

Letters of Dahui: Letters 27-45

Thomas Kirchner

Letter 27

Dahui's Letter to Zhang Tixing 張提刑 (Yangshu 陽叔)

老居士所作所為。冥與道合。但未能得因地一下耳。若日用應緣。不失故步。雖未得因地一下。臘月三十日。閻家老子亦須拱手歸降。況一念相應耶。妙喜老漢。雖未目擊觀其行事。小大折中無過不及。只此便是道所合處。到這裏不用作塵勞想。亦不用作佛法想。佛法塵勞都是外事。然亦不得作外事想。但回光返照。作如是想者從甚麼處得來。所作所為時。有何形段。所作既辦。隨我心意無不周旋。無有少剩。正恁麼時。承誰恩力。如此做工夫。日久月深。如人學射自然中的矣。眾生顛倒。迷已逐物。耽少欲味。甘心受無量苦。逐日未開眼時。未下床時。半惺半覺時心識已紛飛。隨妄想流蕩矣。作善作惡。雖未發露。未下床時。天堂地獄在方寸中。已一時成就矣。及待發時。已落在第八。佛不云乎。一切諸根自心現。器身等藏自妄想相施設顯示。如河流如種子。如燈如風如雲。剎那展轉壞。躁動如猿猴。樂不淨處如飛蠅。無厭足如風火。無始虛偽習氣因。如汲水輪等事。於此識得破。便喚作無人無我知。天堂地獄不在別處。只在當人半惺半覺未下床時方寸中。並不從外來。發未發覺未覺時。切須照顧照顧時亦不得與之用力爭。爭著則費力矣。祖不云乎。止動歸止。止更彌動。纔覺日用塵勞中漸漸省力時。便是當人得力之處。便是當人成佛作祖之處。便是當人變地獄作天堂之處。便是當人穩坐之處。便是當人出生死之處。便是當人致君於堯舜之上之處。便是當人起疲憊於凋瘵之際之處。便是當人覆蔭子孫之處。到這裏說佛說祖。說心說性。說玄說妙。說理說事。說好說惡。亦是外邊事。如是等事。尚屬外矣。況更作塵勞中先聖所訶之事耶。作好事尚不肯。豈肯作不好事耶。若信得此說及永嘉所謂行亦禪坐亦禪。語默動靜體安然。不是虛語。請依此行履。始終不變易。則雖未微證自己本地風光。雖未明見自己本來面目。生處已熟。熟處

已生矣。切切記取。纔覺省力處。便是得力處也。妙喜老漢。每與箇中人說此話。往往見說得頻了多忽之。不肯將為事。居士試如此做工夫看。只十餘日便自見得。省力不省力。得力不得力矣。如人飲水冷煖自知。說與人不得。呈似人不得。先德云。語證則不可示人。說理則非證不了。自證自得自信自悟處。除曾證曾得已信已悟者。方默默相契。未證未得未信未悟者。不唯自不信。亦不信他人有如此境界。老居士天資近道。現定所作所為。不著更易。以他人較之。萬分中已省得九千九百九十九分。只欠噴地一發便了。士大夫學道。多不著實理會。除却口議心思。便茫然無所措手足。不信無措手足處正是好處。只管心裏要思量得到。口裏要說得分曉。殊不知。錯了也。佛言。如來以一切譬喻。說種種事。無有譬喻能說此法。何以故。心智路絕不思議故。信知思量分別障道必矣。若得前後際斷。心智路自絕矣。若得心智路絕。說種種事。皆此法也。此法既明。即此明處便是不思議大解脫境界。只此境界亦不可思議。境界既不可思議。一切譬喻亦不可思議。種種事亦不可思議。只這不可思議底。亦不可思議。此語亦無著處。只這無著處底。亦不可思議。如是展轉窮詰。若事若法。若譬喻若境界。如環之無端。無起處無盡處。皆不可思議之法也。所以云。菩薩住是不思議。於中思議不可盡。入此不可思議處。思與非思皆寂滅。然亦不得住在寂滅處。若住在寂滅處。則被法界量之所管攝。教中謂之法塵煩惱。滅却法界量。種種殊勝一時蕩盡了。方始好看庭前柏樹子。麻三斤。乾屎橛。狗子無佛性。一口吸盡西江水。東山水上行之類。忽然一句下透得。方始謂之法界無量回向。如實而見。如實而行。如實而用。便能於一毛端現寶王刹。坐微塵裏轉大法輪。成就種種法。破壞種種法。一切由我。如壯士展臂。不借他力。師子遊行。不求伴侶。種種勝妙境界現前。心不驚異。種種惡業境界現前。心不怕怖。日用四威儀中。隨緣放曠。任性逍遙。到得這箇田地方可說無天堂無地獄等事。永嘉云。亦無人亦無佛。大千沙界海中漚。一切聖賢如電拂。此老若不到這箇田地。如何說得出來。此語錯會者甚多。苟未徹根源。不免依語生解。便道一切皆無撥無因果。將諸佛諸祖所說言教。盡以為虛。謂之誑惑人。此病不除。乃莽莽蕩蕩招殃禍者也。佛言。虛妄浮心多諸巧見。若不著有便著無。若不著此二種。種於有無之間搏量卜度。縱識得此病。定在非有非無處著到。故先聖苦口叮嚀。令離四句絕百非。直下一刀兩段。更不念後思前。坐斷千聖頂額。

四句者。乃有無。非有非無。亦有亦無是也。若透得此四句了。見說一切諸法實有。我亦隨順與之說有。且不被此實有所礙。見說一切諸法實無。我亦隨順與之說無。且非世間虛豁之無。見說一切諸法亦有亦無。我亦隨順與之說亦有亦無。且非戲論。見說一切諸法非有非無。我亦隨順與之說非有非無。且非相違。淨名云。外道六師所墮。汝亦隨墮。是也。士大夫學道。多不肯虛却心聽善知識指示。善知識纔開口。渠已在言前一時領會了也。及至教渠吐露盡。一時錯會。正好在言前領略底。又却滯在言語上。又有一種。一向作聰明說道理。世間種種事藝。我無不會者。只有禪一般我未會。在當官處。呼幾枚杜撰長老來。與一頓飯喫却了。教渠恣意亂說。便將心意識。記取這杜撰說底。却去勘人。一句來一句去。謂之廝禪。末後我多一句。爾無語時。便是我得便宜了也。及至撞著箇真實明眼漢。又却不識。縱然識得。又無決定信。不肯四楞塌地放下。就師家理會。依舊要求印可。及至師家於逆順境中示以本分鉗鎚。又却怕懼不敢親近。此等名為可憐愍者。老居士妙年登高第起家。所在之處隨時作利益事。文章事業皆過人而未嘗自矜。一心一意。只要退步著實理會此段大事因緣。見其至誠。不覺忉怛如許。非獨要居士識得這般病痛。亦作勸發初心菩薩。入道之資糧也。

Old Layman, your actions and conduct are in deep accord with the Way, it's just that you haven't yet experienced the final breakthrough.⁽¹⁾ However, even without this experience, if in your daily life you maintain your steady step-by-step progress on the Way then on the day of your death Old Yama, the judge of the dead,⁽²⁾ will have to fold his hands and yield to you. How much better, then, if in a single instnt you attain complete accord with the Truth!

Although I haven't witnessed your activities myself, they appear to strike a good balance between large and small, avoiding both excess and deficiency. This is precisely where you accord with the Way. Having reached this point, entertain neither deluded thoughts nor thoughts of the buddhadharma; delusion and the buddhadharma are both external matters. Nor must you entertain thoughts of them as being external matters. Simply turn the light of consciousness around and ask yourself: "Where does the one who produces such thoughts come from? When

acting, what form does he have? When this is accomplished there is nowhere one cannot go at will; there is no excess or lack. At just this time, whose power is one receiving?" If you practice in this way, as the days and months go by you will be like a person learning archery who naturally comes to hit the target.

Sentient beings have things backward—they lose the self and chase after externals. Giving themselves over to petty desires, they call boundless suffering upon themselves. Day after day, even as they lie in bed half asleep and half awake, their minds are already flying about in all directions, chasing after a torrent of deluded thoughts. Although they have yet to perform any good or evil acts, already heaven and hell are there in their hearts. By the time any such acts actually *are* performed it's already too late. Did not the Buddha say:

The sense organs are all manifestations of our own minds. The world, the body, and so forth are all forms manifested from the storehouse consciousness⁽³⁾ through deluded thought. The manifestations transform and decay from moment to moment, like a river, like a seed, like a lamp, like the wind, like a cloud. They are like monkeys never at rest, like flies that love filthy places, or like wind-fanned flames that never go out; they turn endlessly like waterwheels from the momentum of beginningless falsehood.⁽⁴⁾

If you thoroughly understand this you have attained the knowledge that there is neither individual nor self.

Heaven and hell are nowhere else than in the half-awake, half-asleep mind of the person who hasn't yet left his bed. They don't come from somewhere outside. When [your discursive thoughts] are just starting to stir, when your consciousness is just waking up, *then* is the time to watch carefully. When watching, however, you must not forcefully struggle with your thoughts; if you do, you will simply exhaust yourself. Doesn't the Patriarch say, "If you try to gain stillness by putting a stop to activity, the stillness gained is all the more active"⁽⁵⁾

When you become aware that gradually less effort is necessary in dealing with

the difficulties of everyday life, this shows that you are gaining strength in the practice. This is where you become a buddha and a master, transform hell into heaven, sit in restful repose, leave the realm of samsara, transcend the ancient sage-emperors Yao and Shun, rouse the weary people when they are exhausted, and bestow blessings upon your descendents. When one reaches this point it is superfluous to speak of buddhas and masters, of mind and nature, of the mysterious and the wonderful, of the noumenal and the phenomenal, or of good and bad. If even such things as these are superfluous, how much more should we avoid the dusts and defilements that are censured by the ancient sages! If we are not willing to do that which is beneficial, how can we then proceed to do that which is not beneficial?

If this makes sense to you then will realize that Yongjia⁽⁶⁾ was not speaking empty words when he said, “Walking is Zen, sitting is Zen; speaking or silent, active or still, the essence is not disturbed.”⁽⁷⁾ Please act in accordance with this, and if you maintain this through to the end then, even if you never realize the full view of your Essential Ground, even if you never clearly perceive your Original Face, nevertheless you will familiarize yourself with the unfamiliar and unfamiliarize yourself with the familiar.”⁽⁸⁾ Please keep this firmly in mind. When you notice that your practice involves less effort, this shows you are gaining strength.

This old monk always offers this guidance to those in our school, but most of them, seeing how frequently I repeat it, pay me no heed and make no attempt to act on it. But I urge you, Layman, to practice as I suggest.⁽⁹⁾ In about ten days you should see whether or not less energy is necessary, and whether or not you are gaining strength in your practice. It’s like drinking water and knowing for yourself whether it is hot or cold—you can neither explain it to other people nor impart the experience to them. An ancient sage said, “The matter of enlightenment is not something you can show to others; without enlightenment the matter of Truth cannot be grasped.”⁽¹⁰⁾ One must realize for oneself, grasp for oneself, attain faith for oneself, and awaken for oneself. To be in silent accord with this understanding one must have already realized, grasped, attained faith, and awakened; those who

have not yet realized, grasped, attained faith, and awakened will not only lack faith themselves but will also be unable to accept that other people have attained this realm.

Old Layman, you have a natural affinity for the Way. There is no need to amend your usual activity and behavior. Compared to other people you have already understood 9,999 parts out of 10,000. The only thing you lack is that one final breakthrough to enlightenment.

When educated laypeople study the Way they often fail to reach a sound understanding. Deprived of thought and discussion they're left adrift, with nowhere to place their hands and feet. Failing to realize that "nowhere to place their hands and feet" is actually a *good* place, they focus on getting somewhere through reasoning with their minds and elucidating with their mouths. They have no idea how mistaken this is.

The Buddha said, "The Tathagata uses all sorts of parables to explain various things, but there can be no parable to explain this Dharma, because this Dharma is ineffable and thus the path of intellectual knowledge is cut off."⁽¹¹⁾ Thinking and discrimination invariably obstruct the Way. If we can cut off past and future then the paths of conceptualization disappear of themselves. Once the paths of conceptualization disappear, then whatever you speak of is the Dharma. Once the Dharma is clear, this clarity is itself the realm of inconceivable great liberation. But this realm, too, is beyond conception. Thus all parables are beyond conception and things of all kinds are also beyond conception. This inconceivability, too, is beyond conception. Nor do these words on inconceivability refer to anything, and this "not referring to anything" is also beyond conception.

Investigating thoroughly in this circular fashion, we see that, like a ring with no starting point, everything—whether phenomena, Dharma, parables, or realms—is the inconceivable Dharma, without beginning and without end. Thus it is said that "bodhisattvas dwell in the inconceivable, in which conceiving occurs without end."⁽¹²⁾ When you have entered the inconceivable, thinking and nonthinking are both empty and unconditioned. But you must not linger in this empty,

unconditioned state—to do so is to confine yourself to the sphere of the Dharma Realm. The teachings describe this as “the affliction of Dharma defilement.”⁽¹³⁾ Only when the sphere of the Dharma Realm has been swept away and everything extraordinary has been exhausted is all finally right 始めて好し [this the 国訳 reading: 荒木 has something different].

If at a single phrase you can immediately penetrate [koans] like “The juniper tree in front of the garden,”⁽¹⁴⁾ “Three pounds of flax,”⁽¹⁵⁾ “A dry piece of shit,”⁽¹⁶⁾ “A dog has no buddha-nature,” “Swallow the waters of West River in a single gulp,”⁽¹⁷⁾ and “East Mountain walks on the water,”⁽¹⁸⁾ only then can you speak of the Infinite Merit-Transference of the Dharma Realm.⁽¹⁹⁾ When you see, act, and utilize in accordance with the way things truly are, then you can manifest the Jewel King’s realm on the tip of a single hair, sit in a mote of dust and turn the Great Wheel of the Dharma, and both create and destroy phenomenal dharmas just as you wish. You will be like an able-bodied man who needs no help from others when he extends his arm, or like a lion who seeks no companion as he strides along. Though marvelous realms appear before you, you are not filled with awe; though evil realms confront you, you feel no fear. In your everyday activities you will accord with circumstances in an open, uninhibited way and wander freely as your nature moves you. Upon reaching this stage⁽²⁰⁾ one can truly say such things as “there is no heaven or hell.”

Yongjia Xuanjue said, “There are neither people nor buddhas; the myriad worlds of the universe are bubbles in the sea. The saints and sages are all like flashes of lightning.”⁽²¹⁾ Yongjia had obviously attained to this stage; how could he have written these words otherwise? But many are those who misinterpret such statements. Those who have not penetrated right through to the source invariably interpret them in a conceptual way. Thus they end up claiming that all is nonexistent, negating cause and effect, and denouncing the teachings of the buddhas and masters as lies intended to deceive people. Unless this illness is removed, then [as Yongjia says], you will become one who, “in confusion, invites calamity.”⁽²²⁾

The Buddha said, “The false, groundless mind is full of artful views.”⁽²³⁾ If it

can't cling to being it will cling to nonbeing. If it can't cling to either one it will figure out something to cling to *between* being and nonbeing. And if it is aware of these problems then it is certain to arrive at the position of "neither being nor nonbeing." Thus the sages of old conscientiously admonished us to avoid the four propositions,⁽²⁴⁾ sever the one hundred negations,⁽²⁵⁾ cut straight through with a single stroke, think no more of the past or future, and sever the heads of the thousand sages.

The four propositions are: "being," "nonbeing," "neither being nor nonbeing," and "both being and nonbeing." If one thoroughly comprehends these four propositions, then, if one hears someone saying that all things are truly existent, one can conform with this and also speak of everything as existent yet not be hindered by this view. If one hears someone saying that all things are in fact nonexistent one can conform with this and also speak of everything as nonexistent, but not in the usual sense of nihilism. If one hears someone saying that all things are both existent and nonexistent one can conform with this and also speak of everything as both existent and nonexistent without this being mere rhetoric. If one hears someone saying that all things are neither existent nor nonexistent one can conform with this and also speak of everything as neither existent nor nonexistent without this being contradictory. This is what Vimalakīrti meant when he spoke of "following the six heretical teachers when they fall into error."⁽²⁶⁾

Scholar officials who study the Way tend to make their minds blank and pay no heed to the advice of good teachers. They think they understand their teacher's meaning the moment he opens his mouth and before they've even heard him out. But have them explain their understanding and it's clear they've missed the point. By jumping to conclusions in this way they limit themselves to superficial understandings.

There is another sort of scholar official, one who always strives to appear intelligent by holding forth on various ideas and acting as though there is no subject he is not familiar with. Only this one subject of Zen, he thinks to himself, he hasn't yet understood, so he summons a succession of untrustworthy teachers

to his offices, serves them a meal and, after they have satisfied themselves, allows them to expound to their heart's content on their misguided views. Using his discriminating mind he commits these views to memory. He then tests people by trading phrases with them, calling this "question-and-answer Zen." If in the end he has even a single phrase to which the other person has no reply, this he calls a victory. Someone like this wouldn't recognize a true clear-eyed person if he ran right into one. And supposing he did recognize him, he would be unable to drop his preconceived views since such people lack any kind of truly grounded faith. Yet he still tries to associate with teachers and receive certification for his understanding. However, when the teacher gets serious and in circumstances both good and bad starts wielding hammer and tongs, he gets frightened and doesn't dare come close. Such fellows are truly pitiable.

You, Layman, at a young age passed the examinations with honors and elevated your status in the world. Wherever you have been you have governed benevolently in accordance with the situation; in both grace and achievements you surpass ordinary people. Yet you remain humble, devoting yourself single-mindedly to continuing steadily in your quest to understand the One Great Matter. Seeing such sincerity, I couldn't help writing at such length. I did this not only so that you might be aware of the various problems I described, but also in order to encourage you, a beginning bodhisattva, and provide nourishment for your efforts to enter the Way.

Notes

- (1) "The final breakthrough" translates 因地一下, which, traditionally, signifies the shout a person makes at the moment of enlightenment.
- (2) For Old Yama, see Letter 7, note 1.
- (3) The storehouse consciousness (Skt., ālaya-vijñāna), the eighth consciousness of the Yogācāra school, is the basic consciousness in which the impressions resulting from an individual's karmic activities are stored and out of which the other seven levels of consciousness (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, conscious thought, and self-consciousness) arise to produce all samsaric existence.
- (4) From the *Avantamsaka Sutra* (T16: 487c)

- (5) The Patriarch referred to is Sengcan (d. 606?), the third patriarch of Chinese Zen. The text quoted is *Faith in Mind* 信心銘 (T48: 376b).
- (6) Yongjia Xuanjue 永嘉玄覺 (675–713) was a disciple of the Sixth Patriarch, Huineng. He became a monk while still quite young and studied the Tripitaka and Tiantai meditation. It is said that his understanding was so deep that he was recognized as a successor of Huineng after a single night at the master’s monastery.
- (7) From Yongjia’s *The Song of Enlightenment* 證道歌 (T48: 396a).
- (8) See Letter 7, note 9.
- (9) Mujaku: This refers to Dahui’s advice, “When [your discursive thoughts] are just starting to stir, when your consciousness is just waking up, *then* is the time to watch carefully...”
- (10) The ancient sage is Qingliang Chengguan 清涼澄觀 (737-838), the fourth Huayan-school patriarch. The passage is found in *Pointing at the Moon Record* 指月錄 2 (X83: 424c)
- (11) From the *Avatamsaka Sutra* 52 (T10: 277b)
- (12) From the *Avatamsaka Sutra* 30 (T10: 165a).
- (13) “The affliction of Dharma defilement” translates 法塵煩惱. 煩惱 is the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit *kleśa*, meaning “affliction,” or more specifically “hindrances,” those things that impede people’s search for complete liberation. In this case the hindrance is attachment to the Dharma Realm of the unconditioned Absolute; this attachment is regarded as 塵, literally “dust,” but in this case indicating a type of defilement.
Dahui refers to “the teachings” as the source of the term 法塵煩惱, but it appears in no sutra. The earliest mention of it appears to be by Baizhang Huaihai in *Records of the Ancient Masters* 古尊宿語錄 2 (X68: 10c).
- (14) See Letter 6, note 8.
- (15) A monk asked Dongshan Shouchu, “What is buddha?” Dongshan answered, “Three pounds of flax.”
- (16) A monk asked Yunmen Wenyan, “What is buddha?” Yunmen answered, “A dry piece of shit.”
- (17) See Letter 6, note 7.
- (18) A monk questioned Yunmen, “What is the place where all buddhas attain complete liberation?” Yunmen replied, “East Mountain walks on the water.”
- (19) “Infinite Merit-Transference of the Dharma Realm” translates 法界無量回向, which refers to the stage of wisdom in which the benefits from all of one’s meritorious acts

- are directed toward the liberation of other beings throughout the universe.
- (20) Mujaku: The stage when one has swept away the sphere of the Dharma Realm.
- (21) From *The Song of Enlightenment* (T48: 396c).
- (22) From *The Song of Enlightenment* (T48: 396a). The full passage says, “Clinging to emptiness and denying cause and effect—such confusion invites calamity.”
- (23) From *The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment* 大方廣圓覺修多羅了義經 1 (T17: 916a).
- (24) The four propositions, in addition to the explanation given in this paragraph by Dahui, are sometimes defined as identity 一, distinction 異, being 有, and nonbeing 無.
- (25) The one hundred negations comprise the sum total of the various ways in which the four propositions may interrelate. Each proposition may be affirmed, negated, both affirmed and negated, or neither affirmed nor negated, resulting in four. This applies to all four of the original propositions, resulting in sixteen. These sixteen exist in the three worlds of past, present, and future, resulting in forty-eight. These forty-eight have either arisen or are about to arise, resulting in ninety-six. To the ninety-six are added the original four, resulting in one hundred.
- (26) The full passage reads, “Subhuti, if without seeing the Buddha or listening to his Law you are willing to take those six heretical teachers, Purana Kashyapa, Maskarin Goshaliputra, Samjayin Vairatiputra, Ajita Keshakambala, Kakuda Katyayana, and Nirgrantha Jnatiputra, as your teachers, leave the household life because of them, and follow them in falling into the same errors they fall into, then you will be worthy to receive food.” (Watson 1997, p. 42; T14: 540b-c).

Letter 28

Dahui’s Letter to Wang Neihan (Yanzhang)

承。杜門壁觀。此息心良藥也。若更鑽故紙。定引起藏識中無始時來生死根苗。作善根難。作障道難無疑。得息心且息心已。過去底事。或善或惡。或逆或順。都莫思量。現在事得省便省。一刀兩段不要遲疑。未來事自然不相續矣。釋迦老子云。心不妄取過去法。亦不貪著未來事。不於現在有所住。了達三世悉空寂。但看。僧問趙州。狗子還有佛性也無。州云無。請只把閑思量底心。回在無字上。試思量看。忽然向思量不及處。得這一念破。便是了達三世處也。了達時安排不得。計較不得。引證不得。何以故。了達處不容安排。不容計較。不容引證。縱然引證得。計較得。安排得。與了達底。

了沒交涉。但放教蕩蕩地。善惡都莫思量。亦莫著意。亦莫忘懷。著意則流蕩。忘懷則昏沈。不著意不忘懷。善不是善。惡不是惡。若如此了達。生死魔何處摸搽。一箇汪彥章。聲名滿天下。平生安排得。計較得。引證得底。是文章。是名譽。是官職。晚年收因結果處。那箇是實。做了無限之乎者也。那一句得力。名譽既彰。與匿德藏光者。相去幾何。官職已做到大兩制。與作秀才時。相去多少。而今已近七十歲。儘公伎倆。待要如何。臘月三十日。作麼生折合去。無常殺鬼念念不停。雪峯真覺云光陰倏忽暫須臾。浮世那能得久居。出嶺年登三十二。入闔早是四旬餘。他非不用頻頻舉。己過還須旋旋除。為報滿城朱紫道。閻王不怕佩金魚。古人苦口叮嚀為甚麼事。世間愚庸之人。飢寒所迫。日用無他念。只得身上稍煖肚裏不飢。便了。只是這兩事。生死魔却不能為惱。以受富貴者較之。輕重大不等。受富貴底。身上既常煖。肚裏又常飽。既不被這兩事所迫。又却多一件不可說底無狀。以故常在生死魔網中。無由出離。除宿有靈骨方見得徹識得破。先聖云。瞥起是病。不續是藥。不怕念起。唯恐覺遲。佛者覺也。為其常覺故。謂之大覺。亦謂之覺王。然皆從凡夫中做得出來。彼既丈夫。我寧不爾。百年光景能得幾時。念念如救頭然。做好事尚恐做不辦。況念念在塵勞中而不覺也。可畏可畏。近收呂居仁四月初書。報曾叔夏劉彥禮死。居仁云。交遊中。時復抽了一兩人。直是可畏。渠邇來為此事甚切。亦以瞥地回頭稍遲為恨。比已作書答之云。只以末後知非底一念為正。不問遲速也。知非底一念。便是成佛作祖底基本。破魔網底利器。出生死底路頭也。願公亦只如此做工夫。做得工夫漸熟。則日用二六時中便覺省力矣。覺得省力時。不要放緩。只就省力處崖將去。崖來崖去和這省力處。亦不知有時不爭多也。但只看箇無字。莫管得不得。至禱至禱。

I understand from your letter that you have shut your gate and are sitting in meditation. This is excellent medicine for quieting the mind. However, if in addition to this you dig into the teachings it will undoubtedly awaken all sorts of samsaric roots and shoots latent in your storehouse consciousness from beginningless time, which can only hinder the cultivation of good karmic roots and obstruct your progress on the Way. When you gain some inner quiet, remain

that way for a while and do not think of anything, whether of past, of good or of evil, of boon or of bane. Those things of the present that can be eliminated, eliminate. Cut them off with a single stroke—have no hesitation. Then future concerns will naturally fade away.

Shakyamuni said, “The [bodhisattva’s] mind does not falsely cling to things of the past nor crave for things in the future, nor does it dwell on the present. It realizes that past, present, and future are void.”⁽¹⁾ Just examine the koan, “A monk asked Zhaozhou, ‘Does a dog have buddha-nature?’ Zhaozhou answered ‘No!’” Please take the mind occupied with useless thinking and direct it instead to this “No!”, and try occupying it with that. If, facing the place where thinking does not reach, you suddenly break through this very thought, you have penetrated the three periods of time. At that time there is no deliberation, no discernment, no intellectual understanding.⁽²⁾ This is because such things have no place in this experience—regardless of how much one researches, discerns, or deliberates, it has nothing to do with realization. Just let go and be open and at ease. Do not think “good” or “bad,” do not arouse the mind, do not silence the mind. When you arouse the mind it becomes excited; when you silence the mind it becomes dull.⁽³⁾ If you do neither of these things then good is not “good” and bad is not “bad.” If you understand in this way, to what can the demons of samsara adhere?

Your fame, Wang Yanzhang, fills the world. What you have gained in your daily life through deliberation, discernment, and scholarship are cultural refinement, reputation, and official status. When you sum it all up at the end of your life, what of this is real? After all of your endless literary efforts, is there a single phrase that has truly done you any good? How much difference is there between those who are famed throughout the land and those who hide their virtue and conceal their light? Is an official who has reached the highest ranks really any different from what he was as a student who hadn’t yet passed the examinations? You are now approaching seventy—what more are you hoping to accomplish through the exertion of your talents? How will you settle accounts on the day of your death? The killer-demons of impermanence do not halt for even an instant. As Xuefeng

Zhenjue⁽⁴⁾ said:

Our time is fleeting, in an instant it is gone;
How can one stay long in this ephemeral world?
I was thirty-two⁽⁵⁾ when I left the mountain;⁽⁶⁾
It has already been forty years since I came to Min.⁽⁷⁾
No use continually criticizing people's faults
Rather should one steadily remove one's own failings.
I humbly inform the palace officials dressed in vermilion and purple:
Old Yama is unawed by your golden emblems of rank.⁽⁸⁾

Consider well what Xuefeng is trying to tell us with these carefully chosen words.

The common people of the world are beset by hunger and cold, and can think of little else in their daily lives. They're satisfied if they can keep themselves reasonably warm and assuage the pangs of hunger. Since these two things are their only concerns the demons of samsara cannot trouble them. Compare them to prosperous people and we see that the two groups differ greatly in what they consider to be important. Prosperous people are always sufficiently warm and have enough to eat, and precisely because these two matters are not a problem for them they are beset by an excess of vague, inexpressible concerns. Hence they are always caught in the net of the samsaric demons, with no way to escape unless they possess the superior aptitude and awareness to see their way through.⁽⁹⁾

An ancient sage said, "Subtle arisings of deluded thought are the disease. Not continuing them is the medicine. Do not fear the arising of thoughts; fear the failure to be aware of them."⁽¹⁰⁾ "Buddha" means "aware" or "awake." It is because buddhas are continuously aware that they are known as "Great Aware Ones" or "Kings of Awareness." Moreover, all buddhas were awakened and came forth from among the ranks of ordinary people. "They were worthy practitioners; why cannot I, too, be like that?"⁽¹¹⁾

Even if you were to live one hundred years, how much time is that? Practice

from moment to moment as though trying to extinguish flames on your head! Even when engaged in good works we fear being unable to carry them through; how much more frightening, then, is it to be mired from one moment to the next in the dusts of delusion without ever attaining awakening?

Recently, at the beginning of the fourth month, Lu Juren sent me a letter in which he informed me of the deaths of Ceng Shuxia and Liu Yanli.⁽¹²⁾ Juren commented, “Once more I have lost several of my friends. This [transiency] is truly what we must keep in mind.” Juren has recently become quite serious with regard to resolving the Great Matter, and regrets that he was rather late in this change in his thinking. In the reply I wrote to him the other day I said, “Just take as true that final thought where you realized your error. Do not be concerned with ‘early’ or ‘late.’ The realization of your error forms the foundation of your becoming a buddha and a master, comprises a sharp instrument for cutting through the nets of the demons, and provides the path to escaping samsara.”

I hope that you, too, will practice in this way. As your practice throughout the day gradually matures you will notice a lessening in the effort it requires. With this realization do not slacken off. Just follow all the way through with this lessening of effort, remaining in accord with it whether coming or going. When you are no longer even aware of this lessened effort⁽¹³⁾ then indeed you are close. Just examine Zhaozhou’s “No!” Do not concern yourself with whether or not you will gain realization.

With my best wishes.

Notes

- (1) From the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (T10: 156b).
- (2) Mujaku: Dahui makes this comment because Wang was much attached to the intellectual study of Buddhism.
- (3) See also Letter 15.
- (4) Xuefeng Zhenjue is another name for Xuefeng Yicun (see Letter 9, note 10). “Zhenjue” is a posthumous title.
- (5) The year was 853.

- (6) Mujaku identifies the mountain as Feiyuan Peak 飛猿嶺 in Fujian.
- (7) Min 閩 was the ancient name for Fujian.
- (8) From *The Record of Xuefeng Yicun* (X69: 84b). A slightly different version of this verse is found in Case 22 of the *Blue Cliff Records* (T48: 163a).
- (9) Mujaku: The aptitude and awareness to see that the demons' net is composed of the five desires (the desires that arise as a result of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch; or the desires for wealth, sexual pleasure, food and drink, fame, and sleep).
- (10) It is not known who the ancient sage was.
- (11) An early mention of this line is found in the *Infinite Life Sutra* 佛說大阿彌陀經 2 (T12: 340, a).
- (12) The identities of Ceng Shuxia 曾叔夏 and Liu Yanli 劉彥禮 are unknown.
- (13) Mujaku: "When you are no longer even aware of this" 亦不知有時 indicates a state of unity, where the distinction between subjective and objective no longer exists.

Letter 29

Dahui's Second Letter to Wang Neihan (Yanzhang)

伏承。杜門息交。世事一切闕略。唯朝夕以某向所舉話頭提撕。甚善甚善。既辦此心。當以悟為則。若自生退屈。謂根性陋劣。更求入頭處。正是含元殿裏問長安。在甚處爾。正提撕時是阿誰。能知根性陋劣底又是阿誰。求入頭處底又是阿誰。妙喜不避口業。分明為居士說破。只是箇汪彥章。更無兩箇。只有一箇汪彥章。更那裏得箇提撕底知根性陋劣底求入頭處底來。當知皆是汪彥章影子。並不干他汪彥章事。若是真箇汪彥章。根性必不陋劣。必不求入頭處。但只信得自家主人公及。並不消得許多勞攘。昔有僧問仰山。禪宗頓悟畢竟入門的意如何。山曰。此意極難。若是祖宗門下上根上智。一聞千悟。得大總持。此根人難得。其有根微智劣。所以古德道。若不安禪靜慮。到這裏總須茫然。僧曰。除此格外。還別有方便令學人得入也無。山曰。別有別無。令汝心不安。我今問汝。汝是甚處人。曰幽州人。山曰。汝還思彼處否。曰常思。山曰。彼處樓臺林苑人馬駢闐。汝返思思底。還有許多般也無。曰某甲到這裏一切不見有。山曰。汝解猶在境。信位即是。人位即不是。妙喜已是老婆心切。須著更下箇注脚。人位即是汪彥章。信位即是知根性陋劣。求入頭處底。若於正提撕話頭時。返思能提撕底。還是汪彥章否。

到這裏間不容髮。若佇思停機。則被影子惑矣。請快著精彩。不可忽不可忽。記得前書中嘗寫去。得息心。且息心已。過去底事。或善或惡。或逆或順。都莫理會。現在事得省便省。一刀兩段不要遲疑。未來事自然不相續矣。不識曾如此覷捕否。這箇便是第一省力做工夫處也。至禱至禱。

I hear that you have shut your gate, set aside your social interactions, and deferred all worldly concerns so that you can apply yourself morning and night to the koan I gave you earlier. This is good news indeed!

In cultivating your mind this way make enlightenment your standard. If, losing heart, you say that your natural capacities are inferior and thus seek some other way to gain awakening,⁽¹⁾ this is like being inside the palace and asking where the capital is. When focusing on your koan, ask “Who is it?” The one who thinks his capacities are inferior—“Who is it?” The one seeking to gain awakening—“Who is it?” I’ll explain it clearly for your sake, not sparing my words. It is *you*, Wang Yanzhang, and no one else. There is only one Wang Yanzhang. Where do you find “one who practices,” “one who thinks his capacities are inferior,” or “one who seeks enlightenment”? Know that these are all just shadows, and have nothing to do with the true Wang Yanzhang.⁽²⁾ Concerning the true Wang Yanzhang, it is certain that his capacities are not inferior and that he needn’t seek awakening. If you just have complete faith in your own inner Master there is no need for so many worries and concerns.

In olden times a monk asked Yangshan,⁽³⁾ “What, ultimately, is the true meaning of ‘entering the gate’ in the Zen school, with its teaching of sudden enlightenment?” Yangshan replied, “The meaning is very hard to define. When Zen students of superior capacities and outstanding wisdom ‘hear one they understand a thousand,’ and gain a thorough command of the teachings. However, such students are exceedingly rare. Regarding people of meager capacities and inferior wisdom, an ancient master said, ‘Unless one does dhyāna meditation, one is at a complete loss when coming here.’”⁽⁴⁾ The monk then asked, “Aside from this guideline, is there any other expedient to help students attain realization?”

Yangshan replied, “Whether there is or whether there isn’t, either way you’re simply disturbing your mind. What I ask now is, where are you from?” “From Youzhou,” said the monk. Yangshan asked, “Do you still think about that region?” “I think about it all the time,” replied the monk. Yangshan said, “In Youzhou there are many buildings, forests, gardens, people, and horses. Reflecting back upon that which thinks, are such things present or not?” The monk answered, “When I do so, I can see nothing existing.” Yangshan said, “Your understanding is still in the realm of the void.”⁽⁵⁾ This is fine for the stage of faith, but not for the stage of humanity.”⁽⁶⁾

Being one who tends toward grandmotherly kindness, I should add a few comments to what Yangshan says. The stage of humanity is *you*, Wang Yanzhang; the stage of faith is that which thinks its capacities are inferior and seeks to gain awakening. When attending to your koan reflect back on that which is attending: “Is *this* Wang Yanzhang or not?” At this point there is no gap even a hair’s-breadth wide. If you linger in thought and stifle your potential you’ll be confused by shadows. Please apply yourself to your practice. Do not neglect this!

Do you remember what I wrote in my last letter? “When you gain some inner quiet, remain that way for a while and do not think of anything, whether of past, of good or of evil, of boon or of bane. Those things of the present that can be eliminated, eliminate. Cut them off with a single stroke—have no hesitation. Then future concerns will naturally fade away.” Did you understand that this says just what I have said in this letter? This is the most important point for practicing in the most effortless way.

With my best wishes.

Notes

- (1) “Gain awakening” translates 入頭, which refers to gaining an initial experience of enlightenment.
- (2) Mujaku: Dahui is referring to Wang’s true Master 主人公.
- (3) Yangshan Huiji 仰山慧寂 (807–883) became a monk at the age of seventeen and studied the vinaya at Nanhua si 南華寺. After practicing under several of the greatest masters of his time, including Danyuan Yingzhen, he entered the temple of Guishan

Lingyou. To Guishan's style of Zen he added use of the circle-figures 圓相 he had received from Danyuan, and that became one of the characteristic teachings of the Guiyang lineage.

The passage that follows is found in the *Jingde-era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* 景德傳燈錄 8 (T51: 283c).

- (4) The ancient master is Dazhu Huihai (n.d.), a disciple of Mazu Daoyi. The quote is found in the *Jingde-era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* 景德傳燈錄 28 (T51: 441b).
- (5) "Void" translates 境, lit., "sphere," "realm," or "circumstances." Mujaku comments that in this case "the circumstances objectified by the monk are not his surroundings, such as mountains, rivers, etc., but rather the void of sunyata."
- (6) The stage of faith 信位 is the stage in which one seeks enlightenment; the stage of humanity 人位 is the stage in which one works to liberate all sentient beings. The essence of the Mahayana spirit is that one follows the Way and strives for enlightenment in order that one may then help save all sentient beings.

Letter 30

Dahui's Third Letter to Wang Neihan (Yanzhang)

伏承。第五令嗣。以疾不起。父子之情。千生百劫恩愛習氣之所流注。想當此境界。無有是處。五濁世中種種虛幻。無一真實。請行住坐臥常作是觀。則日日月深。漸漸消磨矣。然正煩惱時。子細揣摩窮詰。從甚麼處起。若窮起處不得。現今煩惱底。却從甚麼處得來。正煩惱時。是有是無。是虛是實。窮來窮去。心無所之。要思量但思量。要哭但哭。哭來哭去。思量來思量去。抖擻得藏識中許多恩愛習氣盡時。自然如水歸水。還我箇本來無煩惱無思量無憂無喜底去耳。入得世間。出世無餘。世間法則佛法。佛法則世間法也。父子天性一而已。若子喪而父不煩惱不思量。如父喪而子不煩惱不思量。還得也無。若硬止遏哭時又不敢哭。思量時又不敢思量。是特欲逆天理滅天性揚聲止響潑油救火耳。正當煩惱時。總不是外事。且不得作外邊想。永嘉云。無明實性即佛性。幻化空身即法身。是真語實語不誑不妄等語。恁麼見得了。要思量要煩惱。亦不可得。作是觀者名為正觀。若他觀者名為邪觀。邪正未分。正好著力。此是妙喜決定義無智人前莫說。

I hear that your fifth son has passed away from illness. The affection between father and son flows for a thousand lives and a hundred eons through the habitual forces⁽¹⁾ of human attachment, so I fear that there is nothing you can do about your present state of mind. But if in whatever you do you bear in mind that in this world of the five impurities⁽²⁾ all is illusory and nothing is true, then as the days and months go by these feelings will gradually fade away. When feelings of grief arise look closely into the source from which they emerge. If you are unable to reach this source, then examine where that which at this very moment is grieving comes from. Look constantly into whether this grieving is existent or nonexistent, whether it is empty or real, till the mind has nowhere left to go. If you want to think, just think; if you want to weep, just weep. Weep as much as you like, think as much as you like. Once one has shaken out⁽³⁾ and exhausted the many habitual energies of human affection found in the storehouse consciousness, one simply returns to the original state without affliction and without thought, without sorrow and without joy, like ice naturally returning to water when it melts.

To be truly in the world is none other than to have truly left the world;⁽⁴⁾ the law of the world⁽⁵⁾ is the Buddha-law and the Buddha-law is the law of the world. Father and child are by nature one. Is it possible that a father could lose a child and not grieve for or have thoughts of the child, or that a child could lose a father and not grieve for or have thoughts of him? If one forcibly prevents oneself from weeping or thinking when it is only natural to do so, then one is opposing natural law and harming one's inherent nature. It is like shouting at an echo to silence it, or pouring oil on a fire to put it out.

To feel emotions is not something separate [from enlightenment],⁽⁶⁾ so do not try to see it as something apart from you. Yongjia Xuanjue said, "The true nature of ignorance is Buddha-nature; the empty body of illusory transformation is the Dharma body."⁽⁷⁾ These words are true, not lies and deceptions. If you understood things in this way, you will not lose yourself in thought and emotions even if you try to. To see in this way is known as true contemplation; other types of seeing are

false contemplation. When you have yet to distinguish “true” from “false,” that is precisely the time to be diligent in your practice. This is truly the correct way as I have determined it. Do not speak of this in front of ignorant people.

Notes

- (1) “Habitual forces” translates 習氣, the “habitual energy” that continues to generate thoughts and images even after the original delusions that gave rise to the thoughts have been overcome.
- (2) The five impurities 五濁 are: 1) the impurity of the age 劫濁, 2) the impurity of view 見濁, 3) the impurity of desire 煩惱濁, 4) the impurity of sentient beings 衆生濁, and 5) the impurity of life span 命濁. That is, 1) when living in an impure age marked by warfare, disease, and natural disasters, 2) false views prevail, 3) the desires of craving, aversion, and ignorance are strong, 4) the bodies and minds of sentient beings are weak, and 5) life spans are short.
- (3) “Shaken out” translates 抖擻, which originally referred to the movement of a dog shaking water out of its fur. It became a translation for “dhūta,” practice or discipline.
- (4) Mujaku: To know the true nature of the world is to be free of the world; there is no leaving the world that is separate from being in the world.
- (5) That is, the law of birth-and-death, i.e., samsara. See also Letter 18.
- (6) Mujaku: the deluded passions and enlightenment are equally the function of Buddha-nature.
- (7) From *The Song of Enlightenment* 證道歌 1 (T48: 395c).

Letter 31

Dahui’s Letter to Xia Yunshi (Zhihong)

示論。道契則霄壤共處。趣異則覲面楚越。誠哉是言。即此乃不傳之妙。左右發意。欲作妙喜書。未操觚拂紙。已兩手分付了也。又何待堅忍究竟。以俟他日耶。此箇道理。唯證者方默默相契。難與俗子言。延平乃閩嶺佳處。左右能自調伏不為逆順關梘子所轉。便是大解脫人。此人能轉一切關梘子。日用活鱗鱗地。拘牽惹絆他不得。苟若直下便恁麼承當。自然無一毫毛於我作障。古德有言。佛說一切法。為度一切心。我無一切心。何用一切法。又

懶融云。恰恰用心時。恰恰無心用。曲談名相勞。直說無繁重。無心恰恰用。常用恰恰無。今說無心處。不與有心殊。非特懶融如是。妙喜與左右亦在其中。其中事難拈出似人前。所謂默默相契是也。

Thank you for your letter. You write, “If our paths accord, we may be as far apart as heaven and earth but it’s as though we’re together; if our intentions differ we may be standing face to face but we’re as far apart as Chu and Yue.”⁽¹⁾ How apt these words are! This is truly a mystery inexpressible in words. Even before you conceived of writing to me and dusted off your paper you’d already presented it to me with both hands. Why need you wait until you attain the stage of fortitude⁽²⁾ or the stage of the ultimate⁽³⁾ before meeting me? The truth of this Matter is mutually understood by all enlightened beings without a single word being said. But with deluded people it cannot be discussed.

Yanping is one of the most pleasant areas in the province of Min.⁽⁴⁾ If you skillfully regulate your own mind and are not controlled by adverse circumstances then you are truly a liberated man. Such people themselves control the circumstances around them and are vigorous and lively throughout the day. They can be neither confined nor provoked. Should you attain a direct understanding of this, then everything that obstructs you will quite naturally disappear.

An ancient master said,⁽⁵⁾ “The Buddha preached the various teachings to liberate all minds. In me there is no trace of mind, so what use have I of any teachings?”⁽⁶⁾ Lanrong said, “At the moment mind is used, just then there is no use of mind. Circuitous talk labors under names and forms; direct talk has no encumbrances. No-minded, just functioning; always functioning, yet no-minded. The ‘no-mind’ I speak of is no different than the active mind.”⁽⁷⁾ This state of mind applies not only to Lanrong, but to you and me as well. Its contents cannot be taken hold of and shown to others. This is what I meant when I wrote, “without a single word being said, it is mutually understood.”

Notes

- (1) Chu 楚 and Yue 越 were states in ancient China during the Zhou dynasty in first millennium BCE.
- (2) The stage of fortitude 堅忍[位] corresponds to the ten stages of devotion 十回向, the thirty-first to the fortieth among the fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice. In these stages the bodhisattva sees the “non-arising, non-dwelling, and non-perishing” nature of existence and begins developing the buddha fruit of complete enlightenment.
- (3) The stage of the ultimate 究竟[位] refers to the final stage of bodhisattva practice, in which the full enlightenment of the Buddha is attained.
- (4) Yanping is a district in the present-day city of Nanping 南平市, Fujian; Min 閩 is the ancient name for Fujian Province in southeastern China.
- (5) The ancient master is Huangbo, who attributes the passage to “a patriarch.”
- (6) From the *Essentials of the Transmission of Mind* 傳心法要; T48: 381b.
- (7) For Lanrong and this passage, see Letter 23, notes 3-6, above.

Letter 32

Dahui's First Letter to Lu Sheren 呂舍人 (Juren 居仁)

千疑萬疑。只是一疑。話頭上疑破。則千疑萬疑一時破。話頭不破。則且就上面與之廝崖。若棄了話頭。却去別文字上起疑。經教上起疑。古人公案上起疑。日用塵勞中起疑。皆是邪魔眷屬。第一不得向舉起處承當。又不得思量卜度。但著意就不可思量處思量。心無所之。老鼠入牛角便見倒斷也。又方寸若鬧。但只舉狗子無佛性話。佛語祖語諸方老宿語。千差萬別。若透得箇無字。一時透過。不著問人。若一向問人。佛語又如何。祖語又如何。諸方老宿語又如何。永劫無有悟時也。

A thousand doubts, ten thousand doubts—all are really just a single doubt. If on a *huatou* you break through your doubt then all doubts are destroyed at a single stroke. If you can't break through then continue for a time to examine it from above. If you discard your *huatou* and start wondering about words, about sutras and sastras, about stories of the old masters, or about the problems of everyday life, then all of these become the minions of the devil.

The most important things to avoid are assuming you know what [the *huatou*] is pointing to and speculating with the thinking mind. Simply direct your awareness of that which cannot be thought. When the mind is left with nowhere to go, like an old mouse trapped headfirst in a hollowed-out ox's horn, then you will see delusion severed. If your mind is unsettled just take up the koan, "A monk asked Zhaozhou, 'Does a dog have buddha-nature?' Zhaozhou answered 'No!'" If you grasp Zhaozhou's "No" then you will at once see through the words—diverse though they may be—of the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and masters of the ten directions. It's useless to ask other people. If you do nothing but ask others about the words of the buddhas, the words of the bodhisattvas, and the words of the masters, then in all eternity you will never attain enlightenment.

Letter 31

Dahui's Letter to Senior Secretary Lu 呂郎中 (Longli 隆禮)

令兄居仁。兩得書。為此事甚忙。然亦當著忙。年已六十從官又做了。更待如何。若不早著忙。臘月三十日如何打疊得辦。聞左右邇來亦忙。只這著忙底。便是臘月三十日消息也。如何是佛。乾屎橛。這裏不透。與臘月三十日何異。措大家一生鑽故紙。是事要知。博覽群書高談闊論。孔子又如何。孟子又如何。莊子又如何。周易又如何。古今治亂又如何。被這些言語使得來。七顛八倒。諸子百家纔聞人舉著一字。便成卷念將去。以一事不知為恥。及乎問著他自家屋裏事。並無一人知者。可謂終日數他寶自無半錢分。空來世上打一遭。脫却這殼漏子。上天堂也不知。入地獄也不知。隨其業力流入諸趣並不知。若是別人家裏事。細大無有不知者。士大夫讀得書多底無明多。讀得書少底無明少。做得官小底人我小。做得官大底人我大。自道。我聰明靈利。及乎臨秋毫利害。聰明也不見。靈利也不見。平生所讀底書一字也使不著。蓋從上大人丘乙己時。便錯了也。只欲取富貴耳。取得富貴底。又能有幾人。肯回頭轉腦向自己腳跟下推窮。我這取富貴底。從何處來。即今受富貴底。異日却向何處去。既不知來處。又不知去處。便覺心頭迷悶。正迷悶時亦非他物。只就這裏看箇話頭。僧問雲門。如何是佛。門云。乾屎橛。

但舉此話。忽然伎倆盡時。便悟也。切忌尋文字引證。胡亂擲量註解。縱然註解得分明說得有下落。盡是鬼家活計。疑情不破。生死交加疑。情若破。則生死心絕矣。生死心絕。則佛見法見亡矣。佛見法見尚亡。況復更起眾生煩惱見耶。但將迷悶底心。移來乾屎橛上。一抵抵住。怖生死底心。迷悶底心。思量分別底心。作聰明底心。自然不行也。覺得不行時。莫怕落空。忽然向抵住處絕消息。不勝慶快平生得消息絕了。起佛見法見眾生見。思量分別。作聰明說道理。都不相妨日用四威儀中。但常放教蕩蕩地。靜處鬧處常以乾屎橛提撕。日日月來水牯牛自純熟矣。第一不得向外面別起疑也。乾屎橛上疑破則恒河沙數疑一時破矣。前此亦嘗如此寫與居仁。比趙景明來得書。書中再來問云。不知離此別有下工夫處也無。又如舉手動足著衣喫飯。當如何體究。為復只看話頭。為復別有體究。又平生一大疑事。至今未了。只如死後斷滅不斷滅。如何決定見得。又不要引經論所說。不要指古人公案。只據目前直截分明。指示剖判斷滅不斷滅實處。觀渠如此說話。返不如三家村裏省事漢。却無如許多糞壤。死也死得瞥脫。分明向他道。千疑萬疑只是一疑。話頭上疑破。則千疑萬疑一時破。話頭不破。則且就話頭上與之廝崖。若棄了話頭。却去別文字上起疑。經教上起疑。古人公案上起疑。日用塵勞中起疑。皆是邪魔眷屬。又不得向舉起處承當。又不得思量卜度。但只著意就不可思量處思量。心無所之。老鼠入牛角便見倒斷也。寫得如此分曉了。又却更來切切怛怛地問不知許多聰明知見向甚處去也。不信道。平生讀底書。到這裏一字也使不著。而今不得已。更為他放些惡氣息。若只恁麼休去。却是妙喜被渠問了。更答不得也。此書纔到。便送與渠一看。居仁自言。行年六十歲。此事未了。問渠。未了底。為復是舉手動足著衣喫飯底。未了若是舉手動足著衣喫飯底。又要如何了了他。殊不知。只這欲了知決定見得死後斷滅不斷滅底。便是閻家老子面前喫鐵棒底。此疑不破。流浪生死。未有了期。向渠道。千疑萬疑只是一疑。話頭若破。死後斷滅不斷滅之疑。當下水銷瓦解矣。更教直截分明。指示剖判斷滅不斷滅。如此見識與外道何異。平生做許多之乎者也。要作何用。渠既許多遠地。放這般惡氣息來熏人。妙喜不可只恁麼休去。亦放些惡氣息。却去熏他則箇。渠教不要引經教及古人公案。只據目前直截分明。指示斷滅不斷滅實處。昔志道禪師問六祖。學人自出家。覽涅槃經。近十餘載。未明大意願師垂誨。祖曰。汝何處未了。對曰。諸行

無常是生滅法。生滅滅已寂滅為樂。於此疑惑。祖曰。汝作麼生疑。對曰。一切眾生皆有二身。謂色身法身也（此乃居仁同道）色身無常。有生有滅。法身有常。無知無覺。經云。生滅滅已寂滅為樂者。未審是何身寂滅。何身受樂。若色身者。色身滅時四大分散。全是苦。苦不可言樂。若法身寂滅。即同草木瓦石。誰當受樂。又法性是生滅之體。五蘊是生滅之用。一體五用。生滅是常。生則從體起用。滅則攝用歸體。若聽更生。即有情之類。不斷不滅。若不聽更生。即永歸寂滅。同於無情之物如是則一切諸法。被涅槃之所禁伏。尚不得生。何樂之有（可與居仁一狀領過）祖師到這裏。不能臨濟德山用事。遂放些氣息還他云。汝是釋子。何習外道斷常邪見。而議最上乘法。據汝所解。即色身外別有法身。離生滅求於寂滅。又推涅槃常樂。言有身受者。斯乃執客生死耽著世樂。汝今當知。佛為一切迷人認五蘊和合為自體相。分別一切法為外塵相。好生惡死念念遷流。不知夢幻虛假。枉受輪回。以常樂涅槃。翻為苦相。終日馳求。佛愍此故。乃示涅槃真樂。剎那無有生相。剎那無有滅相。更無生滅可滅（到此請著眼睛）是則寂滅現前。當現前時。亦無現前之量。乃謂常樂。此樂無有受者。亦無有不受者（猶較些子）豈有一體五用之名。何況更言涅槃禁伏諸法令永不生。此乃謗佛毀法（居仁亦有一分子）聽吾偈曰（分疎不下）無上大涅槃。圓明常寂照。凡愚謂之死。外道執為斷。諸求二乘人。目以為無作。盡屬情所計。六十二見本。妄立虛假名。何為真實義（居仁要見實處但看此一句子）唯有過量人（未見其人）通達無取捨（居仁更疑三十年）以知五蘊法。及以蘊中我（居仁在裏許求出無門）外現眾生像（莫眼花）一一音聲相（賺殺人）平等如夢幻（救得一半）不起凡聖見。不作涅槃解（亦未見其人）二邊三際斷。常應諸根用。而不起用想。分別一切法。不起分別想。劫火燒海底。風鼓山相擊。真常寂滅樂。涅槃相如是。吾今彊言說。令汝捨邪見（只是居仁不肯捨）汝勿隨言解（居仁記[1]此）許汝知少分（只這少分也不消得）志道聞偈。忽然大悟（葛藤不少）只這一絡索。便是直截分明指示居仁底指頭子也。居仁見此。若道猶是經論所說。尚指古人公案。若尚作如此見。入地獄如箭射。

I have received two letters from your esteemed elder brother Juren, who has become quite anxious about the Great Matter. As well he should—he is already

sixty years old and has retired from his government position. What higher goal has he to aim for? If he hadn't become anxious how would he settle accounts when he reaches the hour of death?

I have heard that recently you, too, are feeling anxious. These feelings are tidings from the final day of your life. "What is the Buddha?" "A dry piece of shit!" If you haven't penetrated this koan, how is [today] any different from the day you face death?

Conceited fellows of humble gifts spend their lives delving into old texts, reading widely and holding animated discussions in an attempt to understand what they say. "What about Confucius?" "What about Mencius?" "What about Zhuangzi?" "What about the *Yijing*?" "How about the ancient and modern historical records?" Obsessed with such trivial concerns, they drive themselves to distraction. If they hear someone so much as mention one of the great sages of antiquity they straightaway recite his work and are overcome with shame if there's even a word they can't remember. But when asked about their own self-nature⁽¹⁾ not one of them has any understanding. This is what is meant by, "All day long counting someone else's treasure, without a farthing of one's own."⁽²⁾ Such people pass their lives in vain. When departing this husk of a body they know not whether they will ascend to heaven, descend to hell, or wander through the various realms of existence in accordance with the forces of karma. Yet ask them about the affairs of others⁽³⁾ and there's nothing, great or small, that they do not know.

Among the educated elite, ignorance is greater in those who have read much and lesser in those who have read little. Individuals whose rise in the ranks of officialdom is small have small egos; those whose rise in the ranks of officialdom is great have big egos. The latter say of themselves, "I'm so wise, I'm so perceptive," but the moment the least amount of national interest⁽⁴⁾ is involved their wisdom and perception are nowhere to be seen. Not a word of what they read every day is of any use. This is because ever since⁽⁵⁾ they have been on the wrong path, concerned only with gaining wealth and high rank.

How many are those who have actually been able to attain these things? You should turn your attention to investigating the very spot on which you stand. Where does that in you which seeks after wealth and rank come from, and, in the future, to where will it go? You are certain to feel confused since you don't know from where it comes nor to where it will go, but this state of confusion is precisely the place from which you should examine this *huatou*: "A monk asked Yunmen, 'What is the Buddha?' Yunmen answered, 'A dry piece of shit!'" Just bring up this exchange. When suddenly all of your stratagems are exhausted you will awaken.

Strictly avoid turning to texts for intellectual understanding or resorting in confusion to conjecture and interpretation. Even if you come up with interpretations that explain everything clearly and to your full satisfaction, this is nothing more than tallying accounts in a ghost house. If you don't break through your feeling of angst you simply extend the cycle of birth and death; if you do break through this feeling you cut off the mind of birth and death. When the mind of birth and death is cut off then conceptions of "Buddha" and of "Dharma" disappear; if even conceptions of "Buddha" and "Dharma" disappear, how much more unlikely is it that notions of "sentient beings" and "deluded passions" will arise?

Just take the confused, anxious mind and shift it onto the *huatou* "A dry piece of shit." Let it sit solidly there, and the mind that fears birth and death, the mind that is confused and anxious, the mind that thinks and discriminates, and the mind that waxes clever will naturally cease to arise.

When you realize that this is happening, don't be afraid of falling into nihilism. The mind, firmly seated on the *huatou*, suddenly ceases all its contrivances and everyday life becomes unsurpassably joyful. Once all contrivances have ceased, you are no longer hindered by conceptions of "Buddha" and of "Dharma," by notions of "sentient beings," by thinking and discrimination, by being clever, or by teaching the truth. Just be open and at ease in all the activities of your everyday life, and in places both noisy and quiet always keep in mind the *huatou* "A dry piece of shit."

As the days and months pass by the water buffalo⁽⁶⁾ will naturally purify and mature. The most important thing is not to entertain doubts about other, external

matters. When your doubt regarding the *huatou* “A dry piece of shit” is destroyed, then doubts as numerous as the sands of the Ganges will be destroyed at the same time.

Earlier I had occasion to say much the same thing to your brother Juren. When Zhao Jingming was here recently he gave me a letter from Juren, in which Juren questioned me again on this matter:

Is there, I wonder, anything other than this [*huatou*, “A dry piece of shit,”] to which I should direct my practice? Also, in [everyday] activities such as raising my hand, moving my feet, putting on clothes, and eating food, how do I engage in concentrated investigation? Should I limit my practice to the *huatou*, or are there other things I should thoroughly investigate?

Furthermore, I have not yet resolved the one great question that is always on my mind—how does one fully resolve an issue like “Do we, or do we not, suffer annihilation after death?” I don’t want explanations from the sutras or the sastras; I don’t want pointers from the stories of the ancient masters. I just want an immediate, direct, and clear explanation of the truth regarding whether or not we suffer annihilation following death.”

Seeing Juren talk in this way, I felt that even a simple rustic in a three-family village who dies an unthinking death without insight or concern is better off than he is. I therefore wrote to him as follows:

A thousand doubts, ten thousand doubts—all are really just a single doubt. If with a *huatou* you break through your doubt then all doubts are destroyed at a single stroke. If you can’t break through then continue for a time to examine it from above. If you discard your *huatou* and start wondering about words, about sutras and sastras, about stories of the old masters, or about the problems of everyday life, then all of these become the minions of the devil.

The most important things to avoid are assuming you know what [the

huatou] is pointing to and speculating with the thinking mind. Simply direct your awareness to that which cannot be thought. When the mind is left with nowhere to go, like an old mouse trapped headfirst in a hollowed-out ox's horn, then you will see delusion severed.

I wrote to Juren in this clear, understandable way, yet he came back once again questioning me at length. What became of his wisdom and knowledge? Does he still doubt that, when one gets to this point, not a single word in anything one has read is of any use? I have no choice than to direct more severe words his way; if I don't respond to his question he'll just say that "even Dahui is at a loss to answer me [regarding annihilation after death]." As soon as this letter reaches you please pass it on to Juren.

Juren himself has said that he is sixty years old but has yet to resolve this Matter. I ask him, "That which you don't understand—is it that which raises your hand, moves your feet, puts on your clothes, and eats food? If so, how do you intend to understand it? Don't you see that attempting to gain a decisive understanding of whether death is followed by annihilation is tantamount to standing before Old Yama and inviting the blows of his iron cudgel? If you do not destroy this doubt you will wander endlessly through the realms of birth and death."

Tell Juren that a thousand doubts, ten thousand doubts, are all just a single doubt. If he breaks through his *huatou* his angst regarding annihilation or no annihilation after death will dissolve like melting ice. To seek, above and beyond this, a clear-cut declaration on whether or not there is annihilation—this is nothing but the [eternalist and annihilationist] thinking of non-Buddhists. To what use is Juren attempting to put all the twiddle-twaddle he studies every day?

In any event, Juren has given me a good tongue-lashing from afar, so I suppose I can't just let it rest and will have to give him a bit of a tongue-lashing in return. He says that he doesn't want to hear passages from the sutras and the teachings nor stories about the ancients, but just wants "an immediate, direct, and clear explanation of the truth regarding whether or not we suffer annihilation."

[Nevertheless, there is a story he needs to hear.] Long ago Zen Master Zhidao said to the Sixth Patriarch:

“For over ten years now since my ordination I have studied the *Nirvana Sutra*, yet I still do not understand its deepest meaning. I beseech you, Teacher, to instruct me.” The Patriarch asked, “What is it that you do not understand?” Zhidao replied, “I am confused about the part that says, ‘All things are impermanent, being subject to generation and extinction. When generation and extinction are no more, quiescent cessation⁽⁷⁾ is joy.’”⁽⁸⁾

“What do you doubt?” asked the Sixth Patriarch.

Zhidao replied, “All sentient beings have two bodies, the physical body and the Dharma-body. (*This is just what Juren says.)⁽⁹⁾ The physical body is impermanent and is subject to generation and extinction; the Dharma-body is eternal and is without cognition or awareness. The sutra says, ‘When generation and extinction are no more, quiescent cessation is joy.’ I am wondering which body experiences quiescent cessation and which body experiences joy. One could say it is the physical body, but when the physical body experiences cessation the four elements⁽¹⁰⁾ disperse, which is nothing but suffering and cannot be called joy. If the Dharma-body were to experience cessation it would become [insentient] just like herbs, trees, tiles, and stones, so what would there be to experience joy? Furthermore, Dharma-nature is the essence of generation and extinction, while the five skandhas⁽¹¹⁾ are the functions of generation and extinction; there is one essence and five functions. Generation and extinction are everlasting—when generation occurs the functions activate from the essence, and when extinction occurs the functions return to the essence. If allowed to experience rebirth, then sentient beings will never undergo cessation or extinction; if not allowed rebirth, then they will permanently return to extinction and be the same as inanimate objects. If this were to happen all things would be stopped in extinction and unable to have life, so how could there be joy? (*Charge this

fellow with the same crime as Juren!)(¹²)

The Sixth Patriarch, unable to respond as Linji or Deshan would have [with their shout or staff], answered him with these words:

You are a disciple of Śākyamuni. How can you speak of the teaching of the Supreme Vehicle by repeating the false eternalist and annihilationist views of non-Buddhists? According to your thinking there is a Dharma body separate from the physical body and there is a quiescent cessation to be sought apart from life and death. Furthermore, you assume that there is someone who physically experiences the eternal joy of nirvana. Such assumptions constitute attachment to sensate existence and addiction to worldly pleasures. Now you should know that the Buddha saw that deluded people believe that the aggregation of the five skandas constitutes their own essential form; differentiate things and see them as material forms outside of themselves; crave life and abhor death; drift from thought to thought without ever realizing they are empty, illusory and unreal; vainly undergo the cycle of samsara; misconstrue the eternal joy of nirvana as suffering; and run about seeking throughout the day. Taking pity on them, he showed them the true bliss of nirvana, in which there is no sign of generation for even an instant and no sign of annihilation for even an instant. Nor, for even an instant, is there any generation-and-extinction to be extinguished. (*Focus your eyes on this!) This is the manifestation of quiescent cessation. Moreover, as it manifests there is no concept of manifestation and thus it is said to be eternal joy. There is no one to receive this joy and no one to not receive this joy. (*This is still no more than a bit.) How can there be labels like “one essence” and “five functions,” not to mention a statement like “all things would be stopped in extinction and unable to have life”? Such things slander the Buddha and defame the Dharma. (*Juren has some of this too.) Listen to my verse. (*He just can’t explain.)

Unsurpassable Great Nirvana
 Is perfect illumination, always silently shining.
 Deluded beings call it death;
 Non-Buddhists hold it to be annihilation.
 All who aspire to the Two Vehicles
 Call it non-activity.
 This is all intellectual contrivance,
 The root of the sixty-two views.⁽¹³⁾
 Useless propositions of empty names,
 How could they constitute the truth? (*If Juren is seeking the real point, he
 need only look at this one stanza.)
 Only extraordinary people (*I have yet to see one!)
 Fully understand, and neither grasp nor reject. (*Juren must continue
 questioning for another thirty years.)
 Because they know that all forms (*Juren mustn't see sky-flowers in his
 eyes) and all sounds (*They deceive people.)
 Manifested by the five skandas and by the self formed of the skandas
 (*Even if Juren tries to escape these views he has no gate by which to
 leave.)
 Are equally like dreams and illusions,
 They do not give rise to views of "sacred" and "mundane" (*Half-
 liberated!)
 Nor do they form conceptions of Nirvana (*Again, I have yet to see such a
 person.).
 They cut off the two extremes and three times;⁽¹⁴⁾
 They always respond to the function of the five senses
 But do not give rise to the concept of function;
 They differentiate between all things
 But do not give rise to the concept of differentiation.
 Though the eonic fire were to burn through the ocean floor

And the wind were to blow mountains against each other,
The true and eternal joy, tranquility, and cessation
Of Nirvana would remain the same.
Out of necessity I have turned to explanation
To help you discard your false views. (*But Juren will not not try to
discard them.)
If you don't get caught up in my words, (*Juren, remember this!)
You may understand just a bit! (*He won't give this even the slightest
consideration.)
Hearing this verse, Zhidao suddenly experienced a deep awakening.
(*There were quite a few entangling words!)

This entire passage is like a finger clearly and directly pointing out the way to Juren. Juren may read it and say, “This is still just explanations from the sutras and sastras, still just pointers from the stories of the ancient masters.” If he continues to hold such views, he will fall into hell as swiftly as an arrow.

Notes

- (1) Mujaku: When you were born, from where did you come? When you die, to where do you go?
- (2) A saying from the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, “A Bodhisattva Asks for Clarification” chapter. The full couplet reads: “Like one who all day counts another’s treasure, without a farthing of his own; thus is the person who is learned but who doesn’t practice the Dharma.” (T10: 68a)
- (3) Mujaku: “Others” refers to Confucius, Mencius, Zhuangzi, etc.
- (4) “National interest” translates 利害, literally “profit and loss.” Mujaku comments that the profit and loss involved is not of the ordinary type (i.e., that of the individual), but that of the nation. Those officials with big egos—those who have not seen their Original Nature—are unable to discern what is truly advantageous for their ruler or their country.
- (5) “Started their schooling” translates 上大人丘乙己, the first part of an ancient sentence of uncertain origin that was used when children started their education to teach them

- the elements of Chinese calligraphy, as it was composed entirely of simple characters using basic strokes.
- (6) Zen often likens the mind in training to a water buffalo 水牯牛 or an ox, as in the Ten Oxherding Pictures. See also Chapter 35, note 9.
 - (7) “Quiescent cessation” translates 寂滅 (lit., tranquility and cessation). The term 寂滅 is also used to translate “nirvana.”
 - (8) From the *Nirvana Sutra 2* (T12: 951c1)
 - (9) Dahui periodically interjects his own comments into the passage he is citing from the *Platform Sutra*. I have placed these comments in parentheses and marked them with asterisks.
 - (10) Earth, water, fire, and air.
 - (11) The five skandhas are form (rūpa), feeling (vedanā), perception (samjñā), volition (saṃskāra), and consciousness (vijñāna).
 - (12) The same crime of getting caught up in “extinction” versus “nonextinction.”
 - (13) The term “sixty-two views” is applied to several sets of sixty-two views held by non-Buddhist philosophers views regarding the permanence or annihilation of the self.
 - (14) The two extremes of existence versus nihilism, and the three times of past, present, and future.

Letter 34

Dahui’s Second Letter to Lu Sheren (Juren)

承。日用不輟做工夫。工夫熟則撞發關捩子矣。所謂工夫者。思量世間塵勞底心。回在乾屎橛上。令情識不行。如土木偶人相似。覺得昏但沒巴鼻可把捉時。便是好消息也。莫怕落空。亦莫思前算後幾時得悟。若存此心。便落邪道。佛云。是法非思量分別之所能解。著即禍生。知得思量分別不能解者是誰。只是箇呂居仁。更不得回頭轉腦也。前此答隆禮書。說盡禪病矣。諸佛諸祖。並無一法與人。只要當人自信自肯自見自悟耳。若只取他人口頭說底。恐誤人。此事決定。離言說相。離心緣相。離文字相。能知離諸相者。亦只是呂居仁。疑他死後斷滅不斷滅。亦只是呂居仁。求直截指示者。亦只是呂居仁。日用二六時中。或臆或喜。或思量或分別。或昏沈或掉舉。皆只是呂居仁。只這呂居仁。能作種種奇特變化。能與諸佛諸祖。同遊寂滅大解

脫光明海中。成就世間出世間事。只是呂居仁信不及耳。若信得及。請依此註脚入是三昧。忽然從三昧起。失却孃生鼻孔。便是徹頭也。

I understand from your letter that in your everyday life you are diligently maintaining your practice. As your practice matures you will surely hit upon the essential point.

What practice involves is taking the mind occupied with the deluding dusts of the mundane world and directing it instead to [the *huatou*] “A dry piece of shit” so that such feelings are no longer active, as though you were a figure made of wood or clay. When you find that you’re at a complete loss and have nothing left to hold onto, this is a wonderful sign. Don’t be concerned that you’ll fall into emptiness; don’t think about this and that or wonder when you’ll attain enlightenment. If that’s your state of mind you’re certain to fall into false paths.

The Buddha said, “The Dharma is not something that can be understood through pondering or analysis.”⁽¹⁾ If you try to understand it in this way you invite misfortune. And who is it that knows it cannot be understood through pondering or analysis? None other than you, Lu Juren. Do not turn your attention away from this anymore.

Earlier, in my answer to your brother Longli’s letter, I spoke to him of your “Zen sickness” at some length. The buddhas and the masters haven’t a single thing to give anyone. Individual practitioners must entrust for themselves, must assent [to the practice] for themselves, must see for themselves, and must awaken for themselves. If one simply accepts the lip-service explanations of others, one is sure to end up misled. This Matter is definitely beyond all verbal explanations, beyond mental cognition, and beyond the written word. The one who knows that it is beyond all forms is none other than Lu Juren; the one who wonders about his continuation or annihilation after death is none other than Lu Juren; the one who seeks direct, to-the-point guidance is none other than Lu Juren; the one who throughout all the hours of the day is upset, or happy, or pensive, or analytical, or dejected, or uplifted—all of these are none other than Lu Juren. Just this Lu Juren

can effect various extraordinary transformations; can frolic in the Luminous Sea of Peace and Liberation, just as the buddhas and masters do; can bring to completion all mundane and supermundane affairs. The sole thing he lacks is sufficient faith. If you gain sufficient faith, please, enter samadhi as I have described. If when you emerge from samadhi you have lost the nostrils born of your mother⁽²⁾ then you have truly penetrated through.

Notes

- (1) From the *Lotus Sutra*, “Expedient Means” chapter (T9: 7a; translation follows Watson 1993, p. 31).
- (2) A synonym for one’s Original Face.

Letter 35

Dahui’s Third Letter to Lu Sheren (Juren)

令弟子育。經由出所賜教。讀之喜慰可知。無常迅速。百歲光陰如電閃。便是收因結果底時節到來也。乾屎橛如何覺得。沒巴鼻無滋味肚裏悶時。便是好底消息也。第一不得向舉起處承當。又不得颺在無事甲裏。不可舉時便有。不舉時便無也。但將思量世間塵勞底心回在乾屎橛上。思量來思量去。無處奈何。伎倆忽然盡。便自悟也。不得將心等悟。若將心等悟。永劫不能得悟也。前此答隆禮書。說盡措大家病痛矣。承只置在座右。若依此做工夫。雖未悟徹。亦能分別邪正。不為邪魔所障。亦種得般若種子深。縱今生不了。來生出頭現成受用。亦不費力。亦不被惡業奪將去。臨命終時亦能轉業。況一念相應耶。逐日千萬不要思量別事。但只思量乾屎橛。莫問幾時悟。至禱至禱。悟時亦無時節。亦不驚群動眾。即時怙怙地。自然不疑佛不疑祖。不疑生不疑死。得到不疑之地。便是佛地也。佛地上本無疑。無悟無迷。無生無死。無有無無。無涅槃無般若。無佛無眾生。亦無恁麼說者。此語亦不受。亦無不受者。亦無知不受者。亦無恁麼說不受者。居仁如是信得及。佛亦只如是。祖亦只如是。悟亦只如是。迷亦只如是。疑亦只如是。生亦只如是。死亦只如是。日用塵勞中亦只如是。死後斷滅不斷滅亦只如是。在朝廷作從

官亦只如是。宮觀在靜處亦只如是。住徑山一千七百眾圍遶亦只如是。編管在衡州亦只如是。居仁還信得及麼。信得及亦只如是。信不及亦只如是。畢竟如何。如是如是。如是亦只如是。

When your younger brother Ziyu stopped by he delivered your letter. Imagine how happy I was to read it! All is impermanent and passes quickly away. Even a hundred years is like a flash of lightning, and the time comes to settle accounts.

How is your work with the koan “A dry piece of shit” going? If you feel disheartened, with nothing to grasp and nothing to savor, then these are good tidings! The most important thing is not to jump to conclusions about the teacher’s pointers, nor to set the koan aside thinking “there’s nothing to do.” It mustn’t be that when you take up the koan you “have” it and when you don’t take it up it’s not there. Just take the mind occupied with thoughts of the deluding dusts of the mundane world and direct it instead to the *huatou* “A dry piece of shit.” Let the mind think as much as it likes; when it has exhausted all possibilities and has nowhere left to turn then you will naturally awaken. Don’t consciously anticipate awakening; if you do, you won’t attain enlightenment in all eternity.

Earlier, in my reply to the letter of your brother Longli, I wrote at length of the Zen sickness of “conceited fellows of humble gifts.” I hear that you’re keeping this missive always by your side. Practice in accordance with what it says and, even if you do not experience full enlightenment, you will be able to distinguish true from false, avoid demonic obstructions, and deeply plant the seeds of *prājñā* wisdom. Even if you are unable to attain enlightenment in the present life you will when reborn be naturally ready to utilize it, and this without expending effort. You will not be swept along by evil karma, and at the time of death you will be in control of the karmic forces. How much better, then, if in a single thought-moment you attain complete accord with the Truth!

Don’t fill your days with endless thoughts of other things, just keep your mind on the *huatou* “A dry piece of shit.” I implore you never to wonder when you will get enlightened. There is no set time for the moment of awakening, nor is

awakening the sort of occurrence that astounds the crowd and stirs the assembly. Rather, one is tranquil and quiet, and, in a quite natural way, does not doubt the buddhas, does not doubt the ancestors, does not doubt birth, and does not doubt death. To reach this stage of non-doubting is to attain the Buddha stage.⁽¹⁾ The Buddha stage is fundamentally without doubt; there is no enlightenment and no delusion; no life and no death; no being and no nonbeing; no nirvana and no *prājñā*; no Buddha and no sentient beings; and also no one speaking in this way. Furthermore, these words are not accepted, there is no one not accepting them, there is no one who knows they are not accepted, and there is no one who proclaims in this way that they are not accepted.

Juren, just entrust totally in this way. With the Buddha, too, just so. With the ancestors, too, just so. With enlightenment, too, just so. With delusion, too, just so. With doubt, too, just so. With life, too, just so. With death, too, just so. With being in the midst of deluded passions, this too, just so. With annihilation after death or non-annihilation after death, this too, just so. With being at the court and serving as a minister, this too, just so.⁽²⁾ With living in the quiet surroundings of a Taoist monastery, this too, just so.⁽³⁾ With living on Mount Jing in a community of 1,700 monks, this too, just so.⁽⁴⁾ With being defrocked and living in Hengzhou, this too, just so.⁽⁵⁾ Juren, do you entrust totally? With entrusting totally, too, just so. With not entrusting totally, too, just so. So, in the end, what is it? Just so, just so! Just so, too, also just so!

Notes

- (1) “Buddha stage” translates 佛地 (Skt., Buddha-bhūmi), the stage of buddhahood.
- (2) This refers to Juren’s years as a *zhongshu sheren* 中書舍人, a mid-level official at the legislative bureau
- (3) “Taoist monastery” translates 宮觀. After Juren’s retirement from government office he resided at the Taoist monastery Taipingguan 太平觀.
- (4) This refers to Dahui’s time at the monastery Nengren Chanyuan 能仁禪院 on Mount Jing 徑 in Zhejiang 浙江, where he resided from 1137 at the invitation of the prime minister, Zhang Jun 張浚.

- (5) In 1141 Dahui was defrocked and exiled to Hengzhou 衡州 in Hunan 湖南 on suspicion of supporting armed resistance against the Jurchen invaders in northern China.

Letter 36

Dahui's First Letter to Wang Zhuangyuan 汪狀元 (Shengxi 聖錫)

左右妙年自立。便在一切人頂顛上。不為富貴所籠羅。非百劫千生願力所持。焉能致是。又能切切於此一大事。念念不退轉。有決定信具決定志。此豈淺丈夫所能。老瞿曇云。唯此一事實。餘二則非真。請著鞭不可忽。世間事只是。先聖豈不云乎。朝聞道夕死可矣。不知聞底是何道。到這裏豈容眨眼。不可更引吾道一以貫之去也。須自信自悟。說得底終是無憑據。自見得。自悟得。自信得及了。說不得。形容不出。却不妨。只怕說得似形容得似却不見却不悟者。老瞿曇指為增上慢人。亦謂之謗般若人。亦謂之大妄語人。亦謂之斷佛慧命人。千佛出世不通懺悔。若透得狗子無佛性話。這般說話。却成妄語矣。而今不可便作妄語會。呂居仁比連收兩書。書中皆云。夏中答隆禮書。常置座右以得為期。又聞。嘗錄呈左右。近世貴公子似渠者。如優曇鉢華時一現耳。頃在山頭每與公說這般話。見公眼目定動領覽得九分九釐。只欠囫地一下爾。若得囫地一下了。儒即釋釋即儒。僧即俗俗即僧。凡即聖聖即凡。我即爾爾即我。天即地地即天。波即水水即波。酥酪醍醐攪成一味。餅盤釵釧鎔成一金。在我不在人。得到這箇田地。由我指揮。所謂我為法王於法自在。得失是非焉有罣礙。不是彊為法如是故也。此箇境界。除無垢老子。他人如何信得及。縱信得及。如何得入手。左右已信得及。已覷得見。已能分別。是邪是正。但未得入手耳。得入手時一分老少不在智愚。如將梵位直授凡庸。更無階級次第。永嘉所謂一超直入如來地是也。但相聽決不相誤。

From an early age you have been self-reliant and have stood over all others, yet you have not been seduced by wealth and high status. How could you have attained this if not for the power of vows maintained through a hundred eons and a

thousand lifetimes? You have been earnest and unfaltering with regard to the One Great Matter, you have unshakeable faith and a determined will. No ordinary man could be this way!

Old Gautama said, “[The buddhas appear in the world] solely for this One True Matter; the other two are not the truth.”⁽¹⁾ Please goad yourself on and do not be remiss in your practice. Our task in the world is only this. Didn’t Confucius say, “Hear of the Way in the morning, die content in the evening”⁽²⁾ What is this Way of which one hears [in the morning and can die content in the evening]? Reaching this point, can you afford to waste even an eye-blink of time? It is certainly not the occasion to be citing sayings like [Confucius’s] “My Way has one underlying principle.”⁽³⁾

You must entrust for yourself and awaken for yourself. That which is explained in words is ultimately unreliable. If you can see for yourself, awaken for yourself, and totally entrust for yourself, then not speaking or explaining is all right. Those who present a good show of preaching and explaining but who themselves have neither seen nor awakened are the ones to fear—Old Gautama called such people “persons of overbearing arrogance,”⁽⁴⁾ people who slander prajna wisdom, who tell great lies, and who sever the wisdom-life of the Buddha. Even if a thousand buddhas were to appear in the world such people would never repent. If they were to understand the koan “A Dog Has no Buddha-Nature” then it would no longer be necessary to say this, but being as they are now it’s true.

Recently I have received two letters, one after the other, from Lu Juren. In them he says that he always keeps with him the reply I wrote last summer to his brother Longli, and that his aim is to attain awakening. I have also heard that he transcribed the letter and presented it to you. Young aristocrats like him are in recent times as rare as the flowering of the udumbara tree.⁽⁵⁾

When you were at my temple a while ago I always spoke with you about how, though judging from the movement of your eyes you have grasped ninety-nine percent, you have yet to experience the final breakthrough. If you do attain this final breakthrough, Confucius is Sakyamuni and Sakyamuni is Confucius;

monastics are laypeople and laypeople are monastics; deluded people are sages and sages are deluded people; I am you and you are me; heaven is earth and earth is heaven; waves are water and water is waves. The power to mix butter and ghee into a single flavor or melt pitcher, platter, hairpin, and bangle into a single metal is one's own alone and not someone else's; it is through one's own guidance that this realm is attained. As the sutra says, "I am the Dharma King, free to do as I will with the Law."⁽⁶⁾ In this realm how could gain and loss, right and wrong possibly be hindrances? This is no exaggeration, but is fully in line with the Dharma. Aside from Old Man Wugou,⁽⁷⁾ how will anyone be able to put complete trust in this realm? Even if they could put complete trust in it, how would they make it their own?

You have already entrusted totally and have already caught a glimpse, and you are already able to distinguish between what is true and what is false. The only thing that remains is for you to make it your own. When you do, there will be no difference between young and old nor between wise and foolish; distinctions of rank and hierarchy will be no more, as though the status of the Brahma King were granted to the deluded. This is what Yongjia means when he says, "Enter the stage of the Tathagata in a single leap."⁽⁸⁾ Please put your trust in this—I am not deceiving you!

Notes

- (1) From the *Lotus Sutra*, "Expedient Means" chapter (T9: 8a). The "One True Matter" is the One Buddha Vehicle taught by Sakyamuni in the *Lotus Sutra*. The "other two" are the sravaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles.
- (2) From the Confucian *Analects*, Book 4 里仁, verse 8.
- (3) From the Confucian *Analects*, Book 4 里仁, verse 15. Dahui's point is that looking for the true meaning of "the Way" in the writings of Confucius or anyone else is to seek verification outside of oneself.
- (4) "Persons of overbearing arrogance" translates 增上慢人, from the *Lotus Sutra*, "Expedient Means" chapter (T9: 7a). The term refers to those who left the assembly when the Buddha started to preach the One Buddha Vehicle, feeling that they had

reached a sufficient degree of enlightenment and were therefore unwilling to go beyond this to the supreme perfect enlightenment of the One Buddha Vehicle. The full passage reads:

These persons had roots of guilt that were deep and manifold, and in addition they were overbearingly arrogant. What they had not attained they supposed they had attained, what they had not understood they supposed they had understood. And because they had this failing, they did not remain where they were. (Watson 1993, p. 30)

- (5) The udumbara is a mythical tree said to blossom only once every three thousand years.
- (6) From the *Lotus Sutra*, “Parables” chapter (T9: 15b; translation from Watson 1993, p. 72).
- (7) “Old Man Wugou” refers to Zhang Jiucheng 張九成 (1092-1159).
- (8) From the *Song of Enlightenment* (T48: 396a)

Letter 37

Dahui’s Second Letter to Wang Zhuangyuan (Shengxi) 答汪狀元 (聖錫)

某萬緣休罷。日用只如此。無煩軫念。左右分上欠少箇甚麼。在世界上。可謂千足萬足。苟能於此箇門中翻身一擲。何止腰纏十萬貫騎鶴上揚州而已哉。昔楊文公大年。三十歲見廣慧璉公。除去礙膺之物。自是已後在朝廷居田里。始終一節。不為功名所移。不為富貴所奪。亦非有意輕功名富貴。道之所在。法如是故也。趙州云。諸人被十二時使。老僧使得十二時。此老此說。非是彊為。亦法如是故也。大率為學為道一也。而今學者往往以仁義禮智信為學。以格物忠恕一以貫之之類為道。只管如搏謎子相似。又如眾盲摸象各說異端。釋不云乎。以思惟心。測度如來圓覺境界。如取螢火燒須彌山。臨生死禍福之際都不得力。蓋由此也。楊子云。學者所以修性。性即道也。黃面老子云。性成無上道。圭峯云。作有義事。是惺悟心。作無義事。是狂亂心。狂亂由情念。臨終被業牽惺悟不由情。臨終能轉業。所謂義者。是義理之義。非仁義之義。而今看來。這老子亦未免析虛空為兩處。仁乃性之仁。義乃性之義。禮乃性之禮。智乃性之智。信乃性之信。義理之義亦性也。作無義事。即背此性。作有義事。即順此性。然順背在人。不在性也。仁義禮智信在性。不在人也。人有賢愚。性即無也。若仁義禮智信在賢而不在愚。則聖人之道。有揀擇取捨矣。如天降雨擇地而下矣。所以云。仁義禮智信在性。而不在人

也。賢愚順背在人。而不在性也。楊子所謂修性性亦不可修。亦順背賢愚而已。圭峯所謂惺悟狂亂是也。趙州所謂使得十二時被十二時使是也。若識得仁義禮智信之性起處。則格物忠恕一以貫之在其中矣。肇法師云。能天能人者。豈天人之所能哉。所以云。為學為道一也。大率聖人設教。不求名不伐功。如春行花木。具此性者。時節因緣到來。各各不相知。隨其根性大小方圓長短。或青或黃。或紅或綠。或臭或香。同時發作。非春能大能小。能方能圓。能長能短。能青能黃。能紅能綠。能臭能香。此皆本有之性。遇緣而發耳。百丈云。欲識佛性義。當觀時節因緣。時節若至。其理自彰。又讓師謂馬師曰。汝學心地法門。如下種子。我說法要。譬彼天澤。汝緣合故當見其道。所以云。聖人設教。不求名不伐功。只令學者見性成道而已。無垢老子云。道在一芥則一芥重。道在天下則天下重是也。左右管升無垢之堂。而未入其室。見其表而未見其裏。百歲光陰。只在一剎那間。剎那間悟去。如上所說者皆非實義。然既悟了。以為實亦在我。以為非實亦在我。如水上葫蘆。無人動著。常蕩蕩地。觸著便動。捺著便轉轉地。非是彊為。亦法如是故也。趙州狗子無佛性話。左右如人捕賊已知窩盤處但未捉著耳。請快著精彩。不得有少間斷。時時向行住坐臥處。看讀書史處。修仁義禮智信處。侍奉尊長處。提誨學者處。喫粥喫飯處。與之廝崖。忽然打失布袋。夫復何言。

I have set aside all my worldly ties and am letting the days pass as they will. You, too, should not trouble yourself with anxious thoughts. In your position, what could you possibly lack? Anyone would say that in worldly things you have more than enough. Now if you could just throw yourself bodily into this gate of enlightenment then surely you would have “mounted a crane with a hundred thousand strings of cash in your purse and flown to Yangzhou.”⁽¹⁾

Long ago, when Yang Wengong Danian,⁽²⁾ at the age of thirty, encountered Yuanlian⁽³⁾ of the temple Guanghui, he felt that something caught in his breast had been cleared away. From that time on, whether serving at the imperial court or residing in the countryside, all was the same for him. Fame did not move him nor did riches and honor ensnare him, yet neither did he have any thought of disdaining fame, riches, or honor. This is how the Way is. Zhaozhou said,

“Everyone is used by the twenty-four hours, but this old monk *uses* the twenty-four hours.”⁽⁴⁾ This is not an exaggeration, but simply the way it was.

Study and the Way are essentially one, but scholars nowadays generally regard the proper topics of study to be the five Confucian virtues of benevolence (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 義), propriety (*li* 禮), wisdom (*zhi* 智), and sincerity (*xin* 信), and the proper topics of the Way to be “the investigation of the underlying principle of things” (*gewu* 格物)⁽⁵⁾ and “the sincerity and fairness” (*zhongshu* 忠恕) that is “the One which penetrates the Confucian Way.”⁽⁶⁾ It is as though they’re playing around with riddles or are blind men touching different parts of an elephant and arguing about what the animal is like. Does not the Buddha say, “Attempting to fathom the perfect enlightenment of the Tathāgata using discursive thought is like trying to illuminate Mt. Sumeru with the light of a firefly”?⁽⁷⁾ This is precisely why such people are left utterly powerless when they have to face the realities of life and death, fortune and misfortune.

Yangzi says, “Study is the means by which our nature⁽⁸⁾ is cultivated”;⁽⁹⁾ Yangzi is relating “nature” here to the Way. The Buddha says, “[Our own] nature is what achieves the Supreme Way.”⁽¹⁰⁾ Guifeng Zongmi writes, “That which performs righteous acts is the awakened mind; that which performs acts lacking in righteousness is the deluded mind. Since delusion is rooted in desire, at the time of death [the deluded mind] is controlled by karma. Since the awakened mind is not rooted in desire, at the time of death it controls karma. (The righteousness I refer to here is righteousness as a principle, not righteousness in the sense of virtue.)”⁽¹¹⁾

Looking at this now, it appears that Guifeng, like Yangzi, was unable to avoid differentiating nothingness into two separate parts. As I see it, benevolence is a quality of our nature, righteousness is a quality of our nature, propriety is a quality of our nature, wisdom is a quality of our nature, and sincerity is a quality of our nature. The righteousness of “righteousness as a principle” is also a quality of our nature.⁽¹²⁾ To “perform acts lacking in righteousness” is to go against our nature; to “perform righteous acts” is to accord with our nature. “Going against” and

“according with” pertain to the person, not to nature. Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and sincerity pertain to nature, not to the person. Intelligence and foolishness can be distinguished in the person, but there is no such distinction in nature. If benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and sincerity existed only in the intelligent and not in the foolish, then there would be discrimination in the Way of the Sages. It would be as though Heaven’s rains chose to fall on some spots and not on others. Thus I say that benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and sincerity pertain to nature, not to the person, and that “intelligent,” “foolish,” “going against,” and “according with” pertain to the person, not to nature.

Yangzi speaks of “cultivating our nature,” but our nature cannot be cultivated; only such qualities as intelligence and the ability to accord with our nature can be cultivated. The problem is the same with Guifeng’s talk of the awakened mind versus the deluded mind and with Zhaozhou’s comment on using the twenty-four hours versus being used by the twenty-four hours. If we know where benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and sincerity arise in our nature, then we know wherein lies “the investigation of the underlying principle of things” and “the sincerity and fairness that is the One which penetrates the Way.” As Sengzhao writes, “To be a god or be a man [at will]—is such a thing possible for either god or man?”⁽¹³⁾ Thus I say that study and the Way are one.

Sages do not teach in order to seek fame or take pride in their achievements. Their teaching is, rather, like spring coming to the flowers and trees. In that season all those things possessing the nature of plants will, with the arrival of the proper time and conditions, spontaneously and in accordance with their individual natures, become large or small, square or round, long or short, green or yellow or red, fragrant or malodorous. It is not that spring itself causes them to become large or small, square or round, long or short, green or yellow or red, fragrant or malodorous. These things all happen owing to the innate nature of the plants encountering the proper conditions. Baizhang Huaihai said, “If you wish to know the import of the Buddha-nature, you must observe time and season, cause and condition; when the time arrives this principle will naturally manifest.”⁽¹⁴⁾ Nanyue

Huirang said to Mazu, “Your study of the teaching of the mind-ground is like sowing seed; my teaching of the Dharma essence is like moisture from the heavens. Because conditions have come together for you, you will surely see the Way.”⁽¹⁵⁾ Thus I state that sages do not teach in order to seek fame or take pride in their achievements, but only in order to bring the student to self-awakening and attainment of the Way. It is as Old Man Wugou says: “If the Way is in a mustard seed then the mustard seed is exalted; if the Way is in the world then the world is exalted.” You have entered Wuguo’s outer halls but not his inner chambers; you have seen his exterior but not his interior.

A hundred years are in just a single instant; awaken for an instant and none of what I say above is true, but awaken for good and it’s up to you to make it true or untrue. There’s nothing forced about this—it’s just the way things naturally are, like a gourd in the water, which floats quietly if no one touches it but moves when pushed and turns about when pressed down..

Regarding your practice of the *huatou* “Zhaozhou’s ‘A dog has no buddha-nature’,” you’re like someone who’s after a robber and knows where his hideout is, but hasn’t yet captured him. Please, waste no time in applying your full effort and don’t interrupt it even for a moment. Examine this *huatou* constantly in all of your activities. Always work on it, whether reading books, serving superiors, instructing students, eating porridge or rice, or practicing the five virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and sincerity. If suddenly your heavy burden drops away, what more need be said?

Notes

- (1) This quote, which means basically “then you would have everything you could possibly want,” has its basis in an old Chinese story. A group of men were talking about what they would ask for if they were allowed to have one wish. One man said that he would like to become governor of Yangzhou, another that he would like to have plenty of money, and another that he would like to fly on the back of a crane. Thereupon another man said, “So if you put a hundred thousand in cash in your purse, got on a crane, and flew off to Yangzhou, then you would fulfill all of these wishes at once!”

- (2) Yang Wengong Danian 楊文公大年 (974-1030), also known as Yang Yi 楊億, was a government official who held a succession of posts, including prefect of Henan 河南 and Ruzhou 汝州 and Vice President of the Board of Works. A serious Zen practitioner, he was a Dharma successor of the Zen master Guanghai Yuanlian and one of the compilers of the *Jingde-era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp*.
- (3) Guanghai Yuanlian 廣慧元暉 (Kuang-hui Yüan-lien, Kōe Ganren; 951–1036; Case 137) was a native of Quanzhou 泉州, present-day Fujian 福建, with the family name Chen 陳. Ordained at the age of fifteen, he studied under more than fifty masters before finally attaining enlightenment under Shoushan Shengnian 首山省念 (926–993). He became priest of Guanghai yuan 廣慧院 in 1004. His honorary title is Zen Master Zhenhui 真慧禪師.
- (4) *Compendium of the Five Lamps* 五燈會元 4 (X80: 94a).
- (5) *Gewu* 格物 is a term that appears in a description in Confucius's *Great Learning* of how wise rulers cultivate wisdom and virtue: "Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things (格物). (Legge, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1893; pp. 221-22)
- (6) The term *zhongshu* 忠恕 is found in the *Confucian Analects*, "Li Ren 理仁," verse 15. Legge gives an interpretive translation of 忠 as "being true to the principles of our nature" and of 仁 as "exercising these principles benevolently toward others":

"The Master said, Shan, my doctrine is that of an all-pervading unity." The disciple Tsing replied, "Yes." The master went out, and the other disciples asked, saying, "What do his words mean?" Tsing said, "The doctrine of our master is to be true to the principles of our nature and the benevolent exercise of them to others." (Legge, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1893; pp. 169-70)
- (7) From the *Sutra of Complete Enlightenment* (T17: 915c).
- (8) In Chinese philosophy, the word *nature* (*xing* 性) refers to the qualities and dispositions that a living being is innately endowed with. The Confucians believed that this nature had to be cultivated in order for human beings to reach full maturity; Mencius saw such cultivation as the refinement of naturally occurring proclivities in human nature, and thus as the realization of what it means to be truly human. The Zen master and philosopher Guifeng Zongmi equated *xing* with "the Buddhahood that

exists inherently within all sentient beings as their intrinsically enlightened mind, which is identical with the one mind that underlies all phenomenal reality and is the ground of all experience” (Gregory, Peter N., *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity: An Annotated Translation of Tsung-mi’s Yuan jen lun with a Modern Commentary*, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1995; pp.13-14).

- (9) “Yangzi” 楊子 refers to the scholar and poet Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE), known for his philosophical works and *fu* poetry. The quoted passage is from the first fascicle of his *Fayan* 法言 (Exemplary sayings). The full passage reads, “‘Study is the means by which nature 性 is cultivated. Looking, listening, speaking, manner, and thought are aspects of nature. With study, nature is refined. Without study, nature becomes warped.’”
- (10) From the *Surangama Sutra* 6 (T19: 131b). The translation is based on Luk 1966, p. 149. The full passage reads, “Ananda and all who are here should turn your faculty of hearing inward to hear your own nature, which alone achieves the Supreme Way.”
- (11) From the *Jingde-era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* 13 (T51: 308b). “Righteousness as a principle” translates 義理; “righteousness in the sense of virtue” translates 仁義. According to Mujaku, Guifeng is relating 義理 to the Way 道, and 仁義 to study 學.
- (12) Literally, “benevolence is our nature’s benevolence, righteousness is our nature’s righteousness, propriety is our nature’s propriety, wisdom is our nature’s wisdom, and sincerity is our nature’s sincerity. The righteousness of ‘righteousness as a principle’ is also nature’s.”
- (13) From the *Zhao lun* 肇論, by Sengzhao 僧肇 (384-414). The full passage reads, “The Perfect Being, dwelling in the square is square, in the round is round. In Heaven he is a god, among men he is a man. To be god or man [at will], is that possible for either god or man? No. But because he is neither god nor man, he can be god as well as man.” (Walter Liebenthal, *Chao lun: The Treatises of Seng-chao*; Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1968; p. 67)
- (14) This passage is attributed to Baizhang (who quotes from “a sutra”) in the Guishan Lingyou chapter of the *Liandeng Huiyao* 聯燈會要 (*Essential Materials from the Successive Lamp Records*) (X79: 64a).
- (15) From the *Jingde-era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* 5 (T51: 240c-241a).

Letter 38

Letter to Zong Zhige 宗直閣

示論。應緣日涉差別境界。未嘗不在佛法中。又於日用動容之間。以狗子無佛性話。破除情塵。若作如是工夫。恐卒未得悟入。請於脚跟下照顧。差別境界從甚麼處起。動容周旋之間。如何以狗子無佛性話。破除情塵。能知破除情塵者。又是阿誰。佛不云乎。眾生顛倒迷已逐物。物本無自性。迷已者自逐之耳。境界本無差別。迷己者自差別耳。既日涉差別境界。又在佛法中。既在佛法中。則非差別境界。既在差別境界中。則非佛法矣。拈一放一。有甚了期。廣額屠兒在涅槃會上。放下屠刀立地便成佛。豈有許多切切怛怛來。日用應緣處。纔覺涉差別境界時。但只就差別處。舉狗子無佛性話。不用作破除想。不用作情塵想。不用作差別想。不用作佛法想。但只看狗子無佛性話。但只舉箇無字。亦不用存心等悟。若存心等悟。則境界也差別。佛法也差別。情塵也差別。狗子無佛性話也差別。間斷處也差別。無間斷處也差別。遭情塵惑亂身心不安樂處也差別。能知許多差別底亦差別。若要除此病。但只看箇無字。但只看。廣額屠兒放下屠刀云。我是千佛一數。是實是虛。若作虛實商量。又打入差別境界上去也。不如一刀兩段。不得念後思前。念後思前則又差別矣。玄沙云。此事限約不得。心思路絕。不因莊嚴本來真靜。動用語笑隨處明了。更無欠少。今時人不悟箇中道理。妄自涉事涉塵。處處染著。頭頭繫絆。縱悟則塵境紛紜。名相不實。便擬凝心斂念。攝事歸空。閉目藏睛。隨有念起。旋旋破除。細想纔生。即便遏捺。如此見解。即是落空亡底外道。魂不散底死人。溟溟漠漠無覺無知。塞耳偷鈴徒自欺誑。左右來書云云。盡是玄沙所訶底病。默照邪師埋人底坑子。不可不知也。舉話時都不用作許多伎倆。但行住坐臥處勿令間斷。喜怒哀樂處莫生分別。舉來舉去。看來看去。覺得沒理路沒滋味心頭熱悶時。便是當人放身命處也。記取記取。莫見如此境界便退心。如此境界正是成佛作祖底消息也。而今默照邪師輩。只以無言無說為極則。喚作威音那畔事。亦喚作空劫已前事。不信有悟門。以悟為誑。以悟為第二頭。以悟為方便語。以悟為接引之辭。如此之徒。謾人自謾。誤人自誤。亦不可不知。日用四威儀中。涉差別境界。覺得省力時。便是得力處也。得力處極省力。若用一毫毛氣力支撐。定是邪法。

非佛法也。但辦取長遠心。與狗子無佛性話。廝崖崖來崖去。心無所之忽然如睡夢覺。如蓮華開。如披雲見日。到恁麼時自然成一片矣。但日用七顛八倒處。只看箇無字。莫管悟不悟徹不徹。三世諸佛只是箇無事人。諸代祖師亦只是箇無事人。古德云。但於事上通無事。見色聞聲不用聾。又古德云。愚人除境不忘心。智者忘心不除境。於一切處無心。則種種差別境界自無矣。而今士大夫。多是急性便要會禪。於經教上及祖師言句中。搏量要說得分曉。殊不知。分曉處。却是不分曉底事。若透得箇無字。分曉不分曉。不著問人矣。老漢教士大夫放教鈍。便是這箇道理也。作鈍榜狀元亦不惡。只怕挖白耳一笑。

I received your letter in which you say that even while dealing with circumstances in the realm of discrimination you are always within the Buddhadharmā, and that in the midst of your daily activities you use the *huatou* “A dog has no buddha-nature” to eliminate emotional defilements.

If this is the sort of practice you’re engaging in, I’m afraid you will never attain enlightenment. Please, look under your own feet! From where does the realm of discrimination arise? How do you use the *huatou* “A dog has no buddha-nature” to eliminate emotional defilements while going about your daily activities? Who is it that sees that emotional defilements have been eliminated?

Didn’t the Buddha say, “Sentient beings have things backward—they lose sight of the self and identify with external things.”⁽¹⁾ External things are intrinsically without self-nature; it’s just that people identify with things when they lose sight of the self. The world itself is intrinsically without discrimination; it’s just that people discriminate when they lose sight of the self.

You say that day by day you move in the realm of discrimination, and you also say that you stay in the Buddhadharmā. If you are in the Buddhadharmā, then it is not the realm of discrimination; if you are within the realm of discrimination, then it is not the Buddhadharmā. Letting go of one just to pick up the other—when will there be an end to it?

At the Nirvana assembly the butcher Broad Forehead threw away his butcher’s

knife and immediately attained buddhahood.⁽²⁾ What need is there to go at such length? When in your daily life you realize that you are straying into the realm of discrimination, at just that point bring to mind the *huatou* “A dog has no buddha-nature.” Have no thoughts of elimination, have no thoughts of emotional defilements, have no thoughts of discrimination, have no thoughts of the Buddhadharmā. Simply contemplate the *huatou* “A dog has no buddha-nature,” raising this word “no” 無.⁽³⁾ Do not wait expectantly for enlightenment; if you do, then you differentiate the realm of discrimination, you differentiate the Buddhadharmā, you differentiate emotional defilements, you differentiate “A dog has no buddha-nature,” you differentiate interrupted practice, you differentiate uninterrupted practice, you differentiate “being unable to find peace owing to confusion by emotional defilements,” and you even differentiate the ability to distinguish all these different kinds of differentiation.

If you wish to rid yourself of this disease, just contemplate the word “no.” Just contemplate the butcher Broad Forehead throwing away his butcher’s knife and saying, “I am one of the thousand buddhas.” Is this fact or is this fiction? If you judge this as fact or fiction, then you’re back in the realm of discrimination. It’s best to cut straight through with a single stroke and think no more of the past or future. Think of the past and future and you’re discriminating again.

Xuansha Shibe⁽⁴⁾ said that this Matter is

beyond all limits, and thus transcends the pathways of the mind. It depends not on adornments and is by nature truly tranquil.⁽⁵⁾ Moving, acting, talking, or laughing—in every situation it is crystal clear and never lacks for anything. People nowadays, not realizing this truth, seek after things and sensations. Grasping everywhere, they bind themselves with this and that. Should they awaken to the unreality of names and forms and the chaos of the realm of sensations they try to silence thought by concentrating their minds and take control of things by reducing them to nothingness. They shut their eyes to darken their sight and stifle thoughts whenever they arise. When the

slightest cogitation stirs they immediately suppress it. People who respond in this way are non-Buddhists who have fallen into nihilism; they're dead men with unlaidd spirits. Their minds dark and clouded, they have neither wisdom nor intelligence. They're simply deluding themselves, like someone who plugs his ears when he steals a bell [thinking that this will prevent it from making a sound].⁽⁶⁾

What you speak of in your letter are just the sorts of errors that Xuansha warns us about. They are the pits in which people are buried by the false teachers of silent illumination. You must take due note of this.

When you contemplate a *huatou* do not employ various techniques. Simply allow no gaps in your contemplation whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down. In joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure do not discriminate. Just continue to bring the *huatou* to mind and continue to contemplate it. When the paths of thought are exhausted, when all flavor has disappeared, and the heart feels oppressed—this is precisely the time for practitioners to cast away their very lives. Keep this in mind! When you experience such states of mind don't shrink back—such states are the occasions when buddhas and masters are made!

Nowadays the false teachers of silent illumination present wordless silence as the ultimate principle, referring to it as “that which preceded the Primordial Buddha” or “that which preceded the kalpa of emptiness.”⁽⁷⁾ These teachers, not believing in the gate of enlightenment, regard enlightenment as a deception, as something secondary, as an expedient term, as a word to entice practitioners. Teachers of this ilk deceive others and deceive themselves, lead others into error and fall into error themselves. This, too, you should keep in mind.

When in the course of your daily activities you notice a lessening in the effort it requires to deal with the realm of distinction, this shows that you are gaining strength in the practice. To gain strength is to fully eliminate all strain;⁽⁸⁾ if you're straining even in the slightest this is definitely a mistaken approach and is not in accordance with the Buddhadharma. With an eternally patient mind just

contemplate the *huatou* “A dog has no buddha-nature.” Continue this contemplation at all times. When the mind no longer has anywhere to turn, suddenly it is like awakening from a dream, like a lotus flower blossoming, like seeing the sun when the clouds part. At this moment [the Buddhadharma and the realm of distinction] naturally become one. Through all the ups and downs of daily life just contemplate the word “no.” Don’t concern yourself with whether or not you will awaken or with whether or not you will break through. All the buddhas of the past, present, and future are simply people with nothing to do; all the generations of masters, too, were simply people with nothing to do.

An ancient master said, “In the midst of things continue in nothing-to-do-ness; seeing forms, hearing sounds, don’t be blind and deaf.”⁽⁹⁾ Another ancient master said, “The foolish eliminate the sense realms but do not forget the mind; the wise forget the mind but do not eliminate the sense realms.”⁽¹⁰⁾ If you are in no-mind wherever you go, all the realms of discrimination will vanish of themselves.

Scholar officials nowadays are usually in a hurry to understand Zen, and thus attempt to clarify it through logical explanations based on their conceptual understanding of the sutras, commentaries, and ancient masters’ sayings. They don’t realize that “clarifying” it in this way actually makes it less clear. If you just penetrate this word “No” you won’t have to ask anyone about “clear” or “unclear”! This is why I tell the educated elite to make themselves dull. Indeed, there’s nothing wrong with placing first in the “making yourself dull” exam. I’m just concerned that you may hand in a blank sheet of paper. Haha!

Notes

- (1) There is a similar, though not identical, line in the *Śūraṅgama Sutra* 大佛頂如來密因修證了義諸菩薩萬行首楞嚴經 2 (T19: 111c). Luk translates it as: “All living beings, from the time without beginning, have disregarded their own selves by clinging to external objects, thereby missing their fundamental Minds.” (Luk 1966, p. 38). The line in its present form is found in *Blue Cliff Record* 46, Main Case (T48: 182b).
- (2) The Nirvana assembly was the gathering at the end of the Buddha’s life where he preached the *Nirvana Sutra*. See also Letter 15, note 2, above.

- (3) The 無 of 無佛性 (“no Buddha-nature”).
- (4) Xuansha Shibei 玄沙師備 (835–908), a native of Minxian 閩縣 in the province of Fujian 福建, was an illiterate fisherman until the age of thirty. Desiring to leave the world, he became a monk and later joined the assembly under Xuefeng Yicun, whose Dharma heir he became. Shibei was known for his strict maintenance of the precepts, simple lifestyle, and dedication to meditation. As the teacher of Fayan Wenyi (885–958), Xuansha was one of the forebears of the Fayan school 法眼宗.
- (5) Mujaku: “Truly tranquil” 真靜 is a quality that transcends the dichotomy between silences and noise.
- (6) From the *Extensive Record of Zen Master Xuansha Shibei* 玄沙師備禪師廣錄 2 (X73: 15b).
- (7) The primordial buddha—Buddha Awesome Voice 威音佛—was, according to the *Lotus Sutra*, the first buddha to appear in the universe. The kalpa of emptiness 空劫 is the last of the four-kalpa cycle of existence: a kalpa of formation, a kalpa of continuation, a kalpa of destruction, and a kalpa of emptiness. The kalpa of emptiness is thus the kalpa that lies between the destruction of one universe and the formation of the next. Both of these expressions—“that which preceded the Primordial Buddha” and “that which preceded the kalpa of emptiness”—are thus equivalent to the term “Original Face,” referring to that which precedes time and space.
- (8) Mujaku: Dahui is referring to the state of which Changqing Daan (793–883) spoke when he compared the mind to a white ox: “I have lived on Mount Gui for thirty years, eating Mount Gui rice and shitting Mount Gui shit. I haven’t been studying Mount Gui Zen, but just watching an ox. When it wandered into the grass by the side of the road I would pull it back; when it grazed in people’s fields I’d apply the whip to discipline it. Long it was that the poor beast had to obey my words, but now it’s transformed and become a ‘white ox on the bare ground’, always before me and clearly showing itself throughout the day. Even if I try to chase it off it doesn’t go away.” (*Jingde-era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* 景德傳燈錄 9; T51: 267c)
- (9) The ancient master is Longya Judun 龍牙居遜 (835–923). The passage appears in *Biographies of Monks of the Chan School* 禪林僧寶傳 9 (X79: 510a). Mujaku: In the midst of phenomena don’t block your senses, but see forms and hear sounds in the spirit of practice, asking “What is this?”
- (10) The ancient master is Huitang Zuxin 晦堂祖心 (1025–1100), in *Essential Materials from the Chan School’s Successive Lamp Records* 聯燈會要 14 (X79: 123c). See also Huangbo’s *Essentials of the Transmission of Mind*: “Ordinary people all chase after

the [sensory] realms and generate the mind, so that the mind [has feelings of] enjoyment and detestation. If you would have there be no realms, then you should forget the mind. When the mind is forgotten, then the realms are empty, and when the realms are empty the mind is extinguished. If you do not forget the mind but only eliminate the realms, because the realms cannot be eliminated you will only increase your [inner] agitation.” (MacRae, p. 24; T48: 381b-c).

Letter 39

Letter to Li Shenzheng (Taifa) 李參政 (泰發)

示論。華嚴重重法界。斷非虛語。既非虛語。必有分付處。必有自肯處。讀至此嗟歎久之。士大夫平昔所學。臨死生禍福之際。手足俱露者。十常八九。考其行事。不如三家村裏省事漢。富貴貧賤不能汨其心。以是較之。智不如愚。貴不如賤者多矣。何以故。生死禍福現前。那時不容偽故也。大參公平昔所學。已見於行事。臨禍福之際。如精金入火愈見明耀。又決定知華嚴重重法界斷非虛語。則定不作他物想矣。其餘七顛八倒。或逆或順。或正或邪。亦非他物。願公常作此觀。妙喜亦在其中。異日相從於寂寞之濱。結當當來世香火因緣。成就重重法界。以實其事。豈小補哉。更須下箇註脚。即今這一絡索。切忌作寓言指物會。一笑。

I received your letter saying that the infinitely interrelating dharma-realms of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*⁽¹⁾ are definitely not just idle imaginings. That being so, there must be some basis for them that you can accept. Reading this far, I paused for a while, moved with emotion.

When scholar officials are faced with the challenges of death and misfortune, eight or nine times out of ten their learning fails them. Examining their lifestyles, we see that they don't measure up even to simple rustics in a three-family village whose minds remain unclouded by matters of wealth and status. Comparing the two, we see that often the wise do not equal the foolish and the elite do not equal the commoners. We know this because there's no faking it when faced with mortality or misfortune.

The quality of your learning is apparent in your behavior, which, like pure gold in a fire, shines ever brighter in times of misfortune. Now that you know for certain that the interrelating dharma-realms of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* are not just idle imaginings, you will surely avoid the notion that there are other dharmas outside [of the four dharma-realms]. All of life's sufferings, its weal and its woe, its good and its bad are not outside of the *Avatamsaka* dharma-realms.⁽²⁾ Please always view things in this way. I myself do so.

Some day in the future let's meet on some quiet shore and pledge to continue our Dharma friendship through future lives until we fully realize the truth of the infinitely interrelating dharma-realms. Surely that would be no small contribution [to manifesting the Buddhadharma in the world]!

We should continue this discussion. But you must avoid understanding what I've written as an allegory. Haha!

Notes

- (1) The dharma-realms (*dharmadhātu*) of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* are: (1) the realm of principle; (2) the realm of phenomena; (3) the realm of the unobstructed and mutual interpenetration of principle and phenomena; (4) the realm of the unobstructed and mutual interpenetration of phenomena and phenomena. The teaching of the interrelationship of all phenomena in the four dharma realms is central to the Huayan school:

The teachings of Huayan have as their point of departure the theory of causation by the universal principle, or dharmadhātu. According to this, all dharmas [phenomena] of the universe are dependent on one another and condition each other, and none can subsist on its own. All dharmas are empty: both aspects of this emptiness, the static (理, absolute) and the active (事, phenomena), interpenetrate each other unobstructedly; every phenomenon is identical to every other. (REEPR, p. 145)

- (2) At the time he wrote this letter Dahui was in exile in Hengzhou 衡州 in Hunan 湖南.

Letter 40

Letter to Ceng Zongcheng 曾宗丞 (Tianyin 天隱)

左右天資近道。身心清淨。無他緣作障。只這一段。誰人能及。又能行住坐臥。以老僧所示省要處。時時提撕。休說一念相應千了百當。便是此生打未徹。只恁麼崖到臘月三十日。閻家老子也須倒退三千里始得。何以故。為念念在般若中無異念無間斷故。只如道家流。以妄心存想。日日月深。尚能成功。不為地水火風所使。況全念住在般若中。臘月三十日。豈不能轉業耶。而今人多是將有所得心學道。此是無妄想中真妄想也。但放教自在。然不得太緊。不得太緩。只恁麼做工夫。省無限心力。左右生處已熟。熟處已生。十二時中自然不著枯心忘懷。將心管帶矣。雖未透脫諸魔外道。已不能伺其便。亦自能與諸魔外道。共一手同一眼。成就彼事。而不墮其數矣。除公一人可以語此。餘人非但不能如公行履。亦未必信得及也。但於話頭上看。看來看去。覺得沒巴鼻沒滋味心頭悶時。正好著力。切忌隨他去。只這悶處。便是成佛作祖。坐斷天下人舌頭處也。不可忽。不可忽。

You have a natural affinity for the Way. You are pure in body and mind and are unhindered by other circumstances. In this respect no one can match you.

Whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, always be sure to keep in mind the essential point I indicated to you. You mustn't say that attaining full accord [with the Truth] for a single thought-moment is to understand everything. The point is continuing your practice so that, even should you fail to break through in the present life, at the time of your death Old Yama will retreat three thousand leagues and you will finally get it. This is because by so doing you abide in prajna each and every moment with no interruptions and no stray thoughts. Even the Taoists, who focus the thoughts of their deluded minds, can in the course of long months of training successfully liberate themselves from the control of the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. How much more, then, is one who abides in prajna during every moment able to control the forces of karma at the time of death!

Many people nowadays study the Way with an acquisitive mind. This is the true delusion of a mind without delusion.⁽¹⁾ Just let it go and be free. But you must not be too tense, nor must you be too slack. To practice in this way is to be limitlessly relaxed in mind.

You have already familiarized yourself with that which was unfamiliar, so that the unfamiliar is now the familiar for you.⁽²⁾ Just be as you are throughout the day, and do not deaden your mind to stop thought or focus your mind to control consciousness. Although you haven't yet attained complete liberation the demons and heretics cannot mislead you, and although you may employ the same methods and views as they do in accomplishing the matter at hand you do not fall into their number.

You are the only one qualified to speak of these things. Other people have not practiced as you have, nor do they always have sufficient faith. Whether coming or going, just contemplate the *huatou*. When you find yourself feeling disheartened, with nothing to grasp and nothing to savor, that is precisely the time to be diligent in your practice! Be sure not to let yourself just give in to these depressed feelings. They are your opportunity to become a buddha or a master, to cut off the tongues of everyone on earth. Do not neglect your practice!

Notes

- (1) Mujaku: The desire for enlightenment, which can constitute a great obstacle to practice, is a subtle delusion that can occur in minds free of the usual gross delusions of love and hate, pure and defiled, etc.
- (2) See Letter 7, note 9.

Letter 41

Letter to Wang Jiaoshou 王教授 (Dashou 大受)

不識。左右別後。日用如何做工夫。若是曾於理性上得滋味。經教中得滋味。祖師言句上得滋味。眼見耳聞處得滋味。舉足動步處得滋味。心思意想處得滋味。都不濟事。若要直下休歇。應是從前得滋味處都莫管他。却去沒撈摸

處沒滋味處。試著意看。若著意不得。撈摸不得。轉覺得沒把柄捉把。理路義路心意識都不行。如土木瓦石相似時。莫怕落空。此是當人放身命處。不可忽不可忽。聰明靈利人。多被聰明所障。以故道眼不開。觸途成滯。眾生無始時來。為心意識所使。流浪生死不得自在。果欲出生死作快活漢。須是一刀兩段。絕却心意識路頭。方有少分相應。故永嘉云。損法財滅功德。莫不由茲心意識。豈欺人哉。頃蒙惠教。其中種種趣向。皆某平昔所訶底病。知是般事。颺在腦後。且向沒巴鼻處沒撈摸處沒滋味處。試做工夫看。如僧問趙州。狗子還有佛性也無。州云無。尋常聰明人。纔聞舉起。便以心意識領會搏量引證。要說得有分付處。殊不知。不容引證。不容搏量。不容以心意識領會。縱引證得搏量得領會得。盡是髑髏前情識邊事。生死岸頭定不得力。而今普天之下。喚作禪師長者。會得分曉底。不出左右書中寫來底消息耳。其餘種種邪解。不在言也。密首座宗某與渠同在平普融會中相聚。盡得普融要領。渠自以為安樂。然所造者。亦不出左右書中消息。今始知非。別得箇安樂處。方知某無秋毫相欺。今特令去相見。無事時試令渠吐露看。還契得左右意否。八十翁翁入場屋。真誠不是小兒戲。若生死到來不得力。縱說得分曉。和會得有下落。引證得無差別。盡是鬼家活計。都不干我一星事。禪門種種差別異解。唯識法者懼。大法不明者。往往多以病為藥。不可不知。

How have you been practicing in your daily life since the time of our parting? If, as before, you are finding satisfaction in logic, in the teachings of the sutras, in the words and sayings of the ancestors, in seeing with your eyes and hearing with your ears, in lifting your feet and walking, or in entertaining thoughts, then it's all useless. If you desire immediate peace then pay no heed to any of the things that previously gave you satisfaction, but instead try directing your awareness toward that where there's nothing to hold onto and nothing to savor. When you find that your awareness cannot be directed, that you cannot hold on, that you have no handle to grasp, and that your reasoning, understanding, and mental faculties are as inert as dirt, wood, tile, or stone, don't be afraid of falling into nihilism. This is your opportunity to let go of your very life. Do not squander it!

Quite often highly intelligent people, hindered by that very intelligence, fail to open their Dharma eye and thus get stuck wherever they go. From beginningless time sentient beings, ruled by the thinking mind, have wandered in the realm of samsara and never been able to attain liberation. If you wish to escape samsara and live an enjoyable life, then with a single stroke cut off the paths of the thinking mind and you will surely attain some degree of accord [with the Way]. As Yongjia writes, “Loss of the Dharma treasure and the destruction of merit are all caused by the thinking mind.”⁽¹⁾ Would he say this to deceive people?

The various aims that you set forth in your recent letter are all expressions of the maladies I’ve been criticizing from the start. Whenever you become aware of them, toss them out of your mind and try practicing by directing your attention to where there’s no grasping, no holding, and no savoring.

The moment that intellectuals hear a *huatou* such as “A monk asked Zhaozhou, ‘Does a dog have buddha-nature?’ Zhaozhou answered ‘No!’,” they analyse and interpret it with the thinking mind, citing textual sources for support and seeking the master’s approval for their explanations. They don’t realize that citing sources, analyzing, and interpreting with the thinking mind will never be approved. Even the best citations, analyses, and interpretations are nothing more than the deluded workings of the conditioned mind; they’re of no help on the shores of life and death.

Nevertheless, the “clear understandings” of those regarded throughout the world as Zen masters and venerable monks don’t go beyond the sort of things you discuss in your letter. I needn’t even mention various other, false views. Head monk Chongmi,⁽²⁾ who was with me in the assembly under Purong Zhicang,⁽³⁾ was confident that he’d thoroughly grasped Purong’s intent and attained peace of mind. Yet his attainments were no more than what you speak of. He has now realized his error and found another level of peace, and knows for certain that I have never deceived him in any way. You should meet him sometime when you’re free from your duties—ask him to explain things and see if what he says accords with your outlook.

[This Matter] is like an eighty-year-old entering the examination room;⁽⁴⁾ it is

by no means child's play. If [your understanding] is of no help to you as you face death, then no matter how clear your explanations, how convincing your reconciliations [of various viewpoints], how precise your references, all are utterly useless, like tallying accounts in a ghost house.

In the Zen school there are a variety of differing views, but “those who know the law fear it.” It is those who are unclear about the Dharma who too often mistake the disease for the medicine. You must keep this in mind.

Notes

- (1) From the *Song of Enlightenment* 永嘉證道歌 1 (T48: 396b).
- (2) Chongmi 冲密, also known as Yishan Chongmi 伊山冲密 (n.d.), was a Dharma successor of Dahui. Nothing else is known of him.
- (3) Purong Daoping 普融道平 (n.d.) was a successor of Dagui Muzhe 大滄慕喆 (d. 1095).
- (4) Araki explains this to mean that, like an eighty-year-old facing his final chance to pass the civil service examinations after having failed them throughout his life, attaining enlightenment is a matter of putting one's life on the line.

Letter 42

Letter to Vice-Minister Liu 劉侍郎 (Jigao 季高)

示諭。臘月三十日已到。要之日用。當如是觀察。則世間塵勞之心。自然銷殞矣。塵勞之心既銷殞。則來日依前孟春猶寒矣。古德云。欲識佛性義。當觀時節因緣。此箇時節。乃是黃面老子出世成佛坐金剛座降伏魔軍轉法輪度眾生入涅槃底時節。與解空所謂臘月三十日時節。無異無別。到[9]這裏只如是觀。以此觀者名為正觀。異此觀者名為邪觀。邪正未分。未免隨他時節遷變要得不隨時節。但一時放下著。放到無可放處。此語亦不受。依前只是解空居士。更不是別人。

I received your letter saying that we must live every day as though the final day of December were already here. Truly, if we see things in this way the deluded,

worldly mind will naturally come to an end. Once the deluded mind has come to an end the days [following the final day of December] are, just as before, the cold days of January.

An ancient worthy said, “If you wish to know the import of the Buddha-nature you must observe time and season, cause and condition.”⁽¹⁾ This time and season—which is nothing other than what you, Layman Jiekong, refer to as the final day of December—is that of the Golden-faced Sage appearing in the world and becoming a buddha, sitting upon the diamond throne, scattering the demon hordes, turning the Wheel of Dharma, liberating sentient beings, and entering nirvana. Upon reaching this point just contemplate in this way. To see in this way is known as true contemplation; other types of seeing are false contemplation. When you have yet to distinguish “true” from “false,” you are unable to avoid being moved about according to the times and seasons of others.⁽²⁾ If you wish to escape being moved about like this, just let it all go at once. Letting it all go to the point where nothing remains to let go of, you will no longer need these words either. Just as before, you’ll simply be Layman Jiekong and no one else.

Notes

- (1) The ancient worthy is Baizhang Huaihai. For this quote see Chapter 34, where the quote is given as “If you wish to know the import of the Buddha-nature you must observe time and season, cause and condition; when the time arrives this principle will naturally manifest.”
- (2) Mujaku relates this to Zhaozhou’s statement, “Everyone is used by the twenty-four hours” (see Letter 37).

Letter 43

Second Letter to Vice-Minister Liu 劉侍郎 (Jigao 季高)

吾佛大聖人。能空一切相。成萬法智。而不能即滅定業。況博地凡夫耶。居士既是箇中人。想亦常入是三昧。昔有僧問一老宿。世界怎麼熱。未審向甚麼處回避。老宿曰。向鑊湯鑪炭裏回避。曰只如鑊湯鑪炭裏。作麼生回避。

日眾苦不能到。願居士日用四威儀中。只如此做工夫。老宿之言不可忽。此是妙喜得効底藥方。非與居士此道相契此心相知。亦不肯容易傳授。只用一念相應草湯。下更不用別湯使。若用別湯使。令人發狂。不可不知也。一念相應草。不用他求亦只在居士四威儀中。明處明如日。黑處黑如漆。若信手拈來。以本地風光一照。無有錯者。亦能殺人。亦能活人。故佛祖常以此藥向鑊湯鑪炭裏。醫苦惱眾生生死大病。號大醫王。不識居士還信得及否。若言我自有父子不傳之祕方。不用向鑊湯鑪炭裏回避底妙術。却望居士布施也。

Although our Great Sage, the Buddha, could empty all forms and manifest the wisdom of all dharmas, even he was unable to nullify fixed karma.⁽¹⁾ How, then, can ordinary people do so?

You, Layman, are already among [the committed followers of the Buddha],⁽²⁾ so surely you are always in the following state of mind. Long ago a monk asked an old master, “The world is so hot! Where can I go to escape?” The old master answered, “Escape into the burning coals under the boiling cauldron.” The monk asked, “How does entering the burning coals under the boiling cauldron allow one to escape?” “No sufferings can follow you there,” replied the master.⁽³⁾

I hope that you will practice this way in all of your daily activities—you mustn’t dismiss the old master’s words. Indeed, this is the medicine I prescribe to get results. I wouldn’t tell you about it so readily if we weren’t on the same path and weren’t familiar with each other’s minds. Drink down this “medicine” of a perfectly attuned thought,⁽⁴⁾ and take no other medications. Relying on other medicines can drive a person mad—one must be careful.⁽⁵⁾

Do not search elsewhere for this medicine of a perfectly attuned thought. It’s there in your daily activities, where what is bright is as bright as the sun and what is dark is as black as lacquer.⁽⁶⁾ Whatever comes to hand, just illuminate it with the ground of original nature and you cannot go wrong; with it you can give life and you can take life away. The buddhas and masters have always entered the burning coals under the boiling cauldron and employed the right medicine to heal suffering beings from the great illness of samsara. Thus they are called Great Healing Kings.

Is your faith in this sufficient? If you can tell me of some secret method, not even transmitted from father to son, by which it's possible to escape without entering the burning coals under the boiling cauldron, then I hope you'll kindly teach it to me!

Notes

- (1) Fixed karma 定業: “Also, immutable karma. The opposite of unfixed karma. Karma that inevitably produces a fixed or set result, whether negative or positive. *The Dharma Analysis Treasury* lists the four causes of fixed karma. They are (1) actions motivated by exceptionally strong earthly desires or by a profoundly pure mind; (2) actions, whether good or evil, done habitually; (3) actions, whether good or evil, performed in relation to such sources of benefit as the three treasures of Buddhism; and (4) actions causing harm to one's parents. Fixed karma may also be interpreted as karma whose effects are destined to appear at a fixed time.” (*The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism*, p. 206)
- (2) Added according to Mujaku's commentary.
- (3) 五燈會元 13 (X80: 275a).
- (4) “‘Medicine’ of a perfectly attuned thought” translates 一念相應草湯, with 草湯 meaning “medicine” (literally, “herbal infusion,” infusions being the usual way of preparing remedies in Chinese medicine) and 一念相應 referring to a thought-moment in perfect accord with nondual, undefiled wisdom.
- (5) Mujaku: the term “other medicines” refers to such “medicines” as discriminative thought, aversion and attachment, etc.
- (6) Mujaku quotes from the pointer of *Blue Cliff Record* 31 to explain this comment: “Let free 放行, and even rubble shines; repress 把定, and even true gold loses its color.” The “medicine” of everyday activity can be appropriate or inappropriate for the disease of suffering; which is known by illuminating it with the ground of original nature, as in the following sentence.

Letter 44

Letter to Director Li 李郎中 (Sibiao 似表)

士大夫學此道。不患不聰明。患太聰明耳。不患無知見。患知見太多耳。故

常行識前一步。昧却脚跟下快活自在底消息。邪見之上者。和會見聞覺知為自己。以現量境界。為心地法門。下者弄業識。認門頭戶口。簸兩片皮。談玄說妙。甚者至於發狂不勒字數。胡言漢語。指東畫西。下下者以默照無言空空寂寂。在鬼窟裏著到。求究竟安樂。其餘種種邪解。不在言而可知也。冲密等歸。領所賜教。讀之喜慰不可言。更不復敘世諦相酬酢。只以左右向道勇猛之志。便入葛藤。禪無德山臨濟之殊。法眼曹洞之異。但學者無廣大決定志。而師家亦無廣大融通法門。故所入差別。究竟歸宿處。並無如許差別也。示論。欲妙喜因書指示徑要處。只這求指示徑要底一念。早是刺頭入膠盆了也。不可更向雪上加霜。雖然有問不可無答。請左右。都將平昔或自看經教話頭。或因人舉覺指示得滋味歡喜處。一時放下依前百不知百不會如三歲孩兒相似。有性識而未行。却向未起求徑要底一念子前頭看。看來看去。覺得轉沒巴鼻。方寸轉不寧帖時。不得放緩。這裏是坐斷千聖頂顛處。往往學道人。多向這裏打退了。左右若信得及。只向未起求徑要指示一念前看。看來看去。忽然睡夢覺。不是差事。此是妙喜平昔做底得力工夫。知公有決定志。故挖泥帶水。納這一場敗闕。此外別無可指示。若有可指示。則不徑要矣。

Scholar officials should not worry that they are not intelligent enough to follow the Way; rather, they should worry that they are *too* intelligent. They should not worry that they lack sufficient knowledge; rather, they should worry that they possess *too much* knowledge. Owing to this they always affix thought to consciousness, thus obscuring all signs of the joyous freedom right at their feet.

The least objectionable among those who espouse false views identify the self as a composite of seeing, hearing, and perceiving, and teach that direct, nondual perception is the Dharma gate of the mind-ground. Worse are those who give free rein to their deluded minds, flapping their lips with meaningless words, talking of mysteries and telling of wonders. Worse still are those who, like lunatics, blather on without restraint in words both foreign and Chinese, pointing to the east and pointing to the west.⁽¹⁾ The worst of the worst are those who, seeking ultimate peace, settle down in the empty stillness of a ghost cave and sit wordlessly in

silent illumination. Regarding the various other kinds of deluded views, I'm sure you'll understand even if I say nothing.

I received your letter and was delighted to read that Chongmi⁽²⁾ had returned. In your correspondence you no longer discuss secular matters but only your dauntless resolve to continue your efforts on your path. In Zen there are no basic differences between the teachings of Deshan and Linji or Fayan and Caodong. It's simply that students lack broad, resolute determination and that teachers lack wide, all-encompassing methods of guidance, so that distinctions occur in their approaches. But with regard to where they ultimately return there is not the slightest difference.

You write that you would like me to teach you the direct essentials by letter. With the very thought of seeking instruction in the direct essentials you've already stuck your head in a pot of glue. Nevertheless, though one shouldn't add frost to snow, when a question has been posed it shouldn't go unanswered.

I ask you to immediately abandon the pleasure you experience in studying sutras and contemplating *huatou* or in being enlightened or instructed by others. Instead, be once again utterly without knowledge or understanding, like a three-year-old child in whom consciousness is present but not yet active. Contemplate what was there before the thought arose to seek instruction in the direct essentials. Continue contemplating, and when, more and more, you find yourself left with nothing to grasp onto and no peace of mind, you mustn't slacken off. This is precisely the place where you cut off the heads of the thousand buddhas. Too often this is where students of the Way back off and give up.

If you have sufficient faith, then contemplate what was there before the thought arose to seek instruction in the direct essentials. Maintain your contemplation and suddenly you will awaken from your slumbering dream, make no mistake about it!

This is my regular practice for gaining strength [in the Way]. I know that you are possessed of resolute determination, so I performed this one-act flop for you. I have nothing else to teach you. If I did, it wouldn't be the direct essentials.

Notes

- (1) “Pointing to the east and pointing to the west” 指東畫西 is an expression found in the *Record of Linji*. Sasaki comments that it “seems to mean to indulge in quibbles and avoid giving direct answers.” (Sasaki, p. 176)
- (2) For Chongmi, see note 3, Letter 41.

Letter 45

Letter to Li Baowen 李寶文 (Maojia 茂嘉)

向承示論。性根昏鈍。而黽勉修持。終未得超悟之方。宗杲頃在雙徑。答富季申所問。正與此問同。能知昏鈍者。決定不昏鈍。更欲向甚處求超悟。士大夫學此道。却須借昏鈍而入。若執昏鈍。自謂我無分。則為昏鈍魔所攝矣。蓋平昔知見。多以求證悟之心。在前作障故。自己正知見不能現前。此障亦非外來。亦非別事。只是箇能知昏鈍底主人公耳。故瑞巖和尚居常在丈室中自喚云。主人公。又自應云喏。惺惺著。又自應云喏。他時後日莫受人謾。又自應云。喏喏。古來幸有恁麼勝樣。謾向這裏提撕看。是箇甚麼。只這提撕底。亦不是別人。只是這能知昏鈍者耳。能知昏鈍者。亦不是別人。便是李寶文本命元辰也。此是妙喜應病與藥。不得已略為居士指箇歸家穩坐底路頭而已。若便認定死語。真箇喚作本命元辰。則是認識神為自己。轉沒交涉矣。故長沙和尚云。學道之人不識真。只為從前認識神。無量劫來生死本。癡人喚作本來人。前所云借昏鈍而入是也。但只看能知得如是昏鈍底。畢竟是箇甚麼。只向這裏看。不用求超悟。看來看去。忽地大笑去矣。此外無可言者。

I have read your letter saying that, owing to the dullness of your root nature, you have never experienced a transcendent awakening in spite of your sustained efforts in spiritual cultivation. This is the same as the question from Fu Jishen⁽¹⁾ that I responded to some time ago when I was in Shuangjing.⁽²⁾

That which is aware of being dull is certainly not dull itself; exactly where else do you intend to look for transcendent awakening? In point of fact, scholar

officials who practice the Way should *utilize* dullness in order to enter the Way. However, if you *identify* with dullness and feel that you therefore lack the capacity for awakening, you will find yourself controlled by the demon of dullness.

As I see it, our ordinary understanding tends to objectify our intention to attain enlightenment and thus make it an obstacle that prevents a true understanding of ourselves. But this obstacle is not something from outside of ourselves or separate from ourselves—it is nothing else than the Master that is aware of one’s “dullness.” For this reason every day Master Ruiyan Shiyān⁽³⁾ would call to himself, “Master!” “Yes!” he would answer himself. “Be wide awake!” he would say. Again he would answer himself, “Yes!” Then he say, “Whatever the time, whatever the day, never be misled by others!” “Yes! Yes!” We are fortunate in having such models since times of old!

Try examining this in your own way. That which examines “What is *this*?” is none other than that which can recognize dullness. And that which can recognize dullness is none other than your own True Self.

In saying this I’m simply dispensing medicine according to the illness, having no other alternative; I’m just pointing out the way for you to return home and sit in peace. If you see these dead words as the truth expressing your True Self, then you will have taken the thinking mind⁽⁴⁾ for your self. If you do so you are way off. Thus Changsha Jingcēn⁽⁵⁾ said,

That those who study the Way fail to realize the truth
Is simply because they identify with their thinking mind;
Though this is the cause of endless eons of birth and death,
The foolish regard it as the Original Person.⁽⁶⁾

This is what I driving at above when spoke of utilizing dullness to enter. Just observe what exactly it is that can know dullness. Just turn toward this and look—you needn’t seek transcendent awakening. If, coming and going, you continue observing then suddenly you will break out in laughter. There’s nothing else to be said.

Notes

- (1) For Fu Jishen, see Letter 13.
- (2) Shuangjing 雙徑 was located in the region of Hangzhou 杭州 in present-day Zhejiang 浙江.
- (3) Ruiyan Shiyan 瑞巖師彥 (ca. 9th c.) was born in Minyue 閩越 in Fujian 福建, and was known as a strict follower of the precepts. He was a Dharma heir of Yantou Quanhuo; otherwise little is known of him.
- (4) “Thinking mind” translates 識神, the sixth consciousness, mind consciousness, set forth in the Yogacara school.
- (5) Changsha Jingcen 長沙景岑 (9th c.). Little is known of Jingcen’s life except that he was a Dharma heir of Nanquan Puyuan; that he founded the temple Luyuan yuan 鹿苑院 in present Hunan 湖南; and that he subsequently taught throughout the district of Changsha 長沙.
- (6) *Compendium of the Five Lamps* 五燈會元 4 (X80: 95a).