

## On the Great Wisdom That Is Beyond Discriminatory Thought

*(Makahannya-haramitsu)*

**Translator’s Introduction:** *Makahannya-haramitsu*, the earliest dated Dharma talk in the *Shōbōgenzō*, was given by Dōgen to his monks in his renovated monastery, which he had renamed Kannondōri. The discourse consists largely of paraphrases from the *Scripture Which Is the Heart of the Prajñāpāramitā*, also called the *Heart Scripture* (J. *Hannya Shin Gyō*), and lengthy quotations from the *Larger Scripture on Spiritual Wisdom* (J. *Dai Hannya Gyō*), plus a poem by his Chinese Master Tendō Nyojō, to all of which he has added comments.

There is an allusion in the discourse that may not be as obvious in the translation as it is in the original. In passages from the *Larger Scripture on Spiritual Wisdom*, the questioner is identified as Tentaishaku, ‘the Lord of the Heavens’, a common epithet for Indra. Thus, at first glance, the ensuing dialogue would appear to be between a divine personage from the Hindu pantheon and Subhuti, one of the Buddha’s chief disciples who was known for his understanding of the Buddha’s Teachings on the Immaculacy of Emptiness. However, in the original text the reader is given a subtle hint as to the questioner’s real identity when Subhuti addresses him as Kaushika (‘He Whose Eyes Look Askance at Things’), an epithet applied to Indra when taking human form. In other words, the questioner is a human who, from haughtiness, considers himself the equal of the Lord of the Heavens, as he looks askance at the Buddha’s Teachings.

When Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva\* was at one with the  
deepest Wisdom of the Heart which is beyond discriminatory thought,  
He saw with utmost clarity that the five skandhas which comprise  
one’s whole being were as space.

The five skandhas are our physical form, our sensory perceptions, our mental conceptions and ideas, our volition, and our consciousness: they are a fivefold manifestation of Wisdom. ‘To see with utmost clarity’ is what is meant by Wisdom. To clarify what the meaning and import of this is, He said, “Our physical form is as pure and unbounded as space,” and “The Unbounded is what our physical form is.” Our physical forms are forms: the Unbounded is what is unbounded. The former are ‘the hundreds of individual sproutings’:<sup>1</sup> the Latter is the multiplicity of form.

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\* See *Glossary*.

1. ‘The hundreds of individual sproutings’, an expression often used by Dōgen, refers to the

When the Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought manifests in twelvefold form, It is the twelve sensory fields—that is, the six sensory faculties along with what they perceive to be the properties of all thoughts and things. And this Wisdom has an eighteenfold manifestation, comprised of the six sensory faculties of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, tactile body, and mind plus their six perceived properties, respectively, color, sound, odor, taste, feel, and mental contents, along with the six forms of consciousness associated with eyes, ears, nose, tongue, tactile body, and mind. And this Wisdom has a fourfold manifestation: the arising of suffering, its cause, its ultimate extinguishing, and the method whereby it is extinguished. And this Wisdom has a sixfold manifestation, consisting of almsgiving, keeping to the Pure Precepts, practicing patience, making diligent effort, doing serene reflection meditation, and applying wise discernment. And the Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought has a singular expression, which is constantly manifesting before our very eyes here and now: It is total and absolute enlightenment. And the Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought has a threefold manifestation as past, present, and future. And this Wisdom has a sixfold manifestation as earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness. And this Wisdom has a fourfold manifestation which occurs in daily life as moving, standing, sitting, and reclining.

There was once a mendicant monk in the assembly of the Tathagata Shakyamuni who was thinking to himself, “I bow in deepest respect to the profound Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought. And well I should, for even though within this Wisdom there is nothing that gets born or becomes extinct, nevertheless You have been able to establish that by following the Precepts, our physical skandha will be beyond dualistic morality; that by meditative contemplation, our sensory skandha will be tranquil and freed from all false ideas; that by practicing wise discernment, our consciousness skandha will be wise in what it sees; that by practicing non-attachment, our volitional skandha will be fully liberated from defiling passions; and that by practicing all-acceptance, our thought skandha will have complete comprehension of this liberated state. You have also been able to establish that the fruits of entering the stream of training, the fruits of returning but once more to the world of desire, the fruits of not returning to that world, and the fruits of arhathood\* truly exist. You have been able to establish that there is the enlightenment solely realized by oneself, as well as the supreme awakening wherein all

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manifold forms that arise or ‘sprout up’ because of a set of conditions, persist for a while, then disappear when the conditions that brought them about change.

things are viewed alike as enlightened.<sup>2</sup> You have been able to establish that there are the Treasures of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, as well as to establish that there is a turning of the Wheel of the Dharma and a ferrying of all manner of sentient beings to the Other Shore.”

The Buddha, aware of these thoughts, addressed the monk, saying, “It is just as you have been thinking, just as you have thought: the profound Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought is subtle and difficult for the intellect to fathom.”

In regard to the private thoughts of this monk, whenever someone bows down in respect to all things, the wisdom that prompted this monk to say, “even though there is no being born or becoming extinct, nevertheless...,” expresses a ‘bowing down in respect’. When there is this moment of ‘being duly respectful’, the wisdom of what the Buddha was able to establish in this connection is right before your very eyes and encompasses everything the monk had in mind, from the practicing of Precepts, meditation, and wise discernment up through the ferrying of sentient beings to the Other Shore. It is this that we mean when we speak of ‘*Mu*’.<sup>3</sup> What this expedient term ‘*Mu*’ refers to can be realized through the practices just outlined, for this ‘*Mu*’ is the profound, subtle, and inscrutable Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought.

Someone present, a veritable Indra, Lord of the Heavens, asked the Buddha’s long-standing senior disciple Subhuti, “O great virtuous one, if some bodhisattva or mahasattva\* were desirous of studying this ‘Profound Wisdom That is Beyond Discriminatory Thought’, just how, precisely, should he go about studying such a thing?”

Subhuti replied, “O you who look with doubting eyes, if a bodhisattva or mahasattva is desirous of learning about the Profound Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought, he should study It with a mind as completely open as open space, with no preconceptions to hamper him.”

Thus, ‘learning what Wisdom is’ means ‘to be free of preconceptions’: ‘being free of preconceptions’ is what ‘studying Wisdom’ is.

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2. A reference to Shakyamuni’s awakening on His own, without the aid of a master, and His realizing as part of that enlightenment experience that all things are simultaneously enlightened just as they are.
  3. ‘*Mu*’ is the Japanese reading of the Chinese character that is sometimes used in Zen texts to represent That which ‘is beyond’ the ability of any words or descriptions to encompass.

This Indra Lord of the Heavens then addressed the Buddha, saying, “World-honored One, if virtuous men and women were to receive this teaching on Your purported ‘Wisdom That is Beyond Discriminatory Thought’, hold to it, and recite it to others chapter and verse, were they to explore its implications and then lecture upon it to others, what could they possibly do to defend it from critical attack? All I am really asking, O World-honored One, is that You, out of Your compassion, give us instruction.”

This time, the Buddha’s senior monk Subhuti responded to this lordly Indra by saying, “O you with the doubting eyes, do you see any way in which this Teaching can be defended?”

The lordly one replied, “No, O great virtuous one, I do not see any way in which this teaching can be defended.”

Subhuti then said, “O you with the doubting eyes, if virtuous men and women explain the matter as the Buddha has, the profound Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought will, in fact, be Its own defense. If virtuous men and women put forth the matter in this way, they will never be far from the profound Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought. You need to understand that, as long as any being—human or non-human—seeks to be told what It means while acting from a desire to do harm or mischief, that being will ultimately not be able to realize It. O you with the doubting eyes, if your motive is to defend and protect It, you should act in accordance with what has been said here. All bodhisattvas and the Deepest Wisdom That is Beyond Discriminatory Thought are in no way different from the desire to defend and protect That which is like the clear and empty sky.”

Understand that to receive this Teaching, keep to It, accurately recite It to others, and explore Its implications is precisely what ‘defending and protecting Wisdom’ means. To desire to defend and protect It means that you receive the Teaching, keep to It, accurately recite It to others, and so forth.

My former Master, a Buddha of old, once said in verse:

*My whole being is like the mouth of a bell suspended in  
empty space:*

*It does not ask whether the wind blows east or west,  
north or south.*

*Impartial to all, it sounds the Wisdom for the sake of  
others:*

*“Bong bong bong,” says the wind bell, “bong bong  
bong.”*

This is the sounding of Wisdom, which is the right Transmission of Buddhas and Ancestors. His whole being is this Wisdom, the whole of others is this Wisdom, the whole of oneself is this Wisdom, the whole of east and west, north and south is this Wisdom.

Shakyamuni Buddha then said, “Shariputra,<sup>4</sup> when it comes to the matter of the Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought, all sentient beings, of whatever sort they may be, are to be offered spiritual provisions and respectfully bowed to, each treated as a place where a Buddha dwells. Your exploration of the Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought should be done as though you were making spiritual offerings and respectfully bowing to the Buddha as the Awakened and Revered One.

“And why so? Because the Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought is not something different from the Buddha as the Awakened and Revered One, nor is the Buddha as the Awakened and Revered One something different from what the Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought is. The Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought is, in fact, the Buddha as the Awakened and Revered One, just as the Buddha as the Awakened and Revered One is, in fact, the Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought.

“And how so? Because, Shariputra, all Tathagatas as arhats and Fully Awakened Ones have, without exception, been able to appear in the world by virtue of the Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought. And because, Shariputra, all bodhisattvas, mahasattvas, pratyekabuddhas\*, arhats, non-returners, once-returners, and stream-enterers have, without exception, been able to appear in the world by virtue of the Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought.<sup>5</sup> And because, Shariputra, in all the worlds, the ten ways of doing good, the four meditations leading to heavenly states, the four meditative states beyond the world of form, and the five wondrous faculties have, without exception, been able to appear in the world by virtue of the Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought.”

Thus it is that the Buddha as the Awakened and Revered One is the Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought: the Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought is

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4. Shariputra was one of the chief disciples of the Buddha. He was renowned for his spiritual Wisdom.
  5. These four terms, from arhat through stream-enterers, are the ‘four stages of arhathood’ and are explained briefly in the *Glossary*.

all the various thoughts and things. All these various things are as empty space: they are neither born nor do they wholly die, they are not stained nor yet immaculate, increasing not, decreasing not. When this Wisdom Beyond Discriminatory Thought is manifesting before our very eyes, It is the Buddha as the Awakened and Revered One manifesting before our very eyes. Inquire into this; keep it in mind. To make offerings and bow respectfully is, indeed, to look with reverence to, trust in, and faithfully follow the Buddha as the Awakened and Revered One: to look with reverence to, trust in, and faithfully follow Him is to be the Buddha as the Awakened and Revered One.

*This was delivered to the monastic assembly at Kannondōri during the summer retreat in the first year of the Tempuku era (1233).*

*On the twenty-first day of the third lunar month in the second year of the Kangen era (April 29, 1244), this was copied out by Ejō, while in the chief disciple's quarters at Kippō-ji Temple in Echizen Province.*