

## On Seeking One's Master Far and Wide

(*Henzan*)

**Translator's Introduction:** The term '*henzan*' conventionally refers to the practice of a novice monk's going throughout the country on a pilgrimage to seek a Master under whom to study and train, and possibly to spiritually awaken. As such, it might be rendered as 'seeking a Master far and wide'. Based on several kōan stories, Dōgen understands the term as referring to thoroughly exploring the Matter through one's training with one's Master, which does not require leaving one's training place. In this sense, one is seeking far and wide within oneself for the Master, which is one's True Self.

To practice the Great Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors is to become enlightened through and through, to go forth with no strings entangling our feet, with clouds appearing under our feet. Even though it has been described like this, when the Flower opens, the whole world is awakened. As Tōzan put it: "I constantly make the Way the important Matter."\* This is why there is the saying that a sweet melon is sweet right to its stem and a bitter melon is bitter down to its roots: the sweetness of what is sweet is sweet right to its very stem. This is how Tōzan had explored the Matter through his training with his Master.



Great Master Gensha Shibi was once summoned by his Master Seppō, who said to him, "O Shibi, my austere monk, why haven't you gone out on a pilgrimage to seek a Master to train with?"

He replied, "Bodhidharma did not come east to China for that, nor did the Second Ancestor go west to India for that!" Seppō thoroughly approved of what Shibi had said.

In this dialogue, the conventional meaning that underlies the term '*henzan*' has been turned completely upside down. And furthermore, what Shibi said is not something found in holy writ. What yardstick could possibly be used to measure his awakening?

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\* See *Glossary*.



When Nangaku Ejō first visited the Old Buddha Daikan Enō, the Old Buddha said, “What is it that comes thus?”

Nangaku thoroughly explored this mudball with his Master during a span of eight years. Finally he made his move, which was his thorough exploration with his Master, saying to the Old Buddha, “I have realized what you meant when I first came here. Upon receiving me, you said, ‘What is it that comes thus?’”

Thereupon, the Old Buddha Enō asked, “And, pray, just what have you realized?”

Nangaku then replied, “Were I to try to put the One Matter into words, they would miss the mark.” This was the manifestation of his thorough exploration with his Master, his manifestation of his eight years of training.

The Old Buddha Enō asked, “And is this a substitute for training to become enlightened?”

Nangaku responded, “It is not that there is no training for enlightenment, but rather, there is nothing to be had that will stain It.”

Thereupon, Enō said, “I am no different, and you are no different, and all the Buddhas and Ancestors of India were no different.”

After this, Ejō explored the Matter with his Master, inside and out, during another span of eight years. Counting from beginning to end, it was during a span of fifteen years that he thoroughly explored the Matter with his Master.<sup>1</sup>

His ‘coming thus’ was his thorough exploration of the Matter with his Master. With his remark, “Were I to try to put the One Matter into words, they would miss the mark,” he opened the door to the Temple and went in to meet the Buddhas and Ancestors: this too was how he sought far and wide for a Master. After entering the picture, he pursued his training with his Master, committing himself to turning away from multitudinous forms of delusion, which goes beyond casually entering one monastery upon leaving another. His going in and meeting the Buddhas Eye-

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1. By Japanese reckoning, he did not train for a full eight years but within the span of eight calendar years. Hence, the eighth year in which he trained before awakening was also the first year in which he trained after awakening.

to-Eye was his seeking a Master far and wide, and his earnest acceptance of the Teaching was his exploring the Matter with his Master. To see through, and beyond, the flesh of the Master's face is precisely what exploring the Matter far and wide with one's Master means.



From the first, the purpose of Seppō's remark concerning visiting other Masters was not to recommend that Shibi leave the monastery, nor was it to recommend that he go traveling north or south. It was to help foster the kind of exploring far and wide that Shibi himself expressed by saying, "Bodhidharma did not come east to China for that, nor did the Second Ancestor go west to India for that!" Shibi's saying that Bodhidharma did not come east to China for that goes beyond any silly remarks about his coming not being a coming. It is the principle of the Great Earth not having a single clod to tread upon. What Shibi calls 'Bodhidharma' is but one part of the stream of life. Even if all the eastern lands had suddenly come to a full boil and had sought Bodhidharma out to serve under him, this would not be the same as his turning away from delusion nor would it be the same as his turning himself around within the outpouring of someone else's words. Because Bodhidharma did not come to the eastern lands for such things, he saw the Face in an eastern land.<sup>2</sup> Even though he saw the Face of Buddhas and the Face of Ancestors in an eastern land, this 'land' goes beyond his coming east to China, for that would have been like his grasping what the Buddhas and Ancestors are while losing sight of his own Nose.<sup>3</sup> In sum, 'land' is beyond being east or west: 'east and west' has nothing to do with lands.

As to our Second Ancestor, Taiso Eka, not going west to India, in that he thoroughly explored 'India' with his Master, he did not actually travel west to India. Had the Second Ancestor actually gone to India, it would simply be his 'having dropped off a forearm'.<sup>4</sup> Now, why did the Second Ancestor not go to India? He did not go to India because he had leapt into his Master's blue Eye. If he had not leapt into his Master's blue Eye, he certainly should have gone to India. Instead, he scraped out Bodhidharma's Eye as his thorough exploration of the

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2. A reference to his four Chinese disciples, all of whom awoke to the Truth.

3. 'Losing sight of one's Nose' is a Zen phrase for missing the vitally important part, namely, one's Original Self.

4. This refers to spiritually severing one's attachments in order to find the Truth.

Matter.<sup>5</sup> Going west to India or coming east to China is not thoroughly exploring the Matter with one's Master, nor is someone making a thorough search by proceeding to Mount Tendai or Mount Nangaku, or by going to Mount Godai or to the heavens above. If you do not see through, and rid yourself of, your concept of the four seas and the five lakes, yours will not be a thorough exploration with your Master.<sup>6</sup> Going back and forth between the four seas and the five lakes does not constitute a thorough exploration of the Matter. It just makes our path slippery and our feet sore, thereby causing us to fall and lose sight of our thorough exploration.

Speaking more generally, because we make our penetration into Master Chōsa Keishin's statement, "The whole universe in all ten directions is our True Body," our exploring of the Matter with our Master, this will be our study and practice of Bodhidharma's not coming east to China and the Second Ancestor's not going west to India. Thoroughly exploring the Matter with one's Master means that when a stone is large, it is large just as it is, and when a stone is small, it is small just as it is. Without setting stones in motion, we let the large ones do their training and the small ones do theirs. While training, to encounter a hundred thousand myriad things in a hundred thousand myriad places is still not thoroughly exploring the Matter. Turning ourselves around a hundred thousand myriad times within the outpouring of half a word is our thorough exploration of the Matter. For example, working the soil is simply working the soil, which is exploring the Matter thoroughly. To go from working the soil once to working the sky once and then to working the four quarters and eight directions once is not thoroughly exploring the Matter. When Gutei was exploring the Matter with Master Tenryū, he realized the realm of the One-finger, which was a thorough exploring of the Matter with his Master. Gutei's simply raising one finger was his thorough exploring of the Matter.<sup>7</sup>

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5. To 'scrape out' Bodhidharma's Eye means to fully absorb his spiritual Teaching and to make It one's own.
  6. 'The four seas and the five lakes' is a reference to the whole world with China as its center.
  7. At the heart of Meditation Master Tenryū's Dharma was his teaching that All is One, which he would express by holding up his index finger. Tenryū's very young disciple, Gutei, took to imitating his Master's gesture but without understanding what Tenryū was expressing. On one occasion when Gutei raised his finger, Tenryū is said to have cut it off. Frightened by this, Gutei ran to leave the room. When Tenryū called to him, Gutei turned to face his Master, who then held up his finger. This triggered Gutei's awakening to the Truth. The cutting off of Gutei's finger, like Taiso Eka's cutting off his arm, is probably meant



Shibi once addressed his assembly, saying, “I and Old Master Shakyamuni have done the same practice.”

There was a monk at the time who came forth and asked, “I wonder what person you encountered?”

The Master answered, “The Sha family’s third son, while on a fishing boat.”<sup>8</sup>

From start to finish, the genuineness of what our venerable Master Shakyamuni encountered is naturally the same as His encounter with ‘Old Master Shakyamuni’. And because the genuineness from start to finish of what the venerable monk Shibi encountered is naturally the same as his encounter with the ‘Venerable Fellow Shibi’, our venerable Master Shakyamuni and the venerable monk Shibi have made the same encounter. Both our venerable Master Shakyamuni and the venerable monk Shibi explored to the utmost the sufficiency and insufficiency of their spiritual search, a practice which we take to be the underlying principle of thoroughly seeking one’s Master.<sup>9</sup> Because our venerable Master Shakyamuni had the same kind of experience as the venerable monk Shibi had, He is an Old Buddha, and because the venerable monk Shibi had the same kind of experience as our venerable Master Shakyamuni had, he is one of His descendants. This principle should be thoroughly explored with one’s Master, and in detail.

You need to clarify through your training the import of Shibi’s saying that he met the Sha family’s third son while on a fishing boat. That is to say, we explore through and through, with the utmost diligence, the instance when both our venerable Master Shakyamuni and the venerable monk Shibi had the same kind of simultaneous encounter with their Master. There was the venerable monk Shibi who encountered the Sha family’s third son while on a fishing boat, and there was the Sha family’s third son who encountered the shaven-headed monk upon Mount Shibi. Do your utmost to let yourself and others experience the sameness and experience the difference. The venerable monk Shibi and our venerable Master

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metaphorically as the dropping off of body and mind, since such physically violent acts are clearly serious violations of the Precepts.

8. An allusion to Shibi’s meeting up with his own True Self while he was living on a fishing boat.
9. That is, their awakening to their True Self was fully sufficient and, at the same time, it was insufficient in that there is always the ever going on, ever becoming Buddha.

Shakyamuni had the same kind of encounter and did the same exploring far and wide. In order for you to have the same encounter, you need to explore far and wide the principle that 'the Sha's third son' and 'I' have encountered a One beyond what words can describe. When the principle of seeking the Master far and wide has not yet arisen, one is unable to encounter one's Self and, lacking an encountering with one's Self, one is unable to encounter another and, lacking an encountering with another, one is unable to encounter 'such a person'\* and, being unable to encounter the true 'I', one is unable to encounter a Master's Fist<sup>10</sup> and, being unable to encounter a Master's Eye, one is unable to let oneself hook one's Self and haul It up, and one is unable to let It come on board even before It is hooked.<sup>11</sup>

When we have completely exhausted our seeking far and wide, we drop off seeking far and wide. It is comparable to the saying, "When the sea has dried up, one does not see its bottom," or the saying, "When a person dies, the mind does not remain." 'When the sea has dried up' means 'when the whole sea has completely dried up'. At the same time, when the sea has indeed completely dried up, one does not see a seabed. 'Not remaining behind' and 'completely ceasing', together, comprise our human mind. The mind does not remain because it has customarily withered away into death. Hence, you need to recognize that the whole of a person is his mind and that the whole of the Mind is what a person is. In this manner, we thoroughly explore with our Master the front and back of each side of an issue.



There was an occasion when my former Master Tendō Nyōjō, the Old Buddha, was asked to give a Dharma talk by his veteran fellow monks, who had come from all over. Having gathered together in his Lecture Hall, they were given the following Teaching:

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10. Some Zen Masters were in the habit of raising a fist to express That which goes beyond conceptualization or words.
  11. The references to fishing are connected with Shibi's 'catching his True Self' while he was living on a fishing barge. 'Fishing' itself has a metaphoric connection with doing one's meditation.

*The Great Way has no fixed gate.  
 From out the crown of our heads, It leaps forth in all  
 directions.  
 Unbounded as space itself, It leaves no traces behind.  
 Still, It has found Its way into Seiryō's Nose.<sup>12</sup>*

*Even the bunch of you who would betray Gautama  
 encounter It thus,  
 To say nothing of those of you born from Rin'ai's woeful  
 womb.<sup>13</sup>*

*Ho! In our great family we are tumbled about like apricot  
 blossoms set dancing by the spring breeze.  
 Astonished, they fall, flying wildly in a riot of crimson.*

For the present Dharma talk, veteran monks from all directions came to Seiryō Temple in Chien-k'ang Prefecture, where the Old Buddha who was my former Master was serving as chief priest. He and these fellow monks of long-standing were sometimes related like guest and host and sometimes they were simply fellow practitioners sitting side-by-side in meditation. They were such old friends. How could their number fail to be large? It was an occasion when they had gathered together to petition him for a Dharma talk. Veteran monks who were totally devoid of having anything concrete to say to him were not among his friends or among that number who had petitioned him. Although those old friends were themselves highly respected and prized, they waited upon him, requesting his Teaching.

Speaking more generally, my former Master's practice of thoroughly seeking far and wide was not something fully mastered by those in any other place. In the last two or three centuries in Great Sung China, there has not been an Old Buddha comparable to my former Master.

"The Great Way has no fixed gate" describes four or five thousand flower and willow lanes, and twenty or thirty thousand music pavilions.<sup>14</sup> At the same

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12. Seiryō is an allusion to Master Tendō himself, who at the time of this Dharma talk was chief priest at Seiryō Temple.

13. The overall tone of Tendō's poem, as well as Dōgen's subsequent comments, implies that the preceding two lines are meant ironically.

14. 'Flower and willow lanes' is a common euphemism in China and Japan for a red-light district. Similarly, the term 'pavilion', particularly in association with some kind of entertainment, customarily refers to a brothel. Given the historic practice of monastic

time, in letting one's whole self leap forth, we make no use of whatever may remain behind. It is our leaping forth from the crown of our head and entering into our Nostrils: it is these two together that we explore through our training with our Master. Those who have not yet leapt free through the crown of their head and have not yet turned themselves around within their very Nostrils are not persons who are exploring the Matter through their training with their Master, nor are they folks who are thoroughly seeking the Master far and wide. We should explore the essence of 'seeking the Master far and wide' just as Shibi did.

What the Fourth Ancestor explored through his training under the Third Ancestor during the span of nine years was, simply, seeking the Master far and wide. Meditation Master Nansen Fugan once resided in Chih-yang without leaving the mountain for some thirty years, which was his seeking the Master far and wide. Master Ungan Donjō and Master Dōgo Enchi, among others, diligently explored the Matter through their training at Meditation Master Yakusan's monastery for forty years, which was their seeking the Master far and wide. The Second Ancestor spent eight years exploring the Matter with his Master on Mount Sūzan and, through that training, thoroughly realized his Master's Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow.

'To seek the Master far and wide' simply means 'just sitting there, dropping off body and mind'. It is as if at the present moment, one goes to where one goes and one comes from where one comes, without their being the slightest gap between them. This is seeking the Master far and wide with one's whole body: this is the whole body of the Great Way. 'To go on, beyond the top of Vairochana\* Buddha's head' is the meditative state that is utterly still. Decisive attainment of such a state is Vairochana Buddha's going on. To thoroughly awaken to seeking the Master far and wide by leaping forth means that the gourd leaps forth from the gourd plant. For a long time, we have regarded the stem end of the gourd to be the training place for our 'uncorking Buddha'. Its lifeline is like a thread. We gourds thoroughly explore the gourd plant through our training with our Master. Our

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celibacy both in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, it is unlikely that Dōgen is suggesting or encouraging monks to engage in behavior that would break their vow of celibacy. Even so, there is the teaching in Buddhism that after someone has fully awakened to the Truth, and the false self has completely dropped off, such a person can freely go anywhere, even into brothels or wine shops, without being tempted to partake of what was being offered, and without judging those who were engaged in such activities.



raising a single blade of grass is nothing other than our seeking the Master far and wide.<sup>15</sup>

*Given to my assembly at my hermitage at the foot of Mount Yamashibu in Echizen Province on the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh lunar month in the first year of the Kangen era (January 9, 1244).*

*Copied in the chief disciple's quarters at the same hermitage on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth lunar month in the same year (February 8, 1244).*

*Ejō*

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15. Dōgen's gourd metaphor probably derives from a saying of his own Master, "The vine of the gourd plant embraces the gourd," which is an allusion to the Master-disciple relationship. To paraphrase this closing passage, the vine is like the lifeline of the Buddhas and Ancestors, which threads its way to sustain the disciple. The training place for disciple and Master is like the juncture where the stem joins the vine. Coming to know one's True Master, that is, one's Buddha Nature, is like picking a ripened gourd, which 'uncorks' (lets out) the Buddha within the disciple. As Dōgen says elsewhere, "Picking up a single blade of grass, we make it into a sixteen-foot tall golden body." So here, our simple action of making a beginning by 'raising a single blade of grass' sets us on our way to seeking far and wide with our Master for the True Master who, when ultimately found, will be the fully erect golden body of Buddha.