

On the Monk in the Fourth Meditative State

(Shizen Biku)

Translator's Introduction: In the first part of this discourse, Dōgen quotes a cautionary tale concerning a monk who misunderstood what he was experiencing in his meditation and thought that he had realized arhathood, whereas he had simply realized a state of meditative equanimity associated with the removing of delusions from within the world of form.

In the second part of this discourse, Dōgen takes up 'The Tripod Theory', a view that was popular in China at the time. It held that Chinese culture was based on the teachings of Lao-tzu, Confucius, and Shakyamuni, the respective founders of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, and that, just as a tripod needs all three of its legs in order to remain upright, so too the Chinese needed all three of these teachings in order to maintain their culture. The underlying premise for this view was that these three represented three essential ways of stating the same fundamental teaching. In refutation of this theory, Dōgen points out that Buddhism does not need Taoism or Confucianism to justify its existence in China or anywhere else and that, in addition, the Buddha Dharma is not the same as the teachings of Confucius and Lao-tzu.

Our Fourteenth Indian Ancestral Master Nāgārjuna once said the following:

There was once a certain monk among the Buddha's disciples who, upon experiencing the fourth meditative state, became filled with conceit, fancying that he had attained the fourth stage of arhathood. Previously, upon experiencing the first meditative state, he straightaway imagined that he had attained the first stage of arhathood, that of being a stream-entrant.¹ When he experienced the second meditative state, he imagined that he had attained the second stage of arhathood, that of a once-returner.² When he experienced the third meditative state, he imagined that he had attained the third stage of arhathood, that of a non-returner.³ When he experienced the fourth

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1. That is, one who has understood the Truth of the Buddha's Teachings and, as a result of following those Teachings, will be subject to no more than seven rebirths in the future.
 2. That is, one who will be reborn but one more time.
 3. That is, one who will not be reborn into the world of desire again.

meditative state, he imagined that he had attained the fourth stage of arhathood, that of a full arhat.⁴ Confident of this, he became proud of himself and did not seek to advance any farther in his training.

When his life was just about to end, he saw rising before him what appeared to be an intermediate world, one associated with the fourth meditative state.⁵ Thereupon he gave rise to a mistaken notion, thinking, “There is no nirvana. The Buddha has deceived me.” Because of his unrepentant mistaken view, the intermediate world of the fourth meditative state disappeared and a hellish intermediate world arose. Then, upon his death, he was reborn into a hellish world of incessant suffering.

The monks asked the Buddha, “At the end of this mistaken monk’s life, where was he reborn?”

The Buddha replied, “That person was reborn in a hellish world of incessant suffering.”

The monks were greatly dismayed, “Can doing meditation and keeping to the Precepts lead to that?”

The Buddha answered as before and then added, “This was all due to his being filled with conceit. When he experienced the fourth meditative state, he fancied that he had attained the fourth stage of arhathood. Facing the end of his life, he saw the appearance of the intermediate world of the fourth meditative state, and then gave rise to a mistaken view, thinking, ‘There is no nirvana. Now even though I am an arhat, I am to be reborn. The Buddha has deceived me.’ Because of this, he saw the appearance of a hellish intermediate world and, after his passing, he was reborn into that hellish world.” The Buddha then composed the following verse:

*Though hearing much, holding to the Precepts, and doing
meditation,*

*He had not yet acquired the method for bringing his
excesses to an end.*

Though he had the merit from his actions,

It was hard for him to have faith in this matter.

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4. That is, one who has cleansed his or her heart of all greed, hatred and delusion and will not be reborn into any of the six worlds of existence again.
 5. The intermediate world refers to the period between death and rebirth.

*It was for his slandering Buddha that he fell into a hell,
Which was in no way connected with the fourth great
meditative state.*

This monk is known as ‘the monk in the fourth meditative state’, as well as ‘the monk who did not give ear to the Teaching’. We are being cautioned about mistaking the fourth meditative state for the fourth stage of arhathood, as well as being cautioned about harboring false views that slander the Buddha. All the people in His great assembly, whether ordinary people or those in lofty positions, knew about this event. From the time when the Tathagata was in the world up to this very day, both those in India and those in China, have ridiculed mistaken views in order to caution someone against being attached to what is wrong, saying, “That is like realizing the fourth meditative state and taking it to be the fourth stage of arhathood.”

Let me summarize for you three ways in which this monk was mistaken.⁶ In the first place, he was someone who did not give ear to the Teaching and therefore was not up to distinguishing between the fourth meditative state and the fourth stage of arhathood. And he vainly kept his distance from the Buddha as well as idly living off by himself. He was fortunate enough to live at a time when the Tathagata was in the world. Had he continually paid visits to where the Buddha was, regularly encountering Him and listening to His Teaching, he would not have made the mistakes that he did. Nevertheless, because he lived off by himself like a hermit and did not go to places where the Buddha was in order to hear His Teaching, he was the way he was. Even though he failed to go where the Buddha was, he could have gone to where the great arhats were and received instruction from them. To live alone to no good purpose is a mistake born of conceit.

In the second place, to attain the first meditative state and think it to be the first stage of arhathood, then to attain the second meditative state and think it to be the second stage of arhathood, then to attain the third meditative state and think it to be the third stage of arhathood, then to attain the fourth meditative state and think it to be the fourth stage of arhathood, this was his second mistake. How could he possibly have compared the way the first, second, third, and fourth meditative states appear with the way the first, second, third, and fourth stages of arhathood appear? This was due to the fault of his not giving ear to the Teaching, a fault derived from his not taking refuge in his Master and thereby remaining in the dark.

6. The first two ways are given in this paragraph and the following one. The third way is not given until later in the discourse.



Among the disciples of Ubakikuta, there was a certain monk who, in all good faith, had left home life behind, and upon realizing the fourth meditative state, took it to be the fourth stage of arhathood. Ubakikuta, using his skillful means, had him go live in some distant place. He then made a band of thieves, along with five hundred merchants, materialize upon the monk's path. The thieves threatened to slaughter the merchants. The monk, seeing this, feared for his life, but then it suddenly occurred to him, "I am surely not an arhat. I must just be at the third stage of arhathood."⁷

After all the merchants had fled, only the daughter of a wealthy merchant remained behind. She asked the monk, "All I pray for is that, out of your great virtue, you will let me come with you." The monk replied, "The Buddha does not permit us to travel with a woman." The young girl said, "Be that as it may, I will just follow behind you, my virtuous monk." Taking pity on her, the monk went forth, fulfilling the wishes of both by maintaining a proper distance between them.

The Venerable Ubakikuta then caused a great river to appear. The young woman said, "O great virtuous one, will you cross this with me?" The monk was downstream and the young woman was upstream when the woman fell into the water. "O great virtuous one, save me!" she cried. Then, as the monk reached out his hands to pull her from the river, thoughts of how soft she felt welled up in him, by which he knew that he was not a non-returner. Feeling intense craving for her, he picked her up and took her to a secluded place, desiring to have intercourse with her, when he saw that she was actually his Master. Giving rise to deep shame, he stood with his head hanging low.

The Venerable One then instructed him, saying, "For a long time you have fancied yourself to be an arhat, so how could you possibly want to commit such an act?" Leading the monk back to the community, He had him express his remorse to them, and explained to

7. The fourth stage is marked by equanimity, which the monk realized that he lacked due to his feelings of fear.

him the essence of the Dharma, thereby causing him to truly attain arhathood.⁸

Although this monk's mistake in the first place was having an inflated view of himself, more specifically, when he witnessed the threat of a massacre, he gave way to fear. At the time he thought, "I am not a full arhat," still he made the mistake of thinking that he must be in the third stage of arhathood. Later, when he gave rise to thoughts of how soft the woman felt, thereby allowing carnal desires to well up, he knew that he was not a non-returner. Moreover, unlike the monk in the fourth meditative state, he did not give rise to thoughts that slandered the Buddha, nor to thoughts that slandered the Dharma, nor to thoughts that violated the Scriptures. Because this monk had the strength from having formally studied the sacred Teachings, he realized that he himself was not an arhat or even a non-returner. People today who do not give ear to the Teaching do not know what an arhat is, much less what a Buddha is, so they do not know that they themselves are not yet an arhat or a Buddha; they just recklessly go around thinking, "I am Buddha," which is an enormous mistake. Their's must be a deep-seated fault. Students of the Way must, by all means, learn first off just what a Buddha is.



A virtuous one of old once said, "Those who study the saintly Scriptures know, for the most part, what follows upon what, so, should they go beyond the proper bounds, their fault is easily recognized and corrected." How true are these words of that virtuous one of old! Though people give rise to personal opinions, if they have studiously learned even a little bit of the Buddha's Teachings, they will not be deceived by themselves or be deluded by others.

There was once a man—or so have I heard—who thought he had realized Buddhahood, but as he waited, the light of dawn did not emblazon the sky, as he had anticipated, so he thought it must be due to an obstruction by Mara. When the dawn finally came to full daylight, he did not encounter Brahma encouraging him to give voice to the Dharma. So, he knew he was not a Buddha, and thus he reckoned he was an arhat. But when others reviled him over this, his mind gave rise to negative thinking, so he knew that he was not an arhat. Thus, he imagined that he was at the third stage of arhathood.

8. This quote comes from a commentary on a text written by Master Tendai Chigi, the founder of the Tendai tradition.

And then, when he encountered certain women, he gave rise to lascivious thoughts, thereby knowing that he was not a saintly person.

Here too was one who truly knew the forms of the Teaching and therefore was not different from the person in the previous story.

Now, those who know the Buddha Dharma recognize their mistakes all on their own. Those who are ignorant of their mistakes vainly stay in their befuddled state of mind for the whole of their lives. And it may be like this for them in life after life. Even though that disciple of Ubakikuta's had attained the fourth meditative state and took it for the fourth stage of arhathood, he was wise enough to know that he was not an arhat. Even with the monk who did not give ear to the Teaching, if upon seeing an intermediate world of the fourth meditative state at the end of his life, he had realized that he was not an arhat, he would not have committed the wrong of slandering the Buddha. And what's more, it had been a long time since he had realized the fourth meditative state, so why did he not realize upon reflection that it could not be the fourth stage of arhathood? And if he already knew that it was not the fourth stage of arhathood, why did he not correct his thinking? Instead, he idly stuck to his mistaken view, drowning in his false opinion of himself.

In the third place, as his life came to an end, he made a huge mistake. The fault was so profound that he ultimately fell into a hellish state of incessant suffering. I want to say to him, "Even if, during your whole lifetime, you were convinced that you had come to the fourth stage of arhathood, and then, at the end of your life an intermediate world of the fourth meditative state appeared, you should have acknowledged your lifelong error, realizing that you were never at the fourth stage of arhathood. How could you possibly harbor the thought, 'The Buddha has deceived me. Even though there is no nirvana, He has invented one?'" This was a fault due to your not giving ear to the Teaching. This wrongful way slanders the Buddha. Accordingly, when the intermediate state of a hellish world appeared, you ended your life by falling into a hell of incessant suffering. How could anyone possibly be the equal of a Tathagata, even a saintly one of the fourth stage of arhathood?"

Shariputra had long been a saintly person at the fourth stage of arhathood. Were we to gather up all the spiritually wise discernment that exists in the three-thousand great-thousandfold world and, after excluding that of the Tathagata, treat what remained as one tenth, and then compare a sixteenth of Shariputra's wise discernment with that wise discernment that remained in the three-thousand great-thousandfold world, it would not equal one tenth of that sixteenth that Shariputra had. Even so, upon hearing the Tathagata give voice to Teaching that he had never

heard before, Shariputra did not think, “What the Buddha is now saying is different from what He said earlier. Surely, He is deceiving me.” Rather he says in praise of the Tathagata, “Mara the Tempter has nothing like this to offer!” The Tathagata once ferried a rich man to the Other Shore, one whom Shariputra would not ferry to the Other Shore: this is clearly the difference between Shariputra’s having only realized the fourth stage of arhathood, whereas the Tathagata had realized Buddhahood.⁹

If the universe in all ten quarters were filled with folks like Shariputra and his disciples and they all together tried to fully fathom the Buddha’s wise discernment, they could not succeed. And Confucius and Lao-tzu never had such meritorious virtue. Who among those who have pursued a study of the Buddha Dharma would be unable to fathom the teachings of Confucius or Lao-tzu?¹⁰ But among those who have devoted themselves to a study of Confucius or Lao-tzu, have any ever been able to fathom what the Buddha Dharma is? Nowadays, folks in Sung China, by and large, hold to the notion that the teachings of Confucius and Lao-tzu are in agreement with the Buddha’s Dharma. Theirs is a most profoundly distorted view, one we shall explore by and by.

When the monk in the fourth state of meditation took his distorted view as being true, he fancied that the Tathagata had deceived him, and turned his back on the Buddha for ever so long. The enormity of his folly was the equal of such persons as the six non-Buddhist teachers.¹¹

A virtuous one of old once said: “Even when our Great Master was in the world, there were people with fallacious views and personal opinions. And what is worse, after His passing, there have been those who have been unable to experience meditative states for want of a Master.” The Great Master referred to here is the World-honored Buddha. In truth, even those who had left home life behind and received ordination when the World-honored One was in the world

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9. An allusion to a wealthy man who, at the age of one hundred, resolved to be a monk. Shariputra did not allow him to enter the assembly because of his age. The Buddha, hearing of this, did permit him to become a monk, which ultimately led him to realize Buddhahood.
 10. A thorough knowledge of the works attributed to Confucius, Lao-tzu, and, later, Chuang-tzu was considered essential for any educated Chinese male, and this continued for over twenty-five hundred years, until their writings were replaced by Mao’s *Little Red Book*.
 11. They lived at the time of the Buddha and are identified in Pali Scriptures as Purana Kassapa (an amoralist who denied that good and evil exist), Makkari Gosala (a fatalist), Sanjati Belattiputta (a skeptic), Ajita Kesakambara (a materialist), Pakudha Kaccayana (who explained the universe in terms of seven elemental factors), and Nigantha Nataputta (Founder of Jainism, who believed in the relativity of all things).

found it difficult to avoid having mistaken views and personal opinions, due to their not giving ear to His Teaching. How much less can we avoid mistakes, we who live in a remote land during the last five hundred year period following the demise of the Tathagata!¹² Even someone who has given rise to the fourth meditative state is like this. How much less worthy of mention are those who have not even reached the fourth meditative state and vainly drown in their craving for fame and their greed for gain, that bunch who yearn for official careers and worldly pursuits! Today in Great Sung China there are many ill-informed and silly people, who say, “The teachings of Lao-tzu and Confucius are in accord with what the Buddha Taught, so their paths are not divergent.”



In Great Sung China during the Chia-tai era (1201-1205), there was a monk named Shōju who presented to the emperor a thirty-fascicle work that he had edited entitled the *Chia-tai Era Record of the Lamp Whose Light Reaches Everywhere*. In it, he said:

Your humble subject heard the words of Kozan Chi'en who said, “My way is like a tripod, and its three teachings are like its legs. Should the tripod lack one leg, it would tip over.” Your humble subject has deeply admired that man for ever so long and has explored his persuasive remarks. Thus I have come to realize that the essence of the teachings of Confucius is sincerity and the essence of the teachings of Taoism resides in a non-judgmental heart. The essence of the Shakya's teaching resides in seeing one's True Nature. ‘Sincerity,’ ‘non-judgmentalism,’ and ‘seeing one's True Nature’ are different in name but the same in substance. When we reach the place that they all ultimately come down to, there is nothing to be understood except this teaching, and so forth...

People who hold such mistaken views and personal opinions are many indeed; they are not limited to Chi'en and Shōju. The error of these folks is more profound than those who have realized the fourth meditative state and think that they have experienced the fourth stage of arhathood, for they are surely slandering Buddha, slandering Dharma, and slandering Sangha. They have already denied liberation, the three temporal worlds, and cause and effect. Beyond doubt, in their jungle of

12. ‘The last five hundred years’ refers to the third and final five hundred year period when the Dharma will have become so degenerate as to be spiritually ineffective.

entanglements and confusion, they have invited calamity and woe. They are the equals of that bunch who think that there are no Three Treasures, Four Noble Truths, or four types of monks.¹³ The essence of the Buddha Dharma has never been simply seeing one's True Nature. Where have any of the Seven Buddhas* or our twenty-eight Indian Ancestors said that the Buddha Dharma is merely the seeing of one's True Nature? The *Platform Scripture* of the Sixth Ancestor contains the phrase, 'seeing one's True Nature', but this text is a fraudulent document, it is not a work associated with the Treasure House of the Dharma, nor is the phrase one of Daikan Enō's sayings, nor is it a text that the descendants of the Buddhas and Ancestors have ever relied on. Because Shōju and Chi'en did not have a clue about even a cubbyhole's worth of the Buddha's Dharma, they manufactured this false concoction of a three-footed tripod.



A virtuous one of old once said:

Even Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu were still unaware of the Lesser Course's* possibility of being attached and what it is that gets attached, as well as the possibility of breaking free from attachments and what it is that gets broken free, to say nothing of actually being attached to attachments and actually breaking free from attachments within the Greater Course.* This is why their teaching is not the least bit like the Buddha Dharma. Even so, confused, worldly people who are deluded by names and forms, as well as by dubious meditative practices, have wandered off from the genuine principle. Such people would like to equate such Taoist terms as 'the meritorious function of the Tao' or 'just strolling along',¹⁴ with the teaching of liberation in the Buddha Dharma, but how could such as this possibly be?

From ancient times, people who are confused by names and forms, as well as those who do not know what the genuine principle is, have equated Chuang-tzu and Lao-tzu with the Buddha Dharma. From ancient times, no one who has had even the slightest bit of training within the Buddha Dharma has attached importance to Chuang-tzu or Lao-tzu.

13. The four types of monks are those who are excellent in the practice, those who expound the Dharma, those who devote their lives to exploring the Dharma, and those who disgrace the Dharma.

* See *Glossary*.

14. The latter term might find a closer equivalent today as 'just going with the flow'.



It says in the *Scripture on the Immaculate Practice That Accords with the Dharma*:¹⁵ “Those in China call the Bodhisattva* of Moonlight by the name of Yen-hui,¹⁶ the Bodhisattva Whose Light Is Pure by the name of Chung-ni,¹⁷ and Kashyapa Bodhisattva by the name of Lao-tzu.” From ancient times, people have cited this teaching, saying, “Confucius and Lao-tzu were bodhisattvas and, as a consequence, what they expressed must fundamentally be the same as what the Buddha expressed.” Further, they have said, “They may well have been emissaries of the Buddha, so what they expressed would naturally be what the Buddha expressed.” All such assertions are wrong.

A virtuous one of old once made a comment about that text, saying, “In conformity with the catalogues of Scriptural works, all consider this so-called ‘scripture’ to be spurious.” Relying upon this remark of his, we can say that the Buddha’s Dharma is all the more divergent from the teachings of Confucius and Lao-tzu. To assert that they are already bodhisattvas does not alter this, for bodhisattvahood cannot be compared to realizing the fruition of Buddhahood. Furthermore, the meritorious action of ‘concealing one’s light and accommodating oneself to others’¹⁸ is a method used only by Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three temporal worlds. It is not something that ordinary, secular people can do. How could an ordinary, secular person who is truly keeping to his worldly occupation be free enough to accommodate himself to others? Neither Confucius nor Lao-tzu ever spoke of accommodating themselves for the sake of others. Even less did Confucius and Lao-tzu know about karmic causes from the past or their effects in the present. Their aim was simply to artfully serve their sovereign and govern their households by means of loyalty and filial piety for merely their own single

15. This text (*J. Shōjō Hōgyō Kyō*) has long been considered one of the so-called ‘spurious scriptures,’ whose teaching is patently false. As a consequence, it is not included in the great collections of Buddhist Scriptures, such as the *Taishō Daizōkyō*.

16. Yen-hui was the chief disciple in Confucius’s entourage.

17. Chung-ni was another name for Confucius.

18. ‘Concealing one’s light and accommodating oneself to others’ is a technical Buddhist term. ‘Concealing one’s light’ refers to the ability of Buddhas and bodhisattvas to ‘turn down’ the brilliance that may naturally shine forth due to the effects of Their spiritual attainments, which may put others into awe and thereby stimulate feelings of inadequacy in them. ‘Accommodating oneself to others’ refers to the ability of Buddhas and bodhisattvas to assume a presence that does not frighten people. Both abilities are used in order to help ferry beings to the Other Shore.

generation, since they had nothing to teach future generations. They may already have been equals of the nihilists.¹⁹ Those who felt an aversion towards Chuang-tzu and Lao-tzu and said, “They did not even know of the Lesser Course, much less of the Greater Course!” were bright Masters of old. Anyone who says, as Chi’en and Shōju did, that the three teachings are fundamentally one and the same teaching is an ignoramus during this later, degenerate age of ours. O Chi’en and Shōju, I ask you, what brilliance do you two have that you would disregard what former virtuous ones have expressed by arbitrarily asserting that Confucius and Lao-tzu are surely the equals of the Buddha’s Dharma? Your views are in no way equal to the task of discussing what is penetrable and what is impenetrable in the Buddha’s Dharma. Pack up your belongings and go seek out a clear-minded Master to explore the Matter* with. O Chi’en and Shōju, the two of you are more in the dark about the Greater and Lesser Courses than that monk who mistook the fourth meditative state for the fourth stage of arhathood. How pitiful that, wherever the winds of degenerate times are blowing, there are so many devils like these two.



A virtuous one of old once said:

According to what Confucius and the ancient Chinese emperor Chou-kung said, as well as what the legendary three emperors and five rulers of antiquity wrote, when filial piety governs a household and loyalty governs a nation, they help the nation and profit its people. Even so, this is limited to a single period of time; it does not relieve past or future suffering. Since this does not compare with the benefits from the Buddha Dharma in all three temporal periods, how could theirs possibly not be a mistaken view?

How true they are, these words of the virtuous one of old! He has arrived at a deep understanding of the Truth of the Buddha Dharma and has clarified the principle underlying the secular world. The words of the three emperors and the five rulers still do not come up to the teaching of a saintly Wheel-turning Lord* and should never be discussed alongside what a Lord Brahma or a Shakrendra give voice to.²⁰ The karmic recompense that these Chinese rulers would have received from their

19. Nihilists are those who believe that there is a self which comes to an end at death.

20. Lord Brahma rules over the lowest of the four meditative heavens in the world of form. Shakrendra, Lord Indra, rules over the world of the thirty-three heavens which comprise the second of the six realms in the world of desire.

governance over their realms would have been decidedly second-rate. And not even Wheel-turning Lords, Lord Brahma, or Shakrendra himself are the equal of a monk who has left home life behind and been ordained. How much less could they be the equal of the Tathagata! Further, the writings of Confucius and Chou-kung cannot compare with the eighteen great Vedic texts, much less come up to the four Vedas themselves.²¹ India's Brahmanic Scriptures are still not the equal of the Buddhist Scriptures, not even those of the followers of the Lesser Course. How sad that in a small, remote country like China there is the false doctrine of the three teachings being one and the same teaching.



Our Fourteenth Ancestor, the bodhisattva Nāgārjuna once said, “The great arhats and the pratyekabuddhas* had direct knowledge of eighty thousand great eons, whereas the great bodhisattvas and the Buddha had direct knowledge of immeasurable eons.” People like Confucius and Lao-tzu never knew the past and future within their own single age, so how could they possibly have known of a couple of their past lives? How much less could they have possibly known even a single eon? How much less could they have possibly known a hundred eons or a thousand eons? How much less could they have possibly known eighty thousand great eons? And how much less could they have known an immeasurable eon? When compared with the Buddhas and bodhisattvas who have illumined and known these immeasurable eons more clearly than They knew the palms of Their hands, those like Confucius and Lao-tzu do not even warrant being called ignoramuses. Cover your ears and do not listen to such a phrase as ‘the three teachings are one and the same teaching’, for among erroneous mouthings, it is the most erroneous.



Chuang-tzu once said, “Feeling noble and feeling base, despising suffering and craving pleasure, being right and being wrong, having and losing, are all natural states.” This viewpoint was already the equal of the Naturalist perspective of non-Buddhists in India.²² Feeling noble and feeling base, despising suffering and craving pleasure, being right and being wrong, having and losing, are all what we feel from our good or wicked acts. Because Chuang-tzu did not know about the

21. The eighteen Vedic texts are the four Vedas—the Scriptures of Brahmanism—plus fourteen commentaries.

22. The Indian Naturalists denied cause and effect.

karma that fills us up and the karma* that pulls us along,²³ or about understanding what past and future are, he was ignorant of the present, so how could he possibly be the equal of the Buddha Dharma?



There are some who assert the following:

Because the Buddha Tathagatas have broadly affirmed the ultimate reality of the universe, every tiny mote of the universe is what all Buddhas have affirmed. Thus, because both the external conditions and the internal characteristics that we receive as karmic recompense are what Tathagatas are affirming, the great earth with its mountains and rivers, the sun, moon, and stars, and the four delusions and three poisons are all being affirmed as well.²⁴ To see mountains and rivers is to see the Tathagata. The three poisons and the four delusions are nothing other than the Buddha Dharma. Seeing a dust mote is the same as seeing the whole universe. Every moment of time, without exception, is one of fully perfected enlightenment, which we call ‘the great liberation’. This has been christened as ‘the Way of the Ancestors, which is the Direct Transmission of and the direct pointing to the Truth’.²⁵

In Great Sung China, folks like these are as prevalent as rice and flax, bamboo and reeds. The government and the general populace are filled to the brim with them. However, it is not clear just whose offspring these people are, for they have no understanding of the Way of the Ancestors of the Buddha. Even though ‘the great earth with its mountains and rivers’ describes what Buddhas have awakened to, that does not mean that the Great Earth with Its Mountains and Rivers is something that ordinary people might not suddenly encounter. But they have not learned or even heard of the principle that all Buddhas have come to realize. For such folks to say

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23. The karma that fills us up refers to the purely individual characteristics that we may be born with, such as being born with certain abilities or propensities. The karma that pulls us along refers to the general characteristics that we share with many, such as being born as a human being.
 24. The four delusions are that the physical world is permanent, that the world is a source of pleasure, that the physical world is pure, and that there exists a real, unchanging, personal self.
 25. This quotation borrows the vocabulary of Buddhism in order to support what is essentially a materialist perspective.

that seeing a dust mote is equivalent to seeing the whole universe is like their saying that being a commoner is equivalent to being a king. Further, why do they not say that seeing the whole universe is like seeing a single dust mote? If the view of these folks was equivalent to the Great Truth of the Buddhas and Ancestors, the Buddhas need not have left home life behind, our Ancestral Master Bodhidharma need not have put in an appearance, and none of us would be able to realize the Way. Even if such folks thought they had penetrated the meaning of “That which arises is the very thing that is beyond arising,” it would still not be what the Truth is really saying.



Tripitaka Master Paramārtha once said,²⁶ “In China, there are two fortunate things. The first is that there are no rakshasas.²⁷ The second is that there is no one who is a non-Buddhist.” This saying is indeed something imported by a non-Buddhist Brahman from India. Even if there were no one who had deliberately followed the ways of non-Buddhists, that does not mean that there could not have been folks who gave rise to non-Buddhist views. Even though rakshasas had yet to be seen, this does not mean that there were none who were the equivalent of non-Buddhists. Because ours is a small country in a remote corner of the world, it is not the same as India or China. Though the Buddha Dharma has been studied a bit here, there is no one who has grasped what awakening is as they understood it in India.



A virtuous one of old once said:

Nowadays, there are ever so many monks who are returning to lay life. Fearing lest they will then have to become the working dog of some lord, they enter into non-Buddhist paths. They set themselves up as teachers by stealing the principles of the Buddha Dharma and, undetected, apply them to explain Chuang-tzu and Lao-tzu. Ultimately they create total confusion, misleading innocents as to what is right

26. Paramārtha was a monastic scholar from Western India who was invited to come to South China by Emperor Wu of Liang to translate Scriptures. He arrived in 546 C.E., about a decade after Bodhidharma’s death.

27. A rakshasa is a type of malevolent demon who stalks the night.

and what is wrong by claiming that theirs is the view that unfolds what the Vedas taught.²⁸

Keep in mind that that bunch who do not know right from wrong and confuse the Buddha Dharma with the teachings of Chuang-tzu and Lao-tzu create confusion for someone who is a neophyte. They are our present-day Chi'en and Shōju. Not only is this the utmost in human idiocy, it also shows their lack of study and training, which is all too obvious, all too clear. Among the senior monks and their disciples during recent times in the Sung dynasty, not even a single one of them knew that the teachings of Confucius and Lao-tzu were not the equal of the Buddha Dharma. Although people who called themselves the offspring of the Buddhas and Ancestors were as prolific as rice and flax, bamboo and reeds, and filled the mountains and fields of the nine divisions of China, there was not a person, not even half a person, upon whom it dawned that the Buddha Dharma was foremost in insight and far beyond what was put forth by Confucius and Lao-tzu. Only that Old Buddha, my late Master Tendō, clearly understood that the Buddha Dharma was not one and the same with the sayings of Confucius and Lao-tzu, a fact that he kept affirming day and night. Though there were those who had reputations as teachers and academic lecturers on the Scriptures and commentaries, it had not dawned on any of them that the Buddha Dharma far surpasses the borderlands of Confucius and Lao-tzu. Many a modern academic lecturer over the past century has studied the customs of those who do seated meditation and follow the Way, hoping to walk off with what these practitioners had come to comprehend. Such a one, I dare say, is making a terrible mistake.



In Confucius's writings, there is 'the person with inborn knowledge,' whereas in Buddhist Scriptures, there is no one who has such inborn knowledge.²⁹ In the Buddha Dharma there is talk of sacred relics, whereas Confucius and Lao-tzu did not know whether there are sacred relics or not. Even if the two intended to jumble their two teachings together, ultimately they would not end up with a broad, far-reaching perspective, whether it was penetrable or not.

28. At the time of this quotation, the Chinese government was anti-Buddhist yet supported those who claimed to be Taoists or to have knowledge of non-Buddhist Indian philosophy.

29. Though neither Confucius nor Dōgen specifically identifies what this inborn knowledge is, the context of Confucius's writings implies that it refers to instinctively knowing how to behave like a sagely one, and without having to be taught. Dōgen does not seem to be as concerned with what the knowledge is about as with the notion of having any type of inborn knowledge.

It says in the *Analects of Confucius*, “The person who is born already knowing something is a superior being. The person who knows something through study is next. The person who learns it through great effort is next to him. The one who fails to learn it even with great effort, people will treat as the lowest.” If he is saying that there is inborn knowledge, then his is the fault of denying causality. In the Buddha Dharma there is no talk that denies causality. When the monk in the fourth meditative state reached the end of his life, he immediately fell into the error of slandering Buddha. Should you think that the teachings of Confucius and Lao-tzu are on a par with the Buddha Dharma, your error in slandering Buddha during your lifetime would be profound indeed. O you scholars, you should quickly discard the notion that erroneously considers the teachings of Confucius and Lao-tzu to be in accord with the Buddha Dharma. Those who put store in that viewpoint and do not discard it ultimately end up in some evil world.³⁰

O you scholars, be very clear about this: Confucius and Lao-tzu did not know the teaching on the three temporal worlds, nor did they know the principle of cause and effect, nor did they know anything about how to establish peacefulness in one continent, much less establishing it in all four continents. They still knew nothing about the six celestial worlds of desire, much less could they have known the Teaching concerning the nine divisions within the three worlds of desire, form, and beyond form. They could not have known anything about the small-thousandfold worlds or the middle-thousandfold worlds, so how could there have been a ruler who had encountered or known about three-thousand great-thousandfold worlds? Even in the singular nation of China, Confucius and Lao-tzu were petty officials who had not risen to an imperial rank. They are not to be compared with the Tathagata who was the Lord of the three-thousand great-thousandfold worlds. In the Tathagata’s case, there were Lord Brahma, the imperial Shakrendra, and the Wheel-turning Lords, among others, offering Him veneration and protection day and night, and continually asking him to give voice to the Dharma. Confucius and Lao-tzu did not have merit like this. They were merely commoners wandering about through the realms of existence. They never knew anything of the path to achieving liberation through renouncing the world, so how could they possibly have fully realized the True Nature of all things as the Tathagata did? If they had not fully realized It, how could they possibly have been the equal of the World-honored One? Confucius and Lao-tzu had no inner meritorious behavior nor any outer usefulness. They could never have reached the level that the World-honored One did. How could the Buddha have possibly given

30. The evil worlds are those of the hells, the animals, and the hungry ghosts.

voice to the false teaching that the three are of one accord? Confucius and Lao-tzu were unable to thoroughly penetrate the borders of the world and what lies beyond those borders. They neither knew nor saw the breadth of the world, nor its magnitude. And not only that, they had not seen the most minute forms and could not have known what the shortest span of a moment is. The World-honored One saw the most minute forms and knew directly how long the shortest span of a moment is, so how could we possibly treat Confucius or Lao-tzu as one equal to Him? Those like Confucius, Lao-tzu, Chuang-tzu, and Hui-tzu were simply common men.³¹ They could not have even come up to the level of a stream-entrant of the Lesser Course, so how could they possibly have been the equal of those at the second, third, or fourth stages* of arhathood?

At the same time, that you scholars, out of your ignorance, put them on the same level with the Buddhas is plainly your wandering deeper into your delusions. Not only were Confucius and Lao-tzu ignorant of the three temporal worlds and therefore did not know what the many eons are, they were unable to comprehend what a single moment of mindfulness is or to know the One All-embracing Buddha Mind. They do not even bear comparison with the celestial beings of sun and moon, nor could they compare with the Four Great Guardian Kings or the host of celestial beings. In comparison with the World-honored One, whether they be monastics or lay people, they are wandering off in delusion.



It says in the *Biographies of Commoners*:³²

Yin-hsi was a high-ranking government official in the Chou dynasty. He was particularly skilled in reading heavenly omens. One day, he was traveling to the east to investigate an unusual meteorological condition. Upon encountering it, as might be expected, he met up with Lao-tzu, who had composed a five thousand word text at Yin-hsi's request.³³ Yin-hsi also, for his part, compiled a nine-section work, entitled *The Barrier Gatekeeper* (C. *Kuan Ling Tzu*),

31. Hui-tzu was a famous orator during the Wei dynasty.

32. The *Biographies of Commoners* (C. *Lieh Chuan*) is the major section of a classic Chinese work known as the *Records Compiled by the Historian* (C. *Shih-chi*), which is one of the Chinese dynastic histories, compiled in the first century B.C.E. by Ssu-ma Ch'ien. It was a basic text in the classical education of young boys, who were expected to memorize large portions of it, if not the whole.

33. Later known as *The Way and Its Power* (C. *Tao-te Ching*).

modeled on the *Scripture on Lao-tzu's Converting the Barbarians* (C. *Hua Hu Ching*).³⁴ Later, when Lao-tzu was about to cross over the barrier to the Western Region, Yin-hsi thought he would like to accompany him. Lao-tzu said, "If what you desire within your heart is to be my follower, you must bring me the heads of seven people, including those of your father and mother. Then you will be able to come with me." Yin-hsi followed Lao-tzu's instruction, but on his return, the seven heads had all turned into those of wild boars.

A virtuous one of old once said:

Thus, Confucianists who are well-versed in their secular texts are worshipful even to carved images of their parents, but when Lao-tzu laid down his rules, he had Yin-hsi harm his parents. In the gateway to the Tathagata's Teaching, great compassion is the starting point of training, so how could Lao-tzu have possibly made such a topsy-turvy view the basis for his method of teaching?³⁵

Long ago, there was that wrong-minded bunch who treated the World-honored One as on a par with Lao-tzu, and nowadays, there are foolish fellows who treat the World-honored One as on a par with Confucius and Lao-tzu. How can we not pity them! Confucius and Lao-tzu cannot even measure up to the Wheel-turning Lords who govern the secular world by means of the ten good deeds.³⁶ How could those legendary three emperors and five rulers of antiquity, of whom Confucians speak, possibly come up to the level of the Wheel-turning Lords of the Gold, Silver, Copper, and Iron Wheels, who are equipped with thousands of the seven precious jewels* and who have governance over the four continents or rule some three-thousandfold world? Confucius himself cannot even be compared with those legendary ones. The Buddhas and the Ancestors of past, present, and future have all considered the starting point of training to lie in filial-like piety towards one's parents, one's Master and fellow monks, and the Three Treasures, as well as in the

34. A pseudo-scriptural treatise that attempts to show through various accounts that Buddhism is an inferior, watered-down form of Taoism suited for barbarians but not for Chinese and that Lao-tzu went to India (the Western Region) where he became the Buddha and converted the 'barbarians'.

35. This quotation is from the commentary on Tendai Chigi's lectures on *Great Quietness and Reflection* (*Makashikan*).

36. 'The ten good deeds' refers to actively abstaining from behaving contrary to the Ten Great Precepts.

making of alms offerings to those who are ill, for example. Since time immemorial, They have never considered the harming of one's parents to be the starting point of training. Therefore, Lao-tzu and the Buddha Dharma are not one and the same. To kill one's parents will invariably create karma that will be felt in one's next life, a life in which it is a foregone conclusion that one will fall into a hellish world. Even though Lao-tzu may idly chatter on about emptiness, those who harm their parents will not escape the arising of retribution.



In the *Ching-te Era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp*, it says the following:

Our Second Chinese Ancestor was wont to voice a lament, saying, “The teachings of Confucius and Lao-tzu are merely concerned with the arts of courtesy and the standards for social behavior, whereas the writings of Chuang-tzu and the *Book of Changes* have never come close to the Wondrous Principle.”

Then one day, he heard that Great Master Bodhidharma had taken up residence in Shaolin Monastery. “One who has reached the Other Shore is not far away. With him, I shall indeed attain the Wondrous Frontier.”

People today should clearly trust that the authentic Transmission of the Buddha Dharma in China was wholly due just to the strength of our Second Chinese Ancestor. Though our First Chinese Ancestor, Bodhidharma, came from the West, had it not been for our Second Ancestor, the Buddha Dharma would not have been passed on. If our Second Ancestor had not passed on the Buddha Dharma, there would be no Buddha Dharma in Eastern lands today. In short, our Second Ancestor is not to be grouped among the masses.

It says in the *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp*, “The monk Shinkō was a broad-minded, scholarly gentleman.³⁷ For a long time, he resided in the Ilo district. He was well read in a wide variety of subjects and was able to discuss abstruse principles.” Our Second Ancestor's being well read in a wide variety of subjects in the distant past may well be different by far from what people today read. After having awakened to the Dharma and having the kesa* Transmitted to him, he made no remarks like, “In the past, I was wrong to think that the teachings of Confucius and Lao-tzu were merely concerned with the arts of courtesy and the

37. Shinkō was Great Master Eka's name when he was a young monk.

standards for social behavior.” Keep in mind that our Second Ancestor had already thoroughly grasped that the teachings of Confucius and Lao-tzu were devoid of the Buddha Dharma, so why do his distant descendants go counter to their ancestral parent and insist that the teachings of Confucius and Lao-tzu are in accord with the Buddha’s Dharma? You need to know that this is the spreading of false teaching. If someone were not a distant descendant of our Second Ancestor, such a one might rely upon the explanations of a Shōju or his likes. But if you would be a true offspring of our Second Ancestor, do not say that the three teachings are in accord.



When the Tathagata was in the world, there was a non-Buddhist who was called the Mighty Debater. He was of the opinion that there was no one his equal in debate, due to the enormity of his prowess, which is why he was called the Mighty Debater. Receiving the funds raised by five hundred Licchavis to pay for his services,³⁸ he selected five hundred difficult, debatable issues, and came to pose them to the Buddha. When he arrived at where the Buddha was residing, he asked the Buddha, “Is there one ultimate truth or, for the sake of people, are there many ultimate truths?”

The Buddha replied, “There is just one Ultimate Truth.”

The Mighty Debater said, “We teachers each have our own ultimate truth, which we teach. Among non-Buddhists, each believes his own teaching is right and slanders the ways of others. Since we mutually judge what is right or wrong in what everyone else is teaching, we end up with many ultimate truths.”

At that moment, Migasāsa, whom the World-honored One had already converted and who had gone beyond the stage of still being a student of Buddhism, came and stood next to the Buddha.³⁹ The Buddha asked the Mighty Debater, “Among the many ways that truths are expressed for the sake of others, whose is the foremost for you?” The Mighty Debater replied, “Migasāsa’s is foremost.”

38. The Licchavis were a group within the country of Vaishali who were early supporters of Shakyamuni.

39. Migasāsa was a Brahman who was converted to Buddhism after he had undertaken to debate with the Buddha and ended up dumbfounded by Him. By the time of this story, he had already realized arhathood.

The Buddha then said, “If his is foremost, why then did he discard his own way and become My disciple, thereby entering into My Truth?”

The Mighty Debater, fully realizing this, dropped his head in embarrassment and then, taking refuge, entered the Way. At this time, the Buddha, in order to thoroughly express the Matter, spoke the following in verse:

*When someone thinks, “Mine is the ultimate in truth,”
When someone falls in love with his own opinions,
When someone assumes that he is right and all others
wrong,
Then none such yet knows the Ultimate Truth.*

*Such people readily enter into wrangling and debate,
All eager to clarify what ‘nirvana’ really means.
In squabbling over who’s right, who’s wrong,
Those who outwit feel elated, the outsmarted in misery
sink.*

*The victors fall into vanity’s pit,
While the bested plunge into some gloomy hell.
Thus it is that those whose discernment is truly wise
Fall not into either of these two ways.*

*O Mighty Debater, by all means know
That in the Dharma for My disciples
There is no meaningless ‘emptiness’, no mundane ‘truth’.
So what is it that you so desire to seek from Me?*

*If you desire to debase what I have voiced,
Forthwith you already lack the grounds for doing that.
Impossible the task to know what the whole of
knowledge is.
Strive for that and you strive in vain.*

Now, this is what the World-honored One’s golden words were like. O you foolish and dimwitted people in the Eastern lands, do not recklessly turn your back on what the Buddha taught, saying that there are paths equal to the Way of the Buddha, for that would be slandering both the Buddha and the Dharma. Those in India, from Migasāsa and the Mighty Debater to the Brahmacharins like

Dirghanakha and Shrenika,⁴⁰ were eminent scholars, the likes of whom have never existed in Eastern lands, even from ancient times. What is more, Confucius and Lao-tzu could never come up to them. All of them abandoned their personal ways and took refuge in the Buddha's Way. If we were now to compare worldly persons like Confucius and Lao-tzu with the Buddha Dharma, even those who listened would be involving themselves in wrongdoing. And what is more, even arhats and pratyekabuddhas will all eventually become bodhisattvas, with not even one finishing up in the Lesser Courses. But when it comes to Confucius and Lao-tzu who never entered the Buddha's Way, how could we possibly say that they are the equals of Buddhas? That indeed would be an enormously false view. To conclude, in that the World-honored Tathagata goes far beyond all others, He is praised and so recognized by all the Buddha Tathagatas and by all the great bodhisattvas, as well as by Lord Brahma and Lord Shakrendra. It is something that our twenty-eight Indian Ancestors and our six Chinese Ancestors all knew. In short, all who have the capacity to do the training and explore the Matter with their Master have come to know this. As people of these present degenerate days of the Dharma, do not involve yourself with the wild words of those ignoramuses of the Sung dynasty who speak of the three teachings being one, for theirs is the height of ignorance.

On a day during the summer retreat in the seventh year of the Kenchō era (1255), I finished making this copy of the Master's first draft.

Ejō

40. As used here, Brahmacharin refers to someone who was a Brahman priest and scholar in his younger years, and later converted to Buddhism. There is a tradition that Dirghanakha was Shariputra's father and became a Buddhist, due to his son's example. His name, actually a nickname, means He of the Long Nails, referring to his not cutting his nails because he was so deeply absorbed in his scholarly pursuits. Shrenika's pre-Buddhist teaching is discussed in Discourse 1: A Discourse on Doing One's Utmost in Practicing the Way of the Buddhas (*Bendowa*).