

On the Heart-to-Heart Language of Intimacy

(*Mitsugo*)

Translator’s Introduction: The term ‘*mitsugo*’ has a variety of meanings which come into play throughout this discourse. In its conventional, mundane sense, it refers to using a secret language. That is, someone is using language to conceal something, to hide its meaning from the uninitiated. It also refers to some unique or personal way in which a Buddha or Ancestor puts the Great Matter, a way that has a sense of immediacy in contrast to something discursive. And it refers to the way that Master and disciple communicate, which has inherent in it an element of intimacy or closeness that arises from their being of one Mind and of one Heart.

When your spiritual question fully breaks open and manifests the Great Truth that all Buddhas preserve within Their hearts, the sayings “You too are like this and I too am like this” and “We must guard well” express this awakening to Shakyamuni’s prediction of Buddhahood.



One time when Great Master Ungo Dōyō was being offered alms by a high government official, he was asked, “They say that the World-honored One had a secret way of communicating and that Makakashō did not conceal it. What was the World-honored One’s secret way of communicating?”

The Great Master called out to him, “O Minister!”

The man acknowledged the call with a “Yes?”

The Great Master said, “Do you get It?”

The official replied, “No, I don’t get it.”

The Great Master then said, “Were you not to get It, it would be because it is the World-honored One’s ‘secret’ way of putting It. If you were to get It, it would be because Makakashō did not keep It to himself.”

The Great Master was making fully apparent that he was a fifth-generation descendant of Seigen and a teacher of those in lofty positions, as well as of ordinary people, and that he was an excellent spiritual friend to those throughout the whole universe in all ten directions, who gave guidance to both the sentient and

the nonsentient.¹ As the Forty-sixth Buddha among the Buddha's heirs, he voiced the Dharma for the sake of the Buddhas and Ancestors. Whilst residing in his hermitage on Three-peak Mountain, he was sent food from celestial kitchens as alms. At the time when the Dharma was transmitted to him and he realized the Truth, he transcended the realm of being sent such alms.²

What is quoted here now as “The World-honored One had a secret way of putting It and Makakashō did not conceal It” is what the Forty-sixth Buddha passed on to us as the Original Face of forty-six generations. It is not a matter of chasing after someone who has realized It, nor is It something that comes from outside oneself, nor is It something that Makakashō and he alone was originally endowed with, nor has It ever been some prize newly awarded to someone. It is the manifesting of an intimate and personal way of putting It; it is not a matter of the World-honored Shakyamuni having some secret language of His own. All Buddhas and Ancestors have Their own intimate way of putting It. Whoever has already become a World-honored One, without doubt, has an intimate way of putting It. And when someone has an intimate way of putting It, there is no doubt that there will be a Makakashō who will not conceal It. We must not forget to explore through our training the principle that when there are a hundred thousand World-honored Ones, there will be a hundred thousand Makakashō's. ‘Exploring through our training’ means not intentionally trying to understand everything all at once, but taking great pains in striving a hundred or even a thousand times, as if you were trying to cut through something hard. Do not fancy that when someone has something to relate to you, you should immediately understand what is being said.

In that he of Mount Ungō had already become a World-honored One, he was equipped with an intimate and personal way of putting It and he had Makakashō's way of not concealing It. In your explorations, do not pursue the idea that the calling out of “O Minister!” and the Minister's replying “Yes?” are some secret way of communicating.

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1. The sentient are those who are sensitive to the Dharma and the nonsentient are those who have not yet learned how to listen to It.
 2. While someone is seriously pursuing the path to enlightenment, that person receives celestial sustenance, and when someone realizes the Truth, the offering of celestial sustenance ceases, since there is no longer any need for it.



In the narrative, the Great Master pointed out the Matter* to the high government official, saying, “Were you not to get It, it would be because it is the World-honored One’s ‘secret’ way of putting It. If you were to get It, it would be because Makakashō did not keep It to himself.” You should be determined to do your utmost for as many eons as it takes to pursue what is being said here. What he is saying is, “When you are in a state of not getting It, that is the World-honored One’s intimate way of putting It.” He is not saying that not getting It was due to the official’s being dull-headed. This was his way of giving his support for the official to really listen to what is going on by calmly exploring the principle of ‘were you not to get It’. The official needed to do his utmost in pursuing the Way. Also, his saying, “If you were to get It,” goes beyond saying, “You have already comprehended it.”³

There are many different ways to go in exploring the Buddha Dharma through one’s training. Among them lies the essential matter of grasping what the Buddha Dharma is or of not grasping what the Buddha Dharma is. Those who have not yet encountered an authentic Master do not even know that such an essential matter exists. In wild confusion, they misunderstand, thinking that there is some kind of secret language, and thereby they recklessly shut off their eyes and ears from seeing and hearing. This goes beyond saying that your understanding is the condition upon which Its ‘not being concealed’ is based, for It is still not concealed even when you do not understand It. Do not pursue through your training that not concealing It means that anybody can see or hear It. It is already in plain view right here and now. And when can we say for certain that nothing is hidden? At this very moment, we need to try to make a thorough examination of this point, since we are not to explore through our training that matters which are unknown to us are what is meant by ‘intimate ways of putting It’. The very moment of not understanding the Buddha Dharma is one part of an intimate way of putting It. That part is what invariably belongs to the World-honored One; it is the World-honored One’s existence.

Even so, people who have not heard the instructive teaching of a genuine Master may take to sitting upon the Buddha’s Lion Seat,* but they have not yet

* See *Glossary*.

3. That is, grasping the significance of what the Great Master is pointing to goes far beyond having a purely intellectual or speculative understanding.

encountered this underlying principle even in their dreams. They arbitrarily say such things as the following:

The statement, “The World-honored One had a secret way of communicating,” refers to His raising up a flower, His eyes atwinkle, whilst He stood before an assembly of hundreds of thousands upon Vulture Peak. And He did so because the words used in the Buddha’s preaching are superficial, being concerned only with names and forms, whereas giving expression to It without recourse to words by His holding aloft a flower and twinkling His eyes is the occasion which established this secret way of communicating. The hundreds of thousands in the assembly did not comprehend this, because this was His secret way of communicating for the sake of that assembly. The statement, “Makakashō did not conceal It,” refers to Makakashō’s face breaking into a smile as if he already knew that the World-honored One would raise the flower and His eyes would twinkle. This is the true secret key to practicing the Way, and it is what has been passed on in case after case.

The folks who, hearing this, think it to be true are as common as rice and hemp seeds, bamboo canes and reeds. They are the sort of folks who populate monasteries in all nine divisions of China. How sad that this way of thinking has sent the Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors into a decline! Someone whose eyes are bright and clear can surely get to the bottom of what is really going on here, point by point.

If the words the World-honored One used were really something superficial, then His holding the flower aloft, with His eyes atwinkle, would also be something superficial. Were anyone to consider what He said to be merely name and form, that person is not ‘such a one’* who has learned what the Buddha Dharma really is. Those who consider what is spoken to be no more than names and forms have not yet comprehended that the World-honored One was beyond the use of language as merely ‘names and forms’. They have not yet let go of the confused, emotional attitudes of ordinary, worldly people. What permeates the Body and Mind of Buddhas and Ancestors is the dropping off of self, Their giving expression to the Dharma, and Their using language to voice It, that is, Their turning the Wheel of the Dharma. There have been many indeed who, having witnessed and listened to It, have greatly profited from It. Those whose practice is based on faith, as well as those whose practice is based on understanding the Teaching, are cloaked in Its influence in places where there is an Ancestor of the Buddha, or partake of Its influence even in places where there is no Ancestor of the Buddha. How could any

of the hundreds of thousands in that assembly possibly fail to have witnessed that His holding the flower aloft, His eyes atwinkle, was a holding aloft of a Flower, with His Eye atwinkle? Anyone in the assembly might have been shoulder-to-shoulder with Makakashō, or might have been living in the same way as the World-honored One. And anyone in the assembly might have been exploring the Matter in the same way as hundreds of thousands of others in the assembly were doing, or might, at the same time, have been giving rise to the intention to realize Buddhahood, for they were walking the same spiritual path in the same country. By relying on the wise discernment gained from direct experience, they may see the Buddha and hear His Teaching, or by relying on the wisdom gained from not knowing, they may see the Buddha and hear His Teaching. After having encountered a Buddha for the first time, one will subsequently recognize Buddhas as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges. In any particular assembly of a Buddha, there may be people numbering in the hundreds of thousands of millions, and we may see each Buddha in all the assemblies holding aloft the Flower, Eye atwinkle, at the same time. No observing eye is dim; every listening ear is keen. And there is the Eye of the Heart, and there are the eyes of the body. There is the Ear of the Heart, and there are the ears of the body.

How does that other bunch understand ‘Makakashō’s face breaking into a smile’? Let them try to put that into words. If it were as those folks say, they would have called that smile ‘a secret communication’. But to call it ‘his not concealing anything’ would be piling foolishness atop foolishness. Later, the World-honored One said, “I have the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching, which is the Wondrous Heart of Nirvana, and I have transmitted It to Makakashō.” Is His speaking in this way using speech or not using speech? If the World-honored One had a dislike for spoken language and preferred holding a flower aloft, He surely would have also held up a flower on this occasion. And then, how could Makakashō fail to understand and how could the assembly fail to hear? Do not rely on the tales of those folks who talk this way.

To summarize, the World-honored One had His own way of talking, His own way of acting, and His own way of awakening to the Truth. Foolish people fancy that having one’s own way of putting the Matter—that is, His having a ‘secret’ way—means that other people did not know what He Himself knew. Hence, there were those who were ‘in on it’ and those who were not ‘in on it’. Those who had been voicing their opinions about a ‘secret way’ in India or the eastern lands from remote antiquity to the present day have not explored the Buddha’s Way through their training. Among the uneducated in both secular life and in those who left secular life behind, secrets were many, whereas, among the educated, secrets have

been few indeed. How could those of broad experience possibly have secrets? And how much less can there be secret talk or secret intentions when one is wholly equipped with sharp eyes and sharp ears, or with the Eye of wisdom and the Ear of wisdom, or with a Buddha's Eye and a Buddha's Ear? Associating such things as a secret language, secret intentions, or secret actions with the Buddha's Teaching is not in accord with this principle. When we encounter 'such a person', of course we hear his way of putting It, and we express our way of putting It. When we know our True Self, we know what another's way of demonstrating It is pointing to. Moreover, an Ancestor of the Buddha is capable of understanding the previously mentioned 'secret' intentions and 'secret' language. Keep in mind that, at the very moment of being an Ancestor of the Buddha, secret ways of saying It and secret ways of enacting It vie with each other to manifest. What we mean by 'secret' is the principle of intimacy, of closeness. It means that there is no gap. It embraces Buddha and Ancestor. It embraces you and it embraces me. It embraces our practice. It embraces those of our generation. It embraces our meritorious deeds. It embraces what is most intimate. Even when the Eye of a Buddha spies 'such a person' encountering intimate talk and intimate talk encountering 'such a person', He may not see it, even though He may try. The practice of intimacy is beyond anything known by self or other. Only the Intimate Self can know it, for it is beyond the ken of any other intimate person. Because Intimacy resides all around you, everything relies on Intimacy; each thing or even half a thing relies on Intimacy. You need to explore this principle, doing your utmost to clarify what it is.

In conclusion, whenever and wherever we are practicing the Way, it invariably involves an intimate way of expressing the Matter for the benefit of 'such a one'. This is the legitimate succession of Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor. Because this very moment of Now is such an occasion, we are intimate with our self, with the self of others, with the Buddhas and Ancestors, and with all the different species. As a result, it is an intimacy atop intimacy, ever anew. Because such Teaching, practice, and awakening are what a Buddha or Ancestor is, they comprise what Buddhas and Ancestors intimately pass on.



My Master's Master, Setchō, once said to his assembly in verse:

*The World-honored One had an intimate way of
speaking,
Which Makakashō could not conceal,
For in the night, flowers had rained down,
Bathing the citadel in their perfume.*

Here and now, Setchō's expression, "For in the night, flowers had rained down, bathing the citadel in their perfume," is the very essence of what Intimacy is. Because Setchō proclaimed this, you should scrutinize the Eye and Nose of our Buddhist Ancestor. It was a place that neither Rinzaï nor Tokusan were able to reach. You need to open up and explore the Nostrils that are in your Eye, and let the tip of your Nose sharpen up your Ear. And what is more, you need not go all that deeply into your Ear, Nose, or Eye to make Them your whole body and mind, and without making Them over again. We take this as the principle of "the raining down of flowers gives rise to the world."⁴

Setchō's expression, "Bathing the citadel in their perfume," is synonymous with the True Self being concealed while the outer form becomes ever more like a hermit training in his hut. Therefore, thoroughly explore and pass on to others that within the everyday life of the family of the Buddhas and Ancestors, the World-honored One will have His intimate words and Makakashō will not conceal them from us. Each of the Seven World-honored Buddhas,* in turn, explored the Matter through Their training just as you do now. Makakashō and Shakyamuni likewise probed deeply into the Matter so that They might understand It. I pray that you are now doing the same.

Given to the assembly on the twentieth day of the ninth lunar month in the first year of the Kangen era (November 3, 1243) at the old monastery of Kippō-ji in the Yoshida district of Echizen Province.

Copied while staying in the office of the Abbot of the same monastery on the sixteenth day of the tenth lunar month in the same year (November 29, 1243).

Ejō

4. This quote is a line from a poem by Bodhidharma's Master, the Venerable Hannyatara. Dōgen modified it slightly to fit in the context of his discourse by substituting the words 'raining down of flowers' for Hannyatara's 'opening of a blossom'.