



Manifesting Absolute Reality

Dogen

from *Genjokoan*. Translated by Francis H. Cook (1989), in *Sounds of Valley Streams* (Albany: SUNY Press), 65-9.

When all things are just what they are [apart from discrimination], delusion and enlightenment exist, religious practice exists, birth exists, death exists, Buddhas exist, and ordinary beings exist. When the myriad things are without self, there is no delusion, no enlightenment, no Buddhas, no ordinary beings, no birth, no extinction. Since the Buddha Way from the beginning transcends fullness and deficiency, there is birth and extinction, delusion and enlightenment, beings and Buddhas. However, though this is the way it is, it is only this: flowers scatter in our longing, and weeds spring up in our loathing.

Conveying the self to the myriad things to authenticate them is delusion; the myriad things advancing to authenticate the self is enlightenment. It is Buddhas who greatly enlighten delusion; it is ordinary beings who are greatly deluded within enlightenment. Moreover, there are those who are enlightened within enlightenment and those who are deluded within delusion. When Buddhas are truly Buddhas, there is no need for the self to understand that it is Buddha. Yet we are Buddhas and we come to authenticate this Buddha.

Mustering the [whole] mind-body and seeing forms, mustering the [whole] mind-body and hearing forms, we understand them intimately, but it is not like shapes being reflected in a mirror or like the moon being reflected in water. When one side is enlightened, the other side is dark.

To study the Buddha Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be authenticated by the myriad things. To be authenticated by the myriad things is to drop off the mind-body of oneself and others. There is [also] remaining content with the traces of enlightenment, and one must eternally emerge from this resting. When persons first turn to the Dharma, they separate themselves from its boundary. [But] when the Dharma is already internally transmitted, one is immediately the Original Man.

A person rides in a boat, looks at the shore, and mistakenly thinks that the shore is moving. If one looks carefully at the boat, one sees that it is the boat that is moving. In like manner, if a person is confused about the mind-body and discriminates the myriad things, there is the error of thinking that one's own mind or self is eternal. If one becomes intimate with practice and returns within [to the true self], the principle of the absence of self in all things is made clear.

Firewood becomes ashes and cannot become firewood again. However, you should not think of ashes as the subsequent and firewood as the prior [of the same thing]. You should understand that firewood abides in its own state as firewood, and has [its own] prior and subsequent. Although it has [its own] prior and subsequent, it is cut off from prior and subsequent. Ashes are in their own state as ashes and have a prior and subsequent. Just as firewood does not become firewood again after turning to ash, so a person does not return to life again after death. Thus, it is the fixed teaching of the Buddha Dharma that life does not become death, and therefore we call it "nonlife." It is the fixed sermon of the Buddha that death does not become life, and therefore we call it "nondeath." Life is situated in one time and death is situated in one time. For instance, it is like winter and spring. We do not think that winter becomes spring or that spring becomes summer.

A person's becoming enlightened is like the reflection of the moon in water. The moon does not get wet nor is the water ruffled. Though the moonlight is vast and far-reaching, it is reflected in a few drops of water. The entire moon and heavens are reflected in even a drop of dew on the grass, or in a drop of water. Our not being obstructed by enlightenment is like the water's not being obstructed by the moon. Our not obstructing enlightenment is like the nonobstruction of the moonlight by a dewdrop. The depth [of the water] is equal to the height [of the moon]. As for the length or brevity [of the reflection], you should investigate the water's vastness or smallness and the brightness or dimness of the moon.

When the Dharma does not yet completely fill the mind-body, we think that it is already sufficient. When the Dharma fills us, on the other hand, we think that it is not enough. For instance, when we are riding in a boat out of sight of land and we look around, we see only a circle [of ocean], and no other characteristics are visible. However, the great ocean is neither circular nor square, and its other characteristics are inexhaustible. It looks like a palace [to fish] or a jewel ornament [to beings in the sky]. It just looks round to our eyes when we briefly encounter it. The myriad things are the same. Although things in this world or beyond this world contain many aspects, we are capable of grasping only what we can through the

power of vision, which comes from practice. In order to perceive these many aspects, you must understand that besides being round or square, oceans and rivers have many other characteristics and that there are many worlds in other directions. It is not like this just nearby; it is like this right beneath your feet and even in a drop of water.

When a fish swims in water, there is no end of the water no matter how far it swims. When a bird flies in the sky, fly though it may, there is no end to the sky. However, no fish or bird has ever left water or sky since the beginning. It is just that when there is a great need, the use is great, and when there is a small need, the use is small. In this way, no creature ever fails to realize its own completeness; wherever it is, it functions freely. But if a bird leaves the sky, it will immediately die, and if a fish leaves the water, it will immediately die. You must understand that the water is life and the air is life. The bird is life and the fish is life. Life is the fish and life is the bird. Besides these [ideas], you can probably think of others. There are such matters as practice-authentication and long and short lives.

However, if a bird or fish tries to proceed farther after reaching the limit of air or water, it cannot find a path or a place. If you find this place, then following this daily life is itself the manifesting absolute reality. The path and the place are neither large nor small. They are neither self nor other, and they neither exist from the beginning nor originate right now. Therefore, they are just what they are.

Being just what they are, if one practice-authenticates the Buddha Way, then when one understands one thing, one penetrates one thing; when one takes up one practice, one cultivates one practice. Because the place is right here and the path is thoroughly grasped, the reason you do not know the entirety of what is to be known is that this knowing and the total penetration of the Buddha Dharma arise together and practice together. Do not think that when you have found this place that it will become personal knowledge or that it can be known conceptually. Even though the authenticating penetration manifests immediately, that which exists most intimately does not necessarily manifest. Why should it become evident?

Priest Pao-ch'e of Mt. Ma-ku was fanning himself. A monk came by and asked, "The wind's nature is eternal and omnipresent. Why, reverend sir, are you still fanning yourself?" The master replied, "You only know that the wind's nature is eternal, but you do not know the reason why it exists everywhere." The monk asked, "Why does it exist everywhere?" The master just fanned himself. The monk made a bow of respect.

The authenticating experience of the Buddha Way and the vital way of correct transmission are like this. Those that say that because [the nature of wind] is eternal there is no need for a fan, and we can experience the wind without one, understand neither the meaning of its eternity nor its nature. Because the wind is eternal, the wind of Buddhism manifests the yellow gold of the earth and turns its long rivers into sweet cream.