

[4] Ikka-no-Myoju – The One Bright Pearl

When Great Master Shuitsu, whose monk's name was Shibi and whose family name was Sha, was in this world, he lived in the great kingdom of Sung in Fuchou Province in the temple on Mount Gensa [and was thus known as Gensa Shibi]. Before he became a monk he loved fishing, and would drift in his boat down the river Nandaiko along with the other fishermen. But it seems that he didn't fish with any great intention of catching the big one, and around 860 suddenly felt the urge to leave secular society. He abandoned his boat, and went to live in a temple as a monk. He was just thirty years old. But he had already realised how fragile the foundations of secular life are, and how noble the way of the Buddha is.

Finally he climbed the path up to the temple on Mount Seppo and became a disciple of Master Seppo Gison, under whom he practiced hard day and night. One day, with the idea of travelling around to visit the many masters in other districts, he packed his bag and went to leave the temple.

A short while after leaving for his trip, he stubbed his toe on a stone. His toe started to bleed. He was in great pain. Right then and there he took a serious look at himself, saying, "*I learned that this physical body isn't real, but in that case, where is all this pain coming from?*" Then he turned around and went back to the temple. On seeing him return, Master Seppo said to him, "*Who is this Shibi, who is practicing so hard?*" Gensa replied, "*I have realised that it is not others who deceive me.*" Seppo loved these words, and said, "*We all have this feeling inside, but which of us can express it like that?*" He went on, "*But what happened to your trip?*" Gensa replied, "*Bodhidharma didn't plan to come to China, just as our second ancestor didn't plan to go to India.*" Master Seppo applauded this answer.

When he had been a fisherman, Master Gensa had not even dreamt of reading sutras and other Buddhist texts. But the most important thing is our will

to pursue the truth, and we can see this in Master Gensa's sincere attitude. Master Seppo himself thought that Gensa was a particularly outstanding disciple, and praised him as the most excellent student in his order. Gensa's only robe was made of vegetable fibre, and he patched it again and again. And next to his skin he wore garments made of paper or coarse vegetable fibre. He never visited any other masters, staying only with Master Seppo. But he did gain the power to make the truth of his master's teachings his own. On finally realising what the truth is, he taught this truth to others with the words that the whole Universe which extends in all directions is one bright pearl.

One day a monk asked Master Gensa, "*I have heard that you say that the whole Universe which extends in all directions is one bright pearl. How should we, your students, understand this?*"

Master Gensa replied, "*The whole Universe which extends in all directions is one bright pearl. How could it be useful to understand these words intellectually?*"

Several days later, Master Gensa put the same question back to the monk, "*The whole Universe which extends in all directions is one bright pearl. How do you understand this?*"

The monk replied, "*The whole Universe which extends in all directions is one bright pearl. How could it be useful to understand these words intellectually?*"

The Master said, "*Now I see that you have only been trying to understand my words intellectually, as if struggling with a demon in a cave on a black mountain.*"

This expression – *The whole Universe which extends in all directions is one bright pearl* – originated with Gensa. The point is that the Universe which extends in all directions cannot actually be described with expressions like "vast and great," or "meagre and small." Neither "square" nor "round" describe it. Neither "centred" nor "ordered" fit it. To say that it is in a state of vigorous

activity or that it is disclosed in perfect clarity do not capture it. It is completely beyond our usual interpretations of what living and dying, coming and going are. Living and dying, coming and going *are* the Universe itself. So yesterday has gone from this place, and tomorrow comes to this place. Examining the Universe in detail, should we say that it is only an accumulation of particles, or should we conclude that it is something indivisible and whole? In the end, the whole of reality [the whole Universe] is just endlessly realising that I exist right here in this world, and realising that the world exists right here with me. Normally we say that our emotions and our thoughts are separate from the Universe, but our emotions and our thoughts, just like turning our head or changing our facial expression, *are* momentary actions to take things in, and as such they *are* the Universe itself. The realisation that the world exists right here with me is endless. But because the Universe at this moment exists prior to our conceptualisation [that is, before we interpret it], we cannot grasp its essence. Gensa's expression, "*one bright pearl*" is not yet widely known, but it expresses the real situation, and will one day be recognised as such. "*One bright pearl*" expresses something eternal, and so it brings eternity into the present moment. Although we have bodies and minds that exist here and now, the whole Universe is one bright pearl. Not that grass out there, or those trees over there, not just the mountains and rivers all around us, but one bright pearl.

"*How should we, your students, understand this?*" Although the monk here seems just to be caught up in his intellectual habits, in asking his question, he is fulfilling the essential function of the Universe. A wave contains exactly its amount of water, and our daily conduct must mirror this. A large pearl shows a brightness that fits its size. Master Gensa's words, "*The whole Universe which extends in all directions is one bright pearl. How could it be useful to understand these words intellectually?*" express this fact. This expresses the truth that buddha passes on to buddha, and that one ancestor passed on to another. It is this truth that Gensa passes on to himself. And if we want to evade the truth that these

words convey to us, although we can certainly try, even when we are trying to evade this truth, all of the efforts we are making to evade it are made in the one bright pearl of this present moment. When, several days later, Gensa asks the monk, "*The whole Universe which extends in all directions is one bright pearl. How do you understand this?*" we can see that, although he was teaching the monk a general principle the first time, this time he is testing him out with a concrete example. He is sweeping aside the first time with a laugh and a nod of the head. To this, the monk replied with the same words as Gensa: "*The whole Universe which extends in all directions is one bright pearl. How could it be useful to understand these words intellectually?*" This is just using the master's words to get to where the master is. When the eternal Buddha Gensa taught the monk, he had been speaking out with his own independent opinion. [In merely repeating Gensa's words], the monk shows that he needs to reflect in Zazen and study how many cases there are where understanding is useful! Tentatively we can say that real things and events that are teachings and practice, when put into words, all become conceptual in nature.

Gensa said, "*Now I see that you have only been trying to understand my words intellectually, as if struggling with a demon in a cave on a black mountain.*" Remember one simple fact, since the eternal past, the sun has never appeared in place of the moon, and the moon has never appeared in place of the sun. The sun always appears as the sun. The moon always appears as the moon. This is why, when asked his family name, following the custom, Master Yakusan Igen refrained from giving it, and replied instead that it was a very nice time of year, rather than saying how hot it was that June.

Discussion of whether the Universe is really one bright pearl or not would be never-ending. But we can still assert that the whole Universe which extends in all directions is one bright pearl – not two pearls or three pearls. The whole body of the Universe is a single eye that teaches reality; the whole Universe is our real body; the words "whole Universe" teach the truth; the whole

Universe is pure illumination; in the end the whole Universe is just the whole Universe. And when the Universe is experienced as whole, no hindrances exist; the whole Universe is perfectly rounded, and roundly it rolls along.

Because the nature of the Universe is one bright pearl like this, ancestors like Avalokitesvara and Maitreya, and others [like Master Reiun Shigon or Master Kyogen Shikan] who realized the truth on looking at plum blossoms or hearing the sound of a pebble striking bamboo, appear in the Universe, and as it says in the Lotus Sutra, *the many buddhas of the past and present manifest the body of a buddha and preach the Dharma*.

At this very moment, the Universe as one bright pearl pervades through the whole of space; like the priceless pearl in the Lotus Sutra, tied within someone's garment, or hidden under the black dragon's chin, or hidden in someone's topknot. These are all cases of the Universe which extends in all directions being one bright pearl. It is often hidden beneath a garment, and we shouldn't expect to find it displayed prominently. It is often hidden in a topknot or under a chin, but we shouldn't go searching for it there.

There are always good friends who will give us a pearl of the truth when we are drunk on our delusions. We should do the same for them. And it is inevitably when we are drunk on our delusions that we are given a pearl. Just at the moment when we realise what we have been given, the whole Universe is one bright pearl. And although it seems that the Universe is always changing its form as it rolls along, it is just the bright pearl itself. And the very realisation that the whole Universe is a bright pearl, is itself the bright pearl. The bright pearl is just the sounds and forms we experience. And having realised this, even if you feel that you cannot possibly be a bright pearl, you should not doubt that you are. And although you may feel you are, or are not, or wish you were or were not, this kind of limited thinking is only how you feel about yourself at this moment; you are just trying to limit the Universe to fit your narrow view. How wonderful the Universe is, with its limitless light and colour. Each moment, each place with its

infinite colour and light shows the nature of the whole Universe. How could anyone want to appropriate or destroy it? It would be like casting a stone into the middle of a crowd of people! Don't worry whether you fall into the six states (hell, hungry ghosts, animals, angry demons, human beings, and gods) or not. When we return to our original nature, the Universe rights itself completely, and our features and our eyes are the bright pearl. But even so, neither you nor I know why it is a bright pearl now, or why it was not a bright pearl then. Repeatedly thinking and stopping thinking about it hundreds of times produces something clear in the end. However, after hearing, recognizing and clarifying Gensa's teaching that our body-and-mind is one bright pearl, our consciousness loses its personal bounds. Then why should we worry whether the Universe is or is not a bright pearl? Who is the person who worries about it anyway? Our surmising and worrying are themselves nothing other than the bright pearl. No action nor any thought has ever come out of anything other than the bright pearl. Moving forwards and backwards in the limited world of our thoughts, like grappling with a demon in a cave on a black mountain, are just the one bright pearl itself.

Shobogenzo Ikka-no-Myoju

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