

On Encountering Buddha

(*Kembutsu*)

Translator’s Introduction: The Japanese word that Dōgen chose for the title appears with great frequency throughout this discourse and has numerous possibilities for translation, including to see Buddha, to meet Buddha, to encounter Buddha, a Buddha, the Buddha, Buddha Nature, one’s own Buddha Nature, and someone else’s Buddha Nature, among others. English, on the other hand, requires the choice of just one of these at any point in the text. While there are places where context aids in choosing the most likely nuance, there are other places where a translator picks somewhat more randomly from the list of possibilities.

The discourse itself offers some passages that are rather difficult to render into easily comprehensible English, the opening section being a case in point. Readers may find it helpful to keep in mind the following point which lies at the heart of what Dōgen is talking about: there is That which transcends all that we perceive to be appearing or arising, and that That is in no way excluded from what we perceive, as It encompasses both what appears (has form) and what does not appear (is beyond form). Hence, there is the way that things appear, which is what we perceive the world to be, and then there is That which transcends the forms that comprise our world. That which transcends these forms is, at the same time, not separate from them. Thus, appearance is part and parcel with what is Real. In more concrete terms, the That is synonymous with Buddha Nature.

Shakyamuni Buddha, in addressing His great assembly, once said, “When you see all material forms, which are provisional, as being part of That which goes beyond such appearances, you will then be seeing the Tathagata.”¹ To see the forms of things and to see That which goes beyond such appearances is a realization experienced bodily, one which will free you from delusion. As a consequence, you will meet the Tathagata.² We treat as ‘seeing Buddha’ the manifestation which the Eye that sees Buddha has already brought forth. The ultimate way by which the Eye sees Buddha refers to the Eye by which we encounter Buddha. When we see Buddha Nature in other places and when we see

1. ‘All material forms, which are provisional’ refers to all thoughts and things, which arise, persist for a while, disintegrate, and disappear. ‘That which goes beyond such appearances’ refers to the Buddha Nature which embraces not only all forms in past, present, and future, but also what is not form (the Void). Also, in this discourse, all the quotes Dōgen attributes to Shakyamuni Buddha come from the *Lotus Scripture*.

2. That is, it is a spiritual realization, not an intellectual one.

our own Buddha Nature as being apart from Buddhas, then, even though everything seems to be all tangled up like overgrown vines, we first explore through our training what ‘meeting Buddha’ means. Then we work on dropping off ‘meeting Buddha’ until we realize the vital, living state of ‘meeting Buddha’. Finally, we make use of our ‘having met Buddha’. All of these functions comprise our encountering the Sun-faced Buddha and the Moon-faced Buddha.³

To see such Buddhas is to see an endless stream of countenances, bodies and minds, as well as hands and eyes. From the time of our giving rise to our intention to realize Buddhahood and our stepping forth, right up to our doing our daily practice now, all is the Living Eye and the Living Bones and Marrow rushing in to see Buddha. It is our doing our utmost in training to realize the Way until there is no gap between our own enlightenment and that of our Master. As a consequence, the whole realm of self and the whole domain of other—that is, this individual and that individual—are all doing their utmost to see Buddha. Those folks who lack an Eye for exploring the Matter* through training take up the Tathagata’s phrases, ‘all material forms’ and ‘That which goes beyond such appearances’ and, fancying that the way things appear are not true appearances, imagine that they have encountered the Tathagata. Truly, some of those who are small-minded will take up studying His words like that, but the full realization of the Buddha’s intent is not like this. You need to realize that to see the way things appear while concurrently going beyond the matter of how they appear is to forthwith meet the Tathagata. There is the Tathagata within existence and there is the Tathagata that is beyond existence.



The Great Meditation Master Hōgen of Seiryō-in Monastery once said, “If we see the way things appear as being devoid of form, then we will not see the Tathagata.” Now, this saying by Great Master Hōgen expresses his encounter with Buddha. It contains what Hōgen personally said and what his encounter with Buddha imparted. To put the matter in the colloquial, it is like Hōgen and Shakyamuni Buddha coming head-on in competition and extending Their hands to

3. The lifespan of the Sun-faced Buddha is 1,800 years, whereas the lifespan of the Moon-faced Buddha is twenty-four hours. This derives from a kōan story concerning Baso, who, when he was ill, was asked how he felt. He used the reference to the two Buddhas to express how he was experiencing time, which went beyond conventional, calendar measurements, in that his days seemed to drag on while his months seemed to fly by.

* See *Glossary*.

each other in cooperation.⁴ You need to listen with your ears to what Hōgen said, and, as to what his encountering Buddha imparted, you need to hear what he is voicing with your Eye. At the same time, those in the past who have explored this underlying principle through their training have said:

All the ways in which things appear are appearances of the Tathagata. There is no single way in which the Tathagata appears, nor are the appearances of things and the appearance of the Tathagata ever to be confused with each other. And you should not, even provisionally, take these appearances not to be His appearance. Were you to treat them as not being His appearance, you would be as one deserting his father and running away from home.⁵

In other words, what these trainees are habitually saying is, “Because the appearances of things are the appearing of the Tathagata, the way things appear will be just the way things appear.” Truly, this is a profound discourse on the Greater Vehicle;* it is what is awakened to in all ten quarters.

You should definitely settle the Matter by taking it on faith and then making it your training. And do not be like threads of gossamer blown hither and thither by every breeze.

“The way things appear is the way the Tathagata appears: He is not separate from form.” You should thoroughly explore this statement until you encounter Buddha. Then, having settled the Matter and awakened to faith, you should accept the Teaching given in this statement and, reciting it, thoroughly penetrate its meaning. In this manner you should not let there be any time when your own eyes and ears are not observing and hearkening to it, or when you are not dropping off your own body and mind, bones and marrow, or when you are not letting go of your own self-created world with its mountains and rivers, for this is the daily behavior of Buddhas and Ancestors for exploring the Way through Their training. Do not think that because it is your own way of putting things, it could not possibly bring clarity to your own eyes. Turned around by one word of your own, you may see yourself dropping off your own concept of what Buddhas and Ancestors are, for such is the everyday Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors.

Hence, there is only one way to explore the Matter: ‘the way that all things appear’ has already gone beyond their not having appeared, and ‘That which

4. That is, the two of them are saying the same thing but in different ways.

5. An allusion to a parable in the *Lotus Scripture*, found in the fourth chapter entitled “Belief and Understanding”, which describes how we spend so much of our lives running away from the Tathagata.

transcends what appears' is synonymous with the appearance of all things. Because That which transcends appearances is not separate from appearances, That which transcends appearances truly goes beyond what has appeared. You need to explore through your training that the appearance that is referred to as 'That which transcends appearances' and the appearance that is referred to as 'the way all things appear' are both the way that the Tathagata appears. Within what we are exploring there are the two Scriptural interpretations: that of going to visit Buddha and seeing Him, and that of going to visit Buddha and not seeing Him. These are what we explore with our vital Eye. If your Eye has not yet manifested in order to look at these Scriptural interpretations, yours will not be the Eye of thorough enlightenment. If It is not the Eye of thorough enlightenment, you have not encountered Buddha. In encountering Buddha, there is what is seen as form and what is seen as being beyond form: it is "I do not understand the Buddha Dharma."⁶ In not encountering Buddha, there is what is not seen as form and what is not seen as being beyond form: it is what people who intellectually understand the Buddha Dharma have attained. This is what Hōgen's previously quoted statement is getting at, which demonstrates his realization of eighty or ninety percent of the Matter.⁷ At the same time, in regard to the One Great Matter, we may say, "When you see all forms as the True Form, then you will straight off encounter the Tathagata." Such statements as this are entirely due to the influence of Shakyamuni Buddha: it is not the Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow of any other person.



At that time when Shakyamuni Buddha was residing on Vulture Peak, He once addressed His great assembly through Bhaisajya Rājā, the Bodhisattva* Lord of Healing, speaking in verse:

*If we are on intimate terms with a Dharma Master,
We will surely arrive at the Bodhisattva Path.
If we learn by faithfully following this Master,
We will surely catch sight of Buddhas as numberless as
the Ganges' grains of sand.*

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6. The quotation is by Daikan Enō and refers to his not being content with having just an intellectual understanding of Buddha Dharma.
 7. In Zen stories, realizing the Truth short of a hundred percent is not a negative judgment but actually high praise, as it expresses that someone has a more profound understanding than just what has been voiced.

‘Being on intimate terms with a Dharma Master’ resembles the Second Chinese Ancestor Eka’s attending on Bodhidharma for eight years, after which he got his Master’s Marrow with his whole arm, and it is like Nangaku’s training in the Way for fifteen years. Getting the Marrow of one’s Teacher is what we mean by ‘being on intimate terms’. ‘The Bodhisattva Path’ is synonymous with “I am also like this, and you are also like this.”⁸ It is straightaway attaining the innumerable daily tangles that go along with Buddhist practice.

‘Straightaway attaining’ does not mean acquiring all that has been manifested from ancient times up to now, nor does it mean giving rise to some experience that has never arisen before, nor does it mean consciously grasping what is unbounded in the present; ‘straightaway attaining’ means dropping off the notion of acquiring intimacy. Thus, all attaining is straightaway attaining. ‘What we learn by faithfully following our Master’ means following in ancient footsteps as his attendant, something that we need to thoroughly explore. At the very moment when we do our daily Buddhist practice, we can realize what a Master can see. At that moment, it is our seeing Buddhas as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges River. “Buddhas as numberless as the Ganges’ grains of sand” are just the moments when we are freely functioning, like fish darting about through water.⁹ Do not keep chasing after seeing Buddhas as numberless as the Ganges’ grains of sand by fawning on your Master. What you should do first off is strive to follow the teachings of your Master, for by following them you will attain the perspective of a Buddha.



Shakyamuni Buddha, in addressing all who were experiencing a genuine state of awakening, said in verse:

*Having profoundly entered into a state of meditative
concentration,
We see Buddhas in all directions.*

The whole universe is profound because it is the Buddha Lands of the Ten Quarters. It is not broad, nor large, nor small, nor narrow. When we act, we act by following it. We call this meditative state ‘complete absorption’. This is not seven

8. This quotation is part of a dialogue between Nangaku and his Master Enō, in which the latter speaks of being freed from stain, a condition that he equates with being one with the Buddhas and Ancestors.

9. That is, when we act like a Buddha, at that moment we are a Buddha, and we see all as Buddhas.

feet or eight feet, nor is it ten feet. It is encapsulated in the one phrase ‘entered into’, that is, it is complete absorption, without anything being left outside. This ‘profoundly entered into’ refers to meditative concentration, whereas ‘having profoundly entered into meditative concentration’ means ‘to see Buddhas in all directions’. Because we have reached this state by profoundly entering That Place where no one can reach us, we see Buddhas in all directions. No matter what someone may try to distract us with, we would not chase after it and, as a result, Buddhas will manifest everywhere throughout the ten quarters. The state of ‘entering profoundly’ cannot manifest itself for a very long time. ‘Seeing Buddhas in all directions’ is simply Jōshū’s seeing his Master Nansen as a reclining Tathagata.¹⁰ And ‘meditative concentration’ is beyond something to be ‘gotten into’ or ‘gotten out of’. In our leaping beyond any doubt or fear of the True Dragon, at that very moment when we see Buddha we will not radiate uncertainty. Because we encounter myriad Buddhas by our having encountered Buddha, we profoundly enter myriad states of meditative concentration by our having entered a state of meditative concentration. The underlying principle of such things as ‘meditative concentration’, ‘seeing Buddha’, and ‘entering profoundly’ was not something made up by people in the past who were leisurely in their efforts and then foisted it off to present-day folks. Nor is it some new, present-day item, for such an underlying principle is invariable. All instances of Transmitting the Way and accepting the Precepts have been like this. Exploring the Matter and obtaining Its fruits are also like this.



Shakyamuni Buddha once addressed Samantabhadra,* the Bodhisattva of Universal Goodness, saying:

If there are any who accept and keep to these words of Mine on the flowering of the Dharma, who read or recite them, accurately remember them, put them into practice, or make copies of them, know that such persons have encountered Shakyamuni Buddha just as truly as if they had heard what was said directly from the Buddha’s mouth.¹¹

In general, all Buddhas say that to encounter Shakyamuni Buddha and to become Shakyamuni Buddha is to realize enlightenment and to realize Buddhahood. This

10. Dōgen recounts the story of Nansen’s first meeting with Jōshū, from which this image is derived, in Discourse 34: On the Cypress Tree (*Hakujushi*), pp. 474–475.

11. ‘These words of Mine on the flowering of the Dharma’ is a reference to the *Lotus Scripture*.

realization by Buddhas has, from the first, been made possible by Their doing these seven acts: accepting, keeping to, reading, reciting, remembering, putting into practice, and making copies of what the Buddha said. Anyone who performs these seven acts is ‘one of those persons’ whom we should by all means undertake to know: they are ‘such a one’,* just as he or she truly is. Because this is how we encounter Shakyamuni Buddha, hearing His words being recited is just like hearing the Buddha speak directly to us. Shakyamuni Buddha has been Shakyamuni Buddha ever since He encountered Shakyamuni Buddha. Thus, His eloquent tongue has enfolded the three-thousandfold world far and wide. What mountain or ocean would not be a Scripture of the Buddha? This is why ‘such a person’ who copies down His words encounters Shakyamuni Buddha face-to-face. The Buddha’s mouth has always been open throughout myriad ancient times, so on what occasion has there not been His voicing of Scriptures? Thus, only those who accept and keep to what He has expressed may encounter Shakyamuni Buddha. The meritorious functioning of the sense organs of such persons will be no different from this. And what is before and what after, what is to the right and what to the left, what is given and what taken, as well as whatever constitutes one’s daily attitude of mind, will also be no different. How can we fail to rejoice in having been born in a time when we have met this Scriptural Teaching of His, which permits us to encounter Shakyamuni Buddha? It is our having been born to meet Shakyamuni Buddha. Those who are diligent in body and mind, and have accepted and kept to these words of His on the flowering of the Dharma, have read or recited them, have accurately remembered them, have put them into practice, or have made copies of them, all such persons will consequently encounter Shakyamuni Buddha. Hearing these Scriptural words of His being recited is just like hearing the Buddha speak directly to us, so who would not be eager to hear them? Those who feel no compunction to be the best that they can be are human beings who are truly poverty stricken and lacking in good fortune and astuteness. Those who do their exploring and training are among ‘those persons’ whom we should by all means undertake to know, for, by doing so, we will consequently come to see Shakyamuni Buddha.



Shakyamuni Buddha, when addressing His assembly, once said:

If you good men and women, upon hearing Me say that My life is immeasurably long, trust in what I say and awaken to it with a heart that is profoundly seeking, then you will see the Buddha as constantly existing on Vulture Peak, surrounded by His Bodhisattvas and

shravakas, giving voice to the Dharma.¹² And you will see this everyday world as bedecked with lapis lazuli, ever calm, just, and proper.

This ‘mind that is profoundly seeking’ is our everyday world. Who, pray, would not trust in and thereby awaken to the Buddha’s words that are so true and real? Your encountering these Scriptural words of His is an opportunity for you to trust in Them so as to awaken. Trusting and awakening with a heart that is profoundly seeking is what the flowering of the Dharma is. And so that we might trust in, and awaken to, His immeasurable life with a heart that is profoundly seeking That which is the Truth, He vowed to be reborn in this everyday land of ours. By means of His spiritual powers, the strength of His compassion, and His capacity for immeasurable life, the Tathagata has helped us to trust and awaken by inclining us towards our mind, by inclining us towards our body, by inclining us towards the whole universe, by inclining us towards the Buddhas and Ancestors, by inclining us towards all thoughts and things, by inclining us towards the True Form of all things, by inclining us towards skin and flesh, bones and marrow, and by inclining us towards birth and death, coming and going. These instances of trusting and awakening are ‘seeing Buddha’. Thus, we know that we can encounter a Buddha with the eyes of the mind and that we can see Buddha with the Eye of trusting and awakening.

Surely, the fact that He speaks not only of our seeing Buddha but also of our seeing His continual existence on the Divine Vulture Peak means that the continual existence of the Peak occurs simultaneously with the Tathagata’s life. So, seeing Buddha continually existing on the Divine Vulture Peak describes the continual existence in the past, present and future of both the Tathagata and the Divine Vulture Peak. Bodhisattvas and shravakas alike will have continual existence, and giving voice to the Dharma will also have continual existence. We will see the everyday world as bedecked with lapis lazuli, ever calm, just, and proper. Do not be troubled when seeing this everyday world, for what is high is on a level with whatever is high, and what is low is on a level with whatever is low. This land is a land of lapis lazuli. Do not disparage those eyes that see it as ever calm, just, and proper, for indeed the land of lapis lazuli is ever just so. If you treat this land as not being that of lapis lazuli, the Divine Vulture Peak will not be the Divine Vulture Peak, and Shakyamuni Buddha will not be Shakyamuni Buddha. To trust and

12. Shravakas, here and later in the text, refer to those who, along with Bodhisattvas, stayed to listen to the Buddha’s Teaching while others, being too proud, left in the middle of the Buddha’s expressing the Dharma.

realize that this land is lapis lazuli is the appearance of profound trust and awakening, for this is seeing Buddha.



Shakyamuni Buddha, in addressing His great assembly, once said in verse:

*When those who wholeheartedly yearn to see the Buddha,
Do not begrudge even their own lives,
Then I, with all the Sangha,
Will appear together on the Divine Vulture Peak.*

The wholeheartedness spoken of here is not the wholeheartedness, say, of ordinary folk or of those who follow lesser courses: it is the wholeheartedness derived from yearning to encounter Buddha. ‘The wholeheartedness derived from yearning to encounter Buddha’ refers to the Divine Vulture Peak, along with all the Sangha. When each individual, in private, arouses the desire to see Buddha, that person desires to see Buddha through devotion to the Heart of the Divine Vulture Peak. Thus, wholeheartedness is already the Divine Vulture Peak, so how could one’s whole being not appear together with that Heart? How could it not be body and mind together as one? Our body and mind are already like this, just as are the years of our life and our life itself. Thus, we entrust our own regrets, which are merely our regrets, to the unsurpassed Way of the Divine Vulture Peak. Therefore, Shakyamuni Buddha said that His appearing on the Divine Vulture Peak, along with all His Sangha, is brought about by our wholehearted desire to see Buddha.



Shakyamuni Buddha, in addressing His great assembly, once said in verse:

*If you give voice to this Teaching,
This, then, is to see Me,
As well as the Tathagata Whose Treasures Are Abundant,
Along with all My many transformations.¹³*

What this Scripture is voicing is, “I continue to abide in this world, using My spiritual powers to make confused beings not see Me, though I am near.” The Tathagata’s marvelous spiritual powers, both visible and invisible, have bestowed

13. The Tathagata Whose Treasures Are Abundant is said to have appeared and praised Shakyamuni Buddha after the latter had given voice to the first ten chapters of the *Lotus Scripture*. The transformations spoken of refer to the many ways in which the Cosmic Buddha, Vairochana, manifests through Shakyamuni Buddha.

upon Him the meritorious functioning expressed by “This then is to see Me,” and so forth.



Shakyamuni Buddha, in addressing His great assembly, also said in verse:

*Those who can keep to this Scripture
Are persons who already behold Me
Along with the Buddha Whose Treasures Are Abundant,
As well as all My various bodily transformations.*

Because it is difficult to keep to this Scripture, the Tathagata urged us to do so as a matter of daily practice.

If there are people who, on their own, keep to this Scripture, they will encounter Buddha. You need to realize that the one who meets Buddha is the one who is keeping to the Scripture, and that the one who is keeping to the Scripture is the one who is seeing Buddha. Thus, someone who, upon hearing but a single verse or a single line, accepts and keeps to it is someone who will be able to see Shakyamuni Buddha, as well as meet the Buddha Whose Treasures Are Abundant and see all His various bodily transformations. And such a one will receive the Transmission of the Treasure House of the Buddha’s Teaching, and acquire the True Eye of Buddha, and will see what the life of a Buddha is, attain the Eye to go beyond ‘Buddha’, get the fleshy topknot of a Buddha, and understand what a Buddha’s Nose means.



The Buddha Whose Wisdom Has Flowered, Who is Lord of the Constellations, and Whose Voice Thunders Forth from the Clouds, in addressing the Lord of Wondrous Adornment, once said, “O Great Lord, you need to keep in mind that a good spiritual friend is a great persuader, one who guides us to change so that we may see the Buddha and give rise to the heart of supreme, fully perfected enlightenment.”

At this time, the great assembly had not yet folded up their sitting mats. Even though we may speak of the Buddhas of past, present, or future, you should not liken these to the three temporal worlds of ordinary people. What we call ‘the past’ is what is in our minds, what we call ‘the present’ is our fist, and what we call ‘the future’ is what is in the back of our minds. So, the Buddha Whose Wisdom Has Flowered, Who is Lord of the Constellations and Whose Voice Thunders Forth from the Clouds, is seeing Buddha, which arises in the mind. The stock phrase ‘to

see Buddha right now’ is just like this.¹⁴ ‘Guiding all beings to change’ is seeing Buddha, and seeing Buddha is giving rise to the mind of supreme, fully perfected enlightenment. Giving rise to the mind of enlightenment is seeing Buddha from start to finish.



Shakyamuni Buddha also said in verse:

*Those who practice deeds of merit
And are gentle, honest, and forthright,
All see Me in body
And hear Me voice the Dharma.*

What He calls ‘deeds of merit’ is being dragged through the mud and being stuck in the water, following waves and chasing after billows.¹⁵ He describes those who put this into practice as being gentle, honest, and forthright, as in “I am also like this, and you are also like this.” Being so, they see Buddha within the mud and they encounter Buddha within the midst of waves, and they thereby participate in His existing here, voicing the Dharma.

At the same time, in present-day Great Sung China, the crowd that goes around calling themselves teachers of Zen is large indeed. They do not comprehend the length and breadth of the Buddha’s Dharma, for what they have seen and heard is slight indeed. After learning by rote barely two or three sentences of Rinzai’s or Ummon’s, they fancy that they have obtained the whole truth of the Buddha Dharma. If the truth of the Buddha Dharma was totally exhausted in two or three sentences of Rinzai’s or Ummon’s, the Buddha Dharma would not have reached us today. It is hard enough to hear of Rinzai and Ummon being described as venerable from the point of view of the Buddha Dharma. How much less venerable are that bunch today who fall far short of Rinzai and Ummon! They are rabble not worth mentioning. Being too dull-witted, they can hardly clarify for themselves what the heart of the Buddha’s Teaching is, so they go about arbitrarily slandering the Buddhist Scriptures, ignoring altogether the part about putting Them into practice and studying Them. Such people should be called non-Buddhist fishy folk. They are not the offspring of the Buddhas and Ancestors, much less have they reached the realm of having seen a Buddha! They are a bunch who have not even grasped the principles of Confucius and Lao-tzu. As you are offspring in the house of the Buddhas and Ancestors, do not associate with that pack who go around

14. That is, it is something that arises in the mind.

15. That is, undergoing whatever is necessary to help all sentient beings realize the Truth.

proclaiming themselves to be teachers of Zen. Simply train yourselves thoroughly until you experience the Eye that sees Buddha.



My late Master, the Old Buddha of Tendō, once quoted the following:

King Prasenajit once asked the Venerable Arhat* Pindola, “I have heard it said that you, O Venerable One, have personally met the Buddha. Is that so?”

As a sign of affirmation, the Venerable One used his hand to raise his eyebrow.

My late Master once wrote a eulogy to Pindola:

*Raising his own eyebrow in response to the question, he
laughed,
Showing without guile that he had encountered Buddha
in a familiar way.
For which he deserves gratitude from the four quarters
up to this very day.
The Spring occurs within the twigs of the Plum, which,
wrapped in snow, are ever so cold.*

‘Encountering Buddha’ does not mean that he saw his own Buddha Nature or the Buddha Nature of others; it means that he actually met the Buddha. Because ‘one plum branch’ is meeting ‘one plum branch’, it is the Flower’s bursting open, bright and clear. The underlying principle that King Prasenajit is asking about now is whether Pindola had already met Buddha and whether he had become a Buddha himself. The Venerable One clearly raised an eyebrow in verification that he had seen Buddha, about which no one can be deceived. To this day, this underlying principle has not been abandoned. It is evident that Pindola deserves our gratitude due to his meeting Buddha as a direct experience, even though the experience left no visible trace. He is one of the three billion who had actually encountered Buddha.¹⁶ The present reference is to that meeting with the Buddha, one that went beyond Pindola’s merely seeing the Buddha’s thirty-two marks. Who is so set apart from the realm of the thirty-two marks so as not to see them? There may well be

16. According to Nāgārjuna’s commentary to the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā*, “The world is comprised of nine billion people, three billion of whom have encountered Buddha, three billion of whom have heard of the Buddha’s coming into the world but have not actually met Him, and three billion who have neither encountered nor heard of Him.”

great numbers of all sorts of ordinary humans, celestial beings, shravakas, and pratyekabuddhas* who do not know the principle of meeting Buddha. For instance, it is like saying that there are many who may be holding up a hossu, but there are not many who truly know what ‘holding up the hossu’ means.¹⁷ ‘To see Buddha’ means ‘to have the Buddha see us’. Even if one wished to conceal from oneself the signs of having met Buddha, they would already show, for this is the underlying principle of seeing Buddha. We need to thoroughly explore in detail the aspect of raising an eyebrow, making efforts as numerous as the sands of the Ganges with our body and mind. Even if we had dwelt together with Shakyamuni Buddha constantly, day and night, for hundreds of thousands of myriad eons, if we did not have the ability to raise an eyebrow, we would not see Buddha. Even though we are in a distant place some hundred thousand miles away from India, if we personally exhibit our ability to raise an eyebrow, it will be due to our having seen Shakyamuni Buddha from the time before the Lord of Emptiness,* for it is our seeing a branch of plum blossoms and seeing the Spring within the plum twigs. As a consequence, when we encounter Buddha face-to-face, we make three prostrations, or bow with hands in *gasshō*,* or let our face break into a smile, or make our Fist thunder forth, or sit cross-legged on our mat, doing meditation.



The Venerable Pindola once went to a great gathering at the palace of King Ashoka for a meal. After the king had made an incense offering and had done his prostrations, he asked the Venerable One, saying, “I have heard it said that you, O Venerable One, have personally met the Buddha. Is that true?”

The Venerable One brushed up his eyebrow with his hand and said, “Do you get it?”

The king replied, “I don’t understand.”¹⁸

The Venerable One said, “When the Dragon King of Anavatapta invited the Buddha to a meal, a poor humble monk like me was also among the number that participated.”

17. The hossu is a ceremonial implement resembling an Indian fly-whisk. A monk who holds up a hossu is presumably one who is a genuine Master, but Dōgen is saying that many may hold it up, but that does not mean they know what they are doing.

18. “Do you get it?” has a double meaning. The king took the question literally, whereas Pindola was asking a spiritual question: “Do you get It?” meaning “Do you not see my enlightened Buddha Nature?”

The main point of King Ashoka's question, "I have heard it said that you, O Venerable One, have personally met the Buddha. Is that true?" was to find out whether the Venerable One was already a Venerable One. At that point and without hesitation, the Venerable One brushed up his eyebrow. This caused 'seeing Buddha' to appear in the world and caused 'becoming Buddha' to be personally seen. What he replied was, "When the Dragon King of Anavatapta invited the Buddha to a meal, a poor humble monk like me was also among the number that participated." Keep in mind that in a gathering of Buddhas, the Buddhas may well be as plentiful as rice, hemp, bamboo, and reeds, but no arhats or pratyekabuddhas may participate. Even were arhats and pratyekabuddhas to come, they would not be counted as being among the Buddhas. The Venerable One had already stated, "When the Dragon King of Anavatapta invited the Buddha to a meal, a poor humble monk like me was also among the number that participated." This is a statement about himself that arose naturally, for the principle of meeting Buddha is quite clear. 'Inviting the Buddha' refers not only to Shakyamuni Buddha but also to inviting all the Buddhas within the immeasurable and inexhaustible three temporal worlds, as well as all Buddhas in the ten quarters. To be included among all the invited Buddhas was his meeting Buddha as a direct experience, one that was unconcealed and beyond concealment. Pointing to 'seeing Buddha', 'seeing Master', 'seeing self', and 'seeing you' should be no different. What he called "the Dragon King of Anavatapta" is the Dragon King of Lake Anavatapta. In our country, Lake Anavatapta is called "The Lake Free of Suffering from Heat".¹⁹



Meditation Master Honei Jin'yū once praised Pindola in verse:

*When our Buddha met Pindola face-to-face,
The latter had eyebrows long, hair short, eyes fierce.
But King Ashoka still had his doubts.
Well, om mani śrī sūrya!*²⁰

This eulogy is not a hundred percent right on, but I offer it because it is worth exploring as a possible point of view.

19. Lake Anavatapta is traditionally said to be in Tibet, and is considered to be the source of the four major rivers of India. The particular Dragon King referred to is one of four who resided in the lake and were converted to Buddhism. As a result he became free from the sufferings that dragon kings are otherwise heir to.

20. 'Om mani śrī sūrya' (Hail to him who is a veritable pearl that shines like the sun!) is a mantra praising and confirming the Buddhahood of Pindola.



Jōshū was once asked by a monk, “I have heard it said that you, O Venerable Monk, personally had a face-to-face encounter with Nansen. Is that true?”

The Master replied, “In our Chinshū district, we grow really big daikon radishes.”

What Jōshū is now showing through his response is his experience of intimately meeting Nansen. It is not that he has words for it or that he does not have words for it; it is not that they are words that a Master or disciple might utter or words that common folk might utter. It is not his raising an eyebrow, or his brushing up an eyebrow, or his face-to-face encountering of Nansen’s eyebrow. Even though he was a person of excellent talents who walked his own way, if he had not encountered Nansen, he could not have been like that. Great Master Jōshū uttered the words, “In our Chinshū district, we grow really big daikon radishes,” when he was Abbot of Shinsai-in Monastery in the Chōka Gardens of the Chinshū district.²¹ He was later given the posthumous title of Great Master Shinsai. Because this was the way he was, he correctly Transmitted the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching of the Buddhas and Ancestors after the Eye that sees Buddha had opened through his training. When there is a correct Transmission of the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching, it manifests in one’s everyday behavior as a softening, as an open-heartedness.

Delivered to the assembly at Mount Yamashibu on the nineteen day of the eleventh lunar month during the winter of the first year of the Kangen era (December 31, 1243).

Copied in the quarters of the Abbot’s assistant in Daibutsu-ji Temple in Yoshida district, Echizen Province, on the sixteenth day of the tenth month during the winter of the second year of the Kangen era (November 17, 1244).

Ejō

21. Jōshū’s remark can be understood as follows: just as my Master Nansen was to me, his disciple, so I am to my disciples, who are like the daikon radishes that I cultivate in our monastery garden, in that they sit still within their growing place, becoming ever larger and more deeply-rooted, just like a daikon.