

# Listening to the Voice of the Camphor Tree

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He has authored numerous works, including *Sangai-Kyo no Kenkyu (A Study on the Three Levels Movement)* and *Kegon-Kyo wo Yomu (Reading Kegon-Kyo)*.

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## Prologue

A small, single seed<sup>1</sup> is sowed in the great wilderness of Musashino.  
What seems an eternity passes as it grows to become a camphor tree,  
a cradle for long-term thoughts.  
Watching the process of life and death continuing for generations,  
the camphor quietly closes its mouth and watches words continuously form  
the artificiality of the world that never ceases.

Seeing before its eyes the start of a countdown  
to the limit of the artificial world that words have created,  
it opens its mouth for the first time:

I wish to live in a true world.  
I wish to come upon true words.  
I wish to deliver words of truth.

Driven by such thoughts,  
illuminated by the moonlight that motivates it  
to have the courage to speak,  
it opens a mouth that it does not have.

Hoping that all life forms which exist in this endless world as it stands  
will be born in peace, thrive in tranquility, rest in comfort in death  
and carry on to an eternal future.

## Welcome to Camphor Tree Village

Camphor Tree Village is where lives connect around a camphor tree. In this village, all actions begin by listening carefully. It is not to pay attention to the things that register from moment to moment through the sensory organs but through the entire being. Life forms open up every pore within—every single part of their bodies—and listen to the voices of the world, the unheard, the nameless, and everything in the world as it stands. It is the teachings of the unnamed to determine words.

To listen carefully is to question. To question the self and the world. It is not one to question the

self or question the world, nor question the self and the world. It is to question the relation between the self and the world with our all pores open. There is no self nor a world that questions or is questioned.

Words are cruel. Falsities begin the moment the world becomes an object. However, great wisdom has recognized falsities as such while earnestly portraying the truth.

As an extreme verbalization, the truth about the self and the world felt as a whole has led to the creation of the word, *dependent co-arising*, identifying itself as the ultimate word to us, who can only be convinced of the true world as it stands through separated words<sup>2</sup>.

Listening carefully is an act of humility. Self-centered worlds cannot essentially exist because to be self-centered is to close the pores in one's life. The self cannot live without involvement with a versatile world.

#### Gather at Camphor Village

Listen carefully

Open up your pores

Question the self and the world as a whole

Be humble!

The camphor tree is a tree that symbolizes the eternal flow of time.

It stands for our ancestors who have wholeheartedly wished for a better world and questioned the self and the world.

Wishing a better future, it is a perch where beings that strive to live today may rest.

For those born tomorrow, it is a tree that stores water and is filled with the voices of life forms that have no names.

#### Significant questions that echo in the village<sup>3</sup>

For all life forms in this world,

what is a comforting home?

What does it mean to come home with peace of mind?

What does it mean to become a guide?

What does it mean to be a light that illuminates the darkness?<sup>4</sup>

The leaves of the camphor tree sway in the wind and continue to ask questions—questions for it to face truths and questions as it continues attempting to examine the paths it has taken. Villagers humbly focus on listening to the questions as the voices of their fine forebearers who had once walked these paths lead the way. Humbly and earnestly, the villagers continue to live.

In Camphor Village, questions and hopes echo in all directions. It is a place where an endless world opens up. It is a place of gathering where individuals ask questions, think, act, give form to those thoughts, and re-examine in symbolic spirals. Led by wisdom and mercy without barriers, we shall continue to walk together while listening to the hopes of our forebearers.

## Lending an ear to the world as it stands

The world as is before we sense, recognize, and verbalize it. Let us call that a world of indiscretion. The world itself before we have made it an object. And when that world of indiscretion is dualized by words and made an object, it will become a magma that generates all types of desires and obsessions.

All the goings-on in the beginningless universe prompt everything in the now and all that exist as connected dependent co-arising to subsist. This universe now exists when the generation, change, and obliteration of all phenomena are unerringly accepted, with the self at the juncture of connected dependent co-arising. The significant co-arising in the entire universe in terms of time and space, the goings-on of different energies aligning and realigning, and a magnificent world as a symphony miraculously exist. The attempt to use language to behold that vast symphony as a fabrication, the birth of a separated world.

A small and nameless insect flies before my eyes, incessantly flying around my face and breaking my thoughts. It says to me that it is not the one who is breaking my thoughts, that I am the one who is interrupting my world as I fly around it. Dividing the world and bisecting it into benefits and futility, advantages and disadvantages, and usefulness and uselessness, when no existence is essentially a hindrance.

The small insect is gone before I realize it. The world that had been so divided has now become quiet. What was it that had bisected the world as it exists?

For more than twenty-five hundred years since the appearance of Gautama Buddha, endeavors have been made to discard words through the truth that Buddha has awakened to (Buddha Dharma), approaches to walking on thin ice that is language and cross an undivided world in its natural state,

the extremities of discourse, and through words— through the ultimate words available at each particular time.

The worldview of dependent co-arising has been revealed for the incidence of my suffering. The doctrine that *this exists if that exists* (B is the result of cause A) had been a basic way to say that suffering occurs due to earthly desires such as desire, anger, and ignorance. Conversely, it also serves as a guide to do away with suffering, that *this does not exist if that does not*.

However, in explaining multiple dependent originations, such as A to B and B to C, by materializing the elements A, B, and C and also materializing the various factors that comprise A, B, and C, new separations have also occurred, contrary to our understanding of the world as it exists. *Emptiness* is the thought device for taking these reflux phenomena for understanding the world back to its genuine grasp. Neither A, B, nor C exists anywhere as a solitary element apart from others. Rather than as an existence that lets itself go as it stands, free from multiple and linear views of dependent origination where countless things are enclosed, each co-exists in interrelation. All is one, and all is one—a linguistic activity to mutually earnestly revive the world as it is where beings resonate and mutually connect.

## Listening carefully to the voices of others without boundary

Those who have come into contact with the world as it is, a world of truth and indiscriminate wisdom, will open up words of compassion without boundaries.

“To any living creature, whether frightened or formidable, long or large, short or medium, nanosized, coarse, visible or invisible, living near or far, already born or preparing to be born—all life forms: be happy<sup>5</sup>.”

The wishes of those who awaken as they are do not choose their objects. Therefore, all that exists in this world and all living things that will exist in the future are prayed *to be happy*, whether small or large, near or far, seen or unseen, born or unborn, with no discrimination by subject; we pray for equal happiness for all.

Compassion spreads to the living, the elements that comprise the living, the deceased, the air, the water, tiles, and stones. Those who have awakened to Buddha Dharma will be freed from collective sentient beings, the elements they consist of, and becoming their objectification and becoming one with the world. As everything is empty in that they are separated from the thoughts and attachments to the contrary, they are unrelated in that they do not become objects. We shall call the compassion of the awakened the Eyes of Buddha. No existence will be an object of these eyes, which shall not

see, hear, know, or recognize them as objects<sup>6</sup>.

Compassion based on Buddha Dharma goes beyond the love that is lavished on specific subjects and may be described as an activity of relationships with others related to physical, verbal, and psychological activities (the three intentional actions of the body, speech, and mind) carried out in indiscriminate equality and non-attachment. Great compassion is the heart of great desire and the sense of indiscriminate compassion that opens up when the vows are completed.

## Dana and Ahimsa

The voice of the camphor tree reverberates, and the activities of asking questions while listening carefully become one with the activities of Dana (gift-giving) and Ahimsa (nonviolence). Let us listen to the wisdom and compassion of Buddha Dharma and use Dana and Ahimsa as our strength for a change in our behavior. Our good ancestors have continued verbalizing Buddha Dharma as indiscriminate wisdom and sent it to us as we live today. They have cherished plants, animals, and the global environment forever and delivered them to us today. What can we pass on to the future to become good ancestors? Our practices of Dana will be questioned.

What we hear when we listen carefully to the wisdom and compassion of Buddha Dharma is the fact that all living things and the environmental world are interconnected. It is a bodily attempt to close that world with a self-centered attitude. Dana and Ahimsa are behavioral devices that allow such self to participate in the opening of the world.

Buddha Dharma does not discriminate but verbalizes for the sake of those who live in a world of judgment and identifies itself through non-discriminatory wisdom and compassion for the extremity of the discourse of auspicious, emptiness, and no-self, prompting behaviors of Dana and Ahimsa as the best course of action for continuing to relate with others. Therefore, engagement with others is the only way for the self to become self and have better relationships with others truly, and there is no other way than to adjust one's behavior against the behavioral principles of Dana and Ahimsa.

## Life in Dana

Dana as the first principle of action based on dependent co-arising and compassion:

For those who search for the truth, Dana genuinely becomes a practice of joy and nurtures that

person. The individual becomes a great practitioner of Dana and lets go of self, and everything they believe belongs to them, indiscriminately giving grace to all living things. Dana has no regrets and seeks no rewards. It does not expect honor or profit. Instead, it earnestly saves, protects, and settles all living things and becomes the life force of that being, practicing Dana with such underlying wishes<sup>7</sup>.

Those who live in search of the truth free themselves from those who practice Dana, receive Dana, the objects and events given, the act of Dana itself, its results, and all bifurcated activities that exist linguistically through the practice of Dana<sup>8</sup>.

Let us consider and count Dana passed down from our good ancestors one by one and see how they have appeared. Then, we will see them within life in nature, plants, animals, and mother earth. We all live in the great Dana as we are born and eventually die. Dana is also the activities of our good ancestors that we have cherished to this day without wasting, destroying, or depleting. Everything we enjoy today manifests as the finest Dana. In the long history of humankind, war, peace, plunder, and transfer that have been carried on emerge as Dana when those in the present seek meaning from history. If humanity is to seek meaning in all the activities it has continued to engage in—ideas, religions, cultures, arts, politics, economics, education, productivity, they will become Dana that encourages awakening.

The Dana that those who live in the present can give those who will live in the future must not be Dana that may only exist as a meaning for beings to live in the future. Life forms of the future must first act to maintain the world for its potential survival. In that sense, the Dana that those who live today may perform differs in quality from the Dana that those who lived in the past can give us in the present.

What is the Dana that those who will live in the future give us?

Brakes are applied wordlessly when one's desires drive them out of control. That is the Dana that the future gives us. We receive the Dana of the future when we awaken with the thought not to run wild and out of control and live modestly.

## Living with Ahimsa

Another principle of behavior open to others in looking toward the future is Ahimsa (nonviolence).

Full of true wisdom and compassion, Buddha speaks of Ahimsa as follows: All fear violence and all fear death. One must put themselves in the other's shoes and refrain from killing or allowing others to kill. All are in fear of violence. Life is precious for all (living creatures). One must put themselves in the other's shoes and refrain from killing or allowing others to kill<sup>9</sup>.

One must not kill living creatures (from their initiative), allow others to kill, or accept killings by others. One must prevent violence against all living creatures, whether strong or fearful<sup>10</sup>.

Let us mutually respect each other and allow every being to live while considering the miraculous fact that lives have been present since the beginning of the universe. *Living without killing* is a way of life for becoming a good ancestor and creating rather than killing future lives. It is also a way of life that does not waste the voices of the countless good ancestors who lived in the past and were killed as innocent. This is a mindfulness of the endless lives which have made our lives what they are, and also for mourning the deaths of good ancestors. Finally, it is a nonviolent way of life without killing those with whom we co-exist at this moment.

The leaves sway on the camphor tree.

Depart from the violent looting of the lives of others, the infliction of pain and violence, and the violent fulfillment of one's desires; abstain from physical acts (parting with physical violence), words (parting with verbal violence), and thoughts (parting with psychological violence).

The behavioral principles of Ahimsa (nonviolence) extend to not stealing.

Those who listen to the teachings should know to avoid taking things they are not given, regardless of who or where they are. Neither must they allow others to take or bear away. Anything that is not given to them must not be taken<sup>11</sup>.

Those who live in search of the truth must remove themselves from killing any form of life, remove themselves from and abandon all weapons, remove the enemy label, settle emotions of anger or resentment, and feel horrifying fear and regret for forcefully causing the death of any living being, which will never return to its previous state. Furthermore, they must generate a mind of compassion for living things, always seek comfort for others, and never cause sentient beings to be troubled by evil minds. Furthermore, it is absurd to them cause harm<sup>12</sup>.

A king named Hundun, who rested in a magnificent world without classifications, invited and welcomed kings from the north and south who greatly loved separation. Relaxing in eternity in a



world with no classifications, the kings from the north and south discussed if there was a good return gift. Hundun had no sensory organs, so they offered to make holes in his body and open a hole a day: those for the eyes and ears, nostrils, and nose, opening a hole each day for a total of seven holes in seven days. When they finished, Hundun was dead<sup>13</sup>.

Did the kings from the north and south perform Dana or a killing? Humanity has continued to open countless holes that cannot be recovered, believing it is for their good and displaying smoke screens with beautiful words such as comfort, convenience, prosperity, justice, and beauty. Meanwhile, there is hunger, poverty, inequality, discrimination, war, a worsening global environment, the depletion of resources, and the extinction of rare species. The kings from the north and south had made those holes as a gift to Hundun, who had no sensory organs that would allow him to make distinctions. Listen carefully to the voice of Hundun—one who has already perished.

We may only continue to listen intently. We may only continue to give our undivided attention to listen carefully to the voices of those who are dying and those who have passed away. As long as we are alive, it is impossible never to kill a living thing, including plants and animals. Rather, the reality is that our lives exist based on the killing of others and the lives of those whose lives have been thrown toward us. The fact of life contradicts the continuation of other lives and that of our own. However, listening to voiceless voices pleading not to be killed and continuing to question the self as one cannot live without killing at all, listening to the cries of the dying, and vowing to move forward, even if only in small steps, toward non-killing—to say the least, killing between humans is not indispensable for the survival of humanity. If such is the case, should we not set that as a minimal principle for behavior? Then, the cries of the camphor trees begin to sound.

## Epilogue

The camphor tree, rising in the Musashino wilderness  
watching over the appearance of young lives for a century  
The demise of fair maidens<sup>14</sup> is the hardest to bear.

Let us convey our regret and never repeat the tragedies  
and tell their stories forever  
Those learning from the wilderness of truth  
guided by indiscriminating wisdom and compassion  
while asking Dana and Ahimsa questions about living

and listening carefully.

[The Wilderness of Truth]

Feeling the flower petals, walking through the wilderness of truth

Solemn in the moment

I will dedicate my young life

as the weight of my lifetime

to that path of truth (Buddha) forever more (Lyrics by Ryujo Yamada)

In the hundred-year history of Musashino University, three particularly sad incidents come to mind. One was the Great Kanto Earthquake on September 1, 1923, before Musashino Women's School was established. The second was the loss of four precious lives—four students at Musashino Senior High School for Women after a bomb was dropped on the Musashino campus on December 3, 1944, during the Second World War. The third was during the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, the year before the Ariake Campus was opened.

As Musashino University marks its centenary in 2024 and proceeds toward its next century, there are bound to be unexpected hardships lying in wait. Buddha Dharma will surely be a rock to turn to at those times. It will present itself and guide us when we struggle in a sea of bitterness.

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1. Musashino University was founded in 1924 as Musashino Women's School in the precincts of Tsukiji Hongwanji Temple in Tokyo by globally renowned Buddhist scholar Junjiro Takakusu. Since then, it has offered educational activities in the spirit of character development based on Buddhist philosophies for a hundred years. It moved to the Musashino Campus in 1929. On the east side of the Musashino Campus, which retains its former appearance, is Koundai, where the founder once lived. In front of it stands a camphor tree, estimated to be over a hundred years old. Spanning a century, this tree has quietly watched young people develop and move on based on Buddha Dharma (Buddha's awakening).

2. *Awakening of Faith in Mahayana*, cherished as a compendium of Mahayana Buddhism chiefly in the East Asia world, explains the relationship between the true world as it stands (Shinnyo, suchness) and language as follows: “*All Dharma should be separated from the aspects of discourse, the aspects of surnames, and the aspects of the mind and connections (with the mind as an object), be unfalteringly indiscriminating, non-destructive, to be the of One Mind, thus called Shinnyo (suchness). As all discourses are temporary names without substance that follow and blindly accept delusions, the term*

*Shinnyo (suchness) also does not exist. Therefore, the extreme point of discourse is that words are the origin, and thus words are offered.*” (Taisho Daizokyo, volume 32, p.576)

3. *The Larger Sutra on Amitāyus* contains a passage: “*True voices echo across the world,*” that truths to which Buddha has awakened and the loud sounds of wishes heard by listening intently to the voice of the camphor tree resonate in all directions.

4. See the following question in *Jogyobon: the pure practice of Kagen-Kyo*. What is Bodhisattva becoming a building for sentient beings, a salvation, a return, a place to visit, and a torch; the brightness, a light, a guide, and the ultimate awakening? (Taisho Daizokyo, volume 9, p.430)

5. *Buddha no Kotoba: Suttanipāta (in Japanese) (The Words of Buddha)*, Chapter 1: *Chapter on the snake; 8. Affection* (p.37, translated by Hajime Nakamura, published by Iwanami Bunko)

6. *The Great Perfection of Wisdom Treatise*, vol. 40, explains the three acts of compassion as follows: *There are three types of compassion. Small compassion for sentient beings, the medium-level compassion for the constituent elements of existence, and great compassion for making nothing one’s object.* An ordinary one has compassion for sentient beings. Then, through a process of *Learning (shomon)*, *Realization (engaku)*, and *Bodhisattva (bosatsu)*, one comes to have compassion for elements of existence. As the Buddhas are completely empty to practice virtuously (separate from any thoughts and attachments to objects), they are not unconnected (in the sense that they do not make anything their objects). Thus, we shall call Buddha’s compassion Buddha’s eye. I shall explain where Buddha’s eye is used, as I have already explained it. There is no elemental existence for this eye (as an object); it is not seen, heard, known about, or become aware of (as an object). (Taisho Daizokyo, volume 25, p.350)

7. The *ten stages of practice* in *Kegon-Kyo* explain actions of offerings as follows: *These are the joys of Bodhisattva Mahasattva. This Bodhisattva becomes a great practitioner and will eliminate all his possessions and bless all sentient beings with the same mind. In the end, it will neither repent, seek karmic retribution, seek honor, seek to be born in a victorious place, nor seek benefits. It aims to save all sentient beings, embrace all sentient beings, let all sentient beings flourish, study, consider deeply and remember the practices of all Buddhas, acquire, assume control of, and manifest the pure practices of Buddhas, preach the practices widely, and do everything to remove themselves from suffering and obtain happiness. That is what is called Bodhisattva Mahasattva’s practices of extreme joy.*” (Taisho Daizokyo, volume 9, p.466)

8. The *ten acts of practice* in *Kegon-Kyo* explains as follows: When a Bodhisattva views things about an offering, he does not see who gives, who receives, what is received, nor the possibility of receiving something in return. Neither does he see his karma, the results, the fruits, whether great or small. He sets himself apart from seeing. (*Taisho Daizokyo, volume 9, p.467*)

9. *Buddha's words of truth, Violence* (p.28, translated by Hajime Nakamura, published by Iwanami Bunko)

10. *Buddha no Kotoba: Suttanipāta (The Words of Buddha), Chapter 2: A Small Chapter; 14, Dhammika* (p.81, translated by Hajime Nakamura, published by Iwanami Bunko)

11. *Buddha no Kotoba: Suttanipāta (2. A Small Chapter; 14, Dhammika)* (p.82, translated by Hajime Nakamura, published by Iwanami Bunko)

12. *Kegon-Kyo, Dasabhumikasutra*, says the following: “Distance all killings, discard canes and swords, eliminate thoughts of resentment, recognize shame and fear of wrongs with all living things, feel compassion for all sentient beings, always seek pleasures for sentient beings, refrain from troubling sentient beings, and harm should never be inflicted.” (*Taisho Daizokyo, volume 9, p.548*)

13. Reference: *Soji. Naihen* by Mitsuji Fukunaga (pp.337-340, a selection of 12 Chinese Classics, Asahi Bunko)

14. On December 3, 1944, during the Second World War, four students at Musashino Women's Senior High School, Miyo Akazawa, Ritsuko Kobayashi, Akiko Saito, and Naoko Nakane lost their precious lives when a bomb was dropped on the Musashino Campus.