

Zen Mind, Buddha Mind: Letting It Be As It Is The Reformations of Hui Neng and Hakuin

**David Paul Boaz
(Dechen Wangdu)**

The Reformations of Hui Neng and Hakuin

The fifth Ch'an patriarch, Hung-jen (Gunin) was attempting to determine his *dharma* successor. He asked his monks to create a poem (*gatha*) expressing their understanding of the *Buddhadharma*. The presumed *dharma* heir was Shen-hsiu (Jinshu). His gata read:

Our body is the Bodhi tree,
Our mind a Mirror bright;
Carefully we wipe them,
And let no dust alight.

But the novice monk and stable keeper Hui-neng (Eno, 638-713), having seen Shen-hsiu's *gatha*, submitted his own:

Bodhi is not a tree;
Nowhere is the mirror bright;
As there is nothing from the beginning,
Where can the dust alight?

Hung-jen immediately understood that, although Shen-hsiu's *gatha* expressed a deep but traditional and dualistic understanding of the *dharma* as transmitted from Bodhidharma, the twenty-eighth Indian Buddhist patriarch and first Ch'an patriarch. Hui-neng's understanding transcended the traditional exoteric teaching with its dualism of experiencing subject and external, separate observed object. The two *gathas* above represent the transition from the dualistic to the nondual view in Ch'an Buddhism. Just so, *Ati Dzogchen* represents the same transition from the outer tantras to the inner tantras and ultimately to the subtlest *Ati yoga* of *Dzogchen* practice.

The subtle nondual thread which runs through the fabric of our great Primordial Wisdom Tradition is expressed in many ways. In the *Vajrayana* tradition of Buddhism we have, in the highest inner tantra, *Dzogchen (Ati yoga)*, Garab Dorje's statement: "The nature of mind is Buddha from the beginning." There is no separation between mind (and the objects and beings arising therein), and Buddha. All is Buddha mind. Everything is Buddha essence or Buddha Nature (*bushho, buddhata, Tathagatagarbha*) "from the very beginning." "From the beginning, all beings are Buddha" (Hakuin). The objects of mind, and the experiencing subject are at root, identical. They share the same essence or emptiness base. This is the nondual base, the primordial womb in whom everything arises. So this is the difference between relative mind, "Small Mind," and the nature or essence of mind, "Big Mind," that is its absolute or supreme source, the primordial matrix of all arising objective and subjective phenomenal

reality. This ontological duality expresses the perennial "Two Fundamental Truths" — Ultimate Truth, the nondual Source, and all the realities of Relative Truth arising therein. These Two Truths are in essence an unseparate and inseparable prior unity. Seeing them thusly, then acting in accordance, is Zen enlightenment.

This nondual Zen understanding—The View—of the Mahayana transcends, includes and pervades the gradualist, dualistic view of the Sutras, just as the nondual *Dzogchen* teaching transcends and includes the dualistic "antidotal" view of the outer tantras (*Kriya*, *Carya* and *Yoga*), and even of the inner tantras of *Mahayoga* and *Anuyoga*. The "higher" or innermost teaching is superior to the "lesser" yogas not so much qualitatively, but quantitatively in that the former is more direct, inclusive and less dualistic than the latter, and therefore more directly and expediently reveals or mirrors the great liberating source.

The *Prajnaparamita Sutra* of the *Mayayana* tradition of Buddhism, like the *Hinayana Sutras* (and the Gnostic texts) are considered by scholars to be didactic and dualistic. But within them, particularly the *Heart Sutra* (*Mahaprajna paramita* or *Hridaya Sutra*) and the *Diamond Sutra* (*Vajrachhedika Sutra*), is the profound intuition of the nondual nature of mind. The great Indian Buddhist master, logician and poet, Nagarjuna (2nd Century) has interpreted these *Sutras* in this way. Whether Hui-neng and Hakuin were familiar with the nondual view of Nagarjuna, what is clear is the nondual understanding of all three of these great sages.

Hui-neng's essential statement is this: "From the beginning not a thing is. Seeing into one's self-nature is seeing into emptiness (*shunyata*)." Hakuin's essential statement (in the *Zazen Wasan*) is: "From the beginning all beings are Buddha." This is the great nondual truth that is transmitted directly from the *Dharmakaya* through the historical *Nirmanakaya* Shakyamuni Buddha and on through the teaching transmission lineages to all of those with an eye to see.

From emptiness the wondrous being appears. . . no-mind includes everything. . . even before we practice it, enlightenment is here.
Without any idea of attainment, you are always Buddha.

-Suzuki Roshi (1970)

This great truth (*anatman/no-self/dependent origination*) is contained in the *Hinayana*, *Theravada*, *Mahayana*, and *Vajrayana dharma* teachings (*sutra*, *shastras* and *tantras*) often in a dualistic representation. It is contained in the expressly nondual view of *Ati Yoga* (*Dzogchen*) and the *Anuttara* tantras of the Essence *Mahamudra* of the *Vajrayana*, in the nondualism of the *Mahayana Saijojo* Zen teaching through Hui-neng (Eno) and his immediate Ch'an *dharma* successors Ma-tsu (Buso), Nan-chuan (Nansen), Chao-Chou (Joshu), Huai-hai (Hyakujo), Huang-po (Obaku), Lin-chi (Rinzai), Tung-shan (Tozun), Ts'ao-shan (Sozun), wu-men (Mumon), and from China to Japan in Esai Zenji (1141-1215,

Rinzai/Oryo School), and Dogen Zenji (1200-1253, Soto School).

In Japan, a thousand years after Hui-Neng's reformation of Chinese Ch'an Buddhism, after a period of intellectual dualism wherein *prajna* (wisdom) and *dhyana* (*zazen*/meditation) had again become separated, Hakuin Zenji (1685-1768), reformed Japanese Zen and the nondual practice and expression of Zen was restored.² Before Hui-neng became the 6th Ch'an Patriarch, Ch'an Buddhism was essentially Indian *dhyana* Buddhism, with its emphasis on the *dhyana* practice of *tso-ch'an* (*zazen*), or sitting meditation. D.T. Suzuki has termed this the "dust wiping type of meditation" for it emphasizes the dualistic practice of wiping the dust from the bright mirror of the mind ("keeping watch over purity"), but it cannot transcend the mind to be united with its primordial, nondual source. The fundamental difference between the passive "quietism" of the traditional approach of Shen-hsiu and the approach of Hui-neng was in the view of Buddha Nature (*busho*). For Hui-neng, Ch'an (Zen) was "seeing into one's original nature" (self-nature), which is "nothing from the beginning." "*Shujo honrai hotoke nari*" (all beings are endowed with Buddha Nature from the beginning). Such a nondual view was a truly radical idea through which dualistic exoteric Ch'an/Zen Buddhism was freed from the dualistic view of Indian Hinayana Buddhism.

"We talk of seeing into our own original nature, not of *dhyana* or of attaining enlightenment In self-nature there is from the beginning not a thing that is attainable" (Hui-neng).

Here is the pith and the gist of Zen. It is not merely the quietism of sitting *zazen* that leads to enlightenment—though *zazen* prepares the mind to open to natural *satori*—but truly **seeing** (*kensho*, *satori*), and **knowing** (*wu*, *gnosis*) that one's own original self-nature is "always already" liberated, enlightenment itself. This is the immediate recognition and ultimate realization. Indeed, clinging or attachment to the peace and bliss of *zazen* practice, or the striving or seeking motive (desire) to enlightenment, will effectively prevent enlightenment. "Remaining naturally in the state (*satori*, *rigpa*, *vidya*) is the practice." "Nothing special." In the *T'an-ching* Hui-neng states that "If the view is dualistic there can be no enlightenment. . . . The truth is understood beyond the mind (*hsin*, *sems*, *citta*), not by *tso-ch'an* (*zazen*) sitting."

This dualism between *dhyana* (meditation) and *prajna* (wisdom) which twice stalled the growth of Ch'an/Zen may be understood thusly: If *prajna* is awakened only through the activity of *dhyana*, then *dhyana* is prior, thus the two are separate and a dualism exists.

We see into our own true nature, our Buddha Nature which is *shunyata* (emptiness), through the illusory objects, concepts, and beliefs of the mind by the illuminating clear

² Other expressly nondual views (formulations or representations) of the dharma appear in Shankara's *Advaita Vedanta*, in the *Madhyamaka* (Middle Way) of Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti, in Valentinian Gnostic Christianity and in the Taoism of Lao Tsu and Chuang Tsu. Expressly dualistic representations of the *dharma* teaching are found in the Buddhist *Vaibhashika* and *Yogachara*, in *Sankhaya*'s separation of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, and the Hindu Yoga systems of *Nayaya*, *Vaisheshika* and *Mimamsa*, as well as the dualistic exoteric conventional representations of the major world religions.

light of *prajna*. *Prajna* is the opening to receive the truth of *dharma* that our true self-nature is Buddha Nature, then expressing this original nature through compassionate activity in the world. Thus, seeing into our original nature is "leaving it as it is" and is just being That (*tatata/suchness/shunyata*). *Prajna* is openness to receive the truth of *shunyata*. And *dhyana* (*zazen*) is the simultaneous practice, the yoga, the *sadhana*. But their essence is the same. No conceptual thought (*wu-nien*) is involved. The third aspect of this triad is *sila* (conduct, morality) which flows from *prajna* and *dhyana*. This triad of *prajna*, *dhyana* and *sila* is analagous to View, Meditation and Conduct in *Dogzchen* and *Mahamudra*.

For Hui-neng then, *prajna* and *dhyana* are not separate, but identical. Our self-nature recognizes or realizes itself, its authentic or original nature through directly experiencing or seeing this great ultimate truth (*paramartha*), Reality Itself. This seeing (*kensho*) is *prajna*. The dualistic view separates the seeing from That (*Tathata*) great truth being seen. In Hui-neng's nondual view, the **activity** of seeing unites the seer with that seen. Seeing is the activity of *kensho/satori*. *Prajna* is receptivity or opening to it. The reflected objects appearing through the bright mirror of the mind are transcended in their source, and one sees that the perceiving self and Reality Itself are identical. There is no separation, no separate other. There is no dualism. No dilemma. No problem whatsoever. From the realization of this view, compassionate activity to reduce the suffering of sentient beings spontaneously arises. Is *dhyana* prior? Is *prajna* prior? From the nondual view they are a prior unity, a relationship of identity.

It is significant in this regard that Hui-neng changed the terminology for "seeing into the nature of mind" from *k'an-ching* to *chien-hsing*. The Chinese character *k'an* means to observe from above or from without, as though the observer and that observed were separate. This is the classical, dualistic, exoteric objectivist view of science and religion in both the East and the West. Observer and that observed, spiritual aspirant and the goal of perfect happiness or godhead are viewed as essentially separate. The character for *chien* means "to see" or "pure seeing" and does not imply or connote a separation of observer from that observed, of practitioner from the "goal" of practice. When combined with *hsing* (mind) *chien-hsing* becomes "essential nature of mind", the direct seeing into it, self-seeing, not separate observation of it from without. Therefore, seeing something, a specific object is *k'an-ching*. Seeing into one's primordial original nature—*chien-hsing*—is paradoxically, no-seeing, which arises in "no-mind" (*wu-hsin*). When seeing has no reference to an object or condition, that is, when seeing is non-intentional—consciousness with no intentional object—the pure unconditioned, intuitive realization of the all inclusive source, it is "no thought" (*wu-nien*) and no-mind (*wu-hsin*). This direct, non-conceptual seeing into one's primordial original nature (*chien*) is the liberation from ignorance and suffering that is enlightenment itself (*kensho/satori, wu*). In the Vajrayana the self-perfected nature is the presence *rigpa* (*vidya*) of the primordial matrix, the ground or base or source. The Chinese character *wu* is "my heart-mind," thus it connotes the emotive (*bhakti*) "seeing or recognition/ realization of my own essential heart-mind."

“Seeing” (*kensho*) is a perceptual-emotional, even devotional process. Hui-neng speaks of the nondual identity of *dhyana* and *prajna*:

What is most fundamental is *Dhyana* (*ting*) and *Prajna* (*chin*) . . . do not be deceived that *Dhyana* and *Prajna* are separate. They are one. *Dhyana* is the body of *Prajna*, and *Prajna* is the use (*upaya*, means) of *Dhyana*. . . *Dhyana* is in *Prajna*; *Prajna* is in *Dhyana*. . . they are complimentary in practice (*sadhana* the path) . . . the view that one must precede the other makes a dualism of the *Dharma*.³

For Hui-neng, as for Hakuin, *dhyana* is not the "quietism" of sitting-only zazen, but the actions and activity of seeing, hearing, moving, conduct, thinking, eating, sleeping, all of the activities of a human being. *Dhyana* is activity (openness) as *prajna* (wisdom). ***Prajna* (wisdom) is the harnessing of the primordial prana energy (*lung, ch'i*) through meditation expressed and transmitted as compassionate activity (*karuna*). *Prajna* wisdom is *dhyana* meditation in action.** Zazen is bringing the purity and luminosity of no-mind/Zen mind—the primordial awareness wisdom (*Tao, gnosis, jnana, yeshe*)—into the everyday activity of the earth path of compassionate service to oneself and others, indeed, to all sentient beings. And this is wisdom (*prajna*). Wisdom and meditation are essentially the same—two sides of one reality—always a prior unity. Again, the relation is one of identity. Zazen (meditation)—not merely sitting meditation—is the activity (the action or conduct) of wisdom. **Thus, Hui-neng's great insight created a reformation that opened Chinese Ch'an Buddhism to the nondual view. Just so, Hakuin accomplished the same reformation for Japanese Zen Buddhism a thousand years later.**

From Ignorance to Bliss: Much Ado About Nothing

The perennial question of spiritual practice is this: How does one move from egoic ignorance (*avidya, marigpa, hamartia/sin*) to the bliss of realization? What is the nature of this transition from Relative Truth of phenomenal reality to the Absolute Truth which transcends yet contains all truth and all being; from the limited world of the conditional ego to the enlightenment/*samadhi/satori* of *shunyata* emptiness that is Tao. In exoteric Ch'an and Zen Buddhism the question is one of the transition from *mayoi* (*mi*) to *satori* (*wu*); from *samasara* to *nirvana*. In the *Sanatana Dharma* of the Hindu religious complex this transition from ignorance to happiness is the growing through *bindu* to *ojas*. In dualistic

³ Hui-neng, *The T'an-ching* (*Jap. Dan-gyo*), *The Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* ("Platform Sutra"). Some Scholars believe that the *T'an Ching* was written by an unknown author after Hui-neng's death. Myths of origin and interpretation are always inextricably interwoven. Exoterically considered, this is of historical interest. Esoterically, the truth of the teaching (*dharma*), when it is the truth, transcends historiographic and hagiological explanation. The truths of the sutras and tantras remain the truths of the dharma regardless of the specific exoteric origins of that truth.

pagan and neo-Platonic Gnostic Christianity it is the transition from ignorance or sin (*hamartia*) to the nondual Depth (*Bathos*) in whom arises the fullness of the *Pleroma* (divine realm) of *Abba*, the Primordial Father who is the very *Bathos*/depth/emptiness. And all of this through the activity or agency of *sophia* (relative wisdom) and the *gnosis* (ultimate wisdom) that transcends and embraces it. In the esoteric and nondual teaching of all the traditions "The View" is the pure seeing (*kensho*) or realization (*satori*) that *samsara* and *nirvana* are identical. The polarities of this duality are subsumed in the Primordial Awareness Wisdom that is nondual *jnana/gnosis*. With the realization of this through the stages of meditative stabilization—the accomplishment of *shamatha* and *vipashyana* (*zoriki*)—stabilized, permanent enlightenment may result.

Regarding the nature of this view: Is liberation/enlightenment a sudden, discrete step-function (*tongo*), or is it a gradual learning process (*zenko*, continuity)? It depends on the View, relative or absolute. Thus it is both.

The alleged debate between Hui-neng (Southern School) and Shen-shiu (Northern School) that began with the two *gathas*, was this: Do we wipe the dust of relative conditional existence from the bright mirror of the mind, and polish the tile until it becomes a mirror, and by these purifying activities (*zazen*) gradually reach enlightenment, as Shen-shiu argued with his *zenko*, the gradualist doctrine? Or do we follow the nondual way of Hui-neng and simply hew wood and carry water and continue in the gentle activity and compassionate conduct of our daily practice (including *zazen*), without any "gaining idea" for enlightenment, confident that our inherent Buddha Nature is always present within, at the heart, and that in any given moment we may choose to recognize it. As these brief *satoris* become a continuity of recognition, liberation and then Buddhahood may result. Here is Hui-Neng's eloquent and passionate argument from his *Platform Sutra*:

All the Buddhas of the past, present and future, and all the Sutras (abide) in the self-nature (*tsu-hsing*) of each one where they were from the very beginning. . . There is within oneself that which knows (*prajna*), and from this source comes enlightenment (*wu*). Ignorance arises through thoughts (concepts) and no one, however wise, can help such a one. But in enlightenment through *prajna* all ignorance vanishes in an instant and the actual self-nature is realized. This realization may lead to Buddhahood. This state (activity) of *prajna-samadhi* is *wu-nien* (no-thought), or *wu-hsin* (no-mind).

- Hui-neng, *T'an-ching* (Yampolsky, 1967)

The path of Hui-neng and the Southern School then, is the path of sudden enlightenment (*tongo*), seeing at once, "brief moments, many times" the Buddha Nature

that is always present “from the very beginning” (This is also the view of the *Dzogchen* and *Mahamudra* of the Vajrayana). Indeed the first Buddhist *tongjo* transmission form “heart-mind to heart-mind” was that from Shakyamuni Buddha to his great disciple Mayakashyapa, the first Indian Buddhist patriarch. When the mind is prepared and open through the practice of the path, one may find oneself suddenly taken up by the illuminating clear light (*kensho/satori/vidya/rigpa*), the presence of the very nature or source of the mind. Here, the dualism of conditional, relative existence is transcended yet embraced in the nondual “primordially pure” supreme source, the emptiness (*shunyata*) base or matrix in whom all relative existences arise, dwell and return. This is the enlightenment that “may lead to Buddhahood.”

Thus, in the expanding continuity—“brief moments, many times—of true seeing into one’s original self-nature one realizes that this luminous, awake nature of mind is *shunyata*, already present from the very beginning. Indeed, that is always our essential Buddha nature, always abiding at the spiritual heart (*hridayam*) of each human being. “Wonder of wonders, all beings are Buddhas.” The apparent need to wipe, polish and purify our defiled conventional nature in order to realize this essential Buddha nature was a dualistic illusion based in our unawakened state of ignorance. With the realization that the clear luminosity of *prajna* is ontologically prior to ignorance, and that it is truly our original self-nature as “it was from the very beginning,” then indeed, “where can the dust alight?” Again, this primordial presence (*vidya/rigpa*) of our actual self-nature is “always, already present.” We need merely to recognize it. Yet it is veiled by the obscurations (ignorance/*avidya*) of *Maya*. The mind training of the Path gradually removes this veil so that we can suddenly see (*kensho*) what is. As we accomplish this in a continuity of moment to moment *kensho/satori* through the *sadhana* of practice in the company of the master (*satsang*) and the *sanga* (fellowship of practitioners) we are liberated from the obstructive ignorance—negative emotions (desire/attachment, anger/aggression, ignorance) and *satori*/ enlightenment is now our ordinary state of mind. Thus do we accomplish *shamatha* (mindfulness) and *Vipashyana* (penetrating insight) and enter into later *bhumi* stages of the Bodhisattva’s path to omniscience of perfect Buddhahood.

Ultimately, we realize that even the bright mirror of the mind is an illusion, or merely a metaphor for “nowhere is the mirror bright.” What is it then, that remains when the fiery flux of the appearances of mind is blown out? (*Nirvana* literally means “blown out,” like a flame). What is to be realized here is the prior unity of the “yogi’s great bliss” (*ananda/mahasuka*) with the primordial wisdom (*jnana/yeshe/gnosis*) of transcendental *prajna-samadhi* of no-mind that is our true original nature from the very beginning. This is *sahaj samadhi*, the union of bliss and emptiness. Ignorance then, is simply an ignoring or refusal to recognize our actual identity, the supreme identity that is here now, indwelling, at the spiritual heart as our original Buddha Nature. Ignorance is *hamartia* (sin), literally

"missing the mark" of our primordial original self-nature. Ignorance is *avidya-maya*, the power of the "concealer truths" of relative-conventional reality ("Small Mind") to cloak (*adhyesa*) the numinous presence (*vidya*) of *paramartha*, the Ultimate Reality ("Big Mind") that is its very source. Ignorance is *avidya* (*ajnana*, *marigpa*), the dualistic view of confusing the ego self of the transient phenomenal world of relative, conventional reality with the unconditional, transcendental self that is no-self, our immediate Zen mind-Buddha mind, our Buddha Nature (*tathgatagarbha*) whose very source is *shunyata*, empty, luminous, awake, compassionate, nondual intrinsic primordial awareness itself. Again, as this presence is integrated moment to moment in the lifeworld as self-less *prajna*-compassion the result or fruition is Buddhahood—the unity of appearance and emptiness, the unity of bliss and emptiness—ultimate Happiness Itself.

Wu-Wei
On the Paradox of Seeking

You have always been one with the Buddha, so do not pretend
you can attain this oneness by various practices.
If, in this very instant, you could know that it can never
be attained by effort. . . you would now be the Buddha Mind. . .
Do not seek Buddhahood. Your seeking is doomed to failure.

-Huang Po (Kraft, 1988)

The *wu-wei* that does not aim at *wu-wei*, is truly *wu-wei*.

-Lao Tzu

Let it be, as it is and rest your weary mind. All things are perfect
exactly as they are.

-Shakymuni, The Buddha

Keeping this *wu-wei* wisdom view of not seeking in mind, we hew wood and carry water,
wipe the dust and polish the tile. Have a cup of tea.