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TRANSLATION

Cutting through Desire: Dokuan Genkō's Odes on the Nine Perceptions of Foulness¹

Translated and Introduced by
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INTRODUCTION

DEATH has some tremendous advantages. First, it shines as one of the few certainties that religious followers and agnostics alike cannot avoid sharing. Second, for philosophically-inclined people it offers an anchor, enabling them to bracket all other aspects of existence. In other words, death undercuts arrogant attempts to raise the human condition above its time-constrained finitude, and the very presence of this ultimate buffer can be used to highlight the spiritual dynamics of life.²

Concerning the use of death-related meditation techniques, the contemplation of corpses—real or imagined—has fairly ancient roots in Asia. Although the precise origin of such techniques remains to be determined, a pre-Buddhist context cannot be excluded. What is clear is that since the

¹ The compound *kusō* 九想 (Skt. *navasaṃjñā*) is translated here as the “nine perceptions.” It refers to the nine perceptions of foulness (Skt. *navāśubhasaṃjñā*). Although *saṃjñā* is sometimes rendered as “concept” or “notion,” in the context of a practice focusing on the stages of the decomposition of a body it suggests a contemplation or a visualization rather than an abstract concept, and in some contexts it has been translated as “contemplation.” In Buddhist terminology, the Sanskrit word *saṃjñā* is also used for the third of the five aggregates constituting the “person.” In Chinese and Japanese sources, the same practice is often indicated by the homonym *kusō* 九相. Regardless of the literal meaning of the Chinese character 相, it stands as a variant for 想, and the common translation “nine aspects” does not appear satisfactory.

² See such an attempt by Rosenzweig (2005).

emergence of Nikāya Buddhism they were already firmly grounded in the Pāli tradition. For instance, the *Vaṅgīśasamyutta* depicts how the monk Vaṅgīśa asked for help when he felt overwhelmed by lust. Ānanda gave him the following advice in verse:

Develop the mind on foulness,
One-pointed, well concentrated;
Apply your mindfulness to the body,
Be engrossed in revulsion.³

This passage exemplifies the pivotal role of the perception of foulness (*asubha*) seen as an antidote to the greatest threat to celibate life, variously called lust, craving, greed, or sensual desire (*rāga*), and described as one of the three poisons hindering liberation.

Yet, this ancient practice was apparently not without risks for the monastic community. According to the Pāli sources, after the historical Buddha had given a talk “speaking in praise of foulness” to his monks, they apparently took it too literally and ended up harming themselves:

Being repelled, humiliated, and disgusted with this body, they sought for an assailant. In one day ten bhikkhus used the knife, or in one day twenty or thirty bhikkhus used the knife.⁴

In this story, after half a month had elapsed, the Buddha asked Ānanda “why does the Bhikkhu Saṅgha look so diminished?”⁵ Upon learning what had happened, he gathered the monks and taught them the mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*), which he stated is “peaceful and sublime, an ambrosial pleasant dwelling, and it disperses and quells right on the spot evil unwholesome states whenever they arise.”⁶

Regardless of potential dangers, the perception of foulness continued to develop. In Theravāda circles around the mid-fifth century Buddhaghosa composed his *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification), which devotes considerable space to foulness as a meditation subject (chapter 6). His minute description of the *ten* kinds of foulness provides one of the most graphic accounts of this practice, suggesting that in his time it was often performed in charnel grounds, witnessing the successive stages in the decomposition of corpses

³ *Samyutta Nikāya* (hereafter *SN*), vol. 1, 188, 21–22. Translation by Bodhi (2000, p. 284).

⁴ *SN* vol. 5, 320, 22–25 (translation, Bodhi 2000, p. 1773).

⁵ *SN* vol. 5, 320, 28 (translation, Bodhi 2000, p. 1773).

⁶ *SN* vol. 5, 321, 21–24 (translation, Bodhi 2000, p. 1774).

as they occurred. Among the forty meditation subjects, the ten kinds of foulness were an unavoidable part of the curriculum.⁷ Yet, there is one important dimension that distinguishes the Theravāda practice from its Mahayana equivalents. After having taught how practitioners should define the body used for contemplation purposes, Buddhaghosa voices the following warning:

However, a female body is not appropriate for a man or a male one for a woman; for the object, [namely, the repulsive aspect], does not make its appearance in a body of the opposite sex, which merely becomes a condition for the wrong kind of excitement.⁸

Clearly, the *Visuddhimagga* forbids male monks from engaging in the perception of dead female bodies and this practice aimed first at perceiving the foulness of one's own body. The "demonization" of desire represented under the form of its feminine object thus represents a non-Theravāda development. Speculation about the exact timing for this shift goes beyond the scope of this introduction, but Liz Wilson (1996) provides a fascinating study of the Indian stories related to this theme, mostly from Mahayana sources.

One of these sources, the *Da bore boluomiduo jing* 大般若波羅蜜多經 (The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom, T no. 220) offers one of the earliest enumerations of the *nine* perceptions of foulness, that is the nine stages through which a dead body transforms until cremated. They are rendered as follows in Conze's translation of what he calls "the nine unlovely perceptions."

Which nine? i.e., the perception of a swollen corpse, a worm-eaten corpse, a festering corpse, a bloody corpse, a blueish corpse, a corpse being devoured, a scattered corpse, a burned corpse, a corpse of only bones.⁹

Dokuan's Reliance on Zhiyi

The text provided here in translation was composed by Dokuan Genkō 独庵玄光 (1630–1698, also known as Mōzan Genkō 蒙山玄光), a teacher affiliated with the Sōtō school. Its Japanese title is *Hannya kusō zusan* 般若九想図贊 (The Nine Perceptions [according to] *Prāṅṅā*, with Illustrated Odes) and it was first published as an independent work.¹⁰ It is also included in

⁷ *Visuddhimagga* (hereafter *Vism*) 111, 33–34. See also Ñāṇamoli 1999, p. 110.

⁸ *Vism* 184, 26–29 (translation, Ñāṇamoli 1999, p. 179).

⁹ Conze 1975, p. 46.

¹⁰ Up to now, scholars have not been able to determine whether this text was printed sepa-

the *Kinzan Dokuan-sō gohōshū* 經山獨菴叟護法集 (The Anthology on the Protection of the Dharma by the Old Dokuan of Kinzan) as its fourteenth fascicle.¹¹ At first sight, the title seems to suggest that Dokuan's poems were a response to the *Da bore boluomiduo jing* and the *Dazhidu lun* 大智度論 (The Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom, T no. 1509). Yet, although some passages do reflect these two classics, especially the latter,¹² Dokuan used the *Shi chanboluomi cidifamen* 釈禪波羅蜜次第法門 (The Gradual Approach of the Dharma through the Commentary on the Perfection of Meditation, T no. 1916) as his primary source. Before each of the nine odes Dokuan quotes this text attributed to Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597), the founder of the Tiantai school, and adds his own commentaries and poems. The illustrations were drawn by the painter Terada Masanobu 寺田政信 (n.d.).

Practice in Japan

Retracing even a cursory history of the Japanese literary and visual depictions of the nine perceptions would require far more than a short introduction. It is necessary, however, to mention at least the early contribution by the young Kūkai 空海 (774–835) and to give an outline of research available on this topic. Kūkai's *Sangō shiiki* 三教指歸 (Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings) contains a poem entitled *Mujō no fu* 無常の賦 (Transiency), where he gives a vivid description of the impermanence of the human body and emphasizes the feminine element.¹³ Expressions such as “The pretty eyes of an exquisite girl become two small swamps on which the moss floats. . . . Her pink cheeks become a resting place for flies and her red lips, food for crows”¹⁴ mark a new development on a theme that had already been explored by poets in Tang China. A more systematic treatment by

rately (Yoshida 1996, p. 158). Yet, the presentation of Dokuan's text suggests an independent work and one copy of the first edition as a book of its own is kept at Kanazawa University library (188.5:G331 9300-05742-1). In the present translation, the *Hannya kusō zusan* will thus be treated as an independent book.

¹¹ As to the temple's name where Dokuan resided at that time, see note 36 of this translation.

¹² See the translation by Lamotte (1944–80, in particular vol. 3, chapter 35).

¹³ The preface to this work carries the date December 23, 797 (Enryaku 16, first day of the twelfth lunar month). Kūkai was only twenty-three years old in Western reckoning. He discloses his motivation in the preface: “Now I have a nephew who is depraved and indulges in hunting, wine, and women, and whose usual way of life consists of gambling and dissipation. . . . What has induced me to write [this story] are the opposition of my relatives [to my becoming a Buddhist] and the behavior of this nephew.” Hakeda 1972, p. 103. Compare Grapard 1985, p. 37.

¹⁴ Hakeda 1972, p. 131.

Kūkai appears in his own *Kusōshi* 九想詩 (Poems on the Nine Perceptions), included in the *Zoku henjō hokki shōryō shū* 続遍照發揮性靈集 (Sequel to Kūkai's Anthology of Prose and Poetry).¹⁵ Far from having a purely macabre consonance, since Kūkai, the literary depictions of these perceptions have tended to evoke contrapuntal hymns to the impermanence of beauty.

The complex juxtaposition of literary layers related to the nine perceptions has been studied in depth by François Lachaud (2006). Concerning the Japanese invention of a sequence of nine illustrated poems attributed to Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 (1037–1101, also known as Su Shi 蘇軾), see the translation and the introduction by James Sanford (1988).¹⁶ The artistic dimension has been scrutinized by several scholars, including Gail Chin (1998). Thanks to the expanding body of research dealing with this meditation practice across historical and geographic boundaries, Dokuan's work may now be appreciated as one of the last and most elaborate developments in a long series of Buddhist works emphasizing the perception of foulness as an expedient means to overcome craving.

More recent literary developments include Japanese novelists, among whom Kōda Rohan 幸田露伴 (1867–1947) and his novel *Tai dokuro* 対髑髏 (Facing the Skull) occupy an important place. Kōda's work is discussed at length by Lachaud,¹⁷ who also examines pieces by the more famous Tanizaki Jun'ichirō 谷崎潤一郎 (1886–1965). My own investigation of Dokuan mostly has focused on the Tokugawa context and his relations with Chinese immigrants in Nagasaki (Mohr 2002). There are also numerous articles on the topic of the perception of foulness in Japanese, which are for the most part listed in the above-mentioned publications.

This Translation

The text provided below constitutes the first translation of the *Hannya kusō zusan* of Dokuan Genkō, which contains an afterword dated January 23, 1693 (Genroku 元禄 5, eighteenth day of the twelfth lunar month).¹⁸

¹⁵ Kōbō Daishi Kūkai Zenshū Henshū Iinkai 1983–86, vol. 6, pp. 688–97, 777–79. Hakeda attempted to translate the *Henjō hokki shōryō shū* literally as “The Collected Works of the Universally Illuminating, Soul-inspiring One,” but there is no need to follow his rendering. Hakeda 1972, p. 10. Another attempt to render this title is Ronald S. Green's “Collection Divining the Spiritual Nature of Henjō” (<http://www.ronnygreen.us/kukaipoetry.htm>).

¹⁶ This publication attributed to Su Dongpo is mentioned in Dokuan's afterword.

¹⁷ Lachaud 2006, pp. 4–12.

¹⁸ Sōtōshū Zensho Kankōkai 1931, pp. 230–40; Kagamishima 1996, pp. 264–77. When there are variants between the two texts, the woodblock print edition reproduced in Kagamishima's anthology has been adopted.

The first draft of this translation was made in Spring 2008 for an advanced graduate course of Directed Readings at the University of Hawai'i. Every week, a Japanese reading (*kundoku*) of the text was produced from the original in classical Chinese, followed by the English translation. What was originally meant to be an introduction to *kanbun* for graduate students evolved into a fascinating discovery of unmapped territory. Admittedly, because of its difficulty this text was not entirely appropriate as an introduction, but it proved challenging enough to motivate three dedicated students to stay up late into the night to prepare for these study sessions. These students were Matthew D. McMullen, Matthew S. Mitchell, and Jolyon B. Thomas. Not only did they actively participate by taking turns reading the text, they also made numerous helpful suggestions for improving the translation. From the beginning, our objective was to produce a reliable translation and to publish the results of this research. Without the encouragement of these weekly meetings, none of us would have had the courage to undertake this daunting translation. Now that the editors of *The Eastern Buddhist* kindly have agreed to give us the opportunity to share the result of this research, time invested in this task appears entirely worth the effort. Dokuan obviously enjoyed writing this piece, and readers will certainly perceive between the lines some of the humorous discoveries that we made while deciphering his intentions.

TRANSLATION

Preface to *The Nine Perceptions* [according to] *Prāṇṇā*, with *Illustrated Odes* in the *Anthology on the Protection of the Dharma*

To escape the burning house of the threefold world¹⁹ and reach the cool²⁰ other-shore of Nirvana,²¹ there is no faster way than the nine perceptions. The Buddha taught them at the Prajñāpāramitā Assembly²² and Nāgārjuna commented on them in the *Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*. The Tiantai master Zhiyi [further] commented on them in his [*Gradual*

¹⁹ Our world, which includes the realm of desire, the realm of form, and the formless realm.

²⁰ The Chinese compound *qingliang* 清涼 evokes both clarity and purity. Its nuance of coolness contrasts with the burning condition of delusion (*saṃsāra*).

²¹ Metaphor from the *Lotus Sutra*. See Watson 1993, p. 59.

²² Refers to the teachings on the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) attributed to the Buddha and collected in the *Da bore boluomiduo jing* in six hundred fascicles.

Approach of the Dharma through the Commentary on the] Perfection of Meditation.

He singled out tainted meditation and distinguished the practice and realization for the purpose of discerning untainted meditation. In other words, he divided the untainted meditation into two practices.²³ The Four Noble Truths, the twelve links of codependent arising, true emptiness, and correct insight he considered the wisdom practice. This is why severing delusion through the principle is called the wisdom practice. He considered things such as the nine perceptions and the liberations²⁴ as the performative practice. This is why to start practice and to extirpate defilements through phenomena is called the performative practice.

What is called the wisdom practice [consists in focusing on] pain, craving, cessation of pain, the Way, true emptiness, and correct insight; ignorant men and women of less than average aptitude lack the disposition [to understand such concepts]. What is called the performative practice [consists in focusing on a dead body] swelling, dislocating, etc.; even children playing on the roadside²⁵ are familiar with such scenes²⁶ and they are neither difficult to understand nor difficult to encounter. Without intent [to practice] it stops [there], but if one has even the slightest [intent], it matters not whether one is a man or a woman, old or young, wise or unwise.

Immediately upon entering *samādhi* with the equipment of the wisdom practice in place,²⁷ one equally rides forth, smashing the camp and fortifications made by the demon of the aggregates and the demon of the afflictions,²⁸ establishing merit in the gate of emptiness and completing the dharma-city of awakening. For this reason, the Buddha taught that “[the

²³ These two practices have been translated respectively as wisdom practice (*huixing* 慧行) and performative practice (*xingxing* 行行).

²⁴ Refers to the eight kinds of liberation (Ch. *ba beishe* 八背捨, also written as *ba jietuo* 八解脫; Skt. *aṣṭāvimokṣa*).

²⁵ “Even children playing on the roadside” (*gaidō shiju to iedomo* 雖街童市豎) is an expression used by Fori Qisong 佛日契嵩 (1007–1072) in his *Fujiaobian* 輔教編. See Araki 1981, p. 99.

²⁶ Such scenes are, literally, familiar objects of the senses (*kenmon no jukukyō* 見聞の熟境). Here, *juku* 熟 seems to refer to the intensity and the frequency of such sights of cadavers, with the nuance of these [cognitive] objects (*kyō* 境) being familiar, which is one of the meanings of *shu* 熟 in Chinese.

²⁷ Literally “aligning the horse bit” (*egyō no kutsubami o narabe* 慧行の鑣を並べ).

²⁸ In the *Lotus Sutra*, Kumārajīva translated *skandhamāra* and *kṣeṣamāra* respectively as *wuyin mo* 五陰魔 and *fanna mo* 煩惱魔. See T 9, no. 262: 39a11.

perception on the body] swelling, dislocating, etc. is the great vehicle of the bodhisattva.”²⁹ The aforementioned is the Way.

How can one bear it, [knowing that] the weeds [of delusion] creep over and cover³⁰ sentient beings, deflecting them from [the path]. For this reason I have set the sutra and the treatise on the right³¹ as a standard and have put the representations of the nine transformations [of the corpse] on the left, indicating the path to be followed.³² Following, there are two odes for each [section]. These inspire and stimulate. All [of these] draw sentient beings to the easy way of the performative practice of the nine perceptions, only wishing that they reach the state³³ of Nirvana’s permanent bliss.

[In my text] the initial ode follows the idea of the text, and the latter ode follows my own thoughts. The initial and the latter odes are both aimed at [explaining] the meaning, not the phrasing. They are for the sake of the Dharma, not for the sake of fame. Should there be something worth taking [from this text], I implore you to omit the phrases and [focus on] grasping the meaning.

Composed by the old³⁴ Dokuan Genkō in the Chamber of the Hermit Life³⁵ at the Kinzan Temple of Ryūkō,³⁶ second day of the eleventh month of Genroku 5.³⁷

²⁹ *Shi chanboluomi cidi fa men*, T 46, no. 1916: 479c14–15.

³⁰ “Creeping passions” (*bubotsu* 蕪没), literally weeds that cover everything. See *Dai-kanwa jiten* 大漢和辞典, ed. Morohashi Tetsuji 諸橋轍次 (Tokyo: Taishūkan Shoten, 1955–60), s.v. “*bubotsu*” 蕪没 (vol. 9: 915c).

³¹ What Dokuan calls “the sutra and the treatise” (*kyōron* 經論) actually refers to Zhiyi’s work.

³² To indicate the path to follow (*kyōdō* 鄉導): scouts were used in China to prepare the way for the army.

³³ Here, the character *kyō* 境 indicates the *inner state* (*kyōgai* 境界) reached as the fruit of practice.

³⁴ “Old” (*sō* 叟) is used here as a mark of modesty, but Dokuan was sixty-two in 1692, which was already considered an advanced age.

³⁵ Gaun-shitsu 臥雲室 indicates Dokuan’s teaching room (*shitsugō* 室号) while he resided in this temple. “Gaun” literally means “reclining [in the] clouds” and refers to the life of a hermit.

³⁶ The complete temple name is Kinjizan Ryūkōji 經寺山竜光寺. It is located in Kawachi 河内 (Daitō City 大東市, east of present-day Osaka). Kinjizan is the monastic name (*sangō* 山号) of this temple, which became affiliated with Kōtaiji 皓臺寺, the temple where Dokuan had resided in Nagasaki. In 1689, Dokuan restored this temple that had fallen into ruin and arranged its affiliation with Kōtaiji.

³⁷ Corresponds to December 9, 1692 in the Gregorian calendar. The afterword is dated January 23, 1693.

On the Nine Perceptions [according to] Prājñā, with Illustrated Odes: The Fourteenth Scroll of the Anthology on the Protection of the Dharma

It says in the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*: “The nine perceptions are those of [the corpse] bloated, disintegrating, bleeding, putrefying, turning blue, being devoured [by animals], dispersed, [reduced to] bones, and cremated.”³⁸

The *Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* states as follows:

Question: First one needs to cultivate the nine perceptions and get rid of desire, then one can realize the *dhyānas*. Why is it that [in the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*] the nine perceptions are taught after the various *dhyānas*?

Answer: First [the sutra] praises the karmic rewards [including the *dhyānas*], making the heart of the practitioner rejoice. Although the nine perceptions deal with foulness, because people covet these karmic rewards they will [feel] the need to learn and practice them.

Question: How should the practitioner contemplate these nine things, such as the bloated [corpse]?

Answer: The practitioner first keeps his morality pure, so that, having a heart without remorse, he³⁹ can easily grasp the contemplation method, and thus effectively destroy the hordes of lustful defilements. Observing a person on the very day of her death, she says farewell, breathing out [the last] word, nothing returns. Suddenly, she is already dead. Sorrow-stricken relatives weep and cry, they invoke the heavens saying, “to where did her words disappear so abruptly? Her vital breath has disappeared, her body is cold, there is no more consciousness!” They find it most terrifying; there is no way to avoid it. Similar to the fire burning at the end of a cosmic period,⁴⁰ there is no escape. Thus it is said:

³⁸ *Da bore boluomiduo jing*, T 5, no. 220: 12a13–15, with minor variants. Dokuan is using here the text as it is quoted in the *Mohe bore boluomiduo jing* 摩訶般若波羅蜜多經 (T 8, no. 223: 219a9–10, 242c15–17) and *Dazhidu lun* (T 25, no. 1509: 217a6–7).

³⁹ Of course, the Chinese/Japanese original is not gender-specific, but this practice was mostly aimed at male practitioners who wanted to overcome desire. For practical reasons it is easier to use “he” in this context when referring to the practitioner. Occasionally, the feminine pronoun will be used when referring to the dying person and the corpse.

⁴⁰ The compound *jiejīn* 劫盡 refers to the end of a cosmic period, or *kalpa*, marked by a major conflagration (*jiehuo* 劫火) regarded as burning everything in the physical universe.

When death comes neither poverty nor wealth
 Neither diligent practice nor good or bad [actions]
 Neither nobles nor commoners
 Neither old nor young people can avoid it.
 No rescue through prayer
 Even through deception no parting
 No stratagem allows for escape
 Nowhere can it be avoided.

To describe the phenomenon of death,⁴¹ it is the place where one parts forever from affection. It constitutes what all those endowed with life detest, but even if they deeply detest it no one can escape. [The practitioner considers:] “Inevitably, my body will soon end up like this, similar to wood or stone, indistinguishable from them. From now on I should not be attached to the five objects of desire,⁴² and I should be aware of the coming of death, unlike oxen or lambs. Even though oxen and lambs or wild animals see a dead person, they [keep] jumping and emitting all sorts of sounds, and they are unaware [of what has occurred]. Having already received a human body, I can discern the beautiful from the ugly; I should seek the means to sweet dew and immortality!”⁴³ Thus it is said:

Endowed with the six faculties the [human] body is complete
 Wisdom and vision are also clear and sharp
 [But] if one does not seek the way to realization
 Body and wisdom alike have been received in vain.
 All wild animals also know how to follow their desires and they
 do as they please
 But they do not know how to skillfully practice good actions for
 the Way.⁴⁴

⁴¹ The translation “phenomenon of death” renders *sifa* 死法, where *fa* serves to translate *dharmā*.

⁴² These five objects of desire (*wuyu* 五欲; Skt. *pañca kāmagaṇāḥ*) are variously interpreted as either attachment derived from the five senses, the objects of the senses (*wujing* 五境), or more specifically wealth, sex, food, fame and sleep. See *Kōsetsu bukkyōgo daijiten* 広説佛敎語大辞典, ed. Nakamura Hajime 中村元 (Tokyo: Tōkyō Shoseki, 2001), s.v. “*goyoku*” 五欲.

⁴³ The compounds *ganlou busi* 甘露不死 are two expressions to indicate the same thing: the nectar of the gods, representing access to immortality, *amṛta* in Sanskrit.

⁴⁴ “The Way” is one of the early translations for “awakening.”

Having already obtained a human body
 If we are merely self-indulgent
 And do not know how to practice good actions
 How can we be different from those [animals]?
 Sentient beings in the three miserable forms of rebirth⁴⁵
 Cannot practice deeds [conducive to] the Way.
 Having already obtained a human body
 One should be diligent and make good use [of it].⁴⁶

Based on this, the [*Gradual Approach of the Dharma through the Commentary on the*] *Perfection of Meditation* says:

The practitioner, having reflected upon this, envisions taking that to which he is attached, be it a man or a woman and removing the clothing so as to make the body visible. He then [imagines] placing it lying flat on the ground in front of him. In the perception of the corpse, he observes it with his mind unified in *samādhi*, and the mind is absolutely terrified, smashing attachment. This is in short an abbreviated explanation of the perception of death. It is deemed the preliminary means to the nine perceptions. Among the nine perceptions there are two types. One is for the intelligent, the other for the dull.

In the case of an intelligent person, he will focus his mind, maintaining the perception, and obtaining the realization of all the [different aspects] of the dead, bloated [body], etc. In the case of a dull person, if his attempt is unsuccessful, he must observe a person on the very day of his death. When he arrives at the charnel ground, having completely taken note of the body's features, he should focus his mind and engage in this practice. Once these features have become clear, he will realize the perception in his mind and develop *samādhi*. Afterwards, even if he parts from the dead body, he sees it as in the visualization.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ The expression *san edao* 三惡道 indicates the three “lower” destinies including, hells, animals, and the hungry ghosts.

⁴⁶ This quote is found in *Dazhidu lun*, T 25, no. 1509: 217a7–b5. Compare Lamotte 1944–80, vol. 3, pp. 1314–16.

⁴⁷ The passage quoted here corresponds to *Shi chanboluomi cidī fa men*, T 46, no. 1916: 536a16–24.

First: Perception of the Bloated

To visualize the bloated, the practitioner faces a charnel ground and watches how a bloated [body] resembles a bag of skin⁴⁸ filled with wind, and how it differs from its original features. There is no owner in this body. Deluded consciousness once controlled seeing and hearing, as well as speech, thus deceiving itself. Now where has it gone?

I⁴⁹ watch how only the empty house [remains], bloated, with its straight neck. The looks of this body, its charm, its delicate skin, its red lips, its white teeth, its elongated eyes, its vertical nose, its even forehead, its high eyebrows, such is the way a handsome body used to confuse human minds. Now I only see a bloated [body]. Where is its beauty? Even the male or female features are unrecognizable.

I take these features to observe the object of my desire, identifying it with these [features] and castigate [my] craving. This stinking bag of excrement is bloated and disgusting. How could it be worthy of attachment?⁵⁰ It is because of this that one sinks [into rebirth]. Being mindful of the fact that one's own body still has not become free from the occurrence [of rebirth], the whole mind [focuses in] *samādhi*, eradicating attachments to the world.⁵¹

[Dokuan's Ode A: Perception of the Bloated]

Even though the four limbs are still attached [to the body],
Suddenly it has become different from its former appearance,
As the lantern whose flame has vanished,
Or as a puppet whose strings have been cut.
What challenged the eyes and lured the mind,
Whom could we ask about its remains?⁵²

⁴⁸ *Weinang* 韋囊 (Jp. *inō*) means leather bags, bags made of soft leather, or bellows.

⁴⁹ Although there is no personal pronoun in the text, it is composed in a way that evokes a type of auto-suggestion. See Lamotte 1944–80, vol. 3, p. 1316.

⁵⁰ Or craving, based on the standard translation of the three poisons: craving, anger, and ignorance (*tanchenchi* 貪瞋癡). The Sanskrit provided by Lamotte (1944–80, vol. 3, p. 1316) is *rāgādhyavasāna*, “impressions [left by] desire,” which Lamotte renders as “attachment to love.”

⁵¹ The compound *tan'ai* 貪愛 is translated here as “craving,” instead of dissociating it into “envy and craving” or “attachment to craving.”

⁵² The character *qi* 碁 is used here, but the Japanese reading *ato* is appended to indicate that it intends to convey the nuance of “traces, remains.” It has the meaning of “imprint left by a shoe on the ground” (*kutsuato* 靴跡). See *Daikanwa jiten*, s.v. “*ki*” 碁 (vol. 8: 1093d–1094b).

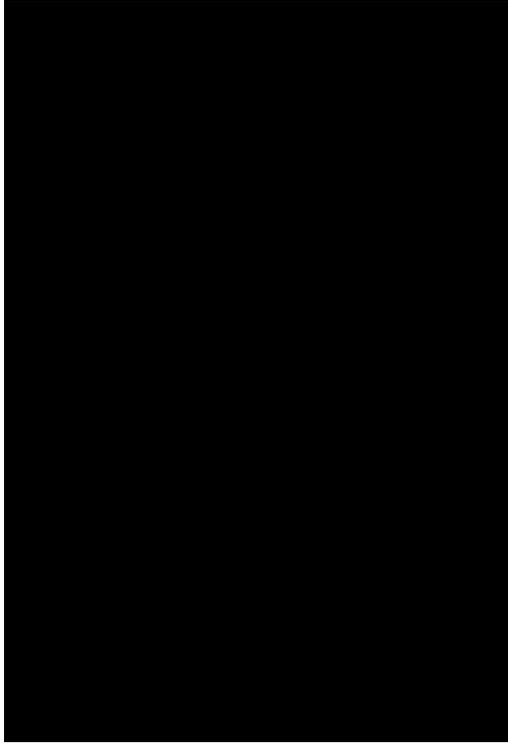


Figure 1: Perception of the Bloated

For one hundred years, it will lie in a cemetery.⁵³
 Let us become aware that we are being enchanted by corpses.

[Dokuan's Ode B: Perception of the Bloated]

Ah, you don't come from a lineage of saints or from a family of sages! You were born from ignorance as your father and attachment as your mother. To crave sounds and to be tainted by forms,⁵⁴ these are your actions; to oppose virtue and turn away from indebtedness, this is your nature. I nurtured you.

⁵³ The compound *zhongjian* 塚間 is often used in ancient Buddhist literature to indicate the ascetic practice of living in a cemetery or a charnel ground. It is one of the twelve ascetic practices (Skt. *dvādaśa dhūtaguṇāḥ*; Ch. *shier toutuo xing* 十二頭陀行).

⁵⁴ There are many passages in early texts that associate the five desires of the five senses with their five objects. See, for instance, *Xiuxing benqi jing* 修行本起經, T 3, no. 184: 471c22 or *Foshuo taizi ruiying benqi jing* 仏説太子瑞應本起經, T 3, no. 185: 478b8. In Japanese the character *shiki* 色 (*iro*) also evokes sensuality, although it is used here to translate the Sanskrit *rūpa*, form.

When you needed it I never failed to offer you beverage and food, clothes, medicines, and bedding, but you caused me trouble. Be it wearing clothes, eating food, defecating, or urinating, there is not a single day when you did not cause me pain. Today it is entirely finished: no traces remain. Now where have you gone? What you have left is only a bag of skin, bloated and abundantly swelling up.

It truly suggests that sowing inevitably involves reaping, and a debt of gratitude involves repayment. You too, as I spent a lifetime⁵⁵ patting and maintaining [you], responded to the good deeds of the numerous efforts made in this interval with beverage and food, clothes, medicines, and bedding; as long as I am present in the bag, you think of them as the most precious treasures. [Yet,] if one inspects the contents of the bag, there are 360 bones and joints, thirty-six parts, but without exception not a single one that is not impure.⁵⁶

Second: Perception of Disintegration

In the perception of disintegration, the practitioner examines again the dead body, [seeing] how being blown by the wind and being exposed to the sun it gradually breaks up completely while lying on the ground. Its six parts are shattered into pieces, the five viscera, excrement and urine, stinking and filthy, gather up and flow, loathing fluids appear.

When I examine what I am attached to using such [an image], nothing desirable is left and I consider it foolish defilement. I was deceived by the thin skin around this bag of excrement. It is similar to a moth disregarding the disaster of burning its own body and throwing itself into the flame because it is only craving for light and color. My own body is identical [to this corpse]; by being mindful of the fact that my own body still has not become free from this law,⁵⁷ the whole mind [focuses in] *samādhi*, eradicating mundane craving.

⁵⁵ The compound *bainian* 百年 literally means a hundred years, but here it is used to indicate a lifetime.

⁵⁶ Here, the translation conveys the nuance of the Sino-Japanese compound (Ch. *bujing*; Jp. *fujō* 不淨), whereas the Sanskrit *śubha* and the Pāli *subha* rather suggest the nuance “horrible” or “foul.” See Wilson 1996, pp. 103–4.

⁵⁷ This recurring expression (*imada kono hō o dassezu* 未脱是法) can be understood in a variety of ways. Zhiyi uses it in another text, where it also refers to the inability to escape from the threefold world because of ignorance (T 46, no 1918: 566b19). This could also be rendered as “the phenomenon (of life and death).”



Figure 2: Perception of Disintegration

[Dokuan's Ode A: Perception of Disintegration]

Being bloated, the belly eventually bursts open.
 The bowels appear, pus and blood flowing out.
 No comparison with what was lovable in the past.
 Now, few things are as detestable.
 Love for beauty⁵⁸ is gone forever.
 Only a disgusting smell remains:

⁵⁸ The Chinese expression *haose* 好色 evokes both a beautiful face and feminine beauty. On the other hand, the Buddhist understanding of the character *se* 色 is that of the translation for “form” (Skt. *rūpa*), not limited to the physical dimension. The Confucian *Analects* 9.18 contain a passage where “The Master said, I have never seen anyone who loves virtue the way he loves beauty” 吾未見好德如好色者也 (Brooks and Brooks 1997, p. 54). Dokuan was a contemporary of Ihara Saikaku 井原西鶴 (1642–1693), author of *Kōshoku ichidai otoko* 好色一代男 (1682, translated as *The Life of an Amorous Man*), and he could not have ignored the current meaning of this word as “lust.” Yet, in this context, the expression seems to be used in a neutral way, while retaining the primary nuance of “color” used in the metaphor of the moth.

When comparing red lips and chubby cheeks with this,
Is it different or not?

[Dokuan's Ode B: Perception of Disintegration]

Ah, this haunted house, is it eternal? Is it only that the owner is absent? Stripping away the robe of forbearance in the place of awakening, peeling off the clothes of shame in the midst of a residential area, robbing the holy treasures of the seven virtues, it obstructs the Eightfold Path. The evil thieves of the six elements dwelled here, but does it become like this when they are gone forever?

Heaven eats up flying birds, fields gnaw running beasts. To [know] the depth, explore the bottomless sea, to [know] the shallowness, examine an ordinary puddle of water. It devours a thousand families and consumes all forms of existence. Those who fly mourn their peers because of this, and those who sink lose their companions because of this. Is it the way Yakṣas and Rākṣasas approach and then are gone forever? With impurities filling up, why is this ominous filth and foul stench overflowing in doorways?⁵⁹ Frightening people,⁶⁰ this makes their hair stand in terror, it makes them lose joy and pleasure.

Third: Perception of Oozing Blood

In the perception of oozing blood, the practitioner examines again the dead body, [seeing] how it has broken up, with pus and blood trickling here and there. He sees that from the top of the head to the bottom of the feet, [the body] is spotted with bodily fluids, while the foulness, the abominable filth, and the rancid smell have expanded [to such a degree that] it has become difficult to approach.

When I examine what I am attached to using such [an image], nothing desirable is left and I consider it a foolish defilement. Since clinging to this [attachment]⁶¹ is the [cause for] sinking [in rebirths], pollution, and foulness, what is desirable in any of it? By being mindful of the fact that my own body still has not become free from this law, the mind unified in *samādhi* eradicates attachment to the world.

⁵⁹ The compound *hushu* 戶樞 (Jp. *kosū*) literally indicated the axis or the pivot of a door, its revolving mechanism. This expression is used as a metaphor for human activity. The expression “[as long as] the door revolves no worm” (*kosū tosezu* 戶樞不蠹) refers to movement indicating the absence of a problem. See *Daikanwa jiten*, s.v. “*kosū*” 戶樞 (vol. 5: 57a).

⁶⁰ Here, the adverb *seran* 歎然 (Jp. *shokunen*) refers to fear, dread, or scare.

⁶¹ Literally “to sit in this” (*kore ni zashite* 坐是).

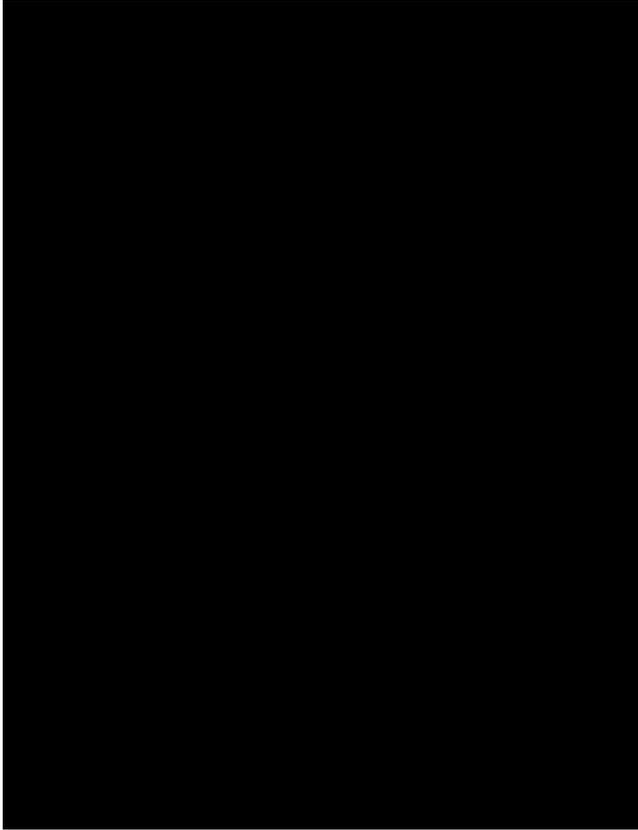


Figure 3: Perception of Oozing Blood

[Dokuan's Ode A: Perception of Oozing Blood]

Yesterday [it was still] adorned with make-up

Today it is garbed with marks of blood.

The appearance made of provisional forms has vanished

Its true form made of stench has become manifest.

Rotten fish is no match for this foul smell

Even the filthiness of excrement cannot approach it.

[The seducer] Dengtuzi⁶² himself would retreat covering his nose.

⁶² The *Dengtuzi haocefu* 登徒子好色赋 (The Lecher Rhapsody) is a literary piece attributed to Song Yu 宋玉 (ca. third century BCE), but the attribution seems controversial. In any case, it is included in the *Zhaoming wenxuan* 昭明文選 compiled under the direction of Prince Zhaoming 昭明太子 (501–531), fascicle 19. Unfortunately, it does not appear in the partial translation by David R. Knechtges (1982).

There are only blowflies remaining
They love it and are busy all day long.

[Dokuan's Ode B: Perception of Oozing Blood]

Life is oozing blood
Death also is oozing blood.
How many people are misled
By the wrong view that life and death are different!

Fourth: Perception of Pus and Putrefaction

In the perception of pus and putrefaction, the practitioner examines the dead body, [seeing] that in the wind and heat, water-soaked, and a long time having already passed, pus and maggots are flowing out from the nine orifices. The skin and the flesh rot in different places and produce pus, which streams onto the ground. The stench increases.

When I examine what I am attached to using such [an image], [I realize that] it is because of the lovely features and the beautiful face that I was confused and deluded. Now I see that this stinking putrefaction is more extreme than the filth of excrement, how could it provoke desire? By being mindful of the fact that my own body still has not become free from this law, the mind unified in *samādhi* eradicates attachment to the world.

[Dokuan's Ode A: Perception of Pus and Putrefaction]

Its charming appearance was praised as peerless
Now nothing can match its ugliness
In the nine orifices pus and blood concentrate
In the whole body maggots wriggle.
Life borrows adornments to mislead the world
Death reveals the truth to awaken people
If one throws away splendor and picks up the truth
One should hate the provisional and admire the real.

[Dokuan's Ode B: Perception of Pus and Putrefaction]

Human life is like a tumor⁶³
Ending up in pus and putrefaction
Why cherish this tumor?
This is the cause for the sages' lamentation.

⁶³ This image (*yōso* 癰疽) is used in Indian texts such as the *Visuddhimagga*. See, for instance, the verses "A tumour where nine holes abide || Wrapped in a coat of clammy hide" (*Vism* 196, 19 [translation, Ñāṇamoli 1999, p. 190]).

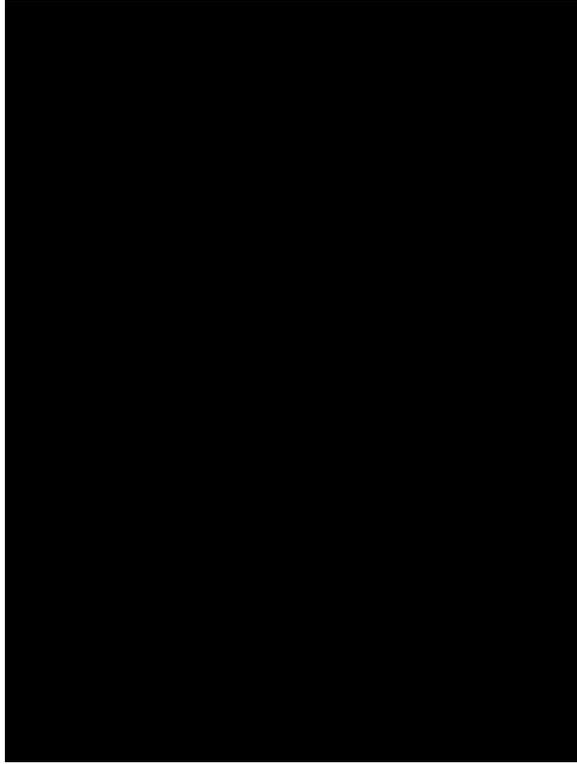


Figure 4: Perception of Pus and Putrefaction

Fifth: Perception of Livid Mottles

In the perception of livid mottles, the practitioner examines again the dead body, [seeing] that pus and putrefaction are somewhat depleted; transformed by the wind and the sun the flesh has become yellowish or reddish, it is darkened and mottled and [has turned] livid black. The stench increases.

When I examine that to which I am attached using such [an image], the color of peach blossom⁶⁴ that deceived⁶⁵ me, where is it now? By being

⁶⁴ The rosy color of peach blossom is a common metaphor for feminine beauty, used in Chinese expressions such as the “unlucky life of a beautiful woman” (*taohua boming* 桃花薄命). In Buddhist texts it is also widely used, for example in *Zengyi ahan jing* 增一阿含經, T 2, no. 125: 660a14.

⁶⁵ Deceit (*kuanghuo* 誑惑) is a technical term used in Buddhist texts, with Sanskrit antecedents.

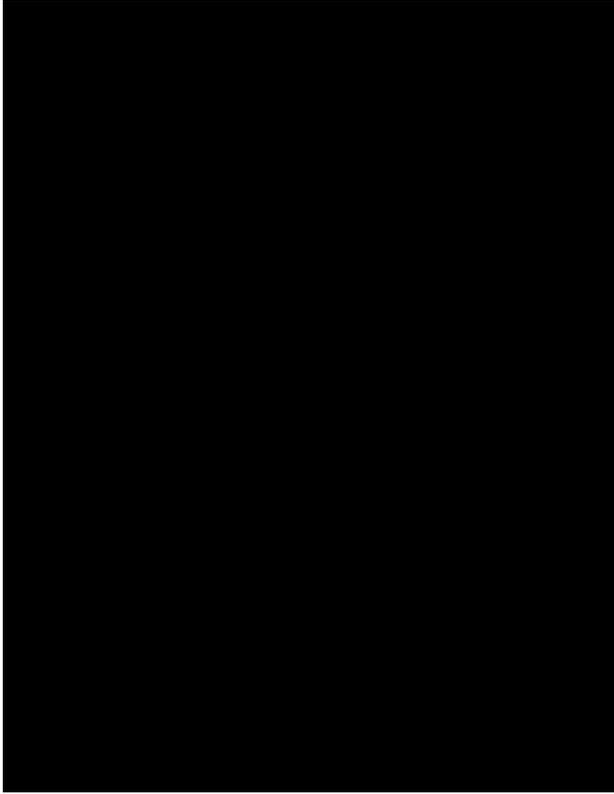


Figure 5: Perception of Livid Mottles

mindful of the fact that my own body still has not become free from this law, the mind unified in *samādhi* eradicates attachment to the world.

[Dokuan's Ode A: Perception of Livid Mottles]

Though the pus is depleted and the flesh dried out
 The stench ebbs, then flows further.
 Livid mottles are indifferent to the pain of the stick.
 The hair is disheveled and matted.
 Beauty rests on ugliness,
 Attachment harbors disgust.
 Even with vows⁶⁶ sincerely renewed day after day,
 They end up in separation and loathing.

⁶⁶ Here, it seems to allude to renewed vows of mutual love.

[Dokuan's Ode B: Perception of Livid Mottles]

Blue and red colors differ

In truth, foulness does not.

A beautiful face and livid mottles.

Do not be deceived by color and features!

The great precious mirror of livid mottles

Illuminates the illusory body with this [vision].

In the hard bronze mirror of the human condition,

It sheds light on the eyebrows and beards of men and women

But cannot shed light on the king of emptiness.⁶⁷

If you have not yet seen the face of the king of emptiness,

The six thieves⁶⁸ will be prone to engage in combat.

[But when] the flag of the king of emptiness appears

The multitude of ghouls and goblins

Are like frost and snow seeing sunshine.

In the past it has been said “when hanging a bright mirror

Demonic spirits lose all trace [of you].”

Why should [we imagine] a soul in a hard bronze mirror?

For the mirror, nothing is as effective as the nine transformations.

Not only will fox-spirits retreat,

One also breaks free from the net of the four Māras.⁶⁹

Sixth: Perception of Feeding [on the Body]

In the perception of feeding, the practitioner examines again the dead body, [seeing] maggots devouring it, birds gouging out its eyes, foxes and dogs gnawing at it, and wild animals tearing it apart; this damaged body, dismembered and lacking some parts, is detestable.

[The practitioner reflects:] When I examine that to which I am attached using such [an image], the shape of this body originally was clean and pure. Through clothes and adornments, its coquetry lured me. Now, having seen

⁶⁷ A metaphor for the Buddha or Buddha-nature. See the *Lotus Sutra*, T 9, no. 262: 30a03.

⁶⁸ Another word for the six faculties.

⁶⁹ Māra indicates “hindrances” personified, including the hindrance of afflictions (Skt. *kleśamāra*; Ch. *fannaō mo* 煩惱魔), the hindrance of the aggregates (Skt. *skandhamāra*; Ch. *yīn mo* 陰魔), the hindrance of death (Skt. *mṛtyamāra*; Ch. *sī mo* 死魔), and the hindrance caused by the king and his dependents of the desire-world known as Paranirmitavasavartin (Skt. *devaputramāra*; Ch. *tianzi mo* 天子魔), the king of the sixth heaven in the world of desire.

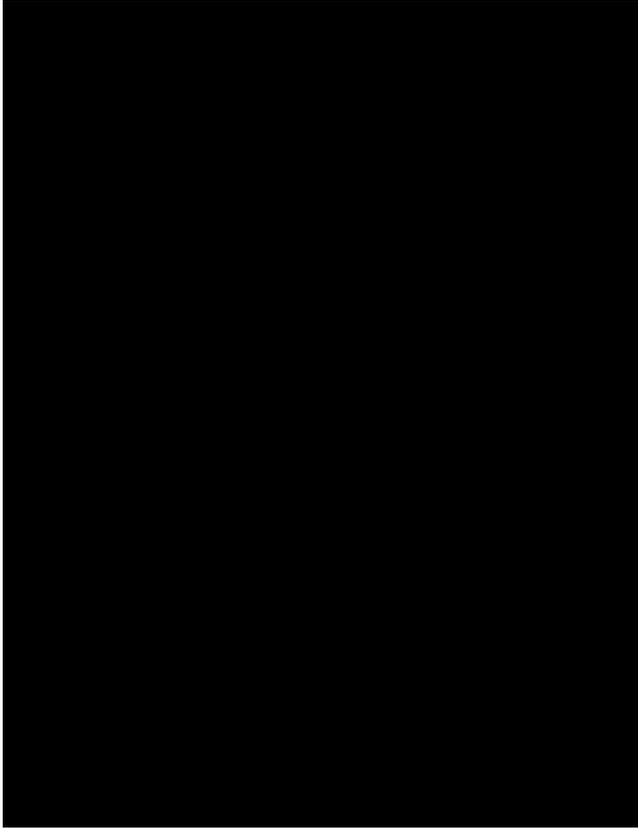


Figure 6: Perception of Feeding [on the Body]

how it gets destroyed, its original features have all disappeared and it has become terribly repulsive. By being mindful of the fact that my own body still has not become free from this law, the mind unified in *samādhi* eradicates attachment to the world.

[Dokuan's Ode A: Perception of Feeding (on the Body)]

In the northern cemetery⁷⁰ birds and beasts are boisterous

⁷⁰ Bei Mang 北邙 refers to the name of a hill, north of Luoyang 洛陽, which was famous as a graveyard. The source for Dokuan's inspiration seems to be a love poem by Liu Tingzhi 劉庭芝 (651–680?), where he expresses his hope to “share forever the immemorial dust of Bei Mang” with the beloved one, remaining united with her even after death. See Takagi 1978, p. 146.

Starving, with this providentially obtained fetid meal⁷¹
 They fight to get a bite and struggle to pick at it
 As if encountering a rare treat.
 Even if [the body] is boxed in an inner or outer coffin⁷²
 Zhuangzi laughs at its grotesque [posture].⁷³
 The young charm people found so enjoyable
 Why is it that it [now] gives pleasure to crows and kites?

[Dokuan's Ode B: Perception of Feeding (on the Body)]

Though the length of life may be long, standard, or brief, it is limited.
 Who could reasonably obtain a life that has no end?
 Within the hundred years of a human life, what does one realize?
 We are only nourishing [our bodies] as human sacrifices for birds and beasts.
 Crows wrangle and kites crouch to gouge out both eyes.
 Maggots resemble boiling gruel in their wriggling.
 Wild animals tear it apart and gnaw at it as they please.
 Starving dogs happily get hold of one of the [disjointed] limbs.
 Today looks just like a great banquet!⁷⁴
 Why is it that these remains are so similar to a private feast?⁷⁵
 Moreover, the stench abounds.
 The birds and beasts one and all gather in joy.

⁷¹ This expression in three characters (Ch. *tianpaoshan*; Jp. *tenbō no namagusaki* 天庖糲) comes from the poem by Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 (1037–1101) entitled *Song Cengzi gucui yuede Yan zi* 送曾子固倅越得燕字. The character *tian* 天 has been understood as meaning “providential” rather than “heavenly.”

⁷² These two types of coffins (*guanguo* 棺槨) were apparently made of wood, as suggested by two passages in the *Zhuangzi*, chapter 4, which depict huge trees having grown so old precisely because they were of *no use*. The carpenter first dismisses the tree, saying “make coffins and they’d rot in no time,” before the tree reveals its secret to him in a dream. See the translation by Watson (1968, pp. 63–65).

⁷³ The exact source for this image is not known, but in the *Zhuangzi*, chapter 18, there is an interesting passage featuring Liezi 列子 (ca. fifth century BCE) who, while on a trip, saw a hundred-year-old skull on the roadside. “Pulling away the weeds and pointing his finger, he said, ‘Only you and I know that you have never died and you have never lived. Are you really unhappy? Am I really enjoying myself?’” (translation, Watson 1968, p. 195).

⁷⁴ Literally, a great Buddhist gathering where vegetarian food is served (*daiesai* 大會齋). Of course, this scene of animals devouring a corpse is anything but vegetarian, hence the irony.

⁷⁵ “Private feast” (*naise* 內施) is an attempt to render one of the ten forms of giving (*jū fuse* 十布施), presumably performed among members of the monastic community as a form of “internal” generosity or a private banquet.

Even if one of them is in want, [the situation] is really different from [the case of] Śivi, who broke his thigh and offered it to hawks and falcons, sacrificing his bodhisattva-body to save those exhausted by starvation. Ah, how sad!

Seventh: Perception of the Scattered

In the perception of the scattered, the practitioner examines again the dead body, [seeing] how birds and beasts have torn it apart and how the bodily shape has broken into pieces. Wind blown and exposed to the sun, tendons sever and bones separate, head and feet become jumbled and sprawled.

[The practitioner reflects:] When I examine the person⁷⁶ to whom I am attached using such [an image], where do human features remain? By being mindful of the fact that my own body still has not become free from this law, the mind unified in *samādhi* eradicates attachment to the world.

[Dokuan's Ode A: Perception of the Scattered]

After the fight between birds and beasts

Limbs and body end up in different places.

Heart and liver hang from a tree.

Hair and nails litter the roadside.

[A life of] one hundred years truly is without reality.

It is similar to the dancing puppet carved by master Yan.⁷⁷

If you want to enter the gate of emptiness

You really have to ask this of the northern cemetery.⁷⁸

[Dokuan's Ode B: Perception of the Scattered]

Although cook Ding⁷⁹ did not look at the ox

In one glance all the joints came apart.

⁷⁶ In other perceptions, it was “that to which I am attached.” Here, the character for “person” is used.

⁷⁷ Master Yan 偃師 (n.d.) was a famous puppeteer who lived under King Mu 穆 during the Zhou Dynasty (1111–249 BCE). Challenged by the king, he made a puppet of a dancing girl, which moved as if it were a true human being. The king was so amazed that Yan had to dissect the puppet to show how it was made. This story appears in *Liezi* fascicle 13.

⁷⁸ See the Odes A and B in the sixth section of this translation called “Perception of Feeding.”

⁷⁹ An allusion to the famous story of cook Ding 庖丁 in the *Zhuangzi*, chapter 3. See Watson 1968, pp. 50–52. His mastery is said to have been such that he claimed “after three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now—now I go at it by spirit and don’t look with my eyes.”



Figure 7: Perception of the Scattered

As long as one does not see people [with] the eye of wisdom
How can one possibly discern [their] four limbs?⁸⁰

Eighth: Perception of the Bones

In the perception of the bones, the practitioner examines again the dead body, seeing how the skin and the flesh have disappeared and only white bones remain. There are two ways to view the bones. The first one is to view the sinews connecting [them]. The second one is to view how the bones separate when the sinews have disappeared. There are also two ways

⁸⁰ Understanding people is here compared to the skill of cook Ding, who could see the whole ox and detect “complicated places” with his spiritual eye.

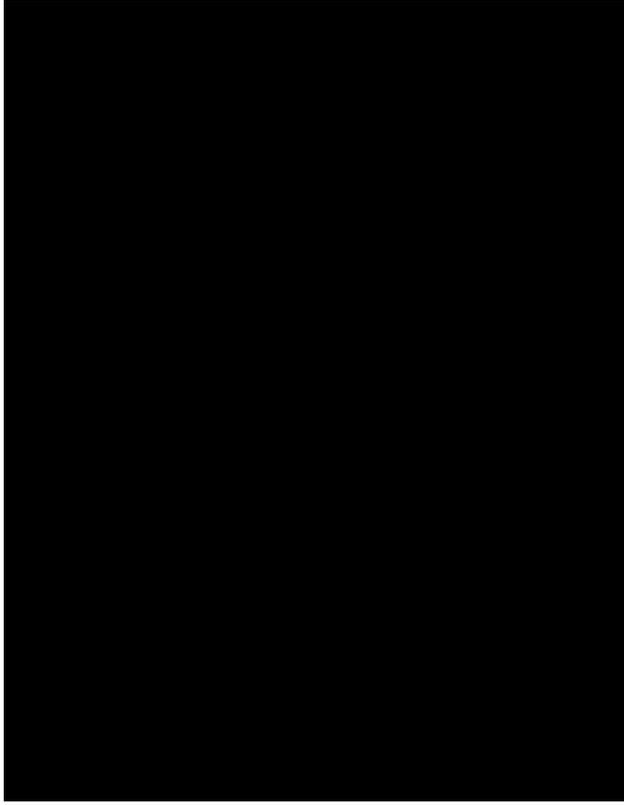


Figure 8: Perception of the Bones

[in the latter type]. The first one [is to be aware of] how the remaining blood and fatty substances are polluted. The second one is [to be aware of] the whiteness of the bones, similar to white agate or shell.

[The practitioner reflects:] When I examine the person to whom I am attached using such [an image], the skeleton is terrifying. Its sturdy features are harder than brick or stone. The soft and gentle touch [it evoked] entirely vanishes at once. By being mindful of the fact that my own body still has not become free from this law, the mind unified in *samādhi* eradicates attachment to the world.

[Dokuan's Ode A: Perception of the Bones]

Entirely white is the stinking skull

Terrifying and shocking.

Mouth and nasal cavities gaping as empty valleys

Ribs and flanks openly exhibited.
 [People] used to compare her charm to a flower.
 Why does she compete in ugliness with demons?
 The pretty mouth and pretty eyes of bygone days
 Presently how could one be willing to continue the old partnership?
 The human condition is only falsehood.
 Pleasure and displeasure undergo many changes.
 This bag of skin filled with impurities
 Its face expresses the essence of stench and filth.
 As the worldly eye is easily deceived
 One praises the pursuit of lust as if it were refinement.
 Stripping off skin, flesh, and bones
 When reality is discovered and truth becomes visible
 One covers one's eyes and retreats in haste
 Instantly losing one's former emotions.
 It is true that worldly feelings can hardly be sincere.
 They always lean toward love or hatred.
 Those who have not yet discovered the gate of emptiness
 Certainly will neither be faithful nor steadfast.
 They will only be fooled by illusions
 All losing their acuity.
 The world resembles a theater stage.
 Its shelves with puppets [used] for a lifetime.⁸¹
 They display beauty and ugliness, sadness and joy,
 Their mechanisms producing all kinds of conditions.
 Once the play is finished the thread is cut
 The wooden puppets collapse in disarray.
 Their countless attitudes and appearances
 With neither scent nor voice.

[Dokuan's Ode B: Perception of the Bones]

Ah, what kind of person were you?⁸²
 Your skin entirely cast off,
 Are you the only one to exist in such a condition?
 Were you originally male or female?
 Were you intelligent or stupid, and what were you doing?

⁸¹ Literally "one hundred years."

⁸² This monologue with bones is reminiscent of the *Zhuangzi*, chapter 18. See note 73 of this translation.

It is through beauty that one is caught up.

Is it [after having been a beauty] such as Lady Mao and Princess Li⁸³ that you came to this?

It is through ugliness that one is edified.

Is it [after having been an ugly woman] such as Sulu⁸⁴ or Wuyan⁸⁵ that you came to this?

Originally, is it after having been loyal to your ruler and compassionate to the people, like Sima Junshi⁸⁶ or Fan Xiwen⁸⁷ that you came to this?

Is it after having subverted the state and perverted the good, like Li Linfu⁸⁸ or Qin Hui,⁸⁹ that you came to this?

Originally, is it after having renounced glory and roamed outside society, [choosing] not to live anywhere unless it is under a Chinese parasol tree,⁹⁰ indifferent unless the time is ripe, like a unicorn⁹¹ or like a phoenix, that you came to this?

Is it after having provisionally adopted a [human] form and borrowed [this]

⁸³ An allusion to the *Zhuangzi*, chapter 2. “Men claim that Mao-ch’iang and Lady Li were beautiful, but if fish saw them they would dive to the bottom of the stream, if birds saw them they would fly away, and if deer saw them they would break into a run” (Watson 1968, p. 46). It is not clear whether *qiang* 嬙 (Jp. *shō*) is part of the name, as in Watson’s translation, or whether this was her function as one of the ladies-in-waiting, the choice made in this translation.

⁸⁴ Sulu 宿瘤 was the consort of Min 閔, one of the Qi 齊 rulers during the Spring and Autumn Period (722–481 BCE). Her name came from a congenital protuberance or tumor (*kobu* 瘤) that she had at the nape of her neck. See *Daikanwa jiten*, s.v. “Shukuryū” 宿瘤 (vol. 3: 1043d).

⁸⁵ Wuyan 無鹽 was considered a model of unattractiveness, but played an important political role as the spouse of Xuan 宣, also one of the Qi rulers during the Spring and Autumn Period. She came from a village called Wuyan 無鹽邑. See *Daikanwa jiten*, s.v. “Muen” 無鹽 (vol. 7: 429c).

⁸⁶ Sima Junshi 司馬君實 is another name for Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), an influential scholar and historian during the Song Dynasty. See *Daikanwa jiten*, s.v. “Shibakō” 司馬光 (vol. 2: 785a).

⁸⁷ Fan Xiwen 范希文 is better known as Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989–1052), another political and literary figure of the same period known for his devotion to the emperor.

⁸⁸ Li Linfu 李林甫 (n.d.–753) was known for his flattery of the emperor and treachery.

⁸⁹ Qin Hui 秦檜 (1090–1155) advocated capitulation during the Song, and was depicted as an example of perfidy.

⁹⁰ An allusion to a poem by Yuan Xisheng 元希聲 (662–707) in the *Quantang shi* 全唐詩 (The Complete Collection of Tang Poems), vols. 101–5, which refers to the independence of the phoenix (*feng* 鳳).

⁹¹ The mythical *lin* 麟 (also *qilin* 麒麟) is also an image for nobility and independence, especially of the literati.

vessel,⁹² having robbed clothes and food like crows and kites, that you came to this?

In ancient times, there was a demon who gnashed his teeth in rage and could not refrain from whipping a person like you.

Conversely, there was a heavenly being (*deva*) who scattered flowers and even in exhaustion could not help making offerings to a person like you.

Originally, were you someone who deserved scattered flowers and incessant offerings?

Or were you someone who deserved the gnashing of teeth in rage and constant whipping?

The white bones, motionless, wouldn't reply.

Hey, are you afraid of answering?

Oh, is it that you simply are one of those individuals of superficial and vulgar character?⁹³

Perhaps you estimate that all my repeated questions and recurrent interrogations come from my own superficial and vulgar character because you still don't know me.

If after all you are the one with superficial and vulgar character, first, it will make me realize⁹⁴ how people like you got intoxicated by pretty colors and drowned in charming voices, giving free rein to your desires, knowing [the consequences] only when it was too late to refrain. First, it will make me realize how people like you were valuing wealth [to the point of] despising benevolence and giving up your sense of honor, [only] concerned with ways of pursuing profit. First, it will make me realize how people like you wielded power and focused on your authority, slandering the intelligent and the competent, until the day your mighty position⁹⁵ ended in failure.

⁹² Probably inspired by the poem above by Yuan Xisheng, which contains the verse “the famous vessel without falsehood” 名器無假 . At the same time, Dokuan plays with the meaning of “vessel” indicating a person, such as in the expression “vessel for the Dharma” (*hōki* 法器).

⁹³ Literally “individual of superficial and vulgar skin, or complexion” (*hifu senzoku no yakara* 皮膚淺俗之輩).

⁹⁴ This long sentence is constructed with the factitive form of the verb “to realize” (*shōkan seshimu* 省観せしむ), which applies to each of the awarenesses it forces. For the sake of understanding, the sentence has been broken down into smaller pieces, repeating the verb. In Buddhist texts, *shō* 省 often indicates an insight, which can be the result of “re-flexion” as in the usual sense of the word *kaerimiru* 省みる.

⁹⁵ Free rendering of the compound *kōsei* 梗正, which indicates something powerful and right.

In other words, does it mean that even a demon has no reason for whipping, even a heavenly being has no grounds for scattering flowers?⁹⁶

Ninth: Perception of Cremation

In the perception of cremation the practitioner again arrives in the forest of dead bodies. In some cases, he watches grass and firewood being piled up and the corpse being burned. Its viscera split and fat flows out, exploding while it bursts open, [emitting] foul smoke. This is truly terrifying. In others, he only watches the incineration of the white bones, [he sees how] the firewood is reduced to billowing smoke, the fire dies and the [bodily] form [becomes] the same as ash. Even if [the corpse] is neither cremated nor buried, still it returns to annihilation.

[The practitioner reflects:] When I examine the one to whom I am attached using such [an image], the fact that all physical attributes disappear is harsher than the blade. Bathing, perfume, make-up, accessories, soft flesh, delicate bodies, pure warmth, flattery: through these people are deceived. Now that they have all been annihilated, where are they in the end? By being mindful of the fact that my own body still has not become free from this law, the mind unified in *samādhi* eradicates attachment to the world.

[Dokuan's Ode A: Perception of Cremation]

Eyes bulging, viscera bursting
 The fire roars, belching foul smoke.
 Beauty and ugliness, a scoop of ash
 Who can distinguish the hideous from the lovely?
 How wonderful that this pile of firewood
 Entirely washes away the stench of make-up.
 Today, a miracle has appeared
 Suddenly one saw a lotus in the fire.

[Dokuan's Ode B: Perception of Cremation]

Ah, you, evil stench, rotting flesh, stinky bones, for those who have not yet discarded [their attachment] in a ditch, they still need to use you⁹⁷ for a while. These days, everyone in the world is engaged in active bustle

⁹⁶ This rhetorical question ending Dokuan's diatribe seems to be a way to express his refusal to be prescriptive concerning good and evil. On the other hand, he puts the responsibility in his reader's hands, indicating that each act inevitably generates its appropriate karmic retribution.

⁹⁷ Speaking to the dead body, always addressed in this text as "you" (*nanji* 你).



Figure 9: Perception of Cremation

because of you. The high and low change their ranks, and because of this the great way of the Son of Heaven⁹⁸ grows wild.

Because of this the mundane way is obscured. This comes from offering the entire world⁹⁹ to a single person, [so that] what she desires remains unabated. All the thousand officials make blunders because of this. Peasants are lamenting because of this, and even if the gods of the soil and grain were overturned, even if heaven collapsed and the earth moved, again this would be due to the fact that your five senses [knew] no limit.

⁹⁸ Literally “yellow robe and green garment” (*kōshō ryokui* 黄裳緑衣). This metaphor indicates intrigue at the court, where secondary concubines envied the legitimate spouses of the emperor. Yellow is an unadulterated color, which should be above, whereas green is a mixed color, which should be below, but the garment is worn above the robe, meaning that things are upside down. See *Daikanwa jiten*, s.v. “*kōshō ryokui*” 黄裳緑衣 (vol. 12: 964a).

⁹⁹ Literally “the four seas” (*shikai* 四海).

The literati serve as courtiers, [but] they stay in the administrative centers without decorating the ceremonial vessels¹⁰⁰ and without displaying the loyalty of officers. Their governance comes about through corruption, the private is carried out [in the name of] the public, and even if dismissed or sinking into incurable disease, still they are deceived because of you.

The bureaucrats selfishly interpret the law, taking bribes from criminals [to shorten their sentences], so that this network of acquaintances becomes a market, but even if tortured or executed, they are pushed to do it because of you.

The vendors fight, replacing the quality of goods with flattery, shrewdly manipulating the scales. They compete over minuscule profit and fight over insignificant differences, but even if they are embarrassed by onlookers, again because of you they endure shame.

Wandering in the market in broad daylight and holding money in the midst of people, some folks have their eyes open but [gaze at their companion] instead of looking at the people [around them], and if they get robbed it is because of you.

With shaven heads and robes there are those who [pretend to] dwell outside the world, but [nevertheless] are brushing shoulders against the gates of influence, polishing words, commanding appearances, begging for attention, again because of you they are driven.

Some are peeking through half-open doorways of wealthy merchants, raising their shoulders and putting on airs, they smile with flattery and seek to befriend them, again because of you they are running around.

First, there are those who covet the strict gate to honors¹⁰¹ without any guidance, supposedly practicing the path in the mountains and forests. They pretend it to be a short cut, wearing grass and eating bark, establishing these hard and trying practices, enduring the cold and putting up with starvation, but again it is because of you they waste time on meaningless

¹⁰⁰ These vessels (Ch. *fugui*; Jp. *hoki* 簠簋) were used in Ancient China to hold grain offered on the occasion of religious festivals. The rectangular plate called *fu* was filled with unhusked grains of rice and fine millet, whereas the square basket of bamboo called *gui* contained another variety of broomcorn millet. See *Daikanwa jiten*, s.v. “*hoki*” 簠簋 (vol. 8: 848d).

¹⁰¹ Dokuan’s text has “the strict gate to honors” (*genki no mon* 嚴貴之門), which presumably indicates the rigors of the religious path. It is likely to have been constructed on the model of the classical expression “the gate to riches and honor” (*fuki no mon* 富貴之門) included for instance in the *Shang jun shu* 商君書, section 7.

expectations.¹⁰²

Some perform mysterious deeds and display extraordinary things, they chase away the cause and obliterate the effect,¹⁰³ thus pleasing the taste of worldly people. Praising themselves and denigrating others, in loud voices they entice men and women of the household. Some, claiming to have received the Dharma from a saint, extort the foolish masses and lie. Even when factions split and the facade of various groups differs, it is because of you they all struggle.

Ah, why are you not reflecting daily upon your rotting flesh and stinking bones? Is it not excessive to follow your will in such a selfish way? The poisonous snakes of the four great elements,¹⁰⁴ having built up their anger, release it on you,¹⁰⁵ while the vindictive thieves of the five aggregates (*skandha*), covered with cloth,¹⁰⁶ descend and dwell in you. Truly, in you the hundred mysteries develop, the thousand evils occur, and rectifying these wrongs is difficult. You truly are the origin of misconduct and errors, you are the nexus of defilements (*kleśa*).

Is now not your exit? It is as if you were thrown away out of revenge. Pass away quickly and without hesitation! Whether this day is a lucky one or whether the stars are beneficial, it is for you that it has been chosen.

Furthermore, there is always a parting gift for one who is leaving. I have neither wealth nor precious clothes to offer, it is rather a pile of firewood that will serve [as my present]. Its glittering brilliance is your brocade for returning home, and the blazing flames illuminating the sky can be used as torches lighting your road to the netherworld. If only you could remain intact without being exposed in the midst of the fields, so that the world

¹⁰² The metaphor of “never leaving the tree trunk” (*shushu* 株守) alludes to the vain expectations of someone who keeps watching a tree trunk waiting for a hare to appear (*kabu o mamorite usagi o matsu* 守株待兔). By extension it is also used to depict conservatism clinging to old customs. An ancient example is found in the *Hanfeizi* 韓非子, section 1, but it is also widely used in Buddhist classics. Similar expressions include “wait foolishly for a most unlikely windfall” or, more theatrically, “waiting for Godot.”

¹⁰³ Seems to be an allusion to “miracles” performed by Shugendō practitioners or adepts of other non-traditional approaches.

¹⁰⁴ Earth, water, fire, and wind.

¹⁰⁵ The verb *kukketsu shi* refers here to the bursting of something that was hidden. See *Dai-kanwa jiten*, s.v. “*kukketsu*” 窟穴 (vol. 8: 669c), third meaning.

¹⁰⁶ The expression *bekizen to shite* 曇然 describes the state of a veil or a cloth covering something.

could have a clear vision¹⁰⁷ of where you are returning, and of the traveling outfit you are wearing for this journey.¹⁰⁸ [Thus] those who will pass away in the future would avoid falling into the pit or dropping into the moat, being invaded by the three poisons¹⁰⁹ or being seized by the six robbers.¹¹⁰ Peacefully, they would equally be heading toward the crossroads [to a new existence].

The Antidote [to Delusion through] the Nine Perceptions

In the [*Gradual Approach of the Dharma through the Commentary on the Perfection of Meditation*], it states:

Practitioners having already mastered the nine perceptions must increase these mental images and repeat the exercise, thus bringing the practice of visualization to fruition and maturity. Depending on the time of visualization, the mind and meditative absorption will support each other and, if the contemplation method makes the mind hold firm without the dispersal of thoughts, one can destroy the six desires and eradicate worldly attachment.

The six desires are: (1) the desire for color; (2) the desire for form; (3) the desire for comportment; (4) the desire for speech; (5) the desire for a soft [touch]; (6) the desire for human features. Six types of attachment can arise from these six desires.

(1) In the case of desire for color, some people become impassioned with red or pink, or light yellow, black, or brown, or blue, or light blue, or peach. The unwise fool, seeing these colors, drowns and becomes inebriated by delusion.

(2) In the case of desire for form, some people only become fixated on features and faces, fine eyes akin to the full moon, high brows, narrow hips, slender fingers, beautiful signs, good-looking posture—such is the way the mind gets caught in attachment.

¹⁰⁷ The verb used here (*shōken* 照見) is a Buddhist technical term indicating a lucid, awakened vision.

¹⁰⁸ Here, the return outfit (*kisō* 帰装) is an ironical depiction of the dead body.

¹⁰⁹ Craving, anger, and ignorance. See the first section of this translation called “Perception of the Bloated.”

¹¹⁰ Common metaphor comparing the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin, and mind to robbers engendering desire and affliction (Jp. *rokuzoku* 六賊). Expressions related to the “six thieves of desire” (Jp. *rokuyokuzoku* 六欲賊) are mentioned below.

(3) In the case of desire for comportment, some people become fixated upon comportment, attitude, the way of walking, of shedding tears,¹¹¹ of raising eyebrows, of suddenly shifting countenance, of smiling, of [displaying] winsome manners—such is the way the taint of desire arises.

(4) In the case of desire for speech, some people only crave the sound of speech. When skillful words or eloquent phrases [are pronounced], in accordance with their own mind they interpret the intention, and when the sound of poetry, refined expressions, songs, or odes is heard, the human heart takes delight in joy. Because of this, in their shallow awareness, foolish men get lost in confusion.

(5) In the case of desire for a soft touch, some people only crave for the softness of the body, the luster of the skin, which like the willow cotton is warm in the cold and cool in the heat, being massaged and entertained, the perfuming and adornment of the body. Ordinary afflictions make them become addicted and because of this they are in deadly peril. In the case of composite desire, all those who [suffer from] it become fixated on the five things [above].

(6) In the case of desire for human features, all those who [suffer from] it do not become fixated on the five things [above], they are exclusively attached to human features. Whether man or woman, even if they see the aforementioned five, if they cannot obtain the object of their craving they do not become stained in attachment. [But] when they meet a person fulfilling their heart's desire, they readily renounce everything the world values, and can instantly abandon their body and life [for the beloved object].

In this way, one life after another, the six desires confound and delude sentient beings. They sink in [the ocean of] life and death, drown in the three [evil] paths, unable to obtain liberation. When one is able to diligently practice the nine perceptions and eliminate them through this antidote, the six thieves of desire disperse and one swiftly realizes Nirvana.

¹¹¹ The Chinese and Japanese texts both use the compound *ōyō* 汪洋 (Ch. *wangyang*), but in this context it seems to be used in the sense of the homophone 汪濊 (Ch. *wangyang*), which refers to abundant weeping or swelling of tears. See *Daikanwa jiten*, s.v. “ōyō” 汪洋 (vol. 6: 942c).

Why is this so? First the perception of death destroys the two desires for form and speech. Next the perception of bloating, disintegration, and feeding destroys the desire for comportment. Next the perception of bleeding, discoloration, and putrefaction will largely destroy the desire for color. Next the perception of the bones and of incineration will largely eradicate the desire for a soft touch.

The nine perceptions [as a whole] remove composite desire for and attachment to human features. The perception of feeding, of scattering, and of the bones entirely abolishes the desire for human features. Leftover scraps scattered among the bones, there is nothing to be seen that one could become fixated upon, this is how through these nine perceptions one can break the bonds of desire. As anger and ignorance also decrease, the three poisons weaken, and the mountains of the ninety-eight defilements all move. Gradually one progresses along that path, and through the adamant *samādhi*, one can crush the mountains of defilement and obtain the paths of the three vehicles. Although the nine perceptions are the meditations on foulness, thanks to these one can manifest the great matter [of awakening]. It is similar to a corpse¹¹² floating in the middle of a great ocean; by hanging to it a drowning person can cross [to the other shore].¹¹³

Toward Realizing the Path of the Nine Perceptions

In the [*Gradual Approach of the Dharma through the Commentary on the Perfection of Meditation*], it states:

There are two ways to perform the nine perceptions. [First,] when practicing them according to phenomena, one can exclusively overcome the bonds of the world of desire; after that, if one separately performs the ten perceptions, one cuts through misleading views and thoughts, realizing the path of no-learning. Second, if one carefully performs the nine perceptions, then one possesses the ten perceptions. Via phenomena one enters into the principle, and thus this also prevents one from being annoyed by the practice of the ten perceptions according to other approaches.

¹¹² The *Dazhidu lun* (T 25, no. 1509: 218b8) uses the even more suggestive metaphor of a “stinking corpse” (*shūshi* 臭屍).

¹¹³ This long quote is found in T 46, no. 1916: 536c15–537a17.

Why is this? The practitioner contemplates how at the time of a person's death, movement and speech in the space of an instant suddenly disappear; the body [then] bloats, putrefies, dislocates, and scatters. These successive transformations precisely constitute impermanence.

When one is attached to this body, as it gets destroyed by impermanence it is called "suffering." When one cannot be freed from the suffering [caused by] impermanence, this [proves] to be nothing other than the absence of [a substantial] self. As the suffering of impermanence [exemplified] by foulness is nothing other than the absence of [a substantial] self, it implies that the people of the world should not be addicted [to such transient entities].

This is illustrated by the examination of the body. When food is in the mouth, the cervical spittle drains down, amalgamates with the sputum and becomes flavor, but there is no difference between swallowing and vomiting. If it descends into a person's stomach it becomes excrement; such is the perception of the foulness of food.

Through meditating on these nine perceptions [the practitioner] sees the impermanence and changes of the body, which instant by instant [moves toward] its complete annihilation; this is precisely the perception of death. By knowing the comfort of perfect stillness he feels aversion to worldly pleasures and cuts through defilements by using these nine perceptions; this is precisely the perception of severing [delusion]. He halts the various defilements through these nine perceptions; this is precisely the perception of detachment. Because he feels aversion to the world through the nine perceptions, the five aggregates are destroyed and cannot arise again; at this stage he knows true comfort, which is precisely the perception of extinction.

If one can in this way perform the nine perceptions, one is endowed precisely with the ten perceptions, cutting through the confusion of misleading views and thoughts. One should know that such a person is definitely headed toward realizing the paths of the three vehicles.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ This is again a long quote from the *Shi chanboluomi cidī fa men* found in T 46, no. 1916: 537a22–b10. Here, the text in many places matches the *Dazhidu lun* (T 25, no. 1509:

Afterword to *The Nine Perceptions* [according to] *Prāṇṇā*, with *Illustrated Odes*

This sick monk¹¹⁵ has two young disciples.¹¹⁶ They are both dull and do not delight in reading books. One of them only knows of bringing me food and tea. Recently, having seen these novices suddenly grow up and reach puberty, I have started worrying that they might go astray and evade the Buddhist precepts. I ordered monk Kō¹¹⁷ to purchase Dongpo's *Poems on the Nine Perceptions* (*Jiuxiang shi* 九想詩) from a bookstore, as it has been transmitted to Japan.¹¹⁸ By initiating them in this book [I hoped that it would] serve as a pen for these young calves. But once we had procured the book, I found the choice of words coarse and of bad taste. Although [in the realm of literary achievements] I am no more than Dongpo's servant, I haven't quite reached this level [of vulgarity].¹¹⁹ Thus, I regretted that, being old and sick, I was not able to compose something akin to the verses and odes that could replace [Dongpo's].

[While I was absorbed in these thoughts] monk Kō came forward [and told me], "Master, although you may be old and sick, these verses and odes comprise no more than nine sections. How could their usefulness be limited only to the novices? Why can you be sure that these small words would not yield many benefits?"

217c28–218a10), but the order was changed by Zhiyi. See the translation by Lamotte (1944–80, vol. 3, pp. 1320–22). The important feature is that this passage explains the correspondence between the "nine perceptions" and the "ten perceptions" (translated by Lamotte as "notions") although the ten perceptions do not correspond to those of the Theravāda.

¹¹⁵ An expression of modesty (*byōsō* 病僧) common for Chan/Zen clerics, but which sometimes is related to poor health. In 1673, Dokuan retired from the abbacy of Kōtaiji in Nagasaki after six years in this position, because of illness. It does not appear to have been an excuse, as Dokuan's ailment persisted for several years and he composed some of his works while lying down. See Kaneko, ed. 1986, p. 65. In the remaining part of Dokuan's afterword *byōsō* will simply be translated as the first person pronoun.

¹¹⁶ They were novices (Jp. *shami* 沙弥; Skt. *śrāmaṇera*), the status of male clerics older than seven and younger than twenty (the age of formal ordination).

¹¹⁷ Kō Zennin 耕禪人 is an unidentified follower of Dokuan, apparently distinct from the two novices. He most likely served as his assistant (*jisha* 侍者) and his adjuration to Dokuan that he write the Odes indicates that he was a mature practitioner.

¹¹⁸ See the introduction about this text translated by James Sanford (1988).

¹¹⁹ Of course, this passage is ironical. Dongpo is regarded as a master of poetry, but the poems attributed to him were less than stellar. In spite of his erudition Dokuan did not imagine it was a forgery.

This is the reason for which I endured my sickness and, following [the nine] perceptions one after another, I composed two odes for each. [In doing so] I adopted the division into nine perceptions [contained in the section] on the perfection of meditation in the *Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*.¹²⁰ Lining up sutras and commentaries in front [of me] as spearheads,¹²¹ I became riveted to the pictures of the nine perceptions as [if they were] army banners. Following each of the perceptions, I playfully disposed of [the texts of the sutras and commentaries] between them, using my vulgar odes as a rearguard. [I further] put up [two sections called] the Antidote [to Delusion] and Realizing the Path, which serve as rewards [for the soldiers]. Having advanced, the army of the wise and sagely [men], the troops of the four types of demons are defeated, my only expectation being to pacify and purify the realm of truth (*dharmadhātu*). Even though this battle was made by way of small words, I [felt obliged to] write down a bit of its history in this afterword.

Inscribed by the old Dokuan on the eighteenth day of the twelfth lunar month of Genroku 5.¹²²

ABBREVIATIONS

- SN* *Saṃyutta Nikāya*. 6 vols., ed. M. Leon Feer. London: Pali Text Society, 1884–1904.
T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. 100 vols., ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 et al. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai. 1924–34.
Vism *Visuddhimagga*. Ed. C. A. F. Rhys Davids. Reprinted in one volume. London: Pali Text Society, 1975.

¹²⁰ Here, Dokuan's reference is imprecise. The section of the *Dazhidu lun* that enumerates the nine perceptions and quotes the *Da bore boluomiduo jing* is found in its chapter 35 (T 25, no. 1509: 217a6–a7). See the translation by Lamotte (1944–80, vol. 3, p. 1314). The list of the nine perceptions is not included in the section on the perfection of meditation. Note that throughout the standard edition of this commentary it is the Chinese compound *jiuxiang* 九相 that is used and not *jiuxiang* 九想.

¹²¹ The series of metaphors that follow compare Dokuan's composition of his *Hannya kusō zusan* to a military campaign.

¹²² Corresponds to January 23, 1693 in the Gregorian calendar. Dokuan was recuperating from sickness in Edo.

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