

# A Treasury of Illumined Visions

## The Zen Master Dogen's *Shobogenzo*

### *Shobogenzo Sansuikyo* The Mountains and Waters Sutra

Translation by

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#### The Mountains and Waters Sutra

The present mountains and waters manifest and bespeak the sempiternal truth realized and spoken by the ancient buddhas. Both abide in their legitimate dwelling and manifest their supreme virtue. Because each expresses the movement existing before the beginningless beginning, each is a living reality of this moment. Because each expresses the self born before the primordial incipience, each is the supreme fulfillment of self-manifestation. Mountains' multitudinous virtues are so high and vast that the active virtue of riding the clouds is always attained in the mountains, and the wondrous power of following the wind is invariably released from the mountains.

Master Fu-jung Dao-k'ai said to the assembly, "Green mountains continuously walk and a stone (barren) woman gives birth at night."

Mountains lack no virtues of being that are proper to their existence. For this reason, they are both eternally abiding and constantly walking. Examine thoroughly this virtue of being of mountains' walking. As walking, mountains' walking is akin to the walking of humans. Therefore, just because mountains' walking does not look like human walking, do not doubt the fact of mountains' walking. The awakened master's elucidatory statement above already points to the meaning of walking, which pointing is tantamount to the attainment of the fundamental. You should therefore study in depth the meaning of his statement to the assembly concerning mountains' continuous walking.

Precisely because green mountains walk continuously, their being is eternal. Although their walk is faster than swift wind, people inside the mountains can be neither aware nor cognizant of it. "Inside the mountains" means being at one with the efflorescence of flowers out of which the world emerges. People outside the mountains are unaware and incognizant, for those who have no vision to see the mountains' walking can have no awareness, no cognizance, no seeing, no hearing of this kosmic truth. If you doubt the walking of the mountains, you do not as yet know the fact of your own walking. This does not mean that there is no fact of your walking but that you do not know the meaning of your own walking, that you have not yet realized your walking. Therefore, if you want to know your walking, you must also know the walking of the green mountains.

Green mountains are neither sentient nor insentient. You are neither sentient nor insentient. The moment you realize this, you can no longer doubt the walking of the green mountains. The fullness of knowing that makes this realization possible transcends and renders irrelevant the way of knowing based on the

dividing of the whole into various realms of existence. You must limpidly examine both green mountains' walking and your own walking. You must also examine both backwar-stepping and stepping-backward. This means, you must examine the fact that since the time of primordial incipience and the time of luminiferous openness, the walking in its stepping-forward and stepping-backward has never once ceased its movement.

Had the walking ceased its movement even for a moment, the awakened masters and adepts of the past would not have appeared. Had the walking had an ultimate end, the principles and teachings of spiritual awakening would not have reached the present. Neither stepping-forward nor stepping-backward has yet ceased. Stepping-forward does not obstruct stepping-backward, nor does stepping-backward obstruct stepping-forward. This virtue of complementarity is characterized in terms of the *mountains flowing* and the *flowing mountains*.

Green mountains study walking on the earth and eastern mountains learn traveling on the water. Therefore, this learning is the self-learning of the mountains. In the process, the mountains do not alter their body-mind, but learn while remaining what they are. Do not calumniate the mountains by asserting that green mountains cannot walk and eastern mountains cannot travel on water. It is because of the ignobleness of your low-level understanding that you distrust the expression that green mountains walk. It is because of the incompleteness of your little learning that you become startled by the words *flowing mountains*. As long as you understand not even the words "flowing water," you are bound only to sink and drown in the stagnant river of little learning and little understanding.

Thus, a totality of increasingly accumulating virtues of being is distinguished as the "mountain" in terms of form, name, and life-continuity. Within that totality, there is walking, there is flowing. There is a time when the mountain begets a mountain offspring. The mountain *is* the very process of becoming spiritually awake and alight. In accordance with this principle, the process of darkness dissipating and light unfolding comes into being.

Even if you see mountains as the manifest totality of grasses, trees, earth, rocks, and walls, and even if you experience no inner doubt or disturbance, your vision does not behold the wholeness of the mountains' consummate realization. Even if you attain the stage of awareness wherein you can behold the mountains as the adornment of the seven jewels of spiritual illumination, you have not attained the ultimate ground. Even if you actualize a vision enabling you to behold the mountains as the realms wherein the process of awakening takes place, those realms are not something to which you should develop attachment. Even if you become aware of the inconceivable virtues of spiritual awakening, and come to behold the summit of consummate fulfillment, the whole truth is not limited to this. Individual fulfillment of spiritual visions depends on the individual's intellectual background, propensity, and environment. Therefore, we should not consider these individual visions as the whole work of the awakened being, but only as a view seen through a bamboo tube in a corner of the world.

The argument concerning which one, external nature or internal mind, is more primary and causative is reproved by the great awakened being. The explication of mind and nature as something substantial is not affirmed by the ancient awakened masters. Seeing mind and nature as substantial is the occupation of those intellectuals who are not on the path of spiritual awakening. Attachment to words and expressions is not the way of spiritual emancipation. There is a way that penetratingly transcends these limited states of understanding. That is, "Green mountains continuously walk," and "Eastern mountains travel on the water." Examine these statements thoroughly.

The statement that a stone woman gives birth at night means that the time when a barren woman gives birth is called "night." According to legends, there exist male stones, female stones, and non-male-female stones. Stones are known to complement heaven and complement earth to bring about balance and harmony. The stones that complement heaven are heavenly stones, and those that complement earth are earthly stones. Although these legends of stones are well known in the mundane world, people rarely know their true metaphoric meaning. You must understand the truth signified therein of giving birth to a child. At the time of birthing, the parent and the child simultaneously co-transform. You should not only learn that the consummate fulfillment of birth means the child becoming the parent, but also learn and penetratingly comprehend that the consummate fulfillment of birth is being realized when the parent becomes the child.

Great Master Ummon Kyoshin (Kuangzhen of Yunmen) said, "The eastern mountains travel on the water."

The basic meaning of this consummate fulfillment of the Way of awakening is that all mountains are indeed *eastern mountains*, and that all eastern mountains are indeed *traveling-on-the-water*. For this reason, Nine Mountains, Mt. Sumeru, and other mountains constituting the whole universe consummately fulfill and realize the Way. This very fact is *eastern mountains*. However, how could Ummon so transparently penetrate the skin, flesh, bones, and marrow of the eastern mountains as well as their realization and living reality?

Now in the present-day China, there is a legion of inauthentic monks, the magnitude of which has grown so large that a small number of authentic monks cannot counter it. These inauthentic monks maintain that this "eastern mountains travel on the water" story and the story of Nansen's (Nanquan's) sickle are irrational stories. Their point is that any expressions having to do with rational thought are not awakened masters' statements or expressions, and that awakened masters' expressions are by nature irrational. Therefore, they claim, Obaku's (Huangbo's) staff or Rinzai (Linji's) shout is beyond rational understanding and unconcerned with rational thought. They thus consider that which is beyond rationality to be the great spiritual awakening of the time before the primordial incipience, and that ancient masters' use of expedient phrases to disentangle the entanglement of our mind is beyond our rational comprehension.

Those who make such statements have not yet met a true master and have no real vision for learning and understanding. These unadepts are too foolish and mediocre to even discuss. However, for the last two to three hundred years in China, there have been numerous legions of such vexatious rascals. What a pity! The great way of the awakened ones has been perishing. The views held by these monks are even inferior to those of Hinayanas (the escapist path of awakening only for one's own liberation) and sravakas (the limited path of awakening based on literally following the words of the Buddhas), and are even more foolish than the views held by those outside the Buddhist way. They are neither lay people nor professional monks, neither ordinary humans nor heavenly beings. They are more stupid than the animals that are said to have learnt the Buddha's way.

The irrational statements of which the vexatious rascals speak are irrational only for them, not for any awakened ones. Just because these statements by the awakened ones are beyond their present understanding, that does not mean that they should not follow the path of rational understanding of the Way. Even if the Way of awakening should be ultimately beyond rational understanding, what they at present call their understanding of rationality and irrationality does not meet the mark at all. In the present-day Sung Dynasty, cases of such misunderstanding or inadequate understanding are numerous

and ubiquitous. I witnessed many such cases with my own eyes. How sad! They do not know *that thought is expression in language and that expression in language penetratingly transcends thought*. While in China, in my discussion with them, having no argument against my logic, they would remain silent, even when I laughed at them. Their idea of the Way of awakening being beyond rational understanding is naught but a false notion concocted by their perverse mind. Who taught them? But even though there have been no authentic teachers to teach them the authentic way, they seem characteristically predisposed to be outside the way.

Know that this statement “eastern mountains travel on water” is the bones and marrow of the awakened masters. The myriad waters consummately fulfill their being-becoming at the foot of the eastern mountains. For this reason, the myriad mountains ride on the clouds and walk in the heavens. The ultimate peak of the myriad waters is the myriad mountains. Both the ascending and descending movement of the mountains’ walking are of the waters. The myriad mountains robustly walk on the myriad waters with their feet energetically splashing the waters. Thus, the walking walks freely in every direction. Although it looks naturally unpolluted, it practices and realizes the way to be free of pollutants.

The water is neither strong nor weak, wet nor dry, moving nor still, cold nor hot, existent nor nonexistent, disintegrating nor integrating. Transformed to a solidity, the water is harder than diamond; thus it is indestructible. Transformed to a liquidity, the water is gentler than milk; thus it is indestructible. For this reason, we cannot doubt the virtues of the consummate fulfillment manifesting as water. You must learn the time-being of your seeing the omnipresence of omnipresent water. Learning is not limited to the time when humans and heavenly beings come to see water, for there is a learning wherein water comes to see itself. Because water realizes itself by seeing itself, there is a learning wherein water comes to elucidate itself. To understand the way of the water, you must develop the inner passage in which you meet yourself, and must be able to move forward and backward within and take a leap beyond the vital passage wherein others come to know themselves.

Different kinds of beings see mountains and waters differently from one another. In seeing what we humans regard as water, some beings see jewels. However, this does not mean that they regard what we call jewels as water. We do not know what in the human realm corresponds to their water. We only see their jewels as water. Some beings see water as wondrous flowers, yet they do not use flowers in the way we use water. Hungry ghosts see water as raging fire or pus and blood. Dragons see water as a palace or a pavilion. Some beings see water as the seven treasures and wish-granting jewels, as forests and walls, the essential nature of pure liberation, as the immortal body of humanity, or as the body-form and mind-nature. We humans see it as water. Thus, the kind of seeing and the kind of being are invariably concomitant and coextensive, and this concomitant coextensity is the very place of our learning, which we can make or break in the Way of spiritual awakening.

We have already established that the views of different kinds of beings are different one from another. You should now question why this should be so. Does this mean that there are many ways of viewing one realm of being or that we are mistaking many different realms of beings for one realm of being? You must pursue this question beyond the end of ordinary pursuit. Accordingly, the cultivation, realization, and elucidation of the Way should not be limited to only one or two types. There should be thousands of types and tens of thousands of kinds of the ultimate state of being. Further, in meditating on the meaning of the above, it seems that even though there may be many kinds of water for many kinds of beings, there exists no original water and there exists no water common to every kind of being. However, the various kinds of water of the various kinds of beings do not depend upon mind or body, do not arise from karmic

action-reaction, and are not dependent upon self or others. The transparent transcendence of water depending only on water is all that there is.

Therefore, the water is not composed of earth, water, fire, air, space, consciousness, and so on, nor is it blue, yellow, red, white, black, and so on, nor is it form, sound, smell, taste, touch, perception, and so forth. Yet, the water of earth, water, fire, air, space, and all the rest naturally realizes itself. In this realization, there is no distinction between the realizer and the realized or the creator and the created. For this reason, with respect to the land and the dwelling of the present instance, we cannot clearly distinguish and state what has created what. To say that the world rests upon four vast wheels such as the wheel of space and the wheel of wind (as is said in India) is not your truth or the truth of others. It is only to argue on the calculations and conjectures of small minds. Statements such as this come from the idea that in order for something to exist it must rest upon something else.

The Buddha said, "All that exists in the universe is fundamentally liberated and utterly free."

You should know that even though every being is fundamentally liberated and utterly free, it resides in its legitimate dwelling place. This being so, when most human beings see water, they only see that it flows incessantly. There are many kinds of flowing, thus this is but one kind of flowing. This is but one way in which human beings see flowing. The water flows through the earth, flows through the heavens, and flows upwards and downwards. It flows around a bend and into many bottomless abysses. Ascending, it becomes clouds; descending, it forms abysses.

In the old Confucian book *Monshi (Wenzi)*, it says, "The way of water is such that when it ascends to the heavens, it becomes raindrops, and when it descends to the earth, it becomes rivers."

Even a secular person can make a statement like this. Those who call themselves to be descendents of the Buddha and ancient awakened ones should feel ashamed of being more ignorant than secular people. The point is this: the way of water is not *recognized* by water, yet is realized in action, and the way of water is not *unrecognized* by water, yet is realized in action.

"When it ascends to the heavens, it becomes raindrops" means that water rises to the high heavens of every possible world and becomes raindrops there. Raindrops vary in form according to the different worlds in which they are formed. To say that there are places where water does not reach is the teaching of Hinayanas and sravakas or the errant teaching of those outside the Way. The water even reaches into the flames of fire, into the mentation, thought, and reason of mind, and into the process of spiritual awakening and enlightenment, of darkness dissipating and light spreading.

"When it descends to the earth, it becomes rivers" means that when water descends to the earth, it transforms into rivers. The spirit of the rivers constitutes the source of being a sage. Now, ordinary fools and mediocre persons think that water necessarily exists in rivers and oceans. This is not so. In truth, rivers and oceans exist in water. Therefore, there exists water even where there is no river or ocean. It only means that when the water descends, it manifests its functionality as rivers and oceans.

Also, you should not get the idea that no real world or no realm where darkness has gone and light has spread can exist in places where water becomes rivers and oceans because of their seeming materiality. Even in a drop of water, infinite realms where darkness has gone and light has spread become consummately manifest. Thus, neither is it that water exists in realms where darkness has gone and light has spread, nor is it that realms where darkness has gone and light has spread exist in water. The locus of

water's existence has nothing to do with the time dimensionality of past, present, and future, or with the space dimensionality of the phenomenal universe. Yet, the water consummately fulfills its being-becoming, and this consummate fulfillment is universal truth.

Wherever a process of spiritual awakening exists, there is water. Wherever water exists, there is a consummate realization of spiritual awakening. Because of this fact, a process of spiritual awakening takes up water and becomes embodied in body-mind and thought processes. Therefore, there is never a mention of water not ascending in classical scriptures inside or outside Buddhism. The way of water freely reaches everywhere in every direction, upward and downward, vertically and horizontally.

However, a Buddhist scripture states that fire-air moves upward, while earth-water moves downward. This upward-downward should prompt a committed study for a proper understanding of its meaning. It is the study of what is called the upward-downward of the Way of spiritual awakening. In point of fact, we call the direction in which earth-water moves "downward." There is no direction "downward" independently of the movement of earth-water. The direction in which fire-air moves is designated as "upward." Although the phenomenal universe has no intrinsic directionality of upward-downward directions or four cardinal directions, based on the relative directions of four, five, or six elements, we temporarily and tentatively set up a universe of directions. Therefore, the highest heaven should not be regarded as existing above, nor should the lowest hell be regarded as existing below. For those whose experiential state is of the lowest hell, the lowest hell is the entire universe. For those whose experiential state is of the highest heaven, the highest heaven is the whole universe.

Thus, dragons seeing water as a palace must be like humans seeing a palace. They would not regard it as flowing. If an outside observer told them that their palace was in fact flowing water, they would be surprised and suspicious, just as we were when we heard that mountains were flowing. However, some dragons might adopt the view that the railings, stairs, and pillars of the palace and pavilion were indeed flowing water. Quietly reflect and meditate upon this whole issue. If you remain on the surface and periphery of reality and do not transcendently penetrate to the depth, you cannot free yourself from the body-mind of mediocrity, nor can you fully understand the realm of darkness dissipating and light spreading or even the realms or the palaces of mediocrity.

We human beings are deeply conditioned to recognize water to be what makes up oceans and rivers, but we do not know as yet what it is that fish recognize and use as water. Do not foolishly assume that other kinds of being also use as water what you recognize as water. You who study the Way of awakening, when studying water, should not limit your perception only to the human perception. You should pursue studying water in accordance with the Way of awakening. You should study what you regard as the water used by awakened masters. You should also study whether or not there is water in the houses of awakened masters.

Mountains have been the dwelling of great sages since the time beyond the past and the time beyond the present. Great seers and sages have made mountains their inner sanctum and their body-mind. Through seers and sages, mountains consummately realize themselves. You may think that in mountains there are many great seers and sages assembled together, but in reality, after entering the mountains, there is no one who meets any one. The consummate fulfillment of the living reality of the mountains alone is, and no trace of someone entering the mountains exists.

There is a vast difference in perception and understanding between seeing the mountains while being in the mundane world and meeting the mountains while being in the sacred mountains. Your thought and

perception of *mountains not flowing* should not be the same as fish's perception of water as a palace. Human and heavenly beings have obtained their own realms of being, the meaning of which other kinds of beings may or may not doubt. Hence, you should study the significance of *mountains flowing* in the way the awakened masters do, and should not remain perplexed and uncertain. Seen as one whole dynamic process, they are *flowing*, while seen as one whole process *dynamic*, they are *not flowing*. One time they are *flowing*, while another time they are *not flowing*. Without penetrating into this singular complementary truth, there can be no innerstanding of the illumined vision.

An ancient awakened master said, "If you do not wish to invite a karmic condition for unceasing hell, never calumniate the eternal unfolding of illumined vision." You should inscribe this enlightening statement on your skin, flesh, bones, and marrow; and on your body-mind processes and external-internal worlds. You should inscribe it on the noumenal realm of no-thingness and on the phenomenal realm of thingness. It is known to be already inscribed on trees and rocks, and on fields and villages.

Although mountains are generally believed to belong to the territory of the nation, in reality, they belong to people who love them. When particular mountains love their lords, you will always find those who are illumined, awakened, or supremely virtuous living in these mountains. When those who are illumined or awakened live in mountains, because the mountains belong to them, trees and rocks become abundant, and birds and animals grow exquisite. This is because those who are illumined or awakened embrace with their virtue every being in the mountains. Therefore, you should know that there is evidence that mountains are fond of those who are awakened and those who are illumined.

Many rulers have visited mountains to pay homage to awakened beings and ask questions of illumined masters. These imperial visits are a wonderful and exemplary custom for the past and present. At such times, rulers honor the masters as their teachers, without following the usual protocols of the mundane world. The worldly authority has no power over awakened masters within the sphere of their virtuous influence. Thus, mountains are far apart from the mundane human world. In remote antiquity, when the Yellow Emperor visited the hermit Guangchen of Mt. Kongdong, the Emperor approached Guangchen on his knees and bowed to him to show his respect before asking questions.

Shakyamuni Buddha left his father's imperial palace and entered the mountains. Yet, his father, the king, did not resent the mountains, nor did he doubt the sincerity of those who taught his son, the prince, in the mountains. The twelve years of Shakyamuni Buddha's cultivation and practice of the Way were spent almost entirely in the mountains. His spiritual awakening and becoming the king of the Way took place in the mountains. Indeed, even the supreme king of the world does not exercise his power in the mountains. Know that the realm of mountains is not the realm of human beings or the realm of heavenly beings. You cannot know the realm of mountains through the scales and measures of delimiting human thought. If the flowing of the human realm were not used as the comparative basis of understanding, no one would doubt the validity of *mountains flowing* and *mountains not flowing*.

Also, since ancient times, some of those who are awakened or illumined have lived on the water. As they live on the water, some catch fish, some catch disciples, and some catch the Way. All of these are ancient spiritual traditions of life on the water. Advancing further, there should be catching the self, catching the catching, being caught by the catching, and being caught by the Way.

Long ago, the master Tokujo (Decheng) abruptly left Yakusan (Mt. Yao) to live on a boat at the heart of a river. There he found an awakened being as his successor, the illumined sage of the Katei (Huating) River. Does this not beautifully exemplify catching fish, catching a disciple, catching water, and catching

the self? When the disciple could see Tokjo, he was Tokjo himself. When Tokjo had contact with the man, he met his disciple as himself.

It is not only that there is water in the world, but also that there is a world in the realm of water. Not only is there a world in the realm of water, but also there is a world of sentient beings in the realm of clouds, in the realm of air, in the realm of fire, and in the realm of earth. In the phenomenal realm, there is a world of sentient beings. Even in a blade of grass or in a single staff, there is a world of sentient beings. Wherever there is a world of sentient beings, there is always a world of awakened beings. You should meditate thoroughly on this universal principle.

Therefore, water is the palace of real dragons, seers of the Way. It is not downward flowing at all. To view water as only flowing is to calumniate it with the word "flowing." This would be the same as obstinately insisting that water does not flow. Water as water is the reality of the universe. Water as water is the functionality of water manifesting as the universe. It is not a flowing. When you penetrate the meaning of the flowing and non-flowing of a handful of water, you will instantly realize the ultimate reality manifesting as all beings of the universe.

There are mountains concealed in treasures. There are mountains concealed in swamps. There are mountains concealed in the sky. There are mountains concealed in mountains. This is the unconcealment of concealing mountains in concealment.

An ancient illumined master said, "Mountains are mountains, waters are waters." This statement does not mean commonsensically that mountains are mountains. It signifies that mountains are in truth mountains. Therefore, penetrate deeply into mountains. If you penetrate deeply into mountains, the process of your awakening becomes the work of the mountains. This is how mountains and waters themselves become awakened and illumined.

--Delivered in the hours around midnight on the eighteenth of October, 1240,  
to an assembly of monks at Kannondori-Koshohorinji Temple.

--Transcribed on the third of June, 1242, in the chief disciple Ejo's quarters at Kippoji Temple.