

## BUSSHŌ

## “Buddha-nature”

**S**hakyamuni Buddha said, “All sentient beings totally possess Buddha-nature. The Tathāgata is permanently abiding, not subject to change.”

Although this is the turning of the Wheel of the Law of the Great Teacher Shakyamuni, it is also the essence and enlightened vision of all the Buddhas and Patriarchs. This teaching has been studied for 2,190 years, having been directly handed down through fifty generations (up to my late master Tendō Nyojō)—twenty-eight generations in India, and twenty-three in China (including Nyojō). All the Buddhas and Patriarchs of the ten directions possess and maintain this teaching.

What is the meaning of “All sentient beings totally possess Buddha-nature?” It is the turning of the wheel of the Law of “What has come?” Sometimes, it is called “sentient beings,” “animate beings,” “living things,” “living species,” “totally,” equals sentient beings, all living things. “Totally possess” is Buddha-nature; One part of possessing is sentient beings. At the proper time, inside and outside of sentient beings is Buddha-nature totally. It is not only valid for transmission of skin, flesh, bones, and marrow, but for all transmissions of “you possess my skin, flesh, bones and marrow.”

We must know that the “possess” of “totally possess” is not related to possession or non-possession. “Totally possess” is the word and tongue of Buddha, the enlightened vision of the Buddhas and Patriarchs, and the nostrils of Zen monks. “Totally possess” does not mean initial, original, miraculous or any other kind of possession. It is, of course, not attained as a result of karma or delusion, and has nothing to do with mind, circumstance, nature, form, etc.

Therefore, that is why the correct understanding of “sentient beings totally possess” does not occur through the influence of karma, does not

arise by illusory causation, does not occur naturally, and is not developed through the miraculous power of practice and enlightenment. If the "totally possess" of sentient beings depended upon karma, causation, or nature and so forth, so would the realization of saints, the awakening of the Buddhas, and the enlightened vision of the Buddhas and Patriarchs. But, that is not the case.

The entire world is free of dust, and here there can be no second person. This is because we are unaware that the root of illusion is cut off and there is no way for the disturbed flow of karma to cease. It has not been bred by deluded causation since nothing in the relative world has ever been concealed. "Nothing has been concealed" does not necessarily mean that all worlds exist. That the relative world is self-existent is an erroneous view of non-believers. Existence is not original being because it is not confined to past or present. It is not an initial occurrence because it contains nothing extra.

It is not independent existence since it is interrelated, nor is it uncreated, for it occurs simply as it is. It is not originally appearing but means rather "our everyday mind is the Way." We must first of all know that it is extremely difficult to find sentient beings within "totally possess." If we comprehend the true meaning of "totally possess", these words themselves signify complete liberation and detachment.

When scholars hear the word "Buddha-nature," they think it is a kind of "eternal self," like that expounded by the non-believer Senika. This is because they have never met a man of the Way, nor clarified their self, nor met a master. They mistake the wild movements of their minds for the enlightened wisdom of Buddha-nature. Who can say that there is enlightened wisdom in Buddha-nature? Even though enlightened persons are Buddhas, Buddha-nature is not enlightenment or awakening. The "enlightenment" of the enlightened and awakened Buddhas is not the misconceived enlightenment most people speak of. And, it is certainly not the enlightenment of a confused mind. Only the face of each Buddha and Patriarch is enlightenment.

From the Han through the Tang to the Sung dynasty, many sages of the past have traveled to India, and many have claimed to be teachers of gods and men. They taught that wild movements of the mind is the enlightenment of Buddha-nature. This is a great pity, due to a lack of study of the Buddhist Way.

Neither advanced nor initiate students of the Buddhist Way should

make such a mistake. Even though one studies enlightenment, it is not the wild movements of the mind. Even if you study that movement, it is not what it appears to be. If you can understand the real movement, you will understand true enlightenment and awakening. If we can understand "Buddha," we can understand "Nature," since they penetrate each other. "Buddha-nature" is surely, then, "totally possess" because "totally possess" becomes "Buddha-nature." "Totally possess" does not mean a myriad of things, nor unified existence. Express it by raising a fist; it is not large or small. To say "Buddha-nature," is to be beyond the level of all the saints, and beyond "Buddha-nature" itself.

Some say that Buddha-nature is similar to the seed of a plant; when it receives the nourishing rain of the Dharma, it naturally sprouts—leaves, flowers, and fruit appear, and the fruit contains its own seeds. This is the view of ordinary, unenlightened people. Those holding such a view should learn that the seed, flowers and fruit each and at the same time have the pure mind [of Buddha-nature]. Within the fruit there are seeds. Although the seeds are not visible, still the roots, stem, and the rest grow. Without outside assistance the branches multiply and a large tree appears. This procedure is not outside or inside; it is true for any time of the past or present. Therefore, even though we have an unenlightened view, the root, stem, branches, and leaves all live, die, "totally possess," and become and are Buddha-nature simultaneously.

Buddha said, "In order to know the principle of Buddha-nature watch for the proper time and circumstance. When the time comes, Buddha-nature will be manifest." "In order to understand the principle of Buddha-nature" does not mean simply "knowing", but means also practicing, enlightening, clarifying, and ultimately forgetting. This explaining, practicing, enlightening, and mistaking or not mistaking are all "proper time and circumstance." The way to watch for proper time and circumstance is through proper time. Watch for proper time with a fly whisk, a staff, and so on. Original enlightenment, initial enlightenment, non enlightenment, right enlightenment, and their wisdom cannot be seen through either worldly or sacred knowledge.

"Watch for" is neither related to the watcher or the watched, nor to true or false watching. It is just watching. It is pure watching—not one own's perception nor others. It is to "watch" beyond proper time. It is Buddha-Buddha, nature-nature.

Many people in the past and present have taken "the proper time

and circumstance” to mean “wait for a time in the future for Buddha-nature to appear.” They say, “If we practice like that, Buddha-nature will naturally appear at the proper time. Even if we study under a master and seek the Dharma, if it is not the proper time, Buddha-nature will not appear. People with such views are worldings who expect good things to fall directly from heaven. Such people are like the non-believers who hold that everything occurs by chance.

“In order to know the principle of Buddha-nature” means “directly knowing the principle of Buddha-nature.” “Watch for the proper time” and circumstance means directly knowing the proper time. That is, if we want to know Buddha-nature, we must seek the proper time and circumstance.

The expression “when the time comes” means the “time has already come.” Even if we doubt it, still Buddha-nature has emerged in us.

You should know that “when the time comes” is manifest in each hour of the day. “When it comes” is as if it has already come.” “When the time comes,” Buddha-nature has not come. Therefore, that is why “the time has already come” is the manifestation of Buddha-nature. In other words, the truth is self-evident. “There has never been a time that has not come right now and an actualization of Buddha-nature that has not appeared right here.”

When the Twelfth patriarch Anabotei, was explaining the ocean of Buddha-nature to the Thirteenth Patriarch he said, “The mountains, rivers, and great earth all depend on Buddha-nature; samadhi and the six spiritual powers appear through it.”

Therefore, mountains, rivers, and the great earth are all the ocean of Buddha-nature. “All depend on” means that mountains, rivers, and the great earth depend on the right time [of Buddha-nature]. You must know that “all depend on” is like the form of the ocean of Buddha-nature; it is not concerned with inside, outside, or between. If this is so, to see mountains and rivers is to see Buddha-nature. To see Buddha-nature is to see a donkey’s jaw or a horse’s mouth [that is to say, it is all around us]. “All depend” equals “entirely depend”—beyond understanding or not understanding.

“Samadhi and the six spiritual powers appear through it.” You must know that appearance and non-appearance of all samadhis depend upon Buddha-nature. All six spiritual powers manifest or not manifest also depend on Buddha-nature. These six spiritual powers are not limited to

those described in the Āgamas (of the Hinayānists). “Six” is not merely a convenient number; it is the perfected six pāramitās. Therefore, we should not study the six supernatural powers as being “the bright tips of a myriad grasses and the bright mind of the Buddhas and Patriarchs.” Although we are involved with the six spiritual powers, such an obstacle occurs with the flow of the ocean of Buddha-nature.

The Fifth Patriarch, Zen Master Kōnin, was from Mount Ōbaku. He was born without a father and attained the Way while very young. He is said to be an incarnation of Saishodōsha. In his previous life, he was on Mount Sei in Kishā planting pine trees when he happened to meet the Fourth Patriarch, who was at that time traveling around the country. The Fourth Patriarch said to him, “I would like to transmit my Dharma to you, but you are too old. If you are reborn, I’ll be waiting for you.” Kōnin agreed. Later, he was reborn into the Shu family. His mother abandoned him in a river, but he was protected by the gods and remained unharmed for seven days. He was rescued and raised as a normal child for seven years. Once as he was walking on road in Mount Ōbai, he accidentally met the Fourth Patriarch, Dōshin. When the Patriarch saw him, although he was just a small boy, he could see he was special. The Patriarch asked him, “What’s your name?” The boy replied, “I have a name, but its not a regular name.” The Patriarch then asked, “What name is it?” The boy said, “It is Buddha-nature.” The Patriarch said, “You don’t have Buddha-nature.” The boy told him, “Buddha-nature is empty, that is why you say I don’t have it.” The Patriarch realized that the child was a vessel of the Dharma and made him his attendant. Later, Dōshin transmitted the Eye and Treasury of the True Law to him. Thereafter, the Fifth Patriarch lived on the Easten Mountain of Obai, and his profound teaching spread throughout the land.

“What is your name?” These words of the Fourth Patriarch are a profound teaching—consider them very carefully. In the past Zen Masters would often ask trainees “what’s your name?” or “where are you from?” The trainees would reply “I am from [that place], or “my name is [that].” In essence the master is saying: “I am that, and you are that too.”

The Fifth Patriarch answered: “I have a name, but it’s not a common one.” That is, there is a name but it’s not a common one; a common name is not my real name. The Fourth Patriarch asked: “What is your name?” In other words, “what” is “this.” “This” is Buddha-nature. He is asking

about “this”; “what” is “this.” Both “what” and “this” are the name. We can find this in everyday life, eating a meal or drinking green tea.

When the Fifth Patriarch said “my name is Buddha-nature,” he meant “this” is Buddha-nature. “What” is that which becomes Buddha. It [“what”] is not restricted only to the family name but is “not this” and covers Buddha-nature; thus we understand “this” indicates “what” [Buddha]. When we are detached from this, there is a name. That name is *Shu* [all pervading]. This name is not inherited from one’s father or ancestors, nor does it resemble one’s mother’s name. Certainly it has no relation to another person’s name.

The Fourth Patriarch said, “You have no Buddha-nature.” Here, “you” is not anyone in particular; understanding varies according to the person, but still it remains “no Buddha-nature.” Does no-Buddha-nature exist at the highest state of Buddhahood or even in the state beyond Buddhahood? These are questions we must ask. Realize that no-Buddha-nature is all pervading and neither try to define [limit] it nor search for it. No Buddha-nature may be experienced in a moment of samadhi. When Buddha-nature becomes Buddha, or when Buddha-nature is aroused by the Buddha-seeking-mind, is it then no Buddha-nature? Ask the temple pillars this question; even ask your own Buddha-nature.

The expression “no-Buddha-nature” originated with the Fourth Patriarch. It was understood by the Fifth Patriarch who transmitted it to Joshin Daie. The latter made it his focal point of practice. Even given that “what is” is the standard of “no-Buddha-nature,” still we need great effort to clarify “no-Buddha-nature.” “You,” “this” or “*Shu*” are also [sometimes] used to clarify “it.”

The Fifth Patriarch said, “You say I have no Buddha-nature because Buddha-nature is empty.” Be careful here; don’t interpret “empty” as meaning “nothing.” If you seek to clarify the emptiness of Buddha-nature, avoid light expressions, rather speak of the finality of “no.” When we say “empty” we do not mean “empty”; likewise when we say “no” we do not mean “no.” We say “no” because Buddha-nature is emptiness. Through “no” used as a standard, we understand emptiness, and through emptiness we understand “no.” Emptiness here differs from the emptiness of “form is emptiness.” “Form is emptiness” does not mean form is transformed into emptiness or that emptiness is transformed into form. This emptiness is that of emptiness is emptiness. Within this emptiness a solid rock is emptiness. Thus the Fourth and Fifth Patriarchs questioned

the existence of Buddha-nature, the emptiness of Buddha-nature, and the “is” and “is not” of Buddha-nature.

Once when the Sixth Patriarch of China, Zen Master Enō, was studying under the Fifth Patriarch Kōnin, he was asked “Where do you come from?” The Sixth Patriarch replied, “Renan.” Kōnin said, “Why have you come here?” Enō replied, “To become a Buddha.” Kōnin said, “People of Renan have no Buddha-nature. How do you expect to attain Buddhahood?”

Whether people of Renan have or do not have Buddha-nature is not the point here—it is simply “People from Renan have no Buddha-nature.”

“How do you expect to attain Buddhahood?” means “What kind of Buddha do you expect to become?” Generally speaking, few in the past have understood Buddha-nature. Certainly Hinayānists or scholars knew nothing about it. Only descendants of the Buddhas and Patriarchs receive and transmit it. Buddha-nature is actualized only after becoming a Buddha, not before. Actualization of Buddha-nature and attainment of Buddhahood occur simultaneously.

We must seek to clarify this principle—though to do so is not an easy matter. The ten saints and three sages failed altogether. While others have taken twenty or even thirty years to do so. We should know this. “Sentient beings possess Buddha-nature; Sentient beings do not possess Buddha-nature.” Realize, actualization of Buddha-nature and attainment of Buddhahood occur simultaneously. This is the Buddhist Dharma. Had this principle not been studied, the Dharma would not exist today. If we fail to clarify this principle we will neither clarify attainment of Buddhahood nor realize it. Thus the Fifth Patriarch said to the Sixth Patriarch “People of Renan have no Buddha-nature.”

“Sentient beings do not possess Buddha-nature.” To a man who has just encountered a Buddha and heard the Dharma for the first time, this is the most incomprehensible, most taxing statement of all. Later, whether through having followed a good master or through having studied the sutras, this statement is the most joy giving of all. If we do not totally feel the truth of “sentient beings do not possess Buddha-nature,” then we have not yet experienced Buddha-nature.

When the Sixth Patriarch, a sincere seeker of Buddhahood, met the Fifth Patriarch, the latter said, “People of Renan have no Buddha-nature.” He said nothing more than this and used no other method.

Thus we realize, the very questioning and studying of “no-Buddha-

