

*Talk on Wholehearted Practice of the Way:
A Translation of Eihei Dōgen Bendōwa*

All buddha-tathagatas together have been simply transmitting wondrous dharma and actualizing anuttara samyak sambodhi for which there is an unsurpassable, unfabricated, wondrous method.¹ This wondrous dharma, which has been transmitted only from buddha to buddha without deviation, has as its criterion jijuyū zanmai.²

For disporting oneself freely in this samadhi, practicing zazen in an upright posture is the true gate.³ Although this dharma is abundantly inherent in each person, it is not manifested without practice, it is not attained without realization. "When you let go, the dharma fills your hands; it is not within the boundary of one or many. "When you try to speak, it fills your mouth; it is not limited to vertical or horizontal.⁴ Buddhas continuously dwell in and maintain this dharma, yet no trace of conceptualization remains. Living beings constantly function in and use this dharma, yet it does not appear in their perception.

The wholehearted practice of the Way that I am talking about allows all things to exist in enlightenment and enables us to live out oneness in the path of emancipation. "When we break through the barrier and drop off all limitations, we are no longer concerned with conceptual distinctions.

After arousing bodhi mind and beginning to seek the dharma, I traveled throughout this country and visited various teachers.⁵ During that time I met my late teacher Myōzen at Kenninji temple. Nine years passed swiftly while I practiced with him, and I learned a little of the way of the Rinzai tradition. Master Myōzen was a great disciple of Ancestor Eisai, from whom he alone received correct transmission of the unsurpassable buddha-dharma.⁶ No one could compare to Myōzen.

Later I went to Song [dynasty] China and visited various masters in Zhejiang Province, where I learned the ways of the five schools of Zen. Finally, I met Zen Master Nyojō on Mount Taipai and completely clarified the great matter of lifelong practice.⁷ After that, I returned home in the first year of Sheting (1227).⁸ To spread this dharma and to free living beings became my vow. I felt as if a heavy burden had been placed on my shoulders.

In spite of that, I set aside my vow to propagate this, in order to wait for conditions under which it could flourish. For now I will live alone, moving from place to place like a cloud or duckweed, and follow the way of the ancient sages. However, there might be some sincere practitioners who on their own do not seek after fame or profit and who give priority to the mind that seeks the Way. But they still may be vainly led astray by false teachers and recklessly cover up correct understanding and become drunk in their own confusion, sinking into delusion for a long time. How will it be possible for [these sincere practitioners] to nurture the true seed of prajna and have appropriate occasion to attain the Way? Since this unworthy wayfarer [Dogen] is now living like a cloud or duckweed, how will they find the mountain or river where they can visit me? Because I care about these people, I have recollected and written about what I saw with my own eyes of the style of practice in the Zen monasteries of Song China, and what I received and uphold as the profound teaching of my master. I leave this for devoted practitioners of the way of serenity in order to let them know about the true dharma of buddhas. Here is the genuine expression of the essence.

Great Teacher Shakyamuni Buddha imparted the

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dharma to Mahakashyapa at the Vulture Peak assembly, and it was correctly transmitted from ancestor to ancestor until it reached the venerable Bodhidharma.⁹ Bodhidharma himself went to China and imparted the dharma to the Great Teacher Eka.¹⁰ This was the first transmission of the buddha-dharma in the East (China).

In the same manner, the dharma was directly transmitted [ancestor to ancestor] until it eventually reached the Sixth Ancestor, Zen Master Daikan.¹¹ At that time, the authentic buddha-dharma actually spread throughout China, and reality beyond conceptual distinctions was manifested. There were two great disciples under the Sixth Ancestor: Ejō of Nangaku and Gyōshi of Seigen.¹² Both of them transmitted and maintained buddha mudra and were guiding teachers for all beings.¹³ As these two streams of the dharma flowed and permeated widely, the five gates opened: the Hōgen, Igyō, Sōtō, Unmon, and Rinzai schools.¹⁴ These days in Song China, only the Rinzai school is present everywhere. Although the five schools differ, there is only one buddha mind mudra.

In China, although scriptures were continuously introduced and spread since the later Han dynasty (first century B.C.E.), still no one could determine which was most essential. After the First Ancestor came from the West, the roots of the entanglements were cut, and the one buddha-dharma pervaded. We cannot help but yearn for this to happen in our country as well.

For all ancestors and buddhas who have been dwelling in and maintaining buddha-dharma, practicing upright sitting in jijuyū zanmai is the true path for opening up enlightenment.¹⁵ Both in India and in China, those who have attained enlightenment have followed this way. This is because each teacher and each disciple has been intimately and correctly transmitting this subtle method and receiving and maintaining its true spirit.

According to the unmistakably handed down tradition, the straightforward buddha-dharma that has been simply transmitted is supreme among the supreme. From the time you begin practicing with a teacher, the practices of incense burning, bowing, nembutsu, repentance, and reading sutras are not at all essential; just sit, dropping off body and mind.¹⁶

When one displays the buddha mudra with one's whole body and mind, sitting upright in this samadhi even for a short time, everything in the entire dharma world becomes buddha mudra, and all space in the universe completely becomes enlightenment.¹⁷ Therefore, it enables buddha-tathagatas to increase the dharma joy of their own original grounds and renew the adornment of the way of awakening. Simultaneously, all living beings of the dharma world in the ten directions and six realms become clear and pure in body and mind, realize great emancipation, and their own original face appears. At that time, all things together awaken to supreme enlightenment and utilize buddha-body, immediately go beyond the culmination of awakening, and sit upright under the kingly bodhi tree.¹⁸ At the same time, they turn the incomparable, great dharma wheel and begin expressing ultimate and unfabricated profound prajna.

There is a path through which the anuttara samyak sambodhi of all things returns [to the person in zazen], and whereby [that person and the enlightenment of all things] intimately and imperceptibly assist each other. Therefore this zazen person without fail drops off body and mind, cuts away previous tainted views and thoughts, awakens genuine buddha-dharma, universally helps the buddha work in each place, as numerous as atoms, where buddha-tathagatas teach and practice, and widely influences practitioners who are going beyond buddha, thereby vigorously exalting the dharma that goes beyond buddha.¹⁹ At this time, because earth, grasses and trees, fences and walls, tiles and pebbles, all things in the dharma realm in ten directions, carry out buddha work, therefore everyone receives the benefit of wind and water movement caused by this functioning, and all are imperceptibly helped by the wondrous and incomprehensible influence of buddha to actualize the

enlightenment at hand. Since those who receive and use this water and fire extend the buddha influence of original enlightenment, all who live and talk with these people also share and universally unfold the boundless buddha virtue and they circulate the inexhaustible, ceaseless, incomprehensible, and immeasurable buddha dharma within and without the whole dharma world. However, these various [mutual influences] do not mix into the perceptions of this person sitting, because they take place within stillness without any fabrication, and they are enlightenment itself. If practice and enlightenment were separate as people commonly believe, it would be possible for them to perceive each other.²⁰ But that which is associated with perceptions cannot be the standard of enlightenment because deluded human sentiment cannot reach the standard of enlightenment.

Moreover, although both mind and object appear and disappear within stillness, because this takes place in the realm of self-receiving and self-employing (*jijuyū*) without moving a speck of dust or destroying a single form, extensive buddha work and profound, subtle buddha influence are carried out.²¹ The grass, trees, and earth affected by this functioning radiate great brilliance together and endlessly expound the deep, wondrous dharma. Grasses and trees, fences and walls demonstrate and exalt it for the sake of living beings, both ordinary and sage; and in turn, living beings, both ordinary and sage, express and unfold it for the sake of grasses and trees, fences and walls. The realm of self-awakening and awakening others is fundamentally endowed with the quality of enlightenment with nothing lacking, and allows the standard of enlightenment to be actualized ceaselessly.

Therefore, even if only one person sits for a short time, because this zazen is one with all existence and completely permeates all time, it performs everlasting buddha guidance within the inexhaustible dharma world in the past, present, and future. [Zazen] is equally the same practice and the same enlightenment for both the person sitting and for all dharmas.²² The melodious sound continues to resonate as it echoes, not only during sitting practice, but before and after striking *sunyata*, which continues endlessly before and after a hammer hits it.²³ Not only that, but all things are endowed with original practice within the original face, which is impossible to measure.

You should know that even if all the buddhas in the ten directions, as numerous as the sands of the Ganges River, together engage the full power of their buddha wisdom, they could never reach the limit, or measure or comprehend the virtue, of one person's zazen.

QUESTION ONE:

Now we have heard that the virtue of this zazen is immense. Stupid people may question this by asking, "There are many gates to the buddha-dharma. Why do you only recommend zazen?"

REPLY:

It is because this is the true gate to buddha-dharma.

QUESTION TWO:

Why is this alone the true gate?

REPLY:

Great Teacher Shakyamuni correctly transmitted the wondrous method for attaining the Way, and the tathagatas of the three times (past, present, and future) also all attain the Way through zazen. For this reason, [zazen] has been conveyed from one person to another as the true gate. Not only that, but all the ancestors of

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India and China attained the Way through zazen. Therefore I am now showing the true gate to human and celestial beings.

QUESTION THREE:

Relying on either the correct transmitting of the wondrous method of tathagatas or following the tracks of the ancestral teachers is truly beyond our ordinary thinking. However, reading sutras or chanting nembutsu naturally can become a cause of satori. How can just sitting vainly without doing anything be a means for attaining enlightenment?

REPLY:

That you now consider the samadhi of the buddhas, the unsurpassed great dharma, as vainly sitting doing nothing, is slandering the Mahayana. This is very deep delusion, as if saying that there is no water even while being in the middle of the great ocean. Thankfully, [doing zazen] is already sitting peacefully in the jijuyū zanmai of the buddhas. Doesn't this manifest extensive virtue? It is pitiful that your eyes are not yet open and your mind is still drunk.

On the whole, the buddha realm is incomprehensible, unreachable through discrimination, much less can it be known with no faith and inferior insight. Only people of great capacity and true faith are able to enter. People without faith have difficulty accepting, even when taught. Even at Vulture Peak, there was a group of people of whom Buddha said, "It is good that they leave."²⁴ Generally, if true faith arises in your heart, you should practice and study. If it does not, you should give it up for a while and regret not having the blessing of dharma from long ago.

Furthermore, do you really know the virtue to be gained by working at such practices as reading sutras or chanting nembutsu? The notion that merely making sounds by moving your tongue leads to the virtue of the buddha work is completely meaningless; it is extremely far, tremendously distant, from resembling buddha-dharma. Also, as for opening the sutras, if you clearly understand what Buddha has taught as the principle of sudden and gradual practice, and practice in accord with that teaching, you will certainly accomplish enlightenment. Vainly wasting your thinking and discrimination does not compare to the virtue of gaining bodhi. Intending to reach the buddha way through stupid ceaseless chanting millions of times is like steering a cart north and trying to go south. It is also the same as trying to put a square peg in a round hole. Reading literature while ignoring the way of practice is like a person reading a prescription but forgetting to take the medicine; what is the benefit? Continuously uttering sounds like frogs in a spring rice paddy croaking day and night is also ultimately worthless. Furthermore, people deeply blinded by fame and profit have difficulty abandoning these things because their greed is exceedingly deep. Since this was the case in ancient times, why shouldn't it be so in the modern world? We must feel the utmost sympathy.

You must clearly understand that the wondrous dharma of the seven buddhas manifests its essential meaning and is received and upheld only when a practitioner matches the mind, actualizes awakening, and follows and receives the true transmission of a master who embodies the Way and clarifies the mind.²⁵ This [wondrous dharma] cannot be fully understood by a teacher who only studies words. Therefore, immediately cease this skepticism, practice the way of zazen under the guidance of a true teacher, and fully actualize the jijuyū zanmai of the buddhas.

QUESTION FOUR:

The Hokke (Tendai) and Kegon teachings, which have been transmitted now in our country, are both the most sublime teachings of the Mahayana.²⁶ Moreover, the Shingon teaching was intimately transmitted from Vairocana Tathagata to Vajrasattva, from teacher to disciple without deviation.²⁷ Its principle is that "Mind itself is buddha" or "This mind becomes buddha," which propounds the true awakening of the five buddhas at the instant of sitting, without passing through many *kalpas* of practice.²⁸ This must be called the pinnacle of buddha-dharma. In spite of that, what superior features in the practice you are now speaking about cause you to recommend this only and set aside those others?

REPLY:

Buddhist practitioners should know not to argue about the superiority or inferiority of teachings and not to discriminate between superficial or profound dharma, but should only know whether the practice is genuine or false. There were those who flowed into the buddha way drawn by grasses, flowers, mountains, or rivers, and there are some who received and upheld the buddha mudra from grasping earth, stones, sand, or pebbles. Furthermore, words that express the vastness [of reality] are even more abundant than all the myriad things, but also the turning of the great dharma wheel is contained in one speck of dust. Therefore, the words "The mind itself is buddha" are like the moon reflected in the water. The principle "at the instant of sitting becoming buddha" is also a reflection within a mirror. Don't be caught up in the skillfulness of words. Now, in order to allow you to become an authentic person of the Way, I recommend [truly engaging in] practice that directly actualizes bodhi, and am showing you the wondrous way that is simply transmitted by buddha ancestors.

Also, in transmitting buddha-dharma, you must definitely have as a true teacher someone who accords with enlightenment. It is worthless to take as a guiding teacher a scholar who just makes calculations about words, since this would be like a blind person leading the blind. Now, the followers of the authentic transmission of buddha ancestors all esteem the clear-sighted masters who have attained the way and accord with enlightenment, and request them to maintain buddha-dharma. Because of this, deities from seen and unseen realms who come to take refuge, as well as people who have actualized the rank of arhat and come to ask about the dharma, will all without fail be given the means to clarify the mind ground.²⁹ We have not yet heard about this in the various schools. Buddha disciples should just learn buddha-dharma.

You should also know that we unquestionably lack nothing of unsurpassed bodhi, but although we receive and use it endlessly, because we cannot fully accept it we mindlessly make our arising views habitual and think of this [buddha-dharma] as an object, thus vainly stumbling on the great way. Because of these views, people see various [illusory] flowers in the sky, such as believing [buddha's teaching to be only] the twelve-fold chain of causation of the twenty-five realms of existence, or never exhausting the doctrines of three vehicles, five vehicles, and buddha's existence or nonexistence.³⁰ These views arise endlessly. You should not think that studying such teachings is the correct way to practice buddha-dharma.³¹ On the contrary, when we truly do zazen thoroughly, relying on the buddha mudra and letting go of all affairs, we transcend the limits of sentimental judgments about delusion and enlightenment, are not caught up in the [dichotomy of] paths of ordinary people or sages, and immediately stroll beyond classifications and receive and use great awakening.³² How can the activities of those who are involved in the snares of words and phrases compare with this?

QUESTION FIVE:

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Concentration is one of the three basic studies; meditation is one of the six *paramitas*.³³ Both of these are studied by all bodhisattvas from the beginning and practiced regardless of whether they are sharp or dull. So the zazen you now speak of is already included. For what reason do you say the true dharma of the tathagata is consolidated in this [one practice]?

REPLY:

This question is arising now because you name as "Zen School" this unsurpassed great dharma of the true dharma eye treasury, the one great matter of the tathagatas.³⁴ You should know that this title "Zen School" originated in China and was never heard of in India. At first, while Great Master Bodhidharma sat facing the wall for nine years at Shōrinji Temple on Su Mountain, both monks and laypeople did not yet know buddha's true dharma and called him the brahman who practiced zazen as the essence.³⁵ After that, all the ancestors for each generation always just practiced zazen. Seeing this, foolish worldly people, who did not understand the reality, in confusion called this the "Zazen School."³⁶ Nowadays, they omit the word *za* (sitting) and just call it the "Zen School." This process is obvious from the sayings of the ancestors. Do not consider [zazen] to be the concentra-tion and meditation of the six paramitas and the three basic studies.

The intention of Buddha to transmit this buddha-dharma is revealed in his own life. It is useless to doubt the truth that the ceremony done by the Tathagata in ancient times at the assembly on Vulture Peak, when he transmitted solely to Venerable Mahakashyapa the unsurpassed great dharma of the true dharma eye treasury of the wondrous mind of nirvana, was seen with their own eyes by celestial beings presently in the heavenly realms.³⁷ Definitely the buddha-dharma is protected eternally by those celestial beings, whose guardianship has not yet passed. Truly you should know that this [zazen] is the complete path of the buddha-dharma, and nothing can compare with it.

QUESTION SIX:

Among the four different postures (walking, standing, sitting, lying down), why does Buddhism encourage entering realization through meditation only in sitting?

REPLY:

It is not possible to thoroughly comprehend the path by which the buddhas from the past, one after another, have been practicing and entering realization. If you seek a reason, you must know that it is only because [sitting] is what has been used by Buddhist practitioners, and beyond this you do not need to search. However, the Ancestor [Nagarjuna] praises it, saying "Zazen itself is the dharma gate of ease and delight (nirvana)."³⁸ So couldn't we infer that it is because [sitting] is the most stable and peaceful of the four postures? Moreover, this is not the path of practice of one or two buddhas, but all buddhas and ancestors follow this path.

QUESTION SEVEN:

As for the practice of zazen, people who have not yet realized buddha-dharma should attain enlightenment through practicing the way of zazen.³⁹ But what could those who have already clarified the true buddha-dharma expect from doing zazen?

REPLY:

Although it is said that one should not relate dreams to fools and it is useless to give oars to mountain folks, I will give you further instruction.

Thinking that practice and enlightenment are not one is no more than a view that is outside the Way [that is, deluded]. In buddha-dharma, practice and enlightenment are one and the same. Because it is the practice of enlightenment, a beginner's wholehearted practice of the Way is exactly the totality of original enlightenment. For this reason, in conveying the essential attitude for practice, it is taught not to wait for enlightenment outside practice. This must be so because [this practice] is the directly indicated original enlightenment. Since it is already the enlightenment of practice, enlightenment is endless; since it is the practice of enlightenment, practice is beginningless. Therefore, both Shakyamuni Tathagata and Venerable Mahakashyapa were accepted and used in the practice of enlightenment, and in the same manner Great Teacher Bodhidharma and Great Ancestor Daikan [the Sixth Ancestor] were pulled and turned in the practice of enlightenment. Traces of dwelling in and maintaining buddha-dharma are all like this.

Already there is practice not separate from enlightenment, and fortunately for us, this wholehearted engaging the Way with beginner's mind, which transmits the undivided wondrous practice, is exactly attaining undivided original enlightenment in the ground of nonfabrication. We must know that, in order not to allow defilement of enlightenment inseparable from practice, the buddha ancestors vigilantly teach us not to slacken practice.⁴⁰ When wondrous practice is cast off original enlightenment fills our hands; when we are free from original enlightenment wondrous practice is carried out through the whole body.

Also, I saw with my own eyes in Great Song China that Zen monasteries in various regions, with from five or six hundred to one or two thousand monks, all had zazen halls and doing zazen day and night was encouraged. When I asked the teachers transmitting buddha mind mudra and who were in charge of temples about the essence of buddha-dharma, they spoke of the principle that practice and enlightenment are not two.

For this reason I urge not only the practitioners in this tradition but all lofty persons seeking dharma, people wishing for the genuine buddha-dharma regardless of whether they are beginners or advanced, without distinguishing between the ordinary and the sage, to engage in zazen according to the teachings of the buddha ancestors and following the path of masters.

Haven't you heard the ancestral teacher's utterance, "It is not that there is no practice and enlightenment, but only that it cannot be defiled"? Also it was said, "A person who sees the Way practices the Way."⁴¹ You should know that you must practice in the midst of attaining the Way.

QUESTION EIGHT:

When all the teachers who spread the teachings in our country in past ages came back from China and introduced Buddhism, why did they put aside this essential practice and only bring back the teachings?

REPLY:

The reason the ancient teachers did not convey this practice is that the time was not yet ripe.

QUESTION NINE:

Did those venerable teachers comprehend this dharma?

REPLY:

If they had understood, it would have been introduced.

QUESTION TEN:

Someone has said, "Do not grieve over life and death. here is an instantaneous means for separating from life and death. It is to understand the principle that mind nature is permanent. This means that even though the body that is born will inevitably be carried into death, still this mind nature never perishes. If you really understand that the mind nature existing in our body is not subject to birth and death, then since it is the original nature, although the body is only a temporary form haphazardly born here and dying, the mind is permanent and unchangeable in the past, present, and future. To know this is called release from life and death. Those who know this principle will forever extinguish their rounds of life and death, and when their bodies perish they enter into the ocean of original nature. When they stream into this ocean, they are truly endowed with the same wondrous virtues as the buddha-tathagatas. Now even though you know this, because your body was produced by the delusory karma of previous lives, you are not the same as the sages. Those who do not yet know this must forever transmigrate within the realm of life and death. Consequently, you need comprehend only the permanence of mind nature. What can you expect from vainly spending your whole life doing quiet sitting?"

Is such an opinion truly in accord with the way of buddhas and ancestors?

REPLY:

The idea you have just mentioned is not buddha-dharma at all, but the fallacious view of Senika.⁴²

This fallacy says that there is a spiritual intelligence in one's body which discriminates love and hatred or right and wrong as soon as it encounters phenomena, and has the capacity to distinguish all such things as pain and itch- ing or suffering and pleasure. Furthermore, when this body perishes, the spirit nature escapes and is born elsewhere. Therefore, although it seems to expire here, since [the spirit-nature] is born somewhere, it is said to be permanent, never perishing. Such is this fallacious doctrine.

However, to learn this theory and suppose it is buddha-dharma is more stupid than grasping a tile or a pebble and thinking it is a golden treasure. Nothing can compare to the shameful of this idiocy. National Teacher Echu of Tang China strictly admonished [against this mistake].⁴³ So now isn't it ridiculous to consider that the erroneous view of mind as permanent and material form as impermanent is the same as the wondrous dharma of the buddhas, and to think that you become free from life and death when actually you are arousing the fundamental cause of life and death? This indeed is most pitiful. Just realize that this is a mistaken view. You should give no ear to it.

Since I cannot avoid this issue, I must now further bestow compassion and extricate you from this false view. You should know that fundamentally in buddha-dharma it is affirmed that body and mind are one, essence and material form are not two, and you should have no doubt whatsoever that this is similarly understood in India and in China. Moreover, in the gate of speaking of permanence, all the ten thousand dharmas are permanent, body and mind are not separate. In the gate of speaking about impermanence all dharmas are impermanent, essence and material form are not separate.⁴⁴ Why do you call the body impermanent and the mind permanent contrary to the true principle? Not only that, you should completely awaken to life and death as exactly nirvana. You can never speak of nirvana as outside life and death. Furthermore, although you have the illusory idea that the understanding that mind is permanent and apart from the body is the buddha wisdom distinct from life and death, still the mind with this discriminating view is itself arising and perishing, not permanent at all. Isn't this [illusory idea] insignificant?

You must savor that the principle of oneness of body and mind is just the everyday talk of buddha-dharma. How then, when this body ceases to exist, could the mind alone leave the body and not cease to exist? If there is a time when they are one and a time when they are not one, then the Buddha's words would unavoidably become vain and false. Also, thinking that life and death must be eliminated, you are guilty of hating buddha-dharma. Why don't you be careful?

You should understand that in buddha-dharma, what is called the dharma gate of the vast total aspect of mind essence includes the whole vast dharma realm without separating essence and appearance and without speaking of arising and ceasings.⁴⁵ [From life and death] up to and including bodhi and nirvana, there is nothing that is not mind essence. Without exception, all the myriad phenomena in the entire universe are nothing other than this one mind, with everything included and interconnected. These various dharma gateways are all equally this one mind. Saying there is no difference at all [between essence and appearance] is exactly how Buddhists understand mind essence.

Consequently, in this one-dharma, how could you discriminate between body and mind or separate life and death from nirvana? As you are already Buddha's child, do not listen to the blabbering of maniacs who preach this fallacious view.

QUESTION ELEVEN:

Is it necessary for those who focus on this zazen to observe the precepts strictly?

REPLY:

The sacred practice of maintaining the precepts is indeed the guiding rule of the Zen gate and the traditional style of buddhas and ancestors, but even those who have not yet received precepts or who have broken the precepts still do not lack the possibility [to practice zazen].⁴⁶

QUESTION TWELVE:

Will it be a problem if people who work diligently at this zazen also combine it with practicing shingon or *shikan*?⁴⁷

REPLY:

When I was in China and had a chance to ask my teacher about the essence, he said he had never heard that the ancestors who properly transmitted buddha mudra from ancient to present times in India and China had ever combined practices like that. Truly, if you do not engage in one thing, you will never reach one wisdom.⁴⁸

QUESTION THIRTEEN:

Can this practice be carried out also by male and female laypeople, or can it only be practiced by monks?

REPLY:

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The Ancestral Teachers stated that in attaining buddha-dharma there is no distinction between men and women, or noble and common.

QUESTION FOURTEEN:

Monks quickly depart from their involvements and have no obstacles to wholeheartedly engaging in the way of zazen. But how can people who are busy with their duties in the world single-mindedly practice and be in accord with the buddha way of non-action?

REPLY:

Certainly the buddha ancestors with their great sympathy keep open the vast gate of compassion in order to allow all living beings to enter enlightenment. So which of the various beings would not enter?

If we search, there are many examples of this from antiquity to the present. For instance, although the Emperors Daisō and Junso were fully occupied with many functions during their reigns, they diligently practiced zazen and were proficient in the great way of the buddha ancestors.⁴⁹ Also Prime Ministers Ri and Bo, although they served in positions as imperial aides and were highly trusted retainers of emperors, diligently practiced zazen and entered the enlightenment of the great way of buddha ancestors.⁵⁰ This only depends on whether or not one has aspiration, without relationship to being a monk or layperson. Also, anyone who can deeply discern what is important or trivial will thereby have this faith. Needless to say, people who think secular duties interfere with buddha-dharma only know that there is no buddha-dharma in the secular realm, and do not yet realize that there is nothing secular in the realm of buddha.

Recently in China there was a minister of state named Hou, a high official who was experienced in the Ancestral Way.⁵¹ He wrote a poem expressing himself:

*In my spare time from state affairs I enjoy zazen,
and hardly sleep lying down on the bed.
Although still manifesting the appearance of a government
official,
My name has pervaded the four oceans as a senior adept.*

Although this person had no rest from his official duties, because of his deep aspiration he attained the buddha way. Seeing others, examine yourself; reflect the ancient in the present.

In Great Song China nowadays the Emperor and great ministers, educated and common people, men and women, all are attentive to the Ancestral Way. Military and civilian officials all aspire to study the Way in Zen practice. Of those who so aspire, many will certainly open and clarify the mind ground. Obviously this shows that secular duties do not obstruct buddha-dharma.

If the genuine buddha-dharma permeates the country, because of the ceaseless protection of buddhas and heavenly beings, the emperor's reign will be peaceful. If the reign is peaceful, buddha-dharma attains its strength.

Also, during Shakyamuni's stay in the world, even the worst criminals and those with harmful views gained the Way. In the assemblies of ancestral teachers, even hunters and woodcutters realized *satori*.⁵² Needless to say, other people can do this. Just seek the guidance of a true teacher.

QUESTION FIFTEEN:

Even in this corrupt declining age of the world, is it possible to attain enlightenment through this practice?⁵³

REPLY:

In the Teaching Schools they focus on various classification systems, yet in the true teaching of Mahayana there is no distinction of True, Semblance, and Final Dharma, and it is said that all who practice will attain the Way. Especially in this simply transmitted true dharma, both in entering dharma and in embodying it freely, we receive and use our own family treasure. Only those who practice know on their own whether they attain enlightenment or not, just as those who use water notice on their own if it is cold or warm.

QUESTION SIXTEEN:

Someone said, "In buddha-dharma, those who thoroughly understand the principle that mind itself is buddha, even if they do not chant sutras with their mouths or practice the buddha way with their bodies, still lack nothing at all of buddha-dharma. Simply knowing that the buddha-dharma exists in the self from the beginning is the perfect accomplishment of the Way. Outside of this, you should not seek from other people, much less take the trouble to engage the Way in zazen."

REPLY:

These words are total nonsense. If it is as you said, how could anyone with cognition fail to understand when taught this principle?

You should know that buddha-dharma is studied by truly giving up the view that discriminates between self and others. If just knowing that the self is itself buddha was attainment of the Way, Shakyamuni would not have taken the trouble in ancient times to give guidance. Now I will confirm this with an excellent example from an ancient worthy.

Long ago, Gensoku was the director monk in the assembly of Zen Master Hōgen.⁵⁴ Hōgen asked him, "Director Gensoku, how long have you been in my assembly?"

Gensoku replied, "I have already been in the Master's assembly for three years."

Hōgen said, "You are a student. Why haven't you ever asked me about buddha-dharma?"

Gensoku said, "I cannot deceive you, O teacher. Once when I was at Zen Master Seihō's place, I realized the peace and joy of buddha-dharma."⁵⁵

Hōgen asked, "With which words were you able to enter?"

Gensoku responded, "I once asked Seihō, 'What is the self of the student [that is, my own self]?' Seihō said, 'The fire boy comes seeking fire.'⁵⁶

Hōgen said, "Good words! However, I'm afraid that you did not really understand them."

Gensoku said, "My understanding is that the fire boy belongs to fire. Already fire, still he seeks fire, just like being self and seeking self."

Hōgen exclaimed, "Now I really know that you don't understand. If buddha-dharma was like that it would not have been transmitted up to today."

The Wholehearted Way

At this, Gensoku was overwrought and left immediately. On the road he thought, "The Master is one of the world's fine teachers, and also the guiding teacher of five hundred people. Certainly there must be merit in his pointing out my error."

He returned to Hōgen and, after doing prostrations in repentance, asked, "What is the self of this student?"

Hōgen said, "The fire boy comes seeking fire." With these words, Gensoku was greatly enlightened to buddha-dharma.⁵⁷

Understand clearly that to comprehend "The self is itself buddha" cannot be called understanding buddha-dharma. If the comprehension that self is itself buddha was the buddha-dharma, Zen Master Hōgen would not have used that saying for guidance or made such an admonishment. From the time you first meet a good teacher, just genuinely inquire about the manners and standards for practice, single-mindedly engage in the way of zazen, and do not keep your mind stuck on a single knowledge or half comprehension. The wondrous method of buddha-dharma is not without meaning.

QUESTION SEVENTEEN:

We hear that through the ages in India and China, someone was enlightened to the Way by hearing the sound of bamboo, and another clarified the heart on seeing the color of blossoms. Needless to say, Great Teacher Shakyamuni Buddha certified the Way upon seeing the morning star, and Venerable Ananda clarified the dharma when the banner pole [signaling dharma meetings] toppled.⁵⁸ Not only that, but among the Five Houses after the Sixth Ancestor many people clarified the mind ground with a single word or half phrase. Were they definitely only people who had engaged the way of zazen?

REPLY:

You should know that, through the ages, those who clarified mind by seeing colors or actualized the Way by hearing sounds were each the exact person who exerted the Way without vacillating deliberation, and right away they had no secondary person [or dualistic being].

QUESTION EIGHTEEN:

In the Western Heaven [India] and in China, people are inherently straightforward. On account of its being the Central Flower [of civilization, i.e., China], when buddha-dharma was expounded they understood very quickly. In our country, from ancient times people have lacked benevolence and wisdom, so shouldn't we regret that, because of being barbarians, it is difficult for us to grow the true seed? Also, home-leaving monks in this country are inferior even to laypeople of those great countries. Everybody here is stupid and narrow-minded. They deeply cling to artificial merits and admire superficial virtues. Even if such people do zazen, how could they actually achieve buddha-dharma?

REPLY:

As you say, benevolence and wisdom have not yet spread to people of our country, who are moreover ignorant and twisted. Even if the authentic dharma was shown, the sweet dew [of Buddha's teaching] would instead become poison. They find it easy to seek fame and profit, and have difficulty dissolving deluded attachments. On the other hand, actualizing and entering buddha-dharma or sailing beyond delusion does not necessarily depend on the intelligence of the human and heavenly realms. Even when the Buddha was in this

world, someone attained the fourth stage [of arhat] because of [being hit by] a handball, while another realized the great way through putting on an *okesa* (priest's robe), although both were imbecilic and stupid beasts.⁵⁹ However, when assisted by right faith, a pathway for departing delusion does exist.⁶⁰ Furthermore, seeing a senile old monk sitting silently, a woman with deep faith who had offered him a meal thereby opened up satori. This was not due to intelligence or from learning, but without waiting for words or sermons she was assisted only by her true faith.⁶¹

Also, it is only for about two thousand and some years that Shakyamuni's teaching has permeated the three thousand worlds.⁶² Among these various lands, all are not necessarily countries of benevolence and wisdom, and the people are not necessarily only intelligent and brilliant. However, the true dharma of the tathagatas, endowed from the beginning with the inconceivably great power of merit and virtue, flourished in those land as the times matured. If people genuinely practice with right faith, they all attain the Way equally, without distinction between the dull and the sharp-witted. Our country may not be a land of benevolence and wisdom, and the people's understanding may be foolish, but do not think that they cannot realize buddha-dharma. Without question, all people are abundantly endowed with the true seeds of prajna, only they rarely accept it and have not yet received and used it.

The foregoing mutual exchange of questions and answers between guest and host has been disordered and may be confusing. How many flowers have been created in the flowerless sky? However, the essential meaning of engaging the way of zazen has not yet been transmitted in this country, so people who aspire to know it must be sorrowful. For this reason, I have compiled some of what I saw and heard in foreign lands, and have written and preserved my brilliant teacher's true essence in order to make it heard by aspiring practitioners. Besides this, I do not have a chance now to also present the standards for monasteries or the regulations for temples, especially as they should not be treated carelessly.

Indeed, although our country is located to the east of the Dragon Ocean, far away through the clouds and mist, since the time of the Emperors Kinmei and Yōmei the buddha-dharma from the West has moved east, much to everyone's happiness.⁶³ And yet philosophical categories and religious activities are overgrown and entangled, so that people are unhealthy in their practice. [Instead of that,] now by using ragged robes and old, repaired bowls till the end of this life, tying together a thatched hut by the blue cliffs and white rocks, and practicing upright sitting, the matter going beyond buddha will be instantly manifested and the great matter of the study of one lifetime will be immediately fulfilled. This is precisely the admonition of Ryūge and the style passed on at Kukkutupada.⁶⁴ The manner of this *zazenn* should accord with the *Fukanzazengi*, which I formulated in the Karoku Period (1225-1227).⁶⁵

Furthermore, although the spread of buddha-dharma throughout the country should await the emperor's approval, if we consider again the request [of Shakyamuni] at Vulture Peak, then emperors, nobles, ministers, and generals now appearing in a thousand trillion lands have all gratefully received Buddha's approval and have come to be born because they did not forget their dedication, through many lifetimes, to protect buddha-dharma. Which of the regions where their control has extended is not a buddha land?

Consequently, in circulating the way of the buddhas and ancestors, we should not necessarily be selective about places or wait upon conditions. Only do not think that today is the beginning [of our spreading the dharma].

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For this reason, I have compiled this writing to leave for bright students who wish to actualize buddha-dharma and for sincere practitioners who wander from place to place like clouds or duckweed seeking the Way.

The third year of the Kangi Period (1231),
on the Mid-autumn Day,
written by Shamon Dōgen who went to China
and who transmits the Dharma.⁶⁶