

[22] Bussho: Buddha-nature – A Modern Interpretation

Gautama Buddha said:

All beings fully manifest buddha-nature in their existence:

Buddha is always present and does not change.

This is the resolute teaching – the loud assertion – of Buddhism by the great Gautama himself. At the same time, this teaching has been the centre of the thoughts and viewpoint of all the buddhas and all our ancestors for a total of 2190 years of study. Barely fifty generations of true successors to the Buddha's truth up to my master, Tendo Nyojo, have learned this through their practice of zazen, including the twenty-eight ancestors in India who lived in this state, and maintained it by their practice of zazen from one generation to the next, and the twenty-three ancestors in China who lived in this state and maintained it by their practice of zazen from one age to the next. All our ancestors have lived in this state and maintained it by practicing zazen. What do the words of the Buddha mean: "*All beings fully manifest buddha-nature in their existence*"? These words express the truth that the person in front of us is manifesting the ineffability of reality. Beings that are alive are often described with the words "living being" or "sentient being" or "life-form" or "creature"; these all refer to beings that live, and fully manifest their existence. In short, to fully manifest existence *is* the nature of buddha. And all beings that fully manifest existence *are* living beings. Just at this moment of the present, in not making any distinction between our inner and outer world, we fully manifest buddha-nature in

our existence. This state is more inclusive than the different states – represented by skin, flesh, bones, and marrow – that Bodhidharma said his disciples had attained, because it actually *is* the person. This full manifesting of existence which is the nature of buddha is not something that can be discussed to see whether it exists or does not exist. "*Fully manifesting existence*" describes real words spoken by the real mouth of the Buddha, it describes our ancestors' looking at reality, it describes me as a living and breathing monk. The phrase "*fully manifesting existence*" does not describe a being who has just appeared now, or a being who has existed since the beginning of time, or some kind of mysterious manifestation. Nor does it describe a being whose appearance depends solely on external circumstances, or a mental delusion. What the phrase describes is not a combination of two different things into one, as in "mind combined with circumstances" or "essence combined with form" or similar concepts. For this reason, "*beings fully manifesting their existence*" is *me-and-the-world-unseparated*, which does not depend on the maturation of karmic powers, is not the random appearance of phenomena without reason or cause, is not nature as it is, does not depend on having mystical powers, or the result of mystical practices. If beings fully manifesting their existence were based on the maturation of karmic powers, on the random appearance of phenomena without reason or cause, on nature as it is, and other similar things, then it would be necessary for people who fully experience what is real, buddhas who live in the state of wisdom, and our Buddhist ancestors' ability to see reality all to depend on the

maturity of karmic powers, random appearance of phenomena without reason or cause, and nature as it is. It is not like that. There can never exist another world outside of this whole Universe. And there can never exist another me at this moment of the present. At the same time, most people cannot recognise this intellectually, because as Master Yoka Genkaku said, they don't know how to stop their busy minds from interpreting reality based on their past experience. *“Fully manifesting existence”* does not refer to how we imagine circumstances cause things to exist; in fact the whole Universe always shows itself just as it is. But this does not mean that the objective material world is existence fully manifesting itself. And on the other hand, neither do Buddhists believe that the Universe is centred around my own subjective consciousness. *“Fully manifesting existence”* is not to return to an original state of existence that we once had and have now lost, because the present moment includes both the eternal past and the eternal present. It is not to attain a new state of existence that we aspire to, for it does not include anything that we haven't already got. It is not a discrete series of moments of existence, for it includes all moments. It is not existence that has no beginning, because it is me manifesting my ineffable self here and now. It is not a new existence, because Master Nansen Fugan said that *“balanced everyday body-mind is the truth”*. Remember, since beings are in the midst of fully manifesting their existence in the Universe, it is not easy for them to see that fact. The meaning of *“fully manifesting existence”* understood in this way is getting to the heart of the matter – it is freedom in this moment.

When some students hear the phrase “buddha-nature” they misunderstand it to be some enduring “self” as described for instance by the non-Buddhist Senika. This is because they do not really see other people in front of them, they do not really see who they are, and they do not see their teacher in front of them. Without really concentrating, they think that mind, will, or consciousness – which is just the movement of molecules in our brains – was the basis of the knowledge and understanding of the enlightened Buddha. No-one has said that buddha-nature is just enlightened knowledge or understanding. Although people who fully realise what enlightenment is are buddhas, the nature of a buddha is beyond enlightened knowledge and understanding. And when I describe a buddha as someone who fully realises, I don't mean the various superficial kinds of realising or knowing described by some people. For instance, I don't mean that the movement of molecules in our brains is fully realising. Full realisation is manifested concretely by a buddha – as it was by our Buddhist ancestors – just at the present moment. Over many years, our ancestors have been to China and returned with an understanding of Buddhism to teach to others. They have been as numerous as blades of grass. But many of them simply grasped knowing and understanding buddha-nature on the basis of the movement of molecules in their brains. With this understanding they mistakenly moved further and further away from the truth. What a shame! We students of the present should not follow in their footsteps. Although they study knowledge and understanding in Buddhism, they do not see that it is not the movement of molecules in our brain. The

movement that they learn is different from the ineffable state at the moment of the present. When we can understand the true nature of movement, then we will also be able to grasp real knowing and real understanding. The relationship between buddha and nature is such that when the state of buddha is attained, buddha-nature is also attained. Buddha-nature is fully manifesting existence, and fully manifesting existence is the nature of a buddha. Fully manifesting existence is not as a series of discrete moments of existence, and not as a continuous line of existence. Because it is pure action at this moment, it is beyond description by the discriminating mind. What I am describing here as buddha-nature is not the nature of some superhuman person, and not like the idea of it we hold in our minds. Some people describe buddha-nature as being like the seed of a plant, which sprouts when watered by the rain of Dharma. Then twigs, leaves and flowers grow and the plant bears fruit, which in turn produces more seeds. These kinds of metaphors are just the romantic thinking of ordinary people. People who are content with this kind of metaphor should notice that seeds, flowers, and fruit all exist as they are at the moment of the present. Seeds are already present in the fruit. And the leaves and twigs are already present in the seed although we cannot see them; because although the seed does not obtain them from somewhere else, it eventually produces a profusion of twigs, branches, and trunks. These real facts cannot be explained ultimately by looking from the inside or the outside; they are just present facts, and are beyond explanation by a process of growth that moves from the past to the present. So even using the metaphor that

ordinary people use, roots, stalks, branches, and leaves are all buddha-nature; they are born as buddha-nature, and die as buddha-nature. It is just the fact that they fully manifest existence.

The Buddha said:

*If we want to know the meaning of buddha-nature,
It is just real present time, causes, and circumstances.
When time is here,
Buddha-nature manifests itself before us.*

The line “*If we want to know the meaning of buddha-nature*” does not refer only to knowing in an intellectual sense. It also means wanting to practice it, wanting to experience it, wanting to explain it to others, and wanting to forget it. Explaining, practicing, experiencing, forgetting, misunderstanding and not misunderstanding, and so on, are all causes and circumstances that just exist at real present time. Causes and circumstances just exist at this real present time, because they *are* real present time. Real time and causes and circumstances thus mirror each other at this present time. But the causes and circumstances that exist at this real present time are never mirrored in concepts that attempt to pin down the perfection or imperfection of this moment. This mirroring in the present is not divided into two as subject and object, and there is no such thing as a right reflection or a wrong reflection. It is just mirroring here and now, with no subject doing the mirroring and no object being mirrored. In this, real present time and causes and circumstances are undivided wholeness, which transcends concepts like “causes” and

“circumstances.” This is real buddha-nature, free of the concept “buddha-nature.” It is buddhas just being buddhas themselves, and the natural state just being the natural state itself. From the distant past to the present, there are many people who have thought that the phrase *“When time is here”* means that we have to wait until some time in the future for the buddha-nature to manifest itself. They think that if they continue their practice with this attitude, then one day the time will come naturally when their own buddha-nature will reveal itself. They say that until that time has come, there is no use in them asking their teachers for explanations or making efforts to find out what is true. With this kind of viewpoint, they continue to entertain themselves with trivia and let their thoughts carry them away. This kind of person is not a Buddhist. To answer the line in the poem, *“If we want to know the meaning of buddha-nature”* is to really know the meaning of buddha-nature right here and now.” And the line *“It is just real present time, causes, and circumstances”* means to know that causes and circumstances *are* real time here and now. If you want to know what buddha-nature is, know that it is causes and circumstances as real time. The phrase *“When time is here”* represents the fact that real time is always here! How can we doubt that? At the very time at which I doubt, buddha-nature is just coming to me. Remember that the phrase *“...the time is here”* suggests not wasting a moment throughout the day: not waiting for the time to come before acting, but seeing that the time is here and acting. And because the time is here, there is no room for concepts of “buddha-nature”; it is self evident that the time is here and

buddha-nature is just manifesting itself in front of us. This means that the time that is here and now is the only time there is, and the buddha-nature that is here and now is the only buddha-nature there is.

Asvaghosa, who was the twelfth descendent from Gautama Buddha, taught his disciple Kapimala about the ocean that is buddha-nature with a poem:

*The mountains, rivers, and the Earth
Are all constructed out of buddha-nature.
The state in zazen and the six powers
Are produced from it.*

He is saying that these mountains, rivers, and Earth in front of us *are* buddha-nature. When he says that they are all constructed out of it, he means just at the moment that buddha-nature is created, it *is* mountains, rivers, and the Earth. As he said, they are all constructed out of buddha-nature, so we should recognize that the form of the natural world is just as we see it: mountains, rivers, and the Earth. It is beyond description by the discriminating mind. To look at mountains, rivers, and the Earth is to look at buddha-nature, which is to look at something real in front of us in everyday life. To move beyond a one-sided view, the phrase *“are all constructed out of it”* can be looked at two ways: all are constructed out of it, and it is constructed out of all. He goes on to say that the state in zazen and the six mystical powers (the powers of free activity, seeing everything, hearing everything, insight into others’ thinking, seeing one’s own and others’ past conduct, transcending secular attachments)

are also produced from it. We should recognize that the manifestation – the appearance in the present – of many kinds of balanced and harmonized states also relies completely on buddha-nature. Whether you manifest the six powers or not also relies totally on buddha-nature. And not just the six powers described in the Agama Sutra. This “six” is not an abstract number unrelated to concrete things. It describes six real things in the past or six real things in the future. These six powers should not be thought of in the same way as the principle that the miscellaneous things in front of us are the teaching of the Buddha. These six powers form part of the ocean that is buddha-nature; we don’t need to deny them.

Master Daiman Konin (who was later to become Bodhidharma’s fifth descendent in China) lived in Obai in east central China. He was born to a single mother and realised the true nature of things while he was still a child. As an adult he lived his life firmly rooted in reality by planting pine trees, originally in the Seizan hills in the area where he lived. By chance, Master Dai-I Doshin, who was Bodhidharma’s fourth descendent and was visiting the area, happened to meet him while out walking. Master Dai-I said to him *“I would like to give you the Dharma transmission, but you are already too old. If you return to this world again, I will wait for you.”* Daiman Konin agreed. According to the story, eventually he is conceived by a daughter of the Shu family, who abandons the baby in the dirty waters of a harbour. But the baby is mysteriously protected, and remains there unharmed for seven days. Seeing this, the family retrieves the baby and accepts him back into the

family. When the boy reaches the age of seven, he bumps into Master Dai-I in the street in Obai. Looking at the young boy, Master Dai-I realises that there is something exceptional about him; he has an unusually shaped head. Looking at the young child, he asks, *“What is your name?”*

The child answers, *“There is a name (Lit: the name exists) but it is not an ordinary name.”*

Master Dai-I says, *“What is it?”*

The child answers, *“It is buddha-nature.”*

Master Dai-I says, *“You are without buddha-nature.”*

The child replies, *“Yes, buddha-nature is without anything (sunya), so we say ‘being without’.”*

Master Dai-I recognises that the child has the truth of Buddhism already, and so appoints him as his assistant. Some years later, Master Dai-I gives him the Dharma transmission, and he becomes his successor, living in the hills to the east of Obai and teaching Buddhism with great vigour.

If we examine the words of these two ancestral masters in detail, we can find meaning in Master Dai-I saying *“What is your name.”* We can find examples in the past of people being asked *“What is your country?”* or *“What is your name?”* We can also express these as statements like *“Your name is what,”* suggesting that a name does not express what we

truly are. Master Daikan Eno simply said “*This is how I am; this is how you are.*”

The child says, “*The name exists, but it is not an ordinary name.*”

In other words, the name is “exists,” which is certainly not an ordinary name. No ordinary name would be adequate to describe existence here and now!

When Master Dai-I says “*What is it?*”, his “what” means the situation here and now; expressed by the name but beyond words. In other words, “What” is “it” and “it” is reality here and now, beyond description.

These situations that are beyond description occur every day when we drink tea and eat meals.

When the child replies “*It is buddha-nature*” he means that “it” – the situation here and now – is buddha-nature. Because people in the here and now are named “what” – inexpressible in words – they are called buddhas. But being here and now is not limited by using “what” to describe “it”; even if “it” is “not-it”, it is already buddha-nature! So “it” equals “what” equals “buddha-nature”. But when we throw away these concepts, and then get rid of throwing away these concepts, there are concrete names, and Shu is one of them. The child didn’t receive buddha-nature from his father or from his grandfather, and neither did he just take it as his mother’s maiden name. He was completely different from the person next to him.

Master Dai-I said, “*You are without buddha-nature.*” By this he meant “*You are someone, but you can’t be described in words; you are just as you are, and being without anything, you are just buddha-nature.*”

Notice and remember when it is that we are without buddha-nature! Are we without buddha-nature when the shoots of buddhahood first appear, or after we have transcended the state of buddha? Don’t try to stop it happening, and don’t try to make it happen. We can understand being without buddha-nature for example, as the balanced peaceful state at the moment of the present. We might ask whether, when this buddha-nature turns into a real buddha, does that buddha have buddha-nature, and when this buddha exhibits the will to the truth, is it without buddha-nature? We should have something to say about this. Let’s get that wooden pillar outside to ask this question. Let’s ask the wooden pillar to answer the question. Let’s get buddha-nature to ask the question! Notice how the principle of “*being without buddha-nature*,” echoing down the ages from Master Dai-I’s room, has been discussed for many years. It reached Master Daiman Konin in Obai, Master Joshu Jushin heard about it, and Master Isan Reiyu taught it energetically. So we too should study the principle of “*being without buddha-nature*” with great diligence, and without any hesitation. And although we can study the overall principle of “*being without buddha-nature*” like this, in reality its criterion is the “what” that cannot be described in words, it is the “you” that is without buddha-nature, “it” is here and now, and the name “Shu” is a common name. Buddha-nature is approaching reality directly.

The child replies, “*Yes, buddha-nature is sunya (without anything), so we say ‘being without’.*” This makes it clear that *sunya*, or “without anything” does not mean non-existent. In order to express the fact that buddha-nature is *sunya*, he didn’t describe it as a concrete quantity of something, he said that it is “*being without*.” He didn’t use the word *sunya* to mean that there is no such thing as buddha-nature, he didn’t say “*being without*” because buddha-nature doesn’t exist; he called buddha-nature *sunya* because it is being without. The criterion for the meaning of *sunyata* is the real state of being without. In this way, *sunyata* is used to express the state where we are without anything. This meaning of *sunya* is deeper than the meaning in the phrase “*form is just emptiness*” from the Heart Sutra (in Japanese: *shiki soku ze ku*; in Sanskrit: *yad rupa sa sunyata*). And at the same time, the phrase “*form is just emptiness*” does not describe the oneness of two different things; in this phrase, *sunyata* means the emptiness of being without anything. When we are truly without anything, we move naturally through life. And it is just in this state that the questions and answers about buddha-nature being without, and buddha-nature being *sunya*, and buddha-nature existing at this moment took place.

When Master Daikan Eno, the sixth descendent from Bodhidharma, first went to meet Master Daiman Konin up in the hills near Obai, Master Daiman asked him, “*Where are you from?*”

Daikan replied, “*I come from south of the five peaks.*”

Master Daiman said, “*What have you come here for?*”

Daikan replied, “*I want to become buddha.*”

Master Daiman said, “*People from south of the five peaks are simple folk without buddha-nature, so why do you want to become a buddha?*”

When the master said “*People from south of the five peaks are simple folk without buddha-nature...*” he didn’t mean that a person from south of the five peaks does not have buddha-nature, and neither did he mean that they have buddha-nature. He meant that since a person south of the peaks is without any idealistic pretensions, they *are* buddha-nature. And with the words “*...so why do you want to become a buddha?*” he meant “*Why do you need to become a buddha?*” On the whole, there have been few masters who have understood the basic principle of buddha-nature. You cannot learn it from the Agama Sutras, and people who teach sutras and commentaries don’t know about it. It is passed down from one real person to another real person directly from the Buddha. In fact, we do not possess buddha-nature before we are buddha, but we do possess it when we are buddha. Being a buddha and buddha-nature go together; they are the same state. We need to study this principle in detail, and learn it in practice for twenty or thirty years. People studying Buddhism as the attainment of various stages on the path to enlightenment don’t realise this. When we have gained a true understanding of buddha-nature, we can assert both that beings have buddha-nature and that beings are without buddha-nature. Learning in practice that buddha-nature goes with the state of buddha is exactly right. If it were not learned in this way, it would not be a Buddhist principle. Buddhism

would not have survived until today if it were not like this. Without clarifying this, we cannot realise what a buddha is. This is why Master Daiman said to people when he discussed buddha-nature, “*People from south of the five peaks are... without buddha-nature.*” When we first encounter buddha and the Buddha’s teachings it is extremely difficult to hear this principle that all beings are without buddha-nature. People who have not realised that all beings are without buddha-nature have yet to realise what buddha nature is. When Master Daikan was sincerely seeking to become buddha, Master Daiman was able to make him into a buddha without using any other expression or technique other than saying “*People from south of the five peaks are without buddha-nature.*” So remember, a direct way to become a buddha is to hear and say the words “*being without buddha-nature.*” Just at this moment, being without buddha-nature, we are buddhas. People who have not digested the phrase “*being without buddha-nature*” can never become buddhas.

Master Daikan continued, “*People give meaning to terms like ‘south’ and ‘north.’ But concepts like ‘south’ and ‘north’ are not part of buddha-nature.*”

What does he mean exactly? Getting rid of all conceptions, what are ‘south’ and ‘north’? In stating something true here, Master Daikan is also suggesting that people can become buddhas, but buddha-nature is already buddha. I wonder if Master Daikan noticed this. The phrase “*being without buddha-nature*” described in the story about Master

Daiman and Master Dai-I caught Kasyapa Buddha, Gautama Buddha, and the other buddhas with its power, giving them the ability to become buddha, preach Buddhism, and insist that all beings “*fully manifest buddha-nature in their existence.*” The meaning of *manifesting* in the phrase “*fully manifesting buddha-nature*” is surely intimately connected to the meaning of *being without* in the phrase “*being without buddha-nature,*” which has echoed down the ages to us from Master Daiman and Master Dai-I. And Master Daikan too must have thought about the meaning of “*being without buddha-nature.*” Apart from whether we manifest it or are without it, he should ask what buddha-nature is. He should find out what exactly it is in fact. These days too, instead of asking what it is, people ask whether it exists or not, and whether we have it or not. They should not be so hasty. We should look at the meaning of “*being without (sunya)*” not in the sense of not existing, but in the sense meant in the phrase “*being without buddha-nature.*” We should go over Master Daikan’s words that “*People give meaning to terms like ‘south’ and ‘north,’ but concepts like ‘south’ and ‘north’ are not part of buddha-nature*” several times, over a long period. We can benefit just from this effort itself. We should quietly both try to understand his words, and give up understanding them. Stupid people think that the phrase means that the world of human beings has south and north because we live in the material world, but not buddha-nature, because it is beyond all physical limitations. People who think that this is what Master Daikan said, do not have the power to see what he really

meant. We should throw away these kinds of wrong interpretations and use the practice of zazen as our reference.

Master Daikan taught his student Gyoshō: “*Buddha-nature exists just at the present moment, but the mind, which categorizes all things into good and bad, creates an enduring image.*”

Non-Buddhists, Buddhists who study only theories or who study only the physical can never even imagine this “*just at the present moment*” that Master Daikan talks about. Both establishers and followers of non-Buddhism, theoretical Buddhism and materialistic Buddhism all exist just at the present moment, although they do not fully realize it. And when something that exists *just at the present moment* preaches, practices and experiences *just at the present moment*, everything is just at the present moment. This is what is meant in the Lotus Sutra where it says that when there are people who wish to be saved, then Bodhisattvas manifest their bodies just at that moment in order to teach them what Buddhism is. This is fully manifesting buddha-nature. The body they manifest may be tall, or it may be short. The saints and ordinary people of our everyday lives all exist *just at the present moment*. The idea that saints and ordinary people cannot manifest buddha-nature is the result of a limited view – narrow intellectual thinking. *Buddha* is an instant of body, and *nature* is an instant of action. This is why Master Daikan said “*Buddha-nature exists just at the present moment.*” But *enduring* refers to something that does not change. We create in our mind separate and enduring images of a subject acting on an object, and since these don’t

seem to appear and disappear in the normal view of things, we say that they *endure*. It is the non-enduring grass, trees, and forests that exist *just at the present moment* that are buddha-nature. And the non-enduring body-and-mind of a human being *just at the present moment* is also buddha-nature. And because countries, mountains and rivers are all *just at the present moment*, they are also buddha-nature. The supreme, balanced and right truth, being *just at the present moment*, is buddha-nature. The great state that the Buddha passed into after his death (parinirvana) is buddha-nature, because it too is *just at the present moment*. Those narrow-minded people who follow only intellectual Buddhism or only material Buddhism, scholars of the Buddhist Canon who teach only from sutras and commentaries, and similar people will feel astonished or afraid on hearing Master Daikan’s words, and might doubt their truth. But people like that are not real Buddhists, and they lead us away from the truth.

The Buddha’s fourteenth descendent was called Nagarjuna. In Chinese, he is known as Ryuju, Ryusho, or Ryumo. He came from the West of India, but went to live in the South. But most of the people in the South sought happiness just in their everyday secular activities. So he explains the subtle teachings of the Buddha to them. People who come to listen to him say, “*The most important thing is to seek for happiness in secular things. But this master only teaches us about the importance of buddha-nature!*” To this, Master Nagarjuna replies, “*If you want to see buddha-nature, you must get rid of selfish pride.*” People ask him, “*Is buddha-nature big, or is it small?*” To this he replies, “*Buddha-nature*

is neither big nor small, neither wide nor narrow, it neither brings happiness nor reward, it does not die and it is not born." When they hear this excellent teaching, they all manifest the will to the truth for the first time. Then Master Nagarjuna, sitting in zazen on his seat in the lecture hall, manifesting his own body just as it is, appears as complete and whole as the full moon. And those listening to his talk hear only the truth he is teaching, losing all consciousness of his physical presence. In the audience is a man called Kanadeva, who comes from a wealthy family. He says to the audience, "*Have you ever seen someone in the state that the master is manifesting now?*" The audience reply, "*This state is something our eyes have never seen, our ears have never heard, our minds have never known, and our bodies have never experienced.*" Kanadeva says, "*Here the master is fully manifesting buddha-nature for us. How can we recognize this? Because it is said that the immanent and balanced state of a buddha shows the fullness of the moon, and like the full moon, his nature is transparent and bright. The meaning of buddha-nature is clear.*" At this, the audience no longer see the master manifesting the form of the full moon, He reappears for them, sitting on his seat. He recites the following verse:

*My body manifests the fullness of the moon
To show you what a buddha is.
There is no set way to teach the truth,
And the efficacy of these teachings is beyond words and images.*

We should remember that the true efficacy of Buddhist teachings is beyond what can be conveyed by words and images, and there is no set way to teach the truth. Master Nagarjuna explained buddha-nature to many people near and far innumerable times, and this is just one example. "*If you want to see buddha-nature, you must get rid of selfish pride.*" Do not fail to study the principle contained in these words. The words do not mean that you cannot see buddha-nature; they mean that getting rid of selfish pride *is* seeing buddha-nature. Selfishness comes in many forms and there are many varieties of pride. There may also be many ways to *get rid of* them, but they are all ways of *seeing* buddha-nature. Here, remember *seeing* means to look at something with the eyes. Do not understand the words "*Buddha-nature is neither big nor small...*" in the everyday sense, or according to the teachings of intellectual or materialistic Buddhists. One-sided and stubborn people who believe that buddha-nature must be vast and great are holding onto the wrong idea. Instead, consider the idea that buddha-nature can be expressed in words just at the present moment, as Master Nagarjuna did when he said "...*neither big nor small...*" Because just at the present moment, there is no separation between hearing and understanding. Just at the present moment we can hear-and-understand the verse that Master Nagarjuna recites: "*My body manifests the fullness of the moon to show you what a buddha is.*" His physical body appeared full, like the round moon, showing them the fullness of a buddha. His manifesting his body fully can teach us what long, short, square and round really mean. People who do not understand the relationship between his *body* and

him *manifesting* it cannot understand what is meant by the *fullness of the moon* or *what a buddha is*. Stupid people who have not realized the truth of the Buddha think that his body was transformed into a full moon, but this is wrong. How could he manifest a different body in the same place and at the same time as he is sitting on his seat in the lecture hall? His body manifested itself in exactly the same way as anyone sitting here and now in this hall. We are all manifesting the fullness of the moon too! The body manifesting itself cannot be completely represented with descriptions like square or round, existing or not existing, visible or invisible, or even using a limitless number of characteristics; it is just the body manifesting itself. The phrase "*the fullness of the moon*" means the same as what Master Fuke said to Master Rinzai: "*What exists right here is indescribable, whether you try to describe it in detail or try to describe it roughly.*" (Shinji Shobogenzo Book 1, Koan No. 96) Because Master Nagarjuna had got rid of selfish pride, in manifesting his own body, he showed them what a buddha is. The act of showing revealed the body of a buddha, something that is completely different from our concept of what a buddha is. Although we describe buddha-nature with words like *clear* and *bright* like the full moon, this does not mean that he turned into a full moon! And since he says "*the efficacy of these teachings is beyond words and images*" we can conclude that the body he showed them was more than just the physical body they could see and describe. Although it seemed to be just a physical body, it was the body of a buddha fully manifested. These are the characteristics of teaching the truth, which has no set way. Kanadeva described Master

Nagarjuna's body not manifesting itself in a set way as "*the immanent and balanced state of a buddha.*" Although the audience described his body as being like the full moon viewed from a distance, in fact they encountered something that they had not experienced before: the dynamic nature of someone teaching the truth which they experienced in the momentary state where they were not aware of any separation between what they saw and what they heard. And as they continued listening to his teaching, at times they were aware of him manifested fully like the moon, at which moments his body seemingly disappeared and they were only aware of him teaching the truth, and at other times this state of fullness dissolved and his normal body came back into their awareness. The Venerable Kanadeva, who became the Master's successor, recognized clearly that the Master was manifesting the fullness and completeness of the moon, recognized that he was fully manifesting existence, recognized this as the nature of a buddha, and recognized it as the body of a buddha. Although there were many students who studied personally with Master Nagarjuna and learned the whole of his teachings, none were as excellent as Kanadeva. The Venerable Kanadeva was worthy to share the Master's seat just as Mahakasyapa did the Buddha's, and his teachings were able to guide Master Nagarjuna's students in addition to his own. He received the essential teachings of Buddhism, the supreme and great truth, in exactly the same way as the Venerable Mahakasyapa did on Vulture Peak, and took his rightful seat in the order. Nagarjuna had many students in the period before he embraced the Buddha's truth, at which time he left

them all behind, together with those non-Buddhist theories. He personally passed on the essence of the teachings only to Kanadeva, who became the authentic successor to the universal truth that the Buddha taught. But there still remained groups of people who claimed that they were successors to the truth that Master Nagarjuna taught. They produced commentaries and interpretations which they falsely claimed were written by him. The writings of these groups, all of whom Master Nagarjuna had forsaken long ago, continue to disturb many people. And we, as students of the Buddha's teachings, should be clear that anything that was not passed on by Kanadeva cannot be the authentic teachings of Master Nagarjuna. This conclusion is the right one because it is based on belief in the authenticity of the teachings passed on directly from one person to another person. But many people accept those theories, although they are obviously false. It is very sad and a cause for regret that many people are stupid enough to insult the wisdom of the buddhas in this way.

The story continues. The Venerable Kanadeva, pointing to Master Nagarjuna manifesting his own body just as it is says, *"Here the master is fully manifesting buddha-nature for us. How can we recognize this? Because it is said that the immanent and balanced state of a buddha shows the fullness of the moon, and like the full moon, the essence of buddha-nature is transparent and bright."* And among the many people of the past and present who have seen and heard the Buddha's truth that has spread through all parts of the Universe, who has ever said that buddha-nature is the body manifesting itself just as it is? The Venerable

Kanadeva is the only person in the Universe who has said this. The others just said that buddha-nature is not something that can be seen, heard, or recognized intellectually, and so on. The reason they did not say so is because they did not know that the body manifesting itself just as it is, is buddha-nature. Our ancestors never withheld this teaching from them, it is just that they did not take in what they were being taught. Since they never learned how to realise things with their whole beings, they could not understand this principle. Watching from a distance the immanent and balanced state of a buddha showing the fullness of the moon, they prostrated themselves to something their eyes had never seen before. *"His nature is transparent and bright, and the meaning of buddha-nature is clear."* Manifesting his own body just as it is was his way to actually show them what the body of a buddha looks like. How could there be a buddha or even two buddhas who don't manifest their own bodies just as they are? The body of a buddha is a body manifesting itself. Buddha-nature is a body manifesting itself.

When the buddhas who are our ancestors are thinking about and explaining what buddha-nature is using concepts like the four elements or the five aggregates, they are all momentary manifestations of real bodies. Master Nagarjuna has said that the body of a buddha expresses the roundness and fullness of the moon. This is true throughout the whole of the Universe; buddha-nature is a universal virtue. The virtue of a buddha is in mastering the state of fully manifesting the body and keeping it. We see manifold virtues appearing and disappearing as the real body manifests itself at the moment of the present. Since the time of

Nagarjuna and Kanadeva, not in India, China, or Japan has anyone studying Buddhism ever said anything as profound as this teacher and his student. But there have been many teachers of sutras and commentaries who have blundered past the truth that the Buddha taught. Since long ago in ancient Sung China people have found it impossible to illustrate this story with their bodies, in their minds, in space, or even as a picture on a wall. People have tried to depict Master Nagarjuna manifesting the fullness and roundness of the moon by drawing a large circle like a mirror above his lecture seat. But these pictorial attempts at depicting the scene that have been kept for hundreds of years are no more than obstacles to understanding the story, because no-one has spoken out to say that the depictions in these pictures are wrong. It is sad to see that so many of our works are mistaken like this. If we believe that his body manifesting the fullness of the moon could look like a large circle, then we don't know the difference between a picture and reality! If we start to make fun of this representation, we might die laughing. It is sad that there existed neither layman nor priest throughout the whole of China who could see what Nagarjuna was saying, and what Kanadeva meant. Then how could they possibly have direct experience of their bodies manifesting as fully as the moon. They have neither experienced the roundness of the moon, nor its fullness. This is because they have not followed the buddhas of old, and have not valued what they taught. Buddhas of old and buddhas of the present should experience the real state in Zazen, when the body manifests its fullness, rather than representations of the state. Remember, if we want to depict

Nagarjuna's body manifesting itself fully as it is, we must paint the form of his real body sitting on the lecture seat. The shape of the eyebrows and the appearance of the eyes should both be straightforward and right. The essence of Buddhism should always be depicted as sitting in the quietness of Zazen. Then the smile that passed between Gautama Buddha and Mahakasyapa will continue forever, because many people will be encouraged to practice Zazen and become buddhas. If the picture doesn't convey the beauty of the fullness of the moon, it cannot depict the shape of reality, and if it does not depict real physical characteristics, it is useless in teaching the truth of the Buddha. When we want to show a real person sitting in the fullness of Zazen, we should give them the roundness of the moon; that is, their form should be round like the full moon. When we want to demonstrate the roundness of the moon, we should show the roundness of the moon with a body in Zazen. However, the authors of these pictures neither show a body fully manifesting itself, nor do they depict the round moon. They do not represent the moon's fullness, or show what a buddha looks like. These people neither know how to demonstrate something concretely, or how to depict someone who is teaching the Buddha's truth. They simple paint a picture of a circle! What is the point of painting a circle? If we look at such a picture with simple eyes, it has no power to bring us into the present moment and make us feel satisfied. Yes, the moon is round, and a body manifesting itself fully is also round. But this roundness is not the roundness of a coin, or the roundness of a rice cake. The body fully manifesting itself has the roundness of the moon, and its form has the

moon's fullness. But we should use a circle only to represent things like coins or rice cakes!

When I was travelling around looking for the truth of Buddhism, I went to great Sung China. In the autumn of 1223 I arrived at Kori Zen Temple on Mount Ikuo-zan, and on the walls in the west corridor I saw paintings of transfigurations of the thirty-three ancestors in India and China. But at that time, I didn't feel anything in particular about them. However, I visited the same temple for the summer retreat in 1225, and happened to walk down the same corridor with Jokei, the guest supervisor. Passing one of those paintings, I asked him, "Whose transfiguration is this?" He replied, "This is Nagarjuna's body manifesting the form of the round moon." But when he said this, his voice had no conviction in it, and his face showed no self-assurance. I said to him, "This is indeed a poor representation of reality!" At this, the guest supervisor laughed loudly, but there was no edge in his voice that could break through the deception perpetrated by the picture. While walking on to view the Hall of Relics and the temple's six views of the mountain, I discussed it with him again, but he didn't express any doubts about the picture. A few of the other monks expressed their opinions on the picture to us, but none of them hit the mark. So I said that I would ask the abbot, who at that time was Master Tokko. The guest supervisor replied, "He doesn't understand Buddhism, so he won't be able to answer you." So I decided not to ask him. But although Jokei said this, he himself couldn't understand, and the other monks overhearing our conversation had nothing to say either. For years, the

many masters of that temple had seen nothing wrong with the painting, and had not tried to correct the representation, having absolutely no idea how to do it. Basically it is impossible to represent reality in a picture, so if we attempt it, we should make a direct representation. But so far no-one has been able to depict a person fully manifesting themselves as the roundness of the moon. This is all because people will not wake up from the idea that buddha-nature is a state of mind or consciousness. They have therefore lost the ability to understand the phrases "manifesting buddha-nature" or "being without buddha-nature." Only a few of them realize that they need to study how to explain the meaning of these phrases. Remember that this deterioration comes from them having stopped making efforts. Of the many temple masters in many districts, some die without once voicing the phrase "buddha-nature." Some even say that only Buddhist who listen to theoretical teachings need to discuss buddha-nature, and Buddhist who practice zazen do not need to do so. These monks are like animals! How have these bands of demons managed to infiltrate and defile the truth of the Buddha's teachings? Does the Buddha's truth consist only of listening to the teachings? Or is Buddhism devotion only to the idea of "practicing zazen"? We should be clear that there has never been a distinction between listening to the teachings and practicing zazen.

National Master Enkan Sai-an from Koshu was a revered ancestor of Master Baso's. One day he preached to the assembly "All beings *have* buddha-nature." We should immediately look at the meaning of the words "all beings." The diversity of beings all have different behaviours,

different thoughts, different characters, and different circumstances, and they all experience the Universe from completely different perspectives. For example, the perspective of an ordinary person, a non-Buddhist, an idealistic Buddhist, a materialistic Buddhist, a realistic Buddhist, a normal human being, and a god are all different. But from the Buddhist point of view, since being and mind are one, we say that all beings *have* minds. At the same time, even if we say that beings don't *have* minds, still being *is* mind. So mind *is* all of being, and being *is* all of buddha-nature. Grass, trees, and land are mind, and because they *are* mind, they *are* being. And because they *are* being, we say they *have* buddha-nature. The sun, moon, and stars *are* mind, and because they *are* mind, they *are* being. And because they *are* being, we say they *have* buddha-nature. This is what Master Enkan meant by "*have* buddha-nature." If it doesn't mean that, then it is not the buddha-nature that Buddhism expounds. The point that Master Enkan was making is just that all beings *have* buddha-nature. And anything that is not "all beings" may not be able to *have* buddha-nature. Then this is what I want to ask Master Enkan: Do all buddhas *have* buddha-nature? We should ask him and then examine his answer carefully. We should look carefully at the fact that he said "All beings *have* buddha-nature"; he didn't say "All beings *are* buddha-nature." He needs to drop off the *have* in "*have* buddha-nature."

Dropping off is a characteristic of the Universe, and the way to transcend the intellect. We can then go on to say that "all buddha-natures have *being*." This method explains both being and buddha-nature perfectly. Master Enkan did not realise this while he was

explaining reality, but that is not to say that he would not have realised it at a later time. And the method I used here is not as illogical as it seems. We do not always understand the truth that we possess here and now; it is a product of our physical and mental state at the moment of the present. Sometimes our whole life seems to be devoted to expressing the truth, and sometimes we simply express the truth moment by moment.

Master Isan Reiyu from Mount Isan one day preached to the assembly, "All beings are without buddha-nature." Out of all the beings, both human and divine, who hear this, the exceptional amongst them will be happy to hear it. But there will also be many who will be surprised to hear it, and will doubt the truth of it. Gautama Buddha taught that "all beings *manifest/have* (U) buddha-nature," but Master Isan teaches us that "all beings *are without/don't have* (MU) buddha-nature." The meaning of *have* and the meaning of *don't have* are opposite, leading some to wonder which of the two expressions is true. But I think that the phrase "all living beings *don't have* buddha-nature" is the more profound of the two. Master Enkan's words that we *have* buddha-nature seem to support Gautama Buddha's words, as if the two men are supporting the truth between them on a pole. But Master Isan's expression is different. Here, both men have been swallowed up by the pole. Master Enkan was a direct disciple of Master Baso, together with Master Hyakujo. But Isan was Hyakujo's disciple, and thus Enkan's junior. Nevertheless, Isan was more deeply versed in the truth than Enkan, his senior. Isan expresses here his conclusion, that all living beings are without buddha-nature. His conclusion is an accurate

description; a real Buddhist teaching of the state that he himself is receiving and maintaining through the practice of Zazen. We should probe on further. How can all beings *be* buddha-nature? How can they *have* buddha-nature? Any being who *has* buddha-nature must be some kind of demon! People want to spread this infernal layer that they call “buddha-nature” over all beings! But buddha-nature is just buddha-nature, and beings are just beings. It is not true to say that beings *have* buddha-nature, as if it is something that comes to beings who don’t have it and then becomes their possession. We should be clear and logical about this. The kind of “being” that we imagine *has* buddha-nature is not a real being. And the state that a real being exists in can never be called *buddha-nature*. This is why Hyakujo, who was Master Baso’s direct successor, said “*To preach that all beings have buddha-nature is to insult Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and to preach that all beings are without buddha-nature is also to insult Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.*” It is an insult both to say “*have buddha-nature*” and “*be without buddha-nature*.” However, it is impossible to discuss buddha-nature without discussing these phrases. I would like to ask both Isan and Hyakujo, “Have you managed to explain buddha-nature despite the fact that both ways of explaining are clearly an insult?” If they have explained buddha-nature properly, their explanation should appear as concrete and real. And to explain it properly is to explain it to ourselves and to hear and fully understand our own explanation. I would also like to say the following to Isan: “Although you said that all beings are without buddha-nature, you didn’t say that all of buddha-nature is

without any beings, or that all of buddha-nature is without any buddha-nature. More than that, you have never even dreamt that all buddhas are without buddha-nature! I’d like to see you try again!

Master Hyakujo preached to the assembly: “*Buddha is the supreme vehicle; it is the highest wisdom. Leading the life of a buddha produces a buddha. Buddhas have buddha-nature, and are guiding teachers. Buddhas can regulate their conduct to avoid obstructions, and their wisdom is unobstructed. They have control over the effect of what they do, and so are free to be happy and wise. Living moment by moment, causes and effects move along with them. Living in the moment, they can throw away their life; dying in the moment, they are not afraid of death. Not trapped by their physical and mental limitations, they can live freely, accepting their limitations or transcending their limitations as they choose. When we have the state like this, unconcerned about status, achievement, or whether we are better or worse than others, then although we are no different to ants running over the surface of the earth, this world that we inhabit becomes unimaginably splendid and pure.*”

This is what Hyakujo says. A buddha’s real body here and now is governed by physical and mental limitation, but since we are always in the present, we are also eternal. So we are not trapped but free. When we act in life, living does not imprison us. When we act in death, dying does not frighten us. Do not love life too much and do not fear death too much, for buddha-nature exists in them. People who are offended or

disturbed at my saying this are non-Buddhists. Realising that buddha-nature is just what is in front of us now, we are free to make use of everything. This is to be a real buddha at the present moment, which is the supreme vehicle. And this real buddha exists at the present time and place; the unimaginably splendid and pure world.

Obaku was sitting in Nansen's room. Nansen asked Obaku, "*What about the teaching that equally practicing physical balance and mental wisdom will make buddha-nature clear?*" Obaku replied, "*Independent of everything throughout the twenty-four hours of the day, we have it already.*" Nansen said, "*Is that view your own?*" Obaku replied, "*I dare not say it is.*" Nansen said to him, "*Well, you don't need to pay me for the food, but who is going to pay me for all the travelling you have done?*" Obaku kept quiet.

With the question on equally practicing physical balance and wisdom, Nansen isn't asking about the teaching that there is something called *balance* that is separate from something called *wisdom*, and if we practice both equally buddha-nature will be made clear. The state where buddha-nature is clear is the practice of Zazen, which is equal practice of balance and wisdom. Nansen's question is the same as asking "Who is it that buddha-nature is made clear to?" We could also express the true situation with the question, "How about the teaching that buddha-nature is made clear to buddha-nature in the balanced state?" Obaku says, "*Independent of everything throughout the twenty-four hours of the day...*" The words "*throughout the twenty-four hours of a day*"

mean that at every moment throughout a real twenty-four-hour day we are independent of everything. Being independent of everything at every moment through a real twenty-four-hour day is making buddha-nature clear. What time should we say has come, what world should we say has appeared, in the real twenty-four hours of a day? And do these twenty-four hours belong to the world that human beings have constructed, or to some other world, or have they arrived just for the time being from the perfect world of our imagination? Whether we are in this world or in another world of our imagination, at this moment we are independent of everything. We are at this moment living in the twenty-four hours of a day, so there may never be a time when we are not independent of everything! When Nansen asked "*Is that view your own?*" he means "*You are not claiming that is your own view, are you?*" And when Nansen asks "*Is that view your own?*" Obaku can't claim it as his own in front of Nansen, because [when Obaku speaks the truth] it is not always "his own" view, since Obaku's viewpoint is expressed in the clear balanced state. Obaku replies "*I dare not say it is.*" In China, this expression is used when someone is asked whether they have a particular ability and they want to say 'yes.' So Obaku's reply doesn't mean that he is unsure of himself. We shouldn't take his words literally in this case. Although Obaku's viewpoint is a viewpoint expressed by Obaku, although it is he who is expressing that viewpoint, he should not *dare to say* that it is. When he expressed his view, his state was natural and unintentional; just like a cow coming up to you and mooing! This is how we express the truth. We can try to express the same truth as Obaku

using different words. Nansen said to him, “*Well, you don’t need to pay me for the food, but who is going to pay me for all the travelling you have done?*” In other words, he meant that he was not bothered about cost of the food Obaku had eaten, but he wanted to know who would pay him for the sandals Obaku had worn out in wasted journeys. We should study what he meant by these words for a long time. Why wasn’t he bothered about the cost of the food Obaku had eaten? We need to study this sincerely and in detail. Why is he concerned about the cost of the sandals, as if to say, “What a lot of sandals you have worn out in these years of travelling!” Obaku could have replied, “I have never worn sandals for a journey unless I could get some result that would justify the cost!” Or he might have said, “I have worn out only two or three pairs!” These could have been expressions of the true situation, and might have been what he wanted to reply. But he kept quiet. Keeping quiet is keeping quiet. He didn’t keep quiet because Nansen didn’t affirm what he said, or because he didn’t affirm what Nansen said. Real Buddhist monks don’t behave in that way. Remember, keeping quiet expresses something, just as a smile can express something sharp. Obaku’s state is buddha-nature expressing satisfaction with daily life.

When Master Isan quoted this story, he said this to his disciple Kyozan Eijaku: “*Obaku wasn’t able to hold his own against Nansen, was he?*” But Kyozan replied: “*I don’t agree! Obaku was resourceful enough to trap a tiger!*” Master Isan replied: “*Your viewpoint is as excellent as this!*” Master Isan was asking Kyozan whether Obaku could match up to Nansen in those times. And Kyozan replies that Obaku had the skill to

trap a tiger. Not only could he trap the tiger, he could also tame it. Trapping a tiger and taming it requires independence of action. Is clearly realizing buddha-nature opening the eye, or is it losing the eye? Answer now! Right now! “*The buddha-nature’s viewpoint is as excellent as this!*” In this way, everything is independent, even every half thing is independent! Hundreds of thousands of things are all independent, and hundreds of thousands of hours are all independent, leading me to say this: The Universe is like an immense interwoven container; all the hours in the day are both dependent and independent in a complex way, and ultimately the whole of the Universe and all the worlds it contains exist before we conceive of them.

A monk asked Master Joshu Jushin “*Would you tell me whether or not a dog (kushi) has buddha-nature?*” Let’s be clear on the meaning of this question. The word *kushi* in Chinese means dog. The monk was not asking whether a dog has buddha nature or whether it doesn’t have buddha-nature. He was asking whether Master Joshu really understood Buddhism or not. So Master Joshu was confronted with a crucial question, but at the same time he was able to encounter an excellent questioner, of the calibre that he had been seeking for more than thirty years.

The Master replied “*Without [any concept of buddha-nature].*” There are many separate ways of studying his one-word answer. It might represent buddha-nature itself expressing that it exists *without* [any concept of buddha-nature], or the dog expressing that it exists *without*

[any concept of buddha-nature], or an onlooker expressing that the dog exists *without* [any concept of buddha-nature]. It might take us until the day that a stone has been ground away to arrive at this *without* [any concept of buddha-nature].

The monk asks *“But it is said that all beings fully manifest buddha-nature in their existence, so why do you say that the dog is without?”*

His question suggests that if human beings were *without* [any concept of buddha-nature], then it is clear that buddha-nature would also exist *without* [any concept], and so the dog could also exist *without* [any concept of buddha-nature]. The monk continued, *“What do you think of my idea? Why should a dog’s buddha-nature be given the new name ‘without’?”*

Joshu replied, *“Because we have a mental viewpoint that is formed from our past experiences.”* This expression means that the reason that we discuss whether it exists or not is because we have a mental viewpoint that is formed from our past experiences, but in spite of our viewpoint being like this, the dog exists *without* [any concept of buddha-nature] and buddha-nature exists *without* [any concept of buddha-nature]. We can never use our mental viewpoint formed from past experiences to understand the nature of a dog, so how could we understand the buddha-nature of a dog? Whether we try to get rid of the inherent duality or whether we try to integrate the two sides, the human state is just the constant working of a mental viewpoint that is formed from our past experiences.

On another day, a monk said to Master Joshu, *“Tell me finally, does a dog have buddha-nature or not?”* This question seems to imply that the monk was having some kind of debate with Master Joshu, and from that we can see that assertions and questions about buddha-nature formed part of everyday life for our ancestors in their temples.

Joshu said, *“It exists [just as it is]”* The meaning of Joshu’s *“It exists”* is not existence as described by scholars and theorists, and it is not philosophical existence as meant by sects who study existence. It is the existence that the Buddha taught. What the Buddha meant by existence is what Joshu meant by *“It exists”*. What Joshu meant by *“It exists”* is that the dog exists. And since the dog exists, buddha-nature exists.

The monk said *“It exists already. But why does buddha-nature need to enter into this animal form?”* The priest’s words raise the question of what *exists already* means; whether it means the dog exists now, or that it existed from the past. Although *exists already* seems to mean the same as all other *exists*, it is clear and stands on its own. If it exists already, does it need to enter in from somewhere? It wasn’t just careless thinking to ask why it needs to enter.

Joshu said, *“Because although we recognize it, we can’t help mistaking our thoughts for the real situation.”* This expression has been around in ordinary societies for a long time, but now Master Joshu uses it to express the true situation. It says that although we can see the real situation, we cannot help misrepresenting reality. Very few people may believe this. It is difficult to understand how it can *enter*, and Master

Joshu suggests that the word is not even necessary. If we want to achieve the simple balanced state, can we do it without our body at this moment? And although we cannot describe this balanced state with words, it is a state where we are in our body. If we mistake our thoughts for reality we are not usually fully in our body, and not being fully in our body usually means that we are mistaking our thoughts for reality. It would appear that recognising and mistaking are the same thing. Remember, recognising a mistake as we make it is a momentary action, and it is this momentary action that is described with the word *enter*. Momentary action in the present unites both me and the world. At the same time, there is no avoiding the ordinary situations of everyday life. And more than that, our ancestor, Master Ungo said that even in starting to study things on the periphery of Buddhism, we have already adopted a mistaken approach. We have been making the mistake of half-studying things on the periphery of Buddhism for a long time, and the days have lengthened into months. This may be the situation with the discussion of the dog entering into its animal form. Although we have a mental viewpoint that is formed from our past experiences, at this very moment we have buddha-nature.

Jiku, who was a government officer and studied under Master Chosa Keishin, asked his master: “*If you cut an earthworm into two, and both parts are still moving, which part has the buddha-nature, I wonder?*” The master replied: “*No delusions!*” The officer replied: “*But if both halves are still moving...?*” The master replied: “*It is merely the worm’s physical energy, which hasn’t dissipated completely.*”

Now when the officer says “*If you cut an earthworm into two...*” is he thinking of the one earthworm that existed *before* it is cut into two? If he is, this is not the way to look at it according to our Buddhist ancestors. It is not that the one earthworm *before* it was cut into two has two parts *after* it is cut. We should look very carefully at the meaning of “one” and “two”. In saying “*...and both parts are still moving,*” is he referring to the two parts of a whole earthworm that existed before it was cut, or did he think that from the ultimate Buddhist viewpoint the two parts should be seen as one? Whether or not the officer understood what he was saying, we should not ignore what he said. Do two separate parts put together make a whole, which then exists? In describing the movement, he says “*both... are still moving*” We should interpret the *moving* in “*both are moving*” here as in the story from the Nirvana Sutra: “*Move (your mental block) with balance, and remove it with wisdom.*”

The question “*Which part has the buddha-nature?*” can also be expressed as “*The buddha-nature has been cut into two; which part is the earthworm, I wonder?*” Expressing the truth in this way needs careful study. “*Both parts are still moving, which part has the buddha-nature, I wonder?*” Does this mean that buddha nature cannot be in both parts if they are both moving? If both are moving, although there is movement in both parts, can buddha-nature only be in one of those parts? The master replied: “*No delusions!*” What did he mean by this? Does he mean that the two parts moving is not a delusion, or beyond delusion? Or does he simply mean that buddha-nature is without

delusion? We should also look to see whether his “*No delusions!*” could be unrelated to either buddha-nature or the two parts of the earthworm. When the official says “*But if both halves are still moving...?*” does he mean that because the parts are moving, we have to attribute buddha-nature to them? Or that because the parts are moving, they cannot both have buddha-nature? Saying “*It is merely the worm’s physical energy, which hasn’t dissipated completely*” might make buddha-nature appear! And should we call what appears buddha-nature, or physical energy? We should not say that they both appear at the same time, or that when one appears, the other cannot. We should not say that physical energy is the same thing as buddha-nature. This is why Master Chosa neither said that the earthworm had buddha-nature, nor that it did not have buddha-nature. He simple said that we should not have delusions, and that the physical energy has not dissipated. To understand the dynamics of buddha-nature, we need to listen to Master Chosa’s words. Consider the words “*The worm’s physical energy hasn’t dissipated completely*” calmly. What did he mean by *hasn’t dissipated completely*? Did he mean that there would be a time when the accumulated physical energy would have dissipated completely, but that time had not yet come? That’s not the way to think about it. The physical energy which has not dissipated completely is a buddha showing us what reality is. The fact that the dissipation of physical energy is not complete yet is reality showing us what a buddha is. For example, when something we hear teaches us what reality is, it happens in the moment of the sound. And the moment of that sound *is* the sound teaching reality. For that sound *is*

reality, and reality *is* that sound. Still more, thinking that buddha-nature can only exist while there is life, and when death occurs, buddha-nature disappears is too simple-minded, too naive. In the moment in which we live, we totally manifest buddha-nature in our existence, and we are without any [concept of] buddha-nature. In the moment in which we die, we totally manifest buddha-nature in our existence, and we are without any [concept of] buddha-nature. When we are discussing whether physical energy dissipates or not, we appear to be discussing whether buddha-nature dissipates or not. But even when the physical energy has disappeared from the earthworm it is both manifesting buddha-nature and at the same time is without buddha-nature. And even before the physical energy has disappeared from the earthworm, it is both manifesting buddha-nature and at the same time is without buddha-nature. If there is anyone who thinks that the existence or non-existence of buddha-nature depends upon the existence or non-existence of movement, or that the existence or non-existence of spirit depends upon the existence or non-existence of consciousness, or that the existence or non-existence of matter depends upon the existence or non-existence of perception, then we must think that they are attached to the mistaken views of non-Buddhism. From the eternal past, many stupid people have equated buddha-nature with the idea of soul or spirit, but thoughts such as these are so plainly absurd that we cannot take them seriously – indeed we might die laughing! To explain buddha-nature further, although we don’t need to remain in the limited area of words, we can describe it as concrete things such as walls, streets, bricks, and concrete.

What is buddha-nature from the ultimate viewpoint? Do you understand fully what it is? It is the usual mix of thinking, frustration, and stupidity in which we live our lives.

Shobogenzo Bussho

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