

# The *Bussō* [Buddha-nature] Section of the *Shōbō-genzō*

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## Introduction

### I. Definition of the Buddha-nature

The teaching on the Buddha-nature<sup>1</sup> forms one of the basic tenets of Buddhism. According to the late Buddhist scholar, Dr. Hakuju Ui, the Buddha-nature may be defined as “to be the Buddha” (*Hotoke de aru koto*) or “the Buddha-nature himself” (*Hotoke sono mono*).<sup>2</sup>

The Buddha-nature, as the original nature of the Buddha,<sup>3</sup> is also known by the Sanskrit term *tathāgata-garbha*,<sup>4</sup> signifying the nature of spontaneous enlightenment, the nature of the Buddha’s Wisdom<sup>5</sup> or the nature of first importance. (cf. *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, sec. 511, 547, 561, 587)<sup>6</sup>

The term “the seed producing the fruit,”<sup>7</sup> that is to say, the ability to become a Buddha, is another method of defining the Buddha-nature. In this connection the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*<sup>8</sup> states: “The [Buddha]-nature is very much like nectar [for growing things], the Mother of all the Buddhas.” (cf. sec. 25, chap. 23)

*Hīnayāna* Buddhism<sup>9</sup> teaches that the Buddha-nature can only be acquired after long years of arduous training through countless rebirths. This is because the purpose of *Hīnayāna* training lies in becoming an Arhat, i.e. one who is free from all craving and rebirth. Hīnayanists regard their ordinary wisdom and training as the essence of the Buddha-nature. It is for this reason that the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-*

*sūtra* states: "The Buddha-nature in *Mahāyāna*<sup>10</sup> Wisdom is a complete mystery to Hinayānists." (cf. sec. 7, chap. 9). The same *sūtra* further states: "[Only] Buddhas, Tathāgatas,<sup>11</sup> and Bodhisattvas in higher levels of attainment are capable of seeing the Buddha-nature." (cf. *ibid.*)

In *Mahāyāna* Buddhism the Buddha-nature is defined as "absolute emptiness" (cf. Commentary on the *Vajra-sūtra*,<sup>13</sup> sec. 2), the twelve-linked chain of dependent origination<sup>14</sup> and beyond birth and decay, coming and going or cause and effect. (cf. *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra*, sec. 13, chap. 19) Mahāyānists, furthermore, also describe the Buddha-nature as pure Mind,<sup>15</sup> or that which is essential, transcendental and indestructible.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, it is known as the "Buddha-nature of Truth" or the "Buddha-nature of the Law."<sup>17</sup> (cf. Commentary on the *Vajra-sūtra*, sec. 3) Since it exists at all times and in all places, the *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra* states: "All sentient beings have the Buddha-nature. The Tathāgata is eternally present and unchangeable." (cf. sec. 27, chap. 23) Having stated this, however, the same *sūtra* goes on to warn against becoming attached to this viewpoint, believing that arduous practice is no longer necessary. It states: "Although we have the Buddha-nature, it cannot be seen unless we have practiced earnestly." (cf. sec. 7, chap. 9). The true and living Buddha-nature cannot manifest itself as long as we are attached to our conceptions of it, no matter how excellent these conceptions may seem to be.

The *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra* further states: "The Buddha-nature denotes great faith. Based on this faith, a Bodhisattva is able to do acts of giving<sup>18</sup> and reveal the great Wisdom." (cf. sec. 30, chap. 23) With great faith, then, a Bodhisattva continuously develops the Buddha-nature, thereby saving both self and others. "Great compassion and benevolence are synonymous with the Buddha-nature," the same *sūtra* states, "for the former follow a Bodhisattva just as a shadow follows its shape." (cf. sec. 30, chap. 23) Through

the help of the Bodhi-mind<sup>19</sup> devoted to saving all sentient beings, the seed of the Buddha-nature will grow into the fruit of the highest supreme Wisdom. Without faith in, and awakening to, the Buddha-nature of great compassion, there is no hope of realizing enlightenment.

## II. Dōgen's teaching on the Buddha-nature

In Dōgen's Zen the Buddha-nature is, ultimately, all encompassing, with no differentiation made between its expression in *Hinayāna* and *Mahāyāna*. For this reason, Dōgen says in the *Bukkyō* (Buddha's Teachings) section of the *Shōbō-genzō*.<sup>20</sup> "The Four Noble Truths<sup>21</sup> are the Buddha-nature." Similarly, the Buddha-nature is beyond discriminative concepts, such as inside and outside ancient and modern, substance and appearance, or sentient and non-sentient. Dōgen makes this clear when he says in the *Bushō* section of the *Shōbō-genzō*:

"There are those who assert that the Buddha-nature is like the seeds of plants and trees which, when often moistened by the rain of the Law, send forth sprouts to become stalks, trunks, branches, leaves, flowers and seed-containing fruit. This is the thinking of ordinary people. Even though they think this way, they should realize that each and every seed and piece of fruit is the Buddha-nature. There are seeds in each piece of fruit which, even though hidden, send out roots, stalks, and so forth. Even though left unattended, they send out branches and become large trees. This is not a question of 'inner' and 'outer' or 'before' and 'after.'"

Dōgen's teachings on the Buddha-nature, as contained in the above-named section, form the 22nd section in the Iwanami edition<sup>22</sup> of the *Shōbō-genzō* upon which this English translation is based. This section was delivered by Dōgen while in residence at Kōshō-ji temple<sup>23</sup> on the 14th of October, the second year of Ninji (1241). Historically, it has been considered one of the three most important sections of the *Shōbō-genzō* (containing 92 sections in all), the other

two sections being the *Bendōwa* (The Practice of the Way)<sup>24</sup> and the *Genjō-kōan* (The Manifestation of the *Kōan*).<sup>25</sup> In other words, this section is one of short cuts to realizing the essence of the *Shōbō-genzō*.

The central idea of this section is, as previously mentioned, that “all sentient beings have the Buddha-nature.” (cf., *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra*, sec. 8, chap. 12) This statement, however, is commonly misunderstood to mean that, at first, sentient beings and the Buddha-nature exist independently of each other, the former coming to encompass the latter only after long training. That is to say, there is duality—a split between subject and object. The characteristic of Dōgen’s Zen, however, lies in the original identity or absolute unity of all dualistic things. This is why Dōgen states that “all sentient beings” mean “all of existence” and the word “have” really signifies “is”, that is to say, all of existence *is* the Buddha-nature.

Dōgen regarded the Buddha-nature as the foundation of all existence and the source of all virtue. His teachings “...all mountains, rivers and lands form the realm of the Buddha-nature” stem from this viewpoint. His further teaching that “all [mountains, rivers and lands] are based on [the Buddha-nature]” mean that the *present time* in which these things exist is, in itself, all mountains, rivers and lands. That is to say, the Buddha-nature is none other than these various elements. The Buddha-nature should not be thought of as existing either apart from, in between or within, these various elements. Mountains, rivers and lands are nothing but the manifestations of all things.

Dōgen’s paradoxical words “The Buddha-nature is [both] temporary and permanent” mean that the Buddha-nature is beyond such dualistic concepts as temporary and permanent. Pai-chang’s (720–814)<sup>26</sup> statement to the effect that to say that all sentient beings either have or don’t have the Buddha-nature is to slander the Three Treasures<sup>27</sup> means that the Buddha-nature is beyond being and

non-being. All things, such as dogs, earth-worms, Mongolian oaks; mountains, rivers and earth; time and space; mental and physical phenomena, are based on this one whole Buddha-nature.

Dōgen's words "The appearance of the round moon depicted by Nāgārjuna<sup>28</sup> is the manifestation of the Buddha-body," mean that the transcendental Buddha-nature can be revealed only through our physical training in the Way. This fact becomes even clearer in Dōgen's statement: "The true meaning of the Buddha-nature can be grasped only after the realization of enlightenment, not before it; for the Buddha-nature appears together with enlightenment. This fact should be studied very carefully, for twenty or thirty years if necessary. This fact cannot be understood by even a Bodhisattva at a high level of attainment." Truly, the Buddha-nature may be said to be practice and practice, the Buddha-nature.

In the concluding part of this section Dōgen states: "Although talking further about the Buddha-nature is not unlike offering water to a drowning man, if I were to say one more thing, it would be that the Buddha-nature is fences, walls, tiles and pebbles: Were I to give even a further explanation of the Buddha-nature, what could I say? That the Buddha-nature has three heads and eight arms."<sup>29</sup> The preceding statement tells us that we should regard the Buddha-nature as something indescribable and try to free ourselves from attempting to grasp it conceptionally. In this regard, Dōgen says: "Both half a thing, as well as its whole, are independent of each other. In the same way, hundreds, as well as thousands of things are also independent of each other, just as hundreds, as well as thousands of [separate] times are independent of each other. For this reason it can be said that illusion is one with enlightenment and that each moment is all of time."

### Conclusion

When, then, should we awake to this absolute Buddha-nature?

Now or never! Time flies like an arrow. We must awake to the Way right away and practice it strenuously, firmly believing that we are endowed with the Buddha-nature, pure and indestructible. Therefore, Dōgen says in discussing the meaning of the Buddha's statement "When the right time comes, the Buddha-nature will manifest itself," that "the words 'when the right time comes' mean the right time has already come. There can be no doubt about this. Even should doubts arise, they are nothing but the manifestation of the Buddha-nature in ourselves"

#### Notes:

1. Skt., *Buddhatā*.
2. *Bukkyō Shisō Kenkyū* (A Study on Buddhist Thought); Iwanami Publishing Co., Tōkyō, 1943; p. 211.
3. (J., *Butsu* ; *Hotoke*) Originally it meant anyone who is awakened or enlightened to the true nature of existence. In present usage, it often refers to the historical founder of Buddhism, born Gautama Siddhārtha, who was born around 565 B.C. as the first son of King Suddhodana, whose capital city of Kapilavastu was located in what is now the country of Nepal. At the age of 29 he left his father's castle and wife and child in search of the meaning of existence. One morning at the age of thirty-five he realized enlightenment while practicing zazen seated beneath a *Bodhi* tree. He spent the next 45 years until his death at the age of eighty, expounding his teachings of the Middle Path, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold Noble Path in order that all sentient beings might realize the same enlightenment he had.

In this translation the term *a* Buddha is generally used to denote anyone who has realized enlightenment while *the* Buddha refers to the historical personage, i.e. Buddha Śākyamuni. When reference is made to *the* Buddha *principle*, as in this passage; the definite article is also used. The plural form, i.e. Buddhas, naturally refers to all enlightened beings.

4. *Tathāgata* refers to *tathatā* (J., *shinnyo*), i.e. the true form of things, reality. *Garbha* (J., *zō*) literally means a womb, i.e. the repository for *tathatā*. The term *Tathāgata* with a capital letter

- is also used as one of the ten epithets of the Buddha.
5. (Skt., *Prajñā*). The mental function which enables one to perceive without error and to distinguish between what is true and what is false.
  6. *The Wisdom Sūtras*, a group of *sūtras* setting forth the doctrine of "emptiness" (Skt., *śūnyatā*; J., *kū*).
  7. J., *Bukka*.
  8. *The Sūtra of the Great Demise*. A *Mahāyāna* discourse which claims to be the last sermon of the Buddha. It has been preserved in Chinese versions alone.
  9. (J., *shōjō*). The southern branch of the two main "schools" of Buddhism. Disparagingly designed by Mahāyānists as *Hinayāna*, or the "Lesser Vehicle" it arose in southern India, later spreading to Ceylon, Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. In *Hinayāna Buddhism* one strives to become an *Arhat*, i.e. a person who has gained liberation by singleheartedly overcoming his passion and ego.

The *Mahāyāna*, or "Greater Vehicle", school, on the other hand spread from northern India to Tibet, Mongolia, China, Korea and Japan. In contrast to *Hinayāna* Buddhism, which tended to remain conservative and rigid, the *Mahāyāna* adapted itself to the need of peoples of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds and varying levels of understanding. Its idea became the Bodhisattva, ever ready to sacrifice himself in the interest of those lost in ignorance and despair, even at the expense of his own supreme enlightenment.

*Minayāna* adherents themselves prefer the term *Theravāda* (Way of the Elders) as the designation for their school.

10. See Footnote 9.
11. See Footnote 4.
12. (J., *Bosatsu*). One who practices the teaching of Buddhism in both other worldly and secular ways. He vows to compassionately save all beings before realizing final enlightenment for himself.
13. *The Diamond Sūtra*. This *sutra* sets forth the doctrines of "emptiness" and the Buddha's Wisdom.
14. The twelve links are: 1) ignorance, 2) actions produced by the preceding, 3) consciousness, which is the first consciousness after conception takes place in the womb, 4) mental functions and matter, 5) the five organs and mind, 6) contact, 7) perception,

- 8) desire, 9) attachment, 10) existence, which along with desire and perception causes the future reward, 11) birth, 12) old age and death.
15. *The Tathāgata-garbha-sūtra* states: "Though all sentient beings are cursed with delusion, *tathāgata-garbha* (Buddha-nature) is always *pure*."
  16. *The Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra* states: "The Buddha-nature is powerful and *indestructible*. For this reason no one can harm it." See. 8, Chap. 12.
  17. Skt. *Dharma*.
  18. One of the six practices of a Bodhisattva for realizing enlightenment.
  19. (J., *Bodaishin*). The wisdom of the Buddha's enlightenment acquired as the result of cutting off the two hindrances: passion and illusory conception; the *Bodhi*-mind refers to a person's aspiration to realize this Wisdom.
  20. Literally means the "Storehouse of the Eye of the true Law." "True Law" refers to the Middle Path principle of "emptiness". "Eye" refers to the quality of the mind capable of cognizing that principle. It especially refers to the functions of the Buddha-nature. "Storehouse" designates the repository for the true Law.
  21. In *Hinayāna* they are: 1) All existence is suffering, 2) The cause of suffering is illusion and desire, 3) Nirvāna is the realm free from suffering, and 4) The means for the attainment of Nirvāna is the practice of the Eight Noble Path.
  22. Edited by Dr. Sokuō Etō (Iwanami Publishing Co. Tōkyo, 1939)
  23. Located in Uji near Kyōto. Dōgen served as the chief monk of this temple from 1233 to 1243.
  24. Although some editions consist of 95 sections, the noted Zen scholar Dr. Dōshū Ōkubo claims that the *Shōbō-genzō* actually consists of three divisions of 75, 12 and 5 sections, respectively, or 92 in all.
  25. (Ch., *kung-an*). Sometimes translated as "Zen riddle". *Kōan* originally meant a public notice issued by the [Chinese] government; but now it refers to the statements, including answers to questions, made by famous ancient Zen masters. These statements are used as objects of meditation by novices in Zen monasteries of the Rinzai sect as a means to transcend the realm of duality,



- such as the subject-object split. In the Sōtō sect, however, they are studied only as reference points for one's own practice. In Sōtō Zen, daily life itself is seen as the ultimate *kōan*, i.e. the manifestation of the Truth.
26. (J., Hyakuji Ekai; 720-814). Buddhist heir of Zen Master Ma-tsu Tao-i. Famous for having written the first set of regulations for a Zen monastery. These regulations, known as the *Pai-chang Ching-kuei*, are, however, no longer extant.
  27. The Buddha, His Teachings (Skt., *Dharma*) and the Buddhist Community (Skt., *Samgha*).
  28. (J., Ryūju). Born in a *Brāhmaṇa* family in southern India around the second or third century. Originally he studied Hinduism and other contemporary religions and philosophies, but later converted to Buddhism. He became one of the chief philosophers of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism and is considered to be the fourteenth patriarch in the lineage of the transmission of the Law. He advocated the theory that all phenomena are relative, i.e. "empty", having no independent existence of their own.
  29. This metaphor symbolizes something which is beyond common sense, indicating the universality and absoluteness of the Buddha-nature.

## TEXT

Buddha Śākyamuni<sup>1</sup> said: "All sentient beings have the Buddha-nature. The Tathāgata<sup>2</sup> is eternally present and unchangeable. This is both a teaching with the power of a lion's roar from our great master Śākyamuni and the essence of all the Buddhas and patriarchs. This teaching has been studied (now, the second year of Ninji, 1241) for 2190 years. During this period fifty successive patriarchs—twenty-eight successive generations in India and twenty-three in China<sup>3</sup>—have correctly transmitted and preserved [this teaching]. The various Buddhas and patriarchs in the ten quarters<sup>4</sup> have also done the same.

What did the Bhagavat<sup>5</sup> mean by saying that all beings have the Buddha-nature? He meant that an inexpressible something is clearly present. The term “all sentient beings” [in Buddhism] is also expressed by the words “things having feelings”, “animate things”, and “living things.” These all mean the same thing, however, that is, the totality of existence. In other words, the totality of existence is the Buddha-nature. One aspect of this totality is [temporarily] designated as all sentient beings. In this instance, both all sentient beings and all other things are the totality of existence, that is, the Buddha-nature. This is possible because not only is the Buddha-nature transmitted from master to disciple, but it is, at the same time, transmitted to the totality of existence. We should realize that the totality of existence identified with the Buddha-nature is beyond any duality of existence and non-existence. The totality of existence is the speech and tongue of the Buddha, the eye-balls<sup>6</sup> of all the Buddhas and patriarchs, the nostrils<sup>7</sup> of mendicant monks.

The “existence” of “the totality of existence” has neither a beginning nor an original or absolute nature. How, then, could it be the result of causal relations or illusion? Furthermore, it has nothing to do with mind and its objects or essence and its manifestations. Therefore, when all beings are the totality of existence, neither they nor the world are produced as the result of past *karma*<sup>8</sup> or illusion, let alone spontaneously; or as a result of enlightenment achieved through miraculous powers. If this were not so, then the enlightenment of the various excellent masters, the Bodhi-wisdom of the Buddhas, and the eye-balls of the Buddhas and patriarchs would become synonymous with all of these things. In fact, however, the reverse is true. There is no illusion in the whole world; for there is nothing which is not immediately the Buddha [just as it is]. We are unaware of this, however, because failing to immediately cut off illusion at its roots, we find ourselves in its dazzling, unending grasp. The whole world is not produced as a result of illusion, for

the whole world is clearly the manifestation [of the Truth]. However, this should not be interpreted as a simple affirmation of the world [as it is]. It is a false non-Buddhist view to regard the whole world as based on self.<sup>9</sup> [The whole world] has no original nature, for it is only "eternal now." Since, furthermore, the whole world is completely free from illusion, it is not a case of its having just come into being. In similar manner, since it is all encompassing, it is not fragmented either. This is not to say, however, that [the whole world] has no beginning, for an expressible something is clearly present. Neither is it to say that the world is *something* which has just come into being, for our ordinary mind is the Way. We should clearly understand that it is impossible to meet all sentient beings within the totality of existence. When we realize the [true] meaning of this totality, our conceptual understanding of it will disappear.

Many Buddhist trainees mistakenly think that the Buddha-nature is the same as the non-Buddhist Śrenika's<sup>11</sup> teaching of "an eternal self." This is because they have neither met enlightened persons or [true] teachers, nor realized their true Self. They imagine meaninglessly that their [illusory] consciousness which is produced by the four elements<sup>12</sup> is the same as the [enlightened] consciousness of the Buddha-nature. Who has ever said that there is [enlightened] consciousness in the Buddha-nature? Although the various Buddhas possess [enlightened] consciousness, this [enlightened] consciousness is not the same as the Buddha-nature. The [enlightened] consciousness of the various Buddhas should not, therefore, be misunderstood to be the same as the [illusory] consciousness produced by the four elements, for [in reality] the [enlightened] consciousness of the various Buddhas is none other than the functioning of each and every Buddha and patriarch.

In the past, beginning with the Han Dynasty<sup>13</sup> and extending down through the Sung,<sup>14</sup> senior virtuous monks as numerous as rice plants, hemp, bamboo and reeds, travelled to and from India and

gave instruction to human and celestial beings. Most of them, however, believed that the [illusory]<sup>15</sup> consciousness produced by the four elements was the same as the [enlightened] consciousness of the Buddha-nature. How tragic! They made this mistake because they were quite remiss in their practice of the Way. We latter-day initiates in the Way should not follow their example. Thus, when we study [enlightend] consciousness, we should not imagine that it is produced by the four elements. Even though we study [illusory] consciousness we should not imagine that it is the same as [enlightened] consciousness. When we realize the true nature of [illusory] consciousness, we will also be able to realize the true nature of [enlightened] consciousness.

“Buddha’ and “nature” are one, not two. The Buddha-nature is inevitably the totality of existence, for the totality of existence is the Buddha-nature. This totality is neither many separate entities nor one whole. It is neither large nor small, for it is daily life itself. The Buddha-nature under discussion here can neither be compared with enlightened persons nor with itself.

There are those who assert that the Buddha-nature is like the seeds of plants and trees which, when moistened sufficiently by the rain of the Law, send forth sprouts to become stalks and trunks, branches, leaves, flowers and seed-containing fruit. This is the thinking of ordinary people. Even though they think this way, they should realize that each and every seed and piece of fruit is the Buddha-nature itself. There are seeds in each piece of fruit which, even though hidden, send out roots, stalks and so forth. Even though left unattended, these send out branches and become large trees. This is not a question of an ‘inner and outer’ or a ‘before and after.’ Even though we adopt the viewpoint of ordinary men, we should realize that the roots, stalks, branches, and leaves [of plants and trees] rise and decay in the same way, for they are all endowed with the Buddha-nature.

The Buddha said: "If you want to understand the true meaning of the Buddha-nature, you should see (correctly understand) its momentary manifestations. When the [right] times comes, the Buddha-nature will manifest itself." The words "If you want to understand the true meaning of the Buddha-nature" do not mean simply to "understand" it, rather it is the same as saying "If you want to practice it", "if you want to realize it", "if you want to expound it", or "if you want to forget it." We should understand, however, that the words "to practice, realize, expound, forget, correctly or incorrectly understand and so forth" are themselves none other than momentary manifestations.

The words "to see its momentary manifestations" mean exactly that, which is to say, we see momentary manifestations for what they are: a *hossu*<sup>16</sup> as a *hossu*, a *shujō*<sup>17</sup> as a *shujō*, and so on. This cannot be done by employing the illusive wisdom [of ordinary men] or the Bodhiwisdom [of a Buddha] that results from perfect, original, initial, non-discriminatory and true enlightenment. The words "to see" are not the discriminatory "seeing" of "seeing" and "being seen," neither is it a question of seeing correctly or incorrectly. It simply means "to see," that is to say, is to see beyond [the discriminatory concepts of] self and others. Momentary manifestations are nothing but momentary manifestations, transcending even [concepts of] themselves. The Buddha-nature is the Buddha-nature itself, transcending even [the concept of] itself. The "Buddha" is the Buddha itself; "nature" is nature itself.

Many monks both past and present have believed that the phrase "When the [right] time comes" means to wait for the Buddha-nature to manifest itself in the future. They think that if they continue training [in the Way] the Buddha-nature will naturally manifest itself at the [right] time. Until that time comes, they [mistakenly] conclude, the Buddha-nature will not manifest itself even should they visit a master in search of the Law or train diligently. Based on

this [false] conclusion, they meaninglessly return to the ordinary world and vainly wait for the [right] time to come. People who think like this are similar to those who believe in spontaneity, thereby denying causality.<sup>18</sup>

The words "If you want to understand the true meaning of the Buddha-nature" mean that we *ought to* understand its true nature. The phrase "you should see momentary manifestations" means that we should *understand* them. If we want to understand the Buddha-nature, we should understand that it is momentary manifestations themselves. The words "when the [right] time comes" mean that the [right] time has already come. There can be no doubt about this. Even should doubts arise, they are nothing but the manifestation of the Buddha-nature in ourselves. We should clearly understand that the words "the [right] time comes" mean that we should make the most of every day. The words "when... comes" mean the same thing as "already...comes." If the [right] time were something which came, the Buddha-nature would not come. This is because the [right] time has already come; the Buddha-nature has [already] manifested itself. This fact is quite clear; for there has never been a [right] time that has not come, nor a Buddha-nature, which has not manifested itself.

The Venerable Aśvaghosa,<sup>19</sup> the twelfth patriarch, once described the realm of the Buddha-nature to the thirteenth patriarch [the Venerable Kapimala]<sup>20</sup> as follows; "All mountains, rivers and lands are based upon the Buddha-nature, *Samādhi*<sup>21</sup> and the six powers<sup>22</sup> have their origin in it as well." For this reason, it can be said that all mountains, rivers and lands form the realm of the Buddha-nature. The words "All...are based upon" mean that the present-time in which they exist, itself, is all mountains, rivers and lands. Furthermore, we should realize that these words mean that the Buddha-nature is composed of these various elements. The Buddha-nature should not be thought of as existing either apart from, in between,

or within these various elements; for to see these elements is to see the Buddha-nature, just as to see the Buddha-nature is to see a donkey's scales and a horse's beak (all things).<sup>23</sup> We should realize that the words "All...are based upon" mean exactly what they say. [Having realized this] we must then transcend even this realization.

We should understand that the words "*Samādhi* and the six powers have their origins in the Buddha-nature" mean that whether or not the various kinds of *samādhi* manifest themselves, they still have their origins in the Buddha-nature. The same can be said for the six powers. These six powers are not the same as those taught by *Hīnayāna*. [In this instance] the number six represents an unlimited number; this unlimited number being expressed as the six *pāramitās*.<sup>24</sup> Having said this, however, we should be careful not to imagine that the phenomena we see before us express the Mind of the Buddhas and patriarchs. Even though we correctly understand [the nature of] the six powers, they still have their origins in the realm of the Buddha-nature.

Hung-jên,<sup>25</sup> the Fifth Patriarch [in China], was a native of Huangmei in Ch'i Province. His father had died before he was born. He realized enlightenment when still a child and supported himself as a monk by raising pine trees. One day, just after he had begun to plant some pine trees on Mt. Hsi in Ch'i province, he happened to meet the Fourth Patriarch Tao-hsin,<sup>26</sup> who was visiting there in the course of his travels. The Fourth Patriarch said to him: "I would like to transmit the Law to you but you are already too old. If you wish to receive the Law, you should seek to be reborn [as a child]. In that case, I'll wait for your return." Hung-jên agreed to do this, and eventually he was reborn as the son of an [unmarried] daughter in the Chou family. Because of his illicit birth he was thrown into a muddy river. Miraculously, however, he escaped drowning for seven days; at the end of which he was rescued [by a passer-by] who raised him to the age of seven. One day, while he was walking on

the road leading to Mt. Huang-mei, he happened to meet the Fourth Patriarch. When the latter saw him he realized that his appearance was not that of an ordinary child. Tao-hsin asked him: "What is [it that is]<sup>27</sup> your family name?" He answered: "I have a family name, but it is not an ordinary one." "What is it, then?" Tao-hsin asked. "It is the Buddha-nature," Hung-jên replied. "But you have no Buddha-nature," Tao-hsin continued. "You say that because the Buddha-nature is formless." Impressed with his understanding of Buddhism, the Fourth Patriarch decided to make him his attendant and eventually transmitted the "Eye-storehouse of the true Law" to him. Subsequently Hung-jên lived on the eastern part of Mt. Huang-mei where his teaching flourished.

The Fourth Patriarch's question "What is it that is your family name?" has a profound meaning. There is an ancient story about a Zen master who, when asked what country he had come from, answered: "I came from what (an indescribable) country." There is another ancient story about a Zen master who, when asked what his family name was, answered: "It is what (something indescribable)." The real meaning of the Fourth Patriarch's question "What is [it that is] your family name?" is similar to the answers of these ancient masters, that is to say, he was stating that Hung-jên's [true] family name was 'what' (something indescribable). [A further example of this is the following statement which Hui-nêng<sup>28</sup> made to Nan-yüeh<sup>29</sup> when they were discussing the nature of practice and enlightenment]: "Both you and I are 'what' (something indescribable)<sup>30</sup>"

What the Fifth Patriarch meant when he said: "I have a family name, but it is not an ordinary one" is as follows. My family name is not ordinary because it is equivalent to the Buddha-nature; therefore, my ordinary family name is not my [true] family name.

What the Fourth Patriarch meant when he asked: "What is [it that is] your family name?" is as follows. 'What' (something indescribable) is 'it' (something concrete), just as 'it' is 'what.' Both of these,



furthermore, are equivalent to the family name (the Buddha-nature). 'What' is dependent upon 'it', just as 'it' is dependent upon 'what'; both of which, as just stated, are equivalent to the family name. All of these [manifestations of the Buddha-nature] should be put into mugwort tea or green tea, that is to say, into all daily actions.

What the Fifth Patriarch meant when he said: "It is the Buddha-nature" is as follows. The "it" (something concrete) of the words "It is the Buddha-nature" is equivalent to the Buddha-nature. The Buddha-nature is based on "what" (something indescribable). We should not assume, however, that the "it" of "It is the Buddha-nature" is equivalent to the "what" of "What is [it that is] your family name?" This is because when the "it" is "not it" (not something concrete) it is still the Buddha-nature. For this reason the "it" is equivalent to "what" and also to the Buddha-nature. When we become enlightened and thoroughly penetrate this fact, we realize that all of the preceding are the family name...that the family name is none other than Chou. His family name, however, was neither received from his father or grandfather, nor from his mother. Is there anything which is not Chou?

What the Fourth Patriarch meant when he said: "You have no Buddha-nature" is as follows. The "you" of "you have" means that you are none other than yourself. Even though this is true, you have no Buddha-nature (the Buddha-nature being beyond any "having" and "not-having"). We should study and understand the meaning of the following question. At what time do we have "no Buddha-nature"? Is it when we have realized enlightenment? Is it when we have gone beyond enlightenment? We should neither hinder nor search for the universal Buddha-nature. It is possible, however, to regard 'no Buddha-nature' as temporary *samādhi*. We should ask ourselves if "no Buddha-nature" appears when the Buddha-nature realizes enlightenment, or when the Buddha-nature awakens to the *Bodhi*-mind. Furthermore, we should make the temple pillars

ask whether such is the case; we should ask the temple pillars whether such is the case; and we should make the Buddha-nature ask whether such is the case.

It is now possible to hear the words “no Buddha-nature” emanating from the distant room of the Fourth Patriarch. These words were heard by Huang-mei, transmitted to Chao-chou<sup>31</sup> and used by Ling-yu of Mt. Kuei.<sup>32</sup> [The meaning of] the words “no Buddha-nature” should be diligently and constantly studied. Although some become confused when they hear the words “no Buddha-nature,” they should remember the existence of “what,” “you,” “it” and “the family name of Chou.” All of these directly point to “no Buddha-nature.”

The Fifth Patriarch has said: “Because the Buddha-nature is ‘empty’ we say there is ‘no Buddha-nature.’” As is clearly expressed here, empti [ness] is different from non-[being]. When he said: “The Buddha-nature is empty,” he dispensed with ordinary terminology to express that the Buddha-nature is “no Buddha-nature.” [Viewed from enlightenment] the ‘empty’ of “the Buddha-nature is empty” is not ordinary ‘empti [ness],’ just as the ‘no’ of “no Buddha-nature” is not ordinary non-[being]. It is for these reasons that he says that because the Buddha-nature is ‘empty,’ there is ‘no Buddha-nature.’ Therefore, every aspect of non-being is an expression of emptiness; for emptiness itself is non-being. This emptiness is not the emptiness of “Form is identical with emptiness.” In the phrase “Form is identical with emptiness” the word “form” should not be forcibly interpreted to mean “emptiness”; nor should “emptiness” be skillfully separated from “form”; for [true] emptiness is emptiness itself. The words “[True] emptiness is emptiness itself” mean that emptiness contains nothing but itself. Therefore, the words “There is no Buddha-nature”, “The Buddha-nature is empty” and “There is a Buddha-nature” were all uttered by the Fourth and Fifth Patriarchs in their conversation [concerning the Law].

When Zen Master Hui-nēng, the sixth Chinese patriarch, visited the fifth patriarch, Huī-jēn of Mt. Huang-mei, for the first time, the latter asked him: "Where do you come from?" The Sixth Patriarch answered: "I come from the Ling-nan district."<sup>88</sup> "Why have you come here?" "To become a Buddha," "People from the Ling-nan district have no Buddha-nature, so how is it possible for you to become a Buddha?"

The words "People from the Ling-nan district have no Buddha-nature" mean that people from the Ling-nan district neither possess nor lack the Buddha-nature; for they have "no Buddha-nature." The words "How is it possible for you to become a Buddha?" mean "How can you *expect* to become a Buddha?" There have been very few past masters who have clarified the [true] meaning of the Buddha-nature; for it cannot be grasped by *Hīnayāna* followers or masters of Buddhist philosophical works and *sūtras*. Instead, it has only been correctly transmitted by the descendants of the Buddhas and patriarchs. The true meaning of the Buddha-nature can be grasped only after the realization of enlightenment, not before it; for the Buddha-nature appears together with enlightenment. This fact should be considered most carefully, for twenty or thirty years if necessary. This fact cannot be understood even by a Bodhisattva at a high level of attainment.

The meaning of the words "All things have the Buddha-nature and all beings have no Buddha-nature" is as has been previously explained. That is to say, the Buddha-nature can be grasped only after the realization of enlightenment. This is the true teaching, and those who have not learned it cannot be considered Buddhists. Enlightenment could not be realized, and the Law could not have been transmitted down to nor heard in the present-day, if this truth had not been understood. For this reason the Fifth Patriarch said to Hui-nēng that people from the Ling-nan district had no Buddha-nature.

The most difficult thing to realize when we first come into contact with Buddhism is that all things have no Buddha-nature. In the course of studying *sūtras* under the guidance of a master, we should rejoice when we hear the words "All beings have no Buddha-nature." Those who have not thoroughly realized that all things have no Buddha-nature are ignorant of [the true meaning] of the Buddha-nature. At the time the Sixth Patriarch was earnestly seeking to become a Buddha, the Fifth Patriarch had no other words or masterful techniques to cause him to realize enlightenment other than to say that all people from the Ling-nan district had no Buddha-nature. We should understand that their conversation about "no Buddha-nature" is the direct way to realize Buddhahood. Therefore, when we understand [the true meaning of] "no Buddha-nature" we become a Buddha. Those who have neither heard of nor spoken about "no Buddha-nature" are still unable to realize Buddhahood.

The Sixth Patriarch said: "Although there are those who come from the northern or southern [parts of the country], there is no north or south in the Buddha-nature." We should consider the inner meaning of these words, taking care to view them with a pure mind, for his words contain the Truth. This means that it is possible to say that although a person can become a Buddha, the Buddha-nature itself cannot become a Buddha. The question is whether the Sixth Patriarch understood this or not.

The words "No Buddha-nature" spoken by the Fourth and Fifth Patriarchs have the power to embody all phenomena. This has been true from beginningless time. The Buddhas Kāśyapa<sup>34</sup> and Śākyamuni were able to realize Buddhahood and teach the Law that all [beings] have the Buddha-nature through this same power. The 'have' of "all...have the Buddha-nature" is not different from the 'no' of absolute nonbeing, and it is for this reason that the words "no Buddha-nature" can still be heard coming from the distant rooms of the Fourth and Fifth Patriarchs. If, in the previous conversation, the Sixth Patriarch

had been a person who had truly understood Buddhism, he should have considered the meaning of the words "no Buddha-nature."

Notes:

1. See footnote 2 of introduction.
2. (J., *Nyorai*): Another name of Buddha Śākyamuni. It signifies a person who has arrived from and gone to *tathāgata*, i.e. the absolute reality which transcends the multitude of forms in the phenomenal world.
3. In Zen Buddhism it has been traditionally believed that the Law, first taught by Buddha Śākyamuni, later passed through twenty-seven successive generations of Indian patriarchs beginning with Mahākāśyapa, before being introduced to China by the twenty-eighth Indian patriarch Bodhidharma, who, at the same time, was the first Chinese patriarch. Subsequently, his Law was transmitted through 22 successors before reaching Ju-ching (1163-1228), Dōgen's own Chinese master.
4. The eight compass directions plus up and down, i.e. the whole universe.
5. (J. *Seson*),: Another honorific for the historical Buddha literally meaning "the world honored one", i.e. a man worthy of being honored because he has destroyed all illusions and rid himself of all defilements.
6. Symbolic of *prajñā*. See footnote 57.
7. Symbolic of the essence of the Law.
8. (J., *gō*): A deed that is produced by the action of the mind, good deeds producing good results and bad deeds producing bad results at some time in the future. In common usage, producing *karma* means to commit bad actions.
9. The non-Buddhist Indian philosopher Śrenika asserted that man possessed an "eternal self," i.e. a "soul," which is held to be synonymous with the universal itself.
19. The translator is aware that it is generally considered bad form to insert the subject of sentence in brackets. The structure of the Japanese language, however, abbreviating as it often does the subject, sometimes makes such usage unavoidable.
11. See footnote 9.

12. (J., *shidai*): earth, which has hardness for its nature and can support things; 2) water, which has moisture for its nature and can contain things; 3) fire, which has heat for its nature and can bring things to perfection; 4) wind, which has motion for its nature and can cause things to mature.
13. 206 B.C.-220 A.D
14. 960-1279 A.D.
15. In general Buddhist usage, illusory consciousness is equated with the discriminating mind. For Dōgen, however, there is no fundamental difference between illusory and enlightened consciousness.
16. A short staff to which is attached, on one end, a stock of horse's hair. In India it was originally used as a fly-swatter. In Zen Buddhism, however, it has come to have only a ceremonial use, held by the officiating monk during temple ceremonies.
17. A long staff originally used by mendicant monks during their travels in search of the Law. Now, however, it is used only at the time of installation of a new head monk in a temple.
18. This passage refers to a non-Buddhist school of Indian philosophy which denied the law of causality and the moral worth of human beings by asserting that all phenomena are the result of spontaneous generation.
10. Originally, a famous writer at the time of King Kaniska in the second century. He was a native of Śrāvastī in central India. Later, after entering the monkhood, he spread the teachings of Buddhism to (Ch.) Yüeh-chih in northern India, and wrote a number of treatises on Buddhism as well.
20. A native of Magadha in central India in the second century. Confuted by Aśvaghosa in a discussion about Buddhism, he became his disciple.
21. (J., *zammai*): Frequently translated as "meditation," or "concentration", it denotes a state in which the mind, free from distraction, is absorbed in intense, "purposeless" concentration. With the mind thus completely absorbed in itself, the essential nature of the Self can be experienced directly. It should be noted that this concentrated state of mind can also be used for other (often magical) purposes. In Zen, however, such latter uses are generally held in low esteem.

22. (J., *rokuzū*): 1) free activity, 2) eye capable of seeing everything, 3) ears capable of hearing everything, 4) insight into others' thinking, 5) remembrance of one's former existence, 6) perfect freedom.
23. This literal translation, preserved here for its unique Zen "flavor," signifies the world of differentiation.
24. The six kinds of practice by which a Bodhisattva is able to realize enlightenment: 1) donation, 2) keeping the precepts, 3) perseverance, 4) diligence, 5) *samādhi*, and 6) *prajñā*.
25. (J., Kōnin; 602-675): Buddhist heir of Ta-i Tao-hsin (580-651).
26. (J., Dōshin; 580-651). Buddhist heir of Chien-chih Seng-tian (?-606).
27. The bracketed material is, of course, redundant. It is necessary to include it here, however, in order to preserve Dōgen's subsequent explanation of the meaning of this sentence.
28. (J., Enō; 637-712): Buddhist heir of Hung-jên. Said to have realized enlightenment when pounding rice while training on Mt. Huang-mei.
29. (J., Nangaku; 677-744): One of the prominent disciples of Hui-nêng. He is considered to be the seventh Chinese Zen patriarch.
30. cf. section 5 of the *Ching-tê-chuan-têng-lu* (a Chinese compiled biography of 1701 Indian and Chinese monks).
31. (J., Jōshū; 778-897): Buddhist heir of Nan-chüan. He is famous for the *kōan* known as Chao-chou's "wu" (included in the latter part of this section).
32. (J., Daii; 771-853): Buddhist heir of Pai-chang Huai-hai (720-814). One of the founders of the Kuei-yang sect, one of the five Chinese Zen sects. He is also known by his posthumous name of Ta-yuan.
33. (J., Reinan): Present-day Kwang-tung Province.
34. (J., Kashō-butsum): the sixth of the six Buddhas who are said to have lived prior to Buddha Śākyamuni.