

## On the Eye of a Buddha

(*Ganzei*)

**Translator's Introduction:** *Ganzei*, the title of this discourse, has several meanings. It literally refers to the physical organs of sight: the eyes. However, in most contexts its meaning is spiritual. For instance, in a story in which a disciple asks his Master to grant him the Eye, he is asking to be Transmitted, that is, to have passed on to him the Eye of the True Teaching. In other contexts, it refers to the Eye of Wisdom (Wise Discernment) or to the Eye with which one perceives that someone is 'such a person', that is, a person who has already awakened to his or her Buddha Nature. While the reader needs to be aware that the meaning of the word Eye in Dōgen's discourses does shift, which of these various meanings is intended is usually fairly clear from context.

When we take up our explorations of the Matter\* through our training for billions of myriad eons and roll them into balls, they will make eighty-four thousand Eyes.<sup>1</sup>



When my late Master, the Old Buddha of Tendō, was residing as Abbot at Zuigan Monastery, he once said as part of his formal teaching to his assembly:

*The autumn wind is cool, the autumn moon is bright,  
It lights up the Great Earth all with Its hills and streams.  
My eyes are atwinkle as we meet each other face-to-face,  
My blows and shouts mingle as I test my patch-robed  
monks.*

Now, 'testing patch-robed monks' means testing whether they too are Old Buddhas. The pivotal point is that he mixed his blows and shouts, using them to test his disciples. It is his Eye that manifests such vitality. The Great Earth with all Its hills and streams is the appearance of things as our Eye reveals them. It is the coolness of the autumn wind, which is inexhaustible. It is the brightness of the autumn moon, which is inexhaustible. Being the coolness of the autumn wind, It is

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\* See *Glossary*.

1. This is a 'recipe' for taking the fruits of one's training and using them to help others see with the Eye of a Buddha. It relates to a story about his Master, which Dōgen later presents.

beyond comparison with even the four great oceans. Being the brightness of the autumn moon, It is more resplendent than a thousand suns and moons. Its coolness and resplendence are the Great Earth with Its hills and streams which our vision perceives. Patch-robed monks are Buddhas and Ancestors. The one whose Eye does not opt for enlightenment, or for being unenlightened, or for being in some state before or after enlightenment, is one who is an Ancestor of the Buddha. ‘Testing’ is the Master’s disclosing the Eye. It is the disciple’s manifesting the One Eye. It is the living Eye itself. ‘Meeting each other face-to-face’ is the mutual encountering of Master and disciple. ‘Mutually encountering’ is the Eye being sharp; ‘meeting face-to-face’ is the Eye thundering forth. In short, do not think that if your whole body is large, your whole Eye must be small. Even those in past ages who have considered themselves to be ever so eminent have been in agreement that their body is large and their eyes are small. This is because they were not yet in possession of their Eye.



Once when Tōzan Ryōkai was in the monastic assembly of Ungan Donjō, Ungan came upon him making straw sandals,<sup>2</sup> whereupon Tōzan spoke to Ungan, saying, “I pray that you will grant me the Eye, O Venerable Monk.”<sup>3</sup>

Ungan asked, “Who did you give yours away to?”

Tōzan replied, “This person never had One.”<sup>4</sup>

Ungan then asked, “Supposing you had One, where would you turn in order to give It to someone else?”

Tōzan had no words.

Ungan then asked, “Is the Eye you are praying for your Eye or not?”

Tōzan replied, “It is not a matter of It being my Eye or not being my Eye.”

Ungan responded, “Ahaaa!”<sup>5</sup>

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2. The practice of making straw sandals is considered one of the secret meritorious practices, since such sandals were made for a fellow monk whose sandals had worn out. Without the maker letting it be known who he was, the sandals would be left where the chosen monk could find them.
  3. Tōzan is formally asking Ungan for the Transmission.
  4. ‘This person’ is a humble way to refer to oneself and avoids the assertion of a personal ‘I’.
  5. Ungan’s response was his way of affirming Tōzan’s answer.

So, fully displaying one's exploring the Matter through training with one's Master is asking for the Eye. Practicing the Way in the Cloud Hall, attending the Abbot's formal talks in the Dharma Hall, entering the Master's quarters to inquire of the Way, these are ways of asking for the Eye.<sup>6</sup> In general, following the assembly when leaving formal meditation and following the assembly when coming to formal meditation are ways of asking for the Eye as a matter of course. The underlying principle that the Eye is beyond self and beyond other is evident.

As the dialogue said, Tōzan had already requested help by asking the Master to grant him the Eye. Be clear about this: if the Eye is truly yours, you do not need to ask anyone for It, and if It is truly someone else's, you cannot beg It off that person.

Ungan pointed to this by asking, "Who did you give yours away to?"

There is the occasion of Its 'being yours' and there is the dispensing of It by 'giving It to whomever'. Tōzan's saying, "This person never had One," was his own way of expressing his Eye.<sup>7</sup> You should take the time to explore through your training the Truth revealed by his manifesting the Way in this manner.

Ungan asked, "Supposing you had One, in what direction would you turn in order to give It to someone else?"

The Eye in this expression signifies that the 'never had' of "This person never had One" is both to have One and to have turned in order to give It to someone else. To turn in order to give It to someone is to have It. You need to thoroughly explore that this is 'such an expression'.

Tōzan had no words.

He was not dumbstruck. Rather, he was a victim of the sudden arising of dualistic thoughts due to past karma.\*

Pointing out the Matter for his disciple's sake, Ungan then asked, "Is the Eye you are praying for your Eye or not?"

This is a detail concerning the one-eyedness of the Eye. It is his vigorously shattering Tōzan's 'Eye'. The main point of what Ungan is saying is, "It is the Eye asking for the Eye." It is water pulling water along. It is mountains standing in

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6. Making straw sandals as a secret meritorious practice would also be a way.

7. That is, there is no 'I' that has the Eye of the True Treasure as a personal possession, and everyone has It.

rows with mountains. It is our going forth among those of unlike mind and our living amidst those of like mind.

Tōzan replied, “It is not a matter of It being my Eye or not being my Eye.”

This is his Eye singing forth of Its own accord.<sup>8</sup> Whenever body or mind, thought or knowledge, or form or rank are present, you should encounter those conditions as being the living Eye which is coming forth of Its own accord from beyond the duality of having or not having. All the Buddhas of the three temporal worlds are continually standing in the Dharma Hall listening to the Eye’s turning of the Great Wheel of the Dharma and giving voice to It. In short, within the innermost realm of what we thoroughly explore through our training, we leap into the Eye as we give rise to the intention to realize Buddhahood, as we do the training and practice, and as we awaken to Great Wisdom. From the first, this Eye is beyond self and beyond other. Because It has no obstructions of any kind, the Great Matter is likewise free of obstructions.



In commenting on the preceding story, Rōya Ekaku, a Master of old, once said, “How wonderful indeed are the Buddhas of the Ten Quarters. From the first, They have been flowers within the Eye.” What he called ‘the Buddhas of the Ten Quarters’ is your Eye. The flowers within the Eye are the Buddhas of the Ten Quarters. Your present activities of stepping forward and stepping back, of just sitting and just sleeping, are just such flowers. Be that as it may, you have inherited the power of the Eye Itself. It is your being stripped of your delusions and your being set loose to rid yourself of them.



My late Master, the Old Buddha, once said, “I’m going to scrape out the Eye of Bodhidharma and make It into mudballs to pelt you monks with.” With a shout he said, “Yes! The sea has dried up, right to the bottom, and its waves are so high that they smite the very heavens!”

While in the Abbot’s quarters at Seiryō-ji Temple, he made a point of this for the sake of the vast sea of assembled monks. This is why he spoke of ‘pelting them’, as if he were saying ‘making them into a real person’. Because of his pelting, all the

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8. This Eye is Tōzan’s True Eye.

various monks would give rise to their True Countenance. He meant, for instance, that with the Eye of Bodhidharma he would make each of them into a ‘real person’. And he has done so! This is what the underlying principle of ‘pelting persons’ is. Because each person is someone who has been struck alive with the Eye, the fist with which he struck someone in the Cloud Hall, the traveling staff\* with which he struck someone in the Dharma Hall, and the lacquered hossu\* with which he struck someone in the Abbot’s quarters are all the Eye of Bodhidharma. His gouging out Bodhidharma’s Eye and making It into mudballs to pelt monks with is called today ‘seeking an interview with the Abbot to ask for a spiritual boon’ or ‘getting up in the morning to do one’s morning practice’ or ‘making the effort to just sit’. And what kind of person does he beat them into? “The sea has dried up, right to the bottom, and its waves are so high that they smite the very heavens!”



My late Master, the Old Buddha, once entered the Dharma Hall and spoke in praise of the Tathagata’s realizing the Way, saying in verse:

*For six years He stumbled on through the weeds of  
provisional truth with the determined spirit of a  
wild fox.*

*He would leap forth with His whole body, only to become  
entangled in delusion’s vines.*

*Having totally lost His eyes, there was no place for Him  
to seek for It.*

*Now He goes about deceiving others by saying that He  
was awakened by the morning star.*

That “He was awakened by the morning star” are the words of someone who had totally lost His eyes at that very moment. This was the entangled condition of His whole being, and so He easily leapt free from it. Seeking what is sought is seeking for that which does not exist in what manifests before our very eyes; It is seeking for that which does not exist in what has not yet manifested before our very eyes.



In the Dharma Hall, my late Master, the Old Buddha, once said in verse:

*When Gautama finally lost His deceiving eyes,  
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.*

Gautama's eyes are not simply one or two or three eyes. To which eye or eyes does this losing refer? It may be that there are eyes which are called 'losing one's eyes'. Further, in such a situation as this, there is the Eye that is 'a single blossom on one bough of the Old Plum Tree'. Before the spring arrives, this Eye discloses the heart of spring.



Once when ascending to the Dharma seat, my late Master, the Old Buddha, said:

Day after long day the pouring rain, then finally the sky completely clear! The croaking of bullfrogs and the mumbling of earthworms. The Old Buddhas have never passed away, displaying for us Their diamond-hard Eye. Oh, dear! I've tangled the entangled.

'The diamond-hard Eye' is the pouring rain day after long day; It is the sky's being completely clear. It is the croaking of bullfrogs, It is the mumbling of earthworms and, because They have never passed away, It is the Old Buddhas. Even if the Old Buddhas were to pass away, it would not be the same as the passing away of those who are not Old Buddhas.



My late Master, the Old Buddha, while giving a Dharma talk, once said:

From the winter solstice on, the days grow longer as the sun moves farther southward. From within my Eye, a light pours forth, and into my Nostrils pours the breath of Life.

In the endless stream of present moments from the winter solstice to the summer solstice, though the days and months grew ever longer, he let go of measuring them. This is the light that was emitted from his Eye. It was his 'seeing mountains' in the light of day.<sup>9</sup> This is what everyday, dignified behavior was like among his assembly.

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9. That is, his seeing that his assembly of monks was doing their training well.



My late Master, the Old Buddha, when giving a Dharma talk at Jinzu-ji Temple in Lin'an prefecture, said:

This morning is the first day of the second lunar month. The Eye of my hossu is bulging out; It is bright like a mirror and as shiny black as lacquer. With a dash, It leaps across heaven and earth and swallows them up, as both together are but a single form of It. You of this monks' assembly are still beating your heads against your walls and butting up against your fences. And, in short, to what end? I've given you my all, tossing It your way with a hearty laugh. I entrust everything to the Spring Wind, for there is nothing more that I need to do.

In this instance, his saying "beating your heads against your walls and butting up against your fences" means the whole of your walls are doing the beating and the whole of your fences are doing the butting. And there is this Eye. 'This morning', 'the second lunar month', 'the first day' are all instances of the Eye; that is, the Eye of the hossu.<sup>10</sup> Because It leaps across every barrier with a dash, it is 'this morning', and because in thousands of myriad ways It swallows up the whole universe, heaven and earth, it is 'the second month', and when I've given you my all, tossing It your way, it is 'the first day'. Such is the life of one who is manifesting the Eye.

*Given to the assembly on the seventeenth day of the twelfth lunar month in the first year of the Kangen era (January 28, 1244) while staying at Yamashibu Peak in Echizen province.*

*Copied by me on the twenty-eighth day of the same month (February 8, 1244) whilst in the quarters of the Abbot's assistant at the foot of the Peak.*

*Ejō*

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10. The hossu is used as part of the ceremonial connected with the disciples coming up in front of the whole community to ask the Master their spiritual question. This ceremony is customarily performed twice each month.