

## On Turning the Wheel of the Dharma

*(Tembōrin)*

**Translator’s Introduction:** The main point of this discourse is that even if a Buddha or an Ancestor quotes a line from a work of questionable authenticity, it may still be valid Teaching if it results from, and with, a turning of the Wheel of the Dharma.

My late Master, the Old Buddha of Tendō, once began a Dharma talk by saying, “The World-honored One once remarked, ‘When someone gives rise to Truth by returning to the Source, the whole of space in all ten quarters falls away and vanishes.’” My Master, commenting on this quote, made the following remarks:

This is what was expounded long ago by the World-honored One, but His Teaching has not escaped from people’s capacity to create thoroughly strange and wondrous interpretations of It. I, Tendō, am not like that. When someone gives rise to Truth by returning to the Source, that ‘begging child’ will have broken his rice bowl.<sup>1</sup> The Venerable Abbot Goso Hōen once said, “When someone gives rise to Truth by returning to the Source, he will keep bumping up against the Space in all the ten quarters.”<sup>2</sup> The Venerable Abbot Busshō Hōtai once said, “When someone gives rise to Truth by returning to the Source, for him the whole of space in the ten quarters will simply be, for him, the whole of space in the ten quarters.” Meditation Master Engo Kokugon once said, “When someone gives rise to Truth by returning to the Source, he will embellish the whole of Space in the ten quarters with his brocaded flowerings.”

I, Dōgen, of Daibutsu-ji Temple would put it this way, “When someone gives rise to Truth by returning to the Source, the whole of space in the ten quarters gives rise to Truth by returning to the Source.” What has initially been quoted as,

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1. That is, such a one no longer needs to beg for the Truth.
  2. That is, having awakened to the Truth, he will keep encountering Buddha Nature, no matter which way he may turn.

“When someone gives rise to Truth by returning to the Source, the whole of space in all ten quarters falls away and vanishes,” is a verse from the *Shurangama Scripture*. This verse has been cited by various Buddhas and Ancestors alike. Up to this very day, this verse is truly the Bones and Marrow of the Buddhas and Ancestors. It is the very Eye of the Buddhas and Ancestors. As to my intention in saying so, there are those who say that the ten-fascicle *Shurangama Scripture* is a spurious scripture, whereas others say that it is a genuine Scripture: both views have persisted from long in the past down to our very day.<sup>3</sup> There are older translations and there are newer translations, but the one considered spurious is the doubtful translation made during the Chinese Shenlung era (705-706). Be that as it may, the Venerable Abbot Goso Hōen, the Venerable Abbot Busshō Hōtai, and my late Master, the Old Buddha of Tendō, have just now recommended this verse. So, this verse has already been set in motion by the Dharma Wheel of the Buddhas and Ancestors; it is the turning of Their Dharma Wheel. As a result, this verse has already set Them in motion; it has already given voice to Them. Because it is set in motion by Them and sets Them in motion, even were the Scripture a spurious one, if They continue to offer its turning, then it is a genuine Scripture of the Buddhas and Ancestors, as well as the Dharma Wheel intimately associated with Them. For instance, even tiles and stones, even yellow leaves, even udumbara blossoms, even robes of gold brocade, once they have been held aloft by a Buddha or an Ancestor, they become the Dharma Wheel of the Buddha. They are the Buddha’s Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching.

You need to keep in mind that when sentient beings transcend a genuine awakening,<sup>4</sup> they are an Ancestor of the Buddha, they are the teachers and disciples of the Buddhas and the Ancestors, and they are the Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow of the Buddhas and Ancestors. They no longer consider sentient beings who were their brothers to be their brothers, but treat the Buddhas and Ancestors as their brothers. Likewise, even if this verse were from a text considered to be spurious, it is the verse for the present moment, it is the verse of a

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3. A spurious scripture is one that purports to be a genuine translation of a Sanskrit original, but is not considered canonical because it contradicts fundamental Buddhist doctrine. In this discourse, ‘a genuine Scripture’ refers to one that was originally composed in Chinese, but one that does not contradict basic Buddhist teaching.

The *Shurangama Scripture* discussed here should not be confused with the three-fascicle and unequivocally genuine *Shurangama Samadhi Scripture*, translated by Kumārajīva from the Sanskrit.

4. That is, having dropped off body and mind, one then drops off ‘dropping off’.

Buddha and the verse of an Ancestor, and it should not be grouped with other phrases or verses from that particular Scripture. Even if there are other verses in that Scripture that far surpass this verse, you should not consider each and every passage to be absolutely, or even provisionally, a saying of the Buddha or the words of an Ancestor, nor should you treat them as the Eye for exploring the Great Matter.\*

There are many reasons why you should not compare this particular verse with the other verses. Let's take up just one of them. What is called 'the turning of the Wheel of the Dharma' is a matter for Buddhas and Ancestors. There have not been any Buddhas or Ancestors who have not turned the Wheel of the Dharma. Some will turn the Wheel of the Dharma by using sound and form to free Their disciples from attachment to sound and form, and some will turn the Wheel of the Dharma by Their leaping free of sound and form, and some will turn the Wheel of the Dharma by scraping out Their Eyes, and some will turn the Wheel of the Dharma by holding Their Fist aloft. And there are times when the disciple comprehends what his Nose is or comprehends what the Unbounded is, which are instances of the Wheel of the Dharma naturally turning Itself. To comprehend what this verse is about is to grasp what the morning star is about, what one's Nose is about, what the plum blossom is about, and what the Unbounded is about. It is comprehending what Buddhas and Ancestors are about and what the Wheel of the Dharma is about. The underlying principle of these is, clearly, what the turning of the Wheel of the Dharma is about.

'Turning the Wheel of the Dharma' means doing your utmost to explore the Matter through your training with your Master without leaving the temple throughout the rest of your life. I call it sitting with others on the long meditation benches and asking for the Master's benevolence whilst doing your utmost to train in the Way.

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*Copied by me on the first day of the third lunar month in the same year (April 8, 1244), whilst in the quarters of the Abbot's assistant in the same temple.*

*Ejō*

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\* See *Glossary*.