

On Washing Your Face

(Semmen)

Translator’s Introduction: The importance that Dōgen placed on this discourse is signaled in the postscript by the fact that he gave it to his community on three occasions. The first occasion was in 1239 as a companion piece to Discourse 7: On Washing Yourself Clean (*Senjō*). It was repeated with the addition of a final paragraph in 1243, when he and his monks were staying in Kippō-ji Temple while Eihei-ji Temple was being built nearby. The third delivery, with some emendations, was given at Eihei-ji in 1250. This last version is the one presented here.

The title has a double meaning. On a literal level, ‘face’ refers to the physical part of the body; on a metaphorical level, it refers to the surface of the mind’s mirror, which is also being cleansed by seeing the spiritual significance of the mundane act of cleaning the former. As the text makes abundantly clear, on the literal level the face includes not only the whole outer surface of the head but also, most importantly, the mouth, teeth, and tongue. An implement for brushing the teeth similar to that which Dōgen describes is still the preferred form of toothbrush with many Theravadin monks.

In the *Lotus Scripture* it says in verse:

*Anoint your body with fragrant oil
After having washed away all dust and dirt,
And put on a fresh, clean robe,
So that you are clean both within and without.*

This Teaching is one that the Tathagata voiced before the Lotus assembly for the sake of those who practice the four forms of conduct that ease the way of practice.¹ It is unequalled in His Teachings at other assemblies, and is surely unlike that found in other Scriptures. Since this is so, cleansing your body and mind and anointing yourself with fragrant oil after having removed the dust and dirt of life is foremost in the Buddha’s Teaching. And putting on a fresh, clean robe is one of the methods for purifying yourself. By washing away the dust and dirt and by anointing yourself with fragrant oil, you will be clean both within and without. When both

1. These four forms of conduct were also voiced by the Tathagata in the *Lotus Scripture*. One translation may be found in “The Scripture on the Conduct That Eases the Way” from *Buddhist Writings on Meditation and Daily Practice*, (Shasta Abbey Press, 1994), pp. 5-25.

inside and outside are clean, the conditions around you and the conditions within you will be immaculate.

Even so, befuddled people who do not understand what the Buddha's Dharma is and who do not practice the Buddha's Way say, "Bathing merely cleanses the body's skin, but it does not cleanse the five vital organs or the six forms of entrails within the body. Since it does not cleanse each of these, one after the other, we cannot really become immaculate. Therefore, it follows that we cannot really cleanse our bodies." People who talk like this do not yet know the Buddha's Dharma, nor have they even heard It; they have not encountered a true teacher or met an offspring of the Buddhas and Ancestors. You should just cast aside the words of folks who hold to false views like these. Instead, explore and put into practice the True Teaching of the Buddhas and Ancestors. The limits of all thoughts and things have never been determined, and what lies within and outside the various elements, likewise, cannot be fully grasped. This is why what lies within our mind and outside our body is also beyond our grasp.

Be that as it may, when bodhisattvas* who are in their final body² are sitting in the Meditation Hall and are just on the verge of realizing the Way, even they wash their kesa* and then cleanse their body and mind. This is part of the ordinary, everyday behavior of all Buddhas in all times—past, present and future—everywhere in the ten directions.

Bodhisattvas who are in their final body are different from other types of beings in all matters. Their meritorious wise discernment and the splendor of their body and mind are most precious and unsurpassed. The same will also be true for their methods of washing and cleansing, not to mention the fact that everyone's body and mind, along with their limitations, differ according to the times. Within the time of one period of seated meditation, it is said, three thousand worlds have passed away. Even though such a period of time is like this, it is not some measure of self or other: it is the meritorious fruit of the Buddha Dharma. The measure of body and mind is beyond 'five feet' or 'six feet', because body and mind are beyond the five or six feet that we conventionally define as 'five feet' and 'six feet'.

The place where body and mind exist is also beyond both the limits and the limitlessness of the realms of self or other, or of the whole universe or immeasurable universes, because "Right here is where the What is, whether the

* See *Glossary*.

2. A technical term for one who is about to realize Buddhahood. It is synonymous with a non-returner, which is the third of the four stages of arhathood. A brief explanation of these four stages can be found in the *Glossary*.

Matter* is put clumsily or put delicately.”³ The dimensions of mind are beyond anything the discriminations of intellectual thought can possibly know: they are beyond anything that the non-discriminations of not thinking can possibly fathom. Because this is the way the dimensions of body and mind are, it is also the way the dimensions of cleansing are. To grasp what these dimensions are and to train until one fully realizes them are precisely what Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor are concerned with and have held to. We should not take our estimate of ourselves to be foremost, nor should we take our estimate of ourselves to be real. Therefore, it follows that when we wash and cleanse ourselves in this manner, we fully fathom the dimensions of body and mind, and we make ourselves immaculate. Whether we see ourselves as comprised of six elements, or five skandhas,* or of That which is indestructible, through our cleansing we can make everything immaculate.

This does not mean that we are immaculate only after we have fetched water and washed ourselves with it. How can water be inherently pure or inherently impure? Even if it were inherently pure or inherently impure, we cannot assert that it makes the place we bring it to pure or impure. It is simply that, when we preserve the methods that the Buddhas and Ancestors have trained in and actualized, then a Buddha’s methods for using water with which to wash the body and using the Water with which to cleanse the mind will have been handed down to us. Accordingly, in training to realize Buddhahood, we go beyond ‘clean’, we discard ‘unclean’, and we abandon ‘not clean’ and ‘not unclean’.

Hence, even though we may not yet have soiled ourselves, we wash and cleanse ourselves, and even when we have reached Great Immaculacy, we still wash and cleanse ourselves. This process has been preserved solely in the Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors. It is beyond what those who are non-Buddhists understand. Were the situation as those befuddled persons say, even if we were to reduce the five vital organs and the six forms of entrails to particles of dust so minute that they were like empty space, and then completely use up the waters of the great ocean in washing them, unless we washed the inside of these particles, how could they possibly be immaculate? And unless we washed the inside of empty space, how could we possibly achieve complete immaculacy within and without?

3. This quotation is a remark made by Meditation Master Fuke to Meditation Master Rinzai when both were novice monks. This kōan story, as recounted by Dōgen in his Chinese *Shinji Shōbōgenzō*, is given in the Addendum to Discourse 21: On Buddha Nature (*Busshō*), p. 279.

Such befuddled people are also incapable of recognizing the process of cleansing emptiness. We make use of Emptiness to cleanse emptiness, and we make use of Emptiness to cleanse body and mind. Those who, with faith, accept cleansing as a form of the Dharma will be preserving what the Buddhas and Ancestors trained in and came to realize. That is to say, in the True Dharma of Buddha after Buddha, Ancestor after Ancestor, and Successor after Successor of the Buddhas and Ancestors, when we engage in cleansing ourselves, then body and mind—both inside and out—along with the five vital organs, the six forms of entrails, the outer world and the inner world, the inside, outside, and middle of the realms of thoughts and things, as well as unbounded space, are all instantly immaculate. When we make use of incense or flowers in purifying ourselves, then our deeds of past, present, and future, as well as their accompanying causes and conditions, are instantly immaculate.



The Buddha said, “By washing thrice and perfuming thrice, our body and mind become immaculate.” Thus, the method for washing our body and cleansing our mind is to habitually do one perfuming with one washing, and by such a sequence to do three washings and three perfumings. We then pay homage to the Buddha, recite some bit of Scripture, and do seated meditation followed by walking meditation. Once our walking meditation is finished and before we endeavor to sit up straight in seated meditation again, it is said that we should always wash our feet. Even if our feet have not become sullied, this is still the method of the Buddhas and Ancestors.

In these three washings and three perfumings of which He spoke, washing once refers to taking a bath: it is bathing the whole body. And after having done so, we get dressed as usual, then we light incense in a small censer and cense inside the bosom of our upper robe, as well as censing our kesa, our meditation place, and so forth. After that, we bathe again and cense again. We do it like this three times. This is the ceremony that accords with the Dharma. At this time, even though the six sense organs and the six types of objects that stimulate them are still there, they will undoubtedly manifest the virtue of immaculacy before your very eyes. And, as the Buddha taught, even though we may not be rid of the three poisons of greed, hate, and delusion or of the four topsy-turvy beliefs,⁴ the virtue of being immaculate will immediately manifest before our very eyes. Who can fathom It by using conventional ways of thinking? What person can spot It by using his

4. Namely, believing that what is impermanent has permanence, that what causes suffering is pleasurable, that what is sullied is pure, and that what is without self has a self.

ordinary eyes? For instance, when we wash aloes wood to cleanse it for making incense, we should not break it into bits and pieces before washing it, nor should we grind it into a powder before washing it; it attains immaculacy simply by our washing the whole piece, in a body.

The method for cleansing has been definitely set forth in the Buddha's Teaching. We wash our body, we wash our mind, we wash our feet, we wash our face, we wash our eyes, we wash our mouth, we wash our private parts, we wash our hands, we wash our alms bowl, we wash our kesa, and we wash our head. All of these are part of the True Teaching of all the Buddhas and Ancestors of the past, present, and future.

When we undertake to make an offering to Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, we first wash our hands and face, rinse out our mouth, and put on a clean robe. We then bring some type of fragrant wood, and, taking fresh water in a clean bowl, we wash this incense. Once this is done, we offer it to the realm of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. May the offering we make to the Triple Treasure be as sandalwood incense from the Malaya Mountains that has been washed in Lake Anavatapta's water of eight virtues.⁵

Washing the face was passed down from India in the west and spread throughout China in the east. Although the procedure is made clear enough in various passages in the monastic regulations, it will still be something that Buddhas and Ancestors hold to and directly pass on to Their genuine successors. It is not merely something that Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor have come to practice over the centuries; it has flowed down through hundreds of thousands of millions of eons of the past, and will continue to do so in the future. It does not merely remove dirt and grime; it is the lifeblood of the Buddhas and Ancestors.

It is said that if we do not wash the face, both our receiving obeisances and our making obeisances to others will be stained.

*When we bow, and bow to others,
If we can make our bow to That which is bowed to,
Then our True Nature will be free and serene,
For 'True Nature' too will have dropped away.*

This is why we must, by all means, wash the face.

5. The Malaya Mountains in southern India are renowned for their highly prized sandalwood. Lake Anavatapta is considered by some as the source of the four major rivers of India, and by others as a lake on Mount Sumeru. Its eight virtues are its sweetness, its coolness, its softness, its lightness, its purity, its absence of odor, its harmlessness to the throat, and its harmlessness to the stomach.



The time for washing our face may be during the pre-dawn fifth watch or it may be after the sun has risen. When I was staying with my late Master, Nyojō, he took the third period of the third watch (around 2:00 A.M.) to be the time for doing it. Putting on our skirt and undershirt, or a full under-robe, and carrying our hand towel, we proceeded to a washstand. A hand towel is a piece of cloth twelve feet long. It should not be white in color since white is prohibited.

It says in the *Great Scripture on the Three Thousand Forms of Everyday Behavior for Monks*:

There are five things to consider when using the hand towel. First, wipe with the top and bottom ends. Second, wipe your hands with one end and wipe your face with the other. Third, do not wipe your nose with it. Fourth, should it become soiled through using it to wipe up grease or dirt, by all means wash it right away. Fifth, do not wipe your body with it. When you wash, each of you should have your own towel.

When handling our hand towel, we should take care of it in the following way. We fold the hand towel in two and then drape it over our left forearm. We wipe our face with one half of the hand towel and our hands with the other half. The statement “Do not wipe your nose with it” means that we do not use it to wipe the insides of our nostrils or the mucus from them. We should not use the hand towel to wipe our sides, back, belly, navel, thighs, or lower legs. We should wash our hand towel if it becomes soiled with dirt or grime. When it gets wet, we dry it by the fire or hang it out in the sun to dry. We should not use a hand towel when taking a bath.

The washing place for those in the Cloud Hall is the rear washstand.⁶ The rear washstand is to the west of the Illumination Hall.⁷ This layout is what has been passed on to us. For retreat huts and private quarters, a washstand is put in a convenient place. The Abbot washes up in the abbatical quarters. In the residence for elderly monks, a washstand has been put in a convenient place. When the Abbot is residing in the Cloud Hall, he should use the rear washstand to wash up.

When going to the washstand, we hang the middle part of our hand towel over the nape of our neck. Bringing the two ends in front over our shoulders, we

6. The Cloud Hall is the hall where the monks meditate. ‘The rear washstand’ refers specifically to the washstand behind the Cloud Hall.

7. The Illumination Hall is used when senior monks other than the Abbot give Dharma talks.

use both hands to take the ends under our arms and to our back. Then, crossing the ends, we bring the left end around to the right and the right end around to the left, and tie the ends in front of our chest. When we do it in this fashion, the upper part of our robe is covered by the hand towel, and our sleeves are bound up by it above our elbows, while below our elbows, our arms and hands are left exposed. It is just as if we had tucked up our sleeves with a sash.⁸

Next, if we are at the rear washstand, taking a wash bucket in hand, we go to where the iron cauldron is and get a bucket of hot water. Then, returning, we put it atop the washstand. If we are somewhere else, we pour hot water from the hot water tub into a washbowl.

Next, we use our willow twig.⁹ Nowadays, in various monasteries in Great Sung China, the method for chewing a willow twig has long been discarded and is not passed on, so there is no place for chewing a willow twig. But today at Eihei-ji Temple on Mount Kichijō there is a place for chewing a willow twig, which is our present way of looking at the matter. Accordingly, first we chew the willow twig. Then, holding the willow twig in our right hand, we recite the appropriate verse. In the “Pure Deeds” chapter of the *Avatamsaka Scripture*, it says the following:

*Taking this willow twig in hand,
I pray that all sentient beings
May realize in their hearts the True Dharma
And thereby become naturally pure.*

After we have finished reciting this text and are about to chew the willow twig again, we should then recite the following:

*Chewing the willow twig this morning,
I pray that all sentient beings
May obtain the teeth for overcoming evil,
So that they may chew up their defiling passions.*

Having finished reciting this text, we chew on our willow twig.

The length of a willow twig is the width of four, eight, twelve, or sixteen fingers. As it says in Article 34 of the *Code of Behavior for Members of the Greater Sangha*, “We use for our teeth a twig of suitable dimensions. The longest is the width of sixteen fingers, the shortest is the width of four fingers.” We need to keep in mind that it should not be shorter than four fingers and that beyond sixteen

8. The sleeves worn by monastics during Dōgen’s time were of a large, koromo style and therefore needed to be bound up.

9. The willow twig was used as a toothbrush.

fingers is not a suitable dimension. The thickness is that of our little finger. However, there is nothing to preclude it from being thinner than that. Its shape is that of the little finger: one end thick, one end thin. The thicker end is chewed into fine shreds. As it says in the *Great Scripture on the Three Thousand Forms of Everyday Behavior for Monks*, “Do not go beyond a third of an inch along the length of the willow twig.” We must chew it well, then rub and clean the front and back of our teeth as if we were polishing them. We rub and polish, and then rinse out our mouth from time to time. We should thoroughly polish and clean the base of our teeth above the gums and thoroughly scrape between our teeth, and wash that area clean. When our mouth is rinsed out again and again, our teeth will be washed clean.

After we have done this, we need to clean our tongue. It says in the *Great Scripture on the Three Thousand Forms of Everyday Behavior for Monks*:

There are five things to consider when scraping the tongue. First, do not go beyond three times. Second, if your tongue begins to bleed, by all means cease. Third, do not soil your sanghati robe or your feet by flailing your hands about.¹⁰ Fourth, when discarding your willow twig, do not put it where others walk. Fifth, always scrape your tongue in a screened off area.

In the phrase ‘scrape your tongue three times’, ‘scraping your tongue’ means putting some water into your mouth and scraping your tongue repeatedly. It does not mean scraping it just three times. Keep in mind the statement that if your tongue begins to bleed, by all means cease.

As to the remark that we should thoroughly scrape our tongue, it says in the *Great Scripture on the Three Thousand Forms of Everyday Behavior for Monks*, “Purifying your mouth means chewing a willow twig, rinsing your mouth out, and scraping your tongue.” Hence, the willow twig is something that the Buddhas and Ancestors, along with Their successors, have come to preserve and hold to.



The Buddha was living in the Bamboo Grove Park at Rajagriha, along with twelve hundred and fifty monks. It was the first day of the twelfth month, and King Prasenajit was providing food for them on that day. At daybreak he personally offered the Buddha a willow twig. After the Buddha had taken and thoroughly chewed it, He discarded

10. The sanghati robe is the largest of three basic types of kesa. Dōgen gives a detailed explanation of all three in Discourse 84: On the Spiritual Merits of the Kesa (*Kesa Kudoku*).

what remained. No sooner had it touched the ground than it came to life, with roots and sprouts gushing forth in great profusion, until it was five hundred yojanas* tall. Its leaves and branches spread out like a cloud to a circumference of the same magnitude. At length, it brought forth blossoms as large as cart wheels. Finally, it produced fruit the size of five-gallon jars. The roots and buds, branches and leaves, were entirely comprised of the seven treasures,* whose various colors glimmered with extraordinary beauty. In accord with their color, they gave off rays of light that eclipsed both sun and moon. When the fruit was eaten, it proved as delicious as nectar. Its fragrance filled the four quarters; whoever smelled it was truly filled with delight. As the fragrant breeze came blowing, the branches and leaves rubbed against each other so that they all gave forth melodious sounds, delightfully voicing the essence of the Dharma. Whoever heard this never tired of listening. The hearts of all the people who witnessed this transformation of the tree grew ever more pure and their reverence and trust deepened. The Buddha then gave voice to the Dharma according to their ability to grasp Its intent, so that all their hearts were opened to comprehend It. Those who sought what the Buddha intended attained their goal and were reborn in a heavenly state, their number being extremely great.¹¹

The method for making an alms offering to the Buddha and the assembled monks was invariably to proffer willow twigs at daybreak. After that, various other offerings were prepared. There are many instances of willow twigs being given to the Buddha, and there are many instances of the Buddha using a willow twig, but, for the time being, I have presented the story of King Prasenajit's personally making the alms offering, along with the story of this great tree, because you should know about them.



Also on that day, six non-Buddhist teachers were all bested in debate by the Buddha. Being dismayed and frightened, they took to flight. Ultimately, as the Scripture recounts:

All six teachers together threw themselves into the river and drowned. The nine hundred million followers of these six teachers all

11. This narrative is quoted from "The Defeat of the Six Teachers," which is the second chapter of the *Scripture on Accounts of the Wise and the Befuddled*.

came to the Buddha, seeking to be His disciples. Upon the Buddha's welcoming them as monks, their beards and hair naturally came off, and they had Dharma robes on their bodies, for they had all become mendicant monks. As the Buddha voiced the Dharma for their benefit, pointing out Its essence, they disentangled themselves from their defiling passions and fully attained arhathood.*



Thus, because the Tathagata was already accustomed to using willow twigs, both ordinary people and those in lofty positions made alms offerings of them. It is clear that all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, along with disciples of the Buddha, beyond doubt, hold to chewing a willow twig. Should anyone not use a willow twig, they will have forfeited the Teaching. And what a pity that would be!

It says in the Bodhisattva Precepts section of the *Scripture of Brahma's Net*:

During the two retreat periods in winter and summer, as well as during the renewal period at the beginning of summer when pilgrimages are undertaken, as a disciple of the Buddha, you should always have for your personal use a tooth-cleaning willow twig, soap, your three monastic robes, a water jug, your alms bowl, your bowing mat, your mendicant's traveling staff, an incense burner, a clothes box, a water filter, a towel, a razor, something to light a fire with, tweezers, a hammock, a Scripture and *Vinaya* text, an image of the Buddha, and some image of a Bodhisattva. Whenever you go on a pilgrimage or travel for other spiritual reasons, be it for thirty miles or three hundred, you should always carry these eighteen objects with you. The retreat periods last from the fifteenth day of the first month to the fifteenth day of the third month and from the fifteenth day of the eighth month to the fifteenth day of the tenth month; during these two periods you should always carry these eighteen objects with you when you travel, just as a bird carries its two wings.

Not even one of these eighteen objects should be missing. If you lack any, you would be like a bird that had shed one wing. Even though one wing remained, the bird would be unable to fly, for its condition would not be the way birds are. Similarly for bodhisattvas: if they are not equipped with these eighteen 'wings', it will not be the way that bodhisattvas do their practice.

Among these eighteen articles, the willow twig already occupies the first position and should be the very first thing you supply yourself with. Folks who are clear about the use of the willow twig will be bodhisattvas who are clear about the

Buddha Dharma. Those who have not yet clarified this matter have probably not encountered the Buddha Dharma even in their dreams.

Hence, to see the willow twig is to encounter the Buddhas and Ancestors. If someone should ask me, “What is its purpose?” I would reply, “How fortunate we are to have witnessed that old fellow Dōgen chewing on a willow twig.”

All Buddhas and bodhisattvas of past, present, and future invariably accept and hold to this Bodhisattva Precept from the *Scripture of Brahma’s Net*. Thus, they have likewise come to accept and hold to the willow twig in the three periods of time.



It says in the *Procedures for Cleanliness in a Zen Temple*:

It is imperative that you read, recite aloud, and thoroughly comprehend both the Ten Great Precepts and the Forty-eight Less Grave Precepts in the Mahayana* *Scripture of Brahma’s Net*, and thereby know well what keeps to them or breaks them, as well as what they permit or prohibit. But do so in accord with the sage words from the golden mouth of the Buddha. Do not indulge in following ordinary people in such matters.

By all means, you need to understand that Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor have correctly Transmitted the import of what this quotation is saying. Whatever deviates from this is not the Buddha’s Way, nor is it the Buddha’s Teaching, nor is it the Way of the Ancestors.



Be that as it may, in Great Sung China today the willow twig is never to be seen. In the fourth month of the eighteenth year of the Chinese Chia-ting Era (1223) when I began to visit the various monasteries and temples in China, the willow twig was unknown to the monks, and it was likewise unknown in court and country both to ordinary people as well as to those in lofty positions. Because it was unknown to any in the monastic family, whenever I inquired about the method for using a willow twig, they would turn pale and lose their composure. What a pity that this spotless method has been lost. Folks who barely rinse out their mouths have fashioned a device by cutting more than an inch of hair from a horse’s tail and then setting it, two inches deep, into a piece of ox horn about a third of an inch thick and six or seven inches long, so that it quite resembles a horse’s mane. This is the only thing they use for cleaning their teeth. It is an inappropriate implement for monks to use. As it may well be an unclean utensil, it is not an instrument of the Buddha’s Teaching. Pious common folk, who worship the

emperor and other celestial beings, are bound to be repelled by it. Further, commoners and monks both use this instrument as a tool for brushing the dirt off their shoes, or use it for brushing their hair. Though some of these tools may be a bit larger or smaller, they are one and the same in their usage. And only one in ten thousand use even this inadequate device. As a result, the breath of monks and householders alike is foul smelling. When people two or three feet away speak, their bad breath comes forth and even a whiff of it is hard to take. Not even those praised as venerable senior monks who have realized the Way or those who are known as teachers and guides for ordinary people and those in lofty positions know that there is a method for rinsing the mouth, scraping the tongue, and chewing a willow twig. Based on this, we cannot begin to know in how many other ways we may now find the Great Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors in decay. Although I do not begrudge either committing my dewdrop existence to thousands of miles of blue waves, or my crossing foreign mountains and rivers in order to find the Way, yet I must regret this sad state of affairs. How many unstained methods have already disappeared there? How sad, how very sad!

Despite this, throughout the whole of Japan both monks and laity in court and country are all personally acquainted with the willow twig, which may be due to their personal experience of the Buddha's light of wisdom. Even so, their way of chewing a willow twig is not like the standard practice, and the method for scraping the tongue has not been introduced to them, probably due to their being in too big a hurry. Still, those who are aware that they should use a willow twig—in contrast with the people of Sung who are totally unaware of the willow twig—have naturally learned this method of the spiritually preeminent ones. Among the practices of mountain hermits, we find that they too use the willow twig. You need to realize that, as they say, it is the instrument whereby all may emerge from the dust; it is the tool of immaculacy.



It says in the *Great Scripture on the Three Thousand Forms of Everyday Behavior for Monks*:

There are five things to consider when using a willow twig for chewing. First, cut it according to the proper length. Second, split it according to the proper method. Third, when chewing its head, do not go beyond one third of an inch. Fourth, in cleaning between the teeth, chew it three times. Fifth, make use of the sap to bathe your eyes.

Our present-day practice of washing our eyes by scooping up some water in our right hand from the water that we used for chewing the willow twig and rinsing out our mouth was originally a doctrine in the *Great Scripture on the Three Thousand*

Forms of Everyday Behavior for Monks. Nowadays in Japan, it is a long-standing domestic custom. The method for scraping the tongue was transmitted by the exemplary monk Eisai.¹² Before disposing of your used willow twig, use both hands to split it in two, tearing it from the chewed end. Put the sharp edge of the split twig crosswise on your tongue and scrape it. That is, take up some water with your right hand, put it in your mouth and rinse it out, and then scrape your tongue. Again and again, rinse your mouth and scrape your tongue, scraping repeatedly with the edge of the split willow twig as if you were attempting to draw blood.

When you are rinsing your mouth, you should silently recite the following verse, as put forth in the *Avatamsaka Scripture*:

*In cleansing my mouth and teeth,
I pray that all sentient beings
Will turn towards the Gate to Immaculacy
And ultimately attain freedom.*

Repeatedly rinse your mouth out and use the ball of the first, second, or third finger of your right hand to cleanse the inside of your lips and under your tongue, as if you were licking them clean. When you have recently eaten something oily, you should use ground honey locust pods. When you have finished with the willow twig, you should then dispose of it out of sight. After you have disposed of your willow twig, you should snap your fingers three times. There is a container for disposing of willow twigs on the rear washstand. In other places, you should dispose of it in an unobtrusive place. You should spit out the water from rinsing your mouth somewhere other than in the washbowl.



Next, we need to wash our face. Scooping hot water from the washbowl in both hands, we wash all over, from the forehead to the eyebrows, the eyes, the nose, the inside of the ears, the crown of the head, and the cheeks. We should first douse them thoroughly with hot water and then scrub them. Take care not to let tears, spittle, or nasal mucus drip into the washbowl water. When washing in this manner, do not use excessive amounts of hot water, spilling or slopping it outside the washbowl, so that you run out of it too soon. Wash until the dirt and oil has been removed. Wash behind your ears, since water does not customarily reach there. Rinse your eyeballs, since they cannot be cleaned with sand. And washing even from your hairline up over the crown of your head is ordinary, everyday

12. The Japanese monk who introduced the Rinzai tradition into Japan. He was the first Zen Master under whom Dōgen trained.

monastic behavior. After you have finished washing the face and have disposed of the water in your washbowl, snap your fingers three times.

Next, wipe and dry your face with one end of your hand towel. After that, take off the hand towel, fold it as it was before, and hang it over your left arm. At the rear washstand behind the Cloud Hall are face-wiping cloths for common use; long pieces of toweling have also been provided, and there are charcoal braziers. Members of the community need not worry about there not being sufficient toweling for drying their face. They can dry their heads and faces with those provided or use their own hand towel: both are proper methods.

When washing your face, do not make a sound by noisily clanging the ladle against your bowl. And do not let the surrounding area get wet by splashing hot or cold water about. Quietly reflect on the fact that, even though we were born in the final five hundred years of the Dharma and live on a remote island, the merit that we have accumulated from the past has not fallen into decay. We should rejoice in deepest gratitude that we have had correctly passed on to us the ordinary, everyday behavior of earlier Buddhas and that, without stain, we do our training to experience the Truth. In returning to the Cloud Hall, we should step lightly and speak with a low voice.

In the private quarters of aged and virtuous monks, without question there needs to be a washstand, since not washing the face is counter to the Dharma.

When washing the face, there are methods for using facial medicines.

In short, chewing a willow twig and washing the face are the True Teachings of Old Buddhas. Those who do their utmost to train with a heart that is fixed on the Way should train with and experience these Teachings. Using cold water when there is no hot water is an ancient custom, a long-established method. When there is neither hot nor cold water available, in the early morning wipe your face thoroughly dry, using a fragrant grass, powdered incense, or the like. Then, pay homage to the Buddha, recite a Scripture, light incense, and do seated meditation. To do our religious practices before we have washed our face is discourteous.

Delivered to the assembly on the twenty-third day of the tenth lunar month in the first year of the En'ō era (November 21, 1239) at Kannondōri in Kōshōhōrin-ji Temple, Yamashiro Province.



In India and China, kings, princes, ministers of state, government officials, lay Buddhists, monks, men and women in court and country, all the people throughout wash their faces. Among their household goods is a washbasin, perhaps of gold, perhaps of tin. Every morning, some people perform the act of washing

their face at a shrine to a celestial deity or at the gravesite of their ancestors. Others offer their face-washing at the stupa* of a Buddha or an Ancestor. After lay Buddhists and monks have washed their faces and straightened their clothing, they bow to those in heavenly states, and bow to the resident spirits, and bow to the Ancestors of their lineage, and bow to their parents. They bow to their teachers, and to the Triple Treasure, and to the myriad beings in the three worlds of desire, form, and beyond form, and they bow to the benevolent guardian spirits. There are none who forget to wash their face, not even farmers and rice growers, fishermen and woodcutters. Even so, they do not chew the willow twig. In Japan, amongst emperors and ministers of state, old and young, courtiers and gentry, householders and monks, both ordinary people and those in lofty positions all remember to chew a willow twig and rinse out their mouth, but they do not wash their face. In each country, it is a case of one strong point and one shortcoming. To preserve and hold to the practice of washing the face and chewing a willow twig corrects this deficiency and is the luminous manifestation of the Buddhas and Ancestors.

Delivered again to the assembly on the twentieth day of the tenth lunar month in the first year of the Kangen era (December 2, 1243) at Kippō-ji Temple in Yoshida Prefecture, Echizen Province.

Delivered to the monks on the eleventh day of the first lunar month in the second year of the Zenchō era (February 13, 1250) at Eihei-ji Temple on Mount Kichijō in Yoshida Prefecture, Echizen Province.