

II

REFRAIN FROM UNWHOLESOME ACTION

ANCIENT BUDDHAS SAY:

Refrain from unwholesome action.

Do wholesome action.

Purify your own mind.

This is the teaching of all buddhas.

This teaching has been authentically transmitted from earlier buddhas to later buddhas of the future as the Seven Original Buddhas' general precepts in the ancestral school. Later buddhas received these precepts from earlier buddhas. This teaching is not limited to the Seven Original Buddhas; it is the teaching of all buddhas. Thoroughly investigate this point.

This dharma way of the Seven Original Buddhas is always the dharma way of the Seven Original Buddhas. Transmitting and receiving these precepts is a mutual activity. This is the teaching of all buddhas—the teaching, practice, and enlightenment of hundreds, thousands, and myriads of buddhas.

Unwholesome action is [the manifestation of] one of the three natures: the wholesome action nature, the unwholesome action nature, and the neutral nature. The unwholesome action nature is unborn, just as the wholesome action nature and neutral nature are unborn. These three natures are also nondefiled and are reality. However, these three natures are manifested in various ways.

As for unwholesome action, unwholesome action in this world and unwholesome action in other worlds are sometimes the same and sometimes different. Unwholesome action in former times and unwholesome action in the present time are sometimes the same and sometimes different. Unwholesome action in the deva world and unwholesome action in the human world are sometimes the same and sometimes different. Furthermore, there is a great difference between the buddha way and the worldly realm in what is called unwholesome action, wholesome action, or neutral action. Wholesome action and unwholesome action are time, although time is neither wholesome action nor unwholesome action. Wholesome action and unwholesome action are dharma, although dharma is neither wholesome action nor unwholesome action. As dharma is all-inclusive, unwholesome action is all-inclusive. As dharma is all-inclusive, wholesome action is all-inclusive.

When you listen, study, practice, and realize unsurpassable, complete enlightenment, it is deep, vast, and wondrous. You learn this unsurpassable enlightenment either by following a teacher or by following a sutra. First you understand it as *refrain from unwholesome action*. If you do not understand it as *refrain from unwholesome action*, it is not true buddha dharma, but the speech of demons. Know that to understand unsurpassable enlightenment as *refrain from unwholesome action* is the true buddha dharma.

Refrain from unwholesome action. This is not what ordinary people first interpret it to mean, although it may sound like it when we hear enlightenment expounded as a teaching of enlightenment. We understand in this way because it is an expression of unsurpassable enlightenment. It is words of enlightenment, therefore it is spoken enlightenment. Moved by what is spoken and heard—unsurpassable enlightenment—you vow to refrain from unwholesome action and practice refraining from unwholesome action.

When you refrain from unwholesome action, the power of practice

is immediately actualized. This is actualized on the scale of the entire earth, the entire universe, all time, and all dharmas. This is the scale of *refrain from*.

This very person at this very moment abides in the place, comes from it, and goes to it, where no unwholesome action is created. No unwholesome action is created, although the person appears to be faced with the conditions of creating unwholesome action or of associating with those who create unwholesome action.

When the power of *refrain from* is actualized, unwholesome action does not manifest as unwholesome action. Unwholesome action has no fixed form. You can pick it up or let it go. At the moment we understand this, we know that unwholesome action does not overcome a person and a person does not destroy unwholesome action.

When you arouse your entire mind and let it practice, and when you arouse your entire body and let it practice, eight or nine out of ten are accomplished before questioning, and *refrain from unwholesome action* is actualized after knowing. When you bring forth your body-mind and practice, and when you bring forth the body-mind and practice of others, the power of practice with the four elements and the five skandhas is immediately actualized. Without defiling the self of the four elements and the five skandhas, the four elements and the five skandhas of today are practiced. The power of the four elements and the five skandhas practiced at this moment actualizes the practice of the four elements and the five skandhas in the past.

When you move mountains, rivers, and earth, as well as the sun, the moon, and stars to practice, they in return move you to practice. This is not the open eye of just one time, but the vital eye of all times. Because it is all the open eye, the vital eye of all times, you move all buddhas and all ancestors to practice, to listen to the teaching, and to realize the fruit.

Since all buddhas and ancestors have not allowed the teaching, practice, and enlightenment to be divided, the teaching, practice, and enlightenment have not hindered all buddhas and ancestors. For this reason, when you move buddhas and ancestors to practice, none of them are separated from before or after your realization, either in the past, present, or future. At the time when sentient beings become buddhas

and ancestors, they become buddhas and ancestors without hindering the buddhas and ancestors who already exist. Ponder this point closely while walking, abiding, sitting, and lying down throughout the twelve hours of the day. It is not that a sentient being is destroyed, taken away, or lost by becoming a buddha ancestor, but a sentient being is dropped away.

You allow the cause and effect of wholesome and unwholesome actions to practice. It is not that you put cause and effect into action or that you create cause and effect, but cause and effect at times allow you to practice.

The original face of cause and effect is already clear. Because this is dropping away, it is *refrain from*, unborn, impermanent, not ignoring, and not dropping.

When you study in this way, you realize that unwholesome action is none other than *refrained from*. Assisted by this realization, you see through, and by sitting you cut through refraining from unwholesome action.

At the beginning, middle, and end, as refraining from unwholesome action is actualized, then unwholesome action does not arise through causes and conditions. It is just *refrain from*. Unwholesome action does not cease through causes and conditions. It is just *refrain from*. As unwholesome action is all-inclusive, all dharmas are all-inclusive.

Those who only know that unwholesome action arises through causes and conditions and do not see that causes and conditions themselves are *refrain from* should be pitied. Because buddha seeds come forth through conditions, conditions come forth through buddha seeds.

It is not that unwholesome action does not exist, but it is just *refrain from*. It is not that unwholesome action does exist, it is just *refrain from*. Unwholesome action is not emptiness, but it is just *refrain from*. Unwholesome action is not form, but it is just *refrain from*.

Unwholesome action is not *refrain from*, it is just *refrain from*. For example, a spring pine is neither nonexistent nor existent. It is *refrain from*. Autumn chrysanthemum is neither nonexistent nor existent. It is *refrain from*. All buddhas are neither nonexistent nor existent. They are *refrain from*. Pillars, lanterns, whisk, and staff are neither existent nor nonexistent. They are *refrain from*. Self is neither existent nor nonexistent. It is *refrain from*.

Studying in this way actualizes the fundamental point. The fundamental point is actualized. Investigate this through host [self] and investigate this through guest [other].

Since this is so, regretting that you have created what should not be created is also inevitably the practice of *refrain from*. Nevertheless, intending to create unwholesome action just because you hear that unwholesome action is *refrain from* is just like walking north to try to get to the southern county of Yue.

Refrain from and *unwholesome action* are not only “the well seeing the donkey,” but also the well seeing the well [inseparable from each other], the donkey seeing the donkey, the person seeing the person, the mountain seeing the mountain. Just as we speak in this way, *unwholesome action* is *refrain from*.

It is said, “Buddha’s true dharma body is like the empty sky. It manifests forms responding to conditions just like the moon reflected in the water.” Because it is *refrain from* that responds to things, it is *refrain from* that manifests forms. It is just like emptiness that claps toward the left and toward the right [without hindrance], like the moon reflected in water. The moon is fully immersed in the water. In this way *refrain from* is actualized without doubt.

Do wholesome action. This wholesome action is [manifestation of] one of the three natures. Although there are many varieties of wholesome action, there is no wholesome action that is already actualized and waiting for someone to practice it. At the very moment of doing wholesome action, there is no wholesome action that does not come forth.

Although myriads of wholesome actions are formless, they arrive at the place where wholesome action is done faster than a magnet drawing iron. Its power is stronger than a vairambhaka storm. The great earth, mountains, rivers, the lands of the world, or the increasing effect of action cannot hinder the intentional encounter of wholesome action.

However, there is a principle that views of wholesome action vary in the world. The views define what is wholesome action. It is just the same as all buddhas in the past, present, and future expounding dharma. Buddhas expounding dharma while they are in the world is just time. They expound nondiscriminating dharma according to their life spans and the dimensions of their bodies.

This being so, wholesome action by a person who practices trust is far different from wholesome action by a person who practices dharma. Nevertheless, they are not two separate dharmas. It is like a shramana's keeping the precepts and a bodhisattva's breaking the precepts.

Wholesome action does not arise due to causes and conditions, nor does it cease due to causes and conditions. Although wholesome action is all phenomena, all phenomena are not wholesome action. Causes and conditions, as well as wholesome actions, equally begin in completeness and end in completeness.

Although wholesome action is *do*, it is not self, and not known by the self. It is not other, and not known by other. In knowing, there is self and other. In seeing, there is self and other. Thus, the vital eye of each is within the sun and within the moon.

This is *do*. At the very moment of *do*, the fundamental point is actualized. Yet, it is not the beginning or the end of the fundamental point. It is not the eternal abiding of the fundamental point. Should this not be called *do*?

Although practicing wholesome action is *do*, it cannot be discerned. Although this *do* is a vital eye, it cannot be discerned. *Do* is not actualized for the sake of discernment. Discernment by the vital eye is not the same as discernment by something else.

Wholesome action is neither existent nor nonexistent, neither form nor emptiness. It is just *do*. Actualizing at any place or actualizing at any moment is inevitably *do*. This *do* always actualizes all that is wholesome action. Although actualizing *do* is the fundamental point, it is neither arising nor ceasing, neither causes nor conditions. The entering, abiding, and departing of *do* is also like this. When one wholesome action among all wholesome actions is *do*, all things, the whole body, and the true ground altogether are moved to *do*.

Both cause and effect of wholesome action actualize the fundamental point through *do*. Cause is not before and effect is not after. Cause is complete and effect is complete. Cause is all-inclusive just as dharma is all-inclusive. Effect is all-inclusive just as dharma is all-inclusive. Although effect is experienced, induced by cause, one is not before and the other is not after. We say that both before and after are all-inclusive.

Purify your own mind. This means that you *refrain from*. Purify through *refrain from*. You that is *your own*. You that is *mind*. *Your own* that refrains from. Mind that refrains from. Mind that does. Purify through *do*. Your own *do*. You *do*. This is the teaching of all buddhas.

Buddhas are like Shiva [creator of the world]. While the spirits of Shiva are sometimes the same and sometimes different, they are not necessarily buddhas. Buddhas are also like wheel-turning kings. However, not all the wheel-turning kings are necessarily buddhas. Investigate and study this point. Those who do not examine what buddhas are may appear to strive with great effort, but they are sentient beings who only suffer and are not practitioners of the buddha way. Refraining from [unwholesome action] and doing [wholesome action] are like “The donkey has not left, yet the horse has arrived.”

Bai Zhuyi of the Tang Dynasty was the lay student of Ruman, Zen Master Fuguang, and a dharma descendant of Mazu, Zen Master Daji of Jiangxi.

When he was governor of Hang province, he studied with Zen Master Daolin of Niaoke.

One day Zhuyi said, “What is the essential meaning of buddha dharma?”

Daolin said, “Refrain from unwholesome action, do wholesome action.”

Zhuyi said, “If that is so, a three-year-old child could say it.”

Daolin said, “A three-year-old child may say this, but even an eighty-year-old person cannot practice it.”

Zhuyi bowed in gratitude and left.

Zhuyi, a descendant of General Bai, was an extraordinary poet. He was regarded as a man of letters who had lived twenty-four lifetimes as a poet. He was sometimes called Manjushri or Maitreya. There was no place he was not known and no place his writing did not circulate.

However, he was a beginner and a latecomer in the buddha way. It seems that he had never dreamed of the true meaning of *refrain from unwholesome action* and *do wholesome action*. He thought that Daolin presented this phrase in a merely intellectual way. Zhuyi had not heard and

did not know that *refrain from unwholesome action* and *do wholesome action* are teachings of the buddha way, which are thousands and myriads of years old and apply to now and then. He responded in the way he did because he was not standing in the buddha dharma and did not understand the buddha dharma.

Even if you caution against doing unwholesome action by intention, and encourage doing wholesome action by intention, you actualize *refrain from*. On the whole, in the buddha dharma, what you first hear from a teacher and what you finally achieve are the same. This is called genuine from head to tail. It is also called “inconceivable cause, inconceivable effect,” or “buddha cause, buddha effect.” Cause and effect in the buddha way is neither a heterogeneous maturing nor a homogenous stream. Since this is so, without buddha cause, buddha effect cannot be experienced. Because Daolin expressed this essential teaching, it was buddha dharma.

Even if unwholesome action fills worlds upon worlds, and swallows up all things upon all things, *refrain from* is emancipation. Wholesome action is wholesome action in the beginning, middle, and end. It is the true essence, marks, substance, and activity of *do*, as it is. Because Zhuyi did not follow this track, he said, “Even a three-year-old can say this! Lacking the capacity for true expression, he uttered these words.

What a pity, Zhuyi! Why did you say this? Because you have not touched upon buddha wind [the buddha teaching]. Do you know about a three-year-old child? Do you understand the principle of a child’s inherent capacity? Those who understand know that a three-year-old child also understands all buddhas in the three worlds. How can those who cannot understand all buddhas in the three worlds understand a three-year-old child? Do not think that to face a person is to understand a person. Do not think that not to face a person is not to understand a person.

Those who understand a speck of dust understand the entire world. Those who master one thing master myriad things. Those who do not master myriad things do not master one thing. Because those who study mastering see myriad things as well as one thing through penetration those who study a speck of dust simultaneously study the entire world.

It is extremely foolish to assume that a three-year-old child cannot express buddha dharma and that what a three-year-old child says is easy

The real issue here, to clarify birth and to clarify death, is the great matter of causes and effects in the buddha house.

An old master said, "When you are born, you have the capacity to roar like a lion." The capacity to roar like a lion is a virtue of the Tathagata turning the dharma wheel. It is turning the dharma wheel.

Another old master said, "The coming and going of birth and death is the true human body."

In this way, to clarify the true human body and to have the virtue of roaring like a lion are indeed the great matter, and are not to be taken lightly. For this reason, to understand the words and practice of a three-year-old child is a great matter of causes and conditions. This is sometimes the same and sometimes not the same as the words and the practice of all buddhas in the three worlds.

Because Zhuyi was ignorant and had never heard the expression of the three-year-old child, without even questioning it he responded as he did. He did not even hear Daolin's voice of the way, which was louder than thunder. He wanted to point out that Daolin failed to hit the mark and said, "a three-year-old child could say it." In this way he failed to hear the lion's roar of the child and missed the turning dharma wheel of the Zen master.

Daolin pitied him and responded further: *Even if a three-year-old child can say this, even an eighty-year-old person cannot practice it.* This means that the words of the three-year-old child hit the mark. Thoroughly study these words. *Even an eighty-year-old person cannot practice it.* Thoroughly investigate these words.

The child's expression is entrusted to you; it is not entrusted to the child. The old person's practice of the unattainable is entrusted to you; it is not entrusted to the old person. To understand, speak, and live in this way is the point of the buddha dharma.

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