

## On Ceaseless Practice

(*Gyōji*)

**Translator's Introduction:** *Gyōji* is Dōgen's longest discourse in the *Shōbōgenzō*. It was apparently given to his disciples in written form, and, because of its length, it was bound in two fascicles, identified as the upper part and the lower part. Since the lower part is simply a continuation of the upper, the two have not been treated here as separate works. In the original text, an alternate name was given at the end of the lower part: The Ceaseless Practice of the Buddhas and Ancestors (*Busso Gyōji*).

*Gyōji* can be literally rendered as 'doing the practice and keeping to it', hence, 'ceaseless practice'. It can also be understood as a truncated form of *shugyō jikai*, 'doing one's training and practice while keeping to the Precepts'. Further, as Dōgen makes clear through the many stories of Indian and Chinese Masters that he recounts, 'practice' does not refer to some fixed agenda but differs in form with each Master, and yet is recognizable as that individual's ceaseless practice.

The Great Way of Buddhas and Ancestors invariably involves unsurpassed ceaseless practice. This practice rolls on in a cyclic manner without interruption. Not a moment's gap has occurred in Their giving rise to the intention to realize Buddhahood, in Their doing the training and practice, in Their experiencing enlightenment, and in Their realizing nirvana, for the Great Way of ceaseless practice rolls on just like this. As a result, the practice is not done by forcing oneself to do it and it is not done by being forced to do it by someone else: it is a ceaseless practice that is never tainted by forcing. The merits from this ceaseless practice sustain us and sustain others.

The underlying principle of this practice is that the whole universe in all ten directions receives the merit of our ceaseless practice. Though others may not recognize it, though we may not recognize it ourselves, still, it is so. As a result, owing to the ceaseless practice of all the Buddhas and Ancestors, our own ceaseless practice has clearly manifested. And, owing to our ceaseless practice, the ceaseless practice of all the Buddhas clearly manifests, and the Great Way of the Buddhas pervades everywhere. And, owing to our ceaseless practice, the Buddha's Way rolls perpetually onward. Accordingly, Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor have dwelt within Buddha, have acted from the Heart of Buddha,

and have fully manifested Buddha, and They have done so without a single moment's interruption.

Due to this ceaseless practice, there is the sun, the moon, and the stars. Due to ceaseless practice, there is the great earth and the vast expanse of space. Due to ceaseless practice, there is body and mind, along with the internal effects of our past karma\* and the external conditions of our surroundings. Due to ceaseless practice, there are the four great elements\* and the five skandhas.\* Even though ceaseless practice is not something that worldly folk desire, it will be what all human beings truly come back to. Due to the ceaseless practice of all Buddhas of past, present, and future, all Buddhas manifest ceaseless practice in the past, present, and future. And there are also times when the merit from that ceaseless practice no longer lies hidden, and, as a result, the intention to realize Buddhahood arises, along with training and practice. And there are times when that merit does not show itself, and, as a result, it is not encountered or perceived. You need to explore through your training that even though it may not show itself, it does not lie hidden, because it is not tainted with appearing and disappearing or with existing and dying away. Though it may be concealed from us at the present moment, the ceaseless practice that has brought us into existence is present in every single thought and thing, all of which arise due to coexisting conditions, and we just do not realize that we are actually doing ceaseless practice.

Moreover, if we wish to grasp what ceaseless practice is, we should not make a special case out of every new thing that comes along. This is because, from the perspective of Dependent Origination, there is simply ceaseless practice, and ceaseless practice does not come about as a result of depending upon anything. You need to explore this point with diligence and in detail. The ceaseless practice that makes ceaseless practice manifest is nothing other than our own ceaseless practice in the here and now. Ceaseless practice is not present here and now because it is something that we innately have within ourselves; it is not something that already dwells within us.<sup>1</sup> Its presence in the here and now is beyond the comings and goings of a 'self' and beyond the departings and emergings of a 'self'. The phrase 'here and now' does not refer to something that existed prior to ceaseless practice: 'the here and now' refers to ceaseless practice fully manifesting itself in the present.

Accordingly, the ceaseless practice of one day is the seed of all Buddhas: it is the ceaseless practice of all Buddhas. By means of it, all Buddhas fully manifest

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\* See *Glossary*.

1. That is, it does not refer to some kind of soul or permanent self.

Themselves. So, to not do ceaseless practice is to loathe all Buddhas, and to fail to make alms offerings to all Buddhas is to loathe ceaseless practice, and to fail to live and die together with all Buddhas is to fail both to learn from Them and to explore the Matter\* with Them. To see a flower opening or a leaf falling in the here and now is to fully see what ceaseless practice is. There is no polishing of the Mirror or smashing of the Mirror that is not ceaseless practice.<sup>2</sup> Thus, if anyone tried to set aside ceaseless practice—ignoring it in an attempt to conceal their wicked intention to escape from ceaseless practice—this too would be ceaseless practice. Accordingly, some who are inclined towards ceaseless practice may merely resemble someone who has a genuine intention to do ceaseless practice, still, such persons would be like the perplexed son who threw away the treasures and riches of the native land of his true father and wandered off into foreign lands.<sup>3</sup> Even though, during the time of his wandering about aimlessly, the winds and waters did not cause him to lose life or limb, nevertheless he should not have thrown away his true father’s treasure, for that is to mistakenly lose the Dharma Treasure of his True Father. This is why ceaseless practice is Dharma that is not to be neglected even for a moment.



Our benevolent spiritual father, Great Master Shakyamuni Buddha, had been observing ceaseless practice deep in the mountains from the nineteenth year of His life until His thirtieth year, when there arose the ceaseless practice by which He realized the Way simultaneously with the great earth and its sentient beings. Up through the eightieth year of His life, He was still doing ceaseless practice in the mountains, and in the forests, and in the monasteries. He did not return to His father’s royal palace or assume governance over the prosperity of the nation. For clothing, He kept to the large sanghati robe—the kind that monks still wear—and He did not exchange it for another type of robe for the rest of His life. He did not exchange His alms bowl for another one during His lifetime, and He never stayed alone, not even once in a day. He did not reject so much as a single worthless alms offering from either ordinary folk or those in lofty positions, and He bore with patience the insults of non-Buddhists. In sum, His whole life was ceaseless

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2. Dōgen explores these allusions to the Mirror thoroughly in his Discourse 19: On the Ancient Mirror (*Kokyō*).
  3. An allusion to a parable in the *Lotus Scripture*, found in the fourth chapter entitled “Belief and Understanding”, which describes how we spend so much of our lives running away from the Buddha.

practice. It can never be said that the Buddha's examples of washing His robe and accepting alms for His food were not ceaseless practice.



The Eighth Indian Ancestor, the Venerable Makakashō, was the Venerable Shakyamuni's Dharma heir.<sup>4</sup> Throughout his life he completely devoted himself to the ceaseless practice of the twelve zudas.<sup>5</sup> The twelve zudas are as follows:

(1) Not to accept personal invitations from people, but to go on alms round for one's food each day. Also, not to accept money with which to purchase even part of a monk's meal.

(2) To lodge overnight on a mountain and not to stay in the dwelling of ordinary folk, in a highly populated district, or in some town or village.<sup>6</sup>

(3) Not to beg people for clothing. Also, not to accept any clothing that is offered by people, but simply to take the clothing of the dead that has been discarded at gravesides.

(4) To lodge under a tree within some field, whether cultivated or not.

(5) To eat one meal per day. This is sometimes called *sunka sunnai*.<sup>7</sup>

(6) Not to lie down, day or night, but simply to sleep while sitting up or to do walking meditation when drowsy. This is sometimes called *sunnai sashakyō*.<sup>8</sup>

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4. Makakashō is considered the Eighth Indian Ancestor when we begin from the first of the Seven Buddhas, of whom Shakyamuni Buddha was the seventh.
  5. A zuda (Skt. *dhūta*) is an austere practice that, in later Mahayana Buddhism, became associated with the Lesser Course. Dōgen's subsequent listing of the twelve zudas is apparently based on a Chinese text called *The Great Scripture on the Three Thousand Forms of Everyday Behavior for Monks*.
  6. 'On a mountain' here most likely refers to staying in a monastery, temple, or hermitage.
  7. *Sunka sunnai* is the Japanese pronunciation of a corrupt Chinese transliteration of the Pali word *ekāsanika*, which means 'one meal a day'.
  8. As in the preceding footnote, *sunnai sashakyō* is a corruption of the Pali *nesajjika*, meaning 'not lying down day or night'.

(7) To possess only three robes and never to have an extra robe. Also, not to sleep wrapped in a blanket.

(8) To reside in cemeteries and not to take up permanent residence in Buddhist temples or among people. To do seated meditation and seek the Way while looking directly at the skulls and bones of the dead.

(9) To desire merely to live by oneself, without desiring to meet other people or to sleep amidst a group of people.

(10) To eat the raw fruits of trees and plants first, and then to eat one's cooked food. After having finished eating one's cooked food, to not then eat the raw fruits of trees and plants.

(11) To be content to sleep out in the open, without seeking shelter under some tree.

(12) Not to eat meat. Also, not to eat processed milk products or apply hemp oil to one's body.

These are the twelve zudas. The Venerable Makakashō did not regress or turn away from these throughout his whole lifetime. Even though the Tathagata's Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching was directly Transmitted to him, he did not step back from practicing these zudas.

The Buddha once said to him, "You are already one who is old in years, so you should eat what the other monks eat."

The Venerable Makakashō replied, "If I had not met the Tathagata in this lifetime, I would have been a pratyekabuddha.\* I would have resided all my life in mountains and forests. Fortunately, I encountered the Tathagata in this lifetime and have been blessed with the beneficence of the Dharma. Even so, in the end, I will not eat as the other monks in the community eat."

The Tathagata praised him for that.

On another occasion, because Makakashō had been ceaselessly practicing these zudas, his body had grown emaciated. When the assembly of monks saw him, they belittled him. Thereupon, the Tathagata cordially summoned Makakashō and made room for him on half His seat. The Venerable Makakashō sat down on the Tathagata's seat. You need to keep in mind that Makakashō was a senior monk of long standing in the Buddha's assembly. We cannot fully enumerate the ways in which he ceaselessly practiced for his whole life.



The Tenth Indian Ancestor, the Venerable Barishiba, once vowed that for the rest of his life he would not let his ribs touch his mat.<sup>9</sup> Even though he was eighty-six years old, he did his utmost in practicing the Way and was soon given the one-to-one Transmission of the Great Dharma. Because he did not let his days and nights idly slip by, he was given the one-to-one Transmission of the True Eye of Enlightenment after barely three years of effort. The Venerable One had been in his mother's womb for sixty years, and when he was born, his hair was already white. Because he kept to his vow not to lie down like a corpse, he was called 'The One of Venerable Ribs'. In the dark, he would release a radiance from his hands by means of which he was able to read the Scriptures and thereby procure the Dharma. This was a strange and wondrous trait that he was born with.

The One of Venerable Ribs was almost eighty years old when he renounced home life and dyed his robes.

A young man who lived in the area asked him, "You foolish, decrepit old man, how can you be so dim-witted? Besides, those who leave home life to become monks have two kinds of undertakings: first, they learn how to meditate; second, they chant the Scriptures. You are now feeble and senile, so there is no way for you to progress by doing either. To put it simply, you will carelessly muddy up the waters and will fill your stomach with alms offerings to no purpose."

The One of Venerable Ribs, upon hearing these rebukes and snide remarks, then thanked the man and made a vow, saying, "I will not let my ribs touch my mat until I have thoroughly mastered the fundamental meaning of the *Tripitaka*,\* cut off all craving for anything within the three worlds of desire, form, and beyond form, obtained the six marvelous spiritual abilities, and equipped myself with the eight kinds of detachment from delusion."

From that time on, there was not even one day that he did not practice walking and seated meditation, as well as practicing mindful meditation while standing still. During the day, he investigated and learned the Scriptures and Their underlying

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9 It is unclear whether Barishiba meant what he said figuratively, as we might speak of 'not lying down on the job', or literally. Over the millennia, some monks have attempted to follow Barishiba's practice literally and have even devised ways to bind themselves whilst in full lotus position so that they would not fall into a prone position if they should fall asleep.

principles; at night, he calmed his discriminatory thinking and cooled down his active mind. Continuing on in this way for three years, he explored and thoroughly mastered the *Tripitaka*, cut off his craving for the three worlds, and attained the wise discernment which arises from the three forms of clarity.<sup>10</sup> People at that time, out of deep respect, gave him the name of the One of Venerable Ribs.

The One of Venerable Ribs left the womb after having first spent sixty years there. Surely he must have been doing his best even whilst in the womb. After he left the womb, it was almost eighty years before he sought to leave home life and explore the Way. This was a hundred and forty years after he was conceived! Truly, he was an extraordinary person, and even so, he was a decrepit old man who must have been more decrepit and more old than anyone else. He had already attained old age whilst still in the womb, and he was advanced in years since having left the womb. Even so, he paid no heed to the slanderous and snide remarks made by people of his time and single-mindedly kept to his vow, never turning away from it. Who could possibly think it would be an easy task to try to emulate his spiritual wisdom?

Do not regret your reaching old age. It is difficult to know what this thing called life really is. Is a person ‘really living’ or ‘not really living’? Is a person ‘old’ or ‘not old’? The four perspectives are completely different; all the various types of perspectives are different as well.<sup>11</sup> Just concentrate on your intention and make your utmost effort to pursue the Way. In your pursuit of the Way, train as if you were facing a life-and-death situation: it is not simply your pursuit of the Way within life-and-death. People today have become so foolish as to set aside their pursuit of the Way upon reaching the age of fifty or sixty, or upon reaching seventy or eighty. Although we are naturally aware of how long we have lived, this is simply the human mind energetically engaged in discriminating and has nothing to do with studying the Way. Do not concern yourself with being in the prime of life or having reached old age. Just be single-minded in exploring the Way thoroughly and diligently, for then you will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the One of Venerable Ribs.

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10. The three forms of clarity are the ability to see one’s own past lives and those of others, the ability to see the karmic consequences that will follow from one’s own actions as well as those of others, and the ability to recognize the sufferings of oneself and others within their present life and to know how to convert the passions that give rise to those sufferings.

11. ‘The four perspectives’ refers to a Buddhist metaphor which describes the way that different beings interpret what they see. In the metaphor, water is described from the perspective of four different beings: humans see it as ordinary water, hungry ghosts as bloody pus, fish as a dwelling place, and celestial beings as liquid lapis lazuli.

Do not always be lamenting the fact that you will end up as a pile of dirt in a graveyard. Do not spend your time worrying about it. If you do not single-mindedly devote yourself to reaching the Other Shore, who will rescue you? When people are aimlessly wandering about in the wilderness like skeletons without a Master, they need to cultivate right perception so that they may fashion an eye for themselves.<sup>12</sup>



The Sixth Chinese Ancestor was a woodcutter in the district of Hsinning. He could hardly have been called an intellectual. While just an infant, he lost his father, and he grew up under the care of his aged mother. He worked as a woodcutter in order to support her. Whilst standing at a crossroads one day, he overheard one line of a Scripture being recited, and immediately parted from his mother in order to seek the Great Dharma. He was a great vessel for the Truth, of a caliber rarely met in any generation. His pursuit of the Way was unique among human beings. To cut off one's arm is easy enough, but to sever himself from someone he loved must have been exceedingly difficult indeed.<sup>13</sup> He would not have abandoned his filial obligations lightly.

He joined in with Daiman Kōnin's assembly, where he pounded rice day and night, neither sleeping nor resting for eight months.<sup>14</sup> In the middle of one night, he received the direct Transmission of Bodhidharma's kesa\* and alms bowl. Even after he had obtained the Dharma, he still carried his stone mortar around with him, and for eight years he continued his rice pounding. Even when he entered the world in order to help ferry people to the Other Shore by giving expression to the Dharma, he did not set aside his stone mortar. This is ceaseless practice that is rare in any generation.

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12. Right perception is described in Buddhism as seeing things with the eye of compassion and wise discernment.
  13. The reference to cutting off one's arm is to the Second Chinese Ancestor, Taiso Eka, who is said to have cut off his arm in order to find the Truth. This 'severing' may refer to giving up one's attachments rather than to a literal, physical act.
  14. Though he was part of Kōnin's assembly, he lived there as a layperson and did not become a monk until some ten years later. Although 'pounding rice day and night' is often used in Zen texts solely as a metaphor for doing ceaseless practice, in this sentence it also alludes to the actual physical work that he did for the monastic community.





Kōzei Baso did seated meditation for twenty years and received the Intimate Seal\* from Nangaku. It has never been said that he set aside the practice of seated meditation after the Dharma was Transmitted to him and he began to help rescue others. When people first came to train under him, he always helped them to personally obtain the Mind seal. He was invariably the first to arrive for the monks' communal work periods.<sup>15</sup> He did not let up even after he became old. Those today who follow Rinzai are in Baso's lineage.



Our revered Ancestor Ungan and the monk Dōgo were both exploring the Matter under Yakusan. Having made a vow together, they did not put their sides to their mats for forty years, so committed were they to thorough and unadulterated practice. Later, when Ungan personally Transmitted the Dharma to Tōzan Ryōkai, Tōzan remarked, "Desiring to realize Wholeness, I have been doing my utmost for twenty years to put the Way into practice by doing seated meditation." That Way of his has now been Transmitted far and wide.



During the time while Ungo Dōyō was living in a hermitage on Three Peak Mountain, he was receiving nourishment from the Celestial Kitchen.<sup>16</sup> Once when Ungo was paying a visit to Tōzan, his spiritual doubt was settled through his realization of the Great Matter, after which he returned to his hermitage. When a celestial messenger came looking for Ungo to bring him nourishment once again, the celestial being could not see him, despite searching for three days. Ungo no longer needed to rely on the Celestial Kitchen, for he had made the Great Matter his sustenance. Try to emulate his determination to comprehend the Truth.



From the time when Hyakujō Ekai was serving as an attendant monk to Baso until that evening when he entered nirvana, there was not a single day when he did

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15. Communal work customarily included such things as sweeping the temple grounds and gathering firewood.
  16. It is said that before awakening to the Truth, a Buddhist trainee is served nourishment by celestial beings, but after the trainee has awakened to the Truth, those celestial beings can no longer serve the person food since the 'person' can no longer be seen.

not endeavor to work for the benefit of the monastic assembly and for the benefit of other people. Meditation Master Hyakujō was already an old monk of long standing when, thank goodness, he said, “A day when I do not work is a day when I do not eat.” He still endeavored to do communal work just the same as those in their prime. The community felt sorry for him, but, though they expressed their pity for him, the Master would not quit. Finally, one day when he came to the communal work, the monks had hidden his tools and would not return them to him, so the Master did not take any food that day. His intention was to express his regret at not being able to participate in the monks’ communal work. This story has become known as Hyakujō’s “One day without work is one day without food.” The traditions found in Rinzai’s lineage—whose Transmission flows throughout Great Sung China today—as well as the traditions found in Buddhist monasteries far and wide, are, for the most part, based on the ceaseless practice of Hyakujō’s profound principles.<sup>17</sup>



When the revered monk Kyōsei Dōfu was Abbot in his temple, the deities of the place were never able to see the Master’s face because they had no reliable means by which to do so.<sup>18</sup>



In former times, Meditation Master Gichū of Mount Sanpei received nourishment from the Celestial Kitchen. After he encountered Daiten Hōtsū of Chōshū Province, the celestial beings sought Gichū out, but were unable to find him.



The later revered monk of Mount Daii, Chōkei Daian, would say of his sojourn with Isan on the same mountain, “I stayed with Isan for twenty years. I supped on Isan food. I urinated Isan urine. But I did not explore Isan’s Way. I have merely been able to raise one unsexed water buffalo that, all day long, is completely out in the open.”

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17. The principles which Hyakujō put forth in his writings are still fundamental to Zen Buddhist monastic practice today.

18. It is said that when someone is truly doing ceaseless practice, the deities that inhabit the environs of a temple cannot see that person, because that person is not wearing the ‘face’ of a false self.

Keep in mind that he raised that one unsexed water buffalo by means of his twenty years of ceaseless practice with Isan, who had himself continually explored the Matter within Hyakujō's community. Without fuss, quietly emulate his actions over those twenty years, and do not at any time forget them. Even though there are many people who explored Isan's Way, there must have been only a few whose ceaseless practice was their 'not having explored Isan's Way'.



The revered monk Jōshū Shinsai of Kannon-in Monastery was in his sixty-first year before he gave rise to the intention to realize the Truth and therefore began to seek the Way. Carrying his bottle gourd filled with water and his monk's traveling staff, he set out in search of a Master. He traveled far and wide in all directions, constantly saying to himself, "If even a child of seven has spiritually surpassed me, I shall explore the Matter with him or her accordingly. If even an old man of a hundred has not yet spiritually reached where I am, I shall instruct him accordingly."

It was with this attitude of mind that he did his utmost for twenty years to study Nansen's Way. At the age of eighty, he was installed as Abbot of Kannon-in Monastery, east of Jōshū City, and for forty years he spiritually guided ordinary people as well as those in loftier positions. Since he never sent out letters soliciting donations, his Monks' Hall was not large, lacking both a hall for the temple officers in front and a washstand in back. One time, the leg on his meditation platform broke. He tied a piece of charred firewood to it with some rope and, for years, went on using it for his training and practice. The temple officers wished to replace the leg, but Jōshū would not permit it. We should learn from this venerable Old Buddha's customary ways of doing things.

Jōshū lived in Jōshū Prefecture from his eightieth year on, after receiving the Transmission of the Dharma. He had received the authentic Transmission of the True Teaching, and people called him the Venerable Old Buddha. Those who had not yet received the authentic Transmission of the True Teaching must surely have been less imposing than Master Jōshū, and those who had not yet reached the age of eighty must surely have been more robust than he was. So how are those of us who are in our prime, yet still spiritually unimpressive, to equal one who is so deeply revered? Simply, by striving to do our utmost in ceaselessly practicing the Way. During those forty years, he did not accumulate worldly goods, and there was no rice or other grain in storage. Sometimes, chestnuts and acorns would be gathered and meted out for food; sometimes, one meal would be stretched out to

cover a couple of days. These were truly the customary ways of a dragon elephant\* in the past, ways of training that we should aspire to.

One day, Jōshū addressed his community, saying, “If you did not depart from the monastery even once in your lifetime and did not speak for five or ten years, no one should call you a mute.<sup>19</sup> And after that, how could even the Buddhas do anything for you?” This points to ceaseless practice.<sup>20</sup>

Keep in mind that even though your not talking for five or ten years might give you the look of being dumb, and even though you might not talk due to your efforts not to depart from the monastery, still, you would not be a mute. The way a Buddha speaks is no different. Those who cannot hear the voice with which a Buddha speaks will fail to understand that someone who is not mute has gone beyond talking. Consequently, the most wondrous practice within ceaseless practice is ‘not departing from the monastery’. The phrase ‘not departing from the monastery’ completely encapsulates the expression ‘letting go of things’. The most foolish of people do not recognize a non-mute person, and do not help others to know ‘such a one’\* as a non-mute person. Even though no one prevents them from doing so, they do not help others to know ‘such a person’. Pitiful indeed are those who have not heard that to be a non-mute is to be someone who has realized the state of ‘being just what one is’, or who do not even recognize that there is such a state of ‘being just what one is’. Never abandon the ceaseless practice of not departing from the monastery. Do not be blown east and west by the prevailing winds. Even if you do not pay attention to the spring breezes and the autumn moons for five or ten years, there will be the Way that is free from delusions concerning sounds and forms. How one arrives at that Way is beyond our ability to know and understand. You should explore through your training just how precious each moment of your ceaseless practice is. Do not entertain doubts that the practice of not talking may be something vain and meaningless. Ceaseless practice is the one monastery that we enter, the one monastery that we emerge from, the one monastery that is the path left by flying birds, and the one monastery that is the whole universe.

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19. In the Zen tradition, the term ‘mute’ is often used to describe trainees who are unable to give a response when a Master puts a spiritual question to them.

20. In other words, ceaseless practice is synonymous with not departing from one’s spiritual seat and with not just talking about the practice but actually doing it.



Mount Daibai is located in Keigen Prefecture. Goshō-ji Monastery was established on this mountain, and Meditation Master Daibai Hōjō was its founder. The Master was a man from Jōyō in Hubei Province.

While training in Baso's community, Hōjō once asked the Master, "Just what is Buddha?"

Baso replied, "Your very mind is Buddha."

Hearing this phrase, Hōjō immediately experienced the great realization. As a consequence, he climbed to the summit of Mount Daibai to be apart from human society. Living alone in a hermit's thatched hut, he survived on pine nuts and wore clothing he made from lotus leaves. On this mountain was a small pond, in which lotuses were plentiful. For more than thirty years he pursued the Way by doing seated meditation. He neither met anyone nor heard about any human affairs whatsoever, and he forgot about the passing years, seeing only the mountains around him turning now green, now yellow. You can imagine how wretched the winds and frosts were.

In doing seated meditation, the Master would place an eight-inch high iron pagoda atop his head, as if he were wearing a jeweled crown. By endeavoring to keep this pagoda from dropping off, he kept from falling asleep. This pagoda is still in his monastery today, and it is listed in the inventory of the temple's storehouse. Until his death, this is how he tirelessly trained in the Way.

He had been passing the months and years in this manner when, one day, a monk from Enkan's community arrived. The monk had come to the mountain in search of a suitable traveling staff, but he had wandered off the mountain path and fortuitously came upon the Master's hermitage.

Unexpectedly, he encountered the Master, whereupon he asked him, "Venerable monk, how long have you been living on this mountain?"

The Master replied, "All I have seen is the mountains about me now dyed green, now dyed yellow."

This monk then asked him, "In what direction should I go to find the path out of the mountains?"

The Master said, "Go by following the stream."

The monk was struck by this response. So, when he returned, he told Enkan what had happened. Enkan said, "Some years ago when I was with Baso in Chiang-hsi Province, I once met a certain monk, but

I don't know what happened to him later. I wonder whether he could be that monk."

Later, when Enkan sent the monk to invite the Master for a visit, the Master would not leave the mountain. Rather, he composed a poem in reply:

*Broken down yet living still, a withered tree aslant amidst  
the chill forest,  
How many times have I met the spring, my heart  
unswerving?  
Woodcutters pass this monk by, without even a backward  
glance,  
So why does the carpenter eagerly desire to seek me  
out?*<sup>21</sup>

The upshot was he did not pay Enkan a visit. Afterwards, he decided to move deeper into the recesses of the mountain, whereupon he composed the following poem:

*From this pond, the lotus leaves I have taken for wear  
have known no end,  
And from a few trees, the pine cones have supplied for my  
meals more than enough.  
Now people from the world have discovered my dwelling  
place,  
So I shall move my reed abode to enter a seclusion ever  
more deep.*

Finally, he moved his hermitage further into the mountains.

One day, Baso had a monk go and expressly ask Hōjō, "Venerable monk, in former times when you went in deepest respect to train under Baso, what was the underlying principle you obtained from him that you then came to dwell on this mountain?"

The Master answered, "Baso turned directly to me and said, 'Your very mind is Buddha,' and then I came to dwell upon this mountain."

The monk then said, "These days his Buddha Dharma is different."

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21. 'Woodcutters' is a common metaphor in Zen Buddhism for disciples who are still working on cutting the roots of their past karma. 'The carpenter' is an allusion to Enkan as a spiritual master artisan.

The Master asked, “In what way is It different?”

The monk replied, “Baso now says, ‘What is not mind is not Buddha.’”

The Master responded, “That old fellow! I swear there is no end to his bewildering people! Even if that ‘What is not mind is not Buddha’ of his is so, well, I’ll stick with ‘Your very mind is Buddha.’”

When the monk reported to Baso what Hōjō had said, Baso replied, “The Plum has fully ripened.”<sup>22</sup>

This story is known by all, commoners and gentry alike.

Tenryū was a leading disciple of Master Hōjō, and Gutei was the Master’s Dharma grandson. The Korean monk Kachi received the Transmission of the Master’s Dharma and became the First Ancestor of his own country. All the Korean Masters today are Hōjō’s distant descendants.

During his lifetime, a tiger and an elephant served him, and they did it without quarreling between themselves. After the Master’s parinirvana, the tiger and the elephant gathered stones and mud, and built a stupa\* for their Master. That stupa exists in Goshō-ji Temple even now. The Master’s ceaseless practice has been extolled by good spiritual friends of the past and present alike. Those with limited wisdom do not recognize that they should praise his practice. To hold on tenaciously to the notion that Buddha Dharma can surely be found even amidst one’s greed for fame and love of gain is a narrow, foolish view.



Meditation Master Goso Hōen of once said:

When my Master’s Master first took up residence on Mount Yōgi, the rafters of the old buildings were in ruins and the damage from wind and rain was extensive. It was midwinter at the time. The temple halls throughout the monastery had long been damaged. The Monks’ Hall was especially dilapidated. The snow kept drifting in, and it so filled the floors that there was nowhere for the monks to sit. Veteran monks, their hair white with age, were sweeping the snow off everything, including themselves, and shaggy eyebrowed monks of venerable years looked as though those brows were knitted with apprehension. The monks of the community were unable to do their seated meditation tranquilly.

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22. The name Daibai in Daibai Hōjō’s name means the ‘Great Plum Tree’.

When one patch-robed monk asked in all sincerity whether repairs might be made, the old Master turned down the request, saying, “Our Buddha has said that this period of time corresponds to the degenerate eon, and that even high cliffs and deep valleys shift and change, never remaining constant. So, how can we possibly seek to sate ourselves by fulfilling our every wish? The saintly ones of olden times, for the most part, did their walking meditation on bare ground beneath the trees. This was the ancient and exemplary way of practice, a profound custom that went far beyond simply the form of walking. You have all left home life behind in order to pursue the Way, but you still have not learned how to use your hands and feet harmoniously. A monk’s life lasts barely some forty or fifty years. Who has time to waste in vain pursuits, such as making ostentatious buildings?” So, the upshot was that he did not go along with the request.

The next day, in giving Teaching in the Dharma Hall, Goso gave instruction to his assembly, saying:

When Yōgi first came to reside here as Abbot, the roofs and walls of the buildings had fallen into such neglect that the floors were completely covered with drifts of snow. We hunched up our necks and grumbled in the gloom. But then, with a change of heart, we recalled the old ones who had resided under trees.

Ultimately he never gave his permission for repairs, yet, even so, many itinerant monks from the Four Oceans and Five Lakes, clothed in their cloud-like robes and their mist-like sleeves, later asked to hang up their traveling staff in his community.<sup>23</sup> We should delight in the fact that there have so many who were avid for the Way. We would do well to engrave these words of Goso on our hearts and to impress them on our bodies.

Our Venerable Master Goso Hōen once gave Teaching, saying, “Practice is not something that lies beyond thoughts and feelings, and thoughts and feelings are not things that lie beyond practice.” Give great weight to these words. Ponder upon them day and night; put them into practice from dawn to dusk. Do not allow yourself to be vainly blown about in all directions by the gusting winds. How much less could those who have left home life behind to pursue the Way possibly live a quiet, secluded life amidst luxurious accommodations! In Japan today, even the

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23. ‘The Five Lakes’ is an allusion to China, whereas ‘the Four Oceans’ refers to the rest of the world.



‘palatial homes’ of royalty and their ministers are hardly splendid, but are merely thatched cottages which are falling to pieces. If someone has obtained a luxurious estate, chances are it came from a wrong livelihood; it is rarely obtained from a pure one. A building that is already there is a different matter, but do not make plans for new constructions. Thatched hermitages and cottages were where the saintly ones of old dwelt; they are residences esteemed by the saintly ones of the past. Today’s trainees should wish to be the same when exploring the Matter through their training, so do not make a mistake about this.

The Yellow Emperor and other Chinese emperors such as Yao and Shun were secular people, yet they lived in thatched houses and were an example for their nation. In a book by the Chinese writer Shih-tsu it says, “If you wish to see the practice of the Yellow Emperor, take a look at Hekung Palace. If you wish to see the practice of the emperors Yao and Shun, take a look at Tsung-ts’ao Palace. The Yellow Emperor’s reception hall in Hekung Palace was roofed with thatch. Emperor Shun’s reception hall in Tsung-ts’ao Palace was also roofed with thatch.” Keep in mind that both Hekung and Tsung-ts’ao were thatched with straw.

Now, when we compare the Yellow Emperor, Emperor Yao, and Emperor Shun with ourselves, the difference is as great as that between heaven and earth. Even so, they used straw thatch for their reception halls. When even secular people reside in thatched dwellings, how can those who have left home life behind to be monks possibly aim at dwelling in lofty halls or elegant mansions? How unbecoming that would be! People of old would dwell under a tree or live in a forest, for these were the residences that both laymen and monks desired. The Yellow Emperor was a disciple of the Taoist Kuang-cheng of Mount Kung-tung. Kuang-cheng himself lived in a cave within Kung-tung Mountain. Today in Great Sung China, many heads of state and high-ranking ministers have carried on with this significant custom of emperors. As a consequence, even secular folk moiling about in their delusions do the same. How could those who have left home life behind to be monks possibly be inferior to secular folk who moil about in their delusions, or be as muddied by defiling passions as such folk? Among the Buddhas and Ancestors of the past, many received offerings of alms from celestial beings. Even so, once They had realized the Way, the eyes of the celestial beings could not see Them, and demons had no way to find Them.

We need to clarify this point. When celestial beings and demons keep to the daily conduct of Buddhas and Ancestors, they have a path by which they can approach the Buddhas and Ancestors. And, in that Buddhas and Ancestors far surpass celestial beings and demons, such celestial beings and demons have nothing by which to look up at Those who are so far off, so it is difficult for them to approach the vicinity of an Ancestor of the Buddha. As Nansen once said about

himself, “The training and practice of this old monk has lacked vigor, so I have been spotted by demons.” Remember, to be spotted by a demon who has done no training is due to your lacking vigor in your own training and practice.



Once, in the community of the Venerable Monk Wanshi Shōgaku of the Great White Mountain, one of the guardian deities said, “I heard that the Venerable Monk Wanshi has been residing on this mountain for over ten years, but whenever I have come to the Abbot’s reception room to try to see him, I am never able to enter and still do not know what he looks like.” Here, truly, we can see evidence of an exemplary person who has realized the Way. His temple on Mount Tendō was originally a small one.<sup>24</sup> While the Venerable Monk Wanshi was in residence there, he refurbished what had once been a Taoists’ shrine, a female monks’ temple, and a scholars’ temple, and turned them into what is now Keitoku-ji Temple.

After the Master’s death, the court secretary Wang Pai-hsiang compiled a record of the practices and deeds of the Master. A person once said to him, “You should have recorded the fact that the Master usurped a Taoist shrine, a female monks’ temple, and a scholars’ temple in establishing the present-day temple on Mount Tendō.” Pai-hsiang replied, “No way! Such matters are not relevant to the merits of a monk.” Many people at that time praised Pai-hsiang for this. Keep in mind that questions such as the one asked above are a function of secular thinking and are not relevant to the merits of a monk.<sup>25</sup>

Speaking more generally, from the very first moment that we begin to walk on the Buddha’s Way, we far surpass the three worlds of desire, form, and beyond form that ordinary people and those in lofty positions occupy. You should closely investigate the fact that Wanshi was not being manipulated by the three worlds, nor

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24. Mount Tendō is an alternative name for the Great White Mountain and for the temple which stands on it.

25. When Wanshi arrived, his small temple was in great disrepair. He renovated it and appropriated the three abandoned buildings mentioned to form the core of his monastery, which, in time, came to house some twelve hundred monks. In Wanshi’s day, making use of abandoned non-Zen temples was a widespread practice by Zen monks, due to the phenomenal expansion of the Zen tradition and the rapid decline in support for other Buddhist traditions as well as for Taoism. Since the buildings, in effect, no longer belonged to anyone or to any organization, the term ‘usurped’ is inappropriate, deliberately insulting, and inaccurate. Wanshi simply made good spiritual use of something that had been abandoned or discarded—a common practice in Buddhism which can be most widely seen in the monks’ use of discarded cloth to make monastic robes.

was he visible to the three worlds. You should do your utmost to thoroughly explore through your training the arising of body, speech, and mind, along with your inner experiences and the outer conditions that affect you. From the start, the meritorious activity of the Buddhas and Ancestors has great benefit in spiritually helping ordinary people as well as those in lofty positions. Even so, such people do not recognize that the ceaseless practice of Buddhas and Ancestors is helping to rescue them from their suffering. In ceaselessly practicing the Great Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors now, do not get into discussions about great hermits and small hermits.<sup>26</sup> Do not talk about someone's being sharp-witted or thick-headed. Simply discard fame and gain forever and do not get all tied up in worldly things. Do not let time slip away. Put out the fire that is burning atop your head.<sup>27</sup> Do not wait for some great enlightenment experience, for the great enlightenment is synonymous with our everyday tea and meals. Do not aspire to 'non-enlightenment', for non-enlightenment is synonymous with the precious pearl concealed within the king's topknot.<sup>28</sup> Simply, should you be attached to home and homeland, separate yourself from 'my home and my homeland'. Should you have bonds of affection, separate yourself from 'my bonds of affection'. Should you have a good reputation, rid yourself of 'my reputation'. Should you have wealth, rid yourself of 'my wealth'. Should you own cultivated fields and gardens, rid yourself of 'my cultivated fields and gardens'. Should you have family, separate yourself from 'my family'. And you need to let go of 'my not having such things as fame and gain', as well. In ridding yourself completely of 'I have', the principle of also ridding yourself of 'I do not have' is clear. This is nothing other than the matter of ceaseless practice. Your letting go of fame and gain throughout your whole lifetime will be your ceaselessly putting into practice the One Matter, for it is this ceaseless practice that is as endless as the life of Buddha. Once you have established this ceaseless practice here and now, your ceaseless practice will be done by the ceaseless practice itself. And, you should love and respect your body and mind which are imbued with this ceaseless practice.

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26. An allusion to a poem by the Chinese poet Haku Rakuten:

*Great hermits dwell in courts and frequent market places;  
Little hermits go off into the hills or hide behind some bamboo fence.*

27. A widely used Zen metaphor, alluding to an intense, single-minded effort to train, just as if your head were on fire and you were trying to put the fire out.
28. An allusion to a passage in the *Lotus Scripture*, in which the Buddha's Teaching of the Dharma is likened to a king giving someone a precious jewel which he has kept concealed in his topknot.



Meditation Master Daiji Kanchū once said, “Explaining what one yard is cannot compare with putting one foot into action, and explaining what one foot is cannot compare with putting one inch into action.” This sounds like Kanchū was admonishing people of his time who were being negligent in their ceaseless practice and who had forgotten about mastering the Buddha’s Way. But it does not mean that it is incorrect to explain what one yard is: it means that putting one foot into practice takes more skill than explaining what one yard is. Why should we be limited to measurements in yards and feet? There could also be discussions about the comparative merits of far-off Mount Sumeru and a poppy seed. Sumeru is completely whole and a poppy seed is completely whole. The important point in ceaseless practice is just like this. The present explanation is not the way Kanchū put it, and it is the way Kanchū put it.



Great Master Tōzan Gohon once said, “I put into words what I am unable to demonstrate by action, and I demonstrate by action what I am unable to put into words.” This is the way a lofty Ancestor put it. His point is that his practice illumines the path that makes understandable what he has put in words, and his explanations have pathways that make understandable what he does as practice. Hence, what he preached in a day is what he practiced in a day. The point of this is that we practice that which is difficult to practice, and we explain that which is difficult to explain.



Ungo Dōyō, having penetrated through and through what Tōzan had expressed, said, “At the time for explanation, there is no path for practice: at the time for practice, there is no path for explanation.” This way of putting it is not saying that there is no practice or explanation. His ‘time for explanation’ is synonymous with one’s ‘not leaving the monastery even once in a lifetime’. His ‘time for practice’ is synonymous with the hermit’s washing his head and then coming before Seppō.<sup>29</sup> Do not disregard or treat lightly his expression, “At the time for explanation, there is no path for practice: at the time for practice, there is

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29. The allusions to not leaving the monastery and to the hermit’s washing his head will be explored in detail by Dōgen later in Discourse 38: On Expressing What One Has Realized (*Dōtoku*).

no path for explanation.” This is something that Buddhas and Ancestors of the past have continually asserted. It was once expressed in verse as:

*Were you to live a hundred years  
Yet fail to see what the Nature of all Buddhas is,  
It would still not equal living even one day,  
Having rightly grasped the Matter.*

This is not something that one or two Buddhas have said: it is what all Buddhas are continually putting into words and putting into practice. Within the recurring cycles of birth and death over hundreds and thousands of myriad eons, one day in which there is ceaseless practice is a bright pearl within the topknot of the king: it is the Ancient Mirror within which we are born and die, and it is a day we should rejoice in. The strength of our ceaseless practice is a joy in itself. Those who have not yet attained the strength of ceaseless practice or received the Bones and Marrow of an Ancestor of the Buddha do not prize the Body and Mind of Buddhas and Ancestors or take delight in the True Face of Buddhas and Ancestors.

The true Face, Bones, and Marrow of Buddhas and Ancestors is not something that departs. It is a Tathagata’s having come in this way and having gone in that way. It is beyond something that comes. Even so, we invariably receive our allotment of spiritual nourishment through our ceaseless practice of one day.

Thus, a single day must be of great importance. Were you to live in idleness for a hundred years, you would regret the days and months you had wasted, and you would be a shell of a person, one to be pitied. Even if you were to gorge yourself as a slave to sight and sound for a hundred years, yet within that time you performed ceaseless practice for just one single day, not only would you be putting your whole life of a hundred years into the practice, you would also be helping ferry other hundred-year-old beings to the Other Shore. Your life of this one day is the life you should cherish, the skeleton you should prize. Thus, if your life were to last but a single day, if on that day you grasped what the Nature of all the Buddhas is, then that life of one day would have surpassed many lifetimes spanning vast eons. So, if you have not yet grasped the Matter, do not squander one day idly. This one day of ceaseless practice is a precious jewel that you should prize. Do not compare it with the value of some foot-wide gem, and never exchange it, even for the Black Dragon’s Jewel.<sup>30</sup> Sages of old prized it even more than their whole life.

Quietly think about it. You can ask for the Black Dragon’s Jewel at any time, and can even get possession of a foot-wide gem along the way, but one day within

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30. The Black Dragon’s Jewel, which It holds under Its jaw, is a common Buddhist metaphor for the Buddha Dharma.

a lifetime of a hundred years, once gone, cannot come again a second time. Is there any skillful means by which we can have returned to us even one day that has passed? That is something you do not find recorded in any book. Those who do not idly let time pass by wrap up their days and months in that skin bag\* of theirs so that the time will not leak away. This is why the saints of old and the former sages prized their days and months; they prized time more than they prized their own eyes and prized it more than their native land. To idly let time pass by means to be polluted and corrupted by the transient world of fame and gain. To not idly let time pass by means to act for the sake of the Path whilst being on the Path.

One who has already completely grasped the Matter will not let a day idly go by, but will do the practice for the sake of the Way and will explain the Way for the sake of the Way. Because of this, we have come to know the standards set by the Buddhas and Ancestors from ancient times, who did not vainly squander the efforts of even one day. This is something you should constantly reflect on. You should consider it even as you sit by a window, looking out on some slowly blossoming spring day, and do not forget it even as you sit in a humble abode on some desolate rainy night. How does time rob us of our efforts? Not only does it rob us of one day, it also robs us of the merits of many eons. What animosity is there between time and us? Sad to say, it will be our own lack of practice that robs us so. This is due to our not being on friendly terms with ourselves, to our thinking ill of ourselves. Even Buddhas and Ancestors have not been without Their loved ones, but They have let them go. Even Buddhas and Ancestors have not been without Their various involvements, but They have let them go. Even though we prize our relationships, such connections between ourselves and others are not things that can be held onto, so if we do not let go of our loved ones, chances are that our loved ones will let go of us, both in word and in deed. If you can have compassion for your loved ones, have compassion for them. To have compassion for our loved ones means letting go of them.



When the Venerable Monk Nangaku Ejō was training under Daikan Enō, he attended on Enō for fifteen autumns. As a consequence, it was possible for him to be given the Transmission of the Dharma and the Precepts personally, just as if water from one vessel were being poured into another vessel. We should most dearly cherish the everyday behavior of this former Ancestor. The winds and frosts that plagued him during those fifteen autumns must have been many indeed. Even so, he persisted in practicing the Way purely and simply, and he is a paragon for us trainees of the present day. In winter, he slept alone in an empty hall with no coal for his stove. In the cool of summer nights, he would sit alone by his moon-lit

window having no candle. Even though he did not know everything and understood only half of what he knew, he had nothing further to learn about non-attachment. This was surely due to his ceaseless practice.

Speaking more generally, once we have discarded our greed for fame and our love of gain, it is simply a matter of striving to do the practice ceaselessly, day after day. Do not disregard this intention. Nangaku's saying, "When you explain what something is like, you have already missed the bull's-eye," reflects eight years of his ceaseless practice. It is this ceaseless practice that people of both past and present treat as rare and that both the clever and the inept earnestly desire.



While Great Master Kyōgen Chikan was cultivating his practice under Isan, he tried several times to give expression to the Way but was unable to do so. Deploring this, he burned his books and became the monk who served gruel and rice to his fellow monks, and so he passed his years, month after month. He later went to Mount Butō in search of old traces of National Teacher Echū. He built a thatched hermit's hut and, casting everything aside, he lived tranquilly and apart from human society.

One day, when he was sweeping off his walkway, he happened to hit a pebble, which struck a cane of bamboo. Upon hearing the sound it made, he suddenly realized the Way. He then took up residence as Abbot of Kyōgen-ji Temple, where it was his wont never to replace his one alms bowl and his one set of clothes. He dwelt amidst a landscape of strange rock formations and crystal springs, spending the rest of his life in secluded repose. Many traces of his practice still remain at his temple. It is said that it was his custom not to come down from the mountain.



Great Master Rinzai was a Dharma heir of Ōbaku. He was in Ōbaku's community for three years, during which time he devoted himself purely to pursuing the Way. Upon instruction from the Venerable Bokushū Chin,<sup>31</sup> he asked Ōbaku three times what the Great Intent of the Buddha Dharma is, whereupon he tasted the Master's staff again and again, for sixty blows. Still, his determination did not flag. When he went to Daigu, under whom he had his Great Realization, it was at the instruction of both venerable monks, Ōbaku and Bokushū. When it comes to the great heroic figures who have inherited the Dharma seat of the First Chinese Ancestor, Rinzai and Tokusan are usually spoken of. Even so, how could

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31. Chin was also a Dharma heir of Ōbaku, and Rinzai's senior.

Tokusan possibly be considered the equal of Rinzai? Truly, someone like Rinzai is not to be corralled with the herd. Those who have been considered outstanding in recent times cannot even compare with those who were in the herd during Rinzai's time. It is said that his practices and deeds were pure and single-minded, and that his ceaseless practice was outstanding. Were we to try to imagine how many forms and how many ways his ceaseless practice had, none of us could come close to the mark.

While Rinzai was residing with Ōbaku, he and Ōbaku took to planting pine and cedar trees together. On one occasion, Ōbaku asked him, "What is the use of planting so many trees here, deep in the mountains?"

Rinzai replied, "First, to make something with a tasteful appearance for the benefit of the monastery, and second, to make signposts for the benefit of others coming later." Thereupon, he took his hoe and struck the ground twice with it.

Ōbaku held up his traveling staff and said, "You are like this now, but you have indeed already tasted thirty blows from my staff."

Rinzai gave out with a ho-hum sigh.

Ōbaku said, "Our tradition will flourish in the world, with many coming to you."<sup>32</sup>

So on the basis of this, we should realize that even after he had realized the Way, he brought along a hoe in his own hands for planting such things as cedars and pines. It may have been because of this that Ōbaku said, "Our tradition will flourish in the world, with many coming to you." It must indeed be that the old traces of 'the trainee who planted pines' pointed directly to the one-to-one Transmission of Ōbaku and Rinzai.<sup>33</sup> Ōbaku, likewise, planted trees alongside Rinzai. In the past, Ōbaku displayed the ceaseless practice of leaving his assembly behind and going off to mix in with the laborers at the Daian Training Temple where he cleansed the halls. He cleansed the Buddha Hall, as well as the Dharma Hall. He did not expect his ceaseless practice to cleanse his heart and mind and he did not expect his ceaseless practice to cleanse his innate brightness. It was around this time that he met Prime Minister P'ei.<sup>34</sup>

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32. This quotation is from the *Sayings of Meditation Master Rinzai*.

33. 'The trainee who planted pines' is an epithet applied to the Fifth Chinese Ancestor, Daiman Kōnin.

34. The Prime Minister subsequently became a lay disciple of Ōbaku.





Emperor Hsüan-tsung of the T'ang dynasty was the second son of Emperor Hsien-tsung. From the time he was small, he was quick-witted and astute. He always loved sitting in full lotus position and was constantly doing seated meditation in the palace. Mu-tsung was Hsüan-tsung's elder brother. After Mu-tsung had become emperor, once government business had concluded, Hsüan-tsung would playfully climb up on the imperial Dragon Throne and pretend that he was saluting various ministers. When the prime minister saw this, he thought Hsüan-tsung had cerebral palsy, and accordingly, reported this to Mu-tsung. When Mu-tsung saw his brother, he patted Hsüan-tsung on the head and said, "My little brother is the bright one in our family." At the time, Hsüan-tsung had just turned thirteen.

In the fourth year of the Tseng-ch'ing era (824 C.E.), Mu-tsung passed away peacefully. He was succeeded by his three sons. The first became Emperor Ching-tsung, the second became Emperor Wen-tsung, and the third became Emperor Wu-tsung. Ching-tsung succeeded his father to the throne and passed away three years later. Wen-tsung succeeded him to the throne for just one year before court ministers schemed to ease him out. When Wu-tsung ascended the throne, Hsüan-tsung, who had not yet ascended the throne, was residing in his nephew's kingdom. Wu-tsung made a habit of referring to Hsüan-tsung as 'my fool of an uncle'. Wu-tsung was emperor during the Hui-ch'ang era (841–846) and was the person who banned the Buddha Dharma. One day, Wu-tsung summoned Hsüan-tsung and ordered that he immediately be put to death for having climbed up onto the throne of Wu-tsung's father in the past. His corpse was placed in a flower garden behind the palace and waste matter was poured over it, whereupon he came back to life.

He then left his father's land and secretly entered the community of Meditation Master Kyōgen, where he shaved his head and became a novice. However, he did not take the full Precepts.<sup>35</sup> Making the rounds of temples along with Meditation Master Shikan, he arrived at Mount Rozan, whereupon Shikan composed a couplet on the topic of the local falls:

*Boring through cliffs, bursting through rock, never  
declining from its toil,  
By distant lands are seen the heights from which it  
falls.*

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35. That is, when ordained as a novice he would have taken the Ten Great Precepts, but he had not yet gone so far in monastic training as to take the two hundred and fifty *Vinaya* Precepts or the Bodhisattva Precepts.

By this couplet, he was attempting to lure the novice into revealing just what kind of person he was spiritually. The novice continued this verse with the following:

*What can stem this valley torrent  
From surging back to the Ocean Great?*

Upon hearing this couplet, Shikan knew that the novice was no ordinary person.<sup>36</sup>

Sometime later, Hsüan-tsung entered the community of Enkan Saian,<sup>37</sup> which was in the region of Hangchow, and was assigned to serve as the Abbot's Chief Clerical Officer. At the time, Meditation Master Ōbaku was serving as Enkan's Chief Priest. And, as a consequence, Hsüan-tsung sat on the platform next to Ōbaku.

One day when Ōbaku had entered the Buddha Hall and was doing prostrations to the Buddha, Hsüan-tsung entered and asked him, "Since we are not to seek for anything based on an attachment to Buddha, or an attachment to the Dharma, or an attachment to the Sangha, what, pray, do you hope to accomplish, Venerable Monk, by doing prostrations?"

Having been asked in this way, Ōbaku turned towards Hsüan-tsung, slapped him, and said, "I am not seeking anything due to an attachment to the Buddha, nor am I seeking anything due to an attachment to the Dharma, nor am I seeking anything due to an attachment to the Sangha. I am simply doing my prostrations just as I usually do them." When he had finished speaking in this manner, with one hand he gave Hsüan-tsung another slap.

The Clerical Officer said, "You play rough!"

Ōbaku responded, "Right here is where the What resides! So why speak of rough or genteel?" Again, he gave Hsüan-tsung a slap with his hand, whereupon Hsüan-tsung silently took his leave.

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36. It was a common practice in China for a traveler, whether alone or with a companion, to compose a poem inspired by an encounter with a particularly beautiful scene. If one were accompanied, the companion was expected to supply a couplet to complete the traveler's couplet. This custom was sometimes used by Zen Masters to test the spiritual attainments of a companion, someone who was usually a monk, but one who had not yet been declared a Master.

37. In some versions of the text, Dōgen comments that Enkan was later named as National Teacher by Hsüan-tsung when the latter became Emperor for a short while.

After the death of Emperor Wu-tsung, Hsüan-tsung returned to lay life and ascended the throne. He abolished Wu-tsung's ban on the Buddha Dharma, and forthwith reinstated It. From the time of his ascending to the throne and throughout his reign, Hsüan-tsung was ever fond of doing seated meditation. Before he ascended to the throne, he had left the country of his father, the king, and was traveling the countryside, following the valley streams with Shikan, doing his utmost to practice the Way purely and simply. It is said that after he ascended to the throne, he did seated meditation day and night. Given that his father the king was already deceased, his elder brother the emperor had also passed away, and he himself been put to death by his own nephew, he truly resembled a destitute child worthy of our pity. Nevertheless, he did his utmost to pursue the Way with unswerving determination. His is an excellent example, wondrous and rare in the world. His ceaseless practice must have been open-hearted and spontaneous.



After the venerable monk Seppō Gison had given rise to the intention to realize the Truth, he never neglected his seated meditation, day or night, regardless of where he was. And he did so even though the paths between the monasteries where he would hang up his traveling staff and the places that sheltered him upon his journey were far apart. From the time when he clearly manifested his True Nature by his founding his monastery on Mount Seppō, he did not let up on his practice, and he died whilst doing seated meditation. In earlier times, in order to put his spiritual questions to a Master, he climbed Tōzan's mountain nine times and visited Tōsu Daidō three times, which was his doing his utmost to pursue the Way. This is something wondrous and rare in the world. In promoting the integrity and rigor of ceaseless practice, many people today speak of Seppō's lofty practice. Seppō's attachments were on a par with those of other people, but his astuteness was not something that others could match. Ceaseless practice is like that. People who follow the Way today should learn from Seppō's ceaseless practice of spiritually washing himself clean. When we quietly look back on Seppō's physical exertion in exploring the Matter with Masters in all directions, truly, this must have been due to the merit that he inherited from some saintly bones in a previous life.

When people today wish to enter the assembly of a Meditation Master who has realized the Way and ask their spiritual question in order to explore the Truth with such a one, it is extremely difficult for them to find a chance to do so. They are confronted not with just some twenty or thirty skin bags,\* but with face after face of hundreds of thousands of people, all of whom are seeking the way back to their True Nature. The day on which a Master offers them a helping hand soon

darkens into night, and the night that they spend pounding rice in their mortar soon brightens into another day. Sometimes, when the Master gives an informal talk, they act as though they lacked eyes and ears, and so they gain nothing from what they see and hear. When they are finally in possession of their eyes and ears, the Master has already finished what he has to say. While kind, elderly monks of great virtue are clapping their hands and loudly guffawing in their delight in the Dharma, it seems as though newly ordained novices rarely have a chance to even come in contact with their bowing mats. There are those who enter the Master's private chambers and those who do not, and there are those who hear the Master's promise of realizing enlightenment and those who do not. The days and nights pass even more swiftly than an arrow, and this dewdrop of a life is even more fragile than our body. There is the grief of having a Master yet being unable to explore the Matter through training with him, and there is the grief of wanting to explore the Matter yet being unable to find a Master. I have personally witnessed such situations as these.

Although good spiritual friends may know a person well, the opportunities for contacting them when they themselves are diligently cultivating the Way are rare. It is likely that when Seppō, long ago, climbed up Mount Tōzan and climbed up Mount Tōsu, he too must surely have endured just such hardships. We should recognize the integrity of his ceaseless practice, which serves as an excellent model, for to fail to explore the Matter through your training with a Master is to be regretted indeed.



It was at the behest of the Venerable Hannyatara that the First Ancestor of China came from the West to the Eastern lands. During the frosts and springs of his three years in sailing the seas, how could the winds and snows have been the only miseries? How the clouds and mists must have billowed up over the roiling waves! He was attempting to go to an unknown land. To do something like this would never have occurred to ordinary people who hold dearly to life and limb. This must have been due to his ceaseless practice that sprang from his great desire to earnestly Transmit the Dharma and to instruct those who are deluded by their passions. This was so because it was he himself who Transmitted the Dharma, and it was so because it is the whole universe that Transmits the Dharma, and it was so because the whole universe in all ten directions is the words and ways of Truth, and it was so because the whole universe in all ten directions is Bodhidharma himself, and it was so because the whole universe in all ten directions is the whole universe in all ten directions. What karmic conditions in any life are not like Shakyamuni's royal palace, and what royal palace may not serve as a spiritual training ground?

This is why he came from the West as he did. Because it was he himself who instructed those who are deluded by their passions, he had no fears or doubts, nor did he act from timidity or awe. Because it was the whole universe that instructed those who are deluded by their passions, he had no fears or doubts, nor did he act from timidity or awe. Leaving behind his father's kingdom forever, he fitted out a large ship, crossed the southern seas, and arrived at Canton Province. Undoubtedly the crew was a large one and there were many monks to serve his needs, but chroniclers have failed to record this. Upon his reaching the shore, no one there knew him. It was the twenty-first day of the sixth lunar month in the eighth year of the Chinese P'u-t'ung era during the Liang dynasty (August 3, 527). The governor of Canton Province, a man named Hsiao-ang, made a show of extending to him all the courtesies of a host, giving him an audience and plying him with entertainments. Hsiao-ang then wrote an account to inform Emperor Wu about him, for Hsiao-ang was punctilious in his duties. When Emperor Wu saw the report, he was delighted and sent a messenger to invite Bodhidharma to pay him a visit. That was on the first day of the tenth lunar month of that year (November 9, 527).

When the First Ancestor arrived at the city of Chinling, he had an audience with Emperor Wu of Liang, whereupon the emperor said to him, "Since the time when I ascended to the throne, I have so excelled in building temples, in copying the Scriptures, and in permitting both men and women to become monks that my deeds must be quite beyond anyone's ability to keep a record of. So what merit have I accrued?"

The Master replied, "There is no merit in any of these."

Dumbfounded, the emperor asked, "Why, pray, are they lacking in merit?"

The Master replied, "Such deeds are merely the results achieved by ordinary people and those in lofty positions who follow the Lesser Course.\* Such seeking after merit defiles one's deeds. It is like a shadow following a form: even though it exists, it is not the real thing."

The emperor then asked, "What, pray, is true merit?"

The Master answered, "One's immaculately wise discernment being wondrous and fully realized, and one's body being naturally unbounded and tranquil. Merit like this is not sought by the worldly-minded."

The emperor then asked, "What is the paramount Truth of the Holy Teachings?"

The Master replied, “Since the Truth is devoid of any limits, It is beyond holiness.”

The emperor then demanded, “And who, pray, is this one who is confronting my royal presence?”

The Master replied, “I do not personally know that One.”<sup>38</sup>

The emperor had failed to awaken to what Bodhidharma was pointing to, and the Master realized that the occasion was not opportune. So, on the nineteenth day of the tenth lunar month (November 27), he snuck away to north of the Yangtze River and arrived at Loyang on the twenty-third day of the eleventh month of that year (December 31). He lodged temporarily at Shōrin-ji Temple on Mount Sūzan, where he sat all day long, silently facing a wall in meditation. The ruler of the Wei dynasty was spiritually confused and did not recognize who Bodhidharma was, and he did not even recognize that this failure was a reason for feeling shame.

Bodhidharma was of the warrior caste of Southern India. He had lived in the royal palace of a large kingdom, so he was long accustomed to the ways of a royal palace in a large kingdom. In the manners and customs of small nations, there were habits and views that would prove shameful for an imperial ruler of a large nation, but the First Ancestor did not have a heart that was disturbed by such matters. He did not reject the country, nor did he reject its people. At that time, he did not respond to the slanders of Bodhiruchi or despise him for making them, nor did he find the evil-mindedness of the Vinaya Master Kōtō worth resenting or even paying heed to.<sup>39</sup> Even though Bodhidharma’s spiritual merits were great, the people of China looked upon him as if he were a conventional teacher of the *Tripitaka* and its commentaries, for they were befuddled due to their being followers of the Lesser Course. And there were some who thought that Bodhidharma was expounding a course of Dharma which they named ‘the Zen Sect’, and they believed that what was being taught by others—such as non-Buddhist scholars, for instance—and the True Teaching of the First Ancestor must surely be the same. These were the views of petty creatures who were helping to defile the Buddha Dharma.

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38. That is, my True Nature is beyond anything my intellect can directly know.

39. During that time, there were two Indian scholars named Bodhiruchi: one was an eminent translator of Scriptures and the other was a scholar who was envious of Bodhidharma. It is the latter Bodhiruchi who is referred to here. The Chinese Vinaya Master Kōtō was a translator and writer of Scriptural commentaries. Both tried to discredit Bodhidharma’s focus on meditation practice, and it is said that both attempted to poison him.

The First Chinese Ancestor was the twenty-eighth in the line of Shakyamuni Buddha's direct heirs. He left the large realm of his father the king in order to spiritually help sentient beings in the East. Who could stand head-and-shoulders with him? If the Ancestral Master had not come from the West, how could sentient beings in the East have possibly learned of the Buddha's True Teaching? They would only have distressed themselves—and to no avail—with 'the grit and stones' from which we fashion the names and forms we give things.<sup>40</sup> Even those today in the hinterlands or in some even more distant realm, like ours, where people clothe themselves in fur and adorn their heads with horns, have been able to hear the True Teaching to Its utmost. Today, even peasants and farmers, old country folk and village children learn of It, and all due to having been spiritually rescued through the Ancestral Master's ceaseless practice in crossing the seas. The cultures of India and China differ greatly as to what they are superior or inferior in, and there are vast differences as to what their local customs consider to be morally upright or depraved. China was not a place to which a great saintly person who had been Transmitted and who was keeping to the Teaching and the Scriptures would normally go, unless he was someone of great compassion and great enduring strength. There were no Meditation Halls in which he could reside, and those who recognized 'such a person' were few. So he hung up his traveling staff at Mount Sūzan for a stay of nine years. People called him 'the Brahman who looks at a wall'.<sup>41</sup> Chroniclers have included him among the ranks of those learning how to meditate, but this is not the way it was. He and he alone was the Ancestral Master who possessed the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching which had been Transmitted to him through Buddha after Buddha and heir after heir.



The following quotation is from the *Forest Records*, compiled by Shih-men:

Bodhidharma first went from the kingdom of Liang to the kingdom of Wei. He traveled to the foot of Mount Sūzan and rested his traveling staff at Shōrin-ji Temple. He simply sat in stillness, facing a wall: he was not engaged in learning how to meditate. For a

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40. The 'grit and stones' is another way of saying the 'tiles and stones' with which our mind builds its discriminative 'walls and fences'.

41. Dōgen makes a distinction between what people literally saw when they looked at Bodhidharma sitting in front of a wall and what Dōgen earlier described as Bodhidharma's 'facing a wall as he sat silently in meditation', which carries the figurative connotation of facing the walls of his own mind.

long time no one could figure out why he was doing that and, consequently, interpreted it as his learning how to meditate.

Now, meditation in its narrow sense is simply one among various practices, so how could it suffice to say that this was all there was to the Saintly One? Yet, people of his time did just that. Those engaged in making chronicles followed suit and reported him as being among the ranks of those learning how to meditate and grouped him with people who are as dead trees or cold ashes.<sup>42</sup> Even so, the Saintly One's practice did not simply stop at doing meditation; he also did not act contrary to meditation. And even with the yin and yang described in the *Book of Changes*, he did not act contrary to yin and yang.

When Emperor Wu of Liang first met Bodhidharma, he asked him, "What is the paramount Truth of the Holy Teachings?"

The Master replied, "Since the Truth is devoid of any limits, It is beyond holiness."

The emperor went on to ask, "And who, pray, is this one who is confronting our royal presence?"

And the Master replied, "I do not personally know that One."

If Bodhidharma had not been fluent in the local language, how could the discussion have gone like this at that time?<sup>43</sup>

It is clear from this that Bodhidharma went from the empire of Liang to that of Wei, that he traversed to Mount Sūzan, and that he hung up his traveling staff at Shōrin-ji. Even though he simply sat in stillness, facing a wall, it was not in order to 'learn how to meditate'. And even though he had not brought with him a single copy of a Scripture, he was the authentic Successor who came to Transmit the True Teaching. Be that as it may, chroniclers are not clear about the matter and, sad to say, list him among those learning how to meditate, which is the height of folly.

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42. 'Dead trees and cold ashes' is a common Zen Buddhist figure of speech for someone who has dropped off self. In the present context, it implies that Bodhidharma had gone just so far in his practice, but no further.

43. Shih-men's final remark may be in reference to an oft-held view that Bodhidharma sat at Shōrin-ji Temple, silently staring at a wall, because he could not speak Chinese. Bodhidharma's final remark, in particular, shows that he clearly knew the difference between the words *pu chih* (Modern Chinese: *pu chih-tao*) "I do not know" and *pu shih* (Modern Chinese: *pu jen-shih*) "I do not know him." This is analogous to the differences between the German 'Ich weiss nicht' and 'Ich kenne ihn nicht', or between the French 'Je ne sais pas' and 'Je ne le connais pas'.



Thus it was that, while he was doing his walking meditation, there was a dog who would yap at the Great One.<sup>44</sup> Alas, that too was the height of folly. How could anyone with a heart possibly take lightly their indebtedness to the Master for his compassion? How could anyone with a heart possibly fail to repay this indebtedness? There are many people who do not forget their indebtedness to the world in which they live and who treat it responsibly: we call them human beings. The great indebtedness that we owe to our Ancestral Master surely surpasses that which we owe to our parents, so do not compare the beneficent love of the Ancestral Master with that of a parent for a child.

Should people become concerned about the humbleness of their status, they may feel fear over not having visited China, not having been born in China, not knowing any saintly person, never having met a sage, and not having anyone around them who has ever risen to a lofty position. Their human mind is wholly befuddled due to such misgivings. Since the dawn of history, there has been no one in our country who has changed his worldly habits, nor do we hear of a time when our country was cleansed of them. This is due to our not knowing what ‘clean’ means or what ‘muddied’ means. We are like this due to our being in the dark about what the causes and effects of the two princely powers and the three universal powers are, to say nothing of our ignorance of the waxing and waning of the five elements of wind, fire, earth, metal, and water.<sup>45</sup> This folly of ours is due to our being in the dark about the sounds we hear and the forms that are right before our eyes. And this darkness is due to our ignorance of the Scriptures and our lack of a teacher of Scriptures. Our lacking such a teacher means that we do not know how many dozens of Scriptural texts there are, or how many hundreds of poems or thousands of sayings there are in these texts, or, if we read just the commentaries on some text, how many thousands of poems or tens of thousands of sayings they may contain. People who know the ancient Scriptures and have read the ancient texts have been inclined to venerate the Ancient Ones. If we have a heart that venerates the Ancient Ones, then the ancient Scriptures will manifest before our very eyes.

Both the founder of the Han dynasty and the founder of the Wei dynasty were emperors who clearly understood the poems that astrological events

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44. The larger context implies that ‘dog’ here refers not to an animal but to a person who is constantly breaking Precepts.

45. The two princely powers are the authority of a ruler to bestow rewards and to mete out punishments. The three universal powers are associated with the heavens, the earth, and human beings.

expressed and who could read the lay of the land. When people clearly understand classic texts such as these, then they have a bit of understanding of the three powers: heavenly, earthly, and human. Folks of our country, never having been ruled by saintly lords like these, do not know how to serve a lord or even how to serve one's parents. As a result, they are pitiful as subjects of a lord, and pitiful as members of their family clan. Whether they are ministers or children, they vainly pass by jewels a foot-wide in span and squander moments of time to no purpose. No one born into family clans like these has yet had an important national office conferred upon him. They even prize insignificant government positions. This is how it is in confused times like ours; in saner times, behavior like this was rare indeed. While we are cherishing lowly lives like these in a remote land such as this one, we may chance to hear the True Teaching of the Tathagata; how then could we possibly have the heart to cling to these lowly lives? Were we to persist in clinging to them, for what purpose, pray, would we attempt to drop them off at a later date? Even if you were someone weighty and wise, you should not begrudge your life for the sake of the Dharma, so how much less should you begrudge a life that is mean and lowly! Even though it may be mean and lowly, if you unbegrudgingly abandon your life for the sake of the Way and the Dharma, you will be more hallowed than those in the highest heaven, more exalted than even a universal monarch. In sum, you will be more exalted than any celestial being, earthly deity, or sentient being within the worlds of desire, form, or beyond form.

Our First Chinese Ancestor Bodhidharma, on the other hand, was the third son of the king of Kōshi in Southern India. Thus, He was already an imperial prince in the royal bloodline of India. In China and its bordering nations, which should have shown respect for his nobility and dignity, people did not yet know the forms of etiquette by which they should attend on him. There was no incense or flowers. They were remiss in supplying him with a cushion to sit on and the temple accommodations were wretched. How much worse it would have been in our country, a remote island with enormous crags! How could we possibly know the customs by which one pays respect to the ruler of a large country? Even if we tried to imitate them, they would be too intricate for us to comprehend, since those customs might well be different for noblemen and for imperial personages, and expressions of respect for them might have varying degrees of formality, but we would not know how to distinguish among them. When we do not know the value of a person, we do not support and take responsibility for that being, and when we do not support and take responsibility for a person, we need foremost to clarify the value of that being.

Our First Chinese Ancestor Bodhidharma was the twenty-eighth successor to the Dharma of Shakyamuni. Once he had entered the Way, he became more and

more impressive. The reason that such a great and revered saint did not spare his life in following his Master's instructions was so that he might Transmit the Dharma and rescue living beings. In China, before the First Ancestor came from the West, no one had ever encountered a disciple of the Buddha who had received the one-to-one Transmission from Successor to Successor, no Ancestor had given the Face-to-Face Transmission from Successor to Successor, and no one had ever encountered a Buddha. And even after that time, apart from the distant descendants of the First Chinese Ancestor, no one could be found who had ever come from the West. The flowering of an udumbara blossom once every three thousand years is easy to predict: one need only count the months and years left before it blooms, but the First Ancestor's coming from the West will not happen a second time. At the same time, that bunch who mistakenly call themselves distant descendants of the Ancestral Master are besotted, like that great fool in the Kingdom of Ch'u who was unable to tell the difference between a jewel and a stone.<sup>46</sup> And, due to their dearth of knowledge and shallow understanding, they have fancied that even pedantic teachers of Scriptures and cerebral scholars could stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Master. Those who failed to plant the genuine seeds of spiritual wisdom in past lives do not become descendants in the Way of the Ancestors, for they have idly wandered off onto the false path of names and forms, and are to be pitied.

There were people who were still going to India after the P'u-t'ung era of the Liang dynasty, and for what? This was foolishness in the extreme. Depending on how their bad karma led them, they wandered about in foreign countries. Step by step, they proceeded down false paths that were an insult to the Dharma; step by step, they were running away from their Father's True Home. And what, pray, was gained by their going off to India? Nothing but suffering the hardships from crossing great mountains and obstructing waters. Without examining the principle that India had already come to the East, they did not clearly see what the eastern advance of the Buddha Dharma was, so that they futilely wandered about, lost in the labyrinths of India. Although they had a reputation for seeking the Buddha Dharma, they lacked an earnest desire for the Way-seeking Mind, so that they did not meet any genuine Masters in India, and vainly encountered only pedantic teachers of Scriptures and cerebral scholars. Even though genuine Masters were still present in India, these travelers lacked the true spirit that seeks the True Teaching, and, as a result, the True Teaching did not come within their grasp. Some claimed that they had met a genuine Master upon their arrival in India, but we have

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46. 'The great fool' is a reference to the king of the ancient Chinese kingdom of Ch'u who, when presented with a large uncut jewel, rejected it because he thought it was just a big stone.

yet to hear who those Masters were. Had they met genuine Masters, they would naturally have named names, but there have been no such names mentioned because there were no such encounters.

Further, after our Ancestral Master came from the West, there were many monks in China who relied on a mundane understanding of the Scriptures and commentaries, and thus failed to encounter the True Teaching. Even though they may have read the Scriptures and commentaries, they were still in the dark as to Their meaning and purpose. These blind deeds were due not only to the force of their karma from the present but also to the force of bad karma from their past lives. During this lifetime of theirs, they have not heard what the Tathagata's keys to the Truth are, nor have they encountered the Tathagata's True Teaching, nor have they been illumined by the Tathagata's face-to-face Transmission, nor do they employ the Tathagata's Buddha Mind, nor have they heard of the tradition of the Buddhas. What a sad life theirs must be! In the Sui, T'ang, and Sung dynasties in China, people like that were plentiful. To put it simply, only people who have planted the seed of wisdom in past lives have become the distant descendants of the Ancestral Master. Some have entered via the gate of training without expectations, and others by letting go of their preoccupation with counting grains of sand. All of them are bright-minded trainees, trainees most capable of understanding, and genuine seeds of a 'real person'. For ever so long, befuddled and ignorant folks have merely taken up lodging in the thatched hut of the Scriptures and commentaries. At the same time, the Master did not quit in the face of dangerous frontiers, nor did he avoid them. If we today who still revere the profound principle of our First Ancestor's coming from the West should, nevertheless, be sparing of these stinking skin bags we call ourselves, what, ultimately, would be the purpose of that?



Zen Master Kyōgen once said in verse:

*A hundred plans, a thousand schemes  
All made just for this self of ours alone,  
As though this body could yet evade  
Its future in some dusty grave.*

*Say not that white-haired corpses mute  
Take all their secrets to their tombs.  
For they are the ones who fully know  
What death's domain is all about.*

Accordingly, even though we make a hundred plans and a thousand schemes to hold onto our self, as he said, yet ultimately we are reduced to dust within some burial mound. How much worse to have countless bodies and minds uselessly endure untold thousands of hardships and myriad miseries whilst galloping off east and west in the service of the ruler or citizenry of some small nation! Following custom, some of our people hold their own existence lightly, being unable to forego committing ritual suicide upon the death of their lord. The journey ahead for those who are driven by such a sense of obligation will be filled with obscuring mists and clouds.

Since ancient times, there have been many who have thrown away life and limb as ordinary citizens in the employ of some minor official. These were human bodies that should have been treasured because they could have been vessels for the Way. Now that you have encountered the True Teaching, you should explore the True Teaching through your training, even though you forsake lives as numerous as the hundreds of thousands of grains of sand in the Ganges. For which is it worthwhile to forsake life and limb: for some small-minded person or for the broad, vast, deep, and far-reaching Buddha Dharma? Neither the nimble nor the maladroit should be concerned with whether they are going forward or backward. Calmly reflect upon the fact that before the True Teaching had spread throughout the world, people could not encounter It, even if they had been willing to give up their own life for the sake of the True Teaching. They might well envy those of us today who have encountered the True Teaching. We should be ashamed to encounter the True Teaching and yet fail to give up life and limb for It. If we should be ashamed of anything, we should be ashamed of this failing.

So, the only way to repay our great indebtedness to the Ancestral Master is by our ceaseless practice all day long. Pay no heed to your own existence. Do not cling to love and affection, which is more foolish than the behavior of birds and beasts. Even if you are attached to feelings of love, they will not remain with you over the long years. Do not remain dependent on your family's standing within a clan, which is like so much rubbish. Should you remain like this, ultimately you will not have a tranquil and peaceful existence. The Buddhas and Ancestors of the past, being wise, all tossed aside the seven worldly treasures\* and the thousand things they spawn, and They quickly abandoned Their jeweled palaces and scarlet-lacquered mansions as well. They viewed such things as if they were sweat and spittle; They looked upon them as though excrement and dirt. This is the model for recognizing and repaying one's indebtedness by which all the Buddhas and Ancestors have habitually repaid the Buddhas and Ancestors of the past. Even the sick sparrow did not lose sight of his indebtedness and was able to repay it by

means of the three spheres of public office.<sup>47</sup> Even the trapped turtle, not losing sight of his indebtedness, was able to repay it by means of Yōfu's seal.<sup>48</sup> What a pity it would be for someone to be even more foolish and dull-witted than beasts while having the face of a human being.

In that we have encountered Buddha and heard the Dharma today, we are indebted for the loving-kindness evinced by the ceaseless practice of each and every Buddha and Ancestor. Had the Buddhas and Ancestors not directly Transmitted the Dharma to us, how could It possibly have reached us in the present? We should repay our indebtedness for even a single line of verse, and we should repay our indebtedness for even a single Teaching. How much more should we repay our immeasurable indebtedness for the unsurpassed great Dharma of the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching! All day long, we should desire to give up our own lives, which have been as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges. In generation after generation, we should bow in deepest respect and make alms offerings to the bodies that we have abandoned for the sake of the Dharma. Together with all the celestial beings, dragons, and divine spirits, we should venerate and esteem these bodies, for they are something to protect and praise, because the principle of gratitude underlying this veneration is indispensable.



The practice of the Brahmins who buy and sell skulls has long been reported in India. They have deeply revered the numerous, meritorious virtues of the skulls and bones of those who have hearkened to the Dharma. Now, if we do not give up our own lives for the sake of the Way, we will not attain the meritorious virtue of having heard the Teaching. If we hearken to the Dharma without giving a thought for life and limb, that hearing of the Dharma will fully ripen, and this skull of ours will be revered. The skull that we have not yet given up for the sake of the Way will one day be tossed in some vacant field and left to bleach in the sun. Who then

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47. A reference to a classic Chinese story concerning a boy who helped a sick sparrow recover and to whom the sparrow gave four silver rings as recompense, which ultimately led to the boy's being appointed to three high government positions.

48. A reference to a classic Chinese story in which a man rescued a trapped turtle. As the turtle swam off, it looked back over its shoulder to its benefactor, as if to acknowledge its indebtedness. Later, the man rose to a high official position, and, when the seal of his office was cast, it miraculously appeared in the form of a turtle looking over its back. No matter how many times the seal was recast to remove the form, it would nevertheless reappear on the seal. Finally, the man realized that somehow the turtle had played a part in his having received his appointment, so he kept the strange seal out of gratitude.

will bow out of respect for it? Who would buy or sell it as a relic? We surely would look back upon our attitude and spirit of today with regret.

There was once a demon who angrily reduced his former bones to dust, and there was a celestial being who bowed in respect to his former bones.<sup>49</sup> When we think ahead to a time when, no matter what, we will be transformed into dust, those of us who had no attachments to craving in our present life will feel sympathy for others in the future. And this feeling of sympathy that is aroused may well be akin to the tears of an onlooker. Fortunately, by using our present skull—which will ultimately turn to dust and which people may well look upon with disgust—we can ceaselessly practice the True Teaching of the Buddha. For this reason, do not fear suffering from the cold, for suffering from the cold has yet to destroy anyone, nor has it ever destroyed the Way. Do not fear training, for not training is what destroys a person and what destroys the Way. Do not fear the heat of summer, for the heat of summer has yet to destroy anyone, nor has it ever destroyed the Way. Not training can well destroy both a person and the Way. The accepting of barley and the choosing of bracken, which involved both monks and laity, are excellent examples of this.<sup>50</sup> We should not copy hellish creatures and beasts by seeking for blood or seeking for milk. Simply, ceaseless practice all day long is precisely what the everyday practice of Buddhas is.



Our great Ancestor Eka, the Second Chinese Ancestor, was of lofty virtue. He was a magnanimous and cultured person, adored by deities and daemons, both of whom were drawn to him. He was esteemed alike by followers of the Way and by the worldly. He resided for a long time between the rivers Ii and Lo, where he read extensively on a wide variety of subjects. He was considered to be a person rare in any country, one who is seldom encountered. Because of the loftiness of his

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49. The demon was angry with his former body because, due to the karmic consequences of that being's breaking the Precepts, he was born into the suffering of the hells. On the other hand, the celestial being was grateful to his former body because, due to that being's keeping the Precepts, he was born into the bliss of a heavenly state.

50. 'The accepting of barley' refers to an incident in which the Buddha, along with many of his assembly, was invited to a feast. The host, however, got distracted and forgot to prepare the meal, so that all he could offer his guests was the barley that he kept stored for feeding his horses. Since the barley was offered with a pure heart, the Buddha and His monks accepted it without judgment.

'The choosing of bracken' refers to a story of two noblemen who fled to the mountains after their country had been seized by a tyrannical warrior-king, since they preferred eating bracken as free men to eating the warrior-king's millet as his slaves.

Dharma and the dignity of his virtuous ways, a strange and wondrous being suddenly appeared and said to him, “If you really desire to receive the fruits of your endeavors, why do you tarry here? The Great Way is not far off. Just go to the south.”

The following day, the Ancestor suddenly had a stabbing headache. His teacher at the time, a teacher of meditation named Kōzan Hōjō of Dragon Gate Mountain in Loyang, was about to treat his condition when a voice from out of the blue said, “This is due to an altering of the skull and is not an ordinary headache.” Our Ancestor then told his teacher about his encounter with the strange and wondrous being. When the teacher looked at the top of Eka’s head, it was as if five peaks had blossomed forth, whereupon he said, “This feature of yours is an auspicious sign, and you will surely have an awakening to the Truth. This wondrous being’s telling you to go south is because Great Master Bodhidharma of Shōrin-ji Temple is undoubtedly to be your Master.” Heeding these instructions, our Ancestor Eka then left in order to train with Bodhidharma, who was residing atop a remote mountain peak. As for the wondrous being, he was a guardian deity who, for a long time, had been doing his own training in the Way.

The mid-winter weather was cold, for it is said to have been the night of the ninth day of the twelfth lunar month. Even if there had not been any great snowfall, a winter’s night deep in the mountains atop a high peak is not the time or place to be standing outside someone’s window, as you can well imagine, for it was that time of year which is so dreadfully cold that the joints of bamboo would split open. Notwithstanding that, a deep snow did indeed cover the earth, burying the mountains and concealing the peaks, as Eka sought his way, plowing through the drifts. How dangerous it must have been! He ultimately reached the Ancestor’s quarters, but the Ancestor did not give him permission to enter. Indeed, he did not even bother to turn around and look at him. That night, Eka never dozed off, or sat down, or took a respite. He stood firm, without moving, waiting for the dawn to break, as the night snow continued mercilessly on, piling up layer upon layer until it buried his waist. His tears froze upon his cheeks as they fell, drop by drop. Catching sight of his tears only led him to shed more tears, and reflecting upon himself only led him to reflect more deeply upon himself. He thought to himself, “In the past, some of those who sought the Way would break their bones to get at the Marrow, or prick open their Blood that they might succor those who hungered for It, or spread out their Hair to cover the mud, or throw themselves off cliffs to feed the Tiger.<sup>51</sup> Those of old were just like this. So what kind of person am I?”

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51. These allusions refer to various legends and past life stories. While they have often been



Thinking in this way encouraged him to be more and more resolute. We trainees of today must not disregard his remark, “Those of old were just like this. So what kind of person am I?” The moment we lose sight of this, we sink into eon upon eon of delusion. By thinking in this way, his resolve to search for the Dharma and to seek the Way only intensified. In that he did not treat the purity that resulted from his cleansing himself in this way as ‘my being pure’, it was possible for him to be pure.<sup>52</sup> To surmise what that night of slow dawning was like is enough to break one’s innermost heart. The hairs on one’s body simply bristle with cold fear.

Just as the dawn was breaking, the First Ancestor, taking pity on him, asked, “What do you seek that you have stood such a long time in the snow?”

When Eka heard this, his sorrowful tears fell in greater profusion as he replied, “I simply ask that you, Venerable Monk, out of your great benevolence and compassion, open the Gate to the Sweet Dew so that I may ferry all manner of beings far and wide to the Other Shore.”

Having been asked in this way, the First Ancestor said, “The wondrous, unsurpassed Way of all the Buddhas is to be most diligent over vast eons of time in ceaselessly practicing what is hard to practice and in ceaselessly enduring what seems beyond endurance. If you desire the True Course whilst relying upon little virtue and less wisdom, or on a frivolous heart, or on a prideful and conceited mind, surely you will toil in vain.”

When Eka heard this, he became more and more encouraged by this instruction. Hidden from sight, he took the Keen-edged Sword and cut off his left forearm.

When he placed this before the Master, the First Ancestor then knew that Eka was indeed a vessel for the Dharma.<sup>53</sup> So he said, “In

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interpreted only on a literal level, the present translation attempts to point the reader to deeper, non-literal meanings based on figures of speech found in Zen Buddhist writings.

52. That is, Eka had been cleansing himself of any self-serving motives or hidden agendas.
53. While the account of Eka’s cutting off his arm has often been taken literally, and so depicted in paintings, there is a deeper, non-literal interpretation of what took place, one that does not support the notion that self-mutilation is somehow proof of one’s willingness to do ceaseless practice. This interpretation states that Eka used Manjushri’s Keen-edged Sword of Wise Discernment to cut himself free of dualistic thinking, and, though this act was not visible to the naked eye, Bodhidharma was able to discern what was going on within Eka’s heart and

Their seeking the Way, all the Buddhas, from the first, have laid down Their own bodies for the sake of the Dharma. Now you have cut yourself free of your arm right before me, which is proof that there is also good in what you are seeking.”

From this time on, Eka had entry into the Master’s innermost private quarters. For eight years he served as attendant to the Master through thousands of myriad endeavors. Truly, he was a great, reliable spiritual friend for both ordinary people as well as for those in loftier positions, and he was a great teacher of the Way for them. Deeds such as his were unheard of even in India and came to exist for the first time in the Eastern lands. We hear of Makakashō’s face long ago breaking into a smile: we learn of Eka’s getting to the Marrow.

What we need to reflect on is that, even if a thousand myriad First Ancestors came from the West, if the Second Ancestor had not been doing his ceaseless practice, we today would be unable to learn how to put the Great Matter to rest. Today, now that we have been able to encounter and hear the True Dharma, we should, beyond doubt, gratefully repay our indebtedness to the Ancestors. Any attempt to repay our gratitude with external objects cannot begin to truly repay our gratitude. Even one’s own bodily existence will be insufficient repayment. And even one’s nation or hometown is of no real value. Nations and cities are plundered by others or passed on to kith and kin. Our physical lives are entrusted to what is impermanent, put into the hands of rulers and their ministers, and abandoned to false ways. Thus it is that any attempt to repay our indebtedness by offering such as these will not be the practice of the Way.

Simply, our day by day ceaseless practice will be the true way to repay that indebtedness. The principle of which I speak is to do one’s ceaseless practice in such a way that we do not neglect our daily life or waste it in selfish pursuits. And why so? This life is due to the merit from our ceaseless practice in times past and we are indebted to that ceaseless practice for it, a debt that we should be quick to repay. How sad, how shameful it would be to turn these physical shells of ours, which have come alive due to the merit of the ceaseless practice of the Buddhas and Ancestors, into useless toys for our spouse and children, letting ourselves be

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mind. For instance, Eka did not ask Bodhidharma to open the Gate to the Sweet Dew for his own sake but for the sake of all sentient beings, and by this Bodhidharma knew that Eka was a True Vessel for the Dharma. The original text does not state what Eka actually placed before Bodhidharma. It may well not have been a physical arm that he offered to the Master, but rather his willingness to commit himself to the ceaseless practice that Bodhidharma had just been instructing him in.

playthings for our spouse and children, and to do so without any regret for breaking Precepts and debasing ourselves. It is out of wrong-mindedness and folly that we turn our lives over to the demons of fame and gain, for fame and gain are the great thieves. If we give importance to fame and gain, then we will sympathize with fame and gain. To sympathize with fame and gain is to commit ourselves to fame and gain, and to thereby bring about the destruction of a life in which we might otherwise have become an Ancestor of the Buddha. Commitment to spouse and children, family and clan, are also just like this. Do not study fame and gain as if they were dreams and illusions, or were flowers in the sky; study their effects upon human beings. Do not sympathize with fame and gain, letting the retributions from your misdeeds pile up. When you use your true Eye to explore all the myriad thoughts and things in the ten directions through your training, you should go about it in this way.

Even an ordinary, worldly person with normal human emotions, upon being given gold, silver, or rare jewels will repay the favor with thanks. All those who have a warm heart will strive to repay the friendliness of kind words and a gentle voice with expressions of gratitude. How could anyone with a human face be oblivious to their great indebtedness to the Tathagata from encountering and heeding His unsurpassed True Dharma? Not to lose sight of this indebtedness is itself a precious treasure for a lifetime. The skull and bones of a being who has never retreated or turned aside from this ceaseless practice, either in life or in death alike, has such spiritual merit that it deserves to be enshrined in a stupa adorned with the seven treasures and to be given offerings of alms by all celestial and human beings. If any people are aware of this great indebtedness, they will not vainly let their lives, which are as transient as the dew on the grass, go to ruin, but will wholeheartedly repay the Second Ancestor for his monumental virtue. This is what ceaseless practice is. And those of us who do the ceaseless practice as the Buddhas and Ancestors have done it will receive the merit of this ceaseless practice. In sum, neither the First Ancestor nor the Second Ancestor ever founded a temple, nor did they have the arduous task of mowing down wild grasses.<sup>54</sup> And the Third and Fourth Ancestors were like this too. And the Fifth and Sixth Ancestors also did not establish their own temples, and both Seigen and Nangaku were no different.<sup>55</sup>

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54. 'Mowing down wild grasses' literally refers to clearing an uncultivated area for the purpose of erecting a temple.

55. Seigen and Nangaku were coequal Dharma heirs of the Sixth Ancestor. The Sōtō branch of the Zen tradition traces its lineage back to Seigen, whereas the Rinzai branch traces its



Great Master Sekitō fastened a grass hut to a boulder and then sat in meditation atop this rock. He did not doze off day or night, for there was not a time when he did not remain seated in meditation. Without neglecting his obligations to the monastic community, he habitually endeavored to do seated meditation throughout all the hours of a day. It is due to the great strength of Sekitō's steadfast ceaseless practice that Seigen's tradition has flowed out and permeated the world to the profit of both ordinary people and those in lofty positions. All those in the lineage of Ummon and Hōgen who have clarified the Matter are also Dharma descendants of Great Master Sekitō.



At age fourteen, our Thirty-first Ancestor, Meditation Master Daii Dōshin, met the Great Master who was our Third Chinese Ancestor. For the next nine years he undertook the responsibility of serving him. From the time when he inherited the Ancestral practices of the Buddhas and Ancestors, he kept his mind meditatively alert without dozing off and without letting his ribs touch his mat for sixty years. He bestowed his Teaching on those who were hostile and those who were friendly, and his virtue pervaded the realms of both ordinary people and those in lofty positions. He was our Fourth Chinese Ancestor.

In the seventeenth year of the Chen-kuan era (643 C.E.), Emperor T'ai-tsung, leaning favorably towards Master Daii's particular taste for the Way, desired to see the monk's imposing presence and so invited him to the capital. Three times altogether, the Master sent humble letters of apology, ultimately declining each invitation on the grounds of ill health. The fourth time, the emperor commanded an emissary to go and fetch him, saying, "If he really will not come to visit our royal presence, then take his head and bring me that."

When the emissary reached Daii's mountain, he warned him of the emperor's command, whereupon the Master stretched out his neck in the direction of the emissary's sword with a demeanor of majestic dignity. The emissary, thinking this strange indeed, returned and informed the emperor of the event. The emperor's admiration for Daii

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lineage back to Nangaku. Dōgen's lineage includes both branches, the Rinzai through his Ordination Master and the Sōtō through his Transmission Master.

only increased. Accordingly, he bestowed upon him a gift of fine quality silks and let him have his way.

Thus, the Meditation Master who is our Fourth Ancestor did not turn life and limb into his life and limb. His ceaseless practice of not becoming intimate with kings and ministers is an example seen perhaps once in a thousand years. Emperor T'ai-tsung was a ruler with integrity, so their meeting would probably not have been a frivolous one, yet even so, you need to explore through your training that this was the ceaseless practice by such a senior monk and spiritual guide as this. As a ruler of men, T'ai-tsung did not begrudge his life and limb, and he all the more admired someone else who did not begrudge their life and limb but instead stuck out his neck in the direction of a sword. And this was not simply idle behavior on the Master's part for, prizing time, he considered his ceaseless practice to be of primary importance. His proffering letters of refusal three times is an example rare in any generation. It is a sign of our degenerate times that there are now monks who hope and pray for an audience with someone of royal blood.

On the fourth day of the intercalary ninth lunar month<sup>56</sup> in the second year of the Yung-hui era (651 C.E.) during the reign of Emperor Kao-tsung, Master Daii, in expounding the Dharma for those who were with him at the time, said, "All thoughts and things are completely free of suffering and delusion. Let each and every one of you preserve and keep this in mind. In the future, spread it abroad."

When he had finished speaking, he passed away whilst sitting peacefully in meditation. He had lived for seventy-two years. They placed his body in a stupa within the temple grounds. On the eighth day of the fourth lunar month of the following year (652 C.E.), the door of the stupa inexplicably opened of its own accord, and his bodily form looked as if it were still alive. After this, those who were at the temple did not dare to close the door again.

Keep in mind what he said: all thoughts and things are completely free of suffering and delusion. This does not mean that thoughts and things are as empty

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56. There are twelve months of either twenty-eight or thirty days in the Chinese and Japanese lunar calendar. Since this creates a discrepancy with the 365-day solar calendar, every two or three years a thirteenth lunar month is inserted (intercalated) in the calendar at some point. In the present instance, it was inserted between the ninth and tenth lunar months. This is technically known as an intercalary lunar month. An analogy can be found with our inserting the day of February 29 every four years to even out the annual solar calendar, and that day is technically called an intercalary day.

space, nor does it mean that thoughts and things are something other than thoughts and things. It means that thoughts and things are all, each and every one of them, completely free of suffering and delusion. Now, there was our Fourth Ancestor's ceaseless practice before he entered the stupa and there was his ceaseless practice after he had been placed in the stupa. To observe that those who are alive will ultimately perish is but a small-minded view. And to hold the opinion that those who have perished are beyond thinking or perceiving anything is also a narrow view. When it comes to studying the Way, do not copy such small-minded and narrow views. There may well be those among the living who do not perish, and there may well be those among the dead who have thoughts and perceptions.



Great Master Gensha Sōitsu of Fukien Province, whose Dharma name was Shibi, was a person from the Minhsien district. His family belonged to the Sha clan, and from an early age he was fond of fishing. He sailed a small boat upon the Nant'ai River and was friendly with the various fisherfolk thereabouts. At the beginning of the Hsien-t'ung era (ca. 860 C.E.) during the T'ang dynasty, when he was just thirty, he suddenly desired to leave the dust of lay life behind. So, he abandoned his fishing boat and, joining the assembly of Meditation Master Fuyōzan Reikun, he shaved his head. He received the full Precepts from Vinaya Master Dōgen of Kaigen-ji Temple in Yüchang.

Dressed in a hempen robe and straw sandals, and with barely enough food to sustain life, he would customarily sit in stillness throughout the day. All the members of the assembly took this to be strange. From the first, he was a brother in the Dharma with Seppō Gison, and the closeness of their relationship was like that of Master and disciple. Because of Shibi's stringent practice, Seppō, when addressing him, would refer to him as being austere.

One day, Seppō asked him, "Is this Shibi the Austere Monk?"

Shibi responded, "I have never dared to deceive anyone about that!"

On another occasion, Seppō called out to him, "O Shibi, my austere monk, why haven't you gone out on a pilgrimage to seek a Master to train with?"

Shibi responded, "Bodhidharma did not come east to China for that, nor did the Second Ancestor go west to India for that!"

Seppō highly praised what he had said.

Eventually, Shibi climbed Mount Zokotsu and joined Master Seppō in his efforts to build a temple there.<sup>57</sup> A large number of serious followers gathered to train in this temple. They would enter the Master's private quarters to raise questions and resolve issues, never wearying of this practice from morn till dusk. Among those serious trainees who had come from all directions, if there was someone who had a particular, personal problem that was still not resolved, that person would invariably go and ask the Master about it, whereupon the venerable monk Seppō would say, "You should go ask that of Shibi the Austere Monk." Master Shibi, out of his benevolence, would forthwith endeavor to address the matter. If he had not had his preeminent ceaseless practice, he could not have engaged in such daily conduct. The ceaseless practice of sitting in stillness throughout the day is a ceaseless practice that is rare indeed. Even though there are many who vainly gallop off after sounds and forms, rare are those who endeavor to sit in stillness throughout the day. Those who have entered into training late in life should fear that the time remaining to them is short indeed, and so they should endeavor to sit in stillness through their remaining days.



The venerable monk Chōkei Eryō was a revered senior monk training under Seppō.<sup>58</sup> For twenty-nine years he went back and forth between Seppō and Shibi, exploring the Matter through his training with both of them. During those months and years he wore out twenty sitting mats. There are people today who love doing seated meditation and, citing Chōkei, they take this beloved ancient one as their model. Those who idolize him are many; those who equal him are few.

At the same time, his efforts for thirty years were not in vain. There was a time when he was rolling up a bamboo blind in the doorway of the Meditation Hall and suddenly had a great awakening. During those thirty years, he never returned to his home country, or visited his relatives, or chatted with those sitting on either side of him; he just put his efforts into the Principle Matter. The ceaseless practice of this Master went on for thirty years. For thirty years he treated his doubts and misgivings as doubts and misgivings: we should speak of him as someone of keen wit who did not ignore anything, as someone with great potential for realizing the Truth. Reports of such firmness in resolve are sometimes met with when studying the Scriptures. When we desire what we should desire and feel shame about what

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57. Mount Zokotsu is the earlier name for Mount Seppō, where Meditation Master Seppō was attempting to establish his new monastery.

58. Chōkei later succeeded Seppō as the Abbot of Seppō's monastery.

we should feel shame about, then we may encounter Chōkei. To speak the truth, it is only due to a lack of heart for the Way and a lack of skill in handling their daily conduct that people become vainly tied to fame and gain.



After Meditation Master Isan of Mount Daii received affirmation of his awakening from Hyakujō, he straightaway climbed up the steep and remote slopes of Mount Isan where he made friends with the birds and beasts, thatched himself a hut, and continued on with his training. He never strove to retire from the winds and snows, and he supplied himself with various kinds of wild chestnuts for food, as he had no temple buildings or monastery gardens. Even so, for forty years he manifested ceaseless practice. Later, he became famous throughout China because of all the dragon elephants\* who beat a path to his door. Even if you should wish to establish a temple as your own pure place, do not concern yourself with the quagmire of public opinion, just hold steadfast to doing the ceaseless practice of the Buddha Dharma. Doing one's training without having a temple compound was the training ground for ancient Buddhas. We have heard from afar Their custom of training in open fields and under trees. These places have for ever so long become 'enclosed realms'.<sup>59</sup> Wherever there is ceaseless practice by one person, such a place will be handed down as a training ground of the Buddhas. Do not become obsessed with constructing buildings, like foolish people in the degenerate days of the Dharma do. The Buddhas and Ancestors never craved buildings. Those whose Eye has not yet become clear and who therefore arbitrarily construct temple buildings and monastery halls are not making alms offerings of Buddhist buildings for the Buddhas, but are doing it for the sake of their own lairs of fame and gain.

Calmly imagine the ceaseless practice that was happening on Mount Isan long ago. What I mean by 'imagine' means thinking about how it would be for us today if we were residing on Mount Isan. The sound of the rain deep in the night was probably not just of water washing over the moss, for the rain would certainly have had the strength to bore through boulders. On the snowy nights in the dead of winter, the birds and beasts must have been scarce indeed, and how much less would there have been smoke from man-made fires to acknowledge human existence! It was a way of living that could not have been tolerated, were it not for the Master's ceaseless practice in which he made light of his life whilst stressing

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59. 'Enclosed realms' is a technical term referring to areas that were set apart and preserved for use by Buddhist communities in India. Later, it was used in China and Japan to refer to monastery grounds.



the Dharma. He was in no hurry to cut down the undergrowth, nor did he engage in cutting down trees to clear the land for building. He just continued his ceaseless practice and simply did his utmost to practice the Way. What a pity that an authentic Ancestor who had Transmitted, and kept to, the True Dharma came to undergo such hardships in such precipitous mountains! It is said that Mount Isan had many ponds and running water, so there must have been thick ice and dense banks of fog. Most people could not have tolerated such a secluded life, nevertheless Isan transformed it into the Buddha's Way and explored Its innermost purpose. Today, we are able to learn of his expressions of the Way and Its purpose because of the ceaseless practice that he did. Even though we may not be listening with a casual attitude, we still need to recognize our indebtedness to his strenuous efforts in ceaseless practice. When we hear about what he did and imagine the hardships he faced, how can those of us today who are heartfelt trainees possibly fail to feel pity for him? Due to the transformative power derived from Isan's ceaseless practice of the Way, the winds cease their howling, the world remains intact, the palaces and dwelling places of the celestial community are tranquil, and the homelands of human beings are preserved. Though we may not be direct descendants of Isan, he will be our Ancestor in spirit.

Later, Kyōzan Ejaku came and served as Isan's attendant. Kyōzan had previously trained with his late Master Hyakujō. Though he was a veritable Shariputra with a hundred responses for every ten questions,<sup>60</sup> for three years he trained under and attended on Isan while doing his utmost to oversee his own buffalo.<sup>61</sup> His was a ceaseless practice that has become extinct in recent times and is no longer seen or even heard of. In tending to his buffalo for three years, there was no need for him to seek for a well-put expression of the Matter from someone else.



Our Ancestor Dōkai of Mount Fuyō manifested a pure wellspring of ceaseless practice. When the ruler of the nation tried to bestow upon him the title of Meditation Master Jōshō along with a purple kesa, our Ancestor would not accept them and wrote a letter to the emperor politely declining his offer. Although the ruler of the nation censured him for this, the Master, to the end, did not accept them. His rice broth has passed down to us the taste of the Dharma. When he built his hermitage on Mount Fuyō, the monks and laity streamed to his refuge by the

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60. Shariputra was the chiefmost of the Buddha's ten great disciples, being the monk whom his fellow monks viewed as 'having all the answers'.

61. That is, he worked at training himself in accord with his own karmic propensities.

hundreds. Because he served them only one bowl of gruel as a day's rations, many of them left. The Master, upon a vow, did not partake of any meals offered by donors. One day he pointed out the Matter to his assembly, saying the following:

To begin with, those who have left home behind to become monks have a distaste for the dust and troubles stirred up by defiling passions and seek to rise above birth and death. And they do so in order to give their hearts and minds a rest, to abandon discriminatory thinking, and to eradicate entanglements, which is why it is called 'leaving home'. So, how can it possibly be all right for monks to indulge in conventional ways of living by being neglectful and greedy? Straight off, you should discard all dualistic notions and let neutral ones drop off as well. Then, whenever you encounter any sights or sounds, it will be as if you were trying to plant a flower atop a stone, and whenever you encounter gain or fame, it will resemble getting dirt in your eyes. Moreover, it is not that, since beginningless time, no one has ever done this, or that no one has ever known how. Simply, we just stop reversing our head and making a tail out of it.<sup>62</sup> If we stop our training at this point, we will suffer from our cravings and greeds, but why do we need to do so? If we do not bring them to a halt right now, when will we deal with them? Therefore, the saintly ones of the past, who were ordinary human beings, invariably and thoroughly exhausted these cravings in each moment of the present. If we can exhaust them in each moment of the present, what more is there to do? If we are able to be calm in heart and mind, it will be as if even 'the Buddhas and Ancestors' become our enemy. When everything in the world has become naturally cooled down and impermanent for us, then, for the first time, we will be in accord with the Other Shore.

Have you not heard of Inzan, who, to his dying day, did not wish to meet with anyone? Or of Jōshū, who, to his dying day, did not wish to speak with anyone? And there is Hentan, who gathered various kinds of chestnuts for his food. Daibai made his clothing out of lotus leaves, and the lay practitioner Shie only wore clothes made from paper, whereas the veteran monk Gentai wore only cotton cloth. Sekisō built a Hall for Withered Trees where he and his community did their sitting and lying down, only requiring of his monks that their hearts and minds

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62. That is, getting things upside down by taking the false self to be our True Nature.

completely quiet down.<sup>63</sup> Tōsu had others prepare the rice, which they cooked for everyone so that all could dine together. Tōsu himself used the meal preparation time to examine the Matter on his own. Now, the saintly ones listed above had characteristics like these. If they did not have such strong points, how could anyone have entrusted themselves to them? O my virtuous ones, if you too master yourself in this way, you will truly be an unfaltering one. If, on the other hand, you do not dare to take charge of yourself, you will, I fear, simply waste your strength in the future.

Though there has been nothing in this mountain monk's own practice to be particularly commended, I have been privileged to be head of this mountain monastery. So how could it possibly be all right for me to sit here, squandering our communal provisions and forgetting about our connection with the former saintly ones? Now what I desire is to try to give you, right off, a concrete example of how the temple heads of old behaved. I have consulted with various senior monks about this. We will not go down from our mountain, nor betake ourselves to meals offered by lay donors, nor have a monk in charge of fund raising.<sup>64</sup> Simply, we will divide into three hundred and sixty equal parts whatever crops we harvest in one year from our own fields and then use one part of this each day, regardless of whether our numbers increase or decrease. If our supply of rice is sufficient, we will make steamed rice. If there is not enough rice for that, we will make rice gruel. And if there is not enough to make rice gruel, we will make rice broth. For the interview with new arrivals, we will simply serve tea, foregoing the customary tea ceremony with cakes.<sup>65</sup> We will simply arrange a tearoom that we can go to and make use of on our own. We need to strive to sever our connections with the secular world and just concentrate on doing our utmost to practice the Way.

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63. A Hall for Withered Trees is an epithet for a Monks' Meditation Hall.

64. In addition to its literal meaning of not staying in one's place of training, 'going down from the mountain' has non-literal implications, such as leaving the monastery in order to visit the lay world, as well as leaving one's training behind in order to participate in worldly affairs.

65. This tea ceremony is not the same as that often associated with Japanese Zen. Rather, it is part of the face-to-face encounter with newly arriving trainees, during which the Abbot will endeavor to assess the quality and depth of the guest's spiritual intention and actual training.

And what is more, our life is already complete and our landscape lacks for nothing. The flowers teach us how to smile: the birds teach us how to sing. The Wooden Horse neighs loud and long: the Stone Cow gallops apace. Beyond the blue horizon, the form of the green mountains fades away: when distant from our ears, the voice of the babbling brook does not exist. Atop the mountain peaks, the monkeys chatter: in the sky, the moon is steeped in mist. Within the forest, the cranes cry out: at break of day, the wind swirls through the pines. When the breezes of spring rise up, the withered trees sound forth the Dragon's song: when the leaves of autumn wither, the chill woods scatter their flowers abroad. The jewel-like stepping-stones make patterns in the moss: the faces of people take on the hue of haze and mist. Distracting sounds have become hushed: conditions are just what they are. The Underlying One stands alone: nothing needs to be contrived.<sup>66</sup>

I, a mountain monk, facing all of you here today, am setting forth what the gateway to our monastic family is: it is not getting all wrapped up in what have simply been expedient means. Why should it be necessary for any Master today, upon entering the Dharma Hall to give Teaching or upon letting trainees enter his private chambers for instruction, to imitate some Master of old by picking up the drum stick, or holding his ceremonial hossu\* upright, or shouting towards the east, or pointing his traveling staff\* to the west, or raising his eyebrows, or looking with glaring eyes—and all this done in the manner of one who is sick with rage? Not only does such behavior belittle those training in the Meditation Hall, even worse, it treats with contempt one's indebtedness to the saintly ones who have gone before.

Have you not realized that Bodhidharma came from the West and, having arrived at the foot of a remote mountain, sat facing a wall for nine years? And the Second Ancestor's standing in the snow and

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66. This pastoral portrait is composed of various Buddhist and Zen expressions descriptive of experiences encountered through one's spiritual training and practice, and is a way of demonstrating that all things in nature are giving voice to the Dharma. For instance, the flower that teaches one to smile is an allusion to Shakyamuni's holding aloft the udumbara blossom and Makakashō breaking out into a smile of recognition of the Truth underlying the Buddha's gesture. Also, the Wooden Horse neighing and the Stone Cow galloping are Zen-derived metaphors referring to the natural functioning of one's Buddha Mind and one's immediate, spontaneous response to that functioning.

severing his forearm can only be described as his suffering hardships. Even so, Bodhidharma never gave forth a single word of Scripture and the Second Ancestor never asked him for a single phrase of Scripture. Further, in speaking of Bodhidharma, do we think he was unable to teach anything for the sake of human beings? In speaking of the Second Ancestor, do we think that he was not seeking a Master?

Whenever this mountain monk gets to the point of expounding what the saintly ones of old did, I immediately feel as if there were no place on earth where I can hide, for I am overwhelmed with shame at the weakness of us people of these later times. And what is more, having already been supplied with the four necessities—nourishment, clothing, bedding, and medicine—we treat ourselves to delicacies served in a hundred different ways and then have the cheek to say that one should, by all means, give rise to the Buddha Mind. I simply fear that our physical behavior is so compulsive that we will continue on, passing through myriad lives in the six worlds\* as a result. Our days fly by like arrows, and we should deeply regret wasting them.

Even though we are like this, there may still be people who have reached the Other Shore by relying on their strengths. And this mountain monk cannot compel you to learn. And, my virtuous ones, have you encountered the following poem by one of old?

*From our mountain fields, millet harvested for our meal,  
From our garden, plain yellow leeks;  
Whether you eat from what there is to eat is up to you,  
And if you choose not to eat thereof, feel free to go  
where you will.*

I pray that, on reflection, each of you, my companions on the Path, will practice diligently. Take good care of yourselves!

This is the very Bones and Marrow of the direct, Face-to-Face Transmission of our Ancestral lineage. Even though the ways of ceaseless practice by our founding Ancestors are many, I have given you this one for the present. We trainees today should want to do the ceaseless practice that was cultivated on Mount Fuyō, and we should explore that practice in our training, for it is the correct standard established at Jetavana Monastery.<sup>67</sup>

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67. Jetavana was a grove purchased from Prince Jeta by the lay patron Sudatta, who gave it to the Buddha for Him and His community to use in their training and practice.



Baso Dōitsu of Kagen-ji Temple in the Hungchou District of Kiangsi Province was a native of Shihfang Prefecture in the district of Hanchou. He trained and served under Nangaku for over ten years. One day, with the intent of revisiting his home, Baso reached the halfway point on his journey. From this halfway point, he came back to the temple, making an incense offering and bowing in respect to Nangaku, whereupon Nangaku composed the following poem for Baso:

*I recommend that you do not return to your former home;  
Should you return to that home, your practice of the Way  
will wane,  
And the old women of your neighborhood  
Will call you by your former name.*

When he gave Baso these words of Dharma, Baso reverently accepted them and made a vow, saying, “I will never return again to Hanchou, not even in future lives.” Having made this vow, he never again took even one step towards Hanchou. He lived in Hungchou for the rest of his life, leaving others to come and go from all directions. Apart from expressing the Way simply as “Your very mind is Buddha,” he had not a single word of Teaching for the sake of others. Be that as it may, he was Nangaku’s Dharma heir and a lifeline for both ordinary people and those in lofty positions.

Just what is this “Do not return to your former home?” What are we to make of it? Traveling to and from the east, west, south, or north is simply the continual arising of our false self. Truly, this is to return to our home and have our practice wane. Is one doing a ceaseless practice which recognizes that ‘returning home’ is the same as not practicing the Way, or is one doing a ceaseless practice that is beyond ‘returning home’? Why is returning home not practicing the Way? Is one hindered by not practicing or is one hindered by self? It is Nangaku’s assertion that the old women in the neighborhood will call Baso by his former name. Why did Nangaku put this expression in his poem, and why did Baso accept these words of Dharma? Because when we go towards the south, the whole world likewise goes towards the south. It will also be the same with the rest of the directions. To doubt that this is so by using Mount Sumeru and the Great Ocean surrounding it as one’s measure, or to gauge it by using the sun, moon, and stars as one’s standard is, in either case, a small-minded view.



The Thirty-second Ancestor, Meditation Master Daiman, was a native of Ōbai. Because he was born illegitimately, just like Lao-tzu was, he received his mother's surname of Shū. From the time that the Dharma was Transmitted to him at the age of seven until he was seventy-four years old, he preserved and kept to the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching. He secretly bestowed Bodhidharma's kesa and Dharma on the monastery laborer Enō, which was an example of his extraordinary ceaseless practice. He did not let his chief disciple Jinshū know about the kesa and the Dharma, but bestowed them instead upon Enō, and, because of this, the life of the True Teaching has continued on without interruption.



My former Master, the Reverend Monk Tendō, was a person from Yüeh or thereabouts. At nineteen, he gave up academic religious study to explore the Matter through training with his Master. He did not regress from that training even upon reaching his seventies. During the Chinese Chia-ting era, the emperor offered him a purple robe and the title of Meditation Master, but ultimately he turned them down, writing letters to the throne in which he declined the honors with thanks. Monks far and wide all greatly revered him, and the wise from near and far alike all treasured him. The emperor also took delight in him, sending him a gift of ceremonial tea. Those who found out about this spoke highly of it, as being something rare in any age. Indeed, this was due to true ceaseless practice on my Master's part, since craving fame is even worse than acting contrary to some Precept. Acting contrary to a Precept is a onetime wrong, whereas craving fame is a whole lifetime of trouble. Do not foolishly fail to forsake fame and do not blindly welcome it. Not welcoming it is ceaseless practice and forsaking it is ceaseless practice. Each of the first six generations of our Ancestral Masters had the title of Meditation Master bestowed upon them posthumously by an emperor, and this was because they did not crave fame while they were in the world. Thus, we too should quickly forsake any craving for fame within life and death, and aspire instead to the ceaseless practice of the Buddhas and Ancestors.

Do not be the equal of birds and beasts through indulging your greeds. To greedily look after the trivial self is what birds have in their thoughts, what animals have in their hearts. The forsaking of fame and gain is considered rare among both ordinary people and those in lofty positions, and no Ancestor of the Buddha has ever yet failed to forsake them. There are some people who say that it is for the benefit of sentient beings that they desire fame and crave gain, but this is a

monstrously false assertion. These people are non-Buddhists who have connected themselves with the Buddha Dharma; they are a bunch of demons who malign the True Teaching. If you were to claim something like this, would it mean that the Buddhas and Ancestors, who do not crave fame and gain, are therefore unable to benefit sentient beings? How laughable, how truly laughable that would be! And truly, there are others as well who are of benefit to living beings without being greedy. Further, those who have not yet learned that, although there are many ways to benefit beings, one should not label as benefiting beings that which is not of benefit to them, must surely be some species of demon. Living beings who would try to gain spiritual benefit from the likes of such demons will fall into all manner of hellish states. How pitiful to spend one's whole life like this! Do not call such silliness 'spiritually benefiting sentient beings'. So, even though the emperor's gift of the title of Meditation Master was graciously offered, letters were written to decline it with thanks, which is an excellent example from the past, and today's trainees would do well to explore this example with their Master.

To meet my former Master face-to-face was to encounter an ordinary human being. From the time my former Master left his hometown at the age of nineteen to seek out a spiritual teacher, he did his utmost to practice the Way, and when he had reached the age of sixty-five, he still had not regressed or turned aside from this practice. He was not on intimate terms with any emperor nor was he ever the guest of any emperor, and he was not on close terms with any minister of state or government official. Not only did he decline the purple kesa and the title of Meditation Master, but throughout his life he also did not wear a varicolored kesa, but customarily used a black kesa with a black formal robe, whether he was giving a talk in the Dharma Hall or letting trainees enter his private chambers for spiritual counseling.<sup>68</sup>

Once when he was giving spiritual instruction to his monks, he said the following:

In practicing your meditation and studying what the Way is, having a heart for the Way is foremost, for this is the beginning of learning the Way. For about two hundred years now, the Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors has been dying out, sad to say. What is more, skin bags who have been able to give expression to even a single line of Scripture have been few indeed. Formerly, when I had hung up my traveling staff at Mount Kinzan, Busshō Tokkō was the head of the temple at the time. Once while we were in the Meditation Hall for our

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68. Black is the color that is customarily worn by novice monks.



meal, he gave Teaching, saying, “In meditating on the Way of the Buddha Dharma, there is no need to seek out how others have put it into words: simply let each of you come to your own understanding of the Principle!” After having spoken like this, he made no effort at all to supervise what went on in the Monks’ Hall. Both the junior and senior monks similarly did not supervise themselves and just busied themselves in meeting with official guests. Busshō did not particularly understand what the Buddha Dharma is getting at, and so he simply chased fame and craved gain. If each person is to come to his own understanding of what the Buddha Dharma is about, why, pray, did those in the past who probed into the Matter seek out a Master so that they might ask the way to go? The truth is that Busshō Tokkō never practiced meditation. Today, there are senior monks all over the place have no heart for the Way, for they are simply the offspring of those like Busshō Tokkō. How can the Buddha Dharma possibly flourish in their care? What a pity, what a pity!

When my Master talked in this way, even though many among those who were listening were direct descendants of Busshō, they did not resent what he said.

My Master also said once, “Practicing meditation is to let body and mind drop off. Without engaging in burning incense, making bows, reciting the name of Buddha, doing repentance, or doing walking meditation, we can realize It from the start just by sitting.”

Truly, throughout Great Sung China today, there are not merely one or two hundred skin bags who call themselves both meditators and descendants of our tradition, these folks are as prevalent as rice and flax, bamboo and reeds. But I never got wind of anyone else who encouraged sitting simply for the sake of sitting. Between the four oceans of the world and the five lakes in China, only my late Master Tendō did this. Monks far and wide were alike in praising Tendō, yet Tendō did not praise all monks far and wide. Also, there were heads of large temples who did not know of Tendō at all. Even though they had been born in Great Sung China, perhaps they were some species of bird or beast. They did not explore what they should have explored, and, because of that, they were wasting their time to no avail. How sad that those folks who did not know Tendō have vociferously given forth barbarous teaching and confused talk, mistaking this for the family tradition of the Buddhas and Ancestors.

In giving informal talks, my former Master would customarily say, in effect:

From the age of nineteen, I began to visit monasteries all over the place, yet I did not find anyone who taught for the sake of

ordinary people. And from that time on, there has been no time—not even one day or one night—when I did not flatten my meditation cushion. Before I became head of a temple, I did not engage in chitchat with the locals, for time was dear to me. Even though there were places where I hung up my traveling staff, I never entered, or even saw, the interior of a hermit's hut or a private dormitory.<sup>69</sup> How much the less could I squander my efforts on wandering off to the mountains or playing about in lakes and streams? Apart from sitting in meditation in the Cloud Hall and in the public monastic areas, I would go alone, seeking out an upper floor in a tall building or a screened-off area where I could sit in meditation in a secluded place. I always carried a meditation mat rolled up in my sleeve, and sometimes I would sit in meditation even at the foot of a crag. I always felt that I would like to sit upon the Diamond Seat<sup>70</sup> until it split, for this was the outcome I was seeking. There were times when the flesh on my buttocks would blister and split open. At such times I all the more took delight in sitting in meditation. This year I am sixty-five, old in my bones and weak in the head. Though I no longer do my seated meditation along with the community, I have sympathy for my fellow monks, senior and junior, wherever they are. Accordingly, I am Abbot of this mountain monastery so that I may counsel those who come here and Transmit the Way to them for the sake of all beings. Otherwise, my old friends, where could the Buddha Dharma be found and what would It be like?

And this is how he would speak, both formally in the Dharma Hall as well as in his informal talks. Further, he would not accept any personal gifts that were offered to him by any of the monks who came from all directions to hear him speak.

Government Minister Chao was a descendant of the saintly sovereign of the Chia-ting era. As a senior official in the Mingchou district, he was in charge of both military and agricultural affairs. One day, he invited my late Master to come to his district office and give a Dharma talk, donating ten thousand silver pieces as an alms offering.

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69. That is, he slept, ate, and meditated in the Meditation Hall.

70. The Diamond Seat is the name given to the flat rock upon which Prince Siddhārtha sat until he realized Buddhahood.

After my Master had given the Dharma talk, he turned to the minister and said the following by way of thanks, “In accordance with established tradition, I have left my mountain monastery in order to ascend the Dharma Seat and give voice to the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching, which is the Wondrous Heart of Nirvana. I am respectfully doing this in memory of your relative, the late emperor, who is now in the realm of the departed. However, I dare not accept this silver. Monks in our family have no need of such things. So, with a thousand myriad thanks, I am humbly returning it to you exactly as I received it today, which is what we customarily do.”

The minister said, “Venerable Monk, because this lowly official has been favored by being a relative of His Imperial Highness, wherever I go people honor me, and thus my treasures have grown in abundance. Today is the day for commemorating my former parent’s happiness in the realm of the departed, so I wish to contribute something for his sake. Venerable Monk, why will you not accept it? Today has been one of great joy for me, so out of your great kindness and compassion, please retain this small alms offering.”

My Master replied, “My dear minister, yours is a very sincere request, which I would usually not dare decline. But, simply, there is a reason why I am doing so. When I ascended the Dharma Seat and gave voice to the Teaching, were you able to hear It clearly?”

The minister said, “Just hearing it has filled me with immeasurable joy.”

My Master then said, “My dear minister, you are very astute and have seen clearly what this monk’s words were about. My awe is unceasing. Further, as to what you have hoped for, your late relative has been blessed ten thousandfold. Now, when this mountain monk ascended the Dharma Seat, what Dharma did he give expression to? Try and see if you can express It. If you can, I shall respectfully accept your ten thousand pieces of silver. If you are unable to express It, then let one of your emissaries retain the silver.”

The minister arose and, facing my Master, said, “With due respect and careful consideration, I found your Dharma talk and your deportment, Venerable Monk, to be a ten thousandfold blessing.”

My Master replied, “That is just the way I talk. What did you learn from listening to it?”

The minister was left speechless at this.

After a while, my Master said, “The blessings for your departed one have been fully done. Let’s wait a bit on the matter of deciding on an alms offering on his behalf.”

Having spoken thus, my Master was taking his leave when the minister said, “I bear no resentment that you have still not accepted the offering, and my delight is to have had the pleasure of meeting you.” Having said this, he saw my Master off.

Many monks and laity, who had come from both east and west of the River Che, spoke highly of the event, and an attendant monk named Hei recorded of it in his diary, “This venerable old monk is a person not easily encountered. Where else could one possibly meet with such a person?”

Is there anyone who would not have accepted the ten thousand pieces of silver? A person of long ago said, “Look upon gold, silver, jewels, and jade as if they were dirt.” Even if they do look like gold or silver to us, it is the custom for tatter-robed monks not to accept them. This was the way my Master would have it: it is not this way with others.

And my Master used to say, “For three hundred years, people have not had a spiritual friend like me, so you must all strive to do your utmost in pursuing the Way.”

In my Master’s assembly, there was a man from the Mienchou district in the western province of Szechwan, Dōshō by name, who was of the Taoist tradition. Together with five companions, he made a vow, saying, “In this lifetime, we shall master the Great Tao of the Buddhas and Ancestors or else we shall not return to our homeland.” My Master was especially delighted by this and let them do walking meditation and train in the Way alongside his trainee monks. When arranging them by seniority, he placed them in a position behind his female monks; this was an excellent example that is rare in any generation. Also, there was a monk from the Fuchou district by the name of Zennyō, who made a vow, saying, “In this lifetime, I shall not take one step towards the South from whence I came, but shall train in the Great Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors.” There were so many within my Master’s community who were like this; it is something that I saw with my very own eyes. Although behavior like this was not to be found in the communities of other Masters, it is, nevertheless, the ceaseless practice of monks in our tradition in Great Sung China. It is sad that this kind of constancy of heart has been absent among us Japanese. It is still absent, even at this time when we can encounter the Buddha Dharma; in former times when we could not have encountered It, the state of our bodies and minds would have been worse than disgraceful.

Calmly consider: a lifetime is not all that long. Even when the sayings of the Buddhas and Ancestors consisted of merely three words, or even just two words, what They gave expression to would have expressed what all the Buddhas and Ancestors truly are. And why so? Because the Bodies and Minds of Buddhas and Ancestors are one and the same, so Their one or two phrases all express the genial Body and Heart of a Buddha and Ancestor. This Body and Heart of Their's also comes to us, and It expresses our body and heart. At the very moment when They express It, Their expression comes to us and expresses our own body and heart. And this life of ours also expresses the embodiment of past lives. As a result, when we awaken and become a Buddha, and when we become an Ancestor by having a Dharma heir, we go beyond 'Buddha' and we go beyond 'Ancestor'. The ability of two or three words to embody our ceaseless practice is in no way different. Do not vainly chase after the sounds and forms of fame and gain. When you do not chase after them, then this is the very ceaseless practice that the Buddhas and Ancestors Transmit directly, one-to-one. Whether you seclude yourself within the world or seclude yourself apart from the world, whether you are wholly enlightened or half enlightened, what I recommend is that you cast aside the myriad things of the world and your myriad entanglements with them, for this is the ceaseless practice that Buddhas and Ancestors practice ceaselessly.

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*Ejō*