



7 No Enlightenment, No Words of Teaching

“Subhuti, what do you think? Has the Tathagata attained the Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment? Has the Tathagata a teaching to enunciate?”

Subhuti answered, “As I understand Buddha’s meaning, there is no formulation of truth called Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment. Moreover, the Tathagata has no formulated teaching to enunciate. Wherefore? Because the Tathagata has said that truth is uncontainable and inexpressible. It neither is nor is not, neither anything or nothing. Thus it is that this unformulated Principle is the foundation of the different systems of all the sages.”

Buddha now asks Subhuti two questions. First, is there any enlightenment that may be reached, and does Buddha teach anything at all?

Subhuti says that as far as he has understood the Buddha’s words, there cannot possibly be any enlightenment that can be reached by anyone, and it would be equally impossible for there to be any Dharma that Buddha could ever teach.

The reason for this, says Subhuti, is because beings who truly are enlightened understand all these things as being unborn, therefore it is not possible to say that they either exist or do not exist. Buddha’s words are in accordance with the view that all things proceed from, and return to emptiness.

Therefore all things are one with emptiness.

Nirvana or enlightenment is not somewhere we go to or something that we achieve. It is not something we can grasp and keep for ourselves. It is not a destination or a final resting place. The idea of enlightenment is a concept, a thing, and as the Lord is now repeatedly telling Subhuti, all things are illusory.

Words are form, so their existence is transitory and unreal. Since all form is also emptiness, we may say that Buddha never uttered a word, even though he taught for forty nine years.

There was a man who had reached mid-life and was feeling disillusioned and depressed. To ease his depression he began taking long walks. On such a walk he became aware of a bell ringing. Attracted by the sound of the bell, he walked towards it.

He came to a temple where a woman was praying before a statue of Buddha. As he watched, he became entranced by her apparent devotion and found that it had a calming effect on him. In the following weeks the man came often to the temple and discovered that the woman was a regular visitor. Whenever he watched her, he felt at peace and became convinced that she was a Bodhisattva who had appeared solely for his benefit.

One day his peace was disturbed by a man on a bicycle who carried a bucket of ice cream which was obviously for sale. The watching man became aware of a group of children surrounding the salesman, clamouring for ice cream. One of the children, a boy, perhaps the son of the praying woman, ran to her and pulled at her sleeve. At first she ignored the boy, but when he became more insistent she told him sharply to go away.

"I want ice cream money!" shouted the boy. "Get away from me, can't you see I'm praying!" said the woman.

"I need money now!"

"Respect my praying and be patient!"

"But the man will be gone!"

The man watching understood that the woman was interested only in her own wishes being fulfilled, as was the boy. Furious, the woman struck out at the boy, who ran away from her. She ran after him and as she did so, she cursed him loudly. The boy stumbled across a road and was struck and killed by a vehicle.

The man had run to help, but saw that it was too late.

"My curse came true!" cried the now grief-stricken woman. "You wanted him dead," said the man, "And it happened." "But I didn't really mean it," she wept.

And yet she cursed him. She didn't really want him dead, but she did want her prayers answered. Now she grieves, her behaviour has led to suffering.

We cling to our own desires. The wisdom she needed was within her, it didn't reside in a statue. She wanted Buddha to grant her wishes, like a god.

She clung to prayer, not knowing that Buddha is within, so she refused the boy with tragic results.

Though not truly a Bodhisattva, it is as a Bodhisattva that she functions to this man, because she helps him to understand that clinging (even the clinging to Buddha) and ignorance are one, but the woman, despite her grief and deep remorse remained unawakened to this fact.

Clinging to words is clinging to something that is transitory and unreal as well.

A nun brought a Sutra to the sixth Patriarch and asked him to explain its meaning to her.

"Then first," said Hui Neng, "You will have to read it to me."

Realising that the master was illiterate, the nun was shocked.

*"If you cannot read, how can you possibly understand the Sutra?" she asked.
"The essence of Buddhism is not to be found in words," replied Hui Neng.*

Clinging and ignorance are one, including clinging to Buddha, and they lead us to suffering and regret. To live in the now moment is to be free of all this.

A king asked a Zen master: "Sakyamuni spent six years under the snowy mountain. What was Sakyamuni's attainment?"

The master said: "Have you forgotten, your Majesty?"

Attainment is living with the true nature, thus it is called non-attainment, though we call it attainment.

Annutara Samyak Sambodhi is living with the true nature.

But if you cling to your attainment, you attain nothing as you are clinging to the ego – the "me" who attains.

There is a shore, but it is no-shore. Just as we drop the raft once the stream is crossed, so we drop the idea of a shore.

