

On the Plum Blossom

(*Baika*)

Translator’s Introduction: The plum tree holds a particular place in Chinese culture, one that was transplanted into the culture of Japan. As the earliest blooming of all trees, it comes into flower in the latter part of winter and is therefore considered a harbinger of spring. In Buddhist contexts, it is used as a metaphor for Shakyamuni Buddha, who was considered the first to bring forth the blossoming of the Dharma, and whose blossoming has inspired others to seek and find the Way.

By extension, the plum tree is also seen as a reference to one’s Master and, in his writings, Dōgen frequently refers to his Master as an ‘Old Buddha’. Further, the plum blossom is used as a metaphor for the udumbara flower which Shakyamuni held aloft, His eyes atwinkle. Upon seeing this, His disciple Makakashō broke out into a smile in response to his spiritual recognition of True Nature.

Dōgen’s commentaries in this discourse are based primarily on various poems that his late Master, Tendō Nyojō, had composed. The discourse begins with a poem that describes Nyojō’s relationship with his own Master, Setchō Chikan. Dōgen uses this poem to comment on the Master-disciple relationship in general, as well as to explore various applications of the metaphor to the functioning of the non-personal Buddha Nature (the Plum Blossom) after the conventional body and mind have dropped off.

The perspective from which Dōgen speaks derives from just such a spiritual experience, which not all of his disciples would have had. How he puts things often bypasses customary modes of discourse wherein one’s intellect functions as the final arbiter of meaning. To attempt to explain or ‘rationalize’ all the allusions in this text would require extensive annotation and would seem counter to Dōgen’s intent in the first place. To put it simply, his process of ‘boggling the mind’ is intended, in part, to liberate his disciples from conventional modes of thinking and to help point them towards their True Nature.

My late Master Tendō, an Old Buddha, was the thirtieth Abbot and a most venerable monk of Keitoku-ji Temple on the renowned Mount Tendō in the Keigen district of Great Sung China. Once when speaking to the assembly he said, “Here at Tendō in midwinter have come forth the first lines of a verse.” He then recited the following poem of his:

*The thorn-like, spike-branched Old Plum Tree
Suddenly bursts forth, first with one or two blossoms,
Then with three, four, five, and finally blossoms beyond
count.*

*No perfume to take pride in, no fragrance to boast of.
 In scattering, they evoke a springtime scene as they are
 blown over grass and trees.
 The patch-robed monks, to a one, have no sooner shaved
 their heads
 Than, suddenly, the weather shifts with howling winds
 and squalling skies,
 Until the whole earth is wrapped in swirling snow.
 The Old Plum Tree's silhouette is barely to be seen,
 As the freezing cold seizes their noses and rubs them raw.*

The Old Plum Tree with which he began his talk was a silhouette barely to be seen when It suddenly burst into bloom and bore fruit. Sometimes It brought forth a springtime, sometimes It brought forth a winter. Sometimes It brought forth howling winds, sometimes It brought forth squalling skies. Sometimes It was simply the head of a patch-robed monk, sometimes It was the Eye of my Old Buddha. Sometimes It changed into grass and trees; sometimes It suddenly changed into a pure fragrance. Its sudden spiritual transformations and spiritually wondrous ways were inexhaustible, even up to the point where the great earth and the high heavens, along with the luminous sun and the pure moon, were functioning like trees, due to the arboreal merits of the Old Plum Tree, as they—Master and disciple—entwined around and supported each other, like the vines of kudzu and wisteria do.

At the time when the Old Plum Tree burst into bloom, Its flowering characterized the world. Whenever Its flowering characterizes the world, that is what we call ‘the arrival of spring’. On that occasion, there is a single blossom of five petals that bursts forth. At the time of this single blossom, there can be three, or four, or five blossoms, or there can be a hundred, or a thousand, or myriad blossoms, right up to there being countless blossoms. These blossomings forth are nothing compared to the one or two or countless boughs that the Old Plum Tree can boast of. Flowers such as the udumbara and the blue lotus are like one or two branchings of the Old Plum Tree’s blossoming.¹ All blossomings, in general, are beneficent gifts of the Old Plum Tree. There is the Old Plum Tree of common folk and the Old Plum Tree of those in loftier realms. And from within the Old Plum Tree, both the ordinary human realms and the realms of the more lofty manifest,

1. The udumbara flower is said to bloom only once every three thousand years. For this reason it is used in Buddhism as a metaphor for how difficult it is to come into contact with the True Teaching. The blue lotus is a metaphor for wise discernment and one’s victory over slavery to the senses.

due to the merits of the Tree. We call the hundreds and thousands of blossoms the flowering of ordinary people and of those in loftier realms; the thousands of millions of blossoms are the flowering of Buddhas and Ancestors. At this very moment in time the blossoms cry out, “A Buddha has appeared in the world!” and they cry out “From the first, the Ancestral Master Bodhidharma came to this very land of ours!”



My late Master, an Old Buddha, once addressed his assembly in verse:

*When Gautama finally lost His deceiving eyes,²
There appeared in the snow a single blossom on one
bough of the Old Plum Tree.
What has now arrived is the growing of thorn-like spurs,
So that all the more I laugh at the spring winds which
send all things flying in disarray.*

Now that this Old Buddha has turned the Wheel of the Dharma to Its full throughout the whole universe, it has created an opportunity for all ordinary folk, as well as those in lofty positions, to realize the Way. There is nothing that has not been covered with the benefits of the Dharma, even including clouds and rain, winds and water, plants and insect life. The heavens and the earth, along with their domains, having been set in motion by this Wheel of the Dharma, are like fish freely and vigorously swimming about in water. When people say, “I am hearing words that I have not heard before,” they are saying, “I am listening to the Dharma of the present moment.” When they say, “I am getting what I did not have before,” they are giving a name to their realizing the Dharma of the present moment. In short, His Wheel of the Dharma cannot be seen or heard without there being at least a vague feeling of happiness and prosperity.

In and about the hundred and eighty provinces within Great Sung China today, there are temples in the mountains and in populated areas whose number is beyond reckoning. Within them, the number of trainees is great. But most of them never met my late Master, the Old Buddha. Further, only a small percentage of those who had met him actually heard what he had to say. And even more, how could there possibly be many who had a one-to-one meeting with him and made their prostrations to him?³ And those permitted in his private quarters were fewer

2. Gautama, Prince Siddhārtha’s family name, is customarily used to refer to Shakyamuni Buddha before His enlightenment.

3. That is, became his disciples.

still, to say nothing of those who were permitted to do prostrations to my late Master's Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow, Countenance and Eye.

My late Master, the Old Buddha, did not readily allow new monks to stay in the monastery. He would often say, "Those who are unfamiliar with the mind that seeks the Way cannot dwell here with me," and then he'd send them on their way. Once rid of them, he would say, "If they are not 'such a one',* what, pray, do they want to achieve? Dogs like that are noisy beings. They are not permitted in the monastery." I have actually witnessed this and personally heard him say that. In private, I thought to myself, "What could they possibly have done wrong that even though they are his countrymen, he would not allow them to dwell with him? By what good fortune have I been permitted to enter his monastery, even though I am an alien seed from a distant foreign land? And further, I have been allowed to have free access to the Abbot's private quarters that I might do prostrations to his venerable body and listen to his words of Dharma. Though I am foolish and ignorant, I have been able to form a fruitful bond with him."

At the time when my late Master was doing his part to transform the worldly ways of Sung China, there were people who were able to explore the Matter,* as well as those who were not able to do so. Now that my late Master, the Old Buddha, has departed from the world of Sung China, it has probably become even more dismal than a moonless night. And why is that? I would simply answer, "Because around the time of my late Master, an Old Buddha, there were no Old Buddhas like my late Master, the Old Buddha." Thus, when you trainees of today encounter and hear what he said in his poems, do not think that other countrymen of yours are able to encounter and heed the Wheel of the Dharma and thereby explore the Matter with a Master. The Plum Blossom in the snow is a single glimpse of the udumbara flower. How often does it happen in everyday life that, while looking respectfully at the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching of the Buddha Tathagata, we vainly fail to break into a smile when His eyes twinkle? Right now, beyond doubt, we have already had authentically Transmitted to us—and affirmed for us—that the Plum Blossom in the snow is the very Eye of the Tathagata. Taking this up, some may take the Eye to mean a painted eye on a forehead or the pupil within an organ of sight. But when we get inside the Plum Blossom through our training and completely investigate It, such dubious explanations do not come forth any longer. This is the very Eye of the statement, "In the heavens above and the earth below, I alone am the Honored One."⁴

4. This quotation is attributed to the Buddha who, upon His birth, is said to have taken seven steps and then uttered these words. However, as the discourse states, it was Gautama's Eye

Thus it is that the celestial flowers in the world of the heavens and the celestial flowers in the world of humans—coral tree flowers and great coral tree flowers, as well as the red manjusha tree flowers and great red manjusha tree flowers—along with flowers that are kindred to innumerable lands within the ten quarters, are all the kith and kin of the Plum Blossom in the snow. Because they have received a portion of the beneficence of the Plum Blossom, millions of blossoms are the kin of the Plum Blossom and should, therefore, be called miniature plum blossoms. Illusory flowers in the sky, earthbound flowers, flowerings within the mind of meditation, and so on, are all large and small flowers that are kindred to the Plum Blossom. The flowers that have opened within the millions of domains within the Flower are all a portion of the beneficence of this Plum Blossom.⁵ Apart from the beneficence of the Plum Blossom, there is not a single raindrop or dewdrop of beneficence. The bloodlines of all who have flowered have come forth from the Plum Blossom. Do not explore the statement “The whole earth was wrapped in swirls of snow” as something that occurred only at Shōrin-ji Monastery. That snow was the Eye of the Tathagata, which shone upon Eka’s head and under his feet.⁶ Do not merely explore it as what the snow of ‘a snow-covered shrine in the snow-capped Himalayan Mountains’ refers to. It was the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching for Old Gautama,⁷ for in that place He fully realized the opening of the five eyes.⁸ The eyes of the Thousand-eyed One would have been completely fulfilled within these five eyes of His.⁹

Truly, there was not one smidgen of the Real Form of all thoughts and things that Old Gautama did not fully realize within the luminous brilliance of His body and mind. Even though the views of ordinary people and those in lofty positions have differences, and even though the feelings of the mundane and the saintly

(Buddha Nature) that made the statement. That is, the ‘I’ in the quote does not refer to a personal self. It is Buddha Nature Itself that is making the claim.

5. ‘The Flower’ is an allusion to the multi-petaled lotus that opens upon the crown of the Tathagata’s head, in the center of which sits Vairochana Buddha, that is, the Cosmic Buddha.
6. The reference here is to the Second Chinese Ancestor Eka, who stood all night in the deepening snow outside Bodhidharma’s quarters while seeking to be Bodhidharma’s disciple.
7. A reference to Gautama doing His training in the Himalayan Mountains.
8. ‘The five eyes’ refers to Gautama’s two physical eyes, which are the non-worldly eyes of someone who is in meditation, plus the Eye of wise discernment, the Eye of the Dharma, and the Eye of a Buddha.
9. ‘The Thousand-eyed One’ refers to the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara of the Thousand Eyes and the Thousand Hands, who is the embodiment of the compassion of Vairochana Buddha.

stand far apart, the vast expanse of snow is what the earth is, and the earth itself is a vast expanse of snow. If there were no vast expanse of snow, there would be no Earth anywhere within the universe. The whole of this vast expanse of snow—inside and out—is synonymous with these eyes of Old Gautama.¹⁰

You need to realize that both the Flower and the Earth are completely beyond birth and death. The Flower is beyond birth and death, and because the Flower is beyond birth and death, the Earth is beyond birth and death. Because both Flower and Earth are completely beyond birth and death, the Eye is beyond birth and death. What is called ‘beyond birth and death’ is synonymous with supreme enlightenment. What is seen at that very instant of enlightenment is simply a Plum Blossom branch. What is expressed at that very moment is simply ‘a Plum Blossom bough in the snow’. Both Earth and Flower are Life that transcends life.

Further, the phrase ‘the vast expanse of snow’ means the vast expanse of snow totally, inside and out. The whole universe is one’s Original Mind. Because Original Mind is what the flowers in the whole universe feel, the whole universe is the Plum Blossom. Because the universe is the Plum Blossom, the whole universe is synonymous with the eyes of Gautama. What they perceive at the moment of understanding is the Great Earth with Its mountains and rivers. Arriving at the Matter, arriving at the Moment, is synonymous with Bodhidharma’s poem, which is an expression of what has been arrived at:

*From the first, I came to this land to Transmit the
Dharma
That I might rescue deluded beings,
And when the Single Blossom opened Its five petals,
The fruit thereof naturally came about of itself.*

Even though there was his coming from the West and his barely arriving in the East, nevertheless the Plum Blossom was ‘the Now’ of what arrived.

Bodhidharma’s manifesting ‘the Now’ like this is called ‘the growing of thorn-like spurs’. Now at this very moment, there are old branches and new branches on large limbs, which has resulted in places where old twigs and new twigs are on small branchings. You need to explore the places wherein these have arrived, and explore ‘arrival’ as meaning ‘the Now’. ‘What is within three, four, five, six blossoms’ means ‘what is within countless blossoms’. The Flower is equipped with internal meritorious functions that are profound and far-reaching,

10. That is, what one sees before spiritually awakening is the product of the intellect’s interpretation of the data from the sense organs.

and It clearly opens up external meritorious functions that are far-reaching and great. Both this ‘internal’ and ‘external’ manifest in the blooming of one blossom. Because it is just one bough, there is no other, different one, since it is not one species among others. The One who calls the arrival of the one bough ‘the Now’ is our Old Fellow Gautama.

Because there is only One Bough, It is what is Transmitted from heir to heir. Hence, it is expressed as “My Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching is what I Transmit to Makakashō,” and it is expressed as “You have got what my Marrow is.” In this manner, because each heir is a greatly honored and valued life where an arrival has manifested, it is a matter of the five petals opening, for five petals comprise a plum blossom. Thus, there are the Seven Ancestral Buddhas,* and there are the twenty-eight Indian Ancestors and the six Chinese Ancestors up through Enō, plus nineteen other Ancestors.¹¹ All are the five petals opening on just One Bough; it is just One Bough of five-petaled blossoms. Once you have explored the One Bough and the five petals, you will encounter face-to-face the genuine ‘Transmission of the Plum Blossom in the snow’ being Transmitted to you. Once you have turned yourself around and turned your mind around within the way that the words ‘only One Bough’ relate to each other, ‘clouds’ and ‘moon’ are what are equal, whereas ‘valleys’ and ‘mountains’ are different from each other.

However, folks who have never had an Eye for exploring the Matter are wont to say, “What the five petals means is that there is the one flower which is comprised of the First Chinese Ancestor Bodhidharma plus the subsequent five generations of Chinese-born Ancestors, and because the line-up of the five transcends past and present, before and after, we speak of them as the five petals.” These words are not even worth taking up and refuting. These folks, sad to say, are not sentient beings who explore the Matter with Buddhas or train with Ancestors. How could the saying ‘one flower comprised of five petals’ possibly be limited to just these five generations? Are those who have come after the Sixth Ancestor not to be spoken of? What such folks have to say does not even come up to the prattle of little children. It is something they don’t see or hear about even in their dreams.

11. As traditionally counted, the six Chinese Ancestors would be Bodhidharma down through Enō. As to the nineteen subsequent Ancestors, which are not specifically identified as being Chinese, some scholars understand the nineteenth to refer to Nyōjō, but by actual count he would be the seventeenth. Dōgen’s Dharma heir, Kōun Ejō, would be the nineteenth, which may be why Dōgen does not identify the nineteen as being specifically Chinese.



My late Master, the Old Buddha, once said as his salutary poem that followed his formal Dharma talk on a New Year's Day:

*On this first day of the year I wish you happiness.
All the myriad things arising are fresh and new.
Upon reflection, my great assembly, I submit to you,
The Plum Tree has blossomed early this spring.*

When I quietly reflect upon this poem, I realize that even if you dear old veteran monks in all ten quarters within the three periods of time have let go of your bodies, if you have no equivalent of “The Plum Tree has blossomed early this spring,” who would say that you have expressed the Matter fully? My late Master alone, the Old Buddha, was the Old Buddha among Old Buddhas.

The fundamental meaning of what he said was that once the Plum has blossomed, a myriad springtimes are quick to follow its lead. The myriad springtimes are but one or two of the meritorious functions of the Plum Tree. Just one springtime can make the myriad things that arise into something fresh and new, and make our myriad thoughts and things into a New Year's Day.

His wish for our happiness denotes the authenticity of his Eye. ‘The myriad things that arise’ are not only of the past, present, and future, they are what existed before the Lords of Awe-inspiring Voices and what will come after the future. Because he is saying that the past, present, and future, which are immeasurable and inexhaustible, are ever fresh, this freshness has dropped off ‘freshness’. Thus, what he reflected on and submitted was his wish for his great assembly, because what he wished was that each of them might be ‘such a person’.



My late Master Tendō, the Old Buddha, during a Dharma talk for his assembly, once said in verse:

*If a single word accords with the Truth,
It will not change, though myriad generations pass:
Thus, eye-shaped willow buds sprout forth from new
branches,
Whereas plum blossoms fill up the older boughs.¹²*

12. In this section of the discourse, ‘willows’ refers to those who are new to training, for whom all is new and who are ‘all eyes’, whereas the plum tree refers to a Master whose years of training, like old boughs, have brought forth a profusion of blossoms.

That is to say, pursuing the Way for hundreds of eons is, from beginning to end, equivalent to a single word according with the Truth, and the effort of one moment's thought is, from before to after, the same as its not changing, though myriad generations pass. The willow brings about a luxuriant growth of new branches and contrives 'eyes' to burst out upon them; even though the branches are new, it is 'eyes' that they bring forth. The principle is that the 'eyes' are nothing other than 'eyes', and we thoroughly explore these branches as being new. The 'new' should be explored through your training as meaning "Everything is all new." To say that plum blossoms fill up the older boughs means that Plum Blossoms are entirely old boughs, that They permeate old boughs, that the old boughs are Plum Blossoms. For example, plum boughs explore the Matter just as willow branches do; plum boughs come into being just as willow branches do; plum boughs are filled up, just as willow branches are. Because plum boughs are filled up with bloomings, just as willow branches are, this is the same as saying, "I have the True Teaching which I Transmit to Makakashō." The countenance of the One filled the countenance of the other with His raising the Flower aloft: the flowering of the one filled the flowering of the Other by his breaking into a smile.



My late Master, the Old Buddha, in formally addressing his assembly, once said in verse:

*The riverside willows look as though adorned with a
minister's waist sash:
The plum blossoms look as though clad in an archer's
gauntlet.¹³*

This gauntlet is not like some fine brocade from Szechwan Province or like Pien-ho's priceless jewel:¹⁴ it is simply the opening of a Plum Blossom. The opening of a Plum Blossom is equivalent to 'you whom my Marrow has gotten'.¹⁵

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13. On a literal level, this verse describes the way the dark branches of the budding willow and the bright blossoming plum tree look.
 14. Pien-ho was a person in ancient China who offered to three rulers a huge, unpolished jewel that he had found, but none of these rulers were able to perceive its intrinsic value, and they therefore summarily rejected the offering.
 15. "You whom my Marrow has gotten" is Dōgen's reversal of the words Bodhidharma spoke to Eka when confirming him as a Dharma heir: "You have gotten what my Marrow is."



Once, when King Prasenajit invited the Venerable Pindola to a midday meal, the king asked him afterwards, “I have been given to understand that you, O Venerable One, have actually met the Buddha. Is this true?”¹⁶

The Venerable One pointed to the Matter by using his hand to raise his eyebrow.

Concerning this, my Late Master, the Old Buddha, composed a poem:

*Raising his own eyebrow as response to the question, he
laughed,
Showing without guile that he had ‘encountered Buddha’
in a familiar way.
For which he deserves gratitude from the four quarters
up to this very day.
The Spring occurs within the twigs of the Plum, which,
wrapped in snow, are ever so cold.*

This story is about King Prasenajit once asking a Venerable One whether he had or had not actually met the Buddha. ‘Encountering Buddha’ means becoming a Buddha, and ‘becoming a Buddha’ means using one’s hand to raise an eyebrow. If the Venerable One had merely realized some fruit of arhathood and were not a full-fledged arhat,* he could not have encountered Buddha. If he had not encountered Buddha, he could not have become Buddha. If he had not become Buddha, he would probably not have used his hand to raise an eyebrow, signaling that he had realized Buddhahood.

Accordingly, you need to keep in mind that, as a disciple who had received the Face-to-Face Transmission of Shakyamuni Buddha and as one who had already experienced the fourth fruit of arhathood and was awaiting his rebirth in the world as a present-day Buddha,¹⁷ how could the Venerable One possibly not have encountered Shakyamuni Buddha? ‘Having met Shakyamuni Buddha’ does not mean ‘encountering Buddha’. As you explore this through your training, understand that to encounter Shakyamuni Buddha as Shakyamuni Buddha is

16. As used in the translation of this section of the discourse, ‘to meet the Buddha’ means having had a social contact with the historical Shakyamuni, whereas ‘to encounter Buddha’ means having seen one’s own Buddha Nature.

17. The fourth fruit of arhathood refers to the results experienced from attaining the fourth stage of arhathood. Please see the *Glossary* for an explanation of these four stages.

‘encountering Buddha’. In that King Prasenajit was able to open his eyes to exploring, he had come in contact with one who skillfully used his hand to raise an eyebrow. You simply need to have the Eye of a Buddha to explore the principle underlying ‘having encountered Buddha in a familiar way’. This Spring, of which my Master spoke, is beyond humankind, beyond the domains of a Buddha; It is within the twigs of the Plum Tree. How do we know this is so? Because the chill of the snow is the raising of an eyebrow.



My late Master, the Old Buddha, once said in verse,

*Our Original Countenance is beyond birth and death.
The Spring is within the blossom of the Plum and has
entered a picture.*

To paint a picture of Spring, you need not paint willows, or plum trees, or peach trees, or damson trees; you should just portray Spring. To picture willow, plum, peach, or damson is to picture a willow tree, a plum tree, a peach tree, or a damson tree; it is not yet portraying Spring. It is not that Spring should not be portrayed, but apart from my late Master, an Old Buddha, there is no one within India in the west and China to the east who has portrayed Spring. Only my late Master, the Old Buddha, and he alone, had sharp-tipped a brush to portray the Spring. The Spring he spoke about now is the Spring within the picture, because he has put It into the picture. Because he had no need to call upon other abilities, he could simply make a plum blossom be Spring by putting it or its tree into the picture—such were his skillful means.

Due to the clarity of my late Master, the Old Buddha, concerning the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching, he Transmitted It to Buddhas and Ancestors who had assembled from all ten quarters over the past, present, and future. Thus it was that he penetrated what the Eye is and clarified what a Plum Blossom is.

On the sixth day of the eleventh lunar month in the first year of the Kangen era in Japan (December 18, 1243), at Kippō-ji Temple in the Yoshida district in Echizen province, where snow, some three feet deep, has wrapped the whole earth in swirling white.



If perchance some demon of self naturally arises and the Plum Blossom seems not to be the Eye of Gautama, then ponder on the question, “What physical

thing can you see as the Eye that is more apt than the Plum Blossom?” And if at such a time, you search for the Eye somewhere else, then every moment will be your being face-to-face with It and failing to recognize It, because mutual recognition will not have occurred to you as possible. Today is not ‘my today’, it is the today of our whole tradition. Straight off, you must clarify what the Eye of the Plum Blossom is and seek that, and that alone!



My late Master, the Old Buddha, once said in verse,

*Everything is so bright and clear,
No need to seek some phantom in the Flowering Plum,
Spontaneously creating rain and raising clouds in past
and present.
Past and present are rare enough, and what ending will
they have?*

Thus, the creating of rain and the raising of clouds are functions of the Plum Blossom. Floating clouds and falling rain are the Plum Blossom’s thousands of twists and turns and myriad masses of forms, as well as Its thousands of merits and myriad virtues. What is naturally ever-present is the Plum Blossom. Thus, we speak of the Plum Blossom as being forever.



The time-honored Meditation Master Hōen once said in verse:

*The snow-laden north wind sets the valley trees to
swaying.
Everything is buried deep within, with little complaint,
While on the mountain peak, the bright-spirited plum
stands alone.
Even before the twelfth month’s heavy snows spew forth, I
have the feeling of the yearly ‘greater cold’.¹⁸*

Thus, without having penetrated what the movements of the Plum Blossom are, it is hard to know what the feeling of the greater cold is. Harmonizing the

18. Traditionally in China, there is a period around early November that is called ‘the time of light snow’ and, a month later, one called ‘the time of heavy snow’. Similarly, a short while after the winter solstice there is a period called ‘the time of the lesser cold’ and, a month later, one called ‘the time of the greater cold’.

meritorious functioning of little bits of the Plum Blossom with the north wind is what has created the snow. Be very clear about this. It is the strength of the Plum Blossom that calls forth the wind, creates the snow, brings order to the year, and brings the valley woodlands, along with all other things, into existence.



The senior monk Taigen Fu expressed his awakening by saying in verse,

*I remember from the days before I had awakened
Whenever I heard the wail of the painted horn, it was like
a cry of grief.¹⁹
Now, when upon my pillow, I have no idle dreams
And just trust to whatever the Plum Blossom may blow
my way, large or small.*

Senior monk Fu was originally an academic lecturer. Having been shaken up by the Chief Cook of Mount Kassen, he had a great awakening. This was his Plum Blossom letting the Spring Wind blow as It would, large or small.

19. The painted horn is the name of an ancient Chinese musical instrument.