

The questioner said, "The Daoists say that Yao, Shun, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius and his seventy-two disciples did not die, but became immortals. The Buddhists say that men must all die, and that none can escape. What does this mean?"

Mouzi said, "Talk of immortality is superstitious and unfounded; it is not the word of the sages. Laozi said, 'Even Heaven and Earth cannot last forever. How much less can human beings!'¹⁹ Confucius said, 'The wise man leaves the world, but humaneness and filial piety last forever.' I have looked into the six arts and examined the commentaries and records. According to them, Yao died; Shun had his [place of burial at] Mount Cangwu; Yu has his tomb on Kuaiji; Boyi and Shuqi have their grave in Shouyang. King Wen died before he could chastise [the tyrant] Zhou; King Wu died without waiting for [his son] King Cheng to grow up. . . . And, of Yan Yuan, the Master said, 'Unfortunately, he was short-lived,'²⁰ likening him to a bud that never bloomed.²¹ All of these things are clearly recorded in the Classics: they are the absolute words of the sages. I make the Classics and the commentaries my authority and find my proof in the world of men. To speak of immortality, is this not a great error?"

[From *Hongming ji*, TD, no. 2102:1-7 — adapted from LH by IB]

HUIYUAN: A MONK DOES NOT BOW DOWN BEFORE A KING

When an Indian entered the Buddhist clergy, he left his clan, his caste, and all his worldly possessions. As one standing outside of ordinary society, he from then on paid no outward signs of veneration to secular potentates. In China, too, early Buddhist clerics, though they knelt in their religious ceremonies, displayed no signs of respect to laymen in positions of authority, not even to the emperor.

At first this constituted no great problem, since only the most eminent monks were ever likely to meet the emperor, and these were usually foreigners who were not expected to follow full Chinese etiquette. When native Chinese came to constitute the majority of Buddhist clerics, however, the problem became more serious. The question was brought under discussion at court during the Eastern Jin period, but no settlement was reached until 402 C.E. At that time the high minister Huan Xuan (369-404), who had temporarily usurped the throne, referred the problem to one of the outstanding monks of the day, Huiyuan (334-417), for a recommendation. Huiyuan replied with a letter stating that, though Buddhist laymen, like other laymen, were obliged by the customary etiquette to acknowledge their loyalty and respect for their sovereign, the Buddhist clergy, who by the nature of their life and aims were far removed from ordinary men, could not be expected to go through the outward signs

19. *Daodejing* 23.

20. *Analects* 11:6.

21. *Analects* 9:21.

of obeisance⁷. Huan Xuan accepted Huiyuan's argument and decreed that monks need not bow before the emperor. Shortly after this, Huiyuan composed a treatise titled "A Monk Does Not Bow Down Before a King" ("Shamen bu jing wang zhe lun"), stating his argument in greater detail.

Buddhism in the Household

If one examines the broad essentials of the teachings of the Buddha, one will see that they distinguish between those who leave the household life and those who remain in it. . . . Those who revere the Buddhist laws but remain in their homes are subjects who are obedient to the transforming powers [of temporal rulers]. Their feelings have not changed from the customary, and their course of conduct conforms to the secular world. Therefore this way of life includes the affection of natural kinship and the proprieties of obedience to authority. Decorum and reverence have their basis herein, and thus they form the basis of the doctrine. That on which they are based has its merit in the past. Thus, on the basis of intimacy it teaches love and causes the people to appreciate natural kindness; on the basis of austerity it teaches veneration and causes the people to understand natural respect. . . . Thus obedience is made the common rule, and the natural way is not changed. . . .

Hence one may not benefit by [the ruler's] virtue and neglect propriety, bask in his kindness and cast aside due respect. Therefore they who rejoice in the way of Śākya invariably first serve their parents and respect their lords. They who change their way of life and throw away their hair ornaments must always await [their parents'] command, then act accordingly. If their lords and parents have doubts, then they retire, inquire of their wishes, and wait until [the lords and parents] are enlightened. This, then, is how the teaching of Buddha honors life-giving and assists kingly transformation in the way of government.

Buddhism Outside the Household

This second part sets forth the core of Huiyuan's argument as to why the monk should not make a display of respect for worldly potentates. The monk, so the argument goes, is not a disrespectful, much less an impious, person, but he stands completely outside of the framework of lay life; hence he should not abide by its regulations insofar as merely polite accomplishments are concerned.

He who has left the household life is a lodger beyond the earthly [secular] world, and his ways are cut off from those of other beings. The doctrine by which he lives enables him to understand that woes and impediments come from having a body, and that by not maintaining the body one terminates woe. . . .

If the termination of woe does not depend on the maintenance of the body,

then he does not treasure the benefits that foster life. This is something in which the principle runs counter to physical form and the Way is opposed to common practice. Such men as these commence the fulfillment of their vows with the putting away of ornaments of the head [shaving the head] and realize the achievement of their ideal with the changing of their garb. . . . Since they have changed their way of life, their garb and distinguishing marks cannot conform to the secular pattern. . . . Afar they reach to the ford of the Three Vehicles,²² broadly they open up the Way of Heaven and the human. If but one of them be allowed to fulfill his virtue, then the Way spreads to the six relations and beneficence flows out to the whole world. Although they do not occupy the positions of kings and princes, yet, fully in harmony with the imperial ultimate, they let the people be. Therefore, though inwardly they may run counter to the gravity of natural relationships, yet they do not violate filial piety; though outwardly they lack respect in serving the sovereign, yet they do not lose hold of reverence.

He Who Seeks the First Principle Is Not Obedient to Change

In general, those who reside within the limits [of ordinary existence] receive life from the Great Change. . . . Life is fettered by physical form, and life depends upon change. When there is change and the feelings react, then the spirit is barred from its source and the intellect is blinded to its own illumination. If one is thus shut up as in a hard shell, then what is preserved is only the self, and what is traversed is only the state of flux. Thereupon the bridle of the spirit loses its driver, and the road to rebirth is reopened daily. One pursues lust in the long stream of time; is one thus affected only once? Therefore he who returns to the source and seeks the First Principle does not encumber his spirit with life. He who breaks out of the grimy shell does not encumber his life with feelings. If one does not encumber one's spirit with life, then one's spirit can be made subtle. The subtle spirit transcending sense-objects — this is what is meant by *nirvāṇa*. The name *nirvāṇa*, can it possibly be an empty appellation? I beg leave to extend this argument and so to prove its truth. Heaven and Earth, though they are great because they give life to living beings, cannot cause a living being not to die. Kings and princes, though they have the power of preserving existence, cannot cause a preserved creature to be without woe. Therefore in our previous discussion we have said, "[He who has left the household life] understands that woes and impediments come from having a body

22. That is, postponing enlightenment in order to bring others closer to salvation, attaining enlightenment by personal exertions in an age in which there is no Buddha, and attaining enlightenment by hearing the Buddha's preaching. These three are associated with the bodhi-sattva, the *pratyeka* or "private buddha," and the *śrāvaka* or "voice-hearer," respectively.

and that by not maintaining the body one terminates woe. He knows that continued life comes from undergoing change, and by not obeying this change he seeks the First Principle." Herein lay our meaning, herein lay our meaning. This is why the monk refuses homage to the Lord of the Myriad Chariots [i.e., the emperor] and keeps his own works sublime, why he is not ranked with kings or princes and yet basks in their kindness.

[From *Hongming ji*, TD 52, no. 2102:29–32 — LH]

ADMONITIONS OF THE FANWANG SŪTRA

The following admonitions represent the basic moral code to which many Mahāyāna monks in China subscribed when they took the bodhisattva vows or precepts. From what now appears to be an apocryphal text, never canonically sanctioned, these admonitions purport to come from the mouth of the Buddha. In effect they constitute a substantial reduction and modification of the disciplinary code for monks in the earlier, so-called Hīnayāna or Smaller Vehicle (seen as “smaller” because it was more restrictive, difficult to practice, and thus limited in its practicability for all). Here the unlimited expedient or adaptive means available through the later, Greater Vehicle enable it to overcome some of the Chinese objections to the Hīnayāna cited in the preceding Mouzi text.

Note in these admonitions the strong invocation of filiality as a basis for Buddhist discipline. This adaptation to the more life-affirming, family orientation of Confucianism contrasts with the earlier characterization of the Buddhist religious vocation as “leaving the family” (*chujia*). As a major concession to Chinese values, this new view of Buddhism as fulfilling the ends of filial piety became a marked feature of East Asian Buddhism in general.

Later even this simplified code was further minimized in the two main schools of Chinese Buddhist practice, Pure Land and Chan, which emphasized means other than adherence to the traditional disciplinary code for the attainment of salvation.

(At that time, the Buddha Śākyamuni, seated under the Bo tree after having attained supreme enlightenment, first set up the Precepts (*Prātimokṣa*): to be filial to one's parents, teacher[s], members of the Buddhist community, and the Three Treasures.) Filial obedience is the way by which one attains the Way. Filial piety is called the “admonitions”; it is also called the “prohibitions.” Then the Buddha emanated infinite light from his mouth.

At that time, trillions of participants in the assembly, including all the bodhisattvas, eighteen Brahmin kings, the kings of the six heavens in the realm of desires, and sixteen great kings, etc., all joined their palms in front of their chests and listened to the Buddha reciting the Mahāyāna Admonitions of all the Buddhas.

The Buddha told all the bodhisattvas: “I now recite by myself every fortnight,