



The Scripture of the  
**Founding Master**

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# The Scripture of the Founding Master

## Chapter Seven The Principle of the Nature

1. Upon attaining great enlightenment, the Founding Master expressed his state of mind in a verse:

When the moon rises while a fresh breeze blows,  
The myriad forms become naturally clear.

2. The Founding Master said, “When people’s nature is at rest, it is neither wholesome nor unwholesome; when it is in action, it can be either wholesome or unwholesome.”

3. The Founding Master said, “‘Utmost good’ is that realm where wholesome and unwholesome are transcended; ‘Ultimate Bliss’ is that place where suffering and happiness are transcended.”

4. The Founding Master said, “The great Way is perfectly interfused, hence being and nonbeing are nondual, universal principles and human affairs are nondual, birth and death are nondual, and action and rest are nondual. There is nothing that is not subsumed in this gate of nonduality.”

5. The Founding Master said, “The great Way is all-pervasive, without any gaps, but people do not understand this and end up creating gaps on their own. Regardless of who it is, if one understands and practices the principle that illuminates the one mind by penetrating the myriad dharmas, then one will certainly attain the great, perfect, right enlightenment.”

6. The Founding Master said, “If one claims that the mind’s form cannot be seen because it has no shape or substance, and that the nature cannot be described because it is ineffable, then one is not a person who has truly seen the nature. Thus, only if the mind’s shape and the nature’s substance are perfectly clear before one’s very eyes, so that one can see them without shifting one’s

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gaze and clearly speak of it any time – only then can one be called a person who has clearly seen the buddha-nature.”

7. The Founding Master said, “The reason a person cultivating the Way endeavors to see the nature is to know the original realm of the nature and, by using one’s mind and body without fault like that realm, to achieve perfect buddhahood. If one only tries to see one’s nature but not to achieve buddhahood, this would be of little use, like an ax that is well crafted, but made of lead.”

8. The Founding Master said, “‘Seeing the nature’ is like a millionaire who, without realizing that his assets are his own, one day eventually comes to realize that fact. ‘Commanding the nature’ is like a millionaire who now realizes that fact but who for some time has lost those assets to others during the days of his ignorance and therefore resorts to various means to recover the rights he had lost.”

9. The Founding Master said, “If the gateways of religion do not elucidate the principle of the nature, then it is not a consummate Way. That is because the principle of the nature becomes the master of all dharmas and the foundation of all principles.”

10. While the Founding Master was staying at Pongnae hermitage, a heavy rain fell one day, and a waterfall over a rocky cliff, as well as all the valley streams, were flowing vigorously. He watched the sight for a long time, and finally said, “The water flowing down these many valleys is traveling different courses now, but it will finally collect in a single place. The saying ‘all dharmas return to one’ is just like this.”

11. The Founding Master composed a verse for his disciples while staying at Pongnae hermitage:

On the winding road up Pyönsan,  
A rock sits listening to the sound of a stream.

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Nothing, nothing, but no nothing either.

Not, not, but not not either.

Then, he said, “If you understand what this means, you are a person who has awakened to the Way.”

12. When the Founding Master returned to Pongnae hermitage from Yōngsan, he said to a disciple, “When I was returning here on a steamship, I noticed how deep and vast is the water in the sea. So, I measured every gallon of that water and counted every single fish in it. Do you perchance know how many there were?” That person could not guess the true meaning of his words.

13. The Founding Master addressed all his disciples at Pongnae hermitage, “A long time ago a scholar asked his teacher about the Way, and the teacher said, ‘Were I to teach you about it, it would be against the Way; were I not to teach you, it would be against the Way. So, what shall I do?’ Do you understand what he meant?” The congregation was silent and could not answer. At the time, it was the winter and white snow was piled in the yard. The Founding Master stood up and went outside, and started to clear the snow from the courtyard (toryang) himself. A disciple quickly went outside and, grabbing the snow shovel from him, asked the Master to go back inside. The Founding Master said, “What I did right now was not just to clear the snow, but to teach the arcane realm to you all.”

14. While he was at Pongnae hermitage, the Founding Master asked Mun Chōnggyu, “Can you make the portrait of Bodhidharma that is hanging on the wall walk?” Chōnggyu replied, “I certainly can.” The Founding Master said, “Then, let’s see him walk.” Chōnggyu stood right up and took some steps himself. The Founding Master said, “That is Chōnggyu walking. How can you claim that you made Bodhidharma’s portrait walk?” Chōnggyu replied, “A wild goose approaching from the east flies off toward the south.”

15. While the Founding Master was living at Pongnae hermitage, a Sōn monk came from the Diamond Mountains one day to visit him. The Master

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asked, “Without considering the hardship, you came from afar to seek me out. What are you looking for?” The Sŏn monk replied, “I wanted to hear about the Way. Please tell me where the Way is.” The Founding Master said, “The Way is in your question.” The Sŏn monk bowed and left.

16. A Sŏn monk came to Pongnae hermitage for an audience with the Founding Master. He asked, “It is said that the tathāgata descended into his royal family without leaving Tusita Heaven and delivered all sentient beings while still in his mother’s womb. What does this mean?” The Founding Master said, “Your body is in Sŏktu hermitage without leaving Silsang monastery. And you have finished delivering all sentient beings while staying in Sŏktu hermitage.”

17. While the Founding Master was staying at Pongnae hermitage, someone came to see him through Sŏ Chungan’s introduction. The Master asked, “What have you heard that you would walk here on such a rugged path?” He replied, “Hearing about the excellence of your Way and its power, I came to see you in person.” The Founding Master said, “Now that you have seen me, is there something you want?” He replied, “My mind cannot be rectified even for a moment because of the defilements and the idle thoughts that I constantly have in this dusty world. I want to rectify that mind.” The Founding Master said, “The method for rectifying the mind is first to awaken to the original foundation of the mind and then to be impartial when using the mind. If you wish to understand why this is so, you must try to study this question.” Then, the Master wrote for him, ““The myriad dharmas return to one; to what does the one return?””

18. When the Founding Master was staying at Pongnae hermitage, the Sŏn Master Paek Hangmyŏng would come to visit, and sometimes enjoyed conversing in an extraordinary argot on the subject of the principle of the nature. One day, the Founding Master told a few things to the young female novice Yi Ch’ŏngp’ung. The following day the Sŏn Master arrived from Wolmyŏng hermitage. The Founding Master greeted him and said, “It seems that the Way

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is ripening for Ch'ōngp'ung, who is over there hulling rice in a mortar.” The Sōn Master went right up to Ch'ōngp'ung, and said in a loud voice, “Without moving your feet, show me the Way!” Ch'ōngp'ung stood perfectly still, raising the pestle up into the air. The Sōn Master went inside without saying a word, and Ch'ōngp'ung followed him in. The Sōn Master asked, “Can you make that Bodhidharma hanging on the wall walk?” Ch'ōngp'ung answered, “Yes, I can.” The Sōn Master responded, “Then make him walk.” Ch'ōngp'ung stood up and walked several steps. The Sōn Master slapped his knee in amazement and sanctioned her enlightenment, saying that she had awakened at the age of thirteen! Seeing this sight, the Founding Master smiled and said, “Seeing the nature neither does nor does not involve words. However, from now on, one will not be able to give the seal of approval to ‘seeing the nature’ by such a method.”

19. One day, Sōn Master Hangmyōng sent a verse that read:

Ah, the highest summit of a mountain pierces the sky!

Water returning to the sea will billow into waves.

Not knowing where to turn back,

You built a home at that rocky place [Sōktu hermitage].

The Founding Master responded with the following verse:

The summit rises sharply in natural innocence,

On the great sea billow waves of innocence.

As one knows again where to turn back,

The home at that rocky place will be revealed on the heights.

20. Kim Kwangsōn asked, “What was the substance before the myriads things in heaven and earth came into being?” The Founding Master said, “Reflect silently on your state of mind before you asked this question.” He asked again, “In our practice, why is it necessary to see the nature?” The Founding Master said, “It is like mastering the alphabet when you’re learning a language.”

21. A disciple asked, “What happens if one sees the nature?” The Founding

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Master said, “One will understand the original principle of the myriad things in heaven and earth and will become like a carpenter who has acquired a ruler and chalk line.”

22. After listening to Kim Kich’ŏn’s lecture on the principle of the nature at a meditation hall, the Founding Master said, “Today, while I was in that state between sleep and wakefulness, I dreamt that I received a wish-fulfilling gem, which I gave to Samsan [Kim Kich’ŏn]. Receiving it, he swallowed it, and I saw him immediately transfigured, as if he were a wholly different person. Now that I have actually heard Samsan lecture on the principle of the nature, my spirit is refreshed.” He continued, “The dharma cannot be shared with others simply out of your affection for them; only by opening one’s wisdom-eye may one receive the dharma. A dragon must find the wish-fulfilling gem in order to work wonders, but people who are cultivating the Way must see into their natures and train themselves before they can attain spiritual ability.” Mun Chŏnggyu asked, “Since early on, we have respected Chŏngsan. Did he also ‘see the nature’?” The Founding Master said, “Even though you may have simultaneously started to build a large house and a small house, some houses take a month to complete, some a year, some several years. In the same way, Chŏngsan will need a little time.”

23. A disciple asked, “We speak of ‘seeing the nature and achieving buddhahood.’ Is just seeing the nature enough to immediately achieve buddhahood?” The Founding Master said, “Depending on one’s spiritual capacity, there are people who achieve buddhahood instantaneously upon seeing the nature, but that is rare. For the most part, the effort required to achieve buddhahood is a lot greater than that required to see the nature. In the past, however, people’s intelligence was dull and they called someone a ‘person of the Way’ if that person had simply seen the nature. But in the coming age, one will not be called a person of the Way just by seeing the nature. Most practitioners will come easily to see their natures early on while living at home, and they will seek out a great teacher so they may work hard at achieving buddhahood.”

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24. The Founding Master addressed the congregation at a meditation hall, “Even though it is said that the principle of the nature cannot be fully expounded in words, you should still be able to express it convincingly. If there are any of you who think that you have realized it, then try to answer my query. In the line, ‘All dharmas return to one,’ tell me in detail what that one is to which they return; and in ‘To what does the one return?’ tell me where this one returns.” The members of the congregation offered their answers one after another, but the Founding Master did not sanction any of them. One disciple stood up, bowed to the Master, and said, “Please, Great Master, ask me the question one more time.” The Founding Master did so. The disciple answered, “Since all dharmas are originally complete and have not returned anywhere since the very beginning, why do we need to return the one anywhere?” The Founding Master smiled and again said nothing.

25. The Founding Master said, “These days, there are often many people who claim to be experts on the principle of the nature who try to resolve it without using words. This is a serious illness. Those who truly understand it should know how to clearly distinguish its head from its tail, even though it originally does not possess either head or tail; and also know how to clearly describe it in words, even though it is beyond all language. Those who truly understand it will show it in whatever they do, and those who are ignorant of it will show their ignorance of it in whatever they do. However, one should not make too much of verbal expression, either. The thousands of scriptures and tens of thousands of treatises attributed to the Buddha and the enlightened masters are just like fingers pointing at the moon.”

26. The Founding Master addressed the congregation at a meditation hall, “Who among you has completed a deed transferring possession of the dharma realm of empty space?” The congregation was silent, and did not reply. The Founding Master said, “Since all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three time-periods work hard to take possession of the formless and invisible dharma realm of empty space, they are able to make their own even the myriads of things in heaven and earth that possess form. However, since ordinary beings

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and sentient beings are greedily attached to things that have form, they not only never manage to possess them, but end up only wasting their precious time. How can this not be deluded? Thus, do not exhaust yourselves trying to possess only things that have form, but instead work hard to take possession of the dharma realm of empty space, which is formless.”

27. The Founding Master addressed the congregation at a meditation hall, “Understanding completely the substance of the principle of the nature means knowing how to divide the ‘great’ into the ‘small,’ which are the myriads of phenomena of all shapes and forms in the universe, and knowing how to integrate the various ‘smalls’ extending through every shape and form into the single whole of the ‘great.’ Again, understanding completely the functioning of the principle of the nature means understanding being as nonbeing and non-being as being, thereby understanding the truth that all principles under heaven do not change while changing, and change while not changing. There are quite a few people who, while they have attained a general sense of great and non-being, have not understood the principles of small and being. How can we say that they have fully awakened to the principle of the nature?”

28. The Founding Master addressed the congregation at a meditation hall, “Tell me right now how you can either divide a person up into mind, nature, principle, and energy, or take the whole person solely in terms of either mind, nature, principle, or energy.” The congregation offered various answers to his question, but he did not sanction any of them. He said, “To give you an example, when you are raising a goat, you do not raise it quickly by overfeeding it all at once; but, so long as you properly regulate the process of raising it and the amount it is fed, the goat will naturally grow up, bear offspring, and produce milk, thereby benefiting human beings. In a religious order, this is exactly how we help others to awaken to the Way.”

29. The Founding Master was in the prime dharma master’s room when a group curious about Won-Buddhism came to pay a visit. They bowed and asked, “Where is your esteemed religion’s buddha enshrined?” The Founding

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Master said, “Our buddha has just gone out, so if you would like to see him, please wait a moment.” Not understanding what he meant, the group was puzzled. A little later when it was lunchtime, a group of workers returned from the fields carrying their farm tools. The Founding Master pointed to them and said, “They are all the buddhas of our house.” The group was even more puzzled about what he meant.

**30.** The Founding Master addressed Song Tosōng at a meditation hall, “Interpret the dharma-transmission verses of the seven buddhas of antiquity.” Tosōng explained the dharma-transmission verses of each of the seven buddhas of antiquity until he got to that of the seventh buddha, Śākyamuni, which he glossed as follows: “The dharma is the dharma that is originally based on no-dharma; the dharma of no-dharma is also the dharma. Now, when we entrust that no-dharma, we aim to base the dharma on the dharma, but what dharma is that?” The Founding Master told him, “Stop your interpretation,” and then said, “Originally, there is not one thing that can be called the dharma, but for the benefit of those of inferior spiritual capacity, this one dharma was expounded. However, even that one dharma is also not the true dharma. If you awaken to the true meaning of this verse, you will not need to read thousands of scriptures.”

**31.** In the first lunar month of the twenty-sixth year of the Won Era, after giving his transmission verse, the Founding Master said: “Being is a realm of change; nonbeing is a realm that is unchanging. But this realm is the locus that can be called neither being nor nonbeing. It is referred to as ‘turning and turning’ and ‘ultimate,’ but these two are nothing more than mere expressions offered as a teaching device. So what is the point of saying that these are ‘both void’ or ‘complete’? Since this realm is the true essence of the nature, do not try to understand it by ratiocination; rather, you should awaken to this realm through contemplation.”