

SHUKKE

“Home Departure”

The *Ch'an yüan ch'ing kuei*¹ says, “All the Buddhas of the past, future, and present have taught home departure and achievement of the Way. All the twenty-eight Indian patriarchs and the six Chinese patriarchs who have transmitted the seal of the Buddha mind were *śramanas*. All who left the home life were afterwards able to become the teachers of the three worlds because they upheld the moral precepts (*śīla*) of the Buddha Way. Consequently, when you practice Zen and seek the true teacher, you should give priority to the observance of these precepts. If you do not free yourselves from worldly delusion and dissociate yourselves from evil acts by upholding the pure precepts of the Buddha Way, there is no way for you to ever become a Buddha or patriarchal teacher. You must receive the precepts (*jukai*).”

“In order to receive the precepts of home departure, you must supply yourselves with the three robes, bowl, eating utensils, cushion, and new underclothes. If you do not have new underclothes, you may use some that have been washed, but when you enter the place where you are going to receive the precepts, you must not use someone else's robes and bowl. Concentrate single-mindedly on the Buddha Way, be modest in mind and body, model yourself on the Buddha, unite the precepts to your own mind and body, and make the Buddha mind your own mind. This is very important in the life of home departure, so do not neglect it. If you just borrow robes and bowl and go where the precepts are given, it will be as if you had not received them. If you do not receive the precepts by following these regulations, you are probably the kind of person who will not be able to receive the precepts in this life. By entering the Dharma gate carelessly, you become the kind of person who received the offering of the faithful in vain. When you are introduced to the Way for the first time and still do not understand the precepts, then if your teacher does not teach them to you, he is leading you down the wrong path. Therefore, I am now giving you this frank advice. I hope very much that you will engrave it on your hearts and never forget it. If you receive the precepts of the *śrāvakas* of the small vehicle, you should next be diligent about receiving the bodhisattva precepts, because this is the proper sequence of entering the door of the Dharma.”

Clearly understand that the achievement of the Way by all the Buddhas and patriarchs was only through home departure and receiving the precepts. The life pulse of the Buddhas and patriarchs is only home departure and receiving the precepts. If you still have not made your home departure, neither are you a Buddha patriarch. Seeing the Buddha, seeing the patriarchs, is making your home departure and receiving the precepts.

Mahākāśyapa² left the home life to follow the Buddha in his wish to be freed of all defilements. The Buddha said to him, “Welcome, monk,” and his hair and beard spontaneously fell to the ground and his body was spontaneously covered with monks' robes. It is clear from the traces we have of all the Buddhas that all who practiced the Way and freed themselves from defilements have made their home departure and received the precepts.

According to the third volume of the *Large Sutra on the Perfection of Wisdom*,³ the Buddha, the World-Honored One, said, “If a bodhisattva, a great being, thinks, ‘Someday I will surely abandon the ranks of the court and leave the home life, and on that day I will attain supreme bodhi. Also, on that day, when I leave the home life, I will turn the wonderful wheel of the Dharma and cause countless, numberless beings to abandon wickedness and delusion and produce the pure Dharma vision. Then I will cause them to exterminate their impurities forever and become wise and emancipated. Moreover, I will cause them to become irreversible in supreme bodhi,’ then this bodhisattva who desires to accomplish such a thing should extensively study the [*Sutra on the*] *Perfection of Wisdom*.”

Supreme enlightenment is acquired on the day one leaves the home life and receives the precepts. If there is no day of home departure, there is no day of supreme enlightenment. Thus, the dawning of the day of your home departure is the dawning of the day when you achieve supreme bodhi, and the dawning of the day when you achieve supreme bodhi is the dawning of the day of your home departure. This is the day when your layman's body, just as it is, is transformed into a Buddha's body, and you attain supreme bodhi and preach the Dharma for the sake of all beings. Your home departure itself causes many living beings to enter the Buddha Way. It is the practice of self-benefit and benefit to others which causes them to experience supreme bodhi and acquire irreversibility.

You should understand that when you have perfected this self-benefit and benefit to others, this is itself the seeking of supreme bodhi and becoming irreversible, and this immovability is nothing other than leaving the home life and receiving the precepts. Attaining supreme bodhi enlightens us to the fact that the day of home departure is the day of supreme bodhi. What you should understand correctly is that the day of home departure is the day when the opposition between bodhi and the first thought of enlightenment is transcended. This absolute time is the time of liberation. The day of home departure is the day when you know from inner experience that the time of three incalculable eons is the eternal now of the day of home departure. This day of home departure contains within itself the time when you dwell in the boundless oceans of the eons and teach the Dharma to all beings. The time of home departure is not a small period of time, such as that required for eating a meal, nor is it the unthinkable time of sixty small eons; it is time which transcends time. It is time which freed the Buddha's topknot. The day of home departure even transcends the day of home departure. The day of home departure is truly the day of home departure when you have overcome attachment and reached the state of dropping off mind and body. The day of achieving the Way is the day of achieving the Way; that is, the day of home departure is the day when you achieve the Way, and the day when you achieve the Way is the day of home departure.

The following is recorded in the thirteenth volume of the *Ta chih tu lun*:⁴ "When the Blessed One was staying in the Jetavana Grove, a drunken Brahmin came to the Buddha and said that he wanted to leave the home life. At this, the Buddha had some monks shave off his hair and dress him in the robes of a monk. The Brahmin sobered up and was surprised to discover his altered appearance, and he left. Some monks then asked the Buddha why he had allowed the Brahmin to leave the home life. The Buddha replied, 'Never in all the ages up to now has that Brahmin ever thought of home departure. Now while he was drunk, it was a small matter for him to think that he wanted to leave the home life, but because this happened, in a later time he will really leave the home life.' "Thus, there are various conditions for home departure. It is better to break the precepts as one who has left the home life than to observe them as a householder, because a householder cannot be liberated by the precepts. You should understand the truth of the Buddha's words. The fundamental requirement of the Way is home departure. He who has not yet left the home life cannot acquire the Buddha Dharma. When the Buddha was still in the world, various non-believers had already given up their wicked ways through their own faith, but when they took refuge in the Buddha Dharma, they necessarily asked for home departure and the precepts.

Sometimes the Blessed One himself says in a friendly manner, "Welcome, monk," and thereby acknowledges home departure, and sometimes he gathers monks about him and has them shave their hair and beards and thus leave the home life and receive the precepts. In both cases, the Dharma of home departure and receiving the precepts is fulfilled in the minds and bodies of these people. You should understand how great are the merits of home departure and receiving the precepts. When the Buddha's efforts flood the minds and bodies of these people, their hair falls spontaneously to the ground and the kesa covers their bodies. If the Buddha does not acknowledge home departure, their hair is not shaved and the kesa does not cover the body. This means that the person has not yet

received the Buddha's precepts. This being so, home departure and receiving the precepts is the new prediction of all Buddha Tathagatas that Buddhahood is certain.

Śākyamuni Buddha said, "Sons of good family, the Tathagata perceives that those who practice the Dharma in the small vehicle are slight of merit and laden with impurities, and it is for their sake that I left the home life and attained supreme bodhi when I was young. However, in truth, my experience of bodhi really occurred many, many ages ago. Now, in the present time, I exercise skillful means in order to educate beings and cause them to enter the Dharma, and so I say this. Although I experienced bodhi long, long ago, I say that I left the home life when young. 'I attained supreme bodhi' means 'I made my home departure when young.' When I departed the home life when young, beings who followed the small vehicle and whose merits were few and whose impurities were many left the home life with me when I was young. When I experienced the Dharma teaching of 'home departure when I was young,' I experienced the Buddha's enlightenment. So, in order to aid beings who delight in the Dharma of the small vehicle, I say that I left the home life when young and experienced supreme enlightenment." This may be so, but it still may be asked what the merits of home departure are. The answer is that the merits of home departure are countless and unlimited.

NOTES

1. The *Ch'an yüan ch'ing kuei* is a well known list of monastic regulations of Chinese origin (*ch'ing kuei* are monastic regulations, which the Japanese call *shingi*), and is one of several such documents. *Ch'ing kuei* give detailed instructions for the living of the monastic life, including eating, bathing, interrelations between superiors and inferiors, use of the toilets and libraries, and so on. This *ch'ing kuei* was brought to Japan by Dōgen. It is said to be related in spirit to the *Pai-chang ch'ing kuei*, the first of its kind in Chinese Zen.
2. Mahākāśyapa was the spiritual successor of Śākyamuni, according to the Zen lineage charts.
3. *The Large Sutra on the Perfection of Wisdom* is the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā prajñāpāramit* sūtra, the best known of the longer versions of this literature.
4. A lengthy commentary on the above sutra, ascribed to Nāgārjuna but suspected to have been composed by its supposed translator into Chinese, Kumārajīva.

Eihei Dōgen, "Shukke, Home Departure" in Francis Dōjun Cook, Tr., *How to Raise an Ox*, Zen Center of Los Angeles, ©1978, pp 127 - 132