

The Dharma of Timeless *Sōn*

As a rule, *Sōn* is a practice that leads to the achievement of freedom of mind through gaining awakening to one's own nature, which is originally free from discrimination or attachment. Since time immemorial, those who have been determined to achieve the great Way have all practiced *Sōn*.

If people intend to practice genuine *Sōn*, they first should take true voidness as the substance and marvelous existence as the function and, externally, be unmoving like Mount T'ai when in contact with the myriad of sensory conditions, and, internally, keep the mind unsullied, like empty space. Let the mind function so that it is not acting even in action and not resting even at rest. If we do so, then there will be no discrimination that is separate from absorption, so that the functioning of the six sense organs will accord with the self-nature of the void and calm, numinous awareness. This is what is called Mahāyāna meditation and the method of practice in which we progress in concert through the Threefold Study.

Therefore it says in a sūtra, "Give rise to a mind that, even while responding, does not abide anywhere." This is precisely the great dharma of practice that remains unmoved amid the myriad of sensory conditions. This dharma may seem extremely difficult, but if only we come to understand in detail the methods of practice, then even a farmer wielding a hoe can practice *Sōn*, as can a carpenter wielding a hammer, a clerk using an abacus, and an official seeing to an administrative matter; and we can practice *Sōn* even while going about or staying at home. What need is there to bother with choosing a specific place and with talking about action or rest?

However, for people who are first beginning to practice *Sōn*, the mind is not easily controlled according to their wishes; it is like training an ox where, if the reins of the mind are dropped even for a moment, it will instantly harm one's commitment to the Way. Therefore, if you keep exerting yourself without letting go of that spirit which is ready to fight to the bitter end no matter how alluring the sensory conditions you face may be, the mind gradually will become tamed and you will reach a state where the mind will do what you wish. Each and every time you are in contact with a sensory condition, do not forget to keep the thought in mind that an opportunity for practice has arrived, always taking a suitable measure of only whether or not you are affected by that sensory condition. Thus, once there is a gradual increase in instances of behavior in which the mind does what you wish, you may from time to time let yourself be put in situations that you normally would find extremely attractive or abhorrent. If the mind is moved as before, then your commitment to the Way is immature; but if it is unmoved, then you will know that this is proof that your commitment to the Way is ripening. However, at the very time that you realize that the mind is unmoving, do not let down your guard, for it is unmoving through your employing the mental powers, rather than naturally unmoving. The mind has been well tamed only when it is unmoving even if left unguarded.

If you continue for a long time to practice *Sōn* so as to put an end to all the defilements and achieve freedom of mind, then, you will be centered like an iron pillar and defended from the outside like a stone wall, so that neither wealth or status, or honor and glory, can coax the mind, nor can anyone make the mind submit through weapons or authority. Practicing all dharmas in this wise, you will never be enticed or obstructed, and even while residing in this dusty world, you constantly will attain hundreds and thousands of samādhis. Once you reach this stage, the entire world will be transformed into the one genuine realm of reality, and right

and wrong, good and evil, and all the defiled and pure dharmas will become the single taste of ghee. This state is called the gateway of nonduality. Freedom in birth and death, liberation from the cycle of rebirths, and the ultimate bliss of the pure land all emerge through this gateway.

Recently groups that practice *Sōn* think that *Sōn* is extremely difficult. There are many who hold that it is impossible to do for someone who has a family or who pursues an occupation, and that you can only practice *Sōn* by entering into the mountains and sitting quietly. This view derives from their ignorance of the great dharma, in which all dharmas are nondual. But if one can only practice *Sōn* while sitting but not while standing—this would be a sickly *Sōn* indeed; how could this become the great dharma that can save all sentient beings? Moreover, since the own-essence of the nature is not merely limited to voidness and calmness alone, if you practice that *Sōn* which is like a senseless thing, this would not be the *Sōn* practice that disciplines the nature, but the making of a helpless invalid. Therefore, even when involved in disturbing situations, the mind should be undisturbed; even when involved with greed-creating sensory conditions, the mind should be unmoving—this is true *Sōn* and true absorption.

To reiterate the main principle of timeless *Sōn*:

“When the six sense organs are free from activity, remove distracted thoughts and nurture the one mind. When the six sense organs are involved in activity, remove the wrong and nurture the right.”