



## Dōgen

Slowed by geographical, sociopolitical, and linguistic barriers, Chan took half a millennium to reach Japan. Dōgen Kigen was by no means the first Japanese monk to travel to China or even to study Chan in depth with a Chinese master. Indeed, several others preceded him in receiving formal recognition as Dharma heirs in one or another Chan lineage, and history recognizes one of his early teachers, Myōan Eisai (1141-1215), as the founder of Japanese Zen. Yet Dōgen opened the country's first Zen monastery, produced its first Zen record, established its first enduring line of succession, and stood head and shoulders above near-contemporaries in his contribution to Zen literature.

Dōgen's early life, like his teaching, defies simple or certain exposition. He was born into a time of extraordinary upheaval, marked by bitter competition for power between the imperial court and the shogunate, within the nobility and the rising samurai class, and among the Buddhist sects that served and depended on these groups. Maneuvering in Kyoto court circles probably accounts for both the liaison that produced him and the doubt that surrounds his parents' identities; all this remains subject to scholarly conjecture. His ancestry was certainly aristocratic, however, and after his mother's death in 1207, he grew up in the household of a high-ranking courtier from the powerful Minamoto clan. His upbringing included extensive tutelage in literature and the arts, the lifeblood of Kyoto society, and he is said to have demonstrated an extreme precocity in reading the Chinese classics.

Legend depicts the boy Dōgen realizing the impermanence of all existence and resolving to pursue a religious vocation as he watched clouds of incense billow over his mother's ashes. Disastrous events of the previous century—earthquakes, fires, famines, and epidemics as well as war—had put many of his compatriots in an apocalyptic mood, eager to adopt new forms of religious expression, but guided by family connections, Dōgen began his religious career in the Tendai sect, which then predominated in the imperial capital. Many details elude us, but by the time he was seventeen, Dōgen's quest had carried him to Tendai headquarters on Mt. Hiei, where he formally entered the Way, and back to Kennin-ji, in Kyoto, where the eminent Eisai had established a beachhead for Zen study. Along the way, no doubt, he got a look at Mt. Hiei's warrior-monks, a conspicuous manifestation of the rivalry and violence that infected Japanese Buddhism in those tempestuous times.

Whether this young monk of privileged background arrived soon enough and had sufficient entree to meet Eisai himself is another of the enigmas in Dōgen's biography, but within two years of the old man's death, Dōgen did embark on Zen studies with Eisai's successor, Myōzen (1184–1225). Eisai had twice made the trip to China, had succeeded to the Huang-lung school of Linji Chan, and had passed this teaching on to Myōzen, all while remaining within the Tendai fold. Myōzen took the same course to avoid an affront to Mt. Hiei, but his heart plainly lay with Zen. He and Dōgen formed a close bond during the six years they spent studying in Kyoto, and they sailed together to China in 1223, a difficult venture to execute but one that would give them firsthand access to the vaunted Chinese tradition.

When they arrived, the fall of the Southern Sung dynasty lay yet a century and a half in the future. Disembarking in easternmost China, they found the Yangqi branch of the Linji still holding sway and descendants of Dahui directing most of the prominent temples. These included

the big Tiantong monastery that Hongchi had restored, where Eisai had later practiced and which they themselves soon entered. Myōzen settled down to practice, but Dōgen who seems to have had no affinity with Wuzhi Liaopai, the master there, spent part of his first two years in China visiting other monasteries, perhaps searching for a more suitable teacher. In 1225, he lost both the one he had—Myōzen, who suddenly died—and gained another, the man he later revered as "the old Buddha." This was the monastery's incoming abbot, a Caodong master of exceptional repute, commonly known as Tiantong Rujing.

The fact that Dōgen hit it off with the new abbot had nothing to do with lineage. Rujing (1163-1228) is said to have concealed his dharma pedigree, never saying whose heir he was until shortly before he died, preferring to regard himself, by Dōgen's testimony, as "the total storehouse of the Buddha-Dharma." Dōgen also reports that Rujing rejected not only the practice of categorizing Chan into schools and houses but even the view that Chan was one of many Buddhist sects. It is not surprising that Dōgen, having witnessed sectarianism at its violent worst in Japan, adopted this stance on the indivisibility of the Dharma, maintaining in his later preaching and writing that he taught the way of buddhas and Ancestors, not merely Zen, much less Soto Zen. It appears that Dōgen absorbed as well Rujing's perspective that false teaching had become pandemic and his emphasis on long and fervent practice of zazen, an emphasis traceable to Hongzhi and Kumu.

After a powerful awakening experience but less than two years of study with Rujing, Dōgen sailed home, taking Myōzen's ashes and a transmission document acknowledging him as Rujing's successor. The next three years he spent at Kennin-ji, probably with the hope of preaching Rujing's brand of Zen there or of obtaining an appointment to direct another established temple. No such opportunity materialized, however, and his work as a Zen master did not take off until he moved outside Kyoto in 1230 and began developing an independent base of activity at a small temple made available by unidentified patrons, perhaps members of his extended family. Within six years, he had succeeded in getting a monk's hall built, a major step toward transplanting the Chinese monastic model to Japanese soil. The phenomenon of monks sitting immobile for long hours in a hall dedicated to that purpose so intrigued Kyoto residents that they flocked to see it for themselves.

No doubt such notoriety drew the ire of the Buddhist establishment, but it also brought Dōgen political and financial support that he sorely needed in lieu of the official sponsorship or estate revenues other temples enjoyed. Judging by his early writings, he geared much of his teaching at this time to religiously inclined aristocrats who might back his efforts—and who were, after all, his own people. Perhaps the first piece of writing he prepared for distribution was a meditation manual, patterned after a century-old Chinese text, providing zazen instruction in relatively straightforward manner. He chose to write another early piece not in Chinese, the language of learning, but in Japanese and employed a question-and-answer format as an engaging means of introducing the practice and dispelling common misunderstandings. A third, highly accessible product of this initial phase of his teaching, *The Record of Things Heard*, consists of brief, informal talks on a wide range of subjects.

In these contexts, Dōgen made strong statements about lay practice that he would subsequently set aside, asserting that what mattered was not one's standing in the world but simply one's eagerness for the Way:

In Sung China, kings and ministers, officials and common people, men and women, kept their intention on the ancestors' way. Both warriors and literary people aroused the intention to practice Chan and study the way. Among them, many illuminated the mind-ground. From this you should know that worldly duties do not hinder the Buddha-Dharma.

Rejecting all other practices as secondary or worse, Dōgen promoted zazen as "the front gate" of the Dharma, the practice for one and all, irrespective of intelligence, education, rank, or gender.

Such universalism aligned him, nominally, with the Pure Land movement that had taken hold in a populace driven to despair by the era's continuing crises, but he mercilessly ridiculed the Pure Land (and Tendai) practice of repeating the Buddha's name: "People who chant all the time are just like frogs croaking day and night in the spring fields. Their effort will be of no use whatsoever." Dōgen's anti-sectarianism in no way restrained him from this sort of criticism; instead, it led to another kind of impartiality—a readiness to denounce everything as a deviation from true Buddhism except *shikantaza*, pure sitting.

As time wore on, perhaps to correct the ideas of some monks who came to his community after prior training in Zen, Dōgen turned his fire increasingly on Zen methods that he considered deleterious, chief among which was Dahui's technique of "contemplating sayings." In a real sense, however, what Dōgen did was simply go Dahui one better: now koan study rather than silent illumination had become the *idée fixe* and thus a serious obstacle to genuine practice and realization, so Dōgen set out to eliminate it. That he had no fundamental objection to the contemplation of sayings in a larger sense is readily apparent from his own formal lectures, later polished and gathered under the title *Eye Treasury of the True Dharma*—the same title Dahui had chosen for his investigation of koan.

These were lectures prepared for delivery either to his growing assembly of monks or to devoted lay students and patrons, and he gave increasing attention to them as his first decade of teaching progressed. Ultimately, he intended his text, like Dahui's and like Yuanwu's *The Blue Cliff Record* before it, to contain an even one hundred chapters and to present its author's most penetrating insights in a very elegant form. Dōgen did not live long enough to complete the full complement of essays, but those he finished are inventive, consummately crafted explorations of public cases, persistently urging and challenging his students to examine the old sayings in detail and from diverse perspectives. Among the chapters are "The Sound of the Valley Stream," inspired by Su T'ung-po's enlightenment poem, and "Dragon Howl," a meditation on the famous dead-tree metaphor.

"One Bright Pearl," a chapter completed in 1238, the same year as *Record of Things Heard* exemplifies the prose of the *Eye Treasury*. Poetic almost to the point of mystery, it abounds in twists, reversals, unexpected juxtapositions, and questions designed to surprise and illumine an unguarded mind while foiling any attempt to extract merely logical meanings. Dōgen often took extreme liberties in achieving these effects, misquoting texts, lifting passages out of context, mixing Chinese and Japanese characters in a single sentence, playing with grammar and syntax, and so forth. How much he owes his style to his Dharma ancestor Hongzhi will be seen by looking back at Chapter 26, especially by comparing Dōgen's "Lancet of Seated Meditation" with Hongzhi's verse of the same name.

Abruptly, but obviously with forethought, Dōgen and most of his monks left the Kyoto area in 1243, relocating without explanation to the mountainous, rural province of Echizen. In the year or so prior to this move, he had twice twitted the religious hierarchy by lecturing in the capital under the protection of his most prominent patrons, and this may have provoked an attack from Mt. Hiei. Indeed, one Tendai document claims that the sect drove Dōgen off to Echizen, and though no other records bear out this report, it probably contains a germ of truth. His teaching had come under criticism in the imperial court, and growing weary of defending himself, he may well have opted to remove the community from the spotlight. The news that a Linji master of Japanese descent had been tapped to open a large monastery nearby probably weighed heavily in his decision, too.

In leaving Kyoto, Dōgen abandoned not only his hometown but whatever hopes for prominence he may still have harbored. On the other hand, he fulfilled a perception he had

expressed three years before in "The Mountains and Rivers Sutra," a celebrated chapter of the *Eye Treasury*: that mountain are the natural dwelling place of sages. Whatever else it may have meant, the move to Ichizen constituted a change of Dōgen's economic base from the Kyoto nobility to the samurai class—and in particular to Hatano Yoshishige, who represented the shogunate in the capital and whose property became the site of Dōgen's new monastery, Eihei-ji. Hatano, a one-eyed veteran of many battles, was such a sincere disciple that he oversaw clearing for the new building himself and eventually joined the monkhood. Dependence of this sort had its consequences, however. In 1247, Dōgen was obliged to interrupt his work for seven months to answer Hatano's summons to Kamakura, the seat of the shogunate, and in decades to come, the direction of Sōtō Zen would be greatly affected by the line's historic tie to the Hatano family and other rural patrons.

Dōgen produced many new chapters of the *Eye Treasury* before his death in 1253, along with exacting regulations on how his monks should eat, wash, dress, interact, use the library, and otherwise comport themselves. Dōgen obviously saw these very different kinds of text as serving his long-term goal of establishing the Way in Japan, and they form the bulk of his literary remains. Dōgen lives on as well in his *Record*, a transcript of his remarks to the Eihei-ji monks, and in the Sōtō tradition that he established, the largest of the Zen schools in Japan. Though he is now regarded as a genius, his name and work fell largely into obscurity a few generations after his death, and six centuries passed before the government, in a fit of nationalist pride, honored him with the title *daishi*, great master.

#### FROM THE RECORD OF THINGS HEARD

One day a student asked: "I have spent months and years in earnest study, but I have yet to gain enlightenment. Many of the old Masters say that the Way does not depend on intelligence and cleverness and that there is no need for knowledge and talent. As I understand it, even though my capacity is inferior, I need not feel badly of myself. Are there not any old sayings or cautionary words that I should know about?"

Dōgen replied: "Yes, there are. True study of the Way does not rely on knowledge and genius or cleverness and brilliance. But it is a mistake to encourage people to be like blind men, deaf mutes, or imbeciles. Because study has no use for wide learning and high intelligence, even those with inferior capacities can participate. True study of the Way is an easy thing.

But even in the monasteries of China, only one or two out of several hundred, or even a thousand, disciples under a great Chan master actually gained true enlightenment. Therefore, old sayings and cautionary words are needed. As I see it now, it is a matter of gaining the desire to practice. A person who gives rise to a real desire and puts his utmost efforts into study under a teacher will surely gain enlightenment. Essentially, one must devote all attention to this effort and enter into practice with all due speed. More specifically, the following points must be kept in mind:

"In the first place, there must be a keen and sincere desire to seek the Way. For example, someone who wishes to steal a precious jewel, to attack a formidable enemy, or to make the acquaintance of a beautiful woman must, at all times, watch intently for the opportunity, adjusting to changing events and shifting circumstances. Anything sought for with such intensity will surely be gained. If the desire to search for the Way becomes as intense as this, whether you concentrate on doing zazen alone, investigate a koan by an old master, interview a Zen teacher, or practice with sincere devotion, you will succeed no matter how high you must shoot or no matter how deep you must plumb. Without arousing this wholehearted will for the Buddha Way, how can anyone succeed in this most important task of cutting the endless round of birth-and-death? Those who have this drive, even if they have little knowledge or are of inferior capacity, even if

they are stupid or evil, will without fail gain enlightenment.

"Next, to arouse such a mind, one must be deeply aware of the impermanence of the world. This realization is not achieved by some temporary method of contemplation. It is not creating something out of nothing and then thinking about it. Impermanence is a fact before our eyes. Do not wait for the teachings from others, the words of the scriptures, and for the principles of enlightenment. We are born in the morning and die in the evening; the man we saw yesterday is no longer with us today. These are facts we see with our own eyes and hear with our own ears. You see and hear impermanence in terms of another person, but try weighing it with your own body. Even though you live to be seventy or eighty, you die in accordance with the inevitability of death. How will you ever come to terms with the worries, joys, intimacies, and conflicts that concern you in this life? With faith in Buddhism, seek the true happiness of nirvana. How can those who are old or who have passed the halfway mark in their lives relax in their studies when there is no way of telling how many years are left?"

Think of those who gained enlightenment upon hearing the sound of bamboo when struck by a tile or on seeing blossoms in bloom. Does the bamboo distinguish the clever or dull, the deluded or enlightened; does the flower differentiate between the shallow and deep, the wise and stupid? Though flowers bloom year after year, not everyone who sees them gains enlightenment. Bamboos always give off sounds, but not all who hear them become enlightened. It is only by the virtue of long study under a teacher and much practice that we gain an affinity with what we have labored for and gain enlightenment and clarity of mind.

The most important point in the study of the Way is zazen. Many people in China gained enlightenment solely through the strength of zazen. Some who were so ignorant that they could not answer a single question exceeded the learned who had studied many years solely through the efficacy of their single-minded devotion to zazen. Therefore, students must concentrate on zazen alone and not bother about other things. The Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors is zazen alone. Follow nothing else.

At that time Ejo asked: "When we combine zazen with the reading of the texts, we can understand about one point in a hundred or a thousand upon examining the Zen sayings and the koan. But in zazen alone there is no indication of even this much. Must we devote ourselves to zazen even then?"

Dōgen answered: "Although a slight understanding seems to emerge from examining the koan, it causes the Way of the Buddhas and the Ancestors to become even more distant. If you devote your time to doing zazen without wanting to know anything and without seeking enlightenment, this is itself the Ancestral Way. Although the old Masters urged both the reading of the scriptures and the practice of zazen, they clearly emphasized zazen. Some gained enlightenment through the koan, but the merit that brought enlightenment came from the zazen. Truly the merit is in the zazen."

The basic point to understand in the study of the Way is that you must cast aside your deep-rooted attachments. If you rectify the body in terms of the four attitudes of dignity, the mind rectifies itself. If at first you uphold the precepts, the mind reforms itself. In China it is the custom among laymen to show their filial gratitude towards a deceased parent by assembling at the ancestral mausoleum and pretending to weep so earnestly that eventually real tears of grief would fall. Students of the Way, even though they do not have the mind that seeks the Way at the outset, eventually arouse this mind merely by a steadfast love and study of Buddhism.

Students who have been moved to study the Way should merely follow the rest of the assembly in their conduct. Don't try to learn the essential points and the examples from the past

right away. It is best, however, that they be fully grasped before you go alone to practice in the mountains or conceal yourself within a city. If you practice by doing what the assembly does, you should be able to attain the Way. It is like riding in a boat without knowing how to row. If you leave everything up to a competent sailor, you will reach the other shore, whether you know how to row or not. If you follow a good teacher and practice together with the assembly and have no concepts of the Self, you will naturally become a [person] of the Way.

Students, even if you gain enlightenment, do not stop practicing, thinking that you have attained the ultimate. The Buddha Way is endless. Once enlightened you must practice all the more.

Every action of a [person] well versed in Buddhism shows deep thought, whether that action seems good or bad. This, ordinary people do not understand. One day the Abbot Eshin<sup>1</sup> asked a man to beat and drive away a deer that was eating grass in the garden. At that time someone remarked: "You seem to have no compassion. Why have you begrudged the grass and tormented this animal?"

The Abbot replied: "You do not understand. If I did not chase the deer away, it would soon become accustomed to people. If it came near an evil person, it would surely be killed. That's why I chased it away."

Although chasing the deer seemed to show a lack of compassion, it was motivated by a deep compassion.

While the late Abbot Eisai was living at Kennin-ji, a poor man from the neighborhood came and said: "My home is so poor that my wife and I and our three children have had nothing to eat for several days. Have pity and help us out."

This was at a time when the monastery was completely without food, clothing, and money. Eisai racked his brains but could think of no solution. Then it occurred to him that just at this time a statue of Yakushi<sup>2</sup> was being built at the temple and that there was a bit of copper that had been hammered out to make the halo. Eisai broke it up with his own hands, made it into a ball, and gave it to the poor man. "Exchange this for food and save your family from starvation," he said. The poor man left overjoyed.

His disciples were critical: "You've given the halo of a Buddhist statue to a layman. Isn't it a crime to make personal use of what belongs to the Buddha?"

"You are right," the abbot replied, "but think of the will of the Buddha. He cut off his own flesh and limbs for the sake of all sentient beings. Certainly he would have sacrificed his entire body to save starving people. Even though I should fall into the evil realms for this crime, I will still have saved people from starvation." Students today would do well to reflect on the excellence of Eisai's attitude. Do not forget this.

#### LANCET OF SEATED MEDITATION

Essential function of all the Buddhas,  
Functioning essence of all the Ancestors—  
It is present without thinking,  
It is completed without interacting.  
Present without thinking.  
Its presence is inherently intimate;

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<sup>1</sup> Otherwise known as Genshin (941-1003). A famous priest of the Tendai sect, he lived at Yokawa on Mt. Hiei, near Kyoto.

<sup>2</sup> Bhaishajya, the Healing Buddha.

Completed without interacting,  
 Its completion is inherently verified.  
 Its presence inherently intimate,  
 It is ever without any stain or defilement;  
 Its completion inherently verified,  
 It is ever without the upright or inclined.  
 Intimacy ever without stain or defilement,  
 Its intimacy sloughs off without discarding;  
 Verification ever without upright or inclined,  
 Its verification makes effort without figuring.  
 The water is clear right through the earth,  
 A fish goes along like a fish.  
 The sky is vast straight into the heavens,  
 A bird flies just like a bird.

## ONE BRIGHT PEARL

Great Master Zongyi of Mt. Xuansha, in Fuzhou, in great Sung China, had the Buddhist name Shibeī, and the family name Xian.<sup>3</sup> Before he became a monk, he loved fishing, and floating along on the River Nantai in his boat, he learned how to fish from other fishermen. He never expected the Golden Fish, which is never hooked but jumps into the boat of itself. In the beginning of the Xiantong era, during the Tang dynasty,<sup>4</sup> he suddenly wished to leave the world [and seek the Dharma]. He abandoned his boat and went off into the mountains. He was thirty years old, awakened to the dangers of this impermanent world, and aware of the loftiness of the Buddha Way.

He finally ascended Mt. Xuefeng and, practicing with Great Master Zhenjue [i.e., Xuefeng Yicun], pursued the Way day and night. Once, in order to practice with other masters elsewhere and get to the bottom of the whole matter, he got together his traveling gear and was in the process of descending the mountain when his toe struck a rock and began to bleed. In pain, he had an awakening experience and said, "The body does not exist. Where does the pain come from?" Then he returned to Mt. Xuefeng. Master Xuefeng asked him, "What is this Ascetic Pei?"<sup>5</sup> Replied Xuansha, "Henceforth, I shall not deceive people."<sup>6</sup> Xuefeng was delighted with this answer and said, "Everyone has the capacity to utter those words, but no one expresses them [as Shibeī does]." Xuefeng asked, "Ascetic Pei, why aren't you going on the pilgrimage?" Xuansha answered, "Bodhidharma did not come East, the Second Ancestor [Huiko] did not leave [for India]." This answer especially pleased Xuefeng.

Having been a simple fisherman, Xuansha had never encountered many sutras and treatises even in his dreams, but when he put his foremost, he manifested a spirit that surpassed that of others. Xuefeng considered him to be superior to others and praised him as an outstanding disciple. His clothes were of cloth, and because he always wore the same ones, they covered with patches. His underclothes were of paper and he used mugwort padding]. Apart from his practice

<sup>3</sup> Xuansha Shibeī, or Xuansha Zongyi (835-908) was a successor to Xuefeng Yicun (822-908) and seventh in the Ancestral line of Qingyuan Xingsi.

<sup>4</sup> That is, soon after 860, the beginning of the Xiantong era.

<sup>5</sup> "Ascetic" is the translation of the Japanese *zuta*, which originally is the Sanskrit *dhuta*.

<sup>6</sup> Okada Giho says ... that this is an alternate form of "To say something is to miss the mark." Xuansha is thus denying that he is really Shibeī as far as the ultimate truth is concerned. Xuefeng's question is an alternative for the classic "What is it that thus comes?"

with Xuefeng, he had no other teacher. However, he experienced the power of succeeding to his teacher's Dharma straightaway.

After attaining the Way, he would instruct others by saying, "The whole universe is one bright pearl."<sup>7</sup> Once a monk asked him, "You have a saying, 'the whole universe is one bright pearl.' How can a student [like me] understand that?" The master replied, "What is the use of understanding that the whole universe is one bright pearl?" The next day the master asked the monk, "What is your understanding of 'the whole universe is one bright pearl?'" The monk said, "What is the use of understanding that the whole universe is one bright pearl?" Xuansha said, "I know that you are alive among the demons in the Dark Cave."<sup>8</sup>

This expression, "The whole universe is one bright pearl," originated with Xuansha. Its deep meaning is that the whole universe is neither vast and expansive nor minute and small. It is not square or round, middle or true. [Its dynamic workings are] neither the lively darting of fish<sup>9</sup> nor the disclosure of forms distinct and clear. Moreover, because it is not birth-and-death or arrival-and-departure, just so it is birth-and-death, arrival-and-departure. Because this is the way it is, it is the past departing from here, the present appearing from here. If it is penetrated to the very bottom, who will see it as limited to being a movement from life to death? Who can see it as being nothing but stillness?

"The whole universe" is the unrelenting pursuit of things as the self and the pursuit of the self as things.<sup>10</sup> Answering "separated" to the question, "When feeling arises, is one separated from understanding?" is a turning of the head and an alteration of facial expression, an expanding of the problem and a seizing of opportunity.<sup>11</sup> As a result of pursuing the self as things, it is an unrelenting "whole universe." Because of its priority over its functional manifestations, this principle remains as something ungraspable even in the midst of its functioning.

"One bright pearl" thoroughly expresses it even though it is not itself revealed in its name, and we can recognize it in its name. "One bright pearl" directly transcends the eons, and because in the eternal past it never ceased to be, it reaches up to the eternal present. Though there is one's mind now and one's body now, they are just the one bright pearl. This grass or that tree are not grass and tree, nor are the mountains and rivers of the world mountains and rivers; they are one bright pearl.

The expression, "How can a student understand that?" makes it seem as if [the question] originates in the student's deluded karmic consciousness, but in reality it is the Great Model itself

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<sup>7</sup> "One bright pearl" translated *ikka myōju*, the title of this piece. *Myō* is "bright," "brilliant," "clear," and so on. *Ju* means such things as "bead," "jewel," and so on. It is a round beadlike object such as those found on Buddhist rosaries (*juzu*) . . . .

<sup>8</sup> This is an old Zen expression denoting abysmal ignorance. It recurs in a number of Zen stories, *mōndo*, and elsewhere. Xuansha means that even here, in the Dark Cave inhabited by dreadfully ignorant beings, the bright light of the pearl exists.

<sup>9</sup> "Lively darting of fish" is a translation of the Chinese *buo p'op'o(ti)* .... It seems to be a pre-Sung colloquialism, used, for instance, by Linji in his recorded sayings, where English translations such as "brisk and lively" and "vividly alive" can be found . . . .

<sup>10</sup> "Unrelenting pursuit of things." The *Monge* commentary says, "When one pursues things as the self, the self becomes the standard and things are not established. This is the place apart from forms. Also, pursuing the self as things is the situation in which things are the measure and the self is not established. This is great and vast, life and death."

<sup>11</sup> "Expanding the problem" is a reference to the technique of the *mōndo* exchange between Zen master and disciple. "Seizing the opportunity" refers to the teacher's intuitive grasp of the student's problem and responding accordingly. This is sometimes done by "expanding the problem," exemplified in the text by the teacher's response of "Separated" to a student's question.



manifesting as this functional appearance. Continuing, you can make a foot of water into a one-foot wave, which is to say, make a ten-foot pearl into a ten-foot brilliance.

In expressing what can be expressed, Xuansha says, "The whole universe is one bright pearl. What is the use of understanding that?" This expression expresses the fact that Buddha succeeds Buddha, Ancestors succeed Ancestors, and Xuansha succeeds Xuansha. Even if you try to avoid succession, you can not do it, because even if you avoid it for a while, any expression [such as 'what is the use of understanding?'] is, after all, the occasion of its manifesting.

The next day, Xuansha asked the monk, "What is your understanding of 'the whole universe is one bright pearl?'" This expresses "Yesterday I spoke the fixed Dharma [in asking, 'What is the use of understanding that?'], and today I use a different approach [and ask 'What do you understand?']. Today, I speak the unfixed Dharma, turning my back on yesterday with a smile."

The monk said, "What is the use of understanding that the whole universe is one bright pearl?" This is nothing but a mimicry of Xuansha; that is, "riding the thief's horse in pursuit of the thief." In speaking as he did for the sake of the monk, Xuansha was conducting himself in the form of a different species.<sup>12</sup> Reverse the light and illumine within yourselves; how many are there of "what is the use of understanding?" If I try to express it, there may be seven sugar cakes or eight herb cakes, but this is teaching and practice north of the Xiang [River] and south of the Tan.<sup>13</sup>

Xuansha says, "I know that you are alive among the demons in the Dark Cave." You should understand that the faces of the sun and moon have not changed since time began. Because the sun's face always appears as the sun's face and the moon's face always appears as the moon's face, even though I say that my name is "Exactly Now" while it is summer, this does not mean that my name is "Hot."<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the bright pearl, existing just so and being beginningless, transcends changes in time and place. The whole universe is one bright pearl. We do not speak of two or three pearls, and so the entirety is one True Dharma-eye, the Body of Reality, One Expression. The entirety is Brilliant Light, One Mind. When [the bright pearl] is the entirety, nothing hinders it. Round [like a pearl], it rolls around and around. The merits of the bright pearl being manifested in this way. Avalokiteshvara and Maitreya therefore exist now, and old Buddhas and new Buddhas appear in the world and preach the Dharma.

When it is just so, it hangs suspended in space, it is hidden in the linings of clothing, it is held under the chin [of a dragon], and it is worn in the hair topknot.<sup>15</sup> All these are the one bright pearl

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<sup>12</sup> Xuansha's taking on the form of a different species is a reference to a bodhisattva's assumption of a nonhuman form, such as that of an animal, in order to conduct the compassionate activities of a bodhisattva.

<sup>13</sup> This phrase refers to the omnipresence of buddha, in what is called the "one bright pearl" in the present essay. The expression can be found in [*The Blue Cliff Record*], case 18, and Dōgen has used the same expression in *Eihei kōroku*, section I, where he says, "Yellow gold is found in the land south of the Xiang and north of the Tan. Ordinary people beyond number are engulfed in it." . . .

<sup>14</sup> An allusion to a *mōndo* recorded in the *Wu deng hui yuan*. "Liao asked Yueshan, 'What is your family name?' Replied Yueshan, 'Right Now.' Liao did not understand and later asked the head monk, 'Recently I asked Yueshan what his family name is and he said 'Right Now.' Just what is his name?' The temple master told him, 'His family name is Han' [i.e., "cold." Yueshan's family name was "Han," but written with a different character and having a different meaning]. When Yueshan heard about this, he said, 'The temple head does not understand the difference between good and bad' [or anything else]. When Li asked his question, it was cold, so the temple head said 'cold.' I suppose that had it been summer, he would have said 'hot.' " According to Okada, the reason Dōgen alludes to the *mōndo* is Yueshan's expression. "Right Now." Despite such phenomena as "hot," "cold," "summer," and "winter," all time is just one bright pearl. This is Dōgen's meaning in the essay. Okubo's text (*Zenshu*) has "nature" where I have "family name" in the translation.

<sup>15</sup> The four images are allusions to four stories: (I) in the sutra named *Pusa ying luo jing* a passage speaks

as the whole universe. It is its nature to be attached to the lining of clothing, so never say that it is attached to the surface. It is its nature to be guarded under the chin [of a dragon] or kept in a topknot, so do not think that it is found on the surface. When you are drunk, a friend will give you the pearl, and you must give the pearl to a friend. When you receive the pearl from a friend, you surely will be drunk. Because this is so, it is the one bright pearl as the whole universe.

Thus, though on the surface there may seem to be change or no change [i.e., enlightenment or no enlightenment], it is the one bright pearl. Realizing it is so is itself the one bright pearl. The shapes and sounds of the bright pearl are seen in this way. Saying to yourself, "It is so," do not doubt that you, yourself, are the bright pearl by thinking, "I am not the bright pearl." Confusion and doubts, affirmations and negations, these are nothing but the ephemeral, small responses of ordinary folk; however, still, they are [the bright pearl] appearing as small, ephemeral responses.

Should we not appreciate it? The bright pearl's colors and brilliance are boundless. Color after color and every scintillation of light are the merit of the whole universe. Could anything ever snatch them away? Would anyone ever toss away even a simple roof tile in the marketplace [while looking for the pearl]? Do not be anxious about being reborn in one of the six realms of cause and effect. The bright pearl, which from beginning to end is essentially uninvolved [with cause and effect], is your original face, your enlightened nature.<sup>16</sup>

However, you and I, unaware of what the bright pearl is and is not, entertain countless doubts and nondoubts about it and turn them into indubitable fodder for the mind. But Xuansha's expression has made it clear that our own minds and bodies are the one bright pearl, and so we realize that our minds are not "ours." Who can be anxious as to whether birth and death are or are not the bright pearl? Even if there is doubt and anxiety, they are the bright pearl. There is not a single activity or thought that is not the bright pearl, and, consequently, both advancing and retreating in the Black Mountain Cave of demons is nothing but the one bright pearl.

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This selection is adapted from:

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of a jewel suspended in the air and emitting a brilliant light; (2) a story in the *Lotus Sutra* tells of a man placing a precious jewel in the lining of the clothing of his drunken friend, who, upon awakening, is unaware of his wealth; (3) Zhuangzi, the Daoist, speaks of a jewel guarded beneath the chin of a dragon; and (4) the *Lotus Sutra* tells of a grateful king who rewarded his military commander with castles, gold, and other things but would not part with a jewel that he wore in his topknot.

<sup>16</sup> "Uninvolved" is *fu-i*, which is literally, "does not taste." Here it is an abbreviation for *fu-i inga*, "not involved in cause and effect." Hence, my interpolation in the translation. The one bright pearl does not experience cause and effect.

*Shōbōgenzō*  
*Eye Treasury of the True Dharma*

[The commentary introducing each essay is by the translator Thomas Cleary].

**The Issue at Hand** (*Genjōkōan*)

The term *genjōkōan* seems to appear first in ninth-century China and is often used in Japanese Sōtō Zen to refer to present being as the topic of meditation or the issue of Zen. *Gen* means “manifestation” or “present,” *jō* means “become.” *Genjō* means actuality—being as is, at hand, or accomplished, as of an accomplished fact. *Kōan* is a common Zen word which is often left untranslated, having to some extent become a naturalized English word. *Kō* means official, public, or open, as opposed to private or personal; *an* means a consideration, or a considered decision. A *kōan* in standard literary Chinese means an official report or an issue under consideration. The term was adopted in Zen with much the same meanings, only transposed into the frame of reference of Zen tradition and experience.

*Genjōkōan* is one of the most popular and oft-quoted essays in *Shōbōgenzō*. Written to a lay disciple, it contains a number of key points stated in a most concise fashion. The very first paragraph contains a complete outline of Zen, in a covert presentation of the so-called “five ranks” (*go i*) device of the original Chinese Sōtō Zen school. The scheme of the five ranks—relative within absolute, absolute within relative, coming from within the absolute, arriving in the relative, and simultaneous attainment in both relative and absolute—is not overtly used in Dōgen’s work, perhaps because of the confusion surrounding it, but its structures are to be found throughout *Shōbōgenzō*.

Following this summary introduction, the essay proceeds to the discussion of enlightenment. Dōgen says the way to enlightenment is to forget the self. The self in this sense refers to an accumulation of habits, including the habit of attachment to this accumulation as a genuine personality. Dōgen calls this forgetting “shedding body and mind,” an expression which is said to have galvanized his awareness as a young man and which he repeatedly uses to describe Zen study. Commentators on Dōgen’s lectures describe it in these terms: “Each moment’ of time is thoughtless; things do not provoke a second thought,” and “This is the time when the whole mind and body attains great freedom.”

This, however, is not the whole issue. In one of his lectures Dōgen says that “shedding body and mind” is the beginning of the effort, and in *Genjōkōan* he affirms that there is continuing progress in buddhahood, going beyond the attainment of enlightenment: “There is ceasing the traces of enlightenment, which causes one to forever leave the traces of enlightenment which is cessation.” In the *Hokke* scripture Buddha reveals to his liberated disciples that nirvana, cessation of afflictive habits, which had been expediently represented as the goal, is as it were a resting place on an infinite path.

In the essay *The Business of Progress (or transcendence) of Buddha*, also in *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen wrote, “To go on informing the Buddha of today it is not only today is called the business of progress of Buddha.” The celebrated Zen master Hakuin said, “Without cultivation and practice after enlightenment, many who have seen the essence miss the boat”; and Hakuin’s assistant Tōrei said, “Lesser enlightenment turns out to be a hindrance to great enlightenment. If you give up lesser enlightenments and don’t cling to them, great enlightenment will surely be realized.” Dōgen says that there are differences in depth and breadth of the realization of enlightenment, and speaks here of enlightenment as being enlightened by all things. This leads to the issue of perspective.

Dōgen states that delusion is a matter of experiencing things with the burden of the self—the bundle of mental habits, ingrained views, which is identified with the self. This is a basic issue of all Buddhist thought. The condition of the self, with its set of conditioned perceptions and views, is implicitly taken as a kind of absolute or veritable point of reference if one takes one's experience as conceived to be reality. In order to overcome hidden prejudice in the form of unquestioned views, Dōgen says that introspection is necessary, to see that things have no absolute identity, that they are not necessarily or totally as one may view them.

But then Dōgen goes on to point out the absoluteness, so to speak, of relative identity. Logically, if particular things exist, or are defined, relative to one another and therefore lack absolute identity, yet that absolute identitylessness still depends on their relative identity. The approach Dōgen takes, however, is not that of deduction but of direct witness (*genryō*), which he refers to, in classic Zen terminology, as the realms of before and after being disconnected. Thus Dōgen explains the traditional “characteristics of emptiness” called birthlessness and nonperishing in terms of the noncoexistence of before and after, or the nonconcurrency of a state with its own nonexistence. Dōgen's emphasis here seems to be not on discursive understanding of this point of logic, but on presence of mind in the most thoroughgoing sense, direct experience of the present.

Dōgen also speaks of enlightenment in terms of the universal being reflected in the individual; this “merging” of universe and individual does not, however, obliterate the individual or restrict the universal. This leads to the apparent paradox of life being at once finite and infinite. One life, or one sphere of experience, contains everything that is within its scope and nothing that is beyond its range. At every moment we reach, or are at, the full extent of our experience; and yet this never limits the potential of experience in itself. Each moment is complete, hence infinite, in itself, though it be finite as a point of comparison with past or future. In the Kegon philosophy, this interpenetration of the finite and the infinite is represented by the figure of “arriving in one step,” each moment of awareness being the focal point of the whole nexus of existence. Again Dōgen drives at the full experience of the present without conceptually delineating it.

Finally Dōgen quotes a classic Zen story alluding to the necessity of practical application even though truth, or enlightenment, is inherent in everyone. A monk asks his teacher why he uses a fan if the nature of wind is eternal and omnipresent; the teacher replies that the student knows the nature of eternity but not the principle of omnipresence, and to illustrate this principle the teacher just fans himself. As one of the Kegon philosophers said, “If not for practice flowing from reality, there is no means to merge with reality.”

### *The Issue at Hand*

When all things are Buddha-teachings, then there is delusion and enlightenment, there is cultivation of practice, there is birth, there is death, there are Buddhas, there are sentient beings. When myriad things are all not self, there is no delusion, no enlightenment, no Buddhas, no sentient beings, no birth, no death. Because the Buddha Way originally sprang forth from abundance and paucity, there is birth and death, delusion and enlightenment, sentient beings and Buddhas. Moreover, though this is so, flowers fall when we cling to them, and weeds only grow when we dislike them.

Acting on and witnessing myriad things with the burden of oneself is “delusion.” Acting on and witnessing oneself in the advent of myriad things is enlightenment. Great enlightenment about delusion is Buddhas; great delusion about enlightenment is sentient beings. There are also those who attain enlightenment on top of enlightenment, and there are those who are further deluded in the midst of delusion. When the Buddhas are indeed the Buddhas, there is no need to be self-conscious of being Buddhas; nevertheless it is realizing buddhahood—Buddhas go on realizing.

In seeing forms with the whole body-mind, hearing sound with the whole body-mind, though one intimately understands, it isn't like reflecting images in a mirror, it's not like water and the moon—when you witness one side, one side is obscure.

Studying the Buddha Way is studying oneself. Studying oneself is forgetting oneself. Forgetting oneself is being enlightened by all things. Being enlightened by all things is causing the body-mind of oneself and the body-mind of others to be shed. There is ceasing the traces of enlightenment, which causes one to forever leave the traces of enlightenment which is cessation.

When people first seek the Teaching, they are far from the bounds of the Teaching. Once the Teaching is properly conveyed in oneself, already one is the original human being.

When someone rides in a boat, as he looks at the shore he has the illusion that the shore is moving. When he looks at the boat under him, he realizes the boat is moving. In the same way, when one takes things for granted with confused ideas of body-mind, one has the illusion that one's own mind and own nature are permanent; but if one pays close attention to one's own actions, the truth that things are not self will be clear.

Kindling becomes ash, and cannot become kindling again. However, we should not see the ash as after and the kindling as before. Know that kindling abides in the normative state of kindling, and though it has a before and after, the realms of before and after are disconnected. Ash, in the normative state of ash, has before and after. Just as that kindling, after having become ash, does not again become kindling, so after dying a person does not become alive again. This being the case, not saying that life becomes death is an established custom in Buddhism—therefore it is called *unborn*. That death does not become life is an established teaching of the Buddha; therefore we say *imperishable*. Life is an individual temporal state, death is an individual temporal state. It is like winter and spring—we don't think winter becomes spring, we don't say spring becomes summer.

People's attaining enlightenment is like the moon reflected in water. The moon does not get wet, the water isn't broken. Though it is a vast expansive light, it rests in a little bit of water—even the whole moon, the whole sky, rests in a dewdrop on the grass, rests in even a single droplet of water. That enlightenment does not shatter people is like the moon not piercing the water. People's not obstructing enlightenment is like the drop of dew not obstructing the moon in the sky. The depth is proportionate to the height. As for the length and brevity of time, examining the great and small bodies of water, you should discern the breadth and narrowness of the moon in the sky.

Before one has studied the Teaching fully in body and mind, one feels one is already sufficient in the Teaching. If the body and mind are replete with the Teaching, in one respect one senses insufficiency. For example, when one rides a boat out onto the ocean where there are no mountains and looks around, it only appears round, and one can see no other, different characteristics. However, this ocean is not round, nor is it square—the remaining qualities of the ocean are inexhaustible. It is like a palace, it is like ornaments, yet as far as our eyes can see, it only seems round. It is the same with all things—in the realms of matter, beyond conceptualization, they include many aspects, but we see and comprehend only what the power of our eye of contemplative study reaches. If we inquire into the “family ways” of myriad things, the qualities of seas and mountains, beyond seeming square or round, are endlessly numerous. We should realize there exist worlds everywhere. It's not only thus in out of the way places—know that even a single drop right before us is also thus.

As a fish travels through water, there is no bound to the water no matter how far it goes; as a bird flies through the sky, there's no bound to the sky no matter how far it flies. While this is so, the fish and birds have never been apart from the water and the sky—it's just that when the need is large the use is large, and when the requirement is small the use is small. In this way, though the bounds are unfailingly reached everywhere and tread upon in every single place, the bird would instantly die if it left the sky and the fish would instantly die if it left the water. Obviously,

water is life; obviously the sky is life. There is bird being life. There is fish being life. There is life being bird, there is life being fish. There must be progress beyond this—there is cultivation and realization, the existence of the living one being like this. Under these circumstances, if there were birds or fish who attempted to traverse the waters or the sky after having found the limits of the water or sky, they wouldn't find a path in the water or the sky—they won't find any place. When one finds this place, this action accordingly manifests as the issue at hand; when one finds this path, this action accordingly manifests as the issue at hand. This path, this place, is not big or small, not self or other, not preexistent, not now appearing—therefore it exists in this way. In this way, if someone cultivates and realizes the Buddha Way, it is *attaining a principle, mastering the principle*; it is *encountering a practice, cultivating the practice*. In this there is a place where the path has been accomplished, hence the unknowability of the known boundary is born together and studies along with the thorough investigation of the Buddha Teaching of this knowing—therefore it is thus. Don't get the idea that the attainment necessarily becomes one's own knowledge and view, that it would be known by discursive knowledge. Though realizational comprehension already takes place, implicit being is not necessarily obvious—*why necessarily* is there obvious becoming?

Zen Master Hōtetsu of Mt. Mayoku was using a fan. A monk asked him about this: “The nature of wind is eternal and all-pervasive—why then do you use a fan?” The master said, “You only know the nature of wind is eternal, but do not yet know the principle of its omnipresence.” The monk asked, “What is the principle of its omnipresence?” The master just fanned. The monk bowed.

The experience of the Buddha Teaching, the living road of right transmission, is like this. To say that since (the nature of wind) is permanent one should not use a fan, and that one should feel the breeze even when not using a fan, is not knowing permanence and not knowing the nature of the wind either. Because the nature of wind is eternal, the wind of Buddhism causes the manifestation of the earth's being gold and by participation develops the long river into butter.

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### **The Nature of Things** (*Hossho*)

The *nature of things* is a fundamental term of Mahayana Buddhism. It is defined as being the nature of *thusness* (*Tathatā*), *emptiness* (*Śūnyatā*), and *nirvana*. In pristine Buddhism, nirvana, or “extinction,” refers to the attainment of dispassion, peace of mind, freedom from anxiety and mental afflictions. In Mahayana Buddhism, nirvana is commonly used in reference to things, with the meaning of “emptiness.” In terms of the person, nirvana refers to the extinction of false description, of fixed views; this results in awareness of the “empty” or “open” nature of things. Emptiness means that things in themselves are indefinable; being dependent on relations, things are said to have no individual or absolute nature of their own. It is this nonabsoluteness which is called emptiness. Another way of expressing it is in terms of inconceivability. The descriptions by which things are defined, and even the experience of things, depend on the mind, and are not the supposed things in themselves. Thus the nature of things in themselves is said to be inconceivable, beyond description, or “empty.”

Yet this “emptiness” has no existence of its own either, since it is nothing but the nature of things as relative and identityless. That is to say, the emptiness of things and the relative existence of things are not antithetical but identical in essence. The term *thusness* embraces both of these aspects of reality—the relative existence of things and the emptiness of absolute existence of particular things. These two perspectives are referred to as two facets of thusness—that which is unchanging (absolute emptiness) and that which accords with conditions (relative existence). The

term *thusness* itself alludes to the simultaneous realization of emptiness and existence, experiencing directly and openly without fixed conceptual glosses, seeing everything as being simply “thus.”

This essay by Dōgen clearly aims at countering the mistaken notion that the nature of things *qua* emptiness is opposed to or exclusive of the appearances of things, or relative existence. This erroneous notion posits the obliteration of appearances as the means of realizing the nature of things, something which Dōgen opposes throughout his works. Rather than trying to obliterate anything, Dōgen aims at breaking through the barrier of conception to realize the nature of things in everything, to realize the nature of things *is* everything.

### *The Nature of Things*

In meditation study, whether following scripture or following a teacher, one *becomes enlightened alone without a teacher*. Becoming *enlightened alone without a teacher* is the activity of the nature of things. Even though one be *born knowing*, one should seek a teacher to inquire about the Path. Even in the case of *knowledge of the birthless*<sup>1</sup> one should definitely direct effort to mastering the Path. Which individuals are not *born knowing*? Even up to enlightenment, the fruit of buddhahood, it is a matter of following scriptures and teachers. Know that encountering a scripture or a teacher and attaining *absorption in the nature of things* is called the *born knowing* that attains *absorption in the nature of things* on encountering *absorption in the nature of things*. This is attaining knowledge of past lives, attaining the three superknowledges,<sup>2</sup> realizing unexcelled enlightenment, encountering inborn knowledge and learning inborn knowledge, encountering teacherless knowledge and spontaneous knowledge and correctly conveying teacherless knowledge and spontaneous knowledge.

If one were not *born knowing*, even though might encounter scriptures and teachers one could not hear of the *nature of things*, one could not witness the *nature of things*. The *Great Path* is not the principle of *like someone drinking water knows for himself whether it's warm or cool*. All Buddhas as well as all bodhisattvas and all living beings clarify the *Great Path* of the nature of all things by the power of inborn knowledge. To clarify the *Great Path* of the *nature of things* following scriptures or teachers is called clarifying the *nature of things* by oneself. Scriptures are the nature of things, are oneself. Teachers are the *nature of things*, are oneself. The *nature of things* is the teacher, the *nature of things* is oneself. Because the *nature of things* is oneself, it is not the self misconceived by heretics and demons. In the *nature of things* there are no heretics or demons—it is only *eating breakfast, eating lunch, having a snack*. Even so, those who claim to have studied for a long time, for twenty or thirty years, pass their whole life in a daze when they read or hear talk of the *nature of things*. Those who claim to have fulfilled Zen study and assume the rank of teacher, while they hear the voice of the *nature of things* and see the forms of the *nature of things*, yet their body and mind, objective and subjective experience, always just rise and fall in the pit of confusion. What this is like is wrongly thinking that the *nature of things* will appear when the whole world we perceive is obliterated, that the *nature of things* is not the present totality of phenomena. The principle of the *nature of things* cannot be like this. This *totality of phenomena* and the *nature of things* are far beyond any question of sameness or difference, beyond talk of distinction or identity. It is not past, present, or future, not annihilation or eternity, not form, sensation, conception, conditioning, or consciousness—therefore it is the *nature of things*.

Zen Master Baso said, “All living beings, for infinite eons, have never left absorption in the nature of things: they are always within absorption in the nature of things, wearing clothes, eating, conversing—the functions of the six sense organs, and all activities, all are the nature of things.”

The *nature of things* spoken of by Baso is the *nature of things* spoken of by the *nature of things*. It learns from the same source as Baso, is a fellow student of the *nature of things*: since hearing of it takes place, how could there not be speaking of it? The fact is that *the nature of things rides Baso*; it is *people eat food, food eats people*. Ever since the *nature of things*, it has never left *absorption in the nature of things*. It doesn't leave the *nature of things* after the *nature of things*, it doesn't leave the *nature of things* before the *nature of things*. The *nature of things*, along with *infinite eons*, is *absorption in the nature of things*; the *nature of things* is called *infinite eons*. Therefore the *here* of the immediate present is the *nature of things*; the *nature of things* is the *here* of the immediate present. *Wearing clothes and eating food* is the *wearing clothes and eating food of absorption in the nature of things*. It is the manifestation of the *nature of things* of food, it is the manifestation of the *nature of things* of eating, it is the manifestation of the *nature of things* of clothing, it is the manifestation of the *nature of things* of wearing.<sup>3</sup> If one does not dress or eat, does not talk or answer, does not use the senses, does not act at all, it is not the *nature of things*, it is *not entering the nature of things*.

The manifestation of the Path of the immediate present was transmitted by the Buddhas, reaching Shakyamuni Buddha; correctly conveyed by the Zen adepts, it reached Baso. Buddha to Buddha, adept to adept, correctly conveyed and handed on, it has been correctly communicated in *absorption in the nature of things*. Buddhas and Zen adepts, *not entering*, enliven the *nature of things*.<sup>4</sup> Though externalist scholars may have the term *nature of things*, it is not the *nature of things* spoken of by Baso. Though the power to propose that *living beings* who *don't leave the nature of things* are not the *nature of things* may achieve something, this is three or four new layers of the *nature of things*. To speak, reply, function, and act as if it were not the *nature of things* must be the *nature of things*. The days and months of *infinite eons* are the passage of the *nature of things*. The same is so of past, present, and future. If you take the limit of body and mind as the limit of body and mind and think it is far from the *nature of things*, this thinking still is the *nature of things*. If you don't consider the limit of body and mind as the limit of body and mind and think it is not the *nature of things*, this thought too is the *nature of things*. Thinking and not thinking are both the *nature of things*. To learn that since we have said *nature* (it means that) water must not flow and trees must not bloom and wither, is heretical.

Shakyamuni Buddha said, "Such characteristics, such nature." So *flowers blooming* and *leaves falling* are *such nature*. Yet ignorant people think that there could not be *flowers blooming and leaves falling* in the realm of the *nature of things*. For the time being one should not question another. You should model your doubt on verbal expression. Bringing it up as others have said it, you should investigate it over and over again—there will be escape from before.<sup>5</sup> The aforementioned thoughts are not wrong thinking, they are just thoughts while not yet having understood. It is not that this thinking will be caused to disappear when one understands. Flowers blooming and leaves falling are of themselves flowers blooming and leaves falling. The thinking that is thought that there can't be flowers blooming or leaves falling in the *nature of things* is the *nature of things*. It is thought which has fallen out according to a pattern; therefore it is thought of the *nature of things*. The whole thinking of thinking of the *nature of things* is such an appearance.

Although Baso's statement *all is the nature of things* is truly an *eighty* or *ninety percent* statement, there are many points which Baso has not expressed. That is to say, he doesn't say *the natures of all things do not leave the nature of things*,<sup>6</sup> he doesn't say *the natures of all things are all the nature of things*. He doesn't say *all living beings do not leave living beings*,<sup>7</sup> he doesn't say *all living beings are a little bit of the nature of things*, he doesn't say *all living beings are a little bit of all living beings*,<sup>8</sup> he doesn't say *the natures of all things are a little bit of living beings*.<sup>9</sup> He doesn't say *half a living being is half the nature of things*.<sup>10</sup> He doesn't say *nonexistence of living beings is the nature of things*,<sup>11</sup> he doesn't say *the nature of things is not living beings*, he doesn't say *the nature of things exudes the nature of things*, he doesn't say *living beings shed living beings*. We only hear that living beings do not leave absorption in the nature of



things—he doesn't say that the nature of things cannot leave absorption in living beings, there is no statement of absorption in the nature of things exiting and entering absorption in living beings. Needless to say, we don't hear of the attainment of buddhahood of the *nature of things*, we don't hear *living beings realize the nature of things*, we don't hear *the nature of things realizes the nature of things*, there is no statement of how *inanimate beings don't leave the nature of things*. Now one should ask Baso, what do you call "living beings"? If you call the *nature of things* living beings, it is *what thing comes thus?* If you call living beings living beings, it is *if you speak of it as something, you miss it*. Speak quickly, speak quickly!

<sup>1</sup>"The Birthless" means emptiness, also immediate experience without comparison of before and after. This line could read "Even if one be without inborn knowledge . . .," but in Buddhism the term conventionally refers to knowledge of the uncreated.

<sup>2</sup>The three superknowledges are paranormal perceptions of saints and Buddhas: knowledge of birth and death of beings in the past, knowledge of the features of birth and death of beings in the future, and knowledge of extinguishing mental contaminations. In Zen all three are sometimes interpreted in reference to insight into the fundamental mind, which is in essence the same in all times and has no inherent contamination.

<sup>3</sup>Var. Lect. "Clothing is the manifestation of the nature of things, food is the manifestation of the nature of things, eating is the manifestation of the nature of things, wearing is the manifestation of the nature of things."

<sup>4</sup>Here "not entering" means that the nature of things is not something external to be entered; rather it is something omnipresent to be lived.

<sup>5</sup>This passage seems to point to *kōan* practice, specifically the use of *kosoku kōan* or ancient *kōan*, Zen sayings or stories used to focus awareness in certain ways. "There will be escape from before" refers to the shedding of former views or states of mind.

<sup>6</sup>The (individual) natures of things are not apart from the (universal) nature of things, because individual natures are relative, hence empty of absolute identity—this emptiness itself is the universal nature of things.

<sup>7</sup>Living beings *qua* living beings—that is, in terms of relative identity or conditional existence—are always such, by definition.

<sup>8</sup>"All living beings" as seen from one point of view (such as that of human perception) are a small part of "all living beings" as seen or experienced from all possible points of reference. This is reminiscent of the Kegon teaching of all realms of being mutually containing one another. According to the Tendai doctrine, the totality of all living beings is defined in terms of ten realms or universes, but as each contains the potential of all the others, this makes one hundred realms. The Kegon doctrine takes this further and says that each of the latent or potential realms in each realm also contains the latent potential of every other realm, so they are, in terms of their endless interrelation, multiplied and remultiplied infinitely.

<sup>9</sup>In terms of the doctrine of the interdependence of everything in the cosmos, as exemplified by the Kegon teaching, all things are a part of the existence of each and every thing and being.

<sup>10</sup>Essence (emptiness of absolute identity) and characteristics (existence of relative identity) may be likened to two "halves" of the totality of all existence and the nature of things.

<sup>11</sup>"Nonexistence of living beings" as emptiness of an absolute nature of "living beings" is the nature of things *qua* emptiness.

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## Birth and Death (*Shoji*)

*Birth and Death*, which is undated in the *Shōbōgenzō*, integrates transcendence with being in the world. The theme is a reflection of the basic principle that existence is empty and emptiness is existence, which is put into practice by neither grasping nor rejecting, being free from both craving and aversion.

In a well-known Zen story a monk comes to a Zen master, who asks him where he has come from. "The South," replies the monk. The master asks the monk about Buddhism in the South, a region abounding in Zen centers; the monk answers, "There's a lot of discussion going on." The

master says, “How can that compare with me planting the fields here and making rice balls to eat?” The monk, who apparently did not see anything enlightening or liberating about this, said, “What can you do about the world?” The master said, “What do you call the world?”

In the final analysis, according to the Zen teachings, it is not that the world binds people, it is people who bind themselves to the world. Bondage and delusion do not come from the world itself, but from ideas and attitudes regarding the world, from people’s relation to the world. Therefore the question of what can be done about the world calls forth the question of what people think and feel the world to be.

### ***Birth and Death***

“Because there is Buddha in birth and death, there is no birth and death.” Also, “because there is no Buddha in birth and death, one is not deluded by birth and death.” These are the words of two Zen teachers called Kassan and Jōsan. Being the words of enlightened people, they were surely not uttered without reason. People who want to get out of birth and death should understand what they mean.

If people seek Buddha outside of birth and death, that is like heading north to go south, like facing south to try to see the north star: accumulating causes of birth and death all the more, they have lost the way to liberation. Simply understanding that birth and death is itself nirvana, there is nothing to reject as birth and death, nothing to seek as nirvana. Only then will one have some measure of detachment from birth and death.

It is a mistake to assume that one moves from birth to death. Birth, being one point in time, has a before and after; therefore in Buddhism birth is called unborn. Extinction too, being one point in time, also has before and after, so it is said that extinction is nonextinction. When we say “birth” there is nothing but birth, and when we say “extinction” there is nothing but extinction. Therefore when birth comes it is just birth, and when extinction comes it is just extinction. In facing birth and extinction, don’t reject, don’t long.

This birth and death is the life of the Buddha. If we try to reject or get rid of this, we would lose the life of the Buddha. If we linger in this and cling to birth and death, this too is losing the life of the Buddha; it is stopping the Buddha’s manner of being. When we have no aversion or longing, only then do we reach the heart of the Buddha.

However, don’t figure it in your mind, don’t say it in words. Just letting go of and forgetting body and mind, casting them into the house of Buddha, being activated by the Buddha—when we go along in accord with this, then without applying effort or expending the mind we part from birth and death and become Buddhas. Who would linger in the mind?

There is a very easy way to become a Buddha: not doing any evil, having no attachment to birth and death, sympathizing deeply with all beings, respecting those above, sympathizing with those below, not feeling aversion or longing for anything, not thinking or worrying—this is called Buddha. Don’t seek it anywhere else.

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All selections from:

Cleary, Thomas, trans. *Shōbōgenzō: Zen Essays by Dōgen*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1986.