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News of Soto Zen Buddhism: Teachings and Practice

Zen and Culture

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To speak of "Zen and culture" is to enter such a vast topic that it is easy to get in over our heads. It is a topic that could easily fill a thick volume in a lecture series. In writing this short article that is limited because of space restrictions, I read several books on this theme of "Zen and culture." Difficult things were written in these books. Here, I would like to write about the underlying issues

By putting "Zen" at the beginning, there is an abundance of possibilities such as: "Zen and Chinese poetry," or painting, crafts, tea and flowers, gardens, architecture, literature, Noh drama, kendo, theater, and so on. This doesn't only apply to Japanese culture. If you look throughout the modern world for books with the title "Zen and...," you will find "Zen and Movies" or "Zen and Painting," or theater, poetry, sculpture, dance, and so forth, including all general art forms. If the scope is widened, there is "Zen and Politics," or "Zen and Finance" or education, medicine, physical exercise, science, physics, biology, astronomy, war, and many other subjects. It is to this extent that with the word "Zen" at the beginning, the scope can become so wide that it includes everything.

If we make such a list, this might even create a false sense as if "Zen" holds a concrete position in civilization and general culture, the manifestation of mankind's spiritual activity. When I come in contact with the words "Zen and culture," I think automatically of two of Dogen Zenji's poems, from a set entitled "Six Verses on Dwelling in the Mountains":

Sitting zazen as night gets late, still not sleepy;
I realize more and more that practicing the Way is best done in mountain forests.
The sound of valley streams enters my ears; the moonlight comes into my eyes.
Other than this, what other cares should I have?

For a long time, I've resided among people, beyond attachments.
Writing with brush and inkstone has already been discarded.
Seeing flowers and hearing birds sing brings little interest.
I don't mind if people of this day and age laugh at my lack of talent.

If these poems are taken literally, then Dogen Zenji can be thought of as being far away from cultural activity. He was an extremely rare person who completely devoted himself to shikan-taza and earnestly practiced only the Buddha Way of Zen. But for myself, I feel my chest get tight with emotion because Dogen Zenji had the scent of "Zen and culture" more than any other person. The two poems mentioned above are poems of exquisite purity and clarity. Dogen Zenji straightforwardly expresses life in the mountains with graceful, elegant words and furthermore expresses precisely the basic principles of Zen. It even seems as if poetry and Zen mind have become one. These poems express Dogen Zenji's noble severity, his intensity, and also give us a taste of his lofty, yet intimate and warm character.

Dogen Zenji's feeling for words was that of a genius.

Another well-known poem of Dogen Zenji's is:

In the spring, flowers,
In the summer, the cuckoo;
In autumn, the moon;
In winter, the snow is clear and cold.

Oyama Koryu Roshi comments on this poem: In spring, a hundred flowers bloom and this gives beautiful hues of color to the mountain fields. When summer comes, the cuckoo brings a feeling of purity in the scorching heat. The autumn sky is high and the color of the moon is singularly beautiful. Seeing the snow in winter, the cold is deeper, and the purity passes through and covers everything. In a few words, Dogen Zenji poetically expresses the principle of "the real nature of all things;" in other words that all things including natural phenomena present the Truth as-it-is. The way these short Japanese poems (*tanka*) are composed is by aligning concrete images and then taking up an irregular expression, thereby putting the meaning of the poem perfectly in order.

Originally, "Zen" was a fusion of the Prajna Wisdom in the Mahayana view of emptiness, the Kegon view of "things influencing one another endlessly," the teaching that "one thing is everything," and the Tendai teaching that "all phenomenal things express the universal truth." Zen was systematized like this as the Way of Buddha. For one person to always practice this system in everyday life, to take the standpoint of manifesting this in life - what would such a person's spirit be like, somebody who was actually practicing this? The substance of this spirit could be identified as "Dwelling nowhere and fostering such a mind," the free activity of the spiritual function. To put it simply, it is to live your life engendering a mind that is not constrained and working diligently at this within all activities. In actual terms, the easiest way to live this life is in a monastery because the life there is set up to live this way. The special characteristics of that way of life can be summed up in three points: 1) simplicity, 2) directness, and 3) depth. This life is based on the teaching that essentially all people are Buddhas. All living things - all sentient beings - and all other things as well, including grass, trees, mountains, and rivers are Buddha and this way of thinking is complete within the monastery. The flesh-and-blood person who is you is in essence unconditionally a Buddha and yet regardless of this, the monastic life is to live just as a human being.

This way of living is expressed as "everyday mind." In a narrow sense, through the manifestation of "everyday mind," the whole of everyday life activity can be called the essence of "Zen culture." In the words and actions of Dogen Zenji, for example, and this would include his calligraphy, there are cultural assets, the contents of which we can take and take and they will never be exhausted. I think that Dogen Zenji showed us the fundamental secret of all the issues involved in the creativity of Zen culture.

Nevertheless, it isn't the case that Zen culture is the exclusive monopoly of Zen monks who live in a particular kind of society. The essence of Zen extends in its actions and influence across all of general culture and what people refer to as "Zen culture" is one form or style that manifests in culture and then is pointed at. The common characteristics of that mode or form are: 1) asymmetry, 2) simplicity, 3) age, 4) nature, 5) the subtle and profound, 6) freedom from the everyday world, and 7) tranquility. The characteristics of Zen culture are to always break out by oneself from within, to deny perfection, and to have a structure that is based on the idea that the form of present society is perfect.

Certainly this is an attractive culture for modern people. Within Zen culture, there is included the potential for a new culture that can bring about creativity, and it is only natural perhaps that people would feel as if this is something that they are looking for in this world of excessive consumerism, the busyness of everyday life, and always living exposed to the contradictions of modern civilization. It can be said that within the elaborately organized structure of modern culture the development of Zen essence will allow the contradictions of human existence in order that there can be a restoration of human nature.

The case that Zen makes for "coming from the self, returning to the self," which is nothing other than the flexibility, toughness, purity and depth of human existence, is provided in "the cultural creativity" that comes from the spiritual activity that is based on Zen essence. I personally believe that it is here on American soil that the flowers of this creative culture will bloom.

The Artless Arts of Zen

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Although Zen arts originally emerged in a religious context in China and Japan, they broke with all forms of religious and secular art. Zen arts are not representational or iconographic. They do not inspire faith or facilitate liturgy or contemplation. They do not function to deepen the devotees' experience of religion. They are not used in worship ceremonies or as a part of prayer. Their only purpose is to point to the nature of reality. They suggest a new way of seeing, and a new way of being that cuts to the core of what it means to be human and fully alive. Zen art, as sacred art, touches artists and audiences deeply, expressing the ineffable, and helping to transform the way we see ourselves in the world. As D.T. Suzuki said: "The arts of Zen are not intended for utilitarian purposes, or for purely aesthetic enjoyment, but are meant to train the mind, indeed, to bring it into contact with ultimate reality."

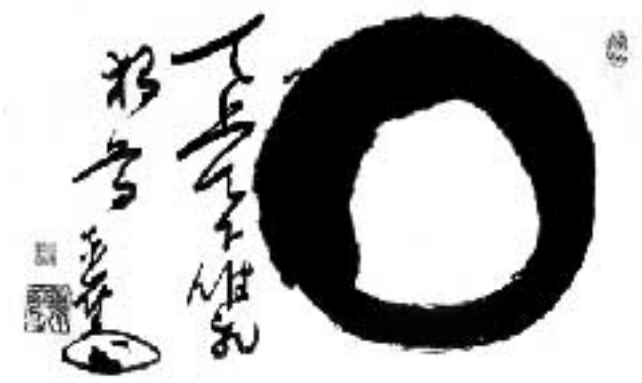
Zen practice and teachings intimately inform the arts of Zen. They are reflected in a particular aesthetic unique to Zen. Over time, different art historians and commentators have attempted to define this aesthetic and its relationship to its roots in Zen Buddhism.

Zazen, seated meditation, is the foundation of Zen arts. In working with zazen, as the meditation process deepens, a particular kind of *chi* or energy develops which ultimately leads to a state called *samadhi*, the falling away of body and mind. When this energy develops, absolute samadhi becomes working samadhi, which functions in activity. This is known as the functioning of "no mind," one of the characteristics of the Zen aesthetic.

In no mind there is no intent. The activity, whatever it may be, is not forced or strained. The art just slips through the intellectual filters, without conscious effort and without planning. This functioning of no mind is sometimes called the action of no action. This is the Taoist concept of *wu-wei*: a continuous stream of spontaneity that emerges from the rhythm of circumstances.

There is a clear sense of the presence of this quality in Zen paintings and poetry. It is an essential component of the martial arts. In the instant in which there is intent there is expectation. Expectation is deadly because it disconnects us from reality. When we get ahead of ourselves, we leave the moment. No mind is living in the moment, without preoccupation or projection. On the other hand, hesitancy or deliberation will show in our art when we leave the moment. Words in a poem will not flow. Notes from the flute will lack smoothness. The flower arrangement will be contrived rather than a natural reflection of nature herself.

The Zen circle of enlightenment painted by the monk Torei Enji (1720-1792) embodies the quality of no mind. Torei was one of Hakuin's chief disciples. His Zen circle is crude and closed, without the characteristic gap that Zen circles usually have. It is uneven, thick in some places, narrow in others, but bold and captivating. There is no sense that it is forced or strained. There is a feeling of emptiness and, simultaneously, of fullness and infinity. The poem included with the painting says, "In heaven and earth, I alone am the honored one." These are the words attributed to the Buddha at the time of his birth. They are an expression of the realization of his unity with the totality of the universe, where there is no subject or object, no self, no other—where the moment fills all space and time. This is no mind.



This "no mind" approach to the creation of art ultimately led to a body of work that was devoid of the usual characteristics found in sacred arts, such as perfection, grace, formality, or holiness. The sacred arts of Zen do not aspire to these ideals, but are instead imperfect and worldly. It is *through* their ordinariness that they go beyond perfection and holiness.

The great Zen master Linji said, "Followers of the way, if you want to get the kind of understanding that accords with the teachings, never be misled by others. Whether you are facing inward or facing outward, whatever you meet up with, just kill it. If you meet a buddha, kill the buddha."

The word "kill" here is not literal. It means to put an end to, or to cause to stop. That is, not to be controlled by convention, precedent, or rules, but to express one's creative energy freely and spontaneously.

When seen in paintings, this quality appears as irregularity, crookedness, unevenness, or it may be seen as the shocking or unusual turning of a phrase in a poem. Sometimes called "the rule of no rule," this characteristic reflects a fundamental aspect of Zen teachings which is called "teaching outside of patterns" or "action outside of patterns."

Zen teaching and practice tends to be expressed very directly, without excessive ornamentation. The design of a typical Zen monastery reflects this. The space is sparse, unobtrusive, and uncluttered. We see this in the simple flower arrangement on the Buddhist altar, in the architecture of the monastery's buildings, in its gardens and pathways. We also see it in the kind of food that is served and the way it is served, as well as in the practitioners' vestments. All of it reflects a simplicity that allows our attention to be drawn to that which is essential, stripping away the extra.

We hear this simplicity in the chanting during liturgy. Chants are monochromatic and follow the deep drone of a wooden drum. They tend to ground us, rather than lift us to higher states of consciousness, the way that Gregorian chants might do. The chanting has the sound of a heartbeat or the pounding of the surf.

This quality of simplicity or lack of complexity opens up a creative space that is filled with possibility. In simplicity there is a touch of boundlessness. Nothing limiting, like a cloudless sky. There is a dynamic that exists in the relationship of form to space, or of sound to silence. The moment the brush touches the blank canvas, the empty space springs into activity and enters a dynamic relationship with form. When the wooden block is struck to call practitioners to the meditation hall, the sounds are interspersed with silence of decreasing length.

This quality of simplicity is also experienced in the execution of a work of art. Calligraphy is often produced in a single stroke. Some zenga paintings are created, and haiku is recited, like this one by Basho, in a single breath:

A garden butterfly
The baby crawls, it flies
She crawls, it flies.

Our lifestyles have become extremely complex. How can we simplify our lives, reduce consumption, lower our impact on the environment, do less harm to other living things, reduce expenses, have fewer distractions, less maintenance, more freedom and flexibility, and be able to live in a way that is financially less demanding? These are the questions that the simplicity of Zen can help to address.

Another trait of the Zen aesthetic is "no rank." Master Linji, instructing his assembly, said, "In your lump of red flesh is a true person without rank who is always going in and out of your senses. Those who have not yet realized this should look! Look!"

The true person of no rank cannot be measured or gauged. There is a sense of being matured, seasoned, or ripe. Inexperience and immaturity have vanished. In their place appears a hardiness that comes with aging.

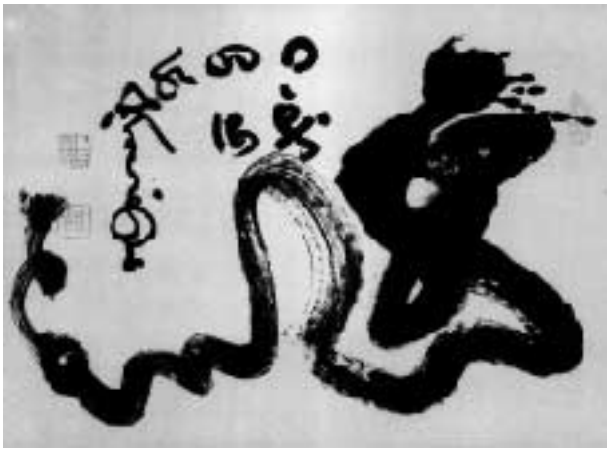
This quality is regarded as an important element in the Zen concept of beauty, which first emerged in the Heian period when the Japanese aesthetic of poetry was being defined. No rank, or ordinariness, reflects a seasoning wherein all weakness and frailty have been removed. Sensuousness disappears and in its place surfaces a poverty in which there is nothing superfluous.

The late thirteenth-century Chinese painter Muchi's bird on an old pine is a manifestation of the quality of mystery in the Zen aesthetic. With a few bold brushstrokes, Muchi has created a timeless image. The crow is clearly the nucleus of the painting. The surrounding space gives the image openness and freedom. It clearly conveys a sense of containing within itself the totality of being. The tiny dot of the crow's eye pulls you into the painting's boundlessness.

Whether we're speaking of art, religion, or life, there are always apparent edges beyond which we cannot see. As Master Dogen says, "The limits of the knowable are unknowable." The process remains open. There is an element of trust that must be functioning, a trust that when the foot is thrust forward to take the next step, it will find solid ground. There is always a little bit further than can be seen.

In the Zen arts, this is reflected as implication rather than naked exposure of the whole. From within that sense of bottomlessness is born a sense of possibility and discovery. That is the way life is. That is the way truth is. It cannot be contained. It extends indefinitely and infinitely. New perspectives previously unseen appear and open up. Where does it end? It's endless. It is without boundaries. That's what makes the unknowable so wonderful and pregnant with possibilities.

Yamaoka Tesshu's (1836-1888) dragon is an embodiment of this quality. The dragon is a mysterious enlightened being in Zen lore. Tesshu's poem accompanying the calligraphy reads: "Dragon—it feasts on sunlight and the four seas."

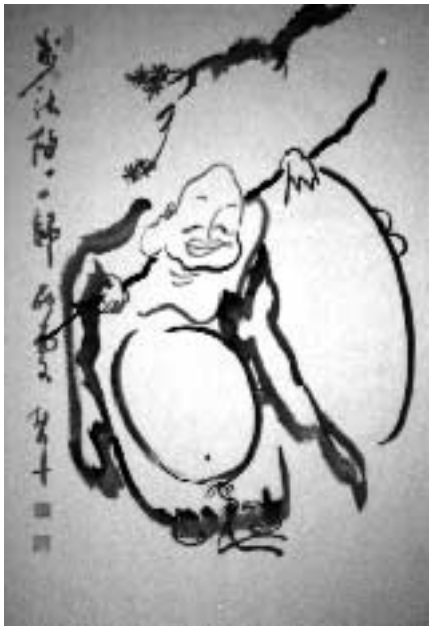


Despite its obvious profundity, the Zen aesthetic also contains a certain playfulness in the way the teachings are presented, perceived and transmitted. Zen embodies a wide and unusual range of teaching methods, unique religious expressions and a healthy ladleful of laughter, humor, clowning and playfulness. Zen has always taken the liberty of poking fun at itself and dispelling the legend of grim austerity that people sometimes conjure up when they think of Zen because of the intensive meditation that accompanies it.

In the paintings of Zen we see again and again the monk Hotei, who traveled about carrying a bag of things discarded by people to give as gifts to the children he encountered along the way. He is often portrayed laughing at falling leaves and delighting in all things. During his life, people weren't sure whether he was a sage or a madman.

The characteristics we have been dealing with up to this point are essentially palpable qualities. Still point, no

mind, simplicity, ordinariness, mystery, playfulness are traits that can be seen in a picture, heard in a poem, or perceived in a subject. There is, however, one other aspect of the Zen arts that is less obvious. We must rely on our intuitive faculties to become aware of it. It is suchness.



Suchness, or thusness, is used in Zen literature to suggest the ineffable: a truth, reality, or experience that is impossible to express in words. It refers to the "that," "what," or "it" that is self-evident and does not need explanation. It is essentially being as it is, the all-inclusive reality that is manifested as a sense of presence.
Thusness is the points of two arrows meeting in midair. It is a quality of being that is nondual and does not fall into either side.

Once a monastic bid farewell to Zhaozhou. Zhaozhou said, "Where are you going?"
The monastic said, "I will visit various places to study the teachings."
Zhaozhou held up the whisk and said, "Do not abide in the place where there is a buddha. Pass by quickly the place where there is no buddha. Upon meeting someone three thousand miles away, do not misguide that person."

This holding up of the whisk points to the meeting place where differences merge.

The quality of suchness is not limited to this non-dual instant of merging alone. There is more to it than that. Zen Master Yuanwu addressed the assembly, "If you want to attain the matter of suchness, you must be a person of suchness. Since you already are a person of suchness, why raise concern about the matter of suchness?"

In the words of Zen Master Dogen, "There are those who, being suchness, are inspired spontaneously. Once this inspiration occurs, they give up what they have hitherto been fascinated with, and hope to learn what they haven't yet learned and seek to realize what they haven't yet realized. Know that this is totally not the doing of the self."

Suchness is not something added from outside. It is being itself. It is in living life itself. It is the "isness" of a thing, indeed, the isness of existence itself. Suchness is a translation of the Sanskrit word *tatha*, sometimes used as part of the term used to refer to the Buddha: *Tathagata*, the "One Who Thus Comes." It is expressed in the calligraphy *Thus!* of Maezumi Roshi. It can be felt in Muchi's "Persimmons," six simple fruits, no two alike, suspended in space, and with an irrefutable sense of presence: Here we are!

To bring that sense of thusness into a painting, poem or piece of music gives it a vitality that is easily experienced, although difficult to pinpoint. It may be only an instant in time, a moment out of the constant flow of life. But to sense thusness and to be able to express it brings it into our own reality, as in Basho's haiku:

In the morning dew,
dirtied, cool,
a muddied melon

Several hundred years later, Joyce Carol Oates expressed thusness with a similar subject in her poem "That":

A single pear in its ripeness this morning swollen ripe,
its texture rough rouged,
more demanding upon the eye than the tree
branching about it.
More demanding than the ornate grouping limbs

of a hundred perfect trees.
Yet flawed, marked as with a fingernail,
a bird's jabbing beak, the bruise of rot,
benign as a birth mark, a family blemish.
Still, its solitary stubborn weight, is a bugle,
a summoning of brass.
The pride of it subdues the orchard.
More astonishing than acres of trees, the army of ladders,
the worker's stray shouts.
That first pear's weight exceeds the season's tonnage,
costly beyond estimation,
a prize, a riddle, a feast.

As we begin to realize how to recognize suchness and move with it, rather than opposing it, we enter a realm of harmony with the flow of things and we're able to discover for ourselves the words of Master Jianzhi Sengcan:

Obey the nature of things [you own nature]
and you will walk freely and undisturbed.
When thought is in bondage, the truth is hidden,
for everything is murky and unclear,
and the burdensome practice of judging
brings annoyance and weariness.
What benefit can be derived
from distinctions and separations? . . . .
. . . . For the unified mind in accord with the Way
all self-centered striving ceases.
Doubts and irresolutions vanish
and life in true faith is possible.
With a single stroke we are free from bondage;
nothing clings to us and we hold to nothing.
All is empty, clear, self-illuminating,
with no exertion of the mind's power.
Here thought, feeling, knowledge and imagination
are of no value.
In this world of Suchness,
there is neither self nor other-than-self.

The process of discovery is the endless spring of creativity, always bright, fresh and new, brimming with life. Where it comes from is not too important. What matters is that it's already present in each one of us, waiting to be uncovered. Ultimately, engaging the artless arts means to see into one's own heart and mind, and to bring to life that which is realized.

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The Art of Buddhism

By Rev. Mauricio Yūshin Marassi
(Translated into English by Mr. Carlo Geneletti)

Introduction

There are very few people with the kind of personal commitment to Buddhism and the vast background in art history that is needed to understand Buddhist art. I regret to say that I am not among those few. I have been studying and practicing Buddhism for many years, but I began exploring how Buddhism has expressed itself in art only two or three years ago. I was – and still am -- afraid that I would be unable to do justice to this vast theme. Buddhist art encompasses twenty-five centuries of history throughout much of the world, in countries as far apart as Afghanistan and Japan. How could one have the presumption to master it?

However, last year, my Christian brother, Father Carlo de Filippi, asked me to take up this challenge, and, recklessly, I accepted. It is now time to keep my word.

Perhaps I should conclude this brief preface with a warning. I will look at Buddhist art not as a historian, but as a Buddhist. Style will be examined here only as a tool for religious expression. I will search for the ways through which Buddhist art was able – when it was – to transmit

the message of the Buddha, silent and clear.

This approach is of course not new. Painting, carving, and writing, in prose and rhyme, are acts complete in themselves but they are vehicles for meaning at the same time. It does not matter what kind of meaning is being transmitted. Meaning can belong to the sphere of the profane but also to that of the sacred and the transcendental. Art speaks to the spirit and the spirit is nourished by the perception "of things not seen"[1]. Art can be a bridge between the invisible and the spirit, between understanding and the incomprehensible.

Early Buddhism

Buddha's message is as fertile and luxuriant as life and it is as multifarious and diverse as the cultures within which it grew. To be able to transmit it effectively, early Buddhism wove together form and content in a truly original way. Nowhere is this clearer than in the five hundred and forty-seven stories contained in the *Jātaka*, [Stories of the] *Birth* [of Buddha],[2] which were completed around the third century CE and count therefore among the earliest examples of Buddhist art.[3]

The form of storytelling is particularly suited to Buddha's teaching. It is both vital and vibrant and it involves the listener actively in some kind of complicity. The stories, told, memorized and told again over and over spring from the same essential source but are never identical. No story is repeated exactly, with the same words and the same intonation, as another. Each story weaves its way from its creator through the voice of the storyteller to the heart of those who listen. By being recited, the stories of the *Jātaka* were never dead words.

Also, oral transmission encourages the listeners to participate. One must fill in the gaps in the story with one's own fantasy, one's own memory of earlier hearings, and bring every word heard back to one's own personal experience. The message is not standardized. It is intimately individual. Think of what happens to us any time we hear about the lilies of the field and of the fowls of the air[4]. Thanks to the art of the evangelist, behind the hidden meaning we perceive the unique and gratuitous splendor that springs from life.

In addition, these stories, taken together, hammer home a clear message. They paint in full colors the image of the Universal Community, one of the critical concepts of Buddhism, and the subject of many of his sermons. The stories contained in the *Jātaka* tell in plain language the lives of hundreds of manifestations of Buddha, as he appeared in the shape of a king, a woman, a merchant, a pariah, or even an animal, an elephant or an antelope. The Community, or Communion, symbolized by the variety and richness of the forms of life offered by India's bountiful nature in its vegetable, animal, human and superhuman worlds, was the idealized subject of Buddhist art long before the Buddha was represented in human form, and stories bring this wealth up very clearly.

These are then the two deep wells, the two most important sources of inspiration of Indian Buddhist art: the ideal Community, which is constituted by the whole cosmos, and the invisible presence of Buddha's spirit in every life, be it real or imaginary, as the only vehicle or the only way of salvation for all.

While the first instances of representation of the Universal Community were in storytelling, and those which followed soon after were in plastic arts, the type of message they conveyed did not change that much. Soon after the funerary monuments, which are the earliest extant examples of Buddhist statuary art, there appeared the stone bas-reliefs representing dozens of living forms: elephants, peacocks, tigers, monkeys, gods, and kings with their followings. In the midst of this teeming life, an empty space, or a sign was usually included, to underline the fact that it was impossible to constrain the formless into a physical shape.

Later, this shape began to be reproduced, and in the shape of a Greek God. The masonry walls of the first monasteries that were built in the North and Northwest of India provided the wide surfaces needed for the first paintings. The influence of Hellenism[5] on Buddhist visual arts became apparent in this period, between the second and third century BC. It was as a result of this influence, that the Buddha, "the light of the world that dispels the

darkness of illusion" began to be shown in the midst of the assembly of monks, dressed up in the traditional Indian garb but looking like Apollo.

It must be kept in mind, however, that the statues of the Buddha were not the portraits of Mr. Śākyamuni Gautama. They represented the Dharma embodied in the human form. Therefore, they were not statues (or paintings) like all others. Their proportions, their expressions, the features of their faces, and the emotions they sought to instigate in the viewers expressed, when they were successful, the transcendence by which they had been inspired. In fact, there and then, artist and religious devotee, art and religion began to overlap.

Mahāyāna and the Lotus Sūtra

The relation between faith and artistic inspiration, between religious experience and symbolic communication that had remained subtle and implicit in early Buddhism, deepened, was clarified and was made explicit by the development of Mahāyāna[6]. The Buddhism of the Great Communion or the Great Vehicle placed great emphasis on the essential unity of all lives and all phenomena, and, as a result, underlined the critical role played by friendly benevolence and mutual cooperation in men's efforts towards salvation. The impossibility of describing reality as a whole, "from the outside", coupled with the limits of verbal expression when it addresses matters of the spirit, inspired a very specific form of literature, one of the best – but by no means the only – example of which is the Lotus Sūtra, or Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra[7] .

Let's look at this sūtra. The first important novelty represented by this sūtra as compared to earlier texts, was that it was composed in a hybrid Sanskrit, when all earlier sūtra were written in Pāli or, more probably, in *māghadī*, the ancient language of Bihār.

In addition to the use of a new language and, perhaps, a new alphabet, this sūtra, like most of those belonging to the Mahāyāna tradition, differs from the Buddhist literature of earlier times for the wide use of a type of language called "intentional"[8]. This language is very special in that it aims to keep itself at a distance from the contextual substance that it purports to communicate. The reason is that it intends to transmit meanings that cannot be conveyed by words or concepts. The sūtra describes it in these words: "teaching beyond doctrine and thinking".

As a way of expression, intentional language is similar to that used in parables – at least in those parables which work through metaphor and paradox. Like these parables, intentional language tries to stamp directly into readers' and listeners' minds meanings that are different from the literal meanings of the words it employs. To give an example, pay attention to what happens to us when we read: "Let the dead bury their dead". It is clear that this sentence does not mean that those who officiate or participate in a burial ceremony are actually dead, or that this ceremony is wrong in some ways and should be called off. On the contrary, this sentence raises another idea in the minds of the readers; it contrasts those who give in to the inducements of this world with those who have converted and turn towards the life of the spirit, a life which is so free from the world that there is "nowhere to lay their heads on"[9]. This contrast is expressed by the verbal trick of calling "dead" the former, alive as they may be from world's point of view.

In the highest expressions of this art, form and content overlap. Those who read these sūtras are affected – and sometimes turned off – by the rhythm and timing of story-telling, the abundance of details, the endless repetitions, the meticulous and painstaking lists of the bystanders and participants in the assembly, of the types of tree, bushes and herbs -- drenched by the only, tasteless, water of the teaching – that constitute the material out of which these sūtras[10] are made. However, we would be wrong to assume that this is all fluff and "form" and ignore it. If the only thing we try to do is grasp the concept that we believe this form is there to convey, entire sections of the sūtra vanish into thin air. They melt away like snow in the sun. If I were to put this idea in a somewhat stark language I would say that since Buddha's teaching does not consist in an idea, or in a concept or in a particular doctrine, the writing that conveys it must also shed all ideas, concepts and doctrines. Which explains, in my eyes at least, the "fluff".

To say it in another way: the entire body of Buddha's teaching aims at starting a process; not any process, to be

sure. A specific process in a specific way. But a process nonetheless. Therefore, since the sūtras are tools with which he pursues this aim, they too must contribute to start that process, or to keep it alive, consolidate and strengthen it.

In these sūtras therefore, we would look in vain for the information, or the concepts that we are accustomed to finding in the sapiential texts of our culture. They are there very seldom. What we must do is to read carefully, and perceive attentively what is happening to us as we read. Which is what we do - or should do— when we look admiringly at a statue or a painting. The perception of their meaning should not be veiled by arbitrary rational activity. When I think about music, I cease to listen to it.

The Lotus Sūtra stands out in the Buddhist literature of all times for its purest idealism coupled with its highest artistic achievement. A good part of the Buddhists aesthetics that developed in the course of the centuries took their cue from or was inspired by this text, and particularly by its novel and daring use of the intentional language embedded in parables and hyperboles. Buddha's eternal and cosmic dimension is represented through a series of special effects that dissolve time and space in the crowded presence of every kind of living being, vegetable, animal and supernatural. Attending Buddha's assembly, we see the mythical figures of the Hindū culture: spirits, deities and ghosts. They are shoulder to shoulder with princesses, curious bystanders and great kings with their trains of thousands of pages and servants accompanied by elephants adorned with multicolored canopies. Then, nearer the center of the scene appear the great disciples and the most famous bodhisattvas. And the whole pack swishes through thousands of galaxies and numberless universes over periods of time of such an extension that hundreds of billion years are like the batting of an eyelid compared to them.

The imagination becomes so dazzled that the divine dimension implicitly attributed to Buddha in this vast *mise en scéne* becomes an unimportant detail. The immensity of the phenomenal world represents the eternal and infinite, and, therefore, the divine. It stands for and suggests *something beyond*. The text conveys this sense of awe with a subtle humor; never overwhelming like a scent, more like a light fragrance.

Tantrism

There is only another tradition in Buddhist art that differs significantly from that which has just been described: tantric art. Its critical difference is that it replaces free allusion with a rigorously codified and symbolic language.

Since the sixth century CE, tantrums[11] spread to Buddhism from the Hind religious traditions, particularly from Shiva's and Vishnu's. As is known, tantrums are a set of religious practices whose main aim is to give power to the spirit, the mind and the body. Initially, this approach influenced the most popular forms of Buddhism only. The poor and uneducated felt it could help them improve their lives and protect them against wars, famines, diseases and death. From tantrums they sought good health, rapid recovery from illness, plentiful harvests, and safety against physical harm.

Later on, tantrums began influencing the higher forms of Buddhism too. Hence the power released by tantric practices was no longer sought in order to satisfy material needs. Instead, it was channeled towards contributing to greater cooperation and mutual love among all living beings on the path to the salvation that frees from pain and suffering. In doing this, Tantrism flowed into Mahāyāna Buddhism and became *Vajrayāna Buddhism*, the diamond and lightning vehicle.[12]

Like all forms of Buddhism, tantrism moved through space. From the 11th century onwards, it took roots particularly in Tibet and Nepal. Before this, however, thanks to the translations into Chinese of the main tantras, completed already by the end of the 8th century, *Vajrayāna* spread throughout China and, from there, in the course of the 9th century, into Japan, where it was called *Shingon*, True Word, or *Mikkyō*, Secret Doctrine. In China, this school, called *Zhenyan* disappeared in 845, the year of the great persecution of Buddhism (and Christianity). In Japan, on the contrary, it grew and prospered and is alive even today.

The creation and visualization of the *maṇḍala*[13] are important tantric practices. The following quote from Kukai,

the Japanese monk who brought tantric/vajrayāna Buddhism from China to Japan conveys the idea that plastic arts are irreplaceable tools in the process of transmission:

"The secret teachings of esoteric Buddhism are so profound that they can be contained in no written word. Only painting can reveal them".[14]

The realization of, and through, the *maṇdalas* requires knowing their meanings, and not only their precise composition. This meaning, in turn, is expressed through the artist's inspiration. The *maṇdala* can be made up of thousands[15] of symbolic figures, each of which can be created in one of five different colors. They are meant to represent the texture of the cosmos in its deepest aspects. Each figure can "appear" in four different ways: in human form; as a gesture or a typical action; as a symbolic attribute – it could be a flower, a book, or a bud; and in the form of syllables-seeds written in Sanskrit.

Yet once completed, the *maṇdala* is sometimes destroyed. The "destruction of the mandala" is a critical element in the practices for initiation into Vajirajāna Buddhism. When the myriad figures made of sand are stirred and muddled up, their contours disappear. There remains only a simple heap of monochrome sand.

Nothing remains unchanged. Everything that is born dies. If you try to catch beauty and hold it still, you are poisoning life; you are taking the path that leads to suffering and pain. The narrow path of freedom from pain requires that you "*open up your spirit's hands wide*"[16] without holding onto and without possessing anything.

The harmony of the parts, their unspeakable beauty, the precision and the symmetric balance of these compositions make it a unique form of art, and, at the same time, the graphic expression of the worldview of what, for the lack of a better term, I would call cosmo-theist idealism. In this worldview, infinitely graceful and deeply serene figures coexist with beings of awesome power. The Shingon School teaches: "Taste the serene dignity of the Mahāvairocana[17] because the deepest part of your heart is in communion with him. Fear the severe expression of the irate face of the Motionless[18] because something in your life and in your mind can be pierced by his steely sword".

Another typical practice of Vajarayāna Buddhism – but of almost all Buddhist traditions as well, including Theravāda Buddhism -- is the recitation of mantra[19].

The practice of reciting a particular type of *mantra*, the *dhāraṇī*, also called "*long mantra*" is particularly relevant for the issue at hand. *Dhāraṇī* are in Sanskrit, and they tend to be very long. What is interesting, however, is that, for *dhāraṇī*, the meaning of the words is less important and inspiring than the sounds and the music produced. For all intents and purposes, they are exercises in magic. The concentration needed to pronounce all the long, short and medium syllables in their right length, in their right order and with the right tone generates a very peculiar sense of estrangement. Reciting it, one is likely to hear oneself and the other participants pronounce these words and see one's hands holding the book with the *dhāraṇī* as if from afar, as if from outside oneself. The effect is very moving. Hearing, even from afar, a group of monks reciting a *dhāraṇī* is an unforgettable experience. A friend of mine, who is very sane and not easy to deceive, told me he took part in a meeting on the shores of the Ganges, where a few thousand people practiced *dhāraṇī* and, several times he felt he was being lifted up from the ground by the vibrations produced by the voices reciting all round him.

Buddhist Rituals

There is another form of art I would like to mention, where execution, fruition and form completely overlap, as they do in the *dhāraṇī*. It is the daily conduct of rites in all Buddhist traditions. As is known, they are not public ceremonies. Indeed, they are not exhibitions in the normal sense of this word. However, these ceremonies are a form of performing art in which sound, action and form are tightly interwoven. They are choreographies in which every gesture and every sound is carefully studied, measured, and performed with perfect timing by a group of meticulously trained persons. Within the wide parameters of the unchangeable rules of each ritual, there is interpretation, and this brings the ritual back to life.

If one must classify these performances, one would say

that they belong in the theater. It is total theater. Moment by moment, every gesture, every sound (bell, voice, drum, kettledrum, cymbal) merge with style, rhythm and the smell of incense, to form a living, and therefore, moving, *mandala*, that transforms itself, lives and changes under our own eyes, ears and noses. If and when these moments of artistic religiosity become show and exhibition, they die. The purpose for which they are re-enacted dies with them.

A Few Thoughts on Emptiness, Religion, and Art

I believe that emptiness is a critical dimension of inspiration for Buddhist art. To explain why let me remind that emptiness is not nothing and can either describe an absence or constitute the inner quality of fullness, or both.

In the 5th century BC, this ambivalent nature of emptiness was underscored by the great Indian grammarian Pāṇini. Using formulae to describe the morphology, syntax and phonetics of Sanskrit, Pāṇini noted that the words "without prefix" convey a meaning that is different from what it would be if the prefix were there and concluded that this absence had a value. It was the birthday of zero, not as "nothing", but as the value of emptiness.

Five hundred years later, Nāgārjuna, founded the first Buddhist philosophical school, identified with unthought emptiness, *śūnya* in Sanskrit, the Middle Way that Buddha had taught in Vārāṇasi in his first sermon. Parenthetically, in the 7th century, this very word, *śūnya*, with the circular sign that represented it came to the West under the Arab word *sifr* where it changed its name into *zephirum* first and into *zero* afterwards and finally.

It was essentially thanks to Nagarjuna's school, called *Mādhyamika*, or the Middle Way that Buddhism avoided the risk of assimilation when, in his long travel towards the East, it met the great Chinese culture in the 1st century CE. Buddhism could have easily melted into the sea that had, or thought to have, fathomed the deepest recesses of the human soul. However, Shakyamuni's offer was too original and innovative to allow itself to be closed in and smothered by old religious forms. So, in the 4th century, it freed itself from the fetters of syncretism. As a result, when, in the 6th century, Bodhidharma, brought to China from India the living and unmediated form of the Way, found the ground already prepared by the Middle Way proposed by Nāgārjuna, with its deep awareness of the emptiness and impermanence of every form of life and every phenomenon.

However, the cultural ground where the new school -- called Chan in China and Zen in Japan -- took its first steps and grew to adulthood, was steeped in Confucianism and Taoism. The a-religious essentiality of Zen resonated with the misanthropic naturalism of Taoism. Given over to reading the book of nature, Taoism supported and followed the course of nature without harming anyone. Therefore, in the 8th century, the first Chan monks who tried to express the ineffable they perceived in their daily lives, through painting and rhyming, borrowed the forms and the ambience of the idealized life of the Tao hermits and added to them, in a manner of speaking, the sense of the emptiness and transience of life. In the new aesthetic canon that emerged from this contamination, the Taoist hermits, the mythical *sennin*[20] , and nature were taken as the models.

Many of the artists who created these paintings in China ink and the poets who wrote comments on them were Chan monks. Having steadfastly practiced *zazen*[21] for many – even thirty or forty – years, they had dropped away body and mind and were living their most inner life, without interference from mental constructions. They had a direct and lucid experience of true life and of the infinite potentiality of emptiness. Their art derived from this religious experience, and therefore did not contain "sacred" or "devotional" images. Sanctity and devotion were the language spoken by very humble subjects– a stone or a grass tuft –as if lost in a vast empty space, like the mysterious beginning of life in the immensity of the cosmos.

Sometimes, the figures represented in these paintings were still Indian in origin: the most famous bodhisattva or Bodhidharma himself. But they were completely metamorphosed. Their traits were apparently coarse, their beards and hair unkempt and their sullen, almost angry countenance expressed stability, strength and mystery. Other times we see cheerful vagabonds jeering at the moon or heaping up dead leaves with twig brooms. The dragon, which is a symbol for the living mystery, can be glimpsed through the edges of fog banks or while it peeps from the

dark bottom of a cave.

Since the 13th century, this simple and straight art made its appearance in Japan. As it had been in China, the finest artists were Chan – Zen in Japanese – monks. Their style was characterized by the essentiality and the absolute individuality of the stroke. Their subjects, essentially drawn from nature, clearly gave off a subtle sense of poignancy and melancholy at time fleeting away: a petal falling off from the corolla, the outline of a far away mountain becoming indistinct, a bird's flight more intuited than seen. The most delicate and sensitive streak of Japanese culture understood and reproduced this sense and these images unerringly.

From the 15th century onwards, aesthetic refinement has permeated the Japanese intellectual elites and has contributed to the birth of those methods for personal realization that is based on the beauty of the gestures and the harmony of forms. This has given rise to a sort of lay religiosity, in that it has religious origins, but it expresses them according to secular aesthetic canons. The art of serving tea, *Ikebana*[22], calligraphy, *No* theatre, architecture and interior decoration are the visible expressions of the penetration in Japan of the aesthetics born of Buddhism. But it is important to underline that this aesthetics was critically different from that of the period immediately preceding it -- that is before the 13th to 15th century -- in its religious significance.

The absence of clear religious symbols and of images taken from the pantheon of a religion, ceased to belong to a form of art that prefers to suggest than to say explicitly, to imply the divine without bringing it on stage. Little by little, this changed, slowly but unfalteringly. The sparrow, the flower, the portrait of the ascetic, became the true subject of art. Religious figures, bodhisattvas and gods came back again, but as subjects of a sort of Mannerism. It may be beautiful; but, without the inexpressible something that created it, it does not move us any longer. The fertilization of lay aesthetic sensitivity through the art born of Buddhism had a very positive impact on Japanese society as a whole, but this was the beginning of the end of art of Zen as a religious expression.

[1] "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen". Hebrew 11,1

[2] It is an indicator of their vitality that one should find them in very far-flung lands, and centuries later than when they were composed. Herodotus had read at least some of them, and they contain an early version of Solomon's verdict (Jātaka 546). We find echoes of them in Aesop's fables, in La Fontaine's Fables and in Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales. Many of the tales told in the Jātakas found their way in the Mahābhārata, in the Panchatantra and in the Rāmāyana. Even the Lotus Sūtra, a fundamental Buddhist text whose first draft was completed by the first century BC., said that one of the ways Buddha taught his disciples was through the Jātaka.

[3] For the record, more than half of these stories were produced in the world of Hindū asceticism, but were modified in the course of the centuries and through innumerable retelling, have become vehicles for the message of the Buddha, the bodhisattva par excellence.

[4] "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? 6:27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? 6:28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin." Matthew, 6; 26,28

[5] Alexander the Great conquered Bactriana (Uzbekistan and Northern Afghanistan), Sogdiana (Southern Afghanistan and South-Western Pakistan) and Northwest India in 326, and left behind a cultural mix. It has often been stated that the first images of Buddha were only Hellenistic. However, statues found in Southern India in a different style, suggest that there were two different schools of Buddhist art. It may be added that this latter school in turn influenced Buddhist art in Thailand, Burma, China, Korea and Japan. See M. Anesaki, *Buddhist art in its relation to Buddhist ideals*. Houghton Miffin and Co. Boston and New York, 1915, page 12.

[6] The new Buddhism, as Mahayana has also been called, started in earnest after the second century BC.

[7] Literally: the sutra of the white lotus of the good law.

[8] In Sanskrit, saṇdhābhāṣa.

[9] Matthew 8,20

[10] In particular, the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Vimalakirti Sutra* or *Vimalakīrti nirdeśa sūtra.*

[11] This term derives from Sanskrit *tantra*, which means web.

[12] In Sanskrit, *vajra* means both diamond and lighting.

[13] According to the *Monnier Williams* dictionary, *maṇdala* means circle. However, *maṇdala* literally, means "the foam formed while cooking rice". Therefore, it means content and essence. And *la* means the form which surrounds it. *maṇdala* can therefore be translated as "the circle which surrounds the essence" or "the essence of enlightenment in its manifest perfection".

[14] P. Cornu, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du Bouddhisme*, Édition du Seuil, Paris 2001.

[15] This is true in particular for the two basic *maṇdala* of the Shingon school: the *Garbahdhātu maṇdala*, which symbolizes the unitary whole of the myriad forms appearing in the universe in all eternity, including mental forms; and the *Vajradhātu maṇdala*, which represents the essential nature, or Buddha nature, that suffuse every being.

[16] Quoted from Uchiyama Kōshō Rōshi, former abbot of Antaiji.

[17] In Japanese, *Dainichi Nyorai*, the Buddha Great Sun or Great Light.

[18] In Japanese *Fudō*, the terrifying aspect of Mahāvairocana.

[19] The word *mantra* means "tool for thought" of *mati*, "thought", and the verb man, which means "to think", "to believe", "to imagine", " to suppose". From this root comes the word *manas*, "intellect". Its etymological origin is the same of the Latin for "mind", "comment", "memento." It is also found in Nordic (English and German) words. Man, for instance, is "he who thinks". Since the suffix *tra* means "protection", "cover", some translate mantra as "protection of the mind". E. Conze (see: *Buddhist Wisdom Books*, George Allen & Unwin, London 1975), defines *mantra* this way: " The mantra are verbal formulae that produce miracles if pronounced".

[20] The word here in Japanese because it is better known in this language. The Chinese equivalent, in Pinyin transliteration, is *xian.*

[21] In Chinese, *zuochan*, the practice brought to China by Bodhidharma, which consists simply in sitting facing the wall, motionless and in silence.

[22] Literally: "life-flower".

Sumié and Me

By Mrs. Ryusetsu Kokuzo of Taiyoji,
Waipahu Soto Zen Temple, Hawaii

My first encounter with *Sumié* (ink brush painting) was a painting of one piece of bamboo that included a knot in the bamboo and a small branch with many leaves on it. It was in a high school art class. I don't know why, but I still remember the painting. Then, I had the opportunity to get married and at the same time that I was dreaming of going to France, I went instead to live in a temple in Long Beach, California.

We wanted to bring people into the temple. To that end, the thing I could do was teach drawing. Without the least delay, I began a drawing class for children and a Sumié class for adults. I didn't have the confidence to teach Sumié, so I quickly looked for a teacher. In Los Angeles, there was the Kawai Art School. There was also a gallery attached to the school and a man named Kawai Toshio (Bokusetsu), who was a master artist, taught Sumié. Right away, I knocked on his door and asked to be his student.
At the beginning, I commuted to his classes in LA and later to Gardena and while continuing to study I also taught. At that time, I was unable to drive a car and so my husband took me to class and came back when it was over to pick me up. Kawai Sensei was from Miyagi Prefecture in Japan and once I found out we were from the same area I felt reassured. He gave me a sense of peace of mind and I felt nostalgia and amusement at his unique way of speaking the northern Tohoku dialect. While raising three children, I felt uplifted by continuing to draw by beloved Sumié. Looking back, it feels as if I spent this time with absorbed interest in sumie.

Kawai Sensei's style of Sumié drew on the Maruyama Shijo School and was based on sketching from nature. It was very easy to understand and the color of the ink (sumi) was very clear and deep. Let me quote a little from him, "Pure Sumié comes from the harmony created between white and black. The objective is not to duplicate figures or flowers and so on." "Song is to sing, painting is to draw, and Zen is to sit. And so, no matter how many books a person may read about art history or aesthetics, anatomy or drawing in perspective, it isn't possible to teach drawing. It is to be awakened through drawing." This deeply impressed me and I understood that the most I could teach was technique.

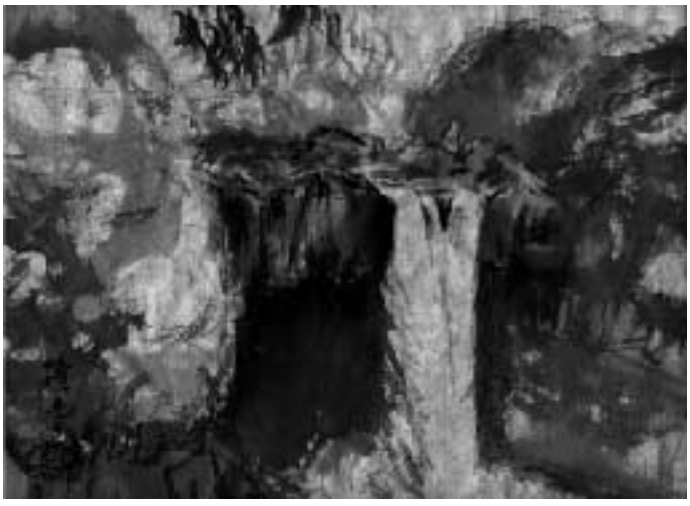
With regard to the attitude one has when drawing Sumié, Kawai Sensei strictly taught me the posture, the way to breathe, putting the body's center in the *tanden* (lower abdomen), and so forth. Even now, I teach beginners this way of painting. Originally, Sumié was influenced by Zen. There was an emphasis on natural posture, getting rid of unnecessary things, and it was thought good to draw concisely with an economy of brush strokes. So as a

member of a Soto Zen family, I felt it was easy to adapt to this way of teaching. While it was difficult, I continued to want to draw near Sensei's realm. I've always liked the expression "Continuation is power." It is now about thirty five years since I began to draw Sumié.

Six years ago, my husband was transferred to Hawaii and I began to make pottery. Here was one more thing that I completely absorbed myself in. I forgot myself making ceramics to the extent that I neglected Sumié. Rebuking myself for this, I took up the challenge of painting landscapes. I tried painting waterfalls. While teaching in a classroom, it occurred to me that there was a good feeling if a painting was finished in such a way that importance was given to the first impression, the tension we feel when we see something for the first time. Then painting it in a short time, I felt it was important to stop the brush with a feeling of something lacking. I thought that the result isn't necessarily good because a painting took longer to do and that it is possible to work too carefully and be too concerned about details. If a painting is done quickly, then the color is good and clear and the hazy aspect of the ink also comes out well. This is to paint non-stop in one sitting.

Here, I would like to quote a few words from Fujita Tsuguharu Sensei, a master painter who developed a unique combination of fine-hair brushes used in oil painting and sumi. These sentences are taken from a book called The Hidden Charms of Lines, "My hope is before drawing, that I become one with the object and then draw from intuition. In other words, not to draw with lines that are corrected or thought out. Lines that are born from intuition are precise and infinitely deep. And then, I think there is a lot that speaks to the heart of the person looking at the painting. Or, later seeing the painting as a whole, there may be a mistake. However, by catching hold of the feeling honestly, you can draw healthy lines. I don't say that healthy lines are in essence always superior to sick lines. All I can say is only that is accurate. And then, instead of drawing something intricately, it will appear with a higher level of feeling and also will actually appear that way. Lines do not speak only of the contours; they must be a quest for the very core of the thing. Fine artists gaze deeply at things and then must be able to capture what they see in precise lines. In order to understand this matter, it is necessary to train only at mastering the essence of beauty."

Landscape was the drawing theme that I was least skillful at. However, it has now become a pleasure to draw landscapes and the world of drawing has become a little wider. By continuing to repeat something over and over, we will get the hang of even those things that are difficult for us to do. I am realizing the meaning of "To teach is to learn."



Rainbow Falls, Hiro, Hawaii

Deep Mountains

My Zazen Notebook (17)

Rev. Issho Fujita

Fragmentary Thought XXV
"Zazen in which nothing is gained"

In *Shobogenzo Zuimonki*, there are the words "When you sit upright with no idea of something to gain or something to realize, then immediately this is the Way of the Ancestors." This is to state decisively that "You mustn't practice zazen with any idea of gaining something or realizing something. This would be to split zazen in two and having any idea of gaining something while practicing zazen is absolutely not the Way of Buddha." I think that this expression "nothing to gain" is the most important keyword in understanding Dogen Zenji's teaching about zazen. For me, this concept ranks with "sitting upright" as being of equal importance in Zen practice. I have already written my observations on this in Fragmentary Thought "Zazen Only." Here I would like to take up several topics that I did not touch upon:

1. "Do zazen without gaining mind," this is not a matter of reaching a state of mind that is called "nothing to gain." If this were the case, then this would be nothing other than attempting to add it to zazen and it would become of a practice of "gaining something." Shouldn't it be said that zazen in which both "nothing to gain" and "something to gain" have both been forgotten entirely is the state of "nothing to gain"? So "nothing to gain" is really another word for zazen (zazen is nothing to attain) and it is not a goal we have in mind when sitting in zazen.

2. It is important that we must keep close watch so that in our practice of nothing-to-gain zazen we do not mix into zazen elements of practice that change zazen from "nothing to gain" to "something to gain." More than anything else, this is first of all a fundamental attitude for those people who take on the practice of zazen and it is a matter of even before we begin to practice. Wouldn't it be all right to say that the quality of zazen is in fact dependent on this attitude we have even before we begin practicing zazen? With regard to our actual zazen, the result is nearly decided even before we get up "on the stage". When we sit down on a sitting cushion (zafu), with what attitude are you facing zazen? Isn't there some expectation lurking in your mind that you will get something in exchange for practicing zazen? How deeply do you understand that zazen is not a means to attain something? In order that we can sit zazen so that just sitting zazen can itself be nothing to attain, it is necessary that we carefully check to see if this is the case so that we can purify in advance our attitude in taking up zazen.

3. Dogen Zenji said, "Let go of it and it fills your hands; it isn't a question of one or many." Sawaki Kodo Roshi said, "We lose what is sought for. There is the wealth of 'not-seeking'." The instant we grasp what we think we have gotten, we lose our freedom. So in fact, it is an illusion to think we will become wealthy by means of what we acquire. Zazen isn't "wealth through gain" but studying and tasting for ourselves the teaching of the "wealth of not seeking."

4. In order for us to be able to sit upright in zazen without gaining mind, we must foster a certain conviction within ourselves. If we do not, then no matter how much we shout in a big voice "Nothing to gain, nothing to realize", it will be limited to just a slogan at best and the contents of our actual zazen will tend to be an extension of the usual "gaining mind." This conviction is "Right now, no matter what the circumstances may be, there is no need to add anything and no need to remove anything. The 'present' has nothing lacking and nothing extra. It is absolutely perfect as it is. It is perfect and faultless with nothing lacking and this is precisely why the present can attain the present here as the present. To try by means of your own speculation and plans to do something about the present so that it is something else is nothing more than a useless escape. You are missing the present and only floating in the air because you want to escape." This is nothing other than the deep insight into the true nature of the present and ourselves. I think it can be said that upright sitting with no gaining mind is the concrete form of absolute acceptance that embraces all

things as they are in here and now. Behind this, there must be the understanding that the present is perfect and absolute regardless of what we think about it and the "faith" that we can completely surrender ourselves unconditionally to the present. It is when zazen is backed with this "faith-understanding" that it becomes possible to do just sitting without seeking anything and without bringing in any objectives or intentions, something that is extremely pure but not easy to do. How, then, can we cultivate this understanding and faith?

5. Here, in the time we call the "present" there are currently conditions around us that include injustice and evil, poverty and war, violence and oppression, discrimination, and so on, conditions that we must address and change. To say that the present is absolutely perfect within upright sitting in which there is nothing gained does not mean that it is all right to close your eye to the situation indulging yourself by feeling good nor is it acceptable to approve of the present situation as being good, praising it as good, and thinking that there is no need to change it. Making all sorts of effort, it is necessary to change such a situation. We mustn't use upright sitting with no gaining mind as an excuse not to make an effort. To the contrary, we must be active in correctly leading the effort to make actual change. We must practice in such a way. More often than not, it happens that because the people who participate in movements to do real change are twisted and turned about by their inconclusive principles and ideals so that they are not in touch with the crucial reality, their attachment to their self-centered sloppy acknowledgements of reality, by bringing forward their own individual chaotic feelings (greed, anger, prejudice, and so forth) and acting on them, that finally they end up causing these social movements to become deadlocked.

I think that it is precisely those people confronting such situations where complicated problems are entangled who must temporarily pause and clearly let go of those earnest problems and concerns that they must do something about, and then from that vantage point perceive the reality as it is. They need to foster the power to deeply see through the whole thing. Movement that doesn't know stillness is blind movement. However, if it is stillness without movement, then it is a dead thing. A hand that only grasps and doesn't know how to let go is restricted continuously by the thing it is holding. That said, if there is a fear of grasping things, then the function of the hand is not fulfilled. To forget returning to the source and only stay outside is to wander. However, to quit going outside and stay at the source is to stagnate. Stillness and activity, grasping and letting go, returning and learning, when these directly opposed activities are working together harmoniously, then free and unrestricted movement unfolds. Furthermore, within movement there is stillness and within stillness there is movement. To leave is to return…it is possible that there is a higher state where both can be totally unified. As in this example, the relation of between "no gaining-mind" zazen based on "faith/understanding" about the absolute perfection of the present moment (where the present settles in the present) and squarely looking at the problem of the present and grappling with the change are independent to each other. But it is necessary within a person's life as a human to simultaneously harmonize those two in an interlocking way. The deepening of zazen prepares penetrating insight into social problems, in the manner that the work of taking on actual problems makes us keenly feel the need for more and more zazen, we must carefully study the way in which the path of coming and going will develop so that the two activities can mutually give energy to each other.

In present-day America, the topic of "engaged Buddhism" is frequently discussed and I have been inspired by this in various ways. To sit in zazen is itself certainly one social movement already and it is an expression of one's attitude in relation to society. For that reason, it is possible to have the opinion that to practice zazen is enough and any more than that is to transgress the sphere of a religious person. Yet, of those people who practice zazen, how many of them see the practice of zazen in the context of social criticism or criticism of civilization? Isn't it rather that they see zazen as a psychological method to adapt well to the current social system?

It is certain that the practice of zazen with nothing to gain is not a social movement that tries to bring about direct resolutions to social problems by means of that practice. If someone did think this way, then zazen would end up being sorcery. Zazen is only zazen, nothing more and nothing less. However, if the sense of tension is lost between the practice of zazen and the realities of society that are full of contradictions, then there is a great danger that zazen falls into a conservative activity just as if you were to shut yourself up in a silkworm's cocoon. We must acknowledge that in the past this very thing has happened and we can now see similar indications here and there.

We mustn't simply understand the "perfect nature of the present" in a bland, monotonous way and thereby jump to the conclusion that it's all right to accept the way things are and the maintenance of the status quo on the pretext that everything is all right as it is. To not insert your own convenience and preferences and to accept the way things are no matter what is completely different to accept and maintain the present with the secret intention to utilize it for one's own convenience. "The perfection of the present moment" does not teach us to indulge in the present nor is it to say that there is no problem either with society or us. Regardless of your discriminations, expectations, and hopes, it is clear that it isn't possible for the present to be anything else, including all of the contradictions in society as well as your own suffering and anguish. This is related to the solemn nature of the present.

6. Usually, when we think of "practice" in a common-sense sort of way, it is thought to be a means of somehow changing your present imperfect self and the effort involved in ultimately reaching your perfect self. However, as it says at the beginning of Dogen Zenji's *Fukan-zazengi*, "The Way is originally perfect and all pervading. How could it be dependent upon practice and realization?" Originally, the Way of Buddha is such that there is nothing that must be added, and furthermore, it is also not a matter of ending in an impasse with the way things are. There is no need at all to do anything. (Uchiyama Kosho Roshi's version in modern speech). This means that this sort of zazen is not a practice based on a transition model moving from imperfection to perfection. Rather, it is a practice based on a "deepening model" (perfection→perfection) in which the originally perfect "present' is more and more deeply verified at your own position here, right now. What is here referred to as "the absolute perfection of the present" is generally referred to in Buddhism as "The real form of all things" (The different forms of all things as they are is the form of true sameness or equality) or "The world in all its totality is never hidden" (The myriad things that clearly appear in front of us are themselves the complete appearance of the original Self). Dogen Zenji expressed this as "the Genjo-koan." This is a word which expresses the teaching of the absolute nature of facticity, regardless of whether we believe it or don't believe it, or whether we practice or don't practice, or our own personal circumstances. And so, it is not something "distant" that we attain after all the human effort involving faith and practice. Rather, it is the other way around, that faith and practice are already the human activity within this reality and so it is something "intimate" or "close."

Nevertheless, as long as we live weighed down by our thoughts and emotions, it will not really be possible to have faith in this "absolutely perfect present." "Thoughts" and "emotions" are not self-contained and so for that reason we are always and at all times creating the sense that in terms of the present there is something lacking or something extra. So, we inevitably perceive that the present is always insufficient and imperfect and we end up constantly viewing the present with the doubt "Is it really okay like this?" We cannot live peacefully in the present nor can the self settle down. With regard to all endeavors, we try to make them perfect. By making this effort a little at a time, or in a burst, we live in the imperfect present by counting on sometime getting a hold of "perfection." What develops there is continuing to live your life constantly "either wanting something or fearing something" (the fear that you will not get what you want or the fear of losing what you have obtained). Sadly enough, however, no matter how much we

manipulate or extend "thoughts" and "emotions", it will not be possible to reach the absolute perfection of the present.

7. The reality of "the true form of all things," "the world in all its totality has never been hidden," and "the Genjo koan" cannot be grasped with either thought or emotion. The struggle (end-gaining mind) itself to grasp such things prevents us from directly experiencing this open secret. It is only when we are just sitting, having let go of pursuing all of the imaginary ideas we have constructed in our head about "perfection" that it is possible to encounter the present which from the beginning has essentially had nothing extra and nothing lacking. For this reason, the expression "the true form of things" simultaneously indicates "reality" as well as the problem or theme we must practice and verify.

Letting go of this gaining-mind, it is an absolute requirement for the self to be able to open itself and surrender completely to the present and for the present to be able to permeate the self with an unlimited abundance. To say "permeate" doesn't mean that something new is tacked on. It simply becomes clear that there is the lively, animated self inter-connected with all beings. Zazen isn't a process of aiming at getting something, but a practice of how to let the self be present now, which is a completely different practice in quality and dimension. "Nothing to gain" can be said to be an expression which helps clarify that zazen is not an activity that is involved in gaining something as a result. It is not for "having", but for "being".

8. When we hear that zazen "is only sitting still without seeking anything," surely there are some who think "What?! Such a simple thing! It's a waste of time and energy to do that. To put value in such a passive and escapist thing is only something an idle person who has given up life in the world would do." "Nothing to gain" can, in other words, be thought of as a condition where there is completely no challenge or worth, and so, such a person might tend to indulge themselves in a way that their zazen becomes "like a cat sunning itself on the veranda." It may be that the above-mentioned criticisms are aimed at this sort of understanding of zazen.

However, zazen where there is nothing to gain is essentially likened to "a dragon that has reached the water, like a tiger that has entered the mountain." (*Fukan-zazengi*) If this kind of lively enthusiasm and impetus does not fill the body and mind, then this sort of zazen will not be manifested. In non-gaining zazen, the importance is placed on the way one is, moment by moment, rather that what will be gained as the ultimate result. In other words, it is a question of process rather than output and so, each moment is important in the same way, each moment cannot be neglected. It is because it is "nothing to gain' that "continual diligence" is asked for. Where there isn't "continual diligence," the mind quickly succumbs to "gaining mind" or laziness or negligence and upright sitting which is poised not to gain anything will crumble. So, the practice in which there is no gaining mind is the purest and simplest thing and is never simple. To the contrary, it can be said that there is nothing more difficult.

The time spent sitting with nothing to gain and nothing to realize may seem to be wasteful in market terms because nothing is produced at all. However, as I wrote earlier, it is there that the self can meet the absolute perfection of the present. It will permeate the self and so there is no greater gift than this for the self.

Zazen is not something for an idle person who has turned his or her back on the world. It is something that can be recommended to all people regardless of whether they are from the West or the East, regardless of gender or age. I think there is an urgent need for people to practice this sort of zazen and moreover to become people who can accurately and clearly explain this to other people.

(Note: I have written above about the "absolutely perfect present." There is no obstacle in that prefect present moment continuously arising to the next perfect present moment. Within perfection of the moment, there is included the power of hidden vigor that can bring forth the next perfect moment. It isn't that it moves to the next thing because it is imperfect, but rather because it is perfect it is always being renewed).

The 28th Chapter of Shobogenzo: Bodaisatta-Shishobo
The Bodhisattva's Four Embracing Actions

Lecture (7)

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[Beneficial Action]
Transformation of human consciousness
[text]
Beneficial action is simply creating skillful means to benefit living beings, whether they are noble or humble. For example, we care for the near and distant future of others, and use skillful means to benefit them. We should take pity on a cornered tortoise and care for a sick sparrow. When we see this tortoise or sparrow, we try to help them without expecting any reward. We are motivated solely by beneficial action itself.

Among the Four Embracing Actions, *dana* (offering) is the foundation of all four practices. *Loving speech* is an offering that uses language, and beneficial action is a form of offering using body and mind. Identity action is a method we can use to make our offerings acceptable to others.

Bird and Tortoise

In this section Dogen introduces two examples of *beneficial actions* that are directed towards small living beings. He shows that these helping activities arise solely from a compassionate heart rather than a calculating mind, emphasizing that a *beneficial action* should be performed for its own sake. According to Dogen, *beneficial actions* will return to those who perform them without any expectation of reward. So here is a paradox: when a person performs a *beneficial action* without expecting any reward, that person receives some benefit in return for that action. However, if a person helps others with some expectation of a reward, such actions essentially become a means of barter, therefore producing no reward. According to Dogen, actions can be either defiled or pure, depending upon the motivation of the person performing them. If a person performs a generous act without any expectation of personal gain, although rewards for the action are not important to that person, the person does receive a reward. If the person has even the slightest expectation of any reward, however, the action is defiled and the person definitely is not rewarded. What strange logic!

Kongyu (Jap. Koyu), who lived in Jin (Shin) Dynasty China, met a person on the road who was carrying a basket on his shoulder that contained a captured tortoise. Kongyu, seeing that the poor tortoise was suffering, aroused a compassionate heart and gave the person some money for the tortoise. When Kongyu released it to the river, the tortoise turned its head to the left to look back at Kongyu in a gesture of gratitude as it headed to its home. Many years later, Kongyu became the governor of the region in which he released the tortoise. As was the custom, shortly after being installed to the position, Kongyu designed the governor's official stamp. The stamp was to bear the head of a tortoise, but the finished image inexplicably showed the tortoise with its head turned to the left. Kongyu had the stamp remade three times, but each time the head of the tortoise was turned in the same way. Then he remembered that the tortoise he released many years before had looked back to him three times, turning its head to the left. He realized that he had become governor as a result of the tortoise's aid and protection.

Another story about Yangbao (Yoho) of the Later Han Dynasty (Gokan) contains a similar theme. When he was nine years old, Yangbao found a sick sparrow on the ground that was being attacked by ants. Yangbao took the bird home, and after nursing it back to health he release it. Later when Yangbao was an adult, the sparrow came to him in a dream. It appeared to him in the form of a yellow-robed boy offering four white rings. According to the story, Yangbao's family enjoyed prosperity for four generations as a result of the sparrow's protection.

In order to present the Buddhist teaching of *beneficial action* more understandably to Japanese people, Dogen Zenji used such stories from Chinese classic literature because they were well known among the educated people of his day. There are many such tales to be found in Chinese as well as Japanese classic story collections.

From the Perspective of the Tortoise and the Sparrow

As I wrote in the section of this series about *dana* (offering), throughout my life my position has been more similar to the tortoise's and the sparrow's in these stories rather than the position of the people who helped them. Since I became a monk as a young university student and then entered directly into a monastic life at Antaiji, for much of my life I have had no particular skill or knowledge with which to help others. I had some knowledge of Buddhism and some experience of zazen, but these things were not useful in helping others until I became a mature practitioner, many years later. I also had no money to offer to needy people; in fact, I was often in need of help myself.

When I was young, I traveled quite a lot, crossing the USA twice. Soon after I first came to this country in 1975, I made a cross-country car trip with several friends. After driving from San Francisco to Los Angeles, we made our way across the USA by way of the South and then headed north to Massachusetts. During my second cross-country trip, I traveled from San Francisco to Boston by Greyhound Bus. During both of those trips I never had to stay at a hotel. I always stayed with someone who offered food and shelter to "the traveling monk with no money". I also did a lot of hitchhiking in the 70's.

In Japan, for many years I lived on offerings I received from *takuhatsu* (Buddhist begging). Thousands of people gave support to me with out expecting anything in return. They did not even know who I was or what I was doing; they made offerings simply because I was wearing Buddhist robes. Since I could not offer anything in return directly helpful to those people, I have been trying to be gentle and kind to others in order to pay back some tiny part of my debt to the many people that helped me.

While I was living in Kyoto I did *takuhatsu* in Kobe several times a year. At that time I was giving on-going lectures on the *Shobogenzo* and Heart Sutra to a Catholic study group. Members of that group transcribed the Heart Sutra lectures and made a book from that material after I revised it. The book was completed in 1995, the year an earthquake in Kobe killed several thousand people. I was in Minneapolis at the time, and I was certain that many of the people who gave me offerings were killed, injured, or otherwise suffering from the loss of family members or possessions. For that reason I asked that any money raised from the sale of the book composed of my Heart Sutra lectures be offered to help needy people in Kobe. The Catholic study group members donated the money through their church in Kobe, and although the amount of money donated must have been small, I nonetheless was very happy that I could make even a tiny offering to the people in Kobe.

[text]

An ignorant person may think that if we benefit others too much, our own benefit will be excluded. This is not the case. Beneficial action is the whole of Dharma; it benefits both self and others widely.

Friends and Enemies

When we vow to adopt *beneficial action* as a bodhisattva practice, we must try to do what is best for all living beings without discriminating between noble or humble, rich or poor, friends or enemies.

The Buddha said in *Dhammapada*, "Through hatred, hatreds are never appeased; through non-hatred are hatreds always appeased – and this is a law eternal."

Jesus Christ said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?" (Matthew 5/43-46)

Jesus said that we should our love enemies; to love families, relatives, and friends is a matter of course. In Buddhism, our ability to love our enemies determines our ability to be bodhisattvas.

Buddha's teaching and Christ's teaching are the same on this point. Can we carry out these teachings? Of course it is usually very difficult or seemingly impossible for us to do so. In fact, if we can love someone, that person is not our enemy; people become our enemies because we cannot love

them. So each of us must transform our consciousness and go beyond discriminations between friends and enemies. Buddha and Christ were people who could make that transformation. There have been other people who could do so as well, such as India's Mahatma Gandhi. Dogen Zenji taught in the *Shishobo* that we should act in accordance with what is best for the sake of all beings. To do this, we must act without concern for whether people are noble or humble, whether they are someone we love or a stranger, or even whether they are considered to be our friends or our enemies.

Bodhisattva Never-Disparaging

In the Lotus Sutra there is a chapter called "Bodhisattva Never-Disparaging". This chapter is the story about a bodhisattva who made prostrations to everyone he met saying, "I will never disparage you because in the future you will attain Buddhahood." Other monks and lay people were arguing about Buddhist teachings, each trying to prove their own understanding was best. But the bodhisattva Never-Disparaging did not study systems of doctrine or meditation; he just walked the streets and made prostrations to whomever he met, saying he would never disparage them because they would someday become a Buddha. But those arguing did not like this bodhisattva because he would not choose sides in arguments; he said he respected everyone involved in any argument since all were bodhisattvas. From the perspective of the people arguing and fighting, a person who respected all points of view in their conflicts could not be a friend. Sometimes people even beat or threw stones at Bodhisattva Never-Disparaging, but as long as he lived he did not stop his practice of honoring everyone he met.

According to the story, when the bodhisattva Never-Disparaging was dying he was able to see the reality of all beings, even though he had never studied any system of Buddhist teachings. He accepted, upheld, and expounded this reality and attained eternal life. People who had despised him became his followers.

Human History

Throughout actual human history, things have been difficult for people who have taught us to go beyond discriminations between friends and enemies and to love all beings. Shakyamuni Buddha could not help his clan from being conquered by the strong neighboring kingdom, Kosala. Christ was crucified. Gandhi was assassinated. Dogen had to leave the capital of Japan to live deep in the mountains.

Buddhist teachings emphasize seeing all things equally, without greed, anger/hatred, and ignorance. Buddha's wisdom, *prajna*, is the wisdom beyond discrimination that sees the emptiness and equality of all things. To see this reality is the goal of all the various styles of Buddhist meditation. In our meditation practice we can become one with *prajna*, but it is very difficult to realize such wisdom in our daily lives.

Shortly after September 11th in 2001, I had a chance to read a Japanese scholar's article about the person who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi. According to the author, the person was a Hindu fundamentalist who thought he had good reason to kill Gandhi. In the assassin's mind, if his family members were attacked and killed, justice demanded that he carry out revenge. But Gandhi forbade Hindu people to carry out such revenge, asking them to forgive their enemies. But because this was contrary to the assassin's concept of justice, he killed Gandhi. When the American government responded to the 9-11 tragedy with military action, I remembered this article. When I learned that the majority of American people supported the government's decision to use military force in seeking revenge, I felt they were supporting the same concept of justice held by the assassin of Ganghi.

Many of my American Buddhist friends were against the war. In San Francisco where I lived at that time, thousands of people demonstrated against the war, and some of them were arrested. I admired them but they were in a minority; on almost every block of each street we saw a sign saying, "God bless America." I wondered if that God was the same God of Jesus Christ, the God whom Jesus taught wishes us to love our enemies. To me, the signs saying "God bless America" seemed to refer to a guardian god of the nation, a type of god that almost all countries have. Of course, Japanese Buddhists did something similar during World War II. During that time, Buddhism was used for nationalist means in persuading young people to fight for Japan in the war.

Transformation

How can we transform our consciousness and go beyond this sense of separation from other human beings? This is an especially important question at this time in human history. As a result of developments in science, technology, transportation and communication, the world of human beings has become one community. People from different racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds must communicate and interact with each other. Unless we find some common ground, one on which people can live knowing they are connected to each other, humans beings will not be able to live together peacefully.

Many people from many spiritual traditions have put forth much effort into this area. In my case, I have been practicing zazen and sharing Buddhist teachings with American people for many years. Even though my activity is limited, my hope is that I can contribute at least a small drop into this stream of transformation that aims to change the consciousness of human beings.

I am from Japan, and for me the USA has been a special country. Japan and the USA are the only two countries I have lived in. I was born three years after World War II ended, and in my parents' time Japan and the USA were enemies. The first time I ever heard anything about the USA was when I was probably four or five years old. It was raining and my mother and some neighborhood women were idly talking beneath the eaves of a house. I was running around in the rain and one of the women said to me, "Don't run around in the rain, you might lose your hair." That was near the time the US government had performed a nuclear experiment in the Bikini Islands. A Japanese fishing boat, the *Daigo Fukuryumaru*, was exposed to nuclear radiation that eventually killed one of the boat's crewmembers and made many others sick. In Japan the ash from nuclear weapons was called "*shi-no-hai*" (ash of death). It was probably on that occasion, the time the woman said, "you might lose your hair", that I first heard that Japan had fought and lost a war against the USA. My family had been merchants in Osaka for several generations, but in just one night in March of 1945 we lost all of our family wealth during a US Air Force bombing. I also heard that my uncle was killed during the war and that his wife had died with TB (my parents raised one of my uncle's orphaned children as part of our family). After hearing these things, I had some negative feelings about the USA. I did not see US soldiers in Japan on many occasions, but when I did see them, I was afraid.

When I entered elementary school, our principal told us that Japan had a very difficult time after losing the war. People were hungry but they were saved from starvation by food and other aid offered by the USA. He also said that we needed to study and work hard to restore the prosperity we had before the War. I was taught that the USA had brought democracy to Japan and that all good things such as electronics, science, technology, movies, and music came from the USA. The USA was the great teacher of democracy and of scientific and technological civilization; it seemed like a paradise of materialistic culture. So, my view of the USA became confused. Later I also learned that from the end of the 19th century until the end of World War II, Japan did terrible things to other Asian countries such as Korea and China. As I studied history, my fear turned to sadness.

When I became a teenager, my view of the USA took another twist. During the Vietnam War, some Japanese newspapers presented American military action as imperialist activity that was close to being the enemy of humanity. Newspaper cartoons depicted President Johnson's face as the face of a demon.

When I began practicing at Antaiji in the late 60's, I met some Americans from my own generation. Those people, who were so-called "hippies", were the first American people I had actually met. I found that many of them were not so different from me; they were just ordinary human beings. They had the same questions I had and were trying to find the answers to those questions. In fact, very good friendships, ones that continue to this day, developed between some of those Americans and me.

In 1975, I went to Massachusetts to live and to create a small Zen community. There I again found that American people are not so different from Japanese people. Some were extremely kind and friendly and some were not so kind. Of course, I found many cultural differences between Japanese and American people, but overall I saw that we are all simply human beings who must live through many

different conditions in this life; sometimes those conditions are happy and sometimes they are not so happy.

I found that the views I held in Japan before I had been in the USA reflected only partial truths; my views of this country and its people did not contain a complete perspective. My knowledge, understanding, and experiences of the USA and its people are still limited because I have being living only in Buddhist communities since I have been here. Seeing that my views were limited and distorted enabled me to let go of my preconceptions of other nations. In addition to studying our own history and culture and the cultures of other countries, living and working with people from other countries is the best way to go beyond our stereotypes.

Thirty years have passed since I went to Massachusetts, and I now practice in a small Zen Buddhist sangha with Americans as well as people from other countries. My zazen practice and study of Buddhist teachings have helped me in my effort to go beyond my fixed views of others, views that are a product of my limited karmic consciousness. This small broadening of my own perspective is a source of hope for me. My hope is that we will make a transformation of consciousness and let go of our prejudices against those who differ from us according to national origin, race, religion, and other characteristics.

[text]
In an ancient era, a man, who tied up his hair three times while he took a bath and who stopped eating three times in the space of one meal, solely intended to benefit others. He never withheld truths from people of other countries.

This example is from the Chinese classic *Shiji (Jap .Shiki)*. When the lord Zhougong (Shuko) sent his son to govern the country of Lu (Ro), his son came to say farewell. At that time Zhougong admonished him saying, "I am a son of King Wen (Bun), the younger brother of King Wu (Bu), and the uncle of King Cheng (Jo), and I therefore am not a person of humble birth. Yet I tied up my hair three times while bathing and stopped eating three times in the space of one meal in order to meet with gentlemen [who wished to offer me their opinions in person]. I am fearful that we will lose wise people in this country; when you arrive in the country of Lu, be careful not to disparage its people even though you will be the governor."

Zhougong sent his son to a neighboring country that was a dependent of his own more powerful county. He told his son that even though his son would be governor, he should not miss any opportunity to meet and listen to any wise people of Lu.

[text]
Therefore, we should equally benefit friends and foes alike; we should benefit self and others alike. Because beneficial actions never regress, if we attain such a mind we can perform beneficial action even for grass, trees, wind, and water. We should strive solely to help ignorant beings.

It is interesting that this chapter of *Shobogenzo* was written in the 5th month of 1243. This was two months before Dogen Zenji and his assembly moved from the then capital city of Kyoto into the deeply remote mountains of Echizen. Their move to establish a new monastery appears to have been very abrupt. If the move had been well planned, I think the monks would have first found a suitable location and built their new temple before relocating. Yet Dogen's assembly lived at the new temple location for more than a year before the construction of the new building for Diabutsuji (later named Eiheiji) was completed in the fall of 1245. During this interim time the monks lived in two tiny temples without a *sodo* (monks' hall) or dharma hall; Dogen did not even have a place to give formal dharma discourses. During this time he focused on writing fascicles of the *Shobogenzo*, completing 33 chapters.

Scholars think Dogen and his assembly were forced to make a fast move to Echizen when Koshoji came under attack by Mt. Hiei's soldier monks of the Tendai School. It was around this time that Dogen wrote the fascicle *Shisobo*. So Dogen was likely not living in a peaceful environment when he wrote of the *Four Embracing Actions of Bodhisattva Practice*. At this time, the Japanese Buddhist establishment was trying to oppress Dogen's newly introduced Chinese style of Zen Buddhism. It was in this condition of great conflict that Dogen Zenji wrote, *"Therefore, we should equally benefit friends and foes alike; we should benefit self and others alike."*

One of the reasons Dogen moved from Kyoto so abruptly was to avoid conflict with the established religious institution. When we study the background of *Shishobo*, we can more clearly understand the significance of these words of Dogen:

Because beneficial actions never regress, if we attain such a mind we can perform Beneficial Action even for grass, trees, wind, and water. We should strive solely to help ignorant beings.

This was Dogen's faith and wish. He did not think it meaningful to fight against the religious establishment; rather, he practiced the Bodhisattva Vow to help all beings that suffer within the cycle of transmigration in samsara. His enemies, the Tendai monks who held religious and political power, were not excluded from his vow.

正法眼藏六十六三昧王三昧
Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma
Book 66
The King of Samadhis Samadhi
Zanmai o zanmai

Translated by Carl Bielefeldt

Introduction

This work was composed early in 1244 at Kippoji **吉峰寺**, the monastery where Dogen taught in the period from his arrival in Echizen (present-day Fukui prefecture) till the opening of Daibutsuji **大佛寺** (later renamed Eiheiji **永平寺**). The text appears as number 66 in the seventy-five-fascicle redaction of the *Shobogenzo*, as well as number 10 in the so-called "secret," (himitsu **秘密**) twenty-eight facscicle redaction held at Eiheiji.

The notion of a samadhi (i.e., state of mental concentration) that is the king of samadhis (Sanskrit *samadhi-raja-samadhi*) occurs with some frequency throughout the Buddhist literature, without consistent reference to a specific spiritual practice or state of mind. Dogen's essay here draws on a passage from the famous *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (Chinese *Dazhidu lun* **大智度論**), a commentary, traditionally attributed to Nagarjuna, on the 25,000-line *Prajña-paramita-sūtra*. A line in the sutra reads, "At that time, the World Honored One spread his lion seat and, sitting with legs crossed, straightening his body and binding his thoughts before him, entered into the king of samadhis samadhi, in which all samadhis are included." The commentary on this line in the *Treatise* extols the spiritual advantages of cross-legged sitting and goes on to explain that this samadhi is first among samadhis because it is "freely able to take innumerable dharmas as its object."

Dogen's own comments here focus especially on the practice of sitting with legs crossed (*kekkafu za* **結跏趺坐**; Sanskrit *paryaça*), the posture sometimes known as the "lotus position" (Sanskrit *padmasana*). This practice, he associates with a famous teaching he attributes to his Chinese master, Rujing **如淨**, that the study of Zen is "just sitting," (*shikan taza* **祇管打坐**) with "body and mind sloughed off" (*shinjin datsuraku* **身心脱落**). Through this association, Dogen is able to claim that sitting with legs crossed is itself the king of samadhis, is itself the complete practice and teaching of the Buddha, is itself the spiritual lineage of the first Zen ancestor, Bodhidharma. The emphasis on such claims makes this short text one of the more important sources for understanding Dogen's approach to zazen practice.

The present translation is based on the edition in Kawamura Kodo **河村孝道**, ed., *Dogen zenji zenshu* **道元禅師全集** ,vol. 2, pp. 177-181. More detailed annotation on the text accompanies the translation appearing on the Soto Zen Text Project website: http://scbs.stanford.edu/sztp3. Other English translations of this fascicle can be found in Nishiyama and Stevens, *Shobogenzo* (1977); Yokoi, The *Shobogenzo* (1986); and Tanahashi, *Beyond Thinking* (2004).

Translation

Abruptly transcending the entire realm, to be greatly honored within the quarters of the buddhas and ancestors-this is sitting with legs crossed. Trampling the heads of the outsiders and the minions of Mara, to be the one here within the halls of the buddhas and ancestors-this is sitting with legs crossed. To transcend the limit of the limits of the buddhas and ancestors is just this one dharma. Therefore, the buddhas and ancestors engage in it, without any further task.

We should realize that there is a vast difference between the entire realm of sitting and other entire realms. Clarifying this principle, we confirm the aspiration, the practice, the bodhi, and the nirvana of the buddhas and ancestors. We should investigate: at the very moment we are sitting, is the entire realm vertical? Is it horizontal? At the very moment we are sitting, what about that sitting? Is it a flip? Is it "brisk and lively" ? Is it thinking? Is it not thinking? Is it making? Is it without making? Are we sitting within sitting? Are we sitting within body and mind? Are we sitting having sloughed off "within sitting," "within body and mind," and so on? We should investigate one thousand points, ten thousand points, such as these. "We should do the sitting with legs crossed of the body; we should do the sitting with legs crossed of the mind; we should do the sitting with legs crossed of the body and mind sloughed off."[1]

> My former master, the old buddha, said,
> "Studying Zen is body and mind sloughed off. You get it only by just sitting; you don't need to burn incense, make prostrations, recollect the buddha, practice repentence, or look at scripture."[2]

For the last four or five hundred years, clearly my former master is the only one who has plucked out the eye of the buddhas and ancestors, who sits within the eye of the buddhas and ancestors. There are few of equal stature in the land of Chinasthana [i.e, China]. It is rare to have clarified that sitting is the buddha dharma, that the buddha dharma is sitting. Even if [some] realize sitting as the buddha dharma, they have not understood sitting as sitting – let alone maintained the buddha dharma as the buddha dharma.

This being the case, there is the sitting of the mind, which is not the same as the sitting of the body. There is the sitting of the body, which is not the same as the sitting of the mind. There is the sitting of the body and mind sloughed off, which is not the same as the sitting of the body and mind sloughed off. To be like this is the accordance of practice and understanding of the buddhas and ancestors. We should maintain this thought, idea, and perception; we should investigate this mind, mentation, and consciousness.

The Buddha Shakyamuni addressed the great assembly, saying,

> When sitting with legs crossed,
> Body and mind realizing samadhi,
> One's majesty, the multitudes respect,
> Like the sun illumining the world.
> Removed, the lethargy clouding the mind,
> The body light, without pain or fatigue;
> The awareness similarly light and easy,
> One sits calmly, like the dragon coiled.
> King Mara is startled and fearful
> On seeing depicted [one] sitting with legs crossed,
> How much more [on seeing] one who realizes the way,
> Sitting calmly without stirring.[3]

Thus, King Mara is startled and frightened to perceive the depiction of [someone] sitting with legs crossed – how much more [someone] actually sitting with legs crossed; the virtue cannot be fully reckoned. This being the case, the merit of our ordinary sitting is measureless.

The Buddha Shakyamuni addressed the great assembly saying,

> Therefore, [the Buddha] sits with legs crossed. Further, the Thus Come One, the World Honored One, instructs his disciples that they should sit like this. Factions of the outsiders seek the way while always keeping a leg raised, or seek the way while always standing, or seek the way with their legs on their shoulders. Thus, their minds are crazed, sinking in the sea of falsity, and their bodies are ill at ease. Therefore, the Buddha instructs his disciples to sit with legs crossed, to sit with mind upright. Why? Because, when the body is upright, the mind is easily corrected. When one's body is sitting upright, the mind will not slacken. With straightforward mind and correct attention, one fastens thought in front of one. If the mind wanders, if the body leans, one controls them and brings them back. Wishing to realize samadhi, wishing to enter samadhi, one collects the multiple wandering thoughts, the multiple distractions. Training in this way, he realizes and enters the king of samadhis samadhi.

Clearly we know that sitting with legs crossed is the king of samadhis samadhi, is realization and entrance. All the samadhis are the attendants of this king samadhi. Sitting with legs crossed is upright body, is upright mind, is upright body and mind, is upright buddha and ancestor, is upright practice and realization, is upright head, is upright vital artery.[4]

Now crossing the legs of the human skin, flesh, bones, and marrow, one crosses the legs of the king of samadhis samadhi. The World Honored One always maintains sitting with legs crossed; and to the disciples he correctly transmits sitting with legs crossed; and to the humans and gods he teaches sitting with legs crossed. The mind seal correctly transmitted by the seven buddhas is this.[5]

The Buddha Shakyamuni, sitting with legs crossed under the bodhi tree, passed fifty small *kalpas*, passed sixty *kalpas*, passed countless *kalpas*. Sitting with legs crossed for twenty-one days, sitting cross-legged for one time – this is turning the wheel of the wondrous dharma; this is the buddha's proselytizing of a lifetime. here is nothing lacking. This is the yellow roll and vermillion spindle. The buddha seeing the buddha is this time. This is precisely the time when beings attain buddhahood.[6]

Upon coming from the west, the First Ancestor, the worthy Bodhidharma, passed nine autumns in seated meditation with legs crossed facing a wall at Shaolin monastery at Shaoshi Peak. Thereafter, his head and eyes have filled the world of the land of Chinasthana till now. The vital artery of the First Ancestor is just sitting with legs crossed. Prior to the First Ancestor's coming from the west, beings in the eastern lands had not known sitting with legs crossed; after the ancestral master came from the west, they knew it. Therefore, for one life or ten thousand lives, grasping the tail and taking the head, without leaving the "grove," just sitting with legs crossed day and night, without other business – this is the king of samadhis samadhi.[7]

Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma
The King of Samadhis Samadhi
Number 66
Presented to the assembly fifteenth day, second month,
second year of Kangen (*kinoe-tatsu*) [i.e., 1244], at
Kippo hermitage, region of Etsu

Notes

1. The questions, "is it thinking," and "is it making," doubtless allude to two of Dogen's favorite koan about zazen practice: Weiyan's "thinking of not thinking," and Mazu's "figuring to make a buddha." His discussion of them can be found in the *Shobogenzo zazen shin* ("Lancet of Meditation").

2. Dogen's source for this saying, versions of which appear elsewhere in his writings, is unknown.

3. This and the following quotation reflect a passage in the *Dazhidu lun* ("Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom").

4. The expression "vital artery" is regularly used by Dogen to indicate the authentic lineage of the buddhas and Zen masters.

5. The seven buddhas are the standard set of ancient buddhas up to and including Shakyamuni.

6. The expression "yellow roll and vermillion spindle" refers to a roll of text; hence, a scripture or, by extension, the teachings of the buddha.

7. The expression "grasping the tail and taking the head" means "from head to tail," or "from beginning to end," "through and through." The term "grove" here refers to the Zen monastery.

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Correction: On page 6 of Dharma Eye No. 17, it was noted that Jakkoji is located in Muenster, Germany.
Jakkoji is located in Schonboken, Germany.