

DHARMA EYE



法眼

News of Soto Zen Buddhism: Teachings and Practice in North America

Merging of Difference and Unity: Gathering of Soto Zen Temples and Centers

Shohaku Okumura
Director, Soto Zen Education Center

When I read the biography of the founder of San Francisco Zen Center, Rev. Shunryu Suzuki, "Crooked Cucumber: The Life And Zen Teaching of Shunryu Suzuki," (by David Chadwick), I found a very impressive photo in the book. The photo was taken at the occasion of Rev. Suzuki's *sinsanshiki* (mountain seat ceremony) on May 20, 1962. In the photo, four Japanese priests are doing procession through San Francisco's Japantown with Rev. Suzuki. These were Rev. Reirin, Rev. Wako Kato and Rev. Hakuyu Maezumi and one more unknown Japanese priest.

Rev. Reirin Yamada was the bishop at Zenshuji Los Angeles for four years from 1960 to 1964. After he went back to Japan he became the president of Komazawa University and then Abbot of Eihei-ji, one of the two head temples of Soto Zen in Japan.

Rev. Suzuki came to San Francisco and became the resident priest of Soko-ji in May of 1959. Many young Americans came to practice zazen with Rev. Suzuki, and some of them formed San Francisco Zen Center in 1962. Rev. Suzuki was both the priest of Soko-ji and the teacher of the Zen Center until the Zen Center bought its own building on Page Street and became independent from Soko-ji in 1969.

Rev. Hakuyu Maezumi came to America in 1957 when he was 26 years old. Five years after the photo was taken, Rev. Maezumi established Zen Center of Los Angeles. Rev. Dainin Katagiri came to America in the next year, 1963, to Zenshuji, and later moved to Soko-ji and SF Zen

Center to assist Rev. Suzuki. He established Minnesota Zen Meditation Center in 1972.

Rev. Ji-yu Kennett went to Japan in 1962 to practice at So-ji. She trained there for eight years and came to the United States in 1969. She established Shasta Abbey in 1970. These four teachers were the origins of many of the Soto Zen centers scattered all over the United States today.

Thirty-eight years ago, when the photo was taken, only one Zen center existed in the United States, or even in the world. That was a tiny drop of dharma-dew and that was not yet separate from Soto Zen temples for Japanese American Community: Zenshuji and Soko-ji. According to "Crooked Cucumber," in August of the same year, Rev. Suzuki invited Rev. Reirin Yamada from Los Angeles to lead the third annual week long sesshin at SF Zen Center. That was the first one at the Center to go morning to night for a full seven days. (Crooked Cucumber p.224)

But after that, Soto Zen temples and centers have been developed separately without much interaction for a long time. In July 2000, Soto Zen Education Center sponsored a two-day workshop at Zenshuji in Los Angeles. Our theme was "Temple administration and religious activity." We chose this theme because we wanted to find something common in Zen temples and centers. We wanted to invite people both from Zen temples and Zen centers, priests and lay members to discuss what we share. Thirty-six people, including priests, lay



Dedication Ceremony of Zenshuji

●October 23rd, 1912

teachers, and lay members working for temple administration and religious practice, participated from seventeen temples and centers. We asked all the participating temples and centers to give short presentations about the present situation of their sanghas in both administration and religious practice. We had a short discussion after each presentation.

I think it was the first time that people from Zen temples and centers got together and talked of their joys and challenges in the work and practice of cultivating the soil of this country to grow the flowers of Dharma. It turned out to be a very exciting gathering.

We were very fortunate to have Rev. Wako Kato, one of the Japanese priests in the photo of Rev. Suzuki's mountain seat ceremony, at the workshop. On the second day of the workshop we asked Rev. Kato to give a short talk on the history of Soto Zen Buddhism in the Japanese American community. For many of the people from Zen centers, that was the first time they heard about Soto Zen Buddhism in the Japanese American community. Many people said it was very interesting.

We thought it must be interesting for many Soto Zen practitioners to read something about the origin of the Soto Zen in America and Soto Zen Buddhism in Japanese American community. We also want to promote mutual understanding, communication and friendship as members of the larger Soto Zen sangha in this country. As I said at the end of the workshop, one phrase kept coming up in my mind during the discussion: "Merging of Difference and Unity." To see the unity we need to study

differences. The workshop was the first step to study the differences and find the unity.

In this country, it is said that there are two streams of Buddhism: one is Buddhism for ethnic communities from Asian Buddhist countries and the other is Buddhism for American practitioners of meditation imported from Zen, Tibetan and Theravadan traditions. These two seem separate from each other, like water and oil. We feel sorry about this situation. We believe that Buddhism for ethnic communities and Buddhism practiced at meditation centers have many things to learn from each other and share.

That was the reason we invited people both from Japanese American communities and Zen centers at the workshop. We would like to continue this dialogue. To do so, in this issue of "Dharma eye" we asked Rev. Wako Kato and Rev. Kisan Ueno to write about Soto Zen Buddhism in the Japanese American community. Rev. Kato wrote a short history of Soto Zen Buddhism in the Japanese American community. He emphasized that Japanese American sanghas and Zen centers are not two separate streams. Sitting at a zendo and doing gassho before the Buddha at temples or in front of a family altar are both Zen practice following Dogen Zenji's teachings.

Rev. Ueno has been a priest at Monterey Zenshuji since 1963. He encourages Japanese American Buddhists to study Buddha's teachings more as the guideline for their own lives. Then ceremonies and community activities become more meaningful for them.

We also asked Rev. Chozen Bays to write about the workshop from the perspective of American Zen practitioners.



We are very grateful for their contributions. We also appreciate all the people who participated in the workshop for their sincere and enthusiastic presentations and discussion.

The Flowing of the Dharma Stream: Soto Zen Buddhism in Our Japanese Communities

Rev. Wako Kato

Kaikyoshi of North America



Long ago, Chinese Zen practitioners called themselves *daoliu*, the stream or followers of the way. The "stream" signifies the togetherness of people who accepted the same goal of study and practice. Today, in the United States, some people think of the Zen *sangha* as having two streams. One is comprised of the practitioners at Zen Centers. The other is considered to be the members of Zen temples in Japanese communities. I shall disregard such an artificial division and will proceed to the source of the Dharma stream in America.

An ephemeral temple of Soto Zen, which only lasted 3 years and 11 months, was inaugurated in Los Angeles as

Soto-shu Kari-kyokai (A temporary church of the Soto sect) in July, 1922, by Hosen Isobe. It moved to a new location, the present Zenshuji Soto Mission site, in June of 1926, with the enthusiastic backing of 1,434 Japanese immigrants living in the vicinity. One additional factor in this swift erection of a temple was the vision of Rev. Isobe, (a virtually unknown monk both in Japan and in the U.S.), which stimulated the approval of the Japanese Counsel General in Los Angeles, Oyama Ujio. Oyama then, wholeheartedly abetted Isobe's mission. Thus, Soto Zen began its first step in the U.S. And, of course, three quarters of a century since, Isobe's enthusiasm still resonate in all of us who practice Zen.

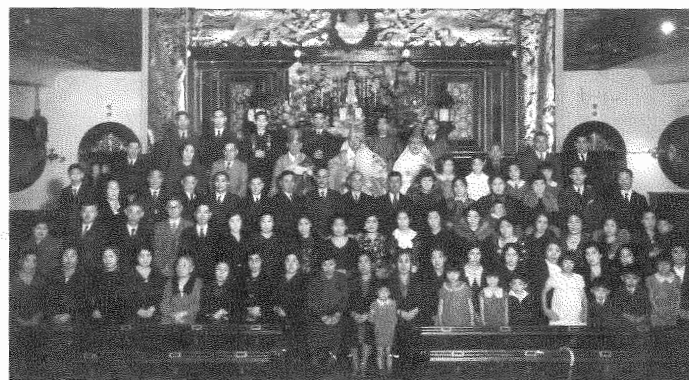
Long before this event of 1926, a noteworthy occurrence relating to Zen Buddhism took place at the World Exposition in Chicago in 1893, which commemorated the 4th centennial of the discovery of the American continent by Christopher Columbus. A renowned Rinzai Zen master, Shaku Soen, attended the religious conference held in concurrence with the Exposition. After that event, he stayed awhile in La Salle, Connecticut, at the request of Dr. Paul Carus, a proprietor of the publishing house, Open Court.. Dr. Carus asked Master Shaku to send a Zen scholar to the United States.

Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, then twenty-seven years old, accepted the invitation to come to the United States. Henceforth, he spent 12 years here, writing the book, *Studies of Lankavatara Sutra* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul. 1930), translating *the Lankavatara Sutra* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul. 1932), and producing the earliest version of the book, *Zen Buddhism*.

At that time, Zen Buddhism, was virtually unknown by the general public in this country except for a few people who had studied the history of Eastern religions. And there were only a handful of books on East Asian religions in existence, such as the *Sacred Books of the East* series published by Oxford University Press. Around the turn of the 20th century, a Soto scholar named Nukariya Kaiten, (who later assumed the presidency of Komazawa University) wrote a small book, *A Religion of Samurai*, in English. Suzuki's and Nukariya's books circulated only sparsely in the West due largely to their esoteric nature. Only a small number of people sustained an interest in Zen but this supported a steady flow of publications during the first half of the 20th century. The record of the dissemination of religions in the United States of 1910 counted 15 Buddhist institutions of all denominations, 74 clergy, and 3,165 followers. Then, in the midsummer of 1915, San Francisco hosted a World Religious Conference. This time, a Soto Zen representative took part in the conference. Although the importance of this conference for the United States in general was lesser than that of the earlier Chicago Exposition, it was of definite significance for the Japanese immigrants who had been living in unpretentious communities for a couple of decades.

We now move to 1922. In May of the year 1922, Rev. Isobe started the first Soto temple in Honolulu, Hawaii. Then he came to Los Angeles in 1926 and established Zenshuji where he resided for 8 years. Then, in 1934, he headed north to San Francisco and opened the Sokoji Soto Mission.

Zenshuji, the fountainhead of Soto Zen in America, remains as the center of Soto Zen activities in this country. It became the American appendant to Eiheiiji and Sojiji, head temples of the Soto School in 1937. Subsequently, there have been three or four monks from Japan residing at Zenshuji to serve its congregations daily. Several Soto scholars from Japan have also stayed at Zenshuji: Kosaka Myosen (Komazawa University), Otsuka Doko (President of Aichi Gakuin and the Administrator at Eiheiiji), and Nakamura Soitsu (Shumicho, President of Soto Sect) to name a few. Several temples and schools have branched out from Zenshuji. In 1931, the San Pedro Japanese language school, called Sokei School commenced and after several years, became an independent temple, Kotaiji. Within a few years, Dominguez Hills, Riverside and Montebello Schools were added. All of these were terminated in 1941 by the outbreak of World War II. All Japanese nationals and their American born children were sent to



Dedication Ceremony of Sokoji
December 4th and 5th, 1937



Sokoji Old Building
1934 — 1984

several relocation camps for the duration of the war. Japanese priest, nuns, and monks of whatever religions could not escape this ill fate. Zenshuji and its branches, and Sokoji closed their doors for four years.

After the war, Zenshuji reopened. Some former members, but not all of them, returned to the Los Angeles area. Zenshuji immediately began publishing a monthly journal, the *Busshin*. It is still published today. One new branch temple, Sozenji was built in 1971. But Zenshuji's original building of 1926 had decayed so much that a new temple was badly needed. It took the members 14 years of planning to build a new one. It was completed in 1969 and is the present temple. This time, the members who helped to build the temple were approximately half the number of the 1926 participants.

In 1963, the Rev. Reirin Yamada, Bishop of North

America launched the Zen Buddhist Study Institute in Zenshuji compound where he lectured weekly on the *Shobogenzo* until his departure to assume the position of presidency at Komazawa University. He then became the Abbot of Eihei-ji.

Today, sadly, the members of Zenshuji consist of only approximately 400 families. The women's club has about 30 members, senior members' Dharma club is about 30, the Zazen-kai group has 30, and Terakoya counts 80 children and their mothers. There are also a score of active drum players in the Zendeko group. This membership is smaller than the previous count of 1967. Soko-ji in San Francisco, today, also has fewer members compared to the pre-war and immediate post-war periods. This is also true of the Long Beach Buddhist Church.

From its inception, Soto Zen in Japanese communities followed closely the Japanese temple management system. Rev. Isobe's effort to establish Zen temples were matched with the desires of Japanese people in America who needed Japanese style Buddhist temples.

1. They needed the continuation of their old-country heritage for spiritual peace:

Observation of New Years Day, Observation of the Buddha's Birth (Hanamatsuri), Obon, Higan and Omisoka (the year-end occasion) — all of them normal temple functions in Japan even today.

2. Pre-war Japanese immigrants needed the priests for consolation and consultation.
3. America was a new and unknown world to the immigrants. Their limited English ability isolated themselves from the rest of society. By and large, temples created shields for them from racial and social discomfort.

I am certain that there would be many more reasons. But today, society and its value system have changed. As the Japanese-speaking generation has decreased, their offspring has absorbed into the American main stream. The tight knit intimacy and intensity of the family system has changed to more relaxed nuclear families. Close comradeship in the Zen community has been loosened and people have moved away from temple neighborhoods to suburban regions. Many have stopped coming to temples which were once the center of their community.

In the late 1950s we observed a "Zen boom" in the U.S. So called 'beatniks' flocked to Zenshuji and Soko-ji. In those days, they followed D.T. Suzuki's rationale and

Alan Watts' eloquence in Zen. The *Lankavatara sutra* has been the *vade mecum* of the early Zen practitioners of the 7th century, before the Sixth Patriarch. At that time, Zen practice was not formalized and appeared to be totally carefree. Those 50's Zen aficionados loved such carefree thoughts and attitudes of early Zen. But to be truly is not the same as being freed from strict Christian ethos or social orders. Understanding *sunyata* (seeing the true state of existence as nothing) and reaching *prajña* (the knowledge beyond ordinary knowledge) is the way of Zen whereby one attains "freedom." Many lighthearted followers soon dropped out but some serious and diligent practitioners remained and helped to build the present Zen centers. Had it not been for Zenshuji and Soko-ji, this would not have happened.

As Buddhists, we all know that the world is a state of evanescence. Unlike the predictable motions of a pendulum, the world is constantly changing and turning. When Zen moved eastward to Japan, it became acclimated to a new milieu. Now, it has moved eastward again and, again, we will adapt our practice. In 1928, Senzaki Nyogen, a lay master, believed Zen practice would take root in San Francisco, and named his Zen meditation place then "Eastward Zen Cave." It evanesced. But the conditions of our lives have not changed for thousands of years. We have the same innate anxieties and fear of old age and death. Probably those fears have not changed for thousands of years. Everyone wishes to overcome such fears but knowing electrons and neutrons are components of matter, and genomes are maps of our body elements does not help ease those fears. Science and technology lack a spiritual side and do not lend support for us to attain complete serenity.

Whatever exterior differences may appear, Japanese Community temples have served and will serve the same end as Zen centers in serving their congregations. We follow Dogen's teachings: *Juki* (reception of the prediction of Buddhahood), *Hou* (the mendicant bowl), *Zazengi* (the rules of zazen), *Kesakudoku* (the significance of Kesa), and *Den'e* (the transmission of the robe), of the *Shobogenzo* may be meaningful to the centers' practitioners. But not for the temple members, still, they practice Zen by coming to temples, and in their homes, when they put their two palms together before the Buddha.

The flowing of the Dharma stream is always one; never divided.

For Nisei and Sansei Buddhists

Rev. Kisan Ueno
Monterey Soto Zen Temple



There was a time when the main problem of the various world religions was to determine the ways and means of their particular manifestations of religion. At various times each of the great world religions seemed to hold the upper hand over all other faiths. That era seemed to represent a period of conflict between religions.

The picture has now changed. The conflict now is between religion and irreligion and at the moment, the advantage is on the side of irreligion.

To me, the ability to point out facts and to express opinion takes a great deal of courage. To oppose years of tradition or to Buddhism itself is no small matter. Here I will speak as a layman. But I want you to understand at the outset that I am a born Buddhist. I was born in a Buddhist family and was brought up in the Buddhist atmosphere. Speaking truly, I am a son of the Buddhist priest and both of my parents are very keen Buddhists. So naturally I was taught the beautiful words of Lord Buddha from my childhood days. When I was in college I majored in sociology and linguistics with Buddhism as a minor. My background in Buddhism may not be considered vast.

Let me begin with a story, after the end of World War II, I developed a great contradiction in my mind. Yes, war is one of the contradictions of this life, which is very difficult to give an adequate explanation for. It is brought about by a deficiency in human nature, there is no doubt, and yet I thought the religious influence ought to have been sufficiently strong enough in human beings to have brought its suppression. But since it failed to do so at that time, it proved to me the complete lack of religion in the evolution of human society. This was one of the arguments I held against religion, and the result was that I became a free thinker.

Whatever may be the cause of this conflict, the way it

was handled by the religious fanatics of the time was far from being laudable and I became more and more anti-religious in my sentiment. This is the first problem that I want to present to you. My question is "Do we need Buddhism really?"

Please allow me to speak as a free thinker. We have many problems which should be solved and I belong to your generation.

Let me give you a short history of emigration. Emigration to the United States from Japan began in the 1890's. Single men, attracted by the possibilities of earning and amassing funds with which they might return to a welcoming homeland, were the first comers. But in the early part of the present century, the importation of wives permitted the founding of family units and promoted the growth of Japanese communities along the Pacific Coast and in Hawaii. Wholesale immigration, with some interruptions, continued until 1924, the year in which the laws barring Orientals were passed, Japanese colonies in the United States continue to the present time. The bulk of the ethnic minority is still to be found on the Pacific Coast despite the mass evacuation and confinement in the government sponsored relocation centers during the war years. New communities, however, have arisen in urban areas away from the Pacific Coast since the war.

As early as 1898, attempts were made to recreate the native life of Japan in the new environment of the American mainland. In that same year in San Francisco a Young Men's Buddhist Association was founded. It seems fairly evident that no actual concern was felt for the people's spiritual welfare and Y.M.B.A. was built to serve as a social center and as a place where cherished native customs could be perpetuated to relive a not unnatural nostalgia for the homeland among the immigrant pioneers. As the church organizations developed, they became social centers to permit the maintenance of the tie with the mother-land. As Japanese language centers, they allowed members of the immigrant generation to hold posts of leadership and responsibility in congregational administration, permitting them thus to satisfy ambitions for social prestige which could not otherwise be achieved in the hostile alien environment. Social activities revolved around the missionary priest who preached, buried the dead, and conducted other appropriate ritual, but who otherwise had few spiritual responsibilities.

Recent years have witnessed the advent of the second

generation descendant of immigrant group. The American born Nisei, following a not unfamiliar minority social pattern, have tended to break away from parental values in favor of the newer culture. The Nisei in general have stressed the ways of America and tend to view with some scorn any adherence by their parents to native Japanese customs. It is scarcely surprising, in view of the Nisei rejection of the parents culture, to note that many have abandoned Buddhism to join various Christian churches. It is obvious that the practices surrounding the ancestral cult can have neither meaning nor value to those whose cultural orientation is so heavily directed to Euro-American life.

It is true that the contemporary Japanese-American Buddhists, with few exceptions, set the paradise concept aside. The younger members of a congregation will be held to the group either by dedicated laymen (because the Japanese-born priest is handicapped not only by language but also by an essential unfamiliarity with the themes of American culture.), or by an attractive recreational program. Then the Issei (first generations) religious needs can be more meaningfully met. It is virtually to be expected that the religious interests of most Nisei are half-hearted: they are held to the church by parental demand and often by age, mate, and neighborhood association. So the membership in the ethnic church is still largely dependent on social loyalties. The Buddhist churches, like their Christian counterparts, offer a recreational outlet. The familiar church "social", rather than doctrine, serves to keep the younger members in the group.

Religious practice, in accord with the demands of the American setting, must lie in the church rather than in the circle of family. Then, what shall we do with Buddhism? What is Buddhism for us? Is a true Buddhism the one in which your parents have been practicing for years? No, Buddhism leaves aside all dogmas, speculations and theories about God, Universe and immortality of the Soul, the three cardinal pillars upon which most religions build up their systems. Lord Buddha insists on the tangible facts of life and calls to verify these rational and pragmatic facts of life and put an end to the misery and suffering coming from our ignorance without wasting time on useless speculations. It is merely in prescribing the medicine for the malady, which each and every unenlightened man suffers from, that the Buddha is concerned about, not in profitless speculations into the unknowable and

Unknown. Pure Buddhist belief lays stress on foundations of logic and science and not on meaningless ceremonies and cults. And remember, "Every thing is considered in Buddhism."

Soto Zen Education Center Workshop in Los Angeles

Rev. Chozen Bays
Zen Community of Oregon



The meeting sponsored by the Soto Zen Education Center in Los Angeles in July, 2000 was the most interesting and exciting meeting I have attended yet. This meeting differed in several respects from those in the past. First, it was a gathering not only of Soto priests but also of an administrator from each Soto Zen temple or center. Second,

the agenda consisted entirely of short and very personal reports from each center. This format made it very clear that no matter what our country of birth, no matter what our age, each one of us has a profound love for the Buddha dharma and each one of us feels a deep responsibility to maintain and transmit the teachings of the Buddha and the ancestors. Most touching was a pervasive theme of ongoing willingness to face barriers and to undergo personal difficulties in this work we have all gladly undertaken.

I found a wealth of information in the center's reports. Annual budgets for the centers ranged from \$12,000 a year (Cedar Rapids and Monterey Bay Zen Centers) to \$3.3 million (San Francisco Zen Center's three sites). The mean is \$100,000 without SFZC and \$300,000 if SFZC is included. Means of support for priests range from surviving on social security to a salary of over \$3,500 a month. Many priests teach or have other outside jobs. Facilities

range from the modest— a rented closet in a yoga studio to hold zafus and a temple housed in the priest's home — to the complex of the large variety of buildings owned by San Francisco Zen Center. The average facility is one or two modest buildings.

Common challenges were raising money to keep temples running and working with increasingly restrictive zoning laws that prevent new temples from being built or make remodeling expensive. As we talked a contrast between two types of Soto Zen temples in the United States became evident.

The first type consists of older temples founded by Japanese *kaikyoshi* for immigrant Japanese believers. These temples are family and community centered. Originally they served the needs of people who found refuge in these temples from the discrimination that then was pervasive in the larger American society, and who wished to keep alive their cultural traditions and language as well as their abiding Buddhist faith. These temples typically have had a rich variety of seasonal events like O-bon festival and cultural offerings such as Japanese language classes, tea ceremony and taiko drumming. Some like Zenshu-ji, are served by young priests who expressed their gratitude for the practical help the older members of their congregations give them as they carry out their functions as a priest in a foreign land.

The challenge these "ethnic temples" now face is the loss of older members through death and also the lack of interest in Buddhism among younger members, many of whom have married non-Buddhists. As one priest said, "The mother's desire prevails in matters of religion." Some younger people's conversion to the Christian faith has occurred through the desire to assimilate and some through their Christian friends' sincere belief that someone who is not converted will go to hellish realms.

Representatives of the ethnic temples spoke of working now to provide programs for young people. For example, Zenshu-ji has a parenting group for young Japanese mothers and both Sozen-ji and Zenshu-ji have developed a very popular and well trained taiko drumming group. To serve the young and earnest spiritual seeker, whether *nisei*, *sansei* or "no"sei, some temples have added a program of zazen and classes in Buddhism.

The second type is comprised of "Zen centers" run by American second generation teachers who trained either with teachers in Japan or in the US under the Roshis Suzuki, Maezumi, Katagiri and Kennett. Their approach

is more monastic and centered upon individual training. They were established to serve a group of students who typically came from a counter-culture generation. They saw themselves as serious spiritual seekers and wanted a place to jump in feet first and become enlightened. The limited life energy of their (naturally iconoclastic) teachers at these centers was focused on the essentials. They taught discipline, how to quiet body and mind, and gave their students a taste of the innate clarity and compassion that arises from emptiness.

As these western Zen centers mature they face the challenge of including children and non-practicing spouses, integrating into the wider culture, and the practical details of administration such as fund raising and pension funds. They are also recognizing the need for a more comprehensive training program for priests, to include an academic foundation in Buddhist studies and topics such as pastoral guidance and temple administration.

Professor Wako Kato gave a talk illuminating the historical reasons for the inherent polarity between the community centered churches and monastic training centers. Although the Buddha and his original followers were forest ascetics, gradually householders came together to study under an elder and to practice, creating the foundation for the Mahayana school. Obon festival had its origins in the coming together of lay people and monastics at a feast held for the monks when they emerged from the summer retreat. Asian culture has as its basic unit the family. Temples count their membership as "family members," and temple life must take into account the needs of all family members. Western culture holds the individual as its basic unit of civilization and thus has so far emphasized forms that support the pursuit of individual enlightenment. Professor Kato emphasized that monastic life cannot survive alone, it must support and be supported by, the practice of the laity.

It seems that these two types of Soto Zen temples, ethnic and western, have much to offer each other. American practitioners can take heart from the lives of the Japanese pioneers who have lived and practiced quietly, struggling to make ends meet, enduring hardships, prejudice and the injustice of wars and internment. We can turn to them for lessons in keeping faith in the Buddha dharma as we face the frustration of zoning laws, government bureaucracy, commercial exploitation of the name Zen and the day-to-day problems of a congregation that sometimes has trouble getting along. We can learn about family and community events and what sells best at Obon.

Ethnic temples can learn from the American teachers what has been innovative and effective as we have adapted the transmitted teaching to the mind state and emotional make-up of westerners and further-generation Asians who seek personally to experience the truth of Dharma through intensive study and training. This could help bring the energy and enthusiasm of young members back into aging and shrinking congregations.

We face a common enemy, human suffering caused by greed, anger and ignorance. It is not a matter of competition. There is plenty of suffering to go around. It is not a matter of inferior or superior, community church versus monastic training center. Both have been essential to the health of Zen in Japan and both are essential to the health of Zen in America. This conference was a true embodiment of the spirit of the harmony that is the sangha. May we continue to support and enjoy each other as we do this happy work together.

Soto Zen in America (2) San Francisco Body Work

Prof. John R. McRae
Indiana University

In many meditation halls, students are told not to move at all while sitting. Any change of position, even just a fidget, represents a loss of concentration, a break in one's steely resolve. Over the years I've often heard gruffly shouted commands to "sit still!" echo through the silent space of the zendo. Once I spent a week sitting with a group that had each practitioner perch on an individual wooden platform, the top of which was sloped just enough to give the legs a comfortable incline — or just enough to send one slipping inexorably forward if one so much as twitched a muscle! During that week — over thirty years ago — a newcomer to Buddhist practice, of high school age, was repeatedly berated for not being able to sit through 50-minute periods without moving his legs. I often wonder what became of him.

This last summer I spent a long weekend at the San Francisco Zen Center, where I was able to interview a

half-dozen or so people about their Zen practice. Although quite a number of different issues were discussed, the one theme that came up in virtually every case was a particular attitude toward the body. I've taken to calling it the "San Francisco body work" style, a particular combination of attention to inner changes and a very hands-off attitude toward consciously influencing those changes.



One long-time Zen practitioner there had formerly been in charge of instructing newcomers at Tassajara, the San Francisco Zen Center's justifiably famous retreat near Big Sur. "I tell them to go ahead and move," he said, almost revelling in what was clear to him as a radical break with Zen authoritarianism. His point was that *zazen* is a process of both listening to what goes on in body and mind, and allowing body and mind to settle naturally. As Dogen counseled, *zazen* is to allow body and mind to "drop away." Over the course of a single period, let alone a day's retreat or a full seven-day sesshin, the body is going to flex and sag, relaxing into position or building up internal tension. Enforced stolidity would be unnatural.

In this context — and perhaps throughout Soto Zen in America — "control" is anathema, rejected on deep ideological grounds. Control, to Americans on the cusp of the twenty-first century, implies an abandonment of freedom, the introduction of artifice.

Most of us do not realize how odd the contemporary American ideology of freedom is within the historical panorama of the Buddhist tradition. I once had a Zen student auditing a course on Buddhist meditation in East Asia who reacted instantly when he heard my discussion of the traditional methods of controlling the mind and its thoughts. He immediately raised his hand to ask, "Don't you mean freeing the mind?" I replied that centuries of Buddhists believed that a lack of self-control left one at the mercy of one's senses and desires, a prisoner of *samsara* — the very opposite of our conventional understanding of "free as able to do what I want." The auditor, who had taken *jukai* from a teacher in Maezumi Rōshi's White Plum lineage, stopped coming to class from about that point on.

In a similar fashion, my San Francisco Zen Center informants also recoiled, with an automatic and almost physical revulsion, at the very notion of control. In both cases this attitude was probably based on a combination of contemporary American concepts of freedom and a unique perspective on religious practice. I suspect, but am not at all certain at this point, that this combination is widely shared throughout American Soto Zen.

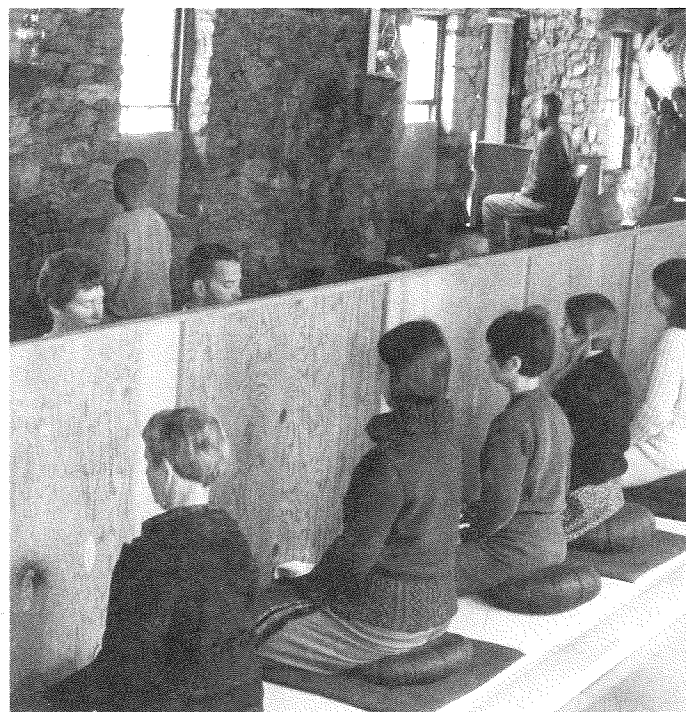
Another practitioner in San Francisco, one with considerable experience at Zen Center, told me that she found the meditation mudra (the position in which one's hands are held, one palm on top of the other and the thumbs touching) uniquely meaningful during sitting. The quiet circle formed by the hands just in front of the abdomen became a portal between her and the world, a channel through which her energies were concentrated and delivered. Years of sitting meant that she was entirely at ease during meditation, and although I didn't observe her during zazen (and watching other people sit motionless for hours at a time is not a research method I plan to adopt!), I'm certain that there is no sense of enforced rigidity about her at all. More important, as I think over the explanation that I'm paraphrasing here, the interpretation she placed on the circle formed by her hands fit very closely with the style of interactive collaboration that she described between her and her co-practitioners. That is, for her and for her cohorts at the San Francisco Zen Center, Zen practice is a never-ending process of negotiation among a multitude of personal situations. Just as one watches and reacts to changes within one's own body, so is one to respond to developments within the community. "Control" is simply not part of the picture.

This same practitioner said she remembered only one time when Suzuki Shunryu Roshi, the founder of Zen Center, ever got angry at her. This was when she informed him she had now gotten pretty good at keeping her concentration on counting the breathing, thank you, and wondered what she could do next. His response was on the order of, "Never think that you are doing zazen!"

Not all of us are so comfortable in our bodies as the Zen students I've mentioned here. In fact, given what seems to be a commonly shared "San Francisco body work" style, I find it odd that the institution offers no instruction in and practice times for yoga, stretching and strengthening exercises, and the like. I was told by students that the attitudes they expressed were adopted from the instructions of their teachers, not imported from

other religious contexts or the world at large, but also that Zen Center does nothing programmatic in terms of physical preparation for long hours of sitting. I do not mean to advocate that there should be time set aside for Zen calisthenics, only to observe that the absence of any such institutionalized activity is in accord with the "don't just do something, sit there!" approach.

Several years ago I visited a Rinzai training center in Hawaii, where calligraphy and the martial arts occupied an important part of the curriculum. Residents and trainees were required to write the same Chinese character on very large paper once every week, and the teacher said he would sometimes have each student display several months worth of these large characters at once, examining them to determine the student's psychological and spiritual evolution. I can't imagine this approach ever being used at a Soto Zen center, and if it did occur I'd be tempted to label it Rinzai influence. Along with the hyper-sensitivity to issues of "control," American Soto Zen seems to involve a reluctance to design or plan out a comprehensive system of training, let alone to have a teacher do so. This may be perfectly in accord with the teachings of Japanese Soto Zen as they have been handed down to us, but it's unusual within the Buddhist tradition as a whole. The San Francisco body work style uniquely fits the ethos of the times — and perhaps specifically of the great city — in which it has developed.



My Zazen Sankyu Notebook (6)

Rev. Issho Fujita

Pioneer Valley Zendo

(With translation assistance from Tansetz Shibata and
Tesshin Brooks)

Fragmentary Thought XVI

<Sealing Up Human Foolishness>

"Since zazen is the posture in which a human being does nothing for the sake of the human being, the human being is freed from being a human being and becomes a Buddha."

(From "Songs of Life - Paeans to Zazen" by Daiji Kobayashi)

"It is good to take a little break. Buddha is a human being who is just taking a break from being one. Make no mistake, Buddha is not a human being grown up great and admirable!"
(Kodo Sawaki, Roshi)

In these two quotations Mr. Kobayashi and Sawaki Roshi use the word "ningen (人間)", a word that is usually translated into English as "human being." The familiarity of the English phrase may obscure what they mean by it. They are contrasting "Buddha" with "ningen (human being)." If so, it is more appropriate to use the Buddhist technical term "*bonpu* (凡夫, ordinary human being)" or "*shujo* (衆生, living being)" which have much more clear definition. A *bonpu* is a non-Buddha, a person who is not yet enlightened and who therefore is caught up in all sorts of ignorance, foolishness and suffering. As a reminder of this meaning I will use the word "*bonpu*" in this article.

In the *Shobogenzo Zuimonki* Dogen says that "Zazen is Buddha's practice." When we actually carry out the Buddha's practice instead of keeping it as an idea, we should never fail to understand that, zazen practice is in a sense, negation or giving up our *bonpu-ness* as Mr. Kobayashi and Sawaki Roshi said, "doing nothing for the sake of *bonpu*" or "taking a little break from being a *bonpu*."

If we fail to take this point seriously we ruin our selves by pandering to our own *bonpu-ness*, we get slack, adjust zazen to fit our *bonpu-ness* and ruin zazen itself.

* * *

By folding our legs into a full or half lotus position our ability to use our legs for standing or walking is temporarily suspended. Under these circumstances it is

impossible for us to chase after the things or states of mind which we want, or to run away from the things and mental states that we don't want.

In *Fukan Zazengi* ("Universally Recommended Method of Zazen") Dogen Zenji advises us on how to properly place the hands in the cosmic mudra: "Put your right hand palm up on your left foot, and your left hand palm up on your right palm. The tips of your thumbs should be lightly touching."

In doing this the capabilities of the hands, like those of the legs in lotus position, are temporarily suspended.

Human hands were freed from bearing the weight of the body when human beings acquired the ability to walk upright on two legs. Now, using the cosmic mudra, we free our hands from their inclination to seize, to manipulate, to hold, and so on.

Dogen Zenji explained how to close our mouths: "Place your tongue against the roof of your mouth. Close your lips and jaw."

When we follow these instructions we temporarily relinquish our ability to speak — yet another ability of great importance to a social animal like us. Without the use of speech we are deprived of the ability of communicating with others, of negotiating with them, of persuading them.

Further, Dogen Zenji says: "Do not think of either good or evil. Do not be concerned with right or wrong. Put aside the operation of your intellect, volition and consciousness. Stop considering things with your memory, imagination, or reflection."

Following this advice we are free, for the time being, to set aside our highly developed intellectual faculties. We simply let go of our ability to conceptualize. In zazen we do not intentionally think about anything. This does not mean that we ought to fall asleep. On the contrary, our consciousness should always be clear and awake.

While we sit in zazen posture all of our human abilities, acquired through eons of evolution, are temporarily renounced, and suspended. Since these capacities — moving, speaking, grasping, thinking — are the ones which human beings value the most, and are most proud of, we might accurately say that "entering zazen is going out of the business of being a human being" or that in zazen "no human being business gets done."

What is the significance of giving up all these hard-

won human abilities while we sit in zazen? I believe it is that we have the opportunity to "seal up our *bonpu-ness*." In other words, when sitting in zazen we unconditionally surrender our human ignorance.

In effect we are saying "I will not use these human capacities for my confused, self-centered purposes. By adopting zazen posture, my hands, legs, lips and mind are all sealed. They are just as they are. I can create no karma with any of them." That is what "sealing up of *bonpu-ness*" in zazen means.

When we use our sophisticated human capacities in our everyday lives we always use them for our deluded, self-centered purposes, our "*bonpu*" interests. All our actions are based on our desires, that is our likes and dislikes.

The reason we decide to go here or there, why we manipulate various objects, why we talk about various subjects, have this or that idea or opinion, is determined only by our inclination to satisfy our own selfish interests. This is how we are. It is a habit deeply ingrained in every *bonpu* human being. If we do nothing about this habit we will continue to use all our wonderful human powers ignorantly and selfishly, and bury ourselves deeper and deeper in delusion.

If on the other hand we correctly practice zazen our human abilities will never be used for "*bonpu*" interests. In this way this tendency will be halted, at least for a time. This is what I call "sealing up *bonpu-ness*."

Our *bonpu-ness* still exists, but it is completely sealed up. Dogen Zenji described zazen in the *Bendowa* (On Following the Way) as a condition in which we are able "to display the Buddha seal at our three karma gates — body, speech and mind — and sit upright in this samadhi."

What he means is that there should be absolutely no sign of "*bonpu*" activity anywhere in the body, speech or mind, that all that is there is the mark of the Buddha. The body does not move in Zazen posture. The mouth is closed and does not speak. The mind does not seek to become Buddha, but instead stops the mental activities of thinking, willing, and consciousness."

By removing all signs of "*bonpu*" from our legs, hands, mouth and mind, which ordinarily act only on behalf of our deluded human interests - by putting the Buddha seal on them — we place them in the service of our Buddha nature. In other words, when our "*bonpu*" body-

mind acts as a Buddha it is transformed into the body-mind of a Buddha.

This recalls Keizan Zenji's injunction in his *Zazen Yojinki* (Things to Watch Regarding Zazen): "*Sokuhyo shobutsu tai*" — Immediately manifest the Buddha's body.

With our *bonpu-ness* completely obstructed by Zazen posture, pursuing our deluded human interests becomes impossible. We might say "I, a deluded human being, am crucified in Zazen, and so can no longer manifest my deluded nature."

Understood this way, my deluded human nature does continue to exist, even while I am sitting in Zazen. However it is totally annihilated at the same time.

We should remember that when we seal up our deluded human nature we break open the seal of our Buddha nature. When we take Zazen posture the signs of Buddhahood appear everywhere. Then only Buddha is active. The sealing up of our deluded nature in Zazen, and the liberation of our Buddha nature, take place at the same place and the same time.

This is a matter of perspective. From the deluded human point of view, when our legs folded in lotus position what we notice most is that we are unable to stand and walk. From the deluded human point of view, in this case, our legs just seem useless.

However, at the same time, from the point of view of "*zaso mihotoke*" — "Zazen posture is the Buddha" — (cf. fragmentary thought XV), our legs in zazen posture immediately become an essential part of a Buddha's body. This same sort of comparison can be made for the hands, mouth, mind and so on.

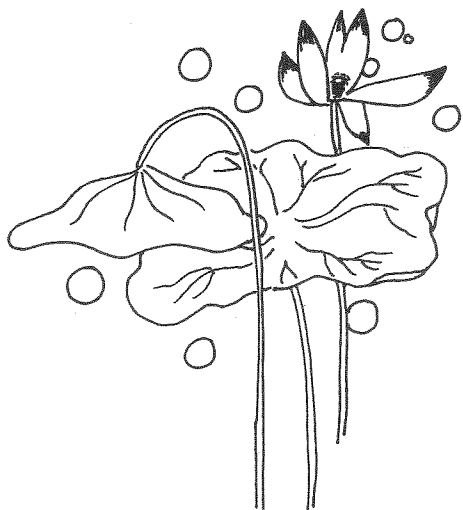
We should be very careful about the fact that when we talk about "sealing up our deluded human nature" this "deluded human nature" we are talking about is not something which exists as a fixed entity, as either a subject or an object, from its own side. It is simply our perceived condition.

We cannot just deny it and get rid of it. The fact of the matter is that when we sit zazen as just zazen, without intentionally intending to deny anything, our deluded human nature gets sealed up by the emergence of our Buddha nature at all three gates of karma, i.e. at the level of our body, speech and mind. As a result, our deluded human nature is automatically renounced.

All the foregoing explanations — of renunciation, of

sealing up, of deluded human nature — are just words. These explanations are based on a particular, limited point of view, looking at zazen from outside.

Certainly it is true that zazen offers us the opportunities I have been describing. However, when we practice zazen, we should be sure not to concern ourselves with “deluded human nature”, “renunciation”, and those kinds of ideas. All that is important for us is to practice zazen, here and now, as pure, uncontaminated zazen.



Dogen Zenji's Genjo-koan Lecture (7)

Rev. Shohaku Okumura
Director, Soto Zen Education Center

(Text: section 8)

Firewood becomes ash. Ash cannot turn back into firewood again. However, we should not view ash as after and firewood as before. We should know that firewood dwells in the dharma position of firewood and it has its own before and after. Although there is before and after, past and future are cut off. Ash stays at the position of ash and it has its own before and after. As firewood never becomes firewood again after it is burned and becomes ash, after person dies, there is no return to living. However, in buddha dharma, it is a never-changing tradition not to say that life becomes death. Therefore we call it no-arising. It is the laid-down way of buddha's turning the dharma wheel not to say that death becomes life. Therefore, we call it no-perishing. Life is a position at one time; death is also a position at one time. For instance, this is like winter and spring. We don't think that winter becomes spring, and we don't say that spring becomes summer.

Life-and-Death and “Self”

Genjo-koan is the first chapter of the 75-volume version of Dogen Zenji's *Shobogenzo*. This is one of Dogen's most popular written works. But to understand this short article is very difficult. Dogen Zenji does not explain himself, he simply expresses the buddha dharma using a very poetic and precise language that was the outcome of his profound insight and experience. In Japan, we study the *Shobogenzo* along with its commentaries. But, often, the commentaries made by Soto Zen masters are just as difficult as Dogen's writings. In order to understand Dogen we need to read the text and the commentaries many times and reflect on our own experience of zazen and day-to-day practice. So today, I will present my own understanding based on my own study and practice. Don't believe my words, but please learn through your own study and practice. This is the way the buddha dharma has been transmitted generation to generation.

From section 4 to 7 of *Genjo-koan*, Dogen Zenji discusses delusion and enlightenment, and buddhas and living beings based on the relationship between the self and all myriad things. In the end of section 7, Dogen Zenji says, “When we conceive our body and mind in a confused way and grasp all things with discriminating mind, we mistakenly think that the self nature of our own mind is permanent. When we intimately practice and return right here, it is clear that all things have no [fixed] self.”

In section 8, Dogen Zenji discusses life and death, or arising and perishing as the reality of our life that is impermanent and egoless (no-fixed self). In order to discuss arising and perishing, we need to think of change of “things” within “time”. We usually think we are born, live and die within the stream of time flowing from the past to the future through the present. But Dogen says it is not the only way to see the “time”.

Life-and-death is an English translation of Japanese expression *shoji* (生死). The Japanese word *sho* (生) as a verb means “to live (*ikiru*)”, and also “to be born (*umare-ru*)”. This expression can be translated into English as birth-and-death. *Shoji* is the process of our life in which we are born, live and die.

As a Buddhist term, *shoji* (life or birth and death) is used as equivalent of two Sanskrit words. One is *jati-marana* that means the process of birth and death. This is also used as an abbreviation of “birth, aging, sickness and death” that is; the four kinds of suffering or *duhkha*.

In Buddhist philosophy, there are two kinds of life (birth) and death. One is life and death of an ordinary living being who is transmigrating within the six realms in the three worlds (the worlds of desire, form and formlessness) and being pulled by *karma*. This life-and-death is called *bundan-shoji* (分段生死, separating life-and-death). Another is the birth (life)-and-death of bodhisattvas who practice within the three worlds to save all beings, although they are free from transmigrating based on three poisonous minds. They continue this practice life after life toward accomplishment of buddhahood all the way through the fifty two steps of bodhisattva practice. This kind of life-and-death based on the bodhisattva vow is called *henyaku-shoji* (変易生死, transforming life-and-death).

There are also two other kinds of life and death. One is called *ichigo-shoji* (一期生死, life-and-death as one period) that is the life span between birth and death as we usually understand it. Another is called *setsuna-shoji* (刹那生死, moment by moment life-and-death). *Setsuna* (Skt. *Ksana*) means the slightest moment, much shorter than a second. Our body and mind are born (arising) and dying (perishing) moment by moment. Dogen discusses this in *Shobogenzo Hotsu-bodaishin* (Arising Awakening Mind).

The second Sanskrit word as the origin of the expression life-and-death is *samsara*. Life-and-death is another name of *samsara* in which living beings transmigrate within the six realms (hell, the realms of the hungry ghosts, animals, the asuras, human beings, and heavenly beings). It is important to remember that life-and-death in common Buddhist usage is *samsara*, that is the opposite of *nirvana*. When Dogen Zenji says in *Shobogenzo Shoji* (Life-and-Death), "Life-and-death is Buddha's Life," he means our life in *samsara* is nothing other than Buddha's Life, that is, *nirvana*. Unless we understand this point, we cannot really appreciate the power of Dogen's words.

Life-and-death has two meanings: one is the process of being born, living and dying; another is transmigration within the six realms of *samsara*. And often these two are used alternatively because the usual process of an ordinary being's life is birth, living and dying, and is a part of transmigration in *samsara*. But here in *Genjo-koan*, Dogen Zenji uses this expression as the process of being born, living and dying in the case of living beings, or arising, staying for a while, and perishing in the case of things other than living beings before separation between *samsara* and *nirvana*.

We were born at a certain time in the past. In my case, I was born on June 22nd, 1948, fifty-two years ago. When I was born my body was tiny. Since then, my body and also my mind have been constantly changing. The baby became a boy. The boy became a teenager. The teenager became a young adult. The young adult became a middle-aged person as I am now. If I am lucky, the middle-aged person is going to become an old person. And eventually the old person is going to die and disappear.

Between our birth and death, we are constantly changing, experiencing various conditions. But somehow, we commonly think that fifty years ago, the baby was Shohaku and fifty years later this middle aged person is the same Shohaku. Thirty years ago, I was a newly ordained young monk with lots of energy and problems. Now, thirty years later, I don't have so much energy and I have totally different kinds of problems. My way of thinking was very different when I was twenty. I never thought I would live in the United States and speak English. My way of thinking has been strongly influenced by American ways of thinking since I came to this country. And yet we usually understand that I am the same person I was when I was a baby, as I was when I was a teenager, and when I was in my twenties, and then thirties, forties and fifties. This is our common understanding. We almost always believe it to be so. But, is it really true?

Buddha's teaching of no-self

If, it is true, then we have to agree with a theory that there is something that does not change within ourselves. And this unchanging entity stays intact right through the very process of changing. This one thing, which is not a baby, a teenager, a young man, a middle-aged man, or an aged man, changes its appearance through the flowing of time. It is like one person who changes clothes one outfit after another depending upon the occasion. My body and mind, which are constantly changing, are like various pieces of clothing that I put on and take off. This one entity which does not change goes through the process of changing only in appearance. This is an idea Indian people believed at the time of the Buddha. This one thing called *atman* transmigrates through many different conditions being pulled by good and bad *karma*. The *atman* (soul) is pure but it is imprisoned in the body that is source of delusive desires.

The definition of *atman* (ego or fixed-self) in Buddhist

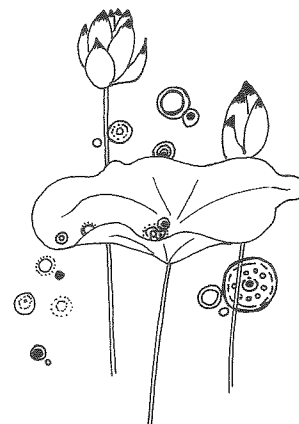
philosophy according to the Abidharma-kosa, written by the famous Indian Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu, is that the *atman* is something which is permanent, only one, the owner of this body and mind (five aggregates) and the operator of the body and mind (常一主宰). The *Atman* is like the owner and driver of a car and the body and mind; as the five aggregates that are always changing, are like a car. The owner owns the car and drives the car as far as the car runs. When the car becomes old and not possible to fix anymore, then the owner gives up that car and buys a new one. The *Atman* (soul or ego) is like an owner of this body and mind. When this body and mind dies, the owner leaves the body and mind and it will be born with the new body and mind. This is the basic idea of how the *atman* (soul, ego) transmigrates and is born again and again life after life. And according to the Indian belief, depending upon our good and bad deeds, the *atman* transmigrates from a hell to a heaven within the six realms.

If we do good actions and accumulate good karma, we will be born with a good body and mind in a good circumstance. When we do bad actions and accumulate bad karma, we will be born with an inferior body and mind in a difficult environment. This is the theory of karma that was widely believed in Indian society at the time of the Buddha.

When the Buddha taught *anatman*, that is, no-atman (no soul, no-ego, no self). He was against this basic idea of *atman* that is a permanent entity transmigrating in *samsara*. Buddha taught that there are only five aggregates (form or material, sensation, perception, impulse and consciousness) which are not substantial. In the case of human beings the five aggregates refer to body and mind. Buddha taught that only the five aggregates exist and nothing else. And the Heart Sutra says that those five aggregates are in their self-nature empty.

Then what is transmigrating? This is a very natural question. The Buddha negated the theory of *atman* but did not negate the belief of transmigration because that was the basis of social morality in India. The Buddha put emphasis on cause and result (因縁 or 因果). If we do bad things we have to receive a painful effect. If we do good things we will receive a pleasurable effect. This is the principle of causality. If so, if there is no *atman*, who does the action and who receives the result? Buddha said that the self has to receive the result of one's own karmic actions. What is this self, if it is not *atman*? This is a question often asked regarding the Buddha's teachings. And many Buddhist philosophers in various schools tried to logically explain this problem. And yet, as far as I know,

there is no perfect answer so far. Without offering any perfect explanation, both the theory of no self (*anatman*) and the belief of transmigration within six realms are maintained within almost all Buddhist traditions.



Dogen and no-self

In the case of Dogen, in the *Bendowa* (Talk on the Wholehearted practice of the Way) and a few other chapters of *Shobogenzo* such as *Sokusinzebutsu* (Mind is itself Buddha), and *Bussho* (Buddha-nature), he clearly negates the *atman*. In *Bendowa*, question 10, Dogen said:

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

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

However, to learn this theory and suppose it is buddha-dharma is more stupid than grasping a tile or a pebble and thinking it is a golden treasure. Nothing can compare to the shameful of this idiocy. National Teacher Echu of Tang China strictly admonished [against this mistake]. So, now isn't it ridiculous to consider that the erroneous view of mind as permanent and material form as impermanent is the same as the wondrous dharma of the buddhas, and to think that you become free from life and death when actually you are arousing the fundamental cause of life and death? This indeed is most pitiful. Just realize that this is a mistaken view. You should give no ear to it." (The Wholehearted Way, P.32-33, Okumura and Leighton, Tuttle, 1997)

Some people think mind to be permanent and body to be impermanent. In this case, mind was considered to be *atman*; that is, pure and permanent. And the body was considered to be the source of delusive desire and impermanent. In this case, mind was called *shinsho* (心性, mind nature) and body was called *shinso* (身相, bodily form). And this mind-nature was often used as a synonym of buddha-nature. This is the reason Dogen negates the idea of *kensho* (見性, seeing the nature).

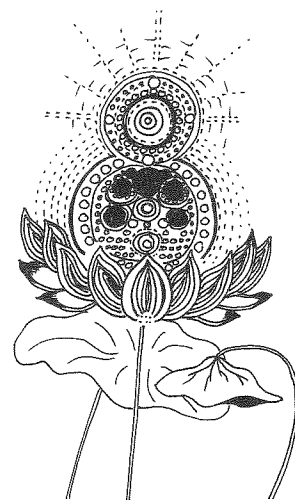
On the other hand, in *Shobogenzo Sanjigo* (Karma in the Three Times), or *Jinshin-inga* (Deeply Believing in Cause and Result), Dogen puts emphasis on faith in the principle of cause and result beyond this present lifetime. Also in *Shobogenzo Doshin* (Way Mind) Dogen encourages people to deeply take refuge in the Three Treasures; Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. And gives advice that one should ceaselessly chant "I take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha" during the period of *chuu* (*antara-bhava*) between death in this life and the next birth, that is usually considered to be 49 days. He said, we should chant "I take refuge in the Buddha," life after life until we reach buddhahood. I am pretty sure Dogen himself believes in the bodhisattvas' *henyaku-shoji*, (transforming life and death) that is, as the Buddha did, bodhisattvas practice life after life because of their vows to save all beings and accomplish the buddhahood.

For me, these two sides seem to contradict each other. At least, I don't understand that if there is no *atman* (permanent self) beside this impermanent body and mind, what is chanting, "I take refuge in Buddha," after the death of this body and mind? Anyway, if this is a contradiction, Buddhism itself has had this contradiction from the very beginning until today. Many Buddhist philosophers have tried to clarify this point and no one has been completely successful.

I am not going to try to create a new theory to explain this contradiction. I don't believe in rebirth and yet, I don't negate it. There is no basis to believe or negate it. What I can say for sure is, "I don't know." The important thing for me is to practice in this lifetime as the Buddha instructed in the *Dhammapada*, "To refrain from anything bad and practice everything good. Purify your mind. This is the teaching of the seven Buddhas." If there is rebirth, it is all right, I will try to practice in the same manner. If there is no-rebirth, I don't need to do anything after my death. So I don't need to think about it in that case. Even if I don't believe rebirth as a person, I don't negate the principle of cause and result. What I am doing

now will have result even after my death. My practice is a result of my teacher's practice.

This is how I answered the question about rebirth until recently. But after I became fifty, I found that I have a wish to live the next life, simply because this lifetime seems too short to practice the Buddha way. For example, I have been working on the translation of Zen Buddhist texts from Japanese to English, and there is too much work for me to do in this lifetime. Also my life seems too short a span to fully understand the true meaning of Buddha's, Dogen's and other teachers' words. I need much more time to translate all the texts I want to introduce. I wish to be reborn as a Buddhist again and continue to work on it. I think this is because I am aging and have found my limitations. Probably the belief in the Bodhisattva's *henyaku-shoji* (transforming life-and-death); ceaseless practice life after life because of their vows was originated in this awakening to the limitations of our personal lives.



Life-and-Death and "Time"

Well, I have discussed about *atman* and *anatman* too long. I need to talk about "time" and life-and-death. Dogen's philosophy of the unity of "time" and "being" is very famous among philosophers not only in Japan but also in the West. It sometimes compared with the thought of modern Western philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Since I don't know much about Western philosophy, I cannot tell whether Dogen and Heidegger thought the same thing or not. Anyway, this section of *Genjo-koan* is one of the sources of Dogen's idea of identity of "time" and "being". Later, he wrote *Shobogenzo Uji* (Being Time) and clearly said, "Time is just being, and all beings are time." "All beings in the whole universe are stretching in a row and at the same time, it is my being-time. Because being and time are one, it is 'me (self)-being-time'."

(Text) Firewood becomes ash. Ash cannot turn back into firewood again. However, we should not view ash as after and firewood as before. We should know that firewood dwells in the dharma position of firewood and it has its own before and after. Although there is before and after, past and future are cut off. Ash stays at the position of ash and it has its own before and after.

Here Dogen compares life and death to firewood and ash. We commonly think that a seed sprouts and grows gradually and after long period of time, becomes a big tree. When we need firewood, we cut the tree, split it into small pieces, pile them and dry them to make them into firewood. And when we burn the firewood, the firewood becomes ash. This is the same as we think our own life and death. I was a baby, I grow up for about twenty years, I then stop growing and live as a grown-up for certain period of time, then I start to get older and older and finally die. Finally, I will be burned and become ash.

We think there is a stream of time, like a river that is flowing from the beginningless past to the endless future. When I was born I appear in the stream and when I die I disappear from the stream. But the stream continues to flow before my birth and after my death. This is our thought about time, history and our own lives. And as a thought, it might be not wrong. But this is not exactly how we live and die.

According to Dogen, 'time' is 'being' and 'being' is 'time'. As a tree, a tree has its own time. As firewood, firewood has its own time. As ash, ash has also its own time. Each being is at its own dharma-position (hoi, 法位), and at each dharma-position, each being has its own past and future. When a tree is at the dharma-position of a tree, it has its own past as a seed and its own future as firewood. When firewood is at the dharma-position of firewood, it has its own past as a tree and its own future as ash. When ash stays at its dharma-position as ash, it has its own past as a tree and its own future as something else. If ash is scattered on the mountain it will be part of the mountain and help other beings to grow.

And the dharma-positions of a tree, of firewood, and of ash are independent of each other. When we use the analogy of tree, firewood, ash, or each stage of our own life and death, each position seems to have length of time. But, as a reality, the present moment does not have any length. If there is length, no matter how short it is, we can cut it into half and one half is already in the past and

another half is still in the future. When I say "now", when I pronounce "n", "ow" is still in the future. When I pronounce "w", "no" is already in the past. The present moment has no length. It is zero. When we think of a certain period of 'time' including the present moment, all which exists is only past and future. The present moment is just a "line" without any width as its definition in geometry. Isn't it strange? The present moment is the only reality, the past is already gone and the future has not yet come. Still there is nothing that can be grasped as the present moment. The present moment does not exist. So, time does not really exist. Still, at the present moment which is zero and does not exist, the entire past and the entire future are reflected. And this present moment (zero) is the only real reality. And at each moment, everything continuously arises and perishes. Each moment everything is new and fresh.

A seed stays at the dharma-position of a seed and it has its own past and future. Since a seed has life, it has a power to negate its own position when it has appropriate conditions such as moisture, temperature, sun light and so on. It sprouts and becomes something that is not a seed. When a seed fully functions as a seed according to its own life force, it negates itself and becomes something else. That is the reality and function of a seed. A seed is not stuck in a stage of being a seed. A baby is the same. When a baby fully lives as a baby, within its life force, it has a power that negates babyhood and becomes a boy or a girl. That is the function of the life force of a baby. Everything has this life force which negates itself and changes into something else, this is what "everything is empty in its self-nature" means. A baby is a baby because a baby negates its babyhood. The Buddha is Buddha because the Buddha is not Buddha.

A baby Shohaku negated itself and became a boy Shohaku, and the boy Shohaku negated itself and became the teenage Shohaku. The teenage Shohaku negated itself and became the grown-up Shohaku. There is continuation but the baby Shohaku was not a boy Shohaku and the boy Shohaku was not the teenage Shohaku. Is there something which does not change within this constant change? According to the Buddha's teachings there is nothing. All existences are just correction of five aggregates of each time. There is a continuation, therefore the baby Shohaku did not become a bird, a dog or other human beings beside Shohaku. But there is no Shohaku as a fixed self. Isn't this strange? Yes it is strange. This reality is very difficult for us to grasp. This is why, we call

the reality 'wondrous dharma' (*myoho*, 妙法) as in the title of the Lotus Sutra (妙法蓮華經, the Sutra of Wondrous Dharma Like a Lotus Flower).

This means that even though we are a continuation from our babyhood as we have karma (influences from the previous experiences) from the past, our life is always new and fresh. There was a Japanese Soto Zen priest whose name was Rev. Doyu Ozawa. When he was a young soldier in the World War II, he lost both of his legs. After the War, because he had no legs, he had to go through many difficulties. After all the struggling, he made up his mind to believe that he was born just now, without legs. That was how he could accept the reality of his life at this moment, and could live positively without his legs. And after that, he was always smiling. After Uchiyama Roshi retired from Antaiji in 1975 and lived in Ogaki, he met Rev. Ozawa and encouraged him to write about his experiences. Rev. Ozawa's book became one of the bestsellers of the year.

We all have the past as karma, memory, habit, and experiences, but the past has already gone. We all have the future as our hopes, wishes, vows, and ambitions, or goals, but the future has not yet come. This present moment is the only reality. How can we live fully at this moment? If we are firmly caught up in the past experiences, we are afraid to change. If we put too much emphasis on the future, this moment becomes merely a step to the future. When we live in such a way, if we die before reaching our goal, our life becomes meaningless.

Dogen's teaching of time allows us to live fully right now, and right here, in this given condition and change this condition as a practice of this moment. This is what he meant when he says that "there is before and after, but the before and after are cut off." As he wrote in the first three sentences of *Genjo-koan*, "there is both life and death, enlightenment and delusion, Buddhas and living beings" and at the same time there is no such thing. And again, he discusses how we should practice with life and death, living beings and Buddhas, delusion and enlightenment.

(Text) However, in buddha dharma, it is a never-changing tradition not to say that life becomes death. Therefore we call it no-arising. It is the laid-down way of buddha's turning the dharma wheel not to say that death becomes life. Therefore, we call it no-perishing. Life is a position at one time; death is also a position at one time. For instance, this is like winter and

spring. We don't think that winter becomes spring, and we don't say that spring becomes summer.

In *Shobogenzo Shoji*, Dogen says exactly the same thing; "It is a mistake to think that life turns into death. Life is a position at one time with its own before and after. Consequently, in the buddha dharma, it is said that life is itself no-arising. Death is a position at one time with its own before and after. Consequently, it is said that death is itself no-perishing. In life there is nothing other than life. In death, there is nothing other than death. Therefore, when life comes, just live. And when death comes, just die. Neither avoid them nor desire them."

Is this difficult to do? Yes, it is. We want to chase after something like such as life, enlightenment, buddha and escape from something we don't like such as death, delusion or living beings. Our main motive in our lives is greed and hatred, like and dislike. Sometimes we are successful and feel like a heavenly being sometimes we fail and feel as miserable as a hell dweller. This is *samsara* in our present life-time.

In *Shobogenzo Zenki* (Total Dynamic Function), Dogen says, "Life in the present moment lies in this functioning mechanism, and this functioning mechanism lies in life in the present moment. Life is not coming; life is not leaving; life is not appearing; and life is not becoming. Rather, life is a manifestation of total dynamic function, and death is manifestation of total dynamic function. You should know that among the countless dharmas within the self, there is life and there is death."

In 1975, Uchiyama Roshi retired from Antaiji when he was sixty-three years old. He retired while he was so young because he was physically a very weak person. He said that after retirement, his practice was facing his own life-and-death. When he was around seventy, he published a collection of several poems on life-and-death. The following are his poems where I think Uchiyama Roshi expresses the reality and practice of life-and-death within no-life-and-death.

Life-and-Death

Water isn't formed by being ladled into a bucket

Simply the water of the whole Universe has been ladled into a bucket

The water does not disappear because it has been scattered over the ground

It is only that the water of the whole Universe has been emptied into the whole Universe

Life is not born because a person is born

The life of the whole Universe has been ladled into the hardened "idea" called "I"

Life does not disappear because a person dies

Simply, the life of the whole Universe has been poured out of this hardened "idea" of "I" back into the universe

Just Live, Just Die

The Reality prior to the division into two

Thinking it to be so, or not thinking it to be so

Believing it to be so, or not believing it to be so

Existence-nonexistence, life-death

Truth-falsehood, delusion-enlightenment

Self-others, happiness-unhappiness

We live and die within the profundity of Reality

Whatever we encounter is buddha-life

This present Reality is buddha-life

Just living, just dying—within no life or death

Samadhi of the Treasury of the Radiant Light

Though poor, never poor

Though sick, never sick,

Though aging, never aging

Though dying, never dying

Reality prior to division—

Herein lies unlimited depth

NEWS

FROM THE SOTO ZEN ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE AND EDUCATION CENTER

- The 20th Anniversary Celebration of Zen Mountain Monastery in New York was held through 13th to 18th of June. Rev. Gengo Akiba and Rev. Shohaku Okumura from the Soto Zen Administrative Office and Education Center attended the ceremonies on 17th and 18th.
- The 30th Anniversary Celebration and Reverend Jiyu Kenett Stupa Dedication were held at Shasta Abbey in California on September 3rd and 4th. Rev. Gengo Akiba, Rev. Shohaku Okumura and Rev. Kensho Miyamae from the Soto Zen Administrative Office and Education Center attended the ceremonies.
- Rev. Taiken Yokoyama is having a tour of visiting in Europe (19 Zen Centers in 7 countries) from Administrative Headquarters of Soto Zen Buddhism in Japan through August to October.
- A service to celebrate the 800th Anniversary of the birth of Dogen Zenji will be held with Japanese American Soto Zen community in North America and Hawaii in Las Vegas, Nevada on October 28th.
- The Preliminary Memorial Service of 750th Dogen Zenji's Entering Nirvana will be held in May 12, 2001 at Zenshuji Soto Mission.

SOTO ZEN EDUCATION CENTER ACTIVITY SCHEDULE

October, 2000 to March, 2001

DHARMA STUDY GROUP

At Sokoji Temple, San Francisco, CA.

Led by Rev. Shohaku Okamura in English

Text: Shobogenzo (Buddha Nature)

On Sundays - November 19, December 17, 2000

January 14, February 11, March 25, 2001

8:30am Zazen, 9:10am Morning Service, 9:30am Work Period,
10:00am Lecture

For more information call *Soto Zen Education Center: (415)567-7686*

LECTURE SERIES ON BUDDHISM

At Sokoji Temple, San Francisco, CA

On Fridays November 3, December 1, 2000

January 5, February 2, March 2, 2001

6:30pm Zazen, 7:20pm Lecture

November 3: Led by Mr. Mark Gonnerman, Research Fellow at Stanford University
"Gary Snyder's Mountains and Rivers Without End" Part 2

December 1: Led by Mr. Mark Gonnerman, Research Fellow at Stanford University
"Gary Snyder's Mountains and Rivers Without End" Part 3

January 5: Led by Mr. Mark Gonnerman, Research Fellow at Stanford University
"Gary Snyder's Mountains and Rivers Without End" Part 4

February 2: Led by Rev. Paul Haller, San Francisco City Center
"Buddhism and Social Action"

March 2: Led by Rev. Hozan Alan Senauke,
Buddhist Peace Fellowship/Berkeley Zen Center
"Daily Life of Buddhism"

For more information call *Soto Zen Education Center: (415) 567-7686*

SESSHIN

February 18 - 25, 2001 (Gathering of Soto Zen Sangha)

At Sonoma Mountain Zen Center in Santa Rosa

For more information call *Sonoma Mountain Zen Center: (707)545-8105*

SOTO ZEN JOURNAL is published semiannually by
the Soto Zen Education Center
Shohaku Okumura, Editor

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