Song of Realizing the Way

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Have you not seen: “A carefree person of the Way, beyond learning and contrivance,” who neither eliminates deluded thoughts nor seeks the true? The true nature of ignorance is itself Buddha-nature; this illusory empty body is itself the dharmakāya. Awakening to the dharmakāya, one finds not a single thing. The original source of one’s nature is the naturally genuine Buddha. The five aggregates are floating clouds, vainly coming and going; the three poisons are water bubbles, empty in their appearing and vanishing.

Realize the true aspect: there is neither self nor dharmas. In an instant, the karma of Avīci is extinguished. But if one deceives sentient beings with false words, one will bring upon oneself aeons as numerous as dust motes of having one’s tongue pulled out. Suddenly awaken to the Tathāgata Chan: the six perfections and myriad practices are complete within its essence. In dreams, the six realms are vividly present; after awakening, the great thousandfold world is utterly empty.

There is neither sin nor blessing, neither loss nor gain. Within the nature of quiescent cessation, do not seek or search. The dusty mirror of the past has never been polished; today it must be clearly discerned. Who is without thought? Who is unborn? If there truly is no birth, then no birth is excluded. Call forth a wooden puppet and ask it: by striving to seek Buddhahood, when will it ever be attained?

Let go of the four elements; do not grasp at them. Within the nature of quiescent cessation, simply follow your food and drink. All conditioned activities are impermanent; everything is empty. This is the Tathāgata’s great perfect enlightenment. I speak decisively, to reveal the true monastic: some will not allow feelings to interrogate them. The Buddha has sealed the root source directly; I cannot pluck leaves and seek branches.

The maṇi jewel is not recognized by people, yet it is personally received within the Tathāgata-garbha. Its six kinds of spiritual functioning are neither empty nor not empty; its single sphere of perfect radiance is neither form nor not form. Purify the

five faculties and attain the five powers—only realization can know how unfathomable this is. Seeing one's reflection in a mirror is not difficult; how can one grasp the moon in water?

Ever walking alone, ever treading alone, those who have realized the Way travel together on the road to nirvāṇa. Their bearing is ancient and their spirit clear; their manner naturally lofty. Though their appearance is worn and their bones are strong, people pay them no heed. The impoverished disciple of Śākyamuni calls himself poor, yet only his body is poor—the Way is not poor. In poverty, his body is always clad in ragged robes; in the Way, his heart conceals a priceless treasure.

This priceless treasure is inexhaustible in use; in benefiting beings and responding to their capacities, it is never miserly. The three bodies and four wisdoms are complete within its essence; the eight liberations and six supernormal powers are sealed in the mind-ground. Those of highest capacity resolve one matter and all is resolved; those of middling and lesser capacity hear much yet believe little. Simply remove the filthy garment from within your breast—who can boast outwardly of diligence?

Let others slander me; let them find fault with me. Trying to burn the sky with fire merely exhausts them. What I hear is just like drinking sweet dew; it melts away at once and enters the inconceivable. Regard malicious words as merit and virtue: they thereby become my good spiritual friends. Without slander giving rise to enemies and kin, how could the power of compassion and forbearance in the unborn be made manifest?

The teaching is understood, and its exposition is understood; samādhi and wisdom are perfectly bright, without stagnating in emptiness. It is not only I who have now attained realization: the essence of the Buddhas as numerous as the Ganges' sands is all the same. The lion's roar, the fearless teaching—when the hundred beasts hear it, their brains split apart. Fragrant elephants flee in panic and lose their majesty; devas and nāgas listen silently and rejoice.

Traveling rivers and seas, crossing mountains and streams, one seeks teachers and visits practitioners of the Way in order to investigate Chan. Since recognizing the road of Caoxi, I have known that birth and death have nothing to do with me. Walking is also Chan; sitting is also Chan. In speech and silence, movement and stillness, the essence remains at ease. Even when encountering blades and swords, one is ever tranquil; even poison is leisurely endured.

My teacher beheld Dīpaṃkara Buddha and, through many kalpas, was once the Immortal of Forbearance. How many times was he born, how many times did he die? Birth and death continued endlessly, with no fixed end. Since suddenly awakening to the unborn, what joy or sorrow can there be amid honor and

disgrace? Entering deep mountains and dwelling in an araṇya, beneath towering, secluded ancient pines, he roams at ease and sits quietly in the dwelling of a wilderness monk. In silent solitude, he lives in true ease.

Awakening is complete; no effort need be applied. All conditioned dharmas are unlike it. Giving while attached to appearances brings heavenly blessings, like shooting an arrow upward into empty space. When its force is exhausted, the arrow falls again, bringing unsatisfactory circumstances in a future life. How could this compare with the gate of the unconditioned true aspect? One leap takes one directly into the ground of the Tathāgata.

Only attain the root; do not worry about the branches. It is like pure lapis lazuli containing a precious moon. Once one can understand this wish-fulfilling jewel, benefiting oneself and others will never be exhausted. The river moon shines; the pine wind blows. What is there to do through the clear night? The jewel of Buddha-nature precepts and the seal of the mind-ground are garments of mist, dew, clouds, and rosy vapors upon its essence. The dragon-subduing bowl and tiger-releasing staff, their two-ringed vajra finials ringing clearly—these are not empty adornments held merely for appearance, but the personal traces of the Tathāgata's precious staff.

Do not seek the true or cut off delusion; clearly know that both dharmas are empty and without characteristics. Without characteristics, without emptiness, without non-emptiness—this is the Tathāgata's true aspect. The mind-mirror is bright and reflects without obstruction; vast, luminous, and transparent, it pervades worlds as numerous as grains of sand. The myriad forms of existence appear as reflections within it; its single sphere of perfect radiance is neither within nor without.

To speak wildly of emptiness and reject cause and effect is reckless and unrestrained, inviting calamity and misfortune. Abandoning existence and clinging to emptiness is likewise a sickness, like fleeing drowning only to throw oneself into fire. Abandon deluded mind and grasp true principle: the mind that grasps and abandons becomes artificial and deceptive. When practitioners fail to understand the application of cultivation, they deeply mistake a thief for their own son.

Damaging the Dharma treasure and destroying merit and virtue—does it not all arise from this mind-consciousness? Therefore, the Chan gate completely resolves mind and directly enters the power of the knowledge and vision of the unborn. A great person grasps the sword of wisdom: its prajñā edge is a vajra flame. It not only crushes the minds of non-Buddhist paths, but long ago made the heavenly māras lose heart.

Thunder the Dharma thunder, strike the Dharma drum, spread clouds of compassion, and shower sweet dew. Dragons and elephants tread forth, moistening

without limit; the three vehicles and five natures all awaken. The rich cream of Snow Mountain contains no admixture; it yields only ghee, which I constantly partake of. One nature perfectly penetrates all natures; one dharma universally contains all dharmas. One moon appears in all waters; all water-moons are contained in one moon. The dharmakāyas of all Buddhas enter my nature; my nature joins as one with the Tathāgata. One bhūmi contains all bhūmis; it is neither form nor mind nor karmic activity. In the snap of a finger, the eighty thousand Dharma gates are perfected; in an instant, three asaṃkhyeya kalpas are extinguished. All numerical expressions are not numerical expressions—what connection do they have with my numinous awareness?

It cannot be disparaged or praised; its essence is like empty space, without shore or boundary. Never departing from this very place, it is ever clear and still; seek it, and you will know it cannot be seen. It cannot be grasped or abandoned; within the unattainable, it is simply thus attained. Silent when speaking, speaking when silent, the great gate of giving is open without obstruction. If someone asks me what school I understand, tell them: the power of mahāprajñā. Whether it is or is not, people do not recognize it; its accordant and contrary workings are beyond the reckoning even of devas. I have practiced through many kalpas; this is not idle deception.

Raise the Dharma banner and establish the essential principle: the Buddha's clear injunction declares Caoxi to be so. Mahākāśyapa was the first to transmit the lamp; the records of India count twenty-eight generations. When the Dharma flowed eastward into this land, Bodhidharma became the first patriarch. The robe was transmitted through six generations, renowned throughout the world; how countless are those who later attained the Way! Truth is not established; delusion is originally empty. Being and nonbeing are both relinquished, yet one does not abide in empty emptiness. The twenty gates of emptiness are originally not grasped; the essence of one nature is naturally identical with the Tathāgata.

Mind is the faculty; dharmas are objects. The two are like marks upon a mirror. When the marks and grime are wholly removed, the light first appears; when mind and dharmas are both forgotten, the nature is true. Alas for the degenerate age and these evil times: sentient beings have scant blessings and are difficult to tame. Far removed from the sages, wrong views are deep; māras are strong and the Dharma weak, with much hostility and harm. Hearing of the Tathāgata's gate of sudden teaching, they resent it and wish to smash it to pieces. What one does lies in the mind; its calamity lies in one's body. There is no need to make resentful complaints or worry about others. If you wish not to incur the karma of the Avīci hell, do not slander the Tathāgata's true Dharma wheel.

In a sandalwood forest there are no other trees; dense and deep, it is where lions dwell. In the quiet forest they roam alone; flying birds and running beasts all keep

their distance. Lion cubs are followed by the whole pride; at three years old, they can already give a great roar. But if wild jackals pursue the Dharma King, even century-old monsters merely open their mouths in vain.

The perfect and sudden teaching does not accommodate human sentiment. If there is doubt that remains unresolved, one must argue it through directly. It is not that this mountain monk flaunts self and others; I fear that practitioners may fall into the pit of annihilationism or eternalism. What is not not, what is not is—if one differs by a hair's breadth, one goes astray by a thousand miles. If it is so, the dragon girl instantly becomes a Buddha; if it is not so, Śubhakarasiṃha falls alive into hell.

In my early years I accumulated learning and inquiry; I also studied commentaries and searched through sūtras and treatises. Discriminating names and characteristics without knowing when to stop, I was like one counting sand after entering the sea, exhausting myself in vain. Yet the Tathāgata sternly rebuked me: what benefit is there in counting another's treasures? I had long stumbled along, realizing that my efforts were empty; for many years I had vainly been a traveler amid the dust and wind.

With deviant dispositions and mistaken understanding, one does not comprehend the Tathāgata's perfect and sudden teaching. The two vehicles may be diligent, yet lack bodhicitta; non-Buddhist paths may be clever, yet lack wisdom. They are foolish and childish, giving rise to a real understanding from an empty fist or a pointing finger. Clinging to the finger as the moon, they labor in vain; amid faculties, objects, and dharmas, they vainly fabricate strange things.

To see not a single dharma is the Tathāgata; only then may one be called Avalokiteśvara. Once understood, karmic obstacles are originally empty; not yet understood, one must repay past debts. When hungry, even encountering a king's meal, one cannot eat; when ill, though meeting the king of physicians, how can one be cured? Practicing Chan amid desires is the power of knowledge and vision; a lotus growing in fire is never destroyed. The brave Śrīsiṃha committed grave offenses yet awakened to the unborn; having become a Buddha long ago, he remains so even now.

The lion's roar, the fearless teaching—deeply lamenting the ignorant, stubborn, thick-skinned ones who know only that grave offenses obstruct bodhi, yet do not see the Tathāgata's revealed secret instruction. Two bhikṣus committed sexual misconduct and killing; Upāli's firefly-like light increased the knot of their guilt. Vimalakīrti, the great being, instantly dispelled their doubts, like the blazing sun melting frost and snow. The inconceivable power of liberation and its wondrous functioning are as countless as the Ganges' sands and without limit. Why shrink from the toil of the four requisites of offering? Even ten thousand taels of gold may

be accepted. Shattering one's body and crushing one's bones would still not repay it; one phrase clearly understood surpasses a hundred million.

King among dharmas, supreme and most excellent, realized alike by Tathāgatas as numerous as the Ganges' sands. Now that I understand this wish-fulfilling jewel, all who faithfully receive it will correspond with it. Clearly seeing, there is not a single thing; there is neither person nor Buddha. The great thousandfold worlds are bubbles in the ocean; all sages and saints are flashes of lightning. Even if an iron wheel whirled above one's head, samādhi and wisdom, perfectly bright, would never be lost. The sun may grow cold and the moon hot, but all māras cannot destroy this true teaching. Elephants advance majestically along their path—who has ever seen a mantis able to block their tracks? Great elephants do not travel rabbit paths; great awakening is not confined by petty details. Do not slander the vast sky with narrow views. For those not yet awakened, I now set forth this essential instruction.