

One Bright Pearl

Ikka myōju

Translated by
The Soto Zen Text Project

Introduction

This chapter, written at Dōgen's *Kōshōji* monastery near Kyoto in the early summer of 1238, marks the beginning of its author's serious work on the *Shōbōgenzō* texts. It occurs as number 7 in both the sixty- and seventy-five-chapter early *Shōbōgenzō* compilations, and as number 4 in the twentieth-century Honzan edition published by *Eiheiji*.

"One Bright Pearl" is devoted entirely to a single saying of the Tang-dynasty monk Xuansha Shibeī: "All the worlds in the ten directions are one bright pearl." The pearl has a rich metaphorical life in Buddhist literature: as the luminous consciousness on the floor of the ocean of the mind, as the wish-fulfilling gem held by the dragon, as the sign of majesty in the king's topknot, as the perfect self rolling freely round the bowl of the world. Here, in Dōgen's telling, everything everywhere is such a pearl. Hence, he can say toward the end of his essay that merely to know this is itself the bright pearl, even to doubt this is the bright pearl.

Treasury of the True Dharma Eye

Number 7

One Bright Pearl

Great Master Zongyi of Mount Xuansha Cloister, in Fuzhou, Land of the Great Song, in the Saha world: his dharma name was Shibeī;

his lay surname was Xie.¹ As a householder, he loved fishing and went out in a boat on the Nantai River with the fishermen.² It seems he did not wait for the golden-scaled one that rises of itself without being caught.³ At the beginning of the Xiantong era of the Tang, he suddenly felt the desire to leave the dusty world.⁴ Abandoning his boat, he entered the mountains.⁵ He was thirty years of age. He understood the perils of the floating world and knew the great worth of the way of the buddhas. Eventually, he climbed Mount Xuefeng and, studying with Great Master Zhenjue, pursued the way day and night.⁶

One time, in order widely to study [under masters in] all quarters, he was leaving the ridge with his bag in his hand when he stubbed his toe on a rock.⁷ Bleeding and in pain, he suddenly reflected earnestly, saying, "If this body doesn't really exist, where does the pain come from?" Thereupon, he returned to Xuefeng.

Feng asked, "What is this Bei Dhūta?"

Xuansha said, "I would never fool anyone."⁸

These words, Xuefeng especially liked and said, "Who does not possess these words? Yet who could say these words?"⁹

Xuefeng further asked, "Bei Dhūta, why don't you go on extensive study?"¹⁰

The Master said, "Dharma didn't come to the Eastern Land; the Second Ancestor didn't go to Sindh in the West."¹¹

When he said this, Xuefeng praised him even more.

Since he had always been a fisherman, [Xuansha] had never seen books even in his dreams; yet because he made depth of

commitment his priority, he displayed a determination beyond that of his peers. Xuefeng, too, thought that he stood out in his assembly and praised him as pre-eminent among his followers. For his robe, he used plant fibers and, since he did not change it for another, he patched and re-patched it. Against his skin, he used a paper garment or wore mugwort fiber. Apart from studying with Xuefeng, he visited no other wise friends. And yet he certainly acquired the authority to inherit the dharma of his master.

After he eventually attained the way, in instructing people he would say, “All the worlds in the ten directions are one bright pearl.”

* * * * *

Once, a monk asked him, “I’ve heard that you say, ‘All the worlds in the ten directions are one bright pearl.’ How is your student to understand it?”¹²

The Master said, “All the worlds in the ten directions are one bright pearl. What’s the use of understanding it?”

The next day the Master in his turn asked the monk, “All the worlds in the ten directions are one bright pearl. How do you understand it?”

The monk said, “All the worlds in the ten directions are one bright pearl. What’s the use of understanding it?”

The Master said, “Now I know that you make your living inside the ghost cave at the Black Mountains.”¹³

The words spoken here, “All the worlds in the ten directions are one bright pearl,” originate with Xuansha. Their essential point is

that “all the worlds in the ten directions” are not vast, are not minute, are not square or round, are not centered and upright, are not brisk and lively, are not everywhere exposed.¹⁴ Furthermore, because they are not birth and death, coming and going, they are birth and death, coming and going.¹⁵ This being so, “Once, in the past, he left from this”; now, he comes through this.¹⁶ When we exhaustively examine them, who would discern that they are in pieces? Who would propose that they are firmly fixed?¹⁷

“All the worlds in the ten directions” means that pursuing things as the self and pursuing the self as a thing are without rest.¹⁸ The “blockage” spoken of “when feelings arise and wisdom is blocked” — this is turning the head and changing the face; it is divulging the matter and achieving accord.¹⁹ Because they are “pursuing things as the self,” they are “all ten directions” “without rest.” Because they are a principle before their functioning, they can exceed our control of the essence of their functioning.²⁰

“This one pearl” though not a name, is a saying, and this has sometimes been recognized as a name.²¹ “One pearl” is “it would surely take ten thousand years.”²² It is “the past throughout is not yet over when the present throughout has already arrived.”²³ While there is a present of the body and a present of the mind, they are the “bright pearl.”²⁴ It is not the grasses and trees of here and there; it is not the mountains and rivers of heaven and earth: it is the “bright pearl.”²⁵

“How is your student to understand it?” This saying, though it resembles the monk’s playing with karmic consciousness, is “the manifestation of the great function” is the great rule.²⁶ Going further, “one foot of water”

should thrust up one foot of wave: that is, ten feet of pearl is ten feet of bright.²⁷

In making his statement, Xuansha's words are, "All the worlds in the ten directions are one bright pearl. What's the use of understanding it?" This saying is a statement that buddhas inherit from buddhas, ancestors inherit from ancestors, Xuansha inherits from Xuansha. When he tries to avoid inheriting it, although it is not that it could not be avoided, even if for the moment he does clearly avoid it, this saying is present in all time right before us.²⁸

The next day Xuansha asked the monk, "All the worlds in the ten directions are one bright pearl. How do you understand it?"

This says, "Yesterday, I preached a fixed dharma"; today, I'm borrowing the pair to exhale.²⁹

It is, "Today, I'm preaching an indeterminate dharma"; it is, overturning yesterday, I'm nodding and laughing.³⁰

The monk said, "All the worlds in the ten directions are one bright pearl. What's the use of understanding it?"

We should say this is riding the bandit's horse to chase the bandit.³¹ When the old buddha preaches for your sake, "he moves among different types."³² You should for a bit turn the light around and shine it back: how many instances are there of "what's the use of understanding it"?³³ To try to say something, while it might be seven milk cakes and five vegetable cakes, would be a teaching and practice "south of Xiang and north of Tan."³⁴

Xuansha said, "Now I know that you make your living inside the ghost cave at the Black Mountains."

We should understand that, since ancient

times, the face of the sun and the face of the moon have never been switched. The face of the sun emerges together with the face of the sun; the face of the moon emerges together with the face of the moon.³⁵ Hence, "If I say in the sixth month that it's just this time, you shouldn't say that my surname is 'Hot.'"³⁶

Thus, the suchness and beginninglessness of this bright pearl is limitless.³⁷ It is the one bright pearl of all the worlds in the ten directions; it is not described as "two" or "three." Its whole body is a single true dharma eye; its whole body is the true body; its whole body is a single phrase; its whole body is radiance; its whole body is the whole mind.³⁸ When it is the whole body, it is not obstructed by the whole body.³⁹ It is round, round; it rolls round and round.⁴⁰ Since the virtues of the bright pearl appear like this, there are the present Avalokitesvara and Maitreya, seeing forms and hearing sounds, there are old buddhas and new buddhas, manifesting their bodies and preaching the dharma.⁴¹

At this very moment, hanging in empty space or hanging inside a garment, tucked under the chin or tucked in the topknot — these are all the one bright pearl of all the worlds in the ten directions.⁴² To be hanging inside your garment represents the standard; do not say, "Let's hang it outside." To be in the topknot or under the chin represents the standard; do not think to play with them in front of the topknot or in front of the chin. There is a close friend who gives a pearl when one is drunk; he always gives the pearl to his close friend. When the pearl is hung, he is always drunk. "Since you are such" is the one bright pearl of all the worlds in the ten directions.⁴³

Therefore, although it seems to change its appearance as it spins or does not spin, it is the bright pearl. To know that there truly is a pearl like this — this itself is the bright pearl. The bright pearl has sound and form that is perceived like this. When they “have got such,” those who confusedly think, “we are not the bright pearl,” should be without doubts about not being the pearl.⁴⁴ The actions and non-actions of being confused and doubting, accepting and rejecting — these are just temporary small views; going further, they are just making it resemble something small.⁴⁵

Can you not but love it? The colorful lights like this of the bright pearl are boundless. Each bit and each ray of each color and each light is a virtue of all the worlds in the ten directions. Who could seize them? In the market, there is no one who would toss out a tile.⁴⁶ Do not worry about falling or not falling into the cause and effect of the six paths.⁴⁷ Our not being in the dark about the fundamental is true from head to tail; the bright pearl is its face; the bright pearl is its eye.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, while neither you nor I knows what is the bright pearl and what is not the bright pearl, a hundred thinkings and a hundred not-thinkings have bundled the perfectly clear fodder.⁴⁹ But, thanks to the dharma words of Xuansha, we have heard about and clarified the status of body and mind as the bright pearl; therefore, the mind is not our own, and exactly as whom its arising and ceasing is the bright pearl or is not the bright pearl — the taking and rejecting of this might well worry us.⁵⁰ Even being confused and worrying is not not the bright pearl. Since there exists neither action nor thought brought about by what is not the

bright pearl. Since there exists neither action nor thought brought about by what is not the bright pearl, stepping forward and stepping back in the ghost cave at the Black Mountains — this is nothing but one bright pearl.⁵¹

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Number 7

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