# The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch

HUINENG

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六祖壇經

*Translated from the Classical Chinese with AI (Claude) and edited*



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Chinese text: *Nanzong dunjiao zuishang dasheng mohe bore boluomi jing Liuzu Huineng dashi yu Shaozhou Dafansi shifa tanjing* (南宗頓教最上大乘摩訶般若波羅蜜經六祖惠能大師於韶州大梵寺施法壇經), the Dunhuang manuscript Stein 5475, as printed in the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (大正新脩大藏經), vol. 48, no. 2007 (Tokyo, 1928), pp. 337a–345b, ed. Takakusu Junjirō (d. 1945) and Watanabe Kaigyoku (d. 1933); public domain. Transcribed for Forage from the Internet Archive scan (archive.org/details/taisho-tripitaka) of the volume and proofread a second time against it. The text is diplomatic: the manuscript's errors are kept as printed, with the Taishō's punctuation; paragraph divisions are Forage's. One demeaning ethnic term is replaced by a neutral editorial substitution in ⟦ ⟧. English: translated from the Chinese with AI (Claude), then edited for accuracy and consistency. Not reviewed by a human specialist. Free to reuse under CC BY-SA 4.0. The small numbers set in the text are the page and register (a, b, c) of the Taishō edition.

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# INTRODUCTION

The *Platform Sutra* presents itself as a sermon given from the ordination platform of the Dafan Temple in Shaozhou, in the far south of China, by Huineng (AD 638–713), whom the Chan (in Japanese, Zen) tradition honors as its Sixth Patriarch. It opens with his own story: an illiterate seller of firewood who has an awakening on hearing the *Diamond Sutra*, goes north to the Fifth Patriarch Hongren, is set to pounding rice, and answers the head monk Shenxiu's verse on polishing the mirror of the mind with a verse of his own—and so receives, in secret, the robe and the dharma.

The sermon itself teaches that meditation and wisdom are one, that awakening is sudden, and that "no-thought" is the source of the teaching: buddha-nature is nothing other than one's own nature, to be seen directly rather than sought outside. Huineng administers formless precepts, vows and repentance, answers questions on merit and the Pure Land, and the text closes with encounters with disciples, his last instructions and his death. The work was compiled within a century of Huineng's death by followers who claimed him for a "Southern" school of sudden awakening against a "Northern" gradual one; scholars read it as much as a document of that rivalry as a record of his words. Tradition counts it the only work by a Chinese author to be honored with the title of sutra.

This edition gives the earliest surviving version, a manuscript of the ninth or tenth century found at Dunhuang (British Library, Stein 5475), as printed in the Taishō canon. Later and much longer versions, above all the Zongbao edition of 1291, became standard; the Dunhuang text is shorter and closer to the work's origins, but it is full of copyist's errors. The Chinese is printed exactly as the Taishō gives it, errors included; the translation fol-

lows the evident intended readings, mostly the corrections suggested by the Taishō editors themselves.

# Huineng's Story

*How an illiterate firewood seller from the far south came to the Fifth Patriarch, answered Shenxiu's verse with his own, and received the robe and the dharma.*

337a The Sudden Teaching of the Southern School: The Supreme Great Vehicle Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra: The Platform Sutra of the Dharma Bestowed by the Sixth Patriarch, Master Huineng, at Dafan Temple in Shaozhou, in one fascicle

Together with the conferring of the formless precepts. Compiled and recorded by Fahai, a disciple who spreads the dharma[1]

## THE OCCASION OF THE SERMON

*Huineng preaches at Dafan Temple, and the prefect has Fahai record the sermon.*

Master Huineng ascended the high seat in the lecture hall of Dafan Temple, preached the dharma of the great perfection of wisdom, and conferred the formless precepts. At that time more than ten thousand monks, nuns and laypeople sat below the seat. Prefect Wei Qu of Shaozhou, together with more than thirty officials and a number of Confucian scholars, jointly asked the Master to preach the dharma of the great perfection of wisdom. The prefect then had the monk Fahai, a disciple, compile a record. It was to circulate in later generations, so that those who study the way could receive this teaching, hand it on from one

1 Fahai, a disciple of Huineng, is named as the compiler of the text; little else is known of him.

to another, and have something to rely on as proof of succession. This is the Platform Sutra he preached.[2]

Master Huineng said, "Good friends, purify your minds and call to mind the dharma of the great perfection of wisdom." The Master fell silent and purified mind and spirit. After a long while he said, "Good friends, listen quietly."

## HUINENG'S ORIGINS

*Huineng, a poor firewood seller, hears the Diamond Sutra and goes north to Hongren.*

My kind father was originally registered at Fanyang. He was demoted and exiled to the south, where he became a commoner of Xinzhou. When I was small, my father died early, and my old mother, left alone, moved to Nanhai. We lived in hardship and poverty, and I sold firewood in the market. One day a customer bought firewood and had me carry it to a government lodging house. The customer took the firewood, and I received the money. As I was going out by the gate, I suddenly saw a guest reciting the Diamond Sutra. The moment I heard it, my mind became clear and I awoke. So I asked the guest, "Where have you come from, carrying this scripture?" The guest answered, "I paid homage to the Fifth Patriarch, the reverend Hongren, at Mount Fengmao, east of Huangmei county in Qizhou. He is there now, with more than a thousand disciples. I listened to him there and heard the Master urge monks and laypeople alike simply to keep the one fascicle of the Diamond Sutra: then they would see their nature and directly become buddhas."[3]

When I heard this—for there was a karmic connection from past lives—I took leave of my mother at once and went to Mount Fengmao in Huangmei to pay homage to the Fifth Patriarch, the reverend Hongren.

2 Wei Qu (韋璩, garbled in the manuscript) was prefect of Shaozhou, in the north of modern Guangdong.

3 Hongren (601–674), the Fifth Patriarch, taught at Mount Fengmao (written 憑墓 in the manuscript), near Huangmei in modern Hubei.

The reverend Hongren asked me, "Where are you from, that you come to this mountain to pay homage to me? Now that you have come to me, what is it you are seeking?" I answered, "Your disciple is from Lingnan, a commoner of Xinzhou. I have come all this way only to pay homage to you, Reverend. I seek nothing else; I seek only to become a buddha." The Master rebuked me: "You are from Lingnan, and one of the southern tribal peoples besides—how could you become a buddha?" I answered, "People have north and south, but buddha-nature has no north and south. A southern tribesman's body is not the same as yours, Reverend, but what difference is there in buddha-nature?"

337b The Master wanted to talk with me further, but seeing people standing nearby, said nothing more and sent me off to work with the assembly. A lay worker then assigned me to the threshing room, where I trod the pestle of the rice-pounder for more than eight months.

## THE FIFTH PATRIARCH CALLS FOR VERSES

*Hongren tells his disciples each to write a verse showing whether they have seen their nature.*

One day the Fifth Patriarch suddenly called all the disciples together. When they had assembled, the Fifth Patriarch said, "Let me tell you: for people in the world, birth and death is the great matter. All day long you disciples make offerings, seeking only fields of merit, not seeking to escape the bitter sea of birth and death. If your own nature is deluded, how can the gate of merit save you? All of you, go back to your rooms and look into yourselves. Whoever has wisdom, draw on the wisdom of your original nature, and each of you write a verse and present it to me. I will look at your verses, and whoever has awakened to the great meaning, I will give the robe and the dharma and confirm as the sixth generation. Hurry, hurry!"

Having received these instructions, the disciples went back each to their own rooms and said to one another, "There is no need for us to clear our minds and rack our brains writing a

verse to present to the reverend. The head monk Shenxiu is our instructor. Once the head monk Xiu has received the dharma, we can simply rely on him. We needn't write anything." So they all gave up the idea, and none dared present a verse.[4]

In front of the Master's hall was a corridor three bays long. On the walls of this corridor, as an offering, they meant to paint tableaux of the Laṅkāvatāra Sutra, and also the Fifth Patriarch transmitting the robe and the dharma, as a record to be handed down to later generations. The painter Lu Ling had inspected the wall and was to begin the next day.[5]

### SHENXIU'S VERSE

*The head monk Shenxiu hesitates, then secretly writes his verse on the corridor wall at night.*

The head monk Shenxiu thought: "The others are not presenting verses of their minds because I am their instructor. If I do not present a verse of my mind, how can the Fifth Patriarch see how deep or shallow the understanding in my mind is? If I present a verse of my mind to the Fifth Patriarch to show my intent, then seeking the dharma is good, but seeking the patriarchship is not good: it would be just like an ordinary mind trying to seize the holy rank. Yet if I do not present my mind, I will never attain the dharma." He pondered for a long time: "It is very hard, very hard, very hard, very hard!" In the third watch of the night, unseen by anyone, he went to the middle of the wall in the south corridor and wrote there, composing a verse to present his mind and seek the dharma. "If the Fifth Patriarch sees the verse and speaks of it, he will look for me. If not, my karmic obstructions from past lives are heavy and I am not fit to obtain the dharma.

4 Shenxiu (606?–706) later became an eminent teacher at the Tang capitals; this text presents him as the founder of the "Northern" school it criticizes.

5 Lu Ling (盧玲; later versions call him Lu Zhen) was a court artist. Such "transformation tableaux" were narrative wall paintings of scenes from a sutra.

The sage's intention is hard to fathom; my mind will come to rest."[6]

In the third watch, holding a candle, the head monk Xiu wrote his verse in the middle of the wall in the south corridor, and no one knew. The verse said:

The body is the bodhi tree, the mind is like a bright mirror's stand. / At all times diligently wipe it, do not let dust collect.[7]

337c When the head monk Shenxiu had finished writing this verse, he went back to his room and lay down; no one at all had seen him. At dawn the Fifth Patriarch called the court artist Lu to paint the Laṅkāvatāra tableaux in the south corridor. Suddenly the Fifth Patriarch saw this verse, and having read it, said to the court artist, "I, Hongren, will give you thirty thousand cash for your great trouble in coming so far, but we will not paint the tableaux after all. The Diamond Sutra says, 'All marks are illusory.' Better to leave this verse here and have deluded people recite it. Practicing according to it, they will not fall into the three evil paths. People who practice according to this dharma will gain great benefit." The Master then called all the disciples together and burned incense before the verse. The assembly came in to see it, and all felt reverence. "All of you, recite this verse, and you will be able to see your nature. Practicing according to it, you will not fall." The disciples all recited it, all felt reverence, and called out, "Excellent!"[8]

The Fifth Patriarch then called the head monk Xiu into the hall and asked, "Did you write this verse? If you wrote it, you should receive my dharma." The head monk Xiu said, "Forgive me—it was indeed Shenxiu who wrote it. I do not dare seek the patriarchship. I only hope that you, Reverend, will compassionately look and see whether your disciple has a little wisdom and has grasped the great meaning." The Fifth Patriarch said, "In writing this verse, your understanding has not yet arrived. You

6 The manuscript is corrupt here; the sense seems to be that Shenxiu will come forward if the verse is approved and give up if it is not.

7 Bodhi means "awakening"; the bodhi tree is the tree under which the Buddha awoke.

8 The three evil paths are rebirth in the hells, as a hungry ghost, or as an animal.

have come only as far as the gate and have not yet entered. Ordinary people who practice according to this verse will not fall. But if you seek supreme bodhi with this understanding, it cannot yet be attained. You must enter the gate and see your own original nature. Go for now and think it over for a day or two, then write another verse and bring it to me. If you have entered the gate and seen your own original nature, I will give you the robe and the dharma."

The head monk Xiu went away, and for several days could not write one. A young boy passed by the threshing room chanting this verse. The moment I heard it, I knew that whoever wrote it had not seen the nature, and I grasped the great meaning. I asked the boy, "What verse is that you were reciting just now?" The boy answered, "Don't you know? The Master said that birth and death is the great matter, and he wants to hand on the dharma. He told the disciples each to write a verse and bring it to him to look at: whoever has awakened to the great meaning will be given the robe and the dharma and confirmed as the sixth generation. The Patriarch has a head monk named Shenxiu, who suddenly wrote this formless verse in the south corridor. The Fifth Patriarch had all the disciples recite it: whoever awakens to this verse will see their own nature, and whoever practices according to it will gain release."

### HUINENG'S VERSE

*Huineng, who cannot read, has the verse read to him and has a reply written on the wall.*

I answered, "I have been treading the pestle here for more than eight months and have never been to the front of the hall. Please, sir, take me to the south corridor so that I can see this verse and bow to it. I too wish to recite it and form a connection for my next life, and to be born in a buddha-land." The boy led me to the south corridor, and I bowed to the verse. Because I could not read, I asked someone to read it to me. As soon as I had heard it, I grasped the great meaning. I too composed a

verse, and asked someone who could write to write it on the wall of the west bay, to present my own original mind. If you do not know the original mind, studying the dharma is of no benefit; to know the mind and see the nature is to awaken to the great meaning. My verse said:

338a Bodhi originally has no tree, the bright mirror has no stand. / Buddha-nature is always clean and pure: where could there be dust?

Another verse:

The mind is the bodhi tree, the body is the bright mirror's stand.
The bright mirror is originally clean and pure: where could it be stained by dust?

The followers in the monastery were all astonished to see the verses I had written. I went back to the threshing room. The Fifth Patriarch saw at once that I had truly grasped the great meaning, but fearing that the others would find out, the Fifth Patriarch said to them, "This one hasn't fully understood either."

## THE ROBE AND THE DHARMA AT MIDNIGHT

*Hongren secretly transmits the sudden dharma and the robe to Huineng and sends him south.*

At the third watch of the night the Fifth Patriarch called me into the hall and expounded the Diamond Sutra. Hearing it only once, at those very words I awoke. That night I received the dharma, and no one knew. The Fifth Patriarch transmitted to me the sudden dharma and the robe: "You are the sixth generation. The robe is the token of succession, handed down from generation to generation. The dharma is transmitted from mind to mind: you must let people awaken by themselves."

The Fifth Patriarch said, "Huineng, from ancient times the transmission of the dharma has hung by a thread. If you stay here, people will harm you. You must leave at once." Having received the robe and the dharma, I set out in the third watch. The Fifth Patriarch personally saw me off as far as the Jiujiang

post station, and there we parted. The Patriarch instructed me: "Go, and work hard. Take the dharma south. For three years do not spread this dharma. When the troubles are past, then spread the teaching and skillfully guide deluded people. If their minds open, they will be no different from you in awakening."[9]

### HUISHUN ON THE MOUNTAIN PASS

*Pursuers turn back, but the monk Huishun overtakes Huineng at the Dayu Pass and awakens.*

When I had taken my leave, I set off south. Within two months I reached the Dayu Pass. Unknown to me, several hundred people had come after me, intending to harm me and seize the dharma. Halfway there they all turned back—all but one monk, surnamed Chen and named Huishun, formerly a general of the third rank, rough and violent by nature. He came straight up the pass and caught up with me. I at once offered him the dharma-robe, but he would not take it: "I have come all this way seeking the dharma. I don't want the robe." There on the pass I transmitted the dharma to Huishun. Hearing it, at those very words his mind opened. I sent Huishun back north to teach people.[10]

338b I have come to this place, and my meeting with you officials, monks and laypeople is due to causes over many kalpas. The teaching is what the former sages handed down; it is not something I know by myself. Those who wish to hear the teaching of the former sages must each purify their minds. Having heard it, may you clear away your own delusion and awaken as those of former generations did. (What follows is the dharma.)[11]

9 The manuscript says Huineng "awoke" at the post station; most editors read "parted."

10 Huishun (惠順) is the monk later versions of the text call Huiming.

11 The words in parentheses are a heading in the manuscript marking the start of the sermon proper. A kalpa is a cosmic age of immense length.

# The Sermon at Dafan Temple

*Meditation and wisdom as one; no-thought; the formless precepts, vows and repentance; the perfection of wisdom; Prefect Wei's questions on merit and the Pure Land; the formless verse.*

## MEDITATION AND WISDOM ARE ONE

*Huineng begins his sermon: meditation and wisdom are one, like a lamp and its light.*

Master Huineng called out: Good friends, the wisdom of bodhi and prajñā is something people in the world have in themselves from the start. Only because their minds are deluded can they not awaken by themselves. They must seek a great spiritual friend to show them the way to see their nature. Good friends, meet with awakening and wisdom is formed.

Good friends, this dharma gate of mine takes meditation and wisdom as its basis, first of all. Do not be deluded and say that wisdom and meditation are different. Meditation and wisdom are one in substance, not two. Meditation is the substance of wisdom; wisdom is the function of meditation. At the moment of wisdom, meditation is in wisdom; at the moment of meditation, wisdom is in meditation. Good friends, this is what "meditation and wisdom are equal" means. You who study the way, take note: do not say that meditation comes first and produces wisdom, or that wisdom comes first and produces meditation, as though the two were separate. Whoever holds this view makes the dharma two-sided. If the mouth speaks good while the mind is not good, wisdom and meditation are not equal. If mind and mouth are both good, inside and outside are one, and

meditation and wisdom are equal. Awakening by yourself and practicing do not lie in arguing. If you argue over which comes first, you are like deluded people who never stop striving to win; you only strengthen attachment to dharmas and self and do not leave behind the four marks.[1]

## THE SAMĀDHI OF ONENESS

*The samādhi of oneness is the straightforward mind at all times, not sitting without moving.*

The samādhi of oneness is to practice the straightforward mind at all times, whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down. The Vimalakīrti Sutra says, "The straightforward mind is the place of practice; the straightforward mind is the Pure Land." Do not let the mind act crookedly while the mouth merely talks of being straightforward. To speak of the samādhi of oneness with the mouth while not practicing the straightforward mind is not to be a disciple of the Buddha. Just practice the straightforward mind and cling to no dharma whatever: this is called the samādhi of oneness. Deluded people cling to the marks of dharmas and hold fast to the samādhi of oneness, saying that to sit without moving, to remove the false and not let the mind arise, is the samādhi of oneness. If it were like this, this dharma would be the same as being insentient, and would instead be a cause of obstruction to the way. The Way must flow freely; why should it be blocked? When the mind does not abide in dharmas, the way flows freely; if it abides, it is bound. If sitting without moving were right, Vimalakīrti would not have scolded Śāriputra for sitting quietly in the forest.[2]

Good friends, I have also seen people teaching others to sit contemplating the mind, contemplating purity, not moving, not arising, and to make this their effort. Deluded people do not

1 "Meditation" and "wisdom" translate 定 and 慧, Chinese for samādhi (meditative concentration) and prajñā (wisdom).

2 The samādhi of oneness (一行三昧, literally "single-practice samādhi") is a meditative absorption in the one reality; the text reinterprets it as the straightforward mind in all activity.

understand; they cling to it and become confused. There are hundreds of such cases. Know that teaching the way like this is a great mistake.

Good friends, what are meditation and wisdom like? They are like a lamp and its light. With the lamp there is light; without the lamp there is no light. The lamp is the substance of the light; the light is the function of the lamp. The names are two, but the substance is not two. The dharma of meditation and wisdom is just like this.

Good friends, the dharma is neither sudden nor gradual; people are sharp or dull. The deluded progress gradually; the awakened practice suddenly. To know your own original mind is to see your original nature. Awakened, there is from the start no difference; not awakened, you go round in rebirth for long kalpas.

## NO-THOUGHT, NO-FORM, NON-ABIDING

*No-thought is the source, no-form the substance, and non-abiding the basis of the teaching.*

338c Good friends, in this dharma gate of mine, from the earliest times, both sudden and gradual have established no-thought as the source, no-form as the substance, and non-abiding as the basis. What is no-form? No-form is to be amid forms and yet apart from forms. No-thought is to be amid thought and yet not think. Non-abiding is people's original nature: thought after thought, it does not abide. The previous thought, the present thought and the next thought follow one another, thought after thought, without a break. If a single thought were cut off, the dharma body would separate from the physical body. In every thought, do not abide in any dharma. If one thought abides, then thought after thought abides: this is called bondage. If, thought after thought, you do not abide in any dharma, there is no bondage. That is why non-abiding is the basis.

Good friends, to be outwardly apart from all forms is no-form. If only you can be apart from forms, the substance of the

nature is pure. That is why no-form is the substance. Not to be stained by any object is called no-thought. Within your own thoughts, be apart from objects, and do not let thoughts arise over dharmas. But do not stop thinking of the hundred things and get rid of thought altogether: once a single thought is cut off, you die and are reborn elsewhere. You who study the way, take care! Do not fail to understand the meaning of the dharma. To be mistaken yourself is bad enough, but you go on to urge it on others; deluded, you do not see your own delusion, and you slander the sutras and the dharma as well. That is why no-thought is established as the source. It is because deluded people have thoughts about objects, and on those thoughts give rise to false views, that all the defilements and deluded thoughts arise.[3]

So this teaching establishes no-thought as the source. People of the world, be apart from views and do not give rise to thoughts. If there were no thought at all, no-thought itself could not be established. "No"—no what? "Thought"—thought of what? "No" means being apart from dualistic marks and all the defilements. Suchness is the substance of thought; thought is the function of suchness. When your nature gives rise to thought, then though you see, hear, perceive and know, you are not stained by the ten thousand objects and are always free. The Vimalakīrti Sutra says, "Outwardly able to distinguish well all the marks of dharmas, inwardly unmoving in the ultimate meaning."

Good friends, in this dharma gate, seated meditation does not fix on the mind, does not fix on purity, and does not speak of not moving. If one speaks of contemplating the mind, the mind is from the start false; since the false is like an illusion, there is nothing to contemplate. If one speaks of contemplating purity, people's nature is originally pure; only because of deluded thoughts is suchness covered over. Apart from deluded thoughts, the original nature is pure. If you do not see that your

3 The manuscript is corrupt here; the reading follows the usual emendation, that cutting off thought amounts to death and rebirth elsewhere.

own nature is originally pure and raise the mind to contemplate purity, you only produce a false purity. The false has no location, so know that the contemplating itself is false. Purity has no shape or form, yet you set up a form of purity and call it effort. Whoever holds this view obstructs their own original nature and is instead bound by purity. As for not moving: not to see the faults of others—that is the nature not moving. Deluded people keep their own bodies unmoving, but as soon as they open their mouths they talk about others' rights and wrongs, going against the way. Contemplating the mind, contemplating purity, is instead a cause of obstruction to the way.

### WHAT SEATED MEDITATION IS

*Seated meditation means thought not arising toward objects and seeing the original nature unconfused.*

339a Now I tell you: in this dharma gate, what is called seated meditation? In this dharma gate nothing is obstructed. Outwardly, for thoughts not to arise toward any object is "sitting"; to see the original nature without confusion is "meditation."

What is called meditation—dhyāna and samādhi? To be outwardly apart from forms is dhyāna; to be inwardly unconfused is samādhi. Even if there are forms outside, if the nature within is unconfused, it is originally pure and concentrated of itself. Only through contact with objects is there confusion: contact brings confusion. To be apart from forms and unconfused is samādhi. Outwardly apart from forms is dhyāna; unconfused inside and out is samādhi. Outward dhyāna and inward samādhi: that is why it is called dhyāna and samādhi. The Vimalakīrti Sutra says, "At once, suddenly, one regains the original mind." The Bodhisattva Precepts says, "The original source is one's own nature, pure."[4]

Good friends, see for yourselves that your own nature is pure of itself. Cultivate it yourselves, create it yourselves: the dharma

body of your own nature. Walk the buddha's path yourselves; by your own effort, attain the buddha way yourselves.

### THE THREE BODIES OF THE BUDDHA IN ONESELF

*The assembly takes refuge in the three bodies of buddha within their own physical bodies.*

Good friends, all of you must receive the formless precepts with your own bodies. Repeat these words after me, all together, and I will let you see the three bodies of buddha in yourselves: "In my own physical body I take refuge in the pure dharma body of buddha. In my own physical body I take refuge in the ten billion transformation bodies of buddha. In my own physical body I take refuge in the perfect reward body of buddha that is to come." (The above was chanted three times.)[5]

The physical body is a house; one cannot speak of taking refuge in it. The three bodies just named are in your own dharma-nature. Everyone in the world has them, but because they are deluded they do not see them. They seek three Tathāgatas outside and do not see the three buddhas of their nature within their own physical bodies. Good friends, listen. I will explain it so that you see that within your own physical bodies your own dharma-nature has the three bodies of buddha. These three buddha bodies arise from your nature.

What is the pure dharma body of buddha? Good friends, people's nature is originally pure in itself, and the ten thousand dharmas are in one's own nature. Think of every evil thing, and one practices evil; think of every good thing, and one cultivates good practice. Know that in this way all dharmas are in one's own nature. One's own nature is always pure. The sun and moon are always bright; only because clouds cover them is it bright

4 The text splits the compound 禪定 into its two halves, dhyāna (meditative absorption) and samādhi (concentration). The Bodhisattva Precepts is the Brahmā's Net Sutra.

5 The three bodies (trikāya) are the dharmakāya, the nirmāṇakāya and the saṃbhogakāya: buddhahood as ultimate reality, as the forms that appear in the world, and as the fruit of practice.

above and dark below, so that sun, moon and stars cannot be clearly seen. Suddenly a gentle wind blows, scattering the clouds and mist and rolling them all away, and the myriad forms in all their array appear at once. People's nature is pure like a clear sky: wisdom is like the sun, insight like the moon. Insight and wisdom are always bright, but when one is attached to outer objects, the floating clouds of deluded thought cover one's own nature and it cannot shine. So one meets a good teacher who opens up the true dharma and blows away delusion, and inside and outside are bright and clear, and in one's own nature the ten thousand dharmas all appear. All dharmas are in one's own nature: this is called the pure dharma body. Taking refuge oneself means removing unwholesome practice; this is called taking refuge.

339b What are the ten billion transformation bodies of buddha? When one does not think, one's nature is empty and still; when one thinks, this is self-transformation. Think of evil things, and one is transformed into hell; think of good things, and one is transformed into heaven. Malice is transformed into animals; compassion is transformed into bodhisattvas. Wisdom is transformed into the higher realms; foolishness is transformed into the lower regions. The transformations of one's own nature are very many, but deluded people do not know it themselves. With a single good thought, wisdom is born. A single lamp can dispel the darkness of a thousand years; a single wisdom can destroy the folly of ten thousand years. Do not think of what is past; always think of what is to come. When the next thought is always good, this is called the reward body. A single evil thought destroys a thousand years of good mind; a single good thought destroys a thousand years of evil. From beginningless time on, the next thought being good is called the reward body. Thinking that comes from the dharma body is the transformation body; thought after thought being good is the reward body. Awakening oneself and cultivating oneself is called taking refuge. Skin and flesh are the physical body, and the physical body is a house; it

is not a place of refuge. Only awaken to the three bodies, and you will know the great meaning.

### THE FOUR GREAT VOWS

*Huineng leads the four great vows and explains that beings must free themselves.*

Now that you have taken refuge yourselves in the three bodies of buddha, I will make the four great vows with you, good friends. Good friends, repeat after me, all together: "Beings are numberless; I vow to free them. Afflictions are endless; I vow to cut them off. The gates of the dharma are boundless; I vow to learn them. The supreme buddha way: I vow to attain it." (Chanted three times.)

Good friends, "Beings are numberless; I vow to free them"—it is not Huineng who frees them. Good friends, the beings within the mind each free themselves, in their own bodies, by their own nature. What is freeing oneself by one's own nature? Within one's own physical body are wrong views, afflictions, foolishness and delusion, and one has in oneself the nature of original awakening, which frees them with right views. Once one has awakened to right views, the wisdom of prajñā removes foolishness and delusion, and beings each free themselves. Wrong views are freed by right views; when delusion comes, awakening frees it; when foolishness comes, wisdom frees it; when evil comes, good frees it; when afflictions come, bodhi frees them. Freeing in this way is true freeing. "Afflictions are endless; I vow to cut them off": in your own mind, remove what is false. "The gates of the dharma are boundless; I vow to learn them": learn the supreme right dharma. "The supreme buddha way: I vow to attain it": always practice with a humble mind and revere everyone; keep far from deluded attachment, and awareness is born; prajñā removes delusion, and then, awakening yourself, you attain the buddha way. This is the power of practicing the vows.

### FORMLESS REPENTANCE

*Huineng leads a repentance of past wrongs and explains confessing and repenting.*

Now that the four great vows have been made, I will give you, good friends, formless repentance for the hindrances of sin of the three times. The Master said: Good friends, "In the previous thought, the next thought and the present thought, thought after thought, may I not be stained by foolishness and delusion. If the evil deeds of the past are removed from my own nature at once, this is repentance. In the previous thought, the next thought and the present thought, thought after thought, may I not be stained by folly. Removing the deceitful mind of the past and cutting it off forever is called repentance of one's own nature. In the previous thought, the next thought, and thought after thought, may I not be stained by envy. Removing the envious, defiled mind of the past—if it is removed from my own nature, this is repentance." (The above was chanted three times.)

339c Good friends, what is called confessing and repenting? Confessing means never doing it again as long as one lives. Repenting means knowing one's former wrongs and evil karma and never letting this leave the mind. Saying it aloud before the buddhas is of no benefit. In this dharma gate of mine, cutting it off forever and never doing it again is called confessing and repenting.

### THE THREEFOLD REFUGE

*Huineng gives the threefold refuge in awakening, rightness and purity within one's own mind.*

Now that you have confessed and repented, I will give you, good friends, the formless precepts of the threefold refuge. The Master said: Good friends, "I take refuge in awakening, the most honored of two-footed beings. I take refuge in rightness, the most honored of those free from desire. I take refuge in purity, the most honored in the assembly. From now on I call the

buddha my teacher, and will never again take refuge in wrong and deluded non-Buddhist paths. May the three jewels of my own nature, in their compassion, bear witness." Good friends—[6]

I, Huineng, urge you, good friends, to take refuge in the three jewels. Buddha is awakening; dharma is rightness; sangha is purity. When your own mind takes refuge in awakening, wrong delusions do not arise; with few desires and contentment, free of wealth and free of lust—this is called the most honored of two-footed beings. When your own mind takes refuge in rightness, thought after thought is without wrong views, and so there is no clinging attachment; because there is no clinging attachment, this is called the most honored of those free from desire. When your own mind takes refuge in purity, then although all the dust and toil of affliction and all deluded thoughts are in your own nature, your own nature is not stained by them or attached to them—this is called the most honored in the assembly.

Ordinary people, not understanding this, receive the precepts of the threefold refuge day after day. If they say they take refuge in the buddha, where is the buddha? If they do not see the buddha, there is nothing to take refuge in; and if there is nothing to take refuge in, what they say is false. Good friends, each of you examine this for yourselves and do not apply your minds wrongly. The sutras say only "take refuge in the buddha within yourself"; they do not say take refuge in some other buddha. If you do not take refuge in your own nature, there is nowhere to turn.

### THE GREAT PERFECTION OF WISDOM

*Huineng explains mahā, prajñā and pāramitā, and praises the great perfection of wisdom.*

Now that you have taken refuge yourselves in the three jewels, each of you with your whole heart, I will speak to you, good

6 The manuscript is corrupt at the end of the vow; it is read here, as most editors read it, as asking the three jewels of one's own nature to bear witness.

friends, about the dharma of mahāprajñāpāramitā, the great perfection of wisdom. Good friends, though you recite it, you do not understand it. Huineng will explain it for you; each of you listen. Mahāprajñāpāramitā is a Sanskrit word from the western countries; in the language of Tang it means "great wisdom reaching the other shore." This dharma must be practiced; it is not in the mouth. If you recite it with the mouth and do not practice it, it is like a phantom, like a conjured illusion. For one who practices it, the dharma body is equal to the buddha's.

What is mahā? Mahā means "great." The capacity of the mind is vast, like empty space. Do not sit with an emptied mind, or you will fall into a blank, indifferent emptiness. Empty space can contain the sun, moon and stars, the great earth, mountains and rivers, and all grasses and trees; bad people and good people, bad dharmas and good dharmas, heaven and hell are all within emptiness. The emptiness of people's nature is just the same. Nature contains the ten thousand dharmas: this is "great." The ten thousand dharmas are all one's own nature. Seeing all people and non-humans, evil and good, bad dharmas and good dharmas, one rejects none of them and is not stained by or attached to them, like empty space: this is called "great." This is the practice of mahā. Deluded people recite it with the mouth; the wise practice it with the mind. There are also deluded people who empty the mind and do not think, and call this "great"; this too is wrong. The capacity of the mind is great, but not to practice is small. Do not talk emptily with the mouth. Whoever does not cultivate this practice is not my disciple.

340a What is prajñā? Prajñā is wisdom. At all times, thought after thought, never being foolish, always practicing wisdom—this is called prajñā. One foolish thought, and prajñā is cut off; one wise thought, and prajñā is born. People are always foolish in their minds, yet say, "I am cultivating prajñā." Prajñā has no form or appearance; it is simply the nature of wisdom.

What is pāramitā? This is a Sanskrit sound of the western countries; it means "the other shore reached." Understand its meaning, and you leave birth and death behind. When one is

attached to objects, birth and death arise, like water with waves: this is this shore. Apart from objects there is no birth and death, like water always flowing on: therefore it is called reaching the other shore, and therefore it is called pāramitā. Deluded people recite it with the mouth; the wise practice it with the mind. In the very moment of reciting there is falseness, and where there is falseness there is no true being. If you practice it thought after thought, this is called true being. Those who awaken to this dharma awaken to the dharma of prajñā and cultivate the practice of prajñā. Not to cultivate it is to be an ordinary person; with a single thought of practice, your dharma body is equal to buddha.

Good friends, afflictions are themselves bodhi. When the previous thought is deluded, one is an ordinary person; when the next thought is awakened, one is a buddha.

Good friends, the great perfection of wisdom is the most honored, the highest, the first. It does not abide, does not go, does not come; all the buddhas of the three times come forth from it. Taking great wisdom to the other shore, it smashes the afflictions and the dust and toil of the five aggregates. It is the most honored, the highest, the first—the praise of the highest. Practice the dharma of the highest vehicle, and you will surely become a buddha. No going, no abiding, no coming and going: here meditation and wisdom are equal, and one is not stained by any dharma. All the buddhas of the three times come forth from it, transforming the three poisons into precepts, meditation and wisdom.[7]

Good friends, this dharma gate of mine gives rise to eighty-four thousand wisdoms. Why? Because the world has eighty-four thousand kinds of dust and toil. If there were no dust and toil, prajñā would always be present, never apart from one's own nature. Those who awaken to this dharma are without thought, without memory, without attachment. Do not give rise to falsehood: this is the functioning of the nature of suchness itself. Observing and illuminating with wisdom, neither grasp-

7 The three poisons are greed, anger and delusion.

ing nor rejecting any dharma—this is seeing one's nature and attaining the buddha way.

Good friends, if you wish to enter the profoundest dharma realm and enter the samādhi of prajñā, simply cultivate the practice of the perfection of wisdom. Just keep the one scroll of the Diamond Perfection of Wisdom Sutra, and you will see your nature and enter the samādhi of prajñā. Know that the merit of such a person is immeasurable; the sutra praises it clearly, and it cannot all be told. This is the dharma of the highest vehicle, taught for people of great wisdom and superior capacity. If people of small capacity and small wisdom hear this dharma, no faith arises in their minds. Why? It is like a great dragon: if it sends down a great rain and the rain falls on Jambudvīpa, everything floats away like leaves of grass; if it sends down a great rain and the rain falls on the great ocean, the ocean neither increases nor decreases. When people of the Great Vehicle hear the Diamond Sutra taught, their minds open and they awaken and understand. So know that one's original nature has the wisdom of prajñā in itself; one uses one's own wisdom to observe and illuminate, and does not depend on written words.[8]

## GREAT AND SMALL CAPACITIES

*Prajñā is in everyone, but people of small capacity do not believe the sudden teaching.*

340b Take this rainwater: it does not come from nowhere. It is the dragon king who, with its own body, draws this water up from the rivers and seas, so that all living beings, all grasses and trees, all things sentient and insentient, receive its moisture. Then the many streams of water flow back into the great ocean, and the ocean takes in all the waters and they merge into one body. The wisdom of prajñā in the original nature of living beings is just the same.

When people of small capacity hear this sudden teaching, they are like grasses and trees on the earth whose roots are nat-

urally small: drenched once by a great rain, they all fall over by themselves and cannot grow. People of small capacity are just like this. Yet they have the wisdom of prajñā, no different from people of great wisdom. Why then do they hear the dharma and not awaken? Because the obstruction of wrong views is heavy and the roots of affliction are deep—like great clouds covering the sun: if no wind blows, the sun cannot appear. The wisdom of prajñā is neither large nor small; all living beings have it in themselves. Because their minds are deluded, they cultivate outwardly and seek buddha, and have not awakened to their own nature; these are the people of small capacity. Hearing the sudden teaching, do not rely on outward cultivation; simply, in your own mind, let your own original nature always give rise to right views, and then living beings, with all their afflictions and dust and toil, are awakened at once—like the great ocean taking in the many streams, small waters and great waters merging into one body. This is seeing one's nature. Abiding neither inside nor outside, free to come and go, able to remove the grasping mind, penetrating everything without obstruction—whoever practices this with the mind is fundamentally no different from the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra.

All sutras and writings, the twelve divisions of scripture of the Small and Great Vehicles, were established because of people; it is because of the nature of wisdom that they could be established. If there were no people, the ten thousand dharmas would not exist in the first place. So know that the ten thousand dharmas arise from people, and all sutras and writings exist because people teach them. Among people there are the foolish and the wise: the foolish are lesser people, the wise are great people. The deluded ask the wise, and the wise teach the dharma to the foolish, so that the foolish awaken and understand and their minds open deeply. If deluded people awaken and their minds open, they are no different from people of great wisdom. So know: unawakened, a buddha is a living being;

8 Jambudvīpa is the southern continent of Buddhist cosmology, the world inhabited by human beings.

awakened in a single thought, a living being is a buddha. So know that the ten thousand dharmas are all within one's own body and mind. Why not, from within your own mind, suddenly reveal the original nature of suchness? The Bodhisattva Precepts Sutra says: "Originally my own nature is pure." Know the mind and see the nature, and you attain the buddha way yourself: at once, all is suddenly open, and you regain the original mind.

### SEEING ONE'S OWN NATURE SUDDENLY

*One should awaken suddenly by oneself, and seek a teacher only if one cannot.*

340c Good friends, when I was with the Reverend Hongren, I heard him once, and at his words I had a great awakening and suddenly saw the original nature of suchness. That is why I am making this teaching spread to later generations, so that those who now study the way may suddenly awaken to bodhi, each contemplating their own mind and letting their own original nature suddenly awaken. Those who cannot awaken by themselves must seek a great spiritual friend to show them the way to see their nature. What is a great spiritual friend? One who understands the dharma of the highest vehicle and directly points out the right path—that is a great spiritual friend, that is a great cause and condition. What is called transforming and guiding is enabling people to see buddha. All good dharmas can arise because of a great spiritual friend. The buddhas of the three times and the twelve divisions of scripture are within people's nature, originally complete in themselves. Those who cannot awaken by their own nature need a good teacher to show them the way to see their nature. Those who awaken by themselves do not depend on a good teacher outside. If you cling to seeking a good teacher outside in the hope of liberation, that is impossible. Recognize the good teacher within your own mind, and you will be liberated. If your own mind is wrong and deluded, with false and inverted thoughts, then even though a

good teacher outside gives you instruction, you cannot be saved.[9]

If you cannot awaken by yourself, raise the observing illumination of prajñā, and in an instant all deluded thoughts vanish: this is your own true good teacher. Good friends, with one awakening you know buddha. Your own nature, the mind-ground: illuminate it with wisdom, and inside and outside are bright and clear, and you recognize your own original mind. To recognize the original mind is liberation. Once you are liberated, this is the samādhi of prajñā. To awaken to the samādhi of prajñā is no-thought.

What is no-thought? The dharma of no-thought is this: seeing all dharmas without being attached to any dharma; reaching every place without being attached to any place; always keeping one's own nature pure, letting the six thieves go out through the six gates, and amid the six dusts neither leaving them nor being stained by them, free to come and go. This is the samādhi of prajñā, free and liberated, and it is called the practice of no-thought. Do not think of nothing at all, making your thoughts cease; that is being bound by the dharma, and is called a one-sided view. Those who awaken to the dharma of no-thought penetrate all the ten thousand dharmas. Those who awaken to the dharma of no-thought see the realms of all the buddhas. Those who awaken to the sudden dharma of no-thought arrive at the stage of buddhahood.[10]

Good friends, if in later generations you obtain my dharma, you will always see my dharma body, never apart from you. Good friends, take this dharma gate of the sudden teaching, share the same view and the same practice, and vow to receive and keep it as if serving the buddha. Those who receive and keep it all their lives without falling back will enter the stage of the sages. But when it is handed on, it must be entrusted in

9 The last clause, missing in this manuscript, is supplied from another Dunhuang copy of the text.

10 The six thieves are the six sense-consciousnesses, the six gates the sense organs, and the six dusts their objects.

silence, as the dharma has been from of old. To those who make the great vow and do not turn back from bodhi, it must be entrusted. If people do not share the same view and understanding and have no resolve, do not carelessly proclaim it anywhere; it harms those people and in the end is of no benefit. If you meet people who do not understand and who slander this dharma gate, the seed of buddhahood will be cut off in them for a hundred kalpas, ten thousand kalpas, a thousand lives.

### THE VERSE FOR DESTROYING SIN

*Huineng recites a verse saying that cultivating merit does not destroy sin.*

341a The Master said: Good friends, listen as I recite a formless verse that will make the sins of the deluded among you vanish. It is also called the Verse for Destroying Sin. The verse goes:

The foolish cultivate merit, not the way, and say that cultivating merit is the way.
Giving and offerings bring boundless merit, but the three kinds of karma in the mind remain as before.
If you hope to destroy sin by cultivating merit, you may gain merit in later lives, but the sin remains.
If you know to remove the conditions of sin within your mind, each of you truly repents within your own nature.
If you awaken to the true repentance of the Great Vehicle, remove the wrong, practice the right, and you are without sin.
Students of the way who can observe themselves are of one kind with the awakened.
The Master had this sudden teaching handed on; may all who would learn it be one body.
If you wish in time to come to find your original body, wash the evil conditions of the three poisons from your mind.
Strive to cultivate the way, do not drift, or suddenly your one life is spent in vain and over.
If you meet the dharma of the Great Vehicle's sudden teaching, join your palms in reverence and seek it with all your heart.[11]

### EMPEROR WU'S MERIT

*Prefect Wei asks why Emperor Wu's temple-building earned no merit, and Huineng explains.*

When the Master had finished preaching the dharma, Prefect Wei, the officials, the monks, and everyone there, ordained and lay, praised him without end: they had never heard anything like it before. The prefect bowed and said, "Reverend, your preaching of the dharma is truly beyond thought. I, your disciple, now have a few small doubts I would like to ask you about. I hope that, in your great kindness and great compassion, you will explain them to me." The Master said, "If you have doubts,

11 The three kinds of karma are those of body, speech and mind.

ask. Why ask twice?" The prefect asked, "Is the dharma you preach not the teaching of the patriarch Bodhidharma, the first patriarch from the western countries?" The Master said, "It is." "I have heard it said that when the great master Bodhidharma was teaching Emperor Wu of Liang, the emperor asked him, 'All my life I have built temples, given alms and made offerings. Is there merit in this?' Bodhidharma answered, 'No merit at all.' The emperor was displeased and sent Bodhidharma out of his territory. I do not understand these words. Please explain them, Reverend." The Sixth Patriarch said, "There truly is no merit. Do not doubt the words of the great master Bodhidharma, Prefect. Emperor Wu was attached to a false path and did not know the true dharma."[12]

The prefect asked, "Why is there no merit?" The reverend said, "Building temples, giving alms and making offerings is only cultivating blessings. Blessings cannot be taken for merit and virtue. Merit and virtue are in the dharma body, not in the field of blessings. Merit and virtue lie in your own dharma-nature. Evenness and straightforwardness are virtue: within, buddha-nature; without, the practice of respect. If you look down on everyone and do not cut off the sense of self, you yourself have no merit and virtue. If your own nature is false and unreal, the dharma body has no merit and virtue. Thought after thought practicing virtue, with an impartial, straightforward mind—then your virtue is not slight. Always practice respect. Cultivating your own body is merit; cultivating your own mind is virtue. Merit and virtue are made by your own mind. Blessings are different from merit and virtue. Emperor Wu did not know the true principle; the fault was not the great patriarch's."[13]

12 Bodhidharma, the Indian monk traditionally said to have brought Chan to China, is counted as its first patriarch; Emperor Wu of Liang (r. AD 502–549) was a famous patron of Buddhism.

13 The Chinese word for merit, gongde, combines gong ("merit, achievement") and de ("virtue"); the Master explains the two halves separately.

### IS THE PURE LAND IN THE WEST?

*Huineng teaches that the Pure Land is found by purifying one's own mind.*

341b The prefect bowed and asked again, "I see monks and lay people always chanting the name of Amitābha Buddha, wishing to be reborn in the Western Land. Please tell me, Reverend: can they be reborn there? I hope you will dispel my doubt." The Master said, "Listen, Prefect, and I, Huineng, will explain it to you. When the World-Honored One was in Śrāvastī, he preached the Western Land to lead people on. The words of the sutra are clear: it is not far from here. It was only for those of lower capacity that he spoke of it as far; speaking of it as near was for those of higher wisdom. People are of two kinds; the dharma is not of two kinds. Delusion and awakening differ; seeing is slow or quick. The deluded chant the Buddha's name to be reborn there; the awakened purify their own minds. That is why the Buddha said, 'As the mind is pure, so the buddha-land is pure.'[14]

"Prefect, a person of the East who simply purifies the mind is without fault; a person of the West whose mind is impure has transgressions. The deluded wish to be born in the East or in the West, but wherever one is, it is all the same. If only the mind has no impurity, the Western Land is not far from here. If the mind gives rise to impure thoughts, then even chanting the Buddha's name for rebirth, it is hard to get there. Get rid of evil, and you have traveled the hundred thousand; be without the eight wrong ways, and you have passed the eight thousand. Just practice the straightforward mind, and you arrive in a snap of the fingers. Prefect, just practice the ten good deeds—why should you need to wish for rebirth? If you do not cut off the mind of the ten evils, what buddha will come to welcome you? If you awaken to the sudden dharma of no-birth, you see the Western Land in a

**14** Amitābha is the buddha of the Western Land, or Pure Land, where those who call on his name hope to be reborn; Śrāvastī was a city in northern India where the Buddha often taught.

single instant. If you do not awaken to the sudden teaching of the Great Vehicle, the road to rebirth by chanting the Buddha's name is long—how will you ever get there?"[15]

The Sixth Patriarch said, "I, Huineng, will move the Western Land here for you, Prefect, in an instant, so that you see it right before your eyes. Do you wish to see it?" The prefect bowed: "If it can be seen here, why would one need to be reborn there? I hope that, in your compassion, you will make the Western Land appear, Reverend. That would be wonderful." The Master said, "There—the Western Land is seen all at once. If you have no doubts, you may disperse." The assembly was dumbfounded and did not know what he meant.[16]

The Master said, "Everyone, everyone—listen attentively. For people of the world, their own physical body is a city; the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body are its gates. Outside there are five gates; inside there is the gate of thought. The mind is the ground; one's nature is the king. While the nature is present, the king is present; when the nature departs, there is no king. While the nature is present, body and mind remain; when the nature departs, body and mind decay. A buddha is made in one's own nature—do not seek it outside the body. When one's own nature is deluded, a buddha is a living being; when one's own nature is awakened, a living being is a buddha. Compassion is Avalokiteśvara; joy and equanimity are called Mahāsthāmaprāpta; the power to purify is Śākyamuni; evenness and straightforwardness are Maitreya. Self and other are Mount Sumeru; the false mind is the great ocean; the afflictions are the waves; the poisonous mind is the evil dragons; the toils of the world are the fish and turtles; falsehood is the spirits and ghosts; the three poisons are hell; ignorance is the realm of animals; the ten good deeds are heaven. Without self and other, Mount Sumeru topples of itself; remove the false mind, and the ocean's

15 The Western Land was said to lie 108,000 li away; the Master links the hundred thousand to the ten evils and the eight thousand to the eight wrong ways (the opposite of the eightfold path).

16 The manuscript is corrupt here; the Master's words are usually read as an abrupt dismissal, which he then explains.

waters dry up; without afflictions, the waves subside; get rid of poison and harm, and the fish and dragons vanish.[17]

341c "On the ground of your own mind, the awakened nature, the Tathāgata, sends forth the light of great wisdom, shining so that the six gates are clean and pure, shining through the heavens of the six desires. Shining downward, when the three poisons are removed, the hells vanish all at once. Inside and outside are bright and clear, no different from the Western Land. If you do not practice this way, how will you get there?" Those seated below heard this, and the sound of their praise reached the heavens; even the deluded saw it clearly. The prefect bowed and praised him: "Excellent, excellent! May all beings in the dharma realm who hear this awaken and understand at once."

### THE FORMLESS VERSE FOR LAY PEOPLE

*Huineng says practice can be done at home and gives a verse for lay people.*

The Master said, "Good friends, if you wish to practice, you can do it at home as well; it does not depend on being in a temple. Being in a temple and not practicing is like a person of the West with an evil mind. Being at home and practicing is like a person of the East who practices good. Just wish to cultivate purity yourself, at home, and that is the Western Land."

The prefect asked, "Reverend, how should one practice at home? Please instruct us." The Master said, "Good friends, I, Huineng, will make a formless verse for you, ordained and lay. All of you, recite it and remember it. If you practice according to it, you will always be with me, no different from being in one place." The verse says:

17 Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta are the two bodhisattvas who attend Amitābha; Śākyamuni is the historical Buddha and Maitreya the buddha to come. Mount Sumeru is the great mountain at the center of the world in Buddhist cosmology.

Mastery of preaching and mastery of mind are like the sun in empty space;
only transmitting the dharma of the sudden teaching, they come into the world to destroy false doctrines.
The teaching has no sudden or gradual; delusion and awakening are slow or quick.
If you study the dharma of the sudden teaching, even fools cannot stay deluded.
Explaining it takes ten thousand ways, but in principle they return to one.
In the dark house of the afflictions, the sun of wisdom must always rise.
The false comes because of the afflictions; when the right comes, the afflictions are removed.
Use neither false nor right, and in purity you reach nirvāṇa without remainder.
Bodhi is originally clean and pure; to stir the mind is falsehood.
The pure nature is within the falsehood; only be right, and remove the three obstacles.
If you practice the way in the world, nothing at all hinders you.
Always see your own faults, and you will be in accord with the way.
Every kind of being has its own way; if you leave the way to seek the way elsewhere,
you seek the way and do not see the way, and in the end you only grieve.

342a If you are eager to seek the way, acting rightly is the way.
If you yourself have no right mind, you walk in the dark and do not see the way.
One who truly practices the way does not look at the foolishness of the world.
If you see the wrongs of the world, the wrong is yours, and you are the one astray.
If others are wrong, the fault is mine; if I am wrong, the fault is my own.
Just rid yourself of the mind that finds wrong, and smash the afflictions to pieces.
If you wish to transform fools, you must have skillful means.
Do not let them have doubts, and bodhi appears.
The dharma is originally in the world; in the world, you go beyond the world.
Do not leave the world to seek outside it for what is beyond the world.
False views are in the world; right views go beyond the world.
Knock away both false and right: this alone is the sudden teaching.
It is also called the Great Vehicle. Deluded, you pass through countless kalpas;
awakened, it takes an instant.

The Master said, "Good friends, all of you, recite and remember this verse and practice according to it. Though you are a thousand miles from me, you will always be at my side. If you do not practice according to it, though face to face with me, you are a thousand miles away. Each of you, practice for yourselves; the dharma does not wait. Now, everyone, disperse. I am going back to Mount Caoxi. If any of you have great doubts, come to that mountain, and I will dispel your doubts for you, so that together we see buddha-nature."

All those present—officials, ordained and lay—bowed to the reverend, and none failed to exclaim: "Excellent! A great

awakening, something we have never heard before! Lingnan is blessed: a living buddha is here. Who could have known?" Then they all dispersed.

# Disciples and Last Days

*Sudden and gradual; the encounters with Zhicheng, Fada, Zhichang and Shenhui; the thirty-six pairs; the verses of the patriarchs; Huineng's death and the transmission of the sutra.*

### THE PLATFORM SUTRA AS THE TOKEN OF TRANSMISSION

*Huineng teaches at Caoxi for forty years; the Platform Sutra itself becomes proof of succession.*

The Master went to Mount Caoxi and taught in the two prefectures of Shaozhou and Guangzhou for more than forty years. As for his disciples, monks and lay people together numbered three to five thousand—too many to tell. As for the essence of his teaching, he handed down the Platform Sutra and made it the token of trust. Anyone who has not received the Platform Sutra has not received the teaching. The place, the year, month and day, and the names must be recorded, and it is entrusted from one to the next. Anyone without the Platform Sutra as proof of succession is not a disciple of the Southern school. Those who have not received the proof of succession, though they preach the dharma of the sudden teaching, do not know its root and in the end cannot avoid disputes. Those who have received the dharma should only urge others to practice. Disputing comes from a mind set on winning and losing; it runs counter to the way.[1]

1 This passage reflects a time when copies of the Platform Sutra themselves served as certificates of transmission within the lineage.

### SOUTH AND NORTH, SUDDEN AND GRADUAL

*The text explains the names Southern and Northern, sudden and gradual.*

People everywhere speak of "Huineng of the South and Shenxiu of the North," without knowing the real reason. Chan Master Shenxiu lived and practiced at Yuquan Temple in Dangyang County, in the southern prefecture of Jing; the great master Huineng lived at Mount Caoxi, thirty-five li east of the city of Shaozhou. The dharma is one school; it is people who are of the north and the south. That is how the names "Southern" and "Northern" came about. Why sudden and gradual? The dharma is one, but seeing is slow or quick. Slow seeing is gradual; quick seeing is sudden. The dharma has no sudden or gradual; people are sharp or dull. That is why it is called sudden and gradual.[2]

### ZHICHENG, THE ENVOY FROM SHENXIU

*Shenxiu sends Zhicheng to spy on Huineng; Zhicheng awakens and stays.*

342b Master Shenxiu often heard people say that Huineng's dharma pointed quickly and directly to the path. So Master Shenxiu called his disciple, the monk Zhicheng, and said, "You are clever and very intelligent. Go to Mount Caoxi for me. When you reach Huineng's place, bow to him and just listen. Do not say that I sent you. Remember the meaning of what you hear, then come back and tell me, so that I can see whose understanding is slower and whose quicker, Huineng's or mine. Above all, come back quickly; do not make me displeased."[3]

Zhicheng gladly accepted the mission, and within half a month he reached Mount Caoxi. He saw the reverend Huineng, bowed, and listened, without saying where he had come from.

2 A li is about a third of a mile. Yuquan Temple lay in present-day Hubei, Caoxi in present-day Guangdong.

3 Zhicheng appears here as a disciple of Shenxiu who goes over to Huineng; little else is known of him.

Hearing the dharma, Zhicheng awakened at once at the words and was in accord with the original mind. He stood up, bowed, and said, "Reverend, I have come from Yuquan Temple. With Master Shenxiu I could not reach accord and awakening; hearing you speak, I was at once in accord with the original mind. Reverend, in your compassion, please instruct me." The great master Huineng said, "If you have come from there, you must be a spy." Zhicheng said, "Before I spoke, I was; now that I have spoken, I am not." The Sixth Patriarch said, "'The afflictions are bodhi' is just like this."

The Master said to Zhicheng, "I hear that your Chan master teaches people only by transmitting precepts, meditation and wisdom. How does your reverend teach people precepts, meditation and wisdom? Tell me." Zhicheng said, "The reverend Shenxiu says of precepts, meditation and wisdom: not doing any evil is called the precepts; practicing every good is called wisdom; purifying one's own intention is called meditation. This is what he calls precepts, meditation and wisdom. That is how he explains it. I do not know what your view is, Reverend." The reverend Huineng answered, "That explanation is beyond thought, but my view is different." Zhicheng asked, "How is it different?" Huineng answered, "Seeing is slow or quick." Zhicheng asked the reverend to explain his view of precepts, meditation and wisdom. The Master said, "Then listen to what I say and see where my view lies. The mind-ground without wrong is the precepts of one's own nature. The mind-ground without disturbance is the meditation of one's own nature. The mind-ground without ignorance is the wisdom of one's own nature."[4]

The great master Huineng said, "Your precepts, meditation and wisdom are for encouraging people of small capacity; my precepts, meditation and wisdom are for encouraging people of higher wisdom. Once you awaken to your own nature, you do not set up precepts, meditation and wisdom either." Zhicheng said, "Please, Master, explain what you mean by not setting

4 Shenxiu's definitions follow a famous verse attributed to the buddhas of the past: "Do no evil, practice every good, purify your own mind."

them up." The Master said, "One's own nature is without wrong, without disturbance, without ignorance. Thought after thought, wisdom shines and observes, always free of the forms of dharmas. What is there to set up? One's own nature is cultivated suddenly. Setting things up implies stages; that is why nothing is set up." Zhicheng bowed and did not leave Mount Caoxi; he became a disciple and never left the Master's side.

### FADA AND THE LOTUS SUTRA

*Huineng explains the one buddha vehicle of the Lotus Sutra to the monk Fada.*

342c There was also a monk named Fada, who had been reciting the Lotus Sutra constantly for seven years, but his mind was deluded and he did not know where the true dharma lay. He had doubts about the sutra and, since the Master's wisdom was vast, hoped that he would clear them away. The Master said, "Fada, the dharma itself penetrates everything; it is your mind that does not penetrate. There is no doubt in the sutra; the doubt is in your mind. Your own mind is false, and yet you seek the true dharma. When my mind is rightly settled, that itself is upholding the sutra. All my life I have never known how to read. Bring the Lotus Sutra and read it to me once; when I hear it, I will understand." Fada brought the sutra and read it once to the Master. When the Sixth Patriarch had heard it, he understood the Buddha's intent and explained the Lotus Sutra to Fada.[5]

The Sixth Patriarch said, "Fada, the Lotus Sutra does not say much. Its seven scrolls are all parables and stories of causes and conditions. The Tathāgata preached the three vehicles at length only because people's capacities are dull. The sutra's words are clear: there is no other vehicle, only the one buddha vehicle." The Master said, "Fada, listen to the one buddha vehicle and do not seek two buddha vehicles, which would delude your nature.

5 Fada's name means "penetrating the dharma"; the Master puns on da, "to penetrate." The Lotus Sutra is one of the most revered scriptures of the Great Vehicle (Mahāyāna).

Where in the sutra is the one buddha vehicle? I will tell you. The sutra says, 'The buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, appear in the world for one great cause alone.' (These sixteen characters are the true sutra text.) How is this dharma to be understood? How is this dharma to be practiced?[6]

"Listen to what I say. When the human mind does not think, its original source is empty and still. To leave false views behind —that is the one great cause. Not deluded inside or outside, you are free of the two extremes. Deluded outwardly, you cling to forms; deluded inwardly, you cling to emptiness. Within form, be free of form; within emptiness, be free of emptiness—that is not being deluded. Awaken to this dharma, and in a single thought the mind opens: that is 'appearing in the world.' What does the mind open? It opens the knowledge and insight of a buddha. 'Buddha' means awakening. This is divided into four gates: opening the knowledge and insight of awakening, showing the knowledge and insight of awakening, awakening to the knowledge and insight of awakening, entering the knowledge and insight of awakening. Opening, showing, awakening and entering all enter from one place: the knowledge and insight of awakening. See your own original nature, and you come forth into the world."[7]

The Master said, "Fada, I always wish that on the mind-ground of all people of the world the knowledge and insight of a buddha would always open of itself, and not the knowledge and insight of a living being. When people's minds are false, deluded by ignorance and doing evil, they open the knowledge and insight of a living being. When people's minds are right, giving rise to wisdom that shines and observes, they open the knowledge and insight of a buddha. Do not open the knowledge and insight of a living being. Open the knowledge and insight of a buddha, and that is coming forth into the world."

6 The Lotus Sutra teaches that the three vehicles were provisional devices and that there is in truth only the one buddha vehicle.

7 The four gates echo the Lotus Sutra's account of why buddhas appear: to open, show, awaken beings to, and lead them into a buddha's knowledge and insight.

The Master said, "Fada, this is the dharma of the one vehicle of the Lotus Sutra. Further on, it is divided into three, for the sake of deluded people. You should simply rely on the one buddha vehicle." The Master said, "Fada, when the mind practices, it turns the Lotus; when it does not practice, the Lotus turns it. When the mind is right, it turns the Lotus; when the mind is false, the Lotus turns it. Open the knowledge and insight of a buddha, and you turn the Lotus; open the knowledge and insight of a living being, and you are turned by the Lotus."[8]

343a The Master said, "Strive to practice according to the dharma—that is turning the sutra." As soon as Fada heard this, he had a great awakening at the words. Weeping, tears streaming down, he said, "Reverend, truly I have never turned the Lotus; for seven years the Lotus has turned me. From now on I will turn the Lotus, practicing the buddha's practice thought after thought." The Master said, "To practice as a buddha is to be a buddha." Of those who heard this at the time, there was no one who did not awaken.

### ZHICHANG AND THE FOUR VEHICLES

*Huineng tells Zhichang that the four vehicles are only differences in people's minds.*

At that time there was a monk named Zhichang who came to Mount Caoxi, bowed to the reverend, and asked about the meaning of the dharma of the four vehicles. Zhichang asked the reverend, "The Buddha taught three vehicles, and he also spoke of the supreme vehicle. I do not understand; I hope you will instruct me." The great master Huineng said, "Look into your own mind; do not cling to the forms of outer dharmas. Originally there are no four vehicles of the dharma. People's minds are of four grades of themselves, so the dharma has four vehicles. Seeing, hearing, reading and reciting is the small vehicle. Awakening to the dharma and understanding its meaning is the middle

8 To "turn" a sutra means to recite it; the Master plays on turning the sutra and being turned by it.

vehicle. Practicing according to the dharma is the great vehicle. Mastering all the ten thousand dharmas, complete in all the ten thousand practices, departing from nothing, yet free of the forms of dharmas, attaining nothing—this is the supreme vehicle. 'Vehicle' means practice; it is not a matter for argument. You must practice for yourself; do not ask me."[9]

### SHENHUI: DO YOU SEE OR NOT?

*Huineng strikes Shenhui and tells him to see his own nature instead of questioning others.*

There was also a monk named Shenhui, a man of Nanyang. He came to Mount Caoxi, bowed, and asked, "Reverend, when you are in seated meditation, do you see, or do you not see?" The Master got up and struck Shenhui three times. Then he asked him, "When I struck you, did it hurt or not?" Shenhui answered, "It both hurt and did not hurt." The Sixth Patriarch said, "I both see and do not see." Shenhui asked again, "Master, how is it that you both see and do not see?" The Master said, "I see: I always see my own faults. That is why I say I see. I do not see: I do not see the faults and wrongs of heaven, earth, or other people. That is why I both see and do not see. And you—how is it that it both hurt and did not hurt?"[10]

Shenhui answered, "If it did not hurt, I would be like an insentient tree or rock. If it hurt, I would be like an ordinary person, and resentment would arise." The Master said, "Shenhui, the seeing and not seeing you asked about are the two extremes; hurting and not hurting are arising and ceasing. You have not yet seen your own nature, and you dare to come here and toy with people!" Shenhui bowed and said nothing more. The Master said, "If your mind is deluded and does not see, ask a good teacher to show you the way. If your mind awakens, you

9 Zhichang is otherwise little known. The three vehicles are traditionally those of the disciples who hear the teaching, the solitary buddhas, and the bodhisattvas.
10 Shenhui (AD 684–758) later championed Huineng's Southern school against the Northern school; Nanyang is in present-day Henan.

see for yourself; then practice according to the dharma. You yourself are deluded and do not see your own mind, and yet you come asking whether Huineng sees or not. Whether I see, I know for myself; I cannot take on your delusion for you. If you see for yourself, can you take on my delusion for me? Why not practice for yourself instead of asking me whether I see?" Shenhui made a bow and became a disciple. From then on Shenhui never left Mount Caoxi and was always at the Master's side.

## THE THIRTY-SIX PAIRS OF OPPOSITES

*Huineng teaches ten disciples to preach with the thirty-six pairs of opposites.*

343b The Master then called the disciples Fahai, Zhicheng, Fada, Zhichang, Zhitong, Zhiche, Zhidao, Fazhen, Faru and Shenhui. The Master said, "You ten disciples, come forward. You are not like the others. After my extinction each of you will be the head of a region. I will teach you how to preach the dharma without losing the original teaching. First bring up the three categories of dharmas; then use the thirty-six pairs of opposites in their functioning. Coming out and going in, leave both extremes behind. In preaching any dharma, do not depart from the nature and its characteristics. If someone asks you about the dharma, make every reply a pair: always take the opposites, so that coming and going depend on each other. In the end both dharmas are wholly removed, and there is nowhere left to go.

"The three categories of dharmas are the aggregates, the elements and the sense-fields. 'Aggregates' means the five aggregates; 'elements,' the eighteen elements; 'sense-fields,' the twelve sense-fields. What are the five aggregates? The aggregates of form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness. What are the eighteen elements? The six sense-objects, the six gates and the six consciousnesses. What are the twelve sense-fields? The six sense-objects outside and the six gates within. What are the six sense-objects? Form, sound, smell, taste, touch and dharmas. What are the six gates? Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body

and mind. The dharma-nature gives rise to the six consciousnesses—eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness and mind-consciousness—and to the six gates and the six sense-objects. One's own nature contains the ten thousand dharmas; this is called the storehouse consciousness. When thinking starts, it turns into consciousness: it produces the six consciousnesses, which go out through the six gates to the six sense-objects. Three sixes make eighteen. When one's own nature is wrong, eighteen wrongs arise; when one's own nature is right, eighteen rights arise. Used for evil, it is a living being; used for good, it is a buddha. What does the function depend on? It depends on one's own nature.[11]

"Among the insentient objects of the outer world there are five pairs: heaven and earth, sun and moon, dark and light, yin and yang, water and fire. In words and the characteristics of dharmas there are twelve pairs: the conditioned and the unconditioned; with form and without form; with characteristics and without characteristics; with outflows and without outflows; form and emptiness; motion and stillness; clear and murky; ordinary and holy; monastic and lay; old and young; large and small; long and short; high and low. In the functions arising from one's own nature there are nineteen pairs: wrong and right; folly and wisdom; foolishness and knowing; distraction and meditation; precepts and wrongdoing; straight and crooked; real and unreal; steep and level; afflictions and bodhi; compassion and harm; joy and anger; giving and stinginess; advancing and retreating; arising and ceasing; permanent and impermanent; the dharma body and the physical body; the transformation body and the reward body; substance and function; nature and characteristics; sentient and insentient. Words and the characteristics of dharmas have twelve pairs; the outer objects, the insentient, have five pairs; the functions arising from one's own

11 The storehouse consciousness (Sanskrit ālaya-vijñāna) is the Yogācāra term for the base consciousness that holds the seeds of all experience.

nature have nineteen pairs. Altogether they make thirty-six pairs of dharmas.[12]

343c "These thirty-six pairs of dharmas, once understood and used, run through all the sutras; coming out and going in, you leave both extremes behind. How does one's own nature function in the thirty-six pairs? When you speak with people, outwardly, amid forms, be free of forms; inwardly, amid emptiness, be free of emptiness. If you cling to emptiness, you only increase ignorance; if you cling to forms, you only increase wrong views and slander the dharma. Some flatly say, 'Do not use words and letters.' But if they say not to use words and letters, then people should not even speak, for speech is itself words and letters. They speak of emptiness in one's own nature, but true speech is, in its own nature, not empty. The deluded confuse themselves, and it is through speech that this is removed. Darkness is not dark of itself; it is dark because of light. Darkness is not dark of itself: light changes into darkness, and through darkness light appears. Coming and going depend on each other. The thirty-six pairs are all like this."[13]

The Master said, "Ten disciples: when you transmit the dharma hereafter, hand down this one scroll of the Platform Sutra from one to another, and do not lose the original teaching. One who has not received the Platform Sutra does not hold my teaching. Now that you have it, pass it on from generation to generation. Whoever comes upon the Platform Sutra will be as if receiving it from me in person." When the ten monks had received the teaching, they wrote it down as the Platform Sutra, to be passed on from generation to generation. Whoever obtains it will surely see their nature.

12 The manuscript is corrupt here: the summary actually reads "the three bodies have three pairs," restored by editors from the count above. The lists as copied do not add up exactly to thirty-six.

13 The manuscript is corrupt in this passage; the translation follows the usual restorations (for example "dark because of light" for "dark because of the name").

## FAREWELL TO THE DISCIPLES

*Huineng announces his coming death; only Shenhui does not weep, and Huineng gives a verse.*

The Master entered extinction on the third day of the eighth month of the second year of Xiantian. On the eighth day of the seventh month the Master called the disciples together to take leave of them. In the first year of Xiantian the Master had built a stupa at Guoen Temple in Xinzhou; and now, in the seventh month of the second year of Xiantian, came the farewell. The Master said, "All of you, come forward. In the eighth month I intend to leave this world. If you have doubts, ask about them soon, so that I can dispel them for you. I must bring your delusion to an end and give you peace and happiness. After I am gone, there will be no one to teach you."[14]

When Fahai and the other monks heard this, they wept and wailed. Only Shenhui was unmoved and did not weep. The Sixth Patriarch said, "Shenhui, a young monk, has reached the point where good and not-good are the same, and is not moved by praise or blame. The rest of you have not. What way have you been practicing on this mountain all these years? Now that you weep, for whom are you weeping? Are you worried that I do not know where I am going? If I did not know where I was going, I would not be taking leave of you. You weep because you do not know where I am going; if you knew, you would not weep. The nature in itself has no arising and no ceasing, no going and no coming.

"Sit down, all of you. I will tell you a verse: the verse of the true and the false, motion and stillness. All of you recite it. If you see the meaning of this verse, you and I are the same. Practice by it and you will not lose the teaching." The monks bowed and asked the Master to leave them the verse, which they would receive and keep with reverent minds. The verse said:

14 The Xiantian era began in AD 712, so the death falls in AD 713. Xinzhou, in present-day Guangdong, was Huineng's home district.

Nothing anywhere is true; do not see things as true.
If you see things as true, all that seeing is untrue.
If you can have the true in yourself, apart from the false the mind is true.
If your own mind does not leave the false, there is nothing true—where could the true be?
The sentient know how to move; the insentient do not move.
If you practice not moving, you are like the insentient that do not move.
If you would see true unmoving, in moving there is the unmoving.
Unmoving that is mere unmoving is insentient, without the seed of buddhahood.
Able to distinguish characteristics well, one is unmoving in the first principle.
If you awaken and see in this way, this is the function of suchness.
I tell all who study the way: make every effort and take care.
At the gate of the Great Vehicle, do not cling to the knowledge of birth and death.
If those before you are in accord, discuss the Buddha's words together;
if they are truly not in accord, join your palms and urge them toward the good.
This teaching from the start has no disputes; to dispute is to lose the meaning of the way.
Clinging to delusion and disputing over the teaching, one's own nature enters birth and death.

## THE ROBE WILL NOT BE PASSED ON

*Huineng says the robe will not be handed on and recites the verses of the patriarchs.*

344a When the monks had heard this, they understood the Master's meaning; they no longer dared to dispute, and they practiced according to the dharma. All bowed together, knowing that the Master would not remain in the world.

The head monk Fahai came forward and said, "Master, after you are gone, to whom should the robe and the dharma be entrusted?" The Master said, "The dharma has already been entrusted; you need not ask. Some twenty years after my extinction, wrong teachings will run riot and confuse my teaching. Then someone will come forward who, without sparing their own life, will settle right and wrong in the Buddha's teaching and set up the teaching: that will be my true dharma. The robe should not be handed on. If you do not believe me, I will recite for you the verses of the five patriarchs before me on transmitting the robe and entrusting the dharma. Going by the meaning of the verse of the First Patriarch, Bodhidharma, the robe should not be handed on. Listen as I recite the verses for you." The verses said:[15]

The verse of the First Patriarch, the Reverend Bodhidharma:
I came originally to the land of Tang to pass on the teaching and rescue deluded beings.
One flower opens five petals, and the fruit forms of itself.[16]

15 Scholars generally read this as an allusion to Shenhui, who from AD 732 publicly campaigned for Huineng's line against the Northern school.

16 The five petals are traditionally taken to mean the five patriarchs after Bodhidharma, ending with Huineng.

The verse of the Second Patriarch, the Reverend Huike:
From the beginning, because there is ground, it is from the ground that seeds give rise to flowers.
If from the beginning there were no ground, from where would flowers grow?

344b The verse of the Third Patriarch, the Reverend Sengcan:
Though flower seeds depend on the ground, it is on the ground that seeds give rise to flowers.
If flower seeds had no nature to grow, on the ground, too, nothing would grow.

The verse of the Fourth Patriarch, the Reverend Daoxin:
Flower seeds have the nature to grow; from the ground, seeds give rise to flowers.
If the prior conditions do not come together, nothing at all will grow.

The verse of the Fifth Patriarch, the Reverend Hongren:
Sentient beings come and sow the seed; from the insentient, flowers then grow.
Without sentience there is no seed, and in the mind-ground, too, nothing grows.

The verse of the Sixth Patriarch, the Reverend Huineng:
The mind-ground holds sentient seeds; when the dharma rain falls, flowers grow.
When you awaken yourself to the sentient seeds of the flower, the fruit of bodhi forms of itself.

Master Huineng said, "Listen, all of you. I have made two verses that take up the meaning of the Reverend Bodhidharma's verse. You deluded people, practice according to these verses and you will surely see your nature."

The first verse:
On the mind-ground wrong flowers open, five petals following from the root;
together they make the karma of ignorance, and you see it blown about by the wind of karma.

The second verse:
On the mind-ground right flowers open, five petals
following from the root;
together they cultivate the wisdom of prajñā, and what is to
come is the bodhi of a buddha.

## THE LINE OF TRANSMISSION

*Huineng lists the patriarchs through whom the sudden teaching has been handed down.*

Having finished speaking the verses, the Sixth Patriarch dismissed the assembly. The disciples went out and reflected, and realized that the Master would not remain long in the world. Later, on the third day of the eighth month, after the meal, the Master said, "Take your seats in order, all of you. I am now going to take leave of you."

Fahai asked, "This dharma of the sudden teaching—from the beginning until now, through how many generations has it been handed down?" The Sixth Patriarch said, "It was first handed down through the seven buddhas, of whom Śākyamuni Buddha was the last. Seventh, Mahākāśyapa; eighth, Ānanda; ninth, Madhyāntika; tenth, Śāṇakavāsa; eleventh, Upagupta; twelfth, Dhṛtaka; thirteenth, Buddhanandi; fourteenth, Buddhamitra; fifteenth, the monk Pārśva; sixteenth, Puṇyayaśas; seventeenth, Aśvaghoṣa; eighteenth, the elder Kapimala; nineteenth, Nāgārjuna; twentieth, Kāṇadeva; twenty-first, Rāhulata; twenty-second, Saṅghanandi; twenty-third, Saṅghayaśas;[17] 344c twenty-fourth, Kumāralāta; twenty-fifth, Jayata; twenty-sixth, Vasubandhu; twenty-seventh, Manorhita; twenty-eighth, Haklena; twenty-ninth, Siṃha Bhikṣu; thirtieth, Śāṇakavāsa; thirty-first, Upagupta; thirty-second, Saṅgharakṣa; thirty-third, Subhamitra; thirty-fourth, Bodhidharma, third son of a king of South India; thirty-fifth, Huike, a monk of the land of Tang; thirty-sixth, Sen-

17 The numbering is the manuscript's; this list differs from the later standard Chan lineage of twenty-eight Indian patriarchs, and some names (Śāṇakavāsa, Upagupta) appear twice.

gcan; thirty-seventh, Daoxin; thirty-eighth, Hongren; thirty-ninth, I myself, Huineng, who have now received the dharma."[18]

The Master said, "From today on, as you hand it on from one to another, there must be something to rely on as a pledge. Do not lose the teaching."

### THE VERSE OF THE TRUE BUDDHA

*Huineng leaves a verse saying that the buddha is found by knowing living beings.*

Fahai spoke again: "Master, now that you are going, what dharma will you leave and entrust to us? How will people of later generations see the buddha?" The Sixth Patriarch said, "Listen. Deluded people of later generations need only know living beings, and they will be able to see the buddha. If they seek the buddha without knowing living beings, they will not see the buddha in ten thousand kalpas. Now I will teach you how to know living beings and see the buddha, and I will also leave you a verse on seeing the true buddha and liberation. Deluded, one does not see the buddha; awakened, one sees." Fahai asked to hear it, so that it might be handed down from generation to generation and never be cut off.

The Sixth Patriarch said, "Listen, and I will tell you. If people of later generations want to seek the buddha, they need only know that the buddha-mind is in living beings, and then they can know the buddha. For the buddha-mind depends on living beings: apart from living beings there is no buddha-mind.[19]

18 The manuscript ends the list with a stray "fourteenth," probably miscopied for "fortieth" (counting Śākyamuni); it is omitted here.

19 The manuscript is garbled here; the translation follows the usual restoration.

"Deluded, a buddha is a living being; awakened, a living being is a buddha.
Foolish, a buddha is a living being; wise, a living being is a buddha.
With a crooked mind, a buddha is a living being; with an even mind, a living being is a buddha.
If once in a lifetime the mind turns crooked, the buddha is inside a living being.
If for one thought you awaken to evenness, the living being is itself a buddha.
My own mind has its own buddha, and one's own buddha is the true buddha.
If you yourself had no buddha-mind, where would you look for the buddha?"

The Master said, "Stay well, my disciples. I leave you a verse called 'The Verse of the True Buddha of One's Own Nature and Liberation.' If deluded people of later generations grasp the meaning of this verse, they will see the true buddha of their own mind and their own nature. I give you this verse, and with it I take leave of you." The verse said:

345a Suchness, the pure nature, is the true buddha; wrong views and the three poisons are the true Māra.
In a person of wrong views, Māra is in the house; in a person of right views, the buddha comes to call.
When wrong views and the three poisons arise in the nature, it is Māra the king come to live in the house.
When right views do away with the three poisons, Māra turns into a buddha, true and not false.
The transformation body, the reward body and the pure body—these three bodies are originally one body.
If you look within your own body and see for yourself, that is the cause of buddhahood and bodhi.
From the transformation body the pure nature originally arises; the pure nature is always within the transformation body.
The nature makes the transformation body walk the right path, and what is to come is perfect, true and without end.[20]

20 Māra is the tempter who tried to obstruct the Buddha's awakening; the three poisons are greed, anger and ignorance.

The nature of lust is at root the cause of purity: apart from lust there is no body of the pure nature.
Only leave the five desires in your nature yourself, and the instant you see your nature, that is the true.
If in this life you awaken to the gate of the sudden teaching, in that awakening you will see the Honored One before your eyes.
If you mean to practice and seek the buddha, you will not know where to look for the true.
If within your own body you can have the true, having the true is the cause of becoming a buddha.
Not seeking the true in yourself but looking outside for the buddha—all who go looking like that are utterly foolish.
The dharma of the sudden teaching came from the West; to save the people of the world, you must practice yourself.
Now I tell all in the world who study the way: not to rely on this is to drift far astray.

## HUINENG'S DEATH

*Huineng gives last instructions and dies; marvels follow and he is buried at Caoxi.*

Having finished the verse, the Master told the disciples, "Stay well, all of you. Now I take leave of you. After I am gone, do not weep in the worldly way, and do not accept people's condolence gifts of money and silk or wear mourning clothes. That would not be the holy dharma, and those who did so would not be my disciples. Be just as when I was alive. Sit upright all together. Only be without motion or stillness, without arising or ceasing, without going or coming, without right or wrong, without abiding. Only be calm and still: this is the great way. After I am gone, simply practice according to the dharma, just as when I was alive. Even if I were still in the world, if you went against the teaching, my staying would be of no use."

When the Master had spoken these words, at the third watch of the night, the Master passed peacefully away. The Master was

seventy-six years old. On the day the Master entered extinction, a rare fragrance filled the temple and did not disperse for several days. The mountains crumbled and the earth shook; the trees of the forest turned white; the sun and moon lost their light; wind and clouds lost their color. The Master entered extinction on the third day of the eighth month; in the eleventh month the reverend's coffin was received at Mount Caoxi and buried within the dragon niche. A white light appeared, rising straight up into the sky, and only after two days did it disperse. Wei Qu, the prefect of Shaozhou, erected a stele, and offerings are made there to this day.

### THE TRANSMISSION OF THIS SUTRA

*The text records who kept this sutra after Fahai and to whom it may be given.*

345b This Platform Sutra was compiled by the head monk Fahai. At the head monk's death it was entrusted to a fellow student, Daoji; at Daoji's death, to a disciple, Wuzhen. Wuzhen lives at Faxing Temple on Mount Caoxi in Lingnan and is now transmitting this dharma. Whoever is entrusted with this dharma must have superior capacity and wisdom, a mind that believes in the Buddha's dharma, and a firm foundation of great compassion. Holding this sutra serves as the proof of succession, and to this day it has not been cut off.[21]

The reverend was originally a native of Qujiang district in Shaozhou. When the Tathāgata entered nirvāṇa, the teaching flowed into the lands of the East. What all have passed on is non-abiding, that is, the non-abiding of my mind. This true bodhisattva taught the truth and showed the practice, teaching with true parables only people of great wisdom. This is the purpose to rely on: only to one who vows to practice, who does not turn back when meeting hardship in practice, who can bear suffering, and whose merit and virtue are deep and abundant, may this

21 Daoji and Wuzhen, named here as the text's later keepers, are not otherwise known.

dharma be given. If someone's capacities are not equal to it and their abilities fall short, then even if they seek this dharma it must not be given; and no one who breaks the rules and lacks virtue may be carelessly given the Platform Sutra. I tell all fellow followers of the way, so that they may know its hidden meaning.[22]

The Platform Sutra of the Sudden Teaching of the Southern School, the Supreme Great Vehicle: one scroll.

Great Vehicle Resolve, thirty; Great Sage Resolve, forty; Great Penetration Resolve, fifty; Great Treasure Resolve, sixty; Great Dharma Resolve, seventy; Great Virtue Resolve, eighty; Pure Wisdom Store Resolve, thirty; Pure Upholding Store Resolve, forty; Pure Treasure Store Resolve, fifty; Pure Lotus Store Resolve, sixty; Pure Ocean Store Resolve, seventy; Great Dharma Store Resolve, eighty. These are bodhisattva dharma names.[23]

22 This colophon is badly corrupt; "the reverend" here may be Wuzhen rather than Huineng, whose home was Xinzhou.

23 This list, added at the end of the manuscript, is obscure: it seems to pair dharma names with numbers, possibly ages. "Wisdom" reads the manuscript's 之 as 智.