

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE ASIAN CLASSICS

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*Translated by Burton Watson  
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## ENTERING THE GATE OF NONDUALISM

At that time Vimalakirti said to the various bodhisattvas, "Sirs, how does the bodhisattva go about entering the gate of nondualism? Let each one explain as he understands it."

One of the bodhisattvas in the assembly, whose name was Dharma Freedom, spoke these words: "Sirs, birth and extinction form a dualism. But since all dharmas are not born to begin with, they must now be without extinction. By grasping and learning to accept this truth of birthlessness, one may enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Virtue Guardian said, "'I' and 'mine' form a dualism. Because there is an 'I,' there is also a 'mine.' But if there is no 'I,' there will be no 'mine.' In this way one enters the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Unblinking said, "Perception and nonperception form a dualism. But if dharmas are not perceived, then there is nothing to take hold of. And because there is nothing to take hold of, there will be no grasping, no rejecting, no action, no volition. In this way one enters the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Virtue Peak said, "Defilement and purity form a dualism. But if one sees into the true nature of defilement, it is without the marks of purity but leads into the extinction of all marks. In this way one enters the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Good Constellation said, "The stirring of the mind and thought—these two form a dualism. But if the mind is not stirred, then there will be no thought. And if there is no thought, there will be no discrimination. The one who has thoroughly mastered this may in this way enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Good Eye said, "The unique in form and the formless constitute a dualism. But if one understands that the unique in form is in fact the formless, and then does not seize on the formless but sees all as equal, one may in this way enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Wonderful Arm said, "The bodhisattva mind and the voice-hearer mind constitute a dualism. But if one regards the mind as empty in form, like a conjured phantom, then there is no bodhisattva mind and no voice-hearer mind. In this way one may enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Pushya<sup>1</sup> said, "Good and not good form a dualism. But if one does not call up either good or not good but enters into the realm of the formless and truly masters it, in this way one may enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Lion said, "Blame and blessing form a dualism. But if one penetrates the true nature of blame, it is no different from blessing. When one can dispose of forms with this diamondlike wisdom, neither bound nor liberated, one may in this way enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Lion Will said, "Presence of outflows of passion and absence of such outflows constitute a dualism. But if one can grasp the fact that all dharmas are equal, then one will not give rise to the concept of outflows or no outflows. One will not be attached to form nor dwell in formlessness either. In this way one may enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Pure Understanding said, "The created and the uncreated form a dualism. But if one does away with all enumerations, then the mind is like empty sky, freed of all obstacles through pure clean wisdom. In this way one enters the gate of nondualism."

1. *Pushya (Pusya)* is the twenty-third of the twenty-eight constellations or stellar mansions of Indian astrology, the constellation under whose influence this bodhisattva was born.

The bodhisattva Narayana said, "The worldly and the unworldly form a dualism. But since the nature of the worldly is empty, the worldly is in fact the unworldly. Neither entering into it nor going out of it, neither exceeding nor falling short—in this way one enters the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Good Will said, "The realm of birth and death and that of nirvana form a dualism. But if one sees the true nature of birth and death, one sees that there is no birth or death, no binding, no unbinding, no birth,<sup>2</sup> no extinction. One who understands in this way may thereby enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Direct Seeing said, "The exhaustible and the inexhaustible form a dualism. But whether dharmas are in the end exhaustible or inexhaustible, they are all without the marks of exhaustibility. And if they are without the marks of exhaustibility, they are empty. And if they are empty, they are without the marks either of exhaustibility or inexhaustibility. If one enters this realm of understanding, one may thereby enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Universal Guardian said, "'I' and 'not-I' form a dualism. But when one cannot grasp even 'I,' how can one grasp 'not-I'? One who has seen into the true nature of 'I' will no longer give rise to these two concepts, and in this way enter the gate of nondualism."

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The bodhisattva Lightning God said, "Enlightenment and ignorance form a dualism. But the true nature of ignorance is none other than enlightenment. And enlightenment cannot be seized, but is apart from all enumerations. One dwells in the center, in the equality without dualism, and in this way enters the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Joyful Seeing said, "Form and the emptiness of form constitute a dualism. But form is none other than

2. In place of sheng, "birth," some texts read jan, "burning;" that is, no burning of the fire of passion, no putting out of the fire.

emptiness; emptiness does not represent the extinction of form. Form is itself empty by nature. In the same way perception, conception, volition, and consciousness, and the emptiness of consciousness, constitute dualisms. But consciousness is none other than emptiness; emptiness does not represent the extinction of consciousness. Consciousness is itself empty by nature.<sup>3</sup> Dwelling in the midst of these concepts and understanding them thoroughly, one may in this way enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Enlightened as to Form said, "To regard the four elements [earth, water, fire, and wind] as different from the element emptiness or space is dualistic. The nature of the four elements is none other than the nature of emptiness. Just as the past and future of these elements is empty, so too must their present be empty. If one can understand the nature of the elements in this way, one may thereby enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Wonderful Will said, "The eye and the objects it observes constitute a dualism. But if one understands the nature of the eye, then with regard to objects one will be without greed, without anger, and without stupidity. This is called tranquil extinction. Similarly, the ear and sounds, the nose and smells, the tongue and tastes, the body and touch, and the mind and phenomena constitute dualisms. But if one understands the nature of the mind, then with regard to phenomena one will be without greed, without anger, and without stupidity. This is called tranquil extinction. Dwelling at rest in its midst, one may thereby enter the gate of nondualism."

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3. The text spells out the argument in full only in the case of the first and last terms in the series, form and consciousness, but the same argument applies to the other terms, perception, conception, and volition. This same type of abbreviated construction is used in the next answer and in several of those that follow.

The bodhisattva Inexhaustible Will said, "Almsgiving, and applying the merits gained thereby to acquire comprehensive wisdom, constitute a dualism. But the nature of almsgiving is none other than the applying of merits to acquire comprehensive wisdom. Similarly, keeping of the precepts, forbearance, assiduousness, meditation, and wisdom form dualisms in contrast to the applying of merit to acquire comprehensive wisdom, etc. But the nature of wisdom is none other than the applying of merits to acquire comprehensive wisdom. By entering into an understanding of the singleness of form that all these share, one may thus enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Deep Wisdom said, "This is emptiness, this is formlessness, this is nonaction—to speak in this manner is dualistic. Emptiness is none other than formlessness, formlessness is none other than nonaction. If something is empty, formless, nonacting, then it is without mind, will, or consciousness. This single doctrine of emancipation is the same as the threefold doctrine of emancipation [regarding emptiness, formlessness, and nonaction]. In this way one enters the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Tranquil Roots said, "To speak of the Buddha, the Law, and the assembly is dualistic. The Buddha is none other than the Law, the Law is none other than the assembly. These Three Treasures are all uncreated in form, like the empty sky, and all dharmas are the same. One who can act in accordance with this understanding may thereby enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Mind Unobstructed said, "The body and the body extinguished constitute a dualism. But the body is none other than the body extinguished. Why? Because one who sees into the true form of the body does not give rise to thoughts of seeing the body or seeing the extinction of the body. The body and the extinction of the body are not two things, not a distinction to be made. One who rests in this understanding, neither alarmed nor fearful, may in this way enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Superior Goodness said, "To speak of the activities of body, mouth, and mind is dualistic. These three activities are all marked by the aspect of nonaction. If the body is marked by nonaction, then the mouth must be marked by nonaction, and if the mouth is marked by nonaction, then the mind must be marked by nonaction. And since these three activities are marked by nonaction, then all dharmas must be marked by nonaction. One who can go along with this wisdom of nonaction may in this way enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Merit Field said, "To speak of meritorious deeds, blameful deeds, and deeds that call forth no retribution is dualistic. The true nature of all three kinds of deeds is empty. And if it is empty, then there are no meritorious deeds, no blameful deeds, and no deeds that call forth no retribution. One who does not rouse any thought of distinctions with regard to these three types of deeds may thereby enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Flower Garland said, "From the concept of 'self' rises the concept of two things, [self and other,] which creates a dualism. But one who sees into the true form of the self will not give rise to the thought of two things. And if one does not dwell in the thought of two things, then one will be without consciousness and without anything one is conscious of, and in this way may enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Virtue Storehouse said, "To suppose that there is some form or object that one can acquire is dualistic. But if one realizes that there is nothing to be acquired, then there will be no grasping and no rejecting. And when there is no grasping and no rejecting, one may in this way enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Moon in Midair said, "Darkness and light form a dualism; if there is no darkness and no light, there will be no dualism. Why? It is like entering the meditation that wipes out perception and conception, where there is neither

darkness nor light. And the forms of all dharmas are the same as this. If one enters this state and views all with equality, one may thereby enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Treasure Sign said, "To yearn for nirvana and not delight in the world constitutes a dualism. But if one does not yearn for nirvana and does not loathe the world, there will be no dualism. Why? If there is binding, there will be unbinding. But if there is no binding to begin with, who will seek to be unbound? And where there is no binding and unbinding, there will be no yearning and no loathing, and in this way one may enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Jewel Crowned King said, "The correct way and the erroneous way constitute a dualism. But one who dwells in the correct way does not make distinctions, saying 'This is erroneous!' or 'This is correct!' By removing oneself from both, one may thereby enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Delight in Truth said, "The true and the not true form a dualism. But one who sees truly cannot even see the true, so how can he see the untrue? Why? Because they cannot be seen by the physical eye; only the eye of wisdom can see them. But for this eye of wisdom there is no seeing and no not seeing. In this way one may enter the gate of nondualism."

When the various bodhisattvas had finished one by one giving their explanations, they asked Manjushri, "How then does the bodhisattva enter the gate of nondualism?"

Manjushri replied, "To my way of thinking, all dharmas are without words, without explanations, without purport, without cognition, removed from all questions and answers. In this way one may enter the gate of nondualism."

Then Manjushri said to Vimalakirti, "Each of us has given an explanation. Now, sir, it is your turn to speak. How does the bodhisattva enter the gate of nondualism?"

At that time Vimalakirti remained silent and did not speak a word.

Manjushri sighed and said, "Excellent, excellent! Not a word, not a syllable—this truly is to enter the gate of nondualism!"

When this chapter on Entering the Gate of Nondualism was preached, five thousand bodhisattvas in the assembly were all able to enter the gate of nondualism and to learn to accept the truth of birthlessness.