

Self-Realization (Self-Verification) Samadhi

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What has been authentically transmitted by all buddhas, including the Seven Original Buddhas, is self-realization samadhi. It calls for following a teacher and following a sutra. This is the eyeball of buddha ancestors.

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One time, Huineng, Old Buddha Caoxi, asked a monk, “Do you depend upon practice and realization?”

The monk replied, “It’s not that there is no practice and no realization. It’s just that it’s not possible to divide them.”

This being so, know that the undividedness of practice and realization is itself the buddha ancestors. It is the thunder storm of the buddha ancestors’ samadhi.

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At the very moment of following a teacher, you encounter with half a face or half a body. Or, you encounter with the entire face or the entire body. At times you encounter half a self and half an other. You realize a spirit’s hairy head, and practice a demon’s horned face. At times you follow others while traveling in the midst of different beings. At other times you travel differently while being born with those who have the same kind of birth.

In this way, you let go of the self for the sake of dharma without knowing how many thousands of times you do so. You seek dharma for the sake of the self without knowing in how many billions of eons you do so. This is the vital activity of following a teacher. This is the activity of practicing the self and following the self. In this way, at the time of winking [by the Buddha], there is smiling [by Mahakashyapa]; at the occasion of bowing to receive the marrow [as Huike did], there is cutting off an arm.

From the time before and after the Seven Original Buddhas to the time of Huineng, the Sixth Chinese Ancestor, teachers who saw through the self were not limited to one or two, and teachers who have seen through others are not limited to then or now.

When you follow a sutra, you thoroughly experience your skin, flesh, bones, and marrow. When you drop away your skin, flesh, bones, and marrow, all of a sudden the emergence of the eye of peach blossoms is encountered; the roaring sound of bamboo is heard in your ear consciousness.

When you follow and study a sutra, it emerges. A sutra means the entire world of the ten directions—mountains, rivers, the earth, grass, trees, self, and others. It is having a meal, putting on a robe, and engaging in activities. When you study the way, following a sutra, thousands and myriads of sutras that have never existed emerge and become present.

There are phrases that clearly affirm. There are verses that completely deny. By encountering these phrases and studying them with the entire body and mind, however long the eons you exhaust, and however long the eons you take up, there is always a place where you arrive with full mastery. By studying the letting go of body and mind, even if you pluck out the beginningless eon and fly beyond the beginningless eon, you will always achieve the experience of receiving and maintaining the sutra.

At the present time there are less than half a myriad of scrolls of scriptures translated from Sanskrit into Chinese. There are the Three Vehicles, the Five Vehicles, the Nine Divisions, and the Twelve Divisions among these scriptures. These are sutras to follow and study. Even if you try to avoid and not follow them, it will not be possible. This being so, they become the eye, and “my marrow.” Their heads are right. Their tails are right.

When you receive a sutra from someone and give it to someone else, it becomes the vital emergence of the eye, dropping away self and other. It is just the entrusting of “my marrow,” penetrating self and other. Because the eye, and “my marrow,” is not self and not other, buddha ancestors have authentically transmitted it since olden times and have entrusted it from right now to right now.

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There is a sutra of a walking stick, expounding vertically and horizontally, crushing emptiness and crushing existence. There is a sutra of a whisk, rinsing snow and rinsing frost. There is a sutra of zazen, in one assembly and two assemblies. There is a sutra of the kashaya in one scroll and ten wrappings. These have been protected and maintained by buddha ancestors. Following sutras in this way, you practice, realize, and attain the way. With a deva face, a human face, a sun face, or a moon face, you actualize the practice of following sutras.

Thus, both following a teacher and following a sutra are following the self. A sutra is no other than a sutra as the self. A teacher is invariably a teacher as the self. This being so, to visit teachers everywhere is to visit the self everywhere. To take up one hundred grasses is to take up the self. To take up myriad trees is to take up the self. Study the self that always endeavors thus. In this study, drop away, merge with, and realize the self.

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Thus, in the great way of buddha ancestors, there are the essentials of self-realization, and self-enlightenment. These cannot be authentically transmitted unless one is a direct successor of a buddha ancestor. The essentials transmitted from heir to heir cannot be authentically transmitted unless one is the bones and marrow of buddha ancestors. Because you study in this way, when this is transmitted to another, there is the entrusting of “You have attained my marrow,” “I have the treasury of the true dharma eye. I entrust it to Mahakashyapa.”

To speak to another [in this way] does not necessarily divide self and other. Speaking to another is self speaking to self. It is self and self, hearing and speaking together. One ear speaks and one ear hears. One tongue speaks and one tongue hears. Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, touch, mind, root, consciousness, and objects are all like this. Furthermore, one body and one mind realize and practice. This is the ear itself hearing and speaking, the tongue itself hearing and speaking.

Even if you spoke of the dharma of impermanence to others yesterday, you speak of the dharma of permanence to yourself today. Such a sun face continues, such a moon face continues. To speak of dharma and practice for others is to hear dharma, to clarify dharma, and to realize dharma, birth after birth. If you have a sincere heart in speaking of dharma to others in this birth, your attaining dharma is easy. Or, if you assist and support others hearing dharma, your study of dharma receives a wholesome message. You receive the message in your body and in your mind. On the other hand, if you obstruct others from hearing dharma, your hearing of dharma is obstructed.

To speak dharma and to hear dharma birth after birth means to hear dharma lifetime after lifetime. Further, it is to hear in this world the dharma you have authentically received from the past. Because you are born in dharma and die in dharma, if you authentically receive dharma in the entire world of the ten directions, you hear it birth after birth and practice it body after body. Because you actualize dharma birth after birth, and make body after body into dharma, you bring forth a single particle, as well as the entire world of phenomena, and help them to realize dharma.

This being so, if you hear a phrase from someone in a far-eastern region, speak it for another in a far-western region. Endeavor in hearing and speaking equally with a single self. Practice and verify an east self and a west self.

Rejoice, hope for, and have the aspiration for bringing buddha ancestors’ dharma, the ancestral way, closer to the body and mind of the self. Extend this practice from one hour to one day, then to one year and to one lifetime. Make buddha ancestors’ dharma essential spirit and play with it. This is to live your life meaningfully.

So, do not think that you should not speak of dharma to others until you master it. If you wait until you master it, it will not be possible for countless eons. Even if you have mastered human buddhas, you need to master celestial buddhas. Even if you have mastered the heart of mountains, you need to master the heart of waters. Even if you have mastered the dharma of birth with causation, you need to master the dharma of birth beyond causation. Even if you have mastered the realm of buddha ancestors, you need to master going beyond buddha ancestors. Trying to speak to others after mastering all of these in one lifetime is not an endeavor of a person, and it is not the study.

Studying the way of buddha ancestors is to raise the aspiration as high as heaven for speaking to others from the moment of studying one dharma and one procedure. Thus, you drop away [become free from] self and others. Further, studying yourself thoroughly is studying others thoroughly. Studying others thoroughly is studying yourself thoroughly.

This practice of buddha ancestors cannot be experienced with the body without receiving it from a teacher, even if you have knowledge by birth. Knowledge by birth does not know knowledge beyond birth, and beyond knowledge beyond birth. Even those who have knowledge by birth would not know the great way of buddha ancestors unless they study it.

To experience your self with the body and to experience others with the body is the great road of buddha ancestors. Just turn the study of your beginner's mind and study simultaneously with others' beginner's mind. When self and others study together with the beginner's mind, you arrive together at the ultimate realm. In this way, your own endeavor encourages the endeavor of others.

However, hearing the words "self-realization" and "self-enlightenment," foolish people think that this is to receive transmission without a teacher and that one only needs to study by oneself. This is a great mistake. Those who make a crooked interpretation of self-realization without receiving instructions from a teacher are the same as those outside the way in India who believed in spontaneous enlightenment. How can those who do not understand this be considered practitioners of the buddha way?

Furthermore, those who hear the words "self-realization" and assume that this is the accumulation of the five skandhas, are simply abiding in the practice of "self control" in the Lesser Vehicles. There are many of those who do not understand the Great and Lesser Vehicles who call themselves descendants of buddha ancestors. Who with clear eyes would be fooled by them?

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In the Shaoxing Era [1131-1162] of Great Song China, there was someone called Zonggao, Zen Master Dahui, of Mt. Jin. He was originally a student of scriptures and treatises. While wandering [in search of a master], he studied Yunmen's commentaries on ancient words, and Xuedou's commentaries and verses on ancient words, under Shaoli, a Zen master of Xuan Province. This was the beginning of his practice and study. He could not understand Yunmen's style, and went to study with Daowei of Mt. Dong, who did not allow him into his inner chamber. Daowei, a dharma child of Furong, cannot be viewed shoulder to shoulder with ordinary people who sit in lower positions. Although Zonggao studied with Daowei for a fair amount of time, he could not touch upon Daowei's skin, flesh, bones, and marrow. Furthermore, he was not aware that there is an eye in the midst of the objects of the senses.

One day, Zonggao heard about the practice of burning incense on one's elbow [to show determination] upon receiving a document of heritage. He kept asking Daowei to transmit a document of heritage to him. But Daowei would not do so. He said, "If you want to receive transmission of dharma, you should endeavor wholeheartedly and not be hasty. Buddha ancestors have not received and transmitted dharma groundlessly. It is not that I spare transmission, but that you do not yet have the eye."

Zonggao said, "The true eye one originally has is self-realization, self-enlightenment. How is it possible to transmit dharma groundlessly?"

Daowei just smiled and was silent.

Later, Zonggao studied with Zhantang Wenzhun [of Mt. Baofeng]. One day Zhantang asked him, "How come one of your nostrils is missing today?"

Zonggao said, "It is studying at Mt. Baofeng."

Zhantang said, "A coarse Zen student."

Later, when Zonggao was reading a sutra, Zhantang asked, “What sutra are you reading?”

Zonggao said, “The *Diamond Sutra*.”

Zhantang said, “Dharma is equal with nothing high and nothing low. How come Mt. Yunju is high and Mt. Baofeng is low?”

Zonggao said, “Dharma is equal with nothing high and nothing low.”

Zhantang said, “You have become a lecturer.”

Another day, seeing the images of the Ten Kings [of Hell] being decorated, Zhantang asked senior monk Zonggao, “What is the family name of these officials?”

Zonggao said, “Liang.”

Zhantang rubbed his head and said, “My family name is also Liang. How come I am not wearing a head dress?”

Zonggao said, “You are not wearing a head dress but your nostrils look like theirs.”

Zhantang said, “A coarse Zen student.”

Another day, Zhantang said to Zonggao, “Senior Monk Gao, you have understood Zen in my place all at once. When I ask you to speak, you speak. When I ask you to practice, you practice. When I ask you to make a commentary, make a verse commentary, give an unscheduled talk, give a talk to the assembly, or ask questions, you can do any of those things. But there is one thing missing. Do you know what it is?”

Zonggao asked, “What is missing?”

Zhantang said, “You don’t understanding this one point. Indeed, this is the point you don’t understand: When I am at the abbot’s quarters and speak to you, there is Zen. But as soon as you step out of the abbot’s quarters, it disappears. When you are clearly thinking, there is Zen. But when you are asleep, it disappears. If so, how can you grab hold of birth and death?”

Zonggao said, “That is exactly what I am questioning.”

Some years later, Zhantang showed a sign of illness.

Zonggao said, “After your death, whose help should I get to complete my clarifying the great matter?”

Zhantang said, “There is someone called Qinbazi [Keqin of Ba Region]. I haven’t met him. But if you meet him, you will certainly complete your study. After meeting him, do not wander around any more. You will certainly bring out the fruition of your study.”

When we examine these stories, Zhantang did not approve Zonggao yet. Although Zonggao often tried to open up for one phrase of enlightenment, he was lacking a single experience. He could not take hold of or drop away from this single experience. Earlier, Daowei did not give Zonggao a document of heritage and encouraged him to try harder. Daowei’s observation of his student was clear and trustworthy.

Indeed, Zonggao did not thoroughly study, drop away, and crush the point of doubt. He did not have a great doubt. He was not immersed in doubt. His request for transmitting a document of heritage groundlessly was a coarse action—an extreme example of having no aspiration for the way, not following the authentic procedure. It was a lack of deep consideration. He was not a vessel of the way and was completely ignorant of the study. He tried to invade the inner chamber of buddha ancestors with the intention of grabbing fame and loving benefit. How pitiful that he did not understand the phrases of buddha ancestors!

Because Zonggao did not understand that learning from the ancients is self-realization, and he did not hear and study that to examine myriad generations is self-enlightenment, he made such a mistake and had such self-delusion. Thus, among students of Zonggao, there is not one or even half a person who is truly worth grabbing by the nose. Many of them are expedient teachers. They do not understand buddha ancestors’ dharma and do not go beyond understanding buddha ancestors’ dharma in this way. Monks nowadays should study this in detail without neglect.

After Zhantang passed away, Zonggao followed his recommendation and went to study with Keqin, Zen Master Yuanwu of the Tianning Monastery in Jingshi. One day, Yuanwu ascended the teaching seat. Zonggao said he had a divine enlightenment and presented it to Yuanwu.

Yuanwu said, “Not yet. You understand in this way, but you haven’t clarified the great matter.”

Another day, Yuanwu ascended the teaching seat and explained Wuzu Fayan’s words “having a phrase” and “having no phrase.” Hearing this, Zonggao immediately said that he had attained the dharma of great ease and bliss, and presented his understanding.

Yuanwu said, “I do not want to fool you.”

These are stories of Zonggao studying with Yuanwu. He served as secretary in Yuanwu’s community. But from beginning to end, he did not seem to have a unique point of understanding. He did not show any point of understanding in his own lectures or talks. Know that the recorder of his words mentioned that he had had divine enlightenment or dharma of great ease and bliss, but did not admit that he had actually had realization. Do not take him seriously. He was merely a student.

Yuanwu was an old buddha, most revered in the ten directions. After Huangbo there had not been a venerable teacher like Yuanwu. He was an old buddha, rare in any world. But few humans and devas in this Saha land know this. It is pitiable. If we take up Yuanwu’s words and examine senior monk Zonggao, we see that he did not have wisdom close to that of his teacher and he did not have wisdom equal to his teacher. Furthermore, it seems that he had never dreamed of wisdom beyond his teacher. Thus, know that Zonggao had less than half the capacity of his teacher. He only memorized lines from the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and the *Shurangama Sutra* and spoke about them. He was not yet the bones and marrow of buddha ancestors.

Zonggao regarded the views expressed by various hermits who follow the spirits abiding in grass and trees as buddha ancestors’ dharma. Because he thought in this way, we know that he had not thoroughly studied the great road of buddha ancestors. After studying with Yuanwu, Zonggao did not wander around and visit teachers. Groundlessly, he became the abbot of a large monastery and lead monks. The words he left cannot come close to great dharma.

However, ignorant people think that Zonggao was not less than earlier masters. But those who see and know agree that he did not have clear understanding. Without clarifying the great dharma, he merely chattered groundlessly. We know that Daowei did not make the mistake of acknowledging him and thus became an example for later generations. Students of Zonggao still resent Daowei. But Daowei just did not accept his understanding. Even further, Zhantang did not accept his understanding. Whenever Zhantang saw Zonggao, he scolded him. How shameful it is that those in the past and present have resented Zhantang for that!

There are a number of people in Great Song China who call themselves descendants of buddha ancestors. But there are few who study the truth, and there are few who teach the truth. This can be understood through these stories. It was like this in the Shaoxing Era. It is worse nowadays. These times cannot be compared. Today, those who do not know the great way of buddha ancestors have become leaders of monks.

Know that the Qingyuan Line has the authentic transmission of a document of heritage through buddhas and ancestors in both India and China. From the Qingyuan Line, the Dongshan Line started. The rest of the world has not seen it. All those who have this realization are descendants of Dongshan, and are highly regarded among monks.

Zonggao did not understand the words “self-realization,” and “self-enlightenment” when he was alive. Then, how could he have examined other cases thoroughly? Even more so, how can descendants of old Zonggao understand the words “self-enlightenment”?

Thus, in the words of buddha ancestors, for themselves and for others, there is always the body-mind of buddha ancestors, and the eye of buddha ancestors. Because these words [“self-realization” and “self-enlightenment”] are the bones and marrow of buddha ancestors, their skin cannot be grasped by mediocre people.

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