

The mountain flowers bloom like brocade
The valley streams are brimming blue as indigo

Sanka hiraite nishiki ni nitari
Kan sui tataete ai no gotoshi

山花開似錦
澗水湛如藍



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The valley streams are brimming blue as indigo



This couplet comes from the eighty-second case of the Blue Cliff Record, "Dairyo's 'Indestructible Dharma Body.'"

Dairyo Chiko Kosai Zenji was of Tokusan's lineage, but little more than this is known of his life. In this case, a monk asks him, "The physical body rots away: what is the hard and fast body of reality?"

Our physical body will without fail stop breathing and lose its pulse. Taken to the crematory grounds, we become ashes. If we're buried, we rot and become worm food. In this world everything is impermanent.

Will I go first or will someone else go first
We don't know if it will be today
We don't know if it will be tomorrow
Those who are being sent off first,
Like drops of dew,
We never know which falls next

This morning a strong young person
Tonight nothing left but a skeleton
How pitiful, how foolish

Shinran Shonin includes this poem of impermanence in his Hakkotsu.

We will all leave this world, but we don't know when. We don't know who will go first. Who will die today? Who will die tomorrow? Those who die young are like the raindrops that land on an autumn leaf and then quickly fall onto the branch and roll down the trunk to the ground. Those who live longer are like the drops of dew that form on the colored leaf, not rolling to the earth until the wind blows. We'll all go just the same, but when?

No matter how strong and lively we feel this morning, by evening we may be a bag of bones. The vivid face with which we awoke this morning may be gone by nightfall. If we're attached emotionally to this body, it's pitiful. Everyone dies, and anyone who does not see this is foolish. This is how Shinran Shonin explained it in the Tannisho.



Without fail everyone will die. Those who meet must depart. Anything that's built will crumble. No thing is eternal. We feel this impermanence and long for the eternal. This longing is what led the Buddha to leave home. For six years he trained in the mountains, and then he realized satori. He experienced that which is without birth or death, is not tainted nor pure, does not increase nor decrease; it lacks for nothing and contains not one thing extra. It was to this pure body that the Buddha awakened. He realized that eternal life energy. This is the Buddha Dharma.

There's no god out there that we can entreat to save us from our delusion. Each and every one of us has to discover this eternal life within our own rotting flesh. That is the truth of the Buddha Dharma.

The monk asked, "The physical body rots away: what is the hard and fast body of reality?"

This body will die and decay; in that sense ours is a melancholy existence. But that eternal life energy, that which isn't born and doesn't die, that to which the Buddha awakened--where is it?

Did this monk already know? Was he asking his question to test Dairyo? If he asked without knowing, then he was still confused about where he himself was headed. Nothing is more stupid than that.

But the majority of humans are this stupid. They don't know where they're going or what their existence is. If this monk knew and still asked, then in his asking, he was falling into the trap of dualism and relativity. He was splitting the world in two. He was still looking for something special within himself, and anything that he understood was only mental dross and not yet born from experience. That is not the true essence.

Dairyo said without hesitation, "The mountain flowers bloom like brocade, the valley streams are brimming blue as indigo."

The cherry trees are blooming and the flower petals fall. The mountains are a rich brocade, a gloriously, complete world. This is the world of the pure body of the Dharma.

A stream so full to its bank that the water does not move--this is the eternal world. The brocade of cherry blossoms--this is our wide open awareness. We want the blossoms to last forever, but in three days, where have they gone? With the rain of impermanence they fall. With one gust of wind, no trace of them remains. At the stream's edge the water seems to be still, but it's always flowing, always changing. Yet in the constantly flowing water we can find that world that does not flow at all. The cherry flowers all of a sudden fall away, but in an instant, we discover a world that does not change.

This body of ours will without fail die and rot and be gone, but within it, there's an eternal form. Can we say that we have discovered this?

In the brief time that flies by, we can discover the eternal, but we have to have this sharpness. In our own body we can find the pure body of the Dharma, the absolute that drinks down the whole universe. There's no eternal separate from the temporary. There's no absolute separate from the individual.



Dairyo had offered no such intellectualization or explanation. He simply spoke about the world exactly as it is. In that way, he highlighted the monk's weakness.

Put down the four elements, do not cling to anything;
In this Nirvanic nature, feel free to eat and drink.
All phenomena are impermanent; all are empty.
This is the complete enlightenment of the Tathagata.

This is how it is put by Yokka Daishi in the Song of Enlightenment. But Dairyo doesn't offer so much explanation:

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These words can't be understood through any explanation or mentation whatsoever. The physical body is the Dharma body.

Not a single word of interpretation can be inserted, but this monk probably didn't understand. Dairyo was way beyond understanding or not understanding. His mind was beyond any realizing, so of course the monk couldn't understand. This monk was looking for something apart from the physical body, something separate from it that he could hold on to! We all think we need that! But Master Dairyo smashed this idea of a precious soul; he crushed this concept.

If we have had the same experience as the Buddha and the patriarchs, then we have been liberated from any dependence on the Dharma and the Buddha. We know Dairyo's free and easy state of mind because it's ours. It's the responsibility of such a person to crush the delusions of a person of training, and this is what Master Dairyo did.