

The *Bussō* [Buddha-nature]
Section of the *Shōbō-genzō*
(2)

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Setting aside the question of “no [*Buddha-nature*]” for the moment, we should consider the questions of what the Buddha-nature is or what is it that is the Buddha-nature. When presentday people hear the expression “the Buddha-nature,” instead of asking what the Buddha-nature is, they tend to concentrate upon the question of having or not having the Buddha-nature. How reckless they are! They should realize that the “no” of “no Buddha-nature” is the same as the “no” of absolute non-being.

The sixth patriarch’s words “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” should be considered over and over again for ever, thereby developing our ability to understand his words. Furthermore, having quietly considered his words, we should free ourselves from attachment to them. There are some foolish people who believe that what the sixth patriarch meant was as follows: “Since human beings are restricted [to a certain area] by virtue of having a physical body, such differentiations as north and south can exist. The Buddha-nature, however, is formless and all pervading, and consequently, admits of no such differences.” This is an extremely ignorant opinion! Disregarding such mistaken views, we should earnestly and singlemindedly study [the Way].

The sixth patriarch said to his disciple Hang-ch'ang:³⁵ "Impermanence is the Buddha-nature. Permanence is the discriminative mind which divides all phenomena into good and evil." What the sixth patriarch meant by the words "impermanence" is far beyond the grasp of non-Buddhists and followers of the two [lesser] vehicles.³⁶ Even though people in these categories, whether the founder [of various sects] or their descendants, talk about impermanence, they are unaware of its true meaning. The impermanence [of which the sixth patriarch speaks] is itself that which clarifies, practices and realizes impermanence. Furthermore, these latter three actions themselves are nothing but impermanence, manifesting itself and teaching that the Law is the Buddha-nature. In the same way, "Everything, whether long or short, is the manifestation of the Law-body,³⁷" and is also the Buddha-nature. And just as enlightened beings are, as they are, impermanence, so ordinary beings are, just as they are, also impermanence. [To think that] enlightened and ordinary beings remain as they are forever is to misunderstand the Buddha-nature. This is a narrow-minded and foolish opinion. Their opinions severely limit [the essence of] both 'the Buddha' and 'nature.' It was for this reason that the sixth patriarch said: "Impermanence is the Buddha-nature."

Permanence is that which leaves no traces of change. "Leav [ing] no traces of change" means that all things, both animate and inanimate, enlightened or deluded, leave no traces of change. This is the true meaning of permanence.

Impermanence, on the other hand, is grass, trees, groves and forests, that is, the Buddha-nature. In the same way, people in both their bodies and minds, as well as things, are impermanence, that is, the Buddha-nature. Because the land, moun-

tains and rivers of any nation are the Buddha-nature, they are impermanence. Because the highest supreme Wisdom is the Buddha-nature, it too is impermanence. Great enlightenment itself is the Buddha-nature ; for it is impermanence. Were the followers of the two lesser vehicles or scholars of the *tripitaka*³⁸ to hear these teachings of the sixth patriarch, they would undoubtedly be greatly surprised, incredulous and fearful. Those who are surprised or incredulous [upon hearing these teachings] are not different from heretical non-Buddhists.

“The fourteenth patriarch is known in Sanskrit as Nāgārjuna and in Chinese as Lung-shu, Lung-shêng or Lung-mêng. He was born in western India and later moved to southern India. Since most of the people in the latter area believed in [a mistaken form of] karmically-produced happiness, Nāgārjuna expounded the Buddha’s teachings for their benefit. Those who heard him, however, said to each other ; “Although seeking karmically-produced happiness is the most important of all, Nāgārjuna meaninglessly talks to us about the Buddha-nature. Who has ever seen such a thing?” Hearing them talk [in this manner], Nāgārjuna said : “Those who wish to see the Buddha-nature should first of all eliminate their own arrogance.” One of them asked him : “Is the Buddha-nature large or small?” “It is beyond such differences as large or small, wide or narrow, karmically-produced happiness or unhappiness, and life or death,” Nāgārjuna answered. They all were deeply moved by his words ; for they realized that his teachings were indeed superior [to their own].

On another occasion, when Nāgārjuna was in the midst of expounding the Law, he manifested his enlightenment-body [the Buddha-nature] in the form of a full moon. All the assembled

monks, however, were unable to see this appearance and were only able to hear his voice. Kāṇadeva,³⁹ a rich man's son, was one of those present at this time. He asked the other monks whether or not they could see the appearance which Nāgārjuna had made himself manifest in. They said: "We can neither see, hear, comprehend nor experience this manifestation." Kāṇadeva continued: "The Venerable One is manifesting the appearance of the Buddha-nature, showing it to us. Considering that the "form" of formless *samādhi* is like the full moon and that the essence of the Buddha-nature is absolutely empty and radiant, it is no wonder that you are unable to see it." When Kāṇadeva finished speaking, Nāgārjuna's manifestation of himself as a round moon suddenly disappeared; and he was once again seen expounding the Law. At that time, he spoke the following *gāthā*:⁴⁰

I have manifested my [enlightenment] body as a
round moon,

Thereby manifesting the bodies of the Buddhas.

Expounding the Law is formless [as an act],

Beyond both voice and form.

We should realize that the true expounding of the Law is formless, depending neither upon voice nor form. In the past the Venerable Nāgārjuna widely discoursed upon the Buddha-nature on occasions too numerous to count. Here I have presented only one example.

The real meaning of the words "Those who wish to see the Buddha-nature should first of all eliminate their own arrogance" is as follows. First of all we should see the Buddha-nature and understand it thoroughly. Although, indeed, the Buddha-nature may be "seen," this "seen" really means to

eliminate one's arrogance. Just as the "one" of "one's arrogance" is not limited to only one, so arrogance manifests itself in many ways, and there are many methods of eliminating it. All of these, however, are equivalent to "seeing the Buddha-nature", just as our eyes are used to see various things.

Most ordinary men and followers of the two lesser vehicles also state that the Buddha-nature is beyond such differences as large or small, and so forth. The meaning [of their words], however, should not be considered to be the same [as Nāgārjuna's]; for they make the mistake of stubbornly believing that the Buddha-nature is something transcendental. Just as you are listening to my words now, you should be thinking [of the true meaning of the Buddha-nature] beyond large and small. This is possible because we are able to freely use the listening which is identical with thinking.

Let us next take up the *gāthā* which the Venerable One wrote. First of all, consider the meaning of the words "I have manifested my [enlightenment] body as a round moon, thereby, manifesting the bodies of the Buddhas." It was because Nāgārjuna had manifested the bodies of the Buddhas that he was able to manifest his [enlightenment] body as a round moon. Therefore, we should realize that all forms, long or short, round or square, are manifestations of the bodies of the Buddhas. Those who are unaware of the [enlightenment] body and its manifestations are not only ignorant of the form of a round moon but are also far from realizing their own Buddha-bodies. Foolish people think that the Venerable One temporarily transformed his body into the appearance of a round moon. This, however, is the mistaken opinion of those who have not had the Way [correctly] transmitted to them. At no

time, or at no place can [the Buddha-nature] be manifested apart from one's [own] body. We should clearly understand that the Venerable One remained seated on the dais [for expounding the Law] throughout his discourse. The way in which he manifested [his enlightenment] body was like any other seated person of today. His body, just as it was, manifested the appearance of a round moon. This manifestation of his body has [in reality] nothing to do with round or square, being or non-being and appearance or disappearance: nor has it anything to do with the 84,000⁴¹ kinds of illusion turning into enlightenment. It is simply the manifestation of the [enlightenment] body. When speaking of the appearance of a round moon, the words "the appearance of a round moon" mean that when looking at the moon, everything in the whole world, no matter how small or how coarse, becomes the moon.

Since the manifestation of the [enlightenment] body means the elimination of one's own arrogance, the manifested body is that of the various Buddhas, not of Nāgārjuna. As the manifestation of the Buddhas' bodies, however, the manifested body is even beyond those bodies themselves, and therefore, beyond even the concept of a Buddha itself. Even though the Buddha-nature is as absolutely empty and radiant as a full moon, this does not mean that the appearance of a round moon is the same as the Buddha-nature. Furthermore, as stated previously, the expounding of the Law is beyond both voice and form, just as the manifestation of the [enlightenment] body is beyond body and mind and all phenomena. Although the [enlightenment] body is somewhat similar to all phenomena, it is, in fact, the manifestation of the various Buddhas, that is to say, the Buddhas' bodies. It is this formless body which expounds the Law.

Furthermore, when this formless [body] enters formless *samādhi*, it manifests the [enlightenment] body. Although the assembled monks wished to see the appearance of a round moon, they were unable to do so because the physical body of the Venerable One had become one with the [enlightenment] body, beyond form and voice, which expounds the Law. The appearance and disappearance [of a round moon] is the function of the appearance of a round moon itself. When Nāgārjuna manifested his [enlightenment] body on the dais [for expounding the Law], the assembled monks were able to hear his voice alone, and could not see his form.

It was Nāgārjuna's foremost disciple, the Venerable Kāṇadeva alone, who clearly saw the appearance of a full moon, the appearance of a round moon, the manifestation of the [enlightenment] body, the Buddha-nature and the bodies of the Buddhas. Although many of Nāgārjuna's disciples had the Law correctly transmitted to them, like water poured from one vessel to another, none of them could match Kāṇadeva [in understanding]. In fact, Kāṇadeva's understanding was so great that he was capable of occupying one half of his master's dais [for expounding the Law]; that is to say, he was capable of becoming a leader of the assembled monks and expounding the Law in Nāgārjuna's place. Kāṇadeva had the Eye-storehouse of the highest supreme Law correctly transmitted to him just as the Venerable Mahākāśyapa,⁴² the Buddha's foremost disciple, had it transmitted to him on Vulture Peak.

Nāgārjuna had many disciples, before he had become a Buddhist and when he was still a student of non-Buddhist teachings. However, he terminated his relationship with all of them [after converting to Buddhism]. After Nāgārjuna had realized

Buddhahood, he correctly transmitted the Eye-storehouse of the true Law to Kāṇadeve, regarding him alone as the true heir to his Law. This, indeed, was the correct transmission of the highest supreme Way. There were some cunning and evil disciples, however, who wilfully claimed that they, too, were Nāgārjuna's Buddhist heirs. On this basis they wrote various treatises and compiled various commentaries [on the *sūtras*], claiming that Nāgārjuna had written them, when in fact he hadn't. The disciples who did this were those with whom Nāgārjuna had broken his relationship in the past. They cause both human and celestial beings to go astray. Buddhist trainees should whole-heartedly realize that it is Kāṇadeva alone who has correctly transmitted Nāgārjuna's teachings. This, indeed, is the true belief which will enable one to enter the Way. There are many, however, who believe in the previously mentioned [false teachings], though they know they are mistaken. These foolish people slander the supreme *Bodhi*-wisdom and are to be pitied!

As previously stated, the Venerable Kāṇadeva, when describing the manifestation of Nāgārjuna's [enlightenment] body, said to the assembled monks: "The Venerable One has manifested the appearance of the Buddha-nature and shown it to us. Considering that the 'form' of formless *samādhi* is like a full moon and that the essence of the Buddha-nature is absolutely empty and radiant, it is no wonder that you were unable to see it." Who among past or present Buddhist trainees of the Way which is now to be found in the human and celestial worlds, as well as throughout the universe, has ever taught that the manifested appearance of Nāgārjuna's [enlightenment] body was the Buddha-Nature? In the whole universe it has been Kāṇadeva

alone who has done so. Others have merely said that the Buddha-nature was something which could not be seen, heard, known, and so forth. It was because they were ignorant of the fact that the manifestation of his [enlightenment] body was the Buddha-nature that they failed to teach anything about it. Although Patriarch Nāgārjuna did not attempt concealment of [this teaching], his disciples were, due to an obstruction of their eyes and ears, unable to see or hear it, just as, due to their lack of good sense, they were unable to understand it. Even though they prostrated themselves [before a full moon], wishing to see the formless *samādhi* which is like a full moon, they were unable to see it.

As previously stated, the essence of the Buddha-nature is absolutely empty and radiant. Therefore, the manifestation of the [enlightenment] body expresses the Buddha-nature, which is absolutely empty and radiant. At the same time, expressing the Buddha-nature is [the same as] manifesting the [enlightenment] body — the bodies of the manifested Buddhas. There is no Buddha who does not consider the manifestation of the [enlightenment] body to be the same as the bodies of the Buddhas. The bodies of the Buddhas are the manifestation of the [enlightenment] body — the Buddha-nature. Even though we say that the body and mind of the Buddhas and patriarchs are composed of the four elements and the five aggregates⁴³, these latter are nothing but the daily expression of the manifestation of the [enlightenment] body. As has been previously stated, the bodies of the Buddhas are the manifestation of the [enlightenment] body. Therefore, the five aggregates, the twelve sense-fields⁴⁴ and the eighteen worlds⁴⁵ are also the manifestation of the [enlightenment] body. In

fact, all functions [of a Buddha] are the manifestation of the [enlightenment] body. The functions of a Buddha are contained in the thorough realization of the manifestation of the [enlightenment] body. In other words, all the innumerable functions [of a Buddha], subject [as they are] to arise and decay, are the momentary expressions of the manifestation of the [enlightenment] body.

Although, following Kāṇadeva's discipleship to Nāgārjuna, there have been many in India, China and Japan who have wilfully studied Buddhism, none of them have ever spoken [about the manifestation of Nāgārjuna's enlightenment-body as the appearance of a full moon]. How many *sūtra* and *śāstra* masters have mistakenly understood the Way of the Buddhas and patriarchs! Although from ancient times there have been those in Sung China who have attempted to depict this incident [through drawings], they have been unable to draw it on the wall, let alone on [their] body, mind or ultimate emptiness. Meaninglessly [conceptualizing this incident] they have drawn a mirror-like round figure with the tip of their writing brushes while seated on the dais [for expounding the Law], imagining that they are depicting the manifestation of Nāgārjuna's [enlightenment] body as the appearance of a round moon. For hundreds of years these masters have been depicting this incident in this way, thinking it to be golden dust in their eyes, when in fact it was damaging their vision. No one, however, has ever pointed out their mistake. How tragic! Everything these masters do is like this. Regarding the manifestation of Nāgārjuna's [enlightenment] body in the appearance of a round moon to be the same as drawing a round figure [with a writing brush], is like believing that the picture of a rice-cake is the

rice-cake itself. Those who amuse themselves with thoughts like this are truly ridiculous!

How regrettable it is that in a large country like Sung China no one, layman or monk, has ever heard or understood Nāgārjuna's or Kāṇadeva's teachings [on this subject], let alone become one with the manifested [enlightenment] body. People [in that country] neither understand [the meaning of] the round moon nor the full moon. This is because they are negligent in their study of the past and unwilling to follow the examples of ancient Zen masters. Neither experienced nor new trainees should amuse themselves with a pictured rice-cake, but should attempt to encounter the true manifested [enlightenment] body.

We should realize the following things. First, in order to depict the appearance of the manifested [enlightenment] body as the appearance of a round moon, it is necessary to manifest that appearance [with one's body] while seated on the dais [for expounding the Law]. In doing this it is necessary to raise the eye-brows and blink the eyes [among other actions] properly.⁴⁶ Furthermore, it is necessary to practice zazen in order to realize the essence of Bōdhidharma's⁴⁷ Eyestorehouse of the true Law. It is through doing these things that [Mahākāśyapa's] smile⁴⁸ (the true Law) is transmitted to us, and we ourselves become the Buddhas and patriarchs.

When the pictured manifested [enlightenment] body has not yet taken on the appearance of a round moon, there is no figure of formless *samādhi*, like a full moon. Furthermore, there is no expounding of the Law, voice, form or words. If one seeks for the truly manifested [enlightenment] body, it is necessary to depict the appearance of a round moon. If one

depicts the appearance of a round moon, it is necessary to depict the manifested [enlightenment] body as the appearance of a round moon, for the manifested [enlightenment] body is the appearance of a round moon. When depicting the appearance of a round moon, it is necessary to depict the appearance of a full moon — to manifest the appearance of a full moon.

In spite of this, the teachers [previously mentioned] meaninglessly depict pictured rice-cake, failing to depict the appearance of the [enlightenment] body, the round or full moon, the bodies of the Buddhas or the Law being expounded, let alone comprehend the manifestation of the various Buddhas. Of what use is this? Should we rashly pay attention [to their pictured rice-cake], how can we ever expect to save ourselves from immediate starvation! The moon is round; “round” is the manifested [enlightenment] body. One should not make the mistake of assuming that this “round” refers to the “round [ness] of [an object like] a copper coin, or to the “round [ness]” of a rice-cake. [In reality] the manifested [enlightenment] body is the body of a round moon. Its shape is that of a full moon. We should realize that it is this “round” which is like the “round [ness]” of a copper coin or a rice-cake.

In the past, when still traveling about [in search of the Way], I went to Sung China. In the autumn of the sixteenth year of Chia-ting (1223) I visited Kuang-li temple⁴⁹ on Mt. Ayuwan for the first time. There, on the wall of the western corridor, I saw various paintings of the thirty-three Indian and Chinese patriarchs. At that time, however, I was unable to understand their true significance. Sometime later, during the summer training period of the first year of Pao-ch'ing (1225), I happened

to visit there again. As I was walking along the [same] corridor with the monk in charge of receiving guests, who was a native of Ssü-ch'uan Province by the name of Ch'êng-kuei,⁵⁰ I asked: "What are these various paintings?" "They are Nāgārjuna's manifested [enlightenment] body as the appearance of a round moon," he glumly answered, his voice lacking force. I then said to him: "These paintings really look like pictured rice-cakes." Hearing this, he burst out laughing; but his laughter was unconvincing, demonstrating the shallowness of his understanding [of the true significance of these paintings].

Subsequently, I exchanged a number of questions and answers [about the paintings] with this monk as we visited the hall enshrining the relics of the Buddha and six places [on the mountain] famous for their scenery. He was unable, however, to understand the true import of my questions in the slightest. There were also some other monks who ventured opinions [on this subject], but they were all wrong. I said: "I would like to discuss this question with the head of this monastery." At that time the head monk's name was Ta-kuang. The monk in charge of receiving guests said to me: "The present head of this monastery will be unable to answer you; for he is ignorant of the Way." Hearing this, I decided to forego meeting the head monk. Although the monk in charge of receiving guests talked to me in this way, he himself did not understand this matter. The other monks, too, were no better. No doubt had ever arisen in the successive generations of head monks when they viewed these paintings, and [consequently] they never attempted to revise them. Actually, there are some things which can not be depicted at all; and it is wrong to attempt to do so. Those things which can be depicted should be depicted cor-

rectly, if they are depicted at all. As for the manifested [enlightenment] body, it has never been [correctly] depicted as the appearance of a round moon.

Monks [like the above] have lost the key to the true understanding of the words “having the Buddha-nature” and “having no Buddha-nature”; because they have not realized that the

Buddha-nature has nothing to do with discriminating thought and consciousness. There are very few [monks] who have ever even attempted to study how to express [the true meaning of] the Buddha-nature. We should realize that this negligence on their part is the result of their having forsaken any desire for the Way. There are some head monks who have passed their entire lives without having ever once mentioning the Buddha-nature. [Among them] there are those who say that although students of scholastic Buddhism talk about the Buddha-nature, Zen trainees should not. People who talk like this are [truly] animals! How dare such friends of demons associate themselves with, and defile the Way of the Tathāgata! Is [scholastic Buddhism [alone] the Way? Is Zen training [alone] the Way? We should realize that neither scholastic Buddhism nor Zen training are [in themselves] the Way.

National Master Ch'ī-an,⁵¹ a native of Yen-kuan Prefecture in Hang-chou Province, was one of Ma-tsu's⁵² foremost disciples. Once he said to the assembled monks [of his monastery]: “All sentient beings have the Buddha-nature.” His words “all beings” should be thoroughly studied without delay. The subjective as well as the objective circumstances in which sentient beings find themselves differ according to their past conduct. [For this reason] they have various opinions. [This is reflected] in the existence of ordinary men, non-Buddhists,

followers of the three or five vehicles,⁵³ and so forth. In Buddhism the words "all sentient beings" denote all who possess mind-feelings,⁵⁴ for mind-feelings themselves are sentient beings. Those who lack mind-feelings, however, are also sentient beings, for sentient beings themselves are mind-feelings. Therefore, both those things which possess mind-feelings, and those which do not, are sentient beings. It is [for this reason] that all sentient beings have the Buddha-nature. In similar fashion, grass, trees and land are mind-feelings, and therefore, sentient beings. As sentient beings, they too have the Buddha-nature. Not only this, but the sun, moon and stars are also mind-feelings, and therefore, sentient beings. As sentient beings, they too have the Buddha-nature. This, then, is what National Master Ch'i-an meant when he said: "[All sentient beings] have the Buddha-nature." If this were not the meaning of his words, it would not be the Buddhist teaching on having the Buddha-nature.

The true meaning of Ch'i-an's teaching is simply that all sentient beings have the Buddha-nature. That is to say, anything other than sentient beings does not have the Buddha-nature. [Were it possible to do so,] it would be good to test Ch'i-an's understanding by asking him whether or not all Buddhas have the Buddha-nature. It should be noted that he said all sentient beings *have* the Buddha-nature, not all sentient beings *are* the Buddha-nature. The "have" of "having the Buddha-nature" must be transcended. This means to become absolutely one with this "have." By doing so, [we can enjoy] the same freedom as a bird that flies through the sky without leaving any traces. It is for this reason that it can be said that all Buddha-natures⁵⁵ have (are) sentient beings. The truth of this state

ment transcends not only [the concept of] sentient beings but of the Buddha-nature as well. Even though Ch'i-an did not fully explain his understanding [of the Buddha-nature] at that time, this does not mean that he was unable to do so. Therefore, his words should not be regarded as lacking in essential truth. Even though one is still completely unaware of the Buddha-nature, it manifests itself through every aspect of one's being, both physical and mental. Similarly, there are some who are able to fully explain the meaning of the Buddha-nature after one lifetime, and others who need many lifetimes.

Zen Master Ta-yüan of Mt. Ta-kuei⁵⁶ once said to the assembled monks [of his monastery]: "All sentient beings have no Buddha-nature." Among the human and celestial beings who heard these words there were some of deep understanding, who were overjoyed. On the other hand, there were others who were greatly surprised and incredulous. Buddha Śākyamuni taught that all sentient beings have the Buddha-nature. Ta-yüan, however, taught that all sentient beings have no Buddha-nature. [Outwardly] their words differ greatly, and one is apt to doubt the correctness of [Ta-yüan's] words. However, his statement alone expresses the essence of the Way. Even though Ch'i-an's teaching that [all sentient beings] have the Buddha-nature appears to indicate that he has the same ability as Buddha Śākyamuni, he in fact is merely repeating the latter's words. Ta-yüan's words, on the other hand, are not like this; for they envelop both Ch'i-an and Buddha Śākyamuni at one swoop. Although Ch'i-an was Ma-tsu's direct disciple and Ta-yüan was [only] his second generation disciple, in reality, Ta-yüan's teachings were superior to even Ma-tsu's, while Ch'i-an's teachings were inferior to Ma-tsu's. The real

meaning of Ta-yüan's teaching that all sentient beings have no Buddha-nature is that the Buddha-nature transcends the question of "having" and "not having." His understanding [of the Buddha-nature] did not stem from his own egoistical viewpoint, but was the result of the Truth which he had realized within himself.

We should further ask ourselves how it is possible that all sentient beings are the Buddha-nature — that they all *have* the Buddha-nature. Those who say that sentient beings have the Buddha-nature are the friends of demons. Attached to their conceptualized view of the Buddha-nature, they force it on others, [ignorant of the fact that all sentient beings have always had the Buddha-nature.] The Buddha-nature is nothing but the Buddha-nature, just as sentient beings are nothing but sentient beings. Sentient beings have, from the beginning, never been endowed with the Buddha-nature. Even should one wish to possess the Buddha-nature, it is not something that comes from the outside. The relationship between the Buddha-nature and sentient beings is not like the situation in which one person drinks wine and another gets drunk [as a result]. If sentient beings were originally endowed with the Buddha-nature, there would be no Buddha-nature [existing] apart from sentient beings. If sentient beings existed already, there would be no Buddha-nature [existing] apart from them.

For this reason Pai-chang said: "Those who teach that sentient beings have the Buddha-nature slander the Three Treasures. Those who teach that sentient beings have no Buddha-nature also slander the Three Treasures." Therefore, to say that [sentient beings] either have or don't have the Buddha-nature is to slander [the Three Treasures]. This does

not mean, however, that one should forgo talking about this question. Were it possible, [it would be good] to ask Ta-yüan and Pai-chang the following questions: [Addressing Pai-chang] "Although it is true that one slanders [the Three Treasures by teaching whether or not sentient beings have the Buddha-nature], I would like to ask you whether or not you taught about the Buddha-nature. For example, if you did so, that teaching itself would be the Buddha-nature. Furthermore, to teach about the Buddha-nature is the same as listening [to an explanation of] the Buddha-nature. [Addressing Ta-yüan] "Although you said that all sentient beings have no Buddha-nature, you failed to say that all Buddha-natures have no (are not) sentient beings, or that all Buddha-natures have no Buddha-nature, let alone that you are completely ignorant of the fact that all Buddhas have no Buddha-nature. Answer if you can!

Zen Master Pai-chang said to the assembly of monks: "Buddha Śākyamuni possessed supreme *prajñā*,⁵⁷ and his teachings [on the realization of enlightenment] are superior to any other. It is for this reason that he is highly esteemed in Buddhism. He is the Buddha, as well as the possessor of the Buddha-nature and the teacher [of all mankind]. Furthermore, he is completely free [from any restriction], and endowed with unlimited Wisdom. As a result he had perfect command of causal relations and was able to impart happiness and Wisdom [to others] at will. Based upon this latter ability, he was able to utilize causal relations. In life he was nothing but life, and in death nothing but death. As for the five aggregates, he was nothing but the five aggregates, free to enter and leave them at will. At this stage of realization there is no need

to talk of stages of development [in realizing Buddhahood] or "superior" and "inferior." Even an ant reaching this stage becomes the pure Buddha-land, a profoundly wondrous object."

These, then, are Pai-chang's words. The five aggregates of which he speaks are this very body itself. Our daily actions are free, unrestricted by the five aggregates. When life is nothing but life, it transcends itself, just as death transcends itself when it is nothing but death. Therefore, death is not to be unduly feared nor life meaninglessly loved. Non-Buddhists are attached to life and fear death; for they fail to realize that the Buddha-nature is in the midst of life and death. The realization that all phenomena are produced as a result of causal relations is [what is meant by] exercising perfect command over causal relations. He who has realized this supreme teaching is known as a Buddha, and the place where he resides is already the pure Buddha-land.

Once, when Huang-po⁵⁸ was sitting in the Nan-ch'üan's⁵⁹ reception room, the latter asked him the following question: "It is said that the Buddha-nature can be clearly seen by those who study both *samādhi* and *prajñā* equally. What does this mean?" Huang-po answered: "It means that we should not depend on anything at any time." Nan-ch'üan then asked: "I wonder whether the opinion you have just expressed is really your own." "Of course not!" Huang-po answered. Nan-ch'üan then said: "Setting aside the question of payment for the drinking water for the moment, let me ask whom you intend to have the money for the straw-sandals returned to."⁶⁰ To this question Huang-po made no reply.

The words "to study both *samādhi* and *prajñā* equally" do not mean that because studying *samādhi* does not interfere with

studying *prajñā*, it is possible to clearly see the Buddha-nature when studying both [*samādhi* and *prajñā*] equally. This is because the clear perception of the Buddha-nature is the cause [not the result] of the equal study of both *samādhi* and *prajñā*. Herein lies the true meaning of Nan-ch'üan's question. It is similar to asking *who* it is that clearly sees the Buddha-nature, or *what* it means to clearly see the Buddha-nature when the Buddha-nature itself studied.

When Huang-po said : "We should not depend on anything at any time" he meant that because "at any time" alone is present in "at any time", there is nothing to be depended on. It is because non-dependence on anything is the same as 'at any time', that it is possible to clearly see the Buddha-nature. We should ask ourselves the following questions : "What particular time or place does 'at any time' signify? Is 'at any time' the same as the 'at any time' of the ordinary human world? Or the same as that of any other world? Or the temporary manifestation of the 'at any time' of the pure world [of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra]?" No matter in what place or world 'at any time' may be found, there is nothing to be depended on ; for, as has been pointed out, as 'at any time' alone is present in 'at any time ; there is nothing to be depended on.

When Nan-ch'üan said : "I wonder whether the opinion you just expressed is really your own," he was really expressing his doubt of whether Huang-po had really understood his own words. Even though Nan-ch'üan doubted that Huang-po's opinion was really his own, Huang-po should not have answered that it was. This is because although Huang-po's assertion was correct, it was not limited to himself alone. The truth of this assertion is so abundantly clear [that it is to be found

among many, many others].

In Sung China the words “of course not” are used when someone wishes to express [with humility] his ability [to perform a certain task]. Therefore, when Huang-po said: “Of course not,” his words have a meaning different from their face value and should not be taken literally. Whether the “you” in Nan-ch’üan’s question: “I wonder whether the opinion you just expressed is really your own” refers to Huang-po in particular or merely any senior monk, the answer should remain the same “of course not.” It is similar to a cow which appears and is unable to say anything but “moo!”⁶¹ The Truth is fully manifested in the words “of course not.” Yet, even these words must be transcended. Try to do so!

When Nan-ch’üan said: “Setting aside the question of payment for the drinking water for the moment, let me ask whom you intend to have the money for the straw-sandals returned to,” he meant exactly what he said. It is important that we consider the true meaning of these words throughout our life. Furthermore, we should carefully consider why he said that it was all right to set aside for the moment the question of payment for the drinking water. The reason that Nan-ch’üan was interested in the money which Huang-po had paid for his straw-sandals was that he wanted to know how many straw-sandals the latter had worn out in the course of his travels as a mendicant monk.

If Huang-po wished to answer this question, he should say: “If there is no one to return the money for these straw-sandals to, I’ll never wear straw-sandals again,”⁶² and, furthermore: “I have worn out two or three pairs of straw-sandals.”⁶³ This is the truth and the real meaning of Huang-po’s words.

The sentence "Huang-po made no reply" shows his separation from [both affirmation and negation]. The reason he made no reply is not because his words had been negated [by Nan-ch'üan] or because he, on his part, intended to negate Nan-ch'üan's words. True Buddhist trainees would never act this way. We should realize that within [the silence of] "no reply" there is [hidden] a powerful weapon like that contained in laughter. Huang-po's silence fully showed that he clearly understood the Buddha-nature.

Once, Ta-yüan of Mt. Ta-kuei asked Yang-shan⁶⁴ the following question about this story: "Don't you think this [story] shows that Huang-po was no match for Nan-ch'üan?" "No, I don't," Yang-shan answered, "for you should realize that Huang-po had the strength to capture a tiger alive." Ta-yüan then said: "Your opinion is truly excellent!"

Ta-yüan once said that Huang-po was no match for Nan-ch'üan. Yang-shan, on the other hand, answered that Huang-po had the ability to capture a tiger alive. If this were true, however, Huang-po should have also been able to stroke the tiger's head; for both capturing a tiger alive and stroking its head are, in essence, the same thing. Answer these questions quickly: "Are the Buddha's eyes opened when the Buddha-nature is clearly understood? Are the Buddha's eyes lost when the Buddha-nature clearly manifests itself?" [If you are able to answer the questions] you will truly have understood the Buddha-nature.

On the other hand, 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. Furthermore, all of these things are, [at one and the same time] both independent and dependent on each other, just like ivy and wisteria-vines coil themselves around [the trunks of] trees. Everything in the whole world is [the Buddha-nature] and, therefore it was impossible [for Huang-po] to express it in words.

A monk once asked Zen Master Chao-chou: "Does even a *koutsu* have the Buddha-nature?" It is necessary to clarify the meaning of this question. [First of all] a *koutsu* is a dog. [Secondly] the monk was not asking whether or not a dog possesses the Buddha-nature. Rather, he was asking whether or not it was necessary for even a fully enlightened person to continue his training in the Way. This devilish question is one which has confounded many [trainees] to their regret. Still this same question has another [superior] aspect, similar to that which enabled a trainee to meet a somewhat enlightened person after thirty years [of practice].⁶⁵

Chao-chou answered: "No."⁶⁶ There is much to be learned from this answer. Even were the Buddha-nature itself to answer [the monk's question], it would answer: "No." The same thing can be said if the dog were to answer, or even in the case a third party were to answer. This "no" has the power to easily dissolve things like rocks at any time.

The monk continued: "All sentient beings have the Buddha-nature; how, then, is it that a dog doesn't have?" The meaning of this question is as follows: "If all sentient beings did not exist, neither the Buddha-nature nor a dog would exist." What does this mean? Since both a dog and the Buddha-nature are

in essence “no” it is unnecessary to negate them.

Chao-chou answered: “Because it (the dog) has karmic ignorance.” The meaning of this is as follows. “Because it has” is equivalent to “karmic ignorance.” Although karmic ignorance has [existence as a dog] and is equivalent to “because it has,” both the dog and the Buddha-nature are “no”. Karmic ignorance is karmic ignorance alone, just as a dog is a dog alone. How, then, could a dog be equivalent to the Buddha-nature? Whether one believes in the existence of the Buddha-nature and a dog or not, they are the manifestation of karmic ignorance.

Another monk once asked Zen Master Chao-chou: “Does even a *koutsu* have the Buddha-nature?” The true meaning of this question is as follows. This particular monk, being well acquainted with Chao-chou, purposely asked the same question. Thus, it can be seen that exchanges like this concerning the Buddha-nature were daily occurrences in the lives of the Buddhas and patriarchs. [This time,] however, Chao-chou answered: “Yes.”⁶⁷ The nature of this “yes” is different from the “yes”⁶⁸ taught by teachers of scholastically-oriented [Mahāyāna] Buddhism, as well as that taught by the *Sarvāstivāda* school⁶⁹ of [Hīnayāna] Buddhism. We should, forsaking teachings like these, learn the true nature of “yes” as taught by the Buddha. This “yes” of the Buddha is the same as that of Chao-chou; Chao-chou’s “yes” is the same as that of a dog; and a dog’s “yes” is the same as that of the Buddha-nature.

The monk continued: “You answered: ‘Yes,’ but how, then, did it (the Buddha-nature) enter [the dog’s] skin-bag (body)?” This particular monk was asking whether the “yes” involved

was something which had just [begun to exist, had existed in the past, or was already in a stage of existence. Although it is true that the “yes” already in a state of existence is similar to the “yes” taught by the *Sarvāstivāda* school, in fact, it is completely independent. Is it possible, or impossible, for this “yes” already in a state of existence to enter [the dog’s body]? This question is one which deserves our closest attention.

Chao-chou answered: “The dog knowing [it was the Buddha-nature], purposely defiled [the Buddha-nature].” Ordinary people have long believed [that one is subject to rebirth as an animal as a result of] bad karma produced by having knowingly done bad. Actually, Chao-chou meant something more profound than this. That is to say, the dog, knowing [*only conceptually* it was the Buddha-nature], purposely defiled [the Buddha-nature]. There are many who remain incredulous at this statement. This is because it is difficult to clarify the meaning of the word “enter.” Actually, this word is unnecessary [for explaining the Buddha-nature]. We should realize that it is impossible to grasp the Buddha-nature within us apart from our body. Whatever the Buddha-nature may be, there is no time at which it exists apart from the body. Purposely defiling [the Buddha-nature] does not necessarily mean entering the [dog’s] skin-bag. Entering the [dog’s] skin-bag does not necessarily mean that “[the dog] knowing [the Buddha-nature], purposely defiled [the Buddha-nature]” should be based upon knowing [the Buddha-nature]. We should realize that [the dog’s] purposely defiling [the Buddha-nature] is none other than the action of enlightenment. It is this action that is designated by the word “enter.”

When this enlightened action functions properly, it en-

compasses both self and others. Furthermore, having recognized this fact, one should not say that he is not yet enlightened. Were someone to speak in this manner, it would show that he was a person who was incapable of independent thinking. In the same vain, Supreme Patriarch Yün-chu⁷⁰ said: "If you have [only] a conceptional grasp of the Law, it will serve to delude you." Therefore, if, over a long period of time, one has mistakenly or [only] partially, understood the Law, he is like the dog whose body was defiled [by a conceptional grasp of the Buddha-nature]. Even though [the dog] knowing of the [Buddha-nature] purposely defiled [the Buddha-nature], it still has (is) the Buddha-nature.

Chou, the monk in charge of clerical affairs in the assembly of monks headed by Ching-ts'ên of Mt. Chang-sha⁷¹ once asked his master the following question: "When an earth-worm is cut in two, the two parts both move. I wonder which of them has the Buddha-nature? Ching-ts'ên replied: "Stop your illusory thinking!" "But how do you explain their movement?" Chou retorted, "It's because their bodies have not yet separated [into the four elements]." Should Chou's question about an earth-worm being cut in two be interpreted to mean that [he assumed] the earth-worm was originally one? Such an interpretation is not that of the Buddhas and patriarchs. The earth-worm was neither originally one, nor did it become two when it was cut in half. Close attention should be paid to the meaning of the words "one" and "two."

Should the "two" of "the two parts both move" be thought of as referring to the "one" earth-worm in contrast to its [previously having been cut in two]? Or referring [once again by way of contrast] to the "one" of "one [Buddha-nature]"? We

should not treat the meaning of the words "two parts" lightly, simply because there is a question of whether or not Chou understood their meaning correctly. As the two cut parts were originally one [earth-worm], is it possible for there to be a separate one [Buddha-nature]? The words "both move" are used to describe "move." This refers to the fact that *samādhi* shakes [the roots of] illusion, and *prajñā* uproots it. Both of these actions are none other than movement.

Instead of saying: "I wonder which of them has the Buddha-nature," it would have been better for Chou to have said: "When the Buddha-nature is cut in two, I wonder which part has the earth-worm." These words should be considered carefully. Should the words "... the two parts both move. I wonder which of them has the Buddha-nature" be interpreted to mean that if the two parts both move, the Buddha-nature can no longer exist? Or should they be interpreted to mean that since, in terms of movement, the two parts both move, which of them has the Buddha-nature?

Ching-ts'ên said: "Stop your illusory thinking!" The true meaning of his words is as follows. First of all, [it goes without saying] he was warning Chou against illusory thought. Should his words be interpreted to mean that when the two parts both move there is no illusory thought, or that the words "the two parts both move" are not illusory thought, or that the Buddha-nature has no illusory thought, or that it is not a question of the Buddha-nature or "the two parts" at all, or merely that there is no illusory thought? These questions should be studied carefully.

Should the words "But how do you explain their movement?" be interpreted to mean that since the two parts are

moving, it is a question of piling one Buddha-nature on top of another? Or, should they be interpreted to mean that since the two parts are moving, they are not the Buddha-nature?

The words "It's because their bodies have not yet separated [into the four elements]," should be considered to manifest the Buddha-nature. Nothing should be said, however, with regard to the question of whether it is the Buddha-nature or the four elements that separate, or both. Similarly, nothing should be said with regard to the question of whether or not the Buddha-nature and the four elements are mutually exclusive, or whether the four elements themselves are the Buddha-nature. It is for this reason that Ching-ts'ên, avoiding the question of whether or not an earth-worm has the Buddha-nature, simply said: "Stop your illusory thinking!" and "It's because their bodies have not yet separated [into the four elements]." In order to truly understand the functioning of the Buddha-nature, it is necessary to carefully study Ching-ts'ên's words. His words "It's because their bodies have not yet separated [into the four elements]" should be quietly reflected upon. What is the meaning of the words "not yet separated"? Should they be interpreted to mean that it is still too early for the four elements to separate? Definitely not! The words "The four elements have not yet separated" are a case of the Buddha teaching the Law. The words "the not-yet-separated four elements", on the other hand, are a case of the Law teaching the Buddha. Said in a different way, the time has come for the Buddha to discourse on the Law with one sound.⁷² The Law and one sound are, in fact, the same; for it is the Law of one sound.

There are some who think that the Buddha-nature exists only in life, and not in death. Truly, those who think in this

way have heard little and have only a shallow understanding [of the Law]. The Buddha-nature is both existent and non-existent in life, as well as in death. To discuss the question of the separation or non-separation of the four elements is to discuss the separation or non-separation of the Buddha-nature. Even after the separation [of the four elements], the Buddha-nature is both existent and non-existent. Even before the separation [of the four elements], the Buddha-nature is both existent and non-existent. Non-Buddhists, however, mistakenly believe that the existence of the Buddha-nature depends upon movement, or upon the mind's consciousness or knowledge of it. From ancient times there have been many ignorant people who have identified the mind's consciousness with the Buddha-nature, believing this to be enlightenment. Could anything be more ludicrous!

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. Do you fully understand?

Delivered to the assembly of monks of Kōshō-ji temple on the 14th of October, the second year of Ninji (1241)

Notes:

35. (J., Gyōshō): Nothing more is known about him.
36. A disparaging epithet for *Hīnayāna*. Correctly it refers to the vehicle for Śrāvakas, in which one rightly understands the Four Noble Truths and becomes an *Arhat*, and the vehicle for Pratyeka-Buddhas, in which one rightly understands the twelve linked causality and becomes

a Pratyeka-buddha.

37. (Skt., *Dharma-kāya*: J., *hosshin*): The body of the highest aspect of the threefold body of the Buddha; the absolute nature of the Buddha-mind.
38. (J., *sanzō*): The three divisions of the Buddhist scriptures, consisting of 1) *Sūtras*, which contain the Buddha's teachings, 2) *Vinayas*, which contain his precepts, and 3) *Abhidharmes*, which contain various commentaries on Buddhist doctrines.
39. (J., Kana-daiba): A native of southern India in the third century. Buddhist heir of Nāgārjuna.
40. (J., *ge*): A verse used to sing the praises of the Buddha, or to restate succinctly major points of Buddhist doctrine.
41. (J., *hachimanshisen*): In Buddhism this term is used to indicate a limitless number.
42. (J., Maka-kashō): One of the ten major disciples of the Buddha. He became a disciple of the Buddha about three years after the latter attained enlightenment and is said to have become an *Arhat* after being with the Buddha for only eight days. He is regarded as the first patriarch of Zen Buddhism.
43. (J., *goun*) In Buddhist philosophy, all physical, mental, and other elements in this phenomenal world are classified into five kinds of aggregates: 1) *rūpa-skandha*, a generic term for all forms of matter; 2) *vedanā-skandha*, perception; 3) *samjñā-skandha*, mental conceptions and ideas; 4) *samskāra-skandha*, volition; and 5) *viññāna-skandha*, consciousness of mind. Regarding man, the *rūpa-skandha* among these five aggregates is his body, the *viññāna-skandha* is the totality of his mind, and the other three *skandhas* are mental functions. Thus the five *skandhas* compose the body and mind of all sentient beings who are in the world of desire and the world of form, but those sentient beings who are in the formless world of pure spirit have no material elements.
44. A classification of the elements that is made with a view to a division into cognitive faculties and their objects. There are six cognitive faculties and six categories of corresponding objects, making twelve sense-fields or bases of cognition.
45. A classification of the elements of existence that is made with a view to a division into the cognitive faculties, their objects, and the corresponding consciousness. There are six subjective elements, six

- objective elements, and six kinds of consciousness.
46. It is said that Buddha Śākyamuni once picked up a golden lotus-flower, raised his eyebrows and blinked his eyes. Mahākāśyapa, seeing this, smiled, indicating that he had realized the true Law.
47. (J. Bodai-darma): Traditionally said to have come to China from India on the 21st of September in the 8th year of P'u-tung (519). After meeting the Emperor Wu of Liang State, he crossed the Yang-tse river and stayed at Shao-lin temple, where he did zazen for nine years facing the wall. He is revered as the first patriarch of Zen in China, the twenty-eighth patriarch in line from the Buddha.
48. See footnote 46.
49. One of the five great Zen temples in China, located in present-day Che-kiang Province.
50. Nothing more is known about him.
51. (?-?)
52. (?-788): Buddhist heir of Nan-Yüeh (677-744). One of the great Chinese Zen masters of the T'ang Dynasty.
53. The three vehicles are 1) *Śrāvaka-yāna* or *Hīnayāna*, in which one rightly understands the Four Truths and becomes an *Arhat*, 2) *Pratyeka-buddha-yāna* or *Madhyamyāna*, in which one rightly understands the twelve linked causality and becomes a Pratyeka-buddha, and 3) *Bodhisattva-yāna* or *Mahāyāna*, in which one becomes a Bodhisattva as a result of religious practice over innumerable years. The five vehicles consist of above-mentioned three vehicles plus 4) Vehicle for laymen, in which one rightly receives the five lay precepts and, upon rebirth becomes a celestial being, and 5) Vehicle for celestial beings, in which one rightly practices the good deeds and *samādhi*, ensuring rebirth in a higher realm of heaven.
54. (Skt., *citta*; J., *shin* or *kokoro*): Often translated simply as "mind", it refers to the discriminating mind *including* emotional feelings.
55. The Buddha-nature is, of course, essentially "one whole." Here, however, Dōgen uses the plural to refer to the numerous manifestations.
56. See footnote 32.
57. Frequently translated as "wisdom", *prajñā* is the function of the mind which makes decisions and eliminates doubts. It also enables the mind to gain an understanding of phenomena and is therefore closely associated with enlightenment itself.

58. (J., Ōbaku; ?-850): Huai-hai's most prominent disciple, noted for his strong sense of irony and strict teaching methods.
59. (J., Nansen; 748-834): Buddhist heir of Ma-tsu Tao-i. Famous for the *kōan* known as "Nan-ch'üan's cat killing." In this *kōan* Nan-ch'üan, seeing his disciples quarrelling over [the ownership of] a cat, picks it up and says he will kill it unless someone speaks [a word of Zen]. When none of these present reply, he cuts it in two. Later, when Nan-ch'üan recites this episode to Chao-chou, his foremost disciple, the latter puts his straw-sandals on his head and walks away. Nan-ch'üan, pleased with this spontaneous, non-dualistic act on the part of his disciple, then states that the cat's life would have been saved had Chao-chou been present at the original incident. This *kōan* points to the impossibility of grasping the Buddha-nature with the discriminating mind. cf. *Wu-mên-kuan* (Wu-mên's Collection of *Kōan*), Case XIV.
60. Here "drinking water" refers to the Buddha-nature and "payment for" to the question of whether or not the Buddha-nature has been correctly understood. In "setting aside" this question, however, there is an implicit assumption, on Nan-ch'üan's part, that Huang-po still has only a limited understanding of the Buddha-nature.
- "Money for the straw-sandals" refers to the depth of Huang-po's practice of the Way, with Nan-ch'üan inferring that Huang-po's training (as opposed to his insufficient understanding of the Buddha-nature) is so advanced that there is no one to return the money to, i.e. no one who is his equal.
61. Similar in the sense that both the "moo" of a cow and the words "of course not" (something indescribable) are beyond discriminative understanding.
62. Dōgen states that Huang-po should have said he intended to continue his practice under Nan-ch'üan's guidance to the point where it became unnecessary for him to wear straw-sandals, as a mendicant monk, *in search of* the Law, i.e. until he realized full enlightenment.
63. Dōgen states that even attachment to practice, expressed as "worn-out sandals", must be transcended.
64. (J., Gyōzan; 840-716): Buddhist heir of Ta-yüan of Mt. Ta-kuei. One of the founders of the Kuei-yang sect, one of the five Chinese Zen sects. See footnote 30.
65. The reference here is to an encounter between Zen Master Shih-gōng and Sam-ping. One day when Sam-ping saw Shih-gōng carrying a bow

and arrows, he asked "Is your bow for killing or sustaining human life?" In answer, Shih-gōng simply drew his bow three times. At this Sam-ping prostrated himself three times before Shih-gōng who then said: "After carrying a bow and arrows for thirty years I have at last been able to meet a somewhat enlightened person." Here "carrying a bow and arrows for thirty years" is symbolic of Shih-gōng's long period of training.

66. The "no" of *absolute non-being* which is beyond being and non-being.
67. The "yes" of *absolute being* which is beyond being and non-being.
68. The "yes" of "yes" and "no", i.e. the *relative* "yes".
69. One of the twenty *Hīnayāna* schools which was formed about three hundred years after the death of the Buddha. Its main tenets are that the Law is eternally present and the three periods of time, i.e. past present and future, have a real existence.
70. (J., Ungo Dōyō; ?-902): Chief disciple and Buddhist heir of Liang-chieh of Mt. Tung.
71. (., Chōsha Keishin): Little more is known about him, other than that he was said to be remarkably intelligent, earning for him the nickname of Ts'ên Ta-ch'ung (Ts'ên the Tiger).
72. It is traditionally believed in Buddhism that even as little as one sound uttered by the Buddha gives expression to the ultimate Truth.