

# Dragon Song

龍吟

Shobogenzo Ryugin by Eihei Dogen Zenji  
Translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi and Sojun Mel Weitsman

Touzi, Great Master Ciji of Shu Region, was once asked by a monk, “Is there a dragon singing in a withered tree?” Touzi replied, “I say there is a lion roaring in a skull.”

Discussions about a withered tree and dead ash [composure in stillness] are originally teachings outside the way. But the withered tree spoken of by those outside the way and that spoken of by buddha ancestors are far apart. Those outside the way talk about a withered tree, but they don’t authentically know it; how can they hear the dragon singing? They think that a withered tree is a dead tree which does not grow leaves in spring.

The withered tree spoken of by buddha ancestors is the understanding of the ocean drying up. The ocean drying up is the tree withering. The tree withering encounters spring. The immovability of the tree is its witheredness. The mountain trees, ocean trees, and sky trees right now are all withered trees. That which sprouts buds is a dragon singing in a withered tree. Those who embrace it one hundredfold, one thousand-fold, and one myriadfold are descendants of the withered tree.

The form, essence, body, and power of this witheredness are a withered stake spoken of by a buddha ancestor [Sushan Guangren]. It is beyond a withered stake. There are mountain valley trees, and fields-of-village trees. The mountain valley trees are called pines and cypresses in the common world. The fields-of-village trees are called humans and devas in the common world.

Those that depend on roots and spread leaves are called buddha ancestors. They all go back to the essence. This is to be studied. This is the tall dharma body of a withered tree and the short dharma body of a withered tree. Without a withered tree there wouldn’t be the dragon singing. Without a withered tree the dragon’s singing wouldn’t be smashed. “I have encountered spring many times, but the mind has not changed” [a line by Damei Fachang] is the dragon singing with complete witheredness. Although the dragon’s singing does not conform with gong, shang, jue, zhi, yu [do, re, mi, fa, so], gong, shang, jue, zhi, yu are the before and after, two or three elements of the dragon’s singing.

In this way, the monk’s words, *Is there a dragon singing in a withered tree?* emerge for the first time as a question and a statement for immeasurable eons.

As for Touzi’s response, *I say there is a lion roaring in a skull*—what could hinder it? It keeps bending self and pushing other without ceasing. The skull covers the entire field.

Xiangyan, Great Master Xideng of Xiangyan Monastery, was once asked by a monk, “What is the way?” Xiangyan said, “A dragon is singing in a withered tree.” The monk said, “I don’t understand.” Xiangyan said, “An eyeball in the skull.” Later a monk asked Shishuang, “What is a dragon singing in a withered tree?” Shishuang said, “It still holds joy.” The monk asked, “What is the eyeball in the skull?” Shishuang said, “It still holds consciousness.”

Later a monk asked Caoshan, “What is a dragon singing in a withered tree?” Caoshan said, “The blood vein does not get cut off.” The monk asked, “What is the eyeball in the skull?” Caoshan said, “It does not dry up.” The monk said, “I wonder if anyone has heard it?” Caoshan said, “In the entire world there is no one who has not heard it.” The monk said, “I wonder what kind of song the dragon sings?” Caoshan said, “No one knows what kind of song the dragon sings. All who hear it lose it.”

The one who questions hearing and singing is not the one who sings the dragon’s tune. The dragon’s tune has its own melody. *In a withered tree* or *in a skull* are neither inside nor outside, neither self nor other. It is right now and a long time ago.

*It still holds joy* is growing a horn on the head. *It still holds consciousness*, is the skin dropping away completely.

Caoshan’s words *The blood vein does not get cut off* are not avoided, turning the body in the word vein. *It does not dry up* means that the ocean’s dryness never reaches to the bottom. Since the never-reaching is itself dryness, it is dryness beyond dryness.

To ask *if anyone has heard it* is like asking if there is anyone who has not gotten it. In regard to Caoshan’s statement, *In the entire world there is no one who has not heard it*, ask further: “Never mind the fact that there is no one who has not heard it; where is the dragon’s song at the time when no one in the entire world has heard it? Say it quickly, quickly!”

*I wonder if anyone has heard it*. Regarding this question, say: “The dragon song is howling and humming in muddy water, exhaling through the nostrils.”

*No one knows what kind of song the dragon sings* is to have a dragon in the song. *All who hear it lose it* [become completely selfless] is something we should treasure.

Now, the dragon songs of Xiangyan, Shishuang, and Caoshan come forth, forming clouds and forming water. They go beyond words, beyond saying eyeballs in the skull. This is thousands and myriad pieces of the dragon song.

*It still holds joy* is the croaking of frogs. *It still holds consciousness* is the singing of earthworms. Thus, the blood vein does not get cut off, a gourd succeeds a gourd. As *it does not dry up*, a pillar conceives a child; a lantern faces a lantern.

*Presented to the assembly on the foot of Yamashi Peak on the twenty-fifth day, the twelfth month, the first year of the Kangen Era [1243].*