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## Mountains and Waters Sutra

Zen Master Dogen ponders the buddha way of the natural world.

By Eihei Dogen Zenji

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**M**ountains and waters right now are the actualization of the ancient buddha way. Each, abiding in its phenomenal expression, realizes completeness. Because mountains and waters have been active since before the Empty Aeon, they are alive at this moment. Because they have been the self since before form arose they are emancipation-realization.

Because mountains are high and broad, the way of riding the clouds is always reached in the mountains; the inconceivable power of soaring in the wind comes freely from the mountains.

Priest Daokai of Mount Furong said to the assembly, “The green mountains are always walking; a stone woman gives birth to a child at night.”

Mountains do not lack the qualities of mountains. Therefore they always abide in ease and always walk. You should examine in detail this quality of the mountains’ walking.

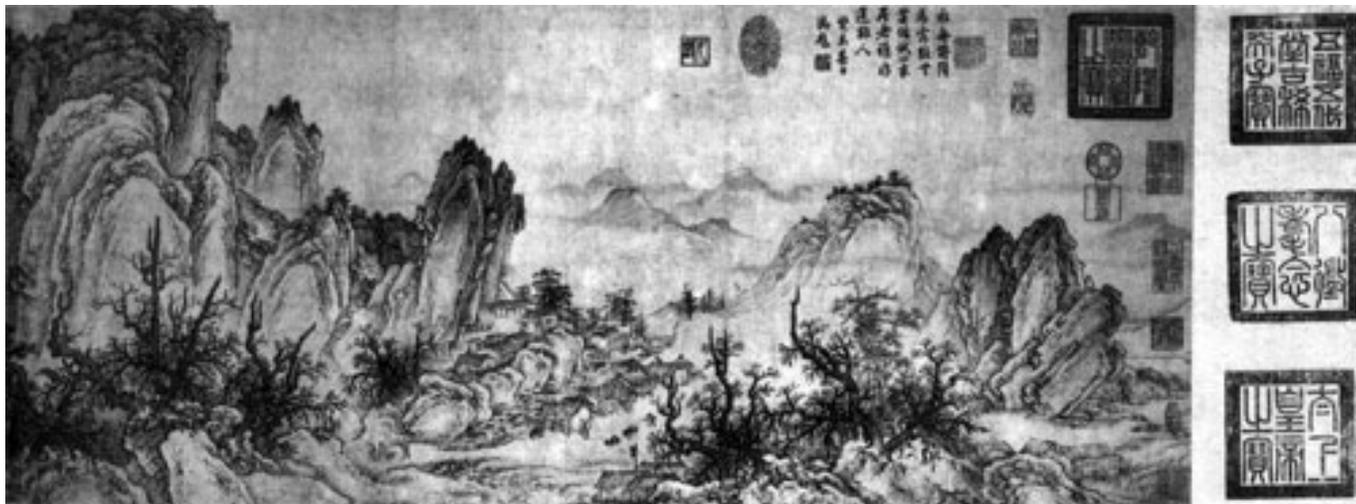
Mountains’ walking is just like human walking. Accordingly, do not doubt mountains’ walking even though it does not look the same as human walking. The buddha ancestors’ words point to walking. This is fundamental understanding. You should penetrate these words.

Because green mountains walk, they are permanent. Although they walk more swiftly than the wind, someone in the mountains does not realize or understand it. “In the mountains” means the blossoming of the entire world. People outside the mountains do not realize or understand the mountains walking. Those without eyes to see mountains cannot realize, understand, see, or hear this as it is.

If you doubt mountains’ walking, you do not know your own walking; it is not that you do not walk, but that you do not know or understand your own walking. Since you do know your own walking, you should fully know the green mountains’ walking.

Green mountains are neither sentient nor insentient. You are neither sentient nor

insentient. At this moment, you cannot doubt the green mountains' walking.



Traveling Among Streams and Mountains (detail), T'ai-ku i-min, thirteenth century, China, ink on paper, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO (Spencer Fund F74-35)

You should study the green mountains, using numerous worlds as your standards. You should clearly examine the green mountains' walking and your own walking. You should also examine walking backward and backward walking and investigate the fact that walking forward and backward has never stopped since the very moment before form arose, since the time of the King of the Empty Aeon.

If walking stops, buddha ancestors do not appear. If walking ends, the buddha-dharma cannot reach the present. Walking forward does not cease; walking backward does not cease. Walking forward does not obstruct walking backward. Walking backward does not obstruct walking forward. This is called the mountains' flow and the flowing mountains.

Green mountains master walking and eastern mountains master traveling on water. Accordingly, these activities are a mountain's practice. Keeping its own form, without changing body and mind, a mountain always practices in every place.

Don't slander by saying that a green mountain cannot walk and an eastern mountain cannot travel on water. When your understanding is shallow, you doubt the phrase "Green mountains are walking." When your learning is immature, you are shocked by the words "flowing mountains." Without fully understanding even the words "flowing water," you drown in small views and narrow understanding.

Yet the characteristics of mountains manifest their form and life-force. There is walking, there is flowing, and there is a moment when a mountain gives birth to a mountain child. Because mountains are buddha ancestors, buddha ancestors appear in this way.

Even if you see mountains as grass, trees, earth, rocks, or walls, do not take this seriously or worry about it; it is not complete realization. Even if there is a moment when you view mountains as the seven treasures shining, this is not returning to the source. Even if you understand mountains as the realm where all buddhas practice, this understanding is not something to be attached to. Even if you have the highest understanding of mountains as all buddhas' inconceivable qualities, the truth is not only this. These are conditioned views. This is not the understanding of buddha ancestors, but just looking through a bamboo tube at a corner of the sky.

Turning an object and turning the mind is rejected by the great sage. Explaining the mind and explaining true nature is not agreeable to buddha ancestors. Seeing into the mind and seeing into true nature is the activity of people outside the way. Set words and phrases are not the words of liberation. There is something free from all of these understandings: "Green mountains are always walking," and "Eastern mountains travel on water." You should study this in detail.



*From [Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen \[Japan, 1200-1253\]](#), edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi, with the permission of San Francisco Zen Center.*



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