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The Contemplation of Suchness

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The Contemplation of Suchness (*Shinnyo kan*) is attributed to the great scholar and teacher of the Tendai school of Buddhism, the prelate Genshin (942–1017). However, it actually dates from around the twelfth century. Tendai writings of medieval times were often compiled by unidentified authors who attributed them to earlier Tendai masters. By the early medieval period, a few Buddhist thinkers had begun to write in vernacular Japanese rather than the literary Chinese that formed the accepted scholarly medium for works on Buddhist doctrine. *The Contemplation of Suchness* is an example of this new development. It may have been written for an educated lay person, rather than a monastic reader, and reflects a number of significant developments within early medieval Japanese Buddhist thought.

One important intellectual trend to develop within Tendai Buddhism of the medieval period is known as original enlightenment thought (*hongaku shisō*). This doctrine denies that enlightenment is achieved as the result of a long process of religious cultivation; rather, it holds that all beings are, from the outset, enlightened by their very nature, that is, “originally.” From this perspective, Buddhist practice is to be approached, not as a means to “attain” a future result, but to realize that oneself is Buddha already. The present writing describes this in terms of knowing, or believing, that “oneself is precisely suchness.” “Suchness” or “thusness” (Skt., *tathatā*; J., *shinnyo*) is a Buddhist term for the true nature of reality, or what an enlightened person is said to realize. Like many such terms, it is intended to designate without describing, for the Buddha wisdom can be neither described nor grasped conceptually but only indicated as being “such.”

In this text, the idea of original enlightenment is explained in terms of traditional Tendai (C. T’ien-t’ai) forms of doctrinal classification and meditative practice, as well as the Tendai school’s particular reverence for the *Lotus Sutra*. The historical Buddha, Śākyamuni, was said to have preached for fifty years. According to the Tendai systematization of doctrine, for the first forty-two years the Buddha taught provisional teachings that were accommodated to his listeners’ understanding, while in the final eight years of his life he taught the true teaching, the *Lotus*

Sutra, said to be the direct expression of his own enlightenment. *The Contemplation of Suchness* assimilates this distinction between true and provisional teachings to two different views of enlightenment. The provisional teachings preached before the *Lotus Sutra*, it says, teach that one can attain Buddhahood only after many kalpas (aeons) of austere practices, while the *Lotus Sutra* uniquely reveals that all beings are enlightened inherently.

In terms of meditative practice, the "contemplation of suchness" discussed in this text is equated with the "contemplation of the Middle Way" or the "threefold contemplation in a single thought" set forth in the *Great Calming and Contemplation* (*Mo-ho chih-kuan*), the influential treatise recording the teachings on meditation of Chih-i (538–597), founder of the T'ien-t'ai school, the Chinese precursor of Japanese Tendai. T'ien-t'ai meditation aims at perceiving all things from the threefold perspective of emptiness, provisional existence, and the Middle, known as the threefold truth. By contemplating all phenomena as empty—that is, as dependent upon conditions and without permanence or underlying essence—one is freed from delusive attachments. This is said to correspond to the practice and insight of persons of the two vehicles (the Hīnayāna teachings) and bodhisattvas of elementary Mahāyāna. However, merely to be freed from attachment is not enough. Therefore, while knowing all things to be empty, one also contemplates them as provisionally existing. In this way, one is able to understand them correctly as conditioned aspects of conventional reality, without imputing to them false notions of essence, and so act wisely and compassionately in the world. This is said to correspond to the insight and practice of bodhisattvas of the higher Mahāyāna teachings. Lastly, by contemplating all things as both empty and provisionally existing, one maintains both views simultaneously, the two perspectives holding one another in perfect balance and preventing one-sided adherence to either. This is said to correspond to the practice and insight of Buddhas. In explaining the threefold truth, one must unavoidably explain its three aspects sequentially, and novice practitioners were also taught to contemplate the three truths of emptiness, provisional existence, and the Middle as a progressive sequence. However, this sequential meditation was regarded as a lesser form of the threefold contemplation. Its ultimate form is to cognize all three truths simultaneously, "in a single thought."

Within the traditional T'ien-t'ai/Tendai structure of meditative discipline, the threefold contemplation, or the contemplation of the Middle Way, required formal meditative practice, usually performed in a monastic context and often carried out in seclusion for a specified number of days, weeks, or months. The "contemplation of suchness" discussed in this writing, however, is not a formally structured meditation but rather the cultivation, in the midst of daily activities, of a particular mental attitude—namely, of seeing oneself and all others as identical to suchness. As the text says,

Clergy or laity, male or female—all should contemplate in this way. When you provide for your wife, children, and retainers, or even feed oxen, horses, and the

others of the six kinds of domestic animals, because the myriad things are all suchness, if you think that these others are precisely suchness, you have in effect made offerings to all Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and to all living beings, without a single exception.

Because suchness is the real aspect of all things, to think of both oneself and others in this way is to open a perspective from which individuals are not separate, unrelated, or conflicting existences but nondual—each identical with the totality of all that is and encompassing all others within itself. In other words, it is to see all beings manifesting original enlightenment just as they are.

Some evidence suggests that the "contemplation of suchness" described in this text may actually have been conducted as a form of lay practice during the early Kamakura period (1185–1333). A late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century anthology of tales called *A Collection of Treasures* (*Hōbutsu shū*), attributed to Taira Yasuyori (fl. 1190–1200), refers to the above passage from *The Contemplation of Suchness* and says:

When you eat, visualize [this act] as making offerings to the thirty-seven honored ones [i.e., the Buddhas and bodhisattvas depicted on the Diamond-Realm mandala of Esoteric Buddhism], and when you feed others, form the thought that you are, upwardly, making offerings to the Buddhas of the ten directions and three periods of time, and downwardly, giving alms to hell-dwellers, hungry ghosts and those in the animal realm. And you should likewise form this thought when you feed your servants and retainers, or give food to horses and cattle, birds and beasts. For lay people, men and women engaged in public and private affairs, what practice could possibly be superior? [DNBZ 147:426]

By cultivating the attitude that "all things are precisely suchness," the simplest acts of daily life in effect become Buddhist practice.

The Contemplation of Suchness links notions of original enlightenment to several other trends that characterized much of Japanese Buddhism in the medieval period. One is a growing emphasis on simple practices, which developed within both older, established schools of Buddhism—Tendai, Shingon, and the Nara schools—and the new Buddhist movements of the Kamakura period. Practices such as the repeated chanting of the nembutsu, the Buddha Amida's name (*Namu-Amida-butsu*), or of the *daimoku*, the title of the *Lotus Sutra* (*Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō*), gained popularity during this time. Such practices were of course accessible to a great range of persons, including lay people unable to undertake demanding religious disciplines or to read difficult Buddhist texts. Beyond the issue of accessibility, however, the emphasis on simple practices was connected with the idea that the world had entered a period known as the Final Dharma age (*mappō*), regarded as a time of decline when traditional Buddhist disciplines would be beyond the capacity of most persons. The "contemplation of suchness" described here, which can be undertaken by anyone even in the midst of daily activities,

appears to have been one of the simple practices regarded as particularly suited to those people born in the Final Dharma age.

While the simple practices were on the one hand touted as appropriate to people of limited capacity unable to undertake traditional Buddhist disciplines, they were at the same time extolled as being superior to those disciplines, in that they were said to encompass all merit in a single religious act and thus offer direct access to the Buddha's enlightenment without lifetimes of austere practice. For example, Hōnen (1133–1212), founder of the Japanese Jōdo or Pure Land sect, praised the nembutsu as encompassing the Three Bodies, Ten Powers, and Four Fearlessnesses—in short, all the virtues of the Buddha Amida. Nichiren (1222–1282), who preached a doctrine of exclusive devotion to the *Lotus Sutra*, similarly taught that the *daimoku* contains the merit of all the virtuous practices carried out by Śākyamuni Buddha in his quest, over countless lifetimes, for supreme enlightenment; by chanting the *daimoku* of the *Lotus Sutra*, Nichiren said, one can immediately access the Buddha's merits. Here, at a slightly earlier date, we find similar claims made for the "contemplation of suchness," which is said to encompass all merit within itself.

Related to the notion of simple practices was the idea that sincere devotion to the particular religious act in question was more important to one's salvation than the cultivation of moral conduct. In the present writing, even those who "violate the precepts without shame" are nonetheless said to be able to realize enlightenment and achieve birth in the Pure Land by diligently contemplating suchness. Such passages link this text to broader medieval concerns about the possibility of the salvation of evil persons. For many, the Final Dharma age was a time when proper observance of the Buddhist precepts was thought to be impossible. These concerns also reflected the rise to power of the warrior class, people whose hereditary profession required them to violate the traditional Buddhist precept against killing.

When Saichō (767–822), who established Tendai Buddhism in Japan, studied in China, he received instruction not only in the T'ien-t'ai *Lotus* teachings but also in Esoteric Buddhism, Ch'an (Zen), and the bodhisattva precepts. Building upon this foundation, his successors sought to develop a comprehensive religious system that would encompass all practices within the "one vehicle" of the *Lotus Sutra*. This all-encompassing approach would become characteristic of Japanese Tendai, and strands of Buddhist thought other than the original Tendai/Lotus teachings are accordingly evident in *The Contemplation of Suchness*. The most obvious of these is Pure Land Buddhism, centering on contemplation of and devotion to the Buddha Amida (Skt. Amitābha), said to live in a pure land called Utmost Bliss (Sukhāvātī, Gokuraku) in the western quarter of the universe. Birth after death in Amida's Pure Land, the goal of many Pure Land practitioners, was seen as liberation from the sufferings of the round of rebirth and equated with the stage of nonretrogression on the path of achieving Buddhahood. Pure Land practices in premodern Japan were extremely widespread, transcending sectarian divisions, and assumed a number of forms. These ranged from various Pure Land medita-

tions that developed within the Tendai school; to the chanting of Amida's name, interpreted as both contemplation and devotion; to popular uses of the nembutsu, for example, as a deathbed practice, to transfer merit to the deceased, and to placate unhappy spirits. The medieval period also witnessed the rise of independent Pure Land traditions, such as the Jōdo (Pure Land) sect of Hōnen, the Jōdo Shin (True Pure Land) sect of Shinran (1173–1262), and the Ji sect of Ippen (1239–1289). *The Contemplation of Suchness* reflects the Pure Land tradition that developed within Tendai Buddhism. Genshin, to whom it is attributed, was a key figure in the development of this tradition and the author of an extremely popular work on Pure Land faith and practice, the *Essentials of Birth in the Pure Land* (*Ōjōyōshū*). It will be noted that *The Contemplation of Suchness* on one hand speaks of birth after death in Amida's pure land as a real event and yet, on the other, urges the necessity of realizing that oneself and the Buddha are nondual in essence. This dual perspective is not altogether uncommon in the Tendai Pure Land writings of this period, which may describe the pure land as both a real place in the western part of the universe and immanent in this world, and Amida, as both a transcendent Buddha and identical to one's own mind. For example, *Questions and Answers on the Nembutsu as Self-Cultivation* (*Jigyō nembutsu mondō*), another medieval Tendai text retrospectively attributed to Genshin, says: "Even though one knows Amida to be one's own mind, one forms a relationship with Amida Buddha of the west and in this way manifests the Amida who is one's own mind" [DNBZ 31: 212].

Although less prominent than the Pure Land references, elements of the Esoteric strand within Tendai Buddhism also occur in this text. The Buddha revered in the Esoteric teachings is Dainichi (Skt. Mahāvairocana), the cosmic Buddha said to pervade and be embodied by the entire universe: all forms are his body, all sounds are his voice, and all thoughts are his mind, although the unenlightened do not realize this. In Esoteric practice, the practitioner is said to realize the identity of one's own body, speech, and mind with those of Dainichi through performance of the "three mysteries": the forming of ritual gestures (*mūdras*) with the hands and body, the chanting of mantras or secret ritual formulas with the mouth, and the mental contemplation of mandalas or iconographic representations of the cosmos as the expression of Dainichi. Portions of *The Contemplation of Suchness* not included here suggest that contemplating suchness is identical to the adept realizing one's identity with Dainichi in the act of Esoteric practice.

The Contemplation of Suchness makes clear that, although all beings are said to be enlightened inherently, this does not amount to a denial of the need for Buddhist practice: Original enlightenment, according to this text, must be manifested by cultivating the attitude that oneself and all others are inseparable from the Buddha. Its concluding passage admonishes the reader to "think that we are precisely suchness, night and day, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, without forgetting." Moreover, while all creatures, even insects, are deemed to be enlightened innately, there is an implicit privileging of the human state, in that only humans can realize their identity with suchness and so free themselves

from the suffering of transmigration. It is also recognized that, due to individual differences in human capacity, not everyone will be able to achieve and sustain this insight with equal speed. Some will require "a day, two days, a month, two months, a year, or even a lifetime," though the implication is that everyone can do so within this present existence.

The translated excerpts are from *Shinnyo kan*, in Tada Kōryū et al., eds., *Tendai hongaku ron*, in *Nihon shisō taikai* 9 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1973): 120–149.

Further Reading

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The Contemplation of Suchness

Volume 1 of the [*Great*] *Calming and Contemplation* states: "Of every form and fragrance, there is none that is not the Middle Way. So it is with the realm of the self, as well as the realms of the Buddha and of the beings" [*Mo-ho chih-kuan*, J. *Maka shikan*, T 46:1c]. The "realm of the self" is the practitioner's own mind. The "Buddha realm" indicates the Buddhas of the ten directions. "The beings" means all sentient beings. "Every form and fragrance" means all classes of insentient beings, including grasses and trees, tiles and pebbles, mountains and rivers, the great earth, the vast sea, and empty space. Of all these myriad existents, there is none that is not the Middle Way. The different terms for [this identity] are many. It is called suchness, the real aspect, the universe [Skt. *dharma-dhātu*, J. *hōkai*] the Dharma body, the Dharma nature, the Thus Come One, and the cardinal meaning. Among these many designations, I will for present purposes employ "suchness" and thus clarify the meaning of the contemplation of the Middle Way that is explained in many places in the sutras and treatises.

If you wish to attain Buddhahood quickly or be born without fail in [the pure land] of Utmost Bliss, you must think: "My own mind is precisely the principle of suchness." If you think that suchness, which pervades the universe, is your own essence, you are at once the universe; do not think that there is anything apart from this. When one is awakened, the Buddhas in the worlds of the ten directions of the universe and also all bodhisattvas each dwell within oneself. To seek a separate Buddha apart from oneself is [the action of] a time when one does not know that oneself is precisely suchness. When one knows that suchness and oneself are the same thing, then, of Shaka (Śākyamuni), [A]mida (Amitābha), Yakushi (Bhaiṣajya-guru) and the other Buddhas of the ten directions, as well as Fugen (Samantabhadra), Monju (Mañjuśrī), Kannon (Avalokiteśvara), Miroku (Maitreya), and the other bodhisattvas, there is none that is separate from oneself. Moreover, the *Lotus Sutra* and the others of eighty thousand repositories of teachings and the twelve kinds of scriptures, as well as the myriad practices of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas undertaken as the cause for their enlightenment, the myriad virtues they achieved as a result, and the boundless merit they gained through self-cultivation and through teaching others—of all this, what is there that is not within oneself?

When one forms this thought, because all things are the functions of the mind, all practices are encompassed within one mind, and in a single moment of thought, one comprehends all things: This is called "sitting in the place of practice" (*zadōjō*). It is called "achieving right awakening" (*jōshōgaku*). Because one [thus] realizes Buddhahood without abandoning this [present body], it is also called realizing Buddhahood with this very body. This is like the case of the eight-year-old dragon girl who, on hearing the principle of the *Lotus Sutra* that all things are a single suchness, immediately aroused the aspiration for enlightenment and, in the space of a moment, achieved right awakening [Hurvitz, 199–201]. Moreover, for one who contemplates suchness and aspires to be born [in the pure land] of Utmost Bliss, there is no doubt that one shall surely be born there in accordance with one's wish. The reason is: Attaining Buddhahood is extremely difficult, because one becomes a Buddha by self-cultivation and by teaching others and thus accumulating unfathomable merit, enough to fill the universe. But achieving birth in [the land of] Perfect Bliss is very easy. Even those who commit evil deeds, if, at life's end, they wholeheartedly chant *Namu Amida-butsu* ten times, are certain to be born there.

Thus, when one contemplates suchness, one can quickly realize even Buddhahood, which is difficult to attain. How much more is one certain beyond doubt to achieve birth in [the pure land of] Utmost Bliss, which is easy! This being the case, those who wish by all means to be born in the Pure Land should simply contemplate suchness. A hundred people out of a hundred are certain to be born there, surely and without doubt. But if one does not believe [that oneself is suchness], that person slanders all Buddhas of the ten directions in the past, present, and future periods of time. This is because the Buddhas of the ten directions, as well as the *Lotus Sutra*, all take suchness as their essence. One who has slandered the Buddhas of the ten directions or the *Lotus Sutra*

falls into the Hell without Respite (*muken jigoku, avīci*) and will not [readily] emerge. The "Parable" chapter expounds the karmic retribution for the sin of slandering the *Lotus Sutra*, saying: "Such a person, at life's end, shall enter the Avīci hell, where he shall fulfill one kalpa. When the kalpa is exhausted, he shall be reborn there, transmigrating in this way for kalpas without number" [*Miao-fa lien-hua ching*, T 9:15b–c].

How awesome! Whether we fall into the Hell without Respite or are born in the land of Utmost Bliss depends solely on our [attitude of] mind in this lifetime. We ourselves are precisely suchness. One who does not believe this will surely fall into hell. But one who believes it deeply without doubting will be born in the Pure Land. Whether we are born in [the land of] Perfect Bliss or fall into hell depends on whether or not we believe in [our identity with] suchness. How pointless that by not believing that one can be born in [the land of] Perfect Bliss by the power of the contemplation of suchness, one falls into the Hell without Respite and suffers for countless kalpas, when, simply by believing deeply, one may be born in [the pure land] of Perfect Bliss and experience happiness that shall not be exhausted in kalpas without number! Therefore we must each firmly believe in the contemplation of suchness. In lifetime after lifetime and age after age, what greater joy could there be than to learn in this life of this way by which one may so easily become a Buddha and be born in [the pure land of] Utmost Bliss? Even if one should break the precepts without shame, one should simply—without the slightest negligence, even while lying down with one's sash unloosed, even for a moment—think, "I am suchness." How extremely easy and reliable [a mode of practice]!

Bodhisattvas of the provisional teachings, who did not know this contemplation of suchness, for countless kalpas broke their bones and discarded bodily life; without even a moment's neglect, they engaged in difficult and painful practices (*nangyō kugyō*), undertaking them because they valued the path of attaining Buddhahood. And in the case of our great teacher, the Thus Come One Śākyamuni, there is no place even the size of a mustard seed where, throughout countless kalpas in the past, he did not throw away his life [for the beings' sake]. Precisely by cultivating such difficult and painful practices, he was able to become a Buddha. But in our case, we have learned of the way of realizing Buddhahood and achieving birth in [the pure land] of Utmost Bliss in a very short time, without cultivating such difficult and painful practices for countless kalpas and without practicing the six perfections [the *pāramitās* of giving, keeping the precepts, forbearance, assiduousness, meditation, and wisdom], simply by a single thought with which we think, "I am suchness." In all the world, [encountering this teaching] is the thing most rare and to be appreciated.

During the time when we did not know that our own mind is precisely the principle of suchness, we thought that the Buddha and ourselves differed

greatly and were widely separated. We thought so because we are ordinary worldlings who have not yet extirpated delusions, while the Buddha, throughout countless kalpas, carried out difficult and painful practices, both for his own self-cultivation and to teach others, and is fully endowed with unfathomable merits. Of the Buddha's six perfections and myriad practices, what merit do we possess? Not even in this lifetime have we broken our bones and thrown away our lives [for enlightenment's sake], let alone for countless kalpas! Rather, since it has been our habit since the beginningless past, we value only worldly fame and profit, aspiring to this estate or that temple or shrine; hastening in pursuit of the world's pleasures and prosperity, we have not sustained our aspiration for birth in [the land of] Utmost Bliss, or for Buddhahood and enlightened wisdom (*bodhi*), which are the important things. Having spent this life in vain, in our next life we are certain to sink into the depths of the three evil paths [of the hells, hungry ghosts, and animals]—so we have thought, but this was merely the deluded mind at a time when we did not yet know the contemplation of suchness.

From today on, knowing that your own mind is itself suchness, evil karma and defilements will not be hindrances; fame and profit will instead become nourishment for the fruition of Buddha[hood] and enlightened wisdom. Even if you should violate the precepts without shame or be negligent and idle [in religious observances], so long as you always contemplate suchness and never forget to do so, you should never think that evil karma or defilements will obstruct your birth in [the pure land of] Utmost Bliss.

Someone asks: I do not understand this about all beings being Buddhas originally. If all beings were Buddhas originally, people would not resolve to become Buddhas through difficult and painful practices. Nor would there be the divisions among the six paths [of transmigration], that is, hell dwellers, hungry ghosts, animals, asuras, humans, and heavenly beings. Thus the Buddha himself taught that the beings of the six paths always exist. In the *Lotus Sutra* itself, it states, "[I, with the eye of a Buddha,] see the beings on the six courses, reduced to poverty's extreme, having neither merit nor wisdom" [Hurvitz, 42]. Moreover, phenomena do not exceed what they actually appear to be. In reality there are humans and horses, cows, dogs and crows, to say nothing of ants and mole crickets. How can one say that all [such] beings are originally Buddhas? And, as people in the world are accustomed to thinking, "Buddha" is one endowed with the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of physical excellence, an unrestricted being whose supernatural powers and wisdom surpass those of all others. That is precisely why he is worthy of respect. How can such creatures as ants and mole crickets, dogs and crows, be deemed respectable and revered as Buddhas?

Now in reply it may be said: Oneself and others are from the outset a single reality that is the principle of suchness, without the distinctions of hell-dwellers, animals [, etc.]. Nevertheless, once ignorance has arisen, within the

principle that is without discrimination, we give rise to various discriminations. Thinking of suchness or the universe merely in terms of our individual self, we draw the distinctions of self and other, this and that, arousing the passions of the five aggregates [the physical and mental constituents of existence: forms, perceptions, conceptions, mental volitions, and consciousness] and six dusts [the objects of the senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought]. [Toward objects that accord with our wishes, we arouse the defilement that is greed;] toward objects that do not accord with our wishes, we arouse the defilement that is anger; and toward objects that we neither like nor dislike, we arouse the defilement that is folly. On the basis of the three poisons—greed, anger, and folly—we arouse the eighty-four thousand defilements. At the prompting of these various defilements, we perform a variety of actions. As a result of good actions, we experience the recompense of [birth in] the three good realms of heavenly beings, humans, and asuras. And as a result of evil actions, we invite the retribution of [birth] in the three evil realms of the hells, hungry ghosts, and animals.

In this way, [living] beings and [their insentient] environments of the six paths emerge. While transmigrating through these six realms, we arbitrarily regard as self what is not really the self. Therefore, toward those who go against us, we arouse anger and we abuse and strike or even kill them; thus we cannot put an end to the round of birth and death. Or toward those who accord with us, we arouse a possessive love, forming mutual bonds of obligation and affection throughout lifetime after lifetime and age after age. In this case as well, there is no stopping of transmigration. In other words, transmigrating through the realm of birth and death is simply the result of not knowing that suchness is oneself, and thus of arbitrarily drawing distinctions between self and other, this and that. When one thinks, "Suchness is my own essence," then there is nothing that is not oneself. How could oneself and others not be the same? And if [one realized that] self and others are not different, who would give rise to defilements and evil actions and continue the round of rebirth?

Thus, if while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, or while performing any kind of action, you think, "I am suchness," then that is realizing Buddhahood. What could be an obstruction [to such contemplation]? You should know that suchness is to be contemplated with respect to all things. Clergy or laity, male or female—all should contemplate in this way. When you provide for your wife, children, and retainers, or even feed oxen, horses, and the others of the six kinds of domestic animals [that is, horses, oxen, sheep, dogs, pigs, and chickens], because the myriad things are all suchness, if you think that these others are precisely suchness, you have in effect made offerings to all Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and three periods of time, as well as to all living beings, without a single exception. This is because nothing is outside the single principle of suchness. Because the myriad creatures such as ants and mole crickets are all suchness, even giving food to a single ant is

praised as [encompassing] the merit of making offerings to all Buddhas of the ten directions.

Not only is this true of offerings made to others. Because we ourselves are also suchness [with each thought-moment being mutually identified with and inseparable from all phenomena], one's own person includes all Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and three time periods and is endowed with the hundred realms, thousand suchnesses, and three thousand realms, lacking none. Thus, when you yourself eat, if you carry out this contemplation, the merit of the perfection of giving at once fills the universe, and because one practice is equivalent to all practices, the single practice of the perfection of giving contains the other perfections. And because cause and effect are non-dual, all practices, which represent the causal stage, are simultaneously the myriad virtues of the stage of realization. Thus you are a bodhisattva of the highest stage, a Thus Come One of perfect enlightenment.

And not only are living beings suchness. Insentient beings such as grasses and trees are also suchness. Therefore, when one offers a single flower or lights one stick of incense to a single Buddha—because, "of every form and fragrance, there is none that is not the Middle Way"—that single flower or single stick of incense is precisely suchness and therefore pervades the universe. And because the single Buddha [to whom it is offered] is precisely suchness, that one Buddha is all Buddhas, and the countless Buddhas of the ten directions without exception all at once receive that offering. . . . When one contemplates suchness with even a small offering, such as a single flower or stick of incense, one's merit shall be thus great. How much more so, if one chants the Buddha's name even once, or reads or copies a single phrase or verse of the sutra! [In so doing], the merit gained by thinking that each character is the principle of suchness [is so vast that it] cannot be explained in full.

In this way, because all living beings, both self and others, are suchness, they are precisely Buddhas. Because grasses and trees, tiles and pebbles, mountains and rivers, the great earth, the vast sea, and the empty sky are all suchness, there is none that is not Buddha. Looking up at the sky, the sky is Buddha. Looking down at the earth, the earth is Buddha. Turning toward the eastern quarter, the east is Buddha. And the same is true with the south, west, north, the four intermediate directions, up and down.