

# **SONG OF THE JEWEL MIRROR AWARENESS**

A STUDY GUIDE OF  
TUNG-SHAN LIANG-CHIEH'S  
ENLIGHTENMENT POEM

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# SONG OF THE JEWEL MIRROR AWARENESS

## Introduction

Tung-shan Liang-chieh (Japanese – Tozan Ryokai 807-869 CE) wrote the Song of the Jewel Mirror Awareness during the Tang dynasty (618 – 907), the most creative and influential phase in the development of Zen Buddhism in China. He is regarded as the founder of the Ts’ao-tung lineage, one of the Five Houses of Ch’an. It was his approach to the Dharma, and the house it gave rise to, that attracted the interest of Zen Master Dogen during his stay in 13<sup>th</sup> century China. Dogen subsequently carried Tung-shan’s lineage back to Japan where it is known as Soto Zen.

The Song of the Jewel Mirror Awareness is a chant that is recited regularly in Soto Zen monasteries and centers. It describes the internal process required to attain and maintain the “Jewel Mirror Awareness,” the heart of Zen training. It offers insight through its depiction of a Chinese master’s understanding of the dynamic interpenetration of two aspects of reality; the Personal (phenomenal, relative, particular) and the Universal (numinous, absolute, collective)<sup>1</sup>.

The poem consists of 94 lines of 4 Chinese characters each, for a total of 376 characters. The English translation is composed of 47 couplets. Many verses are statements that seemingly offer comparisons in metaphoric language that start with the phrase, “*it is like*.” The usual understanding of a metaphor is that it is a poetic tool by which meaning is conveyed through comparison of one thing to another. The language of Tung-shan, however, is not a comparison suggesting a similarity. The poem is written from the understanding of an awakened mind. What Tung-shan describes is the mutually beneficial interaction of the Personal and Universal aspects of reality. Here, the metaphor contains both the symbol and what is symbolized. In order to grasp its meaning, it is necessary to transcend the notion that metaphors in Soto Zen convey only a kind of likeness standing apart from “reality as it is” (thusness). Dogen wrote, “*Being like* does not express resemblance, *being like* is concrete existence.”<sup>2</sup> This view is consistent with how “*it is like*” is used in the Song of the Jewel Mirror Awareness. “*It is like*” is not merely pointing out an idea or concept. Rather, we must understand “*it is like*” as thusness itself.<sup>3</sup> The Chinese character for “thusness” also has the meaning of “like.”

When Master Tung-Shan uses the phrase “*it is like*” he is expressing the direct realization of the intimacy of the Personal and Universal aspects of phenomena. Intimacy here is used in the way Taizan Ma-

ezumi Roshi means it when he asserted, "... intimacy is simply realizing that your true nature and the phenomenal world are meeting right here, now, as your life."<sup>4</sup>

## Biography of Zen Master Tung-shan Liang-chieh

Tung-shan Liang-chieh is one of two masters credited with founding the Ts'ao-tung [Soto] school of Zen. The other master was Tung-shan's disciple Ts'ao-shan Pen-chi [840-901]. It was not formally a school until after Ts'ao-shan's death. It developed into an important sect in China, Japan, and now in the West.

We are told that Tung-shan was only ten years old when he left home in search of the Dharma. While still a boy, he studied the Heart Sutra with a noted scholar. One day he asked his teacher why the Heart Sutra said there are no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, etc.; when he certainly did have eyes, ears, a nose, and a tongue. His teacher found this question very provocative and thought it showed extraordinary intelligence. As a result, he felt he was not the right teacher for this boy. He sent him to Ling-mo [747-818], whom he felt was a more experienced Zen master.

Tung-shan traveled for ten years studying with many Zen teachers of his time. This afforded him exposure to a rich diversity of various traditions and doctrines. He became the formal disciple of Yun-yen T'an-sheng [780-841] at age twenty, and eventually his dharma heir.

After studying with Yun-yen and achieving his awakening, he continued to wander until around the age of fifty when he settled down to guide disciples of his own on Mount Tung, by which name he is known.

The Song of the Jewel Mirror Awareness is Tung-shan's exposition of his awakening experience after the resolution of his natural koan. Natural koan refers to the question that arose naturally in his life, and became the crux of his spiritual inquiry and the source of his awakening. Dogen calls this, "the koan realized in life." Dogen's natural koan was, "If we are already Buddha, why do we need to practice?" The Buddha's natural koan was, "Why is there suffering in the world?"

Tung-shan's natural koan was, "How does non-sentient phenomena expound the dharma?" This koan arose after Tung-shan heard an exchange between a monk and the National Teacher of the time, Master Chung.

The monk asked Master Chung, "What is the mind of an ancient Buddha?"

Master Chung answered, "Walls, tiles, and pebbles."

The monk then asked, "Aren't walls, tiles, and pebbles non-sentient?"

Master Chung said, "That's right."

The monk responded, "And can they expound the Dharma or not?"

Master Chung said, "They are always expounding it clearly, without interruption."

In his study with Yun-yen, Tung-shan brought up his question regarding the exchange between Master Chung and the monk.

Yun-yen raises his whisk [a non-sentient phenomena], and shakes it before Tung-shan and asks, "Do you hear it?"

Tung-shan said, "No."

Yun-Yen replied, "If you do not even hear my expounding of the Dharma [swishing the whisk], how will you hear the universal flowing from every direction? They are not two."

Then we are told:

Tung-shan said, "Now I am awake. How wonderful! The preaching of all phenomena occurs simply through phenomena appearing as phenomena. Before, listening with conventional hearing, I could not hear the sound of the inconceivable. Now, listening with Wisdom Eye open, inconceivability speaks eloquently, everywhere."

Yun-yen said, "That is precisely how it is."<sup>5</sup>

Sometime later, as he crossed a river he saw his reflection, he achieved a greater awakening as to the inner meaning of his previous insight. About this he said:

Just avoid seeking answers from others,  
Or you will be far estranged from yourself.  
Wandering freely, I meet my own true nature everywhere,  
Through all phenomena.  
I cannot become it,  
For it is already me.  
One must understand in this way  
In order to unite with Thusness.<sup>6</sup>

There are a few things to remember when undertaking this study. These ancient stories can seem incomprehensible for a many reasons. They have a different historical and cultural context. It must not be forgotten that the awakening experiences related in these anecdotes are the culmination of long years of effort and practice. In a sense we are eavesdropping on one moment without a thorough understanding of the causes and conditions of its occurrence. For example, from the statements related above, we have no sense of how much time elapsed between Tung-shan's initial awakening in his exchange with Yun-yen and the time he sees his reflection in the river. We just read one anecdote after another. Was it days, weeks, or months? What we can learn from the ancient masters is the manner in which we must nurture our own spiritual dilemmas.

# Song of the Jewel Mirror Awareness

- #1 The teaching of thusness  
Has been intimately communicated by buddhas and ancestors
- #2 Now you have  
So keep it well.
- #3 Filling a silver bowl with snow,  
Hiding a heron in the moonlight-
- #4 When you array them, they are not the same;  
When you mix them you know where they are.
- #5 The meaning is not in the words,  
Yet it responds to the inquiring impulse.
- #6 If you're excited, it becomes a pitfall;  
If you miss it you fall into retrospective hesitation.
- #7 Turning away and touching are both wrong,  
For it is like a mass of fire.
- #8 Just to depict it in literary form  
Is to relegate it to defilement.
- #9 It is bright just at midnight;  
It doesn't appear at dawn.
- #10 It acts as a guide for beings-  
Its use removes all pains.
- #11 Although it is not fabricated,  
It is not without speech.
- #12 It is like facing a jewel mirror;  
Form and image behold each other-
- #13 You are not it  
It actually is you.
- #14 It is like a babe in the world,  
In five aspects complete;
- #15 It does not go or come,  
Nor rise nor stand.
- #16 "Baba wawa"-  
Is there anything said or not?
- #17 Ultimately it does not apprehend anything,  
Because its speech is not yet correct.
- #18 It is like the six lines of the double split hexagram;  
The relative and absolute integrate-
- #19 Piled up they make three;  
The complete transformation makes five.
- #20 It is like the taste of the five-flavored herb,  
Like a diamond thunderbolt.
- #21 Subtly included within the true,  
Inquiry and response come up together.
- #22 Communing with the source and communing with the process,  
It includes integration and includes the road;
- #23 Merging is auspicious;  
Do not violate it.

#24 Naturally real yet inconceivable,  
It is not within the province of delusion or enlightenment.

#25 With causal conditions, time and season,  
Quiescently it shines bright.

#26 In its fineness it fits into spacelessness;  
In its greatness it is utterly beyond location.

#27 A hair breadth's deviation  
Will fail to accord with the proper attunement.

#28 Now there are sudden and gradual,  
In connection with which are set up basic approaches.

#29 Once basic approaches are distinguished,  
Then there are guiding rules.

#30 But even though the basis is reached and the approach comprehended,  
True eternity still flows.

#31 Outwardly still while inwardly moving,  
Like a tethered colt, a trapped rat-

#32 The ancient saints pitied them,  
And bestowed upon them the teaching;

#33 According to their delusions,  
They called black as white-

#34 When erroneous imaginations cease,  
The acquiescent mind realizes itself.

#35 If you want to conform to the ancient way  
Please observe the ancients of former times;

#36 When about to fulfill the way of Buddhahood,  
One gazed at a tree for ten aeons,

#37 Like a tiger leaving part of its prey,  
A horse with a white left hind leg.

#38 Because there is the base there are  
Jewel pedestals, fine clothing;

#39 Because there is the startlingly different  
There are house, cat, and cow.

#40 Yi with his archer skill,  
Could hit a target at a hundred paces;

#41 But when arrow points meet head on,  
What has this to do with the power of skill?

#42 When the wooden man begins to sing,  
The stone woman gets up to dance;

#43 It's not within the reach of feeling or discrimination-  
How could it admit of consideration in thought?

#44 A minister serves the lord,  
A son obeys the father.

#45 Not obeying is not filial,  
And not serving is no help.

#46 Practice secretly working within,  
As though a fool, like an idiot-

#47 If you can achieve continuity,  
This is called the host within the host.

# Song of the Jewel Mirror Awareness

## #1 The teaching of thusness

### Has been intimately communicated by Buddhas and Ancestors

*The teaching of thusness*

Thusness is a term meaning “reality as it arises.” It is witnessing the unfolding of the world, free of identification with conceptions, opinions, assumptions, judgments, or sentimentality. The teaching of thusness points toward the attainment of liberating wisdom.

*Has been intimately communicated by Buddhas and Ancestors*

The Buddhas and Ancestors expound the truth for the benefit of ordinary beings. “*Intimately communicated*” is intuitive perception. Zen Master Dogen describes this communication as, “What all Buddhas and Ancestors have received and retained, and transmitted one-to-one, is the eternal mirror.”<sup>7</sup>

*Just at the moment  
Ear and sound  
Do not interfere –  
There is no voice,  
There is no speaker.<sup>8</sup>*

## #2 Now you have it

### So keep it well.

*Now you have it*

Through the efforts of all the Buddhas and Ancestors, we now have a record of the stream of awakening. More personally, *now you have it* is the functioning of your own Buddha Nature.

*So keep it well.*

Appreciate the dharma. Protect your aspiration to awaken. Value your insights and understanding. Deeply trust your inner truth. In the Fukanzazengi<sup>9</sup> Dogen states, “You have gained the pivotal opportunity of human form.”<sup>10</sup> Human form embodies the ability for awakening – a rare chance to hear, practice, and express the Dharma.

*Now you have it* may also refer to sudden awakening, glimpsing the mirror awareness. *So keep it well* is an instruction to attend to gradual cultivation. Enlightened understanding is maintained through diligent practice.



**#3 Filling a silver bowl with snow,  
Hiding a heron in the moonlight –**

*Filling a silver bowl with snow,<sup>11</sup>*

This couplet is the interplay of the two aspects of mind, Personal and Universal. The bowl represents the Universal mind, and contains the quickly changing impermanent snow, the Personal aspect of mind.

*Hiding a heron in the moonlight*

The heron represents the Personal, and moonlight the Universal.

Both the Personal (snow and heron), and the Universal (silver bowl and moonlight) are represented as appearing white for inherent purity. A silver bowl holds something precious: our innate Buddha Nature.

This is the special circumstance of encountering the Dharma, and the special manner learned in Zen training. It is how we secretly conduct our spiritual lives, our inner clandestine connection to the world of awakening. Mel Weitsman quotes Suzuki Roshi, “You should be like a white bird in the moonlight. Zazen is like sitting in your mother’s lap.” This means, according to Weitsman, coming home – being one with all things.<sup>12</sup>

*A white heron  
Hiding itself  
In the snowy field  
Where even the winter grass  
Cannot be seen.<sup>13</sup>*

**#4 When you array them, they’re not the same;  
When you mix them you know where they are.**

*When you array them, they’re not the same;*

When a person glimpses the world through the Jewel Mirror, perception is transformed. “Things” are arrayed, are made manifest. Things are what they are – tree, rock, person or frog, *and at the same time*, everything is much more than what we usually take them to be. What one sees is that all things are made of the same universal substance – light or fire – and everything has cognizance. They are not the same in the sense that they are no longer *just* a tree, rock, person, or frog. The splendor and thusness of beings are observed.

*When you mix them you know where they are.*

*When you mix them* means witnessing the universal aspect of all things. *You know where they are* indicates you can still distinguish and identify a tree from a rock, and a person from a frog. You see the unity and particularity of everything at the same time.

**#5 The meaning is not in the words,  
Yet it responds to the inquiring impulse.**

*The meaning is not in the words,*

*The meaning is not in the words* is an acknowledgment that the experience described in the previous couplet cannot be fully expressed through language. This is compassionate encouragement to seek the deeper meaning. Don't be satisfied with words and mere descriptions.

*Yet it responds to the inquiring impulse.*

Inquiry is the vehicle of realizing thusness. Nature's radiance reveals itself in the natural koan – the koan realized in life. It is tentatively formulated in concepts and words that penetrate the mundane, triggering the source that lies beyond the bounds of human speech.

*Yet it responds to the inquiring impulse* also reflects the compassion of the teaching process. Tung-shan's whole poem is an attempt to clarify for the benefit of others the question, "What is awakening?" Posing a question immediately stimulates within the practitioner an intuitive response that is thusness itself. Awareness arises from within our inherent purity.

*Not limited  
By language  
It is ceaselessly expressed.  
So, too, the way of letters  
Can display but not exhaust it.<sup>14</sup>*

**#6 If you're excited, it becomes a pitfall;  
If you miss it, you fall into retrospective hesitation.**

*If you're excited, it becomes a pitfall;*

The focus and attention needed for the Jewel Mirror Awareness requires precision. If one responds to a glimpse by becoming inflated and making more of it, or by doubting and making less of the experience, the vision will be cut short.

*If you miss it, you fall into retrospective hesitation.*

If it is cut short *you miss it and fall into retrospective hesitation*, leaving one to try to reconstruct the experience through memory. That also becomes a pitfall because it cannot be done.

**#7 Turning away and touching are both wrong,  
For it is like a mass of fire.**

*Turning away and touching are both wrong,*

Turning away doubts the experience of the breakthrough moment; touching clings to it. Both miss the mark. This couplet is instruction for the proper orientation or attitude one must maintain throughout the experience.

*For it is like a mass of fire.*

What is *like a mass of fire?* – Reality as seen through the Jewel Mirror. But how does one live a simple human life in a reality that *is like a mass of fire?*

Prior Soku asked Master Hogen, “Just what is the student that is I?” Master Hogen replied, “Children of fire come looking for fire.” Even though our lives are cradled in the Universal, we must seek to actualize that truth through the cultivation of wisdom. “The reality of life is not attained without realization. If you do not actualize the reality of life, it is not attained.”<sup>15</sup>

*Seeking the Way  
Amidst the deepest mountain paths,  
The retreat I find  
None other than  
My primordial home: satori.*<sup>16</sup>

**#8 Just to depict it in literary form  
Is to relegate it to defilement.**

*Just to depict it in literary form*

The fire of wisdom cannot be captured in language. Whatever is said, no matter how beautiful, it remains incomplete. Language is by definition dualistic because it retains the subject-object split. It is important to strive to understand what language is, from where it arises, what are its strengths and correct usage. Language is not an opponent. To embrace its source and manifestation is thusness itself.

*Is to relegate it to defilement.*

“It” is not a thing that can be interpreted or represented. Thusness cannot be contained in words. Even though human language has its roots in the depths of time and has evolved into a marvelous means of communication, it has not as yet gained the capability of fully conveying the source from which it arises.

es.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, trying to express thussness with words remains an incomplete attempt. Allusions are possible, but even great poets are silenced when asked to do so.<sup>18</sup> Still volumes are written and poems such as *Song of the Jewel Mirror Awareness* are composed to help.

**#9 It is bright just at midnight;  
It doesn't appear at dawn.**

*It is bright just at midnight;*

This is Sekito Kisen's – "right in darkness there is light"<sup>19</sup> – the deepest darkest interior place attained in meditation. Here is where the Jewel Mirror light is found. The practice of the mirror Samadhi is essential for this to come about because the brightness manifests in secret far from common understanding.

*It doesn't appear at dawn.*

Cultivation of the Jewel Mirror light does not take place directly during the activities of the day. "O night more lovely than dawn."<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, every encounter, no matter how seemingly mundane, contains its very essence. This being so, its truth can arise at any moment.

*Contemplating the clear moon  
Reflecting a mind empty as the open sky –  
Drawn by its beauty  
I lose myself  
In the shadows that it casts. <sup>21</sup>*

**#10 It acts as a guide for beings;  
Its use removes all pains.**

*It acts as a guide for beings;*

It (the source, intuition) is clarity and guidance showing the path that untangles the "entwined vines" of our existence.

*Its use removes all pains.*

When we listen to our deepest intuition we connect intimately with the source that has the potential to remove all pain. Healing is an attribute of the Universal mind. With intimate connection, healing occurs, clearing the mind of afflictive emotions.

**#11 Although it is not fabricated,  
It is not without speech.**

*Although it is not fabricated,*

The beginningless and endless source does not have common speech, yet fully informs speech. The source of it is not made up or imagined. This information can be trusted without recourse to doubt.

*It is not without speech.*

A new language must be learned. Intuitive perception – the language of nonduality – arises constantly. Whether there is understanding or not, the language of the Jewel Mirror never ceases. Its inspiration is poised on the doorstep waiting to be let in.

*Because the mind is free –  
Listening to the rain  
Dropping from the eaves  
The drops become one with me. <sup>22</sup>*

**#12 It is like facing a jewel mirror,  
Form and image behold each other.**

*It is like facing a jewel mirror,*

The “Jewel Mirror Awareness” is a metaphor for Zazen wherein the Personal and Universal Minds communicate intimately. This is like Tung-shan’s awakening when he saw himself reflected in the water of the river that resolved his natural koan.

*Form and image behold each other.*

The Personal and Universal Minds communicate without intercession of any media. The Jewel Mirror Awareness dissolves the illusion of separateness that is the source of confusion. Intimacy, the human embodiment of thusness, arises naturally.

**#13 You are not it;  
It actually is you.**

*You are not it;*

This is an invitation to look again at what we assume the “self” to be. Is it the usual limited separate entity caught in the trap of affliction and alienation? Is its boundary this bag of skin? Are we the limited individual we commonly sense ourselves to be?

*It actually is you.*

Awakening is exquisite joy arising from the release of the illusion of being a separate self. It is residing in one's true home. It is the revolution of mind that transforms a sentient being into a Buddha, the discernment of the relationship of Personal and Universal Minds with no barrier.

This couplet can also be viewed from the understanding of Dogen's statement in the Genjo Koan, "To carry the self forward and illuminate myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come forth and illuminate the self is awakening."<sup>23</sup>

The message of the couplet also serves as an essential warning to be very cautious. Where does the experience of awakening go within an individual? If one becomes inflated, thinking *you are it*, the experience creates narcissism. However, when perception is through the lens of no separate self, it validates that *it actually is you*. How the experience is integrated determines the character of the awakening.

**#14 It is like a babe in the world,  
In five aspects complete.**

*It is like a babe in the world,*

A babe is new to the ways of the world; all of its encounters are fresh and filled with curiosity. Awakening shatters old patterns of response that can create a sense of disorientation. Unhelpful habit energies abound and must be understood for what they are. Overcoming their vestigial effects offers the way to establish new patterns of being. Subsequent freedom of behavior is the result.

*In five aspects complete.*

Our senses (five aspects) operate without attachment, responding with a babe's guileless innocence.

This is possible because the sixth sense of consciousness within the Jewel Mirror functions freely without being ensnared by doubt.

**#15 It does not go or come,  
Nor rise nor stand.**

*It does not go or come,*

*Nor rise nor stand.*

Thusness maintains its intimate nature in all circumstances. It remains steady and all pervasive, embracing everything.

## **#16 “Baba wawa”-**

### **Is there anything said or not?**

*“Baba wawa”*

The language of the relative world is inadequate for expressing the nondual experience. Human speech sounds like the babbling of an infant when attempting to define the Jewel Mirror Awareness. Explanations and intellectual knowledge are, at best, invitations to direct experience. The inconceivable is beyond comprehension of human speech, yet it is present in every utterance.

*Is there anything said or not?*

Master Sheng Yen says, “All the illustrations and explanation we use to describe the precious mirror really have no meaning and cannot tell us what the precious mirror truly is. Nonetheless, we continue with our explanations, because people need them ... Masters are much like babies, making nonsense sounds trying to speak. They know what they have experienced, they know what they want to say, but there is no way they can say it.”<sup>24</sup>

*Is there anything said or not* is not answered through intellectual understanding. When an individual experiences a glimpse she/he realizes the attempts of the masters are literal, pure, and open statements.

## **#17 Ultimately it does not apprehend anything,**

### **Because its speech is not yet correct.**

*Ultimately it does not apprehend anything,*

Understanding does not arise because human speech alone cannot fully express the inconceivable.

*Because its speech is not yet correct.*

Human speech is considered baby talk because it cannot convey the merging of the infinite and relative. The word “*yet*” indicates that time and practice may yield an opening to the language of nonduality where an individual may accurately describe their intuitive perception.

## **#18 It is like the six lines of the double split hexagram;**

### **The relative and absolute integrate.**

*It is like the six lines of the double split hexagram;*

The double split hexagram in the I Ching is #30 Li, the Clinging, Fire. Its makeup contains the Five Ranks that Tung-shan devised for understanding Zen training. Li is clarity of thought in the human mind, providing the means to recognize the conditioned state of existence, and to point out the way to harmonize oneself with the beneficent forces of the universe.

*The relative and absolute integrate.*

The relative (Personal) is the phenomenal world; the absolute (Universal) is the realm of emptiness. Actualizing the Five Ranks of Tung-shan manifests as conscious awareness of their harmonious interplay. The *Song of the Jewel Mirror Awareness* can be considered a commentary on the Five Ranks.<sup>25</sup>

1. **The Personal within the Universal:** Here the Universal Mind dawns within the Personal. A new way of living in the world is unveiled, one grounded in experiential certainty, observation, and inquiry.
2. **The Universal within the Personal:** Here the Universal Mind is the dominant sphere acting as a container for the thoughts, feelings, and aspirations of the Personal.
3. **Coming from within the Universal:** The inconceivable mind comes compellingly to the forefront introducing the new world of unity of the Personal and Universal. The Universal is reflected within the Personal.
4. **Arriving within the Personal:** Within this rank the Universal and Personal beneficially interact, refining the attributes of the Personal. Each phenomenon's unique expression of the Universal is intimately perceived.
5. **Attainment in both the Personal and Universal:** Unity of the Personal and Universal is attained.

### **#19 Piled up they make three;**

**The complete transformation makes five.**

*Piled up they make three;*

The Personal and the Universal are two aspects. The relationship between them is the third aspect.

*The complete transformation makes five.*

The transformation is accomplished by realizing the Five Ranks.

### **#20 It is like the taste of the five-flavored herb**

**Like a diamond thunderbolt.**

*It is like the taste of the five-flavored herb*

“It is like” is exactly thusness – the relational activity of the Personal and Universal Minds.

The “five flavored herb” contains all five tastes. It stands for the dialectical completeness found in the Five Ranks.

*Like a diamond thunderbolt.*



The “*diamond thunderbolt*” is the action of transformation, the awakening experience. It is the lightning bolt from the sky reaching the earth – something new and unexpected appears.

*Colors of the mountains,  
Streams in the valleys;  
One in all, all in one,  
The voice and body of  
Our Shakyamuni Buddha.* <sup>26</sup>

**#21 Subtly included within the true,  
Inquiry and response come up together.**

*Subtly included within the true*, “*True*” is the Buddha Nature of all beings. All phenomena express universal truth. “*Subtly*” refers to the awareness that witnesses the “*true*” as it unfolds in our lives.

*Inquiry and response come up together.*

“*Inquiry and response come up together*” is spiritual curiosity honed by meditative discipline that generates personal questions. The Personal inquiry and Universal response heal and instruct. The Personal and the Universal when taken together constitute the wholeness of Zen dialogue.

Within the “*true*,” conscious inquiry becomes a liberating force because of its identity with the meaningful “*response*.” They are two inseparable activities.

Zazen practice uncovers the pathway leading to the unity of inquiry and response. The usual method of problem-solving uses thought to think about something with hopes of deriving a course of action. Striving for resolution accompanies this process. In inquiry-response, striving is put aside. Tung-shan’s way relies on a trust that comes about after all other paths are tried and found wanting. “Inquiry-response” establishes the focal point that leads to an inspired breakthrough. It asks us to view our daily life dilemmas, and the issues surrounding them, as opportunities for spiritual growth. Inquiry-response includes all aspects of human investigation: scholastic knowledge, introspective understanding, and experiential wisdom.

**#22 Communing with the source and communing with the process,  
It includes integration and includes the road.**

*Communing with the source and communing with the process,*

The practice of Zen and the realization of Zen are not distinct activities separated in space and time. All aspects of Sanzen (the widest understanding of Zen practice that includes all activities beyond for-

mal meditation) are included in Dogen's radical nonduality. It is being free of a pernicious sense of lack. Nothing more is required; one experiences a sense of being in harmony.

*It includes integration and includes the road.*

Radical nonduality does not create a distinction between the content and process of Zazen. All of human experience, Personal and Universal, is included in the Way. Integration is the process of internal awareness. *The road* is our interactions with the world based on that awareness. No matter how deep the understanding, we still must live this human life.

*The Swaying bamboos keep resonating,  
Shedding the tears of dew at dawn;  
Only those who exert themselves fully  
Will attain the Way,  
But even if you abandon all for the ancient path of meditation,  
You can never forget the meaning of sadness.<sup>27</sup>*

### **#23 Merging is auspicious;**

**Do not violate it.**

*Merging is auspicious;*

With *merging* one attains the proper attunement to witness the wisdom-fire of the Jewel Mirror.

It is encouragement that engenders wonder for the living reality of Buddha's teaching, without diminishment or false adornment.

*Do not violate it.*

Finding and activating the Dharma in one's life is a most favorable event. To violate it would be to take it for granted. One must keep it as the heart of daily life.

### **#24 Naturally real yet inconceivable,**

**It is not within the province of delusion or enlightenment.**

*Naturally real yet inconceivable,*

*Naturally* refers to whom and what we are without artifice. It is the Samadhi of the Jewel Mirror. It is at once how we witness the real and natural truth of the entire world, and how the obstructions to that understanding are recognized and resolved. The passive (tranquility) and active (insight) sides of Samadhi provide the stepping-stone to the *inconceivable*.

*It is not within the province of delusion or enlightenment.*

The reflective power points beyond conceptual understanding, beyond the boundaries of delusion and enlightenment, the world arrayed in the nondual mind.

**#25 With causal conditions, time and season,  
Quiescently it shines bright.**

*With causal conditions, time and season,*

The teaching of dependent arising connects the one (Personal) with the many (Universal). The causes and conditions of an individual's life cannot be separated from the collective action of the whole.

*Quiescently it shines bright.*

Enjoying the fruits of positive conditions, its brightness appears. With realization one perceives it was there from the beginning.

*Chancing to meet Shakyamuni's  
Blissful Dharma however briefly,  
Would I ever be inclined  
To follow any other path?<sup>28</sup>*

**#26 In its fineness it fits into spacelessness;  
In its greatness it is utterly beyond location.**

*In its fineness it fits into spacelessness;*

The creative and beneficent activity of the universe spreads into all places without exception. This line is reminiscent of the opening line of Dogen's Fukanzazengi: "The Way is basically perfect and all pervading...."

*In its greatness it is utterly beyond location.*

It is the Dharma Seal of Nirvana – universally present at all time and all places. "Spacelessness" and "beyond location" take us directly to inconceivability, an invitation to "Don't Know Mind," the gate to the Jewel Mirror Awareness.

**#27 A hairbreadth's deviation  
Will fail to accord with the proper attunement.**

*A hairbreadth's deviation*

The width of a hair – a tiny distance – when put between form and image leaves the "Mind lost in confusion."<sup>29</sup> Creating even the minutest gap of a hair between the Personal and the Universal by the activity of doubt and discrimination, blocks the harmony of their interplay.

*Will fail to accord with the proper attunement.*

“*Proper attunement*” is realizing the truth of Buddha’s teaching through the glimpses of thusness that we may be privileged to experience. It is what keeps us treading the path and deepening our understanding of the Dharma.

**#28 Now there are sudden and gradual,  
In connection with which are set up basic approaches.**

*Now there are sudden and gradual,*

These competing notions of Sudden and Gradual enlightenment began in India, continued in China, and they are still points of inquiry today.

*In connection with which are set up basic approaches.*

The Gradual School works with karmic obstructions, resolving them through diligent and persevering effort as the path to enlightenment. The Sudden School teaches the emptiness of karmic obstructions, and understands practice and enlightenment to be one from the beginning.

However, both of these elements must be included in a lifetime of Zen practice. Attempting to jump to the Universal leaves the karmic obstructions untouched. Even with a genuine sudden breakthrough, without combining sudden experience with gradual practice, one cannot hope to sustain the valuable effects of the breakthrough for oneself or others.

**#29 Once basic approaches are distinguished,  
Then there are guiding rules.**

*Once basic approaches are distinguished,*

The basic approaches are accepting and employing the necessity of working with both “*sudden*” and “*gradual*.”

*Then there are guiding rules.*

Distinguishing the activities associated with each approach are the “*guiding rules*.”

**#30 But even though the basis is reached and the approach comprehended,  
True eternity still flows.**

*But even though the basis is reached and the approach comprehended,*

Putting into practice the basis and approach sets the stage for progress along the path.

*True eternity still flows.*

The source of practice is non-attachment, knowing how to live without “turning away or touching,” allowing the free flow of eternity. This practice is identical to realization. Practice is in the end not a skillful means to enlightenment. From the first, before and beyond human effort, inherent purity exists.

**#31 Outwardly still while inwardly moving,  
Like a tethered colt, a trapped rat.**

*Outwardly still while inwardly moving,*

The practice of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi requires learning the skill of resolving karmic obstructions. Being unsure of how to recognize and resolve the afflictive emotions associated with them creates inner tensions. Stability and calmness are not accomplished. This is being caught in a trap of unresolved conditioned states. Even though we hold the posture of Zazen, and from the outside appear “still,” what is going on internally?

*Like a tethered colt, a trapped rat.*

Without a firm foundation, anxiety and fear are generated, and the inner world finds no escape or peace.

**#32 The ancient saints pitied them,  
And bestowed upon them the teaching;**

*The ancient saints pitied them,*

Teachers compassionately moved by the conditions of sentient beings were inspired to take action.

*And bestowed upon them the teaching;*

They responded, expounding the teaching of liberation, offering the Dharma as the antidote for dukkha.

**#33 According to their delusions,  
They called black as white.**

*According to their delusions,*

Each of us is unique and requires our own *upaya* – skillful means – based on the conditions of our life. The Dharma acknowledges and provides infinite varieties of *upaya*, tailoring the teaching for each individual. It is through our specific karmic obstructions – how we misperceive the truth and thereby become trapped – that we discover the driving force of our seeking and eventual liberation.

*They called black as white.*

The Dharma brings into focus the means to overcome the tendency for confused and inverted thinking.

**#34 When erroneous imaginations cease,  
The acquiescent mind realizes itself.**

*When erroneous imaginations cease,*

“*Erroneous imaginations*” are, from the Mahayana perspective, taking the experience of self and others as existing apart from the world, the illusion of our separateness. The teaching of thusness challenges and overturns this mistaken worldview.

*The acquiescent mind realizes itself.*

When *erroneous imaginations* are resolved, harmony naturally arises. The Gradual school sees this as polishing the mirror and removing the dust – a never-ending process. The Sudden school realizes “*the acquiescent mind*” never was and never could be sullied by the world’s dust; only through our imaginings do we think it so. How does one resolve this apparent contradiction of Gradual and Sudden? “When the mind-stream of ordinary beings is pure, enlightenment reflects itself in it.”<sup>30</sup>

*Long night,  
Long as the  
Long tail of the pheasant:  
The light of dawn  
Breaking through* <sup>31</sup>

**#35 If you want to conform to the ancient way  
Please observe the ancients of former times.**

*If you want to conform to the ancient way*

If our search has discovered the ancient teaching that has been transmitted from the depths of time, it is up to us to respond with creative action.

*Please observe the ancients of former times;*

The examples of those who have been successful in actualizing the truth are of noble assistance.

**#36 When about to fulfill the way of Buddhahood,  
One gazed at a tree for ten aeons,**

*When about to fulfill the way of Buddhahood,*

The path has led the seeker to the point where accomplishment looms ahead. Care is taken to focus the required energy.

*One gazed at a tree for ten aeons,*

The “*ten aeons*” is the illusory citadel for those on the path. How long must one rest in stillness and quiescence before achieving Buddhahood? How long is an aeon? Is it ten kalpas or one minute?

How long have you been gazing at a tree?

### **#37 Like a tiger leaving part of its prey,**

#### **A horse with a white left hind leg.**

*Like a tiger leaving part of its prey,*

*A horse with a white left hind leg.*

Practice contains the uniqueness of experience like a hungry tiger not finishing feeding, or how the eye is drawn to a white shank of an otherwise single-colored horse. Buddhahood is an exceptional and distinctive event, drawing the attention of the world. Nobility and venerability are the attributes of a person who has successfully put themselves through the rigors of Zen practice. One must spend the *ten aeons* to mature the initial awakening. Then the “Ordinary Mind” of Nansen arises without encountering any barrier.<sup>32</sup>

*The moon mirrored  
By a mind free  
Of all disturbances;  
Even the waves breaking  
Are reflecting its light. <sup>33</sup>*

### **#38 Because there is the base**

#### **There are jewel pedestals, fine clothing;**

*Because there is the base*

The Universal Mind acting in accord with the Personal Mind creates the foundation for all constructive endeavors. Because there is the base – emptiness – all phenomena arise.

*There are jewel pedestals, fine clothing;*

The practice of Zen reveals the dignity of the individual penetrating the source. Life unfolds out of the source naturally revealing the *jewel pedestals* and *fine clothing*, the compassionate activities of the Bodhisattva.

**#39 Because there is the startlingly different there are  
House cat and cow.**

*Because there is the startlingly different there are  
House cat and cow.*

All phenomena, beyond our mundane presuppositions and habituated views, profess the Dharma. The house cat and cow communicate thusness simply by being what they are.

**#40 Yi with his archer skill  
Could hit a target at a hundred paces;**

*Yi with his archer skill*

*Could hit a target at a hundred paces;*

Yi, in Chinese mythology, was an archer of great skill. He was said to be capable of piercing a tiny willow leaf with an arrow at one hundred paces. This demonstrates technical skill at its farthest reaches.

**#41 But when arrow points meet head on,  
What has this to do with the power of skill?**

*But when arrow points meet head on,*

Witnessing the inconceivable rouses one from the small-self mind. Another realm lies beyond technical skill.

*What has this to do with the power of skill?*

Practice makes perfect in archery training, but what is beyond perfection? Practice is using devices, creating, and utilizing conceptual models and physical technique to help in our exploration. Arrow points meeting head on plumbs the vastness of Zazen practice.<sup>34</sup>

**#42 When the wooden man begins to sing,  
The stone woman gets up to dance.**

*When the wooden man begins to sing,*

“The wooden man,” a puppet, locked in William Blake’s “mind forged manacles,” is not yet fully alive. Suddenly he breaks out in song and releases himself from the bonds of the illusion of the permanent self. Dancing cannot be avoided. Liberated actions spontaneously arise.

*The stone woman gets up to dance.*

“The stone woman,” formerly cold and immobile, harmonizes with the melody of the long life and dances.



Both the wooden man and stone woman throw off enforced stillness and spring into life, celebrating the joy of liberation.

**#43 It's not within the reach of feeling or discrimination,  
How could it admit of consideration in thought?**

*It's not within the reach of feeling or discrimination,*

We come to Zen with our heart and mind accustomed to pulling the petals off the flower in an attempt to understand its true nature. The teaching asks something else of us – to recognize an entirely new way of relating to the world.

*How could it admit of consideration in thought?*

We can struggle to think our way out of a problem, but that approach can only partially relieve the trouble. Where else can one go? And what exactly is the new way?

*In the heart of the night  
The moonlight framing  
A small boat drifting,  
Tossed not by the waves  
Nor swayed by the breeze.<sup>35</sup>*

**#44 A minister serves the lord,  
A son obeys the father.**

*A minister serves the lord,*

*A son obeys the father.*

The lord and father in Chinese mythology refer to two aspects of thusness: authentic authority and compassionate guidance. Thus, ministers and sons recognize wisdom and empathy, accept their roles, and cultivate their relationships within the given situation. Successfully accomplishing the tasks of minister and son places one firmly on the Zen path.

**#45 Not obeying is not filial,  
And not serving is no help.**

*Not obeying is not filial,*

*And not serving is no help.*

The roles of our Personal life must be determined, understood, and fully lived. Not living in accord with the relative issues of our life prevents recognizing the appearance of our Universal life.

**#46 Practice secretly working within,  
As though a fool, like an idiot.**

*Practice secretly working within,*

Practitioners do not call attention to themselves, but go about their daily tasks transforming the troubles of life into spiritual progress. Hui Neng, the Sixth Ancestor, counsels us to limit discussion of the Dharma to the Sangha, and simply to try to make all others happy.

*As though a fool, like an idiot.*

People not yet engaged in a teaching of awakening often look with disdain and bring discord to the process. Better to be a silent fool and nurture the lotus in deep quiet.

**#47 If you can achieve continuity,  
This is called the host within the host.**

*If you can achieve continuity,*

“Continuity” is the uninterrupted awareness of the harmonious interplay of the Personal and Universal aspects of our experience.

*This is called the host within the host.*

Personal truth is cradled within the Universal. From that perspective the Universal is host to the Personal. When an individual embodies Universal truth, they manifest the Universal within the Personal, having learned another way of *seeing* and *being* in the world. From this perspective the Personal hosts the Universal. When it functions in both directions, *this is called the host within the host.*

The *host within the host* (liberation, unity of the Personal and Universal) is the fourth and final stage of growth in the Taoist Way. It is preceded by 1) the *guest within the guest* (unconscious living). 2) The *host within the guest* (learning the backward step of turning your light inwardly). 3) The *guest within the host* (mutually beneficial interpenetration of Personal and Universal). This four-fold arrangement is used in the Rinzai sect in much the same way the Five Ranks are used in Soto.<sup>36</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The table below contains a number of different dualistic descriptions of our experience of the world along with their complementary nondual resultants.

Personal	Universal	Complementary Activity
Individual, Relative, Conventional	Collective, Absolute, Ultimate	Unity
Inquiry	Response	Radiant Knowledge
Delusion, Apparent	Enlightenment, Real	Wholeheartedness
Afflictions	Awakening	Liberation
Practice	Realization	Shikan Taza, Zazen Only
Psychological	Spiritual	Oneness
Form, Feelings, Perceptions, Impulses, Consciousness	Emptiness	Emptiness of Emptiness
Body, Subject	Mind, Object	Simultaneous Arising
Thinking	Not Thinking	Non-thinking
Being (Space)	Time	Continuum

<sup>2</sup> Dogen’s fascicle entitled *Tsuki*, p. 2 in Book 3 in the Nishijima’s and Cross’s translation of the Shobgenzo.

<sup>3</sup> See Hee-Jin Kim, *Eihei Dogen Mystical Realist*, pp. 84-85

<sup>4</sup> *Jewel Mirror Samadhi Translation Study* (found on-line), p 2 Taizan Maezumi (from the preface of Two Arrows Meeting Mid-Air.)

<sup>5</sup> Lex Hixon, *Living Buddha Zen*, p. 179

<sup>6</sup> Ibid p. 184

<sup>7</sup> Dogen’s fascicle entitled *Kokyo* p. 207 in Book 1 in the Nishijima’s and Cross’s translation of the Shobgenzo.

<sup>8</sup> Steven Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dogen*, p. 112. All of the poems quoted in this commentary are Dogen’s from Heine’s translation.

<sup>9</sup> Dogen’s Fukanzazengi, Universal Instructions for the Practice of Zazen, was his first composition after his return from his time in China.

<sup>10</sup> The importance of attaining human form is not well understood. The practice of the Jewel Mirror Awareness opens up the door to what the wisdom the physical form contains. Dogen asserts, “To realize the self in bodily experience and to realize the external world in bodily experience is the great truth of the Buddhist Ancestors.” Dogen’s fascicle entitled *Jisho Zanmai – Samadhi as the Experience of the Self*, p. 31 in Book 4 in the Nishijima’s and Cross’s translation of the Shobgenzo.

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- <sup>11</sup> Zen Master Tenkei comments on this line: “This is uniform transcendence, wherein the world is nonetheless not hidden. You cannot discern this unless you have the eye to distinguish differences. Ultimately the whole universe should be seen as the school of the enlightened mind.” Thomas Cleary, *Secrets of the Blue Cliff Record*, p. 45
- <sup>12</sup> Quoted from the *Jewel Mirror Samadhi Translation Study* (JMST) Page 9. Mel Weitsman is the longtime abbot of the Berkeley, CA Zen Center.
- <sup>13</sup> Steven Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dogen*, p. 117
- <sup>14</sup> Steven Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dogen*, p. 103
- <sup>15</sup> Kosho Uchiyama, trans. Okumura and Leighton, *The Wholehearted Way: A Translation of Eihei Dogen’s Bendowa*, p. 64
- <sup>16</sup> Steven Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dogen*, p. 103
- <sup>17</sup> Christine Kennelly, in her book *The First Word*, traces the origination of the physical underpinnings of the human ability to convey linguistic intricacies and subtle nuances. She begins by examining our closest relatives, the chimpanzees and continues back through the fossil record to a mollusk that lived 600 million years ago. In these evolutionary connected animals, the growth of the potential physical capability of language is observed from that ancient time up until the present. She, however, does not make any comment on a simultaneous development of the mental side of language, but leaves it the reader to take the next step of speculating that physical and mental aspects evolved together.
- <sup>18</sup> The 18<sup>th</sup> century Japanese poet Ryokan left this verse describing the enforced silence left by the experience of thusness. Steven Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dogen*, p. 159
- One evening sitting by the light, my tears flowing non-stop  
Thoroughly soaked through my copy of the Eihei Koroku.  
The next morning an old man living next door visited my thatched hut  
And asked me how the book got so wet;  
As I tried to speak up, my heart was flooded with feeling,  
And my mind could not grapple with explaining an attitude that cannot be put into words;  
I lowered my head, but then after a while I thought of something to say:  
“It was the rain leaking in last night that got my bookcase soaked.”*
- <sup>19</sup> From *The Merging of Difference and Unity*, Sekito Kisen is the second ancestor after Huining, the famed Sixth Ancestor. The rendering used here is from the Ryumonji Zen Monastery chant book.
- <sup>20</sup> St. John of the Cross
- <sup>21</sup> Steven Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dogen*, p. 52

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, Page 116

<sup>23</sup> Kazuaki Tanahshi, *Enlightenment Unfolds*, p. 35

<sup>24</sup> Quoted from the *Jewel Mirror Samadhi Translation Study*, p. 26

<sup>25</sup> See Dogen and the Five Ranks at <http://www.mszo.org/zen-sparks/essays> for further elaboration.

<sup>26</sup> Steven Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dogen*, p. 71

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, Page 134

<sup>28</sup> Steven Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dogen*, p. 107

<sup>29</sup> From the Fukanzazengi, “When the least like or dislike arise the Mind is lost in confusion.” The desire for or against the natural flow of the unfolding of the universe dislocates the harmonious accord of the form and image.

<sup>30</sup> Part of the Memorial Day dedication quoted from the Ryumonji Zen Monastery Chant Book.

<sup>31</sup> Steven Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dogen*, p. 108

<sup>32</sup> Joshu once asked Nansen, “What is the Way?”

Nansen said, “Ordinary Mind is the Way.”

“Should I turn toward it or not?”

“If you turn toward it you turn away from it.”

Joshu asked, “How can I know the way if I don’t turn toward it?”

Nansen said, “The way is not about knowing or not knowing. When you know something you are deluded, and when you don’t know, you are just empty-headed. When you reach the Way beyond doubt, it is as vast and infinite as space.

You can’t say whether it’s right or wrong.” At this Joshu was awakened.

Quoted from James Green, *The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Joshu*, p. 11

<sup>33</sup> Steven Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dogen*, p. 117

<sup>34</sup> “A famous archer named Fei-wei taught his technique to his student Chi-chang. Chi-chang decided that were he to kill his teacher, no one could compete with him. However, in attempting this he failed. They met on a small country road. Chi-chang shot at Fei-Wei who in turn shot his own arrow. The two arrows met and fell harmlessly to the ground. As a result, Chi-chang was enlightened to his selfishness and developed a more profound relationship with his teacher.” Taken from *The Jewel Mirror Samadhi Translation Study*, p. 58. See Eugen Herrigel, *Zen and the Art of Archery*, Pages 66-67 for a modern example of this same teaching.

<sup>35</sup> Steven Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dogen*, p. 104

<sup>36</sup> See Thomas Cleary, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, pp. 142 through 146 for a detailed explanation.