

On Reading the Minds and Hearts of Others

(*Tashintsū*)

Translator's Introduction: This discourse is Dogen's reworking of his commentary on a section in Discourse 18: On 'The Mind Cannot Be Grasped' (*Shin Fukatoku*) concerning the encounter between the National Teacher Echū and a Tripitaka Master named Daini. 'National Teacher' is a Chinese imperial title often posthumously conferred upon a monk whose devotion to spiritual life was exemplary. Such a monk customarily served as the emperor's personal spiritual advisor. 'Tripitaka Master' is a secular title which might be comparable to the present-day academic 'Professor of Buddhology'; it does not imply that the person was necessarily a monk or even a practicing Buddhist.

National Teacher Echū of the Temple of Luminous Residence in the Western Capital was a man from Chuchi in the Yüeh-chou District. His family name was Zen. After having received the Mind seal,* he went to reside on Mount Poyai in Tangtsu Valley in the Nang-yan District. For forty years he did not go out from the monastery's gate, yet his reputation for practicing the Way was well-known throughout the country, not only in the towns and villages but also in the imperial court. In the second year of the Chinese Shang-yüan era (761 C.E.), Emperor Su-tsung of the T'ang dynasty privately dispatched his messenger, Sun Ch'ao-chin, to convey to the monk an invitation, summoning him to come to the capital. The emperor attended on the monk with all the courtesies due a Master, and had him take up residence in the Western Meditation Cloister of the Temple of a Thousand Blessings. When Emperor T'ai-tsung ascended to the throne after Su-tsung, he too sent his messenger to the monk, and now had him sequestered in the Temple of Luminous Residence. During his sixteen-year stay there, Echū gave voice to the Dharma in accordance with the capabilities of his audience. Then, one day, a person arrived at the capital from India, calling himself Tripitaka Master Daini. He claimed that he possessed the Eye that is keen enough to read people's

* See *Glossary*.

minds. The emperor summoned the National Teacher Echū to test this person. No sooner had the Tripitaka Master caught sight of the National Teacher than he did a full prostration and then stood to the left of the National Teacher.

The National Teacher asked him, “Do you have the ability to read minds?”

The Tripitaka Master answered, “I would not dare to make such a claim.”

The National Teacher then said, “You, say! Where is the old monk right now?”¹

The Tripitaka Master replied, “The reverend monk is indeed the teacher of this nation, so why does he go to the Western River and watch people racing about in their boats?”²

The National Teacher then asked a second time, “You, say! Where is the old monk right now?”

The Tripitaka Master replied, “The reverend monk is the teacher of this nation, so why does he go to Tientsin Bridge and watch people playing with their pet monkeys?”³

The National Teacher asked a third time, “You, say! Where is the old monk right now?”

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1. ‘The old monk’ is an ambiguous term. On the one hand, it is a conventionally humble way for older senior monastics to refer to themselves, which is how the Tripitaka Master would have understood it. On the other hand, as ‘the Old Monk’, it can be understood as the National Teacher referring to his Buddha Nature, something which the Tripitaka Master would not have picked up on. In the latter sense, what the National Teacher asked could also be taken to mean, “Where is your Buddha Nature?”
 2. The Western River flows through the Western Paradise. The Tripitaka Master is saying, in effect, “Why do you, who are so saintly that you are already in the Western Paradise, bother to pay any attention to us ordinary people who are engaged in worldly, competitive pursuits?”
 3. ‘Tientsin Bridge’ literally means ‘the bridge that leads into the Harbor of Heaven’. The Tripitaka Master is saying, in effect, “Why do you, who are standing on the very Bridge of Heaven, concern yourself with us worldly people who are preoccupied with playing around with our everyday minds?” Both this and the Tripitaka Master’s previous statement are offering seemingly flattering but spiritually meaningless remarks in response to the National Teacher’s deeply spiritual question, all the while still hinting that he could, indeed, read the minds of others.

Although the Tripitaka Master remained there for quite a long time, he did not know what to say.

The National Teacher said, “O you wild fox spirit, where is your ability to read minds now?”

The Tripitaka Master still had no response.⁴



Concerning this story, there was a monk who once asked Jōshū, “Why didn’t the Tripitaka Master see where the National Teacher was the third time?” Jōshū replied, “He did not see where the National Teacher was because he was right on the tip of the Tripitaka Master’s nose.”

Also, there was a monk who once asked Gensha Shibi, “Since the National Teacher was already right on the tip of the Tripitaka Master’s nose, why didn’t he see him?” Shibi replied, “Simply because he was just much too close.”

A monk once asked Kyōzan, “Why didn’t the Tripitaka Master see the whereabouts of the National Teacher the third time, since he was there a rather long time?” Kyōzan replied, “The first two times, the National Teacher’s mind was in the realm of externals. He then entered the meditative state of delight in the Self, so the Tripitaka Master was unable to perceive his whereabouts.”

Kaie Shutan once said, “If the National Teacher was right on the tip of the Tripitaka Master’s nose, why was he having such difficulty seeing it? After all, he did not recognize that the National Teacher was right inside the Tripitaka Master’s Eye.”

Also, as if rebuking the Tripitaka Master, Shibi once remarked, “You, say! Did you even see It the first two times?” About this, Setchō Jūken once said, “Seen through the first time! Seen through the second time!”

From ancient times, there have been many senior monks who have commented on or tried to explain this story concerning National Teacher Echū’s

4. Evidently, the Tripitaka Master realized that what he was being asked for required something beyond ‘parlor Zen’ responses, but because he did not know what the True Mind of the National Teacher was, he was unable to reply. ‘A wild fox spirit’ here refers to a clever and manipulative person who gives teachings that are false and misleading.

testing of Tripitaka Master Daini, but these five venerable Fists are noteworthy.⁵ And though I do not deny the insight and appropriateness of the remarks of these five esteemed veteran Masters, there are several points where the commentators have not spotted the way that the National Teacher was behaving. If we ask why this is, it is because all concerned, in both the past and present, have been of the opinion that the first two times the Tripitaka Master correctly knew where the National Teacher was residing. This was the common error of our Ancestors and, as present-day trainees, you need to recognize it.

Now there are two reasons why I have doubts about these five esteemed veteran Masters. First, they did not recognize the underlying intention in the National Teacher's testing of the Tripitaka Master. Second, they did not appreciate the body and mind of the National Teacher.

To begin with, I have said that they did not appreciate the body and mind of the National Teacher because the first time the National Teacher said, "You, say! Where is the old monk right now?" his underlying intention was to test whether the Tripitaka Master had the Eye to see and hear the Buddha Dharma; he wished to test whether the Tripitaka Master had the ability to read the minds and hearts of others, which is part of the Buddha Dharma. At that moment, if the Tripitaka Master had been equipped with the Buddha Dharma, then when asked, "You, say! Where is the old monk right now?" he would have been in possession of a path for going beyond the discriminatory, of an expedient means for putting the Matter* in his own personal way. The National Teacher's saying "Where is the old monk right now?" is equivalent to asking, "What is the Old Monk?" His question, "Where is the Old Monk right now?" is his asking, "What occasion is 'right now?'" His saying, "Where is..." is his asserting "This is the place where the What resides." It has the underlying principle of referring to 'the What' as 'an old monk'. The National Teacher is not the whole of what the Old Monk is, but the Old Monk is certainly the National Teacher's Fist. Even though Tripitaka Master Daini had come from India, he did not know the heart of this, for he had not learned what the Buddha Dharma is and had just vainly studied the paths of non-Buddhists and those of the two Lower Courses.*

The National Teacher then asked a second time, "You, say! Where is the old monk right now?" And here, again, the Tripitaka Master gave a pointless reply. Again the National Teacher asked, "You, say! Where is the old monk right now?" This third time, even though the Tripitaka Master took a considerable amount of

5. When referring to a Master, the term 'Fist' refers to someone who has gone beyond conceptualizing and verbalizing in order to express the Buddha Dharma.

time, he was in a daze and gave no respectful reply. The National Teacher now rebuked the Tripitaka Master, saying, “O you wild fox spirit, where is your ability to read minds now?” Even though the Tripitaka Master was rebuked in this way, he was without a respectful reply and had no way out of his predicament.

However, in regard to the National Teacher rebuking the Tripitaka Master, all of the five Ancestors were of the opinion that the latter knew the whereabouts of the National Teacher the first two times and only failed to see it the third time, and because he did not see it then, he was rebuked by the National Teacher. This is a huge mistake. The National Teacher’s rebuke of the Tripitaka Master was, from the first, a rebuke for not having encountered the Buddha Dharma even in his dreams. He does not rebuke him, as some have thought, for not having understood the third time even though having understood the first two times. He rebukes him for having styled himself as one who knew how to read minds when he did not know how to read minds at all.

The National Teacher is, first off, testing the Tripitaka Master by asking him, in effect, whether the ability to read minds exists within the Buddha Dharma. By his answering, “I would not dare to make such a claim,” he implies that it does exist. After that, the National Teacher is apparently of a mind that thinks, “If we say that the ability to read minds exists in the Buddha Dharma and if we obtain the ability to read minds during our practice of the Buddha Dharma, then things are as they should be, but if what is expressed by words is not a full offering of the Teaching, then it cannot be the Buddha Dharma.” Even if the Tripitaka Master was at a point where he could have managed to express a small bit of the Teaching the third time, if it was anything like the first two times, it would not be a genuine expression through words and the National Teacher should rebuke him on principle. In asking his question three times, the National Teacher was trying to see again and again whether the Tripitaka Master could understand the question, which is why he asked his question three times.

Second, none of the ancient worthies could fully appreciate the Body and Mind of the National Teacher. What I have called ‘the Body and Mind of the National Teacher’ is something that is beyond the reach of scholastic teachers of Scriptures like the Tripitaka Master, who could not see It, much less comprehend It. Among the bodhisattvas,* even the ‘thrice wise and ten times saintly’* have not reached It, nor is It something that those who will be reborn as Buddhas have clarified. Scholars who are students of Scriptures are ordinary, unenlightened people, so how could they possibly comprehend the National Teacher’s Whole Being? By all means, you need to be certain about this underlying principle. To say that the Body and Mind of the National Teacher can be known or seen by a scholar of Scriptures is to insult the Buddha Dharma. To believe that his Body and Mind

are on a par with those of scholarly commentators on Scriptures is the utmost height of lunacy. Do not teach yourself that someone who may be able to read the worldly intentions of others must surely know where the National Teacher is existing.

Now and again, as a cultural custom, there have been those in India who have succeeded in developing the ability to read minds. But I have never heard an example of anyone attaining the ability to read minds without, at the same time, relying on the Mind that has given rise to the intention to realize Buddhahood and without relying on the Right Views of the Greater Course.* A person like this, after attaining the ability to read minds, has genuinely mastered the Buddha Dharma. On the other hand, if an ordinary lay person has attained the ability to read minds, and then later gives rise to the intention to realize Buddhahood and therefore undertakes the training and practice, that person can, quite naturally, realize enlightenment in the Buddha's Way. If one could comprehend the Buddha's Way merely by having attained the ability to read the minds of others, then all the saintly ones of the past would have, first off, trained themselves to read the minds of others and then used that ability to realize the fruits of Buddhahood. But this has yet to be the case, even though thousands of Buddhas and myriad Ancestors have come into the world. I must ask, if someone has not already come to know the Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors, what is one to do, for such a person is of no use to the Way of the Buddhas? Someone who has attained only the ability to read minds and some ordinary, everyday person who cannot read minds are surely equals. When it comes to maintaining and relying upon one's Buddha Nature, someone who can read minds and some ordinary, everyday person may well be the same.

You who are studying what Buddha is must never think that those who possess the five or six spiritual abilities—be they non-Buddhists or those of the two Lesser Courses—are in any way superior to an ordinary, everyday person. There is simply the Mind that seeks the Way—the Mind of one who is truly studying the Buddha's Teaching—which will surpass the five or six spiritual abilities, just as the song of the kalavinka bird, even in its egg, surpasses that of all other birds. Furthermore, what is called in India 'the ability to read the minds of others' should be called 'the ability to know the concerns of others'. Even though one with such an ability may have some affinity with the thoughts and feelings that arise in someone else, they are so vague as to be laughable. What is more, Mind is not necessarily thoughts and feelings, nor are thoughts and feelings necessarily what Mind is. When one's mind becomes entangled with thoughts and things, one cannot know how to read the minds of others, and when thoughts and things become entangled in the mind, that mind cannot know how to read the thoughts of others.

Thus, the five or six abilities of India cannot come up to mowing down weeds and tending the fields in this country of ours. Such abilities are ultimately of no use. Accordingly, all the previous virtuous ones in China and the lands east of India had no taste for practicing the five or six abilities, because they had no need for them. Even a foot-wide jewel may still have some value, but there is no value in the five or six abilities. Even a foot-wide jewel is not the Treasure, but every inch of time is precious. How could anyone who attaches any importance to moments of time waste them by dabbling with the five and six abilities? In short, you need to be decisive in affirming the principle that the ability to read the mind of another is outside the bounds of the wise discernment of a Buddha. Also, all five of the veteran Masters were greatly mistaken in having thought that the Tripitaka Master knew the whereabouts of the National Teacher the first two times. The National Teacher was an Ancestor of the Buddha, whereas the Tripitaka Master was an ordinary, everyday person, so how can anyone possibly take him to be the National Teacher's equal in any spiritual discussion?

First off, the National Teacher is saying, "You, say! Where is the Old Monk right now?" There is nothing that is hidden in this question; what he said clearly expresses It. The Tripitaka Master was not at fault in that he did not recognize this, but it was a serious mistake that the five veteran Masters did not pick up on this and failed to see it. The National Teacher had already said, "You, say! Where is the Old Monk right now?" He did not say, "You, say! Where is the old monk's mind now?" nor did he say, "Where are the old monk's thoughts now?" Rather, what he said is something which is vital to hear, and recognize, and inquire into. But the veteran monks neither recognized nor saw it. They did not hear or see what the National Teacher was saying. As a result, they did not know what the Body and Mind of the National Teacher was. One who has a way of explaining what a National Teacher is saying is called a National Teacher. If someone does not have a way of putting It, such a person cannot be a teacher of one's nation. What is more, a person like this will not know that the Body and Mind of the National Teacher is beyond being something great or something mediocre, beyond being oneself or being someone else. It is as if this person had completely forgotten that he had a Crown upon his head or that he had a Nose on his face. Since the National Teacher had no break from his daily practice, how could he possibly have in mind the goal of becoming a Buddha! Therefore, we should not await our meeting up with him, waiting to meet a 'Buddha'.

The National Teacher already has the Body and Mind of a Buddha, but we cannot take measure of It by employing spiritual abilities or by realizing what It is through practice, nor can we be prepared to say what It is by suppressing thought or by being oblivious to karmic* conditions, for It is not something that can be

successfully talked about or not talked about. The National Teacher is not one who possesses a Buddha Nature, and he is not one who lacks Buddha Nature, and he is not one whose being is vast space. The Body and Mind of such a National Teacher is something that is completely unknown. In our lineage from Daikan Enō of Sōkei on down, apart from Seigen and Nangaku, only National Teacher Echū is such an Ancestor of the Buddha.

I now wish to test each of the five veteran Masters and will attempt to go them one better.

Jōshū said that the Tripitaka Master did not see where the National Teacher was because he was right on the tip of the Tripitaka Master's nose. This remark lacks validity. How could the National Teacher possibly be right on the tip of the Tripitaka Master's nose when the latter still lacked a Nose?⁶ If we grant that the Tripitaka Master did have a Nose, then the National Teacher would have had a spiritual encounter with him. Even if we grant that the National Teacher had a spiritual encounter with the Tripitaka Master, this would simply be one Nose facing one Nose but, to put it simply, the Tripitaka Master was unable to have a mutual encounter with the National Teacher.

Shibi said that it was simply because he was just much too close. The phrase, 'being much too close', may have some truth to it, but it still does not hit the mark. Just what is this 'being much too close'? Shibi may well have still not known what 'being much too close' means, for he may not have encountered being much too close. If you were to ask why, it is because he only knew that a mutual encounter is never too close. He did not know that a mutual encounter is being ever too close. We can say that when it comes to the Buddha Dharma, he was the farthest of the far. If we say that being ever too close only applies to the third time, then it must be that there was a being ever too close which existed before the first two times. I should like to ask Shibi at this time, "What are you calling 'being too close'? Do you call it a Fist? Do you call it the Eye?" In the future, don't you trainees go around saying that nothing you see is ever too close!

Kyōzan said that the first two times the National Teacher's mind was in the realm of externals, and that he then entered the meditative state of delight in the Self so that the Tripitaka Master was unable to perceive his whereabouts. While you were living in China, Kyōzan, you were honored in India as having the reputation of a lesser Shakyamuni, but even so, what you are saying now contains a great error. The mind that is in the realm of externals and the mind that enters the meditative state of delight in the Self are not two different minds. Therefore, you

6. That is, he still lacked an awakened Buddha Nature.

should not say that the Tripitaka Master is unaware the third time because the mind in the realm of externals and the mind taking delight in the Self are different. So, even though you come up with a reason based upon a difference between taking delight in the Self and being in the realm of externals, that assertion of yours is still not a true assertion. Were you to say that when someone enters the meditative state of taking delight in the Self, others cannot ‘see’ that person, then taking delight in the Self could not realize taking delight in the Self, and there could be no practice that is synonymous with enlightenment.

Kyōzan, if you gathered that the Tripitaka Master truly saw the whereabouts of the National Teacher the first two times, then you are not yet one of those who has learned what Buddha is. In short, it was not just the third time that the Tripitaka Master Daini failed to see the whereabouts of the National Teacher, he also failed to see it the first two times as well. And if your understanding was as I have just stated it, then I would have to say that not only did the Tripitaka Master not know the whereabouts of the National Teacher, but you too, Kyōzan, did not know the whereabouts of the National Teacher. Right now I would like to ask Kyōzan, “Where is the National Teacher at this very moment?” And if, at this time, you should deign to open your mouth, I would let out such a yell!

Shibi, as a reproach to the Tripitaka Master, questioned whether he had even seen the National Teacher the first two times. Now this one statement, “Had you even seen the National Teacher the first two times?” sounds as if he is saying what needs to be said. But Shibi needs to study his own words. This sentence is fine as fine goes, but if we just look at it, it is as if he was saying, “He saw and he didn’t see.” Therefore, it is not accurate. Upon hearing this, Setchō Jūken said, “Seen through the first time! Seen through the second time!” When we see Shibi’s words as true, we should also say this, but when we do not see Shibi’s words as true, we should not say this.

Kaie Shutan said, “If the National Teacher was right on the tip of the Tripitaka Master’s nose, why was the latter having such difficulty seeing it? After all, he did not recognize that the National Teacher was right inside the Tripitaka Master’s Eye.” This statement also only deals with the third time. He did not reprimand the Tripitaka Master, as he should have, for failing to see the first two times, so how could he possibly recognize that the National Teacher was on the tip of the Tripitaka Master’s nose or inside his Eye? If he talks like this, we can say that he has not yet heard what the National Teacher is saying, for the Tripitaka Master did not have the Nose or the Eye for it. But even should the Tripitaka Master have maintained and relied upon an Eye and a Nose of his own, if the National Teacher penetrated that Nose and Eye, both the Tripitaka Master’s Nose and Eye would immediately have been ripped open. Once they had been ripped

open, they would not be the niches and baskets that a National Teacher needs to stay in.⁷

None of the five veteran monks really knew the National Teacher. He was the Old Buddha of his generation and the Tathagata for his world. He had clarified the Matter and had received the genuine Transmission of the Buddha's Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching. And he was undoubtedly preserving, and relying upon, his Eye, which was as black as a nut from a bo-tree.⁸ He genuinely experienced the Transmission within his own Buddha Nature and he genuinely Transmitted It to the Buddha Nature of others. He was as a fellow trainee with Shakyamuni Buddha and, at the same time, he thoroughly explored the Matter with the Seven Buddhas.* And he acted like a fellow trainee with all the Buddhas of the three temporal worlds. He awoke to the Way that came before the Lord of Emptiness,* and awoke to the Way that came after the Lord of Emptiness, and awoke to the Way as a fellow trainee at the very time of the Buddha Who is the Lord of Emptiness. Right from the start, the National Teacher treated our ordinary, everyday world of suffering as his native land, and at the same time, this world of suffering was not necessarily within his Dharma world or within the whole of his universe in all ten directions. And Shakyamuni, as Lord of this world of suffering, never usurped or hindered the National Teacher's native land, which is just like each of the former and latter Buddhas and Ancestors who had innumerable awakenings to the Truth, but without interfering with or hindering each other's experience. And it is like this because the awakening to the Truth by former and latter Buddhas and Ancestors was unique to each of Them based on how it is that They awoke to the Truth.

Based on the evidence that Tripitaka Master Daini did not understand the National Teacher, the underlying principle should be clearly evident that folks like the shravakas* and pratyekabuddhas* of the Lesser Two Courses do not recognize even the periphery of Buddhahood. You should clarify through your training the National Teacher's intention in censuring the Tripitaka Master. That is, if the National Teacher had reprimanded him for knowing his whereabouts the first two times, and then reprimanded him for not knowing it the third time, this would lack

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7. That is, if the Eye of the Tripitaka Master were to open, even though he would then be one who had awakened to the Truth, the National Teacher, who was already more spiritually advanced, would not need to depend on the Eye and Nose of the Tripitaka Master to accurately point out the Old Monk's whereabouts.
 8. The black nut from the bo-tree resembles the pupil of an eye. The reference is to the Eye, which unlike ordinary eyes does not function as one of the thieving sensory organs.

validity. To know two thirds is to know the whole. So if it were this way, the National Teacher should not have reprimanded him. If he is reprimanded, it is not for being ignorant of the whole, but because the Tripitaka Master's attitude was insulting to the National Teacher.⁹ If the latter had reprimanded the Tripitaka Master simply for failing to know the third time, who could trust the National Teacher's judgment? On the grounds of the Tripitaka Master knowing the first two times, the Tripitaka Master would be justified in reprimanding the National Teacher.

The National Teacher's intent in censuring the Tripitaka Master is as follows: He reprimands him because, right from the start, he failed all three times to recognize where the National Teacher was, what he was thinking, and what his Body and Mind were. He reprimands him for never having encountered or heard the Buddha Dharma, much less having studied It. Because this was the National Teacher's purpose, from the first time through the third, he asked his question using the same words. The first time the Tripitaka Master answered, "The reverend monk is indeed the teacher of this nation, so why does he go to the Western River and watch people racing about in their boats?" Spoken to in this way, the National Teacher did not reply, "Yes, Tripitaka Master, you have truly grasped the Old Monk's whereabouts." He simply repeated his question two more times. For several centuries since the time of the National Teacher, monks of long standing in all quarters, failing to grasp and clarify this point, have irresponsibly brought forth their commentaries and expounded their theories. The comments made by these individuals of the past lack the original intent of the National Teacher, and none accords with the Buddha Dharma. How sad that these veteran monks of the past have tripped up over this!

Now, if we say that, within the Buddha Dharma, there is the ability to see into someone's mind, then there must surely be an ability to see into someone's body, an ability to see into someone's Fist, and an ability to see into someone's Eye. If that is the way things are, then we ought to have the ability to see into our own mind and our own body. In that things are already like this, you certainly must have the ability to use your own mind right at this very moment to see into your own mind. To state more clearly what is being said, you undoubtedly have the ability to see into the minds of others, for this arises spontaneously from your own mind.

9. The Tripitaka Master's two responses were insulting because, despite his feigning humility and his using flowery language, he is actually accusing the National Teacher of engaging in behavior that is improper for a monk.

Let me ask you right now: which is better, to use your ability in order to see into the minds of others or to use it to see into your own mind? Answer! Quick! Quick! Putting this aside just for the moment, let me say that Bodhidharma's remark, "You have gotten what my Marrow is," is what 'seeing into the Mind of another' is all about.

Delivered to the assembly at Daibutsu-ji Temple in Echizen Province on the fourth day of the seventh lunar month in the third year of the Kangen era (July 28, 1245).