

On the *Record of Rinzai*

PART VII

HISAMATSU SHIN'ICHI

The Meaning of the Patriarch's Coming from the West

One episode in the Discourses section of the *Record of Rinzai* revolves around the "meaning of the Patriarch's coming from the west."¹ I want to discuss this today.

Someone asked: "What is the meaning of the Patriarch's coming from the west?"

The Master said: "If he had had a meaning, he couldn't have saved even himself."

The person continued: "Since he had no meaning, how did the Second Patriarch attain the Dharma?"

The Master responded: "'To attain' is to not attain."

The person said: "If it is 'to not attain,' what is the meaning of 'to not attain'?"

The Master said: "It is because you cannot stop your mind which runs on seeking everywhere that a Patriarch said, 'Bah, superior people! Seeking for your heads with your heads!' When at these words you turn your own light in

* This is the seventh installment of a series of talks which the author began at the fall session of the FAS Society in September 1963. These talks were later included in his *Collected Works*, Volume VI: *Kyōroku-shō* (Risō-sha, 1973), the present ones being found on pp. 314-337. Quotations of the *Record* are from Ruth Fuller Sasaki (tr.), *The Record of Lin-chi* (Kyoto: Institute for Zen Studies, 1975), pp. 33, 1-2 (section 2); portions have been adapted. Footnotes have been provided by the translators.

¹ The character *i* or *kokoro* 意 has several connotations: "meaning," "purpose," "intention," and "will."

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upon yourselves and never seek elsewhere, then you'll know that your body and mind are not different from those of the patriarch-buddhas and on the instant have nothing to do—this is called “attaining the Dharma.”

A monk asks here about the “meaning of the Patriarch's coming from the west,” about why Bodhidharma went to China from India. This question first appeared in Zen circles long before Rinzai's time—in fact, from the beginning of Zen—and over the years people have asked it on countless occasions. Of course, Zen originated in Bodhidharma, so it is only natural for us to inquire into the fundamental meaning of his taking the trouble to journey from India to China.

Although this question asks about the meaning or purpose of Bodhidharma's going to China, it isn't concerned merely with the particular issue of why he did so. That is to say, in asking about the meaning of Bodhidharma's arrival from India, the monk is trying to get at the root-source of Zen. From the Zen perspective, though, the question asks not about Zen as a particular sect, but about Zen as the essence of Buddhism. And as I have said, Zen isn't simply the essence of a specific religion called Buddhism, but the essence of humanity, of the True Self. Hence this question about the meaning of Bodhidharma's going to China from India can be restated, “What is our True Self?” We might also ask, “What is the cardinal principle of the Buddha-dharma?” Of course, this is the question Rinzai asked Ōbaku three times, the question for which he received three blows.

Rinzai answers the monk, “If he had had a meaning he couldn't have saved even himself.” If we try to grasp conceptually the “meaning” or “purpose” for which Bodhidharma came from India, we won't understand why he came. Nothing like that is involved, says Rinzai, as he snatches away all meaning from the monk's way of questioning, and thereby gives direct expression to the “meaning of the Patriarch's coming from the west.” From his perspective, in true meaning there is no meaning at all.

The questioning monk fails to understand Rinzai's disclosure of the “meaning of the Patriarch's coming from the west,” so he pursues the idea that there isn't any meaning, and asks another question: “If he had no meaning, how did the Second Patriarch attain the Dharma?” From the ordinary perspective, this is a reasonable question, for Zen is

the tradition of the transmitting and attaining of the Dharma, the “transmission from Self to Self.” Hearing that the Second Patriarch, Eka, attained the Dharma from Bodhidharma, we are apt to assume that there must be a thing called Dharma involved, and that this Dharma is the “meaning” in question. We might ask how, if there is no meaning, we can speak of attaining the Dharma. But this question derives from objectifying the Dharma, in seeing the “meaning” objectively. And the monk isn’t only objectifying the meaning—he can’t even fathom what it is. He thinks the Dharma is a fixed thing, a limited entity. He isn’t alone, though, for people usually think the “transmission of the Dharma” indicates some special thing called “Dharma” which is transmitted.

As Rinzai always says, “The dharma² called Self is without form and pervades the ten directions.” The Self-dharma is formless. It has no form, so there is no attainment or non-attainment of it. Since we can attain something only if it is “some thing,” that which isn’t any thing at all is unattainable. We are originally equipped with the Dharma, in which all means of verbal expression are cut off and all activities of the mind have ceased. So how can we speak of attaining or not attaining it? How can we speak of transmitting or not transmitting it? Though people talk about transmitting or not transmitting the Dharma, they aren’t getting at the reality itself. They have objectified the “meaning” or “Dharma” as some sort of thing. And when they conceive of it in that objectified way, it ceases to be the Dharma itself or its meaning. All along, Rinzai has been disclosing the Dharma, the basis from which he gives his discourse. This is a superb aspect of *Zen mondōs*—Rinzai is speaking by means of the true “meaning.”

But the monk doesn’t understand. Tangled up in language, he can’t delve into the heart of the matter. He asks about there being “no meaning.” Meaning is no meaning, and this “meaning of no meaning” is precisely the meaning of Bodhidharma’s coming from the west. But if “no meaning” were a lack of meaning or purpose in the ordinary sense, it would be a mere negation. From Rinzai’s perspective, “no meaning” indicates the very reality in question: “This is it!” “If he

² Though of the same derivation as *Dharma* (truth, teaching) and translated from Sanskrit with the same character 法, *dharma* here means “event,” “entity,” or “constituent of reality.”

had had a meaning he couldn't have saved even himself." It is just as Rinzai says.

We see this expressed by the Second Patriarch, who is said to have received the Dharma from Bodhidharma. He declared, "When I seek my Self, I can't attain it." This statement directly expresses the transmission of Dharma to him from Bodhidharma. Yet when people hear the words, "transmission from Self to Self," they think there is something transmitted, even though the transmitting Self is unattainable. In ultimate truth, however, "the Self is unattainable." (Speaking of truth, let me mention here that truth, too, tends to be seen as some sort of "meaning.") In any case, the Second Patriarch attains peace of mind when he realizes that the Self is unattainable. That is to say, he receives the transmission of the Dharma from Bodhidharma when he realizes that nothing is transmitted. Here, too, people misconstrue words by taking this "unattainability" and "no transmission" to mean that there is no Dharma involved. Such is the limitation of a mere verbal understanding.

In response to the monk's question, Rinzai says, "'To attain' is to not attain." True attaining is non-attainment. In a sense, to *not* attain is to attain. If you should attain something, you aren't engaging in true attainment. Rinzai is kind enough to answer this way, but this may still fall short of a direct expression of the truth, for even now the monk doesn't understand.

The monk next asks, "If it is 'to not attain,' what is the meaning of 'to not attain'?" He is going around in circles. No matter how many times he asks a question, he fails to comprehend what Rinzai is really saying. People tend to get this way. In doctrinal Buddhism, one approach repeatedly negates everything, arguing that Dharma is not this, not that, and not even "not that." Nothing like that at all. Not, not, not. Yet no matter how long you continue to negate things, you won't ever encounter what is real. Even if you were to pile negation upon negation for thousands of years, you wouldn't arrive at truth. Therefore, you must "go beyond a hundred negations." The true Dharma lies beyond even a hundred negations. It isn't this, or that, or anything. But it isn't a sheer negation. The "thing" is there. It is that which isn't anything whatsoever. That is why it is neither this nor that.

The "meaning of the Patriarch's coming from the west" is that which has no form—the Self. Precisely this is what is meant by "unat-

tainable." And yet, as we have seen, the monk goes on to ask about the meaning of "to not attain." Knowing that this questioning will be forever repeated to no avail, Rinzai flips things around and says, "It is because you can't stop your mind that a Patriarch said, 'Bah, superior people! Seeking for your heads with your heads!'" Rinzai is telling us that if we stopped the mind that searches everywhere, we would comprehend the meaning of the Patriarch's coming from the west. No matter how much we seek it outside ourselves, we will only become eternally busy. The meaning of the Patriarch's coming from the west is found where the seeking mind has stopped. And it isn't found outside us, but inside. Though we look all around outside ourselves, we are endowed with "it" all along. It is our Original Face. Apart from our Original Face, there is no meaning in the Patriarch's coming from the west.

Now, about this "inside." This term often appears in the *Record* and other Zen texts, where we are told not to look outside ourselves. But if we should search internally, "inside" will be external to us as well. Therefore, Rinzai isn't discussing "inside" and "outside" in the usual sense. Rather, "inside" is *right here*. The "thing" itself, the Self itself, is the "inside." It is an inside without inside or outside, hence the expression about our Awakened nature: "It is neither inside, nor outside, nor in the middle." Inside, outside, and the middle are all external. And that which does not have an inside, outside, or middle, the place that is neither inside, nor outside, nor in the middle—that is the true "inside." What tells us this is the very Self; from its perspective, everything that is "something" is external. Thus Rinzai in effect admonishes us: "Stop the mind which searches everywhere."

The seeking mind looks everywhere—inside, outside, and in the middle—and hence diverges from the Self. It is said, "When you seek it you turn against it." Because you haven't brought your seeking mind to rest, you go around in circles. Rinzai scolds us: "Bah!" He admonishes us against seeking far and wide. Stop! Stop that seeking mind! When you do, you will discover the true meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the west.

"Seeking your heads with your heads!" You can't seek the Buddha with the Buddha. It's like trying to find your self with your self. This expression, "Seeking your head with your head," appears in the *Record of Rinzai* and several other Zen texts. It originates in the story of Ya-

jñadatta,³ a handsome Indian man who always enjoyed looking at himself in the mirror. One day, however, his face was not reflected there. He was shocked. Wondering where his face had gone, he started to search all around for it. As you can gather from this story, “to look for one’s face with one’s face” means that even though the sought is the very seeker, we seek it externally. Though you may search for a hundred or even a thousand days, you won’t find what you are looking for. This idea is also expressed in the *Zazen wasan*:⁴ “Born in a wealthy home, yet lost in an impoverished village.”

We speak of the Self, the ultimate True Self. That which is objective or particular can be sought externally, but the Self, which is a self and yet a formless self, cannot be objectified or sought outside of us. It can’t be other than itself. The realization of this is crucial in Zen practice. Though we constantly seek outside ourselves for Zen, it is none other than the Self. This is why Rinzai admonishes us to stop the seeking mind. Be careful, though—he isn’t telling us not to seek. If we lose our bearings here we will succumb to error. Though we might search for ten thousand kalpas, we won’t ever reach our goal. In truth, the Self is not even a hair’s breadth apart from us; it is right here where we stand. It is close at hand, closer to us than anything at all. The Self is the Self—nothing is closer. If you search externally for this closest thing, you won’t ever find it. Rinzai says here, “Bah, superior people! Always seeking your heads with your heads!” He warns us that it is a mistake for the head to go around looking for itself.

Rinzai next tells you to “turn your own light in upon yourselves and never seek elsewhere.” Again, he is telling you not to seek your head with your head—the sought-after head is in the seeker, and hence it is right here.

This morning I didn’t know where my handkerchief was, and though I looked for it, it was nowhere to be found. At first I was unable to locate it anywhere in the room, but I finally found it in the “pocket” of my kimono sleeve. This sort of thing happens to us from time to time, so we are told to turn the light in upon ourselves, to stop seeking elsewhere. This admonition comes from the true way of being

³ See the *Sutra of Shurangama Practices*, fascicle 4, Taisho 19, No. 944, p. 12-b.

⁴ “Hymn to Zazen,” written by Hakuin (1685-1766).

of the Self, where there is no “seeking” and no “not seeking,” either. Ordinarily we fail to realize this, so we have no choice but to make all-out efforts to find what has been lost. We seek Awakening, try to become the Buddha, or have faith in and worship the Buddha, all the while taking Awakening or the Buddha to be something apart from us. Buddha-nature isn’t above or below us, inside or outside of us, or in the middle. That which is presenting itself here and now is the Buddha-nature. When we fail to realize this, we seek the Buddha-nature inside ourselves. So doing, “whenever we seek, we turn against it.” But when this seeking mind is stopped, we first discover the Buddha-nature. The *Heart Sutra of Prajñāpāramitā* says:

No eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind;
No color, sound, smell, taste, touch, or thought-object.

Why was this written? What does this mean? These words indicate the way of being of the Self that cannot be sought externally. The True Self isn’t something we can seek after with our minds. It is found where the activity of the mind has ceased.

“You’ll know that your body and mind are not different from those of the patriarch-buddhas.” To realize that your body-mind doesn’t differ from the patriarchs and buddhas, you must stop seeking externally and “drop off body and mind.” Dropping off body and mind—no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind, no color, sound, smell, taste, touch, or thought-object—there is no buddha or patriarch apart from you. The Self as buddhas and patriarchs isn’t apart from us, and in grasping this we discover the meaning of Bodhidharma’s journey from India, the “cardinal principle of the Buddha-dharma.”

When we realize we aren’t different from the patriarchs and buddhas, we will, “in that instant, have nothing to do.” Right here and right now, we have nothing to do, for the seeking has come to a halt. The meaning of the Patriarch’s coming from the west now presents itself, *right here*. And yet we often seek satori far away. We take it to be something distant, something ordinary people can’t reach. But such is not the case. There is nothing easier, nothing more simple. It is the easiest action to perform. It is beyond difficult and easy—it is just as it is, which is the same as saying it is right here.

For the person who has realized this, there is nothing to do. We read in the *Record*, “The one who has nothing to do is the noble person.”

This expression often appears in calligraphy, such as the beautiful piece by Jiun Sonja.⁵ Only when we have nothing to do are we the noble person. Of course, “noble” here doesn’t refer to one pole of the dichotomy between nobility and commoners. To be noble is to have nothing to do. Hence, “The one who has nothing to do is the noble person.”

“On the instant we have nothing to do—this is called ‘attaining the Dharma.’” Rinzai says that having nothing to do—precisely that—is the attaining of the Dharma. Nothing is attained. If you speak of having attained something, you are mistaken. “There is no Dharma to be attained,” “no Dharma to be given.” We sometimes encounter the saying, “Descending to save sentient beings.” In “descending to save,” there is no Dharma to be given, so you can have others attain the Dharma. Because the Dharma isn’t apart from the Self, it can’t be obtained from the outside. “That which comes in through the gate is not the family treasure.” If our way of attaining the Dharma leads us to value our [certification] paper, it will be worth less than toilet paper. True certification [*inka*] occurs only when we realize that the Dharma goes beyond attainment, that we are the True Self. But we tend to get caught up in things, forgetting that the Dharma isn’t something we receive from others. Ask yourself: who certifies whom? The Self does it to the Self. There is no other type of certification. Nevertheless, certification tends to get off the track and become fixed as something apart from us. The transmission of the Dharma becomes a mere form, which prevents the Dharma from being transmitted in the true sense. Contemporary Zen people need to think seriously about this. For each of you the Dharma is truly unattainable. You must realize the attainment of the unattainable. You must confirm yourselves.

The Three Vehicles' Twelve Divisions of Teachings

Recently I have been giving talks on passages of the *Record of Rinzai* that I find especially interesting. I will continue doing so throughout this retreat, and focus today on an early section of the text, in which a

⁵ Jiun the Venerable Onkō (1718-1804), a Shingon priest.

lecture-master asks Rinzai about the Three Vehicles' twelve divisions of teachings. Let me start by reading their dialogue.

A lecture-master asked: "The Three Vehicles' twelve divisions of teachings reveal the Buddha-nature, do they not?"

"This weed patch has never been spaded," said Rinzai.

"Surely the Buddha would not have deceived people!" said the lecture-master.

"Where is Buddha?" asked Rinzai.

The lecture-master had no reply.

"You thought you'd make a fool of me in front of the Counselor," said the Master. "Get out, get out! You're keeping the others from asking questions."

The Master further said: "Today's Dharma-assembly is concerned with the Great Matter. Does anyone else have a question? If so, ask it now! But the instant you open your mouth you are already way off. Why is this so? Don't you know? Venerable Shakyamuni said, 'Dharma is separate from words, because it is neither subject to causation nor dependent upon conditions.' "

A lecture-master is a person who studies scriptures in an attempt to elucidate doctrinal Buddhism as opposed to Zen, the direct awakening to Buddha-nature as the source of scriptures. Monks who engage in such study are referred to as "scholars of the various facets of Buddhist teaching," and the head of a group of these monks is called a lecture-master. In any case, a lecture-master steps forth and asks the kind of question one would expect from a scholar of doctrine. In effect, he is asking, "Even the Three Vehicles' twelve divisions of teaching elucidate the Buddha-nature, do they not? Such elucidation isn't done only by Zen, right?"

The Three Vehicles are the Vehicle of the Sbrāvakas, the Vehicle of the Pratyekas,⁶ and the Vehicle of the Bodhisattvas. The twelve divi-

⁶ The Vehicle of the Shravakas (*Srāvaka-yāna*) indicates those who have gathered to form the Sangha to study and practice the Awakened One's teaching, strive to become Arhats, and after attaining Arhatship, seek to remain in the Sangha. The Vehicle of the Pratyeka Buddhas (*Pratyekabuddha-yāna*) refers to Buddhists who have understood Awakening or Buddhahood to be a matter of individuals not related to the world and history, and who have been practicing individually apart from the Sangha.

sions of teachings are the twelve parts of Theravada and Mahayana doctrine. Hence the expression, "Three Vehicles' twelve divisions of teachings," refers to all Buddhist teachings conveyed in words, to the entire Buddhist scripture.

In Zen, however, we don't rely on the Three Vehicles' twelve divisions of teachings. The goal of Zen is a direct awakening to the source of those writings, to the essence expressed therein, to the basis of the 84,000 Dharma-gates,⁷ or to what Zen calls the "Self,"⁸ "Buddha-nature," "Self-nature," and "Original Face." This direct awakening finds expression in a Zen saying:

Not relying on words or letters,
An independent transmission apart from doctrinal teachings;
A direct pointing to humanity's True Self,
Seeing one's nature and attaining Awakening (Buddhahood).

The "doctrinal teachings" are the Three Vehicles' twelve divisions of teachings. Their source, however, does not rely on words or letters, and exists "apart from doctrinal teachings." Without depending on the words and statements of Theravada or Mahayana Buddhism, we directly awaken to their source, to the "Self" that is independent of doctrine.

Because this way of transmission diverges from the type of Buddhism that has been conveyed by scriptures and doctrinal teachings, it generates such expressions as "not relying on words or letters," and "an independent transmission apart from doctrinal teachings." Further, because the Self is directly transmitted from person to person, we also encounter the expression, "transmission from Self to Self." This "Self" is our Original Self, our Self-nature, which is none other than the Awakened One (Buddha). Zen points directly to the Self and has us see into our Self-nature to attain Buddhahood. It is a "direct pointing to humanity's True Self," through which we see our original nature and attain Awakening. Humanity's True Self is the original Self common to us all, the Self prior to scriptural expressions. In ordinary Buddhist parlance, it is "Buddha-nature." People might think that "Bud-

⁷ The term Dharma-gate 法門 (*hōmon*) refers to the Buddhist teaching.

⁸ The term here is 心 (Ch. *hsin*, J. *shin*), the Sanskrit equivalent being *hrdaya* (core, pith, heart) or "*svacitta* (oneself) that is *acitta* (no-self)." This is to be distinguished from consciousness.

dha-nature" refers to some sort of transcendent essence of the Buddha separate from us, but along with the expression, "Humanity's True Self," it connotes the true nature of original humanity.

Some people are apt to see the Buddha-nature as an immanent potential for becoming a buddha, but it's no such thing. It doesn't exist internally, externally, or in the middle. Here and now—this is the Buddha-nature's true way of being. In other words, right in this time and place we humans are the Buddha-nature. There is no special need to depend on scriptures. Though you may seek the true Buddha in scriptures, it isn't found there. At this very moment, in this place, we awaken directly to our true way of being, or, you might say, we have it awaken. This manner of awakening is the direct pointing to humanity's True Self. But to see into our original nature and become a buddha is not to see our Self-nature objectively with our eyes, or to know it objectively with our ordinary minds. To "see" is for the original nature to awaken. There is no seen object apart from the seer and no seer apart from the seen. The original nature existing as itself—this is what is meant by "seeing one's nature." And this is precisely what is meant by "attaining Awakening" (literally, "becoming a buddha"). So, to become a buddha is to awaken to the Buddha-nature that is our own original nature. It is our awakening to the Formless, True Self, never our believing in or becoming the kind of buddha that is an other to us.

Because the saying I read before is a kind of Zen slogan, the lecture-master questions it. He asks whether the Three Vehicles' twelve divisions of teachings upon which he relies don't also elucidate the Buddha-nature. He asks why Zen establishes itself as a principle of Buddhism apart from those teachings. Given the Chinese epoch in which Zen emerged with the goal of direct awakening, it is only natural that this doubt arose in someone rooted in the doctrinal tradition that had held sway up until then. Perhaps even today such doubts haven't completely disappeared. For those who think that Buddhism is clarified by relying on scriptures rather than by directly becoming a buddha independent of scriptures, a direct attainment of Buddhahood is extremely hard to fathom. For this reason, doubts start cropping up.

People invariably tend to rely on the scriptures of their religion or sect. As the sole basis of and criterion for truth, these writings constitute the final object of dependence. For example, in Tendai Bud-

dhism, the Lotus Sutra is the single sutra to which people turn; in Pure Land Buddhism the so-called Three Sutras are definitive; and in Kegon Buddhism the Avatamsaka Sutra is the scripture upon which adherents of that sect rely.

Zen, however, does not make any sutra a final criterion. The Zen criterion exists only in the source from which sutras emerge. That source is also the place of reliance, for peace of mind is never found apart from it. In other words, Awakening is the final, and only, place of reliance. This is why Zen admonishes us not to seek the Buddha apart from ourselves or take an "other" as the Buddha, for the "Buddha" is Awakening itself. Nevertheless, the lecture-master still wonders whether the Three Vehicles' twelve divisions of teachings don't elucidate the Buddha-nature, just as the doctrinal approach, based on scripture, clarifies Buddhism.

In response, Rinzai chides him: "This weed patch has never been spaded." To Rinzai, the Three Vehicles' twelve divisions of teachings are like rampant weeds. Rinzai shows restraint in characterizing them this way, for in another talk he says, "The Three Vehicles' twelve divisions of teachings are all ass-wiping paper." From his perspective, the wild weeds have already been spaded, or, rather, they originally do not exist. Rinzai breaks through the lecture-master's Dharma-entanglement and points directly to the True Self by asking how he, a revered priest, could continue to nurture weeds rather than uproot them. Rinzai tells him it would be best to spade them out of the way. Rinzai clearly discloses the direction leading from the leaves and branches to the root of the matter. Actually, it isn't simply the direction but the very root that he is pointing to.

Up until now, the doctrinal study of Buddhism has harbored a pitfall: insofar as there are such things as voluminous sutras and elaborate commentaries, people get entangled in them. They grope about in darkness, become increasingly confused, and never rid themselves of this Dharma-entanglement. But, as an existential critique of the idea that investigation of the scriptures will lead one to a true understanding of Buddhism and the attainment of Buddhahood, Zen provides a living means of shaking free from Dharma-entanglement.

We sometimes hear the expression, "A nun who is ignorant even of a single passage of scripture [but who knows her afterlife is a person of

wisdom].”⁹ Even if you don't know a single word of the scriptures, you can become a buddha. Why? Because “buddha” is our Original Face, our True Self.

In the FAS Society, F, the Formless Self, is the Original Face of all human beings. It is the true I. Accordingly, the *Record* tells us again and again not to seek outside ourselves, for however long we may seek externally, we are heading in the wrong direction. The Self is *you*, and you certainly don't exist outside yourself. Perhaps you've heard the saying, “Missing themselves, all sentient beings chase after things.”¹⁰ When we lose ourselves, we chase after things and search farther and farther outside ourselves. This is a fatal mistake in direction. As you know, Rinzai often draws on the story of Yajñadatta, who ran wildly about looking for his head, only to realize that the seeker was the head. In referring to this story, Rinzai is warning us against seeking Buddha apart from ourselves. All true followers of the Way must realize this.

But the lecture-master says, “Surely the Buddha would not have deceived people.” The Three Vehicles' twelve divisions of teachings are what the Buddha preached. It is insulting to call them toilet paper. What sacrilege! Without doubt they are Buddha's words. “Why would the Buddha deceive us?!”

To this Rinzai replies, “Where is Buddha?” You say Buddha this, Buddha that, but where is he? Tell me!

Though the lecture-master has read every line of the Buddhist canon, he can't even begin to answer this question about the Buddha's whereabouts. All he can do is refer to sections of the scriptures, or, worse yet, state that the Buddha is a man Shakyamuni who lived in India 2500 years ago, that he resides in the western paradise called the Pure Land, or that he abides in a nirvanic afterlife.

⁹ Rennyō (1415-1499), the restorer of the Pure Land Shin Sect, in his *Letters Addressed to Lay People*, 5-2, states: “It is said, you know, that with all the knowledge of the eighty-thousand teachings of the Dharma Treasure, those who are ignorant of their afterlives are fools, whereas a nun who is ignorant of even a sentence from the teachings but who knows her afterlife is a person of wisdom.”

¹⁰ In the *Blue Cliff Record*, Case No. 46, Master Kyōshō Dōfu (Ch. Ching-ch'ing Tao-fu, 866?-937) quotes, with a slight change, this sentence from the *Sutra of Shūrangama Practices* (fascicle 2, Taisho 19, No. 944, p. 111-c). The original scripture reads: “All sentient beings, since beginningless time, have lost themselves, taking themselves for things. Being lost in their original Self, they have had things move them.”

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In "The Existing-Place of the True Buddha," a section of my book, *Oriental Nothingness*, I tried to clarify what the True Buddha is, where Buddha must exist, and what "exist" means here. Rinzai doesn't listen to the priest's explanation of where the Buddha is. He wants the priest to give a direct expression of the Buddha-nature by answering, "Buddha is here!" If the lecture-master were to awaken to the Buddha-nature through Rinzai's direct pointing, he could answer on the spot. He could clearly and fully present the Buddha-nature. But we cannot expect such a response from a lecture-master who searches for Buddha in sutras.

With things proceeding in this way, the lecture-master is left speechless. Were his muteness the same as Vimalakirti's silence, it would be a magnificent self-presentation of the Buddha. But he is simply at a total loss for words. Only able to stand there dumbfounded, the lecture-master reveals the impotency of mere doctrinal study. Present-day Buddhologists need to be especially careful they don't end up like this priest.

Many of us can't answer Rinzai's question, either, so we have gathered here today from far and near to take part in a seven-day retreat. Of course, our central concern isn't limited to Rinzai's question. Our concern is a question we must ask ourselves in total seriousness. It is the most decisive question one person can ask another. But people tend to think of Buddhism as something remote from them, as a religion, philosophy, or cultural tradition transmitted with various changes from ancient India to the modern world. Because of this view, they fail to understand Buddhism in a direct way, here and now. They don't realize that Buddhism is the ultimate question we can't avoid asking ourselves. Another reason they don't grasp Buddhism as our ultimate problem is that Buddhism has become a matter of people worshipping Buddha-images drawn on paper and sculpted from wood or metal, requesting things from those images, believing in a postmortem Buddha, or trying to perceive Buddha as a transcendent entity other than themselves. As I continually stress, though, the Buddha is our Original Face, our True Self, which is never temporally apart from us for even a moment or spatially apart from us even an inch. If you search externally for the Buddha as some sort of object, you will only drift farther away from it. Rinzai is telling you that however much you study the scriptures and acquire correct knowledge,

your knowledge will be “merely a beautiful display of words,” not the true, living Buddha.

For this reason, we all must stop thinking of idols and scriptures as things significant for the afterlife and searching for Buddha apart from ourselves. We should investigate in the direction of the True Self. That is to say, we shouldn't investigate while worshipping Buddha-images or reading sutras—everything necessary is assembled in this five-foot body, this lump of red flesh. That which answers and that which questions never diverge from this, for it is I that questions myself. The 80,000 Dharma teachings¹¹ aren't things written on paper—they are all provided with this five-foot body. Accordingly, though this body is only five-feet tall, it is never small; though its life spans only 70 years, it is in no way short. That is why I repeat that the Formless Self harbors the boundless world of All Humankind and envelops the endless time of Suprahistorical History.

To study Buddhism for many years, perhaps even for a lifetime, and yet fail to directly manifest the Buddha in response to the question about the Buddha's whereabouts, can only be seen as pitiful. Such failure indicates that you haven't truly studied Buddhism. Of course, this question about the whereabouts of the Buddha would surely humble contemporary Buddhologists, for they, too, would end up as silent as the lecture-master. Even if you pile scriptures mountain-high, a true Buddhologist will not emerge. Nor will the True Self awaken. Indeed, the lecture-master's helplessness is quite regrettable.

Because of what has transpired, Rinzai says to the lecture-master: “You thought you'd make a fool of me in front of the Counselor.” The Counselor is a man named Wang, and he is the Governor of Henan Province. At the Counselor's invitation, Rinzai is giving a Dharma talk. In the process, as we have seen, he turns to the questioning lecture-master and asks him if he thought he could make a fool of him in front of the Counselor. Rinzai yells at him: “Get out, get out! You're keeping the others from asking questions.” Rinzai addresses the other people gathered for his talk, saying, “Today's Dharma assembly is concerned with the Great Matter. Does anyone else have a question? If so, ask it now!” And he warns them: “But the instant you open your mouth you are already way off. Why is this so? Don't you know?”

¹¹ See note 9.

ON THE RECORD OF RINZAI

Venerable Shakyamuni said, 'Dharma is separate from words, because it is neither subject to causation nor dependent upon conditions.' "

Rinzai has directly expressed that which hasn't preached a word for forty-nine years, that which words fail to reach. "The moment you open your mouth, you are already way off"—how do you receive this direct pointing? How do you come before him? If you realize your Formless Self, responding to him will be a simple task.

TRANSLATED BY TOKIWA GISHIN
AND CHRISTOPHER A. IVES