

On the True Nature of All Things

(*Hosshō*)

Translator's Introduction: 'The True Nature of all things' (*hosshō*) refers not only to the way things are just as they are, but also to our Buddha Nature and to That Which Is.

If you are really doing your exploring through your training, whether by following the Scriptures or by following your spiritual friend, you will ultimately realize the Truth by yourself, independent of your Master. Realizing the Truth by oneself independent of one's Master is the functioning of one's True Nature. And even so, if you are inherently keen, you will still need to call upon a Master and inquire of the Way. And even if you are not inherently keen, you will still need to do your utmost in practicing the Way. But who among you is not inherently keen? Each one of you follows both the Scriptures and the advice of a good friend in order to arrive at the enlightenment which is the fruit of Buddhahood. Keep in mind that inherent keenness means that when you encounter the Scriptures or come face-to-face with a spiritual friend, you are encountering the meditative state of your True Nature, and that when you encounter the meditative state of your True Nature, you attain the meditative state of the True Nature of all things.¹ It is our tapping into the wisdom from our previous lives, attaining the three illuminations, and awakening to fully perfected enlightenment.² Coming face-to-face with our inherent keenness, we study it; coming face-to-face with the wisdom that goes beyond having a Master and that is inherent within us, we straightforwardly Transmit it. If we had no inherent keenness, then even though we came face-to-face with the Scriptures and a spiritual friend, we could not hear what the True Nature of all things is, nor could we realize It. The Great Truth is not a principle

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1. The 'meditative state of one's True Nature' refers to entering the realm where we can see the True Nature of all things.
 2. The three illuminations are seeing what conditions result from the past lives of oneself and others, seeing what conditions are likely to arise for oneself and others in future times, and seeing what the miseries of present life conditions are in oneself and others, along with how to remove their root causes.

like that of someone drinking water to know for himself whether it is warm or cool.³

All Buddhas, along with all Bodhisattvas* and all sentient beings, by the power of their inherent keenness, clarify what the Great Truth of the True Nature of all things is. They clarify what the Great Truth of this True Nature is by following the Scriptures and by following their spiritual friend. In this way, they come to understand their own True Nature. The Scriptures are what True Nature is: they are our true Self. And because True Nature is our true Self, It is not the self that non-Buddhists and devilish beings misunderstand It to be. Within True Nature there is no ‘non-Buddhist’ or ‘devilish being’; it is simply a matter of “Come to breakfast! Come to dinner! Come to supper!”⁴ Even so, when those who call themselves long-time trainees of twenty or thirty years encounter talk about the True Nature of all things, they stagger on through their lives in a daze. Styling themselves as being both long-disciplined and enlightened, they climb up upon a Master’s wooden Dharma seat. Then, when they hear the Voice of their True Nature, or catch sight of the Form of their True Nature, their body and mind, and everything around them, simply bob up and down in a pit of confusion. In this unpleasant state of affairs, they mistakenly imagine that after the universe has fallen away, the True Nature will appear, and that this True Nature will no longer be comprised of the myriad forms that exist in the world. The principle of the True Nature of all things can never be like that. The myriad forms of all that exists in the world and the True Nature of all things lie far beyond discussions of being the same or being different, and they transcend any talk of being separate or being united. Because they are beyond past, present, and future, beyond being discontinuous or continuous, beyond physical form, sensation, thoughts, actions, and consciousness, they are what the True Nature of all things is.



Meditation Master Baso Dōitsu from Chiang-hsi in Hungchou Province once said:

All sentient beings from countless eons past have never departed from the meditative state of the True Nature of all things, but

3. That is, the Great Truth is absolute, whereas the testing of the temperature of water through direct experience is relative.

* See *Glossary*.

4. That is, all beings are invited, for they are already included within this True Nature.

rather they have always resided within It. Putting on clothes and eating meals, conversing and making respectful replies, using one's six sense organs: all such activities are totally what True Nature is.

The True Nature of all things that Baso spoke of is the True Nature expressed by True Nature. It harmonized with Baso and he harmonized with It. Once he had heard It, how could he have failed to speak out? The True Nature of all things rode astride Baso.⁵

Now, people absorb meals and meals absorb people. The True Nature of both of these, from the start, has never left the meditative state of the True Nature of all things. Their True Nature, after manifesting Itself, has never left the True Nature of all things. Their True Nature, before manifesting Itself, has never left the True Nature of all things. The True Nature of all things over countless eons of time is simply the meditative state of the True Nature of all things. So we describe this True Nature as being eons beyond measure. Accordingly, whatever is here at this very moment is the True Nature of all things, and the True Nature of all things is what exists at this very moment. When we put on our clothes and eat our meal, it is the meditative state of the True Nature of all things that is putting on the clothes and eating the meal. The True Nature of clothing is fully manifested; the True Nature of food is fully manifested. The True Nature of eating is fully manifested; the True Nature of dressing is fully manifested. If we did not put on clothes and eat food, if we did not converse and make respectful replies, if we did not use our six sense organs, if we were not performing all our actions, then we would not be in the meditative state of the True Nature of all things, nor would we have entered into our own True Nature. What was just quoted here and now from Baso is what the Buddhas fully conferred to Shakyamuni Buddha, and it is what the Ancestors have accurately Transmitted to Baso. Authentically Transmitted and handed on by Buddha after Buddha and by Ancestor after Ancestor, It was authentically Transmitted through the meditative state of the True Nature of all things. Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor, without having to enter this meditative state, have set Their True Nature frolicking like a fish leaping about in the water. Even though teachers of doctrine who rely on the written word speak of 'true nature', it is not the True Nature of which Baso spoke. Now, there may be some merit in human beings, who have never yet departed from their True Nature, thinking that they must certainly be devoid of a True Nature, but this will just be a

5. There is a play on words here. Baso's name literally means 'our Ancestor who is a horse', the horse being a common Zen metaphor for someone who goes traveling near and far to help all sentient beings.

fresh instance of their True Nature manifesting Itself. Even were we to talk or converse as if we lacked True Nature, or were to work or act as if we lacked True Nature, this too would only be True Nature manifesting Itself.

The passing of days and months of immeasurable eons past has been the passing of the True Nature of all things. And it is just the same for the present and the future.

We may take the measure of our body and mind to be just the measure of our body and mind, not recognizing them as an aspect of our True Nature, but this way of thinking about them is also a function of our True Nature. Or we may take the measure of our body and mind not to be a true measure of our body and mind, while still not recognizing them as an aspect of our True Nature, but this way of thinking about them is likewise a function of our True Nature. Whatever we may consider or not consider them to be, in either case they are an aspect of our True Nature. To think that the ‘Nature’ in ‘True Nature’ means that water does not flow and that trees do not flourish and then wither away is a non-Buddhist view.⁶



Shakyamuni Buddha once said, “The appearance of each thought and thing is just as it is, and the nature of each thought and thing is likewise just as it is.” Accordingly, flowers blooming and leaves falling are just True Nature as it is. Even so, foolish people fancy that within the realm of True Nature flowers do not bloom and leaves do not fall. Right now, without questioning anyone else, articulate your own doubts by forming a concept or image of them. Go over them thoroughly three times as if they were being expounded by someone else, and chances are that you will have already extricated yourself from them. It is not that these doubts are wicked thoughts, but they are simply thoughts arising at a time before you have clarified your doubts. When you are clarifying your doubts, do not think that you need to get rid of them. The blooming of flowers and the falling of leaves are, quite naturally, the blooming of flowers and the falling of leaves. The thinking which gives rise to the idea that there can be no blooming flowers or falling leaves within True Nature is True Nature Itself. True Nature manifests Itself when our thinking is freed from concepts or images, and is therefore in accord with the way that True Nature ‘thinks’. The totality of Its thinking resembles a contemplation on the True Nature of all things.

6. That is, it is non-Buddhist to think that because something has True Nature, it is absolutely unchanging.



Baso's phrase, 'totally what this True Nature is,' is truly eighty or ninety percent of expressing the Matter.*⁷ And yet there are many things that Baso did not expound. He did not say that all true natures never depart from their True Nature. Nor did he say that all True Natures are totally what True Nature is. Nor did he say that no True Nature ever departs from being a sentient being. Nor did he say that the True Nature of all sentient beings is but a small bit of the True Nature of all things. Nor did he say that all sentient beings comprise the whole of the True Nature of all things. Nor did he say that the totality of True Nature is just a small bit of a sentient being. Nor did he say that half of a sentient being is half of someone's True Nature. Nor did he say that the absence of sentient beings is what the True Nature of all things is. Nor did he say that True Nature is not a sentient being. Nor did he say that the True Nature of all things frees Itself from 'being True Nature'. Nor did he say that sentient beings drop off 'being a sentient being'. He simply said that sentient beings do not depart from the meditative state of the True Nature of all things. He did not say that this True Nature cannot depart from the meditative state of sentient beings. Nor did he assert that the meditative state of True Nature departs from or enters the meditative state of sentient beings. Much less can we hear him say that the True Nature of all things is synonymous with realizing Buddhahood, or that sentient beings' awakening to their True Nature is their True Nature's awakening to True Nature. Nowhere does he assert that non-sentient beings do not depart from the True Nature of all things.

At this moment I would like to ask Baso, "What is it that you call 'sentient beings'? If what you call 'True Nature' refers to 'sentient beings', then It is That Which Comes in This Way. If what you call 'sentient beings' refers to beings that are sentient, then what you say resembles Nangaku Ejō's saying, "Were I to put It in words, they would not hit the bull's-eye." So, YOU! NOW! SAY WHAT IT IS! RIGHT RIGHT NOW!

Given to the assembly at the beginning of winter in the first year of the Kangen era (November 14, 1243) at Kippō-ji Temple in Echizen Province.

7. In Zen, to say that someone is expressing eighty or ninety percent of the Matter is a complimentary way of saying that someone has had a full realization that goes beyond anyone's ability to completely express.