

THE ZEN READER



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EDITED BY

THOMAS CLEARY

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ENTRY INTO THE WAY

by the Founder of Zen

There are many avenues of entry into the Way, but they are essentially of just two types, referred to as principle and conduct.

Entry by principle is when you realize the source by way of the teachings and deeply believe that all living beings have the same real essential nature, but it is veiled by outside elements and false ideas and cannot manifest completely. If you abandon falsehood and return to reality, abiding stably in impassive observation, with no self and no other, regarding ordinary and holy as equal, persisting firmly, immovable, not following other persuasions, then you deeply harmonize with the principle. Having no false notions, being serene and not striving, is called entry by way of principle.

Entry by conduct refers to four practices in which all other practices are included. What are the four? First is compensation for opposition. Second is adapting to conditions. Third is not seeking anything. Fourth is acting in accord with truth.

The practice of compensation for opposition means that when people cultivating the Way are beset by suffering, they should think how in past times they themselves neglected the fundamental and pursued the trivial over

countless ages, flowing in waves of existences, arousing much enmity and hatred, with no end of offense and injury. Although they may be innocent right now, they think of their suffering as the results of their own past evil deeds, not something inflicted upon them by gods or humans. Thus they accept contentedly, without enmity or complaint. Scripture says, "There is no anxiety when experiencing suffering, because of perfect knowledge." When this attitude is developed, you are in harmony with the Way. Because we make progress on the Way by comprehending opposition, this is called the practice of compensating for opposition.

Second is the practice of adapting to conditions. Living beings have no absolute self; they are all influenced by conditions and actions. Their experiences of pain and pleasure both come from conditions. Even if they attain excellent rewards, things like prosperity and fame, these are effects of past causes only now being realized. When the conditions wear out, they return to nothing, so what is there to rejoice about? Gain and loss come from conditions; there is no increase or decrease in the mind. When the influence of joy does not stir you, there is profound harmony with the Way; therefore, this is called the practice of adapting to conditions.

Third is the practice of not seeking anything. Worldly people wander forever, becoming attached by greed here and there. This is called seeking. The wise realize that the principle of absolute truth is contrary to the mundane.

Mentally at ease in nonstriving, physically they adapt to the turns of fate.

All existents are empty; there is nothing to hope for. Blessings and curses always follow each other. Living in the world is like a house on fire, all corporeal existence involves pain—who can be at peace? Because of understanding this point, we let go of all existences, stop thinking, and seek nothing. Scripture says, “Seeking is all painful; not seeking anything is bliss.” Not seeking anything is clearly the conduct of the Way, so it is called the practice of not seeking anything.

Fourth is the practice of acting in accord with truth. The principle of purity of essential nature is called truth. In terms of this principle, all appearances are empty; so there is no infection, no attachment, no this, no that. Scripture says, “In truth there are no beings, because it is free from the defilement of beings. In truth there is no self, because it is free from the defilement of self.”

Therefore, if the wise can believe in this principle, they should act in accord with truth. The substance of truth has no stinginess: practicing charity with one’s person, life, and goods, the mind has no regret. Liberated from empty personality and things, independent and unattached, with the sole purpose of getting rid of defilement, edifying people informally, this constitutes your own practice, and can also help others. It can also adorn the path of enlightenment.

As this is true of charity, it is also thus with the other five perfections, or ways of transcendence. Practicing

the six ways of transcendence in order to get rid of false ideas, without objectivizing practices, is called practice in accord with truth.

Bodhidharma

FORM AND SHADOW

Shadows arise from forms, echoes come from sounds. If we fiddle with shadows and ignore the forms, we do not recognize that the forms are the roots of the shadows. If we raise our voices to stop echoes, we are not cognizant of the fact that sounds are the roots of the echoes. To try to head for nirvana by getting rid of afflictions is like removing forms to look for shadows. To seek Buddhahood apart from living beings is like seeking echoes by silencing sounds.

So we know that illusion and enlightenment are one road. Ignorance and knowledge are not separate. We make names for what has no name. Because we go by the names, judgments of right and wrong arise. We make rationalizations for what has no reason. Because we rely on the rationalizations, argument and discussion arise. Illusion is not real: who is right, who is wrong? The unreal is not actual: what is empty, what exists? Thus I realize that attainment gains nothing, and loss loses nothing.

Layman Hsiang

NONDUALITY

When the illusory body faces a mirror and its form is reflected, the reflected form is not different from the illusory body. If you only want to get rid of the reflection but leave the body, you do not realize the body is fundamentally the same as space.

The body is basically not different from the reflection. You cannot have one without the other: If you try to keep one and get rid of the other, you'll be forever estranged from the truth. Even more, if you love the holy and hate the ordinary, you'll bob in the ocean of birth and death.

Afflictions have reasons based on mind; when mindless, where can afflictions abide? If you do not bother to discriminate and grasp appearances, you will attain the Way naturally in an instant. While dreaming, you act in dreams; when you awaken, dreamland doesn't exist. If you think back to waking and dreaming, they are not different from deluded dualism.

If you seek to gain by reforming illusion and grasping awakening, how is that different from involvement in commerce? When movement and stillness are both forgotten, and you are ever serene, then you spontaneously merge with reality as it is.

If you say that sentient beings are different from Buddha,

then you are forever alienated from Buddha. Buddha and sentient beings are not two; this naturally comprehends all.

Pao-chih

THE NONDUALITY OF GOOD AND EVIL

My own mind and body are blissful and happy, calm and serene, without good or evil. The body of reality is independent, without location; whatever strikes the eye is none other than true awakening.

The objects of sense are originally empty and null; ordinary people arbitrarily create attachments and fixations. Nirvana and samsara are equal; who in the world gets differential treatment? The uncontrived Great Way is natural and spontaneous; you don't need to use your mind to figure it out.

Enlightening beings are untrammelled, spiritually effective. Whatever they do is always imbued with sublime awareness. Seekers clinging to method sitting in meditation are like silkworms spitting out thread binding themselves. The essence of reality is originally completely clear; when the sickness is healed, what is the need to cling to the medicine? When you know all things are equal, you are serenely clear and open, blissfully happy.

Pao-chih

THE NONDUALITY OF QUIETUDE AND DISTURBANCE

Seekers who disdain clamor to seek quietude are as it were throwing away flour but seeking cake. Cake is originally flour, which changes according to use.

Afflictions are not other than enlightenment. When there is no minding, there are no objects. Samsara is not different from nirvana. Craving and anger are like flames, like shadows.

The wise have no mind to seek Buddha. The ignorant cling to wrong and right. Passing all their lives in wasted toil, they do not see the sublime peak of realization of being as is. If you realize the essence of lust is empty, then even hellfire is cool.

Pao-chih

THE NONDUALITY OF PHENOMENA AND NOUMENON

The mind-monarch is independent and serene; the real nature is originally unbound. Everything without exception is Buddha-work; why should you concentrate thought in sitting meditation? Errant imaginations are originally empty and null; one need not cut off attention to objects.

The wise have no mind to be grasped; they are naturally noncontentious and peaceful. If you do not know the Great Way of noncontrivance, when can you realize the hidden mystery?

Buddhahood and ordinary life are of one kind; ordinary beings are themselves Buddhas. The common man creates arbitrary distinctions, clinging to the existence of what has none, rushing in confusion. When you realize desire and wrath are void, what place is not a door to reality?

Pao-chih

THE NONDUALITY OF BUDDHAHOOD AND ORDINARY LIFE

Ordinary life and Buddhahood have no distinction. Great knowledge is not different from ignorance. Why should one seek outwardly for a treasure, when the field of the body has its own bright jewel?

The right way and wrong way are not two. When perfectly known, ordinary and sage are on the same road. Illusion and enlightenment originally have no distinction; nirvana and samsara are one suchness.

In the final analysis, clinging to objects is empty and null; only seek clear spaciousness of mind and thought. There is not a single thing that can be attained; serenely, spontaneously, you enter the ultimate.

Pao-chih

THE NONDUALITY OF DISCIPLINE AND LICENSE

The actions of great people are uninhibited, not controlled by precepts and regulations. Discipline and license basically have no origin of their own, yet ignorant people are bound by them. The doings of those who know are all empty; followers get stuck on the road.

The physical eyes of enlightening beings are completely perceptive; the celestial eyes of individual illuminates have cataracts. If you arbitrarily cling to being and nonbeing in emptiness, you will not arrive at the noninterference of matter and mind.

Enlightening beings live with ordinary people; their purity is never stained by the world. Ignoramuses are greedy for nirvana; for the knowers, life and death are ultimate reality.

The nature of things is empty and has no verbal explanation; there is nothing at all in interdependent occurrence. The hundred-year-old without knowledge is a child; the child with knowledge is a hundred years old.

Pao-chih

THE NONDUALITY OF ENLIGHTENMENT AND AFFLICTION

People who do not know how to practice the Way therefore want to get rid of afflictions. Afflictions are originally void and null; you are trying to use the Way to seek the way beyond.

The instantaneous mind is it. What is the need to seek somewhere else? The Great Way is right before the eyes; the ignorant who are deluded do not comprehend.

Buddha-nature is natural and spontaneous; it is not caused, conditioned, or fabricated. If you do not know the three poisons are unreal, you grasp at random and flounder in life, growing old. Before, when you were deluded, it wasn't too late; now you finally realize it isn't too early.

Pao-chih

WASTE OF EFFORT

Seekers cut off confusion in every state of mind, but the mind that does the cutting off is a thief. When one thief sends off another, when will you ever realize the basis of speech and silence? You may recite a thousand scrolls of scripture without understanding how the scripture applies to you; if you do not understand the comprehensive completeness of what the Buddha taught, you are just wasting effort following lines and counting ink marks.

Ascetic exercises and austere practices may be done seeking meritorious qualities in later life, but seeking is itself a barrier to wisdom; how could the Great Way be attained thereby? It is like crossing a river in a dream: the boatman, having crossed over the river, suddenly awakens to find he's been sleeping in bed, and has lost the way to ferry the boat. The boatman and the people he ferries over never know each other.

Sentient beings, confused and bound up, come and go in the realms of desire, form, and abstraction, to the extremes of exhaustion. When they realize that life and death are like dreams, all their sense of seeking will spontaneously stop.

Pao-chih

VANITY

How many ignorant people in the world try to seek the Way by means of the Way! Searching widely among a profusion of doctrines, they cannot even save themselves. Only pursuing the confused explanations of others' writings, they claim to have arrived at the subtlety of noumenon.

Wasting a life in idle labors, they sink forever in birth and death. When polluted attachment binds the mind unrelentingly, the mind of pure knowledge afflicts itself; the forest of the cosmos of realities turns into a wasteland of brambles.

As long as you cling to yellow leaves as gold, you won't know to give up the gold for jewels. The reason you lose your mind and run around crazily is that you forcibly try to keep up appearances; you may be reciting scriptures and treatises in your mouth, but in your heart you're always lifeless.

If you realize the original mind is empty someday, the fullness of reality as is will not leave you lacking.

Pao-chih

SEEK NOTHING

The inner view and the outer view are both wrong; the way of Buddhas and the way of demons are both mistaken. If you are subject to these two evils, then you will reject suffering and seek pleasure. When you awaken to the root, birth and death are essentially empty; where can Buddhas or demons stay?

It is just because of the discriminations of arbitrary feelings that successive lives are isolated and alienated. The repetitious routines of mundane ways go on unceasing; if you form compulsive habits, you cannot get rid of them. The reasons for flowing in the waves of birth and death all come from arbitrary production of schemes for control.

The body is fundamentally empty and unreal; when you go back to the basis, who is calculating? Being and nonbeing can be done on your own; don't bother figuring with a confused mind. The body of sentient beings is the same as cosmic space; where can afflictions stay? Just seek nothing at all, and afflictions will naturally fall away.

Pao-chih

PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE

The Great Way is not attained by practice; talk of practice is for the ordinary and the ignorant. When you have found the principle and look back on practice, for the first time you will realize you have misused time and effort.

As long as you have not realized the great principle that permeates all, it is essential that speech and action should support each other. Do not hold to the intellectual understanding of others; turn the light of awareness back to the root, and it is not there at all.

Who understands this talk? I'll have you turn to yourself to seek. After having seen past faults and gotten rid of the sores of sensual desires, liberated, roaming free and independent, wherever I may be I sell refinement on the cheap; whoever is inspired to buy will get to be carefree just like me.

Pao-chih

THE NATURE OF THINGS

The nature of things is fundamental perpetual silence, open and clear, without limits or boundaries. If you place your mind in the midst of grasping and rejecting, you will be under the influence of those two states.

If you concentrate, enter trance, and sit in meditation, focusing on an objective, setting your mind on awareness and contemplation, practicing the Way like a mechanical mannequin, when will you ever arrive at the goal?

All things are fundamentally empty; there is nothing to stick to. Objects are like floating clouds, certain to disperse. When you realize the basic emptiness of fundamental essence, that will be like a fever's breaking. Don't speak of it to the ignorant, or they'll beat your body to pieces.

Pao-chih

FALSE BUDDHAS

A gold Buddha can't get through a furnace, a wood Buddha can't get through a fire, and a clay Buddha can't get through water. The real Buddha sits within: enlightenment, nirvana, suchness, and Buddha-nature are all clothes sticking to the body. They are also called afflictions; don't ask and there is no vexation.

In the noumenal ground of reality, where is there to grasp? When the individual mind is not aroused, myriad things have no fault. Just sit investigating the truth for twenty or thirty years; if you don't understand, then cut off my head.

It is useless to bother to try to grasp dreams, illusions, and false appearances. If the mind does not differ, myriad things are also thus. Since it is not gotten from outside, what is there to get wrapped up in or hung up on anymore? Why go on being like goats, picking up things at random and putting them in your mouth?

Chao-chou

TRANSCENDING DUALISM

If you want to avoid experiencing reversal, just cut off dualism; then measurements cannot govern you. You are neither Buddha nor sentient being; you are not near or far, not high or low, not equal or even, not going or coming. Just do not cling to written letters that obstruct It, and neither side can hold you. You will escape both pain and pleasure, and escape the opposition of light and dark.

The true principle is that even reality is not really real, and even falsehood is not unreal. It is not something calculable. Like space, it cannot be cultivated. If any intellectual fabrication occurs in the mind, then it is governed by measurements. This is like divination signs—they are governed by metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. It is also like sticky glue; the king demon can grab you, stuck in five places, and go home freely.

Pai-chang

PROVISIONAL TEACHINGS

If a Buddha would not speak, then people would have no hope of liberation; but if a Buddha speaks, then people pursue the words and create interpretations, so there would be little advantage and much disadvantage. That is why the Buddha said, “I would rather not explain the truth, but enter into extinction right away.”

But then afterward he thought back on all the Buddhas of the past, who had all taught the doctrines of three vehicles. After that he made temporary use of verses to explain, and provisionally established names and terms.

Originally it is not Buddha, but he told people, “This is Buddha.” Originally it is not enlightenment, but he told people, “This is enlightenment, peace, liberation,” and so on. He knew people couldn’t bear a burden of ten thousand pounds, so for the time being he taught them the incomplete teaching. And he realized the spread of good ways, which was still better than evil ways.

But when the limits of good results are fulfilled, then bad consequences ensue. Once you have “Buddha,” then there are “sentient beings.” Once you have “nirvana,” then there is “birth and death.” Once you have light, then

there is darkness. As long as cause and effect with attachment continue to operate, there is nothing that does not have consequences.

Pai-chang

THREE STEPS

The words of the teachings all have three successive steps: the elementary, the intermediate, and the final good.

At first, it is just necessary to teach people to develop a good mind. In the intermediate stage, they break through the good mind. The last stage is finally called really good.

This is what is meant by the sayings, "An enlightening being is not an enlightening being, but is called an enlightening being; the truth is not truth, yet is not other than truth." Everything is like this.

If, however, you teach only one stage, you will cause people to go to hell. If all three stages are taught at once, they'll go to hell on their own. This is not the work of a real teacher.

Pai-chang

FACING THE END

When facing the end, generally beautiful scenes appear. According to your mental inclinations, the most impressive are experienced first. If you do not do bad things right now, then there will be no unpleasant scenes when you face death. Even if there are some unpleasant scenes, they too will change into pleasant scenes.

If you fear that you will go mad with terror at the moment of death and will fail to attain freedom, then you should first be free right now. Then you'll be all right. Right now, in respect to each and every thing, don't have any obsession at all, and do not remain fixated on intellectual interpretation. Then you will be free.

Pai-chang

in your repository consciousness over incalculable ages, now coming out under the pressure of the work.

It is absolutely necessary that this point be distinctly clear. You must see through these phenomena to begin with and pass right through them. Be sure not to be trapped by them, be sure not to fiddle around with them, and be sure not to take them for realities. Just clarify your spirit, exert yourself, and pluck up your courage: take up the saying you are looking into, and use it to chase away these thoughts when they arise. There are originally no such things in us—ask where they come from, and ultimately what they are; be sure to see what they come down to.

Keep on pushing like this, and you'll simply make spirits and ghosts weep; you'll obliterate tracks and traces. Strive to drive them all into extinction, not leaving any at all. Apply effort in this way, and you'll naturally see some good news. The moment you push all the way through, all errant thoughts will fall away at once, like the shadows of flowers in the sky dropping, like the waves of a mirage settling.

Once you've gone through this, you'll gain immeasurable ease and comfort, immeasurable freedom. This is the beginner's empowerment; it is not considered a mysterious marvel.

Now when you reach ease and freedom, still do not become joyful. If you become joyful, the demon of joy will stick to your mind and add yet another kind of obstacle.

If you come to forces of habit and seeds of the root of attachment that are so firmly rooted deep in the unconscious that a saying can exert no effect on them, then look into where the mind's perception cannot reach.

If you can't do anything yourself, then perform prostrations before Buddhas, recite scriptures, and practice repentance. You also need to inwardly hold the essence of sacred spells, relying on the esoteric symbols of Buddha to dispel these obstacles. Because the esoteric spells are all impressions of the indestructible mind of Buddhas, when we use them it is like wielding a diamond club, smashing everything into atomic particles. The secret of the mind seal of the Buddhas and Zen masters since high antiquity is not beyond this. Therefore it is said that the Buddhas of the ten directions hold the essence of spells, attaining unexcelled universal true enlightenment.

In the schools of the Zen masters, it was feared that this would fall into common emotion, so it was kept secret and not spoken of; it's not that it wasn't used. This should be done on a regular daily basis; over a long period of time it becomes pure and mature, and very much power is gained. Just refrain from wanting or seeking spiritual experiences.

Han-shan

DIRECT REALIZATION

The matter of Zen is only realized directly by people of superior faculties; those of mediocre and lesser potential have no part in it. Without opening any doors or setting out any pathways, it presents the whole right to your face, to be personally realized and personally attained, without any further how or why.

Speaking in extreme terms, the statement “This very mind is Buddha” says it all. This statement, however, is still in the realm of inducement. If you actually understand it, every breath is cut off, all conceptions are cut off—you just silently accord, that’s all. Otherwise, you are mistaking your consciousness for the master.

Ta-tu