The Gateless Gate

Wumen Huikai

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Preface

The Buddha’s teaching takes mind as its principle and no-gate as its dharma gate. Since it is gateless, how does one pass through it? Have you not heard it said: “What enters through a gate is not a family treasure. What is gained through conditions is subject, from beginning to end, to formation and decay.” To speak in this way is much like raising waves where there is no wind, or cutting into sound flesh to make a wound! How much less is there any relevance in clinging to words and phrases, seeking intellectual understanding, striking at the moon with a stick, or scratching an itch through one’s boot!

In the summer of the wuxi year of the Shaoding era, Huikai was head of the assembly at Longxiang in Dongjia. At the request of patch-robed monks seeking instruction, he took the koans of the ancients as tiles for knocking at the gate, guiding students according to their capacities. They were then copied down, and before he knew it, they had formed a collection. They were not originally arranged in any sequence; altogether there are forty-eight cases, collectively called “The Gateless Gate.” If you are a true person, disregarding danger to life and limb, you will charge straight in with a single blade; even Nata with his eight arms will be unable to stop you. Even the twenty-eight patriarchs of India and the six patriarchs of China will have no choice but to flee at the mere sight of you and beg for their lives. But if you hesitate, it is like watching a rider pass by through a window: in the blink of an eye, the opportunity has already slipped away!

Verse:
The great Way has no gate;
A thousand different paths lead to it.
Pass through this barrier,
And you alone stride beneath heaven and earth.

The Gateless Gate of the Chan School: 1. Zhaozhou's Dog

A monk asked Chan Master Zhaozhou, "Does a dog also have Buddha-nature or not?"

Zhaozhou said, "No."

[Wumen said:]

To investigate Chan, one must penetrate the barrier of the patriarchs; to attain wondrous awakening, one must exhaust the road of mind. If one has not penetrated the patriarchal barrier and the road of mind has not been exhausted, one is merely a ghostly spirit clinging to grass and trees. Tell me: what is the barrier of the patriarchs? It is simply this one word, "No." This is the one barrier of the Chan school; therefore it is called the Gateless Barrier of Chan. Those who penetrate it will not only see Zhaozhou face to face, but may join hands with the patriarchs of every generation and walk alongside them, their eyebrows interwoven, seeing with the same eyes and hearing with the same ears. Would that not be a great joy? Is there anyone who wishes to penetrate this barrier?

Make the three hundred and sixty joints and eighty-four thousand pores of your entire body into one mass of doubt, and investigate this single word, "No." Hold it up day and night. Do not understand it as empty nothingness, nor as a matter of being or nonbeing. It is like swallowing a red-hot iron ball that cannot be spat out. Sweep away all your former mistaken knowledge and mistaken awareness. When this becomes thoroughly mature over time, inside and outside will naturally become one unbroken whole, like a mute person who has had a dream and can know it only for himself. Suddenly, you will break through, startling heaven and earth. It will be as though you had seized General Guan's great sword: meeting a Buddha, kill the Buddha; meeting a patriarch, kill the patriarch. At the brink of birth and death, you will attain great freedom; amid the six realms and four modes of birth, you will sport freely in samādhi.

But how should one hold it up? Exert the full strength of your life in raising this word, "No." If you do not let it lapse, it will be like a Dharma candle: touch it once, and it ignites.

[The verse says:]

A dog's Buddha-nature—fully bringing forth the true command. As soon as one enters into being or nonbeing, one loses body and life.

The Gateless Barrier 2: Baizhang's Wild Fox

Whenever Chan Master Baizhang addressed the assembly, there was an old man who would always follow the community to hear the Dharma. When the others withdrew, the old man withdrew as well. One day, however, he did not leave. The Master therefore asked, "Who is this standing before me?"

The old man said, "I am not human. In the time of Kāśyapa Buddha, I once lived on this mountain. A student asked me, 'Does a person of great cultivation still fall under cause and effect or not?' I replied, 'He does not fall under cause and effect.' For five hundred lifetimes, I have fallen into the body of a wild fox. I now beg the Venerable Master to speak a turning word on my behalf, so that I may be freed from this fox body."

He then asked, "Does a person of great cultivation still fall under cause and effect or not?"

The Master said, "He does not obscure cause and effect!"

Upon hearing these words, the old man experienced great awakening. After making prostrations, he said, "I have now been freed from the body of a wild fox. It lies behind the mountain. I venture to inform the Venerable Master and beg that the rites for a deceased monastic be performed."

The Master instructed the monastic officer to strike the gavel and announce to the assembly, "After the meal, we shall conduct the funeral rites for a deceased monastic." The assembly discussed this among themselves: "Everyone is well, and no one is ill in the Nirvāṇa Hall. Why should this be so?" After the meal, they saw only the Master leading the assembly to the foot of a cliff behind the mountain. With his staff, he drew out the corpse of a wild fox and then had it cremated according to the rites.

That evening, the Master ascended the Dharma seat and recounted the preceding circumstances. Huangbo then asked, "The man of old gave one mistaken turning word and fell into the body of a wild fox for five hundred lifetimes. If, turning word after turning word, one makes no mistake, what then?"

The Master said, "Come closer, and I will tell you."

Huangbo stepped forward and gave the Master a slap. The Master clapped his hands and laughed, saying, "I thought only barbarians had red beards—here is another red-bearded barbarian!"

[Wumen said:]

If one does not fall under cause and effect, why does one become a wild fox? If one does not obscure cause and effect, why is one freed from the wild fox? If you gain an eye of insight here, you will know how the former Baizhang gained five hundred lifetimes of carefree freedom.

[Verse:]

Not falling, not obscuring—two calls in a single contest. Not obscuring, not falling—a thousand errors, ten thousand errors.

If we are to activate great capacity and great function, we need only, after recognizing our original nature, to safeguard it continuously and closely, diligently tempering and applying it amid circumstances. Remove every attachment, obstruction of doubt, and deluded habit such as greed and anger. When its use becomes thoroughly mature, one will naturally merge into the realm of great capacity and great function. By no means should you be intimidated by the word "great" and imagine something lofty and abstruse. All capacities and functions are present right before you. At the moment of action, simply be without obstruction or doubt; the instant doubt or obstruction arises, it flies away.

Take the Baizhang Wild Fox koan as an example. When the monastic asked, "Does a person of great cultivation still fall under cause and effect?" the answer, "He does not fall under cause and effect," was in itself not greatly mistaken. Yet he himself gave rise to doubt and consequently fell into the body of a fox. Poor fellow! Even after five hundred years, he still had not awakened. Fortunately, Baizhang compassionately resolved his doubt by saying, "He does not obscure cause and effect." Only then did he put down this mass of doubt, become released, and pass away.

"Not falling" and "not obscuring" differ by only one character, yet their meanings differ as vastly as life and death, heaven and abyss. For one who has realized the Way, however, there is not the slightest distinction between them.

Buddha-nature is naturally pure: utterly bare, unstained by a single speck of dust, not establishing a single dharma. Where could causes and effects attach themselves? If death does not exist, whence could life arise? Is there still room therein for right and wrong, correctness and error? It was indeed fortunate that this wild fox awakened through "not obscuring." If he could have awakened through "not falling," it would have been still more expansive and a step beyond. Yet, when he was about to pass away, he still required Baizhang to perform the funeral rites and cremate him as a deceased monastic. This was further attachment. Baizhang, too, complied with his request, and thus could not avoid falling bodily into the weeds—falling into cause and effect.

—Excerpted from Slight Ripples on the Chan Sea by Master Yuanyin

The Gateless Gate of the Chan School 3. Juzhi Raises a Finger

Whenever Chan Master Juzhi was questioned, he simply raised one finger. Later, when an outsider asked an attendant boy, “What essential Dharma does the master teach?” the boy likewise raised a finger.

When Juzhi heard of this, he cut off the boy’s finger with a blade. The boy ran away weeping in pain. Juzhi called him back; when the boy turned his head, Juzhi again raised a finger. The boy suddenly awakened.

When Juzhi was about to pass away, he addressed the assembly: “I received Tianlong’s one-finger Chan and have never exhausted its use throughout my life.” Having said this, he entered extinction.

[Wumen said]

The place of awakening for Juzhi and the boy does not lie in the finger. If you see it here, Tianlong, Juzhi, the boy, and you yourself will all be strung together on a single skewer.

[Verse]

Juzhi made a fool of old Tianlong; with a sharp blade, he tested the little boy. When the giant spirit raised his hand, it took no great effort to split Mount Hua’s myriad towering ridges.

The Gateless Gate of Chan, 4: The Bearded Barbarian Has No Beard

Oran said, “Why does the Western barbarian have no beard?”

[Wumen said]

To investigate, one must truly investigate; to awaken, one must truly awaken. This barbarian must be seen face-to-face once before it will do. But to speak of seeing him face-to-face already makes two.

[Verse]

Before a fool, one cannot speak of dreams. The barbarian has no beard; the clear-eyed only add to the confusion.

The Gateless Gate of Chan, Case 5: Xiangyan Up a Tree

Chan Master Xiangyan said: “It is like a person up in a tree, holding a branch in his mouth. His hands grasp no branch, and his feet rest on no part of the tree. Someone beneath the tree asks him about the meaning of the Patriarch’s coming from the West. If he does not answer, he fails the questioner; if he does answer, he loses his body and life. At just such a moment, how would you respond?”

[Wumen said:]

Even if you possess eloquence like a cascading river, it is of no use. Even if you can expound the entire Buddhist canon, it is of no use. If you can respond appropriately here, you bring to life the former dead road and put to death the former living road. If not, wait until Maitreya appears in the future and ask him.

[Verse:]

Xiangyan truly concocted this out of nothing; his vicious poison knows no bounds. He silences the mouths of patch-robed monks and makes demon eyes burst forth over their entire bodies.

The Gateless Barrier of the Chan School 6. The World-Honored One Holds Up a Flower

Long ago, at an assembly on Vulture Peak, the World-Honored One held up a flower and showed it to the gathering. At that time, everyone remained silent; only the Venerable Kāśyapa broke into a smile. The World-Honored One said, “I have the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa, the true form that is formless, and the subtle Dharma gate—established not on words and letters, a special transmission outside the teachings—which I entrust to Mahākāśyapa.”

[Wumen said:]

That yellow-faced Gautama, as though no one else were present, debased what is worthy and exalted what is cheap, hanging up a sheep’s head while selling dog meat. He must have thought this remarkably extraordinary. But if everyone in the assembly had laughed at that moment, how could the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye have been transmitted? And if Kāśyapa had not smiled, how could the Treasury

of the True Dharma Eye have been transmitted? If you say that the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye was transmitted, then that yellow-faced old fellow was deceiving the common people. If you say that it was not transmitted, why was Kāśyapa alone singled out for approval?

[Verse:]

The moment he held up the flower, the tail was already showing. Kāśyapa broke into a smile; humans and devas were at a loss.

Chan School Gateless Barrier 7. Zhaozhou Washes His Bowl

When a monk asked Zhaozhou, “I have just entered the monastic community. I beg the Master for instruction.”

Zhaozhou said, “Have you eaten your porridge?”

The monk said, “I have eaten it.”

Zhaozhou said, “Go wash your bowl.” The monk had an awakening.

[Wumen said]

Zhaozhou opened his mouth and revealed his gallbladder, laid bare his heart and liver. Yet this monk did not listen carefully and mistook a bell for a jar.

[Verse]

Precisely because it is so clear, realization is delayed. Had he known earlier that the lamp was fire, the rice would have been cooked long ago.

The Gateless Gate 8: Xi Zhong Makes a Cart

Master Yue'an asked a monk, “Xi Zhong made a cart with one hundred spokes. If you remove both ends and take away the axle, what does this reveal?”

[Wumen said:]

If you can realize it directly, your eyes are like shooting stars and your responsiveness like a flash of lightning.

[Verse:]

Where the wheel of function turns, even adepts are bewildered. The four directions, above and below; north and south, east and west.

The Gateless Barrier of the Chan School 9. Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory

A monk asked Master Xingyang Rang, “Great-Universal Wisdom-Excellence Buddha sat at the seat of awakening for ten kalpas. The Buddhadharma did not manifest before him, and he could not attain Buddhahood. How was this?”

Rang said, “Your question is most fitting.”

The monk said, “Since he was sitting at the seat of awakening, why could he not attain Buddhahood?”

Rang said, “Because he was not a Buddha.”

[Wumen said:]

Only the old barbarian is permitted to know; the old barbarian is not permitted to understand. If ordinary beings know, they are sages; if sages understand, they are ordinary beings.

[Verse:]

Resolving the body—how can that compare with bringing the mind to rest? Once the mind is resolved, there is no need to worry about the body. If body and mind are both completely resolved, why would immortals need to be granted noble rank?

The Gateless Gate, Case 10: Qing Shui's Solitary Poverty

Once, a monk asked Chan Master Caoshan, “Qingshui is alone and destitute; I beg the Master for relief.”

Caoshan said, “Ācārya Shui!”

Shui responded, “Yes.”

Caoshan said, “You have drunk three cups of Qingyuan’s White Family wine, yet you still say it has not touched your lips.”

[Wumen said:]

Qingshui missed the opportunity—what was the working of his mind? Caoshan had the discerning eye and deeply recognized the capacity of the one who had come. Yet, even so, tell me: where was it that Ācārya Shui drank the wine?

[Verse:]

Poor as Fan Dan, proud in spirit as Xiang Yu. Though he has no livelihood, he still dares to contend in wealth.

The Gateless Gate of the Chan School 11: Zhaozhou Examines a Hermitage Master

Zhaozhou came to a hermit's hut and asked, “Is there? Is there?”

The hermit raised a fist.

Zhaozhou said, “The water is too shallow; this is no place to moor a boat,” and left.

He then came to another hermit's hut and asked, “Is there? Is there?”

This hermit too raised a fist.

Zhaozhou said, “Able to release, able to seize; able to kill, able to give life!” Then he made a bow.

[Wumen said]

Though both raised a fist, why did he approve of one and not approve of the other? Tell me, where does the discrepancy lie? If you can utter a turning word here, you will see that Zhaozhou’s tongue has no bone: he can raise up and cast down, attaining great freedom. Yet, even so, Zhaozhou was seen through by the two hermits. If you say that the two hermits differed in superiority, you do not yet possess the eye of practice; if you say that they did not differ in superiority, you likewise do not yet possess the eye of practice.

[Verse]

Eyes like shooting stars, activity like lightning; a sword that kills, a sword that gives life.

Chan School Gateless Barrier 12: Yan Calls “Master”

Every day, Chan Master Ruiyan Yanzhao called out to himself, “Master!” and then answered himself. He would say, “Be ever alert!”

“Yes!”

“From this day forward, do not let others deceive you.”

“Yes, yes!”

[Wumen Says]

Old Ruiyan bought and sold himself, producing all sorts of spirit-heads and ghost-faces. Why? One calls, one responds, one is alert, and one is not deceived by others. If you recognize them, it is still not it; if you imitate him, it is all wild-fox understanding.

[Verse]

Students of the Way do not recognize the true,
Only because from the beginning they have taken the conscious spirit for it.
This is the root of birth and death through measureless kalpas;
Fools call it the Original Person.

The Gateless Gate, Case 13: Deshan Carrying His Bowl

One day, Deshan descended from the hall carrying his bowl. On seeing him, Xuefeng asked, “Old fellow, the bell has not rung and the drum has not sounded—where are you going with your bowl?” Deshan thereupon returned to the abbot’s quarters.

Xuefeng related this to Yantou. Yantou said, “For all his greatness, Deshan has not understood the final word.”

When Deshan heard of this, he had an attendant summon Yantou and asked, “You do not approve of this old monk, do you?” Yantou secretly revealed its meaning to him, and Deshan then let the matter rest.

The next day, when Deshan ascended the seat, he was indeed unlike his usual self. Yantou came before the monks’ hall, clapped his hands, and laughed loudly: “How fortunate that the old fellow has understood the final word! From now on, no one in the world will be able to do anything with him.”

[Wumen said:]

If this were truly the final word, neither Yantou nor Deshan had even dreamed of it. Examined closely, they are like a troupe of puppets.

[Verse:]

If you recognize the first word, then you understand the final word. The final and the first are not this one word.

Chan Master Sanfeng could not penetrate this koan: Does this mean that the master was incapable? Must the disciple tell him? What meaning was disclosed in “secretly revealed its meaning”? 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! Investigate until your “head and face are both swollen”—until your head and face are swollen. Persist in this way for a long time, without letting the sense of doubt break off; endure every hardship, and when the right trigger and conditions are encountered, good news will come. One day, Chan Master Sanfeng went to the rear courtyard and heard the sound of bamboo being split. With a sharp “crack!” he was suddenly opened.

In our practice, we must not practice the Yellow Teaching for a while, then the Red Teaching for a while, and then switch again to Buddha-recitation or Chan investigation. If we keep changing our minds whenever we see something different, we will accomplish nothing. Whatever dharma gate we cultivate, we should persevere in it. We should be like Chan Master Xuedou, constant for twenty years as though they were one day, unafraid of hardship and suffering: “For twenty years I have endured hardship; for your sake, I have entered the cave of the blue dragon several times.”

—Excerpted from Master Yuanyin’s The Blue Cliff Record

The Gateless Barrier of the Chan School 14. Nansen Kills a Cat

Chan Master Nanquan, when the monks of the eastern and western halls were disputing over a cat, picked it up and said, “If any of you can say a word, I will save it; if you cannot, I will cut it in two.”

No one replied, so Nanquan cut it in two.

That evening, when Zhaozhou returned from outside, Nanquan told him what had happened. Zhaozhou then took off his sandal, placed it on his head, and walked out.

Nanquan said, “Had you been there, you could have saved the cat.”

[Wumen said:]

Tell me: what was the meaning of Zhaozhou’s putting a straw sandal on his head? If you can utter a turning word here, you will see that Nanquan’s command was not

issued in vain. If not—perilous indeed!

[Verse:]

Had Zhaozhou been there, he would have reversed the command: seized the knife, and made Nanquan beg for his life.

Speaking of function and activity, every gesture and movement is none other than great function and great activity. One simply accords with the time, circumstances, causes, and conditions, with no inward twisting or contrivance and no attachment or obstruction whatsoever. This is what is meant by freedom in every direction, unrestrained in gathering in and letting go. Green bamboo and yellow flowers are all mysterious workings; giving life, taking life, granting, and depriving are all wondrous functioning. When great elders of the school realize the ultimate, they all possess this great function and great activity.

Thus Nanquan cut the cat, and Guizong cut the snake. Both possessed the skillful means of giving life and taking life with complete freedom. Yet when people encounter such koans, they often cannot penetrate them and cannot help but give rise to doubts: Does cutting a cat or killing a snake not violate the precept against killing? How could great practitioners engage in conduct that destroys life and takes lives? Surely this was not an actual event; perhaps it was merely an allegory, intended only to signify cutting off such deluded thoughts as greed, anger, attachment, and contention within one's own mind.

Around 1956, an elder layman named Hu was lecturing on the Record of Pointing to the Moon for everyone at Jing'an Temple in Shanghai. When he came to this koan of Nanquan's cutting the cat, he said to the assembly: "Please do not take this as an actual cutting of a cat. It is only an allegory. As Layman Pang said: 'To protect life, one must use killing; only when killing is exhausted can you be at peace.'"

That is, one must kill off the deluded habits of greed, anger, and attachment within one's own mind. This is also correct, but it depends on the level of the practitioner's cultivation. If one's practice is truly profound and one reaches the point where giving life and taking life occur simultaneously, then killing is giving life, and giving life is killing. Not only is there no distinction between giving life and taking life, but not even a trace of distinction remains. In that case, there is no harm in taking it as an actual event.

At that time, an experienced practitioner seated among the audience would not accept his explanation. Rising to his feet, he said, "This is merely your own realization; it was not Master Wang's original intent. Master Wang held no view of killing and giving life. Though he cut, it was still giving life; there is no reason why this could not have been an actual event." Elder Hu would not concede, and the two

began to argue. Just as they were locked in dispute, some experienced practitioner —no one knew who—gave a cat's cry. On hearing it, the whole assembly was suddenly startled into awakening, and the dispute ceased.

With regard to this koan of cutting the cat, Nanquan's original intention was not to cut the cat. He only wanted someone from among the two groups to step forward and utter a Mind-Seal phrase that would reveal the mind-ground. But no one understood his intention and no one could speak the words that would save the cat. Once Nanquan had spoken, he immediately swung his knife and killed it.

At that time, perhaps the two groups were not in fact without anyone capable of responding; perhaps they wished to examine Nanquan's manner of action more deeply and see what he would ultimately do. It is impossible to know whether they deliberately refused to come forth and say a word to save the cat. Later, when Zhaozhou returned, Nanquan told him of the earlier event. Zhaozhou took off his sandal, placed it on his head, and walked out. Nanquan praised him, saying, "Had you been there, you could have saved the cat."

—Excerpted from Master Yuanyin, Slight Ripples in the Chan Sea

The Gateless Gate, Case 15: Dongshan's Three Blows

When Dongshan came to consult Yunmen, Yunmen asked, "Where have you come from recently?"

Dongshan said, "Chadu."

Yunmen said, "Where did you spend the summer retreat?"

Dongshan said, "Baozi in Hunan."

Yunmen said, "When did you leave there?"

Dongshan said, "The twenty-fifth of the eighth month."

Yunmen said, "I spare you three blows of the staff."

The next day, Dongshan again went to pay his respects and asked, "Yesterday Your Reverence spared me three blows of the staff. I do not know what my fault was."

Yunmen said, "You rice bag! You go from Jiangxi to Hunan just like that?" At these words, Dongshan had a great awakening.

[Wumen said:]

Yunmen at once gave him the proper fodder, enabling Dongshan to find another living path, so that his household would not become desolate. He had Dongshan struggle all night in the sea of right and wrong until dawn; when Dongshan returned, he gave him another thrust that broke it open. Dongshan awakened directly, not because he was impatient by nature. But I ask you all: did Dongshan deserve those three blows of the staff or not? If you say that he did, then the grasses and trees throughout the forest would all deserve blows as well. If you say that he did not, then Yunmen has uttered a lie. If you understand this point, only then can you let Dongshan breathe a sigh of relief.

[Verse:]

When a lion teaches its cub the secret of bewilderment,
Before it can leap forward, it has already turned itself around.
Without cause, he again recounts the blow that struck him head-on:
The first arrow was still light; the second arrow penetrated deep.

The Gateless Barrier of the Chan School 16: Seven Strikes of the Bell

Yunmen said, “The world is so vast and wide—why don the seven-strip robe at the sound of the bell?”

[Wumen said]

In investigating Chan and studying the Way, one must above all avoid chasing sounds and forms. Even if, upon hearing a sound, one awakens to the Way, or upon seeing a form, one realizes the mind, this is still ordinary. Do you not know that the patched-robed monk rides upon sound and covers over form? In every particular he is clear; in every action he is wondrous. Yet, though it is thus, tell me: does sound come to the ear, or does the ear go toward sound? Even if sound and silence are both forgotten, how will you express your understanding at this point? If you listen with the ear, it will be difficult to understand; only when you hear sound from the place of the eye does it become intimate.

[Verse]

If you understand, affairs are all one family; if you do not understand, there are ten thousand distinctions and a thousand differences. If you do not understand, affairs are all one family; if you understand, there are ten thousand distinctions and a thousand differences.

Gateless Barrier of the Chan School 17: The National Teacher's Three Calls

The National Teacher called his attendant three times. The attendant responded three times.

The National Teacher said, "I had thought that I had failed you, but it turns out that you have failed me."

[Wumen said:]

When the National Teacher called three times, his tongue fell to the ground; when the attendant responded three times, harmonious light issued forth. The National Teacher was old and lonely, pressing the ox's head down to make it eat grass. The attendant was unwilling to take it up; fine food is not fit for one already full. Tell me, where did he fail him? When the realm is clear, the talented are esteemed; when the household is wealthy, the children are pampered.

[Verse:]

An iron cangue without a hole demands someone to bear it; to burden one's children and grandchildren is no small matter. If you wish to support the gate and uphold the household, you must climb a mountain of blades barefoot.

The Gateless Gate, Case 18: Dongshan's Three Pounds

A monk asked Chan Master Dongshan, "What is Buddha?"

Dongshan said, "Three pounds of flax."

[Wumen said]

Old Dongshan had realized a bit of clam-and-oyster Chan: he had only just opened the two shells and exposed his very guts. Yet, even so, tell me: where do you see Dongshan?

[Verse]

"Three pounds of flax" suddenly stands forth; the words are intimate, and the meaning more intimate still. Those who come speaking of right and wrong are themselves people of right and wrong.

Chan School Gateless Barrier 19: Ordinary Mind Is the Way

Because Zhaozhou asked Nanquan, “What is the Way?”

Nanquan said, “Ordinary mind is the Way.”

Zhaozhou said, “Can one direct oneself toward it?”

Nanquan said, “The moment you intend to direct yourself toward it, you go astray.”

Zhaozhou said, “If one does not intend to direct oneself toward it, how can one know that it is the Way?”

Nanquan said, “The Way does not belong to knowing or not knowing. Knowing is deluded awareness; not knowing is indeterminate. If you truly reach the Way beyond intentional direction, it is like vast empty space, open and unobstructed. How could it be forcibly judged as right or wrong?”

At these words, Zhaozhou suddenly awakened.

[Wumen said]

Pressed by Zhaozhou’s question, Nanquan’s words collapsed like tiles and melted away like ice; he could not offer any further explanation. Even though Zhaozhou awakened, he still had to continue his investigation for thirty more years before he truly attained it.

[Verse]

In spring there are a hundred flowers; in autumn, the moon. In summer there is a cool breeze; in winter, snow. If no idle matters hang upon the mind, every season is a fine season in the human world.

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

If this were not so, then when one breath no longer comes, though the physical shell remains, why would it be unable to speak, laugh, or move? Layman Pang said in his verse on awakening to the Way: “The affairs of daily life are no different… I alone am

in harmony with them; spiritual powers and wondrous functioning are carrying water and hauling firewood." Thus, all laughing, scolding, coughing, and swinging of the arms are none other than the wondrous functioning of the true mind. Ordinary people are merely deluded by forms and appearances and do not know it.

In terms of the literal wording, ping means "not crooked," and chang means "unbroken." If a Chan practitioner's mind can remain straight and unbent at all times, responding continuously in every circumstance, then the luminosity and free wondrous functioning that manifest in its very being are the Way. This interpretation is passable, but it is not the orthodox explanation of the Chan school.

But where is this Way? Can it be realized through some method? Therefore, Zhaozhou again asked, "Can one direct oneself toward it?" Nanquan replied, "The moment you intend to direct yourself toward it, you go astray!" This means that once the mind forms an intention or directs itself toward something, it turns away from the Way. How, then, can one realize the Way? The great Way is formless, and the great sound is scarcely heard. There is nothing toward which one can direct oneself or that one can seize. When thoughts cease, it is luminously present before one; when the mind stirs, it is obscured by shadows. Therefore, there is nothing toward which one can direct oneself.

Unfortunately, many people who study Buddhism and cultivate practices fall into intending and directing themselves toward something. When reading sūtras or listening to Dharma teachings, they believe there is some real Dharma to be gained; when practicing diligently, they imagine that there are sacred states to be attained. Bustling about in pursuit of such aims, they labor fruitlessly. Is this not a needless and bitter suffering? In truth, the Way is originally complete and ready at hand; it does not belong to cultivation or realization, and it is no different in anyone. It depends only on whether you are deluded by forms and appearances. Therefore, the ancient worthies said: the Way lies in awakening, not in cultivation.

Then, if one does not use thought to form intentions, how can one know that it is the Way? Thus 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 or not knowing. Knowing is deluded awareness; not knowing is indeterminate. If you truly reach the Way beyond doubt, it is like vast empty space, open and unobstructed. How could it be forcibly judged as right or wrong?"

The great Way is vast and open, like empty space. Not a single dharma is established; it is utterly bare. It is clear and distinct, and its wondrous functioning is boundless. Knowing adds a head on top of one's head, utterly distorting one's original face; not knowing is like wood or stone, incapable of wondrous functioning.

In terms of the Chan school, “not belonging to knowing” means that not even a needle can enter by official permission; “not belonging to not knowing” means that horses and carts may pass through by private access. Since neither knowing nor not knowing affords any foothold, 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 cultivate practices should do likewise. Clarify the mind through principle, reveal principle through the mind, and respond to conditions at all times and in all places with ordinary mind. Then the Way is right within it.

—Excerpted from Master Yuanyin’s lectures on the Blue Cliff Record

The Gateless Gate of the Chan School 20. A Person of Great Strength

Chan Master Songyuan said, “Why can a person of great strength not lift a foot?”

He also said, “Opening one’s mouth is not a matter of the tongue.”

[Wumen said]

Songyuan may be said to have poured out his very guts, yet he lacked someone to take it up. Even if someone were to take it up directly, that person should still come to Wumen’s place and receive a painful blow of the staff. Why? To recognize true gold, look at it in the fire.

[Verse]

Lifting a foot, he overturns the fragrant-water ocean; lowering his head, he gazes down upon the four dhyāna heavens. One whose whole body has nowhere to abide —please continue with one line.

The Gateless Gate of the Chan School, 21: Yunmen’s Dried Shitstick

A monk asked Yunmen, “What is the Buddha?”

Yunmen said, “A dried shit-stick!”

[Wumen said]

Yunmen might be said to be so poor that he could scarcely prepare even a simple vegetarian meal, and so busy that he had no time to write a rough letter. At every turn, he brings out a shit-stick to brace the gate and prop the house. The rise and decline of the Buddhadharma can be seen in this.

[Verse]

Lightning flash, spark struck from stone; blink once, and it has already slipped past.

The Gateless Gate 22: Kāśyapa's Banner Pole

Because Ānanda asked Kāśyapa, "Apart from transmitting the golden-brocade kāṣāya, what else did the World-Honored One transmit?"

Kāśyapa called out, "Ānanda!"

Ānanda replied, "Yes!"

Kāśyapa said, "Knock down the temple flagpole in front of the gate."

[Wumen said:]

If, right here, you can utter an intimate turning word, you will see that the assembly at Vulture Peak has solemnly never dispersed. If not, Vipāśyin Buddha had already set his mind upon this, yet even to this day has not attained its wonder.

[Verse:]

How intimate the answer is to the question! How many, here, have sinews grown in their eyes? Elder brother calls, younger brother answers, exposing the family shame; it belongs neither to yin nor yang—this is a different spring.

Gateless Gate of the Chan School 23: Neither Thinking Good nor Evil

Because the Sixth Patriarch had received the robe and bowl, Senior Monk Ming pursued him as far as Dayu Ridge. Seeing Ming approach, the Patriarch threw the robe and bowl onto a rock and said, "This robe represents the seal of faith. Can it be fought over by force? Take it away if you wish!" Ming then tried to lift them, but they would not move, as if they were a mountain. He hesitated, frightened and trembling.

Ming said, "I have come seeking the Dharma, not the robe. I pray that the Practitioner will instruct me."

The Patriarch said, “When you are thinking neither of good nor of evil, at just such a moment, what is Senior Monk Ming’s Original Face?”

Ming awakened greatly on the spot. Sweat streamed over his whole body, and with tears he bowed and asked, “Apart from the secret words and secret meaning just spoken, is there any further significance?”

The Patriarch said, “What I have now told you is not secret. If you turn the light back and contemplate your own face, the secret is right beside you.”

Ming said, “Although I followed the assembly at Huangmei, I had never truly recognized my own face. Now, through your instruction, I have entered the gate, like a person drinking water who knows for himself whether it is cold or warm. You, Practitioner, are now my teacher.”

The Patriarch said, “If that is so, then Huangmei is the teacher of us both. Take good care of yourself.”

[Wumen said:]

The Sixth Patriarch may be said to have acted with urgent concern, like an old grandmother anxious to help. It was like a fresh lychee: he peeled off its skin, removed its pit, placed it in your mouth, and only wanted you to swallow it.

[Verse:]

It cannot be described or painted; praise cannot reach it, so cease seeking to bear it.
The Original Face has nowhere to hide; when the world decays, it does not perish.

After the Sixth Patriarch received the robe and bowl and left Huangmei, many people sought to pursue him and seize them. One of them was named Huiming. Before becoming a monastic, 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 time, the Sixth Patriarch thought, “My robe and bowl are tokens of Dharma transmission—that is, material proof 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 concealed himself in the grass, to see how Huiming would deal with them.

When Huiming caught up and saw the robe and bowl on the rock, he thought, “Now they are mine for the taking; the Patriarch’s seat will belong to us.” But when he reached out to take them, he could not move them. Why could he not move them? There are many different explanations. Some say that the robe and bowl were tokens of Dharma transmission. Since Huiming had not received the Dharma, the Dharma-protecting spirits would not permit him to take them.

Others say this is not so. Huiming also knew that the robe and bowl represented Dharma transmission and could not be seized by force. Since he himself had not yet received the Dharma, even if he seized them by force, he would possess only their outward form. Moreover, it would be an evil act; ashamed in his heart, he could no longer lift them. Though the explanations differ, ultimately the “seal of faith” of the Dharma cannot be seized by force.

Thus Huiming repented and said, “I have come for the Dharma, not for the robe.” The Sixth Patriarch then emerged and said to Huiming, “You have come for the Dharma, and I will teach you the Dharma: think neither of good nor of evil—that is, think neither good thoughts nor bad thoughts.”

Our thoughts do no more than turn within the two spheres of good and evil, beauty and ugliness. Apart from these two, deluded thoughts cannot continue. 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 precisely this critical moment, the Sixth Patriarch instructed him: “At just such a moment, 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 at once.

When not a single thought arises—when the preceding thought has ceased and the next has not yet arisen—are we like wood or stone, without awareness? Clearly not. When not a single thought arises, the mind is clear and distinct. For example, while everyone is in this room, when not a single thought arises and the mind abides nowhere, every object lies within each person’s field of vision, clear as objects reflected in a mirror, without any discrimination.

But what if the mind abides somewhere? “What is this? It is an umbrella!” Then one goes further and thinks, “Is it a nylon umbrella or an automatic umbrella?” Once a thought arises and there is attachment, one sees only this object and no longer sees the others.

When the mind abides nowhere, open and empty, seeing everything while seeming not to see anything, who is it that shines brightly without abiding, like a mirror? At this critical moment, a practitioner turns the light inward for a single look and exerts keen effort; then the true eye suddenly opens.

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

discrimination was his Original Face. At that moment, apart from this there was nothing else, and so Huiming awakened immediately. This is how direct the Chan school is. Among all the major schools, Chan alone is called the school of direct transmission, for its swiftness and simplicity cannot be matched by the other schools.

—Excerpted from Master Yuanyin's lectures on The Blue Cliff Record

The Gateless Gate, Case 24: Leaving Words and Speech

Because a monk asked Chan Master Fengxue, "Speech and silence both involve separation and subtlety. How can one penetrate them without transgressing?"

Fengxue said, "I always recall the third month in Jiangnan: where the partridges sing, a hundred flowers are fragrant."

[Wumen said]

Fengxue's responsiveness was like a flash of lightning: once he found the way, he went straight ahead. Yet he could not break free from the tongues of those before him. If you see intimately here, you will naturally find a way out. Now, setting aside the samādhi of language, speak one phrase!"

[Verse]

A phrase that reveals neither wind nor bone—
before words are spoken, it has already been imparted.
As one steps forward, the mouth keeps murmuring;
you know that one is utterly at a loss.

The Gateless Gate of the Chan School 25. Three Dharma Talks

Venerable Yangshan dreamed that he went to Maitreya's abode and was assigned the third seat. A venerable one struck the gavel and announced, "Today, the Dharma will be expounded from the third seat!"

Yangshan then rose, struck the gavel, and said, "The Mahāyāna Dharma transcends the four propositions and cuts off the hundred negations. Listen closely, listen closely."

[Wumen said:]

Tell me: was this an exposition of the Dharma or not? Open your mouth and you miss it; close your mouth and you lose it. Neither open nor closed—ten thousand eight thousand.

[Verse:]

In broad daylight beneath the blue sky, dreaming within a dream. Conjuring up strange tales, deceiving the whole assembly.

The Gateless Gate, Case 26: Two Monks Roll Up the Screen

When monks came to receive instruction before the monastic meal, the Great Dharma Eye of Qingliang pointed to the curtain with his hand.

At that time, two monks went together to roll up the curtain.

The Great Dharma Eye said, “One gains; one loses.”

[Wumen said:]

Tell me, who gained and who lost? If you can open an eye here, you will know where National Teacher Qingliang failed. Even so, take care not to reason within gain and loss.

[Verse:]

Rolled up, it clearly opens onto the vast sky; yet the vast sky still does not accord with our school. How could it compare with letting go of even emptiness altogether—continuous and seamless, allowing no wind through?

Gateless Barrier, Case 27: It Is Not Mind or Buddha

A monk asked Master Nanquan, “Is there also a Dharma that is not spoken to people?”

Nanquan said, “There is.”

The monk asked, “What is the Dharma that is not spoken to people?”

Nanquan said, “It is not mind, not Buddha, not a thing.”

[Wumen said:]

Confronted by this question, Nanquan had to bring out all the treasures of his house; he was quite put out.

[Verse:]

Repeated exhortation diminishes your virtue; wordlessness truly has merit. Though the blue sea may change, I will never explain it to you.

The Gateless Gate of Chan Buddhism 28: Longtan's Enduring Resonance

Because Deshan had remained until nightfall while seeking instruction from Longtan, Longtan said, "It is late at night. Why do you not go down?"

Deshan then bade him farewell, lifted the curtain, and went out. Seeing that it was dark outside, he returned and said, "It is dark outside."

Longtan lit a paper candle and handed it to him. Just as Deshan was about to take it, Longtan blew it out. At that moment Deshan suddenly attained realization and made obeisance.

Longtan said, "What truth have you seen?"

Deshan said, "From this day forward, I shall no longer doubt the tongues of the old masters everywhere."

The next day, Longtan ascended the Dharma seat and said, "Among us there is a fellow whose teeth are like sword trees and whose mouth is like a basin of blood. One blow of the staff will not make him turn back. One day, atop a solitary peak, he will establish my Way."

Deshan then took up his commentaries and notes. Before the Dharma hall, he raised a torch and said, "To exhaust every subtle argument is like placing a single hair in the vast void; to exhaust all the world's ingenious devices is like casting a single drop into a great abyss." He then burned the commentaries and notes, made obeisance, and took his leave.

[Wumen said:]

Before Deshan left the region, his heart was indignant and his mouth full of vehement words. He deliberately came south intending to extinguish the meaning of the special transmission outside the teachings. When he reached the road in Lizhou, he asked an old woman to buy some refreshments.

The old woman said, “Venerable, what text is in your cart?”

Deshan said, “Commentaries and notes on the Diamond Sūtra.”

The old woman said, “The sūtra says: ‘The past mind is unobtainable, the present mind is unobtainable, and the future mind is unobtainable.’ Which mind does the Venerable wish to refresh?”

At this question, Deshan was left speechless, his mouth like the eaves of a flat roof. Yet even so, he was unwilling to die beneath the old woman’s words. He therefore asked her, “Is there any Chan master nearby?”

The old woman said, “Five li from here is Chan Master Longtan.”

When he arrived at Longtan, he fully exposed all his shortcomings. One could say that his earlier words failed to accord with his later words. Longtan was much like a mother who, unaware of her child’s ugliness, sees that he has a little spark of fire and immediately pours foul water over his head. Viewed coolly, it is all quite laughable.

[Verse:]

Hearing of the name is not as good as seeing the face; seeing the face is not as good as hearing of the name. Though he saved his nostrils, his eyes were nevertheless blinded.

“Deshan’s staff and Linji’s shout” are celebrated throughout the Chan forest. Deshan and Linji, two great Chan masters, were the two great patriarchs of the Chan school in whose teaching staff and shout went hand in hand. Chan Master Deshan Xuanjian, whose lay surname was Zhou, left home at the age of twenty. He thoroughly studied the Vinaya collection and mastered the purport of the sūtras on nature and characteristics.

He originally 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 and Notes. He heard that the southern Chan school advocated “seeing one’s true nature and becoming a Buddha”: awakening suddenly to one’s original nature, one is a Buddha here and now. He regarded this as “demonic teaching.”

According to the doctrines of the scriptural schools, one must spend a thousand kalpas learning the Buddha’s deportment and ten thousand kalpas learning the Buddha’s fine practices before becoming a Buddha. Yet these southern demons dared to say, “Mind itself is Buddha!” So he roused himself, shouldered the Qinglong

Commentary and Notes, and headed straight south to refute these demons. 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, similar to today's glutinous-rice dumplings. He had become hungry from walking, so he set down his load and wished to buy some cakes for refreshment. The old woman asked what he was carrying, and he told her that it was the Qinglong Commentary and Notes, an explanation of the Diamond Sūtra.

The old woman said, "I have a question. If you can answer it, I will give you some rice cakes as refreshment; if you cannot, please buy them elsewhere." Deshan said, "Very well. Ask your question." The old woman said, "The Diamond Sūtra says: 'The past mind is unobtainable, the present mind is unobtainable, and the future mind is unobtainable.'"

"Which mind, Venerable, do you wish to refresh?" Deshan was skilled at expounding the Diamond Sūtra and had assumed that he understood its profound meaning so thoroughly that no question could stump him. Yet here he was silenced by an old woman. He could only stare blankly, unable to reply. The old woman then directed him to seek instruction from Chan Master Longtan Chongxin nearby.

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

Everyone, how can "neither pond nor dragon is seen" mean that he had "personally arrived at Longtan"? This was a way of guiding him. The Diamond Sūtra says, "If one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathāgata." If one sees a pond or sees a dragon, one is attached to appearances. Seeing neither pond nor dragon is precisely to be free of appearances and to see one's true nature.

Moreover, our Buddha-nature is originally free of appearances: "To be free of all appearances is called all Buddhas." Chan Master Longtan's words had a double meaning. But Zhou of the Diamond Sūtra was then coarse-minded and did not immediately enter into accord with it. He merely made a polite bow and withdrew.

That evening, Deshan entered the master's room to seek instruction. Being skilled at expounding the Diamond Sūtra, he spoke at length about its principles, while Chan Master Longtan merely responded with assent. It was already very late. Master Longtan said, "It is late at night. 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 withdrew and said, “It is dark outside.” Chan Master Longtan rolled up some paper into a candle, lit it, and handed it to Deshan. Just as Deshan took it in his hand, Chan Master Longtan suddenly blew out the flame with a puff. Deshan was thoroughly awakened and immediately bowed to Chan Master Longtan.

How could “blowing out the candle” enable one to awaken to the Way? What principle is involved? If you cannot penetrate this point, go home and investigate it carefully. Master Longtan said, “What have you seen, that you bow?” Deshan replied, “From this day forward, I shall no longer doubt what the old masters everywhere say!”

The next day, Chan Master Longtan ascended the Dharma seat and said, “Among us there is a fellow whose teeth are like sword trees and whose mouth is like a basin of blood. One blow of the staff will not make him turn back. One day, atop a solitary peak, he will establish my Way.” (From the old woman onward, he had already received two or three blows of the staff!)

Deshan piled the Qinglong Commentary and Notes before the Dharma hall. Raising a torch, he said, “To exhaust every subtle argument is like placing a single hair in the vast void; to exhaust all the world’s ingenious devices is like casting a single drop into a great abyss.” These words reveal Chan Master Deshan’s literary brilliance. The Qinglong Commentary and Notes must surely have been written with an extravagant abundance of eloquence.

The vast void and the great abyss—the ocean—are metaphors for Buddha-nature. Subtle argument means profound speculation, while ingenious devices are a metaphor for intelligence and wisdom. Even if one exhausts profound speculation, it is only like placing a single hair in the sky; even if one exhausts all worldly intelligence and ability, it is only like casting a drop of water into the ocean. Buddha-nature is so vast and boundless. Yet Chan Master Deshan consigned to the flames the Qinglong Commentary and Notes, into which he had poured out his heart’s blood.

—Excerpted from Master Yuanyin’s lectures on The Blue Cliff Record

The Gateless Gate 29: Neither Wind nor Banner

When the Sixth Patriarch saw a temple banner fluttering in the wind, two monks were arguing about it. One said, “The banner is moving”; the other said, “The wind is moving.” They went back and forth without ever reaching the principle.

The Patriarch said, “It is not the wind that moves, nor is it the banner that moves; benevolent sirs, your minds are moving.” The two monks were startled.

[Wumen said]

It is not the wind that moves, nor the banner that moves, nor the mind that moves. Where do you see the Patriarch? If you see this intimately here, then you will know that the two monks bought iron but obtained gold. The Patriarch could not suppress his laughter: what a complete disclosure!

[Verse]

Wind, banner, and mind move—one charge covers them all. They know only how to open their mouths, unaware that their words have already fallen.

30. Mind Itself Is Buddha

Because Damei asked Mazu, “What is Buddha?”

The Patriarch said, “Mind itself is Buddha.”

[Wumen said:]

If you can immediately grasp this, then, wearing the Buddha’s clothes, eating the Buddha’s food, speaking the Buddha’s words, and carrying out the Buddha’s conduct, you are the Buddha. Yet although this is so, Damei led many people into mistakenly taking the fixed pointer for the standard. Who would know that merely saying the word “Buddha” requires rinsing one’s mouth for three days? If one is a real fellow, upon hearing “mind itself is Buddha,” he covers his ears and runs away.

[Verse:]

In broad daylight beneath a clear sky, beware of seeking. To ask further, “What is it?” is to clutch stolen goods and cry injustice.

The Gateless Barrier of the Chan School 31. Zhaozhou Examines an Old Woman

A monk asked an old woman, “Which way does the road to Mount Wutai go?”

The old woman said, “Go straight ahead!”

When the monk had taken only three or five steps, the old woman said, “What a fine monk—going off like that again!”

Later, a monk reported this to Zhaozhou. Zhaozhou said, “Wait until I go and examine that old woman for you.”

The next day he went and asked in the same way; the old woman answered in the same way.

When Zhaozhou returned, he told the assembly, “That old woman of Mount Wutai—I have exposed her for you.”

[Wumen said:]

The old woman only knew how to sit behind the curtains and devise strategies, yet she was caught by a thief. Zhaozhou, the old man, was skilled at the tactics of sneaking into a camp and plundering a stronghold, but he also showed no marks of a great person. Examined closely, both were at fault. Tell me: where did Zhaozhou expose the old woman?

[Verse:]

The question was the same, and the answer likewise similar. Sand in the rice; thorns in the mud.

The Gateless Barrier of the Chan School, 32: A Non-Buddhist Questions the Buddha

An outsider asked the World-Honored One, “I do not ask about words, nor do I ask about wordlessness.” The World-Honored One took his seat.

The outsider praised him, saying, “The World-Honored One, in great compassion, has dispelled the clouds of my delusion and enabled me to enter!” He then made full prostrations and departed.

Ānanda later asked the Buddha, “What realization did the outsider attain, that he praised you and departed?”

The World-Honored One said, “It is like a fine horse: seeing the shadow of the whip, it moves.”

[Wumen said:]

Ānanda was the Buddha’s disciple, yet his understanding was far inferior to that of the outsider. Tell me: how far apart are the outsider and the Buddha’s disciples?

[The verse says:]

Walk upon a sword's edge; run upon icy ridges. Without ascending the steps, let go on the cliff's edge.

The Gateless Barrier of the Chan School 33: Neither Mind nor Buddha

Once, when a monk asked Mazu, "What is Buddha?"

the Patriarch replied, "Neither mind nor Buddha."

[Wumen said:]

If you see clearly here, your work of Chan study is finished.

[Verse:]

When you meet a swordsman, you must present a sword; when you do not meet a poet, do not offer verse. When meeting people, speak only thirty percent; do not yet give your whole heart.

The Gateless Gate, Case 34: Wisdom Is Not the Way

Nanquan said, "Mind is not Buddha; wisdom is not the Way."

[Wumen said]

It may be said that Nanquan, though old, knows no shame: no sooner does he open his foul mouth than he exposes the family disgrace to the outside world. Yet, though this is so, few know how to appreciate his kindness.

[Verse]

When the sky is clear, the sun comes out; when rain falls, the ground grows wet. He has said it all without reserve; I only fear people will not believe it.

The Gateless Gate, Case 35: Qian Nu's Soul Leaves Her Body

The Fifth Patriarch asked a monk, "When Qian nü's soul leaves her body, which one is the true one?"

[Wumen said]

If you awaken here to what is true, you will know how to leave the shell and enter the shell. It is like lodging at an inn. But if you have not yet done so, do not wander about recklessly. When earth, water, fire, and wind suddenly disperse, you will be like a crab dropped into boiling water, flailing all eight legs. Then do not say that I did not tell you.

[Verse]

Clouds and moon are the same; streams and mountains differ. Ten thousand blessings, ten thousand blessings—is it one or two?

The Gateless Barrier of the Chan School, Case 36: Meeting a Master of the Way on the Road

The Fifth Patriarch said, “When you meet a person who has realized the Way on the road, do not respond with words or silence. Tell me, how will you respond?”

[Wumen said:]

If, at this point, you can respond intimately and aptly, there is cause for celebration. If not, you must keep your eyes open everywhere.

[Verse:]

When you meet a person who has realized the Way on the road, do not respond with words or silence. A fist strikes across the jaw and full in the face; if you understand directly, then you understand.

The Gateless Barrier of the Chan School, Case 37: The Cypress Tree in the Courtyard

A monk asked Zhaozhou, “What is the meaning of the Patriarch’s coming from the West?”

Zhaozhou said, “The cypress tree in the courtyard.”

[Wumen said]

If you see intimately at the point of Zhaozhou’s answer, then before you there is no Śākyamuni and after you there is no Maitreya.

[Verse]

Words do not reveal things as they are; speech does not accord with the occasion. Those who rely on words are lost; those who stagnate in phrases are deluded.

Gateless Barrier, Case 38: The Buffalo Passes Through the Window Lattice

The Fifth Patriarch said, “It is like a water buffalo passing through a lattice window: its head, horns, and four hooves have all passed through. Why can its tail not pass through?”

[Wumen said:]

If, at this point, you can overturn it, gain an eye, and utter a turning word, you may repay the four benefactions above and aid the three realms below. If not, you must look closely after the tail before it will do.

[Verse:]

Going through, it falls into a pit; turning back, it is ruined. This little tail is truly a most strange thing.

The Gateless Barrier of the Chan School, Case 39: Yunmen’s “The Words Fall”

When a monk asked Yunmen, “The luminous, quiescent illumination pervades Ganges sands …,” he had not yet finished the sentence.

Yunmen abruptly said, “Is this not the verse of the scholar Zhang Zhuo?”

The monk replied, “Yes.”

Yunmen said, “Your words have fallen into words.”

Later, Sixin commented, “Tell me, where did this monk fall into words?”

[Wumen said:]

If you can see clearly here, you will understand that Yunmen’s way of functioning is solitary and perilous. Why did this monk fall into words? You will be worthy to serve as a teacher of humans and devas. But if you have not yet understood, you cannot even save yourself.

[Verse:]

Fishing in a rushing current, those greedy for bait are caught. The moment the lips part, life is lost.

The Gateless Gate of the Chan School, Case 40: Kicking Over the Water Vase

When Chan Master Weishan was initially in Baizhang's assembly, he served as the tenzo. As Baizhang was about to select a master for Mount Dayi, he asked Weishan and the head monk to speak before the assembly; whoever gave the outstanding response could go there.

Baizhang then picked up a clean water vase, set it on the ground, and posed this question: "You may not call it a clean water vase. What would you call it?"

The head monk said, "It cannot be called a wooden block."

Baizhang then asked Weishan. Weishan kicked over the clean water vase and left.

Baizhang laughed and said, "The head monk has lost to this mountain fellow." He therefore appointed him as the founding master.

[Wumen said:]

Weishan showed great courage for the occasion, yet he could not jump free of Baizhang's enclosure. On close examination, he took up the heavy rather than the light. Why? Though he slipped free of the head binding, he took up an iron cangue.

[The verse says:]

He casts down the basket and wooden ladle; with one direct charge, all encirclement is cut off. Baizhang's formidable barriers cannot hold him back; with the tip of his foot, he kicks out Buddhas as numerous as hemp.

The Gateless Gate: 41. Bodhidharma Calms the Mind

Bodhidharma was facing the wall in meditation when the Second Patriarch stood in the snow and cut off his arm, saying, "This disciple's mind has not yet found peace. I beg the Master to set it at peace."

Bodhidharma said, "Bring me your mind, and I will set it at peace for you."

The Patriarch said, "Having sought for the mind, I cannot find it."

Bodhidharma said, "I have already set your mind at peace for you."

[Wumen said:]

That old gap-toothed barbarian sailed across the sea from a hundred thousand li away, coming expressly for this—one might say he stirred up waves where there was no wind. In the end he took on a disciple, who moreover lacked the full complement of the six faculties. Ah! Xie Sanlang did not recognize the four characters.

[Verse:]

The direct pointing that came from the West—this matter arose because of your request. It has disturbed the Chan monasteries; in the end, it was you all along.

For example, when the Second Patriarch, Chan Master Shenguang, met the First Patriarch Bodhidharma, he said, “This student’s mind is not at peace. I beg the Master to set it at peace.” The Patriarch said, “Bring me your mind, and I will set it at peace for you.” After a long while, the master said, “Having sought for the mind, I cannot find it.” The Patriarch then took advantage of the situation and said, “I have already set your mind at peace for you!” At these words, the master awakened greatly.

This is to penetrate completely, precisely where the mind cannot be found—when the previous thought has ceased and the next has not yet arisen—and to see the nature of lucid spiritual knowing, which does not fall into annihilationism. Although thought has ceased at that moment, it is not unconscious like wood or stone. The wonder of this koan lies in the fact that the mind is an assemblage of empty delusions, with no real source. Once it is pursued and questioned, it immediately vanishes into nothing.

Yet although thoughts may cease, emptiness and the capacity to know—that is, intrinsic nature—do not perish. Those who understand seize this very moment with utmost vigor, turn the light inward, and directly realize it; this is seeing one’s true nature. Modern scientists all acknowledge that energy is indestructible. But no energy is greater than the power of intrinsic nature.

Because intrinsic nature is without form or appearance, supremely vast and supremely firm—so great that nothing lies beyond it, so small that nothing lies within it—it can destroy all things, while nothing can destroy it. Therefore, it cannot be measured or compared. It is this that takes rebirth in the six realms and undergoes suffering or enjoys blessings; it is also this that transcends birth and death and wanders freely beyond transformation. Therefore, to be liberated from birth and death, one must realize the mind and see one’s true nature.

—Excerpted from Master Yuanyin, A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature

The Gateless Barrier of the Chan School 42: The Woman Emerging from Samādhi

In the past, when Mañjuśrī came to the place where the Buddhas had assembled, he found that each Buddha had returned to his own abode. Only one woman remained, seated near the Buddha and absorbed in samādhi.

Mañjuśrī then addressed the Buddha: "How is it that this woman may sit near the Buddha, while I may not?"

The Buddha told Mañjuśrī, "You yourself awaken this woman from samādhi, and then ask her."

Mañjuśrī circumambulated the woman three times and snapped his fingers once. He then transported her to the Brahmā Heaven and exerted all his spiritual powers, yet was unable to bring her out of samādhi.

The World-Honored One said, "Even if a hundred thousand Mañjuśrīs were to try, they could not bring this woman out of samādhi. Below, beyond twelve hundred million Ganges-sand worlds, there is a bodhisattva named Wuming who can bring this woman out of samādhi." Before long, the great being Wuming emerged from the earth and paid homage to the World-Honored One.

The World-Honored One instructed Wuming to go before the woman and snap his fingers once. The woman then emerged from samādhi.

[Wumen said:]

Old Śākyamuni put on quite a farce, utterly without sense. Tell me: Mañjuśrī is the teacher of the Seven Buddhas; why was he unable to bring the woman out of samādhi? Wuming, a first-bhūmi bodhisattva, was able to bring her out—why? If you see this intimately here, then the busy karmic consciousness itself is the great Nāga samādhi.

[Verse:]

Whether she can be brought out or cannot be brought out, she herself is free. Heads of gods and faces of ghosts—failures and shortcomings make a fine spectacle.

When Śākyamuni Buddha was in the world, there was a woman seated beside him, absorbed in samādhi. When Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva came and saw her, he thought:

How can this woman be so lacking in propriety as to enter samādhi beside Śākyamuni Buddha? She should withdraw far away behind the Buddha.

So he snapped his fingers before her, calling for her to emerge from samādhi. Yet she remained utterly unmoved and did not emerge. Seeing that she had not emerged from samādhi, Mañjuśrī displayed his spiritual powers and lifted her to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, but she still did not emerge from samādhi. Finding this ineffective, he cast her into the eighteenth level of hell, yet still could not make her emerge from samādhi.

Śākyamuni Buddha said, “You cannot make her emerge from samādhi. Below, there is a bodhisattva named Wuming who can do so.” No sooner had he finished speaking than Bodhisattva Wuming arrived from below. The Buddha said, “You have come at just the right time. Make this woman emerge from samādhi.” Bodhisattva Wuming snapped his fingers before the woman, and she emerged from samādhi.

This koan is very perplexing. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva was the teacher of the Seven Buddhas—the teacher of seven Buddhas—and his wisdom was inconceivably great. Why, then, could he not make this woman emerge from samādhi? Wuming was merely a bodhisattva from below; how could a single snap of his fingers make her emerge from samādhi? This koan should be viewed in terms of its essential meaning. The woman's entering samādhi through grasping at appearances was already a grave error.

As we have just said, if you abide in the appearance of samādhi, then you are abiding somewhere, and that is wrong. To become a Buddha, one must not cling in the slightest. One must function with lively, wondrous activity, not remain rigidly fixed in samādhi.

The woman first erred by abiding in samādhi. Then what about Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva? He represents great wisdom. Is great wisdom not good? Yet what we ordinarily call wisdom is worldly cleverness and dialectical intelligence, not the great wisdom of prajñā. To become a Buddha, one must completely eliminate this deluded wisdom.

Your cleverness and intelligence are precisely the obstruction of knowledge and the ignorance of what is known; they block the gate to awakening and prevent you from awakening. In the past, when Confucius went to see Laozi, Laozi told him, “Smash your cleverness.” That is, he told him to discard and overthrow his cleverness and intelligence. Only when the mind is empty and open, with nothing whatsoever in it and no abiding anywhere, can one realize the Way.

Therefore, do not boast of your cleverness. Petty cleverness is a great obstacle. Only by possessing great wisdom while appearing foolish, with the mind unmoved and

free of abiding and attachment, can one accomplish the great Way.

When the mind is settled and unmoving, free of abiding and attachment, this does not mean being like wood or stone, without awareness or understanding. It is a mind that is lucid and clear, neither rejecting nor grasping, neither loving nor hating, yet unmoved. We must therefore understand that right samādhi means not being deluded when encountering circumstances, with neither entering nor emerging; it does not mean sitting rigidly without moving.

Why, then, was Bodhisattva Wuming able to make her emerge from samādhi? Wuming means that one must discard worldly cleverness and dialectical intelligence. When one is without knowing and without attachment, the great wisdom of prajñā appears before one. Thus, this koan is an illustrative teaching. It is not that Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva truly could not make her emerge from samādhi, nor is it that Wuming was superior to Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva.

—Excerpted from Master Yuanyin's A Brief Explanation of Mahāmudrā

Chan School Gateless Barrier 43: Shoushan's Bamboo Whisk

Master Shoushan held up a bamboo stick and addressed the assembly: "If you call it a bamboo stick, you are in contact with it; if you do not call it a bamboo stick, you turn away from it. Tell me, all of you: what do you call it?"

[Wumen said]

If you call it a bamboo stick, you are in contact with it; if you do not call it a bamboo stick, you turn away from it. You must not speak, and you must not remain silent. Speak quickly, speak quickly!

[Verse]

Holding up the bamboo stick,
he issues the command that kills and gives life.
Turning away and touching race together;
Buddhas and patriarchs beg for their lives.

Gateless Gate, Case 44: Bajiao's Staff

Chan Master Bajiao addressed the assembly: "If you have a staff, I will give you a staff. If you do not have a staff, I will take your staff away!"

[Wumen said:]

It supports one across the waters by a broken bridge and accompanies one home to a moonless village. If you call it a staff, you will enter hell like an arrow.

[Verse:]

The depths and shallows of all directions are all within its grasp. It props up heaven and braces the earth; wherever it is, it stirs the spirit of the school.

The Gateless Gate of Chan, Case 45: Who Is He?

Patriarch Yanshi of Dongshan said, “Śākyamuni and Maitreya are still his servants. Tell me, who is he?”

[Wumen said]

If you see him clearly, it is like encountering your own father at a crossroads; there is no need to ask anyone else whether it is so or not.

[Verse]

Do not draw his bow, do not ride his horse, do not judge his faults, do not concern yourself with his affairs.

Gateless Gate, Case 46: Advancing Beyond the Hundred-Foot Pole

Chan Master Shishuang said, “How does one take a step forward from the top of a hundred-foot pole?”

An ancient worthy also said, “Though one seated atop a hundred-foot pole may have gained entry, this is not yet genuine. From the top of a hundred-foot pole, one must take a step forward; then one’s whole body appears throughout the ten directions.”

[Wumen said]

Once you can take that step and turn your body around, what place would fail to honor you? Yet even so, tell me: how does one take a step forward from the top of a hundred-foot pole? Ha!”

[Verse]

Blind the eye atop your head; mistake the fixed star for the compass. Risking his body, he can cast away his life—one blind man leads a host of blind men.

The Gateless Barrier of the Chan School, Case 47: The Three Barriers of Tuṣita

Chan Master Doushuai Yue set three barriers for students:

“You push aside the grasses and investigate the mystery solely to see your true nature. Where is your true nature at this very moment, venerable sir?

Only after recognizing your own nature can you be freed from birth and death. When the light of your eyes fades, how will you free yourself?

Once freed from birth and death, you will know where you are going. When the four elements separate, where will you go?”

[Wumen said:]

If you can give a turning word to each of these three questions, you may be master wherever you are and, upon encountering conditions, make them your source. If not, coarse food is easily filling, but finely chewed food is hard to satisfy with.

[Verse:]

In a single thought, one universally contemplates countless kalpas; the events of countless kalpas are precisely this very moment. Now see through this single thought, and see through the person who now sees.

Ganfeng’s One Road

A monk asked Chan Master Qianfeng, “The Bhagavāns of the ten directions have but one road to the gate of nirvāṇa. Where does this road begin?”

Qianfeng lifted his staff, drew a line with it, and said, “It is here!”

Later, a monk asked Yunmen for instruction. Yunmen raised his fan and said, “The fan leaps up to the thirty-third heaven and strikes Indra on the nose. Strike a carp in the Eastern Sea with one blow, and rain pours down as if from an overturned basin.”

[Wumen said:]

One proceeds along the floor of the deep sea, raising dust and stirring up waves; another stands atop a high mountain, where white waves surge to the sky. In

holding fast and letting go, each extends one hand. They uphold the school, much like two horsemen colliding. There should be no person of straightforward character in the world. Yet, viewed with the true eye, these two old masters still do not know where the road begins.

[Verse:]

Before one raises a foot, one has already arrived; before one stirs the tongue, one has already spoken. Even if every move is made before the pivotal moment, one must still know that there is an opening beyond.

Since ancient times, Buddhas and patriarchs have presented opportunities for realization and judged cases according to the evidence, without a single superfluous word. They overturn skullcaps and expose the eyes, wishing that all of you would directly take responsibility and not seek from others. If one is a person of broad understanding, then upon merely hearing it raised, one immediately knows where it lands. There is no gate to enter and no rank to ascend.

Swinging one's arms, one passes through the barrier without asking the gatekeeper. Have you not seen Xuansha say, "The gate of liberation is without a gate; the intention of a person of the Way is without intention"? Baiyun also said, "Though one clearly knows it, why can one not penetrate it?" To speak in this way is also like smearing red clay on milk. If you penetrate the Gateless Barrier, you have already needlessly encumbered Wumen; if you do not penetrate the Gateless Barrier, you likewise betray yourself. As it is said, "The mind of nirvāṇa is easy to understand; differentiated wisdom is difficult to clarify. Once differentiated wisdom is understood, one's family and country are naturally at peace."

At the beginning of the Shaoding era, five days before the end of the retreat. Respectfully recorded by Huikai, the monk Wumen, eighth-generation descendant of Yangqi.

The Gateless Barrier, Fascicle: End