

DHARMA EYE



法眼

News of Soto Zen Buddhism: Teachings and Practice



A Greeting

Rev. Jiso Forzani
Director, Soto Zen Buddhism Europe Office

As the new director of the Soto Zen Buddhism Europe Office starting from Nov. 1, 2009, with our headquarters in Paris, I wish first of all to thank my predecessor, Rev. Imamura Genshu, for the outstanding job he has done during the five years he held this position. Thanks to his hard work and that of his closest associates, many of the institutional and organizational problems that had long affected our relations with the Japanese Soto Zen Headquarters have been settled. Rev. Imamura's coming to terms with the realization that his role was to provide a service to the common good and not to try to impose his own views is for me a very valuable human and religious lesson.

This is the path I intend to follow. For me, the job of being the director of this office is not a function that follows from, or overlaps with, my religious practice, and, even less so, the final or intermediate stage in an improbable career in the Soto Zen hierarchy. It is the form that my being a disciple of the way of Buddha takes up in these circumstances. To carry out well my new duties, I am convinced that I must take it simply as an opportunity to follow, learn, and bring witness to the Buddhadharma precisely as each and every one of the persons of the Way does in the concrete circumstances of his or her daily life.

The European civilization, which has been the source of inspiration for the whole of the Western civilization that has now become the dominant world culture, is

undergoing an identity crisis of immense spiritual, cultural, and social consequences, a crisis that affects individuals and communities and may have disastrous effects over the long term. In this context, it is absolutely indispensable to ask ourselves once again and in all earnestness what can be the meaning of Buddhism in Europe -- and in the whole world -- and what is the task it should perform? We must ask what kind of Buddhism is right for whom and why in today's Europe. In other words, which Buddhism is appropriate for the European reality.

To be sure, in our case, the reply to this question cannot be but this: it is the Buddhism of Sakyamuni Buddha, rightly transmitted, rightly received, and rightly witnessed by the Ancestors Dogen Zenji and Keizan Zenji in the line of the Soto Zen tradition. But this reply should not be a stale formula that simply denotes our religious affiliation nor can it be only an expression of observance to shared canonical rules considered as the mark of our self-identification as Buddhists. Institutional rules are useful only to the extent that they encourage us to keep searching and to keep advancing on our path. They are useful if they are a means to an end, not the end and the progress in themselves.

In view of this, the reply is valid only if it does not close off the question but formulates it again and again in a way that is relevant for today's world. What is the vibrant meaning of Buddha's teachings in today's Europe and in the life of each of us, if we want to follow the

inspiration and example of Dōgen zenji? This question, if we keep asking it, is what sustains us in our daily activities, and what generates the new forms that Buddhism must take in Europe today and will take in the future. We must not give in to the temptation – so enticing a temptation – to assume once for all a form that is right by definition.

The right transmission in our tradition is not the transmission of the right form. If anything, the right form is the right transmission, the position of our daily zazen, which is the steadfast form of boundless openness and of the pledge to learn each one of the infinite ways that lead to the gates of dharma.

The time of a replacement is also a time to start again. It is a time to keep pushing ahead on the road opened by those who preceded us and at the same time an opportunity for renewal. In particular, the appointment of a non-Japanese Sokan (Director) is a true novelty, not only for the person who has the opportunity to fill this post, but for everyone, because it is a historic sign of the openness of the Japanese institution towards the European and international reality. One of the implications of this novelty is the possibility of a different type and level of communication between the person who holds that position, and those who are in relation with the Europe Office. The language barrier is partly overcome, the filter that can give rise to different interpretations can be done away with, and there is a shared cultural background.

I believe that my mandate consists mainly in listening to the requests that come from the persons that devote their lives to Buddha, while accepting the teachings transmitted through the Soto Zen tradition. I will be there for everybody in accordance to the requests for intervention that I receive, and I will try to cooperate with, and help those who will ask for my help, according to the rules and forms prescribed and allowed for by the Sotoshu and by our office. In addition, I feel engaged to look for ways to confront, interact, and dialogue with the European cultural, spiritual, and religious reality.

This reality is complex, chequered, and contradictory. While it contains strong and self-evident unifying forces, its diversity is also its, perhaps perilous, risky richness.

Buddhism in Europe cannot be a *bonsai* tree placed in the European humus looking eastward. Nor can it be the Europeanization of the Oriental – in our case Japanese – Buddhism. Its history may seem long if one compares it to a human life, but is very short, indeed just begun, if one looks at it from the point of view of Buddhism as a whole. It must find its own form, without hoping for hasty results, and without giving in – it is worth repeating – to the alluring temptation of trying to erase differences that are there and to force them into one single mold, as if it were possible to find one form that is right for everyone.

In today's world, it is clearly evident that many people desire to closet themselves behind a safe wall to chase away the fear of losing themselves in the sea of diversity. As always, to walk the path set out by the Middle Way, one must avoid both extremes: one must neither take a particular form as the perfect model out there for one to imitate, forgetting that each and every form is only a transitory collation of elements in endless mutation, nor regard all forms as if they were identical one to the other, forgetting that the endless search for and practice of the right form is the only possible realization of the ideal of salvation.

My hope is that we will all remain committed to witnessing the deep sense of the lively and emancipating presence of the Soto Zen Buddhism in Europe.

(Translated from Italian by Mr. Carlo Geneletti)



The Memorial Celebrations for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Soto Zen Buddhism South America Office and Busshinji

Rev. Dosho Saikawa
Director, Soto Zen Buddhism South America Office

The memorial celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Soto Zen Buddhism South America Office and the Busshinji temple of the Soto Zen Buddhist community in South America, were strictly practiced from Nov. 13 through 15, 2009.

As part of the memorial activities for the 50th anniversary, a *zazendo*, the founder's hall, and other facilities which completed the temple were consecrated. It had long been the desire and wish of the successive *Kokusai Fukyo Sokan* (the director of Soto Zen Buddhism South America Office) as well as the hope of the members and supporters of the temple to build these facilities, but had been an unfulfilled dream until now.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for receiving the Dharma connection of the various priests from the Two Head Temples and Sotoshu Shumicho, as well as those priests who came from many parts of Japan, for receiving the deep understanding, support, and love for the Dharma of the general public, and also for being able to accomplish our objectives.

Looking back, the real beginning of Sotoshu in Brazil was in 1955 when the Head Priest of Sotoshu at that time, Takashina Rosen Zenji, visited various places throughout the country as a result of a petition sent by immigrants from Japan who were Sotoshu believers requesting that Sotoshu kaikyoshi be sent to Brazil. Even though he was 80 years old, he was willing to hold Dharma teaching activities throughout Brazil despite his advanced age. It seems that the believers throughout Brazil were very much impressed by him. At this time, the first Sotoshu temple in Brazil, Zengenji in Mogi das Cruces, was founded.

In 1956, Rev. Ryohan Shingu was appointed as the first director of the Soto Zen Buddhism South America Office, which was located at Zengenji. In 1959, the

Busshinji Temple of the Soto Zen Buddhist community in South America and Soto Zen Buddhism South America Office were established in Tomas de Lima. In 1965, the Busshinji Temple of the Soto Zen Buddhist community in South America and Soto Zen Buddhism South America Office were moved to their present location.

During that interval, Rolandia Busshinji temple was dedicated in 1960. In 1974, Ibiracu Busshinji temple was dedicated, and also Zen places of practice had been established in each area of Brazil. During this time, Rev. Shingu, the director of the Soto Zen Buddhism South America Office, formulated a plan to rebuild the Busshinji Temple of the Soto Zen Buddhist community in South America and the Soto Zen Buddhism South America Office because the original buildings were getting old. He came up with a plan to rebuild those buildings including the *zazendo*, but he passed away in 1986. It was thirty years since he had been appointed as the director and during that time he had made great efforts to spread Soto Zen throughout South America.

The second director of the Soto Zen Buddhism South America Office was Rev. Shunkyo Aoki, appointed in 1986, and he inherited this plan to rebuild the Busshinji Temple of the Soto Zen Buddhist community in South America and the Soto Zen Buddhism South America Office which would encourage teaching activities throughout Brazil. However, he returned to Japan because of various circumstances in 1989.

The third director of the Soto Zen Buddhism South America Office, Rev. Daigyo Moriyama, was appointed in 1992. In 1995, the Hondo (main hall) of the temple was completed. This had been a long-cherished wish since the first director. A memorial ceremony for the 40th anniversary of teaching activities in Brazil was strictly performed with a dedication ceremony for the new building. After that, he returned to Japan.

For the four years from 1989-92 and the five years from 1995 - 2000, there was no director. However, the Busshinji Temple of the Soto Zen Buddhist community in South America was looked after by the Kaikyoshi as well as the monks and lay people of those places.

The fourth director, Rev. Koichi Miyoshi, was appointed in the year 2000. He was planning on setting into action a plan to build a zazendo, but there were issues which had to be resolved and following the resolution of those problems, he returned to Japan in 2005.

I was appointed as the fifth director in 2005. Shortly after my appointment, I was requested by the temple board to build a new building that would include the zazendo, which had been a long-cherished hope since Rev. Shingu.

Thanks to the help and support from the Two Head Temples, the Sotoshu Shumucho, priests and temple members from throughout Japan, the Dharma relatives of the temple founder Takashina Zenji, and the general temple members and supporters of Busshinji, we were able in 2008 to hold a ground-breaking ceremony at which Rev. Yoyu Miyashita, the director of the Education and Dissemination Division of Sotoshu, officiated. Then, in 2009, we were safely able to complete the memorial celebrations for the 50th anniversary of Sotoshu, with Rev. Eitoku Fuchi, President of Sotoshu, representing the Head Priest of Sotoshu, as the officiant. In addition, we had a ceremony marking the completion of the new addition, which is called "Daikankaku."

The basement level of the Daikankaku is a parking area and behind that monuments for the founder of the temple, the former priests of the temple, and deceased priests of the temple have been erected. The first floor of the building is a multi-purpose hall. On the second floor, there is a founder's hall, a zazendo, a hall for memorial tablets, and a tea room (a study room for Japanese culture). On the third floor, there are guest facilities.

In the inner garden between the Daikankaku and Hondo, a stupa for perpetual veneration of the ancestors has been erected and in the entryway of Busshinji Temple, a stupa for the veneration of the ancestors who have been neglected has been erected. In addition, we have a plan to

build a candelabrum on the first floor. Furthermore, before the ceremonies began, we received framed calligraphies by the abbots of the Two Head Temples, as well as from the President of Shumucho.

On Nov. 13th, the following ceremonies were performed: the opening and unveiling of Daikankaku, the opening of the eyes for the founder's statue, the Dai Hannya prayer ceremony, and the celebration party. On the 14th, there were ceremonies for: the opening of the eyes of the founder's stupa, a memorial service for the founder and past priests of Busshinji, a ceremony for opening the eyes of Bodhidharma and Daigen Shuri Bodhisattva, and a ceremony for offering 10,000 lights. On the final day the 15th, there was a thunderstorm, but it did not affect the memorial service for the deceased ministers and teachers of South America, the commemorative ceremony for the 50th anniversary, the service for all members with a general dedication, and finally a commemorative photo was taken in the Daikankaku which was followed by the commemorative ceremony for the 50th anniversary. This concluded the three days of commemorative ceremonies safely.

We had about 100 people from Japan join us for the three days and about 500 people from Brazil, other foreign countries, as well as our own members and supporters.

One hundred and six years have passed since the Sotoshu teachings were first propagated in South America. Since 1908, Japanese immigrants have been coming to Brazil searching for a dream in a new land. In facing that destination, there have been many trials and tribulations. These immigrants have lived their lives while enduring many hardships. It is also thanks to such people that Sotoshu temples and teachings have been protected and maintained.

It is now my hope that with the completion of the Daikankaku, the members and supporters of the temple as well as Zen practitioners from all over South America will train and practice in the Daikankaku so that it will become the center of the truly transmitted Buddhadharma which can then develop and spread throughout all of South America. It is my hope that the temple members will be evermore diligent in accomplishing this task.
Gassho.



How Do We Live Here, Right Now?

By Rev. Tenshin Nakano
Sotoshu Special Dissemination Teacher

A Talk Given at the Houston Zen Center, Houston, Texas on Oct. 22, 2009

Good evening, everyone. Let me express my gratitude for meeting you here tonight and also for listening to my talk.

First of all, I would like to confirm one thing: “the teaching of Buddha is not simply knowledge and learning.” The main objective of Buddhism is practice. The content of Shakyamuni Buddha’s realization at the end of his practice, which took place about 2,500 years ago, is called the “true Dharma” or the “Buddhadharma.” The “true Dharma” indicates “the principles of truth” or the truth itself. Based on these principles of truth, “Buddhism” is the teaching which shows us the best way to actually practice. “The Way of Buddha” refers to those teachings we study and then put into practice. The first proposition we are charged with is precisely this practice of “the Way of Buddha.”

The title of my talk tonight is “How Do We Live Here, Right Now?” I’d like you to think about something, what is our purpose for living? What do you think? (The people in the audience say: “To be happy.”) That’s right. I think the objective of living for all things that are alive, and not only us human beings, but also animals, and I would also dare to say plants, is the establishment of happiness and nothing else. Regardless of whether it is an animal or a plant, the common instinct of any living thing is to be “more comfortable” and “more pleasant.”

However, among the various living things on this planet, human beings are the only ones that can search for this “happiness” as well as think about it. Then, what will make us happy? This will differ from person to person depending on what each of us keeps within ourselves and what we consider to be important in living our lives. At the same time, everyone thinks they want to be happy

and endeavors to be happy, but the next thing we know is that there are certainly not many people alive who always feel happy.

At the temple where I am the resident priest, there is never an end to the people who come to the temple wanting to speak about their various sufferings. When I ask them about their worries, I see that they have various sufferings. For some people their married life has become strained or the relationship of parent and child is not going well or their work isn’t going as they would like it to and so forth. There are many troubles that people have, but they all say, “I’m doing my very best.” They all emphasize this. It is certainly true that in setting an objective, it is important to make effort and do our best in order to accomplish it. Nevertheless, if we don’t make effort based on carefully thinking through our objective and what our effort is directed at, it is often the case that the effort we make often results in unhappiness.

Both Shakyamuni Buddha, who taught the teaching of Buddhism, as well as Dogen Zenji, who transmitted the Sotoshu teaching from China to Japan, left behind their final teachings just before they died. Within these final teachings, they both said that in order to create true happiness, it is imperative that we are “diligent.” Dogen Zenji taught us very kindly and sympathetically about this matter of “diligence.” In Japan, we combine “diligence” and “effort” into one word, although “diligence” and “effort” are generally thought to have the same meaning in the way these words are used.

What do you people think? Are diligence and effort different? Is there anyone here who makes a distinction between the two?

Dogen Zenji defined diligence as “always endeavoring to face what is correct and in accord with reason.” In other words, “diligence is always making the effort to face the correct direction.” This means that if the direction we

are headed in is mistaken, it is not diligence even if you make an effort. Also, if the direction of our effort is mistaken, the more effort we make the further away we will be from our objective, which is to be happy.

If, for example, you were out on the ocean in a boat and had put down a fishing line to try to catch a fish. Suddenly, you are struck by a storm and thrown into the sea. You think only of somehow saving yourself. You swim single-mindedly, heading for land. At least, your intention is to head for land. But if you are thrown into the ocean, you lose your sense of direction. If you are in fact out to sea, then unfortunately the more desperately you swim the more you are swimming toward your death. In short, if the direction we are headed isn't right, you back away from the objective. This is the physical fact. We can say it is diligence precisely when we are making effort and always headed in the right direction.

Coming this far in my talk, I think that for many of you the doubt will arise "What is the correct direction?" No one is going to make the effort of going in a direction that is known from the beginning to be mistaken. This is because we notice from the result that the direction of our effort is mistaken.

About 2,500 years ago, Shakyamuni Buddha was born a prince in what was a small country, *Sakyakoku*. However, seven days following his birth, his mother died. He was then raised by his aunt who was his mother's sister. It may have been because he encountered impermanence through losing his mother so soon after his birth, but from a young age, Shakyamuni Buddha deeply pursued the meaning of life and the matter of human birth and death as he grew up. Seeing this aspect of his son's life, his father, King Suddhodana, worried about his son's future and endeavored to give him pleasing things and surroundings. The King made great efforts to provide his son with toys, delicious food, and a comfortable environment. We, as well, are apt to continue seeking for conditions that we think will make us happy through playthings, clothes, and so on, but Shakyamuni Buddha was unable to obtain happiness only through such things.

At the age of 29, the Buddha renounced all such material things and set out on a journey to practice as a

monk. At the time, there were many religions in India. A common feature of many of these religions was that spiritual practice consisted of difficult, ascetic practices. The thinking behind this was "Worldly desires and delusion are the cause for us not being able to awaken to enlightenment. It is because of the energy of the physical body that these delusive thoughts and passions arise. If we deplete and excruciate the body to its utmost limits, delusive thoughts and passions will no longer arise." This was the objective of these difficult, ascetic practices.

Over a period of six years, Shakyamuni Buddha also visited many religious teachers, asked for their teachings, and underwent ascetic practice. But he realized that it wouldn't be possible to awaken to the principles of truth only through ascetic practice, so finally he sat in zazen. For seven days and nights, he sat under the bodhi tree in zazen. He completely stopped being pushed around by the ego, adjusted his posture, regulated his breathing, and put the mind in order. Then, on the morning of the eighth day, when he saw the glimmering morning star at dawn in the eastern sky, all of the doubts he had in his mind until then completely cleared away like mist dissipating. That was "satori" or enlightenment." When he realized enlightenment, Shakyamuni Buddha shouted with joy and said, "How miraculous, how marvelous! I have awakened and see the truth of reality; there is nothing to it. All living things in the world are, from the beginning, allowed to live throughout the function of precious life. It is the life of the Buddha itself."

I think it may sound a bit abstract to say "the function of precious life" or "the life of Buddha", so I would like to give an example. For instance, we lie down in bed at night to go to sleep. At that time, you completely forget about making an effort to live and peacefully fall asleep. While you are sleeping, the function of life continues to keep you alive, without ever stopping even for an instant much less a minute. The heart beats, and blood and nourishment are moved to every part of the body. This function of life that supports us is called "the function of precious life" or "the Buddha's life." Even if we were suffering from despair and think of committing suicide, this function of life never betrays us, continuing to keep us alive, while hoping that "you will hang in there and do your best for even one minute or one second."

Midori Nakajima was a woman whose life came to an end on Oct. 5, 1999 at the age of 40 from malignant lymphoma tumors. She had two young children: a daughter named Natsumi who was in second grade and a son named Hiroki who was in kindergarten.

She had full knowledge of the name of her illness and her condition. Knowing that she would have to leave behind two young children when she died, she thought, from the bottom of her heart, how unfortunate that was. Wanting her children to be happy no matter what happened to them, she wrote down her hopes and prayers for them in a book.

The biggest wish she left for her children in that book was “There was something urging others at any time and regardless of what was happening saying, ‘I can say that I’m fine just as I am. Be yourself!’ Isn’t to hear that voice the most important wish for a person?” That is how she expressed it.

From a young age, Midori had gone to a Sunday school at a nearby temple. Consequently, she was familiar with the Buddhist teachings since she was young and had sufficiently made the Buddhist teaching her own. For her, the thing that was calling was “No matter what and at any time, I can say that I’m fine just as I am. Be yourself!” was the function of life itself that always continues to let us live our lives without abandoning us, even when we fail, are in the midst of despair, and are thinking of giving up on life. The function of life, which keeps the heart beating, the lungs breathing, and which carries nourishment to every part of the body without ever stopping even for an instant much less a minute, even when we forget about making an effort to live and lie down in bed at night to go to sleep is the function of precious life. When we notice the function of this precious life, we can be sure that “I’m fine just as I am, at any time and in any situation.” This was also the deep wish of the mother for her two children that she wanted them to always try to live a life where they would have this conviction.

Shakyamuni Buddha awakened to the nature of this precious life, this irreplaceable life which each of us has received, and loudly proclaimed this. The surroundings we have been born into and the conditions of our lives are

different for each person. Nevertheless, regardless of which life we look at, there is no life that can be despised. Each person is carrying the precious task which only they can accomplish. The substance of the Buddha’s enlightenment was that he had received this absolute life. Moreover, this precious life is one with everything, so there is no other life that is unrelated. Each of us supports the lives of others and at the same time our lives are supported by all other things. The Buddha taught about this with the teaching of “causality.” How should we use this precious life? For 49 years, the Buddha taught the people who believed in his teachings according to their sufferings and concerns.

With regard to how to use this precious life, Shakyamuni Buddha taught, “Don’t chase after the past. Don’t have hopes for the future. The past is already gone; the future hasn’t come yet. Look carefully at what is happening now. See clearly. Endeavoring at what must be done now.”

One thing that must be confirmed here is that this isn’t to do “What I *want* do now;” it is to do “what *needs* to be done now.” The founder of Eiheiji Monastery, Dogen Zenji, expressed this as “encountering one practice, practice that practice.” This means that “I have received these conditions ‘here, right now’ and I will practice with them sincerely with my whole body and mind.”

The founder of Sojiji Monastery, Keizan Zenji, expressed this in easier-to-understand words. Keizan Zenji was asked by his master, Tettsu Gikai Zenji, about “everyday mind.” “Everyday mind” is a very important understanding of mind that is found in Zen teaching.

How do you understand “everyday mind”? In present day Japan, this expression “everyday mind” is sometimes used in conversation and usually means to take a firm attitude so that whatever happens we will not be misled or bothered by it. In other words, when this expression is used in modern-day Japan, it means to be like a boulder, not budging at all. That is the contemporary understanding of “mind” in “everyday mind.” How about for you? How do you understand this expression?

In response to Tettsu Gikai Zenji’s question, Keizan Zenji said, “When tea is served, drink tea; when rice is

served, eat rice.” That is “everyday mind.” You may think of Keizan Zenji’s teaching “When tea is served, drink tea; when rice is served, eat rice” as something that anyone does. Nevertheless, in many cases, when tea is served, we are greedy when we drink it and when rice is served we are greedy when we eat it. And then, in our everyday way of living, we are apt to complain when it’s hot and grumble when it’s hard. No, don’t do that. Be grateful for the person who offers you something, for the person who cooks for you. We have to receive whatever food is served with gratitude, but this doesn’t mean that it’s all right to serve whatever food we want. “Everyday mind” includes both the person preparing a meal or someone who is serving tea. If it is your turn to serve the tea, then put yourself in the shoes of the person who is being served and then cordially serve the tea or cook a meal. This means that you have to do everything “right now, here” with all your heart.

Earlier this evening, I ate some food prepared by the tenzo and other practitioners of this center and I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude.

Then, when it’s your turn to cook a meal, put yourself in the shoes of the person or persons who are eating, sincerely make the meal. If the person who is eating the meal should eat less salt because of their physical condition, then cook with less salt. If the person eating the meal is elderly, then cutting the vegetables and so on in smaller pieces as well as cooking them longer to make it easier for them to eat the food. The person who is preparing the meal as well as the person receiving the meal, both people are “everyday mind.” The important thing is to meet each condition “here, right now.” “Everyday mind” is to do each and everything with all our heart.

I was strongly influenced since my university days by a Zen teacher who I truly respected. He passed away already fourteen years ago. He was a person of high moral character thanks to the depth of his understanding. There were always many young people who gathered seeking his teaching and over the last five years of his life, all together 600 monks and students practiced under him.

One day, while a college student was preparing tea for Roshi, the student asked, “There are always lots of people

around you, so it has really been rather difficult to ask you this, but today, there are just the two of us. So, let me make some tea for you. Would it be all right to ask you something?”

Roshi answered, “What is it?” The student said, “Roshi, you always say, ‘True practice is do now what needs to be done now.’ I don’t clearly understand what this means. I’m in graduate school. I think that for me ‘what needs to be done now’ is to study. Would it be all right to understand it that way?”

How about you people? (Asking the audience)

– Those of you who think he said, “You’re absolutely right,” please raise your hand. ?

– Those of you who think he said, “That’s not good at all,” please raise your hands. ?

Roshi immediately barked, “What sort of foolish thing are you saying? What are you doing right now? You’re making tea, right? You must do that with all your whole body and mind. What else is there to do?” “What must be done now” is the moment, “right now,here.”

On February 23, 2007, a woman named Noriko Kamagata was found murdered in the parking lot in front of a supermarket. For some time, her husband, Satoshi, was thought to be the guilty party. Satoshi ran a small company. On top of losing his dear wife, he was also treated like a criminal. Fewer customers came to his company and he lost the desire to live. Later, the police returned to him one of his wife’s belongings. It was notebook with a red leather cover and inside the back cover, Satoshi saw that his wife had written “To do something faithfully/even if other people don’t know/becomes the power to support you.”

Coming across these words which his wife had held dear, Satoshi remembered that she had always lived that way. Then, he reflected deeply on his own present way of living and is now living vigorously, his wish to live having returned. In the spring of this year, this story was featured on the morning news shows on Japanese television.

Indeed, it is precisely when we are faithful to “the matter here, right now” that we are connected with an

unshakeable acceptance in and have self-confidence about our way of life. Then, by being faithful to each condition we encounter, it is possible to be one with this precious life and thereby establish true happiness.

Earlier, I said that even if we are making the effort to go in the right direction, it is difficult to determine what the right direction is. If, within our busy life, we are constantly asking ourselves, “Is this the right direction? Or is this the incorrect direction?” I think this would be quite difficult. So rather than doing that, “here, right now,” sincerely focus on what you are doing now and then your efforts will of themselves connect with diligence.

Shakyamuni Buddha placed a lot of importance on the “conditions and circumstances” of our lives. In our lives, there are direct causes and indirect causes. Even though there is only one cause, it could change into all sorts of results depending on the conditions which have been given. If, for example, you were walking down a road and found a stick that had fallen down, depending how that stick is used it could be used as something to write letters on the ground. Or, it could be used by a teacher to point to something written on the blackboard or it could be used by a baton to conduct an orchestra. Or, it could be used to hit someone in which case it would be a weapon. On a cold day, we could break the stick in half and burn it in a fire as firewood. Even though the stick is one cause, the results would be very different depending on the conditions in which it was used. Our life here, right now is clearly one. And yet, depending on the conditions which we encounter, the result can change in many ways. For this reason, it is important where we set our objectives and which conditions we encounter.

Dogen Zenji taught that the conditions we encounter are surely important, but more important is the condition “here, right now” and the way in which we take advantage of it. Dogen Zenji stipulated that zazen is the basis of practice. Nevertheless, it isn't possible to pass our whole life only sitting in zazen. It was in this connection that Dogen Zenji showed us how to live in such a way that we could bring the mind of zazen alive in our everyday life. He taught us kindly and carefully about how to be present with all the things throughout our everyday life, including washing the face or brushing the teeth or washing our

hands. This is to sincerely do each thing carefully, as practice, in our daily lives. In fact, this is to practice the Zen way of life.

Shakyamuni Buddha taught about the importance of cultivating “true wisdom”. Wisdom is not mere knowledge. In the Zen teaching, we use the words “the great, perfect mirror wisdom.” The meaning of this expression is that wisdom is like a round big mirror. This is a mirror that is well polished and reflects everything that comes in front of its eyes, even things which are minute. If the direction of the mirror is then moved, the things that were reflected in it disappear completely and the things that are now in front of it are reflected as they are. If the things that had been reflected didn't disappear completely and the next things were also reflected, there would be double or triple images and it wouldn't be possible to correctly discern what was reflected. This is an explanation of “true wisdom.”

However, we human beings find it very difficult to be like a mirror. Whether we are happy or sad or worried, since we meet the next thing dragging along the previous emotions and memories, there are many times when we cannot calmly and correctly see the situation. A way of living where each moment, each moment, “here, right now” where we really complete this “here, right now” and then move on to the next thing, this is precisely a life-style backed up by “the great, perfect mirror wisdom.” It is the way of living where “encountering one practice, practicing that one practice.”

So, the ideal Zen way of life is to live our lives with the objective of “now, this one step.” If we place the objective over there and put value only on reaching that objective, and what's more we were not able to get there, we would think that all of the walking was futile. But if each step is the objective and we are able to allow the mind to enjoy the scenery and happenings while we are walking, then the matter of each moment, each moment “here, right now” will be resolved.

If our only objective is to master what is on top of the mountain, then each step on the way to the goal will only feel oppressive. Then, if we are unable to reach the summit, all of the hardship along the way will all seem

meaningless. But if each step, each step, is the objective, then while walking, we can feel happy about each and every thing we see with the eyes, hear with the ears, each fragrant flower we smell with the nose. Then, the result will be good even if we don't reach the summit. The heart will be amply filled with happiness, even if we don't reach the top of the mountain. Don't seek for an ideal or goal somewhere far, far away. The establishment of happiness is linked with practice that is happening in each moment, to wholeheartedly endeavor at what is right in front of you.

In our everyday life, to sincerely practice by receiving each condition one by one – the way we speak to other people, for instance, or our conduct towards our others, and so forth – this is the Zen way of living that carries through every aspect of our life.

Tonight, the title of my talk was “How do we live here, right now?”

I would like to thank you for listening so attentively.

Shobogenzo Zazenshin - A Free Translation (6)

Rev. Issho Fujita, Leader of the Masenkai

Since it is this way, if we look back from ancient times, there are very few people who knew zazen as zazen. (In *Shobogenzo: The Samadhi that is King of Samadhis*, it says, “Even if some people deeply understand sitting to be the Buddhadharmā, none has realized sitting as sitting.”) Presently on many mountains of Great Song China, there are many monks who don't know zazen, who don't study zazen, and this even includes the abbots of well-known monasteries. It isn't that there are no monks who have clarified zazen, but they are very few. Of course, the times for zazen are clearly established in these monasteries (the four times for zazen: 7:00 pm, 3:00 am, 9:00 am, and 4:00 pm). All the people from the abbot to the monks regard sitting together in zazen as their main practice, and strongly recommend the training monks to do zazen. Nevertheless, abbots who really know zazen are rare.

Consequently, from long ago until the present times, there have been one or two eminent priests who have written *Zazenmei* (“Things to keep in mind about Zazen”). There have been one or two great monks who have edited *Zazengi* (“Rules for Zazen”) as well as *Zazenshin* (“The acupuncture needle of Zazen”). But there is no value in picking up any of these texts on zazen. It must be said that all of the priests who wrote these texts were in the dark about the real nature of zazen. These include, for example, the instructions on zazen that appear in the *Keitoku Dentoroku* (“Keitoku Era Transmission of the Lamp”) and the *Katai Futoroku* (“Kaitai Era Record of the Universal Lamp”).

Even though the priests who wrote these works have spent their whole lives going from monastery to monastery, they have never made correct effort in one sitting of zazen. This is truly lamentable and unfortunate. Sitting should be the way to be intimate with one's true Self, but in their cases, they will never be able to meet their original Self with the sort of effort they make in zazen. This is pitiful. That it happens this way isn't because zazen hates their body and mind and so zazen escapes from them. It is because they don't think of doing true practice (zazen) and they imprudently become intoxicated within their own state of mind. Regarding the books they've written, they are only concerned about getting back to the source or of returning to the origin, as well as making the effort to stop thinking and to become absorbed in tranquility. It must be said that these are all deviations of zazen changing it into subjectivism and mentalism.

This sort of zazen isn't even equal to the Tendai teaching of “samatha” which is comprised of four stages: 1) reflecting on dhyana (looking at Dharma forms), 2) training in dhyana (getting rid of all defilements), 3) assuming the fragrance of dhyana (planning the seeds of effect and function), and 4) cultivating dhyana (attaining the state of freedom). Nor is this sort of zazen equal to the ten stages and the equivalent stage of awakening, which is the highest stage of a bodhisattva on the way to Buddhahood. How could such people say that they have received the one-to-one transmission of zazen that has been transmitted from buddhas and ancestors to buddhas and ancestors? The editors of the *Keitoku Dentoroku* and the *Katai Futoroku* were mistaken in including the writings of these

monks. Those who would study Zen should throw these writings away and not read them.

There is only one *Zazenshin* that is truly buddhas and ancestors and a real acupuncture needle for zazen. That is the one written by Wanshi Shokaku Zenji of Tendo Keitokuji temple on Daibyakumyozan mountain in the Great Kingdom of Song China. What is said there is correct. It is only this zazen needle which illuminates both the inside and the outside of the Dharma-world. Among the buddhas and ancestors of past and present, it is only this zazen needle which is a true buddhas and ancestors. Former buddhas as well as later buddhas have all been and will be spurred on by this needle of zazen. It is through this zazen needle that ancestors past and present are made into buddhas and ancestors.

This needle, which is so great, is as follows:

The Needle of Zazen: Genuine Zazen that Will Cure Illness of Zazen

Written by Shokaku, who was posthumously titled Wanshi Zenji by imperial decree

“For any buddha or ancestor, zazen is the pivotal opportunity, so it isn’t possible for any of the buddhas and ancestors to be cut off from zazen. Zazen is the life-line of the buddhas and ancestors. As it is written in *Fukanzazengi*, “Zazen is to take the posture of complete rest. So the body never touches things (the worries of favorable and unfavorable); Zazen is to cast off all affairs. So the mind never opposes against affairs (the outer world becomes an object, without being aware of it). In zazen, all human business and duties are put aside. (Bodhidharma said, “Outside, all conditions are set aside; inside, no struggles.” Sawaki Roshi said, “Stop shooting a gun.”) However, this isn’t to fall into the state of no thoughts like one dead. There must always be the liveliness of being “Like a dragon that reaches water, like a tiger entering the mountain” and in zazen one should continue to be fully awakened. In other words, the body-mind functions of “knowing” and “illuminating” must be vividly taking place. This function, that is, knowing without touching things and illuminating without opposing circumstances, is so subtle that it cannot be grasped by our shallow, discriminating mind (beyond thinking). This is because there isn’t the slightest mixing in of dualistic discriminations

of this or that, right or wrong, into this subtle sense of knowing. The function of illumination is a subtle means where there isn’t the smallest hint of delusion and enlightenment appearing. Before all discrimination arises, before all signs appear, it is just knowing, just illuminating. That knowing where there is no dualistic thought has no object (even) and is independent (odd). That illumination where there isn’t the smallest sign doesn’t have an object on the other side that must be grasped, but only illuminates clearly. In this sort of zazen, there is no impurity throughout heaven and earth; the water of the infinite ocean is clear right to the bottom. The fish (sitting buddha) within the ocean, is swimming leisurely, the water is its life from which it is inseparable. The bird in the endless sky is freely flying in the sky which is its life and from which it is inseparable.”

The “needle” in the title of “The Needle of Zazen” (*Zazenshin*) is usually thought of as a tool in acupuncture used to treat illness, but in this case it refers to practice zazen correctly in order to cure the sickness of zazen. This sort of zazen is a manifestation in front of us as the great function of the Way of Buddha. It is the true behavior of the body beyond the human living based on the senses of sound and form; it is the various forms of life-functioning that have been active as-they-are since the time before our parents were born. That is the marvelous realization of the perfect buddhas and ancestors (the original Japanese sentence here should not be understood as “It is good not to insult the buddhas and ancestors”. Rather, it should be read as “Buddhas and ancestors with no slander are great”). This is to completely lose the common body-mind and become a buddha-ancestor. That is why it is described as the form of a head three feet long and the neck two inches long, which is not possible in they human world.

The pivotal function of every buddha. All buddhas have certainly become buddhas through the opportunity of the self as originally being a buddha. Zazen is to realize this opportunity.

The functional essence of the ancestors. Zazen is certainly a practice to be done, having received the teaching from our late teacher, but our practice must not be just a copy of the teaching. In the place where zazen, practice of the original Self, is actually practiced, there is no secretive

relationship between the teaching from my master and me who is practicing it (“The late master had no such words” are the words of Keikaku, a disciple of Joshu. The context is that he said, “Joshu and the koan of the oak tree in the garden are not two separate things.”) There is only zazen being purely practiced. It is this principle of the same-mind/same-body between zazen and the buddhas and ancestors that embodies the true buddhas and ancestors. It is precisely in becoming this sort of ancestor (=zazen) that the true Dharma is transmitted (in the mind) and that the okesa robe is transmitted (on the body). To express this is in one word, as in “turning the head (buddha) and changing the features (zazen)”, zazen is made into buddhas and each aspect of that zazen is completely the great agency (function, opportunity) of the buddhas. Changing the features (zazen) and turning the head (ancestors) is, in other words, zazen. Each and every ancestor has become an ancestor through the opportunity of zazen.

These first two lines, “the essential function of the buddhas, the functional essence of the ancestors,” set out in words the needle which cures the illness of those people who see the buddhas and ancestors as being separate from zazen.

Knowing without touching things. The “knowing” here is not the usual dualistic sense of cognition where there is “someone knowing” and “something known”. This sort of dualistic knowing based on sense-perception where we suppose there are objects outside of us is only small-scale calculation. Neither is this knowing an intellectual recognition which is clearly knowing something as something. This kind of intellectual knowing is the conditioned thing (appearing and disappearing according to condition) that is based on phenomena produced through causation. Consequently, the “knowing” spoken of here is “Without touching things” (this means not to have the objects besides the Self). This “without touching things” doesn’t consist of “knowing” that is possible based on the establishment of subject/object, but rather consists of the function itself which enables that establishment, and it is precisely this “without touching things” which is said to be “knowing.” So, don’t speculate whether this knowing is universal knowledge nor think narrowly that this knowing is self-knowledge. This “without touching things”

is what Fuke expressed in the *Record of Rinzai* as, “When it’s bright, it’s only bright. When it’s dark, it’s only dark. I leave everything as it is and don’t interfere at all with light and dark (life and death).” At this time, this is “to sit through the body our mother has bore” and so this is the true Self (our nature before our parents were born) appearing.

(To be continued.)

The 2nd Chapter of *Shobogenzo*: Maka-Hannya-Haramitsu (Maha-Prajna-Paramita)

Lecture (5)

Rev. Shohaku Okumura
Director, Soto Zen Buddhism International Center

[Text]

Indra asked the Elder Subhuti, "Venerable one, when bodhisattva mahasattvas want to study the most profound prajna paramita, how should they do it?" Subhuti replied, "Kausika, when bodhisattva mahasattvas want to study the most profound prajna paramita, they should study it as empty space."

Studying Prajna Paramita

This conversation between Indra and Subhuti is a continuation from the previous conversation between the Buddha and a monk who wished to venerate and make prostrations to *prajna paramita* in the same section. (Chapter 291 of the 600-volume *Mahaprajna paramita Sutra*.) The monk thought that the profundity of *prajna* is that although there is neither arising nor perishing, so that there is neither the practitioner who studies and attains *prajna paramita* nor any object to be attained, there are many practical approaches (施設可得); skillful means that can be practiced and attained. As Dogen Zenji says, by venerating and making prostrations, the practitioner hides him/herself within him/herself together with all beings (dharmas), the same as a white bird a snowy world.

In this paragraph, the guardian god of the Buddhadharmā, Indra, asked Subhūti how a bodhisattva can study *prajna paramita*. The Elder Subhūti on behalf of the Buddha replied, “A bodhisattva should study *prajna paramita* as empty space.”

Empty Space as a Buddhist Term

“Empty space” here is a translation of *koku* (Ch. *xukong* 虛空, Skt. *akasa*). The Chinese character, 虛 (Ch. *xu*, Jp. *ko*, *kyo*) means ① emptiness; unpreparedness; crack, fissure; unguarded position; untruth; ② to make empty; ③ a cavity, hollow, hole; ④ emptiness, void, empty, vain; ineffective; lifeless; 空 (Ch. *kong*, Jp. *ku*, *sora*, *kara*,) means; ⑤ air, sky, emptiness; vanity, unreality; hollow; void; ⑥ to become empty, be less crowded; ⑦ empty, open; vacant; ⑧ gap, opening, aperture; space, blank, vacancy; ⑨ emptiness, vacancy, hollowness, vacuum; ⑩ sky, heaven, air, weather, memory, absent-mindedness; and ⑪ pretended, sham, mock. In common Japanese, the compound; *koku* means; ① empty sky; ② lonely place without any person; and ③ empty space in a house or storage without anything.

In Buddhism, particularly in the teaching of the Sarvastivādin sect, *koku* (*akasa*) has two different meanings. One is “empty space” as one of the three unconditioned dharmas (*mūiho*, 無為法); the other is “empty space” as one of the conditioned dharmas (*uiho*, 有為法).

Koku (*akasa*, empty space) as a conditioned dharma is the space between things; that is, a space which is not occupied by anything; a space with a lack of beings. The conditioned empty space has a limitation therefore it is possible to measure how big or small it is. It is arising and perishing. Sometimes it is occupied by something and disappears and when the thing moves out, the empty space reappears. And conditioned empty space can be the object of eye consciousness. We can see with our eyes if a space is occupied by something or not. For example, we see the space in a glass is occupied with milk or is empty. The conditioned empty space belongs to the *rupa skandha*, the element of material as one of the five aggregates.

Koku as unconditioned dharma has no limitation; we cannot measure the size of the empty space. The empty

space does not appear or disappear. This means that even if the space in a glass is occupied by milk, this space itself does not cease to be. The unconditioned empty space does not arise or perish, regardless of whether or not it is occupied by something. It is penetrating everywhere. It is the space in which all things appear and disappear. Therefore, it cannot be the object of our eye consciousness. It is one seamless space and all space is equal. So, there is no way to put a value on it; to determine whether some space is more or less important than other space. We may be able to evaluate the things appearing and disappearing in the space, but we cannot evaluate the space in which things are coming and going. It cannot be separated by things. Things can be separate but the space in which things are arising and perishing never arises or perishes. The unconditioned empty space always embraces everything coming and going without evaluation. It does not reject or obstruct anything from getting together and then dispersing within it. Therefore, it is always pure and clean without any defilement and always calm and tranquil, although all the phenomenal things are happening, arising and perishing, coming and going.

The Third Meaning: Empty Space is Buddha Mind

Thinking of “empty space” in this sense, there is a third usage of this word in Zen Buddhist texts. This is as a metaphor of emptiness that is neither *u* (being) nor *mu* (non-being, lack of being), which is beyond them and yet embracing them.

At the end of the formal oryoki meals within the monks’ hall (*sodo*) in a Zen monastery, the following verse is chanted:

処世界如虚空
如蓮華不著水
心清淨超於彼
稽首礼無上尊

Abiding in this ephemeral world
Like a lotus in muddy water,
the mind is pure and goes beyond.
Thus we bow to Buddha.

(Translation from *Soto School Scriptures for Daily Services and Practice*)

In my understanding, the above English translation is a little bit different from the original. This is a verse for praising Buddha's virtue; the purity of the Buddha mind. My very literal translation of this verse is as follows:

"Abiding in this world, like empty space
and like a lotus flower that isn't stained by [muddy] water,
the purity of the [Buddha's] mind even goes beyond them.
Therefore, we make prostrations to the Most Venerable
One."

In the English translation from the Sotoshu sutra book, *koku* (empty space) is used to modify "the world" and translated as, "this *ephemeral* world," but in the original, I think these words (如虚空, like the empty space) modify "abiding." It shows how the Buddha abides in this world. The way the Buddha is abiding in the world is like empty space and also like a lotus flower. This "empty space" does not mean "ephemeral" or "impermanent" at all. Rather, it means the "unconditioned empty space" in which all things are coming and going both negative and positive, and yet empty space is never defiled and therefore never purified. It is purity beyond the dichotomy of purity and defilement. The "unconditioned empty space" embraces all different things and conditions and yet that is beyond the distinction between purity and defilement. The Buddha abides in this world beyond purity or defilement. Empty space (*koku*) is a metaphor or symbol of emptiness and perfect interpenetration.

The Three Meanings of Empty Space

Thus, in Buddhist terms, *koku* ("empty space") has three meanings. The first one is the "conditioned empty space," as I mentioned before. This is "empty space" in the common sense. For example, when there is a certain amount of water in a glass, we say that there is some empty space above the water. This is a very common usage of "empty space," the space where we see nothing exists. And yet, it is not really empty. That space above the water is filled with air. Empty space in the common sense is not really empty.

The second meaning of "empty space" is "unconditioned dharma", which is the space that does not disappear even when it is occupied by something. In the case of the first meaning of empty space, when the space in a glass is occupied by water or milk, we think this empty space

disappears. When a glass is placed in a certain place, the space is occupied by this glass, so nothing else can share the same space together with the glass. And yet, as the "unconditioned empty space" in Buddhist terms, there is "empty space" which doesn't disappear even when this space is occupied by something; even when a glass is here the space doesn't actually disappear. The "unconditioned empty space" allows all beings to be there and yet, it doesn't disappear and even if something disappears, the empty space never increases. The space never appears and never disappears, never increases or decreases, is never defiled nor pure; space is always there without our evaluation. That is the second meaning of "empty space," as "unconditioned dharma."

The third meaning of this word "*koku*" is derived from the second one, and is used as a metaphor or symbol of emptiness, the emptiness of all beings. Emptiness means the way in which the Buddha sees all beings without self-nature, which is impermanent and without substance, and always changing. This way of being is called "emptiness"; so this emptiness is different from the empty space in the glass which is a lack of being. It is also different from the space which allows all beings to exist in it. But this emptiness, as the Buddha's teaching or Mahayana teaching, is the way all beings exist without self-nature, and since there is no self-nature, we cannot grasp it. Since everything is connected with everything, the reality of all beings which is emptiness pervades and penetrates the whole universe, so there is no discrimination and no attachment; there is nothing to grasp. So this "empty space" or "*koku*" is used as a metaphor of the emptiness as the reality of our life. There are these three meanings. In the case of this verse, "*koku* (empty space)" is used as the third meaning, as the symbol of the emptiness of all beings. Buddha dwells in this world really like "empty space" or a lotus flower without being influenced by neither positive or negative and yet embraces both and blooms as a beautiful flower of Dharma. I think Dogen Zenji interprets the "empty space" in the section of the *Mahaprajna paramita* Sutra in this sense.

A Bird is Flying in the Empty Space

In *Shobogenzo Zazenshin* ("The Acupuncture Needle of Zazen"), Dogen Zenji quotes Zen Master Hongzhi (Wanshi)'s verse of *Zazenshin* and made comments on

each line. Dogen's comment on Hongzhi's final line, 空闊莫涯兮鳥飛杳杳, is as follows:

The sky is infinitely vast and without limitation; a bird is flying far, far away.

"The infinitely vast sky without limitation" is not what is suspended in the firmament. The sky suspended in the firmament is not the infinitely vast sky. Moreover, the space that permeates here and there is not the infinitely vast sky. [The sky] that is never concealed or revealed and that has neither outside nor inside is the infinitely vast sky. When birds fly through this sky, flying in the sky is the undivided dharma. Their activity of flying in the sky cannot be measured. Flying in the sky is the entire universe because the entire universe is flying in the sky. Although we do not know the distance of this flying, in expressing it with words beyond discrimination, we say "far, far away." "Go straightforwardly; there should be no string under the feet." When the sky is flying away, the birds also are flying away; and when the birds are flying away, the sky also is flying away. In studying and penetrating the "flying away", we say "Simply being here." This is the acupuncture needle for immovable sitting. In traveling ten thousands miles by "simply being here," we express it in this way.

He is saying that the infinitely vast sky without limitation in which the bird is flying is not the "sky" hanging in the firmament. This means that the vast sky refers not to the atmosphere around the planet earth, but to the unconditioned empty space. Our zazen practice (flying) is done within the unconditioned empty space and furthermore, our practice and the unconditioned empty space are not two separate things. Within our flying, the entire "empty space" is flying. Without our practice there is no such empty space.

How to Grab Empty Space

In *Shobogenzo Koku* ("Empty Space"), Dogen Zenji introduces a koan story about Shigong Huizang (Sekkyo Ezo) and Xitang Zhizang (Seido Chizo), two disciples of Mazu Daoyi (Baso Doitsu).

Shigong said, "Are you able to grasp empty space (*koku*)?"

Xitang said, "Yes, I can grasp it."

Shigong said, "How do you grasp it?"

Xitang took a pinch of air with his hand.

Shigong said, "You don't know how to grasp empty space."

Xitang said, "How do you grasp it, elder brother?"

Shigong grabbed Xitang's nostrils and pulled.

Groaning with pain, Xitang yelled, "How awful! You are pulling my nose off."

Shigong said, "That is how you should grab it."

In this story it seems that Xitang thinks that empty space (*koku*) is air in the sky as conditioned empty space. Shigong does not mean that the empty sky is conditioned but that there is no other way to grasp and manifest unconditioned empty space besides grabbing the self and practicing with one's own body and mind. In his comment on this story, Dogen Zenji said, "Buddhas and ancestors endeavoring in wholehearted practice of the Way, arousing Way-seeking mind, practice and verification, and speaking and hearing the sounds, are nothing other than grasping empty space (*koku*)." At the end of the same chapter, Dogen says, "Empty space is nothing other than *Shobogenzo-nehanyoshin* (the true dharma eye treasury, the wondrous mind of nirvana)." The *koku*, our practice that is verified by myriad things within the unconditioned empty space in which all things are connected and coming and going, is the dharma transmitted through all buddhas and ancestors.

I think Dogen Zenji quotes this section of the *Mahaprajna paramita Sutra* including the word "empty space," as the introduction to Tiangtong Rujing's poem "Windbell," in which Rujing wrote that the entire body of the windbell is hanging in "empty space." Dogen recorded his conversation with Rujing about what "empty space" means. I will introduce their conversation later when we study that poem.

In the context of the *Prajna paramita Sutra*, Subhuti said that we should study *prajna paramita* as empty space. In this case, the *prajna paramita* is itself like the empty space that is boundless, seamless, without defilement, and beyond any separation, comparison and discrimination. It also means that the person who studies *prajna* is also like empty space. *Prajna* or empty space cannot be the object of this person (subject)'s pursuit as an external target to gain. This is the same as Dogen's teaching in *Genjokoan*, "To study the buddha way is to study the self. To study

the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be verified by all myriad dharmas.” The fire boy is coming to seek for fire; empty space is looking for and studying empty space.

Dogen Zenji’s comment on this quotation from the *Mahaprajna paramita Sutra* is short and simple.

[Text]

Therefore, to study prajna is itself empty space. Empty space is studying prajna.

Empty space is not external space and it is not simply unconditioned empty space in which all things are coming and going. According to Dogen, empty space is our study and practice and our study and practice is empty space. This is the basis of Dogen’s teaching of practice without gaining mind. “A practitioner should not practice the Buddhadharma for one’s own sake, in order to gain fame and profit, or to attain good results, or to pursue miraculous power. Practice the Buddhadharma only for the sake of the Buddhadharma. This is the Way.” This is a very important point in Dogen Zenji’s teachings in *Gakudo Yojinshu* (“Points to Watch in Practicing the Way”). His teaching of *shikantaza* (just sitting) in the case of our zazen practice is also the same.

[Text]

Indra spoke again to the Buddha, "World honored one, when good men and women accept and keep, read and recite, ponder in accord with reality, and expound to others this profound prajna paramita [which you have just] presented, how can I protect them? World- honored One, I simply wish that you bestow your compassion and teach me." At that time, the Elder Subhuti said to Indra, "Kausika, do you see a dharma that can be protected, or not?" Indra replied, "No! Venerable one, I don't see any dharma that I can protect." Subhuti said, "Kausika, when good men and women speak as you have, the most profound prajna paramita is itself protection. If good men and women act as you said, they are never separate from the most profound prajna paramita. You should know that, even if all human and non-human beings wanted to harm them, it would not be possible to do so. Kausika, if you want to protect them, you should do as you said. Wanting to protect the most profound prajna paramita and all bodhisattvas is not different from wanting

to protect empty space."

Next, Indra, the guardian god of the Buddhadharma, asks the Buddha how he can protect bodhisattvas who have accepted the teaching of *prajna paramita*, think of it, understood it, practice it and sharing it with others, like empty space. To this question from Indra, Subhuti answers on behalf of the Buddha in the form of a question, “Do you see any dharma you can protect or not?” This question means that if there is any separation between the practitioners who are studying *prajna* as empty space and the myriad dharmas (things) which are coming and going within empty space. Is there anything that can be protected? Are there any people who can disturb the study and practice of empty space? Is there the protector and bodhisattvas to be protected within empty space? And Indra’s answer is “No.”

Then, Subhuti says that if bodhisattvas practice in such a manner that they are empty space, their study is also like empty space, and *prajna* is also empty space, such practice is itself protection. Indra does not need to protect them.

Dogen Zenji’s comments on this quotation:

[Text]

You should know that accepting and keeping, reading and reciting, pondering in accord with reality, are nothing other than protecting prajna. The desire to protect is accepting and keeping, reading and reciting, and so on.

The practice of *prajna paramita* is itself protection. No one can harm them. If Indra wishes to be a protector of the Buddhadharma, Indra himself needs to be a practitioner of Buddhadharma. Then, his practice is itself protection. When we apply this way of studying empty space and therefore no gain and no attachment to Buddhist monks’ daily social life, it will be the precepts of no possession except for one begging bowl, three robes to protect their bodies, and a few more things. Dogen Zenji also put emphasis on poverty. In *Shobogenzo Zuimonki*, he says;

“Students of the Way should be thoroughly poor. When we look at people in the secular world, men of property inevitably have two kinds of troubles: anger and dishonor. If they have some treasure, others wish to steal it, and when they try to protect it, anger immediately

arises. Or in talking about some matter, argument and negotiation eventually escalate into conflict and fighting. Proceeding in this way, anger will arise and result in dishonor. Being poor and without greed releases people from these problems and they find peace, joy, and liberation. Proof is right in front of our eyes. We don't need to search for it in the scriptures. Not only that, ancient sages and wise predecessors criticized being wealthy, and heavenly deities, buddhas, and ancestors have all denounced it. Nevertheless, foolish people accumulate wealth and bear so much anger; this is the shame of shames. Our wise predecessors, ancient sages, buddhas and ancestors have all been respecting and delighted by seeing people who are poor yet aspired to the Way.

These days, the decay of the Buddhadharma is occurring right before our eyes. From the time I first entered Kenninji Monastery, over a period of seven or eight years I saw many changes gradually taking place. They had built storerooms in each temple building, each person having his own utensils. Many became fond of fine clothing, stored up personal possessions, and indulged in idle talk. No one cared about the forms of greeting one another or about prostrating before the enshrined Buddha. Looking at these things, I can imagine what other places must be like.

A person of the Buddhadharma should not possess any treasure or property other than robes and a bowl. What is the need for a closet? You should not own things which have to be hidden from others. You try to hide things because you are afraid of thieves; if you abandon them you will be that much more at ease. When you don't want to be killed even though you have to kill, your body suffers and your mind is anxious. However, if you firmly make up your mind not to retaliate, even if someone tries to kill you, you will not need to be careful or worry about thieves. You will always be in peace and joy." (*Shobogenzo Zuimonki* 3-4, p.114-115, translation by Shohaku Okumura, *Sotoshu Shumuchō*)

I don't think we need any explanation about Dogen's admonitions in this talk except regarding one word. The word Dogen Zenji uses for the English expression "peace and joy" is *anraku* (安楽), which is a Chinese word used as a translation of the Sanskrit word *sukka*. *Sukka* is the

opposition of *dukkha* (suffering). Dogen Zenji uses the same word in *Fukanzazengi* ("A Universal Recommendation of Zazen") and said that "zazen is the Dharma gate of peace and joy" (*anraku no homon*). Our lives become *dukkha* (suffering) within samsara because of the three poisonous minds: greed, anger/hatred, and ignorance. To study *prajna* (wisdom) as empty space is to be liberated from the three poisonous minds. This study, practice, and day-to-day way of life, without greed, anger/hatred and ignorance, is itself protection for us.

Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma Book 3

Buddha Nature (*Busshō*)

Translated by Carl Bielefeldt

INTRODUCTION

Dogen's essay on the buddha nature is one of the most celebrated texts in the *Shobogenzo*. It was composed in the autumn of 1241, at Koshōji, the monastery Dogen had established five years earlier on the southern outskirts of the imperial capital at Heian. The work appears as book 3 in the major premodern redactions of the *Shobogenzo*.

The concept of the buddha nature, one of the most widely-discussed topics in East Asian Buddhism, was subject to a wide range of interpretations. In his opening remarks, Dogen dismisses several of the most common views: that the buddha nature is the potential to become a buddha, that it is the activity of cognition within us, or that it is a universal self pervading the world. Rather, he says, the buddha nature is existence itself — not an abstract principle of being, but the actual occurrence of things, or, as he puts it simply at the end of his essay, "fences, walls, tiles, and pebbles."

Like the majority of the representative texts of the *Shobogenzo*, Dogen's essay takes the form of commentary on thematically related passages from the Chinese Zen literature. His readings of these passages can be highly

idiosyncratic and often depend on linguistic play with the grammar and syntax of his Chinese quotations — a feature famously exemplified at the beginning of our text, where Dogen transforms the *Nirvana Sutra* statement that beings all have the buddha nature to the claim that all being is the buddha nature. Similar play is found throughout the essay and makes this text one of the most demanding, for both translator and reader, in the *Shobogenzo*.

The *Buddha Nature* is a rather long text, requiring that we here omit annotation and split the translation into two sections, published in consecutive issues of *Dharma Eye*. The full translation, together with the original text and complete annotation, is available on the website of the Soto Zen Text Project: sztp.stanford.edu. Other English versions of this work can be found in Kōsen Nishiyama and John Stevens, *Shōbōgenzō*, volume 4 (1983), pp. 120-140; Yuho Yokoi, *The Shobo-genzo* (1986), pp. 13-61; Gudo Nishijima and Chodo Cross, *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo*, Book 2 (1996), pp. 1-32; Norman Waddell and Masao Abe, *The Heart of Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō* (2002), pp. 59-98; and Hubert Nearman, *The Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching* (2007), pp. 244-279.

Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma Book 3

Buddha Nature (*Busshō*)

The Buddha Shakyamuni said [in the “Lion’s Roar” chapter of the *Nirvana Sutra*], “All living beings in their entirety have the buddha nature. The tathagata always abides, without any change.”

Though it is said [in the sutra] that this is turning the dharma wheel of “the lion’s roar” of the Great Master, Shakyamuni, the Honored One, it is the pate and the eyes of all the buddhas, all the ancestral masters. Its study has come down for two thousand, one hundred ninety years (to this, the second year of the Japanese [era] Ninji, eighth heavenly stem, second terrestrial branch), through merely fifty generations of correct descent (to my former master, the Reverend [Ru]jing of Tiantong): through twenty-eight generations in the Western Heavens [i.e., India], it has

been maintained in generation after generation; through twenty-three ages in the Eastern Earth [i.e., China], it has been maintained in age after age. The buddhas and ancestors of the ten directions have all maintained it.

What is the essential point of the World Honored One’s saying, “All living beings in their entirety have the buddha nature”? It is turning the dharma wheel of the saying [by the Sixth Ancestor Huineng], “what is it that comes like this?” One speaks [in Buddhism] of “living beings,” or “sentient beings,” or “the multitude of beings,” or “the multitude of types.” The term “entirety of being” refers to “living beings,” “the multitude of beings.” That is, the “entirety of being” is the buddha nature; “one entirety” of the “entirety of being” is called “living beings.” At this very moment, the interior and exterior of living beings is the “entirety of being” of the buddha nature. This is not only the “skin, flesh, bones, and marrow” singly transmitted [by Bodhidharma]; for [Bodhidharma said,] “you have got my skin, flesh, bones, and marrow.”

We should realize that the “being” that is here made the “entirety of being” by the buddha nature is not the being of being and non-being. The “entirety of being” is the word of the buddha, the tongue of the buddha, the eyes of the buddhas and ancestors, the nose of the patch-robed monk. Furthermore, the term “entirety of being” is not initial being, not original being, not marvelous being; how much less is it conditioned being or deluded being. It has nothing to do with the likes of mind and object, nature and attribute. Therefore, the circumstantial and primary [karmic recompense] of the “entirety of being” of living beings is not by any means the generative power of karma, not deluded conditioned origination, not of its own accord, not the practice and verification of spiritual powers. Were the “entirety of being” of living beings generated by karma, or conditioned origination, or of its own accord, then the verification of the way of the nobles as well as the bodhi of the buddhas and the eyes of the buddhas and ancestors would also be the generative power of karma, conditioned origination, and of its own accord. And this is not the case.

In all the realms, there is no “adventitious dust” at all; right here, there is no second person beyond this. For [as said in the *Zhengdao ge*,] “the root source is directly cut,” but people have not noticed; “the busy, busy karmic consciousness,” when will it rest? It is not the being of

deluded conditioned origination; for “throughout the realms, it has never been hidden.” To say that “throughout the realms, it has never been hidden” is not necessarily to say that what fills the realms is being; [the notion] that throughout the realms is my being is a false view of the alien paths [of non-Buddhists]. It is not the being of original being; for it is “throughout the past and throughout the present.” It is not the being of initial arising; for “it does not admit a single mote of dust.” It is not the being of individual instances; for it is comprehensive. It is not the being of beginningless being; for [as the Sixth Ancestor asked,] “what is it that comes like this?” It is not the being of initially arising being; for “my usual mind is the way.” We should realize that, within the “entirety of being,” living beings are “hard conveniently to meet.” When the understanding of the “entirety of being” is like this, the “entirety of being” passes through the body and sloughs it off.

Many students, hearing the term “buddha nature,” have falsely reckoned that it is like the “I” in the alien path of Senika [who held that the self was all-pervading]. This is because they have not met a [true] person, they have not met themselves, they have not seen a teacher. They have foolishly thought that the mind, mentation, and consciousness moved by [the physical forces of] wind and fire are the knowing and comprehending of the buddha nature. Who said that the buddha nature has knowing and comprehending? While perceivers and knowers may be buddhas, the buddha nature is not knowing and comprehending. Much less does the perceiving and knowing with which one refers to the buddhas as perceivers and knowers represent the perceiving and knowing in the false understandings you talk on about, the perceiving and knowing of the motion and rest of wind and fire. Just one or two faces of the buddhas and faces of the ancestors — this is perceiving and knowing.

There have frequently been ancient elders and prior worthies who have gone to the Western Heavens and back or have converted and guided humans and gods; from the Han and Tang [dynasties] through the court of the Song, they are like “rice, flax, bamboo, and reeds.” It is pitiful that many of them have thought that the movements of wind and fire are the knowing and perceiving of the buddha nature. It is because they are estranged from the study of the way that they make this mistake. Beginners

and latecomers [in the study of Buddhism] should not be like this. We may study perceiving and knowing, but perceiving and knowing are not movements; we may study movements, but movements are not like this. If one has an understanding of true movement, one will understand true perceiving and comprehending; with “buddha” and “nature,” to master that one is to master this one. The buddha nature is always the “entirety of being”; for the “entirety of being” is the buddha nature. The “entirety of being” is not “a hundred pieces”; the “entirety of being” is not “one strip of iron.” Since it is “raising a fist,” it is not large or small. Given that we are calling it “buddha nature,” it should not be of equal stature with the nobles; it should not be made of equal stature with the buddha nature.

There is one group that thinks that the buddha nature is like the seed of grasses and trees. When the rain of the dharma continually waters it, it sprouts and grows, the branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits flourish, and the fruits contain further seeds. To hold this kind of opinion is the sentiment of commoners. Even if one holds this kind of view, one should study that both the seeds and the flowers and fruits are “the bare mind in each instance.” Within the fruit is the seed; though the seed cannot be seen, it generates the roots and trunks and the rest. Though not assembled, that they become the many twigs, branches, and great span [of the trunk] is not an issue of inside or outside, and is not empty in past or present. Therefore, even if one accepts the opinion of commoners, the root, trunk, branches, and leaves are all born together, die together, and are the buddha nature that is the “entirety of being” together.

* * * * *

The Buddha said [as Baizhang Huaihai puts it], “If you wish to know the meaning of the buddha nature, you should observe the conditions of the time. If the time arrives, the buddha nature appears.”

This “if you wish to know the meaning of the buddha nature” is not just about knowing; it means also “if you wish to practice it,” “if you wish to verify it,” “if you wish to preach it,” and “if you wish to forget it.” That preaching, practicing, verifying, forgetting, mistaking, and not mistaking are, all of them, “the conditions of the time.” In

“observing the conditions of the time,” one observes using the conditions of the time; one mutually observes using the whisk, the staff, and so on. They cannot be observed using in addition the wisdoms of “contaminated wisdom,” “uncontaminated wisdom,” “original awakening,” “initial awakening,” “non-awakening,” “right awakening,” and the like.

[The meaning of] “should observe” has nothing to do with the observer or what is observed; it should not be gauged by such [notions] as right observation or false observation: it is “should observe.” Because it is “should observe,” it is not one’s own observing, it is not another’s observing. It is the very “conditions of the time” themselves; it transcends conditions. It is the very buddha nature itself; it is the buddha nature with body cast off. It is each buddha himself; it is each nature itself.

A bunch in the past and present have frequently thought the words “if the time arrives” mean that one awaits a time later when the buddha nature might appear. “Continuing to practice in this way,” they say, “one encounters the time when the buddha nature appears naturally; if the time does not arrive, even though one visits a teacher and asks about the dharma, even though one makes concentrated effort to pursue the way, it will not appear.” Taking such a view, they return in vain to “the red dust [of the secular world],” they stare vacantly at the milky way [in idleness]. Types like this are doubtless followers of the alien path of “the naturalists” [who deny the teaching of cause and effect].

What is called “if you wish to know the meaning of the buddha nature” is saying, for example, “you should know the meaning of the buddha nature.” To say “you should observe the conditions of the time” is to say “you should know the conditions of the time.” If you wish to know what is called “the buddha nature,” you should know it is precisely “the conditions of the time.” To say, “if the time arrives,” means “the time has already arrived; what is there to doubt?” Let doubting the time be as it may, “give me back the buddha nature.” We should realize that “if the time arrives” is “not passing the twelve times [of the day] in vain.” “If it arrives” is like saying “it has arrived.” If it were “if the time arrives,” the buddha nature would not arrive; therefore, since the time has already arrived, this is the appearance of the buddha nature. Or [as Baizhang says,] “its principle is self evident.” In sum, there has never been a time when the time does not arrive,

nor a buddha nature that does not appear.

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The Twelfth Ancestor, the Venerable Ashvaghosha, in teaching the ocean of the buddha nature to the Thirteenth Ancestor [Kapimāla], said,

The mountains, rivers, and the earth
Are all constructed dependent upon it;
Samadhi and the six [paranormal spiritual] powers
Appear from here.

Therefore, these “mountains, rivers, and the earth” are all “the ocean of the buddha nature.” To say that they “are all constructed dependent upon it” means that the very time they are constructed is the “mountains, rivers, and the earth.” Since it is said that they “are all constructed dependent upon it,” we should realize that such is the shape of “the ocean of buddha nature”; it has nothing beyond this to do with inside, outside or in between. If such is the case, to see the mountains and rivers is to see the buddha nature; to see the buddha nature is to see “an ass’ jaw and a horse’s muzzle” [i.e., this and that sort of thing]. “All . . . dependent,” we understand — and we do not understand — as “wholly dependent,” as “dependent on the whole.”

“Samadhi and the six powers appear from here”: we should realize that the “appearance” and the non-appearance of the samadhis are equally “all dependent” on the buddha nature; the “from here” and the not “from here” of the whole of the six powers are both “all dependent” on the buddha nature. The six spiritual powers are not just the six spiritual powers spoken of in the teachings of the *Agamas*: “six” means that “the former three and three, the latter three and three” are the *paramita* of the six spiritual powers. Therefore, do not investigate the six spiritual powers as being “clear and bright, the hundred grasses; clear and bright, the intention of the buddhas and ancestors.” Even if they are constricted by the six spiritual powers, they are obstructions in the flow to the source in the ocean of the buddha nature.

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The Fifth Ancestor, the Chan Master Daman [Hongren] was from Huangmei in Qizhou. He was born without a

father, gained the way as a child, and then was a practitioner who grew pines. He was growing pines on Xishan in Qizhou when he first encountered the Fourth Ancestor [Dayi Daoxin] on a visit there.

[The Fourth Ancestor] addressed the practitioner, “I want to transmit the dharma to you, but your years are already full. If you wait till you come again [in another life], I will delay it for you.”

The master agreed.

Thereafter, he was born by a woman of the Zhou family. He was thrown into a dirty waterway but was protected from harm by a spirit for seven days. He was then taken in and raised. As a boy of seven, he met the Fourth Ancestor, the Chan Master Dayi, on the road in Huangmei. The ancestor saw that, although a child, the master’s build was remarkably fine, different from that of an ordinary child.

Seeing this, the ancestor asked, “What’s your name?”

The master answered, “I have a name, but it’s not an ordinary name.”

The ancestor said, “What is this name?”

The master answered, “It’s the buddha nature.”

The ancestor said, “You have no buddha nature.”

The master replied, “It’s because the buddha nature is empty that you say I have none.”

The ancestor, recognizing that he was a vessel of the dharma, made him his attendant.

Later, he transmitted the treasury of the eye of the true dharma. [The master] resided on Dongshan at Huangmei, where he greatly wielded the “dark style.”

Therefore, when investigating these sayings of the ancestral masters, there is an essential point to the Fourth Ancestor’s saying, “What’s your name?” In ancient times, there was a person from the country of He [“what”], who had the He family name. He is saying to him, “You are of the “what” family.” It is like saying [in the words of the Sixth Ancestor], “I’m also like this, you’re also like this.”

The Fifth Ancestor said, “I have a name, but it’s not an ordinary name.” That is, “being as itself a name” is not an ordinary name; an ordinary name “is not right” for “being as itself.”

The Fourth Ancestor’s saying, “What is this name?” means “what” is “this”; he has “what-ed” “this” — this is his “name.” For what makes it “what” is “this”; making it “this” is the function of “what.” His “name” is both “this”

and “what.” We fix it as artemisia tea; we fix it as green tea; we make it our “everyday tea and rice.”

The Fifth Ancestor said, “It’s the buddha nature.” The essential point of what he says is that “it’s” is “the buddha nature.” Because of “what,” it is the buddha. Has “it’s” been exhaustively investigated only in the name “what”? When “it’s” was [said to be] “it’s not,” it was “the buddha nature.” Therefore, while “it’s” is “what,” is the buddha, when they have been sloughed off, when they have been liberated, it is necessarily his “name.” That name is Zhou [“all-embracing”]. Nevertheless, he does not get it from his father; he does not get it from his ancestors; it does not resemble his mother’s family name; how could it be of equal stature with [the name of] onlookers?

The Fourth Ancestor said, “You have no buddha nature.” This saying proclaims, “Although I allow that ‘you’ are ‘you’ and not another, you are ‘no buddha nature.’” We should know, we should study, at what time now is it that he is “no buddha nature”? Is it at the head of the buddha that he is “no buddha nature”? Is it “beyond the buddha” that he is “no buddha nature”? Do not block up “the seven penetrations”; do not grope for “the eight masteries.” There are instances when “no buddha nature” is also studied as a momentary samadhi. When the buddha nature becomes a buddha, is this “no buddha nature”? When the buddha nature arouses the aspiration [to become a buddha], is this “no buddha nature”? We should ask this; we should say it. We should make the [temple] columns ask it; we should ask the columns. We should make the buddha nature ask it.

Therefore, the words “no buddha nature” are something heard far beyond the ancestral rooms of the Fourth Ancestor. They are seen in Huangmei [i.e., Hongren]; they circulate to Zhaozhou [i.e., Zhaozhou Congshen]; they are raised by Dayi [i.e., Guishan Lingyou]. The words “no buddha nature,” we should pursue with vigour; do not falter or hesitate. Though we may well have lost our bearings in “no buddha nature,” we have “what” as the standard, “you” as the time, “this” as the accord, “Zhou” as the same name; and we advance directly.

The Fifth Ancestor said, “It’s because the buddha nature is empty that you say I have none.” He says it clearly: being “empty” is not “having none.” In saying “the buddha nature is empty,” without calling it “a half catty,” without calling it “eight tael,” he says he “has none.” He does not say it is “empty” because it is emptiness; he does not say he

“has none” because it is non-existence: he says he “has none” because it is the “emptiness of the buddha nature.” Therefore, the pieces of his “having none” are the signposts of his saying it is “empty”; it’s being “empty” is the power to say “I have none.” This “emptiness” is not the “emptiness” of “form is itself emptiness.” “Form is itself emptiness” does not mean that “form” is forced into “emptiness”; it does not mean that “emptiness” has been divided up to author “form”: it is the “emptiness” of “emptiness is emptiness.” The “emptiness” of “emptiness is emptiness” is “a single stone in space.” Therefore, the “non-existence of the buddha nature,” the “emptiness of the buddha nature,” the “existence of the buddha nature” — this is what the Fourth Ancestor and the Fifth Ancestor are asking about and talking about.

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When the Sixth Ancestor of Cinasthana [i.e., China], [Huining,] the Chan Master Dajian of Mt. Caoxi, first visited Mt. Huangmei, the Fifth Ancestor [Hongren] asked, “Where have you come from?”

The Sixth Ancestor said, “I’m a person of Lingnan [‘south of the peaks’].”

The Fifth Ancestor said, “What did you come here for?”

The Sixth Ancestor said, “I want to make a buddha.”

The Fifth Ancestor said, “A person of Lingnan has no buddha nature. How can you make a buddha?”

This “a person of Lingnan has no buddha nature” does not mean that a person of Lingnan does not have the buddha nature; it does not mean that a person of Lingnan has the buddha nature: it is “the no buddha nature of the person of Lingnan.” “How can you make a buddha?” means “what kind of making a buddha are you expecting?”

Generally speaking, there are few predecessors who have clarified the principle of the buddha nature. The teachings of the *Agamas* and the teachers of the sutras and treatises could not know it; only the descendants of the buddhas and ancestors singly transmit it. The principle of the buddha nature is that one is not endowed with the buddha nature before becoming a buddha: one is endowed with it after becoming a buddha. The buddha nature always studies together with becoming a buddha. This

principle, we should make concentrated effort on and fully investigate; we should study it and make concentrated effort on it for twenty or thirty years. It is not something clarified by “the ten noble and three worthy” [ranks on the bodhisattva path]. To say “beings have the buddha nature,” “beings have no buddha nature” — this is that principle. To study this as the dharma that one is endowed [with the buddha nature] after becoming a buddha is right on the mark. If it is not studied in this way, it is not the buddha dharma; if it had not been studied in this way, the buddha dharma would not have reached us today. Those who have not clarified this principle have not clarified, have not seen or heard of, becoming a buddha.

Therefore, the Fifth Ancestor says to him, “A person of Lingnan has no buddha nature.” When one first sees the buddha and hears the dharma, what is difficult to acquire, difficult to hear, is that “beings have no buddha nature”; “whether from a friend, whether from a scripture,” what is a joy to hear is that “beings have no buddha nature.” Those who have not “studied their fill” of seeing, hearing, perceiving, and knowing that “all living beings have no buddha nature” have not yet seen, heard, perceived or known the buddha nature. When the Sixth Ancestor sought solely to “make a buddha,” the Fifth Ancestor, in order to “make a buddha” of the Sixth Ancestor, had no other words, no other ingenious device: he just said, “A person of Lingnan has no buddha nature.” We should recognize the fact that speaking and hearing of “no buddha nature” — this is the direct path to “making a buddha.” Therefore, the very moment of “no buddha nature” is itself “making a buddha.” Those who have not yet seen or heard, who have not yet spoken of, “no buddha nature have not yet “made a buddha.”

The Sixth Ancestor said [in response to Hongren], “People may have north and south, but the buddha nature has no north and south.” We should take up this saying and make concentrated effort on what is within the phrases. We should reflect with bare mind on the words “north and south.” There is a significant point in the phrase spoken by the Sixth Ancestor: it captures one corner of [the fact that] “people” may “make a buddha,” but the buddha nature does not “make a buddha.” Did the Sixth Ancestor know this?

In making a buddha and turning the dharma, the Buddha Kashyapa and the Buddha Shakyamuni, and the rest of the buddhas have the power to say, “in their entirety

have the buddha nature,” by drawing from afar on one corner, with the power to delimit, of the words “no buddha nature” spoken by the Fourth Ancestor and Fifth Ancestor. How could the “being” of the “entirety of being” not succeed to the dharma of the “no” of “no no” [in the expressions “no buddha nature”]? Therefore, the words “no buddha nature” are heard far beyond the rooms of the Fourth Ancestor and Fifth Ancestor.

At this point, if the Sixth Ancestor is “that person,” he should make concentrated effort on the words “no buddha nature.” Leaving aside the “no” of being or non-being, he should ask, “what is the buddha nature?” He should inquire, “what thing is the buddha nature?” People today as well, once they have heard “buddha nature,” without going on to ask what the buddha nature is, seem to talk about the meaning of the being and non-being of the buddha nature. This is precipitate. Therefore, we should study the “no” of various “nos” in the “no” of “no buddha nature.” The words spoken by the Sixth Ancestor, “People have north and south; the buddha nature has no north and south,” we should long “scoop up two or three times”; there should be power in the scoop. We should quietly take up and let go of the words spoken by the Sixth Ancestor: “People have north and south; the buddha nature has no north and south.” The foolish think that the Sixth Ancestor might have been saying that, since humans are obstructed by materiality, they have north and south, but the buddha nature, being vacant and pervasive, is beyond discussion of north and south. Those who speculate like this must be indiscriminate simpletons. They should discard this false understanding and “straightaway study with diligence.”

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The Sixth Ancestor addressed his follower Xing Chang, saying, “‘Impermanence’ means the buddha nature. ‘Permanence’ means the mind that discriminates all the dharmas, good and bad.”

The “impermanence” spoken of by the Sixth Ancestor is not what is calculated by the likes of the alien paths and two vehicles [of the shravaka and pratyekabuddha]. The two vehicles and the alien paths, from first founder to final follower, may say it is impermanent, but they do not exhaust it. Therefore,

impermanence itself preaching, practicing, and verifying impermanence — they are all impermanent. Now, if there are those who attain deliverance by its manifesting its own body, then it manifests its own body and preaches the dharma to them — this is the “buddha nature.” Going further, it may appear as a “long dharma body,” it may appear as a “short dharma body.” The permanent noble is impermanent; the permanent commoner is impermanent; were there to be permanent commoners or nobles, it would not be the buddha nature: it would be a small, stupid view; it would be a calculating, narrow view: “the buddha is a small body; the nature is a small activity.” Hence, the Sixth Ancestor said, “Impermanence is the buddha nature.”

“Permanence” means “unconverted.” “Unconverted” means that, even though it may change to “eradicating” [the obstacles to awakening], even though it may transform to the “eradicated,” this does not necessarily have anything to do with the traces of coming and going. Therefore, it is “permanent.”

Therefore, that the grasses, trees, thickets and groves are impermanent is the buddha nature; that humans and things, body and mind are impermanent — this is because they are the buddha nature. That the lands, mountains, and rivers are impermanent — this is the buddha nature. *Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*, because it is the buddha nature, is impermanent; the great *parinirvana*, because it is impermanent, is the buddha nature. All those with the small views of the two vehicles and the tripitaka master teachers of the sutras and treatises should be “alarmed, dubious, and frightened” at these words of the Sixth Ancestor. If they are alarmed and dubious, they are grouped with Mara and the aliens.

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[To be continued.]

SOTO ZEN BUDDHISM INTERNATIONAL CENTER
1691 LAGUNA STREET, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94115, USA
TELEPHONE 415-567-7686 FACSIMILE 415-567-0200

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NEWS

Dec. 15, 2009 – March 10, 2010

A Sotoshu Training Monastery was held at Yokoji, USA from Dec. 15, 2009 through March 10, 2010. This was the third officially recognized Sotoshu training monastery angō to be held in the West and the first to be held in the US.



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Please address all inquiries or comments to: Soto Zen Buddhism International Center
1691 Laguna Street, San Francisco, CA 94115
Phone: 415-567-7686 Fax: 415-567-0200