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Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*, Fascicles “Kattō” and “Ōsakusendaba”

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The “Kattō” and “Ōsakusendaba” fascicles of Dōgen’s (1200–1253) master work, the *Shōbōgenzō*, are based to a large extent on a Zhaozhou dialogue concerning the famous “skin, flesh, bones, marrow” anecdote in which the first patriarch of Zen, Bodhidharma, selects his successor. According to the source anecdote, Bodhidharma challenges four disciples to a contest to prove their worthiness. The winner of the competition, second patriarch Huike, attains Bodhidharma’s marrow by remaining silent, while the other contestants all use verbal discourse that gains his skin, flesh, and bones, respectively. These levels were considered to represent a hierarchy of understanding, with skin indicating the most superficial and marrow indicating the most profound levels.

Dōgen’s innovative interpretation breaks from tradition, which valorizes the use of no-words in a tradition based on “a special transmission outside the scriptures, with no reliance on words and letters.” Dōgen strongly criticizes the conventional view of the *kōan*, that silence is the deepest level of understanding beyond language, and emphasizes the notion found throughout his writings that verbal discourse is essential to transmission of the teaching. Language represents the “Teaching of the Way,” to cite the title of another fascicle, “Dōtoku.” In “Kattō,” Dōgen portrays the function of language in terms of the metaphor of “entangled vines,” which at once lead to the labyrinth of confusion and out of the entanglement of ignorance. Thus, verbal discourse that causes unenlightenment is essential for the process of awakening; hence his criticism of the conventional doctrine of a special transmission.

Dōgen's interpretation of the Bodhidharma dialogue is based on four main points. First, reversing the conventional view in which Huike wins the competition by remaining silent, Dōgen maintains that all of the disciples, not the fourth or any other single one, have completely expressed Bodhidharma's expressions, so that "All four disciples heard and realized [skin, flesh, bones, marrow] all at once [...] [as] a complete manifestation without partiality."

Second, there can be neither a sense of hierarchy or sequence separating the responses nor any distinction whatsoever between superficiality and depth. Dōgen also explains the equalization and interchangeability of the four responses by relating the Bodhidharma dialogue to a legend originally found in the *Mahābhārata*. He cites the *Blue Cliff Record* case (no. 92) about the king of a land called Saindhava who asks his retainers for four items, all of which came to be known as *saindhava* (Jap. *sendaba*): salt, a chalice, water, and a horse. The wisest of retainers knows exactly when and where to bring each of the items requested, without having to rely on the king's instructions.

Extending from the "Ōsakusendaba" passage, Dōgen's third point pertains to the pedagogical significance of each response. Since all the expressions are equal, each one is correct for each of the four disciples in question. Furthermore, the possibilities are limitless. If there had been six disciples, Bodhidharma would have spontaneously made additional responses, by telling his disciple that they express his "eyeball" or "body." If there were hundreds or thousands of disciples, each one with his own unique expression would have found a suitable response from the first patriarch.

The fourth point in Dōgen's interpretation refers to the interpenetration of each and every answer and response, which are equally all-pervasive and permeate the entire being of master and disciple, speaker and listener, as well as writer and reader. "You should realize," he maintains, "that when you express me, then I express you, expression expresses both me and you, and expression expresses both you and me." The term "express" is often translated as "gain" or "obtain," as if this was a bestowal from Bodhidharma to the disciple, but the general context and the way the term is used by Dōgen in other cases suggest that what is meant is a sense of resonance between teacher and follower. There is a profound sense of mutuality between questioner and respondent so that each of the latter's expressions is fully compatible and conducive to the former's spiritual path, just as the retainer knows which *saindhava* to bring the king, who, for his part, has already requested the *saindhava* appropriate for the retainer to bring.

The translation that follows contains the full text of "Kattō," one of Dōgen's best known sermons, as well as selected passages from the lesser known "Ōsakusendaba."¹

1. This is a revised and updated version of translations originally published in Heine 1994, pp. 243–253.

Translation: Entangled Vines: Dōgen's "Kattō"

It was only bodhisattva Mahākāśyapa who, at a sermon on Vulture Peak, received the authentic transmission of the supreme wisdom of the treasury of the true Dharma-eye from Śākyamuni. This authentic transmission from Śākyamuni was then transmitted through successive generations to the twenty-eighth patriarch, the venerable Bodhidharma. Bodhidharma came to China and transmitted the supreme wisdom of the treasury of the true Dharma-eye directly to the great teacher Zhengzong Pujue, who became the second patriarch.

The twenty-eighth patriarch [in India] is referred to as the first patriarch in China, and the twenty-ninth patriarch is referred to as the second patriarch, according to the lineal system in China. The first patriarch received the authentic transmission through instruction directly from the venerable Prajñātara, and his transmission in turn became the root for the branches and leaves [symbolizing various Zen schools and doctrines]. Generally, although all Buddhist sages in their training study how to cut off entanglements (*kattō*) at their root, they do not study how to cut off entanglements by using entanglements. They do not realize that entanglements entangle entanglements. How little do they know what it is to transmit entanglements in terms of entanglements. How rarely do they realize that the transmission of the Dharma is itself an entanglement. Few have as yet heard of or practiced the way [of transmission]. How can anyone genuinely realize [the Dharma]?

My late master [Rujing] once said: "The vine of a gourd coils around the vine of a[nother] gourd like a wisteria-vine." I have never heard this saying from anyone else of the past or present. The first time I heard this was from my late master. When he said, "the vine of a gourd coils around the vine of a[nother] gourd," this refers to studying the Buddhas and patriarchs directly from the Buddhas and patriarchs, and to the transmission of the Buddhas and patriarchs directly to the Buddhas and patriarchs. That is, it refers to the direct transmission from mind-to-mind (*ishin-denshin*).

The twenty-eighth patriarch said to his disciples, "As the time is drawing near [for me to transmit the Dharma to my successor], please tell me how you express it."

Daofu responded first, "According to my current understanding, we should neither cling to words and letters, nor abandon them altogether, but use them as an instrument of the Dao (*dō-yō*)."

The master responded, "You express my skin."

Then the nun, Zongzhi, said, "As I now see it, [the Dharma] is like Ānanda's viewing the Buddha-land of Akshobhya, seeing it once and never seeing it again."

The master responded, "You express my flesh."

Daoyou said, “The four elements are emptiness, and the five *skandhas* are nonbeing. But in my view, there is not a single dharma to be expressed.”

The master responded, “You express my bones.”

Finally, Huike prostrated himself three times, and stood [silently] in his place.

The master said, “You express my marrow.”

Huike became the second patriarch as a result of this, and he received the transmission of the Dharma as well as the transmission of the sacred robe.

You must study the first patriarch’s saying, “You express my skin, flesh, bones, and marrow,” as the way of the patriarchs. All four disciples heard and realized this saying all at once. Hearing and learning from it, they realized the skin, flesh, bones, and marrow of the casting off of body-mind (*shin-jin datsuraku*). You should not interpret the teachings of the patriarchs and masters from only a single specific viewpoint. It is a complete manifestation without partiality. However, those who do not fully understand the true transmission think that “because the four disciples had different levels of insight, the first patriarch’s saying concerning the ‘skin, flesh, bones, and marrow’ represents different degrees in recognizing the superficiality or depth [of understanding]. The skin and flesh are further [from the truth] than the bones and marrow.” Thus, they say that [Bodhidharma told Huike] that he “expressed the marrow because the second patriarch’s understanding was superior.” But interpreting the anecdote in this manner is not the result of studying the Buddhas and patriarchs or of realizing the true patriarchal transmission.

You should realize that the first patriarch’s expression, “skin, flesh, bones, and marrow,” does not refer to the superficiality or depth [of understanding]. Although there may remain a [provisional] distinction between superior and inferior understanding, [each of the four disciples] expressed the first patriarch in his entirety. When Bodhidharma says “you express my marrow” or “you express my bones,” he is using various pedagogical devices that are pertinent to particular people, or methods of instruction that may or may not apply to particular levels of understanding.

It is the same as Śākyamuni’s holding up an *udambara* flower [to Mahākāśyapa], or the transmission of the sacred robe [symbolic of the transmission of enlightenment]. What Bodhidharma said to the four disciples is fundamentally the selfsame expression. Although it is fundamentally the selfsame expression, since there are necessarily four ways of understanding it, he did not express it in one way alone. But even though each of the four ways of understanding is partial or one-sided, the way of the patriarchs ever remains the way of the patriarchs.

As a rule, the teaching of a master must be adjusted so that it is appropriate for [each one of] his disciples. For example, in order to instruct one

of his four disciples the first patriarch said, "You express my skin." But, if after the second patriarch there were hundreds of thousands of disciples, there would also be hundreds of thousands of appropriate ways of explaining [the Dharma]. There would be an inexhaustible number [of explanations]. Because he was speaking with four disciples, Bodhidharma only used the four provisional expressions, "skin," "flesh," "bones" and "marrow," and although there were other possible expressions Bodhidharma did not choose to use them. For instance, he could have said to the second patriarch, "You express my skin." But even if Huike had been told "You express my skin," he still would have received the transmission of the treasury of the true Dharma-eye and become the second patriarch. "Expressing skin" or "expressing marrow" does not refer to the superiority or inferiority [of understanding]. Also, Bodhidharma could have said, "You express my marrow" to Daofu, Daoyou, or Zongzhi. He must be able to transmit the Dharma even to someone who expresses [only] the skin. The body-mind of the patriarch is the patriarchs' skin, flesh, bones, and marrow. The marrow is not closer [to the Dharma], and the skin is not further [from the Dharma].

If someone is currently studying with an [authentic] Dharma-eye and receives the seal "You express my skin," that really signifies that they are expressing the complete patriarch. There is the patriarch whose skin permeates his entire body, the patriarch whose flesh permeates his entire body, the patriarch whose bones permeate his entire body, and the patriarch whose marrow permeates his entire body. There is the patriarch whose mind permeates his body, the patriarch whose body permeates his body, and the patriarch whose mind permeates his mind. There is the patriarch who permeates the [other] patriarchs, and the patriarch whose body permeates all selves. When the patriarchs appear and teach hundreds of thousands of disciples, they often explain, "You express my skin."

Although the explanations given to the hundreds of thousands use the expression "skin, flesh, bones, and marrow," you must realize that the masters of the way may use the expression "skin, flesh, bones, and marrow," but without regard for the matter of signifying superficiality or depth. If there were six or seven disciples studying with the first patriarch, he might say "You express my mind," or "You express my body." He might also say "You express my buddha," "You express my eyeballs," or "You express my realization." The term "you" may refer [nondualistically] either to the master [Bodhidharma] or to [the disciple] Huike. One must also study very carefully the meaning of the term "expression."

You should realize that when you express me, then I express you, expression expresses both me and you, and expression expresses both you and me. In studying the body-mind of the first patriarch, you must realize the oneness of the interior and the exterior [dimensions]. If we do not realize that his whole body permeates his body, then we have not realized the domain of the manifestation of the Buddhas and patriarchs. Expressing

the skin is expressing the bones, flesh, and marrow. Expressing the bones, flesh, and marrow is expressing the skin, flesh, face, and eyes. It is none other than the awakening of the true body experienced throughout the entire ten directions of the universe, and [the realization of] the skin, flesh, bones, and marrow. In this way, you express my robe and you express the Dharma.

Therefore, through the ecstatic experience of expressing the way, masters realize an unimpeded mutuality with their disciples. And through the ecstatic experience of receiving the path to liberation, disciples realize an unimpeded mutuality with their masters. The unimpeded mutuality of masters and disciples is the entanglement of Buddhas and patriarchs, and the entanglement of Buddhas and patriarchs is the realization of the skin, flesh, bones, and marrow. Śākyamuni's holding up an *udambara* flower and winking his eye is itself an entanglement, and Mahākāśyapa's wise smile is itself the skin, flesh, bones, and marrow.

You must realize that because the seed of an entangled vine has the capacity for liberation, it produces the branches, leaves, blossoms, and fruit that coil around the entangled vines. Because these [parts of vines] are at once thoroughly surrounding and free from being surrounded by each other, the entangled vine is the spontaneous realization of Buddhas and patriarchs, or the spontaneous realization of the *kōan* (*kōan-genjō*).

The great teacher Zhaozhou once said to his disciples, "Mahākāśyapa transmitted [the Dharma] to Ānanda. You must explain to me, to whom did Bodhidharma transmit it?"

A monk responded, "Everyone knows it was the second patriarch who expressed the marrow. Why even ask such a question?"

Zhaozhou said, "Don't slander Huike."

Zhaozhou further said, "Bodhidharma also said, 'A person of superficial understanding expresses my skin, and a person of deeper understanding expresses my bones.' You must tell me, what does a person of even deeper understanding express?"

The disciple responded [to Zhaozhou], "Isn't it expressing the marrow?"

Zhaozhou said, "You must know only the skin. This old teacher has no reliance (*furyū*) on marrow."

The disciple asked, "What is the meaning of marrow?"

Zhaozhou said, "If you ask such a question, you have not yet even expressed the skin."

Therefore, you must realize that when "you have not yet even expressed the skin," it is also the case that "you have not yet even expressed the marrow." Expressing the skin is expressing the marrow. We must reflect on the meaning of "you have not yet even expressed the skin." When the disciple said, "Isn't it expressing the marrow?" Zhaozhou immediately responded, "You must know only the skin. This old teacher has no reliance on marrow."

His interpretation that expressing the skin is a matter of nonreliance on the marrow is the true meaning of expressing the marrow. Therefore, the monk said, "Everyone knows it was the second patriarch who expressed the marrow. Why even ask such a question?" Just at the moment "Mahākāśyapa transmitted the Dharma to Ānanda," Ānanda's body was fully transformed into Ānanda. However, whenever there is a transmission from person to person, there is usually some kind of change in the face, eyes, skin, flesh, bones, and marrow. That is why Zhaozhou said, "You must explain to me, to whom did Bodhidharma transmit it?" Bodhidharma in transmitting the Dharma is already Bodhidharma, and the second patriarch who expressed the marrow is also already Bodhidharma. In studying the meaning of this, the Buddha Dharma not yet [realized] is the Buddha Dharma realized right now. If that were not the case, there would be no Buddha Dharma realized right now. You must reflect on this quietly, attain it for yourself, and teach it to others.

[Zhaozhou citing Bodhidharma said]: "A person of superficial understanding expresses my skin, and a person of deeper understanding expresses my bones. You must tell me, what does a person of even deeper understanding express?" Whether or not [the understanding] is superficial or has depth, it reflects the clarity of spiritual insight. In the case of superficiality, the skin, flesh, bones, and marrow are all superficial, and in the case of depth, the skin, flesh, bones, and marrow all have depth. Therefore, what the four disciples of Bodhidharma studied in various ways was beyond even the innumerable [levels of] skin, flesh, bones, and marrow. It is not the case that the marrow should be considered the highest level. There are at least thirty-five [other dimensions] beyond the marrow.

The old master Zhaozhou's instruction is the way of the Buddhas. But it is not well understood by a number of monks, including Linji, Deshan, Dawei, and Yunmen, among others. They cannot even imagine it in their dreams, let alone express it clearly. If it were explained to them, they would be surprised and perplexed.

Xuedou Mingjue said, "Zhaozhou and Muzhao were old masters." The sayings of the "old masters" are authentic evidence of the Buddha Dharma as well as of their own personal realization. Great teacher Xuefeng Chenjue also referred to "old master Zhaozhou." [Both Xuedou and Xuefeng] praised [Zhaozhou] as an old master. Thus they considered him an old master who surpassed the buddha and patriarchs of past and present. Therefore, the meaning of the entanglements of skin, flesh, bones, and marrow has become the standard set by old master [Zhaozhou]'s saying in his lecture to his monks, "You express me." You must carefully examine this standard.

Furthermore, the reports that the first patriarch returned to India are unfounded. Although Songyan is said to have seen him there, this is untrue. How could Songyan be said to have seen the works of the first patriarch? The truth of the matter is that after he entered *parinirvāna* the first patriarch's ashes were interred on Mount Xionger in China.

Postscript: This instruction for an assembly of monks was delivered on the seventh day of the seventh month in 1242 at Kannondōri Kōshōhōrinji Temple in Uji-gun, Yawashiro. It was transcribed on the third day of the third month in 1243 at the chief disciple's quarters of Kippōji Temple in Yoshida-gun, Echizen, by Ejō.

Translation: A King Requests *Saindhava*: Dōgen's "Ōsakusendaba" [Selections]

[Dōgen cites a verse]:

Words and wordlessness:
Like tangled vines to a tree,
Feeding a mule to feeding a horse,
Or water to clouds.

In the same vein, the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra* states the following:

The World-Honored One [Śākyamuni] said, "It is just like when a king [of the land of *Saindhava*] tells his retainer to 'bring me *saindhava*.' There are four items all known as '*saindhava*.' The first is salt, the second is a chalice, the third is water, and the fourth is a horse. These are four different things, but each shares the same name. If the king wants to wash his face and hands, he is offered the *saindhava* of water. If the king wants to eat a meal, he is offered the *saindhava* of salt. If the king wants to have a drink after eating, he is offered the *saindhava* of a chalice. And if the king wants to go for a ride after he has finished his meal, he is offered the *saindhava* of a horse. A wise retainer understands the four inner meanings of the king's words."

The mutuality involved in the king's requests and the retainer's offerings has been practiced for a long time, and it closely resembles the transmission of the sacred robe in Buddhism. Since Śākyamuni himself has commented on this topic, all of his descendants should reflect on its meaning. All those who do not practice it in this way must strengthen their efforts to make the first step of authentic practice. The *saindhava* was already being practiced by Buddhas and patriarchs long before it was disclosed, partially, to royal families.

One time old master Hongzhi of Mount Tiantong in Jingyuanfu in Song China entered the lecture hall and instructed his followers:

A monk said to Zhaozhou, "What will you do when asked for *saindhava*?"

Zhaozhou folded his hands over his chest and bowed.

Xuedou commented [on this topic], "When salt is requested, I will offer a horse." [...]

One day when Nanquan saw Tenginfeng coming, he pointed to a pitcher of water and said, "The pitcher is an object. It contains some water. Bring the water over to this old priest without moving the object." Tenginfeng brought the pitcher over to Nanquan and poured the water all over him. Nanquan remained silent.

Nanquan requested water, which came from the dried-up sea, and Tenginfeng offered a chalice or a pitcher he used to pour out every drop of water. Nevertheless, we must study the water in the object and the object in the water. Was it the water that was being moved, or was it the object that was being moved?

The great teacher Xiangyan was asked by a monk, "What is it when a king asks his retainer for *saindhava*?"

Xiangyan responded, "Come over here."

The monk went over there, and Xiangyan said, "Don't be such a fool!"

However, we could ask, did Xiangyan's command "Come over here" indicate a king requesting *saindhava* or a retainer offering it? Just try to answer that question!

Furthermore, when "the monk went over there," did that indicate that Xiangyan was requesting *saindhava*, receiving *saindhava* being offered, or expressing another, more fundamental concern? If he were not expressing a more fundamental concern, we could not understand the meaning of his saying, "Don't be such a fool." If he did not have a more fundamental concern, the monk called over would not have appeared so foolish. Although Xiangyan's response stems from an understanding built up during an entire lifetime, we should not be concerned [that the monk failed]. It is like a general who has lost a battle but is proud in defeat.

Generally, [the Buddhas and patriarchs] explain the [mutuality] of the request and the offering of *saindhava* in extremely subtle ways, such as pointing to black and calling it yellow, in order to reveal the nature of an enlightened vision. Who can say that holding a staff or a fly whisk is not a type of *saindhava*? On the other hand, are there not those [who are supposedly specialists but] who do not know to fasten the bridge to the base of a *koto* or how to tighten the strings of a *koto* to just the right degree?[...]

All activity and expression throughout twenty-four hours is nothing other than requesting *saindhava*. All activity and expression throughout twenty-four hours is nothing other than offering *saindhava*. When you request a fist you receive a fist, and when you request a flywhisk you receive a flywhisk.

However, because in Song China the senior monks in all the districts are pretentious, they cannot imagine this in their wildest dreams. What a pity! The way of the patriarchs is on the decline. Do not avoid taking up the most challenging studies, for it is up to you to transmit the lifeblood of the Buddhas and patriarchs. For example, when we are asked what the buddha is, we answer "this very mind itself is buddha" (*sokushin-ze-butsu*),

but what does this mean? Is it not [an example of] *saindhava*? You must carefully study “this very mind itself is buddha.” How few are there who truly understand the meaning of *saindhava*.

Postscript: This instruction for an assembly of monks was delivered on the twenty-second day of the tenth month in 1245 at Daibutsuji Temple in Echizen.

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