



*Koans & Quotes for
Taking Refuge in the
Bodhisattva Way*

Summer Solstice
in the Year of the Bleeding Ocean 2010

The fruit of the bodhisattva way is this : Each circumstance you encounter constitutes the meaning of your life. When you understand that, your actions are unhindered by anything else. You see that what appears as form is also formless, and so you act according to the customs of the time—just wearing clothes, eating food, constantly upholding the bodhisattva practices, and passing the time according to the circumstances. If you practice like this, is there anything more to be done?

adapted from Great Master Ma

Out the front door there are two paths. Which one goes to heaven and which goes to hell?

All bodhisattvas of the past
have studied these precepts;
those of the future will also study them.
Those of the present study them as well.
This is the path walked by the buddhas,
and praised by the buddhas.

Brahma's Net Sutra

A wooden buddha won't pass through the fire; if she does, she will surely burn.

A clay buddha won't pass through the water; if he does, he will surely dissolve.

A metal buddha won't pass through the furnace; if she does, she will surely melt.

The true buddha is in the house.

Zhaozhou

Shantideva said, "Each uncompassionate act is like planting a dead tree."

"Where was the bodhisattva of compassion in the midst of all those troubles?"

"She was there in the marketplace all along, but nobody recognized her."

Yunyan was making tea. His friend Daowu asked him, "Who are you making tea for?"

Yunyan said, "Someone who wants it."

Daowu asked, "Why don't you get him to make it for himself?"

Yunyan said, "Fortunately, I'm here to do it."

Once Layman Pang and his daughter Lingzhao were out selling bamboo baskets. Coming down off a bridge, he stumbled and fell. When Lingzhao saw this, she ran to her father and threw herself down next to him.

“What are you doing?” cried the Layman.

“I saw you fall, so I’m helping,” replied Lingzhao.

“Luckily no one was looking,” remarked the Layman.

Linji said, “If, wherever you are, you take the role of host, then wherever you are is a true place.”

A student asked, “The Bathhouse Sutra says, ‘By contributing to the bathing of monks, people receive limitless blessings.’ This would appear to be an instance of external practice achieving merit. How does this relate to truly seeing the mind?”

Bodhidharma replied, “Here, the bathing of monks doesn’t refer to the washing of anything tangible. ... The bathhouse is the body. When you light the fire of wisdom, you warm the pure water of the precepts and bathe the true buddha nature within you. ... People nowadays don’t understand this; they use ordinary water to wash a physical body and think they’re following the sutra. But they’re mistaken. Our true buddha nature has no shape, and the dust of affliction has no form. How can you use ordinary water to wash an intangible body?”

Huineng said, “Good friends, you must all receive the formless precepts with your own bodies, seeing the threefold body of the Buddha in your own selves. Recite this three times :

I take refuge in the pure dharmakaya buddha (of the absolute world) in my own physical body.

I take refuge in the thousand billion nirmanakaya buddhas (of the manifest world) in my own physical body.

I take refuge in the sambhogakaya buddha (of the future) in my own physical body.

Your physical body is your home; you can’t speak of turning toward it. The threefold body of the buddhas is within your own self-nature. Everything in the world possesses it.”

Fuguang said, “If your vision is narrow, your courage will be narrow, too. Always try to keep your thoughts all-embracing.”

Master Yuangui used divination to choose a site for his cottage in a valley deep in the mountains, to live the life of a recluse. One day a strange man appeared, wearing formal attire and accompanied by a large retinue of attendants. He demanded to see Yuangui, who greeted him, “Welcome, friend. Why have you come here?”

The visitor, who turned out to be the god of the mountain, engaged in a dharma dialogue with Yuangui. At the end of it, the god bowed down to the floor and said, “I am the most confident and upright of the gods, but I didn’t realize that you possessed such eloquence and wisdom. Please give me the true precepts that will enable me to transcend the world.”

Yuangui replied, “When you ask about the precepts you are already observing the precepts, because there are no precepts apart from seeking the precepts.”

Three monks went to call on the teacher Jingshan. On the way they met a woman whom they asked, “Which way is the road to Jingshan?”

She said, “Right straight ahead.”

One of the monks asked, “The river ahead is deep—can we cross it?”

The woman said, “Your feet won’t get wet.”

“Where do you live, lady?”

“I’m just right here.”

When the monks got to her shop, the woman prepared a pot of tea and brought out three cups. She said to them, “Oh monks, let those of you with miraculous powers drink tea.” As the three looked blankly at each other, she said, “Watch this decrepit old woman show her own miraculous power.” Then she picked up the cups, poured the tea, and went out.

Why are completely enlightened bodhisattvas attached to the blood-red thread?

One time when Dongshan was washing his bowls, he saw two crows fighting over a frog. A monk who also saw this asked, “Why does it come to that?”

Dongshan replied, “It’s only for your benefit, Honored One.”

Yunyan asked, “How does Guanyin, bodhisattva of compassion, use all those hands and eyes?”

Daowu answered, “It’s like someone in the middle of the night reaching behind her head for the pillow.”

Zhaozhou said, "The sky does not go into the world to teach."

The bodhisattva of wisdom, Manjushri, welcomed the pilgrim Wuzho, asking, "Where are you from?"

"From the South," replied Wuzho.

"How is Buddhism being maintained in the South?"

"In this Corrupt Age of the Dharma, people are honoring the precepts a little."

"How many are there?"

"Three hundred here, five hundred there. How is Buddhism being maintained here?"

"Ordinary people and saints live together. Dragons and snakes mix."

Xuefeng said, "Someone sitting next to a basket of food is starving to death, and someone sitting by a river is dying of thirst."

Xuansha commented, "Someone sitting *in* a basket of food is starving to death, and someone up to her head in water is dying of thirst."

Yunmen said, "Her whole body is food, her whole body is water!"

A group of practitioners invited a master of meditation to give them instruction. He told them that they must strive to acquire freedom from strong reactions to the events of daily life, an attitude of habitual reverence, and the regular practice of a method of meditation whose object was to realize the one life pervading all things.

"In the end you must come to this realization not only during meditation, but in daily life. The whole process is like filling a sieve with water." He bowed and left.

They pondered on the image of the sieve without finding any solution that satisfied them all. In the end they dropped the whole thing—except for one woman, who made up her mind to see the teacher. The teacher gave the woman a sieve and a cup, and they went to the nearby seashore, where they stood on a rock with the waves breaking around them.

"Show me how you fill the sieve with water," the teacher said. The woman bent down, held the sieve in one hand, and scooped the water into it with the cup. The water barely appeared in the bottom of the sieve before it was gone.

"How would you do it?" she asked.

The master took the sieve and threw it far out into the sea, where it floated momentarily and then sank. "Now it's full of water," he said.

A monk asked, "What is a bodhisattva before she becomes a buddha?"

Shoushan said, "All beings."

The monk said, "How about after she becomes a buddha?"

Shoushan said, "All beings. All beings."

Chan teacher Baoche of Mt. Mayu was fanning himself. A monk approached and said, "The nature of wind is eternal and there's no place it doesn't reach. Why, then, do you fan yourself?"

"Although you understand that the nature of the wind is eternal," Baoche replied, "You do not understand the meaning of its reaching everywhere."

"What does reaching everywhere mean?" asked the monk. Baoche just kept fanning himself. The monk bowed deeply.

Linji said, "Buddha is not the object of our search; do not make Buddha your ideal aim. Do not make Buddha into a reality outside yourself. The image we have in our head of Buddha is not the Buddha. Such a Buddha is a shadow, a ghost, called Ghost Buddha, who can suck up your soul. That is why when we meet Ghost Buddha, we should cut off Ghost Buddha's head."

Outside the Zen Hall of Naewonsa

The snow-covered world

Is the robe of the bodhisattva of compassion,

Expressing, like flowing water,

The Dharma inexpressible by the body,

Inaudible to the body,

Invisible to the body,

Inexpressible by, and inaudible and invisible

to space.

So who is this wonderful person

Who expresses, hears and sees it?

Korean nun Song'yong Sunim

Linji said, "There is nothing I dislike."