

On ‘The King Requests Something from Sindh’

(*Ō Saku Sendaba*)

Translator’s Introduction: The term *sendaba* (Skt. *saindava*), ‘something from Sindh’, refers to products from the Indus River area, which were held in great esteem throughout India. Thus, asking for something from Sindh is equivalent to asking for the very best someone can offer that is appropriate to the situation. Dōgen views such acts of asking by one and offering by another as a model for the Master-disciple relationship.

*Being possessed of words is having gone beyond words,
As a wisteria vine is to a tree:
The one feeds a donkey and the other feeds a horse,
The one dives into water and the other passes through
clouds.¹*

Because this is the way matters already are, in the *Great Scripture on the Buddha’s Parinirvana*, the World-honored One is quoted as saying the following:

For instance, it is like the great king who would bid his ministers supply him with something from Sindh. The single term ‘something from Sindh’ had four references. The first was to salt, the second was to a goblet, the third was to water, and the fourth was to a horse. These four goods were alike in having one and the same term of reference. Astute ministers were quite familiar with this term. At the king’s bath time, should he ask for something from Sindh, they would accordingly offer him water. At the king’s mealtime, should he

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1. This poem describes various aspects of the Master-disciple relationship. To paraphrase the poem on one level, just as a tree supports a wisteria vine, so the Master’s having gone beyond words supports his verbal teaching. Hence, there are times when the Master uses words and times when he does not. The use of verbal instruction nourishes those who are plodding along nicely, doing their training, ‘the donkeys’ who have not yet awakened, whereas those who have awakened are like horses who do not need words but, upon seeing only the shadow of the trainer’s riding crop, know which way to go. As a result, the trainee who is like a donkey is led to dive into the water of training and practice, whereas the one who is like a horse flies up, penetrating anything that obscures his view of the unbounded sky, which corresponds to That which he has awakened to.

ask for something from Sindh, they would accordingly offer him salt. When the king had finished eating and wished for something to drink, should he ask for something from Sindh, they would accordingly offer him a goblet. Should the king wish to make an excursion, he would ask for something from Sindh, and they would accordingly offer him a horse. In this way astute ministers understood well the king's four hidden meanings.

The sayings, “The king asked them for something from Sindh” and “The ministers offered him something from Sindh,” have come to us from the distant past. They have been passed down to us just as the Eye of the Dharma has. Because the World-honored One had inevitably taken them up as a topic for the Dharma, His descendants have often taken them up too. I suspect that those who have become accustomed to being in step with the World-honored One make ‘something from Sindh’ their way of treading the Path. If their practice is not in step with that of the World-honored One, they should buy straw sandals and go in search of a Master, for such trainees need but advance one step in that direction and they will get it right off. The ‘something from Sindh’ that was already within the house of the Buddhas and Ancestors has quietly leaked out, so that ‘something from Sindh’ is to be found within the households of great kings.



The Old Buddha Wanshi of Mount Tendō in the Great Sung Chinese prefecture of Ch'ing-yüan, in addressing his assembly in the Lecture Hall, once said the following:

To begin with, a monk asked Jōshū, “When a king asks for something from Sindh, what is it?”

Jōshū bowed, his hands in shashu.*

Setchō, picking up on this, has commented, “When the one asked for salt, the other offered him a horse.”

Master Wanshi went on to say:

A hundred years ago, Setchō was an excellent trainer of disciples. And Jōshū was an Old Buddha who lived to be a hundred and twenty. If Jōshū is right, then Setchō is simply otherwise; if

* See *Glossary*.

Setchō is right, then Jōshū is simply otherwise.² Now, at this very moment, say! What ultimately is It? I, Wanshi, cannot avoid adding a comment to this, for if you are a hair short of It, you have missed It by ten thousand miles.

*To simply comprehend my words is to beat about in the
grass and thereby startle some snake
And not to comprehend them is to burn funeral money
and thereby attract some demon.
Old Gutei showed no preferences among his uncultivated
fields,
He just reached out and took whichever one came to
hand.³*

When the Old Buddha who was my former Master was giving Teaching in the Lecture Hall, he would customarily refer to 'my Old Buddha Wanshi'. At the same time, only the Old Buddha who was my late master personally encountered the Old Buddha Wanshi as an Old Buddha. In Wanshi's time, there was a certain Sōkō, known as Meditation Master Daie of Mount Kinzan, who was supposed to have been a distant descendant of Nangaku. The whole realm of Great Sung China apparently thought Daie to be at least the equal of Wanshi, and some even thought him to surpass Wanshi as 'such a person'.* This error had arisen because, in that their eyes for the Way were not yet clear, both monks and laity in Great Sung China were negligent in their learning, they lacked clarity in recognizing what people were, and they were weak in knowledge of themselves.

In what Wanshi was recommending there was a genuine giving rise to the will to train. You need to explore through your training the principle of the Old Buddha Jōshū's bowing with hands in shashu. At the very moment of his doing it,

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2. Although the conventional expectation of what would follow the statement 'if Jōshū is right' would be that 'Setchō is therefore wrong', Wanshi does not say that Setchō is wrong, but asserts that what he is talking about is 'simply otherwise'. That is, each has expressed the whole of the Truth, hence the action by Jōshū and the statement by Setchō in no way contradict or stand against each other.
 3. To paraphrase this poem, to content oneself with an intellectual understanding of Wanshi's Teaching is to beat around in the bushes and thereby run the risk of meeting up with something poisonous to one's training. On the other hand, not to have a clue as to what that Teaching is about is like mechanically going through the ritual of burning 'hell money' at a funeral only to attract devilish obstructions to one's training. When the great Meditation Master Gutei trained his disciples, he showed no preferences among them but would work with whichever disciple happened to come nearest to hand.

was this the king asking for something from Sindh? Or was it the offering of something from Sindh? You need to explore through your training the import of Setchō's saying, "When the one asked for salt, the other offered him a horse." Both 'asking for salt' and 'offering a horse' together are the king's asking for something from Sindh and the minister's offering something from Sindh. It is the World-honored One asking for something from Sindh and Makakashō's face breaking out into a smile. The First Chinese Ancestor asked for something from Sindh and his four disciples offered him a horse, salt, water, and a goblet. You need to learn that, when a horse, salt, water, and a goblet from Sindh are asked for, this is the pivotal point for the offering of a horse and the offering of water.



One day, Nansen saw Tō Impō coming towards him and, pointing at a jar, said to him, "The jar is a vessel and there is water inside the jar. Without disturbing the vessel, please fetch me the water."

Accordingly, Impō fetched the water in the jar and, turning to face Nansen, poured it over Nansen's head. Nansen remained still.

Actually, in Nansen's asking for water, the sea dried up to its very bottom; in Impō's offering a vessel, the jar leaked out its contents which sank into a pond. Even though this is the way things were, you need to explore through your training that there was Water in the vessel and a Vessel in the water. Impō had not yet done anything to disturb the Water, nor had he yet done anything to disturb the Vessel.



Great Master Kyōgen Chikan was once asked by a monk, "What in the world is this 'king asking for something from Sindh' all about?"

Kyōgen replied, "Just come over here."

The monk went over to him.

Kyōgen said, "Your noodle-headed act could get someone killed!"

Now, let us ask, is the basis of Kyōgen's remark, "Come over here," his asking for something from Sindh or is it his offering something from Sindh? Please, I beg of you, try to answer! Was the monk's having gone over to him based on Kyōgen's asking for something or based on Kyōgen's offering something? Or was either of these even Kyōgen's original intention? If neither was his original intention, he could not have said, "Your noodle-headed act could get someone killed!" If either

was his original intention, such a noodle-headed act could not kill anyone. Even though one may say that what Kyōgen has expressed is the full force of a whole lifetime, he still did not escape the disintegration of his body and the loss of his life. He is, for instance, like the general of a defeated army who still talks about his military prowess. In sum, from the Crown of his head and from his Eye, Kyōgen gave voice to what is yellow and spoke of what is black, which is his most meticulous asking for, and offering of, something from Sindh.⁴ Who can say that they do not understand the taking up of the traveling staff* and the raising of the hossu?* Even so, these are not the criteria of folks that play a *koto* with its bridge glued down.⁵ Because these folks don't even know that they are playing a *koto* with its bridge glued down, they are beyond having such criteria.



One day, the World-honored One ascended the Dharma Seat. Manjushri,* having then rapped upon the signal block with his mallet, said, "When we clearly see what the Dharma of the Lord of Dharma is, the Dharma of the Lord of Dharma is just like this," whereupon, the World-honored One came down from His Dharma seat.

Meditation Master Setchō Jūken commented on this by saying:

*As any skilled Master among the sacred ranks of those in
the forest grove knew,
"The Teaching of the Lord of Dharma is not just like
this."
If, in the Buddha's assembly, there had been any trainee
from Sindh,
Why would Manjushri possibly have needed to sound
even one single clap?*

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4. In China, yellow and black are traditionally viewed as opposites or complements: the earth is yellow by day, the sky is black by night. In Chinese Buddhist texts, 'giving voice to what is yellow' is associated with the positive teaching of the Precepts and Buddhist training, whereas 'speaking of what is black' is associated with the pointing out of acts that are contrary to the Precepts and to training.
 5. The *koto* is a traditional Japanese stringed musical instrument. The bridge of a *koto* needs to remain flexible and to 'give' according to the way it is being played; hence, to glue the bridge down would be analogous to holding onto rigid views.

Accordingly, Setchō is saying that if one clap is as though one's whole being is flawless, then whether the block has already been struck or has not yet been struck, it would be one's dropping off of 'being flawless'. If it were like this, then one clap would be something from Sindh. If there were already 'such a person', that one would be a trainee from Sindh who was among the sacred ranks within the forest grove. Hence, the Dharma of the Lord of Dharma is just like this. To make good use of all the hours of a day is to ask for something from Sindh. We should ask for the Fist and offer the Fist: we should ask for the hossu and offer the hossu.

Even so, of the so-called senior monks in all the various monasteries in Great Sung China, none have ever seen something from Sindh even in their dreams. Painful, oh how painful, that the Way of the Ancestors has so declined! Do not shirk from hard training and, beyond question, you will inherit the lifeline of the Buddhas and Ancestors. For instance, someone asks, "What is Buddha?" and the Master asserts, "Your very mind is Buddha!" What does this mean? Would this assertion not be 'something from Sindh'? You need to explore in detail through your training with your Master who it really is that says, "Your very mind is Buddha!" Would any of you know that it is striking, and being struck by, something from Sindh?

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