

On a Vision Within a Vision and a Dream Within a Dream

(Muchū Setsumu)

Translator's Introduction: The Chinese character 'mu' in the title of this discourse is read in Japanese as 'yume'. When translated into English, this single character encompasses the meaning of both 'dream' and 'vision', the former term denoting an experience that occurs while sleeping and the latter referring to an experience that occurs while being awake. The Japanese employ only the single word *yume* for both experiences. Also, in Buddhism, the whole of life and all that exists in the universe is viewed as being as insubstantial and impermanent as a dream or a vision. According to Dōgen, this dream-vision is also a manifestation of the Truth, which we either see or do not see depending on whether we are spiritually awake or still spiritually asleep.

Because the Truth, which all the Buddhas and all the Ancestors have manifested in this world, is something that existed before any thoughts or things had sprouted up, It is beyond anything that those with false and empty notions argue over. Accordingly, within the bounds of the Buddhas and Ancestors there has been the meritorious activity of That which goes above and beyond Buddhahood. Because this meritorious activity is independent of any specific occasion, it will far outlast the life span of any living being —be it for a shorter or longer time—for it never ceases, and it will be far beyond any way of measuring to be found in the realm of ordinary folk.

Further, the turning of the Wheel of the Dharma is the standard for That which has existed since before any thoughts or things had ever sprouted up. Since the great merit of Its turning is beyond praise, It has served as a signpost and model in thousands of times past. Buddhas speak of this Wheel of the Dharma as being a vision from within a vision. Because They see what enlightenment is from within Their enlightenment, They give expression to Their vision from within Their vision.

The place from whence They are giving expression to Their vision from within Their vision is the domain of Buddhas and Ancestors: it is the assembly of Buddhas and Ancestors. The domain and assembly of Buddhas, as well as the pathways and Dharma assemblies of the Ancestors, are based on Their innate enlightenment giving rise to Their experience of enlightenment and on Their subsequently giving expression to the vision that They are experiencing within

Their vision. In encountering these sayings and expressions of Theirs, do not treat them as something apart from the Buddha's assembly, for They are Buddhas turning the Wheel of the Dharma. Because this Wheel of the Dharma encompasses everything in all directions, the Great Ocean, Mount Sumeru, all lands, and all thoughts and things have fully manifested themselves. This is the vision expressed within the vision, which existed prior to any dreams. All that manifests within the whole universe is but a dream. This dream consists of all the hundreds of things that sprout up ever so clearly. It is the very moment when we are about to give rise to doubt, the very moment when we are confused. This moment is, say, a sprouting up of the dream, a sprouting up within the dream, and a sprouting up that gives expression to the dream. In exploring this through our training, we find that the roots and stalks with their branches and leaves, and the blossoms and fruits with their lustrous colors and forms altogether comprise the great dream. And you must not confuse it with dreaminess.

Accordingly, when persons who have doubts about learning the Buddha's Way encounter the phrase 'a vision being expressed within a vision', they vainly imagine that it probably refers to dreaming up things that actually do not exist, or they suppose that it may be like piling delusion upon delusion. But this is not so. Even though one says that there is also delusion within delusion, by all means we need to thoroughly explore, with utmost effort, the path that penetrates through this expression to the comprehension of what is really meant by 'piling delusion upon delusion'.

'A vision expressed within a vision' is what all Buddhas are, and all Buddhas are 'wind and rain, water and fire'.¹ They accept and keep in mind the latter epithet and They accept and keep in mind the former epithet. 'A vision expressed from within a vision' is what the Buddha of old was. Riding within His treasured Vehicle,² He forthwith arrived at His sitting place, where He realized the Truth. 'Arriving at His sitting place, where He realized the Truth' is synonymous with 'His riding within His treasured Vehicle'. "No matter whether the vision of trainees is distorted or correct, the Master either grabs hold of their deluded certainty or lets them go on in their own way, as he himself gives free rein to his

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1. That is, because Buddhas are beyond a personal self, They are a vision expressed within a vision, and when They express that vision, what They give voice to pours forth from Them like wind and rain, water and fire.
 2. A reference to the One Vehicle, which derives from the *Lotus Scripture*. Dōgen discusses its meaning in detail in his Discourse 16: On 'The Flowering of the Dharma Sets the Dharma's Flowering in Motion' (*Hokke Ten Hokke*), pp. 175-178.

elegantly skillful means.”³ At such moments, the Wheel of the Dharma sometimes sets into motion the realm of the great Dharma Wheel, which is beyond measure and beyond bounds. And sometimes It sets this realm in motion within a single dust mote, for even within a mote of dust, Its movement never ceases. The principle here is that no matter how the Dharma’s being set in motion may bring about the experience of That Which Is, even the hostile will smile and nod. And because this setting of the Dharma in motion has brought about an experience of That Which Is, regardless of where this may occur, it is synonymous with setting elegantly skillful means in motion. As a result, all at once the whole earth is a limitless Dharma Wheel and the universe throughout is undisguised cause and effect. For Buddhas, these two realms are the ultimate. Keep in mind that the provisional instructions of Buddhas and the heaping up of Their voicings of the Dharma have established limitless ways of teaching by provisional means and have made limitless places in which the Dharma can abide. Do not look for limits to Their comings and goings. Completely relying on the Dharma, They come; completely relying on the Dharma, They go. Thus, Their planting kudzu and wisteria and Their letting the kudzu and wisteria entwine is the nature and form of supreme enlightenment.⁴ Just as enlightenment is limitless, so sentient beings are limitless and supreme. Notwithstanding the fact that enticements and snares are limitless, letting them go is also limitless. When your spiritual question appears, it will yield thirty blows for you, which is the manifesting of a vision that is being expressed within a vision.

Thus, a rootless tree, an earth without opposites, and a valley that does not echo a shout are all manifest visions that are being expressed within a vision. This is not within the realm of ordinary people or those in lofty positions, nor is it what worldly folks take note of. The vision is enlightenment, so who could doubt it?—for it is not what is governed by doubt. And who could believe it?—for belief does not set it in motion. Because this supreme enlightenment is supreme enlightenment, we speak of it as a vision within a vision. There is the vision within and there is giving expression to the vision; there is the vision being expressed and there is one’s being within the vision. Without being within a vision there is no expressing a vision, and without expressing a vision, there is no being within a vision. Without expressing a vision, there are no Buddhas, and without being within a vision, the Buddhas do not emerge into the world to turn the wondrous

3. A quotation from Dōgen’s Master, Tendō Nyojō.

4. ‘Planting kudzu and wisteria and letting them entwine’ is descriptive of setting up a Master-disciple relationship and then letting the interdependence of Master and disciple grow.

Wheel of the Dharma. That Dharma Wheel refers to each Buddha on His own, just as it refers to all Buddhas and to the vision that is expressed from within a vision. It is only in that vision which is expressed from within a vision that Buddhas and Ancestors exist as a supremely enlightened multitude. Further, the experience of what lies beyond the Dharma Body is a vision that is expressed from within a vision. Herein is there homage for each Buddha alone, together with all Buddhas. They have no attachment to head or eye, marrow or brain, body or flesh, hand or foot. And because They have no such attachments, as an ancient one once said, “The one who is a seller of gold will be a buyer of gold.” We call this ‘the Profound of the profound’ and ‘the Wondrous of the wondrous’ and ‘the Enlightened of the enlightened’ and ‘the Head that rests upon the head’. This is nothing other than the everyday behavior of the Buddhas and Ancestors.

In exploring this Matter* through your training, some of you may think that what is being referred to as a ‘Head’ is merely something extraneous atop the crown of a person’s head. But it may not have occurred to you that what is really atop the crown is Vairochana* Buddha. And even less may you think that It is the Head from which all the hundreds of things ever so obviously sprout up, to say nothing of knowing what the word ‘Head’ is pointing to. From ancient times, the phrase ‘placing a Head upon a head’ has habitually been handed down. Foolish people, on hearing this, think that this is merely a saying that warns against anything that is superfluous or excessive. They treat it as an everyday maxim by saying, “Why put a head atop a head?” to express that there is no need for something. Surely, this is a mistake. For, when giving expression to a vision from within a vision, there is no difference in how both worldly and saintly persons misuse the phrase ‘placing a Head upon a head’. Thus, for both worldly and saintly persons, their giving expression to a vision from within a vision must have occurred in the past and must still extend to the present day. You need to realize that when it comes to their having expressed a vision from within a vision in the past, they customarily believed that they were expressing a dream from within a dream. And when it comes to their expressing of a vision from within a vision today, they still treat it as their expressing a dream from within a dream. This, accordingly, is what the joy in meeting a Buddha is all about. Even though the vision that the Buddhas and Ancestors have of all the hundreds of things which sprout up ever so clearly is more obvious than a hundred thousand suns and moons, how sad that those who are spiritually blind do not see It. What a pity!⁵

* See *Glossary*.

5. To paraphrase this complex passage, in the same way that people do not understand the

The ‘Head’ in the phrase ‘the Head that rests upon the head’ is the Head of a hundred sproutings, the Head of a thousand kinds of things, the Head of ten thousand varieties of things, the Head of one’s whole being, the Head that is the whole universe which has never been hidden, the Head that is the whole universe in all ten quarters, the Head that matches a phrase of Scripture, the Head that is the top of a hundred-foot pole. You should explore through your training, and do it thoroughly, that both ‘what is resting’ and ‘what is upon’ is the very Head of heads.

Thus it is that the saying from the *Diamond-cutting Scripture* that “Buddhas and the supreme, fully perfected enlightenment of Buddhas all come forth from this Teaching of Mine” is also expressing a vision from within the vision wherein the Head habitually rests upon the head. When this Teaching gives expression to a vision from within the vision, supreme enlightenment causes all Buddhas to come forth. And what is more, all Buddhas, being enlightened, give voice to this Scripture, which is, beyond doubt, Their expressing a vision from within the vision. Since the cause of the vision is not obscured, the result of the vision is not hidden from sight. It is simply a matter of one strike of a clapper making a thousand hits or ten thousand hits, or of a thousand strikes or ten thousand strikes making one hit or half a hit. Accordingly, you need to know that there is such a thing as giving expression to a vision from within the vision—one that involves the experiencing of That Which Is—and there are times when the one who gives expression to a vision from within the vision is ‘such a person’.* And there is the giving expression to a dream from within a dream—one that does not involve the experiencing of That Which Is—and there are times when the one who gives expression to a dream from within a dream is not ‘such a person’. And you need to know that the principle being recognized here is dazzlingly clear, namely, that giving expression all day long to a vision from within the vision is simply giving expression to a vision from within the vision. This is why a former Buddha once said, “For your sakes, I am now giving expression to the vision from within the vision. The Buddhas of the three periods of time—past, present, and future—all expressed the vision from within the vision and the first six Chinese Ancestral Masters also expressed the vision from within the vision.” You should clearly study these words.

spiritual meaning of the phrase ‘placing a Head upon a head’, they also misunderstand the nature of their everyday experience. Rather than seeing the Buddha Nature within all the myriad things that exist, they only see the insubstantiality of all things. By viewing things in this one-sided way, they sadly miss the joy of meeting Buddha, until and unless they encounter ‘such a one’ who can explain the deeper spiritual significance of all that exists.

‘Holding the flower aloft, with eyes atwinkle’ is giving expression to the vision from within the vision, and ‘respectful bowing securing for you the very Marrow of the Way’ is also giving expression to the vision from within the vision.⁶

In sum, ‘gaining the Way through a single verse of Scripture’, as well as “I do not understand,” and “I do not personally know that One,” are all ways of expressing the vision from within the vision.⁷ Because the Bodhisattva* of Great Compassion’s making use of His ever so many hands and eyes is the same, His meritorious functions of ‘seeing colors and seeing sounds’ and of ‘hearing colors and hearing sounds’ are sufficient. Sometimes, one gives expression to the vision from within the vision by manifesting oneself in various forms to aid deluded beings. Sometimes, one gives expression to the vision from within the vision by giving voice to the Dharma over and over again. It is giving expression to the vision from within the vision when a Master grabs hold of the deluded certainty of his trainees or lets them go on in their own way. ‘Pointing directly’ is giving expression to the vision, just as ‘hitting the target’ is giving expression to the vision. Whether grabbing hold of the deluded certainty of one’s trainees or letting them go on in their own way, you need to learn how to use an ordinary weighing scale. When you have learned this, then, beyond question, your ability to spot the difference between a pound and an ounce will emerge, and you will have your way of expressing the vision from within the vision.

If you have not yet reached equilibrium and are still arguing over how many ounces to a pound, you will not manifest balance. When you have achieved equilibrium, then you will see what balance really is. When you have completely achieved equilibrium, you will not depend on what is being weighed, or upon some scale, or upon the way a scale functions. You need to thoroughly explore that, even though you may rely on That which is as unbounded space, if you have not attained equilibrium, you will not see what balance is. When you yourself are relying on That which is as unbounded space, letting the objects you encounter float freely in

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6. ‘Holding the flower aloft, with eyes atwinkle’ is a reference to the Transmission of the Dharma from Shakyamuni Buddha to his disciple Makakashō. Dōgen explores the reference to ‘respectful bowing’ in his Discourse 10: On ‘Respectful Bowing Will Secure for You the Very Marrow of the Way’ (*Raihai Tokuzui*).
 7. ‘Gaining the Way...’ is an allusion to the Sixth Chinese Ancestor Daikan Enō, who awoke to the Truth upon hearing someone recite a single verse from the *Diamond-cutting Scripture*. “I do not understand [the Buddha’s Teaching]” is also an allusion to Daikan Enō, whose understanding went beyond an intellectual understanding of Scripture. “I do not personally know that One” was Bodhidharma’s reply to Emperor Wu’s question, “And who, pray, is this one who is confronting my royal presence?”

space, it will be your giving expression to the vision from within the vision, and within that space you will physically manifest equilibrium. Balance is the great truth of a scale, whereon we weigh space and we weigh things. Whether it is space or an object being weighed, when you reach equilibrium, you will express the vision from within the vision.

There is nothing that is not a liberated expression of the vision from within the vision. 'Vision' is synonymous with the whole of the great earth, and the whole of the great earth is synonymous with equilibrium. Therefore, our endlessly turning our head and setting our brains in motion are nothing other than our accepting in trust and acting in devotion, by means of which we realize the vision within our dreams.



Shakyamuni Buddha once said in verse,

*The Buddha with His body all in gold
Was adorned with the marks of a hundred blessings.
His very existence was like a pleasant dream
In which He heard the Dharma and voiced It for the
sake of all.*

*And in His dream He became a nation's king,
One who forsook palace and household,
As well as all desires for finer things,
To find, instead, a place to train for Truth.*

*Beneath the Bodhi tree
He took His place upon the Lion's seat*
And sought the Truth for seven days
Before He reached the wisdom that He sought.*

*Having fully reached the Supreme Way,
He arose and turned the Dharma's Wheel,
Expressing Truth for the sake of all
As hundreds of thousands of millions of kalpas*
passed Him by.*

*Beyond delusion is His wondrous Dharma
That helps all beings reach the Other Shore.
Then the day came when He entered nirvana
Like a lamp going out, its fuel spent.*

*If any in later times
Should express His peerless Dharma,
They too will reap great benefits
Like the meritorious virtues herein described.*

By exploring through your training what the Buddha is saying in the present instance, you will fully realize what the assembly of all Buddhas is, for what He is saying is not a metaphor. The wondrous Dharma of Buddhas is simply that of each Buddha on His own, just as it is for all the Buddhas. Therefore, all things, both in a dream state and in an awakened one, are manifestations of the Truth. Within the awakened state, there is a turning of the heart, practice and training, enlightenment, and nirvana, and within the dreaming state there is likewise a turning of the heart, practice and training, enlightenment, and nirvana. The dream state and the awakened state—each is a manifestation of the Truth. They are beyond large and small, beyond superior and inferior.

At the same time, seeing or hearing a phrase like “And in His dream He became a nation’s king,” people in the past and present have mistakenly understood it to mean that, due to the influence of this foremost Dharma having been voiced, their own nighttime dreams will come true. Their understanding the phrase in this way means that they have not yet fully understood what the Buddha was Teaching. Dreaming and being awake have always been as one and the same, for they are both manifestations of the Truth. And even if the Buddha’s Teaching were a metaphor, it would still be a manifestation of the Truth. And, as already stated, It is not a metaphor. What we create in a dream is the reality of the Buddha’s Teaching. Shakyamuni Buddha, as well as all the Buddhas and Ancestors, have turned Their hearts around and done the training and practice, and They have alike achieved a genuine awakening, and all within a dream. Because this is so, what the Buddha said as Teaching for the present-day mundane world is nothing other than ‘what we create within a dream’.

Seven days expresses a measure for how long it takes to attain the wisdom of a Buddha. Turning the Wheel of the Dharma to help sentient beings reach the Other Shore has already been described as the passing of hundreds of thousands of millions of kalpas, for we should not speculate on the speed with which time passes within a dream.⁸

8. That is, time is how we experience it rather than how it is measured by a clock. Therefore, the seeming length of a ‘day’ and the length of a ‘kalpa’ are variable.

*The Buddha with His body all in gold
Was adorned with the marks of a hundred blessings.
His very existence was like a pleasant dream
In which He heard the Dharma and voiced It for the
sake of all.*

Clearly you must have realized from this that ‘a pleasant dream’ is what the Buddha is. There is the Tathagata’s phrase “His very existence,” for He was not just some hundred-year long dream. “Voicing It for the sake of all” was His manifesting Himself in various forms. “Hearing the Dharma” was the sound that was heard by His Eye, the sound that was heard by His Heart, the sound that was heard by the old habits that He abandoned like an empty nest, and the sound that was heard before time began.

*The Buddha with His body all in gold
Was adorned with the marks of a hundred blessings.*

This is saying that ‘a pleasant dream’ is the bodily existence of the Buddha, which is His forthwith having arrived at the Now and having doubts no more. Even though the instructions of the Buddha do not cease for someone who has awakened, the principle of the Buddhas’ and Ancestors’ complete manifesting is, of necessity, Their manifesting a vision from within a vision. Through your training, you need to explore what it means not to vilify the Buddha’s Dharma. When you explore through your training what not vilifying the Buddha’s Dharma means, the present words of the Tathagata will immediately come forth.

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