

TAIGEN DAN LEIGHTON

*Cultivating the
Empty Field*



*The Silent Illumination
of Zen Master Hongzhi*

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*Traditional Chinese Woodcut
of Zen Master Hongzhi*

CULTIVATING THE EMPTY FIELD

**The Silent Illumination of
Zen Master Hongzhi**

REVISED, EXPANDED EDITION

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The true form is magnificently illuminated with gleaming fire.
The teaching's voice is total silence amid the ringing wind chimes.
The moon hangs in the old pine tree, cold in the falling night.
The chilled crane in its nest in the clouds has not yet been
aroused from its dreams.

Hongzhi, *Homage to the Fourth Ancestor*

A person of the Way fundamentally does not dwell anywhere. The white clouds are fascinated with the green mountain's foundation. The bright moon cherishes being carried along with the flowing water. The clouds part and the mountain appears. The moon sets and the water is cool. Each bit of autumn contains vast interpenetration without bounds.

Hongzhi, *Practice Instructions*

PRACTICE INSTRUCTIONS

Dharma Words of Monk Hongzhi Zhengjue
of Mount Tiantong in Ming Province
Compiled with a Preface by Monk Puqung¹

Hongzhi made vast and empty the bright mirror and saw through it and reflected without neglect.² He manifested the mysterious pivot of subtle change, then trusted his fortune and certainly found the core. Only one who had the true eye and deep flowing eloquence could have mastered this! My teacher lived below Taipai Peak.³ Dragons and elephants tromped around.⁴ The hammer and chisel [of the teaching] chipped away. The meaning of his words spread widely but still conveyed the essence. Sometimes scholars and laypeople who trusted the Way asked for his directions; sometimes mendicant monks requested his instructions. They spread out paper and wrote down his responses. He spoke up and answered their questions, producing appropriate dharma talks. I have selected a few of these and arranged them in order. Ah, the emptiness of the great blue sky, the flowing of the vast ocean. I have not yet attained these utmost depths, so please excuse my attempt to record his talks. I must await the ones who

mysteriously accord with spiritual awakening to pound out the rhythm of his words and appreciate their tones.

The Bright, Boundless Field

The field of boundless emptiness is what exists from the very beginning. You must purify, cure, grind down, or brush away all the tendencies you have fabricated into apparent habits. Then you can reside in the clear circle of brightness. Utter emptiness has no image, upright independence does not rely on anything. Just expand and illuminate the original truth unconcerned by external conditions. Accordingly we are told to realize that not a single thing exists. In this field birth and death do not appear. The deep source, transparent down to the bottom, can radiantly shine and can respond unencumbered to each speck of dust without becoming its partner. The subtlety of seeing and hearing transcends mere colors and sounds. The whole affair functions without leaving traces, and mirrors without obscurations. Very naturally mind and dharmas emerge and harmonize.⁵ An Ancient said that non-mind enacts and fulfills the way of non-mind. Enacting and fulfilling the way of non-mind, finally you can rest. Proceeding you are able to guide the assembly. With thoughts clear, sitting silently, wander into the center of the circle of wonder. This is how you must penetrate and study.

The Practice of True Reality

The practice of true reality is simply to sit serenely in silent introspection. When you have fathomed this you cannot be turned around by external causes and conditions. This empty, wide open mind is subtly and correctly illuminating. Spacious and content, without confusion from inner thoughts of grasping, effectively overcome habitual behavior and realize the self that is not possessed by emotions. You must be broad-minded, whole without relying on others. Such upright independent spirit can begin not to pursue degrading situations. Here you can rest and become clean, pure, and lucid. Bright and penetrating, you can immediately return, accord, and respond to deal with events. Everything is unhindered, clouds gracefully floating

up to the peaks, the moonlight glitteringly flowing down mountain streams.⁶ The entire place is brightly illumined and spiritually transformed, totally unobstructed and clearly manifesting responsive interaction like box and lid or arrowpoints [meeting].⁷ Continuing, cultivate and nourish yourself to enact maturity and achieve stability. If you accord everywhere with thorough clarity and cut off sharp corners without dependence on doctrines, like the white bull or wildcat [helping to arouse wonder], you can be called a complete person.⁸ So we hear that this is how one on the way of non-mind acts, but before realizing non-mind we still have great hardship.

Face Everything, Let Go, and Attain Stability

Vast and far-reaching without boundary, secluded and pure, manifesting light, this spirit is without obstruction. Its brightness does not shine out but can be called empty and inherently radiant. Its brightness, inherently purifying, transcends causal conditions beyond subject and object. Subtle but preserved, illumined and vast, also it cannot be spoken of as being or nonbeing, or discussed with images or calculations. Right in here the central pivot turns, the gateway opens. You accord and respond without laboring and accomplish without hindrance. Everywhere turn around freely, not following conditions, not falling into classifications. Facing everything, let go and attain stability. Stay with that just as that. Stay with this just as this. That and this are mixed together with no discriminations as to their places. So it is said that the earth lifts up the mountain without knowing the mountain's stark steepness. A rock contains jade without knowing the jade's flawlessness. This is how truly to leave home, how home-leaving must be enacted.⁹

Contemplating the Ten Thousand Years

Patch-robed monks make their thinking dry and cool and rest from the remnants of conditioning.¹⁰ Persistently brush up and sharpen this bit of the field. Directly cut through all the overgrown grass. Reach the limit in all directions without defiling even one atom. Spiritual and bright, vast and lustrous, illuminating fully what is

before you, directly attain the shining light and clarity that cannot attach to a single defilement. Immediately tug and pull back the ox's nose.¹¹ Of course his horns are imposing and he stomps around like a beast, yet he never damages people's sprouts or grain. Wandering around, accept how it goes. Accepting how it goes, wander around. Do not be bounded by or settle into any place. Then the plough will break open the ground in the field of the empty *kalpa*.¹² Proceeding in this manner, each event will be unobscured, each realm will appear complete. One contemplation of the ten thousand years is beginning not to dwell in appearances. Thus it is said that the mind-ground contains every seed and the universal rain makes them all sprout. When awakening blossoms, desires fade, and Bodhi's fruit is perfected self.¹³

Performing the Buddha Work

[The empty field] cannot be cultivated or proven. From the beginning it is altogether complete, undefiled and clear down to the bottom. Where everything is correct and totally sufficient, attain the pure eye that illuminates thoroughly, fulfilling liberation. Enlightenment involves enacting this; stability develops from practicing it. Birth and death originally have no root or stem, appearing and disappearing originally have no defining signs or traces. The primal light, empty and effective, illumines the headtop. The primal wisdom, silent but also glorious, responds to conditions. When you reach the truth without middle or edge, cutting off before and after, then you realize one wholeness. Everywhere sense faculties and objects both just happen. The one who sticks out his broad long tongue transmits the inexhaustible lamp, radiates the great light, and performs the great buddha work, from the first not borrowing from others one atom from outside the dharma.¹⁴ Clearly this affair occurs within your own house.

Forgetting about Merit is Fulfillment

Separate yourself from disturbance and face whatever appears before you. Not one iota seeps through from outside. The two forms [yin and yang]¹⁵ have the same root, and the ten thousand images have one substance. Following change and going along with transformation,

the whole is not clouded over by previous conditions. Then you reach the foundation of the great freedom. Wind blows and moon shines, and beings do not obstruct each other. Afterwards, settle back within and take responsibility. Wisdom returns and the principle is consummated. When you forget about merit your position is fulfilled. Do not fall for occupying honorable stations, but enter the current of the world and join with the delusion. Transcendent, solitary, and glorious, directly know that transmitting is merit, but having transmitted is not your own merit.

The Ground That Sages Cannot Transmit

Cast off completely your head and skin. Thoroughly withdraw from distinctions of light and shadow. Where the ten thousand changes do not reach is the foundation that even a thousand sages cannot transmit. Simply by yourself illuminate and deeply experience it with intimate accord. The original light flashes through confusion. True illumination reflects into the distance. Deliberations about being and nonbeing are entirely abandoned. The wonder appears before you, its benefit transferred out for *kalpas*. Immediately you follow conditions and accord with awakening without obstruction from any defilements. The mind does not attach to things, and your footsteps are not visible on the road. Then you are called to continue the family business.¹⁶ Even if you thoroughly understand, still please practice until it is familiar.

With Total Trust Roam and Play in Samādhi

Empty and desireless, cold and thin, simple and genuine, this is how to strike down and fold up the remaining habits of many lives. When the stains from old habits are exhausted, the original light appears, blazing through your skull, not admitting any other matters. Vast and spacious, like sky and water merging during autumn, like snow and moon having the same color, this field is without boundary, beyond direction, magnificently one entity without edge or seam. Further, when you turn within and drop off everything completely, realization occurs. Right at the time of entirely dropping off, deliberation and

discussion are one thousand or ten thousand miles away. Still no principle is discernible, so what could there be to point to or explain? People with the bottom of the bucket fallen out immediately find total trust.¹⁷ So we are told simply to realize mutual response and explore mutual response, then turn around and enter the world. Roam and play in *samādhi*.¹⁸ Every detail clearly appears before you. Sound and form, echo and shadow, happen instantly without leaving traces. The outside and myself do not dominate each other, only because no perceiving [of objects] comes between us. Only this non-perceiving encloses the empty space of the dharma realm's majestic ten thousand forms.¹⁹ People with the original face should enact and fully investigate [the field] without neglecting a single fragment.

The Valley Spirit and the Wind Master

Patch-robed monks practice thoroughly without carrying a single thread. Open-mindedly sparkling and pure, they are like a mirror reflecting a mirror, with nothing regarded as outside, without capacity for accumulating dust. They illuminate everything fully, perceiving nothing [as an object]. This is called taking up the burden from inside and is how to shoulder responsibility. Wisdom illuminates the darkness without confusion. The Way integrates with the body and does not get stuck. From this unstuck place, engaging and transforming at the appropriate opportunity, the wisdom does not leak out. Clearly the Way does not get stained. The valley spirit echoes the sound.²⁰ The wind master walks in the sky. Unobstructed and free, beyond restraints, they do not depend on even subtle indicators and their essential spirit cannot be eclipsed. Fulfilled, wander around and arrive at such a field. The entire place secure, the entire place at leisure, the open field of the white ox is plain and simple, of one color. If you chase the ox, still he will not go away. You must intimately experience and arrive here.

Simply Drop Off Everything

Silently dwell in the self, in true suchness abandon conditioning. Open-minded and bright without defilement, simply penetrate and drop off everything. Today is not your first arrival here. Since the

ancient home before the empty *kalpa*, clearly nothing has been obscured. Although you are inherently spirited and splendid, still you must go ahead and enact it. When doing so, immediately display every atom without hiding a speck of dirt. Dry and cool in deep repose, profoundly understand. If your rest is not satisfying and you yearn to go beyond birth and death, there can be no such place. Just burst through and you will discern without thought-dusts, pure without reasons for anxiety. Stepping back with open hands, [giving up everything], is thoroughly comprehending life and death. Immediately you can sparkle and respond to the world. Merge together with all things. Everywhere is just right. Accordingly we are told that from ancient to modern times all dharmas are not concealed, always apparent and exposed.

The Ancient Ferryboat in Bright Moonlight

A patch-robed monk's authentic task is to practice the essence, in each minute event carefully discerning the shining source, radiant without discrimination, one color unstained. You must keep turning inwards, then [the source] is apprehended. This is called being able to continue the family business. Do not wear the changing fashions, transcend the duality of light and shadow. Accordingly the ancestors' single trail is marvelously enacted.²¹ The residual debris of the world departs, its influence ended. This worldly knowledge does not compare to returning to the primary and obtaining confirmation. Observing beyond your skull, the core finally can be fulfilled and you can emerge from the transitory. The reeds blossom under the bright moon; the ancient ferryboat begins its passage; the jade thread fits into the golden needle. Then the opportunity arises to turn around, enter the world, and respond to conditions. All the dusts are entirely yours; all the dharmas are not someone else's. Follow the current and paddle along, naturally unobstructed!

The Gates Sparkling at the Source

All buddhas and every ancestor without exception testify that they all arrive at this refuge where the three times [past, present, and future] cease and the ten thousand changes are silenced. Straight ahead, unopposed by the smallest atom, the inherently illumined buddha spirit subtly penetrates the original source. When recognized and realized exhaustively, [this spirit] shares itself and responds to situations. The gates sparkle and all beings behold the gleaming. Then they understand that from within this place fulfilled self flows out. The hundreds of grass-tips all around never are imposed as my causes and conditioning. The whole body from head to foot proceeds smoothly.

The Misunderstanding of Many Lifetimes

Emptiness is without characteristics. Illumination has no emotional afflictions. With piercing, quietly profound radiance, it mysteriously eliminates all disgrace. Thus one can know oneself; thus the self is completed. We all have the clear, wondrously bright field from the beginning. Many lifetimes of misunderstanding come only from distrust, hindrance, and screens of confusion that we create in a scenario of isolation. With boundless wisdom journey beyond this, forgetting accomplishments. Straightforwardly abandon stratagems and take on responsibility. Having turned yourself around, accepting your situation, if you set foot on the path, spiritual energy will marvelously transport you. Contact phenomena with total sincerity, not a single atom of dust outside yourself.

Self and Other the Same

All dharmas are innately amazing beyond description. Perfect vision has no gap. In mountain groves, grasslands, and woods the truth has always been exhibited. Discern and comprehend the broad long tongue [of Buddha's teaching], which cannot be muted anywhere. The spoken is instantly heard; what is heard is instantly spoken. Senses and objects merge; principle and wisdom are united. When self and other are the same, mind and dharmas are one. When you face what you have excluded and see how it appears, you must quickly gather it

together and integrate with it. Make it work within your house, then establish stable sitting.

Ten Billion Illuminating Spirits

The way wanders in the empty middle of the circle, reaching the vacancy where appearances are forgotten. The pure ultimate self blazes, brilliant simply from inherent illumination. Facing the boundary of the object world without yet creating the sense gates, realize the subtlety of how to eliminate the effects of the swirling flow of arising and extinction! Rely only on the source of creation. If you feel a shadow of a hair's gap, nothing will be received.²² Just experience and respond appropriately. From this singular impact many thousands of roads open, and all things are preeminent. With this unification I radiantly speak the dharma. The self divides into ten billion distinct illuminating spirits. Distinguish these without falling into names and classifications and accord fully without effort. The mirror is clear and magnanimous. The valley is empty, but echoes. From the beginning unbound by seeing or hearing, the genuine self romps and plays in *samādhi* without obstruction. When enacted like this, how could it not be beneficial?

Sit Empty of Worldly Anxiety

If you truly appreciate a single thread your eye can suitably meet the world and its changes. Seeing clearly, do not be fooled, and the ten thousand situations cannot shroud you. Moonlight falls on the water; wind blows over the pines. Light and shadow do not confuse us; sounds or voices do not block us. The whistling wind can resonate, pervading without impediment through the various structures. Flowing along with things, harmonizing without deviation, thoroughly abandoning webs of dust, still one does not yet arrive in the original home. Put to rest the remnants of your conditioning. Sit empty of worldly anxiety, silent and bright, clear and illuminating, blank and accepting, far-reaching and responsive. Without encountering-external dusts, fulfilled in your own spirit, arrive at this field and immediately recognize your ancestors.

How to Contemplate Buddha

Contemplating your own authentic form is how to contemplate Buddha. If you can experience yourself without distractions, simply surpass partiality and go beyond conceptualizing. All buddhas and all minds reach the essential without duality. Patch-robed monks silently wander and tranquilly dwell in the empty spirit, wondrously penetrating, just as the supreme emptiness permeates this dusty *kalpa*. Dignified without relying on others and radiant beyond doubt, maintaining this as primary, the energy turns around and transforms all estrangement. Passing through the world responding to situations, illumination is without striving and functions without leaving traces. From the beginning the clouds leisurely release their rain, drifting past obstacles. The direct teaching is very pure and steady. Nothing can budge it. Immediately, without allowing past conditions to turn you, genuinely enact it.

Return to the Source and Serve the Ancestors

Those who produce descendants are called ancestors. Where the stream emerges is called the source. After beholding the source and recognizing the ancestors, before your awareness can disperse, be steadfast and do not follow birth and death or past conditioning. If you do not succumb, then all beings will show the whole picture. Wake up and in turn the ground, the roots, and the dusts are clearly cast off.²³ Although empty of desires, with deliberations cut off, transcendent comprehension is not all sealed up. Perfect bright understanding is carefree amid ten thousand images and cannot be confused. Within each dust mote is vast abundance. In a hundred thousand *samādhis* all gates are majestic, all dharmas are fulfilled. Still you must gather them together and bring them within. To reach the time-honored, return to the source and serve the ancestors. Joined together into unity, scrutinize yourself and go on.

The Whole Arrives in Original Brightness

The place of silent and serene illumination is the heavenly dome in clear autumn, shining brightly without strain, gleaming through both

light and shadow. At this juncture the whole is supreme and genuinely arrives. The clear source is enacted with spirit, the axis is wide and the energy lively, everything apparent in the original brightness. The center is manifest and is celebrated. All the various events are consummated, with yin and yang balanced and the ten thousand representations equalized. Smooth and level, magnificently peaceful, from north to south, from east to west, heaven is the same as heaven, people are the same as people, responsive with their bodies, visible in their forms, speaking the dharma. This ability is fully actualized, extensively obliterating obstacles.

Spectacular Images of Clouds and Dragons

In the wind abode clouds and dragons harmoniously follow each other.²⁴ Very naturally from the first they do not [need to] express their intentions to each other. Similarly, patch-robed monks are accommodating and, based on causes and conditions, can harmoniously practice together. Arriving without display, emerging unconcealed, the wondrous [clouds and dragons] enter the whole scene and cannot be confused. Casually hanging above the ten thousand features, each distinctly presents a spectacular image. Complete without a hair's difference between them, springing forth with spontaneity, they clearly exemplify coming home, but still must investigate until they have eaten their fill. Clouds disperse and winds die down. The autumn sky clears and the moon sets. The waters of heaven are limitless. Where the ground is on its own the brightness begins to be realized.

Buddha Flowers, Leaves, Roots, and Dusts

The Way is not what the ancestors transmit. Before the ancestors come, it already pervades the whole environment. Emptiness is inherently without characteristics; spirituality cannot be imitated. On its own, illumination emerges from causes and conditions. Constantly living apart from surface appearances is called being the ancestor. Simply certify and unite with it; you cannot be handed it. All buddhas arrive here and regard this as the ultimate. They respond to

transformations and disperse their bodies as flowers, leaves, roots, and dusts. Wisdom enters the three times and the ten thousand changes do not disturb us, each dust is not outside us. This marvel is beyond the vast thousands of classical texts, so where could you hold on to the shadowy world?

The Backward Step and the Upright Cauldron

With the depths clear, utterly silent, thoroughly illuminate the source, empty and spirited, vast and bright. Even though you have lucidly scrutinized your image and no shadow or echo meets it, searching throughout you see that you still have distinguished between the merits of a hundred undertakings. Then you must take the backward step and directly reach the middle of the circle from where light issues forth.²⁵ Outstanding and independent, still you must abandon pretexts for merit. Carefully discern that naming engenders beings and that these rise and fall with intricacy. When you can share your self, then you may manage affairs, and you have the pure seal that stamps the ten thousand forms. Traveling the world, meeting conditions, the self joyfully enters *samādhi* in all delusions and accepts its function, which is to empty out the self so as not to be full of itself.²⁶ The empty valley receives the clouds. The cold stream cleanses the moon. Not departing and not remaining, far beyond all the changes, you can give teachings without attainment or expectation. Everything everywhere comes back to the olden ground. Not a hair has been shifted, bent, or raised up. Despite a hundred uglinesses or a thousand stupidities, the upright cauldron is naturally beneficent.²⁷ Zhaozhou's answers "wash out your bowl" and "drink your tea" do not require making arrangements; from the beginning they have always been perfectly apparent.²⁸ Thoroughly observing each thing with the whole eye is a patch-robed monk's spontaneous conduct.

Beaming Through All Gloom

Study the Buddha and research his lineage's subtlety. You must clarify your heart, dive into the spirit, and silently wander in contemplation,

apprehending the dharma's source. Without pettiness, or weaving hairs to create an obstacle, be magnanimous beyond appearances. Splendid and lustrous like the waters moistening autumn, noble like the moon overwhelming the darkness, from the beginning just beam through all gloom, profoundly free from stain. Constantly still and constantly glorious, the stillness is not extinguished by causes, the glory is not marred by shadows. Vacant, round, and pure, the empty *kalpa* will not shift, shake, or obscure [this source]. Able to be serene, and able to know, here you can walk securely. The jade vessel turns over on its side, at once dispensing energy for you to return, share yourself, and respond to the world. In this realm are the separate, limited forms, but all are only what the self establishes, arising along with our own four elements.²⁹ How could there be an obstruction? Since [this mind] is entirely without obstruction, there is no difference between that one and me, self and other are not separated by their names. Sounds and colors crowd in together, carefree and transcendent, directly leaping into each other. So it is said that mountains and rivers are not separated. You should enact this like the brightness apparent everywhere.

The Mind Ground Dharma Field and the Single Seed

The field of bright spirit is an ancient wilderness that does not change. With boundless eagerness wander around this immaculate wide plain. The drifting clouds embrace the mountain; the family wind is relaxed and simple.³⁰ The autumn waters display the moon in its pure brightness. Directly arriving here you will be able to recognize the mind ground dharma field that is the root source of the ten thousand forms germinating with unwithered fertility. These flowers and leaves are the whole world. So we are told that a single seed is an uncultivated field. Do not weed out the new shoots and the self will flower.

The Clouds' Fascination and the Moon's Cherishing

A person of the Way fundamentally does not dwell anywhere. The white clouds are fascinated with the green mountain's foundation.

The bright moon cherishes being carried along with the flowing water. The clouds part and the mountain appears. The moon sets and the water is cool. Each bit of autumn contains vast interpenetration without bounds. Every dust is whole without reaching me; the ten thousand changes are stilled without shaking me. If you can sit here with stability then you can freely step across and engage the world with energy. There is an excellent saying that the six sense doors are not veiled, the highways in all directions have no footprints. Always arriving everywhere without being confused, gentle without hesitation, the perfected person knows where to go.

Breezing Through the World

Vast space is all-embracing, the same as ultimate emptiness. Developed skill is equally effective for all the ten thousand forms. If not a single dust is distinguished outside, then you can adapt to changing circumstances. If not one speck is left over inside, then immediately you can abide in meditation. Since the inside is empty and can respond, absorbing or not absorbing is equal. Since the outside is interconnected and constantly vacant, abiding or not abiding is all the same. Patch-robed monks enter *samādhi* just like their home wind that breezes through the entire world.

The Wonder Verified and Fulfilled

The dharma realm in the ten directions arises from the single mind. When the single mind is still, all appearances are entirely exhausted. Which one is over there? Which one is myself? Only when you do not differentiate forms, suddenly not a single dust is established, not a single recollection is produced. Discern that even before the pregnant womb and after your skin bag, each moment is astonishing radiance, full and round without direction or corners, discarding trifles. Where truly nothing can be obscured is called self-knowledge. Only thus knowing the self is called original realization, not even a hair received undeservingly. Magnificent, subtly maintaining uniqueness, genuine hearing is without sound. So it is said that perceiving without eye or ear is where the wonder is verified and fulfilled. Light streams forth

from there and many thousands of images appear. Every being is actually it, altogether in the realm where patch-robed monks function on their own. It is essential only not to borrow from other people's homes. To cultivate our house you must clearly and intimately experience it for yourself.

All Beings Are Your Ancestors

Fully appreciate the emptiness of all dharmas. Then all minds are free and all dusts evaporate in the original brilliance shining everywhere. Transforming according to circumstances, meet all beings as your ancestors. Subtly illuminate all conditions, magnanimous beyond all duality. Clear and desireless, the wind in the pines and the moon in the water are content in their elements. Without minds interacting, [wind and pines or moon and water] do not impede one another. Essentially you exist inside emptiness and have the capacity to respond outwardly without being annoyed, like spring blossoming, like a mirror reflecting forms. Amid all the noise spontaneously emerge transcendent.

Rolling and Unrolling

Where the field is secure and familiar, when the great work is like a clear, cool pond, then you will see the empty *kalpa*. Do not allow a hair to bind you or permit a fiber to screen you. Be supremely empty and bright, pure, round, and glorious. The ten thousand ancients appear in succession, undisguised. If you know the whole story with a nod of your head, you will not chase after birth and death and will not dwell in nihilism or eternalism. If you want to make appropriate changes, then you must transform majestically along with the ten thousand forms. If you want to be still and abiding, you must accord with the process of containing and covering like earth and heaven (yin and yang).³¹ Appearing or disappearing and rolling or unrolling are entirely up to you. In this way, people with the original face must know how to gather together or release.

Drop Off Your Skin, Accept Your Function

In daytime the sun, at night the moon, each in turn does not blind the other. This is how a patch-robed monk steadily practices, naturally without edges or seams. To gain such steadiness you must completely withdraw from the invisible pounding and weaving of your ingrained ideas. If you want to be rid of this invisible [turmoil], you must just sit through it and let go of everything. Attain fulfillment and illuminate thoroughly, light and shadow altogether forgotten.³² Drop off your own skin, and the sense-dusts will be fully purified, the eye readily discerning the brightness. Accept your function and be wholly satisfied. In the entire place you are not restricted; the whole time you still mutually respond. Right in light there is darkness; right in darkness there is light.³³ A solitary boat carries the moon; at night it lodges amid the reed flowers, gently swaying in total brilliance.

Everyone Included in the Field

Immaculate and dazzling, [the field's] limits cannot be seen with the eyes' strength. Serene and expansive, its directions and corners cannot be found with the mind's conditioning. People who sincerely meditate and authentically arrive trust that the field has always been with them. Buddhas and demons cannot invade it, pollution cannot poison it. Square or round, they just enjoy the center. Their conduct and practice accord with the standard. With amazing effectiveness, as numerous as grains of sand in the river Ganges, they harmoniously mature each other.³⁴ From this field our life arises; from this field it is fulfilled. This matter includes everybody. Just go forward for me and try to see. People who know its truth nod their heads with comprehension.

The Third Eye and Bent Elbow

With the forearm bending back to meet [the body] one can respond to every event. The third eye by itself illuminates the solitary casting off of the body.³⁵ Both of these gather in or release with no inside or outside. Many thousands of realms emerge equally with oneself; the three times are naturally transcended. Vast emptiness is boundless, genuinely illuminated by its own brightness. This is when the illuso-

ry appearances are all exhausted. What is not exhausted is the profound spirit, unconcerned by life and death. Arrive at this field, openly letting go of dependency. When conditioned dusts do not pollute it, all situations are intimately matched. Box and lid [joining] and arrowpoints [meeting] are auspicious and do not miss the mark. Roaming and playing in *samādhi*, people in this state accept their function. This upper eye and completely bent elbow are the sole matter that this monk transmits and that you should thoroughly enact.

Beyond the Various Kinds

Receive correctly this monk's word-stream, neither frozen nor trickling away, neither transparent nor muddy. When you wring it dry, take advantage of the opportunity; when you enter the bustle, perceive with your whole eye. Thorough understanding and the changing world fulfill each other totally without obstacle. The moon accompanies the current, the wind bends the grass. They sparkle and sway. After all one is not confused. So it is said that the various kinds are not equal, but beyond each of them is the path. Responding to this occasion you may proceed accordingly. Above the white grass tips, take what you have gathered and bring it back and so act appropriately.³⁶ Find your seat, wear your robe, and go forward and see for yourself.

Noninterference in the Matter of Oneness

The matter of oneness cannot be learned at all. The essence is to empty and open out body and mind, as expansive as the great emptiness of space. Naturally in the entire territory all is satisfied. This strong spirit cannot be deterred; in event after event it cannot be confused. The moon accompanies the flowing water, the rain pursues the drifting clouds. Settled, without a [grasping] mind, such intensity may be accomplished. Only do not let yourself interfere with things, and certainly nothing will interfere with you. Body and mind are one suchness; outside this body there is nothing else. The same substance and the same function, one nature and one form, all faculties and all object-dusts are instantly transcendent. So it is said, the sage is without self and yet nothing is not himself.³⁷

Whatever appears is instantly understood, and you know how to gather it up or how to let it go. Be a white ox in the open field. Whatever happens, nothing can drive him away.

The Conduct of the Moon and Clouds

The consistent conduct of people of the way is like the flowing clouds with no [grasping] mind, like the full moon reflecting universally, not confined anywhere, glistening within each of the ten thousand forms. Dignified and upright, emerge and make contact with the variety of phenomena, unstained and unconfused. Function the same towards all others since all have the same substance as you. Language cannot transmit [this conduct], speculation cannot reach it. Leaping beyond the infinite and cutting off the dependent, be obliging without looking for merit. This marvel cannot be measured with consciousness or emotion. On the journey accept your function, in your house please sustain it. Comprehending birth and death, leaving causes and conditions, genuinely realize that from the outset your spirit is not halted. So we have been told that the mind that embraces all the ten directions does not stop anywhere.

The Resting of the Streams and Tides

Just resting is like the great ocean accepting hundreds of streams, all absorbed into one flavor. Freely going ahead is like the great surging tides riding on the wind, all coming onto this shore together. How could they not reach into the genuine source? How could they not realize the great function that appears before us? A patch-robed monk follows movement and responds to changes in total harmony. Moreover, haven't you yourself established the mind that thinks up all the illusory conditions? This insight must be perfectly incorporated.

Thirty Years of Emptiness and Existence

Authentic clarity is without blemishes. The five degrees of achievement are finally consummated.³⁸ At this time of not discriminating, instantly there is the whole body. The eye cannot see itself but neither can its function be dimmed. The light streams out from the source,

pure and white, shining everywhere. The reed flowers intermingle with the snow; the bright moon bathes the autumn. Here you have the energetic opportunity for mutual union.³⁹ On the path of careful observation, valiantly carry it and apply it well. No place can be other than myself; no place can restrain me. Leap out supreme from the ten thousand forms. Juzhi's one finger Zen is not exhausted by thirty years of using it.⁴⁰ Its subtlety is in its simplicity, which silently, wordlessly secures the purpose at its leisure. Therefore it responds without clutching at things. The Way wanders with the spirits protecting it. This is how the principle is originally. But if suddenly you attach to one thread or fiber, then the guiding mind is obstructed and cannot get through, the gateway is blocked and cannot be opened. Where emptiness is empty it contains all of existence, where existence exists it joins the single emptiness. Still I ask, what is this?

Turning the Pearl

The original source empties out, without representation. When moved it can respond. Then you must peer right through it. Standing solitary like a steep cliff, wide open and accessible, spirited and independent, clear and bright, all this does not even slightly involve external conditions. Such activity is called the single bright occasion, which arrives right along with the ten thousand forms that emerge and are extinguished. The realm where the *samādhi* of all dusts arises, [entering all *samādhis* through one *samādhi*], is clear like the ocean seal.⁴¹ Turn it around as if turning a pearl.⁴² Let everything entirely fall away, and put it all together without any extraneous conditions. This is referred to as the occasion of solitary, glorious unselfishness. At night the moon rises and the waters glisten, the spring wind blows and the flowers blossom. With no need for meritorious activity, all is naturally perfect. Causes, conditions, fruits, and retributions, none is discerned as external. Furthermore, you must know that both the light and the circumstances have altogether vanished. Again, what is it?

A Monk's Inheritance and the Vanishing Clouds

This rustic monk's home wind is using a single begging bowl for a

livelihood and regarding the ten thousand forms of the world as his inheritance.⁴³ Subject and object can be like images in a mirror and the moon in water, blended together with nothing left out. First do not establish your own identity, then beings will not impose their own conditions. Each form has no form. Only in this wholeness are things not isolated. In this manner perfection is fully practiced. Given the loom of energetic opportunity the shuttle can make its passage.⁴⁴ Arriving beyond images the sense-dusts all disappear. Even then you must take the backward step and return home to scrutinize this directly in meditation until you are satisfied. The clouds vanish into a single color. The snow covers the thousand mountains. Penetrating vision brings the opening to view the total body.

The Original Dwelling

A person practicing the Way subtly goes beyond words and thoughts. Instantly authentic, one is on the affirmed path and does not attach to reasoning. Extensively intermingled, the moon flows in all the waters, the wind blows through the supreme emptiness, naturally without touching or obstructing things. Transcendent illumination and function are only illuminating without stains and functioning without leaving traces. Then you can enter *samādhi* in every sense-dust and gather the ten thousand forms in the single seal. Discontinue leaks and do not act on them.⁴⁵ This is called understanding the affair of patch-robed monks. Moreover, you must remember and return to the homeward path. The clouds evaporate in the cold sky. The autumn has departed and the mountain is barren. This is where we originally dwell.

A Ploughman on the Shining Field

From the outset patch-robed monks have this field that is a clean, spacious, broad plain. Gazing ahead beyond any precipitous barriers, within the field they plough the clouds and sow the moon. With clear bright understanding, vast and expansive, the true self accepts its function, whether emerging or disintegrating, whether in a position of receiving or releasing. Directly perform the same workings as earth

and heaven (yin and yang), arising and dispersing along with the ten thousand forms. Lofty and majestic, where do they come from? Still in solitude, where do they go? So we are told that the empty sky cannot encompass it, the great earth cannot uphold it. Subtly existing beyond shapes, perfectly empty beyond names, the merit of being and nonbeing is exhausted; the paths of the worldly and the sages are transcended. Then you have the opportunity to go home. Just then, what do you know? For one hundred fifty thousand acres you can see the cold, pure, shining snow. Observing this well one can be a strong ploughman.

Nāga Meditation

Being withered and cold in body and mind cleanses and sharpens the field. The dusts are jumbled and then distilled, leaving each realm vacant and bright. The moon in the water reflects the light in the clearing sky. The clouds embrace the mountain with its autumn colors. Whether jet black or lush green, the profound depths have great spirit. The inherently illuminated original root is not constrained by the branches and leaves. This is the time and place to leap beyond the ten thousand emotional entanglements of innumerable *kalpas*. One contemplation of ten thousand years finally goes beyond all the transitory, and you emerge with spontaneity. The clouds traveling in the vacant valley are free, whether moving or tranquil. Agreeably enter every sense-dust, while constantly staying in *samādhi*. Therefore we have been told that *nāgas* are always in meditation, never apart from this sublime state.⁴⁶

Investigating Wonder

In clarity the wonder exists, with spiritual energy shining on its own. It cannot be grasped and so cannot be called being. It cannot be rubbed away and so cannot be called nonbeing. Beyond the mind of deliberation and discussion, depart from the remains of the shadowy images. Emptying [one's sense of] self-existence is wondrous. This wonder is embodied with a spirit that can be enacted/invoked. The moon mind with its cloud body is revealed straightforwardly in every

direction without resorting to signs or symbols. Radiating light everywhere, it responds appropriately to beings and enters the sense-dusts without confusion. Overcoming every obstruction, it shines through every empty dharma. Leaving discriminating conditioning, enter clean clear wisdom and romp and play in samādhi. What could be wrong? This is how one must genuinely investigate the essence.

Stepping From the Cliff's Edge

Practice in emptiness and forget conditioning as dazzling light gleams from the shadows. When each portion of spirit is luminous and unhindered, the mind of the three times is interrupted and the four material elements are in balance. Transparent and marvelously bright, in solitary glory for multitudinous *kalpas*, a patch-robed monk can practice like this and not be bound by life and death. In upright practice let go from the edge of the high cliff, not grabbing anything. The ropes around your feet are severed. In wholeness take one step. The buddhas and ancestors all do not reach one's own genuine, wondrously illuminating field, which is called one's self. At this juncture sustain the family business. Just when involved in deliberations, turn around from the stream of thoughts. Empty with enduring spirit, pure with enduring illumination, clear and white, reed flowers and bright moonlight are mixed together. Oars pulled in, the solitary boat drifts past without difficulty. At this time please tell me, who would be anxious to display the eye of discrimination?

Turning the Wheel and the Flavor of Serenity

Traveling around in completion without center or edges, cutting away corners, the circle revolves leaving no residue in the empty cave. In the clear sky of autumn the moon is cold, its radiance bathing the night. The perfect weather of spring is embroidered clouds and elegant flowers. The gateway is open and can be passed through. The wheel of energetic attention turns back to the particulars. All this is the affair that patch-robed monks accept as their own function. No sense-dusts can screen you. The ten thousand dharmas are the mind's light. Step by step go beyond [fixed] location. Unimpeded on the bird's path, just

respond to each event of the world.⁴⁷ The valley spirit does not toil, but essentially it cannot be confused. Its purpose cannot be matched. Moment to moment from the beginning, all dusts, all minds, and all thoughts are without extraneous forms. The one simple true brightness is persistent. The inner function acquires the marvelous opportunity to display the gathering and rolling up of your residual conditioning. The single bright self is sharpened and cleansed until it is without flaw. Sweep away and disperse classifications. If you understand on your own and just shine, the flavor of serenity can spread. Wisdom arrives inside the circle; affairs are left outside the gate. This is the single profundity beyond birth and death. You must take the backward step and return home. Sincerely I relate these words.

The Family Business

Patch-robed monks roam the world constantly emptying and expanding their minds. Without the slightest remnant held inside, they can respond appropriately, not hindered by beings, not tangled up by dharmas. Openly appearing and disappearing you can freely share, but if merely involved in intellect you will be buried. If enacting pure maturity, then you can naturally journey at ease among the ten thousand changes without touching them and without turning away from them.⁴⁸ Box and lid [join] and arrowpoints [meet], harmoniously hitting the mark. Whether releasing or gathering up externals, eliminate all leaking. Such a person can fulfill the family business. From this place just return. The white clouds enter the valley and the bright moon circles the mountain. On this occasion you have the same substance as the elders. So it is said that three people are propped up by one staff and lie down in one bed. Do not leave any traces and inside and outside will merge into one totality, as leisurely as the sky clearing of rainclouds, as deep as the water drenching the autumn. All of you virtuous people, remember this matter well.

The Amazing Living Beings

Our house is a single field, clean, vast, and lustrous, clearly self-illuminated. When the spirit is vacant without conditions, when aware-

ness is serene without cogitation, then buddhas and ancestors appear and disappear transforming the world. Amid living beings is the original place of nirvana.⁴⁹ How amazing it is that all people have this but cannot polish it into bright clarity.⁵⁰ In darkness unawakened, they make foolishness cover their wisdom and overflow. One remembrance of illumination can break through and leap out of the dust of kalpas. Radiant and clear white, [the single field] cannot be diverted or altered in the three times; the four elements cannot modify it. Solitary glory is deeply preserved, enduring throughout ancient and present times, as the merging of sameness and difference becomes the entire creation's mother. This realm manifests the energy of the many thousands of beings, all appearances merely this [field's] shadows. Truly enact this reality.

Perfect Wandering

The eye that engages the fluctuations and the body that voyages over the world are empty and spirited, still and illuminating, and appear extraordinary among the ten thousand forms. They cannot be buried in the earth's dust, and cannot be bundled in the cocoon of past conditioning.⁵¹ The moon traverses the sky, the clouds depart the valley, reflecting without mind, operating without self, becoming radiant and benevolent. This is how everything is perfect, cast off fully and functioning freely. This is called the body emerging from inside the gate.⁵² Still this must be enacted while you continue the family business. Emptiness is your seat, stillness is your shelter. Subtly maintained without being existent, it does not involve conditioning; genuinely illuminating without being nonexistent, it does not fall into quantification. Alone and splendid within the circle, profoundly revolving beyond all measure, perfect wandering is guided by the spirits. The great square is without corners.⁵³ Here you exert energy and, naturally without impediments, comprehend all the shiftings and accept your function.

The Solitary Beacon and the Single Road

People of the Way journey through the world responding to conditions, carefree and without restraint. Like clouds finally raining, like moonlight following the current, like orchids growing in shade, like spring arising in everything, they act without mind, they respond with certainty. This is how perfected people behave. Then they must resume their travels and follow the ancestors, walking ahead with steadiness and letting go of themselves with innocence. The solitary beacon is without companions. The piercing awe-inspiring voice on the single road to the other shore instantly can fulfill center or borders and pervade from top to bottom. Killing and giving life, rolling up or unrolling, is your own independent decision.

Positive and Appropriate Activity

Expansive and inherently spiritual, refined and inherently bright, [awakened mind] can permeate universally without grasping the merit of its illumination, and can apprehend without being bound by discursive thinking. Emerging from manifestations of existence and nonexistence, surpassing the emotions of deliberation and discussion, merely interact positively and appropriately without dependence on others. All buddhas, all ancestors, all leaves, and all flowers relate in this manner. When responding they do not grasp at forms, where illuminating they do not attach to conditions. Then they can stay wide open and unhampered. Only this family wind [intimate awareness] appears complete everywhere. Let yourself accept it.

A Complaint about Bodhidharma's Coming from the West

Attaining the skin and attaining the marrow are only recently established as stages.⁵⁴ Arranging the leaves and arranging the flowers become a flowing display. Patch-robed monks who understand complain about the Founder's coming from the west and creating much ado.⁵⁵ From this juncture branches have grown, leaving flakes in everyone's eyes. Then various people cut open their heads to create boundless cleverness and engraved their boats to mark where their swords fell overboard. By following them how can you ever act appro-

priately? Just right now directly release, drop off, and totally let go. Not a single hair or grain of rice can impede your finally renewing and straightening yourself. Readily you can now cast away everything. The circle integrates brightness; its spirit triumphs in wonder. Simply know that originally it is without defect and not even a bit is excluded. Language cannot reach it, hearing and seeing cannot touch it. It is like a one-horned bison charging through, like a pregnant oyster. In this single beam of light you genuinely wander in practice. Use your vitality to enact this.

The Sixth Ancestor Thoroughly Illuminating

When the Buddha Ancestors first appeared there were no monks and laypeople, but everybody had their own truth and position. When they intimately experienced and genuinely attained it was called entering the Buddha Mind School.⁵⁶ Old Lu, [the Sixth Ancestor Huineng], who penetrated the dharma's source, was a person who sold firewood. As soon as he arrived at Huangmei, [the Fifth Ancestor's place], he said, "I want to be a buddha."⁵⁷ In the rice hulling room the Ancestor [Huineng] worked pounding rice until his mind mirror transcended worldly impurity, and he was thoroughly self-illuminated.⁵⁸ He was bequeathed the ancestral robe at midnight, and crossed the Dayu Mountains. With faith in the robe he set it down. Venerable [Hui] Ming with his mighty strength could not lift it and then knew that each person must intimately experience and authentically realize for himself.⁵⁹ So nowadays please do not acquiesce to sages and exalt their worth [instead of realizing it yourself]. This is how you should wear the robe and eat your food. When constantly mindful with no distracting considerations, minds do not allow contaminating attachments. Cast off the body of the empty *kalpa*; let go from the steep cliff. Comprehend your sense-object faculties until they are exhausted from top to bottom. Solitary brightness is the only illumination; extensive penetration preserves the marvel. Naturally the mind flowers and radiance shines forth, responding to the visible lands and fields. How could you have ever separated from the various permutations? Now you can enter among diverse beings and travel the bird's way without hindrance, free at last.

The Liberating Eye's Authentic View

Monks of our house must have a dried body and cool mind in order to leap over and cast away birth and death. Discern the mirror's utter depths, vacant and intense, perfectly illuminated. Break out from the four elements and five *skāndhas*.⁶⁰ When causes and conditions are not yet in effect, the sense gates not yet matured, the embryo not yet fully developed, and emotions and consciousness not yet flowing, if you still exercise your eye even then, how can suffering not be finished? Realize this fully. The ancestral masters' nostrils and patch-robed monks' life pulse consist of holding firmly and then releasing in activity so that we all discover our own freedom. So it is said that false [thinking] is stopped and stillness necessarily arises, stillness arises and wisdom appears, wisdom arises and stillness necessarily disappears [in wisdom's active functioning]. Clear and distinct, this is the only authentic view.

Graciously Share Yourself

In the great rest and great halting the lips become moldy and mountains of grass grow on your tongue. Moving straight ahead [beyond this state], totally let go, washed clean and ground to a fine polish. Respond with brilliant light to such unfathomable depths as the waters of autumn or the moon stamped in the sky. Then you must know there is a path on which to turn yourself around. When you do turn yourself around you have no different face that can be recognized. Even if you do not recognize [your face] still nothing can hide it. This is penetrating from the topmost all the way down to the bottom. When you have thoroughly investigated your roots back to their ultimate source, a thousand or ten thousand sages are no more than footprints on the trail. In wonder return to the journey, avail yourself of the path and walk ahead. In light there is darkness; where it operates no traces remain. With the hundred grass tips in the busy marketplace graciously share yourself. Wide open and accessible, walking along, casually mount the sounds and straddle the colors while you transcend listening and surpass watching. Perfectly unifying in this manner is simply a patch-robed monk's appropriate activity.

The Genuine Field

The primal mind transcends conditioning, the primal dharma does not speak, but all buddhas and all ancestors are not detained here. In the second gate of meaning [that of phenomena and of speech], they engage in dialogue and energy is aroused, which is instantly extracted and dispensed both to the first class practitioner and to the dull person.⁶¹ Therefore Deshan says that our school has no language and also has not a single dharma for anyone.⁶² Originally the people arrived at the truth themselves and affirmed it themselves. Then they began to discuss it only in order to straighten up and clean out forthrightly obsessive thinking and distraction. If such contamination is purified, then vast radiance without barriers has no middle or edge. Circling and spreading out, the light is glistening white, its illumination pervading the ten directions. Sit in meditation and entirely cut off causes and conditioning, and language of the three times. Reaching this you cannot attach to a single dust mote. Only in silent serenity is the self known, full-spirited in its own glory, no stranger to sages, not diminished with worldly people. From the beginning only this is the single affair of the old home. How can you possibly attain anything outside yourself? This is called the genuine field where awakened people immediately can respond to the ten thousand changes and enter every realm. Wondrous function and spiritual penetration naturally are without any obstruction at all.

Casting Off All Duality

Purity without stain is your body; perfect illumination without conditioning is your eyes. The eye inside the body does not involve sense gates; the body inside the eye does not collect appearances. So it is said that there is no wisdom outside suchness that can awaken suchness. Moreover, there is no suchness outside wisdom that can be awakened by wisdom. This may be called, buddha is the dharma family's buddha, dharma is the buddha family's dharma. Patch-robbed monks arrive here and then know that to follow buddha's utterances and to follow dharma's blossoming is to attain buddhadharma. Restoring upright reality, they all sit and cut off any duality. Only this is what people from ancient to present times have needed to celebrate fully.

Practice Instructions

¹ A disciple of Hongzhi, whose name means “Universal Respect,” Monk Puqung is not mentioned among Hongzhi’s eleven most prominent disciples in the *Wu Deng Hui Yuan* (*Five Lamps Merged in the Source*). I can find no other reference to him.

² The mirror is a traditional Buddhist image for the clear, open mind reflecting without attachment or discrimination. In his “Song of the Precious Mirror Samādhi,” Dongshan Liangjie, the founder of the Caodong/Sōtō tradition to which Hongzhi is a successor, uses the precious mirror as an image of awakened, concentrated mind. See Appendix A.

³ Taipai Peak was the highest peak on Mount Tiantong, where Hongzhi’s Jingde Monastery was located. The three names were used interchangeably for Hongzhi’s temple.

⁴ “Dragons and elephants” is a common Zen image for enlightened

practitioners. “Dragon,” here and elsewhere in the text, refers to the indigenous Chinese dragons rather than the Indian *nāga*, which Hongzhi mentions later using the standard Chinese transliteration.

⁵ “Dharma” comes from Sanskrit and refers to the teaching of spiritual realization, to the Truth of what is taught, and, as “dharmas,” to the particular elements of the field of reality. Here the last meaning is emphasized.

⁶ The moon is an image for awakening, shining equally on all the streams of phenomena.

⁷ The phrase “responsive interaction” is used frequently by Hongzhi, and can also mean “appropriate,” or “union,” or “harmonizing.” “Box and lid” and “arrowpoints” refer to Shitou’s “Harmony of Difference and Equality”: “Phenomena exist; box and lid fit. Principle responds; arrow points meet.” This is an image of the mutual noninterference and unobstructed functioning of phenomena described in Chinese Huayan Buddhist theory. Arrowpoints meeting head-on in air depicts the miraculous functioning of the universal directly in the phenomenal. In the “Song of the Precious Mirror Samādhi” Dongshan says, “When arrows meet head-on, how could it be a matter of skill?” See Appendix A.

⁸ This imagery refers to Dongshan’s “Song of the Precious Mirror Samādhi,” in William Powell’s version, “For the benefit of those with inferior ability, there is a jeweled footrest and brocade robes; for the benefit of those capable of wonder, a wildcat or white ox.” (from Powell, *The Record of Tung-Shan*, pp. 63-65). Dongshan in this phrase refers back to a saying of one of his early teachers, Nanquan (748-834), a student of Mazu (709-788), and teacher of the great Zhaozhou (748-834). Hongzhi cites it in the *Book of Serenity*, case 69: “Nanquan said to the assembly, ‘The Buddhas of past, present, and future do not know it is: cats and cows know it is.’” This case relates to the straightforward, unselfconscious awareness and activity of cats

and cows, as compared to those of humans. Nanquan is famous for the story of his “killing a cat.” See Cleary and Cleary, *Blue Cliff Record*, case 63, II:406. Nanquan was fond of referring to oxen, for example, stating that after he died he would come back as “a water buffalo down the hill”: see Chang, *Original Teachings of Ch’an Buddhism*, pp. 153-163. The ox was later used in Zen in various versions of oxherding pictures that depict stages of spiritual development. In some versions the ox progresses from black to white, representing the purification process. Hongzhi also refers to oxen frequently, sometimes apparently with the oxherding images.

⁹ “Home-leaver” is a traditional designation for Buddhist monks, referring back to when the historical Buddha, Shākyamuni, left his palace in ancient India to seek and achieve perfected enlightenment. The term also applies to Chinese Zen monks who left their society’s rigid family system to enter the monastery or wander from teacher to teacher. On a deeper spiritual level, home-leaving refers to the practitioner’s letting go of attachments derived from personal habitual, psychological, and emotional conditioning.

¹⁰ “Patch-robed monk” is a standard epithet for a Buddhist monk, referring to the ordination robe that monks have sewn together since the time of Shākyamuni, originally from old discarded rags dyed uniformly.

¹¹ The action of pulling back the ox’s nose is pictured in some versions of the oxherding series for the “taming of the ox,” a stage of the path often involving arduous purification and training.

¹² A *kalpa* is a duration of time described by the image of a bird that flies once every hundred years over the peak of Mount Everest with a piece of silk in her talons: the length of time it would take the silk to wear down the mountain completely is said to be one *kalpa*. For the “empty *kalpa*” in the Buddhist cosmological cycle, see Introduction, note 4.

¹³ “Bodhi” is a Sanskrit word meaning complete awakening, from the same root as “buddha,” the awakened one.

¹⁴ The “broad long tongue” is one of the thirty-two physical marks of a buddha, indicating eloquent expression of the truth. “Dharma” is used here to mean the realm of reality and also the teaching that effects its realization.

¹⁵ “Two forms” is a conventional name for yin and yang, the ancient Chinese dualism representing earth and heaven, dark and light, passive and active, and female and male, respectively.

¹⁶ “Family business” is an image for the perpetuation and transmittal of a particular teaching tradition or lineage. In a broader sense, all those who take refuge in buddha dharma are called “children of buddha,” so to carry on the family business means to fulfill one’s own innermost heartfelt vow to achieve enlightenment, in the Mahāyāna by liberating all beings together with oneself.

¹⁷ “The bottom of the bucket falling out” is a Zen image for the experience of one’s preconceptions and fixed world view suddenly and completely evaporating. After such experience one’s attitudes are transformed irrevocably, although ingrained habitual responses may still govern one’s conduct to varying extents in the context of further activity in the world.

¹⁸ *Samādhi* is the state of meditative concentration. Mahāyāna Buddhist sutras list many different colorfully named samādhis.

¹⁹ The dharma realm or realm of reality (in Sanskrit, *dharmadhātu*) is the whole field of dharma or truth, equivalent to all dharmas or entities, that is, the entire phenomenal universe seen in its primordial purity.

²⁰ Reference to Laozi’s *Dao De Qing*, the early Daoist classic, Book 6:

“The valley spirit never dies. This is called the mysterious female. The mysterious female’s door is called the root of heaven and earth.”

²¹ Ancestors, in some English translations called “patriarchs,” refers to the lineage of masters going back to Shakyamuni Buddha, who have maintained and transmitted the teaching. This term especially designates the great founders who established, or developed and spread, branches of the teaching.

²² “A shadow of a hair’s gap” is a gap between the self and the arising and extinction of phenomena. Before the gap there is awareness that immediately recognizes the arising of the scenery of sounds, sights, thoughts, and so on.

²³ “Grounds, roots, and dusts” here refer to the eighteen *dhātus*, that is, the six sense consciousnesses, six sense faculties, and six sense objects, which when combined produce our experience of the phenomenal world.

²⁴ Clouds are an image for home-leaving monks, wandering freely. Dragons are an image for enlightened masters or adepts (see note 4 above).

²⁵ The “backward step” is meditative introspection, the primary technique of Hongzhi’s meditation practice, also expounded by Zen teachers such as the Sixth Ancestor Huineng, Shitou, and Dōgen. See the section entitled “Hongzhi’s Relation to Dōgen” in the Introduction.

²⁶ In “the self joyfully enters *samādhi* in all delusions and accepts its function,” reference is to the *samādhi* of self-enjoyment or fulfillment, an important Sōtō Zen teaching called *jijuyū zammai* in Japanese; see Shohaku Okumura and Taigen Dan Leighton. *The Wholehearted Wat: A Translation of Eihei Dōgen’s “Bendōwa”* (Boston: Charles E. Tuttle and Co., 1997), pp. 14–19, 22–23, 43. The Chinese compound that means enjoyment or fulfillment translates

literally as “receive function.” Here Hongzhi repeats the character for function to emphasize the literal meaning.

²⁷ As an idiom, “cauldrons,” means simply “uprightness.” The cauldron is a traditional Chinese implement for alchemy and cooking and so is associated with spiritual transformation. Here it is an image for the context of meditation practice and its yogic reliability. Cauldron is the name of hexagram 50 in the ancient Chinese classic *Book of Changes*, or *I Ching*: “To change things nothing compares to the cauldron; this is the vessel used to refine the wise, forge sages, cook buddhas, and purify adepts. How could it not be very auspicious and developmental?” (Thomas Cleary, trans., *The Buddhist “I Ching” by Chih-hsu Ou-i* [Boston; Shambhala, 1987], p. 189).

²⁸ The great Zen master Zhaozhou Congshan (778-897; “Zhao Province Obeying Counsel,” in Japanese, Jōshū Jūshin) is the source of many of the classic koans. When he was approached for instructions by a newly arrived monk, Zhaozhou asked if he had eaten breakfast. When the monk replied affirmatively, Zhaozhou said, “Then go wash your bowl.” See Koun Yamada, trans. *Gateless Gate* (Los Angeles: Center Publications), case 7, or Thomas Cleary, trans. and commentary, *No Barrier: Unlocking the Zen Koan, A New Translation of the Mumonkan* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), case 7; and Cleary, *Book of Serenity*, case 39, pp. 171-172. Hongzhi’s verse commentary to this case in the *Book of Serenity* is:

*Breakfast over, the direction is to wash the bowl;
 Opened up, the mind ground meets of itself.
 And now, a guest of the monastery, having studied to the
 full—
 But was there enlightenment in there or not?*

Hongzhi in this passage of the text also refers to another story of Zhaozhou. Receiving two visiting monks, he asked if they had been

there before. When each in turn answered affirmatively and negatively, Zhaozhou responded uniformly to both, “Have a cup of tea.” When a monastery official asked about this, Zhaozhou told him also, “Have a cup of tea.” See John C.H. Wu, *The Golden Age of Zen* (Taipei: United Publishing Center, 1975), p. 136.

²⁹ The “jade vessel” is an image for pure, enlightened mind. “Turning over on its side” represents the function of awakening, responding to limitations of the phenomenal world (“inclined” is a Sōtō term for the phenomenal contrasted to the ultimate). In Buddhism the four elements—earth, water, fire, and air—are traditionally the components of all material.

³⁰ Mountains can be an image for Zen masters, who are often named for the mountains where they reside. “Family wind,” or home wind, refers to the flavor or style of teaching of a particular school or lineage.

³¹ For discussions of the alchemical processes of yin and yang, see Thomas Cleary, trans., *The Taoist I Ching* (Boston: Shambhala, 1986) or Thomas Cleary, trans. and ed., *The Inner Teachings of Taoism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1986).

³² Reference here is to light and shadow as dualistic conceptions.

³³ Reference is to Shitou’s “Harmony of Difference and Equality”: “In the light there is darkness, but don’t take it as darkness; In the dark there is light, but don’t see it as light. Light and dark oppose one another like the front and back foot in walking. Each of the myriad things has its merit, expressed according to function and place.” See Appendix A.

³⁴ Literally “river sand” or “pebbles,” this phrase is conventionally used in Chinese translations of Buddhist sutras to denote “all the grains of sand along the Ganges River,” a common phrase in the sutras indicating a vast number. The image here may also connote the action of pebbles polishing each other in the current.

³⁵ “Forearm bending back to meet” (literally, “forearm [or elbow] back”) is enigmatic but seems to depict a gesture of gathering in or of indicating oneself with forearm drawn back to meet the chest. This appears to be a posture of self-containment, which Hongzhi recommends as also responsive to events. The “third eye” (literally “upper gate eye”) indicates the spiritual eye of insight usually depicted on the mid-forehead; also the eye of Maheshvara, the king of heavenly deities in Indian cosmology, a name used as an epithet for great bodhisattvas as well.

³⁶ The “white grass tips” is a synonym for the variety of phenomena.

³⁷ This is the utterance of Shitou at the time of his great awakening, “Who can understand myriad things as oneself? Only a sage.” See the section entitled “The Sōtō Context” in the Introduction; and Chang, *Original Teachings of Ch’an Buddhism*, p. 245.

³⁸ The “five degrees of achievement,” literally “meritorious action,” is a phrase used in the Sōtō school for the “five degrees of meritorious achievement,” one of two systems of five ranks teachings presented by the school’s founder, Dongshan Liangjie (807-869). See the discussion of the five ranks in the Introduction, “The Sōtō Context.” Hongzhi’s verse commentaries, “The Five Ranks,” may be found in the Religious Verses, below.

³⁹ “Mutual union” here could also be translated as “mutual return” or “interaction.” The character *ji*, rendered here as “energetic opportunity,” is quite versatile: it can denote energy, change, function, opportunity, origin, loom, or mechanism, among its primary meanings. This sentence might also be read, “Here you have the interacting function.”

⁴⁰ Jinhua Juzhi or Judi (9th cent.), “Golden Flower of Juzhi [a place]”; in Japanese, Kinka Gutei. This Zen master was famous for always

responding to questions by raising one finger. See T. Cleary, *Book of Serenity*, case 84; Cleary and Cleary, *Blue Cliff Record*, case 19; and Yamada, *Gateless Gate*, case 3. In the *Book of Serenity*, Hongzhi includes this verse commentary:

*Old Judi's finger-tip Chan--
 Thirty years he used it without wearing it out.
 Truly he has the unconventional technique of a man of the Way--
 Ultimately there are no mundane things before his eyes to see.
 His realization most simple,
 The device the more broad.
 An ocean of billions of worlds is drunk in the tip of a hair:
 Fish and dragons limitless--into whose hands do they fall?
 Take care, Mr. Ren, holding the fishing pole!*

[After speaking this verse, Hongzhi] then also raised a finger and said, "Look!"

(T. Cleary, *Book of Serenity*, p.358.)

⁴¹ "Seal" refers to the stamp of genuineness, also used for *mudrā*, a meditative gesture or position. It is said that the ocean seal *samādhi* is the consciousness from which Buddha spoke the Flower Ornament Sutra. A Huayan commentary says: "The 'ocean seal' is the fundamental awareness of true thusness. When delusion ends, the mind is clear and myriad forms simultaneously appear. It is like the ocean. Due to wind there arise waves; if the wind stops the ocean is calm and all images can reflect in it." Dōgen's essay, "The Ocean Seal Samādhi," begins, "In being Buddhas and Zen adepts, it is necessary to be the ocean seal *samādhi*." (T. Cleary, "Shōbōgenzō: Zen Essays, pp. 76, 78).

⁴² Zen Master Xuansha Shibe (835-908; "Dark Sand Complete Teacher," in Japanese Gensha Shibi) said, "The entire universe is one

bright pearl.” See Norman Waddell and Masao Abe, trans., “Dōgen’s Ikka Myōju: One Bright Pearl,” *Eastern Buddhist* 6, no. 2 (1971).

⁴³ “This rustic [or humble] monk” refers to Hongzhi himself.

⁴⁴ “Loom of energetic opportunity” is the translation for the character “ji” (see note 39 above). The meaning “loom” is implied in this case by its pairing with the character for “shuttle.” This image indicates that clear awareness cannot thoroughly penetrate until totalistic non-alienated vision has arisen or been enacted.

⁴⁵ In Buddhism, leaks or outflows refer to attachment to sense objects and therefore to passions, as well as to the leakage of *samādhi* energy.

⁴⁶ A *nāga* is an ocean spirit or dragon, sometimes the guardian of Buddhist teachings not yet understandable in the human realm. *Nāga* meditation is meditation or *samādhi* in all times amid all activity.

⁴⁷ Dongshan sometimes suggested that his disciples emulate the bird’s trackless path through the sky, on which “one does not encounter a single person.” He contrasted this to the original face, which he said was “not to follow the bird’s path.” The bird’s path is an image for the monk’s full-functioning, leaving no traces. This image goes back to Buddhist sutras, for example the Dhammapada and Prajñāpāramita. See Powell, *Record of Tung-shan*, pp. 55, 85.

⁴⁸ This is a reference to Dongshan’s “Song of the Precious Mirror Samādhi”: “Turning away and touching are both wrong, for it is like a massive fire.” See Appendix A.

⁴⁹ Nirvana, the traditional Buddhist goal, is a state free of birth and death and conditioned consciousness. Here Hongzhi identifies nirvana with samsara, the conditioned realm of the creation of beings.

⁵⁰ Case 67 of the *Book of Serenity*, “The Flower Ornament Sutra’s

Wisdom,” quotes Shākyamuni Buddha’s statement at his moment of enlightenment: “I now see all sentient beings everywhere fully possess the wisdom and virtues of the enlightened ones, but because of false conceptions and attachments they do not realize it.” (T. Cleary, *Book of Serenity*, p. 281). See the section in the Introduction entitled “The Empty Field of Buddha Nature.”

⁵¹ “Earth’s dust” refers to worldly sense desires.

⁵² “Inside the gate” is a phrase for the teaching of a particular school; here Hongzhi refers to emerging from training to function freely. See also the poem “The Body Emerging from Within the Gate” in the Religious Verses, below.

⁵³ A quotation from Laozi’s *Dao De Qing*, Book 41: “The great square has no corners. The greatest vessel takes the longest to finish. Great music has the faintest notes. The Great Form is without shape.”

⁵⁴ Bodhidharma (5th-6th century), the founder of Zen in China, told four of his disciples they had attained his skin, flesh, bones, and marrow, respectively. Since his successor, the Second Ancestor Dazu Huike (487-593) was designated with marrow, this was understood as the deepest realization, and the four were misunderstood as comparative stages. Dōgen says in “Twining Vines”: “All four students had attainment and understanding. Each one’s attainment and understanding is skin, flesh, bones, and marrow leaping out of body and mind; skin, flesh, bones, and marrow dropping away body and mind. You should not see or hear the ancestor with a limited understanding of these statements.... You should know that the ancestor’s words... do not mean that one understanding is closer than another. Even if there are superior or inferior views, in the ancestor way there is only attaining the self.... From the beginning, Bodhidharma’s confirmation of each was equal.” (From Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, pp. 169-170).

CULTIVATING THE EMPTY FIELD

⁵⁵ Traditionally Zen monks have inquired about Bodhidharma's coming from the West (India) as a question of ultimate meaning.

⁵⁶ "Buddha Mind School" is an expression for the Chan/Zen school.

⁵⁷ Huineng (638-713; family named Lu), the famed Sixth Ancestor of Zen, was an illiterate woodcutter from the boondocks of Canton and a layperson when he received the Fifth Ancestor's transmission of the dharma. Huangmei refers to Daman Hongren (602-675), the Fifth Ancestor following Bodhidharma, whose temple was on Mount Huangmei. See also Hongzhi's memorial poem to Daman in the Religious Verses. For the full story referred to in this paragraph of the text, see Philip Yampolsky, ed. & trans., *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1967).

⁵⁸ This is an obvious reference to the poem Huineng is said to have written to earn the transmission of the patriarchy, in which he proclaims his deep realization of emptiness, that there is no such mind and no such mirror upon which to accumulate dust or worldly impurity. Therefore Huineng's "transcending impurity," mentioned here by Hongzhi, signifies Huineng's realization of the emptiness of the independent, inherent existence of any impurity.

⁵⁹ The Dayu Mountains are south of Huangmei. After receiving the transmission, Huineng was warned by the Fifth Ancestor to flee south to escape the jealousies and enmity of the large community of monks ensconced around Huangmei. Huiming ("Bright Understanding," a name used only after this incident) was a senior monk at Huangmei and a former general. He managed to track down Huineng, who placed the robe and bowl, insignia of the transmission, on a rock. Miraculously the burly Huiming was unable to budge them. Realizing that he truly wanted the teaching itself and not its trappings, he became Huineng's first disciple. He immediately asked Huineng for instruction, and was told to sit quietly and then without

thinking of good or bad to find his original face. Huiming was awakened. He asked Huineng if there was any other essential teaching and Huineng told him to turn the light within and he would find whatever was needed. For further discussion, see the section on the “backward step of turning the light within,” the silent illumination meditation technique also described here by Huineng, in the Introduction, “Hongzhi’s Relation to Dōgen.”

⁶⁰ The five *skāndhas* are form, sensations, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. Traditionally in Buddhism all experience is constituted from these five; they are taught as an antidote to fixed views of personal self as inherently existent.

⁶¹ The two gates of meaning are the universal, which is silent, and the particular, which engages in speech. The phrase “they engage in dialogue and energy is aroused” refers to the “Song of the Precious Mirror Samādhi” in which Dongshan says, “The meaning does not reside in the words, but a pivotal moment brings it forth.” The last part can also be read as, “...it responds to the inquiring impulse,” or “...it responds to the arrival of energy.” Later the poem adds, “Wondrously embraced within the real, drumming and singing begin together. Penetrate the source and travel the pathways; embrace the territory and treasure the roads.” “Drumming and singing” could be interpreted as “Inquiry and response.” As for “the first-class... and dull,” in the “Harmony of Difference and Equality” Shitou says, “While human faculties are sharp or dull, the Way has no northern or southern ancestors.” See Appendix A, and T. Cleary, *Timeless Spring*, pp. 36, 39-40.

⁶² Deshan Xuanjian (780-865; “Virtue Mountain Displaying the Mirror,” in Japanese Tokusan Senkan) is an Ancestor of the Yunmen and Fayan schools of Zen. Here “not a single dharma” means there is no teaching to give to anyone.