

## On the Real Form of All Thoughts and Things

(*Shohō Jissō*)

**Translator’s Introduction:** The title of this discourse implies that how we perceive things to be may not actually be their real form. In such contexts the term ‘form’ means ‘the way things appear to us, how they look, and the form they take’. Also, the phrase ‘each and every Buddha’ is saying that everyone who has realized Buddhahood is unique in regards to the way in which They have fully and directly realized the Truth, and, at the same time, They are exactly like all other Buddhas as to what It is that They have realized. Because what is real is That Which is Real, wherever the term ‘real form’ occurs, it implies that all thoughts and things are inseparable from their True Nature. Hence, where Dōgen refers to ‘real form’, he is also referring to ‘Real Form’.

All Buddhas and Ancestors fully manifest Their thorough realization of what is real. What is real are all Their thoughts and the things around Them.<sup>1</sup> All Their thoughts and the things around Them comprise Their form just as it is, Their True Nature just as it is, Their body just as it is, Their mind just as it is, Their world just as it is, Their ‘clouds and rain’ just as they are,<sup>2</sup> Their daily activities—walking, standing, sitting, and reclining—just as they are, Their moving or being still within Their joys and sorrows just as they are, Their traveling staff\* and Their ceremonial hossu\* just as they are, Their flower raised aloft and Their face breaking into a smile just as they are,<sup>3</sup> Their inheriting the Dharma and Their prophesying Buddhahood just as they are, Their training under a Master and Their doing the practice just as they are, and Their pine-like fidelity and Their bamboo-like integrity just as they are.

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1. ‘All Their thoughts and things’ are what They experience directly, whether it be what appears to arise from within as ‘thoughts’ or what appears to arise externally as ‘things’.

2. ‘Clouds and rain’ is a common Chinese metaphor for sexual thoughts and feelings that arise.

\* See *Glossary*.

3 This is a reference to the Transmission of the Dharma from Shakyamuni Buddha, who held aloft an udumbara blossom, to his smiling disciple Makakashō.



Shakyamuni Buddha once said:

Only a Buddha is directly able to fully realize the real form of all thoughts and things, just as all Buddhas have done. What is called ‘all thoughts and things’ is form just as it is, True Nature just as It is, physical body just as it is, spiritual abilities just as they are, as well as actions just as they are, causes just as they are, conditions just as they are, effects just as they are, and consequences just as they are, for all things are Ultimate Reality, from beginning to end, just as they are.

The Tathagata’s phrase ‘Ultimate Reality from beginning to end’ was His own way of expressing the reality of all thoughts and things. It is the way our Master Shakyamuni personally expressed it. It was His exploring through His training that all things are equal, because when we explore the Matter\* through our training, all things are seen to be equal.

Each and every Buddha is the real form of the True Dharma, and the real form of the True Dharma is each and every Buddha. Each Buddha is ‘the real form’, and every Buddha comprises ‘all thoughts and things’. Hearing the phrase ‘all thoughts and things’, we should not explore it as being the One, nor should we explore it as being the many. Upon hearing the phrase ‘the Real Form’, we should not understand it as something beyond emptiness, nor should we understand it as something beyond one’s True Nature. ‘Real’ refers to each Buddha and ‘form’ refers to every Buddha. Being ‘directly able’ refers to each Buddha and ‘fully realizing’ refers to every Buddha. ‘All thoughts and things’ refers to what each Buddha is, whereas ‘the Real Form’ refers to what every Buddha is. ‘All thoughts and things are undoubtedly all thoughts and things’ is realized by each Buddha, and ‘all thoughts and things are reality’ is realized by every Buddha.

Hence, there are forms just as they are and there is the True Nature just as It is, wherein all thoughts and things exist as thoughts and things of their own accord. And forms are, precisely, forms: there are their forms just as they are and there is their True Nature just as It is. When Shakyamuni manifested in the world as Buddha, He expounded, practiced, and realized the Real Form of all thoughts and things just as all Buddhas have done. What He expounded is synonymous with His being directly able to realize the Truth to Its fullest. Though we say that what He experienced was a full realization, He had to be able to directly realize It. Because such a realization was beyond having a beginning, middle, or end, it was His form just as it was and His True Nature just as It was.

His being directly able to fully realize It is synonymous with the Real Form of all His thoughts and things. The Real Form of all His thoughts and things is synonymous with their forms just as they were. Their forms just as they were is synonymous with His being directly able to realize His True Nature just as It was. His True Nature just as It was is synonymous with His being directly able to realize His True Body just as It was. His True Body just as It was is synonymous with His being directly able to realize His spiritual abilities just as they were. His spiritual abilities just as they were is synonymous with His being directly able to realize His actions just as they were. His actions just as they were is synonymous with His being directly able to recognize their causes just as they were. Their causes just as they were is synonymous with His being directly able to recognize their conditions just as they were. Their conditions just as they were is synonymous with His being directly able to recognize their effects just as they were. Their effects just as they were is synonymous with His being directly able to recognize their consequences just as they were. Their consequences just as they were is synonymous with His being directly able to recognize that all things are equally manifestations of Ultimate Reality, from beginning to end, just as they are.

His assertion that all things are equally manifestations of Ultimate Reality, from beginning to end, is their being just as they are as they manifest before us. Hence, if the effect called ‘nirvana’ is not the result of some cause, then it follows that the effect called ‘cause and effect’ must be the result of nirvana. To the extent that these effects—namely, those of form, innate nature, physical body, and spiritual abilities—mutually limit each other, the forms, innate natures, physical bodies, and abilities of all thoughts and things—however immeasurable and unbounded they may be—are their real forms. And to the extent that these effects—namely, those of form, innate nature, physical body, and spiritual ability—do not limit each other, they are their Real Form together with their being such things as form, innate nature, physical body, and spiritual ability. When we entrust the task of defining form, innate nature, physical body, and spiritual ability to such things as effects, consequences, causes, and conditions, there will be an expression that is eighty or ninety percent of a full realization. When we do not entrust the task of defining form, innate nature, physical body, and spiritual ability to such things as effects, consequences, causes, and conditions, there will be an expression that is a one hundred percent full realization.

What has been called ‘form just as it is’ is not one single form nor is it one uniform thing just as it is: it is That which is beyond measure and bounds, which is inexpressible and unfathomable, and which is just as It is. You should not consider a measurement in hundreds or thousands to be Its measure, but you should measure It by using the yardstick of ‘all thoughts and things’, by using the yardstick of ‘Its

Real Form'. Thus, each and every Buddha is able to fully realize the Real Form and the Real Nature of all thoughts and things. And each and every Buddha is directly able to fully realize the Real Physical Body and the real potential of all thoughts and things. And each and every Buddha is directly able to fully realize the real activities and the real causes of all thoughts and things. And each and every Buddha is directly able to fully realize the real conditions and the real effects of all thoughts and things. And each and every Buddha is directly able to fully realize the consequences of all thoughts and things. Each and every Buddha is directly able to fully realize that all thoughts and things are equally manifestations of Truth—that is, of Ultimate Reality—from beginning to end, just as all Buddha's have done.

For reasons like these, the Buddha lands in all ten directions are simply each and every Buddha. Further, there is not a single one, not even half a one, that is not 'each and every Buddha'. 'Each and every' refers to, for example, a Physical Body being provided with a physical body, or a form bearing witness to Form. And it is also like the innate nature of a physical body retaining its innate Nature. This is why the Buddha said, "Only I and all the Buddhas in the ten directions can directly know these things."

Thus, the very moment of being able to fully realize these things and the very moment of being able to know them are, both alike, instances of 'for the time being'. If we ourselves were different from the Buddhas in the ten directions, how could we possibly realize what the Buddhas in all the ten quarters have taught? Because right here in this place there are no 'ten directions', the ten directions are this very place right here.<sup>4</sup> As a result, when Real Form encounters all thoughts and things, the Spring dwells within Its flowers, human beings encounter the Spring, the Moon illumines the moon, people come face-to-face with their True Self and see It reflected in Water, and all of these alike are the principle of a mutual encountering.<sup>5</sup>

This is why we learn through our training with a Master what Real Form is by means of his real form, and why the Buddhas and Ancestors have inherited from Buddhas and Ancestors the kesa,\* which is the mantle of Truth. This is why Buddhahood is predicted for every single thing by means of every single thing. The Dharma was Transmitted for the sake of each and every Buddha, and the Dharma was inherited for the sake of each and every Buddha. This is why birth-and-death and coming-and-going exist. It is why the intention to train, training and practice,

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4. That is, the ten directions are everywhere at every instant and not in just one place at one time.

5. That is, of self encountering Self.

the attaining of Wisdom, and nirvana exist. By making use of the intention to train, training and practice, the attaining of Wisdom, and nirvana, we thoroughly explore that the human body really is birth-and-death and coming-and-going, and, in protecting what we have received, we now hold firm and we now let go. With this as our bloodline, the flower opens and bears its fruit; with this as their bones and marrow, Makakashō and Ananda existed.<sup>6</sup> The forms, just as they are, of wind, rain, water, and fire are what Makakashō and Ananda fully realized, and the innate natures, just as they are, of blue, yellow, red, and white, are what they fully realized as well. By relying upon our physical body and spiritual abilities, we turn the mundane into the sacred, and by relying upon their effects and consequences, we surpass Buddha and transcend Ancestor. By relying on these causes and conditions, we take hold of dirt and transmute it into gold. By relying upon effects and consequences, we receive the Transmission of the Dharma along with the robe.

The Tathagata then said that this gives expression to the real seal\* of the Ancestors. Let me express this another way. This was His putting into action, hearkening to, and bearing witness to the seal of Real Form. We need to truly investigate the Matter in this manner. What this is basically pointing to is, for instance, like a pearl whirling around in a bowl or a bowl whirling around a pearl.



The Buddha Who Is Radiantly Bright as Sun and Moon once said in verse:

*The meaning of 'all thoughts and things are the Real  
Form'  
Has already been voiced both for your sake and for the  
sake of others.<sup>7</sup>*

In exploring this saying through your training with your Master, you should thoroughly investigate that the Buddhas and Ancestors have invariably taken the meaning of 'all thoughts and things are the Real Form' to be synonymous with the one great Matter. The Buddhas and Ancestors have proclaimed what the 'Real Form' of the eighteen realms of the senses actually is.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the time before

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6. Ananda was Makakashō's Dharma heir, making him the Second Indian Ancestor.

7. A quote from the *Lotus Scripture*. All references to 'this discourse' that follow in this text refer to the *Lotus Scripture*.

8. The eighteen realms of the senses are the six sense organs of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, along with the six sense objects of form, sound, smell, taste, sensation, and

the existence of Their body and mind, the time after the existence of Their body and mind, and the time during the existence of Their body and mind, They gave expression to such things as the Real Form, Its Nature, Its physical embodiment, and Its spiritual abilities. Those who have not fully realized what Real Form is, those who have not given expression to It, those who do not understand It, and those who have not gone beyond their present understanding of real form are not Ancestors of the Buddha, but rather demons or beasts.



Shakyamuni Buddha once said, “The fully perfected enlightenment of all bodhisattvas\* is encompassed within this discourse of Mine. This discourse of Mine opens up the Gate of Skillful Means and points to the genuine Real Form of all things.”

‘All bodhisattvas’ means all Buddhas. Buddhas and bodhisattvas are not different species, nor are they different in maturity or in excellence. This bodhisattva and that bodhisattva are not two separate persons, nor are they self and other, nor are they some person of past, present, or future. Rather, training to become Buddha is their means in the Dharma of putting the Bodhisattva Way into practice. They became a Buddha with the first arising of their intention to realize Buddhahood, and they will become a Buddha in the final stage of Bodhisattvahood. And there are bodhisattvas who have become Buddhas countless hundreds and thousands and millions of times. There are those who say that after bodhisattvas become Buddhas, they discontinue practice because there is nothing left for them to do. Such people are mundane persons who have no direct knowledge of the Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors.

Those called ‘all bodhisattvas’ are the original Ancestors of all Buddhas, and all Buddhas are the original Teachers of all bodhisattvas. Whether all these Buddhas did Their practice in the past and awoke to the Truth, do it in the present, or will do it in the future, whether They do the practice first with Their body in order to awaken to the Truth, or ultimately do the practice with Their mind, all these will be in accord with this discourse of the Buddha—beginning, middle, and end. Whatever else can be encompassed or included will also be in accord with this discourse, and, at this very moment, this discourse of His awakens us to all manner of enlightenment.

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thought, and the six sense consciousnesses (that is, the awareness of each organ that allows perception to occur.)

A Buddha's discourse is beyond the sentient and the non-sentient; it is beyond the relative and the absolute. Even so, when He became aware of bodhisattvas, of ordinary humans, of the Real Form of things, and of this discourse, He opened the Gate of Skillful Means. The Gate of Skillful Means is the unsurpassed meritorious functioning of the fruits of Buddhahood. It is the Dharma that resides in the place of Dharma and It is the form of the world as it constantly manifests. The Gate of Skillful Means does not refer to some momentary skill. Trainees take up the Real Form of all thoughts and things, and explore It thoroughly through their training with a Master. Although this Gate of Skillful Means manifests Itself in such a way as to cover the whole universe with the whole of the universe, those who are not among 'all bodhisattvas' are not within Its realm.



Seppō once said, "The whole of the great earth is the gateway to liberation, but people are afraid to enter the gate even if they are dragged through it." So, keep in mind that even though the whole earth and all the worlds are gateways to liberation, it will not be easy to go in and out of any of them, and those who have tried to pass through one are not many. When people are dragged, they neither get in nor get out. If they are not dragged, they neither get in nor get out. The one who advances his step will stumble, and the one who retreats will be delayed. So, what further is to be said? If we try to force a person either to go in or out of the gate, the gate will become more and more distant. If we take the gate and get it to enter a person, there will be a chance of their going in or out of it.

'To open the Gate of Skillful Means' means to point to the genuine Real Form of things. Even though we chop time up into moments of beginning, middle, and end, pointing to the genuine Real Form of things covers the whole of time. The underlying principle of momentarily opening the Gate of Skillful Means involves opening It by opening the whole universe. At the very moment when you catch sight of the opening of the whole universe, it will be something that you have never encountered before. By our grasping once or twice at an intellectual concept of what opening of whole universe is and then grasping at it for a third or fourth time as something real, we cause the Gate of Skillful Means to open. Accordingly, it may seem that the whole universe is identical with opening the Gate of Skillful Means, but it appears to me that an immeasurable number of whole universes have each taken a small piece from the opening of the Gate of Skillful Means and have made that small piece into the form that each universe displays. But their grandeur is due entirely to their being encompassed within the present discourse.

‘To point out the authentic Real Form’ means to keep hearing the phrase ‘the Real Form of all thoughts and things’ throughout all worlds and to realize enlightenment throughout all worlds. It is to help all humanity understand the underlying principle that Real Form is what all thoughts and things are and to help manifest the whole of the Dharma.

Accordingly, the unsurpassed, enlightened Wisdom of the forty Buddhas and forty Ancestors is completely included within this present discourse;<sup>9</sup> It is encompassed within this discourse, and this discourse is encompassed within It. The meditation cushion and the meditation board are Supreme Wisdom and, as such, they are encompassed within this discourse.<sup>10</sup> Shakyamuni’s holding the udumbara blossom aloft and Makakashō’s breaking into a smile, as well as respectful bowing which secures the very marrow of the Way, are all encompassed within this discourse.<sup>11</sup> To open the Gate of Skillful Means is to point to the authentic Real Form.

Even so, an untrustworthy bunch in present-day Great Sung China, not knowing what to think, do not see where the Treasure is housed and act as if the phrase ‘Real Form’ were devoid of meaning. So they study the sayings of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, asserting that their teachings are equal to the Great Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors. They also say that the Three Teachings—Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism—are in agreement with each other. Or they say that the Three Teachings are like the three legs of a tripod that would overturn if even one leg were absent. I am completely unable to come up with any simile for their excessive foolishness.

We cannot acknowledge that people who talk like this have ever heard the Dharma of the Buddha. And why? Because the Dharma of the Buddha had its origin in India where, during the eighty years of His life, the Buddha spent fifty years of His prime giving voice to the Dharma in order to transform both ordinary people and those in lofty positions. By transforming sentient beings, He helped them to enter the Buddha’s Way. After that, twenty-eight Indian Ancestors experienced the genuine Transmission, which is considered to be the ultimate, the

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9. The forty Buddhas is an allusion to the Buddhas from the Seven Buddhas down to the Thirty-third Chinese Ancestor Daikan Enō. The forty Ancestors refers to the Ancestors from Daikan Enō up through the Seven Buddhas.

10. The meditation board is a plank that was used, particularly by the aged or the infirm, to rest one’s chin upon or to lean against while doing long sessions of seated meditation.

11. Dōgen explored this reference to respectful bowing in great detail in Discourse 10: On ‘Respectful Bowing Will Secure for You the Very Marrow of the Way’ (*Raihai Tokuzui*).

subtlest, the finest, and the most esteemed. All those who were outside the Way or who were demons in lofty positions were ultimately defeated. We do not know the number of ordinary people and those in lofty positions who realized Buddhahood and became Ancestors. Even so, none of them ever said that the Buddha's Dharma was insufficient for them, so they never paid a call on Confucianism or Taoism in China. If one were to agree that the Three Teachings were in accord, then at the time when the Buddha's Dharma emerged, such teachings as Confucianism and Taoism should have emerged concurrently in India. But the Teaching of the Buddha's Dharma is encapsulated in the saying, "In the heavens above and the earth below, I alone am the sole Honored One."<sup>12</sup> We should think back to the events of that time and we should not make a mistake by forgetting them. Talking about the Three Teachings being in accord does not equal even the babbling sounds of a little baby. It is a statement made by that bunch who are out to destroy the Buddha's Dharma. Folks like that are all too many. It is provoking to see that people like these have become guiding teachers for ordinary humans and those in lofty places, while others have even become teachers and masters to emperors and kings. Alas, the Buddha Dharma is degenerating in present-day Great Sung China! My former Master, who was an Old Buddha, strongly cautioned me about this.

People like these are seeds that produce the two Lesser Courses\* and the non-Buddhists. They have already wasted two or three centuries without even knowing that Real Form exists. They speak only of exploring the True Teaching so that they might escape from the continual cycle of birth-and-death. Many are those who do not even know what it means to explore the True Teaching of the Buddhas and Ancestors, for they fancy that just living in a monastery is what practice is. How pitiful that the words and ways of the Ancestral Masters are now dying out! It is what the venerable monks of long-standing who hold to the true words and ways of the Buddha greatly lament. Do not give ear to the words and phrases that emerge from the likes of that bunch spoken of earlier. Rather, we should pity them.



Meditation Master Engo once said, "Birth-and-death and coming-and-going are a person's true Real Body." By exploring this expression, we will come to know ourselves and we will give our consideration to the Buddha Dharma.

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12. This quotation is attributed to the Buddha. Immediately following His Birth, He is purported to have taken seven steps and then pointed up towards the heavens with His right hand and down towards the earth with His left, whilst uttering the words quoted above.



Chōsa once said, “The whole universe in all ten directions is a person’s true Real Body. The whole universe in all ten directions lies within the radiant brightness of one’s own True Self.” But, in general, even veteran trainees in present-day Sung China still do not know that they need to explore a saying like this through their training.<sup>13</sup> Much less do they know how to put it into practice! Were we to quote this saying to them, they would simply go red in the face and be left speechless.



My former Master, the Old Buddha, once said:

Veteran trainees all over Sung China have still not illumined either the past or the present. They have not yet grasped the underlying principle of the Buddha Dharma. Although the whole universe in all ten directions, among other things, is constantly presenting itself in this manner, how could they possibly know it? Outside of Great Sung China, it is as if they had never even heard of it.

After hearing this, I questioned veteran trainees throughout Sung China about this underlying principle, and to tell the truth, few had even heard of it. How sad that they dishonor the offices they occupy with such pointless talk!



Meditation Master Ōan Donge once addressed Tokki Daitoku, saying:

If you wish to understand the Matter easily, then throughout the whole twenty-four hours of each day, just keep your focus on the arising of mind and the moving of thoughts. As you approach the moving thoughts, you may suddenly experience the Ungraspable, That Which Is the Here and Now. It will be like vast, unbounded space, and there will be no forms or delimitations within that space. Outside and inside will be one and the same; self and other will both become extinct, and the unfathomable and the clear will both disappear. The three periods of time—past, present, and future—will be equal. Those

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13. ‘Veteran trainees’ is a common term for monks who have been in monastic life for a long time but have made little or no progress spiritually.

who arrive at this state are called ‘people at ease in the Way who are unattached to anything and have nothing more to accomplish.’

These are the words spoken by the elder Ōan who used his full strength to express the essence of the Dharma. But this is simply his chasing after shadows, as if he did not know how to stop pursuing words. Can the Buddha Dharma not exist when inside and outside are not one and the same? What is this ‘inside and outside’? Also, the assertion of the Buddhas and Ancestors is that there are forms and delimitations within space. And what does he mean by ‘space’? When we think about it, Ōan did not yet know what space is, nor had he seen what space is, nor had he taken hold of space, nor had he struck space.

Ōan speaks of mind arising and thoughts moving, and yet there is the fundamental principle that the Mind never moves, so how could there possibly be an arising of mind within the twenty-four hours of a day? No mind can come and enter into the twenty-four hours of a day, nor can the twenty-four hours of the day come into the twenty-four hours of the Mind. Much less can there be an arising of Mind! And what, pray, is the moving of one’s thoughts? Do thoughts move or do they not move? Or are they beyond moving and not moving? What is this ‘moving’ of his? Moreover, what is ‘not moving’? What is he calling ‘thoughts’? Do thoughts occur within the twenty-four hours of a day? Or do the twenty-four hours of a day occur within one’s thoughts? Or can there be a time beyond these two?

He says that if you wish to understand the Matter easily, then throughout the whole twenty-four hours of each day, just keep your focus on the arising of mind and the moving of thoughts. But what is this Matter that can be understood easily? Is ‘easily understood’ something he is saying about the Teaching of the Buddhas and Ancestors? If so, then he needs to know that the Buddha’s Teaching is beyond easy to understand or difficult to understand, which is why Nangaku and Baso followed their respective Masters for ever so long in their practice of the Way.<sup>14</sup>

Ōan speaks of suddenly experiencing the Ungraspable, That Which Is the Here and Now. But he has never encountered the Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors even in his dreams. How can one of such limited ability as his possibly be up to ‘wishing to understand easily’? Understand clearly that he had not yet thoroughly explored the Great Teaching of the Buddhas and Ancestors. If the Buddha’s Dharma was like what he said, how could It possibly have come down to us today?

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14. Nangaku’s Master was Enō and Baso’s Master was Nangaku.

Now, this is the case with Ōan himself. Yet, were we to seek for ever so long among the veteran monks in mountain monasteries of the present day for someone who was like Ōan, we would not encounter him. And were we to search until our eyes grew dim, we would not encounter a veteran monk who was the equal of Ōan. There are many in recent times who acknowledge Ōan, but even so, it would be difficult for me to acknowledge that he had realized the Buddha Dharma. I would simply say that he deserves a seat among the juniors in a monastery and that he is of average experience. And why? Because Ōan did at least have enough spirit to spot ‘such a person’.\* Folks today cannot recognize ‘such a person’ because they do not even know themselves. Although I say that Ōan had not yet fully arrived, he did have experience of the Way, experience that such folks as the veteran monks of today do not have. Though I would say that Ōan had heard good words, they had not penetrated his ears, much less had he ‘seen them’ with his ears. They had not penetrated his eyes, much less had he ‘heard them’ with his eyes. Though this is the way that Ōan was, today he would naturally have awakened to something. Veteran monks in the mountain monasteries of Great Sung China today have not even caught a glimpse of what Ōan’s ‘inside and outside’ means; nothing that comes out of their mouths or that shows on their faces are in the same realm as him. Folks like this cannot tell whether the Real Form that the Buddhas and Ancestors have expressed is embodied within the words and ways of the Buddhas and Ancestors. This is why, for the past two or three centuries, none of the folks who speak wildly, like these old veteran monks, have been able to speak of or to see Real Form.



In giving informal instruction in the Abbot’s private quarters, my late Master, the Old Buddha of Tendō, said in verse one night:

*Tonight, Tendō Mountain is blessed with calves,  
And a golden-faced Gautama holds aloft the Real Form.  
“If buying is your wish, how will you afford Its priceless  
price?”  
So cries the night bird from above the solitary cloud on  
high.*

When the situation is as described above, venerable senior monks who are accomplished in the Buddha’s Way speak of Real Form. Those who do not know the Buddha Dharma and who do not explore the Buddha’s Way do not speak of Real Form.

The preceding poem came about in the following manner. It was nearing the fourth watch of a night in the third lunar month in the spring of the second year of the great Sung era of Hōkyō (1226), when three beats from the summoning drum sounded from above.<sup>15</sup> Putting on my kesa and taking my bowing mat, I left the Cloud Hall through the front entrance. The sign to go enter the Master's room for a spiritual interview had been hung up. First off, I followed the crowd of monks up to the Dharma Hall. Going past the west wall of the Dharma Hall, I climbed the west stairway to the Ancestral Shrine. Passing by the west wall of the Ancestral Shrine, I climbed the west stairway of the Hall of Great Brightness. The Hall of Great Brightness is where the Abbot's quarters are. Going by the southern end of a screen along the west side, I reached the incense stand and, after offering incense, I did my prostrations. I had expected that lines would have formed here for entry into the Master's room, but I did not see even one monk. The Abbot's main room had been screened off from me by bamboo blinds. I could hear, but barely, the sound of the Teaching being given by this Great Monk who was the Head of our temple.

At that moment, the monk who was Precentor, Sokon by name, from Szechwan Province, arrived. After he too had offered incense and made his prostrations, we quietly approached the main room, which was packed with monks who were seated regardless of east or west.<sup>16</sup> The Abbot's informal talk was in progress, so we quietly entered behind the assembly and listened to it while continuing to stand.

He was giving an account of Meditation Master Daibai Hōjō's living in the mountains. At the part where he described Hōjō's wearing clothes made from lotus leaves and harvesting pine trees for food, many in the community began to weep.<sup>17</sup> During his detailed recounting of the story of Shakyamuni Buddha's retreat on Vulture Peak, again, many who heard it were moved to tears.

The Master ended his Dharma talk by saying, "The retreat on Mount Tendō draws near. Since it is springlike now, it is neither cold nor hot. It will be a fine time to do seated meditation, so why would any junior or senior not wish to sit in meditation?" He then recited his poem quoted above.

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15. The Abbot's quarters were in the highest building on the mountain.

16. That is, the monks were mixed together regardless of whether they were juniors or seniors.

17. There are various accounts of Chinese hermit monks living off of or supplementing their diet with parts of pine trees. Sprigs of new growth were eaten, as well as pine nuts.

When the poem was finished, he struck the right arm of his meditation seat with his right hand and said, “Enter my room for your spiritual interview.” His topic for the spiritual interview was “The night bird cries out and the bamboo on the mountain splits open.” These were his very words for the spiritual interview. He offered no commentary. Even though our monastic family was large, many had no response, as they were simply overawed.

This method of conducting a spiritual interview was not done anywhere else; only my late Master, the Old Buddha of Tendō, used it. During such informal teaching, my Master’s seat was surrounded by screens which the community crowded around. While the monks remained standing, the interviews took place with whichever monk was prepared to enter the Abbot’s presence. When a monk had finished his interview, he departed through the door of the Abbot’s quarters in the customary manner. Those who remained, still standing as they were before, could see and hear everything, not only the dignified manner of stepping forward and then halting by the one entering for his interview, but also the deportment of the Abbot and his command for the next monk to enter. This ceremony never existed in other places, and it may be that other veteran Abbots were unable to do it. During interviews with other Masters, monks wanted to enter the Abbot’s interview room before the others did, whereas in entering my Master’s room, the monks wished to enter after the others. We should not forget that there are differences in people’s minds and ways of behaving.

From that time until this first year of the Japanese Kangen era (1243), eighteen years have passed quickly within the changing scenery. I cannot remember how many mountains and bodies of water there have been between Mount Tendō and this mountain, but the Real Form of those beautiful words and wondrous phrases of my Master has been engraved on my body and mind, on my bones and marrow. I believe it would be difficult for monks in that monastic assembly to ever forget hearing the Dharma talk and entering for a spiritual interview on that occasion. On that night, the light of the new moon shone from behind the temple buildings and though, from time to time, a night bird would sing out, it was a night tranquil and still.



Great Master Gensha Shibi was once giving an informal talk when, upon hearing the chirping of some swallow chicks, he said, “How profoundly they discuss Real Form! How skillfully they expound the essence of the Dharma!” Thereupon, he stepped down from his Dharma seat.

Then, a novice monk who was behind him, chasing after instruction, said, “I don’t get it.”

The Master said, “Oh, be off with you! There’s no one who’d believe you.”

Having heard Shibi’s statement, “How profoundly they discuss Real Form,” one might well take it to mean that swallow chicks alone profoundly discuss Real Form, but this is not so. During his informal talk, Shibi heard the chirping of some swallow chicks. It was not that the swallow chicks were profoundly discussing Real Form, and it was not that Shibi was profoundly discussing Real Form, and it was not a cross between the two, but it was that at that very moment itself, there was a profound discussion of Real Form.

We should take a moment to thoroughly explore this story. There is the informal instruction, hearing the swallow chicks’ chirping, and the assertion, “How profoundly they discuss Real Form! How skillfully they expound the essence of the Dharma!” And there is Shibi’s stepping down from his Dharma seat, the novice monk chasing behind him for instruction saying, “I don’t get it,” and the Master’s response, “Oh, be off with you! There’s no one who’d believe you.” Although the statement, “I don’t get it,” need not necessarily be a request for instruction on Real Form, it is nevertheless the lifeblood of the Buddhas and Ancestors, and the very Bones and Marrow of the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching.<sup>18</sup>

You need to comprehend that even if this monk, in seeking instruction, asserted either that he did or that he did not understand, Shibi should say to him, “Oh, be off with you! There’s no one who’d believe you.” Shibi said what he did not because the novice monk had said that he did not understand, but because the monk had already understood.<sup>19</sup> Truly, even though it could have been someone other than this monk, say, any third son of Mr. Chang or fourth son of Mr. Li, and even though all thoughts and things are Real Form, at the time and place when one penetrates directly into the Lifeblood of the Buddhas and Ancestors, one’s exploring Real Form through one’s training manifests just like this. This had already manifested by the time of Seigen’s assembly.<sup>20</sup>

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18. That is, the remark is customarily understood by Buddhas and Ancestors to mean “I don’t get It.”

19. That is, the monk was trying to inveigle Shibi into discussing and intellectualizing what he had said.

20. That is, the exploration of Real Form had already begun generations earlier in the assembly of Seigen Gyōshi. Shibi was in Seigen’s lineage, as was Dōgen.

Keep in mind that Real Form is the genuine Lifeblood which has been passed on from rightful heir to rightful heir, that all thoughts and things are what each and every Buddha has completely and thoroughly explored, and that each and every Buddha manifests His characteristic marks, just as they are.<sup>21</sup>

*Given to the assembly during a day in the ninth lunar month of the first year of the Kangen era (October or November, 1243) at Kippō-ji Temple in Echizen Province, Japan.*

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21. That is, all Buddhas exhibit the characteristic marks and distinguishing signs of a Buddha, no matter how unique each Buddha may be.