

Song of Dharma Nature

Zen Master Seung Sahn

*The nature of the Dharmas is perfect.
It does not have two different aspects.
All the various Dharmas are unmoving
and fundamentally still.
They are without name and form,
cut off from all things.
This is understood by enlightened wisdom,
and not by any other sphere.
The One is in the many, the many are
within the One.
The One is many the many are One.
Numberless kalpas are the same as one moment.
One moment is the same as numberless kalpas.*

This is an excerpt from a long teaching-poem based on the Avatamsaka Sutra. It was written by a very famous master, Ui-Sang, during the golden age of the Shilla Dynasty in Korea. These verses are chanted every day in most temples in Korea. They point directly to the nature of dharma. Many



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people say, “Dharma is this. Dharma is that.” But what is dharma exactly? Originally, true dharma has no name. Dharma has no form. Even calling it “dharma” is already a big mistake. Dharma is not dharma, OK? You must understand that. So, dharma or dharma-nature are just names for your universal substance. This substance, of which everything in the universe is composed, does not have two different aspects. It does not even have two different forms. It also does not have one aspect or form. It is not one and not two. It is also not a “thing.” It takes every form of every thing in the universe, and yet it takes no form, because form is completely empty. It is like electricity. Sometimes electricity appears to us by making fans move and radios emit sound. It produces air-conditioning. It can freeze water and heat a room. It can move a long, heavy train, and yet you walk around with it in your body. It can completely disappear into space. So if you say that electricity is just one thing, you are wrong. If you say that it is all these things that it does, all these actions that it performs, you are also completely wrong. Electricity is none of these things, and yet it is all of them. Similarly, rain, snow, fog, vapor, river, sea, sleet, and ice are all different forms of the same substance. They are different things. But H²O is unchanging, and composes all of them according to their situation. They are all water. The same is true of dharma-nature. It is not one and not two. That is a very important point.

So dharma-nature is universal nature, and it takes many, many different forms. Sometimes it is a mountain, or the rivers, or the sun, the moon, the stars, this cup, this sound, and your mind. They are all the same, because they are all the same universal substance. When any kind of condition appears, dharma-nature follows that condition, and then some form appears. But when condition disappears, then name and form disappear. That is the meaning of “everything is complete” in these lines. “Complete” is this dharma-nature, this universal substance that goes around and around and around with no hindrance. It never lacks anything, anywhere. Sometimes it is a mountain, and sometimes it is a river, or trees, or rocks, clouds, humans, air, animals. But originally it is complete stillness. Even while taking form as everything in this universe, it is completely not moving. It takes these forms, but it is none of these forms and is not touched by these forms. Dharma-nature

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is the same as your true self. It cannot be understood with conceptual thinking. Books and learning cannot give you this point. One hundred PhDs will not help you attain it.

The One is in the many, the many are within the One.

The One is many, the many are One.

Numberless kalpas are the same as one moment.

One moment is the same as numberless kalpas.

Everyone believes that time and space exist. Ha ha ha ha! That's very funny! Your thinking makes time, and your thinking makes space. But no one really understands this. So these lines state that time and space are the same, and they are one. They are also not one. This One is completely empty. "The One is in the many, the many are within the One. The One is many, the many are One." That is talking about space. Everything is one point, and that one point is everything. There are not two separate things. We can think of it this way: Empty space is only one—indivisible—but in space there are many individual things: mountains, rivers, human beings, trees, dogs, cats, the sun, the moon, the stars. All of these "things" comprise space. Everything is part of space, but that space is not two, because everything is contained within it. There is nothing "outside" space.

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This poem has very interesting teaching about the true nature of time, too. "Numberless kalpas are the same as one moment. One moment is the same as numberless kalpas." Time is not long or short. As we saw earlier, since our thinking minds make time, we also make it either long or short. If you practice meditation, however, you can actually perceive that in one moment, there is infinite time. In one moment, there is infinite space. In one moment there is everything! One moment is endless time and space. To most people such a statement must be describing some special realm or experience. So how big is one moment? If we want to imagine this, we can illustrate one moment as being one second divided by infinite time. That is a very short time! A camera can teach you this. There are some special cameras with very high shutter speeds. This kind of camera can photograph a speeding bullet. A moving bullet is invisible to the naked eye. When this camera shutter opens, very quickly, it "catches" the bullet on film. You can see the bullet stopped in midair, not moving. But if you look closely at the photograph, you can tell that this bullet is still moving, though it seems stopped in space. The same is true of our minds, just as they are. If you take your don't-know camera—your mind before thinking arises—and perceive just one moment, very deeply, very clearly, you see this bullet not moving. You see everything not moving. This

whole world is not moving. That's very interesting! Your mind and this whole universe have the same nature. Originally everything is completely still and not moving. This sutra says, "All the various Dharmas are unmoving and fundamentally still." This is the same point. Stillness simply means our moment mind: one second divided by infinite time. We sometimes call that moment world. It is infinite in time and space, which actually means that it has no time or space.

So this *gatha* has very interesting poetic speech about dharma-nature and universal substance. But this is only beautiful speech, and even the Buddha's speech cannot help your life if it does not completely become yours. Then where does universal substance come from? Where does universal energy appear? It comes from complete stillness. "The One is in the many, the many are within the One. The One is many, the many are One." So everything has it. [*Hits the table.*] Everything comes from complete stillness. [*Hits the table.*] Everything comes from this one point. Sometimes this point is called universal substance or energy, or Buddha, or God, or consciousness, or holiness, or mind, or the Absolute. [*Hits the table.*] These are all names, and names come from thinking. But originally, this complete stillness point has no name and no form whatsoever, because it is before thinking. Yet it is present in all things, and all things have it. In Zen there is a famous kong-an, "The ten thousand things return to One. Where does the One return?" If you attain that point [*hits the table*], you attain One, and you attain everything. That means you attain moment. You attain complete stillness and extinction. But mere intellectual understanding of this cannot help you. Only meditation practice can give you this experience directly. [*Hits the table.*] When this experience completely becomes yours, you attain your wisdom. That is the teaching of the Song of Dharma Nature. ♦



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