The Treasure House

the first in a series of commentaries on
Eihei Dogen zenji's Katto: Entwining Vines
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This skin, meat, bones and marrow of the Buddha
arises everywhere as everything.
Because everything, each and every thing,
is the skin, meat, bones and marrow of the Buddha,
the Buddha is the Buddha.
Because the Buddha is the Buddha, there is no Buddha.
Awareness is the only condition.
All appearances, all apparent conditions arise as its display.
Because there is nothing other than it, there is nothing to be aware of.

The vast Treasure House of True Reality is so rich
it is inexpressible.
Its inexpressibility is such that entering into it fully and completely has been called nirvana, nehan, which sometimes is even interpreted to mean
a kind of death without remainder
because it is the death of everything that you think that you are.

You see, the situation becomes so entangled,
so confused,
that we have to say "True Reality", "real' reality
which is like saying "water, water".

But we do have to say True Reality,
sat dhamma, shobo,
because there are realities that are not true.

These realities that are not true appear
when you appear.

When you appear
and squint and stare and shuffle and step,
then all around you arises your reality
and nothing that cannot fit into that is allowed to be real,
whatever does not fit inside the constraints of
whatever your current conviction might be,
is ignored entirely.

but even this demonstrates the richness of the Treasure House of Reality.

It is so rich, so inexpressible,

that your tongue could break in two,
your lips burn from the friction of speaking so many words
before you could begin to say anything at all about it.

We could say that it arises as all worlds, as all beings,
as the infinite infinities of the Total Field of All Possibilities,
but this says nothing of how rich it really is.

We can say that everything arises within it,
but even this is nonsense because there is nothing outside of it
and so how can one speak of something being “within it”?

Its richness, its expansiveness, its vastness is such that
it has room for everything
because anything that is,
is its display.
Its vastness, its richness is such
that it can even express itself as the appearance of contraction,
of confusion,
of there being “me” and “you”.

Its richness is such
that it seems to be so tempting to want to take a look,
it seems to be so tempting to take up some perspective,
some point of view,
in order to look at this richness, this vastness,
but as soon as a perspective is taken up,
all other ways of seeing, of knowing, are shut away.

For Awareness in itself there is nothing to be aware of,
nothing ever happens,
nothing comes or goes,
there is nothing lacking,
there are no gaps,
but as soon as a perspective arises,
time begins to move,
Space becomes a space and this space is active as coming and going,
as the movement of time.

But there are so many things coming and going
that this perspective that has arisen, that point of view that has been taken up,
begins to feel threatened.
There’s too much happening,
the richness is too vast for this point of view to be able to understand it
and so it collapses further in upon itself
and its world becomes smaller and smaller

until the Treasure House of True Reality
becomes the charnel house of birth and death (strikes the nyoi staff against the floor)
but even in this charnel house of birth and death
there is the meat, the bones, the marrow, the skin, the face, the eye
of the Buddha.

Here it is decked all around you,
now it's hanging on hooks.
Can you take it?

Even here in the charnel house of birth and death,
Reality is flayed bare and open to you.
Even in the midst of this coming and going,
even in the midst of your fear of change,
of death,
even in your uncertainty and doubt,
even in your pretensions, even in your misunderstanding
the body of the Buddha stands forth as you, as each and every one of you. (strike!)

But do you understand? Do you understand?

The Transmission of the True Eye of Reality, unsurpassable Radiant Knowing,
Shobogenzo, Nehan Myoshin
is what is transmitted from Ancestor to Ancestor.

It is the life thread, the myomaku, the bloodline
that flows through the body of Reality.

It cuts through self and other,
it brings together self and other.

Self and other become so entwined through this bloodline
that there is only room for the vastness of reality
in this intimate embrace.

Because you see, because you hear,
because you touch, taste, smell and think and feel,
you are radiantly free,
because all that you are
presents itself as ways of knowing,
because everything that you think that you are,
anything that you could point to as being "me"
is merely something known,
something arising within Knowing.

You are radiantly free. (strike!)

But do you understand?

Yunmen said, “All sounds are the Buddha’s voice and all forms are the Buddha’s body yet when you pick up your bowl to eat you hold on to the view of a ‘bowl’, when you walk you hold on to a ‘walking view’. When you sit you have a ‘sitting’ view. The bunch of you are all like this.”

When you hold up the fuhatsu, the black Buddha Bowl in oryoki,
what is it? What is it?

You slurp the soup but
if you think it’s soup,
you don’t understand.
Because you don’t understand
all that you have is a bowl of soup.

Drink it down, chew the vegetables,
a little while later
you’ll piss and shit the whole thing away and
have to do the whole thing
again.

But if you know what’s in the bowl,
if you know what the bowl is,
if you know what this eating and shitting and pissing,
this breathing, this living and dying, are,
If you know what they are,
if you know who you are,
then you are radiantly free.

Then you can enjoy your food.

Then you can taste this breath.

Then you are alive
as that which lives and dies,
comes and goes
as all beings, as all worlds.

You are the skin, meat, bones and marrow of Shakyamuni Buddha,
Mahakashyapa, Bodhidharma, Dogen . . .
but only when you realize that you are not you at all.

Only when you are Shakyamuni Buddha,
Mahakashyapa, Bodhidharma, Dogen . . .
do you understand who you are.

Now I say that you are the skin, meat, bones and marrow of the Buddha.

Please, someone come up here and demonstrate.

Do you know who you are?

There are so many colours,
so many forms, so many sounds.

Now, in the autumn of the year,
the dying leaves burst into bright scarlet,
glow yellow,
here and there mauve
and even when they wither and fall,
they are brown and golden.
And as the leaves dry and wither further,
as the cells of the leaf dry out,
it curls, curls into intricate,
fragile patterns.

The leaves leap forth with the wind,
swirling above the ground.

This coming and going,
this birth and death,
is nothing to be afraid of.

There is nothing to be afraid of.

But because our lives, our worlds,
are coming and going
and because we believe them to be “our” lives and “our” worlds,
we try to hold on.

We try to hold on
as everything
falls
through our fingers.

We try to grasp with words,
with feelings,
with fingers and toes,
but everything
falls away.

We become entangled in our attempts to hold on,
but everything we hold on to
falls away
and even our entanglement

falls away
so we need to entangle ourselves once again
and again.

Our intelligence becomes entangled in what it’s being intelligent about.

We become entangled in deceit.
We become entangled in our relationships
because they are based on the presumption of a separation between self and other.

(Strike!) But do you understand who you are?

Only when your life becomes entwined with this question,
only when your life presents itself
as this question,
will you understand.