

## On ‘The Meditative State That Bears the Seal of the Ocean’

(*Kaiin Zammai*)

**Translator’s Introduction:** This is one of the most subtle discourses in the *Shōbōgenzō*, due in part to the influence of the *Avatamsaka Scripture* on Dōgen’s way of expressing his points. It is primarily devoted to a line-by-line analysis of a poem attributed to Shakyamuni Buddha, which ends with the phrase *kaiin zammai*, ‘the meditative state that bears the seal of the Ocean’. This term is traditionally applied to the meditative state that Shakyamuni Buddha is said to have entered in order to expound the *Avatamsaka Scripture* and, by extension, to the meditative state that all Buddhas and Ancestors enter when They give expression to the Dharma.

The term ‘seal’ is an allusion to a carved seal bearing its owner’s name. It is used to authenticate a person’s signature. For instance, when someone is Transmitted in the Zen tradition, the Transmission documents which the disciple writes on silk at that time are then ‘signed and sealed’ by the Master as proof of the authenticity of the Transmission. By extension, the meditative state referred to in this discourse is one that bears the seal of the Ocean, which means that what the meditator is giving expression to is genuine Dharma. In the context of this chapter, ‘to seal’ carries a meaning of ‘to authenticate as genuine’.

All of the Buddhas and Ancestors invariably enter the meditative state that bears the seal of the Ocean. As They swim about in this meditative state, there are times when They give expression to the Truth, and times when They experience the Truth directly, and times when They put It into Their daily practice. The merit of Their doing Their practice upon the surface of the Ocean includes Their having penetrated to the very bottom of the Ocean. They make Their practice upon the surface of the Ocean Their practice that plumbs the depths of the Ocean. They are not concerned with wistfully seeking out ways to make Their wandering about through birth and death return Them to the Source. Instead, They have broken through former obstructions, as if They were passing through barrier gates or piercing through the joints in a cane of bamboo. This liberation is characteristic of each and every Buddha and Ancestor, for They are the various streams that have flowed into the meditative state that bears the seal of the Ocean.

The Buddha once said in verse:

*Merely of various elements is this body of Mine  
composed.*

*The time of its arising is merely an arising of elements;  
The time of its vanishing is merely a vanishing of  
elements.*

*As these elements arise, I do not speak of the arising of  
an 'I',*

*And as these elements vanish, I do not speak of the  
vanishing of an 'I'.*

*Previous instants and succeeding instants are not a series  
of instants that depend on each other;*

*Previous elements and succeeding elements are not a  
series of elements that stand against each other.*

*To give all of this a name, I call it 'the meditative state  
that bears the seal of the Ocean'.*

We need to make a diligent effort to fully explore these words of the Buddha. Arriving at the Way and entering into the realization of the Truth do not necessarily depend on listening to someone else or on speaking with someone else. And we have heard of those whose knowledge is broad who have realized the Way upon hearing four lines of Scripture, and those who have knowledge as extensive as the sands of the Ganges have been known to realize the Truth through hearing a single line of a Scriptural verse. And what is more, the Buddha's present words are not about seeking one's inherent enlightenment in what lies ahead, nor are they about grasping after one's first awareness of enlightenment within some experience. In general, even though making one's inherent enlightenment manifest is the meritorious behavior of a Buddha or an Ancestor, the various kinds of enlightenment—such as the first inkling of enlightenment or the full experience of one's inherent enlightenment—are not the only things that make a Buddha or an Ancestor what They are.

Just as the Buddha said:

*Merely of various elements is this body of Mine  
composed.*

At this time, the Buddha was speaking from within the meditative state that bears the seal of the Ocean. From within this state, the various elements simply exist as they are, which He expressed as there 'merely being various elements'. He called this moment 'the composing of this body of Mine'. The integrated form which is

composed of the various elements He accordingly calls 'this body of Mine'. He did not consider this body of His as a single unified form, for it was composed of various elements. Thus, He spoke of this bodily composition as 'this body of Mine'.

*The time of its arising is merely an arising of elements.*

This arising of elements never leaves 'arising' behind.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, 'arising' is beyond what we can know through direct perception and beyond what we can know through intellectual discrimination. It is what He spoke of as, "I do not speak of the arising of an 'I.'" By His not speaking of an 'I' that arises, other people have learned not to engage in perceiving or differentiating about any arising of self within such elements, nor do they think about or discriminate between individual arisings. What is more, when there is transcendent 'mutual seeing', there will be a going beyond the realm of 'mutual seeing'.<sup>2</sup>

'Arising' invariably refers to the arrival of a specific moment, for time is what arises. Just what is this 'arising'? It must surely be arising in and of itself. This arising is already a moment in time. Never did He say that it fails to expose what Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow really are. Because this is the arising of 'being composed of', it is this body of His that arises, it is an 'I' that arises, and it is 'merely being various elements' that arises. It is not only hearing sounds and seeing forms and colors; it is also the arising of an 'I'. It is this arising of an 'I' that one does not speak about. 'Not speaking about something' does not mean 'not expressing something', for being able to express something is not the same as being able to put it in words. The time of arising is synonymous with the appearance of 'these elements'; it does not refer to the twenty-four hours of a day. These elements are what the time of arising is, and they do not compete with each other within the three worlds of desire, form, and beyond form. As an Old Buddha once put it, "Suddenly, fire arises." Through this expression, He was saying that there is no waiting about for this arising.

Another Old Buddha once said, "What is this ceaseless time of arising and vanishing?"<sup>3</sup> Thus, in that this arising and vanishing is our experience of the

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1. That is, the arising of elements is not a single event but something that keeps on occurring at each instant of now.
  2. Transcendent mutual seeing refers to an understanding that goes beyond Master and disciple mutually recognizing each other as being 'such a one'.
  3. Although, on a conventional level, this remark is a question, in the context of Chinese Zen Buddhism it would be understood as the assertion, "The What is this ceaseless time of arising and vanishing," the 'What' being used as an epithet for That Which goes beyond any name we can assign to It.

arising of an 'I' and our experience of the vanishing of an 'I', the process is unceasing. In entrusting the Matter\* to Him, we need to discern the real meaning of His stating the ceaselessness of this process. We continually chop up this unceasing time of arising and vanishing, which is the very lifeblood of an Ancestor of the Buddha. In the unceasing time of arising and vanishing, who is it that arises and vanishes? As to the 'who' that arises and vanishes, it is the 'who' that is on the verge of being able to realize enlightenment within this body. That is, it is the 'who' that manifests this body, the 'who' for whom the Dharma is expressed, the very 'who' in the past who was unable to grasp what Mind is. It is "You have gotten what my Marrow is," and it is "You have gotten what my Bones are," because the 'you' is the who that arises and vanishes.

*And as these elements vanish, I do not speak of the vanishing of an 'I'.*

The very moment when He does not speak of the vanishing of an 'I' will be the moment when those elements vanish. The vanishing is the vanishing of the elements. Though we speak of our own vanishing, it will actually be that of the elements. Because they are elements, they are beyond defilement, and because they are beyond defilement, they are untainted. To put it simply, untainted is what the Buddhas and the Ancestors are. And They say that you are just the same, for who is not a 'you'? All those for whom there existed a previous moment and for whom there exists a following moment will be a 'you'. And They say that 'I' is just the same and, since previous moments and following moments all constitute what an 'I' is, who is not an 'I'?

In that vanishing of the Buddha's, He was adorned with all manner of hands and eyes.<sup>4</sup> This was His great, unsurpassed nirvana, which is spoken of by some as His 'death', and which is described by others as His 'entering into extinction', and by others still as His 'entering a place of abiding'. While the ever so many hands and eyes are spoken of in these ways, they are nothing other than the meritorious function of the Buddha's vanishing. He said that on the occasion of His 'I' vanishing, He did not speak about it, and on the occasion of His 'I' arising, again He did not speak about it. Yet even though these were simultaneous when He was alive, they may not have been simultaneous once He was dead.<sup>5</sup>

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\* See *Glossary*.

4. 'Hands and eyes' is an allusion to the myriad ways in which Avalokiteshvara, who is the embodiment of the innate compassion of one's Buddha Nature, sees and offers aid to those who cry out for help.

5. In this context, 'alive' refers to the time when we believed in the delusion of a separate self,

This vanishing refers to the previous elements having already vanished, and it refers to the vanishing of future elements. It refers to the previous moments of the elements and it refers to the future moments of the elements. It refers to the previous and future elements, which are our thoughts and things in operation, and it refers to the previous and future moments, which are also our thoughts and things in operation.<sup>6</sup> Their 'not depending on each other' refers to our thoughts and things in operation and their 'not standing against each other' refers to the operating of our thoughts and things. Our letting them not stand against each other and our letting them not depend on each other is our realizing eighty or ninety percent of the Truth. When this vanishing turns the four elements\* and the five skandhas\* of our being into hands and eyes, there is our taking them up and there is our dedicating them.<sup>7</sup> When vanishing turns the four elements and the five skandhas into our course of action, then we step forward and both Master and disciple mutually recognize each other as being 'such a one'.\* At just such a moment as this, even the statement "Our whole body is hands and eyes" is insufficient. Even "Our whole being, through and through, is hands and eyes" is insufficient. In sum, 'vanishing' is the meritorious activity of an Ancestor of the Buddha.

Now, as to the expressions 'not standing against each other' and 'not depending on each other', you need to realize that 'arising' encompasses 'arising in the beginning, middle, and end'. "Officially, there is not space enough for a needle, but privately, a horse and cart can pass through."<sup>8</sup> 'Arising in the beginning, middle, and end' is not something that depends on vanishing, nor is it something that stands against vanishing. It makes thoughts and things suddenly arise in places

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and 'dead' refers to the time when we have relinquished that self because we have realized our True Nature.

6. The phrase 'our thoughts and things' refers to whatever arises, persists for a while, disintegrates, and vanishes, be it the thoughts that we perceive as being within our mind or the things that we consider to occur in the physical world.
7. This sentence has a double meaning: First, by recognizing the impermanence of all thoughts and things, we dedicate our temporal being to expressing compassion. Second, by dropping off body and mind (the vanishing of a concern with self), all that remains is the dedication of oneself to expressing compassion for all beings. This double meaning of 'vanishing' as 'recognizing impermanence' and 'dropping off a concern with self' carries through the rest of this paragraph.
8. This saying by Meditation Master Sōzan Honjaku can be paraphrased as, "Officially, the Teaching is above any personal considerations, but on an individual level, It permits of broad provisional applications."

where they had previously vanished, but it is not the arising of what has vanished; it is simply the arising of thoughts and things. Because it is the arising of thoughts and things, it does not stand against anything or depend on anything. Further, one moment of vanishing and another moment of vanishing are not something mutually dependent, nor are they something mutually opposing. Even vanishing in beginning, middle, and end is simply vanishing. As a Master once remarked, “While we are encountering something, it does not stand out, but when our attention is drawn to it, then we recognize its existence.” Vanishings occur suddenly in the place of previous arisings, but they are not vanishings of arising, they are vanishings of thoughts and things. Since they are vanishings of thoughts and things, they do not stand against each other, nor are they mutually dependent.

Whether vanishings are what constitutes ‘all of this’ or whether arisings are what constitutes ‘all of this’, the Buddha chose the phrase ‘the meditative state that bears the seal of the Ocean’ to give all these various things a name. It is not that training and enlightenment are not ‘all of this’, it is simply that He called this untainted state ‘the meditative state that bears the seal of the Ocean’.

Meditative states are what manifest right before our eyes. They are our realization of the Way. They are the middle of the night when we grope behind us for our pillow. They are our groping behind us for our pillow on such a night.<sup>9</sup> And our groping about for our pillow is not something we do just for billions and billions of myriad eons: it is our being within the Ocean, constantly doing nothing other than giving expression to the Teaching on the Flowering of the Wondrous Dharma.<sup>10</sup> Because we do not speak of the arising of an ‘I’, we are within the Ocean. Its former surface, which is myriad ripples that follow from the slightest movement of a single wave, refers to our constantly giving expression to the Dharma. And Its later surface, which is a single wave that follows from the slightest movement of those myriad ripples, is the Teaching we give on the Flowering of the Wondrous Dharma. Even were we to reel up and cast out a thousand foot or ten thousand foot fishing line, such a line would, alas, just hang straight down.<sup>11</sup> ‘The former surface’ and ‘the later surface’ refer to that surface of the Ocean which we are on. It is as if we were to speak of the front of our head and the back of our head. What we call the front part of our head and the back part of

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9. The meaning of this metaphor is explained in detail in Discourse 32: On Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Compassion (*Kannon*).

10. ‘The Teaching on the Flowering of the Wondrous Dharma’ refers to our way of expressing the Dharma that the Buddha voiced in the *Lotus Scripture*.

11. In other words, the wondrous Dharma is like an ocean that is bottomless in its depth.

our head is adding a head upon a head.<sup>12</sup> It is not that there is a person inside, for the Ocean of one's being is not some abode of a worldly person nor is it some place beloved by a saintly person; it is one's Self alone within the Ocean of one's being. It is simply our constantly and openly giving expression to the Dharma. This 'within the Ocean' does not pertain to Its center, nor does it pertain to Its inside or outside; it is our constantly and endlessly dwelling within It as we give expression to the Teachings that are the Flowering of the Dharma. Though we do not take up residence in the east, west, south, or north, we do return, our boat empty yet fully illumined by the Moon's Light. This genuine refuge is our returning to our Original Nature. Who could say that this is our day-by-day conduct of 'staying in the water'? It is simply the Way of the Buddha manifesting in the Ultimate. We treat this as the seal that seals water. Put another way, it is the seal that seals limitless space. And put another way still, it is the seal that seals the mud. The seal that seals the water is not necessarily the seal that seals the Ocean, for above and beyond this there can be a seal that seals the Ocean. We call these the seal of the Ocean, and the seal of the water, and the seal of the mud, and the seal of the Mind. Having been directly Transmitted the seal of the Mind, we seal the water, and seal the mud, and seal the boundless space.



Sōzan Honjaku was once asked by a monk, "I have heard that it says in the Scriptures that the great ocean does not give lodging to corpses. Just what kind of an ocean is this?"

The Master responded, "One that contains all that exists."

The monk then asked, "Then why doesn't it give lodging to corpses?"

The Master replied, "What has ceased to breathe is not connected with It."

The monk asked, "Given that it contains all that exists, why is something that has ceased to breathe not connected with it?"

The Master said, "The functioning of all that exists is something other than ceasing to breathe."

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12. That is, just as one cannot separate the surface of the ocean from the rest of the ocean, so one cannot separate the front of the head from the back of the head, as if they were separable objects.

This Sōzan was a monastic brother to Ungo Dōyō. The fundamental thrust of Tōzan Ryōkai's teaching has found its true mark in this account.<sup>13</sup> Now the phrase, 'I have heard that it says in the Scriptures,' refers to the genuine Teaching of Buddhas and Ancestors. It is beyond the teachings of ordinary worldly people and of saintly ones. And it is beyond the teachings of the Lesser Course,\* which are connected with the Buddha Dharma.

*The Great Ocean does not give lodging to corpses.*

'The Great Ocean' does not refer to the Innermost Sea or to the Outermost Sea, for instance, nor does It refer to the Eight Seas or any other similar ones.<sup>14</sup> This is not something for those of us who are studying the Way to have doubts about. And not only do we recognize as an Ocean that which is not an ocean, but we also recognize as an ocean that which is an ocean.<sup>15</sup> Even if you were to insist that the ocean in either case is what is being referred to, it still would not be the Great Ocean. The Great Ocean does not necessarily refer to the deep pools whose waters contain the eight virtues, nor does the Great Ocean necessarily refer to such things as the nine abysses of salt water.<sup>16</sup> Since Its various elements will enter into the composition of all of these, why must the Great Ocean always refer only to deep waters? This is what prompted the monk to ask, "Just what kind of an ocean is this?" And, since the Great Ocean was still unknown to ordinary people as well as to those in lofty positions, he spoke of It as 'the Great Ocean'. Someone who would ask such a question is one who would attempt to put into words his attachment to the word 'ocean'.<sup>17</sup>

As to Its not giving lodging to corpses, the phrase 'does not give lodging to' can mean "If you come with a clear head, you act with a clear head; if you come with a dull head, you act with a dull head." A corpse is dead ashes: its mind does

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13. Sōzan and Ungo were both Transmitted disciples of Tōzan. Sōzan's line died out shortly after his death, whereas Ungo's has continued up to the present day and is known as Sōtō Zen, the name referring to the teachings of Sōzan and Tōzan.
  14. The Eight Seas, which include the Innermost Sea and the Outermost Sea, are associated with Mount Sumeru.
  15. An Ocean that is not an ocean refers to a metaphoric ocean, whereas an ocean that is an ocean refers to ocean in an everyday, worldly sense.
  16. The eight virtues of water are its being sweet, cold, soft, light, pure, odorless, not harmful to the throat, and not harmful to the stomach. 'The nine abysses' refers to nine vast underground rivers in China.
  17. That is, the disciple is asking his question because he is not sure that he understands what Sōzan is talking about, but not because he doubts the validity of what Sōzan is saying.



not change no matter how many times it encounters the springtime. What he called 'a corpse' is something that no one has ever experienced, and that is why they do not comprehend what it is.

The Master's saying, "One that contains all that exists," expresses what the Ocean is. The point he is making is not that there is some single thing that contains all that exists, but rather that It is all contained things. And he is not saying that the Great Ocean is what contains all existing things, but rather that what is expressing 'all contained things' is simply the Great Ocean. Though we do not know what It is, It is everything that exists for the moment. Even coming face-to-face with a Buddha or an Ancestor is a mistaken perception of 'everything that exists for the moment'. At the moment of 'being contained', although it may involve a mountain, it is not just our 'standing atop a soaring mountain peak', and although it may involve water, it is not just our 'plunging down to the floor of the Ocean's abyss'.<sup>18</sup> Our acts of acceptance will be like this, as will our acts of letting go. What we call the Ocean of our Buddha Nature and what we call the Ocean of Vairochana\* are simply synonymous with 'all that exists'.

Even though the surface of the Ocean may not be visible to us, we never doubt its existence in our daily conduct of 'swimming about'. For example, the monk Tafuku—one of Jōshū's Dharma heirs—once described a grove of bamboo as, "One or two canes are crooked, and three or four canes are aslant." Although his daily monastic conduct led him to see all that exists as a bunch of errors, why did he not say, "A thousand crooked canes! Nay, ten thousand crooked canes!" Why did he not say, "A thousand groves! Nay, ten thousand groves!" Do not lose sight of the underlying principle that is present like this in a grove of bamboo. Sōzan's expression, "One that contains all that exists," is synonymous with 'all that exists'.<sup>19</sup>

Although the monk's question, "Why is something that has ceased to breathe not connected with it?" might be viewed, albeit mistakenly, as arising from doubt, it could have been just what his mind was concerned with. When Master Rinzai said about Fuke, his elder brother in the Sangha, "I have long had my doubts about that fellow," he was simply recognizing who 'the person' was about whom he had

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18. Dōgen borrows these two lines from a poem by Meditation Master Yakusan, which Dōgen had previously quoted at the beginning of Discourse 11: On 'Just for the Time Being, Just for a While, For the Whole of Time Is the Whole of Existence' (*Uji*). Here, he is expanding on what he said in that discourse.

19. That is, the It is not something separate from what It contains since both the contents and the container are identical with It.

long held doubts.<sup>20</sup> In what exists, why is something that has ceased to breathe not connected with It and how can It not give lodging to corpses? Herein, why something that has ceased to breathe is not connected with It is that It already contains all that exists. Keep in mind that 'containing' does not mean 'keeping' and that 'containing' is synonymous with 'not giving lodging to'. Even if all that exists were a corpse, it might well be that not giving lodging to it would forthwith span ten thousand years, and it might well be that 'not belonging to It' is this old monk Dōgen playing one stone in a game of *Go*.

What Sōzan said is, "The functioning of all that exists is something other than ceasing to breathe." In other words, whether all that exists ceases to breathe or does not stop breathing, a corpse would still be unconnected with It. Even though a corpse is a corpse, if it had behavior that was in harmony with all that exists, it would contain all—it would be containment. The journey before us and the journey behind us, which is part and parcel of all that exists, each have their own functions, and ceasing to breathe is not one of them. In other words, it is like the blind leading the blind. The fundamental principle of the blind leading the blind includes 'one blind person leading one blind person' and 'a mass of blind people leading a mass of blind people'. When a mass of blind people are leading a mass of blind people, all contained things contain all contained things. Further, no matter how many Great Ways there are, They are beyond 'all that exists', for we have still not fully manifested our meditative practice, which is the meditative state that bears the seal of the Ocean.

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*Copied by me during the first year of the Kangen era (1243).*

*Ejō*

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20. Rinzai's remark was not derogatory, but was a common way among Zen monks of acknowledging that someone—in this case, Fuke—was 'such a person'.