

# Painting of a Rice Cake

Shobogenzo Gabyo by Eihei Dogen Zenji, translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi and Dan Welch

All buddhas are realization; thus all things are realization. Yet, no buddhas or things have the same characteristics; none have the same mind. Although there are no identical characteristics or minds, at the moment of your actualization numerous actualizations manifest without hindrance. At the moment of your manifestation, numerous manifestations come forth without touching one another. This is the straightforward teaching of the ancestors.

Do not use the measure of oneness or difference as the criterion of your study. Thus, it is said, “To reach one thing is to reach myriad things.”

To reach one thing does not take away its inherent characteristics. Just as reaching does not limit one thing, it does not make one thing not separate. To try to make it not different is a hindrance. When you allow reaching to be unhindered by reaching, one reaching is myriad reachings. One reaching is one thing. Reaching one thing is reaching myriad things.

An ancient buddha said, “A painting of a rice cake does not satisfy hunger.”

Those in cloud robes and mist sleeves who study this statement, as well as bodhisattvas and shravakas who come from the ten directions, differ in name and position; the skin and flesh of divine heads or of demon faces in the ten directions differ, sometimes thick, sometimes thin.

This statement has been studied by ancient buddhas and present buddhas; it has become a theme to ponder by seekers in grass-roofed huts and under trees. When they transmit their teaching, they say, “This statement means that studying the sutras and commentaries does not nourish true wisdom.” Or they suppose it means that to study the sutras of the Three Vehicles or the One Vehicle is not the way of complete enlightenment.

However, to think this statement means that expedient teachings are useless is a great mistake. This is not the authentic transmission of the ancestors’ teaching; it obscures the words of the buddha ancestors. If you do not understand this one buddha’s phrase, who could acknowledge that you have thoroughly understood the words of other buddhas?

To say *A painting of a rice cake does not satisfy hunger* is like saying “to refrain from unwholesome actions and do wholesome actions.” It is like saying “What is it that thus comes?” It is like saying “I am always intimate with this.” Investigate it in this way.

There are few who have even seen through this *painting of a rice cake*, and none of them has thoroughly understood it. How is this so? When I inquired of a few skin bags in the past, they had never questioned or investigated this matter. They were unconcerned with it, as if it were someone else’s gossip.

Know that a painted rice cake is your face after your parents were born, your face before your parents were born. Thus, although it is neither born nor unborn, the moment when a painted rice cake is made of rice flour, is the moment of actualizing of the way. Do not see this moment as affected by the limited view that a painted rice cake comes and goes.

The paints for painting rice cakes are the same as those used for painting mountains and waters. For painting mountains and waters, blue and red paints are used; for painting rice cakes, rice flour is used. Thus, they are painted in the same way, and they are examined in the same way.

Accordingly, *painted rice cakes* spoken of here means that sesame rice cakes, herb rice cakes, milk rice cakes, toasted rice cakes, millet rice cakes, and the like are all actualized in the painting. Thus, understand that a painting is all inclusive, a rice cake is all inclusive, things are all inclusive. In this way, all rice cakes actualized right now are nothing but a painted rice cake.

If you look for some other kind of painted rice cake, you will never find it, you will never grasp it. A painted rice cake at once appears and does not appear. This being so, it has no mark of old or young, and has no trace of coming or going. Just here, the land of painted rice cakes is revealed and confirmed.

The phrase *does not satisfy hunger* means this hunger, not the ordinary matter of the twelve hours, never encounters a painted rice cake. Even if you were to eat a painted rice cake, it would never put an end to this hunger. Rice cakes are not separate from hunger. Rice cakes are not separate from rice cakes. Thus, these activities and teachings cannot be given away. Hunger is a single staff maneuvered horizontally and vertically through a thousand changes and myriad forms. A rice cake is the wholeness of body and mind actualized. A rice cake is blue, yellow, red, and white as well as long, short, square, and round.

When mountains and waters are painted, blue, green, and red paints are used, strange rocks and wondrous stones are used, the four jewels and the seven treasures are used. Rice cakes are painted in the same manner. When a person is painted, the four great elements and the five skandhas are used. When a buddha is painted, not only a clay altar or lump of earth is used, but the thirty-two marks, a blade of grass, and the cultivation of wisdom for incalculable eons are used. As a buddha has been painted on a single scroll in this way, all buddhas are painted buddhas, and all painted buddhas are actual buddhas.

Examine a painted buddha, and examine a painted rice cake. Which is the black stone tortoise, and which is the iron staff? Which is form and which is mind? Pursue and investigate this in detail. When you penetrate this matter, the coming and going of birth and death is a painting. Unsurpassed enlightenment is a painting. The entire universe and the open sky are nothing but a painting.

An ancient buddha said:

Attaining the way—a thousand snowflakes disappear.  
Painting green mountains—several scrolls appear.

This is an utterance of great enlightenment, actualized practice in the endeavor of the way. Accordingly, at the moment of attaining the way, green mountains and white snow are painted on countless scrolls. Motion and stillness are nothing but a painting. Our endeavor at this moment is brought forth entirely from a painting.

The ten names and the three cognitions are a painting on a scroll. The virtues, the powers, the methods, and the noble path are also a painting on a scroll. If you say a painting is not real, then the myriad things are not real. If the myriad things are not real, then buddha dharma is not real. As buddha dharma is real, a painted rice cake is real.

Yunmen, Great Master Kuangzhen, was once asked by a monk, “What is your statement about going beyond buddhas and surpassing the ancestors?”

The master said, “A sesame rice cake.”

Quietly examine these words. When this sesame rice cake is actualized, an ancient teacher gives expression to going beyond buddhas and surpassing the ancestors. An iron person asks this question and students understand it. Thus, this expression is complete. Opening the matter and hurling it back as a sesame rice cake is itself two or three painted rice cakes. Yunmen’s is a statement that goes beyond buddhas and surpasses ancestors—an activity that enters buddhas and enters demons.

Rujing, my late master, said, “A tall bamboo and a plantain enter a painting.”

This phrase means that things beyond measure are actualized together in a painting. A tall bamboo is long. Although it is moved by yin and yang, the months and years of the tall bamboo move yin and yang. The months and years of yin and yang are beyond measure. Although the great sages understand yin and yang, they cannot measure it. Yin and yang are all-inclusive phenomena, all-inclusive scale, and the all-inclusive way.

Yin and yang spoken of here have nothing to do with views held by those outside the way or those in the Two Vehicles. Yin and yang belong to the tall bamboo. They are the passage of time of the tall bamboo, and the world of the tall bamboo. All buddhas of the ten directions are the family of the tall bamboo.

Know that the entire heaven and earth are the roots, stem, branches, and leaves of the tall bamboo. This makes heaven and earth timeless; this makes the great oceans, Mt. Sumeru, and the worlds of the ten directions indestructible. A walking stick and an arched bamboo staff are old and beyond old.

A plantain has earth, water, fire, air, and emptiness, as well as mind, consciousness, and wisdom as its roots, stems, branches, leaves, flowers, fruits, colors, and forms. Accordingly, the plantain wears the autumn wind and is torn in the autumn wind. We know that it is pure and clear and that not a single particle is excluded.

There is no muscle in the eye. There is no pigment in the paints. This is emancipation right here. As emancipation is not a matter of time, it is not concerned with a discussion of a certain moment or instant. Taking up this understanding, make earth, water, fire, and air your vital activity; make mind, consciousness, and wisdom your great death. In this manner, the activities of the [buddha] house have been passed on with spring, autumn, winter, and summer as furnishings [essentials].

Now, the fluctuations of the tall bamboo and the plantain are a painting. Those who experience great awakening upon hearing the sound of bamboo, whether they are snakes or dragons [ordinary or extraordinary practitioners], are all paintings. Do not doubt it with the limited view that separates ordinary from sacred.

That bamboo pole is just long. This pole is just short. This pole is just long. That pole is just short. As these are all paintings, the painted forms of long and short always accord with each other. When you paint something long, you cannot help but painting something short. Thoroughly investigate the meaning of this. As the entire world and all phenomena are a painting, human existence appears from a painting, and buddha ancestors are actualized from a painting.

Since this is so, there is no remedy for satisfying hunger other than a painted rice cake. Without painted hunger you never become a true person. There is no understanding other than painted satisfaction. In fact, satisfying hunger, satisfying beyond hunger, not satisfying hunger, and not satisfying beyond hunger cannot be attained or spoken of without painted hunger. For now, study all of these as a painted rice cake.

When you understand this teaching with your body and mind, you will thoroughly experience the ability to turn things and be turned by things. If this is not done, the power of the study of the way is not yet realized. To enact this ability is to actualize the painting of enlightenment.

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