

The Way of Everyday Life

(Shobogenzo Genjokoan)

Eihei Dogen

Written in mid-autumn of the first year of the Tempuku Era (1233 C.E.) and given to my lay student Yokoshu of Kyushu.

When all dharmas are Buddhadharma, there are enlightenment and delusion, practice, life and death, buddhas and creatures.

When the ten thousand dharmas are without self, there are no delusion, no enlightenment, no buddhas, no creatures, no life and no death.

The Buddha Way transcends being and non-being; therefore there are life and death, delusion and enlightenment, creatures and buddhas.

Nevertheless, flowers fall with our attachment, and weeds spring up with our aversion.

To carry the self forward and realize the ten thousand dharmas is delusion.

That the ten thousand dharmas advance and realize the self is enlightenment.

It is buddhas who enlighten delusion.

It is creatures who are deluded in enlightenment.

Further, there are those who attain enlightenment above enlightenment; there are those who are deluded within delusion.

When buddhas are truly buddhas, one need not be aware of being buddha.

However, one is the realized buddha and further advances in realizing buddha.

Seeing forms with the whole body and mind, hearing sounds with the whole body and mind, one understands them intimately.

Yet it is not like a mirror with reflections, nor like water under the moon—

When one side is realized, the other side is dark.

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To study the Buddha Way is to study the self.

To study the self is to forget the self.

To forget the self is to be enlightened by the ten thousand dharmas.

To be enlightened by the ten thousand dharmas is to free one's body and mind and those of others.

No trace of enlightenment remains, and this traceless enlightenment is continued forever.

When one first seeks the truth, one separates oneself from it.

When one has already correctly transmitted the truth to oneself, one is one's original self at that moment.

When riding on a boat, if one watches the shore one may assume that the shore is moving.

But watching the boat directly, one knows that it is the boat that moves.

If one examines the ten thousand dharmas with a deluded body and mind, one will suppose that one's mind and nature are permanent.

But if one practices intimately and returns to the true self, it will be clear that the ten thousand dharmas are without self.

Firewood turns into ash and does not turn into firewood again. But do not suppose that the ash is after and the firewood is before.

We must realize that firewood is in the state of being firewood and has its before and after. Yet having this before and after it is independent of them.

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Ash is in the state of being ash and has its before and after.

Just as firewood does not become firewood again after it is ash, so after one's death one does not return to life again.

Thus, that life does not become death is a confirmed teaching of the Buddhadharma; for this reason, life is called the non-born.

That death does not become life is a confirmed teaching of the Buddhadharma; therefore, death is called the non extinguished.

Life is a period of itself.

Death is a period of itself.

For example, they are like winter and spring.

We do not think that winter becomes spring, nor do we say that spring becomes summer.

Gaining enlightenment is like the moon reflecting in the water. The moon does not get wet, nor is the water disturbed.

Although its light is extensive and great, the moon is reflected even in a puddle an inch across.

The whole moon and the whole sky are reflected in a dew-drop in the grass, in one drop of water.

Enlightenment does not disturb the person, just as the moon does not disturb the water.

A person does not hinder enlightenment, just as a dew-drop does not hinder the moon in the sky.

The depth of the drop is the height of the moon.

As for the duration of the reflection, you should examine the water's vastness or smallness,

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And you should discern the brightness or dimness of the heavenly moon.

When the truth does not fill our body and mind, we think that we have enough.

When the truth fills our body and mind, we realize that something is missing.

For example, when we view the four directions from a boat on the ocean where no land is in sight, we see only a circle and nothing else.

No other aspects are apparent.

However, this ocean is neither round nor square, and its qualities are infinite in variety. It is like a palace. It is like a jewel. It just seems circular as far as our eyes can reach at the time.

The ten thousand dharmas are likewise like this.

Although ordinary life and enlightened life assume many aspects, we only recognize and understand through practice what the penetrating power of our vision can reach.

In order to appreciate the ten thousand dharmas, we should know that although they may look round or square, the other qualities of oceans and mountains are infinite in variety; furthermore, other universes lie in all quarters.

It is so not only around ourselves but also right here, and in a single drop of water.

When a fish swims in the ocean, there is no limit to the water, no matter how far it swims.

When a bird flies in the sky, there is no limit to the air, no matter how far it flies.

However, no fish or bird has ever left its element since the beginning.

When the need is large, it is used largely.

When the need is small, it is used in a small way. Thus, no creature ever comes short of its own completeness. Wherever it stands, it does not fail to cover the ground. If a bird leaves the air, it will die at once.

If a fish leaves the water, it will die at once.

Know, then, that water is life.

Know that air is life.

Life is the bird and life is the fish.

Beyond these, there are further implications and ramifications.

In this way, there are practice and enlightenment, mortality and immortality.

Now if a bird or a fish tries to reach the limit of its element before moving in it, this bird or this fish will not find its way or its place.

Attaining this place, one's daily life is the realization of ultimate reality (genjokoan). Attaining this way, one's daily life is the realization of ultimate reality (genjokoan).

Since this place and this way are neither large nor small, neither self nor other, neither existing previously nor just arising now, they therefore exist thus.

Thus, if one practices and realizes the Buddha Way, when one gains one dharma, one penetrates one dharma; when one encounters one action, one practices one action.

Since the place is here and the Way leads everywhere, the reason the limits of the knowable are unknowable is simply that our knowledge arises with, and practices with, the absolute perfection of the Buddhadharma.

Do not practice thinking that realization must become the object of one's knowledge and vision and be grasped conceptually.

Even though the attainment of realization is immediately manifest, its intimate nature is not necessarily realized. Some may realize it and some may not.

Priest Baoche of Magu Mountain was fanning himself. A monk approached and asked, "Sir, the nature of the wind is permanent, and there is no place it does not reach. Why, then, must you still fan yourself?" "Although you understand that the nature of wind is permanent," the master replied, "you do not understand the meaning of its reaching everywhere." "What is the meaning of its reaching everywhere?" asked the monk. The master just fanned himself. The monk bowed with deep respect.

This is the enlightened experience of Buddhadharma and the vital way of its correct transmission.

Those who say we should not use a fan because wind is permanent, and so we should know the existence of wind without using a fan, know neither permanency nor the nature of wind.

Because the nature of wind is eternally present, the wind of Buddhism actualizes the gold of the earth and ripens the cheese of the long river.

This is a revision by Taizan Maezumi and Francis Dojun Cook of the Chotan Aitken Kazuaki Tanahashi translation.