

True aspiration for enlightenment is development of the mind that has faith in supreme enlightenment. Inherent in everyone, supreme enlightenment is eternal and unchanging. To believe in this is called true aspiration for enlightenment. A scripture says, "From the moment of their first inspiration, enlightening beings only seek enlightenment, with unwavering steadfastness." Even if you believe in inherent enlightenment, if you only believe and have no inner communion with it, this is not yet actually the true aspiration for enlightenment. The belief or faith that characterizes the true aspiration is not reposed in a dogma or in an external object; in essence, it is the orientation referred to in the scripture as only seeking enlightenment. This means passing through worldly states without clinging; it also means passing through spiritual states without taking them to be final or absolute. This progress can only be maintained with an inner sense of the transcendence of enlightenment over lesser goals, coupled with an inner sense of the immanence of this enlightenment in the mind. This fertile union of inner sense is called true aspiration for enlightenment. Aspiration that is only in the realm of belief, without this inner communion, is what scripture refers to when it says, "This aspiration for enlightenment arises and passes away, is transient; it is not the permanent, indestructible essence of enlightenment." The aspiration for enlightenment that is an inherent property of every human mind is referred to in scripture by the saying, "In supreme enlightenment there is no past regression, no present regression, no future regression." The Great Sun Scripture says, "What is enlightenment? It is to know your own mind as it really is." A commentary says, "If the mind itself is enlightenment, why do people not become enlightened? Because they do not know the mind as it really is. If they knew the mind as it really is, they would become truly awakened at the moment of their initial inspiration." If people who are not yet in communion with the inherent mind of enlightenment consider relentless devotion to religious practice to be evidence of firmness of will for enlightenment and power in practice, they will certainly become obsessed because of their pride. Then again, there is also the anxiety that if this determination weakens and they are distracted by worldly conditions, then they will not attain salvation. Thus inherent enlightenment becomes increasingly obstructed and obscured by this pride and this fear. When beginning practitioners get into such a frame of mind, if they realize that these erroneous ideas have arisen because they are not yet in harmony with the transcendental path, and if they lay it all aside to look directly into their minds, they will eventually reach accord. A scripture says, "If people seek enlightenment, they have no enlightenment. To envision enlightenment in some form is to become alienated from enlightenment." (p. 32-24)

Not seeking anything is still not considered ultimate. Not seeking what you think is there is a doorway to finding out what actually is there, beyond your imagination. Only finding, without seeking, is called meeting the source everywhere. Keeping in touch with the source in this way is the essence of the fourth practice taught by the Zen founder. This practice, known as accord with reality, is still in the realm of achievement and is not what Zen literature refers to as the great rest. (p.35-36)

Even those who have set aside all judgments of right and wrong and do not view people in terms of self and other cannot be said to be truly on the Way as long as they have not seen the original state before personal history. A way to see this original state is to turn the attention inward: What is it that distinguishes and defines self and others, body and mind? What is it that thinks of right and wrong and gain and loss? (p.41)

People meditating on the fundamental carry out their ordinary tasks and activities in the midst of meditation and carry out meditation in the midst of ordinary tasks and activities. There is no disparity between meditation and activity.

It is for those as yet incapable of this, those weak in focusing their intent on the Way, that special meditation periods were set up. The practice of meditating four times a day in Zen communities began in this manner during the twelfth century.

In ancient times, Zen mendicants meditated twenty-four hours a day. In later times, however, there were those who became monks to avoid the trouble of making a living in the ordinary world. Their appetites distracted them from Buddhism, and when they participated in rituals their attention was taken away from the fundamental. Since these and other things inhibited them from work on the fundamental, they would have wasted their lives had not some other expedient been devised. This expedient was the rule of four daily periods of sitting meditation. (p.53)

An ancient master said, “The mountains, the rivers, the whole earth, the entire array of phenomena are all oneself.” If you can absorb the essence of this message, there are no activities outside of meditation: you dress in meditation and eat in meditation; you walk, stand, sit, and lie down in meditation; you perceive and cognize in meditation; you experience joy, anger, sadness, and happiness in meditation. Yet even this is still in the sphere of accomplishment and is not true merging with the source of Zen. (p.54)

To think that Zen practice means abandoning all understanding is a big mistake. As an ancient said, “It cannot be sought consciously, yet cannot be found in unconsciousness; it cannot be reached by words, yet cannot be comprehended by silence.” (p. 60)

The fundamental ground is a term provisionally applied to the point where illusion and enlightenment are as yet undifferentiated, to which no worldly names or descriptions apply, and which even transmudane teachings do not reach. This state is also called the one great matter, the original face, and the master within. These are just provisional names, set up to induce confused people to see the reality. (p. 60)

Once you realize the fundamental ground, however, then the Buddha nature, the ground of mind, the matrix of realization of thusness, true suchness, the nature of reality and even the objects seen by ordinary people, all become the fundamental ground. (p. 61)

An ancient said, “It is always there, right where you are; if you seek it, obviously you do not see it.” The fundamental ground is not inside the body and mind, nor is it outside the body and mind. Nor can it be said that the total body-mind is the fundamental ground. It is not in the categories of sentience or insentience, it is not the knowledge of Buddhas and saints. The knowledge of Buddhas and saints, as well as the bodies and minds of sentient beings and even their worlds and lands, all come from this; that is why it is provisionally called the fundamental ground. The Diamond Sutra says, “The Buddhas and the Buddhas’ teaching of supreme perfect enlightenment all come from this ‘scripture.’ ” This adamant insight is the fundamental ground. The Complete Enlightenment Sutra says, “All pure suchness, enlightenment, nirvana, and the transcendent ways flow forth from complete awareness.” This complete awareness is the fundamental ground. (p. 61-62)

The Heroic Progress Sutra says, “The subtle essence is complete clarity beyond all name or description. Originally there are no worlds, no sentient beings.” All the Universalist Buddhist scriptures speak in this vein; why disbelieve in this and instead wear out your body and mind in external seeking? (p.64)

In The Sutra Spoken by Vimalakirti, it says, “Do not use the fluctuating mind to discuss the characteristics of reality.” If people talk about the meaning of the real character of things without changing their conventional views, it is all sophistry. This is what is meant by the saying, “If the wrong person preaches a right teaching, even a right teaching becomes wrong. If the right person expounds a wrong teaching, even a wrong teaching becomes right.” (p. 76)

Fire produced in the world, by means such as drilling wood or striking sparks from stone, is conditioned fire. This fire is insubstantial; it cannot burn without fuel of some kind. When the proper conditions are present, such as fuel, the fire temporarily appears; therefore it is said to be insubstantial. In all the Buddhist scriptures, exoteric and esoteric, it is unanimously stated that conditionally produced phenomena have no real substantiality. As for essential fire, it pervades the cosmos, neither burning nor going out. Ordinary people see only conditional fire and do not know essential fire. If you know essential fire, you do not have to reject conditional fire, because conditional fire is a function of essential fire. (p. 78)

When the insightful understanding of Buddhism is opened up, the features of the world are all Buddhist teachings. As long as you have not escaped mundane sentiments, even what you have understood as the profoundest of subtle principles is also a worldly thing. (p.84)