

On Reading Scriptures

(*Kankin*)

Translator’s Introduction: In this discourse, Dōgen takes up both the literal and the non-literal meanings of ‘reading Scriptures’, as well as various forms of ceremonial involved with the reading of Scriptures in monastic life.

The training that we undertake to directly experience supreme, fully perfected enlightenment sometimes makes use of our good spiritual friends and sometimes makes use of *sutras*. ‘Our good spiritual friends’ refers to the Buddhas and Ancestors, those who have completely realized their True Self. ‘*Sutras*’ is a technical term for Scriptural texts, which are spiritually complete in and of Themselves. Because Self Nature is what all Buddhas and Ancestors are and because Self Nature is what all Scriptures are, this is the way all things are. We speak of Their ‘Self’, but It is a Self that is beyond any adherence to ‘self and other’, for It is Their penetrating Eye, Their emancipating Fist.¹

At the same time, there is the practice of calling the Scriptures to mind, of reading Them, chanting Them, copying Them, accepting Them, and preserving Them, which all together comprise the training to directly experience what the Buddhas and Ancestors experienced. Nonetheless, encountering the Buddha’s Scriptures is no easy matter. As they say, “In countless lands, not even as much as Their names can be heard,” and “Even among Buddhas and Ancestors, not even Their names can be heard,” and “Within the lifeblood of our Ancestral line, not even Their names can be heard.” When we are not a Buddha or an Ancestor, we do not see or hear the Scriptures, read or chant Them, or explain Their meaning. As soon as we have begun to investigate the Buddhas and Ancestors through our training, then, with some considerable difficulty, we begin to explore and train with Scriptural texts. At this time, what manifests before us are the hearing, keeping to, accepting, and expounding of the Scriptures that we experience within our ears, our eyes, our tongue, our nose, our body, our mind, no matter what place we go to, or

1. The eyes of Masters were commonly associated with seeing the essence of the Dharma, whereas the raising of a fist was often used by Masters to show that ‘That Which Is’ is beyond words or conceptual thought.

listen from, or speak at. Because those folks who expound non-Buddhist theories and interpretations are seeking a name for themselves, they cannot put the Buddha's true purpose into practice. That is why the Scriptures have been passed on and preserved on trees and on rocks, why They have spread through field and town, why They are presented to us by worlds of dust motes, and why They are opened up and lectured on by boundless space.



Great Master Igen, our ancient Ancestor of Yakusan Mountain, absented himself from the Dharma Hall for a long time. So the temple's Prior said to him, "Venerable Monk, the whole assembly has for ever so long looked forward to your compassionate instruction."

Yakusan said, "Ring the summoning bell."

The Prior rang the bell. The whole assembly had barely gathered together when Yakusan entered the hall. No sooner had he taken his seat, than he forthwith got up and returned to the Abbot's quarters. Following after him, the Prior said, "Venerable Monk, just a moment ago you promised to give voice to the Dharma for the sake of the assembly, so why have you not conferred a single word on us?"

Yakusan replied, "The Scriptures have teachers of Scripture and the commentaries have teachers of commentary. So, how can you possibly have doubts about the old monk?"²

Whenever the Great Master gave compassionate instruction, the Fist had Its Fist teacher and the Eye had Its Eye teacher. Be that as it may, what the Prior should have respectfully put to the Great Master at that moment was, "It is not that I have had doubts arise about the Venerable Monk, but rather, I wonder what the Venerable Monk is a teacher of?"



In the assembly of the lofty Ancestor Enō, founder of the monastery on Mount Sōkei in Shin-chou Province, a monk named Hōtatsu, who could recite the whole of the *Lotus Scripture* by heart, had come to train under the Master. The Founding Ancestor gave voice to the following poem for Hōtatsu's benefit:

2. Yakusan's question has a double meaning: "What makes you doubt that your Abbot is doing his job?" and "Why do you doubt that Buddha Nature (The Old Monk) has Its teachers, just as the Scriptures and the commentaries have theirs?"

*When the mind wanders onto deluded paths,
It is being set in motion by the flowering of the Dharma;
When the heart awakens,
The Dharma's flowering is set in motion.*

*However long you recite this Scripture, should it be while
still unawakened to the Self that is true,
You will then create an enemy to Its meaning.
To read It without opinion's bonds is the proper way,
But read It bound to fixed ideas, and It becomes error's
way.*

*When you cease to judge whether you are bound or not,
You ride forever long within the cart by the White Ox
drawn.*

Thus, the deluded mind is turned around by the Flowering of the Dharma, and the awakened mind sets the flowering of the Dharma in motion. And further, when we leap beyond 'deluded versus awakened', the Flowering of the Dharma sets the flowering of the Dharma in motion.

When Hōtatsu heard this poem, he leapt for joy and presented the following poem in praise of it:

*The three thousand times that I have recited this
Scripture
Have been surpassed by Enō's solitary verse.
Because I was not yet clear as to the purpose of my
coming into this world,
How was I to halt the folly of my troubled life?
'Sheep', 'deer', and 'ox' provide but expedient means.
At beginning, middle, and end, they promote the virtuous
and the good.
Who within the burning house know
That, from the first, they are lords within the Dharma?*

The Founding Ancestor then said, "From now on, it would be good to refer to you as 'the Monk Who Calls the Lotus Scripture to Mind.'"

You should recognize that in the Buddha's Way there is the monk who calls the Lotus Scripture to mind. This is directly pointed to by Enō, our Old Buddha of Sōkei. The 'calling to mind' in this 'monk who calls the Lotus Scripture to mind' points to one who is beyond 'holding to opinions' and beyond 'being free of

opinions'. He is no longer involved in measuring by means of 'holding to' or 'being free'. This means, simply, that as the Founding Ancestor once said, "From eon to eon, we do not let this Scripture book out of our hands, and, both day and night, there is no time when we do not call this Scripture to mind." In other words, from Scripture to Scripture, there is no time when we are not This Scripture.



The Twenty-seventh Ancestor, the Venerable Hannyatara of eastern India, was once invited to dine with an eastern Indian king.³ After the meal, the king asked her, "All the other monks have recited Scriptures to me, so why have you alone not recited them?"

The Ancestor replied, "In my humble way, what I breathe out does not conform itself to external conditions and events, and what I breathe in does not take up residence in the realm of my skandhas.* The Scriptures that I recite are always like this. Thus they are comprised of hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of scrolls, not just one or two scrolls."

The Venerable Hannyatara was a seedling that sprouted up in a kingdom in eastern India. She was a direct descendant of the twenty-seventh generation from the Venerable Makakashyō. She had had properly Transmitted to her all the necessary equipment of the Buddha's family, having in her charge a monk's Head, Eye, Fist, Nose, traveling staff, alms bowl, robe, Dharma, Bones, and Marrow. She is our Founding Ancestor, and we are her distant descendants. What the Venerable One is now putting her full strength into saying is that not only does what she exhales not conform itself to external conditions, but external conditions do not conform themselves to what she exhales. Even though external conditions comprise her head and eyes, her whole body, and her whole heart and mind, her carrying them about when she comes, when she departs, and when she comes back again are simply her 'not conforming herself to external conditions'. 'Not conforming oneself' means going along with completely; thus, it means participating in the rough and tumble of daily life.⁴ Even though her breathing out was an external condition, it was her not conforming herself to external conditions. Innumerable

3. There is a long-standing Indian tradition which holds that Hannyatara was a female monk who was renowned for her extraordinary spiritual prowess.

* See *Glossary*.

4. That is, Buddhism is not a form of quietism or stoicism, nor is it the trainee's goal to become a doormat.

eons have come and gone, but people have not yet understood the ebb and flow of breathing in and breathing out. Be that as it may, the moment has come, right now, when you can understand it for the first time, so pay attention to ‘not taking up residence in the realm of one’s skandhas’ and to ‘not conforming oneself to external conditions’. This is the moment when external conditions, for the first time, permit the exploration of such things as ‘breathing in’. This moment has never been before, and it may never be again: it is just now.

‘The realm of the skandhas’ refers to our five skandhas, namely, our physical form, our sensory perceptions, our mental conceptions, our volition, and our consciousness. The reason why she does not reside in these five skandhas is because she is in a realm that the five skandhas have not yet reached. Because she chose the right key to unlock this, the Scriptures that she recited were not merely one or two scrolls; they were hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of scrolls which she was continually reciting. Although ‘hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of scrolls’ gives us the general idea of ‘many’, it is not just some measurement of ‘many’. Her ‘not taking up residence in the realm of her skandhas’ made her exhalation of a single breath equivalent to hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of scrolls. At the same time, this is not something which can be measured by discernment that is either tainted or untainted, nor is it to be found in the realm where thoughts and things are either tainted or untainted. As a consequence, it is beyond the measurements of what one having intelligence knows, beyond the conjectures of what one having knowledge discerns, beyond the considerations of what one lacking intelligence knows, and beyond the reach of what one who is ignorant discerns. It is what Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor trained to realize: it is Their Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow, Their Eye and Fist, Their Head and Nose, Their traveling staff* and ceremonial hossu,* Their leaping beyond and Their every little bit of behavior.



Once when Great Master Jōshū was at Kannon-in Temple, there was an old woman who sent the Great Master an offering of monetary alms along with a request that he recite the whole of the *Tripitaka** for her.

The Master came down from his meditation seat, circled once around it, and then turned to her messenger and said, “I have already finished reciting the *Tripitaka* for her.”

The messenger, upon his return, reported this to the old woman. The old woman said, “When I asked him the other day to recite all of

the *Tripitaka* for me, why did the venerable monk read only half the Scriptures?”⁵

In speaking of reciting the whole *Tripitaka* or reciting just half of It, it is clear that, for the old woman, the Scriptures were simply ‘three scrolls’, whereas, for Jōshū, saying that he had already finished reciting the *Tripitaka* showed that his Scripture encompassed the whole of the *Tripitaka*. In sum, as to the plight of reciting the whole *Tripitaka*, there is Jōshū who is circling his meditation seat, there is his meditation seat which is encircling Jōshū, there is Jōshū who is circling Jōshū, and there is his meditation seat which is encircling his meditation seat. Be that as it may, his reciting the whole *Tripitaka* is not just his circling around his meditation seat, nor is it just his meditation seat doing the circling.



Great Master Daizui Shinshō of Ekishū Province was an heir of Meditation Master Chōkei Daian. As in the previous narrative, there was once an old woman who sent the Master an offering of monetary alms along with a request for him to recite the whole of the *Tripitaka* for her.

The Master came down from his meditation seat and circled it once, then, turning to her messenger, said to him, “I have already finished reciting the *Tripitaka* for her.”

The messenger, upon his return, reported this to the old woman. The old woman said, “When I asked him the other day to recite all of the *Tripitaka* for me, why did the venerable monk read only half the Scriptures?”

Now, do not focus your inquiry on Daizui’s circling his meditation seat, or focus it on the meditation seat’s encircling Daizui, as in the previous narrative. It is not just a matter of the perfect roundness of his Fist and Eye; it is his walking in a circle, which has made a circular form. But did the old woman have the Eye to see that, or was she not yet equipped with that Eye? For even though her remark, “He only recited half the *Tripitaka*,” correctly Transmitted what was being stated by Daizui’s Fist, she should have said, “When I asked him the other day to recite the *Tripitaka* for me, why did the venerable monk only waste time fooling around?” Had she put the Matter* like this, even accidentally, she would have been an old woman who was equipped with the Eye.

5. She is saying, in effect, “Why did he do only half the job?”



There was once a government official who provided our Founding Ancestor, Great Master Tōzan Ryōkai, with an alms meal and a votive offering of monetary alms, asking the Master if he would read or recite the *Tripitaka* for his benefit.

The Great Master got down from his meditation seat and, turning towards the official, silently nodded his head.⁶

The official nodded his head to the Great Master.

Leading the official, the Master took both of them around the meditation seat for one circling and then, turning to the official, he nodded his head. After a rather long time, he asked the official, “Did you understand?”

The official answered, “No, I didn’t understand.”

The Master said, “You and I have read and recited the whole of the *Tripitaka*, so why did you not understand?”

This “You and I have read and recited the whole of the *Tripitaka*” is clear enough. Do not consider their going around the meditation seat as their reading and reciting the *Tripitaka*; do not understand their reading and reciting the *Tripitaka* as their going around the meditation seat. Instead, we should listen to the compassionate instruction of our Founding Ancestor.

This incident was cited by my late Master, the Old Buddha, when he was residing on Mount Tendō. A Korean donor had presented him with a votive offering of monetary alms along with the request that the whole community recite a Scripture and that the Master give a Dharma talk from his meditation seat. Having finished recounting this story, my late Master drew a large circle in the air with his ceremonial *hossu* and said, “Today I, Tendō, along with you, have read and recited the whole of the *Tripitaka*.” He then laid his *hossu* to one side and came down from his seat.

We should now study what my late Master said, without comparing it with the sayings of others. Still, in his reading and reciting the whole of the *Tripitaka*, did he use a whole Eye or only half of It? Did what our Founding Ancestor said and what my late Master said involve the use of their Eye or the use of their tongue? And to what extent did they come to use them? Do your utmost to see!

6. Upon being offered alms by a lay person, a monk customarily performs *monjin*. That is, he makes a deep bow from the waist, with hands held in the prayer-like *gasshō* position. The nod spoken of here and later in the text refers to a slight nodding of the head, with the hands usually held in *shashu*. The head nod was used as a simple form of greeting or acknowledgment whilst in the Monks’ Hall.



Great Master Igen, our ancient Ancestor of Yakusan Mountain, was in the habit of not permitting his monks to read Scriptures. One day, when he himself was holding a Scripture in his hands and reading it, a monk asked him, “Venerable Monk, you are in the habit of not permitting us to read Scriptures, so why are you reading one?”

The Master replied, “I just want to shield my eyes.”

The monk asked, “May I take a lesson from the Venerable Monk and do likewise?”

The Master replied, “If you were to read, it would surely be enough to pierce holes even through the hide of an ox.”⁷

The phrase, “I wish to shield my eyes,” is what the shielded Eye Itself utters. ‘To shield one’s Eye’ means to forget all about ‘eyes’ and to forget all about ‘Scriptures’; it means to shield our whole Eye and to shield It completely. It means to open the Eye while we are shielding It, to enliven our Eye within our shielding of It, to enliven our shielding of It within the Eye Itself, to add another eyelid to our eyelids, to make the most of our Eye within our shielding It, and to let the Eye Itself make the most of Its being shielded. Thus, if it is not a Scripture for the Eye, the function of shielding the Eye does not yet exist.

“You would surely pierce through the hide of an ox” refers to the hide of the Whole Ox, and to the whole hide of the Ox, and to making use of the Ox to make a hide. Thus we make hide, flesh, bones, and marrow, along with horns and nostrils, into the living measure of the Ox. When taking a lesson from the venerable monk, the Ox becomes the Eye—this is to be understood as ‘shielding the Eye’: it is the Eye becoming the Ox.



Meditation Master Yafu Dōsen once said in verse:

*You may well ask, “Boundless are the merits of offerings made
to the countless Buddhas,*

*But how can they possibly resemble the merits from continually
reading Their ancient instructions*

Whose words are written in ink upon white paper?”

Well, open your eyes and look at what is right in front of you!

7. In accord with Dōgen’s later discussion, what the Master is actually saying is “If you were to truly read—that is, to read with the Eye of wise discernment—you would be able to penetrate the Scripture (the hide) and see Buddha Nature (the Ox) in it.

You need to recognize that the blessings and merit from making offerings to the ancient Buddhas and from reading Their ancient instructions stand shoulder-to-shoulder with each other, and even go beyond blessings and merit. What people call ‘ancient instructions’ are the inked words written on white paper, but who can understand these as Their Age-old Instruction? You need to train until you thoroughly understand this very principle.



In the monastery of Great Master Ungo Dōyō there was once a monk who was in his quarters chanting a Scripture. The Great Master, from outside the window, asked him, “What Scripture is the acharya* reciting?”

The monk replied, “The *Vimalakirti** Scripture.”

The Master said, “I am not asking you if it is the *Vimalakirti* Scripture. What you are reciting is a Scripture of What!”

Thereupon, this monk gained entry into the Truth.⁸

The Great Master’s remark, “What you are reciting is a Scripture of What!” means that what is at the bottom of reciting a text is far beyond all time; it is not something one would want to describe as ‘reciting’. The monk had met a poisonous snake along his path.⁹ This is why the question of “What Scripture?” manifested before his very eyes. Having met ‘such a person’,* he could not give him a false answer. This is why he said, “The *Vimalakirti* Scripture.”

Speaking generally, ‘to read Scriptures’ means that we collect together every single, solitary Ancestor of the Buddha and read a Scripture through their Eye. At this very moment, in a twinkling, the Ancestors of the Buddha become Buddhas, give voice to the Dharma, give voice to Buddha, and do what a Buddha does. If it is not an occasion for this kind of ‘reading Scripture’, the Head, Face, and Eye of the Buddha’s Ancestors do not yet exist for you.



In the assemblies of present-day Ancestors of the Buddha there are many varied procedures for the reading of Scriptures, such as when a donor comes to the

8. The Great Master’s question and exclamation are translations of the same phrase in the original, but reflect how the monk interpreted them. The monk understood the latter statement as pointing him away from an intellectual understanding of Scripture to That which is the True Source of all Scriptures.

9. That is, the Master’s statement pulled the monk up short, as if he were faced with a life-threatening situation.

monastery and asks the whole community to read a Scripture, or when the monks read a Scripture for someone's benefit on a regular basis, or when monks read them voluntarily, and so forth. Besides these, there is the reading of Scriptures by the whole community for the benefit of some deceased monk.

In the case of a donor coming to the monastery and asking the whole community to read a Scripture, at breakfast time on the appointed day, the Chief of the Monks' Hall hangs up 'Reading of Scriptures' signs in front of the Monks' Hall and at the various private quarters. After breakfast, a bowing mat is spread out before the Saintly Monk.¹⁰ At the appropriate time, the bell before the Monks' Hall is rung either once or three times, in accordance with the instructions of the Abbot. At the sound of the bell, the Chief Junior and the whole community put on their kesas,* enter the Cloud Hall, go to their regular places, and sit facing outwards. Next, the Abbot enters the hall, makes monjin* to the Saintly Monk and, after offering incense, sits in his own place. The novices are then instructed to distribute copies of the Scripture. These Scriptures had been arranged in the proper order earlier in the Kitchen Hall so as to be ready for distribution at the proper time. The Scriptures are distributed from inside a Scripture box or put on a tray and distributed from there. Once the members of the community have asked for a copy of the Scripture, they then open it and begin their reading of it.

At this time, the Guestmaster leads the donor into the Cloud Hall. The donor, having procured a hand-held censer just outside the Cloud Hall, holds it aloft and enters the hall. The hand-held censer is stored in the common area by the entrance to the kitchen. It has been filled with incense beforehand, and a temple helper is asked to bring it to the front of the Cloud Hall and give it to the donor when the latter prepares to enter the hall upon being summoned. The request for the hand-held censer is made by the Guestmaster. When entering the hall, the Guestmaster goes first, followed by the donor. They enter by the south side of the front entrance to the Cloud Hall. The donor goes up before the Saintly Monk, offers a pinch of incense, and makes three bows. He or she does these bows while holding on to the censer. During the bows, the Guestmaster stands to the north of the bowing mat, hands in shashu,* and faces south towards the donor. Once the donor has finished bowing, he or she turns to the right and, facing the Abbot, holds the censer aloft and, bending from the waist, makes a nodding motion with the head. The Abbot, still in his seat, holds the Scripture aloft with his hands in gasshō* in acknowledgment of the donor's nod. The donor then turns to the north and nods.

10. The Saintly Monk in the Monks' Hall usually alludes to the picture or statue of Manjushri, who represents spiritual wisdom, although in some Chinese monasteries the figure is of Hōtei, the Laughing Buddha.

Once the nodding is finished, the hall is circumambulated, starting from in front of the Chief Junior. During the circumambulating of the hall, the Guest Master goes first, leading the donor. Having done one round of circumambulating, they return in front of the Saintly Monk where the donor, facing the Saintly Monk, holds the censer aloft and does a nod. At this time, the Guestmaster, hands in shashu, stands just inside the entrance to the Cloud Hall, south of the bowing mat, facing northwards. Having finished the nodding to the Saintly Monk, the donor follows the Guestmaster out to the front of the Cloud Hall, where they circumambulate the area in front of the hall once, then reenter the Cloud Hall. Facing the Saintly Monk, the donor does three bows. When the bows are finished, the donor sits in a ceremonial folding chair and witnesses the reading of the Scripture. The folding chair is placed near the pillar left of the Saintly Monk and facing south. It may also be placed near the south pillar and facing north. When the donor has been seated, the Guestmaster should turn towards the donor and nod, and then take his own place. Alternatively, while the donor is circumambulating the hall, the Scripture may be chanted in Sanskrit. The seats for those who are chanting may be to the right of the Saintly Monk or to the left of the Saintly Monk, whichever is convenient.

Aloes or some other pure incense is inserted and burned in the censer. This incense is supplied by the donor.

While the donor is circumambulating the hall, the monks in the assembly hold their hands in *gasshō*.

Next, the monetary donation for the reading of Scriptures is distributed among the monks. The amount of the donation is at the discretion of the donor. Sometimes, objects like cotton cloth or fans are handed out. The donor himself may hand them out, or some temple officer or helper may do so.

The method for distributing these offerings is to place the donation in front of the monk, not to place it in the monk's hand. When a donation is placed before the assembled monks, each monk in turn acknowledges it with hands held in *gasshō*. Alternatively, donations may be distributed at that day's midday meal. When they are distributed at the midday meal, after the Chief Junior has made the offering of the donor's food, he strikes his clappers once more and distributes any other alms the donor may be offering.

The donor will have written out on paper the purpose for which he is dedicating the merit of his alms, and this paper will have been affixed on the pillar to the right of the Saintly Monk.

When we are reading a Scripture in the Cloud Hall, we do not read it with a loud voice, but with a low one. Sometimes we simply open the Scripture book and look at the words, reading the text with our eyes word by word, without reading it in phrases. For the reading of Scriptures at such a time, there are hundreds of thousands of copies stored for common use, such as copies of the *Scripture on the Diamond-like Wisdom*, the “Universal Gate” chapter and “The Conduct That Eases the Way” chapter from the *Lotus Scripture*, and the *Golden Light Scripture*. Each monk reads one scroll. When the reading of Scriptures is finished, the temple assistants pass in front of the seats, carrying the original tray or the Scripture box, and each monk in the assembly replaces the Scripture there. When taking and replacing Scriptures, we make gasshō. When we are taking a scroll, we make gasshō first and then take a scroll. When we are replacing a scroll, we first place it and then make gasshō. After this, each monk, with hands in gasshō, recites the Transfer of Merit verse in a low voice.

When there is a reading of Scriptures in a hall that is open to the general public, one of the managerial officers of the monastery offers incense, makes bows, circumambulates the hall, and distributes alms donations, all just as a donor would do. The hand-held censer is also held aloft in the same way that a donor would. If the donor who is requesting the assembly to do a reading is someone from within the monastic assembly, the procedure is the same as for a lay donor: there will be an incense offering, bows, a circumambulating of the hall, a distributing of donations, and so forth. The Guestmaster will lead this monk in the same way that he would lead a lay donor.



It is customary to read Scriptures in celebration of the Imperial Birthday. If the Imperial Birthday is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, we begin reading the Scriptures on the fifteenth day of the twelfth lunar month. On that day there is no Abbatical lecture in the Monks’ Hall. Two rows of meditation platforms are set up in front of the statue of Shakyamuni Buddha in the Buddha Hall. That is, the platforms are set out facing each other east and west, with each platform running from south to north. Special stands are set up in front of these platforms. On these stands we place the Scriptures—the *Scripture on the Diamond-like Wisdom*, the *Scripture on the Two Lords*, the *Lotus Scripture*, the *Scripture on the Supreme Lord*, the *Golden Light Scripture*, and the like. Each day, a few monks from among those in the Monks’ Hall are invited to partake of refreshments well before the time of the midday meal. A bowl of noodles and a cup of hot soup are served to each monk. Or each may receive six or seven steamed dumplings and a serving of hot soup. The dumplings are served in their own bowl and are eaten with

chopsticks, not with a soup spoon. While eating, the monks partake of these refreshments in their sitting place for reading Scriptures; they do not sit anywhere else. The refreshments are arranged on the stand for holding the Scriptures; a separate table is not provided. While the monks are consuming their refreshments, the Scriptures remain on the stand. When they have finished their refreshments, the monks leave their seats to rinse out their mouths and then return to their sitting places. They then begin reading the Scriptures. They read the Scriptures from after breakfast until the time of the midday meal. At the three drummings that signal the midday meal, they rise from their sitting places. The daily reading of the Scriptures is limited to the period before the midday meal.

On the first day, a yellow signboard reading “Training Ground Established in Celebration of the Imperial Birthday” is hung under the eaves on the east side of the front of the Buddha Hall. Also, a yellow placard on which is written the intention of celebrating the Imperial Birthday is hung on the east pillar at the front of the Buddha Hall. The Abbot writes his name on a small piece of red or white paper; its two characters are written on the paper, which is then pasted on the face of the placard beneath the date. The Scripture reading continues in the manner previously described until the day of the Imperial Birthday, when the Abbot gives a lecture in the Monks’ Hall in celebration. This is a custom from ancient times, one that is not out-of-date today.

Further, there is the Scripture reading that a monk does on his own. From the first, temples and monasteries have had a public hall for reading Scriptures. It is in this hall that a monk reads the Scriptures. The procedure for doing so is as given in the *Book of Rules and Regulations*.



Great Master Igen, our founding Ancestor of Yakusan Mountain, once asked the novice monk Kō, “Did you come to realize the Truth through reading some Scripture or through requesting your Master’s personal instruction?”

The novice Kō replied, “I did not come to realize It through reading Scriptures or through requesting personal instruction.”

The Master said, “There are many people who do not read Scriptures or seek instruction, so how come they have not realized It?”

The novice Kō replied, “I do not say that they do not have It. Simply, they have not dared to let themselves experience It.”

In the house of the Buddhas and Ancestors, there are those who let themselves experience It and those who do not. Even so, reading Scriptures and seeking instruction are the common tools of our everyday life.

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Ejō