

# TRANSLATION

## Zen Master Hakuin's Poison Words for the Heart

TRANSLATED BY  
NORMAN WADDELL

### *Introduction*

This commentary on the *Heart Sutra* by Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768), the great figure of modern Rinzai Zen, is one of his most popular works. It is also a representative example of his writings in Chinese in the traditional Zen manner, standing side by side longer counterparts such as the *Kaiankokugo* and *Sendaikimon*, his commentaries on the sayings of Daitō Kokushi and poems of Hanshan. Although Hakuin is known to have lectured on the *Heart Sutra* on more than one occasion, the work as we have it derives substantially, if not entirely, from a series of lectures he gave to his disciples during the winter months of 1744 at a small temple in Kai, present Yamanashi prefecture. He was sixty years old, in the flush of his powers. His comments here, on *prajna*, *shunyata*, and the rest, strike themes at the center of Buddhist experience. Characteristically, he delivers them right from the source.

His text, the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit *Prajna-paramita Hridaya Sutra*, is a member of the Prajna or Wisdom family of the Mahayana Buddhist canon. It is said to contain within its two hundred and seventy Chinese characters the "heart" or essence of the enormous six-hundred volume *Large Prajna-paramita Sutra*. Easily the most widely used scripture in Far Eastern Buddhism, it is recited on virtually every occasion by Zen monks and laymen, who are expected to have it by heart, and in various other schools of Japanese Buddhism as well.

Commentaries on the *Heart Sutra* may be counted in the hundreds. A half dozen or so new ones add to the number each year. They run the gamut in standpoint and purpose from sophisticated philosophical expositions of Buddhist doctrine to practical manuals of faith. In general, though, all of them attempt to spell out the sutra's terse assertions along more or less rational lines. Primary appeal is to the intellect.

## HAKUIN

This is less true only in degree of those authored by the Zen masters themselves, including foes of logic-chopping as hardnosed as Lan-hsi Tao-lung (Rankei Dōryū), Ikkyū Sōjun, Bankei Yōtaku, Tenkei Denson, and Hakuin's own disciple Tōrei Enji, whose commentary is often printed together with his master's. Their explications seem somehow meek and well-mannered, more Buddhist than Zen, at least after a taste of Hakuin's incisiveness, which he employs with a penetration that, like Emerson's self-reliance, "speaks hard as cannon balls."

It is this trenchancy of Hakuin's, coupled with his fine flair for picturesque language, that sets his commentary apart from the others. It also makes it more naturally congenial to the Zen taste; "Poison Words for the Heart" (*Dokugo shingyō* in Japanese) has long been a standard lecture item in Zen monasteries, and a popular study-text at meetings of Zen lay groups.

While the *Dokugo shingyō* belongs to a general type of commentarial literature well known to Western readers in koan collections like the *Pi-yen lu* (*Hekigan-roku*) and *Wu-men kuan* (*Mumonkan*), its closest parallel is a Zen exegesis of another important Wisdom sutra, the *Ch'uan-lao Chin-kang ching* (*Senrō Kongo-kyō*), "Old Ch'uan's Diamond Sutra," written by a Sung master named Yeh-fu Tao-ch'uan (Yafu Dosen). Hakuin is known to have lectured on Tao-ch'uan's work on at least one occasion, and is reported by Tōrei actually to have had it in mind as a model when he undertook his commentary on the *Heart Sutra*.

Like Tao-ch'uan, Hakuin separates the text of the sutra into groups of words and phrases and subjects each of them to a barrage of heavily ironic prose annotations, called *jakugo*, or "capping words," followed by verse evaluations of varying lengths which, on the whole, elucidate the issue at hand rather more straightforwardly, with a shade less of the *jakugo*'s ambiguity.

The preaching of the *Heart Sutra* is said to have been entrusted by the Buddha to Avalokiteshvara, Kanzeon, or, as the Japanese prefer to call him (or her), Kannon. Kannon, revered throughout the East as the embodiment of great compassion, typifies the Bodhisattva ideal of the Mahayana practitioner. But Hakuin gives him and his preaching no quarter, smiting them hip and thigh with the baleful sword of what he calls "verbal prajna." In so doing, he tries to pump living blood into the sutra's dead letters, so they will work for students, instead of against them. His comments are designed to dislodge the assumptions and preconceptions in their minds, to frustrate discrimination, and to incite them to real Self-understanding in the profound but highly abstract series of negations Kannon offers up to them.

But Hakuin's "verbal prajna" is not only destructive. He comes with the physic and the sword. That is the special nature of what may be called his Zen

## POISON WORDS

irony. The point to be emphasized here, is that his primary purpose is not to discredit Kannon or his sutra. When he is devaluing, he is praising, negating and at the same time affirming (and the converse is also true; his occasional bursts of praise often come with a double edge as well). This ambiguity is a natural outgrowth of his religious experience, and thus so pervades the commentary it is not possible to gloss it at all adequately. In the translator's notes, except in random instances, I have not attempted to explain it or even to point it out.

The virulence of Hakuin's poison is proverbial in Japanese Rinzai Zen. The slightest drop, even one word, can, it is said, kill everything in the universe. But he doles it out with loving hands, for only if every flicker of life disappears from the earth in great universal Death, does the great Life of prajna emerge.

*Dokugo shingyō* is above all a practical text, meant to be worked out at firsthand, through non-intellectual means. You chew it for yourself, or else go hungry. As he exhorts his students:

Don't try to tell me my poems are too hard,  
Face it, the problem is your own Eyeless state;  
When you come to a word you don't understand, quick  
Bite it at once! Chew it right to the pith!  
Once you're soaked to the bone in death's cold sweat,  
All the koan Zen has are yanked up, root and stem.

### *Text and Commentaries*

Numerous editions of the *Dokugo shingyō* have been published, mostly during this century. Those prior to 1900 are briefly mentioned in the translator's notes, page 114. The text given in the *Hakuin Oshō Zenshū*, volume 2, pp. 305–328, is perhaps the most accessible, since that collection has been reprinted rather recently. Textual differences between the different editions are few, and of little real consequence.

The seven commentaries on Hakuin's work listed below, by well-known masters of the Rinzai school, are some of them Zen lectures of profound interest and difficulty in their own rights. They have made at least attemptable a task which otherwise I probably should not have even undertaken. The bulk of the Translator's Notes have likewise been gathered, freely and frequently, from their pages, a true compilation, in its Latin sense of pillage.

1. *Dokugo shingyō kanwa*, Kawajiri Hōgin, 1908
2. *Dokugo chū shingyō*, Nantenbō, 1917
3. *Dokugo shingyō*, Sugawara Jiho, 1920
4. *Dokugo shingyō kōwa*, Gōtō Zuigan, 1940

## HAKUIN

5. *Dokugo shingyō teishō*, Ashikaga Shizan, 1953
6. *Dokugo shingyō*, Shibayama Zenkei, 1958
7. *Dokugo shingyō teishō*, Yamamoto Gempō, 1967 (partial)
8. *Dokugo shingyō kōwa*, Yamada Mumon, *Zen bunka*, 1970–80.

To lessen the confusion in distinguishing among the voices in the translation, different typefaces are used for the four divisions of the text. First (1), the key word or words from the *Heart Sutra* are set in large roman TYPE; followed by (2) Hakuin's prose annotations (*jakugo*), in regular roman type; and (3), his critical verses, in *italic type*, uniform in size to (2). Finally, in place of footnotes, translator's notes are when needed set, indented, in smaller roman type. These last are confined mostly to the explanation of the historical allusions, quotations from Chinese literature, and other anecdotal material Hakuin frequently injects into his comments.

## *Hakuin Zenji's Dokugo Shingyō*

EDITED BY HUNGER AND COLD  
REVISED BY COLD AND HUNGER

### • CAPPING WORDS AND VERSES

A blind old geezer in a dark cave thick with a maze of vines and creepers. He returns, stark naked, and sits in the weeds. Poor Master Fu, it's a pity he's going to lose all his lovely mansions! And don't say these words are cold and indifferent, that they have no taste. One bellyful eliminates hunger till the end of time.

*Casting a forest of thorns over the entire universe,  
He wraps in its tangles every monk on earth;  
I pray you will recognize the Way to Deliverance,  
And enjoy yourselves hawking inside a lotus thread.*

*Edited . . . hunger.* An ascription found in other of Hakuin's writings. It refers to the disciples with him at the Shōin-ji, although what part if any they actually played in preparing his commentaries is unclear.

*Capping . . . verses.* These first "capping words" (*jakugo*) and the verse are a commentary on the role they themselves play in the following sutra commentary, and set forth Hakuin's basic Zen standpoint.

*A blind old geezer . . . weeds.* The commentaries take this as a reference primarily to Kannon, the Bodhisattva who preaches the sutra, though in context, Hakuin and his *jakugo* and verses seem a likelier candidate. The maze of vines represents verbal complications and conceptual understanding, which, unable to stand on their own, envelop and constrict the true prajna, preventing its free activity. Beneath the hard words is suggested the Bodhisattva's proper role: he leaves the realm of his own realization, in his naked suchness, undisturbed by the obstruction of the senses which he has overcome, to preach to living beings in the world of relativity ("the weeds").

## HAKUIN

Of this “blindness,” Sugawara Jiho says: “As we are not blind and can all of us see, we see mountains, rivers, men and women, and so forth. Even though we think this gives us a kind of freedom, it is in fact the cause of our unfreedom . . . Shakyamuni, Bodhidharma, Kukai, Nichiren . . . are all men who went forward to become blind men.”

*Poor Master . . . mansions.* This is Fu Ta-shih (Fu Daishi), famed layman of early Chinese Buddhism, regarded by his contemporaries as an incarnation of Maitreya, Buddha of the Future. Hakuin’s comment pertains to Fu as Maitreya. In the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, Maitreya is depicted as dwelling in the splendidly bejewelled palaces of enlightenment he created in the Tushita Heaven, located in the World of Desire along with our own mortal sphere. Hakuin says that in the face of prajna’s Perfect Wisdom (expounded in the sutra and working also in Hakuin’s own comments) everything in the universe is swept away, emptied and negated. Nothing can escape, not the dwellings of sentient beings immured within the walls of selfhood, not even the enlightened universe of Maitreya.

*I pray . . . thread.* “You” refers to Hakuin’s disciples, the primary objects of his commentary. *A lotus-thread.* The lotus tuber is part of the Japanese diet. When it is sliced and the severed portions drawn apart, fine string-like filaments form from the viscous fluid exuded from the surfaces. With true enlightenment comes complete spiritual freedom, incomprehensible to the unenlightened mind, in which all things are possible, and there is no place one is unable to go.

\* \* \*

### • MAHA

The Chinese translated this “great.” But what is it! There’s not a thing in all the universe you can compare it to. Almost everyone thinks it means “wide and vast”—they’re wrong! Even a Superior Man has a love of wealth, but he knows the proper way to get it. Bring me a *small* prajna!

*A thousand million Sumerus in a dewdrop on a hair;  
All three thousand worlds in a foam-fleck on the sea;  
A pair of young lads in the eyes of a midge  
Play games with the world. They never stop.*

In the five sections that follow Hakuin comments on the words which make up the title of the sutra—*Maha-hannya-haramitta-shingyō* (“Great Wisdom Paramita Heart Sutra”), each of which is said to contain the full meaning of the sutra. *Even a Superior . . . get it.* Appropriated from the Confucian Analects, where it

## POISON WORDS

means: even a sage has need of the necessities of life, but he acquires them in accordance with what is right. Substitute *prajna* for *wealth*.

*Sumeru* is the great mountain at the center of the universe. *Three thousand worlds* are the universe in its entirety.

*A pair . . . never rest.* This “midge” is a small insect (*shōbei* 螞蟥) that makes its abode in a mosquito’s eyebrow, which becomes its universe. The “young lads” are perhaps eyebabies in the midge’s eye.

• • •

### • PRAJNA

They translated this “wisdom.” All, without exception, have it. It’s faultlessly perfect in every one of us. This playing around making mud-pies—when will the fellow stop? You’ll never see it until your fingers let go from the edge of the cliff. Why? Don’t pare your nails at the foot of a lamp. You might get an inchworm to measure longs and shorts, but don’t ask a snail to plow a rocky field.

*Ears like the dumb. Eyes like the blind.*

*The empty sky losing itself completely to midnight.*

*Even Shariputra can’t get a close look,*

*The clubfooted Persian has crossed at another ford.*

*Prajna* has been translated into English as *transcendental wisdom, intuitive wisdom, perfect wisdom*. In this translation, *prajna* and *wisdom* are used interchangeably.

*This . . . stop.* By attaching names to *prajna*, Kannon covers over with conceptual defilements the “round and perfect” *prajna*, making it a dirty clod.

*Don’t pare . . . lamp.* A Japanese proverb. It seems to have been thought dangerous to bring scissors and knives out at night when the spirits of the dark could get hold of them. A favorite saying of Hakuin’s teacher Shōjū Rōjin.

*You might . . . rocky field.* Even granting an inchworm, or “looper,” is measuring things as it hunches along, a snail (which resembles an ox somewhat with its horns) cannot plow a rocky field (*prajna*). Don’t ask the impossible.

*Shariputra*, the wisest of the Buddha’s disciples; the one who requested the preaching of the sutra.

*The clubfooted . . . ford* may be an oblique reference to Bodhidharma and the “transmission outside the scriptures.”

## HAKUIN

### • PARAMITA

The Chinese translation for this means “reach the other shore.” But where is that! He’s digging himself in a hole to get at blue sky. Shrimps wriggle and jump, but they don’t escape the dipper. The place where the Treasure is lies near at hand—*take one more step!* Hsuan-sha is in his boat, the water dripping from his line. Even the clearest-eyed monk is secretly troubled.

*Is there a soul on earth who’s a man of “this shore” ?  
How sad to stand mistaken on a wave-lashed quay!  
Practice pursued with the roots to life unsevered  
Is a senseless struggle, however long it lasts.*

*Paramita.* The Yonder Shore of Enlightenment; the Land of Bliss, in contrast to the suffering of the relative world (This Shore).

*Shrimps wriggle . . . dipper.* The prajna-paramita is inherent in every man; it cannot be escaped.

*Hsuan-sha . . . troubled.* This enigmatic statement lends itself of course to a variety of interpretations. Hsuan-sha Shih-pei (Gensha Shibi) is a highly-regarded Tang monk who at the age of thirty resolved suddenly to give up work as a fisherman and enter religious life. Here, “Hsuan-sha fishing” represents a state of deep realization which is only attained when dualities such as catching or not catching, this shore and that shore, are transcended, and one is truly enabled to work for the salvation of others. A man of such attainment is enough to trouble even a deeply enlightened man with a sense of his own incompleteness. (This same phrase is used below, “*Form is Emptiness . . . Form.*”)

\* \* \*

### • HEART (MIND)

For untold ages this didn't have a name. Then they blundered and gave it one. When it flies into your eyes, even gold dust will blind you. A Mani Gem is just another blemish on the Dharma. *What is it!* Most people only think they have the real thing, like the fellow who confused a saddle-remnant for his father’s jawbone. The reason those who search for the Way are unaware of its reality, is simply because from the first they accept all their discriminations for true. *Those* have been the very source of birth-and-death since the beginning of time, yet the fools call them the “original man.”



## POISON WORDS

*It's clearly ungettable within the Three Worlds—  
An empty sky swept clean away. Not a particle left.  
On the zazen seat, in the dead of night, cold as steel;  
Moonlight through a window, bright with shadows of phum!*

*Heart.* Referring to the essence or “heart” of the sutra, it is also the essence of prajna wisdom, and hence “Mind.” Here, the character *shin* 心 has all those implications.

*The reason . . . “original man.”* A much-quoted verse by T'ang master Ch'ang-sha Ching-ts'en (Chōsha Keijin).

*It's . . . Worlds.* Based on a phrase in the *Diamond Sutra*. The Worlds of the past, present, and future; hence, never, not at any time.

• • •

### • SUTRA

“Thus I have heard. The Buddha was once . . .” *Faugh!* Who wants to roll *that* open! Most people rummage through piles of paper trash looking for their “red and yellow scripture-scrolls.” It's just another clove plucked off the lily bulb.

*This is one sutra they didn't compile  
Inside their cave at Pippali.  
Kumarajiva had no words to translate it,  
Ananda himself couldn't get wind of it.  
At the north window, icy drafts whistle through cracks,  
At the south pond, wild geese sport in snowy reeds.  
Above, the mountain moon seems pinched thin with cold;  
Freezing clouds threaten to plunge from the sky.  
Buddhas might descend to this world by the thousands,  
They couldn't add or subtract one thing.*

“Thus I . . . once.” The traditional opening of a Buddhist sutra.  
*Red and yellow . . . scrolls.* Buddhist scriptures, in scroll form.  
*It's . . . lily bulb.* A lily bulb, formed something like an artichoke but smaller and more compact, does not have any real center; the bulb *is* the cloves that make it up. Presumably a reference to the illusion of words and letters. For example; “sutra” is just another of the substanceless words used by Kannon to try to get at the truth. Or, people pore over the Buddhist scriptures one after another, thinking that will bring them closer to the central truth they contain.

## HAKUIN

Another interpretation, giving the other, affirmative side, and taking the "poison" out of the comment, explains that each clove is, as such, a greater truth (greater "sutra") than all the written words in the canon.

*Kumarajiva* is the great Central Asian monk celebrated for his translations of Buddhist sutras into Chinese. *Ananda* is the disciple of the Buddha who is said to have heard and memorized all the Buddha's preachings, and later to have played a central role in the compiling of the first sutra-collection, which is reported to have taken place inside a cave called Pippali (near Rajagṛha in central India) under the direction of Mahakashyapa.



### • KANJIZAI ("FREE AND UNRESTRICTED SEEING")

Why it's the Bodhisattva of Butuoyan! He's the Great Fellow supplied one to every person. Nowhere on earth can you find a single unfree man! You cough. You spit. You move your arms. You don't get others to help you. Who clapped chains on you? Who's holding you back? Lift your left hand up; you just may scratch a Buddha's neck. Raise your right hand; when will you be able to avoid feeling a dog's head?

*Fingers clasp and feet walk on without the help of others,  
While thoughts and emotions pile up great stocks of Wrong;  
But cast out pro and con, and all likes and dislikes,  
And I'll call you a Kannon right there where you stand!*

The sutra proper begins here with the description of Kanjizai's entrance into samadhi prior to preaching.

*Kanjizai*, Kanzeon ("Observer of the World's Suffering"), and the more familiar Kannon, an abbreviated form of Kanzeon, are Japanese readings of different Chinese translations of the Sanskrit Avalokiteshvara. Kanjizai, "Free Seeing," is expressive of the wisdom (*prajna*) aspect, and Kanzeon of the compassion (*karuna*) aspect of Bodhisattvahood.

*Butuoyan*. Potalaka, the name of the mountain where Kannon is said to dwell; his Pure Land.

*Lift your . . . dog's head*. In his account of Hakuin's life, Tōrei quotes a similarly-worded saying (*Hakuin Oshō shōden*, Rikugawa Taiun, Tokyo, 1963, p. 506). Said to have been a favorite phrase of Gudō Toshoku, Hakuin's great-grandfather in the Dharma.

## POISON WORDS

### • BODHISATTVA

To show his difference from the Shravakas and Private Buddhas, and to set him apart from full-fledged Buddhas as well, he is given the (provisional) name of Bodhisattva. He's on the road but hasn't budged from home; he's away from home constantly, but he's not on the road. I'll snatch from you the practice of the Four Universal Vows—that's the very thing will make you Superior Men, able in both directions.

*Flying the formless nest of personal Emptiness  
Entering trouble-tossed seas in the great Karmic Ocean—  
Homage Great Merciful One, Saver from Suffering,  
In forms a hundred million, through boundless space and time!*

The Bodhisattva, the ideal practitioner of the Mahayana tradition, works for deeper attainment for himself while endeavoring to help others to enlightenment. All practitioners working toward this goal, whether priest or layman, are called Bodhisattvas. The Bodhisattva is commonly set against the followers of the so-called Two Vehicles (the Shravaka, who can only reach the inferior attainment of Arhatship, and the Pratyeka Buddha, who though of greater attainment, still is interested mainly in his personal salvation), which are viewed as lesser, incomplete ways to truth in that their adherents remain enjoying their realization of emptiness, and do not proceed on, like the Bodhisattva, to lead others to salvation as well.

*On the road . . . road.* He appears in the present world of birth-and-death while remaining always beyond it in the timeless world of emptiness. A saying of Linchi I-hsüan (Rinzai Gigen).

*I'll snatch . . . both directions.* Only by going beyond (negating and affirming) Bodhisattvahood, can the true practice of the Four Bodhisattva Vows ("Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them; the deluding passions are inexhaustible, I vow to destroy them; the Dharma Gates are manifold, I vow to enter them; the Buddha Way is supreme, I vow to master it") emerge. The words *kunshi kahachi* 君子可入 (translated "Superior Men, able in both directions"), which refers in its original Confucian setting to the Superior Man accomplished in the Eight Confucian Virtues, will permit in this context a wide range of interpretation. None of them, however, would be substantially different from the one adopted here, which is descriptive of the practice of the Bodhisattva, who having shed all odour of enlightenment is able to function with totally unattached freedom in both enlightened and unenlightened realms.

## HAKUIN

### • PRACTICES

What's he saying! He's just making waves. Stirring up trouble. It's sleeping at night and moving around in the daytime. Urinating and passing excrement. Clouds moving and streams flowing. Leaves falling and flowers scattering. But hesitate or stop to think, and Hell rears up in all its hellish forms.

Yes, practice is like that all right, but unless you once penetrate by the cold sweat of your own brow and see it for yourself, there is trouble in store for you and plenty of it!

*What of the movements of your hands and feet!  
What of eating when hungry and drinking when dry!  
If even a flicker of thought intervenes  
You're killing Chaos boring holes to make eyes.*

This "practice" is the enlightened daily activity of the prajna paramita. *Making eyes* is an allusion to Chuang-tzu's allegory of Konton (Chaos). When the gods had finished creating a new world, wanting to show their appreciation to their friend Chaos, without whose silent and self-effacing help they could not have accomplished their task, they decided to give him all the senses (ears, eyes, etc.) they themselves possessed. When the work was finally finished and they were congratulating themselves on the splendid results, Chaos died.

\* \* \*

### • THE DEEP PRAJNA PARAMITA.

Bah! Gouging out healthy flesh and creating an open wound. How strange, this "prajna" of his. Just what is it like? "Deep"? "Shallow"? Like river water? Can you tell me, what kind of prajna has deeps and shallows? I'm afraid it's a case of mistaken identity, confusing the pheasant with the phoenix.

*Annulling Form in the quest for Emptiness, is shallow,  
Seeing Emptiness in the fullness of Form, is called deep.  
He prattles about wisdom with Form and Emptiness in his clutches  
Like a lame tortoise in a glass jug clumping after a flying bird.*

*Confusing . . . phoenix.* The King of Ch'u, a lover of birds, filled his palaces with feathered creatures of every kind. An enterprising merchant, hoping to gain favor

## POISON WORDS

with the king, went to Mount Tan where the phoenix is said to nest and searched high and low (but of course unsuccessfully) for the mythical bird. As he was about to give up and return home, he met a man carrying a strange-looking fowl. It was really a pheasant, but the man told him it was one of the famous Mount Tan phoenix. The merchant bought it and took it to the king, who thought it a rather poor-looking phoenix. But it had a long tail like a phoenix, and since a phoenix is supposed to be an auspicious bird, he accepted it with great pleasure.

• • •

### • AT THAT TIME

He's done it again! Scraping out another piece of perfectly good flesh. Before all the infinite kalpas in the past and beyond all those to come, the Feather-edged Blade gleams coldly in its scabbard-case with a wonderful vibrant radiance. A luminous gem brought forth on its setting in the black of night.

*Yesterday morning I swept out the soot of the old year,  
Tonight I pound rice for the New Year goodies;  
There's a pine tree with roots, and oranges with green leaves—  
I put on a fresh new robes to await the coming guests.*

Hakuin's lectures on the *Heart Sutra* are said to have taken place during the winter months. His verse shows the actuality of time in the activities of temple life.

• • •

### • HE ILLUMINATES AND SEES

The invincible Diamond Eye is free of even the finest dusts. But don't go blinking it open over a bed of flying lime-dust! Where does this "seeing" take place? The entire earth is the eyeball of a Buddhist monk. It's just as Hsuan-sha said.

*A midge works a mill in the eye of a mite,  
A germ spins a web inside a nit's ear;  
Tushita heaven, the world of man, the floors of hell,  
Stark clear as a mango on the palm of the hand.*

## HAKUIN

The Eye of Enlightenment, which perfectly illuminates and discerns the emptiness of the five skandhas, is called the *Diamond Eye* because it can penetrate all things, and is itself indestructible. Though it is found unchanging and unaltered in each person, Hakuin says we mustn't be blinded by dualistic utterances such as "illuminates and sees," which only create unnecessary hindrances to real "seeing."

*Where does this . . . place?* "Seeing" presumes an object, but in the "deep prajna paramita" no such duality exists; hence, "the entire earth . . . Buddhist monk."

*It's just . . . said.* Presumably, this refers to Hsuan-sha's comment on the verse Ling-yun (Reiun) composed when he was enlightened by the sight of peach flowers: "For over thirty years I sought the swordsman,/How many fallen leaves, branches withered;/But the moment I saw the peach flowers in bloom,/I came to where I am right now, no doubts at all." Hsuan-sha said, "Splendid! Splendid! That is just how it is. But I'm afraid Brother Ling has not really made it to full enlightenment yet."

*The verse* describes the incomprehensible working of the all-seeing prajna eye, which takes in the infinitely small as well as the infinitely large.

\* \* \*

### • THAT THE FIVE SKANDHAS ARE ALL EMPTY

The sacred turtle's tail sweeps away all his tracks. But how can the tail help leaving traces of its own? *Forms* are like the towering Iron Hoop Mountains; *reception and perception* like the trenchant Diamond Sword; *conception and consciousness* like the Gem that fulfills the heart's desires. But you must realize how far there is to go. Before you know it, darkness overtakes you once again.

*You see another's Five and you think that's you,  
Then you cling to them, with personal pride or shame,  
It's like a bubble that forms on the surface of waves,  
Like the lightning that snaps across the sky.*

Each individual existence is said to be composed of five constituent parts or aggregates called *skandhas*: the material element (or form), and reception, perception, conception, and consciousness or the totality of mind. This makes the world as we know it, thought and matter in its entirety. To the enlightened eye, all is seen as empty, but Hakuin says this is not mere "empty" emptiness;

## POISON WORDS

positively seen, it is things as they really are in suchness, or, as Dōgen says in his comments on the *Heart Sutra*: "The five Skandhas . . . are five pieces of prajna" (*Shōbōgenzō makahannya haramitta*).

*The sacred turtle . . . own.* Kannon makes everything empty, but the words "all are empty" still remain.

*The Iron Hoop Mountains* encircle the outer limits of the earth. Kannon says forms are empty. Like David Copperfield, Hakuin "sees nothing but makes it everything." He sees forms everywhere, with presences as undeniable as mountains. Nor are the functions of his mind (the other four skandhas) empty, they are as trenchant as the *Diamond Sword*, cutting material and spiritual things with ease; like the fabulous *Mani Gem*, they are capable of giving him his every wish. But to see forms within emptiness like this takes years of hard practice, and there is little time. The final two sentences are taken from the *Records of Hsu-t'ang* (*Hsu-t'ang lu; Kidō roku*).

\* \* \*

### • AND RELIEVES ALL DISTRESS AND SUFFERING

That shadow in the guest's cup never was a snake. How clear, in a dream, the Three Worlds are. When you wake, all is empty, all the myriad worlds are *Mu*.

*The ogre outside shoves at the door, the ogre inside holds it fast;  
Pouring sweat from head to foot, battling for their very lives,  
Fighting on all through the night, until the dawn appears  
And laughter fills the early light. They were friends from the start!*

*That shadow . . . snake.* A man named Yueh-kuang, on becoming provincial governor of Honan, invited a friend to help him celebrate his promotion. The friend was offered a large cup of wine, but when he took it up to drink he saw a small snake wriggling on the surface. Out of deference to his host, he closed his eyes and gulped the drink down, but then begged to be excused and rushed home. He at once fell ill and took to bed. Yueh learned what had transpired and issued another invitation. He filled his friend's cup again and setting it before him asked whether he still saw a snake. When he replied that he did, Yueh pointed to a bow hanging on the wall, a reflection of which had been cast on the wine. Man's illusions create the unrealities (five Skandhas, good and bad, etc.) which are the cause of his suffering. When his prajna eye opens, he sees them to be the shadows they were all along.

## HAKUIN

*The Three Worlds* and *the myriad worlds* represent the universe in terms of time (past, present, future) and space, respectively.

*The verse* recasts an allegory in the *Ta-chi-tu-lun (Daichidoron)* about two fellow travellers who lost their way and each other deep in the mountains. One of them wandered along until it began to grow dark. Seeing a small, lonely cottage he asked the householder for a night's lodging. The householder wanted to oblige him but said he could not; he was haunted by a night goblin and it was too dangerous. But the traveller persisted until the householder finally relented and agreed to allow him to stay. After supper, there was a sudden rattling at the door. The traveller ran quickly and put his shoulder to it, holding it securely. All night long the goblin banged and clawed to get inside, while the traveller held it fast. When daylight came, he was astonished to find the goblin was really the friend he had been separated from the previous day, who had been himself seeking shelter. The *ogre inside* stands for the courageous, resolute heart of the Buddhist practitioner, the *ogre outside*, his illusions, desires, etc. The dawn is the sudden advent of enlightenment. Once enlightened, such illusions are seen, as such, to be enlightenment.



### • SHARIPUTRA

Phuh! What could that puny-fruited Arhat possibly have to offer! Around here, even Buddhas and Patriarchs have to beg for their lives. Where is *he* going to hide, with his "Hinayana face and Mahayana heart"? At Vimalakirti's, he couldn't even get his manhood back. Surely, he hasn't forgotten the way he sweated and squirmed?

*In the Deer Park his wisdom surpassed all the rest.*

*He startled Uncle Long Nails while still in the womb.*

*He went to the Great Man in person, took down his sutra.*

*He was Rahula's private tutor, the clever Mynah Lady's kid.*

Kannon begins to speak with this address to Shariputra, who requested the preaching. Shariputra was foremost among the Buddha's disciples in wisdom, hence his appearance here. As a follower of a lesser way, his attainment is regarded as incomplete, lacking in the compassion of the Mahayana Bodhisattva. *Around here*, i.e., where the true prajna is being preached.

"*Hinayana . . . heart.*" While in outward appearance a Hinayana practitioner, his heart contains the seeds of the Mahayana. A saying from the *Lotus Sutra*.



## POISON WORDS

*At Vimalakirti's . . . squirmed?* In the *Vimalakirti Sutra* (Observing Sentient Beings Chapter), Shariputra, representing the Hinayana faction in attendance, is present as Vimalakirti and Manjushri discuss the role of the Bodhisattva. Also present is a celestial maiden of Bodhisattvic attainment, possessed of supernatural powers. Resentful that a woman should be there to defile such a gathering, Shariputra, intending to put her in her place, engages her in debate on the possibility of enlightenment for women, in the course of which is revealed his own failure to transcend the distinctions of sex. She then transforms him into a celestial maiden and challenges him to change himself back into a man. This he is unable to do because of the attachments which remain in his mind. *Uncle Long Nails* is the brother of Shariputra's mother. Returning confidently home after long and diligent study in great centers of learning, he found that his sister, now married and expecting a child, had become unexplainably intelligent and eloquent, and was far superior to him in argument. Remembering that a woman carrying a child of great wisdom was said to become wise herself, he realized he would have to study harder if he was not to be overshadowed by his new nephew. He even grudged the time to cut his fingernails, which grew very long, hence his name.

*The Great Man* is Kannon. *Rahula* is the son fathered by Shakyamuni prior to his entrance into religious life. He was taught by Shariputra, and later became one of the Buddha's disciples. *The Mynah Lady* is Shariputra's mother Shari (Shariputra means "son of Shari"), whose name, meaning "Mynah bird," is said to have been given because of her eloquence and sharp, piercing eyes.

\* \* \*

### • FORM IS NO DIFFERENT FROM EMPTINESS; EMPTINESS IS NO DIFFERENT FROM FORM

A nice hot kettle of stew, and he plops a couple of rat turds in and ruins it. It's no good pushing delicacies at a man with a full belly. Striking aside waves to look for water when the waves *are* water!

*Forms don't hinder emptiness, emptiness is the tissue of form;  
Emptiness is not dissolution of form, form is the flesh of emptiness.  
Inside the Dharma Gates where form and emptiness are-not-two,  
A lame turtle with painted eyebrows stands in the evening breeze.*

The rat droppings are "form" and "emptiness."

The final line of the verse, says Sugawara Jiho, transcends the principle of emptiness and non-duality and enters "the vital inner sanctum of prajna itself."

## HAKUIN

### • FORM IS EMPTINESS, EMPTINESS IS FORM

Trash! What a useless collection of junk! Don't be trying to teach apes how to climb trees! These are goods that have been gathering dust on the shelves for two thousand years. Hsuan-sha sits in his boat, the water dripping from his line.

*A warbler pipes intermittently in the spring breeze;  
By the peach trees a thin mist hovers in the warm sun.  
A group of young girls, "cicada heads and moth-eyebrows,"  
Carry blossom-sprays, one over each brocade shoulder.*

The sutra phrase is virtually identical with the preceding "Form is no different . . ." but the expression is more direct, and less abstract, a difference reflected in Hakuin's two verses.

*Hsuan-sha sits . . . line.* This appeared earlier (see *Paramita*). In this context, it might be said that Hsuan-sha is fishing but catching no fish. He is trying to "sell the goods," to find someone who can truly grasp the meaning of the sutra words. It is a hard task, but he devotes himself to it with the purposeless activity that characterizes the truly enlightened man.

*Cicada heads and moth-eyebrows* describe the hairdoes and (moth-feeler) eyebrows of beautiful women.

•   •   •

### • AND THE SAME CAN BE SAID OF RECEPTION, PERCEPTION, CONCEPTION, AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Just look at him now wallowing in the sow-grass! When you encounter strange phantoms without alarm, they self-destruct. Snow Buddhas are terrible eyesores when the sun comes out. You certainly won't see strange things like those around my place.

*Earth wind fire water are the tracks left when a bird takes flight;  
Forms reception perception conception are sparks in a man's eye;  
A stone woman works a shuttle, skinny elbows flying,  
A mud cow barrels through the surf, baring her bicuspid.*

## POISON WORDS

*Just . . . grass!* It was bad enough when Kannon talked about the *form skandha*. Now, by talking about the other *four skandhas* he has compounded his wrong fourfold. Before, he had left the path and entered the weeds, but now he's rolling around in them. (And yet this is a Bodhisattva's proper role.)

*Earth . . . water.* The four primary elements of the material world.

Sugawara Jiho says the final two lines of the verse are the secret password that gains one entrance into the truth of "all things are empty."

\* \* \*

### • O SHARIPUTRA, ALL THINGS ARE EMPTY APPEARANCES;

Like rubbing your eyes to make yourself see flowers in the air. If all things don't exist to begin with, then what do we want with "empty appearances"? He is defecating and spraying pee all over a clean yard.

*The earth, its rivers and hills, are castles in the air,  
Heavens and hells, a bogy bazaar atop the ocean waves;  
The "Pure" land and "impure" World are brushes of turtle hair,  
Nirvana and Samsara are hare-horn riding whips.*

\* \* \*

### • THEY ARE UNBORN, UNDYING, NOT STAINED NOR IMMACULATE; THEY DO NOT INCREASE NOR DECREASE

Real front-page stuff! But is that really the way it is? How did you hit on that part about everything being "unborn and undying"? You'd better not swindle us! An elbow doesn't bend outwards.

*The little chaps in your eyes are awaiting their guests;  
The Valley Spirit isn't dead, she's expecting your call.  
No one gets dirty living in the world of men;  
There's not a clean face in all the Buddhas' pure lands.  
With eighty thousand shares of Dharma, isn't that enough?  
Three-thousand Buddha-lands are contained in next to nothing.  
It is just like the pillow-prince of Handan,  
Or the tax-collector of Nanke, raking in the levy.*

## HAKUIN

*In the verse*, the first couplet corresponds to “unborn, undying,” the second to “not stained, not immaculate,” the third to “do not increase . . . decrease.” *The little chap*, the “eyebaby,” or image seen in an eye when an object comes in front of it, is essentially mindless yet reflects different objects faithfully when they appear before it.

*The Valley Spirit* is the mountain spirit Echo (cf. *Tao-te ching*, 6), who has no self but always responds when someone calls out.

*With eighty . . . enough?* Together with the numberless delusive passions found in sentient beings (84,000 by traditional count) are a corresponding number of Dharma teachings.

*It is like . . . the levy.* A young scholar leaves home to take the literary examinations at the capital and stops for lunch at a place called Handan. While waiting for the millet to be boiled for his meal, he takes a nap. He dreams that he has passed the examination with flying colors, and that, advancing through an illustrious career spanning fifty years, he finally attains the post of prime minister (in Zeami's Nō play “Kantan,” he is made a prince of the country). When he awakes to find the millet is still on the fire, he realizes that life is an empty dream, and returns home.

Ch'un-yu Fen falls asleep under a locust tree. He dreams that he goes to a fabulous country where he is met by an imperial envoy in a fine carriage who takes him to the palace of the king. The king tells him of Nanke, a difficult-to-govern district in his realm and asks him to assume its administration. He receives a beautiful imperial princess as a bride, has many fine children, and under his rule the people become wealthy enough to pay him taxes and make him a rich man. Then one day a messenger arrives from the king to tell him the kingdom is in danger and the capital has to be moved. He is asked to return to his original home until he is needed again. A carriage comes for him, and as he is driven away, he wakes up. That evening, there is a great storm. An anthill in a hole in the trunk of the locust tree is found destroyed by the rain and deserted. The ants had all left before the storm.

• • •

### • THEREFORE, IN EMPTINESS

A regular jackal's den. A cave of shadowy ghosts. How many pilgrims have fallen in here! A deep black pit. The unutterable darkness of the grave. What a terrifying place!

## POISON WORDS

*Over a hundred cold hungry monks, a Phoenix brotherhood,  
Spread their winter fans and offer New Year's greetings;  
On the wall hangs a blue-eyed old man with a purple beard;  
In a jar are fragrant flowers of the chaste plum;  
Cold to muffle even the warbler's bright clear cries,  
Warmth rising to the Zen seats from red-hot coals;  
There are presents of wild yams, in plaits of straw,  
And for old men, sugared sweets, laid in their wrappers.*

*The verse depicts the New Year scene at the Shōin-ji, the small rural temple where Hakuin spent his teaching career. It is said to show the wonderful being that emerges in true emptiness. The blue-eyed old man is Bodhidharma, whose picture is hung during the New Year period. The cold is still too severe for the bush warbler (uguisu) to pipe its familiar cries of early spring. In the Zen Hall, a brazier is set out to provide warmth for the guests who will come to pay their respects. The yams and sweets are perhaps presents sent by members of the lay congregation.*

Hakuin is said to have had a great fondness for sweets. Once he fell ill during a lecture series; a doctor was called who prescribed a purgative for "sugar poisoning," perhaps diabetes. Tōrei tells how when he first went to see Hakuin he bought a bag of sugar candies along the way to give as a present.

• • •

### • THERE IS NO FORM, NO RECEPTION, NO PERCEPTION, NO CONCEPTION, NO CONSCIOUSNESS

"Dreams. Delusions. Blossoms of air. Why bother to get hold of *them*? Profit and loss and right and wrong must all be chucked out." This scrupulousness of his only stirs up trouble. What's the good of making everything an empty void?

*A boundless unencumbered place, perfect, open, still;  
Earth and hills and rivers, are but names, nothing more.  
The Mind may be quartered, and Forms lumped into one,  
But they're both still just echoes in empty ravines.*

*Dreams . . . chucked out. From the Hsinhsinming (Shinjinmei).*

*The Mind . . . one. Allusion to the four mental skandhas and the composite form skandha.*

HAKUIN

- NO EYES, EARS, NOSE, TONGUE, BODY, MIND; NO FORM, SOUND, SMELL, TASTE, TOUCH, DHARMAS; NO REALM OF SIGHT, TILL WE COME TO NO REALM OF CONSCIOUSNESS;

Well I have eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind! And forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, and dharmas do exist! Beneath an empty autumn sky stretch endless wastes where no man goes. Do you know the horseman riding from the west?

*When the Six Senses slightly stir, Six Fields appear;  
When the Mind-Root rests, the Six Dusts rest as well.  
The Roots the Fields and Senses, all Eighteen Realms—  
Just a bubble of foam on a great shoreless sea.*

*Well I . . . exist!* A similar statement was uttered as a child by the T'ang priest Tung-shan Liang-chieh (Tōzan Ryokai) when his teacher read him this same phrase from the *Heart Sutra*.

*Beneath . . . west.* These lines from a T'ang poem by Wang Chang-ling (Ō Shōryō 王昌齡) may be said to suggest the mind, emptied and undefiled by a single "dust," arising unattached, as if from nowhere, in affirmation of something beyond such determinations as "Buddha," "Original Man," etc.

*The verse.* The Six Roots or sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, sense of touch, faculty of mind) grasp the corresponding Six Fields or Dusts (shapes and colors, sounds, odors, tastes, touch, and elements or dharmas), to produce the Six Senses or Consciousnesses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and mind). Together, they make up the Eighteen Worlds or Realms of Consciousness.

The first five Senses or Consciousnesses function in conjunction with the sixth, the Mind, which is their source. When this Mind-Root is unattached and at rest, the Six Dusts remain in the stillness of their essential emptiness. But when it stirs and discriminations arise, all the various things of the world come into being. The eye of prajna sees them in their true emptiness.

\* \* \*

- NO IGNORANCE, AND NO EXHAUSTION OF IGNORANCE, TILL WE COME TO NO OLD AGE AND DEATH, AND NO EXHAUSTION OF OLD AGE AND DEATH;

Pearls scattered inside fine purple curtains. Pearls packed inside filthy beggar-bags; it takes a wise man to know that those are jewels. The water

## POISON WORDS

that a cow drinks turns to cream; the water that a snake drinks turns to poison. The twelve-storied mansions where sages dwell are wrapped in perpetual five-colored clouds far beyond man's reach.

*Twelve Causes are produced and Twelve are destroyed,  
Producers are Common Men and destroyers called Sages;  
Such is the world the Solitary Buddha sees,  
The dust in his eyes spinning about in Emptiness.  
Who can really see the dust floating in his eyes?  
O cherished Dharma Wheel, great, perfect, round, sudden!  
Make your way into its light, confirm the dusts yourselves,  
Break free of those leprous fox-carcass shells!*

*No ignorance . . . death.* This abbreviated series, ignorance, old age and death, stands for the 12-linked Chain of Causation or Dependent Origination (*Pratitya-samutpāda*). The full list is: Ignorance, Disposition, Consciousness, Name and Form, the Sense Organs, Touch, Feeling, Desire, Clinging, Becoming, Birth, Old Age and Death. The first, Ignorance or "No Light," is the cause of all the others, and these are both causes and effects of one another, in an endless, unbreakable chain. The Chain of Causation is normally associated with the Solitary Buddha, who by contemplating it, practicing, exhausting ignorance and the others in the chain, attains his enlightenment. But it is also the fundamental conception of human existence, based on the relation of causal origination and karmic transmigration, for Buddhism as a whole. In the Mahayana, when "No Light" is replaced by "Light," all the links of the chain become, as such, the wonderful workings of prajna.

*Pearls . . . curtains.* Responding to the sutra's assertions of the non-existence of the chain of causation, Hakuin says that to his prajna eye, its beingness is so splendidly manifested there are no words adequately to describe it.

*Pearls . . . jewels.* The Buddha-nature or prajna Wisdom in the Unenlightened Man.

*The water . . . poison.* The same water (12-linked Chain) can feed either the process of suffering or the activity of enlightenment.

*The twelve-storied . . . reach.* The five-colored clouds are the true aspect of the five skandhas, which is unapproachable by unenlightened discrimination but grasped through the prajna wisdom of the enlightened, who dwell in a perennial abode of bliss that is indivisible from the 12-linked Chain of Causation.

*Twelve Causes . . . in his eyes?* The Solitary Buddha thinks he ("the Sage") gains enlightenment for himself by realizing the emptiness of the Chain of Causation while the unenlightened man generates causation. Resting in emptiness, his

## HAKUIN

attainment is still incomplete and dualistic, with the impediment of empty emptiness still remaining in his view of things. Hakuin wants men who can go on to see and affirm all the things of the world, the "dusts," just as they really are. This is the attainment of the full and perfect Zen/Bodhisattva practice (e.g., Kannon and his preaching of the *Heart Sutra*).

*Break free . . . shells.* An admonishment the Buddha is said to have given his disciples contains the words: "I had rather you be transformed into a mangy old fox-body, than ever to accept the onesided truth of the Shravaka or Solitary Buddha."



### • NO PAIN, KARMA, EXTINCTION, WAY

Shining gems in the dawn light beyond the bamboo blind. The fool goes at them with an upraised sword. The salt in the seawater, the size in the paint. Egrets settling in a field, a thousand flakes of snow. A warbler alighting on a bough, a treebranch all in flower.

*Four burning bullets, red to the core, put on  
Straw sandals at midnight and rise beyond the clouds;  
The Four Truths (pain, karma, extinction, Way) aren't  
At the end or the beginning, aren't perfect or sudden.  
Kaundinya, Bhadrīka, Kulika, and the others,  
Got their Face-Gates burnt off before they even knew it.  
Don't think the Golden Sage was netting shrimps in Deer Park;  
He was anticipating secretly the Mahayana Roots.*

*No pain . . . Way.* The sutra now negates the Four Noble Truths preached by the Buddha after his enlightenment to explain the causes of suffering and the Way of deliverance. As with the 12-linked Chain of Causation, these are ordinarily associated with the Solitary Buddha.

*Shining gems . . . flower.* Bright beads of dew sparkle in early light, but the fool when he sees them takes them for something dangerous and makes ready to dispatch them with his sword. Applied to the words "No pain . . . Way," the meaning may be something like this: To one with Hakuin's prajna eye "No pain . . . Way" is splendid just as it is, i.e., not as mere negation of the Four Truths but as negation that is at the same time their affirmation. Those not yet fully enlightened, such as Solitary Buddhas, value highly the onesided empti-



## POISON WORDS

ness which merely negates the Four Truths, and try to avoid "Pain, karma, extinction, Way." Truly seen, the relation of the two is a dynamic, non-dualistic inseparability, like the salt in seawater, etc.

*The Four Truths . . . sudden.* Allusion to the categorization of the Buddha's teaching into five different periods.

*Kaundinya . . . knew it.* These three, together with Asvajit and Vasbala Kashyapa, were the first to receive the Buddha's teaching of the Four Noble Truths in the Deer Park, and the first to attain enlightenment. The fiery bullets of the Four Truths burn away the doors of perception, freeing intuitive wisdom and giving immediate access to the truth.

*Don't think . . . Roots.* Though it is supposed the Buddha (Golden Sage) was preaching for the sake of small-fry Arhats like Kaundinya and the others, his true objective, which is first known when his preaching is fully realized, was the enlightenment of the Mahayana tradition.

• • •

### • NO WISDOM, NO ATTAINING

Setting up house in the grave again! So many misunderstand these words! A dead man peeping bug-eyed from a coffin. You can shout yourself hoarse at Prince Chang painted there on the paper, you'll not get a peep out of him!

*A black fire burning with a dark, gem-like brilliance,  
Draining vast heaven and earth of their yellows and blacks;  
Mountains and rivers are not seen in the mirror of Mind,  
A hundred million worlds agonize, all for nothing.*

This is usually regarded as the heart of the sutra. After breaking through the Four Noble Truths and 12-linked Chain of Dependent Origination, there still remains something which perceives and grasps their emptiness. True prajna appears only when this "no wisdom, no attaining" is reached.

*Shout yourself . . . him.* This is based on an old Chinese tale. A sage died and left behind instructions that if his countrymen were ever in trouble, they were to go before his portrait and invoke his name; he then would appear to help them. When the country was threatened by an enemy army, the people did as directed, but it did them no good at all. The country soon fell to the invaders. Even if Kannon knows the vital truth of prajna ("no wisdom") there is no way he can express it on paper, in sutras. It must be grasped for oneself.

*A black fire . . . blacks.* "No wisdom" is at the same time great wisdom, the all-

## HAKUIN

penetrating mind of prajna. This paradox is reflected in the use of “black” and “fire.” “Yellows and blacks” stand for the colors of earth and heaven.

*Mountains and rivers . . . nothing.* From a poem by Hsueh-t’ou (Setchō) in the *Pi-yen lu (Hekigan roku)*.

\* \* \*

### • AS NOTHING IS ATTAINED, HE IS A BODHISATTVA

Get him out of here! A thief pleading innocence with the stolen goods in his hands.

Acting by circumstances, in response to sentient beings wherever they may be, but still never leaving the Bodhisattva Seat. Unless you’re clear about three and eight and nine, you’ll have a lot to think about as you confront the world.

*Bodhisattva, Great Being!*

*In Chinese, “Sentient Hero with Great Heart.”*

*He enters the Three Ways, taking men’s sufferings on himself;*

*Unbidden, he proceeds joyfully through every realm;*

*He vows never to accept the meager fruits of partial truth;*

*While pursuing higher enlightenment himself, he works to save others.*

*The vast void of boundless space could cease to be, still he’d*

*Urge his Vow-Wheel on forever to save the ignorant multitudes.*

*A thief . . . hands.* Even as he professes to obtain nothing his hands and mouth are full. Hakuin tells him to get rid of his non-attainment too.

*Acting by circumstances . . . Seat.* From the *Avatamsaka Sutra*.

\* \* \*

### • BECAUSE HE DEPENDS UPON THE PRAJNA PARAMITA

What a choke-pear! He’s gagging on it! If you catch sight of any thing at all to depend on, spit it out at once! I’m able to endure the northern wastes of Yuchou, but the mildness of Chiangnan is sheer agony.

*Tell us you’ve discovered greed and anger in Saints, but don’t*

*Give us that about Bodhisattvas depending on Wisdom.*

*If you see a single thing around to depend on,*

*That’s not “unhindered”—he’s tied in chains.*

## POISON WORDS

*Bodhisattva and Prajna are essentially the same,  
Like beads rolling on a tray, sudden, ready, uninhibited.  
He's neither worldly nor saintly, stupid nor wise—  
What a shame, when you draw a snake, to add a leg.*

*I'm able . . . sheer agony. Yuchou is in the far north, cold, barren, and inhospitable. Chiangnan is wonderfully mild. "Damn braces, bless relaxes."  
Crystal beads . . . uninhibited. From the Pi-yen lu, Case 95.  
It's such a shame . . . leg. The leg is dependence on prajna.*

\* \* \*

▪ **HIS MIND IS UNHINDERED; AS IT IS UNHINDERED, IT KNOWS NO FEAR, AND IS FAR REMOVED FROM ALL DELUSIVE THOUGHTS**

Nothing extraordinary about that. Supernatural powers and wondrous activity are just drawing water and carrying fuel. Lifting my head, I see the sun setting over my old home in the west.

*Not Mind nor Buddha-nature nor Nirvana,  
Neither Buddha, Patriarch, nor Wisdom;  
Ten Worldfuls of ungraspable red-hot holeless hammer  
Shattering empty space into immense and lasting serenity.  
Just parting his lips, he utters mighty lion roars,  
Scaring the life out of the foxes, rabbits, and badgers.  
Wizard-like, assuming the form of whatever is before him,  
Changing freely according to the situations at hand;  
When he hears of Mother Li's ailing left shoulder,  
He cauterizes Granny Chang's right leg.  
Delusive thoughts, fears, sorrows, and all the rest  
Are just a drop of water cast into a bottomless gorge.  
When Ch'ih was dispatched to Ch'i, he was wrapped in fine furs;  
When Li died, his coffin was plain, with no outer casing.  
They wake the priest from his midday nap in the hermitage to tell him  
Village boys have broken the hedge and are stealing bamboo shoots.*

*Supernatural . . . fuel. From a well-known verse by Layman P'ang (Hō-koji).  
The four four-line stanzaic groups of the verse correspond roughly to the four clauses of the sutra.*

## HAKUIN

*Ten Worldfuls*: the Six "Realms of Illusion" (Hell, Hungry Spirits, Animals, Fighting Demons, Man, Deva), and the Four "Realms of Enlightenment" (Shravaka, Solitary Buddha, Bodhisattva, Buddha). Hence, all the realms of illusion and enlightenment.

*When he hears . . . right leg*. A rich lady named Mother Li was suffering from a growth which caused severe pain in her left shoulder. Granny Chang went to a Taoist healer and asked him to treat Mother Li. The healer knew that his patient had a strong dislike of moxocautery, so without laying a finger on her, he cured her by applying moxa at two places on Granny Chang's right leg.

*When Ch'ih . . . furs*. When Confucius's disciple Ch'ih was sent on a mission to Ch'i, Master Jan asked for an allowance of grain for his mother. Confucius told him to give her two handfuls. Jan said it wasn't enough, so Confucius said to give her a bushel. What Jan actually gave her was much more than that, and when Confucius learned of it, he said, "When Ch'ih went to Ch'i he drove sleek horses and was wrapped in fine furs. There is a saying: 'A Gentleman helps out the necessitous; he does not make the rich richer still'" *Analects*, 6 (Waley trans.).

*When Li . . . casing*. When Yen Hui died, his father begged for Confucius's carriage, thinking he could use it to get an enclosure for his son's coffin. Confucius refused him, telling him that when his own son Li had died, he gave him a coffin but no enclosure. He did not give up his carriage and go on foot in order that his son might have an enclosure, because officials of his rank were not permitted to go on foot.

\* \* \*

## AND REACHES FINAL NIRVANA

This is the hole pilgrims all walk into; they fill it up year after year. He's gone off again to flit with the ghosts. It's worse than stinking socks! The upright men of our tribe are not like this; the father conceals for the sake of the son, the son for the sake of the father.

*The Mind of Birth-and-Death of all beings*

*Is as such the Buddhas' Great Nirvana.*

*A wooden hen sits upon a coffin brooding on an egg;*

*An earthen mare follows the wind back home to the barn.*

*This is . . . socks*. Kannon's words might suggest a passive, quiescent state, the "silent illumination" Zen which Hakuin vehemently denounced.

## POISON WORDS

*The upright . . . father.* When Confucius was told of a man in a neighboring country called Upright K'ung because he bore witness against his father when the latter made off with a sheep, he said, "In my country, uprightness is somewhat different. A father will screen his son, and a son will screen his father." Hakuin adapts these words as a response to Kannon's "reaches final Nirvana," saying in effect: I wouldn't tell my students something like that. It would only do them harm. How can such a dead man's Buddhism help them in any way.



### • BECAUSE THE BUDDHAS OF PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE DEPEND UPON THE PRAJNA PARAMITA

By holding a good man down he cheapens him. The bare skin and bones are fine as they are, with a natural elegance and grace, without larding them with paint and powder. There's no cold water in a boiling cauldron.

*Wisdom fathers forth all Buddhas of the Three Worlds,  
All Buddhas of the Three Worlds enact this Wisdom;  
Mutual inexhaustibility of host-and-guest . . . ONSORO . . .  
Cranes screech in an old nest banged about by the wind.*

*Holding . . . him.* A Buddha's enlightenment encompasses all things, so there is nothing left over for him to "depend upon." To say he is depending on prajna robs him of his Buddhahood. He and prajna are inseparably one. He needs no such touching up from Kannon. A saying from a famous textile region of China, where the women were the principal wage earners and the men often obliged to do women's work.

*The first and second lines of the verse* state the inseparable relation of Buddhas and their wisdom. It is the inexhaustible host-and-guest interrelatedness of all things in the universe. Until the cryptic utterance *Onsoro*, Hakuin gives the usual Buddhist explanation of the matter. *Onsoro* is a magic charm or spell invoked in esoteric Buddhism to bring about some desired result. Here, with a touch of humor, Hakuin, in his typical Zen manner, is affirming his own presence as one who can conjure up at will all Buddhas of the Three Worlds, himself included, with their wisdom. Then, the *final verse* vividly portrays the Buddhas at their work. To preserve the precarious, age-old nest containing the Buddha's teachings and wisdom from destruction, he and the rest of the Buddhas of the Three Worlds do their best to protect it, practicing and teaching others from within it, preaching prajna amid the vicissitudes of the World.

HAKUIN

• THEY ATTAIN HIGHEST ENLIGHTENMENT

Don't go hammering spikes into empty space! A steer may give birth to a calf, but still no Buddha ever got Enlightenment by relying on Prajna. Why? Because Prajna and Enlightenment are essentially not two. And besides, if he has anything at all to get, he is no Tathagata. It's just like a blazing conflagration: If Buddhas and Patriarchs come close, they get burned to death like everyone else.

*An otter will be catching fish in treetops far sooner  
Than a Buddha is enlightened by relying on anything.  
And declaring a Tathagata has something to attain!  
Why not tell us of the Arhats' connubial bliss?*

*Like a blazing conflagration.* Ashikaga Shizan says this is like Chao-chou's "Mu," the shining sword that kills all that come in contact with it. *Arhats* are of course celibate.

\* \* \*

• THEREFORE, YOU OUGHT TO KNOW THAT THE PRAJNA  
PARAMITA IS THE GREAT MANTRA.

Carrying water to sell by a river. Don't drag that old chipped lacquerware out here! Transcribe a word three times, and a crow becomes a how, and then ends up a horse. He's trying to palm off shoddy goods again, like some little shopkeeper. When walking at night, don't tread on anything white; if it's not water, it's usually a stone.

*Cherish the Great Charm of your own nature,  
That turns a hot iron ball into finest sweetest manna;  
Heaven, Hell, and the Floating World of Man—  
A snowflake disappearing down a glowing furnace.*

In esoteric Buddhism, a mantra is a magical incantation or formula uttered to gain certain specific results. Here, the sutra equates it with the mind of perfect wisdom.

*Don't drag . . . here.* At a certain mountain shrine in China, lacquerware bowls were employed during services for Taoist divinities. After the bowls were used once they were discarded into a mountain stream. By the time they were carried down in the rushing torrent to the village below, they were so badly damaged

## POISON WORDS

the villagers could not use them. They became proverbial for something unfit for use. Everyone already possesses the perfect jewel of their own nature, Hakuin says, so it is needless for Kannon to press a prajna on them that he has rendered utterly useless with all his words about it.

*Transcribe a word . . . a horse.* The three characters for "crow" 烏 "how" 焉 and "horse" 馬 have ideographic elements closely in common, and when texts were copied and recopied by hand, scribes might sometimes mistakenly write one character for another, often changing the original meaning of a text completely. Kannon would be better off keeping quiet, Hakuin says. When he explains that prajna is this and prajna is that, he ends up with something altogether different from what he intends.

*He's trying . . . shopkeeper.* In trying to sell prajna to his listeners, he cries it up as a "great mantra," then a "glorious mantra," and so on, every tub-thump taking him, and them, farther and farther from its essential truth.

*When walking . . . stone.* The enlightened man "walks the universe alone" and does not meet up with prajnas or mantras. Anything that should appear can only be an illusion which will harm you, and therefore must be avoided.

*Cherish . . . manna.* The marvelous power of your own nature in its basic suchness transforms the passions and suffering they cause into complete and perfect freedom and bliss.

*Heaven . . . furnace.* Together, these comprise the Six Ways of Transmigration within which sentient beings undergo birth, suffering, old age and death.

\* \* \*

### • IT IS THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS MANTRA.

Don't say "great and glorious mantra"! Break apart the staff that comes rough-formed and unshapen, and the great earth's Indigenous Black stretches out on every side. Heaven and earth lose all their shapes and colors. The sun and moon swallow all their light. Black ink pouring into a black-lacquer tub.

*Great and glorious Mantra, round and perfect in every man,  
Casts a calm illumination over mountains and rivers of the world;  
The vast, barrier-like ocean of our age-long sins vanishes,  
Like foam-bubbles atop waves, like sparks within the eyes.*

*Don't say . . . unshapen.* An unshaped walking stick or monk's staff; a branch just broken off the tree. In T'ang colloquial language, this is said to indicate man in the natural state in which he emerges from the womb. In Zen records, it

## HAKUIN

is often synonymous with the "original face" prior to words and letters. But sometimes it means (as it probably does here) man as he lives in the world of cause and effect, unshorn of his outer bark of selfhood. Once this has been fashioned through a process of shaping and polishing into a real monk's staff (that is, when one has gained real attainment through practice), the true prajna, free of any of the designations Kannon tacks on to it, emerges, and the world is seen in its original emptiness.

\* \* \*

### • IT IS THE HIGHEST MANTRA,

And what about down around your toes? Bring me the lowest mantra! One feels tender affinity for the autumn leaves falling amidst pattering drops of rain. Yet how can that compare to the intimate richness of sunset clouds glowing over bearded fields of grain?

*The Finest, the Noblest, the First,  
Enthralling even Sakya and Maitreya,  
What we all have with us at birth,  
But we each have to die, and then be reborn.*

\* \* \*

### • THE INCOMPARABLE MANTRA,

Talk! He talks and two stakes appear. What ever happened to that single Stake? Where is it now? Who said, "there is no equal anywhere, above, below, or in the four quarters?" He has broken it all up into little bits, there are pieces strewn all over. That idle old gimlet Teyun, how many times is he going to come down from the summit of Wonder Peak? He hires a foolish old saint to help him fill up a well with snow.

*Last winter the plum was bitter cold;  
A dash of rain, a burst of bloom!  
Its shadow is cast by the moon's pale light,  
Its secret fragrance carried on the spring breeze.  
Yesterday, you were only a snow-covered tree,  
Today, your boughs are starred with blossom!  
What cold and suffering have you weathered,  
Venerable queen of the flower realm!*



## POISON WORDS

*That idle . . . snow.* Lines from a poem of Hsueh-t'ou (in his *Tsang-ying chi* 祖英集 *Soei-shū*), which is itself a comment on events related in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Teyun (Tokuun) is a man of deep attainment, a Bodhisattva who, like a well-used gimlet that has lost its sharpness through long years of work, has rounded off all his rough edges in a mature finish. Although he looks old and idle, his Zen is of the first order. Only a man of deep compassion and faith, having completed his training and reached the ineffable heights of enlightenment (Wonder Peak), can carry out his work. He descends to the world and benefits others ("fills the well with snow") through "foolish," purposeless acts (which Zen calls "work of no merit") for the salvation of sentient beings, and tries to get others to join him. Hakuin's use of these lines, however, must be seen in light of the ironic purpose of his commentary.



### • WHICH IS CAPABLE OF REMOVING ALL SUFFERING.

Picking a lily bulb apart to find the center. Shaving a staff of square bamboo to make it round. Ripping the threads from a Persian carpet. Nine times nine is, now and always, eighty-one. Nineteen and twenty-nine meet, but neither offers its hand.

*When you pass the test of Mind and Emptiness  
Your Skandhas and Elements are instant ash;  
Heavens and Hells are old broken-down furniture,  
Buddha-worlds and Demon-worlds smashed into oblivion.  
A yellow bird chortles ecstatic strains of "White Snow,"  
A black turtle clammers up a lighthouse, sword in belt;  
And anyone who wishes to enter their samadhi,  
Must once pour down rivers of white-beaded sweat.*

*Picking . . . center.* The lily bulb has no real center; it is the cloves which make it up. Kannon tells us that "removing all suffering" brings us to the peace of nirvana, but since suffering and nirvana are not two different things, that would mean removing the very thing we seek.

*Shaving . . . eighty-one.* Destroying the very qualities that make them valuable. Kannon preaches about removing suffering, but suffering is not apart from prajna; remove it and you eliminate prajna too.

HAKUIN

IT IS TRUE; IT IS NOT FALSEHOOD.

Liar! He's lying in his teeth right there! The arrow has already flown the China coast. We rub elbows with him all day long—How do we resemble him?

*Mr An of Ch'i bumped off three brave men;  
Szechwan Yi overcame a brace of generals.  
A counterfeit cockcrow gave fierce tigers the slip;  
A sheep-head was dangled to peddle dog-flesh.  
A man pointed to a deer to see who'd submit;  
A lady used a bee to dash a father's fond hopes.  
T'ao Chu led the Beauty of Yueh to her death;  
Chi-hsin surrendered to the ruler of Chu.  
A man slept under a bridge and dined on charred wood;  
A girl wept at a well for a clasp she'd thrown in.  
A king's corpse was carted under piles of stinking fish;  
A father's broken teeth got an ear bitten off.  
Burning by day the log-road along the precipice,  
Crossing by night at the Ch'en-ts'ang ford.  
If your gaze can penetrate to the center of these,  
Then a yard of sharp steel glints cold in its sheath.*

*The arrow . . . coast.* What the text says is "flown beyond Silla," Silla being an ancient kingdom on the Korean peninsula. A common Zen phrase. The minute you start talking about truth and falsehood, it is already too late.

*We rub elbows . . . him?* One of Daitō Kokushi's "Three Turning Words." Gōtō Zuigan says, "Who is this 'other person' who is always with us? Is he real? Is he false? How do we correspond to him?"

Each of the first fourteen lines of this sixteen-line verse is based on some Chinese tale.

*Line 1.* An Pei-chung, the chief administrator of the kingdom of Ch'i, in order to safeguard his country's peace, found it necessary to contrive a plan to dispose of three faithful and valiant retainers whose obstinacy and self-righteousness were the cause of unrest in the country. Calling them together, he presented them with two peaches, knowing that one of them would have to go without. Each deferred to the others, for none would agree to accept a peach if it meant denying it to another. This deferring back and forth went on until finally, to

## POISON WORDS

solve the dilemma, one of them committed suicide. The others, not to be outdone, returned the peaches and killed themselves as well.

*Line 2.* Led by the celebrated generals Teng-yi and Chung-hui, the armies of Wei made a surprise attack on the kingdom of Shu, and despite the valiant efforts of wily General Yi, overwhelmed the Shu forces. After the Shu emperor surrendered, General Yi let himself be taken as well. Recognizing Yi's ability, Chung-hui treated him with great respect, and made him a counselor. When Teng-yi was awarded a high rank for meritorious service during the war, Yi, sensing Chung-hui's deep resentment, persuaded him to slander his rival to the Lord of Wei. The Lord of Wei believed the charges, and had Teng-yi thrown into prison. Next, Yi learned that Chung-hui aspired to become ruler of Shu, and incited him to insurrection. During the ensuing battles between the Lord of Wei and the rebel forces, Yi killed Teng-yi in his prison cell, but later, both he and Chung-hui perished in a losing cause. Although he had been unable to defeat Wei as commander of the Shu forces, Yi brought about the deaths of its two valiant generals.

*Line 3.* For its aggressive policies, Ch'in was feared by its neighbors as a "land of tigers and wolves." King Chao Hsiang of Ch'in invited the wise and courageous Meng Ch'ang-chun to his court with the intention of killing him unless he agreed to serve in his employ. Unable to refuse, Meng pledged reluctant allegiance, but the king then had a change of heart and decided he could not trust Meng. He would have had him executed had not Meng bribed the king's favorite to intercede on his behalf with the gift of a precious robe of white fox, which he had given to the king on his arrival and now had to steal back from him in order to give to her. The king allowed him to leave, and Meng and his followers set out before the theft could be discovered. The Barrier at the border was reached in the middle of the night. With the king's men hard on their heels, one of Meng's followers who was good at imitating bird calls made a sound like a crowing cock. This set to crowing all the cocks within earshot. According to the imperial decree that the gates were to be opened at the first cockcrow, the gates were opened, and Meng and his party escaped to safety.

*Line 5.* Despotic minister Chao-kao, aware of the ill-will his officials bore him, decided to test their loyalty. He presented a deer to the king telling him it was a horse. The king only laughed, but Chao-kao insisted that it was a horse, and asked the officials present what they thought. Some agreed it was a horse, some were silent, and a few said it was a deer. Chao-kao later promoted those who agreed with him and punished all the others.

*Line 6.* A stepmother who caused the death of her husband's favorite son. Catching a large bee, she pulled out its stinger, and knowing her husband was

## HAKUIN

watching from a distance, placed the bee on the lapel of her robe and approached her stepson. Seeing the bee crawling down her chest, he tried to brush it away. His father, thinking he was making improper advances toward his wife, reprimanded him angrily. He was deaf to the son's protestations of innocence, and the son was at last driven to suicide.

*Line 7.* Lord Chu of T'ao was a faithful retainer of the Lord of Yueh. When Yueh was defeated by the Lord of Wu all the Yueh forces were captured and most of them put to death. But the Lord of Yueh begged clemency, and despite an adviser's warning that he might later prove dangerous, the Lord of Wu spared his life. The Lord of Yueh finally succeeded in convincing the Lord of Wu of his fealty and was allowed to return to his own country. There he faithfully served the Wu interests and sent frequent offerings of tribute. His mind at rest, the Lord of Wu surrendered himself to a life of decadence. He asked Yueh to send him fifty beautiful maidens for his seraglio, and among them was Hsi-shih (the Lady of Yueh), one of the famous beauties of Chinese history. The Lord of Wu gave all his time to Hsi-shih, neglecting the government, which fell into decay. It was then that T'ao Chu (Lord Chu of T'ao), a faithful retainer of Yueh, convinced the Lord of Yueh that the time was ripe to avenge his earlier defeat. The Yueh forces marched and defeated Wu handily. The Lord of Yueh took Hsi-shih as his favorite, disregarding the examples T'ao Chu recited to him of beautiful women who had brought about the ruin of a country. On their way back to Yueh, at a place called Stone Lake, T'ao Chu made Hsi-shih get in a boat and took her to the middle of the lake, where he explained he would have to kill her in order to guarantee the safety of the country. But, before he could, she flung herself into the lake and drowned.

*Line 8.* When the first Han emperor was besieged by the forces of Ch'u with no hope of escape, Chi Hsin, a captain in his army, told the King of Ch'u that his lord had decided to surrender and would proceed to the Ch'u headquarters through the eastern gates of the city. The soldiers of Ch'u gathered at the eastern gates to catch sight of the emperor, but Chi Hsin took his place in a covered palanquin, allowing him to escape in secret from the western gate. When the King of Ch'u discovered the ruse, he had Chi Hsin roasted on a burning pyre.

*Line 9.* Yu-jang was not held in high regard by his lord Fan Chung-hang, so when Fan was overthrown by Chih-pai, Yu-jang decided to offer his services to the new master. Chih-pai took a liking to him, and Yu-jang became a trusted retainer. When Chih-pai was overthrown and killed by Hsiang-tzu of Chao, Yu tried time and again to avenge his master's death, without success. Swallowing charcoal and daubing himself with lacquer to disguise himself as a leper, he took to living under a bridge to wait for the day when Hsiang-tzu would pass over

## POISON WORDS

it. But when the time came, and Hsiang-tzu's horse approached the bridge, it sensed Yu's presence and refused to go across. Yu was discovered lying in wait. Hsiang-tzu asked him why, having served the murderer of his first master, he was so strongly bent on revenge this time. His first master had treated him as an ordinary man, Yu said. But Chih-pai had treated him with honor and he wanted to requite him in kind. He begged Hsiang-tzu to be allowed, before he was executed, to have a piece of Hsiang's clothing, so that he could fulfill his vow. On being handed a coat, Yu thrust into it three times with his sword, saying, "I can report this to Chih-pai when I meet him in the next world." He then fell on his sword, killing himself.

*Line 10.* Hou-pai, a famous thief, was making off with an armload of valuables when he saw a young girl weeping sadly beside a well. He stopped and asked what was wrong. She told him she had dropped a valuable hairclasp down the well, and was certain to be punished severely when she returned home. Feeling sorry for her, Hou-pai took off his clothes and went down after the clasp. But the woman was really Hou-hei, a famous thief in her own right, and while Hou-pai was down the well, she made off with his booty and his clothes too.

*Line 11.* Chao-kao (the tyrannical minister who appeared above in the story about the horse and the deer) was accompanying the King of Ch'in on a hunting excursion far from the capital when the latter suddenly died. Wanting to be able to control the selection of the successor, Chao-kao kept the death a secret. He took the king's body back to the capital in a palanquin, as if he were alive. Afraid that the smell of the decaying body might be noticed on the long journey, he had a large quantity of dried fish placed around the body to disguise the smell. His strategy worked, and the new King appointed him chief minister.

*Line 12.* An unfilial son in the west of China struck his father and broke two of his teeth. The father was so angry at this unfilial demonstration, he decided to prosecute him. The penalty, if convicted, was death, so the son went to a clever friend of his and begged for help. After a moment's thought, the friend suddenly bit him on the ear and told him that when called before the magistrate and asked to explain his actions, he should say his father had broken the teeth in a fit of anger by biting his ear. Using this ploy, the son escaped the executioner's block, but on the way home he was struck dead by a bolt of lightning.

*Lines 13-14.* Hsiang-yu, the leader in the revolt against the Ch'in, emerged as the most powerful force in the country. He proclaimed himself King of western Ch'u and made P'ei Kung (later founder of the Han dynasty) ruler of the Han. He was only too aware of P'ei's great ambition and felt uneasy having him near. He sent him to the land of Shu, in the remote western region, and not to be caught off guard even then, he kept his troops battle-ready. Chang-liang, a retainer of

## HAKUIN

Hsiang-yu who was secretly working for the cause of P'ei, assured Hsiang-yu that P'ei no longer presented any danger. To make doubly sure of Hsiang-yu's complacency, Chang had the plank road over which P'ei would have to pass if he were to attack burned and rendered impassable, causing Hsiang-yu to rest secure in the thought that P'ei was effectively bottled within the mountainous borders of Shu. Then Chang sent word to P'ei, alerting him that the time for attack was at hand. P'ei mounted an invasion by a secret road, crossing over at a place called Ch'en-ts'ang, destroyed Hsiang-yu's forces, and went on to establish the Han empire.

\* \* \*

### • THEREFORE I WILL PREACH THE PRAJNA PARAMITA MANTRA.

Well what have you been doing up till now! It's like a man who hates drunks forcing wine down your throat. You don't get the real taste of the drink by swilling it cup after cup. Unable to return for ten full years, you forget the way you came.

*He preached it once, now he trots it out again!  
Snowdrifts accumulating over accumulated snowdrifts.  
There isn't any place for you to hide or escape it,  
So who's the wine for? We're all drunk to the gills!*

*It's like a man . . . cup.* Kannon's repeated assertions regarding prajna cause the very thing he is working against: illusion. One good taste of prajna is all you really need, says Hakuin.

*Unable to return . . . you came.* The commentaries give this verse from the poems of Han-shan two slightly different readings: After long years of practice, enlightenment is attained that is free of any odour of enlightenment. Or, *ten years* stands for the Ten Worlds (the realms of living beings; the universe); getting free of these realms means becoming a Buddha, who is unmindful of the karmic influences in the Ten Worlds, which is the real meaning of the prajna paramita.

\* \* \*

### • THE MANTRA PREACHES.

He's at it again! Over and over! What about woodcutters' songs and fishermen's chanteys? Where do they come in? And what about warbling

## POISON WORDS

thrushes and twittering swallows? Don't enter the waves and pick bubbles from the surf!

*These weed-choked fields with their seven-word furrows  
And the castles of verbiage in lines of five  
Weren't meant for the eyes of flinty old priests, I wrote only  
To help you brothers, cold and hungry in your huts;  
For unless you find the Way, and transform your self,  
You stay trapped and entangled down a bottomless pit.  
And don't try to tell me my poems are too hard—  
Face it, the problem is your own Eyeless state.  
When you come to a word you don't understand, quick  
Bite it at once! Chew it right to the pith!  
Once you're soaked to the bone with death's cold sweat,  
All the koan Zen has are yanked up, root and stem.  
With toil and trouble, I too once glimpsed the Edge—  
Smashed the Scale that works with a blind arm;  
When that Tool of Unknowing is shattered for good,  
You fill with the fierceness and courage of lions.  
Zen is blessed with the power to bring this about,  
Why not use it to bore through to Perfect Integrity?  
People these days turn away as if it were dirt,  
Who is there to carry on the life-thread of Wisdom?  
Don't think I'm an old man who just likes to make poems,  
My motive is one: to rouse men of talent wherever they are.  
The superior will know at a glance where the arrow flies,  
The mediocre will just prattle about the rhythm and rhyme.*

*Ssu-ma of the Sung was a true prince among men,  
What a shame that eyes of such worth remained unopened!  
Whenever he read difficult "hard-to-pass" koan,  
He said they were riddles made to vex young monks;  
For the gravest crimes man is sure to feel repentance—  
Slander of the Dharma is no minor offense!  
Crowds of these miscreants are at large in the world,  
The Zen landscape is barren beyond belief.  
If you have grasped the Mind of the Buddha-patriarchs  
How could you possibly be blind to their words?*

## HAKUIN

*To determine how authentic your own attainment is  
The words of the Patriarchs are like bright mirrors.  
Zen practice these days is all cocksure and shallow,  
They follow others' words, or fancies of their own;  
When hearsay and book-learning can satisfy your needs,  
The Patriarchal Gardens are a million miles away.  
So I beseech you, Great Men, forget your own welfare!  
Make the Five-petalled Zen Flower blossom once more!*

*What about . . . surf!* Ordinarily, the sutra to this point is regarded as the exoteric, and what follows as the esoteric, preaching of the prajna paramita. Transcending such distinctions, Hakuin says that for those with prajna understanding, the wonderful mantra of perfect wisdom is being preached in whatever you hear. It cannot be abstracted from the things of the world about you, and is not apart from the concrete reality of everyday experience. By repeating himself like this, Kannon creates distinctions that foster illusion.

*All these weed-choked . . . five.* In this long verse Hakuin sets forth the reasons for writing his commentary, which he did at the risk of creating even greater complications for the student. The "weed-choked fields" and "castles of verbiage" refer to verses of irresponsible utterance or nonsense, written in seven-character lines and five-character lines, respectively. The Japanese text literally says "twenty-four verses of nonsense in seven-character lines, and four verses of five-character lines," but actually, the number of verses is greater than that. Several explanations may be offered to account for the discrepancy: that he didn't care about an exact number, or that he added more verses later.

*Smashed the Scale . . . arm.* An uncalibrated scale or balance. The self which, as the fundamental source of ignorance and desire, is unable to correctly discriminate things. Or, at a higher level, the enlightened mind dwelling in emptiness, a state of sheer unknowing which must be broken through to reach true prajna.

*When that . . . lions.* When the practitioner achieves this assured freedom, he is able to drive out illusions in others.

*Ssu-ma*, the illustrious Confucian Ssu-ma Kuang (1019–1089). While he was not actually anti-Buddhist, Hakuin condemns him for misunderstanding and misrepresenting Zen.

*For gravest crimes . . . offense!* This may simply imply that slander of the Dharma is a sin of as deep a dye as committing the Five Grave Sins (patricide, matricide, killing an Arhat, injuring the body of a Buddha, creating disunity in



## POISON WORDS

the Sangha). The commentaries give it a more sophisticated reading: commission of one of the Grave Sins is an act that cannot escape the torments of Hell, but even such serious karma may be lightened in time through suffering and repentance. Speaking ill of Buddhism, however, is beyond atonement.

\* \* \*

### • GATE, GATE, PARAGATE, PARASAMGATE, BODHI, SVAHA!

To serve a Superior Man is easy, to please him an impossible task. A falling shred of mist flies together with a lone white gull; the autumn waters are a single color with the far autumn sky. A rain squall sweeps the sky from the hamlet in the south to the hamlet in the north. A new wife carries boxes of lunch to her mother-in-law in the fields; grandchild is fed with morsels from grandfather's mouth.

*Now, in mid-winter, the first year of Enkyō,  
Students of mine got together and had these words  
Carved on wood; each character cost them ten mon,  
And there are over two thousand in all! They wanted  
To preserve these dream-babblings of mine;  
I have added on this final verse for them,  
A tribute of thanks for their kindness.*

*The verses finished, I clasp my hands in prayer:  
Though empty space should cease, my vow will never end;  
Any merit this praising of Wisdom may bring me, I transfer  
To others, to turn them to the realm of Suchness;  
Trusting myself to the Buddhas of the Three Worlds,  
To the Patriarchs and Sages in all directions,  
To every Deva, Naga, and Demon guarding the Law,  
And every god of this Land of the Rising Sun,  
I pray all the brethren living with me here,  
Their Way-minds steadfast and Diamond-hard,  
Will move with despatch, break beyond the Barrier,  
And with the Gem of the Precepts ever round and bright  
In Mind, sweep clear the Demons of Illusion every one,  
And without rest benefit the vast suffering multitudes.*

## HAKUIN

*To serve . . . task.* From the *Analects*. Because of his profound benevolence, a Superior Man is able to deal with others according to their capacities, and is thus easy to serve. But his complete impartiality makes it impossible to please him unless you are in accord with the Way. Prajna is as easy as seeing or hearing or moving your hands, but it is useless for Kannon to keep trying to sell it to us by hammering out such assertions.

*A falling shred . . . sky.* Two lines of T'ang poetry, said to show the meaning of the relation of exoteric prajna, preached before, and esoteric prajna, preached in these Mantras. It is sameness at one with difference, difference at one with sameness; oneness that is twoness, twoness that is oneness.

*A rain squall . . . mouth.* Hakuin's last poison comment is taken from the Sung poet and noted Zen layman Huang T'ing-chien (黃庭堅). Sugawara Jiho says that this is Hakuin's own prajna paramita mantra, the farthest reaches of Zen attainment.

*The final verse* is a kind of postscript, including a word of thanks to his Zen followers, and ending with a declaration of the Bodhisattva's vows.

*The first year of Enkyō* fell in 1744. What the original (apparently) says is that the work was printed from *moveable types*, not, in the usual manner, carved on single blocks of wood. Moveable-type editions were quite rare at this time, and then appeared in very small printings. Curiously, apart from this statement by Hakuin, there is no record of any moveable-type edition of the work. Nor is there evidence of any other printing in 1744. No independent edition is recorded until 1927. It was first published in the supplement to Hakuin's recorded sayings, the *Keisō Dokuzui Shūi*, of 1759. A joint edition in which it is paired with a commentary by his disciple Tōrei, dated 1760 but probably not actually printed until 1883, has been frequently reissued during this century. *Ten mon* was rather a lot of money at this time.