

On the Everyday Behavior of a Buddha Doing His Practice

(*Gyōbutsu Igi*)

Translator's Introduction: The term *igi*, which in common parlance may be literally rendered as 'dignified behavior', refers specifically in Buddhism to the four modes of everyday human bodily behavior: moving, standing still, sitting, and reclining.

In a later section of this discourse, Dōgen takes up an exchange between Meditation Master Seppō Gison and his disciple Gensha Shibi, who was his Dharma heir. The relationship between these two monks is illustrative of what is called the vertical and horizontal relationship of Master and Transmitted disciple: on one level, Seppō remains Shibi's monastic senior, and on another, the two are on equal footing. While this relationship would hold true for Masters and their disciples in general, in this case it extended to the point where the two monks shared the Abbotship and Dharma seat of their temple. What one said was then expressed by the other as another way of putting the matter or as an expansion upon the theme of the first. At times, Dōgen seems to find Shibi's statement to be lacking in some sense, but this may have been his way of illustrating the horizontal and vertical aspects of the Master-disciple relationship in which the two are equal while, at the same time, the Master is the disciple's senior.

All Buddhas, without exception, make full use of Their everyday behavior for Their practice. This is what is meant by 'a Buddha doing His practice'. 'A Buddha doing His practice' does not refer to a Buddha's realizing enlightenment or to a Buddha's transforming Himself for the sake of helping others. Nor does it refer to a Buddha as the embodiment of the Dharma or to a Buddha as others see Him embodied. It is beyond the state of a Buddha at His initial realization or at His fundamental realization, and it is beyond the state of a Buddha in His inherent enlightenment or in His going 'beyond being enlightened'. A Buddha who is equivalent to any of these can never stand shoulder-to-shoulder with a Buddha who is doing His practice. Keep in mind that Buddhas, being within the Buddha's Way, do not go looking for realization. Becoming proficient in one's daily conduct whilst on the path towards Buddhahood is what is meant by 'a Buddha just doing His practice'. It is not something that is even dreamt of by those who are, say, Buddhas as embodiments of the Dharma.

Because this Buddha who is doing His practice manifests the four modes of behavior in everything He does, He manifests these modes right out in the open. Before He speaks, He gives a hint of His spiritual activity, which is woven into

whatever He does. This activity goes beyond time, or place, or ‘being Buddha’, or ‘doing some practice’. If you are not a Buddha doing your practice, you will not let go of your attachment to ‘Buddha’ or your attachment to ‘Dharma’, and you will be grouped with those poor devils who deny that Buddha and Dharma can be found within themselves.

What being attached to ‘Buddha’ means is that a person has formed an intellectual concept of ‘enlightenment’ and then becomes attached to this concept and his understanding of it. Because this view accompanies him through each moment, he does not look for an opportunity to let go of this concept and understanding, and so he uselessly holds onto his mistaken views. On the other hand, to view and explain enlightenment as ‘just being enlightenment’ may well be a perspective that accords with enlightenment, for who could call this a false view? I recall my own indulgence in conceptualization as my tying myself up without a rope. It was a fetter at every moment, for the tree of self had not fallen and the wisteria vines of my entanglements had not withered away. This was simply my passing through life whilst meaninglessly imprisoned in a cave of ignorance on the periphery of Buddhism. I did not realize that my Dharma Body was ill nor did I recognize that my Reward Body was in distress.¹

Those in the various Buddhist doctrinal schools, who are academic teachers of Scriptures or erudite commentators and the like, have heard what the Buddha said as if from afar, and have remarked, as did one of the Tendai Masters, that even though there is the Ultimate Nature of things, to set up some theory as to that Ultimate Nature is the very darkness of karmic* ignorance. In saying this, the Tendai Master failed to add that when a theory on the ultimate nature of things arises within Ultimate Nature, this ‘ultimate nature of things’ is a fetter. Further, he has added the fetter of ignorance atop this. Even though, sad to say, the Master did not recognize the fetter of ‘the ultimate nature of things’, one’s ability to recognize the addition of the fetter of ignorance can become the seed for the mind’s giving rise to the aspiration to realize enlightenment.

Now, a Buddha doing His practice has never been fettered with entanglements like this. This is why Shakyamuni Buddha said in the *Lotus Scripture*, “The lifetime which I obtained by My practice of the Bodhisattva* Path

1. This is a reference to the three Bodies of the Buddha (*Trikaya*). The first is the Truth Body (*Dharmakaya*), which represents Absolute Truth or Buddha Mind Itself. The Reward Body (*Sambhogakaya*) represents the blissful reward of Buddhist training. The third is the Transformation Body (*Nirmanakaya*), which is the physical body of the Buddha as it appears in the world.

* See *Glossary*.

from the start is not exhausted even now, and will still be twice the past number of eons.” You need to recognize that this does not mean that His lifetime as a bodhisattva was strung out in a continuous line to the present, nor does it mean that the life span of the Buddha was ever-present in the past. The ‘past number’ of which He spoke refers to all that He had accomplished up to that point. The ‘even now’ that He refers to is the whole of His life span. Even though His practice from the start has been as continuous and unvarying as an iron rail extending over ten thousand miles, yet, at the same time, it is His letting go of things for hundreds of years and His letting things be what they are, wherever they are.

As a consequence, doing one’s training and realizing the Truth are beyond a matter of existing or not existing, for training and realizing the Truth are beyond any stain. There are hundreds of thousands of myriad places where there are no Buddhas or human beings, yet this does not sully a Buddha who is doing His practice. Thus it is that someone who does the practice of a Buddha is not sullied by notions of ‘doing one’s training’ or ‘realizing the Truth’. This does not mean that one’s training to realize the Truth is necessarily untainted. And, at the same time, this state of ‘being untainted’ really does exist.



As Enō of Mount Sōkei once said to his disciple Nangaku:

This Immaculacy is simply what all Buddhas protect and keep in mind. It is the same for you too, and it is the same for me too. And it is the same for all our Indian Ancestors too.

So, because you are also like this, you are all the Buddhas, and because I am also like this, I am all the Buddhas. Truly, It is beyond ‘me’ and beyond ‘you’. Within this Immaculacy, the me that is the real Me—which all the Buddhas protect and keep in mind—is what the everyday behavior of a Buddha doing His practice is, and the you that is the real You—which all the Buddhas protect and keep in mind—is what the everyday behavior of a Buddha doing His practice is. Due to the ‘me too’, Enō’s everyday behavior is what constituted his excellence as a Master, and due to the ‘you too’, Nangaku’s everyday behavior is what constituted his strength as a disciple, because the excellence of a Master and the strength of a disciple are what comprise the perfect knowledge and conduct of a Buddha doing His practice. You need to realize that what we call ‘what is protected and kept in mind by all Buddhas’ is ‘me too’ and ‘you too’. Even though the explanation by the former Buddha of Mount Sōkei is beyond ‘me’, how could it possibly not refer to ‘you’? What is protected and kept in mind by Buddhas who are doing Their

practice is no different from That which thoroughly penetrates a Buddha who is doing His practice.

From the preceding it should be evident that doing one's training and realizing the Truth are beyond such things as one's innate nature and the forms it takes, or what is the root is and what the branches are. In that the mental attitude of a Buddha doing His training is, as might be expected, what causes a Buddha to train, Buddhas willingly train Themselves accordingly. There are those who put aside their body for the sake of the Teaching as well as those who put aside the Teaching for the sake of their body, and there are those who do not begrudge their own lives as well as those who do begrudge their own lives. And not only are there instances of putting aside 'Dharma' for the sake of the Dharma, there is also the everyday behavior in which someone may put aside the 'Teaching' for the sake of his Mind. Do not lose sight of the fact that the ways of letting go are incalculable. We cannot gauge or measure the Great Way by using what some Buddha may think about. The thoughts of any Buddha represent but a single angle: they are, for instance, like the opening of one flower. Do not use just your discriminative mind to grope about for what everyday behavior is or how to put it in words. The discriminative mind is but one aspect: it is, for instance, like a single realm. Considering a blade of grass is clearly what the discriminative mind of the Buddhas and Ancestors considers.² This is one means by which a Buddha doing His training comes to recognize the traces of His footsteps. Even if, by our wholehearted consideration, we clearly see that our understanding of 'what a Buddha is' is beyond fathoming, when we focus on the bodily behavior and demeanor of a Buddha doing His practice—whether He is moving or still—His behavior and demeanor will fundamentally have features that surpass our present understanding. Because it is His daily conduct that surpasses our fathoming, we cannot compare it or apply it to anyone else, for it is beyond anything that we can gauge or measure.



Now, there is something that we need to investigate in the everyday behavior of a Buddha doing His practice. True, the everyday behavior of 'me too' and 'you too' is connected with the innate capabilities of 'I alone' in regards to one's having come the way one has, both as a Buddha here and now and as oneself here and now. Nevertheless, this everyday behavior is the state of liberation associated with

2. The 'discriminative' mind here refers to the discerning, non-judgmental functioning of the mind of Buddhas and Ancestors. The 'discriminatory' mind is used to describe the judgmental mind, which recognizes differences and then adds a value judgment to them.

the Buddhas in the ten directions and is not simply one's identification with that state. This is why a former Buddha said, "Having comprehended the Matter* in abstract terms, we come back to the here and now where we conduct our daily living." When we maintain and rely upon the Matter in this way, all things, all beings, all practices, and all Buddhas are familiar to us and are our kindly friends.

Simply, each and every one of the Buddhas who physically put the Dharma into practice had obstructions to Their directly experiencing the Truth. Because there are obstructions to one's directly experiencing the Truth, there will be liberation in one's directly experiencing the Truth. When the hundreds of thoughts and things sprout up like grass blades before your eyes in such a bewildering way that they impede your sight, do not be dismayed that you cannot discern even a single thought or a single object. They are simply what is manifesting in this thought and what is manifesting in that thing. No matter what we 'pick up' or 'haul away' as we busy ourselves with entering and departing through the gates of our senses each day, nothing anywhere has ever been hidden from us, and, as a result, the Venerable Shakyamuni's words, and realization, and practices, and Transmission, though unheard and unseen, are ever present.

*Whenever I go out the gates, just grass,
And whenever I come in the gates, just grass,
So for a myriad leagues
There is not even an inch of grass.

And the words 'come in'
And the words 'go out'
Do not apply here
Nor do they apply there.³*

Whatever thoughts or things we are now grasping and clinging to as 'real' are not supported by our practice of letting go, and yet they are our dreams and illusions, our 'flowers in the sky'. Who of us can see as mistaken these persistent dreams and illusions, these manufactured 'flowers in the sky'? Because to step forth is a mistake and to step back is a mistake, because taking one step is a mistake and

3. To paraphrase this poem, whenever I look either outside or within myself, there are only the transient images that my senses perceive and which my mind gives substance to. Hence, all there is in any experience is what I describe as arising, temporarily persisting, and dissipating, and that is of my own constructing. In this sense, the 'myriad blades of grass' are not real, no matter how far I travel within or without. And since there is no 'I' that 'goes out' or 'comes in', these terms are useless in describing or directly knowing That Which Is Real.

taking two steps is a mistake, we make one mistake after another, for we have made Heaven and Earth strangers to each other. The Way to the Ultimate is not hard.⁴ As for our dignity in these comings and goings, we should take as our ideal in our everyday behavior Sōsan's line, "The Great Way is being naturally at ease within ourselves."

We need to keep in mind that our coming forth into life is at one with our coming forth into the Way and that our entering death is at one with our entering the Way. In the head-to-tail rightness of that state, our everyday behavior manifests before our very eyes as if the turning of a jewel or the revolving of a pearl. To make use of, and be possessed of, one aspect of a Buddha's everyday behavior is to be the whole of the great earth in all directions, as well as the whole of birth-and-death and coming-and-going; it is to be a dust-filled mundane world and to be a lotus in full bloom. This dust-filled mundane world and this lotus blossom are each an aspect of It.

Many scholars are of the opinion that to speak of the whole of the great earth in all directions may refer to the southern continent of Jambudvīpa* or to the four continents, whereas some cling to the notion that it is just the single nation of China, or go around in circles thinking that it is the single nation of Japan. Furthermore, just to say the words 'the whole of the great earth' is like thinking of it as the three-thousand great-thousandfold worlds, or like holding onto the notion of it as just one province or one district. Were you to undertake to explore the phrase 'the whole of the great earth' or 'the whole of the universe' through your training, you would need to mull it over three or four times, and do not conclude that such phrases are simply concerned with the breadth of something. This realization of the Way goes beyond 'Buddha' and transcends 'Ancestor'. It is that which is extremely large being the same as that which is small, and that which is extremely small being the same as that which is large. Even though this resembles the dubious statement that when 'large' does not exist, 'small' does not exist, it is nevertheless synonymous with a Buddha doing His practice as His everyday behavior. What Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor have All

4. Dōgen is alluding to lines from the poem "That Which Is Engraved upon the Heart That Trusts to the Eternal" by Kanchi Sōsan:

*The Way to the Ultimate is not hard;
Simply give up being picky and choosey...
Let but a hair's breadth of discriminatory thought arise
And you have made Heaven and Earth strangers to each other.*

One translation of the full poem can be found in *Buddhist Writings on Meditation and Daily Practice*, (Shasta Abbey Press, 1994), pp. 213-221.

affirmed is the everyday behavior of the whole universe. This should be explored by you through your training as ‘nothing ever having been hidden from you’. Not only has nothing ever been hidden from you, the everyday behavior of a Buddha doing His practice is His ‘making tea’ for everyone.



Even though there are those who, in giving voice to the Buddha’s Way, may state that being born from the womb, say, or being born by transformation is a daily occurrence on the way to Buddhahood, such persons have still not stated that one may also be born from moisture or from an egg. And what is more, they have not even dreamt of there being birth beyond those from womb, egg, moisture, or transformation. How much less could they possibly experience and perceive that beyond birth from womb, egg, moisture, or transformation there is birth from Womb, Egg, Moisture, or Transformation? Now, according to the great words of Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor, there is a Womb, a Moisture, an Egg, and a Transformation that is beyond birth from womb, egg, moisture, or transformation, which They have correctly Transmitted as ‘nothing ever having been hidden’, and They have correctly Transmitted this Truth privately and in secret. How are we to categorize that bunch who most likely have not heard of this expression, much less have they learned about it, or understood it, or clarified what it means? You have already heard about the four types of birth, but how many types of death are there? For the four types of birth, could there be four types of death? Or could there be only two or three types of death? Or could there be five or six types, or a thousand or myriad types of death? Even entertaining a bit of doubt about this principle is part of exploring the Matter through training with one’s Master.

Let’s consider this for the moment. Can there be any kind of sentient being sprung from one of the four types of birth who experiences birth but does not experience death? And are there any to whom the direct, one-to-one, Transmission of death has been given who have not received the direct, one-to-one, Transmission of life? You should by all means explore through your training whether there is any kind of being who is only born or who only dies.

There are those who hear the phrase ‘that which is beyond birth’ without ever clarifying what it means, acting as if they didn’t need to make any effort with their body and mind. This is a dullard’s foolishness in the extreme. They must be some kind of beast who has not even reached the level of discussing the gradual awakening of one who practices with faith and the sudden awakening of one who quickly grasps the Dharma. If you ask why, the reason is that even if they hear the

phrase ‘that which is beyond birth’, they still need to explore what the intent of this statement is. Further, they make no effort to inquire into what ‘beyond Buddha’, ‘beyond the Way’, ‘beyond mind’, and ‘beyond annihilation’ might mean, or what ‘being beyond that which is beyond birth’ might mean, or what ‘beyond the realm of thoughts and things’ and ‘beyond one’s Original Nature’ might mean, or what ‘beyond death’ might mean. This is because they sit idly by, like creatures that live in the water or in the vegetation.

Keep in mind that ‘birth-and-death’ refers to our daily conduct in the Buddha’s Way, and that ‘birth-and-death’ is one of the everyday tools in our Buddhist tradition. It is something that we use skillfully and by which we gain skillfulness; it is something that we clarify and by which we gain clarity. As a consequence, all Buddhas are completely clear and bright within the free functioning of this ‘birth-and-death’, and They are completely purposeful in Their making use of it. Should any of you be in the dark about the times when this ‘birth-and-death’ occurs, who could say who your ‘you’ really is? Who would describe you as someone who fully understands what life is and who has mastered what death is? Such people as these cannot hear that they have sunk deep, drowning in ‘birth-and-death’, and also cannot comprehend that they exist within ‘birth-and-death’. They cannot believe and accept that ‘birth-and-death’ means being born and dying at each instant, nor can they plead that they do not understand it or that they do not know it.

On the other hand, some have fancied that Buddhas emerge only in the human world and that They do not manifest in other places or in other worlds.⁵ If it were as they say, would all the places where a Buddha was present have to be part of the human world? This is their inference from the human Buddha’s statement, “I, and I alone, am the Honored One.” Well, there can also be celestial Buddhas, as well as Buddha Buddhas.⁶ To assert that all Buddhas have manifested solely as human beings is not to have entered into the innermost sanctuary of the Buddhas and Ancestors.



An Ancestor of our lineage once said, “After Shakyamuni Buddha received the Transmission of the True Teaching from Kashō Buddha, He went to the Tushita Heaven, where He is now residing, instructing the celestial inhabitants

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5. The worlds referred to here are the six worlds of existence into which a sentient being may be reborn.
 6. Celestial Buddhas exist in the celestial world, whereas Buddha Buddhas exist in a realm beyond the six worlds of existence.

there.” Truly, you need to realize that even though the human Shakyamuni had, by that time, taught about His future extinction, nevertheless, the Shakyamuni who was in a heavenly world is still there even now, teaching celestial beings. You who are undertaking this training should know that the remarks and actions of the human Shakyamuni underwent a thousand changes and myriad transformations. What He gave expression to when He let His light shine forth and manifested auspicious signs was but one aspect of His being a human being. We should not foolishly fail to realize that the Teaching of the Shakyamuni in the Tushita Heaven may also be of a thousand kinds and produce myriad gateways. The Great Way which Buddha after Buddha has correctly Transmitted transcends extinction, and the underlying principle that one lets go of ‘being beyond both beginning and ending’ has been correctly Transmitted by the Buddha’s Way, and by It alone. This is a meritorious behavior of the Buddha that others do not necessarily comprehend or even hear about.

In places where a Buddha doing His practice is establishing the Teaching, there may be sentient beings who are beyond the four types of birth, and there may be places that are beyond the celestial worlds, beyond the world of ordinary human beings, beyond the world of mental objects, and the like. Whenever you attempt to catch a glimpse of the everyday behavior of a Buddha doing His practice, do not use the eyes of someone in a celestial world or in the world of ordinary human beings, and do not employ the discriminatory thinking of someone in a celestial world or in the world of ordinary human beings, and do not aim at fathoming a Buddha’s everyday behavior by trying to measure it. The ‘thrice wise and ten times saintly’* do not recognize it and have not clarified what it is, so how much less would the calculations of ordinary human beings and those in celestial worlds reach it! In that the discriminatory thinking of human beings is narrow in scope, so their sense-based intellects are also narrow in scope, and in that their life span is limited and urgent, what they concern themselves with is also limited and urgent. So, how could they possibly fathom the everyday behavior of a Buddha doing His practice?

Therefore, do not count as disciples of the Buddha those in lineages that only take the world of ordinary human beings to be the realm of a Buddha or that narrow-mindedly take the ways of ordinary human beings to be the ways of a Buddha, for they are nothing more than human beings living out the result of past karma. Neither their body nor their mind has yet heard the Dharma, and they do not yet possess a body and mind that practices the Way. They do not live in accord with the Dharma or die in accord with the Dharma, nor do they see in accord with the Dharma or hear in accord with the Dharma, and they do not move, stand, sit, or recline in accord with the Dharma. Folks like this have never experienced the

enriching benefits of the Dharma. They go around asserting such ‘principles’ as “A Buddha doing His practice is not related to His innate state of enlightenment or to His first awakening to that enlightened state” and “He is beyond ‘having realized or not having realized enlightenment.’”

Now, such notions as ‘thinking’ and ‘not thinking’, ‘having realized enlightenment’ and ‘not having realized enlightenment’, and ‘awakening to enlightenment’ and ‘being innately enlightened’, which common, worldly-minded people are avidly concerned with, are simply the avid concerns of common, worldly-minded people, for they are not what Buddha after Buddha has received and passed on. Do not make comparisons between the thinking of common, worldly-minded people and the thinking of the Buddhas, for they are vastly different. Common, worldly people’s being avidly concerned with their innate enlightenment and all the Buddhas’ actually realizing Their innate enlightenment are as different from each other as heaven and earth, for innate enlightenment is something beyond the reach of comparative discussions. The avid concerns of the thrice wise and ten times saintly have still not reached the Way of the Buddhas. How could the useless, ‘grain by grain’ calculations of common, worldly people possibly yield the measure of It? Even so, many are the folks who avidly concern themselves with false views on cause and effect and on ends and means, views which are held by common, worldly people and others who are outside the Way—and they suppose these views to be within the bounds of the Buddha’s Teachings. All the Buddhas have asserted that the roots of wrong-doing of these folks are deep and serious, and that such persons are to be pitied. And even though the deep and serious roots of their wrong-doing know no bounds, they are a heavy burden which these folks themselves must bear. They should just let go of this heavy burden, fix their gaze upon it, and look at it. And even though they may later take it up again and obstruct themselves with it, this burden will not then be the same as when it first arose.

Now, the everyday behavior of a Buddha doing His practice is unobstructed. And to the extent that He is constrained by being a Buddha due to His having thoroughly mastered the path of ‘dragging oneself through mud and drowning oneself in water for the sake of others’, He is still beyond hindrances and obstructions. When in some lofty realm, He gives instruction for the lofty, and when in the world of ordinary human beings, He gives instruction for ordinary people. There is benefit in both the blossoming of a single flower and in the blossoming forth of the whole world, without there being even the slightest gap between them. As a result, He goes far beyond self and other, and there is a unique excellence in His comings and goings. He goes to the Tushita Heaven here and now, and He comes from the Tushita Heaven here and now, and His very here and

now is the Tushita Heaven. He is content in His goings here and now, and He is content in His comings here and now, and His very here and now is His contentment. He goes far beyond the Tushita Heaven here and now, and He goes far beyond contentment here and now. He smashes to hundreds of bits both His contentment and the Tushita Heaven here and now, and He picks up and lets go of both His contentment and the Tushita Heaven here and now. He swallows both of them whole in one gulp.

Keep in mind that what we call ‘contentment’ and the ‘Tushita Heaven’ are also spinning on the wheel of the six worlds* of existence, as are both the Pure Lands and the various Heavens. His daily activities are likewise the daily activities of the Pure Lands and the various Heavens. When He is greatly awake, they are likewise greatly awake. When He is greatly deluded, they are likewise greatly deluded. All this is simply a Buddha, when doing His practice, wriggling His toes in His straw sandals. There are times when His singular way of putting the Matter will be the sound from His breaking wind or the smell from His emptying His bowels. Those with Nostrils will get a whiff of It.⁷ They catch It through the sense fields of their ears, their bodies, and their actions. And there are times when they get my very Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow. And It is also something that we realize through our practice and which cannot be obtained from someone else.



When someone already has a broad and thorough grasp of the Great Way by understanding what life is and mastering what death is, that great saintly one leaves the matter of birth-and-death to the mind, and leaves the matter of birth-and-death to the body, and leaves the matter of birth-and-death to the Way, and leaves the matter of birth-and-death to birth and death. Although awareness of this principle is not something belonging to either the past or the present, yet, even so, the everyday behavior of a Buddha doing His practice is instantly practiced to the full. He immediately discerns and complies with the principle that the Way is an endless cycle, with body and mind continually arising and dying away. His practicing to the full and His illumining the Matter to the full are in no way forced actions, but greatly resemble what we do when our mind has wandered off into delusion: that is, when we observe the shadows in our mind, we then turn the light of our mind around to reflect on what we truly are. This brightness, which is a brightness

7. ‘Those with Nostrils’ is a common Zen Buddhist term for those who are able to go beyond surface appearances to ‘sniff out’ the deeper, spiritual meaning behind an action done by someone who has awakened to the Truth.

beyond brightness, thoroughly permeates a Buddha doing His practice, and it manifests naturally within His actions.

To grasp this principle of ‘one’s continually leaving it up to’, you must thoroughly explore what your mind is. In the unswerving stillness of this exploration, you will come to understand and recognize that the myriad turnings and shiftings within your mind are due to the brightness and openness of your mind, and that the three worlds of desire, form, and beyond form are simply great barriers within the mind. Also, even though what one has come to understand and recognize are simply the myriad thoughts and things that arise, this in itself has put into action ‘the homeland of our True Self’ and is the same the living experience of ‘such a person’* being ‘just the thing’.

Thus, in ferreting out again and again what we are to take to serve as our model from what the Masters and Scriptures say and what skills we should seek that lie outside their words, there will be a catching on that goes beyond ‘catching on to’, and there will be a letting go that goes beyond ‘letting go of’. In such an undertaking, we need to ask ourselves what life really is. And what is death? And what is body and mind? And what is given and what is taken? And what is ‘keeping true to’ or ‘violating’? Is it going in and out of the same gate without meeting ‘such a one’? Or is it our concealing our body while letting just our horns show?⁸ Or is it placing just one piece at a time on a *Go* game board and letting it lie there? Is it giving great consideration to the Matter until we resolve It? Or is it letting our thoughts mature until we realize It? Is It the One Bright Pearl? Or is It what the whole of the great Treasure House teaches? Is It the staff that supports an elderly monk? Or is It one’s Face and Eye? Is It what comes after thirty years of training? Or is It ten thousand years within a single thought? We should examine these matters in detail and we should not overlook anything in our examination. When we do our examination in detail, our whole Eye hears sounds and our whole Ear sees forms and colors. And further, when a mendicant monk’s single Eye is clearly open, the sounds, forms, and colors It sees will not be the thoughts and things before one’s eyes. There will appear His gentle countenance breaking into a smile and His twinkling eyes. This is the ever-fleeting quality of the everyday behavior of a Buddha doing His practice. It is not a matter of ‘being hauled about by things’; rather, it is a matter of ‘not hauling things about’. It is beyond our notion of something being ‘unborn and uncreated’ which actually arises dependent upon causal conditions. And It is beyond our Original Nature and the Ultimate Nature of things. It is beyond our simply abiding in our place. And It is beyond the

8. This is a Zen Buddhist metaphor meaning that a person has implied more than they have actually said.

state of our Original Existence. It is not only our affirming that things are just as they are, it is simply being a Buddha doing His practice in His everyday behavior.

Accordingly, the living activities of creating things and creating a self are well left up to our mind to do. And the everyday behaviors of getting rid of ‘life’ and getting rid of ‘death’ have been entrusted for the time being to Buddha. This is why there is the saying, “The myriad thoughts and things are simply our mind, just as the three worlds of desire, form, and beyond form are simply our mind.” Also, when we express the situation from a higher perspective, there is ‘simply our mind’, that is, there are simply the tiles* and stones of our walls and fences. Because ‘simply our mind’ is not simply our mind, so ‘the tiles and stones of our walls and fences’ are not the tiles and stones of walls and fences. This is the everyday behavior of a Buddha doing His practice, and it is the principle of leaving things to the mind and leaving things to things even while we are creating both a mind and things.

Further, this goes beyond what is reached by someone’s initial realization or by their fundamental realization, and the like, so how much less could it be reached by those outside the Way, or by those in the two Lesser Courses,* or by those who are thrice wise and ten times saintly! This everyday behavior is not understood by one person after another, and it is not understood in one situation after another. It is like, for instance, a fish darting through the water, for being active is also something that points the Matter out at every instant. Is it a single iron rod? Is it both parts moving?⁹ The single iron rod is beyond being long or short: the two parts moving are beyond self and other. When you realize the fruits of your effort, which is your ability to hit the target through word or deed in response to your Master, then your majesty will envelop all the myriad things that arise, and your Eye will tower over the entire world. You will have a radiant brightness that goes beyond your mastery of letting go and holding back: this is the Monks’ Hall, the Buddha Hall, the Temple Kitchen, and the Temple Gate. Further, you will have a radiant brightness unrelated to letting go and holding back: it is the Monks’ Hall, the Buddha Hall, the Temple Kitchen, and the Temple Gate. And you will have an Eye that will penetrate everywhere in all ten directions, an Eye that takes in everything within the great earth. You will have a mind for the past and a mind for the future. Because the merit of this radiant brightness blazes up in eyes, ears, nose,

9. To paraphrase, is the everyday behavior of a Buddha doing His practice like a single iron rod, which is the same at any time or place? Or is His everyday behavior like a worm that has been cut in two? Since both parts of the worm are moving independently of each other, by analogy the Buddha’s various behaviors would likewise seem to be independent of each other.

tongue, body, and mind, there are all the Buddhas of the three temporal worlds who maintain and rely upon Their not being known to exist, and there is the feral cat and the wild white ox who gamble on their being known to exist. When one has a ring for this ox's nose and also has the eyes for It, then the Dharma gives expression to a Buddha doing His practice and sanctions a practicing Buddha.¹⁰



In pointing out the Great Matter to his assembly, Seppō Gison once said, “The Buddhas in the three temporal worlds exist within the Blazing Fire, turning the Great Wheel of the Dharma.”

His disciple Gensha Shibi added, “Since the Blazing Fire is giving voice to the Dharma for the sake of all the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds, all the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds listen to It right on the spot where They are.”

Meditation Master Engo commented on what they said in verse:

*We have Seppō, Monkey White well called,
Along with Shibi, Monkey Black.*

*Both together throw themselves into the moment at hand,
So that gods appear and demons vanish.*

*The Raging Fire spreading across the heavens is Buddha
giving voice to Truth;*

*The Raging Fire that spreads across the heavens is Truth
giving voice to Buddha.*

*The tangled nests of kudzu and wisteria vines are cut low
before Its wind.*

One remark from Seppō and Shibi, and Vimalakīrti has
been tested and bested.*

‘The Buddhas in the three temporal worlds’ refers to all the Buddhas, each and every one of Them. The Buddhas doing Their practice, consequently, are the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds. Of all the Buddhas everywhere, there is not One who is not in the three temporal worlds. When the words and ways of a Buddha express the three temporal worlds, they are completely expressed in just

10. ‘The feral cat and the wild white ox’ refer to the untamed nature of those who are not doing Buddhist practice. Taming this nature is likened to inserting a ring in an ox’s nose in order to train it, whereas recognizing that the purpose of that training is to realize our Buddha Nature is likened to having the eyes for it.

this manner. In our present inquiry into Buddhas doing Their practice, They are, accordingly, all the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds. Even if we know that They exist, even if we do not know that They exist, They are, beyond doubt, all the Buddhas of the three temporal worlds and They are ‘Buddhas doing Their practice’.

And at the same time, in expressing ‘all the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds’, these three Old Buddhas—Seppō, Shibi, and Engo—each had their own way of putting the Matter. We need to learn the principle underlying what Seppō expressed as, “The Buddhas in the three temporal worlds exist within the Blazing Fire, turning the Great Wheel of the Dharma.” The training ground for the turning of the Wheel of the Dharma by all the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds is undoubtedly within the Blazing Fire: within the Blazing Fire is undoubtedly the training ground for Buddhas. Rigid teachers of Scripture and pedantic commentators cannot hear this, nor can non-Buddhists and those of the two Lesser Courses understand it. Be aware that the Blazing Fire of all the Buddhas will not be any other sort of fire. Also, you need to reflect upon whether any of those other sorts of fire are ablaze. You need to learn the teaching methods of our monastic tradition which are employed by the Buddhas of the three temporal worlds whilst They exist within the Blazing Fire. When They are present within the Blazing Fire, are the Blazing Fire and the Buddhas intimately connected? Or are the Two turning away from each other? Or are They one and the same both within and without?¹¹ Do They have a within and a without? Are Their within and without the same thing? Are Their within and without equally distant from each other?

Turning the Great Wheel of the Dharma will be the turning of oneself and the turning of the opportune moment at hand. It is one’s ability to hit the target through word or deed in response to one’s Master, which will include a turning of the Dharma and the Dharma’s turning. This turning of the Great Wheel of the Dharma, which Seppō has already mentioned, encompasses a Dharma Wheel that is turning the Wheel of Fire, even though the whole of the great earth is already completely ablaze. And It will be a Dharma Wheel that sets all Buddhas in motion. It will be a Dharma Wheel that sets the Wheel of the Dharma in motion, and It will encompass a Dharma Wheel that sets the three temporal worlds in motion.

Thus it is that the Blazing Fire is the great training ground wherein all Buddhas turn the Great Wheel of the Dharma. To try to analyze and measure this by spatial thinking, temporal thinking, human thinking, ordinary thinking, or saintly thinking, and the like, is to miss the mark. Since It cannot be measured by

11. ‘Within and without’ translates a technical Buddhist term for what appears as the subjective ‘inner world’ and the objective ‘outer world’.

those types of thinking, then, because It is the training ground for the turning of the Wheel of the Dharma by each and every Buddha of the three temporal worlds, and because the Blazing Fire exists, there is a training ground for Buddhas.

Shibi remarked: “Since the Blazing Fire is giving voice to the Dharma for the sake of all the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds, all the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds listen to It right on the spot where They are.”

Hearing these words, some may say that Shibi’s remark states the Truth better than Seppō’s remark, but this is not necessarily so. Keep in mind that Seppō’s remark is separate from Shibi’s remark. That is to say, Seppō is stating that the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds are turning the Great Wheel of the Dharma, whereas Shibi is stating that the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds are listening to the Dharma. Although Seppō’s remark is undoubtedly stating that the Dharma is being set in motion, it is not the case that the Dharma’s being set in motion necessarily involves the Dharma’s being heard. As a consequence, we cannot take what Seppō is saying to mean that the Dharma that has been set in motion will necessarily involve the Dharma being heard. In fact, Seppō is not saying that the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds are giving expression to the Dharma for the sake of the Blazing Fire, nor is he saying that the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds are turning the Great Wheel of the Dharma for the sake of the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds, nor is he saying that the Blazing Fire is turning the Great Wheel of the Dharma for the sake of the Blazing Fire. Is there any difference between speaking of turning the Wheel of the Dharma and actually turning the Great Wheel of the Dharma? Setting the Wheel of the Dharma in motion is beyond any voicing of the Dharma, so will the voicing of the Dharma necessarily exist for the sake of others? Accordingly, Seppō’s remark is one that does not fail to say what he meant to say.

As part of your training with your Master, you will certainly need to thoroughly explore Seppō’s phrases ‘being within the Blazing Fire’ and ‘turning the Great Wheel of the Dharma’. Do not confuse them with what Shibi is saying. To penetrate what Seppō is saying is to make as your everyday behavior the everyday behavior of a Buddha doing his practice. The Blazing Fire causes Itself to exist within all the Buddhas of the three temporal worlds. This is beyond Its simply permeating one or two inexhaustible realms of thoughts and things, and beyond Its merely permeating one or two motes of dust. In gauging the turning of the Great Wheel of the Dharma, do not liken It to measuring something as being large or small, broad or narrow. The Great Wheel of the Dharma does not turn for one’s

own sake or for the sake of others, nor does It turn for the sake of giving voice to It or for the sake of hearing It.

Shibi's way of putting it is, "Since the Blazing Fire is giving voice to the Dharma for the sake of all the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds, all the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds listen to It right on the spot where They are." Even though this says that the Blazing Fire is giving voice to the Dharma for the sake of all Buddhas in the three temporal worlds, it does not go so far as to say that It sets the Wheel of the Dharma in motion, nor does it say that the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds set the Wheel of the Dharma in motion. And even though all the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds listen to It right on the spot where They are, how could the Wheel of the Dharma of all the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds possibly have set into motion the Blazing Fire? Does the Blazing Fire which voices the Dharma for the sake of all Buddhas in the three temporal worlds also turn the Great Wheel of the Dharma or not? Shibi also does not go so far as to say, "The Wheel of the Dharma is turning right now." Nor does he say, "There is no turning of the Wheel of the Dharma."

Be that as it may, we need to consider whether Shibi is confused and understands the turning of the Wheel of the Dharma to mean expounding on the Wheel of the Dharma. If that is the case, then he is still in the dark about Seppō's statement. Even though he would have understood that when the Blazing Fire voices the Dharma for the sake of the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds, all the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds listen to It right on the spot where They are, nevertheless, he would not have recognized that when the Blazing Fire turns the Wheel of the Dharma, the Blazing Fire also listens to It right on the spot. He does not say that when the Blazing Fire turns the Wheel of the Dharma, the Fire is blazing at the same time as It is turning the Wheel of the Dharma. Listening to the Dharma by the Buddhas of the three temporal worlds is the practice of all Buddhas; They are not influenced by anything else. So, do not regard the Blazing Fire as 'the Dharma', nor regard the Blazing Fire as 'a Buddha', nor regard the Blazing Fire as just a blazing fire. And, truly, do not make light of the remark by Master Seppō's disciple. Would what he said simply be a case of his having thought that 'Persians have red beards' when, in fact, it was the case that 'a Persian's beard is red'?¹²

Even though Shibi's remark may resemble these ways of looking at the Matter, there is something in it that you would do well to consider: namely, it reveals the strength you will need for exploring the Matter through your training. That is to say, you should explore through your training the Essential Nature and

12. The quoted phrases derive from a remark made by Hyakujō Ekai, alluding to two different ways of saying the same thing.

the transitory forms It takes, which Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor have accurately Transmitted. This is not connected with ‘ultimate reality and its transitory forms’ as worked out in the traditions of both the Mahayana* and the Lesser Courses by pedestrian teachers of Scriptures and commentaries. Shibi is describing the Buddhas of the three temporal worlds listening to the Dharma which, in the traditions of both the Mahayana and the Lesser Courses, is beyond ‘ultimate reality and its transitory forms’. Such narrow-minded teachers only recognize that Buddhas have a way of voicing the Dharma that is limited to opportune occasions. They do not speak of all Buddhas listening to the Dharma, or speak of all Buddhas doing Their training and practice, or speak of all Buddhas realizing Buddhahood.

Now, Shibi has already stated, “All Buddhas in the three temporal worlds listen to the Dharma right on the spot where They are.” This statement encompasses both the Essential Nature and the forms It takes in which all Buddhas listen to the Dharma. By all means, do not regard those who are able to give voice to It as being superior, and do not say that those who are listening carefully to the Dharma are inferior. If those who give voice to It are worthy of our respect, then those who listen to It are also worthy of our respect.



Shakyamuni Buddha once said in verse:

*If any people give voice to this Discourse
Then they will surely be able to see Me.
But to express It for the sake of even one person
Is indeed something difficult for them to do.*

So it follows from this that to be able to express the Dharma is to see Shakyamuni Buddha because, when ‘such a one’ comes to see ‘Me’, he is Shakyamuni Buddha. The Buddha also said in verse:

*After I am extinct,
To hear and accept this Discourse
And to inquire into Its meaning
Will indeed be difficult to do.*

Keep in mind that hearing It and accepting It are also equally difficult to do, and there is no superiority or inferiority involved. Even though Those who are ‘listening right on the spot where They are’ are Buddhas most worthy of respect, what They must be listening to right on the spot is the Dharma, because ‘Those who listen right on the spot to the Dharma’ are what Buddhas of the three temporal

worlds are. All Buddhas have already reached spiritual fruition, so we do not speak of Their listening to the Dharma whilst in some developing stage, because They are already Buddhas in the three temporal worlds. Keep in mind that the Buddhas of the three temporal worlds, as They stand right on the spot listening to the Blazing Fire give expression to the Dharma, are Buddhas. It does not mean that They need to follow the teaching methods of our monastic tradition in exactly the same way as we do. And, in attempting to keep to our traditional methods, there have been those whose arrows have met in mid-air.¹³ The Blazing Fire is certainly expressing the Dharma for the sake of the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds. And on those occasions when heart and mind are stripped bare, blossoms burst forth on the iron tree and the world is redolent with their perfume. In other words, when it comes down to Their listening to the voicing of the Dharma by the Blazing Fire right where They are, what is it that ultimately manifests before Their very eyes? In everyday terms, it will be Wisdom surpassing the Master or it will be Wisdom equal to the Master. In thoroughly exploring that which is beyond the threshold of Master and disciple, it will be the Buddhas of the three temporal worlds.

Engo said that when the ones we rightly call Monkey White and Monkey Black both throw themselves into the moment at hand, gods appear and demons vanish.¹⁴ As to this statement, even though Seppō is manifesting the Blazing Fire from the same situation that Shibi is in, there could be some way in which Seppō does not enter into the situation in the same way that Shibi does. Be that as it may, is Shibi's Blazing Fire the Buddhas or is he taking all the Buddhas to be the Blazing Fire? In the situations where black and white both act together, Shibi arises and disappears along with the gods and demons, but what Seppō has manifested through sound and form does not distinguish between black and white times. Even though this is so, you need to recognize that Shibi has ways of putting It that are quite right and ways of putting It that are not quite right, whereas Seppō has ways of putting It that take up the Matter and ways of putting It that let the Matter go.

Now, Engo also has a way of putting the Matter that is not the same as either Shibi's or Seppō's. It is his saying, "The Raging Fire spreading across the heavens

13. An image referring to a disciple's response to a Master's being 'right on', like two arrows shot from opposite directions hitting each other head on.

14. Originally, Monkey White and Monkey Black were nicknames for two Chinese robbers who were famed for their great skill and daring. Seppō is associated with Monkey White through his name, which means White Peak, whereas Shibi is linked to Monkey Black by his name, which means Dark Sands. There is also the implication that even though the two expressed spiritual matters in superficially different manners, what they taught was of one and the same species.

is Buddha giving voice to the Truth,” and “The Raging Fire that spreads across the heavens is Truth giving voice to Buddha.” This way of putting the Matter serves as a brilliant light for us present-day trainees. Even if we are in the dark about the Raging Fire, Its spreading across the heavens covers us, so that we have our share of It and others have their share too. Whatever is covered by the revolving heavens will completely be the Raging Fire. Why reject ‘this’ merely to adopt ‘that’?

We should be glad that these bags of skin of ours have been able to hear His transforming Truth which has spread across the heavens, even though we’ve been born in a country far from the land of our saintly Shakyamuni and live at a time distant from His. Even though you are in a place where you may hear what Engo called ‘Buddha giving voice to the Truth’, still, how deeply entangled are you in your failure to recognize ‘the Truth giving voice to Buddha’?

Thus, all the Buddhas of the three temporal worlds are expressed within these worlds by the Dharma, and all the various forms of the Dharma in the three temporal worlds have been expressed within these worlds by the Buddha. Only the heavens cover us, and their winds cut low the tangled nests of kudzu and wisteria vines. A single remark has clearly tested and bested Vimalakīrti and others as well. Thus, Dharma gives voice to Buddha, Dharma practices Buddha, Dharma awakens to Buddha, Buddha gives voice to Dharma, Buddha practices Buddha, and Buddha becomes Buddha. All of these, all together, comprise the everyday behavior of a Buddha doing His practice. Over the heavens and over the earth, over the past and over the present, those who have realized It do not trivialize It, and those who have clarified what It is do not debase It.

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