

On Making Venerative Offerings to Buddhas

(Kuyō Shobutsu)

Translator's Introduction: The key term in this discourse is *kuyō*, translated in the title as 'making venerative offerings', and shortened in the text itself to 'making offerings' or some variation thereof. It refers not only to selflessly giving alms and expressing gratitude to the Buddhas but also to showing respect for the sacred objects associated with Them, such as the memorial monuments called stupas, which also serve as reliquaries for sacred relics. What is important is the attitude of mind behind the offering, and, when it is free of any tinge of self, the merit that returns to the giver thereby is, as Dōgen says, beyond measure.

The original text, which is still in draft stage, is one of twelve that Dōgen had not been able to complete before his death. It contains many excerpts, particularly from writings attributed to Nāgārjuna.

The Buddha once said the following in verse:

*If there were no past ages,
There could not have been Buddhas in the past.
If there were no Buddhas in the past,
There could be no leaving home to accept the full
Precepts.*

Clearly you need to keep in mind that Buddhas invariably exist in the three temporal worlds. When it comes to the Buddhas of the past, do not assert that They had a beginning, and do not assert that They had no beginning. If you erroneously impose upon Them Their having or not having a beginning and an end, this is not something that you have learned from the Buddha's Teaching. Those who make offerings to Buddhas invariably become Buddhas, just as do those who leave home life behind and faithfully follow their Master. They become Buddhas due to the merit of their making offerings to Buddha. How could people who have never made alms offerings to even one Buddha ever become Buddhas themselves, since they lack a cause for becoming a Buddha?

In the *Scriptural Collection of the Past Deeds of the Buddha*, it says the following:

The Buddha once told Moggallana, "I recall from My past having planted good roots in places where there were immeasurable,

unbounded World-honored Ones and having ultimately sought supreme, fully perfected enlightenment.

“O Moggallana, I recall from My past having taken on the body of a saintly Wheel-turning Lord* and having encountered thirty billion Buddhas, all sharing the same name of Shakya. I, the Tathagata, along with My assembly of disciples, out of our esteem for Them, sustained Them by respectfully making offerings to Them of the four necessities: namely, shelter, clothing, food, and medicine. At that time, those Buddhas did not foretell My future by saying, ‘You will realize supreme, fully perfected enlightenment and become one who understands the ways of the world, who is a teacher for ordinary people as well as those in lofty positions, and who is the World-honored One, for at some future time You will indeed be able to realize True Wisdom.’

“O Moggallana, I recall from My past having taken on the body of a saintly Wheel-turning Lord and having encountered eight billion Buddhas, all sharing the same name of Dipankara, the One Who Sets the Lamplight Ablaze. I, the Tathagata, along with My assembly of disciples, out of our esteem for Them, sustained Them by respectfully making offerings to Them of the four necessities: namely, shelter, clothing, food, and medicine, along with banners and canopies, flowers and incense. At that time those Buddhas did not foretell My future, saying, ‘You will realize supreme, fully perfected enlightenment and become one who understands the ways of the world, who is a teacher for ordinary people as well as those in lofty positions, and who is the World-honored One.’

“O Moggallana, I recall from My past having taken on the body of a saintly Wheel-turning Lord and having encountered three billion Buddhas, all sharing the same name of the One Who Nourishes. I, the Tathagata, along with My assembly of disciples, made offerings to Them, completely supplying Them with the four necessities. At that time, those Buddhas did not foretell My future, saying, ‘You will certainly become a Buddha.’”

In addition, He made offerings to countless other Buddhas. While in the body of a saintly Wheel-turning Lord, He surely would have ruled over the four continents

and his supplies for making offerings to Buddhas must truly have been abundant.¹ If He was a great, saintly Wheel-turning Lord, He would have been lord over a three-thousandfold world. His offerings to Buddhas at that time were beyond the estimation of ordinary people today. Even if the Buddha were to explain it to them, it would be difficult for them to comprehend.

In the eighth chapter, “Pure View”, of the *Scripture That Is the Buddha’s Treasure House*, it says the following:

The Buddha once told Shariputra, “I recall from My past, when I was chasing after supreme, fully perfected enlightenment, I encountered thirty billion Buddhas, all sharing the same name of Shakyamuni. I then became a saintly Wheel-turning Lord and, for the purpose of seeking after supreme, fully perfected enlightenment, I made offerings of shelter, clothing, food, and medicine to all of Them and to Their disciples. Even so, those Buddhas did not foretell My future, saying, ‘You will certainly realize Buddhahood in some future lifetime.’ And why was that? Because My giving had an ulterior motive.²

“O Shariputra, I recall from My past that I was able to encounter eight thousand Buddhas, all of whom were called One of Constant Radiance. I then became a saintly Wheel-turning Lord and, for the purpose of seeking after supreme, fully perfected enlightenment, I made offerings of shelter, clothing, food, and medicine to all of Them and to Their disciples. Even so, those Buddhas did not foretell My future, saying, ‘You will certainly realize Buddhahood in some future lifetime.’ And why was that? Because My giving had an ulterior motive.

“O Shariputra, I recall from My past that I encountered sixty thousand Buddhas all of whom were called One Who Is the Brightness of the Light. I then became a saintly Wheel-turning Lord and, for the purpose of seeking after supreme, fully perfected enlightenment, I made offerings of shelter, clothing, food, and medicine to all of Them and to Their disciples. Even so, those

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1. The four continents refer to the four regions that lay around the spiritual Mount Sumeru.
 2. Namely, seeking to ‘get’ supreme enlightenment, as if it were something to be purchased by doing virtuous deeds. Also, there is no mention in the quotations in this discourse that He sought enlightenment for the sake of helping others to realize the Truth.

Buddhas did not foretell My future, saying, ‘You will certainly realize Buddhahood in some future lifetime.’ And why was that? Because my giving had an ulterior motive.

“O Shariputra, I recall from My past My encountering three billion Buddhas, all of whom were called One who Nourishes. I then became a saintly Wheel-turning Lord and made offerings of the four necessities to all of Them, but none foretold My future because My giving alms had an ulterior motive.

“O Shariputra, I recall from My past a time when I succeeded in encountering eighteen thousand Buddhas, all of whom were called One Who Is a Lord of the Mountain and whose eon was called the Upper Eight. Within this assembly of eighteen thousand Buddhas, all of us shaved our head, donned a kesa,* and studied the practice of supreme, fully perfected enlightenment, but none foretold My future Buddhahood because of My having an ulterior motive.

“O Shariputra, I recall from My past My being able to meet five hundred Buddhas, all of whom were called One Who Is Atop the Lotus Blossom. I then became a saintly Wheel-turning Lord and made alms offerings to all of Them and to Their disciples, but none foretold My future Buddhahood because I had an ulterior motive.

“O Shariputra, I recall from My past having had the opportunity to meet five hundred Buddhas, all of whom were called One Whose Virtue Is Majestic. Although I gave alms to one and all, none forecast My becoming a Buddha because of My having an ulterior motive.

“O Shariputra, I recall from My past My being able to meet two thousand Buddhas, all of whom were called Kaundinya. I then became a saintly Wheel-turning Lord for the sake of Them all, giving alms to one and all, but none foretold My becoming a Buddha because of My having an ulterior motive.

“O Shariputra, I recall from My past My encountering nine thousand Buddhas, all of whom were called Kashō. I supplied Their assembly of Buddhas and disciples with alms in the form of the four necessities, but none predicted My future Buddhahood because of My offering having an ulterior motive.

“O Shariputra, I recall from My past that there was a period of ten thousand eons, during which no Buddha emerged. At that time, there were ninety thousand pratyekabuddhas* during the first five hundred eons. Throughout the whole of My lifetimes, I made alms offerings of clothes, food, bedding, and medicine to all of Them,

without exception, while showing My respect by praising Them. During the next five hundred eons, I again made alms offerings of the four necessities to all of Them, without exception, while showing My respect by praising Them.

“O Shariputra, when these thousands of eons had completely passed, there were no more pratyekabuddhas. I then died in Jambudvipa* and was reborn in the Brahma Heaven, becoming its great Lord Brahma.³ Tossing about like this for five hundred eons, I was then born again in the Brahma Heaven, being reborn as its great Lord Brahma rather than being reborn in Jambudvipa. When these five hundred eons had completely passed, I was reborn down in Jambudvipa, over which I governed. When My life came to an end, I was reborn in the celestial world of the Celestial Guardian Rulers of the Four Quarters. When My life came to an end there, I was reborn as Lord Indra in the Trayastrimsha Heaven with the name Shakrendra.⁴ Rolling on in this manner, I was reborn in Jambudvipa after completing five hundred eons and then reborn in the Brahma Heaven for five hundred eons, becoming its great Lord Brahma.

“O Shariputra, for nine thousand eons only once was I reborn in Jambudvipa, and for another nine thousand eons I was reborn only in celestial worlds. At the time of the conflagration that ends an eon, I was reborn in the celestial world called Luminous Sound. When the world was completely recreated, I was again reborn in the Brahma Heaven. For nine thousand eons I was not reborn within the world of humans.

“O Shariputra, during these nine thousand eons, there were no Buddhas or pratyekabuddhas. Human beings who fell into evil ways were many indeed!

“O Shariputra, when these ten thousand eons had come to an end, there was a Buddha who emerged in the world called the Tathagata Who Guards the Universe, the Arhat,* the One Who Is Fully Enlightened, the One Possessed of Wise Discernment Who Travels the Way, the One Who Has Attained Emancipation, the One Who Knows the Ways of the World, the Unsurpassed One, the Trainer of Ordinary

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3. The Brahma Heaven is the lowest of the four meditation heavens in the world of form. Its inhabitants are said to be without sexual desire.
 4. The Trayastrimsha Heaven is the second of the six heavens in the world of desire.

People and Those in Lofty Positions, the Awakened World-honored One. At that time, when My life came to an end in that Brahma Heaven, I was reborn in Jambudvīpa, where I became a great saintly Wheel-turning Lord by the name of the Lord of the Celestial Community and had a life span of ninety thousand years by human reckoning. I spent the whole of that lifetime making all manner of pleasant offerings to the Buddha and ninety thousand of His monks, while remaining intent upon chasing after supreme, fully perfected enlightenment during these ninety thousand years. The Buddha Who Guards the Universe also did not predict My future Buddhahood. And why? Because at that time I was not able to thoroughly penetrate what the True Nature of all thoughts and things is, and therefore indulged in the viewpoint of having a personal self with its ulterior motive.

“O Shariputra, during this eon, there were a hundred Buddhas who had left home life behind, each having a different name. At that time, I became a saintly Wheel-turning Lord for each of Them and spent My entire life making alms offerings to Them, along with Their disciples, with the intent of pursuing supreme, fully perfected enlightenment. However, because of My having an ulterior motive, those Buddhas likewise did not foretell My realizing Buddhahood.

“O Shariputra, I recall from My past My having been able to encounter a thousand Buddhas during seven hundred eons of indeterminate length, all of whom were called One Who Is as the Golden Sands of the River Jambu. During the whole of that life, I made offerings to Them of the four necessities, and still none foretold My realizing Buddhahood because of My having an ulterior motive.

“O Shariputra, I recall from My past My having been able to encounter six hundred twenty myriad Buddhas during those great seven hundred eons of indeterminate length, all of whom were called One Who Sees the True Form of All Things. At that time, I became a saintly Wheel-turning Lord and throughout My life made all manner of pleasant alms offerings both to Them and to Their disciples, but again, none foretold My future Buddhahood because I had an ulterior motive.

“O Shariputra, I recall from My past My having been able to encounter eighty-four Buddhas during those great seven hundred eons of indeterminate length, all of whom were called One of Imperial Form. At that time, I became a saintly Wheel-turning Lord and throughout My life made all manner of pleasant alms offerings both to

Them and to Their disciples, but none foretold My future Buddhahood because I had an ulterior motive.

“O Shariputra, I recall from My past My having been able to encounter fifteen Buddhas during those great seven hundred eons of indeterminate length, all of whom were called One Who Is as Radiant as the Sun. At that time, I became a saintly Wheel-turning Lord and through my life made all manner of pleasant alms offerings both to Them and to Their disciples, but none foretold My future Buddhahood because I had an ulterior motive.

“O Shariputra I recall from My past My having been able to encounter sixty-two Buddhas during those great seven hundred eons of indeterminate length, all of whom were called One Whose Tranquility Is Spiritually Good. At that time, I became a saintly Wheel-turning Lord and throughout my life made all manner of pleasant alms offerings both to Them and to Their disciples, but none foretold My future Buddhahood, because I had an ulterior motive.

“I tossed about like this until I met Dipankara, the Buddha Whose Radiance Is Constant, whereupon I was immediately able to realize the non-arising of all thoughts and things. Because of this, Dipankara Buddha foretold My future Buddhahood, saying ‘In the future, after the present eon has passed, You will be able to realize Buddhahood, and You will be called Shakyamuni the Tathagata, the Arhat, the One Who Is Fully Enlightened, the One Possessed of Wise Discernment Who Travels the Way, the One Who Has Attained Emancipation, the One Who Knows the Ways of the World, the Unsurpassed One, the Trainer of Beings High and Low, the Awakened World-honored One.’”

From His initial encounter with thirty billion Shakyamuni Buddhas up to His meeting the Tathagata Dipankara, He constantly served as a saintly Wheel-turning Lord, spending His whole life offering Them alms. Wheel-turning Lords may well live for more than eighty thousand years. His was an alms offering of all manner of pleasant things during each lifetime of some eighty or ninety thousand years. The one He called Dipankara, the Buddha Whose Radiance Is Constant, is the one we know as Dipankara, the Buddha Who Sets the Lamplight Ablaze. In both Scriptures, the Buddha-to-be encountered thirty billion Shakyamuni Buddhas. What is voiced in the passages from the *Scriptural Collection of the Past Deeds of the Buddha* and from the *Scripture That Is the Buddha's Treasure House* is essentially the same.



During His first immeasurable eon, Shakya Bodhisattva* encountered seventy-five thousand Buddhas whom He served and to whom He gave venerative offerings. The first was called Shakyamuni, and the last was one called Ratnashikhin, the One Whose Topknot Contains the Jewel. In His second immeasurable eon, He encountered seventy-six thousand Buddhas whom He served and to whom He gave venerative offerings. The first one was Ratnashikhin, the One Whose Topknot Contains the Jewel, and the last was one called Dipankara, the One Who Sets the Lamplight Ablaze. In His third immeasurable eon, He encountered seventy-seven thousand Buddhas whom He served and to whom He gave venerative offerings. The first one was Dipankara, the One Who Sets the Lamplight Ablaze, and the last was one called Bibashi, He Whose Reflections Are Excellent.⁵ During the ninety-one eons while He was exploring the deeds done in the past for which He was receiving karmic* effects, He encountered the Six Buddhas, whom He served and to whom He gave venerative offerings. The first of the six was Bibashi Buddha and the last was one called Kashō Buddha.

Generally speaking, in making offerings to Buddhas during the three great eons of indeterminate length, He did not begrudge Them anything, beginning with His very life and including such things as His kingdom and cities, His wife and children, His seven royal treasures, and His male and female servants.⁶ This is something that goes beyond the ken of ordinary people. Sometimes He made Them offerings of golden millet piled high in silver bowls. At other times He made Them offerings of the Seven Treasures* piled high in gold and silver bowls. And sometimes He made offerings of sweet beans, or of flowers taken from the water and the land, or of sandalwood, aloes, and other types of incense. And sometimes He made offerings to Dipankara Buddha of five-stemmed blue lotus flowers bought at the price of five hundred gold pieces. He even made an offering to Dipankara Buddha of His deerskin kesa.

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5. Bibashi Buddha is the first of the Seven Buddhas, of whom Shakyamuni Buddha is the seventh.
 6. The seven royal treasures are the Golden Wheel, wise elephants, swift horses, the divine Pearl, able ministers, women as precious as jewels, and loyal generals.

When it comes to offerings for Buddhas, as a rule you need not make offerings of what you think must surely be important to Them, just hasten to make your offerings while you are still alive, without letting any time—day or night—pass by in vain. Of what value is gold or silver to a Buddha? Of what value are incense and flowers to a Buddha? Even so, Their accepting what is offered is due to Their great wisdom and great compassion in helping us human beings to increase our merit.



In the twenty-second fascicle of the *Great Scripture on the Buddha's Parinirvana*, it says the following:

The Buddha once said, “O My good disciples, I recall that immeasurable, unbounded eons ago, when the world at that time was said to be corrupt, there was a World-honored Buddha who was called the Tathagata, the Arhat, the One Who Is Fully Enlightened, the One Possessed of Wise Discernment Who Travels the Way, the One Who Has Attained Emancipation, the One Who Knows the Ways of the World, the Unsurpassed One, the Trainer of Beings High and Low, the Awakened World-honored One. For the sake of His assembly, He was going to give voice to a great Teaching on His passing, a Teaching like this present one. At that time, I turned away from where My friends were in order to hear what that Enlightened One was about to say to His assembly concerning His Great Passing. Having heard of this topic, My heart was filled with joy and I desired to supply Him with an alms offering, but I was so poor that I had no possessions to give Him. Although I wanted to offer My own body for sale, unfortunately it did not sell, so I decided to return home. On My way back home, I met a man on the road, and I asked him, ‘I am desirous of offering my body for sale. Could you not buy it?’ The man replied, ‘The task that I have at my home is beyond what anyone could endure. But if you were able to do it, I would indeed buy it.’ Accordingly, I asked him, ‘What task is it that no one could endure to do?’ The man, seeing My interest, replied, ‘I have a dreadful illness, for which a good physician has prescribed that I must take two or three servings of human flesh a day. If you, good sir, could supply me with two or three servings of your flesh daily, I would by all means provide you with five gold coins.’ When I had heard this, a joy arose in My heart. I then told him, ‘If you will supply me with the coins and allow me seven days to wind up my affairs, I will return to you.’ The man responded, ‘Seven

days won't do. If you will do as I have asked, I can allow you one day.'

"O my good disciples, I then took those coins and returned to where the Buddha was and bowed before Him, My forehead touching His feet. I then took all that I had received and gave it to Him as an alms offering. After that, I listened to His Teaching with an earnest heart. But at the time I was dull-witted, so even though I heard His Teaching, I was only able to retain the following stanza:

*The Tathagata awoke to what nirvana is
And cut Himself free from birth and death forever.
If you listen to this with a sincere heart,
You will ever know joy beyond measure.*

"Having taken this verse in, I forthwith returned to the sick man's house.

"O My good disciples, after My return I gave the man two or three pieces of My flesh daily, but because of the karmic effect of My reciting that verse, I experienced no pain. Day after day, without ceasing, I completed a whole month.

"O My good disciples, due to the karmic effect of this, the man recovered from his illness and My body also returned to normal, leaving no wounds or scars behind. At that time, seeing the merit that My body had been so fully supplied with, I gave rise to the intention to seek supreme, fully perfected enlightenment, for if the strength of one of His verses was like this, how much more so were I to fully accept, preserve, and recite His whole Scripture! Seeing that this Scripture had such profit as this only strengthened My resolve, and I vowed that if I were able to realize Buddhahood at a future time, I would take the name of Shakyamuni.

"O My good disciples, because of the strength from the karmic effects of this one verse, I have given voice to the whole Scripture today for the sake of ordinary people as well as those in lofty positions within this great assembly.

"O My good disciples, because of these karmic effects you should know that this *Great Scripture on the Buddha's Parinirvana* is wondrous beyond comprehension, creating immeasurable, boundless merit. Accordingly, this Scripture is the Treasure House of Fully Awakened Tathagatas, of That which is the Profoundly Mysterious."

The bodhisattva who would sell his own body at that time was a cause from the past for the arising of our present-day Shakyamuni Buddha. When we search through other Scriptures, we learn that at the very beginning of the first eon of indeterminate length, there was a time when He made venerative offerings to a previous Shakyamuni Buddha. At that time, He was a tiler who went by the name of He Who Is a Great Radiance. When He gave alms to the previous Shakyamuni Buddha, along with His disciples, He made three kinds of offerings: namely, meditation cushions, sweetened water, and candles. At that time, He made a vow that His nationality, name, life, and disciples would be one and the same with those of this previous Shakyamuni Buddha.

The vow that He made has already been fulfilled today. Thus, when you consider making an offering to the Buddha, do not say that your body is insufficient or that your home is devoid of any value. This account of someone selling his own body in order to make an offering to the Buddhas is genuine Teaching by our present-day Great Master, the Venerable Shakyamuni. Who would not take delight in it? In this story, the Buddha describes someone who would cut off three pieces of his own bodily flesh day after day. Even if that person had been the sick man's good spiritual friend, it is not something that any friend could bear to do. Even so, aided by his profound desire to give alms to a Buddha, he performed the good deeds just described. We are now able to hear the True Teaching of the Tathagata because He was able to dispense with His fleshly body in ancient times. The four lines of the present stanza are beyond anything that can be bought with five gold coins. During your three immeasurable great hundred eons, do not forget your receiving and discarding of lives. Truly, there will be merit that will boggle the mind in your awakening to the Radiance, just as all the Buddhas have done. The disciples who inherit the Dharma should, in all humility, receive It upon the crown of their head and recite It from memory. The Tathagata has already stated that the power of a single verse can be like this, so immensely profound It is.



In the “Expedient Means” chapter of the *Lotus Scripture*, there is the following verse:

*If people at stupas and shrines,
And before bejeweled statues and their painted forms
Make offerings of flowers and incense, banners and
canopies,
And all with a reverent heart,*

*Or have others make music
 By beating drums, blowing horns and conches,
 Playing panpipes and flutes, lutes and lyres,
 As well as harps and cymbals and gongs,
 And make all such wondrous sounds as these
 To be their offering,
 Or if, with a heart filled with joy,
 They sing the praises of the Buddha's merit,
 Though it be but a single small sound,
 All will realize the Buddha's Way.
 Even if people with a scattered mind
 Should make an offering to His painted form,
 Though it be but a single flower's bloom,
 They will, at length, meet Buddhas beyond count.
 Or if they bow in deepest respect,
 Or simply make gasshō*
 Though it be with the raising of a single hand
 Or a slight nod of the head,
 And thereby make their offering to a pictured Saintly
 One,
 They too, at length, will meet Buddhas beyond count.
 And, personally realizing the Supreme Way,
 They will help countless beings reach the Other Shore.*

This is the very Countenance of the Buddhas in the three temporal worlds. It is Their very Eye, so you should strive with all diligence to meet those of wise discernment and emulate them. Do not let time vainly pass by. As Great Master Sekitō Kisen once said, “Do not waste time.” Spiritually beneficial actions like these produce Buddhahood in every case and will do so in the past, present, and future. There cannot be two ways, or three ways.⁷ Realizing the fruits of Buddhahood is due to one's making offerings to Buddhas.



Our Ancestral Master Nāgārjuna once said the following in verse:

*In our seeking the fruits of Buddhahood,
 To extol a single verse,*

7. That is, there is only one way to realize Buddhahood in any time period.

*To recite a single 'Homage',
To burn a single pinch of incense,
To offer a single flower,
Even such small deeds as these,
Without fail, will enable us to realize Buddhahood.*

Even though this is what our Ancestral Master Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva put forth for himself, nevertheless we should dedicate our life to it. And what is more, it is something that our Great Master Shakyamuni Buddha expressed, and which our Ancestral Master Nāgārjuna expressed and accurately Transmitted. What can be more wonderful than our being so fortunate as to obtain something so precious, as we now climb the Treasured Mountain of the Buddha's Way and enter the Treasured Ocean of the Buddha's Way?⁸ Surely it must be due to the power from our making offerings to the Buddha over vast eons. You must not doubt that you will inevitably realize Buddhahood, for it is a foregone conclusion. It is precisely what the Buddha gave voice to.



Furthermore, there are instances when a small cause produces great fruit and a small karmic condition produces great recompense. In our pursuit of the Buddha's Way, if we extol a single verse, recite 'Homage to the Buddha' one time, or burn a single pinch of incense, without fail, we will be able to realize Buddhahood. And what is more, if, upon hearing the Teaching, we really know the True Form of all thoughts and things, which is beyond birth and beyond death, beyond non-arising and beyond non-perishing, then we will not likely lose sight of whatever karmic causes or conditions we are involved with.

It is clear from this passage that what the World-honored One voiced was authentically Transmitted to our Ancestral Master Nāgārjuna. His golden words, which are faithful to the Truth, are endowed with what he had inherited through the genuine Transmission. Even though they are indeed what our Ancestral Master Nāgārjuna voiced, they should not be judged by comparing them with what other Masters have taught. What can be a greater source of joy than our being able to encounter the genuine Transmission that has spread abroad what the World-

8. 'The Treasured Mountain' is an allusion to Mount Sumeru, which is associated with doing our training. 'The Treasured Ocean' is an allusion to the merit realized through doing that training.

honored One was pointing us to? So, do not compare these saintly Teachings with the arbitrary and meaningless preachings of ordinary teachers in China.



Our Ancestral Master Nāgārjuna once said, “Furthermore, it follows that, because Buddhas revere the Dharma, They make a venerative offering to the Teaching and take the Dharma as Their Master. And why is this? Because all Buddhas in the three temporal worlds make the True Form of all thoughts and things Their Master.”

Someone then asked, “Why do They not make offerings to the Teaching that is within Their own being, but only make offerings to the Teaching in others?”

Nāgārjuna replied, “To make such offerings would be to follow worldly ways. If monks are desirous of showing veneration to the Treasure of Teaching, they do not make such an offering to the Teaching within their own being, but make it to others who are preserving the Teaching, who know the Teaching, who understand the Teaching. Buddhas are no different. Even though They have the Teaching within Their own being, still, They make venerative offerings to the Teaching in other Buddhas.”

The person then asked, “Granted that monks, like Buddhas, are not seeking for good fortune or virtue, so why do they make venerative offerings?”

Nāgārjuna replied, “The Buddha had been cultivating all manner of meritorious deeds over immeasurably long eons, always doing what was good. Even so, He did not seek any manner of recompense. He made His venerative offerings out of His reverence for meritorious deeds.

“For instance, when the Buddha was alive, there was a blind monk who, nevertheless, was able to sew. One day, his needle came unthreaded. Thereupon, he asked, ‘Is there someone who so longs for the merit from performing good deeds that he would thread this needle for me?’ At that very moment, the Buddha had just arrived where the monk was and said to him, ‘I am one who longs for the merit from performing good deeds, so I will come and thread your needle.’ This monk, upon recognizing the Buddha’s voice, immediately stood up, put on his kesa, and then prostrated himself before the Buddha’s feet, saying, ‘O Buddha, You are already filled to the brim with merit , so

why do You say that You long for more?’ The Buddha responded, ‘Though I may already be filled with merit, I profoundly recognize My debt of gratitude for that merit, the effects and recompense from good deeds done in the past, and the power of meritorious actions. My having attained preeminence among all sentient beings is due to the merit from performing good deeds, which is why I long for it.’ The Buddha, having finished His praise of meritorious actions, then gave an impromptu Dharma Teaching for the monk’s sake. Having attained the Pure Eye, this monk’s fleshly eyes were also made clear.”

I heard this story a long time ago during an evening talk in my late Master’s quarters. Later, I was able to check up on it, comparing it against the passage in the *Commentary on the Heart Scripture*. The instructive retelling by my late Master who had Transmitted the Dharma to me was clear, without anything left out. This passage is in the tenth fascicle of the *Commentary on the Heart Scripture*. It was clear from this that all Buddhas, without exception, take the True Form of all thoughts and things to be Their great Teacher. The Venerable Shakyamuni Buddha had also given witness to the eternal Truth of all Buddhas.

Taking the True Form of all thoughts and things to be one’s great Teacher means making offerings out of deep respect for the Three Treasures of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. For immeasurable, indeterminately long eons, Buddhas have amassed meritorious deeds and good spiritual roots without seeking any recompense, but simply making offerings out of reverence for meritorious actions. Having arrived at the state of wise discernment, which is the fruition of Buddhahood, They are fond of doing small virtuous acts, such as threading a needle for a blind monk. If you desire to clarify what the meritorious actions are of someone who brought Buddhahood to fruition, the present story is certainly a precise account of it.

Therefore, meritorious actions that are based on both the wise discernment that is a fruit of Buddhahood and on the underlying principle of what the True Form of all thoughts and things is, are not something akin to what ordinary, everyday people in the world today would fancy them to be. What ordinary people think today is that the True Form of all thoughts and things refers to the manufacturing of evil, and that the wise discernment which is the fruition of Buddhahood simply means having an ulterior motive. False views like these, even though they are known to have existed for eighty thousand eons, have never been

free of the eternalist view of past eons or of the nihilistic view of future eons.⁹ So how could they possibly fully realize that the True Form of all thoughts and things is something that each and every Buddha has penetrated through and through? The reason for this is that each Buddha and every Buddha has thoroughly explored the True Form of all thoughts and things.



Generally speaking, there are ten types of venerative offerings:¹⁰

First, making a venerative offering to the Buddha's Person;

Second, making a venerative offering to the shrine attached to His stupa;¹¹

Third, making a venerative offering to a stupa, a shrine, or whatever else represents the body of that Buddha;

Fourth, making a venerative offering to that Buddha where there is no such representation;

Fifth, making a venerative offering by oneself;

Sixth, urging others to make venerative offerings;

Seventh, making a venerative offering of goods and money to the Buddhas or to Their shrines;

Eighth, making a venerative offering with a devout mind;

Ninth, making a venerative offering with a non-attached mind;

And tenth, making a venerative offering of one's devotion to Buddhist practice.

Among these, Number 1, making a venerative offering to the Buddha's Person, is explained in the commentary as: "Providing an alms offering to the physical body of a Buddha is called making a venerative offering to the physical body of a Buddha."

Number 2, making a venerative offering to the repository of a Buddha, is called making a venerative offering to the shrine attached to His stupa. It says in

9. The eternalist view is that there is something that continues through time as an unchanging, unchangeable essence. The nihilistic view is that there is a self which comes to an end at the time of death.

10. Quoted by Dōgen from the *Writings on the Teachings of Mahayana (Daijōgi-shō)*.

11. Stupa is a Sanskrit term for a pagoda-shaped structure, which customarily contains the funeral ashes of someone who is regarded as a Buddha. The shrine, or in Sanskrit *caitya*, is a ceremonial chapel which is attached to a stupa and which customarily does not contain relics.

the *Code of Behavior for the Members of the Greater Sangha*, “That which houses relics we call a stupa, and that which contains no relics we call a shrine.” Some say that both are called a *caitya*. Also, what is called a stupa in Indic languages is also called a pagoda. Also, what is translated here as ‘shrine’ is called a *caitya* in Sanskrit, which in the *Āgama Scriptures* was pronounced ‘shicha’. But it seems to make no difference whether we call it a stupa or a shrine. Even so, as the great Tendai Meditation Master Nangaku Eshi said in his commentary, *My Humble Explanation of the Meditative State That Is a Blossoming of the Dharma*: “Wholeheartedly do we respectfully bow to the relics of the Buddhas throughout the whole universe and to Their venerable portraits, to Their caityas and to Their stupas, to Them as Tathagatas of many treasures, and to the treasured stupa that is the whole body that They have discarded.” Clearly, stupas and shrines, as well as relics and portraits, seem to be separate things.



The following account comes from the thirty-third fascicle of the *Code of Behavior for the Members of the Greater Sangha*, entitled “The Teaching Regarding Stupas”:

Once when the Buddha was wandering about while sojourning in the country of Koshala, He came upon a Brahman who was tilling the soil. Upon seeing the World-honored One passing by, he stuck his ox-goading staff into the ground as a prop and respectfully bowed to the Buddha. The World-honored One, having seen this, broke out in a smile.

His monks said to Him, “We’d really like to hear what has caused You to smile.”

Thereupon, He told His monks, “This Brahman has just paid homage to two World-honored Ones.”

The monks then asked, “Which two Buddhas do you mean?”

The Buddha then told the monks, “Under that very staff which he used when bowing to Me, there is the stupa of Kashō Buddha.”

The monks then said to the Buddha, “We pray that You will let us see the stupa of Kashō Buddha.”

The Buddha then told the monks, “You must defer to this Brahman and ask him for this plot of land, along with its clod of earth.”

The monks thereupon sought this from the Brahman. The Brahman forthwith offered it to them. The World-honored One then made the seven-jeweled stupa of Kashō Buddha appear. Its height was one yojana,* and the width of its face was half a yojana. When the Brahman saw this, he immediately said to the Buddha, “World-honored One, my family name is Kashō, and this is the stupa of our Kashō.”

At that time when the World-honored One was fashioning the stupa for Kashō Buddha at that place, the monks asked the Buddha if the World-honored One would permit them to contribute the earth that they had received from the Brahman, to which the Buddha replied that they could. He thereupon gave voice to the following poem:

*A hundred thousand loads of purest gold
Are not the equal of a single lump of soil
Used, with devoted mind,
To fashion a Buddha's stupa.*

The World-honored One then personally erected Kashō Buddha's stupa. From its square base, which was bordered on all four sides with a railing, there arose two circular terraces, with ornamental tusk-like structures coming out from the base at its four corners. From the top, there arose a tall pole adorned with banners and ringed with parasols. The Buddha said, “This is how a stupa should be constructed.” Once the setting up of the stupa was finished, the World-honored One Himself made prostrations to it out of respect for the past Buddha.

The monks then asked the Buddha. “World-honored One, may we too make prostrations to Him?”

The Buddha responded, “You may.” He then composed the following poem:

*Even hundreds of thousands of gold coins
Brought here as people's offering of alms
Do not equal the respect of someone of good
heart
Bowling before a Buddha's stupa.*

* See *Glossary*.

At that time, the local people, having heard of the World-honored One's constructing a stupa, brought incense and flowers as offerings to the World-honored One. Because the World-honored One had paid respect to a Buddha of the past, He forthwith accepted the flowers and incense and offered them to the stupa.

The monks then asked the Buddha, "May we too make offerings?" The Buddha replied, "You may." He then composed the following poem:

*Even a hundred thousand carts filled with pure gold
Brought here as an alms offering
Do not equal an offering of flowers and incense
By one of good heart.*

A great assembly then gathered like clouds. The Buddha then instructed Shariputra, "You should give voice to the Dharma for the sake of these people." Afterwards, the Buddha composed the following poem:

*Even an alms offering of pure gold
Enough to fill a hundred thousand Jambudvipas
Does not equal one offering of Dharma
That persuades others to pursue the practice and
training.*

At that time, there were those sitting in the assembly who had realized the Way. The Buddha then composed the following poem for them:

*Even an offering of pure gold
Enough to fill a hundred thousand worldly realms
Does not equal one offering of Dharma
That leads others to see the Truth.*

At that time, a Brahman of unshakable faith set forth before the stupa a food offering for the Buddha and His monks. Then King Prasenajit,¹² hearing of the World-honored One's constructing a stupa for Kashō Buddha, ordered seven hundred carts to be loaded with tiles, then coming to where the Buddha was, he bowed, touching his forehead to the Buddha's feet. He then asked the Buddha, "World-

12. The king of Koshala, who was a lay disciple of the Buddha.

honored One, I would like to enlarge this stupa. May I do so?" The Buddha replied, "You may."

The Buddha then told the great king, "In a past age, at the time of Kashō Buddha's passing away, there was a ruler named He of Good Fortune. He was desirous of constructing for Him a stupa made of the Seven Treasures, when one of his ministers said to the king, 'At some future time, there will be those who are opposed to the Dharma who will appear and will destroy this stupa, acquiring heavy wrongdoing. O Great King, I beg of you that you will simply construct it of tiles, which will then be covered in gold and silver. Even if the gold and silver are taken away, the stupa will still be as it was at first'. Thereupon, in accord with what the minister had said, the stupa was built of tiles, which were then covered over with a thin layer of gold foil. Its height was one yojana high and its front face was half a yojana wide. The railing was made of copper. It took seven years, seven months, and seven days to complete."

King Prasenajit then told the Buddha, "That king had an abundance of merit along with rare treasures. I too will now build a stupa, though I am not that king's equal." When seven months and seven days had passed, the stupa was completed. Upon its completion the king made offerings to the Buddha and His monastic community.



The Method for Constructing a Stupa

The base is foursquare, with a railing around the perimeter. Two circular terraces rise up from the base, and four tusk-like structures emerge from its four corners. A tall spire adorned with banners and ringed with parasols arises from the top. If any say, "Even though the World-honored One may have freed Himself from greed, hatred, and delusion, He still has need for a stupa," they are harboring a violation of the Buddhist Precepts and, for ages, the retribution from that will be great indeed. The preceding is called 'the method for constructing a stupa'.



*Matters Concerning Stupas*¹³

When building a temple, first off, take a survey of land well-suited for erecting a stupa. The stupa is not to be located in the south or in the west. Rather, it should be located in the east or the north. Do not let the place where monks will reside encroach on the Buddha's land, and do not let the place where the Buddhas reside encroach on the place for the monks.¹⁴ If the stupa is close to a burial grove or if dogs were to desecrate this area by bringing in the remains of what they have been eating, by all means, construct a perimeter fence. When you construct monks' quarters, you should locate them in the west or in the south. You should build the stupa atop a high place, and not let water from the monks' land flow onto the Buddha's land, though water from the Buddha's land may be allowed to run onto the monks' land. Within the perimeter of the stupa, you are not to wash or dye your robes, set them out to dry, wear leather shoes, cover your head, or cover your bare shoulder. Nor should you hack and spit on the ground. Were you to say such a thing as, "If the World-honored One has rid Himself of greed, hatred, and delusion, what use does He have for this stupa?" you would be harboring wrongdoing that surpasses what has been spelled out in the monastic Precepts, and the karmic consequences will be heavy indeed! These things are what we call 'matters concerning stupas'.



Stupa Alcoves

At a time when King Prasenajit paid a visit to the Buddha, he bowed down, respectfully touching his forehead on the Buddha's feet, and asked the Buddha, "World-honored One, in making a stupa for Kashō Buddha, may we fashion alcoves?"

The Buddha replied, "You may. In a past generation, after Kashō Buddha had passed on into parinirvana, a ruler named He of

13. In this section, the term 'stupa' is being used as synonymous with 'temple' or 'monastery'.

14. That is, the monks' quarters (in particular, the Meditation Hall) should be kept separate from the Buddha Hall, which is to be reserved for ceremonial.

Good Fortune raised a stupa for that Buddha. He constructed alcoves on its four faces. On their upper parts he fashioned images of lions and all sorts of painted ornamental patterns. In front of them he constructed railings. The alcoves were places for putting flowers. Inside the alcoves he hung banners and parasols.

“Should people say, ‘The World-honored One has already rid Himself of greed, hatred, and delusion, so why does He still take pleasure in glorifying Himself?’ they will be harboring wrongdoing that surpasses what has been spelled out in the monastic Precepts, and the karmic consequences of that will be heavy indeed! This is what we call ‘methods for stupa alcoves.’”

It is evident that, above and beyond the wisdom from realizing Buddhahood, to erect a stupa for a past Buddha and to respectfully bow and make offerings to it is a customary practice of Buddhas. Although there have been many examples of actions such as these, for the present, I will just cite the preceding. As for the Buddha Dharma, the Sarvastivādin tradition is supreme,¹⁵ and within that tradition, the *Code of Behavior for the Members of the Greater Sangha* is considered the most fundamental. The *Code of Behavior for the Members of the Greater Sangha* was first brought to China by Hōken after he had cleared a path to India through brambles and thorns and had climbed the Divine Vulture Peak. The Dharma that has been Transmitted by our Ancestors from one to another is in accord with the Sarvastivādin tradition.



Number 3, making a venerative offering to a stupa, a shrine, or whatever else represents the body of a Buddha, means making venerative offerings to something that is actually right before one’s eyes, such as a Buddha in the flesh or a shrine.

Number 4, making a venerative offering to a Buddha where there is no such representation, means ‘making a venerative offering when there is no Buddha or shrine right before us. That is to say, we make offerings not only to what is right before us but also to what is not right before us, be it a Buddha, a shrine, a stupa, or a tomb. Making offerings to what is right before our eyes earns great merit, and making offerings to what is not right before our eyes earns even greater merit, because the scope is ever so much broader. Those who make venerative offerings

15. The Sarvastivādin tradition, though associated with a scholastic Hinayana viewpoint, nevertheless shares a common viewpoint with the Mahayana Zen tradition: namely, that all thoughts and things have real existence, which thereby affirms the existence of this world.

both to what is right before their eyes and to what is not right before their eyes earn the greatest amount of merit.

Number 5, making a venerative offering by oneself, means using our whole being to make venerative offerings to Buddhas and shrines.

Number 6, urging others to make a venerative offering to a Buddha or a shrine means that even though what someone has to offer is but something quite small, we should help that person not to be shy about offering it. That is, whether such an offering is actually made by oneself or by another, it is all the same. One's own making of the offering earns great merit, helping others learn to make offerings earns twice as much merit, and making offerings together with others earns the greatest merit.

With Number 7, making a venerative offering of goods and money to Buddhas or to Their shrines or stupas or relics, there are three types of offerings. The first is the offering of necessities, such as clothing and food. The second is the offering of venerative goods, such as incense and flowers. The third is the offering of ornamental objects, namely all other kinds of treasures and adornments.

With Number 8, making a venerative offering with a devout mind, there are three types of devotion. With the first, one simply makes various types of offerings. With the second, when we have a pure and trusting heart that has faith in the virtue of Buddha, then the underlying principle is in accord with what is offered. The third is the heart that transfers one's merit to others, which is the making of our offering from within a heart that seeks Buddha.

Number 9, as to making a venerative offering with a non-attached mind, there are two kinds. The first is the mind being untainted, by which we let go of all our mistakes. The second is the things offered being untainted, in which we let go of all the mistakes that we have made through our not conforming to the Dharma.

Number 10 is making a venerative offering that attains the Way. That is to say, what we call making a venerative offering that attains the Way is our doing venerative deeds that comply with the goal. Some call 'attaining the Way' by names like 'making an offering of the Dharma', and some call it 'making an offering of one's actions'. As to these, there are three types: The first treats making an offering that attains the Way as making offerings of material goods. The second treats making an offering that attains the Way as making an offering that complies with what is good. The third treats making an offering that attains the Way as making an offering of one's training and practice.

Making venerative offerings to the Buddha already encompasses these ten types of offerings. Similar categories also apply to the Dharma and the Sangha. That is to say, making venerative offerings to the Dharma is our making offerings to the principles that the Buddha taught, as well as to the methods of practice that

He gave expression to, including the Scriptural texts. And making venerative offerings to the Sangha is our making offerings to saintly assemblies of all Three Courses,* as well as to their temples, along with their iconography and stupas, including monastics who have not yet fully awakened.



Next, there are six types of minds that make venerative offerings.

The first is the unsurpassed mind that produces good fortune like a field abundant with rice. It is the most excellent good fortune that arises within such an abundant field.

The second is the unsurpassed mind that recognizes the virtue of indebtedness, since all virtuous joys arise from the Three Treasures.

The third is the unsurpassed mind that arises within all sentient beings.

The fourth is the mind that is as hard to encounter as a flowering udumbara tree.

The fifth is the solitary, unique mind that is one with the three-thousand great-thousandfold universe.

The sixth is the mind that is fully equipped with dependable understanding of all realms and what lies beyond such realms.

In short, the Tathagata, who fully comprehends the ways of the world and the ways beyond the worldly, has been able to supply sentient beings with a reliable foundation. This is called ‘being fully equipped with dependable understanding’. If you make venerative offerings to the Three Treasures with these six attitudes of mind, then even if your offerings are small, you will receive immeasurable, boundless merit. How much more so if your offerings were plentiful!

We should make such alms offerings with a sincere heart, for, without fail, it is how Buddhas have been accustomed to making offerings. Stories in Scriptures and monastic regulations about such alms offerings are plain to see, still, the Buddhas and Ancestors have customarily Transmitted this practice personally. Occasions for making venerative offerings abound in the days and months you spend attending on others and carrying out your work duties. The methods for placing images and relics, for making venerative offerings and respectfully bowing, for building stupas, and for constructing shrines have been authentically Transmitted only in the quarters of our Ancestors of the Buddha. If these methods had not descended from our Ancestors of the Buddha, they would not have been authentically Transmitted.

Also, if such methods have not been authentically Transmitted in accord with the Dharma, they will contradict the Dharma. When the ways of making offerings contradict the Dharma, they will not be genuine. When the ways of making offerings are not genuine, the merit therefrom will be negligible. Beyond question, you need to learn the methods for making venerative offerings that are in accord with the Dharma and authentically Transmit them. Meditation Master Reitō spent many years tending to Daikan Enō's stupa. The temple worker Ro spent his days and nights pounding rice as his alms offering for the assembly. Both of these are instances of methods for making venerative offerings that accord with the Dharma.¹⁶ These are but a small sample of such instances, which I do not have the time to quote extensively. You should make your alms offerings in a similar manner to theirs.

On a day during the summer retreat in the seventh year of the Kenchō era (1255).

Copied in the Monks' Hall at Eihei-ji Temple on the twenty-third day of the sixth lunar month in the second year of the Kōan era (August 2, 1279).

16. Reitō was a monk in Enō's monastery on Mount Sōkei. After Enō's death, Reitō spent the rest of his life—he died at age 95—devoted to tending Enō's stupa, which housed the kesa that Enō had received from his Master Daiman Kōnin as confirmation of his having fully awakened to the Truth. This kesa is said to be the one that Shakyamuni Buddha Transmitted to Makakashō. It is still in existence at the monastery. Ro is Enō's family name. It is used here to refer to the time when he worked as a lay laborer at Kōnin's monastery.