

Guidelines for Studying the Way

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I

You should arouse the thought of enlightenment.

The thought of enlightenment has many names but they all refer to one and the same mind.

Ancestor Nāgārjuna said, "The mind that fully sees into the uncertain world of birth and death is called the thought of enlightenment."²

Thus if we maintain this mind, this mind can become the thought of enlightenment.

Indeed, when you understand discontinuity the notion of self does not come into being, ideas of name and gain do not arise. Fearing the swift passage of the sunlight, practice the way as though saving your head from fire. Reflecting on this ephemeral life, make endeavor in the manner of Buddha raising his foot.*

When you hear a song of praise sung by a kinnara god* or a kalavinka bird,* let it be as the evening breeze brushing against your ears. If you see the beautiful face of Maoqiang or Xishi,* let it be like the morning dew-drops coming into your sight. Freedom from the ties of sound and form naturally accords with the essence of the way-seeking mind.

If in the past or present, you hear about students of small learning or meet people with limited views, often they have fallen into the pit of fame

and profit and have forever missed the buddha way in their life. What a pity! How regrettable! You should not ignore this.

Even if you read the sūtras of the expedient or complete teaching,* or transmit the scriptures of the exoteric or esoteric schools, without throwing away name and gain it cannot be called arousing the thought of enlightenment.

Some of these people say, "The thought of enlightenment is the mind of supreme, perfect enlightenment. Do not be concerned with the cultivation of fame or profit."

Some of them say, "The thought of enlightenment is the insight that each thought contains three thousand realms."*

Some of them say, "The thought of enlightenment is the dharma gate, 'Each thought is unborn.'"*

Some of them say, "The thought of enlightenment is the mind of entering the buddha realm."

Such people do not yet know and mistakenly slander the thought of enlightenment. They are remote from the buddha way.

Try to reflect on the mind concerned only with your own gain. Does this one thought blend with the nature and attributes of the three thousand realms? Does this one thought realize the dharma gate of being unborn? There is only the deluded thought of greed for name and love of gain. There is nothing which could be taken as the thought of enlightenment.

From ancient times sages have attained the way and realized dharma. Although as an expedient teaching they lived ordinary lives, still they had no distorted thought of fame or profit. Not even attached to dharma, how could they have worldly attachment?

The thought of enlightenment, as was mentioned, is the mind which sees into impermanence. This is most fundamental, and not at all the same as the mind pointed to by confused people. The understanding that each thought is unborn or the insight that each thought contains three thousand realms is excellent practice after arousing the thought of enlightenment. This should not be mistaken.

Just forget yourself for now and practice inwardly—this is one with the thought of enlightenment. We see that the sixty-two views* are based on self. So when a notion of self arises, sit quietly and contemplate it. Is there a real basis inside or outside your body now? Your body with hair and skin is just inherited from your father and mother. From beginning to end a drop

of blood or lymph is empty. So none of these are the self. What about mind, thought, awareness, and knowledge? Or the breath going in and out, which ties a lifetime together: what is it after all? None of these are the self either. How could you be attached to any of them? Deluded people are attached to them. Enlightened people are free of them.

You figure there is self where there is no self. You attach to birth where there is no birth. You do not practice the buddha way, which should be practiced. You do not cut off the worldly mind, which should be cut off. Avoiding the true teaching and pursuing the groundless teaching, how could you not be mistaken?

2

Once you see or hear the true teaching, you should practice it without fail.

One phrase offered by a loyal servant can have the power to alter the course of the nation. One word given by a buddha ancestor cannot fail to turn people's minds. The unwise ruler does not adopt the servant's advice. One who does not step forward cannot accept the buddha's teaching. If you are unbending, you cannot stop floating along in birth and death. If appropriate advice is not heeded, governing with virtue cannot be realized.

3

In the buddha way, you should always enter enlightenment through practice.

A worldly teacher says, "Through study one can gain wealth."³ Buddha says, "Within practice there is enlightenment."

It is unheard-of that without studying someone should earn wealth or that without practicing someone should attain enlightenment. Though practice varies—initiated by faith or dharma knowledge, with emphasis on sudden or gradual enlightenment*—you always depend on practice to go beyond enlightenment. Though study can be superficial or profound, and students can be sharp or dull, accumulated studying earns wealth. This does not necessarily depend on the king's excellence or inability, nor should it depend on one's having good or bad luck. If someone were to get wealth without studying, how could he transmit the way in which ancient kings, in times of either order or disorder, ruled the country? If you were to gain realization without practice, how could you comprehend the Tathāgata's teaching of delusion and enlightenment?

You should know that arousing practice in the midst of delusion, you attain realization before you recognize it. At this time you first know that the raft of discourse is like yesterday's dream, and you finally cut off your old understanding bound up in the vines and serpents of words. This is not made to happen by Buddha, but is accomplished by your all-encompassing effort.

Moreover, what practice calls forth is enlightenment; your treasure house does not come from outside. How enlightenment functions is through practice; how could actions of mind-ground* go astray? So if you turn the eye of enlightenment and reflect back on the realm of practice, nothing in particular hits the eye, and you just see white clouds for ten thousand miles.⁴ If you arouse practice as though climbing the steps of enlightenment, not even a speck of dust will support your feet; you will be as far from true practice as heaven is from earth.⁵ Now step back and leap beyond the buddha land.

This portion was written on the ninth day, third month, second year of Tempuku [1234].

4

You should not practice Buddha's teaching with the idea of gain.

The practice of Buddha's teaching is always done by receiving the essential instructions of a master, not by following your own ideas. In fact, Buddha's teaching cannot be attained by having ideas or not having ideas. Only when the mind of pure practice coincides with the way will body and mind be calm. If body and mind are not yet calm, they will not be at ease. When body and mind are not at ease, thorns grow on the path of realization.

So that pure practice and the way coincide, how should we proceed? Proceed with the mind which neither grasps nor rejects, the mind unconcerned with name or gain. Do not practice buddha-dharma* with the thought that it is to benefit others.

People in the present world, even those practicing the buddha-dharma, have a mind which is far apart from the way. They practice what others praise and admire, even though they know it does not accord with the way. They reject and do not practice what others fail to honor and praise, even though they know it is the true way. How painful! You should try to quiet

your mind and investigate whether these attitudes are buddha-dharma or not. You may be completely ashamed. The eye of the sage illuminates this.

Clearly, buddha-dharma is not practiced for one's own sake, and even less for the sake of fame and profit. Just for the sake of buddha-dharma you should practice it.

All buddhas' compassion and sympathy for sentient beings* are neither for their own sake nor for others. It is just the nature of buddha-dharma. Isn't it apparent that insects and animals nurture their offspring, exhausting themselves with painful labors, yet in the end have no reward when their offspring are grown? In this way the compassion of small creatures for their offspring naturally resembles the thought of all buddhas for sentient beings.

The inconceivable dharma of all buddhas is not compassion alone, but compassion is the basis of the various teachings that appear universally. Already we are children of the buddhas. Why not follow their lead?

Students! Do not practice buddha-dharma for your own sake. Do not practice buddha-dharma for name and gain. Do not practice buddha-dharma to attain blissful reward. Do not practice buddha-dharma to attain miraculous effects. Practice buddha-dharma solely for the sake of buddha-dharma. This is the way.

5

You should seek a true teacher to practice Zen and study the way.

A teacher of old said, "If the beginning is not right, myriad practices will be useless."

How true these words are! Practice of the way depends on whether the guiding master is a true teacher or not.

The disciple is like wood, and the teacher resembles a craftsman. Even if the wood is good, without a skilled craftsman its extraordinary beauty is not revealed. Even if the wood is bent, placed in skilled hands its splendid merits immediately appear. By this you should know that realization is genuine or false depending on whether the teacher is true or incompetent.

But in our country from ancient times, there have not been any true teachers. How do we know this is so? We can guess by studying their sayings, just as we can scoop up stream water and find out about its source. In our country from ancient times, various teachers have written books and instructed their disciples, offering their teaching to human and heavenly beings. Their words are immature, their discourse has not yet ripened. They

have not yet reached the peak of study; how could they have come close to the state of realization? They only transmitted words and phrases or taught the chanting of Buddha's name. They count other people's treasure day and night, not having half a penny themselves.

Previous teachers are responsible for this. They taught people to seek enlightenment outside mind,⁶ or to seek rebirth in another land. Confusion starts from this. Mistaken ideas come from this.

Though you give good medicine, if you do not teach a method of controlling its use it will make one sicker than taking poison. In our country since ancient times it seems as though no one has given good medicine. There are as yet no masters who can control the poisonous effects of medicine. Because of this, it is difficult to penetrate birth and death. How can old age and death be overcome?

All this is the teachers' fault, not at all the fault of the disciples. The reason is that those who are teachers let people neglect the root* and go out on the limbs.* Before they establish true understanding, they are absorbed only in their own thinking, and they unwittingly cause others to enter a realm of confusion. What a pity! Those who are teachers do not yet understand this confusion. How could students realize what is right and wrong?

How sad! In this small, remote nation buddha-dharma has not yet spread widely. True masters have not yet appeared here. If you wish to study the unsurpassed buddha way, you have to travel a great distance to call on the masters in Song China, and you have to reflect deeply on the vital road outside thought. Until you have a true teacher, it is better not to study.

Regardless of his age or experience, a true teacher is simply one who has apprehended the true teaching and attained the authentic teacher's seal of realization. He does not put texts first or understanding first, but his capacity is outside any framework and his spirit freely penetrates the nodes in bamboo.* He is not concerned with self-views* and does not stagnate in emotional feelings. Thus, practice and understanding are in mutual accord. This is a true master.

6

What you should know for practicing Zen.

Practicing Zen, studying the way, is the great matter of a lifetime. You should not belittle it or be hasty with it. A master of old cut off his arm* and another cut off his fingers.* These are excellent models from China.

Long ago Shākyamuni Buddha abandoned his home and left his country. This is an excellent precedent for practicing the way.

People of the present say you should practice what is easy to practice. These words are quite mistaken. They are not at all in accord with the buddha way. If this alone is what you regard as practice, then even lying down will be wearisome. If you find one thing wearisome, you will find everything wearisome. It is obvious that people who are fond of easy practice are not capable of the way.

In fact, the dharma spread and is now present in the world because our great teacher Shākyamuni practiced with difficulty and pain for immeasurable eons and finally attained this dharma. If the original source is like this, how could the later streams be easy?

Students who would like to study the way must not wish for easy practice. If you seek easy practice, you will for certain never reach the ground of truth or dig down to the place of treasure. Even teachers of old who had great capacity said that practice is difficult. You should know that the buddha way is vast and profound.

If the buddha way were originally easy to practice, then teachers of great capacity from olden times would not have said that practice is difficult and understanding is difficult. Compared with the people of old, those of today do not amount to even one hair from nine cows. With their small capacity and shallow knowledge, even if people of today strive diligently and regard this as difficult and excellent practice, still it does not amount to even the easiest practice and easiest understanding of the teachers of old.

What is this teaching of easy understanding and easy practice, which people nowadays like? It is neither a secular teaching nor Buddha's teaching. It does not come up to the practice of Pāpīyas,* the Demon King, nor does it come up to the practice of those outside the way or of the Two Lesser Vehicles.* We should regard it as the product of ordinary people's extreme delusion. Even though they try to attain liberation, they find nothing but endless rounds of suffering.

On the other hand, we can see that breaking bones or crushing marrow is not difficult, but to harmonize the mind* is most difficult. Again, the practice of prolonged austerities is not difficult, but to harmonize bodily activities* is most difficult.

Do you think crushing bones is of value? Although many endured such practice, few of them attained dharma. Do you think people practicing

austerities are to be respected? Although there have been many, few of them have realized the way, for they still have difficulty in harmonizing the mind.

Brilliance is not primary, understanding is not primary, conscious endeavor* is not primary, introspection* is not primary. Without using any of these, harmonize body-and-mind and enter the buddha way.

Old man Shākyamuni said, "Avalokiteshvara* turns the stream inward and disregards knowing objects."⁷

That is the meaning. Separation between the two aspects of activity and stillness simply does not arise. This is harmonizing.

If anyone could enter the buddha way by means of brilliance or broad knowledge, then the senior monk Shenxiu would have been the one. If anyone of ordinary appearance or humble position were excluded from the buddha way, how could Huineng become the Sixth Ancestor? It is clear that the buddha way's transmission lies outside brilliance and broad knowledge. Search and find out. Reflect and practice.

Being old or decrepit does not exclude you. Being quite young or in your prime does not exclude you. Although Zhaozhou first studied when he was over sixty, he became a man of excellence in the ancestral lineage. Zheng's daughter had already studied long by the time she was thirteen, and she was outstanding in the monastery. The power of buddha-dharma is revealed depending on whether or not there is effort, and is distinguished depending on whether or not it is practiced.

Those who have studied sūtras a long time and those who are accomplished in secular texts, all should study at a Zen monastery. There have been many examples of this. Huisi of Nanyue was a very learned man, but still he practiced with Bodhidharma. Xuanjue of Yongjia was an excellent scholar, and still he practiced with Dajian.

To understand dharma and attain the way can only be the result of studying with a teacher. However, when practicing and inquiring of a teacher, listen to his words without matching them with your previous views. If you understand his words in terms of your own views, you will not be able to grasp his teaching.

When you practice with a teacher and inquire about dharma, clear body and mind, still the eyes and ears, and just listen and accept the teaching without mixing in any other thoughts. Your body and mind will be one, a receptacle ready to be filled with water. Then you will certainly receive the teaching.

Nowadays, there are foolish people who memorize the words of texts or

accumulate sayings and try to match these words with the teacher's explanation. In this case they have only their own views and old words, and have not yet merged with the teacher's words.

For some people their own views are primary; they open a sūtra, memorize a word or two, and consider this to be buddha-dharma. Later when they visit with an awakened teacher or a skilled master and hear the teaching, if it agrees with their own view they consider the teaching right, and if it does not agree with their old fixed standards they consider his words wrong. They do not know how to abandon their mistaken tendencies, so how could they ascend and return to the true way? For ages numberless as particles of dust and sand, they will remain deluded. It is most pitiable. Is it not sad?

Students should know that the buddha way lies outside thinking, analysis, prophecy, introspection, knowledge, and wise explanation. If the buddha way were in these activities, why would you not have realized the buddha way by now, since from birth you have perpetually been in the midst of these activities?

Students of the way should not employ thinking, analysis, or any such thing. Though thinking and other activities perpetually beset you, if you examine them as you go your clarity will be like a mirror. The way to enter the gate is mastered only by a teacher who has attained dharma; it cannot be reached by priests who have studied letters.

This portion was written on the "clear and bright" day,⁸ third month, second year of Tempuku [1234].

7

*Those who long to leave the world and
practice buddha-dharma should study Zen.*

The buddha-dharma excels among various ways. For that reason people seek it.

When the Tathāgata dwelt in the world there were neither two teachers nor two masters. The great master Shākyamuni guided sentient beings solely by means of his unsurpassed enlightenment. Ever since Mahākāshyapa transmitted the treasury of the true dharma eye,^{*} the twenty-eight generations in India, the six early generations in China, and all the ancestors in the Five Schools^{*} have in direct succession inherited it without any interruption. Consequently, ever since the Putong Era [520-27] of Liang, all

those who were outstanding—from monks to kings and retainers—never failed to pay homage to buddha-dharma. Indeed, those who are able to love excellence should love excellence. It should not be like Minister She's love for a dragon.*

In the countries east of China the net of scriptural teaching covers the oceans and pervades the mountains. Although it pervades the mountains it lacks the heart of the clouds.* Although it covers the oceans it dries out the heart of the waves.* Foolish people are fond of this kind of teaching, just like taking a fish eye and holding it to be a jewel. Deluded people take pleasure in this kind of teaching, just like treasuring a pebble from Mt. Yan* as an honored jewel. Many fall into a demon's pit, often destroying themselves. How pitiable!

In a distant country a mistaken teaching easily spreads, and the correct teaching has difficulty prevailing. Although China has already taken refuge in Buddha's correct teaching, in our country and Korea Buddha's correct teaching has not yet spread widely. Why is that? What is the reason? In Korea the name of the correct teaching has at least been heard. But in our country not even this has happened. The reason is that teachers in the past who went to China were all caught in the net of scriptural teachings. Although they transmitted the Buddhist scriptures it seems they forgot the buddha-dharma. What is the benefit of that? In the end it is of no use. This is simply because they did not have the key to studying the way. It is a pity that they spent a lifetime as human beings in useless effort.

When you first enter the gate to study the buddha way, listen to the teacher's instruction and practice as instructed. When you do that there is something you should know: Dharma turns you, and you turn dharma.* When you turn dharma, you are leading and dharma is following. On the other hand when dharma turns you, dharma is leading and you are following. Buddha-dharma originally has these two modes, but those who are not true heirs have never understood it; unless they are patch-robed monks they scarcely have heard of it. Without knowing this key, you cannot yet judge how to study the way. How could you determine the correct from the mistaken?

On the other hand, those practicing Zen and studying the way are always given this key, so they do not make mistakes. Other schools do not do this.

Without studying Zen those who seek the way cannot know the true way.

8

The conduct of Zen monks.

The conduct of Zen monks has been directly and uniquely transmitted by buddha ancestors throughout twenty-eight generations in India and six early generations in China, without the addition of a single hair and without the destruction of a single particle. Thus the robe was transmitted to Caoxi and dharma has spread in boundless worlds. Presently the Tathāgata's treasury of the true dharma eye is flourishing in Great China.

This dharma is such that it cannot be attained by groping or searching about. In the realm of seeing, knowledge perishes. At the moment of attaining, mind is surpassed.

Once a face was lost at Mt. Huangmei.⁹ Once an arm was cut off* at Shaolin. By attaining the marrow* and turning around mind, you acquire genuine life. By bowing formally and stepping inward* you stumble into the realm of great ease. However, in mind and body there is no abiding, no attaching, no standing still, and no stagnating.

A monk asked Zhaozhou, "Does a dog have buddha nature or not?"

Zhaozhou replied, "Mu."*

Beyond this word *mu* can you measure anything or grasp anything? There is entirely nothing to hold on to.

Please try releasing your hold, and releasing your hold, observe: What is body-and-mind? What is conduct? What is birth-and-death? What is buddha-dharma? What are the laws of the world? What, in the end, are mountains, rivers, earth, human beings, animals, and houses? When you observe thoroughly, it follows that the two aspects of motion and stillness do not arise at all. Though motion and stillness do not arise, things are not fixed. People do not realize this; those who lose track of it are many. You who study the way will come to awakening in the course of study. Even when you complete the way, you should not stop. This is my prayer indeed.

9

You should practice throughout the way.

Courageous people who study the way should first know what is correct and what is incorrect in practice throughout the way.

The great tamer of beings, Shākyamuni, sat under the bodhi tree and

was immediately awakened to the way, the unsurpassed vehicle, when he saw the morning star. This way of enlightenment cannot be reached by shrāvakas,* pratyekabuddhas,* or beings such as this. Buddhas alone can be enlightened and buddhas have transmitted to buddhas, ceaselessly. How can those who have attained enlightenment not be buddhas?

To practice throughout the way is to actualize the limitless realm of the buddha way and to illuminate all aspects of the buddha way. The buddha way is under everyone's heel. Immersed in the way, clearly understand right on the spot. Immersed in enlightenment, you yourself are complete. Therefore, even though you arrive at full understanding, still this is only a part of enlightenment. This is how it is with practice throughout the way.

People nowadays who study the way do not understand where the way leads or ends, so they strongly desire to gain visible results. Who would not make this mistake? It is like someone who runs away from his father, leaving a treasure behind and wandering about. Though he is the only child of a wealthy family, he endlessly wanders as a menial in foreign lands. Indeed it is just like this.

Those who study the way seek to be immersed in the way. For those who are immersed in the way, all traces of enlightenment perish. Those who practice the buddha way should first of all trust in the buddha way. Those who trust in the buddha way should trust that they are in essence within the buddha way, where there is no delusion, no false thinking, no confusion, no increase or decrease, and no mistake. To arouse such trust and illuminate the way in this manner, and to practice accordingly, are fundamental in studying the way.

You do this by sitting, which severs the root of thinking and blocks access to the road of intellectual understanding.¹⁰ This is an excellent means to arouse true beginner's mind. Then you let body and mind drop away and let go of delusion and enlightenment. This is the second aspect of studying the way.

Generally speaking, those who trust that they are within the buddha way are most rare. If you have correct trust that you are within the buddha way, you understand where the great way leads or ends, and you know the original source of delusion and enlightenment. If once, in sitting, you sever the root of thinking, in eight or nine cases out of ten you will immediately attain understanding of the way.

IO

Immediately hitting the mark.

There are two ways to penetrate body and mind: studying with a master to hear the teaching, and devotedly sitting zazen. Listening to the teaching opens up your conscious mind, while sitting zazen is concerned with practice-enlightenment. Therefore, if you neglect either of these when entering the buddha way, you cannot hit the mark.

Everyone has a body-and-mind. In activity and appearance its function is either leading or following, courageous or cowardly. To realize buddha immediately with this body-and-mind is to hit the mark. Without changing your usual body-and-mind, just to follow buddha's realization is called "immediate," is called "hitting the mark."

To follow buddha completely means you do not have your old views. To hit the mark completely means you have no new nest* in which to settle.

Translated by Ed Brown and Kazuaki Tanahashi