

On Invocations: What We Offer to the Buddhas and Ancestors

(*Darani*)

Translator’s Introduction: Traditionally, a *darani* (Skt. *dhāraṇi*) is a prayer-like invocation used to pay homage to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and it may include some form of supplication. Dōgen expands upon the use of this verbal form to include other manners of expressing homage and supplication, such as making respectful bows to one’s Master.

When someone’s eye for exploring the essential Matter* through training with a Master is clear, the Eye of the True Teaching will be clear. And because the Eye of the True Teaching is clear, that person’s eye for exploring the essential Matter through training with a Master can be clear. Whenever someone receives the authentic Transmission of this key point, it is inevitably due to the strength of that person’s showing respect for a great spiritual friend. This is the great relationship: this is the Great Invocation. ‘The great spiritual friend’ refers to an Ancestor of the Buddha, one to whom a trainee should dutifully serve towel and water pitcher.¹ Thus, to bring tea to your Master or to make tea for your Master is to manifest the very heart and essence of the Teaching. It is to manifest the utmost marvelous spiritual ability.² To bring wash-up water to your Master and to pour it out for him is to leave coexisting conditions undisturbed and to discern what is going on from the next room.³ It is not only exploring through your training the very heart and essence of the Teaching of the Buddhas and Ancestors, it is your mutual encounter with one or two Ancestors of the Buddha within the very heart and essence of the Teaching. It is not only your receiving and making use of the

* See *Glossary*.

1. One of the first everyday tasks for an Abbot’s Assistant was to bring the Abbot a towel and a pitcher of warm water for him to use in performing his morning ablutions.
2. The marvelous spiritual ability is spontaneously doing our everyday activities whilst remaining free of a false self; it is our anticipating what needs to be done and then just doing it. Dōgen discusses this ability in Discourse 24: On the Marvelous Spiritual Abilities (*Jinzū*).
3. It was customary for an Abbot’s Assistant to anticipate the Master’s needs whilst waiting in the assistant’s room, which adjoined that of the Master.

marvelous spiritual ability of the Buddhas and Ancestors, it is your having found seven or eight Ancestors of the Buddha within your marvelous spiritual ability. Accordingly, the marvelous spiritual ability of each and every Buddha and Ancestor has been fully realized in this one bouquet of activities; the very heart and essence of the Teaching of each and every Buddha and Ancestor has been fully expressed in one picking of this bouquet. Because of this, in showing your respect for the Ancestors of the Buddha, there is nothing wrong in doing so by offering incomparable flowers and incense. Even so, to raise up the invocation of your meditative state and respectfully make an alms offering of it is to be an offspring of the Buddhas and Ancestors.

What is called ‘the Great Invocation’ refers to paying our respects, and because paying our respects is the Great Invocation, to pay our respects is to mutually encounter the Buddhas and Ancestors within our paying respect to Them. The term ‘paying our respects’ is patterned on a Chinese way of speaking and has been in social usage for ever so long. Be that as it may, it was not passed on to us from the Brahmanical Heaven or from India, but was correctly Transmitted from the Ancestors of the Buddha. It is beyond the physical realm of sights and sounds, so do not discuss whether it is something that comes before or after the Lords of Awe-inspiring Voices.

This paying of our respects is our lighting incense and respectfully making prostrations before our Master. Sometimes our Master is the one who ordained us upon our leaving home life behind and sometimes our Master is the one who Transmitted the Dharma to us. And there are cases where the Master who Transmitted the Dharma to us may also be the very Master who ordained us upon our leaving home life behind. To continually depend upon and show respect to these Masters is our prayer for seeking out a Master to put one’s spiritual question to. As it is said, we should do our training under them and give them our support, without letting any moment be wasted.

At the beginning and end of our summer retreat, at the time of the winter solstice, and at the beginning and middle of each month, without fail, you should light incense and respectfully make prostrations to your Master. The following procedures should be used when paying your respects. A customary time for doing this is just before or just after taking your breakfast gruel. Dressed in a respectful way, pay your visit to the Master’s quarters. ‘Dressed in a respectful way’ means wearing your kesa,* carrying your bowing mat, arranging your indoor sandals and white socks, and carrying a stick of some incense, such as aloes or sandalwood. When you come before your Master, you make monjin.* The attendant monk then prepares the incense burner and sets up a candle. If the Master is already seated, you should forthwith light the incense, or if the Master is behind the curtain, you

should forthwith light your incense.⁴ If the Master is lying down or eating, then you should forthwith light your incense. If the Master is standing up, you should ask the venerable monk to be seated and then make monjin to him, or ask him to make himself comfortable: there are various conventional ways of asking him to be seated. After you have let the venerable monk get seated in a chair, you make monjin to him. It should be a deep bow, as prescribed. After you have finished making monjin, you walk up to the incense stand and place the incense stick that you have been carrying into the incense burner in an upright position. Prior to being lit, the incense is sometimes carried by sticking it between the back of your robe and your neckband, or sometimes you carry it tucked in the bosom or the sleeve of your robe, as you wish. After making monjin, you take this incense stick out and, if it is wrapped in paper, turn your shoulder to the left and remove the wrapping paper. Then, holding the lit incense stick aloft with both hands, place it in the incense burner. You should set the incense straight. Do not let it lean to the side. When you have finished setting up the incense stick, you walk to the right with hands held in shashu.* When you arrive in front of your Master, facing the venerable monk you make a deep bow, doing monjin in the prescribed manner. Once you have finished, you spread your bowing mat and respectfully do your prostrations. You do either nine prostrations or twelve. When your prostrations are over, fold up your bowing mat and make monjin. And there are times when you just spread out your mat and do three prostrations, and then offer the compliments of the season. With the present nine bows, you do not offer the compliments of the season, but should just spread your mat and make three prostrations three times. This custom has been passed on from the Seven Buddhas* in the distant past. We use this custom since it directly Transmits the fundamental principle of our tradition. Whenever we encounter a time for respectfully doing our prostrations, we should not fail to do them in this manner. In addition to this, whenever we have the opportunity to receive the benefits of a Dharma talk, we respectfully make our bows, and we respectfully bow when asking our Master for an explanation of some story about the Chinese Zen Masters. In the past, whenever the Second Chinese Ancestor asked the First Ancestor for his viewpoints, Eka always respectfully made three bows just like this. Whenever Bodhidharma expounded his perspective on the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching, the Second Ancestor would respectfully make three bows.

You need to realize that respectfully bowing is the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching, and that the Treasure House of the Eye of the True

4. This curtain is made of a thin, semi-transparent cloth and is often used as a room divider.

Teaching is the Great Invocation. In requesting a Master for an explanation, there are many in recent times who employ one prostration during which they thump their head on the ground, but the traditional manner is to do three prostrations. Prostrations done in gratitude for the benefit of the Dharma are not necessarily nine or twelve in number, but they may be three prostrations, or one less formal bow done respectfully, or six prostrations. All these are bows in which the forehead touches the mat.⁵ In India, these were called the supreme bows of respect. Also, there are the six bows in which the forehead strikes the ground. (It has been said that when the forehead contacted the ground, it struck with such force that it would cause bleeding. For this reason too, the bowing mat was spread out.) Be it one bow, three bows, or six bows, in all cases the forehead comes in contact with the ground. Sometimes this is called ‘kowtowing’. This type of bowing also exists in secular society, where there are nine types of bows. When receiving the benefits of the Dharma there is also ‘continuous bowing’. That is, we respectfully bow without ceasing, which can reach hundreds of thousands of bows. These are all bows which are habitually used within the assembly of an Ancestor of the Buddha.

Speaking generally about these bows, you should simply follow the directions of your venerable monk and do your bows in the prescribed manner. In sum, when respectful bowing abides in the world, the Buddha Dharma will abide in the world. Should respectful bowing pass away, then the Buddha Dharma will disappear.

In bowing respectfully to the Master who is Transmitting the Dharma to us, we do not choose only a specific time or argue over a specific place, we just bow. Sometimes we bow to him when he is lying down or eating, and sometimes we bow to him when he is occupied with relieving nature. Sometimes we are separated from him by a wall or a fence, and sometimes we are separated from him by a mountain or a river, but, looking from afar, we respectfully bow to him. Sometimes we respectfully bow to him even though we are separated from him by eons of time, and sometimes we respectfully bow to him even though we are separated from him by life and death, or by coming and going. And sometimes we respectfully bow to him even though we are separated from him by enlightenment and nirvana.

A disciple may do various bows like these, whereas the venerable monk who is your Master does not return your bow, but simply puts his hands in *gasshō*.*

5. ‘The forehead touches the mat’ is a rendering of a technical term for a form of prostration in which one raises one’s hands, palms upward, once the head has lightly touched the mat. It is done as if to raise above one’s head the feet of the person being bowed to.

There may be occasions when he spontaneously makes use of a single bow, but customarily he does not employ that ceremony. At the time of your making such respectful bows, you do them while facing north. The venerable monk who is your Master is sitting upright, facing south. Standing on the ground, right before the venerable monk who is your Master, and facing north, you do your bow to him. This is the basic ceremony.⁶ It has been correctly Transmitted that when genuine trust in the Master arises within someone, respectfully bowing while facing north is inevitably the first thing that occurs to that person.

This is why, in the days of the World-honored One, the human beings, celestial beings, and dragons who had taken refuge in the Buddha respectfully bowed whilst facing north out of reverence for Him. At first, after the Tathagata had realized the Truth, His five ascetic companions—Ajnyata Kaundinya, Ashvaji, Mahanama, Bhadrīka, and Bashpa, who are known in Japan as Kōrin, Ahei, Makakōri, Batsudai, and Jūrikikashō —without giving it a thought, rose up and turned to face the Tathagata, offering Him their respectful bows whilst facing north. When non-Buddhists and bands of demons completely discarded their false views and took refuge in the Buddha, they invariably faced north and respectfully bowed, giving no heed to themselves or others.

Since then, for twenty-eight generations in India and the various generations in China, all those who have come to the assemblies of Ancestral Masters and have taken refuge in the True Dharma have respectfully bowed whilst facing north. This is an affirmation of the True Dharma and is beyond simply paying heed to the desires of Master or disciple. It is the Great Invocation.

*There is the Great Invocation that, for our sake, is called
‘fully perfected understanding’,
And there is the Great Invocation that, for our sake, is
called ‘paying our respects’,
And there is the Great Invocation that is the full
manifestation of bowing respectfully,
And there is the Great Invocation whose name is the
kesa,
And there is the Great Invocation whose name is the
Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching.*

6. The north-south positions were conventionally used in Chinese Buddhism to indicate who is the host (north) and who the guest (south) and did not necessarily correspond to geographical north and south.

By reciting this invocation, we continually remain in stillness and thereby preserve the whole of the great earth. By continually remaining in stillness, we thereby fill the worlds in all the quarters. By continually remaining in stillness, we make manifest the whole sphere of time. By continually remaining in stillness, we cultivate the whole of the Buddha Realms. And by continually remaining in stillness, we realize what is within our hermit's hut and what is outside our hermit's hut. You need to thoroughly explore through your training that this is what the Great Invocation is really like. All invocations take this Invocation as their matrix. All invocations fully manifest as dependents of this Invocation. From the gateway of this Invocation, all Buddhas and Ancestors, bar none, derive Their giving rise to Their intention to realize the Truth and to earnestly follow the Way, right up to Their realization of the Truth and Their turning the Wheel of the Dharma. Since we are already the offspring of the Buddhas and Ancestors, we should thoroughly explore this Invocation in detail.

In sum, the robe that covered Shakyamuni Buddha has also covered all Ancestors of the Buddha in the ten quarters. And the robe that covered Shakyamuni Buddha is the kesa. The kesa is as a flag flown by Buddhists; it is the standard for their practice of the Buddha's Way. The chance to see the kesa and to undertake the practice is rarely encountered, rarely met with. You have received a human body in a remote land, which is rare enough, and, though some may say that you are foolish, the strength of your good roots from invocations performed in past lives is fully manifesting so that you now have the opportunity to encounter the Dharma of Shakyamuni Buddha. Though you are doing respectful bows to the Buddhas and Ancestors who have realized the Truth and are helping others to realize the Truth amidst the hundreds of thoughts and things that are sprouting up, this is Shakyamuni Buddha's fulfilling the Way; it is Shakyamuni Buddha's doing His utmost to practice the Way; it is Shakyamuni Buddha's wondrous transformation of the Great Invocation. Even though you may do respectful bows to former Buddhas of the past and present for billions of kalpas* beyond count, they will still simply be moments of being Shakyamuni Buddha.

To cover our body with a kesa even once is to have already obtained Shakyamuni Buddha's body and flesh, hands and feet, head and eyes, marrow and brains, and to shine forth, turning the Wheel of the Dharma. Such is the case when we wear the kesa, for this is our fully manifesting the merit of wearing the kesa. We preserve it and rely upon it, we love it and devote ourselves to it, and, over time, we protect it. We wear the kesa as we respectfully bow and make our offerings to Shakyamuni Buddha. This is our doing our utmost to pursue the Way through our training and practice over incalculable eons of time.

Our respectfully bowing to Shakyamuni Buddha and making our offerings to Him means that we are respectfully bowing and making our offerings to the Master who has Transmitted the Dharma to us and to the Master who shaved our head. This is nothing other than our encountering Shakyamuni Buddha. It is our making a Dharma offering to Shakyamuni Buddha. It is our offering an invocation to Shakyamuni Buddha. In pointing this out, my former Master, the Old Buddha of Mount Tendō, said, “It is like Eka’s coming over the snows to do his respectful bowing or like Enō’s standing amidst the winnowed rice and doing his respectful bowing; these are excellent examples. They are the traces of former Ancestors. They are the Great Invocation.”

Delivered to the assembly during the first year of the Kangen era (1243) at Kippō-ji Temple in Echizen Province.

Copied by me on the thirteenth day of the first month in the second year of the same era (February 22, 1244) in the quarters of the Abbot’s assistant below the Kippō-ji hermitage in the same province.

Ejō