

On Buddha Nature

(*Busshō*)

Translator’s Introduction: In the present discourse, Dōgen explores the multidimensional meanings of Buddha Nature. His discussion centers on two seemingly contradictory statements, namely, that all sentient beings have Buddha Nature and that all sentient beings lack a Buddha Nature. Confusion as to what these two statements are pointing to can easily arise because of the ambiguity of the Japanese verbs *u* and *mu*. The former term may mean ‘to have’, ‘to possess’, ‘to be in possession of’, ‘to be possessed of’, ‘there is’, ‘there are’, or ‘*X* exists’. The latter term functions to deny or negate the preceding, and it also supplies extended meanings such as ‘to lack’, ‘to be devoid of’, and ‘to be beyond’. What Dōgen asserts—as do the Masters whom he quotes—is essentially that no sentient being is devoid of Buddha Nature and no sentient being possesses a thing called ‘a Buddha Nature’. Further, as Dōgen also asserts, based on a line from a verse by Shakyamuni Buddha, all sentient beings have Buddha Nature through and through; that is, they are inseparable from Buddha Nature, are completely possessed of Buddha Nature, and indeed are Buddha Nature.

Along with the verse by Shakyamuni Buddha, Dōgen builds his discourse upon a number of kōan stories, each of which illustrates some way in which Buddha Nature has been either correctly or erroneously understood.

Shakyamuni Buddha said in verse:

*All sentient beings have Buddha Nature through and through,
And the Tathagata continually dwells therein, ever constant.*

This is the Lion’s roar of our great Master, the Venerable Shakyamuni: it turns the Wheel of the Dharma, and, at the same time, it is the very skull and eyeballs of all Buddhas and all ancestral Masters. As of the second year of the Japanese Ninji era (1241), for two thousand one hundred and ninety years now, it has been explored through one’s training with a Master. Genuine heirs down to my Master have resided in It and have been grounded in It for fifty generations—twenty-eight in India and twenty-three in China.¹ Buddhas and Ancestors everywhere are no different.

1. Bodhidharma is counted as both the twenty-eighth Indian Ancestor and the first Chinese Ancestor.

And what would be the principle underlying the World-honored One's words, "All sentient beings have Buddha Nature through and through?" "It is That which manifests just so," as Enō put it in turning the Wheel of the Dharma. We call It 'a sentient being' or 'whatever has feelings' or 'every living being' or 'every manner of being'. The phrase 'to have It through and through' refers to 'sentient beings', that is, to all beings having existence. Accordingly, it is Buddha Nature that one has through and through, and any instance of 'having It through and through' we call 'a sentient being'. At such a time, what sentient beings experience as existing both within and outside themselves will, therefore, be their 'having Buddha Nature through and through'. It goes beyond the Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow that are directly Transmitted from Master to disciple, one-to-one, because one has already acquired the Master's Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow.

You need to realize right now that the existence which is had through and through by Buddha Nature is beyond the existence of 'existing versus not existing'. 'Having It through and through' is the Buddha's term. It is the Tongue of Buddhas. It is the Eye of the Buddhas and Ancestors. It is the Nose of mendicant monks.

The phrase 'having It through and through', moreover, does not mean that one began having It at some moment, or that one had It to start with, or that one has It as some strange and mysterious thing, much less that one has It conditionally or arbitrarily. It has nothing to do with, say, 'the sphere of the mind' or 'the characteristics of one's true nature'. Hence, the external conditions and internal propensities of a sentient being's 'having It through and through' are beyond any influence from accumulations of past karma,* beyond anything that arises arbitrarily or conditionally, beyond anything that depends on thoughts or things that arise, beyond any spiritual power, and beyond any training done in order to experience the Truth. If the 'having It through and through' of sentient beings was based on past karma, or was the arising of some set of conditions, or the spontaneous arising of some thought or thing, then the path to awakening of all the saintly, the enlightenment of all the Buddhas, and the Eye of the Buddhas and Ancestors would be based on an accumulation of past karma, or would be the occurrence of some set of conditions, or the spontaneous arising of some thought or thing. But this is not the case. The whole realm of one's being is completely devoid of any defilements coming from without. Moreover, in an instant, there is no 'second person'.² But people are not apt to be concerned, straight off, with

* See *Glossary*.

2. That is, upon one's spiritually awakening to Buddha Nature, the distinction of 'self and other' disappears.

cutting the roots of the defiling passions that they are afflicted with, for when does their ever-busy consciousness come to rest?

Buddha Nature is not the existence of something that arises arbitrarily or conditionally, for the whole realm of our being—which is Buddha Nature—is never hidden from us. But saying that the whole realm of our being is never hidden from us is not necessarily the same as saying that our physical world is what existence really is. The statement “The whole realm of my being is something that I possess” constitutes a false view of non-Buddhists. Buddha Nature is not the existence of something that one possesses at the start, for It pervades both our past and our present. It is not the existence of something that has arisen for the first time, for It does not partake of a single bit of illusory dust. It is not the existence of some particular being, for It encompasses all beings. It is not the existence of something that is beyond having a beginning, for It is something that makes Its appearance just in the way that It does. It is not the existence of something that has just come into being for the first time, for our ordinary, ever-present mind is synonymous with the Way.

Above all, you need to know that within this ‘having It through and through’, sentient beings do not readily find an easy or pleasant way to encounter It. When you understand ‘having It through and through’ in this manner, to have It through and through then means to penetrate Its very substance and to let all our notions and opinions about It drop off.



Upon hearing the term ‘Buddha Nature’, many practitioners have erroneously surmised It to be the same as the non-Buddhist ‘innate eternal self’ of the Shrenikans.³ This is because they have not yet become ‘such a person’,* or are not in accord with their True Self, or have not met with a genuine Master. To no avail, they take their mind, will, or consciousness, which are constantly on the move like wind and fire, to be their perception and comprehension of their Buddha Nature. Who has ever said that there is anything within Buddha Nature to perceive or comprehend? Even though persons who have perceived and comprehended It are Buddhas, Buddha Nature is beyond any thing we perceive or comprehend. Even more, the perception that leads us to recognize Buddhas as persons who have discerned It and know It is not perception as some people have erroneously explained it, for this perception lies beyond the realm of their mind, which is ever-

3. Dōgen discusses the Shrenikan view in Discourse 6: On ‘Your Very Mind Is Buddha’ (*Soku Shin Ze Butsu*)

moving like wind and fire. Simply put, a couple of faces of a Buddha or an Ancestor are what we perceive It to be.

In the long past, from the Chinese Han and T'ang dynasties down through the Sung dynasty, the virtuous monks of long ago sprang up like rice and hemp, bamboo and reeds. Having gone to India and returned, they taught the Way to both ordinary people and those in loftier positions. Sad to say, many believed that their mind's moving like wind and fire was their enlightened consciousness of Buddha Nature. Even though such persons were negligent in their exploration of the Way, their faulty remarks persist today. Present-day trainees and novices of the Buddha's Way should not be like them. Even though you may be exploring what enlightened perception is, one thing it is not is the mind's constant moving like wind and fire. And even though you explore its constant movement, this movement is not what It really is. If you have a realization of That which really moves, you will realize what true perception and comprehension are.

Buddha, being at one with Buddha Nature, is encountered everywhere, be it here or be it there. Buddha Nature is invariably what we have through and through, for That which we have through and through is Buddha Nature. What we have through and through is not a fragment of something that has been smashed into hundreds of bits, nor is It something as undifferentiated as a bar of solid iron. This is why a Master brandishes his fist to show It. It is beyond being large or small. What we have been calling 'Buddha Nature' is not to be equated with 'the saintly', nor, indeed, is it to be equated with Buddha Nature Itself.

There is a certain view which likens Buddha Nature to the seeds of plants and trees. When the rain of the Dharma pours down and moistens the seeds, they sprout and send forth shoots, then branch out and produce leaves, flowers, and fruit, with the fruit, in turn, becoming pregnant with seeds. To view and explain It in this manner is due to the sentimental thinking of ordinary people who wander through life in ignorance. Even though they view and explain It in this manner, you should investigate thoroughly through your training that each and every seed, along with each and every flower and fruit, is the product of an honest and sincere heart. There are seeds within the fruit, and even though the seeds are not visible, they will produce such things as roots and shoots. Even when left on their own, they become trees thick with branches large and small. Buddha Nature is beyond discussion of Its being something within or outside them, for nothing is devoid of It at any time, past or present. Thus, even though you put your trust in the view of such ordinary people, the roots, sprouts, branches, and leaves are alike in being born, alike in dying away, and alike in having It through and through.



The Buddha said, “If you wish to grasp the meaning of ‘Buddha Nature’, just look at the conditions associated with the moment. Then, when the right moment arrives, Buddha Nature will manifest before your very eyes.” Now, the statement, “If you wish to grasp the meaning of ‘Buddha Nature’” does not simply mean having knowledge of It. Rather, it is tantamount to saying, “If you want to put It into practice, if you want to experience It directly, if you want to ‘see’ It,” or even “If you want to get the thought of It out of your mind.” And this giving voice to It, putting It into practice, experiencing It directly, dropping off thoughts of whether one is accurate or inaccurate about It, and so forth, are conditions associated with the moment. In contemplating the conditions associated with the moment, we contemplate by means of the conditions associated with the moment. It is our doing mutual contemplation by means of *hossu** and *traveling staff**, for instance.⁴ Further, we cannot do our contemplation by employing intellectual discernment that is tainted with defiling passions or that is free of defiling passions, or by employing discernment derived from our original awakened state or from our first awakening, or by employing discernment derived from our not yet having awakened or from our having genuinely awakened. The Buddha’s saying “just look” does not depend on our being able to look or on what we look at. What “just look” refers to is unconnected with such matters as ‘genuine contemplation’ and ‘false contemplation’. Because it is ‘just looking’, it is not looking at ourselves or looking at anything else. It is pointing to the conditions of the moment and it is transcending the conditions of the moment: it is pointing to Buddha Nature and it is letting go of any concept of ‘Buddha Nature’. It is Buddha pointing to Buddha: it is True Nature pointing to True Nature.

As to the phrase ‘when the right moment arrives’, folks in both the past and the present have frequently held the view that this means one simply waits for some future time when Buddha Nature will manifest before one’s eyes. They believe that while doing their training and practice in this way, the time will arrive when Buddha Nature will spontaneously manifest before their eyes. They say that until that time comes, It will not manifest even by visiting one’s Master and inquiring into the Dharma or even by doing one’s best to practice the Way. Looking at the Matter* in this manner, they uselessly return to worldly ways, vainly waiting for It to fall down upon them from the heavens. Folks like this, I fear, are that type

4. The *hossu* and the *traveling staff* were often employed by Masters in various ways to point their disciples toward realizing Buddha Nature.

of non-Buddhist who believes that things just happen to happen, independent of any cause.

The Buddha's statement, "If you wish to grasp the meaning of 'Buddha Nature,'" was His way of saying, "If you want to know the meaning of 'Buddha Nature' here and now." His statement, "Just look at the conditions associated with the moment," was His way of saying, "Just discern what the conditions at this moment are." You need to realize that His saying "If you wish to know Buddha Nature" is synonymous with the conditions at the moment.

And as to His saying "When the right moment arrives," the moment has already arrived, so where is there room for doubt? Even if we should have doubts about whether it is the right moment, this is still Buddha Nature coming forth in us. You need to realize that the phrase "when the right moment arrives" means that we should not idle away any moment within a day. His saying "when it arrives" is as if He had said, "It has already come." When we get all involved with 'when the time comes', Buddha Nature does not come before us. Hence, since the time has already come, this is "Buddha Nature manifesting before our very eyes." In other words, the truth of It is self-evident. In sum, there has not yet been a time when the right moment has not come, nor is there a Buddha Nature which is not Buddha Nature manifesting before our very eyes right now.



The Twelfth Indian Ancestor, Venerable Ashvaghōṣa, in describing the Ocean of Buddha Nature for the sake of the Thirteenth Ancestor, once said:

*The great earth with its mountains and rivers
Takes all its various forms completely in accord with It,
And deep meditative states and the six spiritual powers
Manifest themselves because of It.*

Accordingly, this great earth with all its mountains and rivers is the Ocean of Buddha Nature. To say that It takes all its various forms completely in accord with It means that, at such time as this materialization takes place, It is the great earth with its mountains and rivers. In his having said that the earth takes all its various forms in accord with It, you should realize that the form of the Ocean of Buddha Nature is like this. Further, It is not something to be associated with being inside, or outside, or in the midst of It. Since this is the way things are, to look at mountains and rivers is to look at Buddha Nature, and to see Buddha Nature is to

see the jaw of a donkey and the muzzle of a horse.⁵ To assert that the phrase ‘completely in accord with It’ means ‘totally in accord with It’ or that it means ‘being in accord with It in Its totality’ is to understand the term and not to understand It.

As to the lines, “And deep meditative states and the six spiritual powers manifest themselves because of It,” you need to understand that one’s manifesting or not yet manifesting deep meditative states is all in accord with Buddha Nature. The dependence of all six spiritual powers upon It and their non-dependence upon It is ‘all in accord with Buddha Nature’. These six spiritual powers are not simply the six spiritual powers spoken of in the *Āgama Scriptures*. ‘Six’ is another way of saying that the phrase ‘three and three in front, and three and three behind’⁶ is the perfection of the six spiritual powers.⁷ So, do not spend your time in studying that the six spiritual powers are ‘the hundreds of things that sprout up in your head ever so clearly’ or that they are ‘whatever so obviously motivates the Buddhas and Ancestors’. Even though the six spiritual powers may seem enticing, they are something that can create a hindrance to one’s immersion in the Ocean of Buddha Nature.



The Fifth Chinese Ancestor, Meditation Master Daiman Kōnin, was a native of Ōbai in Kishū Province. His father had died before he was born. He realized the Way whilst still a child and, as a practitioner of the Way, spent his life cultivating pine trees.

While planting pine trees on Mount Saizan in Kishū, he happened to meet the Fourth Ancestor, who was traveling through the area. The latter told him, “I would like to Transmit the Dharma to you, but you are already too old. If you would wait until your return in some other lifetime, I will still be looking for you.” The forester consented to this.

Later, he went with the unmarried daughter of a family in the Shū clan and was reborn through her. In consequence of her not being married, she cast her baby

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5. ‘To see a donkey’s jaw and a horse’s muzzle’ is a traditional Zen Buddhist phrase for discerning concrete particulars without any taint of discriminatory judgment.
 6. A classical Zen Buddhist phrase for an indefinite number of things or persons, ‘three’ meaning ‘any number more than two’.
 7. ‘The perfection of the six spiritual powers’ can be understood as a reference to the marvelous spiritual powers which Dōgen takes up in Discourse 24: On the Marvelous Spiritual Abilities (*Jinzū*).

into a muddy creek. Divine beings protected him, and even after seven days he remained unharmed. As a result, she picked him up and nurtured him.⁸

He was a child of just seven years when he encountered the Fourth Ancestor, Meditation Master Daii Dōshin, on the road to Ōbai. The Ancestor saw that, even though he was a small boy, he was strikingly handsome and in no way ordinary looking.

The Ancestor greeted him, saying, “What is your family name?”

The boy answered, “Although I have a family name, it is not a conventional family name.”

When the Ancestor asked, “And what is this name?” he replied, “It is Buddha Nature.”⁹

The Ancestor said, “You do not have Buddha Nature.”

The boy replied, “Because Buddha Nature is devoid of anything that can be possessed, you therefore say that I do not have It.”

Realizing the boy’s capacity for training, the Ancestor asked his parent to let the boy leave home and come into the monastic family as his personal attendant. Because of the karma and circumstances of his parent, there was no particular impediment, so he abandoned lay life and became the Ancestor’s disciple. Later, the Ancestor passed on to him the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching. He took up residence on the Eastern Mountain at Ōbai, where he greatly displayed the profound Principle.

Accordingly, when we thoroughly examine the statements of these Ancestral Masters, there is a profound meaning underlying the Fourth Ancestor’s words, “What is your family name?” Long ago, there was a person who described himself as “a native of the country of What,” and there was another who gave as his name “the family name of What.” Here, the Ancestor is making a statement, “Your

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8. Dōgen’s account of Daiman Kōnin’s past life as a forester and his subsequent birth, abandonment, and rescue by his mother is quite truncated. A fuller and clearer account is given by Meditation Master Keizan in his *Denkōroku* (Shasta Abbey Press, 1993), pp. 165-167.
 9. There is an untranslatable play on words in this passage: the spoken Chinese word *hsing* can mean not only ‘family name’ but also, when written with a different character, it means ‘[one’s Innate] Nature’ and ‘[one’s True] Nature’. Thus, when the dialogue is seen from the boy’s perspective, he is, in effect, making a spiritual response to the conventional Chinese inquiry as to someone’s family name (to ask someone’s personal name is considered impolite). Dōgen later explores the subtler meanings of this dialogue when seen from the perspective of the Fourth Ancestor.

family name is What.”¹⁰ It was, for instance, like Enō stating to Nangaku, “I am ‘just like This’ and you are also ‘just like This.’”

When the boy responded, “Although I have a family name, it is not a conventional family name,” he was saying, “The name that I have is not a conventional name, since a conventional name would not be correct for That which I have.” In the Fourth Ancestor’s saying, “What is this name?” the term ‘What’ means This, for he had already made his This the What, which is Its name.¹¹ Our realizing the What is due to the This, and our realizing the This is a functioning of the What. Its ‘name’ is both This and What. We should make the This into our mugwort tea or our green tea; indeed, we should treat It as our everyday food and drink.

The deeper meaning behind the boy’s saying, “It is Buddha Nature,” is that the ‘It’ refers to ‘Buddha Nature’.¹² Due to the What, one is Buddha. Were we to take his ‘it’ to a deeper level than just a response to “What is your family name?” then, at the time when his ‘It’ was no longer an ‘it’, It referred to ‘Buddha Nature’. Thus, even though his ‘It’ refers to the What and refers to Buddha, when he came to drop everything off and realize the Truth, It was certainly his family name. That family name of his, accordingly, was the same as Shū would be. Even so, he did not receive It from his father or from his grandfather, nor was It like his mother’s clan name, so how can It possibly be equated with the name of some third party?

To clarify the Fourth Ancestor’s remark, “You do not have Buddha Nature,” he is saying, in effect, “You are not It, and even though you put your trust in It, you do not possess Buddha Nature.” You must comprehend this and explore it through your training, for when is it that someone does not have Buddha Nature? Does someone lack Buddha Nature upon starting out towards Buddhahood? Does someone lack Buddha Nature upon having gone beyond realizing Buddhahood? Do not become preoccupied with seven different ways of going, and do not go blindly groping for It in eight different directions.¹³ And one can learn in training

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10. That is, one’s True Nature is beyond any name we can give It, but for convenience It was referred to by some Zen Masters as ‘What’.
 11. The term ‘This’ was often used by Zen Masters to designate a direct pointing to That which goes beyond naming, that is, the ‘What’. At the same time, the concrete This and the indescribable What are not separate; in other words, the This is the What.
 12. The common classical Chinese word *shih* has a double meaning: ‘[it] is’ and ‘this [is]’. In this translation, when the word is referring to Buddha Nature, it is rendered as either ‘It’ or ‘This’, depending on which seems smoother in context.
 13. That is, you do not need to seek Buddha Nature far and wide, because It is everywhere at all times.

that ‘not having Buddha Nature’ is, on some occasions, a meditative state. You should ask whether the time when Buddha Nature realizes Buddhahood is a time of ‘not having Buddha Nature’, and whether the time when Buddha Nature gives rise to the intention to realize Buddhahood is also a time of ‘not having Buddha Nature’. You should have the pillars* of the temple ask you, and you should ask the pillars of the temple, and you should have Buddha Nature ask.

Thus, the phrase ‘not having Buddha Nature’ is something that could be heard, long ago, coming from the quarters of the Fourth Ancestor. It was heard about from Kōnin, it was put into circulation by Jōshū, and it was promoted by Isan. By all means, concentrate on the words ‘not having Buddha Nature’ and do not fall into stagnation. Even though you should certainly trace your way back to ‘not having Buddha Nature’, you have Its measure (which is the What), you have Its moment in time (which is you), you have Its correspondence (which is the This), and you have the same family name as It (which is Shū), for all these directly point to It.

When the boy said, “Because Buddha Nature is devoid, you therefore say that It is beyond existence,”¹⁴ he had put it clearly, for ‘being devoid’ does not mean ‘being nothing’. When he stated that Buddha Nature is devoid, he did not say that It is half a pound or that It is eight ounces, as some Masters have done: he uses the term ‘beyond existence’. Since It is devoid, he does not say that It is empty, and since It is beyond existence, he does not say that It is nothing: he says that since Buddha Nature is devoid, It is beyond existence.¹⁵ Thus, when ‘beyond existence’ is said, this is a means of expressing Its being devoid, and ‘being devoid’ is a means of expressing Its being beyond existence. The ‘being devoid’ of which he speaks is not the ‘being empty’ in the statement from the *Heart Scripture* that “Material form is the same as being empty.” Although in the statement, “Material form is the same as being empty,” material form is not being forced into becoming empty, and emptiness is not being split up to manufacture material form, the ‘being devoid’ of which he spoke is that of ‘being devoid is what emptiness means’. The

14. In the following passage, context suggests that Dōgen is shifting his discussion of the word *mu*, meaning ‘not having’, from being devoid of anything that one can possess to not having existence in the sense of not being subject to arising, persisting, undergoing change, and disappearing. In order to help the reader in making this shift, this sentence has been retranslated from what was quoted earlier to bring out this double meaning of the term *mu*, which would otherwise be lost in translation.

15. In other words, Buddha Nature does not exist in the ordinary sense of ‘existing’—that is, being subject to change, as thoughts and things are—and is therefore described as ‘beyond existence’.

‘being devoid’ of ‘being devoid is what emptiness means’ is synonymous with Master Sekisō Keishō’s calling it “a stone in space.” So, this is how the Fourth and Fifth Ancestors inquired into and talked about the non-possessing of Buddha Nature, about the emptiness of Buddha Nature, and about the existence of Buddha Nature.



When the Sixth Chinese Ancestor, Meditation Master Daikan Enō of Mount Sōkei, first went to train on Mount Ōbai, the Fifth Ancestor asked him, “Where have you come from?”

Enō replied, “I am a native from south of the Peaks.”¹⁶

The Fifth Ancestor then asked, “What is it that you seek in coming here?”

Enō replied, “I am seeking to become a Buddha.”

The Fifth Ancestor said, “People from south of the Peaks do not possess Buddha Nature, so how can you become a Buddha?”

In the Fifth Ancestor’s saying that people from south of the Peaks do not possess Buddha Nature, he is not saying that people from south of the Peaks lack Buddha Nature, nor is he saying that people from south of the Peaks have a Buddha Nature: he means that people from south of the Peaks do not possess a Buddha Nature.¹⁷ His saying, “How can you become a Buddha?” means “What sort of Buddha are you hoping to become?”

Generally speaking, senior monks who have clarified the principle of Buddha Nature are few. It is not something that you can learn from any of the *Āgama Scriptures* or from academic teachers of Scriptural texts and writers of erudite commentaries. It is something passed on directly, one-to-one, only to the descendants of the Buddhas and Ancestors.

The underlying principle of Buddha Nature is not that Buddha Nature is perfectly fulfilled before one has realized Buddhahood, but that It is perfectly fulfilled after realizing Buddhahood. Unquestionably, Buddha Nature is in complete harmony with realizing Buddhahood. You need to make a great effort indeed to explore this through your training, and you may need to explore it diligently for ten, twenty, or even thirty years. And it is not something that those ‘thrice wise and ten times saintly’ * have clarified. To state that sentient beings

16. That is, from southeast China.

17. That is, Buddha Nature is not something one can possess since It is not something apart from or less than oneself.

have Buddha Nature and that sentient beings do not possess a Buddha Nature is to state this very principle. And the correct way for you to proceed is to explore through your training that this principle is the Teaching that Buddha Nature will be fully perfected from the moment of your realizing Buddhahood and beyond. What you do not explore in this way will not be the Buddha Dharma. If you do not do your exploring in this way, you cannot hope to arrive at the Buddha Dharma this very day. If you do not clarify what this principle is, you will not clarify what realizing Buddhahood is, nor will you hear of Its existence. This is why the Fifth Ancestor, in addressing the one facing him, made the remark that people from south of the Peaks do not possess Buddha Nature. In encountering a Buddha and hearing His Dharma for the very first time, what is hard to come by and difficult to hear about is that all sentient beings lack a Buddha Nature.¹⁸ Whether you are following a good spiritual friend or following a Scriptural text, what you should take delight in hearing about is that sentient beings do not possess a Buddha Nature. Someone who does not come and participate in learning about and comprehending that all sentient beings lack a Buddha Nature is someone who has not yet learned about or comprehended what Buddha Nature is. In that Enō was wholeheartedly seeking to become Buddha, the Fifth Ancestor said nothing else, nor did he employ any other skillful means to facilitate Enō's realizing Buddhahood. He simply said, "People from south of the Peaks do not possess Buddha Nature." You need to realize that to say and to hear that one does not possess Buddha Nature is the straight path to realizing Buddhahood. So, the very moment that people go beyond 'possessing Buddha Nature' will be the very moment that they realize Buddhahood. Those who have not yet learned of going beyond 'possessing Buddha Nature' have not yet realized Buddhahood.



After becoming the Sixth Ancestor, Enō once said, "For human beings, there is a north and a south; for Buddha Nature, there is no north or south." Being presented with this statement, you should work hard on understanding the meaning of this expression. You should reflect on the phrase 'north or south' with an open mind, for there is a deeper meaning in the expression that the Sixth Ancestor has given us. Namely, there is a way of taking it to mean that, even though people may realize Buddhahood, Buddha Nature cannot realize Buddhahood. I wonder, did the Sixth Ancestor comprehend this or not?

18. That is, they lack a Buddha Nature because they are Buddha Nature through and through.

Long ago, having received a bit of the Teaching that the Fourth and Fifth Ancestors later voiced as ‘not possessing Buddha Nature’, Kashō Buddha, as well as Shakyamuni Buddha, among others, upon realizing Buddhahood and turning the Wheel of the Dharma, had the ability to state that one has Buddha Nature through and through. This Teaching has the capacity to hold us to just the way things are. So, how could Their ‘having It’ in ‘having It through and through’ fail to be Their inheriting of the Dharma that is expressed as ‘not possessing It’, in which there is no lacking It? Thus, the words ‘not possessing Buddha Nature’ could be heard long ago in the quarters of the Fourth and Fifth Ancestors. If, at that time, the Sixth Ancestor was indeed ‘such a person’, then we should work diligently on the words, ‘not possessing Buddha Nature’.

Putting aside the ‘not having’ implied by ‘possessing versus non-possessing’, we should ask, “What is Buddha Nature?” That is, we should inquire into what sort of thing Buddha Nature is. People nowadays, upon hearing of Buddha Nature, do not ask, “What is Buddha Nature?” Instead, they concern themselves with matters like whether someone does or does not have a Buddha Nature. This is a shallow way of going about the Matter. So, among the various meanings of ‘not having’, we need to explore ‘not having’ in the sense of ‘there not being Buddha Nature’. Again and again, we should try to fish out what is meant by the Sixth Ancestor’s statement, “For human beings, there is a north and a south; for Buddha Nature, there is no north or south,” for we doubtless have the ability to wield a fishhook. We need to calmly take up and not hold onto the words, “For people, there is a north and a south; for Buddha Nature, there is no north or south,” which the Sixth Ancestor uttered. There are some befuddled persons who hold to the following opinion, “Doesn’t what the Sixth Ancestor said mean that a north and a south exist for human beings due to their hard-edged physical nature, but since Buddha Nature has no such limitations and is all-pervading, It is beyond any notions of north or south?” To speculate in this way is sheer silliness. You should disregard this false explanation in your diligent exploration of what the Ancestor said.



The Sixth Ancestor, in giving teaching to his disciple, Gyōshō, once said, “Impermanence is, of course, Buddha Nature, and permanence is, in fact, the mind dividing up all things into good or bad.” The impermanence of which the Sixth Ancestor spoke is beyond the conjecturing of non-Buddhists and those who follow the Two Lesser Courses.* Although the non-Buddhists and those of the Two Lesser Courses—extending from those persons who founded their traditions up to their most recent descendants—may speak of something being impermanent, it is

unlikely that they are able to fully fathom what It is. Thus, for the one who would clarify, put into practice, and fully realize impermanence as being impermanent in itself, all will be impermanence. Those who can help others reach the Other Shore through manifesting their True Self will manifest It and give voice to the Dharma for that purpose: this is Buddha Nature. Further, sometimes they will display the Dharma Body as something tall and sometimes they will display It as something short. What is constantly saintly is impermanent and what is constantly ordinary is impermanent. The view that those who are just ordinary people and not saintly ones, and thus must lack Buddha Nature, is a foolish opinion held by some folks who are small-minded; such a view constitutes a narrow perspective which their intellect has conjectured. For the small-minded, ‘Buddha’ is a body and ‘Nature’ is its functioning, which is the very reason why the Sixth Ancestor said, “What is impermanent is, of course, Buddha Nature.”

What seems constant has simply not yet undergone change. ‘Not yet undergone change’ means that, even though we may shift our perspective to our subjective self or shift it to the objective, outer world, in both cases there are no signs of change to be found. In that sense, it is constant.¹⁹ As a consequence, grasses and trees, as well as thickets and forests, are impermanent and, accordingly, they are Buddha Nature. It is the same with the human body and mind, both of which are impermanent and, accordingly, they are Buddha Nature. The mountains and rivers in the various lands are impermanent, so, accordingly, they are Buddha Nature. Supreme, fully perfected enlightenment is Buddha Nature, and hence it is impermanent. The Buddha’s great entry into nirvana was impermanent, and hence it is Buddha Nature.

Those of the Two Lesser Courses with limited insight, along with the academic teachers of the Scriptures and writers of erudite commentaries, must surely be appalled, skeptical, frightened, or awed by what the Sixth Ancestor said. Should people become appalled or skeptical, they will be some sort of devilish obstructionists or non-Buddhists.



In India the Fourteenth Indian Ancestor was called the Venerable Nāgārjuna, meaning ‘He Who Was Born Under the Tree of the Nāgās’, and in T’ang China he was called ‘He Who Is a Tree for Dragons’ and ‘He Who Surpasses the Dragons’,

19. That is, the ever-present ‘now’ is what is constant, even though there is that which we consider to be separate from the ‘now’, namely, the future and the past.

as well as ‘He Who Is as Fierce as a Dragon’.²⁰ He was a native of Western India. He went to Southern India, where he gave voice to the Wondrous Dharma for the sake of the people there, since a great many of them believed that happiness was simply a matter of fate.

Those who heard his Teaching said amongst themselves, “The most important thing in the world is the happiness that people are fated to have. He talks so meaninglessly about some ‘Buddha Nature’. Who has been able to see such a thing?”

The Venerable One responded, “If you wish to see Buddha Nature, you must first rid yourself of your arrogant pride.”

One of them asked, “Is Buddha Nature larger than I am or smaller?”

The Venerable One replied, “Buddha Nature is neither large nor small, neither vast nor constricted. It is beyond happiness, beyond retribution, for It is undying and unborn.” When the person heard these superior principles, he completely turned his mind around.

The Venerable One, whilst still in the Dharma Seat, then revealed himself to be so free of any worldly ways that he looked like the orb of the Moon at Its full. But all those assembled there merely heard the sounds of the Teaching and did not observe the Master’s appearance.

One amongst them, however, Kānadaiba by name, the son of a town elder, said to those assembled, “Don’t you see his appearance?”

Those in the assembly said, “What we do not see with our eyes or hear with our ears right now does not exist, for it is not something that we can know with our minds or experience with our bodies.”

Kānadaiba said, “This is the Venerable One’s manifesting his Buddha Nature, by means of which he shows us how we can know It. By being cloaked in It, his meditative state, which is free of attachments, takes on a form resembling the Moon at Its full, for the meaning of ‘Buddha Nature’ is That which is utterly unbounded and radiant.”

Once Kānadaiba had finished speaking, the orb-like look seemed to disappear. Then, whilst still occupying his Dharma Seat, Nāgārjuna spoke in verse, saying:

20. The Sanskrit word *nāgā*, which forms the first part of Nāgārjuna’s name, means serpent. When the word came to China, it was translated as dragon.

*Through my body, I have manifested the look of the Full
Moon,
Thereby displaying the physical presence of all Buddhas.
My voicing of the Dharma has no fixed form,
For Its real functioning is beyond what is said, or how.²¹*

You need to realize that the genuine functioning of the Dharma is beyond any immediate display of what is said or how It is put. A genuine voicing of the Dharma has no set form. The Venerable One was ever engaged in giving voice to Buddha Nature far and wide, on innumerable occasions. We have given just one brief example here.

You need to discern and affirm for yourself the underlying meaning of his saying, “If you wish to see Buddha Nature, you must first rid yourself of your arrogant pride.” It is not that one lacks sight, but the seeing of which he spoke is based on ridding oneself of one’s arrogant pride. The arrogance of self is not just of one kind, and pride takes many forms. Methods for ridding oneself of these will also be diverse and myriad. Even so, all of these methods will be ‘one’s seeing Buddha Nature’. Thus, you need to learn both to look with your eyes and to see with your Eye.

Do not equate the Master’s statement, “Buddha Nature is neither large nor small,” with similar words used by those who wander through life in ignorance or by those of the Two Lesser Courses. Those who merely think one-sidedly that Buddha Nature is something vast and enormous are harboring a false notion. Because we make use of what we are hearing as the subject for our consideration, we need to consider Its underlying principle as we hear it here and now, unimpeded by the Master’s statement that It is neither large nor small.

Now, let us give ear to the verse that the Venerable One spoke, specifically his lines, “Through my body, I have manifested the look of the Full Moon, thereby displaying the physical presence of all Buddhas.” Because the display of the physical presence of all Buddhas is a manifestation of one’s Spiritual Body, it has the look of the Full Moon. Accordingly, you need to grasp that all manner of tallness and shortness, as well as of squareness and roundness, are manifestations

21. The phrase ‘the look of the Moon at Its full’ in this poem and in subsequent paragraphs refers to the discernible characteristics of one who has fully realized his or her Buddha Nature. In some instances, this phrase is misunderstood and taken literally by persons of worldly mind, in which cases it is rendered as ‘the look of a full moon’. Similarly, the term ‘body’ is used when it refers to the physical body, whereas the term ‘Spiritual Body’ is used in reference to the spiritual Enlightenment Body, which manifests ‘the look of the Moon at Its full’.

of your Spiritual Body. Those who are ever so ignorant of what this Spiritual Body is and of what manifesting It means are not only in the dark about the look of the Full Moon, they are not displaying the physical presence of all Buddhas. Foolish people fancy that the Venerable One provisionally displayed his body in some altered form, which is described as ‘the look of a full moon’, but this is an arbitrary and false notion of those who have not had the Buddha’s Way Transmitted to them from Master to disciple, for where or when would It possibly manifest as something separate from and independent of one’s body? What is important for you to recognize is simply that, at the time, the Venerable One was seated on the raised platform of a Dharma teacher. His body showed itself in the same manner as the body of anyone sitting here now, for this body of ours is, in fact, a manifestation of the Moon at Its full. His manifestation of the Spiritual Body is beyond being something square or round, beyond something existing or not existing, beyond something hidden or revealed, beyond something consisting of eighty-four thousand components: it is simply the manifestation of his Spiritual Body. ‘The look of the Full Moon’ describes the Moon implied in Fuke’s remark, “Right here is where the What is, whether the matter is put clumsily or delicately.”²² Because this manifestation of his Spiritual Body is rid of any arrogant pride, It goes beyond his being Nāgārjuna; It is the physical presence of all Buddhas. Because he displayed It, his Spiritual Body passes through and beyond the physical presence of all Buddhas. Hence, It has no connection with whatever may be on the periphery of the Buddha’s Way.

Although there is the Unbounded Radiance which takes some form like ‘the Moon of Buddha Nature at Its Full’, It is beyond what is commonly construed as ‘the look of a full moon’. And what is more, Its real functioning is beyond what is said or how it is put, and the manifestation of this Spiritual Body is beyond the physical and the mental, beyond the realm of the skandhas.* Although It completely resembles the realm of the skandhas, It displays Itself by means of them, for this realm is the physical presence of all Buddhas. The Buddhas are the skandhas which give expression to the Dharma; the Unbounded Radiance has no set form. Further, when Its not having any set form is evinced by the meditative state that has no attachments, this is a manifestation of one’s Spiritual Body. Even though our whole assembly may desire to see ‘the look of the Moon at Its full’, this is something one’s eyes have never seen before. It is the turning point for the skandhas, which will give voice to the Dharma, and it is the absence of any fixed way in how the Dharma is stated or what form It may take, while the Spiritual

22. This remark appears in one of the stories contained in Dōgen’s Chinese *Shinji Shōbōgenzō*. The full story is translated in the Addendum immediately following this discourse.

Body manifests freely as It will. Its very ‘being hidden from sight’ and Its very ‘being openly displayed’ is Its stepping forward and stepping back in a cyclic manner. At the very time when Nāgārjuna’s Spiritual Body was manifesting Itself freely as he sat upon his platform, the whole assembly merely heard the words of the Dharma and did not perceive the ‘look’ of their teacher.

The Venerable Kānadaiba, who was Nāgārjuna’s Dharma heir, clearly recognized the Full Moon, the perfection of that Full Moon, the manifestation of Nāgārjuna’s Spiritual Body, the look of all Buddhas, and the physical presence of all Buddhas. Although there were many within the assembly who had entered the Master’s private quarters and had had the Buddhist Teachings poured into them, none could stand head-and-shoulders with Kānadaiba. Kānadaiba was respected for his Master’s sharing the Dharma seat with him, and he functioned as a teacher and guide for the whole assembly, since his partial seat was the whole of the Dharma seat. In that he had had the great, unsurpassed Dharma of the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching authentically Transmitted to him, it was just like the Venerable Makakashō occupying the chief Dharma seat on Vulture Peak.²³

During the time when he was involved in non-Buddhist teaching, Nāgārjuna had had many disciples. Even so, once he turned his own heart around, he expressed his thanks to them all and disbanded his classes. After Nāgārjuna became an Ancestor of the Buddha, he authentically Transmitted the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching to Kānadaiba, considering him alone to be his true heir. This was the simple, one-to-one Transmission of the unsurpassed Way of the Buddha. Despite this, groups of pretenders arrogantly boasted, “We too are the Dharma heirs of the great scholar Nāgārjuna.” They composed treatises and compiled commentaries, often forging Nāgārjuna’s hand. But such are not the works of Nāgārjuna. These masses of followers, whom he had long before dismissed, have confused and corrupted both ordinary persons and those in lofty positions. As disciples of the Buddha, you need to know that whatever was not authentically Transmitted directly to Kānadaiba is not the word and Way of Nāgārjuna. This is the correct belief that will make it possible for you to reach your goal. Even so, there are many who have accepted those spurious works as spiritual nourishment, even while being aware that they were fraudulent. This foolish thickheadedness of human beings who insult great enlightened Wisdom is sad and pitiful indeed.

23. A reference to Shakyamuni’s sharing His Dharma seat with His Dharma heir, Makakashō, who led the Sangha after the Buddha’s parinirvana, thus becoming the First Ancestor.



On the occasion when the Venerable Kānadaiba pointed to the Venerable Nāgārjuna's manifestation of the Spiritual Body, he commented to those assembled there, "This is the Venerable One's manifesting his Buddha Nature, by means of which he shows us how we can know It. By being cloaked in It, his meditative state, which is free of attachments, takes on a form resembling the Moon at Its full, for the meaning of 'Buddha Nature' is That which is utterly unbounded and radiant."

Now, among those skin bags,* past or present, who have heard the Buddha Dharma as It has spread through the heavens above, the world of humans, and the great thousandfold worlds that comprise the universe, which of them has said that the look of someone manifesting his or her Spiritual Body is what Buddha Nature is? Throughout the great universe, the Venerable Kānadaiba alone has stated it. The rest have merely asserted that Buddha Nature is not something seen with the eyes, or heard with the ears, or grasped by the mind, or whatever. Because they have not realized that the manifesting of one's Spiritual Body is Buddha Nature, they have not stated it. Although their ancestral Master was not loath to manifest It, their ears were shut so that they never heard about It. Since they had not yet comprehended what their Spiritual Body was, It was not something that they ever fully discerned. Hoping to see the meditative state that is free of characteristics as something with a form resembling the moon at its full, they respectfully bowed, but their eyes had not yet caught sight of It.



"The meaning of 'Buddha Nature' is That which is utterly unbounded and radiant." Thus, the manifestation of the Spiritual Body is one's giving voice to Buddha Nature, for It is unbounded radiance and It is absolute. To give voice to Buddha Nature means to manifest the Spiritual Body, for it is the means by which the physical presence of all Buddhas is displayed. Where is the Buddha, or the pair of Buddhas, whose display of It did not take on the physical presence of a Buddha?²⁴ The physical presence of a Buddha is someone's manifesting the Spiritual Body, and Buddha Nature exists as that person's manifestation of the Spiritual Body. On the other hand, the ability of the Buddhas and Ancestors to speak of It and understand It in terms of the four elements* and the five skandhas is also Their momentary manifestation of the Spiritual Body. The physical presence

24. 'One Buddha' refers to someone who has realized the Truth, whereas 'a pair of Buddhas' is an allusion to a Master and a disciple after Transmission.

of all Buddhas, which we have already spoken about, is just like the realm of the skandhas. All Their functioning is the functioning of this realm. The way that Buddhas function completely plumbs the depths of how the Spiritual Body manifests when It encompasses all Its diverse forms. All the comings and goings of Their immeasurable, unbounded functioning are instances of this Spiritual Body being made manifest.

Even so, since the time of Master Nāgārjuna and his disciple Kānadaiba, among those who spiritually explored Buddhism as it existed in earlier and later generations throughout India, China, and Japan, no one has ever said anything the equal of what Nāgārjuna and Kānadaiba said. How many teachers of Scriptures, as well as erudite scholars of Their commentaries and the like, have tripped over what the Buddhas and Ancestors have said? From ancient times, there have been those in Great Sung China who attempted to illustrate this incident, but they were unable to portray it either physically or mentally, nor could they draw it in space or upon a wall. Vainly sketching with their writing brush, they endeavored to depict Nāgārjuna's 'manifestation of the Spiritual Body as the look of the Full Moon' by sketching a mirror-like circle above a Dharma seat. These people have intended their depictions to be as gold dust before people's eyes, yet even though the frosts of autumn and the flowers of spring have appeared and faded away for centuries since, not a soul has said they err. How sad that so many matters have been bungled like this! If Nāgārjuna's manifesting the 'Spiritual Body with the look of the Full Moon' is taken to mean that It had the look of a circle, it would be a real picture of a rice cake.²⁵ These artists' playing around with people like this is silly enough to make one die laughing. Sad to say, in a kingdom like Great Sung China, nary a householder or a monk has heard and understood the words of Nāgārjuna, or is familiar with what Kānadaiba said, or has even encountered it, let alone having any familiarity with the manifestation of one's Spiritual Body! They are in the dark about the Full Moon, and the Moon at Its full has waned for them. This is because they are remiss in their examination of the past and lack a fondness for examples from the past as well. Further, in your endeavor to encounter the real manifestation of the Spiritual Body of old and new Buddhas, do not prize or play around with 'pictures of rice cakes'. You need to know that, when you attempt to depict the characteristics of the Spiritual Body manifesting with the look of the Full Moon, you should use the image of Nāgārjuna's body seated upon a Dharma seat. His raised eyebrows and twinkling eyes will be straight to the point. The Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching within his very Skin and Flesh, Bones and

25. That is, like a picture of a rice cake, it would be incapable of providing nourishment or satisfying one's hunger.

Marrow will undoubtedly be portrayed by his sitting upright and still. You should convey his face, which beams with the sweetest smile because he has become a Buddha and an Ancestor. To the degree that this portrait of yours does not yet have the look of the Moon, it will lack anything resembling Its form, and it will not give expression to the Dharma either in what is conveyed or how, nor will it have Its genuine functioning.

If you desire to depict the Spiritual Body, you must use the Full Moon as your model. When you wish to use the Full Moon as your model, you must specifically use only the Full Moon, for this is the way that the Spiritual Body manifests Itself. When you wish to portray the look of the Full Moon, you must model it only on the look of the Moon at Its full. And you must demonstrate the look of the Moon at Its full. On the other hand, if you do not portray the manifestation of the Spiritual Body, or portray the Full Moon, or portray the Moon at Its full, or aim at portraying the physical presence of all Buddhas, or embody the displaying of this presence, or aim at manifesting the Dharma, you will be vainly drawing a picture of a rice cake, and what does that get you? If you are quick to set your sights straight, who of you will not be sated right here and now, and not go hungry?²⁶

Just as the moon is circular in form, so circularity is a manifestation of one's Spiritual Body.²⁷ In your investigation of circularity, do not examine it as if it were the roundness of a coin, or liken it to a rice cake. The Spiritual Body is the body of the moon in its characteristic circular shape, so Its form is like the form of the Moon at Its full. You should investigate a coin or a rice cake, too, in terms of their circularity.



While I was still drifting about like a cloud, I went to Great Sung China. It was about the end of autumn in the sixteenth year of the Chinese Chia-ting era (1223) when I first arrived at Kōri temple on Mount Ashoka. I saw that someone

26. In this paragraph, Dōgen explains that in order to draw a correct picture of a human being's manifestation of Buddha Nature, you need to use as your basis the picture of a human being, rather than using some abstract object such as a circle. In order to emphasize this point, he talks about using the Moon at Its full as the model for drawing a Full Moon. This is comparable to saying that if you want to draw a picture of a round plate, use a plate that is round as your model, rather than, say, using some other round object or using a plate that is square.

27. 'Circularity' implies something that has no beginning or ending, that is all-encompassing, and is ever flowing, ever changing, now coming forth, now receding.

had painted portraits of the thirty-three Indian and Chinese Ancestors on the wall of the western corridor. At the time, I did not grasp their meaning. Later, during the summer retreat in the first year of the Chinese Kia-ch'ing era (1225), I happened to return there, and while walking along the corridor with Guestmaster Jōkei of Szechwan Province, I asked him, "Whose picture is this?" The Guestmaster answered, "It is the appearance of a full moon which represents Nāgārjuna's body." When he spoke thus, his countenance showed no nose for the Great Matter, nor was there any expression of It in his voice. I commented, "There is no more to this than a painting of a rice cake." Even though the Guestmaster burst out laughing at the time, there was no sword within his laugh that was capable of smashing a painted rice cake to bits. Subsequently, as the Guestmaster and I visited the Relics Hall and the six scenic spots of the monastery, I brought up the issue of the picture again several times, but not even the slightest inkling of what it was about ever arose in him. Naturally, there were also many other monks who put forth their opinions, but they too were completely useless. So I said, "I'll try raising the question with the Abbot." The Abbot at the time was the monk Daikō. The Guestmaster remarked, "He probably won't be able to give you an answer as he doesn't have the nose for that kind of thing. So how could he know anything about it?" Therefore, I did not ask the Venerable Daikō. Although my monastic brother Jōkei talked to me in this way, he himself had no understanding either. Those other skin bags who heard our talk also had nothing to contribute. Generations of Abbots presiding at that temple's meals of gruel and rice had never looked at that picture and wondered about it, so they had never revised and corrected their understanding of it. Further, when there are things that you cannot possibly depict, then you should not try to depict them at all, and what you can depict, you should depict in a straightforward manner. Despite this, the look of the Full Moon which is the manifestation of one's Spiritual Body is something that one never depicts.

To speak more broadly, in that such persons have not awakened from their present opinions and personal views that Buddha Nature is somehow synonymous with the intellectual, perceptual, or cognitive functions of their mind, it is as if they had lost the distinction of meaning between the phrases 'possessing Buddha Nature' and 'not possessing Buddha Nature'. This can be understood only by those with true understanding, and rare indeed are those who have even tried to investigate how to make such distinctions. You should know that this lack of effort on their part was due to the fact that such investigations had gone out of fashion. In many places, there have been Abbots presiding at meals of gruel and rice who have died without once in their whole life even mentioning the term 'Buddha Nature'. And some among them have said that those who pay heed to Scriptural Teachings may discuss Buddha Nature, but those who practice Zen meditation should not

speak of It. Folks who talk like this are truly beasts! What a bunch of demons they are to mingle with and defile the Way of our Buddha Tathagata! Is what they call ‘paying heed to the Scriptural Teachings’ the Way of the Buddha? Or is what they call ‘practicing Zen meditation’ the Way of the Buddha? Recognize that what they are calling ‘paying heed to the Scriptural Teachings’ and ‘practicing Zen meditation’ are still not the Way of the Buddha.



National Teacher Enkan Saian in Kangshū Province was an esteemed Master under Baso. He once pointed out to his assembly, “All sentient beings are possessed of Buddha Nature.” Right away, we need to thoroughly examine his words ‘all sentient beings’. All sentient beings have different internal propensities and external conditions, which are the fruits of past karma, so their perspectives are different. This holds true for each and every one of them, be they called ‘ordinary people’, ‘non-Buddhists’, ‘those in the Three Courses’, ‘those in the Five Courses’, or something else.²⁸ ‘All sentient beings’, as spoken of in the Buddha’s Way in the present instance, means that all who possess a mind filled with craving are ‘sentient beings’, since having a mind is synonymous with being a sentient being.²⁹ All those whose mind is beyond craving will likewise be sentient beings, since being a sentient being is synonymous with having a mind.³⁰ Accordingly, all minds are, without exception, sentient beings, and all sentient beings are, without exception, possessed of Buddha Nature. And even grasses, trees, and our very nation are synonymous with Mind, and because they are synonymous with Mind, they are sentient beings, and because they are sentient beings, they are possessed of Buddha Nature. And, likewise, the sun, the moon, and the stars are synonymous with Mind, and because they are synonymous with Mind, they are sentient beings,

28. Those in the Three Courses are the shravakas, the pratyekabuddhas, and the bodhisattvas. Those in the Five Courses are the above three, plus lay Buddhists who have taken and keep to the first five of the Ten Precepts, and those in lofty positions (‘celestial beings’) who devote themselves to doing good deeds and practicing meditation.

29. That is, mind does not exist as an entity independent of human existence (such as the Subtle Intelligence posited by the Shrenikans).

30. In referring to the mind in this passage, Dōgen uses two words. The first (*ushin*) has two meanings: having or possessing a mind and having a mind that is enmeshed in attachments. The second (*mushin*) refers to a mind that has dropped off its attachments. This latter state of mind, however, also encompasses the first meaning of *ushin* as simply ‘having a mind’.

and because they are sentient beings, they are possessed of Buddha Nature.³¹ ‘Being possessed of Buddha Nature’, which the National Teacher spoke of, is no different. Were it different, it would not be the ‘being possessed of Buddha Nature’ that is put forth in the Buddha’s Way. The core of what the National Teacher said is simply that all sentient beings are possessed of Buddha Nature. Further, if anything were not a sentient being, it would not be possessed of Buddha Nature. Right now, it would be good for you to ask of the National Teacher, “Are all the Buddhas possessed of Buddha Nature?” since to inquire in this way will put him to the test. You should examine carefully that he did not say, “All sentient beings are the same as Buddha Nature,” but said, “All sentient beings are possessed of Buddha Nature.” A Buddha will have discarded any sense of possessing something as implied by the phrase ‘possessing Buddha Nature’. Their discarding of it is Their being at one with all things, as if all were a single, solid iron bar, and Their being at one with all things is as the passage of birds, which leaves no traces. As a consequence, all Buddhas are possessed of Buddha Nature. For this reason, the truth of what the National Teacher said not only penetrates through what ‘sentient beings’ means, but also penetrates through what ‘Buddha Nature’ means. Even though the National Teacher may not have fully understood all the implications of what he was saying, this does not mean that he lacked the opportunity to understand them, nor does it mean that the essence of what he said is meaningless for us today.

Also, even though you may not yet have understood for yourself the Truth with which you are already equipped, you have Its four elements and five skandhas, and you have Its Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow. Thus it is that there are some whose affirmation of It takes their whole lifetime to affirm, and there are others for whom it takes lifetimes to affirm It.



Meditation Master Isan of Mount Daii once said to his assembly, “All sentient beings lack a Buddha Nature.” Among the ordinary people and those in lofty positions who hear this, there will be those who will be delighted because of their great capacity for understanding, and there will also be no shortage of those who will be disquieted and filled with doubt. This is because the Venerable Shakyamuni stated that all sentient beings have Buddha Nature through and through, whereas Isan is saying that all sentient beings lack a Buddha Nature. Since the meaning of the words ‘have’ and ‘lack’ must surely be greatly different,

31. That is, the whole universe and everything in it is Buddha Nature.

some may harbor doubts as to which statement is true to the mark and which is not. Even so, in the Buddha's Way, only Isan's statement, "All sentient beings lack a Buddha Nature," excels National Teacher Enkan's. Even though Enkan's phrase about 'being possessed of Buddha Nature' resembles a stretching forth of a pair of hands along with the former Buddha, nevertheless, this remark is the same as a traveling staff being shouldered by two people.³² Now, Isan's phrase is not like this; his observation is like a traveling staff absorbing two people.³³ Moreover, even though the National Teacher was a monastic son of Baso, and Isan was a monastic grandson of Baso, the Dharma grandson was an old hand at his grandfather's way of putting the Matter, whereas the Dharma son was a youngster when it came to his father's way of putting It. The gist of what Isan said has made "All sentient beings lack a Buddha Nature" his underlying principle. He did not say anything that is even vaguely beyond the straight and narrow of Buddhist Teaching. This is how he received and preserved the Scriptures within the quarters of his own monastic tradition.

Further, it is imperative that you ferret out how it is that all sentient beings are Buddha Nature, and in what sense they are possessed of Buddha Nature. If any people assert that they possess a Buddha Nature, they must surely be the henchmen of demons who will, one day or another, attempt to wrap all sentient beings up in a demon child's swaddling clothes. Since Buddha Nature is Buddha Nature, sentient beings are sentient beings. Sentient beings, from the start, have never been equipped with a Buddha Nature. Even though they may wish to possess such a thing, the point is that Buddha Nature, in the first place, is not something that can come along with anyone. Do not assert that when Mr. Chang drinks wine, Mr. Li gets drunk. If anything possessed 'a Buddha Nature' in and of itself, such a thing would not be a sentient being. If anything possessed 'being a sentient being', then ultimately such a thing would not be Buddha Nature. This is why Hyakujō said, "To assert that a sentient being possesses Buddha Nature slanders Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. And to assert that a sentient being lacks Buddha Nature slanders Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha." Accordingly, to say that one possesses a Buddha Nature and to say that one lacks Buddha Nature both become slander. Even though they become slander, it does not mean that one cannot say anything

32. The traveling staff was often used by Masters to point a disciple towards the Truth, that is, towards which way to go. Hence, according to Dōgen, while Enkan's statement may seem to be expanding upon what the Buddha said, in reality he was merely repeating the same thing over again.

33. Dōgen's descriptive phrase may refer to the face-to-face relationship in Transmission, wherein Master and disciple are absorbed together in That which points to the Truth.

about It. Were Isan and Hyakujō able to hear me at this moment, I would now say to Hyakujō, “Granted that both are slanderous, are you able to state what Buddha Nature is? Even though you can state what It is, such a statement may restrict the way of expressing It. If you do have a way of expressing It, such an expression will be in complete harmony with how it is heard.” And turning to Isan, I would remark, “Even though your saying that all sentient beings lack a Buddha Nature expresses It through words, you did not say that all of Buddha Nature lacks sentient beings and you did not say that all of Buddha Nature lacks Buddha Nature, and, what is more, you have not yet seen even in your dreams that each and every one of the Buddhas lacks a Buddha Nature. Should you give it another try, I’d like to take a look at it.”



Meditation Master Hyakujō, in giving teaching to his assembly, said:

It is Buddha that is the unsurpassed Vehicle.³⁴ It is Supreme Wisdom. It is what establishes people in the Buddha’s Way. It is the very Buddha Nature which a Buddha is possessed of. It is the Teacher and Guide who makes unhindered use of everything for the sake of others. It is unimpeded in Its discernment. Hence It is able to make good use of karmic cause and effect, and is naturally joyful and wise. Its cart wheels continually roll forward, carrying forth karmic causality. When dealing with life, It does not experience life as something that ceases. When dealing with death, It does not experience death as a hindrance. When dealing with the five skandhas, It does not experience the five skandhas as impediments, but rather as portals that are open; coming and going at will, It suffers no difficulties in going in and out of them. If you can be like this, there will be no need to discuss higher or lower stages of spiritual development. Indeed, if even an ant can be like this, then it will be, through and through, a wondrous Pure Land, beyond anything we can possibly imagine.

This, then, was Hyakujō’s way of expressing the Matter. The five skandhas comprise our intact body at this very moment. Whatever we are doing right now is the opening of a portal, and it opens without our experiencing any impediments from our five skandhas. When we simply live, we are not restricted by life, and

34. ‘Buddha’, here, refers to awakened Buddha Nature, the functioning of which is the subject of Hyakujō’s remarks.

when we simply die, we are not put into turmoil by death. Do not uselessly crave life, and do not vainly fear death. They are both simply places where Buddha Nature resides. To be constantly disturbed and worn out over them is non-Buddhist behavior. To acknowledge the various conditions and circumstances that arise before our very eyes is the way to be unhindered in one's dealing with them. This is the Ultimate Vehicle: it is to be Buddha. Wherever one may reside within this state of 'being Buddha' becomes a wondrous Pure Land.



Ōbaku was sitting in Nansen's Abbatical reception room,³⁵ when Nansen asked Ōbaku, "What do you think of the principle enunciated in the *Great Scripture on the Buddha's Parinirvana* that, if one trains oneself equally in meditative practice and in spiritual wisdom, one will clearly see one's Buddha Nature?"

Ōbaku replied, "Within all the hours of the day, It does not depend on a single thing, so we have It right from the start."

Nansen said, "You aren't saying this as the view of an elder monk, are you?"³⁶

Ōbaku replied, "I daren't say so."

Nansen said, "Setting aside for the moment the matter of payment for your rice broth, to whom are you to return payment for your straw sandals?"

Thereupon, Ōbaku remained silent.

'Training equally in meditative practices and spiritual wisdom' does not mean that, since training in meditative practices does not interfere with pursuing spiritual wisdom, Buddha Nature can be clearly seen when training in both equally. Rather, when we clearly see our Buddha Nature, then we will be training equally in meditation practice and spiritual wisdom. So Nansen stated, "What do you think of this principle?" This would be the same as saying, for instance, "Who is it that sees one's Buddha Nature clearly?" Or it can be stated by saying, "How about the principle that Buddha Nature's equal pursuit of both is what causes us to realize our Buddha Nature?"

35. Ōbaku was a Dharma heir of Hyakujō; Hyakujō and Nansen, as Dharma heirs of Baso, were monastic brothers.

36. The term 'elder monk' refers to a monk of many years training who is recognized for his deep understanding of spiritual matters.

The point of Ōbaku's saying "Within all the hours of the day, It does not depend on a single thing" is that even though twenty-four hours exist within the span of a whole day, It is not dependent on them. Since Buddha Nature's not depending on a single thing extends over all the hours of a day, It can be clearly seen. As to this 'within all the hours of a day' of his, would you ask at what specific time It will show up or in what country? These twenty-four hours that we are speaking of, would they have to be a human being's twenty-four hour day? Or do they exist as a day in some other particular place? Or are they the kind of day that can occur for a while in Samantabhadra's* Silver Realm? Whether it be in this land or some other world, It does not depend on either. It is already within the twenty-four hours of any day and does not depend on anything.

Nansen's asking, "You aren't saying this as the view of an elder monk, are you?" is the same as asking, "You aren't saying that this is your view, are you?" Although Nansen asked whether this is the view of an elder monk, Ōbaku should not turn to Nansen and affirm that it is indeed his own view. Although the statement was appropriate, it did not apply to Ōbaku alone, because Ōbaku is not the only person who held this view, as the views of many elder monks make abundantly clear.

As to Ōbaku's replying, "I daren't say so," when someone in Sung China is asked whether he is capable of doing something, he uses this phrase, "I daren't say so," to acknowledge in a humble way his ability to do so. Thus, to say, "I daren't say so," does not mean that one doubts one's abilities. What this expression says is not to be taken literally. Whether 'the view of an elder monk' refers to some other elder monk or whether 'the view of an elder monk' refers to Ōbaku, in either case the answer should be that he daren't say so. It should be like a water buffalo coming out from the water and bellowing "*Mu.*"³⁷ To put it like this is to affirm It. You should try and see if you can say, in your own words, the Principle that Ōbaku is affirming.

Nansen said, "Setting aside for the moment the matter of payment for your rice broth, to whom are you to return payment for your straw sandals?" In other words, the cost of your rice gruel is put aside for the moment, but who gets paid for the cost of your straw sandals? We should spend life after life exploring the intent of this statement through our training. We should keep our minds diligently investigating what he meant by 'whatever the cost of the broth, don't worry about it for the moment'. Why was he so concerned about the cost of straw sandals? It is as if he had asked, "In all the years that you have spent traveling as a mendicant

37. Dōgen will explain the significance of this term later in this discourse when he discusses the kōan story of Jōshū's dog.

monk, how many pairs of straw sandals have you worn out?” to which Ōbaku might answer, “If I had not paid back the cost, I would not still be wearing straw sandals,” or, then again, he might reply, “Two or three pairs.” Either way could be how he expressed the Matter. Each way would correspond to his intent.

The statement that Ōbaku thereupon remained silent simply means that he desisted from speaking. He did not remain silent because what he said was negated by Nansen, nor did he remain silent because he was negating what Nansen said. A patch-robed monk of true color is not like that. Keep in mind that silence speaks, just as laughter can wield a sword. This is Buddha Nature clearly seeing that there is enough gruel and enough rice.



In citing this story, Isan asked his disciple Kyōzan, “Don’t you think this shows that Ōbaku was no match for Nansen?”

Kyōzan replied, “Not so. We should recognize that Ōbaku had the wherewithal to capture the tiger alive.”

Isan said, “My disciple’s perceptiveness has excelled itself in this.”

What Isan was saying is, “Wasn’t Ōbaku able to match Nansen?” Kyōzan said that Ōbaku had the wherewithal to capture the tiger alive. If he had already captured the tiger, he could probably have stroked the tiger on its head. To capture a tiger and to pet a tiger are to engage in two totally different things. Is clearly seeing Buddha Nature the same as opening the Eye? Is one’s Buddha Nature seeing clearly the same as losing one’s Eye? Quick, quick, speak! The perceptiveness of Buddha Nature excels Itself in this. As a result, It does not depend on half a thing or on its whole. Nor does It depend on hundreds of thousands of things or on hundreds of thousands of occasions. For this reason it can be said:

*The snares and traps of passion are but a single face of It.
On no time within a day does It depend, nor is It outside of
time;
Rather, It is like wisteria and kudzu entwined about a tree.
All within the universe and the universe itself are still
bereft of words for It, you see.*



A certain monk once asked Great Master Jōshū, “Does even a dog have Buddha Nature?”

We need to clarify the intent of this question. ‘Dog’ here means a dog.³⁸ He is not asking, “Can such a creature have Buddha Nature?” nor is he asking, “Can such a creature be devoid of Buddha Nature?” What he is really asking is, “Is even an iron man exploring the Way through his training?” Even though the trainee has made a mistake and his feelings of rancor and regret, which have become poisonous, are profound, still, even after thirty years it would be an improvement to see half a saintly person.³⁹

Jōshū replied, “(Mu) No, it doesn’t.”

When we hear this expression, there are pathways that we need to investigate. The “no” by which Buddha Nature reveals Its identity will be expressed by this word. And the “no” by which the identity of a dog is revealed will also be expressed by this word. And the “no” of an onlooker’s exclamation will also be expressed by this word.⁴⁰ There may come a day when that “no” of Jōshū’s will simply be a word for grinding away at stones.

The monk then asked, “All sentient beings, without exception, have Buddha Nature, so how come a dog is devoid of It?”

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38. Even though *kou-tsu* (the Chinese word for ‘dog’) has often been understood in China and Japan as referring to an animal (as implied by a literal rendering of Dōgen’s discourse), in both countries, ‘dog’ has long been used as a term for someone who is morally depraved (‘a dog of a person’). In Buddhism, such persons were called *icchāntika*, that is, those who were constant in their deliberate and wanton breakage of Precepts. Such persons were consequently thought to be devoid of Buddha Nature. Further, ‘dog’ was also sometimes used in both countries as a humbling term for oneself (‘a dog of a person like me’), someone who is doggedly devoted. There is apparently an interplay of all three meanings in the following passages.
39. That is, the intent behind the monk’s question is as if he were asking, “I have truly tried to train with an iron will, but I have not yet realized the Truth. Is it because a dog of a trainee like me is somehow spiritually defective?” Dōgen’s comment is that even if someone’s training is being poisoned by feelings of regret at not yet having realized the Truth, still, asking the question in the first place is itself a sign of spiritual progress (being a half-saintly person), even if the person has not yet awakened to his True Nature after thirty years of training.
40. That is, the word ‘no’ has different meanings, depending on what it relates to. In the context of Buddha Nature, it means ‘being beyond having or not having’; in the context of a dog, it means ‘not possessing a Buddha Nature’; and in the context of a bystander, it means “There is nothing there that I can see.”

The import of his question is as though he were saying, “If all sentient beings did not exist, then Buddha Nature would not exist and a dog would not exist. How about that point? How could you expect a dog not to have Buddha Nature?”

Jōshū responded, “On the grounds that such a one has karmic ignorance.”⁴¹

The meaning of what he said is that even though the reason for its existence is karmic ignorance, and its having karmic ignorance is the grounds for its existence, a dog does not possess karmic ignorance, nor does Buddha Nature possess it. Karmic ignorance has never understood what a dog really is, so how could a dog possibly encounter Buddha Nature? Whether Jōshū were to confirm or contradict what the monk said, still, this is a case of karmic ignorance on the monk’s part from beginning to end.

Jōshū had another monk who asked him, “Does Buddha Nature exist even in a dog, yes or no?”⁴²

This question may have been the reason why this monk was a match for Jōshū,⁴³ since expressing or asking about Buddha Nature is the everyday food and drink of Buddhas and Ancestors.

Jōshū said, “(U) Yes, It exists.”

The nature of this ‘It exists’ is beyond the ‘existence’ as understood by the commentators of the various scholastic traditions, and beyond the assertion of existence made by the Sarvastivādins.⁴⁴ Advancing on from them, we should investigate what the existence of Buddha is. The existence of Buddha is Jōshū’s “It exists,” and Jōshū’s “It exists” is the dog’s existing, and the dog’s existing is the existence of Buddha Nature.

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41. Karmic ignorance may be defined as the deluded state of consciousness that was inherited at birth from past lives and which inhibits one from seeing Buddha Nature.
 42. In the original text, the wording of this question is the same as that used by the preceding monk, but the intent is different, as the subsequent comments by Jōshū and Dōgen make clear.
 43. The implication of this statement is that the previous monk had asked the question from the perspective of one who had not yet realized his True Nature, whereas this monk had already had such a realization and was exploring True Nature with his Master.
 44. The Sarvastivādins were members of one of the twenty pre-Mahayana schools of Indian Buddhism, which arose some three centuries after the death of Shakyamuni. One of their doctrines was that past, present, and future time all have real existence and that the Dharma is ever-present.

The monk then asked, “If It already exists, why is It strongly impelled to enter into this body of flesh?”

This monk’s question is asking, “Is It something existing now, or is It something that existed at some time in the past, or has It always existed?” Even though That Which Always Exists resembles other types of existence, That Which Always Exists clearly stands alone.

Is That Which Always Exists strongly impelled to enter into fleshly form or is It not? Although we have been strongly impelled to take on this fleshly body of ours, in our daily conduct and spiritual practice there is no bumbling, useless effort.

Jōshū replied, “It is because a dog knowingly and intentionally breaks Precepts.”

Even though this statement had long been spread abroad as a common saying, it was now Jōshū’s way of putting the Matter.⁴⁵ What he is talking about is the deliberate breaking of Precepts. Probably very few people have not had doubts about this expression of his, because it is difficult for them to clearly understand the character for ‘enter into’, which is part of the phrase ‘impelled to enter into’. However, this character for ‘enter into’ is not essential.⁴⁶

Moreover, as Sekitō Kisen put it in a poem:

*If you would know the Undying One within the hermit’s hut,
How can you do it apart from your fleshly body here and now?*

Even though we may not yet know who the Undying One is, when, pray, are we to separate It from our fleshly body? Having broken a Precept is not necessarily what impels us to enter a body of flesh, nor is our impulse to enter this fleshly body of ours necessarily due to our knowingly having broken a Precept. When such an action is done deliberately, then the Precept will be broken. You need to realize that this breaking of Precepts will be hidden from sight within our daily conduct and spiritual practice of dropping off body. This is expressed as ‘being impelled to enter’. When our daily conduct and spiritual practice of dropping off body is genuinely hidden from sight, it will be concealed from both ourselves and others.

45. That is, the popular understanding of the statement was that if someone, knowing better, deliberately broke Precepts, that person would be reborn as an animal.

46. The phrase ‘being impelled to enter into’ is comprised of two characters: the first (*tō*) means ‘to be impelled’, the second (*nyū*) means ‘to enter into’. Dōgen’s point is that the ‘enter into’ is unessential, since it is difficult to see a clear distinction between ‘to be impelled to take on some bodily form’ and ‘to be impelled to enter into taking on some bodily form’.

Even so, do not say that you are not yet free, that you are just a fellow with a donkey in front of him and a horse behind him.⁴⁷

Even more, as our lofty Ancestor Ungo Dōyō said, “Even though you may have studied the Buddha Dharma to Its very limits, you have erred in your approach if you have completely depended on your intellect.” Accordingly, even though someone has made this error for a long time, piling up the days and months by half-learning the Buddha Dharma to Its limits, such a person must be a dog who has been impelled to enter into that fleshly body of his. Although he knowingly has broken Precepts, he will still have Buddha Nature.



In the assembly of the virtuous monk Chōsa Keishin, his lay disciple Chiku, who was a high government official, raised a question, saying, “When a live earthworm is cut in two, both parts continue to move. I wonder, in which part does the Buddha Nature reside?”

The Master responded, “Do not engage in deluded, dualistic thinking.”

The official asked, “But how do you account for the twitching?”

The Master replied, “It is simply that the elements of wind and fire have not yet dissipated.”

Now, when the government official remarked about an earthworm being cut in two, had he concluded that, prior to its being cut, it was one segment of Buddha Nature? This is not the way things are viewed within the everyday experience of the Buddhas and Ancestors. The earthworm was not originally one segment of It, and, after being cut, the earthworm was not two segments of It. The assertion of ‘one’ and ‘two’ needs to be diligently explored through one’s training and practice. As to the ‘two parts’ in his saying that both parts continue to move, did he take the worm before it had been cut to be one part of Buddha Nature, and did he take That which goes beyond awakening to be one part of the worm? Regardless of how the government official may have understood his phrase ‘two parts’, do not disregard the words he spoke. Is it that the two cut segments made up one whole and, moreover, that they exist as a whole being? The movement of which he spoke when saying that both continue to move will be the movement of one’s meditative practice which loosens the roots of delusion and the movement of one’s wise discernment which pulls these roots out.

47. A Zen phrase for an ordinary person who has not yet realized enlightenment.

His statement, “I wonder, in which part does the Buddha Nature reside?” needs to be examined in detail. He should have said, “When someone cuts Buddha Nature in two, I wonder in which part does the earthworm reside?” In saying, “Both parts continue to move, so in which part does Buddha Nature reside?” does he mean that, if both are moving, it is not possible for Buddha Nature to reside in either? Or is he saying that, if both are moving, the place where Buddha Nature is residing must be in one or the other, even though both are moving?

When the Master responded, “Do not engage in deluded, dualistic thinking,” what could he have meant by saying that his disciple should not engage in dualistic thinking? Did he mean that there is nothing dualistic about both parts moving, that the matter is beyond duality? Or did he simply mean that Buddha Nature is beyond duality? We should also investigate his statement that, simply, there is no duality, without getting into a discussion about ‘Buddha Nature’ or about ‘two parts’.

As to the official’s asking what we are to make of their twitching, is he asserting that because they are twitching, it must be due to their piling one Buddha Nature atop another, or is he asserting that even though they are twitching, it is apart from their Buddha Nature?

The Master’s replying that it is simply a matter of the elements of wind and fire not yet having dissipated was his way of making Buddha Nature emerge. Is he saying that it is Buddha Nature or is he saying that it is wind and fire? He cannot say that Buddha Nature appears together with wind and fire, nor can he say that one appears but not the other, nor can he say that because there is wind and fire, there is Buddha Nature. Therefore, Chōsa did not say that an earthworm possesses Buddha Nature, nor did he say that an earthworm does not possess Buddha Nature. He simply stated that his disciple was not to engage in dualistic thinking and that the wind and fire had not yet dissipated. When it comes to the living reality of Buddha Nature, we should make Chōsa’s words our way of thinking about It.

The phrase ‘wind and fire have not yet dissipated’ needs calm and diligent consideration. What is the underlying meaning of ‘not yet having dissipated’? In his saying that they have not yet dissipated, is he saying that although the wind and fire had arrived, the time for their dispersal had not yet arrived? By no means! His saying “Wind and fire have not yet dissipated” is a Buddha giving expression to the Dharma. The wind and fire’s not yet having dispersed is Dharma expressing Buddha. The moment had arrived for giving voice to a single sound of the Dharma. It is a single sound of the Dharma being voiced, and it is the moment of Its arrival. The Dharma is a single sound, because It is the Dharma of the One Sound.

Further, to think that Buddha Nature exists only during the time of life and that It cannot exist during the time of death is to have heard very little and understood even less. The time of life is one of ‘having Buddha Nature’ and of ‘not

having a Buddha Nature’, and the time of death is one of ‘having Buddha Nature’ and of ‘not having a Buddha Nature’. If there were any discussion of whether or not the wind and fire had dissipated, it would have to be a discussion of whether or not Buddha Nature had dissipated. Even the time of their dissipating will be a time when Buddha Nature exists and a time when a Buddha Nature does not exist. And even the time before they have dissipated will be a time in which they are possessed of Buddha Nature and a time in which they do not possess a Buddha Nature. At the same time, to erroneously suppose that Buddha Nature is present or not present depending on whether or not there is movement, or to suppose that It is or is not transcendent depending on whether or not one is conscious of It, or to suppose that It is or is not one’s nature depending on whether or not one is aware of It is to be a non-Buddhist, someone who is outside the Way.

From time immemorial there have been many foolish people who have taken their consciousness to be Buddha Nature and who have taken themselves to be someone who has realized their Original Nature, which is enough to make one die laughing. Moreover, to put into words what Buddha Nature is without going so far as to wallow in the mud or get soaked with water, It is the tiles and stones for our walls and fences.⁴⁸

When It is stated on an even loftier level, what could It possibly be, this Buddha Nature? Have you really grasped It yet, in detail? It is having three heads and eight arms!⁴⁹

Delivered to the assembly on the fourteenth day of the tenth lunar month in the second year of the Ninji era (November 18, 1241) at Kannonōri in Kōshōhōrin-ji Temple, Yamashiro Province.

Copied by me on the nineteenth day of the first lunar month in the fourth year of the same era (February 9, 1243).

Ejō

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48. ‘Wallowing in the mud or getting soaked in water’ is a common Zen phrase for going to whatever lengths are necessary to help a sentient being realize the Truth. ‘Tiles and stones for our walls and fences’ refers to the bits and pieces of our experiences which we use to construct our world.
49. An allusion to the guardian kings Achalanātha, the Steadfast Bodhisattva, and Rāgarāja, the Passionate Bodhisattva. The former is sometimes associated with the firm commitment of trainees to train until they have overcome all hindrances to realizing enlightenment as they persist in helping others to realize Truth. The latter has associations with a passionate desire to help all sentient beings realize Buddhahood.



**Translator’s Addendum from
Book One, Kōan 96 from Dōgen’s Chinese *Shinji Shōbōgenzō***

Fuke and Rinzai were at the house of a donor for an alms meal.⁵⁰ Rinzai remarked, “It is said that a hair swallows up the vast ocean and that a mustard seed contains all of Mount Sumeru. Does this refer to someone’s wondrous use of spiritual abilities, or does this refer to all things having Original Nature?” At this, Fuke knocked Rinzai’s seat out from under him.⁵¹ Rinzai said in rebuke, “Clumsy ox!” Fuke said, “Right here is where the What is, whether the Matter is put clumsily or delicately.” At this, Rinzai, abashed, retired from the room.

The next day, the two were visiting the same family for an alms meal. Rinzai asked Fuke, “Is today’s offering the same as yesterday’s?” Fuke again knocked Rinzai’s seat out from under him. Rinzai said reproachfully, “Clumsy ox!” Fuke replied, “O you with your eyes closed, would you care to expound on the clumsiness or delicacy of the What in the Buddha Dharma?” Rinzai, thereupon, stuck out his tongue at Fuke and ‘blew him a raspberry’.

50. Fuke and Rinzai were training together at the same temple, and Fuke was the more senior of the two monks. They shared a common ancestor in Baso.

51. Rinzai’s question is not only erudite in nature but it is inappropriate during an alms meal, since such alms were given to a monk with the understanding that they were to support a monk’s spiritual training, not to foster intellectual pursuits.