

On Spring and Autumn: Warming Up and Cooling Down

(*Shunjū*)

Translator’s Introduction: This discourse is concerned with the teachings of Tōzan who, along with his Dharma heir, Sōzan, is considered a founding Ancestor of Dōgen’s Sōtō tradition. Dōgen first presents a kōan story for which Tōzan was famous, one dealing with how to train with the opposites. He then makes mention of the *Five Positions* (J. *Goi*), in which Tōzan outlines the relationships between the transient and the Absolute—the Absolute within the transient, the transient within the Absolute, the transient itself, the Absolute itself, and the transient and Absolute in harmony. Dōgen quotes and critiques various Masters who have written poems expressing their understanding of both the story and the *Five Positions*. Since many of these poems contain Zen terms which would most likely have been understood in Dōgen’s time but are unfamiliar to present-day Western readers, some effort has been made to clarify what these poems are pointing to, though Japanese scholarly commentators are not always certain of or in agreement as to the significance of some of the metaphors that the poem contains.

Great Master Tōzan Ryōkai was once asked by a monk, “When cold or heat come our way, how are we to avoid them?”

The Master replied, “Why don’t you proceed to the place where there is no heat or cold?”

The monk then asked, “What is that place where there is no heat or cold?”

The Master answered, “When it is cold, my acharya,* give yourself up to the cold; when it is hot, my acharya, give yourself up to the heat.”

Ever so many people in the past have given much thought to this dialogue, and many people in the present need to make every effort to train with it. The Buddhas and Ancestors have invariably come to explore it, and those who come to explore it are Buddhas and Ancestors. Many of the Indian and Chinese Buddhas and Ancestors in both the past and present have treated this story as an actual incidence of one’s Original Nature manifesting. In this dialogue, Original Nature manifests as the spiritual question of Buddhas and Ancestors.

* See *Glossary*.

At the same time, the monk's question, "When cold or heat come our way, how are we to avoid them?" needs to be examined in detail. It is your taking a good hard look through your training at the very moment when cold comes and at the very moment when heat comes. This cold and heat come from a cold and heat that are entirely cold and entirely hot. Since they come from cold and heat, when they do arrive, they have come from a head that thinks in terms of cold and hot, and they manifest from eyes that see in terms of cold and hot. Above this 'head' is the very place where there is no cold or hot. Within these 'eyes' is the very place where there is no cold or hot. The Great Ancestor's statement, "When it is cold, my acharya, give yourself up to the cold; when it is hot, my acharya, give yourself up to the heat," refers to what was happening at that very moment. Even though 'when it is cold' refers to his saying 'give yourself up to the cold', 'when it is hot' need not necessarily be his way of saying 'give yourself up to the heat'. 'Cold' is fundamentally and totally cold; 'heat' is fundamentally and totally hot. Even though we may have been able to avoid experiencing them on myriad occasions, this is still just exchanging the head for the tail. Cold is what the living Eye of the Ancestors of our tradition is; hot is what the warm skin of my late Master was.



Meditation Master Tanka Shijun was the Dharma heir of the Venerable Monk Fuyō Dōkai. He once said:

Among our monastic assembly, there are those who have deliberated among themselves and then made the assertion, "In this story, the monk's question has already sunk him into duality, whereas the Venerable Monk Tōzan's reply returns the matter to the position of the Absolute. Recognizing what is being sounded in Tōzan's words, the monk then enters into the position of the Absolute, whereas Tōzan now responds by stringing along with the dualistic position." Deliberating in this way, those who assert such a view not only slander the late, saintly Tōzan but they also disgrace themselves. Have you not encountered the saying, "When you listen to the explanations of ordinary people, they may call up pretty pictures in the mind—all in reds and greens—but even though these may be beautiful when before your eyes, after continued repetition, they will ultimately sicken you?"

In general, my noble Buddhist travelers of the Way, if you wish to grasp this Great Matter,* you must first become conscious of this Highest Ancestor's Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching. The teachings uttered by the rest of those Ancestors of the Buddha are as meaningful as the sizzling sounds a cold bowl makes when hot water is poured into it. Even so, I dare to put it to you, what ultimately is the place that is without cold or heat? Do you understand?¹ A pair of kingfishers come to roost in the Jeweled Mansion, whereas the mandarin drake and his mate are allied with the Golden Palace.²

This Master is one of Tōzan's direct descendants, an outstanding personage in the seat of our Ancestors. As such, he rebukes the many who, dwelling within the cave of duality, bow down to our Founding Ancestor, Great Master Tōzan, for the wrong reason.³ If the Buddha's Dharma had been Transmitted from such a position of duality, how could It possibly have ever come down to us today? Be they feral kittens or farmyard clowns, they have not yet been thoroughly trained within Tōzan's inner chambers. Folks who have never crossed the threshold into the day-to-day training with the Buddha's Dharma have erroneously asserted that Tōzan came in contact with people by applying such things as a dualistic five positions. This is barbarous and irresponsible talk, which you should not pay attention to. You should just thoroughly explore through your training that this superior Ancestor of yours was, by all means, in possession of the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching.



Meditation Master Wanshi Shōgaku of Mount Tendō in Chingyüan Prefecture was a Dharma heir of Abbot Tanka Shijun. He once said:

When we discuss this matter which my Master Tanka has brought up, it is just like the two of us playing a game of *Go*. If you do not respond according to the move I made, I will have caught you off guard. If you experience that this is what has happened, you will

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1. In accord with traditional Zen interpretations, these two questions could also be rendered as, "The 'What' is ultimately the place that is without cold or heat. Do you get It?"
 2. The pairs of birds—one male, one female—are a metaphor for the opposites, in the present case cold and hot. They come to rest in That Place which is beyond the opposites, and which is 'experienced' by kingfishers as a jeweled mansion and by ducks as a golden palace.
 3. That is, they do not grasp the true significance of Tōzan's teaching on the *Five Positions*, which ultimately transcends the duality of the transient and the Absolute.

be able to grasp Tōzan's intention right off. I cannot help but add the following comment in verse:

*When he looked inside himself, there was no cold or hot,
For, in an instant, the vast ocean had dried up to its very last
drop.
I say that I can catch the Great Turtle by just picking It up,⁴
But I can't help laughing as you go fishing for It in the sand.*

For the moment, let's say that there is a game of *Go*. Well, how about these two players? If we call it 'a two-person game of *Go*', there could be an eight-stone handicap. If there is an eight-stone handicap, it would hardly be a game of *Go*, would it? But if I were to describe it, it would be something like the following: the game of *Go* is simply a player and his opponent encountering each other. Be that as it may, you should keep in mind Wanshi's statement, "If you do not respond according to the move I made," focusing on it single-mindedly and, while cloaking yourself in it, make a thorough exploration of it. His saying "If you do not respond according to the move I made" is equivalent to his saying "You can never be me." Do not pass over his saying, "I will have caught you off guard." Within mud, there is the mud. The one who walks in it washes his feet, and also washes his chinstrap.⁵ Within a pearl, there is the Pearl. When It is radiant, It illumines both oneself and others.



Meditation Master Kassan Engo was a Dharma heir of Meditation Master Goso Hōen. He once said in verse:

*The bowl sets the pearl to rolling and the pearl rolls in
the bowl:
The transitory within the Absolute and the Absolute
within the transitory.⁶
The antelope holds onto a tree branch by its horns,
thereby leaving no trace.
When the hunting dogs circle the forest, uncertain, they
seek it in vain.⁷*

4. The Great Turtle is a metaphor for Buddha Nature.

5. That is, when you go through the mud of training to spiritually aid others, you do not stop at your ankles but go all the way up to your chin.

6. These two assertions are the first two of the five positions.

The expression here, “the bowl sets the pearl to rolling,” is unprecedented and incomparable. It has rarely been heard in past or present. Hitherto, people have merely spoken as if the pearl rolling around in the bowl were something unceasing. The antelope is now using his horns to hang onto Emptiness, and the Forest is now circling the hunting dogs.



Meditation Master Setchō Jukēn of Shishō Monastery in Keigen City was a Dharma heir of Venerable Abbot Chimon Kōso. He once said in verse:

*The dangling of the Master's hands, on the contrary, is
like a veritable cliff ten thousand feet high.
Why do the transitory and the Absolute necessarily need
to be offered a fixed place?
When the bright moon illumines the ancient palace of
lapis lazuli,
The keen black hound, in eager pursuit, vainly bounds up
its stairs.⁸*

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7. It is said that when the *reiyō* (C. *ling-yang*), a type of antelope, sleeps at night, it uses its horns to hoist itself up onto a tree branch. By keeping its legs above the ground, it leaves no trace of its whereabouts, so that hunting dogs cannot find it. This metaphor is used in Chinese Zen to describe someone who has dropped off body and mind, and thereby leaves no trace of an egocentric self for ‘hunting dogs’ to attack.
 8. ‘Dangling hands’ refers to an ancient Chinese practice of raising children without using physical coercion. In Zen, it was used to refer to a Master’s approach to training a disciple. Despite the seeming gentleness, it ultimately leads to the disciple ending up at the top of a high cliff, from which he needs to take responsibility for his actions and to step off in full faith. When taking such an action, he is no longer in the position of guest looking up to the Master (host position), but has assumed the host position (acting as a Master acts). This resembles the shift in the *Five Positions* from the perspective of the transitory to that of the Absolute. This is possible because the positioning of Master and disciple is not absolutely fixed.

Until this shift takes place, the disciple is like a *kanro* (C. *han-lu*), a type of black hunting dog associated with a small state in China named Han that flourished during the era of the Warring States (440-221 BCE). This highly intelligent dog was used to hunt down rabbits. In the present poem, the last two lines could be paraphrased as the following: When Buddha Nature shines forth like the full moon, it illumines all transitory things. A disciple, one who is as keen as a hunting dog, may attempt to pursue the Buddha Nature, but becomes

Setchō Jukēn was a third generation Dharma heir of Ummon. He could be described as a skin bag* who knew the full satisfaction of having awakened. In saying “The dangling of the Master’s hands, on the contrary, is like a veritable cliff ten thousand feet high,” he reveals an extraordinarily wondrous standard. Even so, dangling hands may not necessarily be as he describes. The present account of the monk asking Tōzan what he was pointing to is not necessarily about hands dangling or hands not dangling or about renouncing the world or not renouncing the world. Even less does it make use of expressions about the transitory and the Absolute. It is as though people could not lay a hand on this story without making use of the perspective of the transitory and the Absolute. It is like their not having been led by the nose to pay a visit to their Master to ask for instruction and, consequently, they do not arrive at the border of our Founding Ancestor’s domain. They therefore fail to catch sight of the great ones of the Buddha Dharma in our monastic family. What is more, they should gather up their straw sandals and go pay visits to other Masters. And they should stop going around slandering the Buddha Dharma of our Founding Ancestor by saying that It is limited to the five positions of the Absolute and the transitory.



Meditation Master Chōrei Shutaku of Tennei Monastery in the Eastern Capital once said in verse:

*Within the relative, there is the Absolute; within the
Absolute, the transitory,
As centuries by the thousands have drifted by within the
human realm.
How many times have I desired to go back, yet have not
been able to turn back time.
Before my gate, as of old, how luxuriant the weeds!*

Though he also gave full expression to the transitory and the Absolute, nevertheless he has picked up on something. Without denying that he has picked up on something, what is It that exists within the transitory?

confused and mistakes the illumined palace of lapis lazuli (the transitory) for what is Real (the Absolute, represented by the Moon) and vainly chases after that.



Abbot Busshō Hōtai of Mount Daii in Tanchou Province was a Dharma heir of Engo. He once said in verse:

*For my sake as a monk, you, Tōzan, showed me the place
beyond cold and hot,
And once again a dead tree brought forth a blossom.
People who scratch a mark on their boat in order to
locate their sword are laughable indeed!⁹
To this very day they are still among the cold ashes.*

This expression of his has a bit of the ability to activate one's spiritual question and to pierce right through it.



Meditation Master Tandō Bunjun of Rokutan once said in verse:

*At times of heat, you gave yourself up to heat and, at
times of cold, you gave yourself up to cold.
You did not involve yourself with the whys and
wherefores of cold and heat.
Having done the practice until you saw what the whole
wide world really is and remembering what
worldly matters really are,
Your head, my dear Master Tōzan, was crowned with a
boar's-hide cap.¹⁰*

So, right now, let me ask, what for heaven's sake does he mean by not involving himself? Quickly say! Quickly spit it out!

9. An allusion to a story in the Chinese classic, *Spring and Autumn Chronicles*, from which the title of this discourse derives. A man once lost his sword while sailing down a river. He made a scratch on the side of his boat to mark the spot where the sword fell overboard. Despite his efforts to retrieve the sword by looking for it beneath the place where he had scratched, he failed to find it, as the boat had drifted downstream.

10. 'Master', here, refers to someone who is beyond 'heat and cold', someone who is at one with True Nature. 'The boar's-hide cap' refers to that which is both hot and cold, since it keeps the head warm when the weather is cold. The transitory heat and cold simply ride above his True Nature.



Meditation Master Kazan Shujun of Huchou Province was a Dharma heir of Zen Master Taihei Bukkan Egon. He once said in verse:

*The place beyond cold and hot is what Tōzan spoke of,
But ever so many meditators wander off from there.
When it is cold, I just huddle by the fire; when it is hot, I
take advantage of whatever is cool.
All my life, I have been able to escape, warding off both
cold and heat.*

Although this Master is a Dharma grandson of Meditation Master Goso Hōen, his words are like those of a small child. Even so, his saying “All my life, I have been able to escape, warding off both cold and heat” shows promise of his becoming an excellent Master later on. His saying ‘all my life’ means ‘with my whole being’ and ‘warding off both cold and heat’ means ‘dropping off body and mind’.

Speaking more generally, even though there have been monastics from ever so many districts and ever so many generations who have beat their drum on both sides, making offerings of eulogies to the ancients, they have not yet caught even a glimpse of what our Founding Ancestor Tōzan was talking about. Were you to ask why, it is because they have not known what ‘cold’ and ‘hot’ mean in the everyday life of an Ancestor of the Buddha. So indeed, they vainly speak of huddling by the fire and of taking advantage of whatever is cool. The more the pity that you, Shujun, even though living amidst venerable senior monks, did not hearken to what ‘cold’ and ‘heat’ meant. How regrettable that what our Ancestral Master Tōzan said has been abandoned! When we truly know the forms of this ‘cold’ and ‘hot’, and have passed through periods of ‘cold’ and ‘hot’, and have continually made use of ‘cold’ and ‘hot’, it is then that we should make eulogies to the ancients and make commentaries on what our Founding Ancestor Tōzan’s words were pointing to for our sakes. Those who have not gone this far cannot even compare with those who know their own shortcomings. Even the worldly are aware of the sun and moon and rely upon the myriad things that arise. And they distinguish among themselves between those who are saintly and those who are wise, as well as between those who are gentle folk and those who are foolish people. Do not make a mistake and mix up the ‘cold and hot’ that Buddhas speak of with the ‘cold and hot’ of foolish people. You need simply to be diligent in your practice forthwith.

Delivered to the assembly a second time in the second year of the Kangen era (1244), whilst deep in the mountains of Echizen Province.

I was expounding to the monks the teaching of revolving the Buddhist “Kirin Sutra” when one encounters a Buddha.¹¹ As an Ancestral Master once said, “Although there may be many in the assembly who have sprouted a horn, one kirin will suffice.”¹²

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11. The *Kirin Sutra* is an alternative name for the *Spring and Autumn Chronicles*, the only work directly attributed to Confucius. Dōgen may be expounding what he considers to be a Buddhist equivalent of that text. The *kirin* (C. *ch’i-lin*) is a fabulous, auspicious beast, considered to be the Far East equivalent of a unicorn. It has the body of a deer, the tail of an ox, the hooves of a horse, and one fleshy horn, with the hair on its back of varied colors and yellow hair on its stomach. It is a metaphor for a Dharma heir who is highly skilled in innumerable means to help others to realize the Truth.
 12. This saying by Seigen Gyōshi means that it is fine to have many extraordinary disciples, but having just one Dharma heir will suffice.