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From the Vimalakirti Sutra, Chapter 3, part 10

The Buddha then said to the venerable Ananda, "Ananda, go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness."

Ananda replied, "Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness. Why? Lord, I remember one day when the body of the Lord manifested some indisposition and he required some milk; I took the bowl and went to the door of the mansion of a great Brahman family. The Licchavi Vimalakirti came there, and, having saluted me, said, 'Reverend Ananda, what are you doing on the threshold of this house with your bowl in your hand so early in the morning?'

"I replied: 'The body of the Lord manifests some indisposition, and he needs some milk. Therefore, I have come to fetch some.'

"Vimalakirti then said to me, 'Reverend Ananda, do not say such a thing! Reverend Ananda, the body of the Tathagata is tough as a diamond, having eliminated all the instinctual traces of evil and being endowed with all goodness. How could disease or discomfort affect such a body?

"Reverend Ananda, go in silence, and do not belittle the Lord. Do not say such things to others. It would not be good for the powerful gods or for the bodhisattvas coming from the various buddha-fields to hear such words.

"Reverend Ananda, a universal monarch, who is endowed only with a small root of virtue, is free of diseases.

How then could the Lord, who has an infinite root of virtue, have any disease? It is impossible.

"Reverend Ananda, do not bring shame upon us, but go in silence, lest the heterodox sectarians should hear your words. They would say, 'For shame! The teacher of these people cannot even cure his own sicknesses. How then can he cure the sicknesses of others?' Reverend Ananda, go then discreetly so that no one observes you.

"Reverend Ananda, the Tathagatas have the body of the Dharma - not a body that is sustained by material food.

The Tathagatas have a transcendental body that has transcended all mundane qualities.

There is no injury to the body of a Tathagata, as it is rid of all defilements. The body of a Tathagata is uncompounded and free of all formative activity. Reverend Ananda, to believe there can be illness in such a body is irrational and unseemly!

"When I had heard these words, I wondered if I had previously misheard and misunderstood the Buddha, and I was very much ashamed. Then I heard a voice from the sky: 'Ananda! The householder speaks to you truly.

Nevertheless, since the Buddha has appeared during the time of the five corruptions, he disciplines living beings by acting lowly and humble. Therefore, Ananda, do not be ashamed, and go and get the milk!

"Lord, such was my conversation with the Licchavi Vimalakirti, and therefore I am reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness."

Among the Buddha's disciples there were 500 who were deeply enlightened. These are usually referred to as the 500 arhats. Among these there were ten disciples who were especially excellent. They are called the Ten Great Disciples.

The Buddha requested them to go to visit the ailing Vimalakirti, asking one after another of the senior disciples. Finally they all had refused and only the last one was left: Ananda Sonja, Talon Daishi, Anan Sonja. Anan Sonja was with the Buddha 25 years, and until the Buddha died he never left his side for even one day. No matter where he went he was by his side; he always took care of the Buddha's needs. He remembered in great detail whenever Shakyamuni gave a teaching and also remembered to whom it was given – to what people he was teaching. He had an amazing memory and so he was called Talon Daishi, Anan Sonja. Anan Sonja was the cousin of the Buddha.

According to the sutras, when the Buddha was enlightened under the Bodhi tree, on the night of that very day Ananda was born. Since this is very congratulatory (auspicious) and fortuitous, from that comes the name Anan, which means great joy and good fortune. It is also written that Ananda was very handsome and he was frequently tempted. In the Surangama Sutra, the Buddha writes about Ananda being seduced by a woman and nearly leaving his Path. This very same Ananda Sonja later was diligently persuasive in matters of essence.

There are many stories about Ananda Sonja. When the Buddha died, there were many disciples and they gathered around him, many varieties of people among them. Among these disciples, there are some to whom the Buddha was usually very, very strict and some of them felt that their strict teacher would now be gone so they would not be corrected so much, and they were relieved and ready to relax.

When Kasho Sonja, an elder monk, heard this he was very worried. Here the Buddha had just died and already it was falling apart like this; where would it go from there? The Buddha's truth and teachings had to be taught correctly. How could this be protected? And if they could not, the Buddha's efforts would all have been wasted.

Kasho Sonja spoke to the 500 awakened disciples and gathered them in a cave near Rajagrihaa for the first council. He gave the words the Buddha had taught correctly so there would be no mistakes and brought together all of the teachings and correctly set them down. This is called the First Council.

At this time Anan Sonja was not yet enlightened. He was not allowed to join his 500 friends. Even though he was Talon Daishi and very clever and knew all of the Buddha's teachings, he was unfortunately not yet enlightened. Anan was miserable. He wanted to get enlightened to be able to join the 500 friends who were all meeting together. He practiced all night long for many nights in a row and finally was able to realize enlightenment. He stood in front of the cave and said, "Let me in!" He knocked on the door and was answered by Kasho Sonja, who said, "You are not yet enlightened so we cannot let you in." "I have realized enlightenment. Let me in." "If you have truly realized enlightenment, enter through the key hole." Anan used his supernatural powers and entered through the keyhole and attended the Council. This is how it is written in the sutras.

When he entered – this disciple who had heard the Buddha's every teaching down to the very last one and had such an excellent memory – he went up to the platform and said he had memorized all of the teachings and he would tell them all. "At this time the Buddha said this and thus have I heard it...At this time he spoke and such-and-such a person was present and he taught at that time to 1250 priests and said the following..." Anan Sonja repeated all of the teachings in this way and for this reason at the beginning of each sutra it is said, "Thus have I heard.... One time the Buddha said this at that time." The person who was the leader said, "Ananda has just spoken. If there is any difference of opinion please say so now, and then we will go on to the next sutra."

In this way they continued working on the sutras. With everyone cooperating, all of the teachings of the Buddha were reviewed in this great meeting. For many days they went over all of the sutras until all had been gone over, and then Upali stood up and went over the precepts.

Once they had held a meeting and all agreed, they began living their daily life accordingly. In this way the Buddha's teachings of a lifetime – the sutras as they were then called, and the rules, which were later called precepts, were for the first time completed as sutras and precepts. At this time they were not written down on paper and made into a book. They were memorized by heart.

In this First Council when the sutras were gone over, they would listen to what Ananda Sonja said. Ananda Sonja was so similar to the Buddha in the way he spoke the words and the words were so much those of the Buddha, the vividness and aliveness of it moved everyone deeply. "Hasn't Ananda become a Buddha?!" Everyone was amazed and in wonder.

It was this Ananda the Buddha asked to go see the ailing Vimalakirti, and he also refused like everyone else. He said, "Buddha, just to Vimalakirti I cannot go, because, a long time ago – if I remember and bring it up again – you, honorable Buddha, were slightly ill. You hadn't had any food for days and couldn't eat, so I wanted to bring you something you could eat easily and went to get some milk. Thinking this, I took my bowls and went to get some milk and was standing at a rich person's gate and right there Vimalakirti came along. He said to me, 'Ananda, you are here at a very early time of day with your begging bowl. Takuhatsu is usually done later than this, isn't it?'"

At this time the takuhatsu was usually done after the meals of people in society were already finished – the monks going out around 9 or 10 in the morning and bringing it home and at 11 all sharing it together. But Ananda at dawn was standing – so early in the morning – at someone's gate and Vimalakirti thought it so strange that he asked why.

"I answered very honestly, 'In fact, Vimalakirti, the Buddha is a little unwell. He isn't eating at all. I thought maybe he would take some milk so I am hoping to receive some milk and that is why I am standing here.' In response to this he said, 'Ananda stop that right now. That kind of foolish thing – how can you talk like that? Shakyamuni Buddha getting sick? How can you say anything so foolish? The Buddha's body is gold and hard as a diamond – it cannot be sick! The Buddha is the one who had cut all of the evils and desires of mind and every day lives gathering merits and is very, very huge in his mind. How can you say that someone like that is sick or confused?'"

Ananda, saying nothing, was told, "Just go home; you do not understand anything at all. 'The Buddha is sick' – don't say anything like that of other people. Oh, that is shameful! The Bodhisattvas from other lands – they come here and you don't want them to hear such a foolish thing being said. The Gods in the heavens even, they have only a few merits and they don't get sick. The Buddha has all of the merits possible for a human, how could he be sick and ailing? Please, quickly get going. To even speak about the Buddha being sick – that is an embarrassment for the entire group! That is a very stupid thing to say. There are people from other religions everywhere around you and if they hear that they will all say, 'Someone who can't even heal their own sickness – how can they cure the sickness of someone else!?' Shakyamuni is called the greatest doctor – that is not a lie! They will doubt that and say, 'what kind of doctor is that? And what kind of an attitude is that toward your teacher?' This is what they will all think and say, so before you are seen please get out of here and go home quickly! From now on you must never speak like that under any circumstances!"

"In this way Vimalakirti got furious at me. And later he said this: 'You have been with Shakyamuni Buddha for so many years – where are you looking? Are you only seeing his form and not hearing what he is always teaching – that Truth which he is always speaking? The Buddha is not a physical body; he is the Body of the Dharma, the Body of the Truth. He is not the body of humans who are lumps of desires. You are only seeing his form and not seeing his essence and his huge mind. The Buddha's mind is manifesting through the body of the Buddha. Where are you looking anyway? And at the same time the Buddha is the most respected person in this whole world. This world of desires and forms, he is so far beyond any of these. And at the same time as well, the Buddha is one who is *shoja jobu* – he is perfectly aligned and in any circumstance he is unmoved and has a body in which all desires are gone completely.

All beings are from the origin Buddhas and are endowed with that same wisdom as the Buddha.

"Also, the Buddha's body is one that has forgotten itself completely, with no such idea of "I have done this" or "I have done that" at all, having let go of every single thing – not like a usual person who is into what they did today and what should be done and how they should be doing it. Always thinking all kinds of things, the Buddha has not the slightest remaining speck of any of those thoughts. He lives simultaneously with what is necessary and comes forth always according to what is necessary. This body as well has been let go of. How could he possibly be sick?"

When Vimalakirti spoke to Anan in this way, Anan said that while he had been with the Buddha for a long time, he realized that he hadn't seen the Buddha clearly but had only seen the physical Buddha and not the true living Buddha. "I was so ashamed," he said. "I thought I was taking care of the Buddha and that was a great mistake! Being spoken to like this by Vimalakirti, for the first time I was aware of how much I had been missing and how I had been so mistaken."

At one time the Buddha said, "The body is born and so it dies: This is the delusion of birth and death. To be deluded by this body that is born and dies, that is the delusion of birth and death. To be liberated from this delusion is to be liberated, to realize the Path of Rebirth."

Everyone is so afraid of sickness and is terrified of death! If that is the case for you, then quickly get rid of that delusion of birth and death! The only way to be free from that world of birth and death is to hold on to nothing in your mind whatsoever. That is the place of no birth and death. In this place there is no sign of sickness and no suffering of death. Go there quickly! And if you ask where that is, it is in the mind of each of us. If you can understand that, then you know that this very place where you sit right now is heaven and paradise! Just as you are is the Buddha's life. If your mind awakens and is freed from all attachments, it is Buddha, just as it is.

In this world, no matter how high Mt Fuji soars, no matter how big and extravagant a house you build with a huge garden to go with it, it will all disappear sometime. There is nothing in this world that is permanent – and if there is anything that is eternal, that is each person's clear Mind only. The physical body manifests that pure clear Mind and is the tool which functions through this high level state of mind. This is our pure Mind and to realize this is the Buddha Dharma.

We don't have a single minute to waste! In this world there is nothing to believe in. It is like a house that is on fire. We cannot believe in this world and assume we will be here forever. If the winds of transiency blow suddenly, with no concern for upper and lower or rich or not rich or man or woman, everyone and all of it will be gone.

This insecure world – to live in it and not know the truth of the Dharma, the world of the Dharma! If we want to awaken to the true Buddha and the true eternal life, we cannot be moved around by a Buddha of form or a concept of paradise. If we hold on to something outside of us like that, it is all dualistic, and anything dualistic is not eternal. If there is any god outside of us, it is dualistic in relationship to ourselves, and that is not eternal or absolute.

Our Mind is like a mirror; originally there is nothing in it, so anything that comes in front of it will be reflected. Like that mind so pure that there is not even the beginning of a *nen* [mind-moment] in it. This is the true Buddha, the True God. Where there is not a thing to be held onto or given rise to – and this pure mind is Buddha – there is no dualism here or even one thought given birth to. This essence with no dualism is Truth and absolute.

Putting it in different words, it is as if the Buddha were to dive right into our lap and we dive right into the Buddha's lap. I enter his house and he enters my house. This is the place of no division – one Being – with no division into subjective and objective. This state of mind is called Buddha. A mirror that reflects things has no discrimination among any of them. Even if what it is reflecting is as tall as Mt Fuji, a mirror has no concern about whether it will be too big to fit it or not. Whether it is Mt. Fuji or Mt. Blanc or the Pacific Ocean, it is the world reflected as it is.

All phenomena that come forth are equal. Everything and anything is reflected without the slightest differentiation. Here there is no dualism inserted. This is Buddha. If it is in the mirror being reflected, it all becomes totally beyond differentiation. In the mirror it is not as if a stone is small and Mt Fuji is large. In the mirror a rich person or a poor person

or philosopher or illiterate are all reflected equally. It is all scenery and all equal and this state of mind in which everything is seen equally is called Buddha.

What is most important is that which is hearing everything: that awareness itself is living Buddha. "All Sentient beings are essentially Buddhas," Hakuin Zenji says in his *Zazen Wasan*. That is the same as saying, "All beings are from the origin Buddhas and are endowed with that same wisdom as the Buddha." Our awareness: Right inside of it there is God and Buddha and the Absolute. We have to actually realize this or we are only seeing the shadow of the Buddha and not the living thing itself.

To put it yet a different way, God does not make humans; humans find God necessary. That which finds God necessary – that very center – that has to be clearly realized! That is not a conceptual idea, that which produces Buddha. That which produces a promised land – that very central nucleus – that is the source of the Buddha, the source of all Buddhas, their very existence – that which is not in any way different from the Buddha, a full and complete Buddha.

In our Mind we are full and complete in abundance, and to discover that is to know Buddha. From here we see things and hear sounds and taste and smell and feel hot and cold.

That which perceives all of these: What is IT!? Is it imagined? Is it a group of cells? Cells can't hear a conversation, and there is no way possible that cells can see the scenery. It is not elements or earth, air, fire, or water. It is not the physical. It is not the kidneys, spleen or liver, neither stomach nor intestines. So it is not the organs either. That which is alive right here and now is not something to which the physical gives birth nor does it come forth from our organs.

And then hearing this one can easily respond with, "Then is there nothing there at all?" The place inside of our brain is hearing sounds and seeing objects: Is this what you think then? It is not so foolish as this. It is not that some kind of nothing at all is hearing and smelling and seeing!

The cells hearing a sound and the nerve making a judgment – it doesn't work like that. The nerves just send along messages about the colors and sounds – that only. That which hears what is being said and says, "Oh yes! That is exactly as I thought!" is our Mind's functioning. If it is explained scientifically, the explanation truly covers to the furthest reaches in its expression. It tells us all about the Mind's very subtle response capability. There is not a single word mistaken in that explanation. But then, is it the cells that understand?

Looking at it even a little more closely, if we don't eat food, the brain cells will die. Their functioning will be stopped. If that is the case, then that which hears talking and sees things must be the daikon and the rice we eat. Could it really be that the daikon and rice hear the sounds and see the scenery?

That which is surging through our physical bodies is called our consciousness. While it never exists separate from the physical body, the consciousness, when it works, uses the body. It becomes the center of imagination and uses the physical body as its tool. Right here is what we have to look at clearly.

The one who drives the locomotive, if we look at it from the outside, we could say that the train is carrying the man. The train does not move all by itself; it is a human who drives it – the engineer. Our body has brought forth our consciousness; that is true. But when that world of consciousness comes forth, it is what commands the physical body. This is where the essence of the imaginative center comes from.

The mind itself has invented the idea that the brain does the work of the mind. Whether we do good things or bad things, this is the freedom of Mind. If our physical body were to decide that, we would have no freedom of mind. Whether we live our life laughing or crying is all decided by the mind. If we understand in this way, we can see that whether we are sick or well is up to us. We are free in this. We get sick because we hold this mind in physical bondage. Humans get sick when the mind is in bondage to the physical body. This has to be clearly seen and understood. In this way the physical body is instructed by the mind.

And having heard this, often it is the next step to think that our consciousness is some special part of our body. We learn the delusion that there is some absolute thing called a mind somewhere in our body. We cough and we hear the cough. But is it the body that hears that cough? Is it our brain cells that hear that cough? Is it our mind? We have no such luxurious free time to think about it every time we cough. Without hesitating and adding in a pause or thought, we cough and hear a cough simultaneously. If there is a sound, we hear a sound. But even if there is no sound we are always ready to pick up and perceive any sound that comes along with clarity.

We have a strong base already with which to do that – the substance of awareness. Here it is called the Body of the Buddha, the Dharma Body, which is aware before even one mind moment arises. So of course it could not possibly have any shape. It has no color either. It has no form, yet it reflects sharply and clearly anytime and anywhere. It is always prepared to reflect clearly and with precision at any moment. If a dog barks, it hears Bow-wow. If a bell rings it hears it: GOOOONG! Hearing that external world it accepts and receives it. The movie screen is always there and ready, under any conditions. As the scenery comes it is simultaneously received.

At the same time, no matter how huge a fire is in a movie and is reflected on the screen, the screen does not burn. No matter what great flood is projected, the screen does not flow away. While reflecting these things, it is independent of them. Everything is exactly received and given birth to, but nothing is moved around by those things at all. Whether this world is reflected or not reflected, noticed or not noticed, ALL of that is up to us. That is what it means to be the center of what gives existence to every thing.

At the same time, if something good comes in front of the mirror, even if we don't judge it as that, it comes forth naturally as that. If something bad comes forth, even if we don't judge it as that, it comes forth as that. The world of good and bad or of this and that, even if we don't judge it as that, it comes forth just like that. We just reflect it precisely as it is, without the slightest speck of deception whatsoever. Whatever comes forth is precisely reflected.

The center of that – the core that receives and accepts all of it – is called the True Master, the core or the center, or the Buddha-nature, or the source of All Buddhas. This awareness is not only of the Buddha but the essence of the Buddhas. It is also our true form and the essence of all of us as well. This is our sacred dignified quality.

Today we are ruled by the scientific and technological culture, which says that first there is a physical body and on top of that a consciousness is laid. This is backwards. Because of that way of thinking, when we are sick in our physical body, our mind has no place to go. Our physical body is not our master; the physical body is what is reflected upon the screen of our consciousness – one phenomenon only, and of course this one phenomenon comes forth as a birth and it happens as a phenomenon of death. There are also the phenomena of being sick and becoming old, and there is also eventually the phenomenon of dying. However, although the phenomena in front of our eyes change, the screen on which they are being projected does not change.

Our actual awareness or consciousness, whether we are awake or asleep, goes without resting beyond space and time. This never-ceasing, never-exhausted awareness – to realize this is to know the Buddha Dharma. As Dogen Zenji said, "To study the way is to study the self, To study the self is to forget the self." He is saying that, for experiencing the phenomena that we are so conditioned and habitualized into thinking are real, we have to liberate that idea that takes our conditioning and our habitualization as the center of our True Nature. And to do this, we must let go of that ego – of the phenomenon of an idea of an egoistic self. If we can let go of that, then to forget the self is to be enlightened by all things.

To study the way is to study the self,
To study the self is to forget the self.
– Dogen Zenji

We can realize that there is no need to make a separation between the screen and what is reflected on it; the screen and what is reflected on it are one and the same thing. The screen itself is the very scenery which is reflected upon it – the place where self and other have become One. If we let go of that small self, we realize the "just-as-it-is", the world of One.

To study the way is to study the self
To study the self is to forget the self
To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things
To be enlightened by all things is to remove the barrier between self and other

Here there is no need for any reasoning or ideas. No doubt about it whatsoever: every single thing that our eyes light upon is the Truth. Every single thing that our ears can hear is the Absolute – freshness itself. What we feel with our body, what we touch with our hands and touch with our feet – all of it is the Truth, the actuality. Our Mind's true base is the Buddha's true base, which pours over into the corners of the whole universe without ceasing. The past, future and present are all pierced through to realize that True Root of our actual Being. This is called the Buddha Dharma.

We are always getting confused by phenomena and emotions and blind thinking about those phenomena – getting attached to them and stuck on them. And by doing that, we all get deluded. Whenever anything comes forth, we immediately get a thought about it. We think immediately that it is good or bad or that we like it or dislike it, and our

feelings and emotions get aroused. Then we get tied up by those feelings. We separate from the real; we get engaged and deluded by what is being reflected. Whether we are angry or sad or agitated, or interested – it is still all phenomena. We get caught on these phenomena when one mind moment arises – and we are moved around by it and confuse it with our true life energy.

We then lose the true flow of life energy. Our original Prajna wisdom gets darkened and lost sight of. Because it gets darkened, that bright shining light of Prajna wisdom, along with those nen and the emotions of one nen arising, gets hidden – and all kinds of incorrect nen are given birth to. That is why we get angry and turned around and get shocked and get blue in the face. We worry about things and get thin. Our mind's nen are always expressed by our physical body. These are all attachments to very small things, which are then laid on top of our absolute, unchanging, bright, true quality and character.

We mistakenly think that these are ourselves and that is why we travel endlessly in the worlds of desire, form and formlessness and receive the painful things and suffering of life, one after another. Images reflected on a mirror or on a screen, what is needed is to not take them as real but only exactly as they are, exactly as they are reflected.

From the origin it is all empty. Where is there any place for a bit of dust to alight?

We pierce through the Three Periods of Time and surge through the Ten Directions. To realize that state within ourselves is to know the Source of the awareness that reflects everything that exists. Then we know the place of "There is nothing in existence to be disliked" (Rinzai's words).

We can know this actuality, and if we understand this then there is infinite wisdom that gets caught on nothing, is stopped by nothing. It goes beyond the physical, and is what commands our physical body – this consciousness, the source of it, the base of it. To realize this and know it directly, there is nothing of greater quality or more excellent. There is nothing of greater good fortune, nothing of greater security and peace in life than this.

Anan said to the Buddha, "I did say that you were not feeling well. I said that and thought I saw it clearly. Was it my mistake in seeing and hearing? I quit waiting for milk there and went home and then I heard a voice from the sky. 'Anan, it is exactly as Vimalakirti says: From the origin there is no such thing as a physical ailment.'"

In order to liberate beings, Buddhas come into this world. Today is really a world full of terrible evils and crimes and horrors. There has never been a time before when the world is as murky as it is today. It is impossible for an individual to do anything about how terrible things are today in the world.

Science has made many discoveries and is brilliant, liberating our lives and making them very convenient. But along with the convenience, we have plutonium and Freon and dioxins and the twelve poisonous versions that will destroy humans. These are all increasing and the world is on its last breath. Human ego becomes stronger and stronger, with wars never ceasing. There is a shortage of food, the water and air are being sullied, and it is beginning

to be a catastrophe on many fronts. Our values for society are murky and our values for human relationships are unclear and sullied.

The Buddha has taught us that life is suffering. We are stuck and caught on our physical bodies and we are stuck on prolonging our lives, and at the same time we all want pleasure and enjoyment as much as possible. Peoples' desires are taking over, with no way to stop them. People can no longer be satisfied with their usual pleasures; they always need something more stimulating to become happy, and they search for that everywhere. Even those desires to which people are attached are becoming ever more murky!

It is in these times that we receive the next century. Human pride has disappeared. Human understanding of what we are has become twisted. People don't live correctly because they don't have any idea how to; they don't have the awareness of what a human is, being so busy with earning more money and believing that anything is permitted in order to do that. In order to stay alive, anything you do is fine and doesn't matter at all.

This is the kind of era it is and in this kind of era the Buddha was born. The Buddha was born into this kind of world and, without fail, this kind of dilemma-filled era is also the body of the Buddha. In the Buddha from the origin, there is no sickness, but for those drowning in attachment to good health, Buddha manifests in this state of being sick as well, and teaches everyone how the life energy with which they have been endowed will not last forever.

We never know when we will become sick. We can't depend on continuing good health and waste our time for even a second. This True human nature – we have to awaken to it immediately! And with the coming of death – we know well that our life is not infinite – no matter how many organs can be transplanted we will all still die without fail. And beyond that, with this life energy that is alive today, we have to awaken to the True Mind and know that true joy of knowing directly the essence of infinite life, right here and now.

The countless Buddhas have been born into this world in order to reveal the Truth, to proclaim the Truth, to help everyone to understand the Truth and guide them to enter into the Truth.

The Buddha's whole life was for bringing forth the karmic connections to this truth, and for doing this he used his entire life. Just born, he walked seven and a half steps, pointed to the heavens with his right hand and with his left hand pointed to the ground and said, "Above the heavens and below the heavens there is only One!"

So it is written in the sutra books of old. It was truly nonscientific, but the teachings of that lifetime of the Buddha have pierced through the life energy of all the times following, and if we look closely, we can see that this is how it could best be expressed.

What is meant by pointing to the heavens with his right hand is that there is no such thing as a god in heaven that can make slaves of humans or use them in a slave-like way. The left hand pointing at the ground could mean that there are no such things as evil spirits that can persuade humans into evil ways. Humans are dignified and splendid as they are and

don't have to depend on anything else. That the Buddha walked seven and a half steps expresses our human freedom.

Whether we are bringing good or bad into this world is our responsibility. He taught and spoke of that responsibility his whole life. The deepest truth of Buddhism was expressed at his very birth. "Above the heavens and below the heavens there is only One!" This is not saying that only I am wonderful and all of you are fools. Of course it is not that. He was rather representing humanity and saying that in the heavens and on earth humans are free and that they are responsible for everything.

The Buddha gave himself entirely. Speaking of his Path, he said that having a family, a people, and a country and many cultures and scholastic pursuits – these each have their deep value. But that which is of the greatest value is to awaken to the true value of being human. There is nothing more valuable than this. This is what he was expressing with his whole body and whole life.

And when he was enlightened, he didn't say, "I have become an Awakened One." He said instead, "How mysterious! How mysterious!" That which had taken him six years – that Buddha Nature to which he finally was able to awaken – he realized that we all have it from birth, that all humans, all living beings, are already endowed with this pure nature. It was this great wonder and amazement that caused him to say, "Mountains and rivers and animals and birds – they are all Buddhas!" This was an actual Awakening to the deepest Truth.

Above the heavens and below the heavens there is only One!
– The Buddha

As he was entering into Parinirvana he said to his disciples, "This is my final teaching." Hearing that, his disciples all cried and wept. Not only the disciples but the laypeople who were his followers also wept and cried, and the animals also cried – as we see in the Nehan Scroll.

It is to this degree that the Buddha's compassion was felt by all beings; this compassion was widely known. He said, "Don't cry! This is not something that we should cry about! Things that are born will die without exception. Things that meet will, without fail, have to separate. I have been telling you this every single day. Stop crying! Listen, all of you! The thing that you must hold precious is to awaken to your true Buddha Mind – to realize that you are all of existence and to awaken to this directly, to this Essence! Then I will live eternally."

Before this he had already said that after three months he would be entering Nirvana, and at that time Anan had asked him, "When you die to whom shall we go for refuge? On whom shall we depend?" And the Buddha had answered, "Be a lamp unto yourselves; find refuge in the Dharma. Don't find refuge in anything else. Go for refuge to the Dharma only." He said it very clearly. "You must all have confidence and go to yourselves for refuge. The Dharma is your refuge! You are the Dharma!" He said it twice so there would be no mistake about it. "You are the Dharma," is what he said.

This is not ego, but that Dharma which connects all existing beings in Mind. Our refuge is only within us, nowhere else. This is what the Buddha was teaching: "I live eternally; don't let the Dharma decay!"

After the Buddha died, there was a grave problem among his disciples: "What is the body of the Buddha? The body of the Buddha is eternal – what does that mean?"

The people of the Southern Buddhist School said it meant to always keep the Precepts. The same way that the Buddha lived when he was alive, the same way that the Buddha taught when he was alive – this was most important, they taught. To observe that, teaching was most important as the Buddha body. So for those of the Southern Buddhist Schools, the rules are always meticulously kept. For the monks there are over a hundred rules; for the nuns there are twice as many. In this way the Precepts were carefully kept, and that is how they found the Buddha's body eternal.

What is the infinite life? What is the infinite Body of the Buddha? This is one of the most complex questions in Buddhist philosophy.

For those in the way of Zen, the Dharma is the Awakening of the Buddha and the Enlightenment of the Buddha. The Buddha's Enlightenment is for each of us to realize directly – and without letting it stop, to keep it passing along more and more and more. Where this Awakening is, the Buddha lives eternally. Anything outside of this direct understanding of the truth is only form. Only when this Awakening is realized can we know the truth for the first time and, having this experience deeply realized within, see the Buddha Mind within each of us.

Our Awakening will then begin to give birth to many others' deep Awakening. Like a candle lighting another candle, the original candle will melt away but the burning light which it has passed along will give the very same light to a new candle – so it will always continue to burn and brighten eternally. Wherever there is this same light of Awakening, the Buddha still lives.

All of it is about Awakening, and that Awakening is still alive and well today. The Buddha is still alive and well today! To receive it and see it like this is everything there is for the person of the Zen Way.

When the Buddha died, Anan said, "What shall we do with your body?" To this the Buddha answered, "This body – after I have died, leave it to the laypeople. They will take care of this body. All of you go and redouble your efforts for the Dharma," This is what he answered. The Buddha was not concerned in any way with his body or about what would happen to it. He would not allow his disciples to do anything about it.

Moreover, he told them all to work at their Awakening with everything they had and were. Even at the very end of his life he held to that deep Awakening and True Mind, and with

himself and with everything he taught, he manifested it completely.

In the *Dhammapada* it says, from the words of the Buddha, "Whether we fall into a good place or a bad place, no matter how much another person prays for us, it has no meaning. Each and every person has to take responsibility for what they do; that is true Liberation. No matter how much another person works, that will not make another Awaken. We each and every one of us have to do our own clarification and Awakening.

Since times of old in India, people have been taught that we will be reborn into another form, without fail. That is knowledge from the olden times. It is not a predestined form, but we can surely be born into all sorts of forms.

And if we look at this carefully, we see that there are people in society who have been our mothers and brothers. And if we look at it like this, then we will naturally want to give everything we are to people in society. It is the greatest offering we can make to those who have gone before us.

In this way, to realize the way of assistance in society is also the teaching of the Buddha and the Dharma. In the *Tanni sho* (the teachings of Shinran) as well it teaches, "For my parents I have never prayed the Buddha's name. Rather, I pray for all of those beings in society to become Awakened; they are all my parents and children – for them to be liberated as soon as possible."

This is the Buddha's true way of teaching the Path. To leave all the people in pain and suffering behind and be satisfied with our own Awakening only – where is the peace of mind or true satisfaction in that?

If we look at men, we think of them as our fathers; if we look at women, we think of them as our mothers. Being born and reborn, at some time we have each become the parent or the child, and there is no stranger among us.

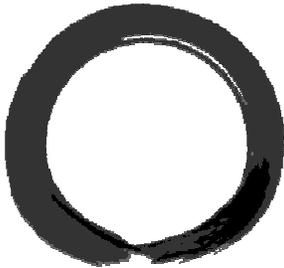
This is where the compassion and human love of Buddhism is born. If we listen to the mountain bird's call of "horo horo", we think of our father and think of our mother, too. In this way, even regarding animals, we have the intimacy of our love for our own parents – to this degree the Buddha's love is all-inclusive. When we think of this, we have to realize Awakening and clarify our True Mind even one day sooner. Doing so, we can go into this society, which has become very formalized and structured, and bring the life energy of true Awakening to every moment and place. This is how I believe it is. In this way Anan Sonja said he would not go to visit the ailing Vimalakirti. All of the other 500 disciples also gave up and, while telling of the superior wisdom and teachings of Vimalakirti, they all refused to go visit him. ❖

Sesshin Schedule Sogenji 1999

May	2-6	Kosesshin	August	4-8	Kosesshin	November	4-8	Kosesshin
	9-15	Osesshin		17-21	Kosesshin		14-20	Osesshin
	21-27	Kosesshin		26-30	Kosesshin		25-29	Kosesshin
June	1-7	Kosesshin	September	4-10	Kosesshin	December	4-11	Rohatsu
	12-18	Osesshin		14-20	Kosesshin		15-21	Osesshin
	23-29	Kosesshin		24-30	Osesshin		24-28	Kosesshin
July	4-10	Osesshin	October	5-11	Kosesshin			
	15-21	Kosesshin		16-22	Osesshin			
	26-30	Kosesshin		26-30	Kosesshin			

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