermore, there are three additional theories of the self. The first holds that the self is identical with the aggregates (namely, matter, sensation, thought, disposition, and consciousness). The second holds that it is separated from the aggregates. And the third holds that it is neither identical with nor separated from the aggregates. The first theory is contrary to reason, for the self would be like the aggregates and is therefore neither eternal nor one. Furthermore, the internal matters (the five senses) are surely not the real self, for they are physically obstructed (or restricted) like external matters. The mind and mental qualities are not the real self either, for they are not always continuous and depend on various causes to be produced. Other conditioned things and matters are also not the real self, for like empty space they are without intelligence.

The second theory is also contrary to reason, for the self would then be like empty space, which neither acts nor receives fruits of action.

The last theory is also contrary to reason. This theory allows that the self is based on the aggregates but is neither identical with nor separated from them. The self would then be like a vase [which depends on clay] and has no reality of its

own. Also, since it is impossible to say whether it is produced from causes or not produced from causes, it is also impossible to say whether it is a self or not. Therefore the real self conceived in the theory cannot be established.

Again, does the substance of the real self conceived by the various schools think or not? If it does, it would not be eternal, because it does not think all the time. If it does not, it would be like empty space, which neither acts nor receives fruits of action. Therefore on the basis of reason, the self conceived by the theory cannot be established.

Again, does this substance of the real self conceived by the various schools perform any function or not? If it does, it would be like hands and feet and would not be eternal. If it does not, it would be like [illusory] horns of a hare and not the real self. Therefore in either case, the self conceived by them cannot be established.

Again, is the substance of the real self conceived by the various schools an object of the view of the self or not? If it is not, how do advocates of the theory know that there is really a self? If it is, then there should be a view of the self that does not involve any perversion, for that would be knowledge of what really is. In that case, how is it that the perfectly true doctrines believed in by those holding the theory of the self all denounce the view of the self and praise the view of the non-self? [Advocates of the theory themselves] declare that the view of the non-self will lead to Nirvana while clinging to the view of the self will lead to sinking in the sea of life and death (transmigration). Does an erroneous view ever lead to Nirvana and a correct view, on the contrary, lead to transmigration?

Again, the various views of the self [actually] do not take the real self as an object, because it has objects [which are not itself] like the mind takes others [such as external matters] as objects. The object of the view of the self is certainly not the real self, because it [the view] is an object like other *dharma*s. Therefore the view of the self does not take the real self as an object. Only because the various aggregates are transformed and manifested by

inner consciousness, all kinds of imagination and conjecture result in accordance with one's own erroneous opinions. ...

## 6. Consciousness-Only

... Therefore everything produced from causes, everything not produced from causes, and everything seemingly real or unreal, are all inseparable from consciousness. The word "only" is intended to deny that there are real things separated from consciousness, but not to deny that there are mental qualities, *dharma*s, and so forth inseparable from consciousness. The word "transform" means that the various inner consciousnesses transform and manifest the characters which seem to be the external spheres of the self and *dharma*s. This process of transformation and change is called *discrimination* because it is its own nature to make erroneous discriminations [that things are real]. It refers to the mind and mental qualities in the three worlds. These, what it holds to be spheres of objects, are called *objects of discrimination*, that is, the self and *dharma*s which it erroneously holds to be real. Because of this discrimination, which evolves characters which seem to be the external spheres of the false self and *dharma*s, what is discriminated as the real self and *dharma*s are all absolutely nonexistent. This theory has been extensively refuted by the doctrines [of our teachers] already cited.

Therefore everything is consciousness-only, because erroneous discrimination in itself is admitted as a fact. Since "only" does not deny the existence of *dharma*s not separated from consciousness, therefore true Emptiness and so forth have the nature of being. In this way we steer far away from the two extremes of holding that *dharma*s are real [although they have no nature of their own] or holding that *dharma*s are unreal [although they do function as causes and effects], establish the principle of Consciousness-Only, and hold correctly to the Middle Path.

## 8.2 TIBETAN BUDDHISM: THE SELF AS TRANSCENDENT

Buddhism reached Tibet in 173 CE and became deeply ingrained into Tibetan life. Kings of Tibet sent people to India to learn Sanskrit and study Buddhism; they also invited prominent Indian thinkers, including Shankara and Nagarjuna. In the ninth century, King Trisong Deutsen (790–844) commissioned teams of scholars—108 brought from India, together with a comparable number from Tibet—to translate Buddhist texts into Tibetan and invited many famous Buddhist teachers, including Padmasambhava, to come to Tibet to teach. He built a monastery and teaching center, Samye, saw the first monks ordained there, and established Buddhism as the state religion. When Padmasambhava arrived in Tibet, the king gave him a remarkably beautiful young woman as a gift, to be his assistant and consort. She was a noble's daughter who had repeatedly rejected marriage proposals; having thus made many enemies, she was under the king's protection. That young woman, Yeshe Tsogyal (late 700s–mid-800s), became Padmasambhava's foremost student. She helped to make the king's dream of a temple complex a reality by gaining the support of many of Tibet's leading women. Eventually, she became a noted Buddhist teacher in her own right, traveling throughout the country and collecting many followers. Her primary means of teaching—indeed, in her view, the only fully legitimate form of teaching—was direct and oral. (This marks Tsogyal's Buddhism as *esoteric*, something that can be transmitted only by direct personal contact.) Concerned about the future, however, she wrote down many of Padmasambhava's teachings as well as her own and hid them in temples and other sacred spots. Most of the hidden texts remained secret for centuries, being discovered only 300 to 800 years after her death.

Yeshe Tsogyal's Buddhism is in the *Vajrayana* ("Lightning" or "Diamond" Raft) tradition, also known as Mantrayana or Tantric Buddhism. It adds to early Buddhist teachings the study of methods for accelerating enlightenment. These Tantra techniques are designed to produce enlightenment within a single lifetime. Tantric Buddhists do not reject Theravada and Mahayana doctrines; they accept those paths but maintain that more direct, faster routes are possible. Those faster routes depend on the Four Purities:

1. Seeing your body as the body of the deity
2. Seeing your environment as the *mandala*, the "pure land" of the deity
3. Seeing your enjoyments as the pleasures of the deity
4. Acting only for the benefit of others.

Those who exhibit the Four Purities are *bodhisattvas*.

The central concept of Tantric Buddhism as taught by Padmasambhava and Tsogyal is *dzogchen*, "great perfection," which is the natural and original state of every sentient being. It is a primordial, undifferentiated, "intrinsic" awareness that has no form of its own. This awareness can take on forms, representing anything within it without changing its nature. It is a mirror reflecting the world. The secret to

enlightenment—to overcoming desire, overcoming suffering, and hence to nirvana experience—is maintaining this sort of awareness.

Known as “pure experience” by Japanese philosophers of the Kyoto School and as “clear mind” by other Zen thinkers, this state of awareness is achieved in three stages. First, the teacher must introduce the student to the great perfection, teaching him or her to recognize intrinsic awareness. Second, the teacher must train the student to investigate, gaining familiarity and confidence with this state. Finally, the teacher must train the student to maintain this state in the face of inevitable distractions. The goal is “the View,” an unbroken contemplation manifesting intrinsic awareness continuously. Those who achieve this and are capable of teaching it to others are “gurus,” or *Lamas*. Tantric Buddhists teach a variety of techniques for achieving this, including meditation, chanting, concentration on *mandalas*, visualization, and sexual practices.

### 8.2.1 Yeshe Tsogyal, from *Autobiography*

#### Tsogyel's *Dzokchen* Instruction

(A *dakini* is a sky dancer or sky walker, a minor goddess.)

Then Odren Zhonnu Pel made this petition:

O Yeshe Tsogyelma!  
When you go to the land of Orgyen  
How should we incorrigible creatures  
Practice Vision Meditation and Action?  
I beg you for a little advice.

In response I gave this instruction:

Listen, faithful Zhonnu Pel.  
The fledgling *dakini*-bird nesting in a crag  
Could not conceive how easy was flight  
Until her skill in the six vehicles was perfected;  
But her potential realised, wings beating with  
hidden strength,  
Breaking the back of even the razor-edged wind,  
She arrived at whatever destination she chose.  
It was like that with me, the girl Tsogyel;

Although I longed for Buddhahood I was  
forced to wait  
Until I had perfected my skill in meditation  
practice.

Practising to perfection the creative and  
fulfilment processes and *dzokchen*,  
This corporeal bundle dissolved in light,  
And now I go into the presence of Orgyen  
Guru.

But I will leave you with these few words of  
testament.

“Vision” is but a quality of all meditative  
existence;

Yet absorbed in reality, experiencing its  
nature,

You find no mere emptiness for there is  
awareness and radiance,

Yet nothing permanent for all is intrinsically  
empty.

That essential insight is called “Vision.”  
What are the modes of Vision?

In the creative mode it is the deity;

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*Source:* Excerpts from *Sky Dancer: The Secret Life and Songs of the Lady Yeshe Tsogyel*. Translated with commentary by Keith Dowman. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984. Reprinted with permission of Snow Lion Publications, [www.snowlionpub.com](http://www.snowlionpub.com).

When you practise radiation and re-absorption, it is compassion;

When you practise the fulfilment process, it is *mahamudra* (direct access to the nature of experience),

The essence without permanence or flux.

Turn your eyes inwards upon your own reality

And you see yourself, but you see nothing:

That visionary perception in itself,

That is what is designated "Vision."

"Meditation" is the basis of all meditative existence;

When absorbed in reality, experiencing its nature,

Intent upon seeing the essential Vision,

Focusing an unwavering attention free of any limitation,

That is called meditative absorption.

And what are the modes of meditation?

Whether you practise the creative or fulfilment process

Peak experience shows you the ineffable reality—

You may practise any of the innumerable modes of meditation.

In truth, whatever your technique, the creative or fulfilment process,

In a condition free from depression, torpor and mental fog,

Registering undistracted silence,

If you focus upon universal sameness, you practise "Meditation."

"Action" is the dynamic form of meditative existence;

When absorbed in its reality, experiencing its nature,

Sure in clarity of Vision, Meditation an ineradicable habit,

In a state of imperturbable relaxation,

You will see yourself perform a variety of actions.

What are the specific modes of Action?

Whatever the variable form of your activity,

Based in primal purity there is no conflict with meditative experience,

Which is intensified and elevated.

In truth, working, sleeping, coming, going,

Eating, sitting—in the performance of every activity

Is the quality of "Action."

Because Action is an integral function of meditation practice—

Creative and fulfilment processes and *dzokchen*, etc.

There is nothing else to say.

### The Supreme Being Is the Dakini Queen of the Lake of Awareness!

The Supreme Being is the *dakini* queen of the lake of awareness!

I have vanished into fields of lotus-light, the plenum of dynamic space,

To be born in the inner sanctum of an immaculate lotus;

Do not despair, have faith!

When you have withdrawn attachment to this rocky defile,

This barbaric Tibet, full of war and strife, Abandon unnecessary activity and rely on solitude.

Practice energy control, purify your psychic nerves and seed-essence,

And cultivate *mahamudra* and *dzokchen*.

The Supreme Being is the *dakini* queen of the lake of awareness!

Attaining humility, through Guru Pema

Jungne's compassion I followed him,

And now I have finally gone into his presence;

Do not despair, but pray!

When you see your karmic body as vulnerable as a bubble,

Realising the truth of impermanence, and that in death you are helpless,

Disabuse yourself of fantasies of eternity,

Make your life a practice of *sadhana* (spiritual practice),

And cultivate the experience that takes you to the place where *ati* (the highest form of yoga) ends.



### 8.3 ZEN BUDDHISM: THE SELF AS EMPTY

Zen Buddhism originated in China, and spread to much of East Asia. Zen offers a hard-to-classify theory of self. The Japanese word *zen* derives from the Chinese *chan*, which, in turn, derives from the Sanskrit *dhyaana* ("meditation"). In China, however, the Indian idea of meditation blended with a Daoist idea of concentration and attunement to Dao.

Theravada Buddhism, an early Buddhist philosophy and still the dominant school in southeast Asia, stresses the monastic life. Mahayana Buddhism, which today is prevalent in China, Japan, and Korea, developed as early as the first century CE, stressing the universal possibility of enlightenment. Indeed, *mahayana* means "Great Vehicle," a path for all to achieve *nirvana*. Mahayana Buddhism split into five schools in China, one of which became Zen. Other schools stressed gradual enlightenment based on a process of eliminating error and establishing mental quietude. Zen, a southern subschool, stressed sudden enlightenment. The Buddha is everywhere; anything can bring about the realization of Buddha Nature, a state of mind in which reality becomes transparent and crystalline.

Central to the development of Zen is the Mahayana tradition of patriarchs and lineages. According to Chinese texts, Bodhidharma came to China in 520, met with Emperor Wu, and stayed in the Shaolinsi monastery for nine years. He brought to China a special "transmission outside the scriptures." The Buddha, near the end of his life, delivered what is called the Flower Sermon. He said nothing; he simply held up a single flower and smiled. Two disciples, Kashyapa and Ananda, understood the Buddha's meaning and becoming "awakened." These patriarchs—including, most importantly for China, Bodhidharma, the first Chinese patriarch and the twenty-eighth of India—passed along a special vector of enlightenment not to be transmitted by words. Sometimes called a *message*, it is said to lie beyond the scriptures.

Nevertheless, some doctrines cluster around this vector, including, for both Indian and Chinese Mahayanins:

- *Interdependent origination*: The view that all things interrelate and affect one another. Each *dharma*—in Buddhist usage, each object or "quality," each little bit of experience, including an individual moment of self-consciousness—cannot be understood except in relation to other *dharms*.
- *Emptiness*: The nature of the *dharms* is Emptiness. The ultimate truth of the world is Emptiness (in Sanskrit, taken over into Japanese, *sunyata*).

The *locus classicus* of the emptiness doctrine is the *Heart Sutra*, written originally in Sanskrit but translated by Xuanzang into Chinese and influential primarily on east Asian Buddhist thinkers.

Zen's doctrine of unity and inseparability of mind or consciousness implies that all distinctions are unfounded. Normally the mind thinks by discriminating, telling one thing from another. But this leads to suffering. The mind discriminates through being shackled and put in the service of desire. The Four Noble Truths teach that desire and suffering are inextricably linked. To escape suffering, we must eliminate desire. To do that, we must recognize that everything is empty. We must recognize that all differentiations are ultimately meaningless impositions or projections of the mind. As

the *Avatamsaka Sutra* has it, "If you wish to understand thoroughly all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future, then you should view the nature of the whole universe as being created by the mind alone."

Zen masters sometimes use extreme methods to transcend the dividing mind. Yixuan (I-Hsüan, d. 867) founded the Linji (Lin-chi) school. Called *Rinzai* in Japanese, it was the most radical of the ninth-century Zen schools. It encouraged the "lightning" method of shouting and beating to prepare the mind for enlightenment. (Yixuan himself is often called Linji or Rinzai.) *Koan*, paradoxes, help the mind transcend everyday concepts as mediated by language: "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" "What was your face before you were born?" A seeker strives to solve the puzzle and thereby to break the mind's attachments.

### 8.3.1 From the *Heart Sutra*

Om Homage to the Perfection of Wisdom the  
Lovely, the Holy!

Avalokita, the Holy Lord and Bodhisattva, was moving in the deep course of the wisdom which has gone beyond. He looked down from on high, he beheld but five heaps, and he saw that in their own-being they were empty.

Here, O Sariputra, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form, the same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses, and consciousness.

Here, O Sariputra, all *dharmas* are marked with emptiness; they are not produced or stopped, not defiled or immaculate, not deficient or complete.

Therefore, O Sariputra, in emptiness there is no form nor feeling, nor perception, nor impulse, nor consciousness;

No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; no forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables or objects of mind; no sight-organ element, and so forth, until we come to:

No mind-consciousness element; there is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so forth, until we come to: There is no decay and death, no extinction of decay and death. There is no suffering, no origination, no stopping, no path. There is no cognition, no attainment and no non-attainment.

Therefore, O Sariputra, it is because of his non-attainmentness that a Bodhisattva, through having relied on the Perfection of Wisdom (*prajna-paramita*), dwells without thought-coverings. In the absence of thought-coverings he has not been made to tremble, he has overcome what can upset, and in the end he attains to Nirvana.

All those who appear as Buddhas in the three periods of time fully awake to the utmost, right and perfect Enlightenment because they have relied on the Perfection of Wisdom.

Therefore one should know the Perfection of Wisdom as the great mantra, the mantra of great knowledge, the utmost mantra, the unequalled mantra, allayer of all suffering, in truth—for what

could go wrong? By the *prajna-paramita* has this mantra been delivered. It runs like this:

*gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha.*

(Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond, O what an awakening, *svaha!*)

This completes the Heart of perfect Wisdom.

### 8.3.2 From *The Recorded Conversations of Zen Master Yixuan*

A monk asked, "What is the basic idea of the Law preached by the Buddha?" Thereupon the Master shouted at him. The monk paid reverence.

The Master said, "The Master and the monk can argue all right."

Question: "Master, whose tune are you singing? Whose tradition are you perpetuating?"

The Master said, "When I was a disciple of Huang-po, I asked him three times and I was beaten three times."

As the monk hesitated about what to say, the Master shouted at him and then beat him, saying, "Don't nail a stick into empty space."

2. The Master ascended the hall and said, "Over a lump of reddish flesh there sits a pure man who transcends and is no longer attached to any class of Buddhas or sentient beings. He comes in and out of your sense organs all the time. If you are not yet clear about it, look, look!"

At that point a monk came forward and asked, "What is a pure man who does not belong to any class of Buddhas or sentient beings?" The Master came right down from his chair and, taking hold of the monk, exclaimed, "Speak! Speak!" As the monk deliberated what to say, the Master let him go, saying, "What dried human excrement-removing stick is the pure man who does not belong to any class of Buddhas or sentient beings!" Thereupon he returned to his room.

3. The Master ascended the hall. A monk asked, "What is the basic idea of the Law preached by the Buddha?" The Master lifted up his swatter. The monk shouted, and the Master beat him.

[The monk asked again], "What is the basic idea of the Law preached by the Buddha?" The Master again lifted up his swatter. The monk shouted, and the Master shouted also. As the monk hesitated about what to say, the Master beat him.

Thereupon the Master said, "Listen, men. Those who pursue after the Law will not escape from death. I was in my late Master Huang-po's place for twenty years. Three times I asked him about the basic idea of the Law preached by the Buddha and three times he bestowed upon me the staff. I felt I was struck only by a dried stalk. Now I wish to have a real beating. Who can do it to me?"

One monk came out of the group and said, "I can do it."

The Master picked up the staff to give him. As he was about to take it over, the Master beat him.

5. The Master told the congregation: "Seekers of the Way. In Buddhism no effort is necessary. All one has to do is to do nothing, except to move his bowels, urinate, put on his clothing, eat his meals, and lie down if he is tired. The stupid will laugh at

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Source: *The Recorded Conversations of Zen Master I-Hsüan*, from Wing-Tsit Chan (ed.), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963, 1991 renewed PUP. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

him, but the wise one will understand. An ancient person said, 'One who makes effort externally is surely a fool.'

6. Question: "What is meant by the mind's not being different at different times?"

The Master answered, "As you deliberated to ask the question, your mind has already become different. Therefore the nature and character of *dharma*s have become differentiated. Seekers of the Way, do not make any mistake. All mundane and supramundane *dharma*s have no nature of their own. Nor have they the nature to be produced [by causes]. They have only the name Emptiness, but even the name is empty. Why do you take this useless name as real? You are greatly mistaken! ... If you seek after the Buddha, you will be taken over by the devil of the Buddha, and if you seek after the patriarch, you will be taken over by the devil of the patriarch. If you seek after anything, you will always suffer. It is better not to do anything. Some unworthy priests tell their disciples that the Buddha is the ultimate and that he went through three infinitely long periods, fulfilled his practice, and then achieved Buddhahood. Seekers of the Way, if you say that the Buddha is the ultimate, why did he die lying down sidewise in the forest in Kusinagara after having lived for eighty years? Where is he now? ... Those who truly seek after the Law will have no use for the Buddha. They will have no use for the *bodhisattvas* or *arhats*. And they will have no use for any excellence in the three worlds (of desires, matter, and pure spirit). They will be distinctly free and not bound by material things. Heaven and earth may turn upside down but I shall have no more uncertainty. The Buddhas of the ten cardinal directions may appear before me and I shall not feel happy for a single moment. The three paths (of fire, blood, and swords) to hell may suddenly appear, but I shall not be afraid for a single moment. Why? Because I know that all *dharma*s are devoid of characters. They exist when there is transformation [in the mind] and cease to exist when there is no transformation. The three worlds are but the mind, and all *dharma*s are consciousness only. Therefore [they are all] dreams, illusions,

and flowers in the air. What is the use of grasping and seizing them? ...

"Kill anything that you happen on. Kill the Buddha if you happen to meet him. Kill a patriarch or an *arhat* if you happen to meet him. Kill your parents or relatives if you happen to meet them. Only then can you be free, not bound by material things, and absolutely free and at ease. ..."

"I have no trick to give people. I merely cure disease and set people free. ... My views are few. I merely put on clothing and eat meals as usual, and pass my time without doing anything. You people coming from the various directions have all made up your minds to seek the Buddha, seek the Law, seek emancipation, and seek to leave the three worlds. Crazy people! If you want to leave the three worlds, where can you go? 'Buddha' and 'patriarchs' are terms of praise and also bondage. Do you want to know where the three worlds are? They are right in your mind which is now listening to the Law."

7. Ma-ku came to participate in a session. As he arranged his seating cushion, he asked, "Which face of the twelve-face Kuan-yin faces the proper direction?"

The Master got down from the rope chair. With one hand he took away Ma-ku's cushion and with the other he held Ma-ku, saying, "Which direction does the twelve-face Kuan-yin face?"

Ma-ku turned around and was about to sit in the rope chair. The Master picked up the staff and beat him. Ma-ku having grasped the staff, the two dragged each other into the room.

8. The Master asked a monk: "Sometimes a shout is like the sacred sword of the Diamond King. Sometimes a shout is like a golden-haired lion squatting on the ground. Sometimes a shout is like a rod or a piece of grass [used to attract fish]. And sometimes a shout is like one which does not function as a shout at all. How do you know which one to use?"

As the monk was deliberating what to say, the Master shouted.

9. When the Master was among Huang-po's congregation, his conduct was very pure. The senior monk said with a sigh, "Although he

is young, he is different from the rest!" He then asked, "Sir, how long have you been here?"

The Master said, "Three years."

The senior monk said, "Have you ever gone to the head monk (Huang-po) and asked him questions?"

The Master said, "I have not. I wouldn't know what to ask."

The senior monk said, "Why don't you go and ask the head monk what the basic idea of the Law preached by the Buddha clearly is?"

The Master went and asked the question. But before he finished, Huang-po beat him. When he came back, the senior monk asked him how the conversation went. The Master said, "Before I finished my question, he already had beaten me. I don't understand. The senior monk told him to go and ask again."

The Master did and Huang-po beat him again. In this way he asked three times and got beaten three times. ...Huang-po said, "If you go to Ta-yu's place, he will tell you why."

The Master went to Ta-yu, who asked him, "Where have you come from?"

The Master said, "I am from Huang-po's place."

Ta-yu said, "What did Huang-po have to say?"

The Master said, "I asked three times about the basic idea of the Law preached by the Buddha and I was beaten three times. I don't know if I was mistaken."

Ta-yu said, "Old kindly Huang-po has been so earnest with you and you still came here to ask if you were mistaken!"

As soon as the Master heard this, he understood and said, "After all, there is not much in Huang-po's Buddhism."