

DHARMA EYE



法眼

News of Soto Zen Buddhism: Teachings and Practice



Honoring Our History and Challenging the Future

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Director of Soto Zen Buddhism Hawaii Office

I assumed the position of Director of Soto Zen Buddhism Hawaii Office on September 1, 2008, succeeding the retiring Reverend Jiho Machida. I would like to extend my gratitude to Rev. Machida for serving as Kokusai fukyoshi in Hawaii for 56 years, since he arrived in Hawaii in 1952.

The history of Sotoshu in Hawaii goes back to 1903, when Taiyoji (in the sugar plantation community of Waipahu, Oahu,) and Zenshuji, (also in the sugar plantation community on Kauai,) opened their doors to serve the needs of immigrant laborers from Japan. In 1904, Ryusenji in Kawailoa Camp in Waialua, Oahu, and later, Mantokuji in Paia, Maui, and Taiheiji in Aiea, Oahu, were established for immigrant sugar plantation workers and their families. Together with these temples, Japanese language schools were established to provide education for children born and raised in Hawaii so that they could learn to speak and write their parents' language. By 1918 Soto Zen temples, together with temples of different sects, became the centers of Buddhist as well as Japanese educational, cultural and social activities.

The sugar strike in 1920 became a bitter struggle for all Buddhists in Hawaii over issues of economic justice, racism, Americanization, Japanization, democracy, and anti-American subversion. Buddhist leaders spoke out and supported the Japanese and Filipino strikers' demand for a daily wage of \$1.25 instead of the 77 cents for men and 58 cents for women. Consequently, the strike gained some

public support and sympathy mainly because of the involvement by Buddhist priests taking leadership roles. This incident spearheaded the involvement of Japanese in Hawaiian politics and social change.

Today, we have nine temples throughout the five different islands and each temple serves its community in many different ways. Each temple, however, devotes and carries out such practices and activities as Sunday services, zazen sessions, Baika-ko practice sessions, Young Buddhist Association activities, senior citizens programs, Japanese language schools, math and English reading classes, cultural art classes of tea ceremony, flower arrangement, Japanese brush painting, Japanese dance, Bon dance, taiko, hula, and martial art classes such as judo, aikido and karate.

We have bi-annual conferences for all temples in the Hawaii Soto Mission Association where both priests and lay delegates meet and work together to exchange information and ideas to create and improve programs and services for all Soto Zen temple members and communities. These include business meetings, study sessions, zazen sessions, seminars, workshops, practicing and sharing of religious as well as educational and social sessions. A newly implemented program encourages local men and women to serve as volunteers to help the priests with temple activities as temple assistants. Scholarships are also available to qualified students who are seriously interested in receiving advanced education in preparation

for becoming a Soto Zen priest.

Another statewide organization is the United Hawaii Sotoshu Women's Association, which is made up of women from all temples. Its board of advisors is comprised of spouses of priests. The UHSSWA aims at promoting Soto Zen teachings through religious, educational, cultural and social activities. Besides its board meetings at Soto Mission of Hawaii, the annual two-day conference, hosted by a different temple unit each year, is attended by 200 plus members. The next one, the 44th annual conference, will be hosted by Kona Daifukuji Women's Association on the Big Island.

In Hawaii, Soto Zen Buddhists embrace *Shishobo*, the four kinds of wisdom that benefit living beings - - "giving", "kind words", "beneficial actions", and "identity actions." In the spirit of *Shishobo* we are committed to continuing the challenge of trying to see our temples actively help and serve communities. Temples should continue to be the place for young and old to acquire fundamental knowledge and practice of Soto Zen teachings and cultivate their lives through weekly,

monthly, and annual services, zazen, meetings, counseling, cultural and other activities. We are determined to go beyond the confines of our own temples in sharing Soto Zen teachings and practice with all people of diverse backgrounds. In so doing we will be able to bring the community into our Soto Zen sangha.

Our Soto Zen Buddhist teachings in Hawaii for the past 105 years have been blessed, nourished, and cultivated by the pioneer priests and Issei (first generation) immigrants, Niseis (second generation Japanese-Americans), and later by older Sanseis (third generation Japanese-Americans). Most of the Isseis are now gone and the majority of Niseis are in their late eighties. We are fortunate to have inherited the spiritual and cultural heritage that our predecessors have handed down to us. Furthermore, the passage of time and history has brought many changes to Soto Zen Buddhism in Hawaii. The legacy of Japanese Buddhism in Hawaii is becoming Hawaiian Buddhism, enriched by members of non-Japanese or mixed heritage, validating the truth that Buddhism is for all people anywhere with the leadership and guidance provided by priests.



Soto Mission of Hawaii, Shoboji



Obon Service



Keynote lecture, Title:
“Bukkyo Tozen – Buddhism in American Life”

Speaker: Dr. Rev. Duncan Ryuken Williams
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Chair, Center for Japanese Studies

Good morning, everyone. It's a great pleasure to be here today. I really regret missing all of you last night. I was in Berkeley, CA last night and I got here just after midnight. We had an event at Berkeley. It was the opening of the new East Asian Library, the first stand-alone library in North America. Just about a million books in that library – Japanese, Chinese, and Korean books – all in one place. It was a big event and the Japanese Consul General, the director of the National Diet Library came. The reason I'm mentioning this, is that it is an interesting time to be a Buddhist in America. We also had from Japan the head of the Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, the Society for the Promotion of Buddhism, donating some money for this new library. And what we noticed was that a great percentage of that library is books on Buddhism.

And it's a remarkable change for our university in Berkeley to be in that position because if we think about the beginnings of many American universities like Harvard, Yale, and Berkeley, they all come from Euro-Christian background and context. Harvard was founded by Unitarians, I went to school there and there is still so much left of that tradition out on the East Coast. Yale was founded by Congregationalists. And Berkeley, where does that name come from? It was the name of a British Anglican bishop, George Berkeley, a famous poet and philosopher and Christian bishop. The university was founded in 1868 and took the name Berkeley as did the town. The reason was that when the regents of the university, back in 1868, trying to find a location to place the first big public university of California, stood where the campus is today and looked over toward the Golden Gate and apparently one of the regents had this idea of looking through that Golden Gate towards the Pacific, and a line of poetry came to him, a line that was written by George Berkeley, poet and philosopher and bishop, a poem that comes from a series of poems called “America.”

George Berkeley had written a number of poems about his intentions to send Christian missionaries from England to New England, Boston, MA, and he wrote a poem called “America” in which one of the lines goes something like this “Just like the movement of the sun goes from east to west, so does the flow of civilization.” And in his mind, civilization, of course, meant Christianity. So, apparently this regent of the University of California looked over the Pacific and thought to himself “this university will carry on that tradition of civilization moving from east” – meaning Europe, and in the case of California, from the East Coast of the US, from places like Harvard and Yale out West and were going to establish a new center of learning here in California that would replicate that transmission of knowledge from Europe. So, it's very ironic that today in the middle of that particular campus, yesterday we celebrated this major opening of the largest East Asian library in North America and Europe. We have a significant portion of books on the second floor all about Buddhism. It's ironic because what it represents is a different kind of movement, a movement not from east to west, but from west, centered in Asia, a new civilizational tradition moving eastward.

The title of today's talk is “Bukkyo Tozen” which is a term that Japanese used especially in the Meiji period to account for the eastward movement of Buddhism. “Buddhism moves or advances or penetrates east” is the meaning of the talk. It was based on a prophecy that the Buddha made that the Dharma would always, inevitably, move eastward. And so, the Japanese interpreted to mean from its roots in India through China and Korea, the Dharma moved eastward and finally landed here in Japan. But as you know, if you look at the early writings of the Sotoshu missions in Hawaii and in mainland U.S., you often find this term being used by the early priests that came to the United States. They would also, in other

words, extend that idea of the eastward movement of Buddhism not only from India to China and Japan, but from Japan towards Hawaii and the West Coast of the US. And in that model us being here in Las Vegas makes sense, we've just come a little further east. So, that's the basic message or point I want to talk about today is that we and I am also a fellow Sotoshu member, we as Sotoshu members represent a different kind of movement, a different civilizational tradition and whether it's because our ancestors came here three or four generations ago or whether it's because we value the civilizational idea embodied in things like Buddhism come from Asia, we share a different movement, a different tradition in which our forefathers, if you have ancestors that came from Japan, or in other words represents people for whom East is the frontier and the pioneers move eastward. Because the general American story is that America is a nation of Manifest Destiny, this is the language that President Bush uses when he talks about America, an America in which the values of Christianity and the civilizational concepts of democracy and freedom. He seems to think that they all come from Europe, that the only things of value come out of that Christian tradition. I think we know that Asian values and Asian religious traditions also offer something extremely important to what makes America, that Asian-Americans and Japanese-Americans in particular have offered and continue to offer something extremely important to American democracy, American pluralism. It's easy to talk about religious freedom enshrined in the U.S. constitution, when you're just talking about Christians, but it's a lot harder to acknowledge and embrace the idea that Buddhists are also not only a marginal part of America but an integral part of America.

Yesterday, I spoke with former Congressman from California and Department of Transportation Secretary, Norman Mineta, at this library opening. It's amazing that people like Norman Mineta or Gen. Eric Shinseki--these people who serve in the military or government--are Japanese-American people who have become central to what America is all about. And that was unthinkable, let's say just sixty some years ago when we think about the wartime, a time when Japanese were put under suspicion, when Buddhist priests were first picked up after Pearl Harbor, in the weeks after where community leaders were

picked up and put into special camps. Buddhist priests and Shinto priests actually, also, were particularly targeted by the Office of Naval Intelligence and the FBI. So, we know when we think of that time and we think of senators, although he's not Buddhist, Daniel Inouye from Hawaii. You know, I think it was in the last year of Clinton, that he and many others who were unjustly, were not awarded proper commendations for their service during World War II, I think there were twenty six of them all together, received Congressional Medals of Honor on the White House lawn and though he wasn't someone from Sotoshu, but a Jodo Shinshu priest, Rev. Honda, presided over a ceremony on the White House lawn to commemorate all of those, many of them Buddhists, who had already passed away, to receive those Congressional Medals of Honor. So, I feel that events like those on the White House lawn suggests that we are at a time in the history of American and Buddhism where we need not be afraid, we need not be shy about our Buddhism. It's a time when this "Bukkyo Tozen", a movement that has taken over 100 years and the efforts and struggles of many thousands of people and many thousands of people that are based at your temples in Hawaii and the West Coast of the U.S., who struggled to make Buddhism part of America's religious landscape. I think we're at the moment where can be both honored in all of their work and also take pride in our Buddhism and it being not just a marginal part of America, but an essential part of America for redefining what America can be and is today.



Opening Ceremony

What I want to do with the rest of the time I have today is to talk in very particular terms about one particular way that Buddhism has contributed to America and in fact not just America but to the global situation. In other words, Buddhism, I think, is best understood especially in this moment, as not only affecting our internal environment (we have in our Sotoshu tradition, wonderful teachings and tradition about meditation that helps us to deal with our internal environment), but the great thing about Buddhism is that it doesn't stop in that internal environment, that it helps us inform the values and the ways we might approach our social environment, most intimately our families, how we might relate to each other in our closest social environment our family, how it might help us and inform our life let's say at work, where we have an angry boss, how do we deal with things like that, how draw on our Buddhist traditions to address the problems, the questions that all come from the Buddhist problematic of suffering. How do we extend that environment a bit further to the farthest part of our environment the natural environment, our eco-system, the natural world within which we live on this planet Earth? It's a pressing issue--as I think most of you know that Al Gore recently won the Nobel Prize precisely because he pointed out that beyond political consideration and even beyond policy considerations and perhaps even beyond the technological questions—this is a critical issue. This is a human problem, the global environment, climate change. These are global problems, that whatever religion we come from, whatever context we come out of, we must think about and address. Al Gore pointed out that ultimately the questions of the environment, whether it be global climate change, whether it be issues that relate to land, water, earth cannot be simply solved, by policy or technology. In other words, just because we change political leadership doesn't necessarily mean that these problems will be all solved. Just because we hope that the next generation Prius or next generational solution to smokestacks or polluting in rivers, those are great things, but they by themselves will not solve the environmental crisis. But these big issues that we face as human beings everyday fundamentally come, he suggested, from our world, from the way we see and understand the world and the human relationship with nature. And that's precisely where Buddhism comes in because Buddhism can offer an interesting and

ultimate vision of what it means to be a human being, what it means to be a human living in relationship with our larger Sangha of the natural world. It provides us with a vision, it provides us with ethical principles, and it provides us with ways of completing communities. That's the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha that Buddhism provides for us. To think about and consider how it is that we human beings need to shift the way we actually see things. And that shift is going to contribute to a fundamental realignment of how we think about everything: our economic systems, how we think about the environment, how we think about our social relations. And Buddhism has some great teachings, great insights to offer to America as well as to the globe on these questions.

I will teach a course called "Buddhism and the Environment" during the next term at Berkeley; it's a fifteen-week course. I'm going to try, in the time allotted, to condense fifteen weeks into 50 minutes. But I just want to preface before I get into this idea, although I'm going to talk about what we in the Buddhist tradition can contribute, of course, the word "tradition" is vast. We have 2,500 years of history behind us. We have Buddhist traditions that not only come out of Japan, but come out of India, Tibet, Southeast Asia, China, Korea, and that within those traditions; let's say, even in Japanese Buddhism, we have different kinds of perspectives. The Nichiren Buddhists have certain ways of seeing the world, we Sotoshu people have a certain way, and Tendai people have yet a different perspective. But there are certain common ideas that tie us all together as Buddhists, especially here in the United States. We might remind ourselves of what some of those things are.

Of course, the first and foremost thing we share as Buddhists is what I call the "Buddhist problematic." Buddhism wouldn't exist if it didn't have a problem or the Buddha wouldn't have become a buddha if he didn't have a problem. All religions begin because there is some kind of problem and in the case of Buddhism; the Buddha Shakyamuni identified it as *dukkha*, which we usually translate as suffering, into English, though sometimes I think better translated by "unsatisfactoriness" from the Sanskrit. Dukkha means "unsatisfactory" or we can even call it "unease." And metaphorically, we can even talk about it as "dis-ease." And so that was the

problem that the Buddha faced. He faced this idea that although he had grown up in this palace where he was given all these luxuries and had a very indulgent life, he understood that that was not all of life and that he needed to face up to all the different aspects of dukkha. The fact that we grow old, that we get sick, that our loved ones pass away, and that there is a sadness that comes from all of that. There is an unease that comes from thinking about our own mortality and that to address that is one of the fundamental problematics of Buddhism. And in some sense, although some Buddhists practice by chanting, other Buddhists practice by going on pilgrimage, other Buddhists practice by doing meditation, other Buddhists practice by observing certain kinds of ritual (we all have different kinds of ways of practicing Buddhism), it's all for the purpose of somehow addressing and alleviating that basic, fundamental problematic.



Group Discussion

In the Christian tradition, for instance, they have a different problematic – original sin. This idea refers to a condition of separation, a condition of alienation from God. And in the Jewish tradition, they rectify this situation of a fallen human, who has somehow separated from God, by talking about a covenantal relationship between the Jewish people and God. And in the Christian tradition, they talk about Jesus Christ as being the kind of bridge, somebody through whom one reestablishes a correct relationship with God and in Islam you have the idea of Allah and the idea of submission to Allah as a kind

of way to rectify that relationship. But Buddhists, do we believe in original sin? No. That's not our fundamental problematic. Which is why we do have a different teaching about that that has to do with the very nature of life and death, a nature which suffering can at least be part of what we experience and coming to some understand, coming to some acknowledgement of being able to reduce, alleviate, and ultimately liberate ourselves from dukkha. That's the goal. And so, without that problematic, we don't need the Buddha's teaching; the Buddha didn't need enlightenment. But you know, if we don't think of that problematic as an assumption, we don't have to be Buddhists, we could be Christians or something else. So, at some point, we have to acknowledge that there is suffering, but I think and this is where I want to connect it to the environment crisis is that suffering is not just a privatized, internal condition – like "I'm suffering, oh my goodness" – of course, we experience suffering in that way, too, don't we? When my Mom passed away last year, I was very sad. That is a normal part of human life. When a loved one passes away, we feel a loss or we feel something that might be akin to suffering. But what the Buddha is encouraging us to do, I think, is to not just to think about suffering as a privatized, personal, internal thing, but it's something we actually share with our families, with our neighbors, with the broadest meaning of the word "Sangha", with the earth community, with all sentient beings, an important phrase found both in the *Nirvana Sutra* and the *Lotus Sutra*, "All sentient beings." The reason, I think, that Buddhism focuses on that view of sentient beings and all of them is that sentience, the root word in English simply means those beings that can feel, and feel what? Feel suffering and joy. And we human beings are fundamentally are just one, in other words, in the Christian tradition, in *Genesis*, we have that idea of the human being made in the image of God, right? That only the human, not all of God's creatures, but only the human, is made in the image of God. So, in the Christian tradition, there is this idea that the human is the center of the world, that the human is the master of the world, the human can, in *Genesis*, be fruitful and multiply, right? And be in charge of all creatures: animals, plants, the natural world. This is the kind of stewardship model of environmentalism that you can tweak out of *Genesis*.

But in Buddhism, this is not necessarily so. We don't necessarily have to think of the human as the center of the universe. And notions like "all sentient beings" or Zen Master Dogen talks about the mountains and rivers preaching the Dharma, it allows us to think about a world in which it's not anthropocentrism but biocentrism. Our entire biosphere is the same as us, is a part of us, we are a part of it, not separate from it, not made in the image of God, kind of distinct from it, but that the natural world is us. The water that we drank--back there, there is some fruit cut up kindly for us this morning--this becomes us. The rain, the plants, so even if you are a vegetarian, so you don't eat meat, the world of vegetables, the world of animals become a part of us, to sustain us, becomes our bones and marrow, sinew, hair follicles, and the world around us informs our thoughts and ideas and worldviews. So in fact, we are deeply interconnected with the world rather than be separate from it. The human is not above all sentient beings and the entire natural world, but rather we are an integral part of it and the natural world and it is an integral part of who we are, our identity. And I think that...let me now get to the Three Treasures, that's the Buddha, the mission that the Buddha had...in other words, the Buddha had the vision of reality in which we understand our interconnectedness and our shared suffering and ways to transcend that better. And so one of the key insights, I think, that the Buddha has is this vision of interconnectedness. I just also want to remind us that the word "Buddha" itself has this kind of idea of vision. In the Sanskrit "Budh-ha", "Budh" comes from the verb "to awaken" and it's used in sentences when somebody is asleep and when they wake up, "Budh." "Ha" in the Sanskrit is a grammatically-speaking, is called a nominalizer, which makes a basic verb into a noun. So, the Buddha simply means someone, verb into a noun, right, someone who wakes up. A person who is awake and in this sense has an awakening or a vision, a view, about reality. The sense of the first treasure that Buddhism gives to us is some kind of view or vision about the nature of reality. One of the metaphors that we have in our tradition that encapsulates that view is the metaphor or the image that's found in the *Kegon-kyo*, the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, called the jeweled net of Indra. It's an image, you know if the Christians have a kind of creation story in Genesis, we Buddhists don't really have "here's how the world started", but the closest thing we have is

this image called the "jeweled net of Indra" that is found in the *Kegon-kyo*. In it, the god Indra, is said to have created this world by casting a net, a net that extends infinitely in all dimensions, north, south, east, west – the Ten Directions – but infinitely, so it doesn't stop. And the idea is, you know, like a tennis court net with its little knots in the net, in each knot or in each node, there is a jewel, a jewel that is polished and cut in such a way that it acts as if it were a mirror, a mirror that therefore reflects everything else in that net. And because all of the other jewels are doing the same thing, and they are infinite in number, the idea is that if we look into one jewel, one can see the entire universe. One can see all of the other jewels. So, that image is one we have, a vision we inherit from our Buddhist tradition. I don't have anything else around me so I'm going to use this example, we have a PET bottle here full of water. Zen Master Dogen often talks about the preaching of the non-sentient and so the idea that even something like a plastic bottle full of water can preach to us, can give us a Dharma lesson, can tell us something, about the nature of the world and make us free. And so, looking deeply into this PET bottle, the idea is that we can see something greater than a PET bottle, something greater than the functional use of me taking a sip of water from it later, but that we can see the great oceans that transmit through clouds into this bottle of water, that that bottle of water makes up, what is it 70%?, like a great percentage of the human body is water. So, we are connected to those clouds, we're connected to those oceans. This plastic comes from oil and unfortunately it means we are connected to all those wars that go on over oil. It's connected to all the suffering that soldiers experience. This one bottle of water makes us connected to everything else, if we see it in the right way. And that's the invitation the Buddha made to us, to see things in the right way and that's a Buddha, that's awakening. It's an invitation that though we mess up all the time, you know, we don't see things right, it's a constant invitation for us to wake up and see things correctly.

The other aspect or the other teaching that I feel encapsulates this idea of the human being as a part *of*, not apart from, not above, but a part of this eco-system called "Planet Earth" is the teaching of "Bussho" or "Buddha-nature." I mentioned that in the *Lotus Sutra* as well as the *Nirvana Sutra* there are these lines that say "Issai shujo

bussho ari.” or “All sentient beings have Buddha-nature.” So, all beings without exception, that’s the great part about Buddhism, they don’t say just because you’re tall or short or you look good or look bad or you’re dog or whatever, all beings who share this common state of suffering, sentient beings, all sentient beings participate in Buddha-nature. So, human beings are not set apart from all beings. You know there is the famous koan “Does a dog have Buddha-nature?” This points to the idea, that’s a whole different discussion, but points to the idea that animals and plants can have Buddha-nature. Dogen talks about “Somoku jobutsu.” “Even the plants and trees attain Buddhahood.” So, there is a long-standing discussion in the Buddhist tradition that comes out of the Chinese Tiantai tradition as Dogen learned during his time at Mt. Hiei as a Tendai monk, but that idea of the Buddhahood or the Buddha-nature of all beings. And we all equally share in the potential to awaken; we equally share not only in the potential but in the fact of Buddhahood. So, that’s another way to see it, that Dogen shares with us.

The usual way to interpret Buddha-nature is to talk about like a seed that we all have within us, that if it is properly nurtured, if you give it the right sunlight and water, if we nurture our inherent Buddha-nature we will eventually one day be able to blossom into a beautiful Buddha. But Dogen, sometimes he likes to mix things up and give us a different vision. He, I think, goes as far as to suggest that although that is also true, we can also see ourselves as already buddhas and not only ourselves but in fact the entire world, all beings, already are in the state of Buddhahood. And that is less a matter of people doing something, gaining something like enlightenment or Buddhahood, etc., but it’s a matter of changing of our perception when we see somebody who is an enemy suddenly as a buddha, when we see an annoying kid suddenly as the buddha. When we shift our minds like that, that’s when we see the world as the Buddha. So, that’s another, I think, very important aspect of the Buddhist heritage that we inherit is that it gives a vision, an understanding, a worldview, that is what Al Gore is talking about. We need to have a different conception of the world, a different idea about human-nature relationship if we are to truly solve our environmental crisis.



Group Discussion

Let me move on to the Second Treasure, the Dharma. The word “Dharma” of course like the word “Buddha” has a kind of specific or narrow historical meaning as well as a broader meaning. So, we generally think of the Buddha narrowly as the historical person but more broadly, as I mentioned, Buddhahood, somebody who is a wake. Dharma can be thought of in the same way. The word “Dharma” in the narrow sense means the Buddha’s teachings or doctrine. When he taught, how he encouraged us to not only have a vision of the world but to act it out, how to embody it, how to live it out in our daily lives, that’s Dharma. And the word “Dharma” in that narrow sense is referring to all those things that the Buddha teaches us. But in the broader sense, if you look at classical Buddhist texts, the word “Dharma” is often used also to refer simply to reality, the Truth, the way things are, not the way things ought to be or the way we would like things to be, but the ways things actually are. The truth will set you free -- that’s a Buddhist message, too. When we see things the way they actually are, not the way we want them to be or hope they will be, but if we actually see things the way they are, it sets us free. I think that’s another key element to the Buddha’s vision; that it’s, you don’t have a vision just to have a vision, you have a vision so you can become free. That is what Buddha teaches, if we embody, if we choose or care to embody it. And let me get to this idea of embodying it. Among the treasures within the Buddhist canon, we also have Abhidharma, we have the sermons of the Buddha, and we also have a thing called the Vinaya or the rules and regulations that govern, in the first instance, the monks

and nuns lives and in the second instance the lives of laymen and laywomen. And so, from the very first, there is this idea that part of the Buddha's teaching is how to embody the vision we receive, whether it's teachings or through meditation or through our own experience, the way we take them up and actually live them in our lives.

I'm sorry that I keep contrasting Buddhism with Christianity, but it's interesting. We have something to offer not only in terms of vision, a new way of seeing things, to the American public and the world in terms of the environment, but I think we have a unique way of thinking about ethics that is also critical for thinking about environmental problems as well as how we think big social questions in this country. You know, big, hot topics like abortion, euthanasia, all these questions are big ethical questions that we face in our world not only in America, but ones to which Buddhists can contribute. And how do we do that? What is our vision? What is our perspective on ethical questions? The simple answer is that we Buddhists have a situational, relativized system of ethics. And let me explain what I mean. We have a different vision of what it means to be an ethical person than the Christian tradition. For example, what is the first precept? Do not kill. Others include, "Do not lie," "Do not steal," "Do not imbibe in intoxicants." We have lots of different suggestions that are put in the form of precepts for ethical guidelines. And that's the main point that I want to make: these are guidelines. The spirit, I think, of the Buddhist approach to ethics is that we take these principles as guidelines rather than commandments. In the Christian tradition and Jewish tradition, they are commandments. God commands you to do something. Therefore, you have to do it.

Buddhism is always an invitation. I feel one of the great things about the Buddha is that many of his sermons begin with the line "Come and see." The Buddha invites us to come and listen and see. He didn't say just because I say something you've got to believe it. And in fact, there is the famous *Kalama Sutra* where he is talking to a group of people, called the Kalama people, who said "you are this new religious leader, how do we know something that you say is true?" In the famous exchange, he says "You know, just because I say something is true doesn't mean it's true." In the Indian culture of that time, there were the



General Meeting



Group Photo

Hindu scriptures (the Vedas) and the Buddha said, "Just because something's in the Vedas or the Hindu scriptures doesn't mean it's true." He says "Just because I say something is true, it's not true and just because it's in the scripture doesn't mean it's true." And then he says, "Just because lots of wise people say it's true, doesn't mean it's necessarily so. Just because a lot of people say something is true, doesn't mean it's true." The Buddha said that "It's really through your own experience and investigation that you confirm that it is true." So the Buddha-- in terms of thinking about America's religious pluralism-- proposes the idea that we don't have to impose ourselves on other people, and say "either you become Buddhist or we're

going to burn you at the stake.” Or “either you become Buddhist or you’re going to go to hell.” We don’t have to say things like that because our religion is an invitation. It’s an invitation to investigate truth. It’s an invitation to investigate our lives. It’s an invitation to investigate how we relate to each other ethically. And so it is with all of these precepts, do not kill, do not steal, it’s an invitation to think deeply about what that means. Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not lie. And I said our ethics is a situational and relative system of ethics. What I mean by situational or relative is the idea that ... let me give you a concrete example.

All right let’s say, you know, there are these strange people who go berserk with guns and these kind of things. Let’s say this person is really mad at Rev. Daigaku-- this is nothing personal--let’s say somebody is really having a problem with Daigaku sensei, they came in with a gun and we knew that that person was going to shoot Daigaku sensei, although he’s really tall, we managed to hide him back here, and that gunman asks me, “Where is that Rev. Daigaku?” And I say, “I believe he went out those doors.” All right? So, let’s take that as the situation. What did I do? A) I broke a precept. I lied because I said that he had gone out those doors, but B) I kept a different precept because if I had told him the truth, he would be dead. So, I would have broken the precept “do not kill.” In other words, we’re invited by the Buddha to take these precepts in some kind of situational context. In other words, sometimes we have to break one precept to keep another, which means that it’s also not absolutist; it’s a relative style, a relativistic system of ethics.

In the Christian tradition or the Jewish tradition, they talk about the commandments being “written in stone” and it comes from that story in the Old Testament of Moses taking the commandments from God and then inscribing them in rock, in stone. So, we use that expression normally in English, like “The group decided something and now it’s written in stone” and it means simply that it can’t be changed. It’s an absolute principle. It can’t be moved. But in Buddhism, we’re invited to think about precisely the way we may have to move, we may have to be sensitive to how we act vis-à-vis the various precepts and the various considerations that we might give to a situation that is complex. This point is



Keynote Speaker

simply that Buddhism offers an interesting different way to approach matters. And Buddhism gives us the opportunity to think about it, to examine it, to investigate, and to confirm for ourselves in this circumstance this is probably the right way to proceed and this is probably the wrong way to proceed. One could say, “Well, OK, if you can’t keep any precepts perfectly, we can throw ethics out. We can’t live a moral life at all. Or since these things are not absolutely set, we are just going to become nihilists and forget about it and just indulge ourselves.” No, Buddhism suggests the Middle Path that allows us to take into consideration the idea that, on the one hand, we may not be able to live our lives perfectly; we may not be able to uphold all the precepts all the time perfectly, right? But there’s always a balance.

Bodhidharma, the founder of the Zen tradition in China, gives us that wonderful phrase “seven times falling down, eight times get up.” That idea that we may fall off the Path once in a while, and in fact maybe quite often, when we practice meditation, we notice that, right? We have our backs straight, we have our hands in the mudra, but sometimes as we fall asleep, we start to get out of shape. Sometimes when we get sleepy, our eyes...we have all experienced falling off the Path, but what we are invited to do is get back straight again. Make that back straight, wake those eyes up, get back in the present moment. And that’s what, I think, the Buddhist path allows us to do is to fall off again, but know that we can come back. To know that these guidelines, these principles, that are given to us...we are as Buddhists lucky enough to have these precepts that act as guideposts rather than commandments written in stone.

(To be continued.)

Shobogenzo Zazenshin - A Free Translation (3)

Rev. Issho Fujita, Leader of the Masenkai

The next thing is something that we all must thoroughly acknowledge. (If we are stuck on what we see and are caught by our assumptions), regardless of the fact that we are meeting buddha from morning until evening, we will not be able to recognize buddha even though we see buddha and we will not be able to understand buddha either. In the same way, even though we see water, we won’t truly know it; even if we see mountains, we won’t be able to truly understand them. Even though the true nature of water and mountains and the self are not different, we only look at such things as objects dualistically with our discriminative mind. If you hastily

assume that things and phenomena before our eyes are not doorways leading to profound truth, then it isn’t possible to say that you are studying the Way of Buddha. You mustn’t imprudently assume that there is no entryway within the task named “polishing a tile” into becoming buddha.

Nangaku said, “Polishing (itself is) making a mirror.” (Dogen Zenji didn’t interpret these words to mean “polishing to make a mirror,” but rather that the action of polishing is, in other words, “making a mirror.”) We must study the truth of these words and clarify them. In this expression, “polishing (is) making a mirror,” there is certainly a legitimate logic. The logic of the “*genjokoan*” penetrates these words with the implication that the reality in front of us is absolute truth. It certainly isn’t a fabrication, empty delusion, or a far fetched allusion. In “polishing a tile is making a mirror,” even though tiles are tiles and mirrors are mirrors, what matters most must be the action of “polishing.” If we study the logic of “polishing” with all our might, then we must know that there are many diversified examples of “polishing.” So, it isn’t good to make narrow or shallow assumptions based on particular points of view. Speaking of mirrors, there are ancient mirrors (*kokyo*, Seppo’s word) and there are bright mirrors (*meikyo*, Huineng’s word). In any case, however, they have all been made into mirrors by polishing a tile. If we don’t know that mirrors are made by polishing a tile, we wouldn’t have the Dharma teachings of the Buddhist Ancestors. We also wouldn’t be able to see and hear them speaking.

Baso said, “Since polishing a tile itself is making a mirror, it is never possible to get a complete mirror as a result that is separate from the polishing.” So polishing a tile is completely polishing a tile and that is thorough, without borrowing any other resources. For that reason, polishing a tile is independent and self-sufficient as polishing a tile and nothing else (i.e. making a mirror) is necessary; there is no room for such a thing. I should add that in polishing a tile, realizing a mirror is already there. Realizing a mirror is nothing but realizing a mirror and in between these two things (polishing a tile and realizing a mirror), there isn’t the slightest gap. The polishing of the tile itself IS realization of the mirror and this no-gap-ness is called “instantaneous.”

Nangaku said, “It’s just as you say. In the same way that polishing a tile is complete and there is no need to wait for realizing a mirror, it is good to leave zazen as it is. There is no need to wait to become a buddha. Since zazen itself is nothing other than becoming a buddha, there is no more room for adding ‘becoming buddha’ to it.” We can clearly understand through these words that zazen is totally content only with zazen. It is independent and unaccompanied by anything. It is absolute. This is the logic that zazen does not become zazen by depending on becoming buddha. To put it the other way around, becoming buddha is absolute and is not something to be attained by means of zazen. Consequently, the point clearly comes out here that there is no connection between zazen and becoming buddha.

Baso said, “Everything as-it-is is the truth itself.” (We must be careful not to understand this as a simple question asking about Nangaku’s words for the teaching. He is not asking, “What, then, should I do?”) Thus, Baso’s words appear to be an earnest question about here (= zazen =polishing a tile), but he is also asking about there (= becoming buddha =realizing a mirror). Figuratively speaking, it is like a close friend meeting a close friend. In other words, these two people are not separate and there is something that continues on between them. What is a close friend to us (= zazen) is also a close friend to him (=becoming buddha). And so, “everything as-it-is is the truth itself” indicates that “zazen” (polishing a tile) and becoming a buddha (realizing a mirror) appear at once (simultaneously, instantaneously).

Nangaku says, “I’m going to try to explain as best I can your wonderful expression, ‘Everything as-it-is is the truth itself’. To sit in zazen is like a person riding in a cart. (This is a metaphor to explain that sitting zazen and becoming buddha are one thing). Riding in the cart, that itself is the important thing. There is no connection between becoming buddha and whether the cart moves forward or not. As far as you are riding in the cart, it’s all right to hit the cart and it’s alright to hit the ox.” (Most people understand Nangaku’s words as a question to mean that even if you practice zazen, in the case that you really are not able to attain satori, should we make more effort in the bodily practice of zazen or to train the

mind? So they understand Nangaku to mean that we must stop being attached to zazen and that he was encouraging some sort of mental practice. But that isn’t what Dogen Zenji thought.) Here, he says “the cart does not move”. Actually whether the cart moves or not, both are “what is it?” (=nothing to say) For example, is water flowing the same as the cart moving? Is water not flowing a cart moving? It is possible to say that flowing water is not moving, but we mustn’t overlook that we could also say that water moving is not flowing. The reason is that flowing is the original nature of water and so there is a logic for being able to say it as “not moving” (water doesn’t change its nature) and there is also a reason for saying that water moving (= flowing) is not flowing (=not flowing, in other words, not moving).

(In this case, water flowing/cart moving are zazen, polishing a tile and water not flowing/ the cart not moving correspond with becoming buddha and making a mirror). In this way, if we study deeply the words of Nangaku, “the cart doesn’t move” (this is usually read as “if the cart doesn’t move,” but should be read as “already the cart doesn’t move”), then we must accept that there is “not moving” and we must also accept there isn’t not moving. It isn’t possible to line these two things (the cart moving and the cart not moving) up and discuss about them. (They are completely mutual and complementary. If one side exists, the other side disappears. It isn’t possible to have the question: how would they relate if they were both together?). This depends on “time.” At the “time” when the cart does not move, we can’t see the cart moving. At the “time” when the cart moves, the cart not moving hides. If the time is different, the names are different. In this way, the expression “already it does not move,” doesn’t only state about not moving one-sidedly. We mustn’t overlook the fact that the meaning of both the cart moving and the cart not moving are included in this expression.

(To be continued.)

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

Lecture (2)

Rev. Shohaku Okumura

Director, Soto Zen Buddhism International Center

Whole Body Seeing Emptiness (continued) (Text)

“The time of Avalokiteshvara bodhisattva practicing profound prajna paramita is the whole body clearly seeing the emptiness of all five aggregates. The five aggregates are forms, sensations, perceptions, predilections, and consciousness. This is the five-fold prajna. Clear seeing is itself prajna.”

Last time I discussed the reason why Dogen Zenji inserts “whole body” into the first sentence of the Heart Sutra. Now, I would like to talk about the meaning of this sentence as a whole. First, I would like to compare the original sentence in the *Heart Sutra* and Dogen’s paraphrase.

The *Heart Sutra*: “Avalokiteshvara bodhisattva, when deeply practicing prajna paramita, clearly saw that all five aggregates are empty and thus relieved all suffering.”

Dogen’s paraphrase: *The time of Avalokiteshvara bodhisattva practicing profound prajna paramita is the whole body clearly seeing the emptiness of all five aggregates.*

When we read the *Heart Sutra*, we think this is a clear sentence, we can understand what it means. Even if we don’t really understand who Avalokiteshvara is or what the prajna paramita is or what the five aggregates are or what to be empty means, we can understand that someone whose name is Avalokiteshvara was practicing this thing named prajna paramita, and at the time this person is doing this thing, the person clearly sees that these things called five aggregates are empty. The person whose name is Avalokiteshvara is the subject of the verb “practice” and prajna paramita is the object of the action done by that person. And the subject also “sees” the object which is “all five aggregates,” and understands that these five things are empty. This very understandable sentence structure is the problem for Dogen and also for

us to really understand the truth the *Heart Sutra* is trying to show us. We see the subject Avalokiteshvara and the objects prajna paramita and five aggregates. And the subject practices the object and the subject sees the objects. Although this is what the sentence is saying, there is no misunderstanding in it. When we read in this way we miss the truth the person or people who wrote the *Heart Sutra* wish to point out to us.

First of all, there is no Avalokiteshvara separate from the practice of prajna paramita. We usually think *prajna* (wisdom) is a kind of device that helps us to see the reality we usually cannot see. When we have some problem with our eyesight, we use a pair of glasses. For the past several years, I’ve needed a pair of reading glasses to read books. We think wisdom is the same as a pair of reading glasses. Without them, I cannot see what is written but with the help of that device, I can see and read the sentences. However, Buddha or Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, the prajna and the reality, are one and the same thing. And also there is no Avalokiteshvara besides the five aggregates. Avalokiteshvara is nothing other than the five aggregates. That is what “emptiness” means. Actually, the five aggregates see the five aggregates themselves and understand the five aggregates are empty. The wholeness of subject, action, and object is itself the practice of prajna paramita.

We commonly understand that practice of zazen is a method to cultivate wisdom (prajna). Once we attain that wisdom, “we” can “see” “the true reality of the five aggregates” that is “empty.” To understand this way is completely against the reality the *Heart Sutra* shows us using the word prajna and emptiness. The subject of the action (doer) and action (doing) are identical. There is no runner beside the action of running within emptiness.

Two Versions of the Heart Sutra

There are two Sanskrit versions of the *Heart Sutra*. One is the shorter version, which is the one we usually chant. Another is a little longer. In *The Perfect Wisdom – The Short Prajnaparamita Texts* (translated by Edward Conze), this version is called, The “Heart of Perfect Wisdom in 25 Lines.” This version is longer than the shorter version we are familiar because it has the introduction before Avalokiteshvara started to talk, and also the concluding part after the Mantra, “Gate Gate ---.” In the

introduction, it describes the situation where Avalokiteshvara talks with Shariputra.

At the time, Shakyamuni Buddha was staying on Vulture Peak together with many monks and bodhisattvas. The Buddha taught the discourse on dharma called “deep splendor.” After finishing the talk, he entered Samadhi. At the same time, “Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva coursed in the current of the deep perfection of wisdom, he looked down from on high, and he saw the five skandhas, and he surveyed them as empty in their own-being.” Then Shariputra, through the Buddha’s might, asked Avalokiteshvara, “How should a son or daughter of good family train themselves if they want to course in the current of this deep perfection of wisdom?” Avalokiteshvara then started to talk to Shariputra. For me, this is very important. We should understand that Avalokiteshvara is answering the question of Shariputra asked through the Buddha’s might. And the Buddha is in Samadhi. Actually this conversation is done within the Buddha’s Samadhi.

I think that what Avalokiteshvara is talking about is our zazen practice. When we sit in zazen, and let go of thought, or in my teacher, Uchiyama Roshi’s expression, opening the hand of thought, the sitter and sitting are one thing. The five aggregates are just simply being the five aggregates without doing anything and without expecting anything. Within this zazen, emptiness is revealed or rather this zazen is simply emptiness itself. It is not a matter that when we practice zazen (action), the sitter (subject) attains prajna (wisdom) and is enabled to see the truth of emptiness of the five aggregates (objects). The sitter, the five aggregates, prajna, and emptiness are simply one reality.

“Time” is “Being”

In Dogen’s paraphrase, the subject of the sentence is “the time.” We need to remember Dogen’s insight on “time.” In *Shobogenzo Uji* (Being-Time), he said, “The time being” means time, just as it is, is being, and being is all time.” What Dogen expresses here is that “the time” is nothing other than Avalokiteshvara is the five aggregates, and that is sitting. This is not only about Avalokiteshvara’s zazen, or Buddha’s zazen, our zazen is the same. Zazen is itself prajna that actualizes the emptiness of five aggregates. And that is “the time.” I think Dogen makes the first sentence of the *Heart Sutra* the precise expression of this undivided,

seamless reality of time, being, space, and wisdom expressed within our practice of zazen using nothing other than our own body and mind (five aggregates).

Five Aggregates Are the Five-fold Prajna

The five aggregates are forms, sensations, perceptions, predilections, and consciousness. This is the five-fold prajna. The five aggregates are our own body and mind. The first is *rupa* or material, which is usually translated as form. In the case of human life, *rupa* refers to our body, including the five material sense-organs such as the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body and their objects in the external world. And the other four aggregates: sensations, perceptions, predilections and consciousness, are the functions of our mind.

The second is sensations (*vedana*), which are all the sensations caused by stimulation that we receive when we have contact with external objects through our sense-organs. They can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. The third is perceptions (*samjina*), which create certain images of the objects from the sensations we receive whether physical or mental. The fourth is predilections (*samskara*), which is usually translated as formation. All volitional activities that create karma are included in this category. The fifth is consciousness (*vijnana*), which is what makes distinctions among the objects of the six sense organs and recognizes them.

What we call the “self” is only a conventional name given to the collection of these five aggregates. They are all impermanent and constantly changing. Often the analogy of a waterfall is used. These five aggregates are like the water constantly flowing. Besides the water and the shape of the land on which water is falling, there is no such thing called a “waterfall.” Traditionally, these five aggregates are considered to be a cause of suffering. Although there is no fixed self beside the collection of five aggregates, somehow we grasp these aggregates as “I” and attach ourselves to it. The Buddha said, “These five aggregates of attachment are *dukkha* (suffering.)”

If we know this traditional understanding of five aggregates, what Dogen is saying here is amazing. These five aggregates are five-fold prajna. Of course what he meant is that in our zazen, using those five aggregates, and letting go of thoughts, our zazen is itself prajna. Here,

these five aggregates are not the objects of our attachments or desire. We free our hands of grasping. Then the five aggregates are simply five aggregates being freed from our attachment. Five aggregates are just being five aggregates. This is the time that five aggregates are nothing other than prajna itself. It reveals impermanence, selflessness (anartman), and interdependent origination, and emptiness. This is the basis of Dogen's teaching on zazen. Using our own body and mind, the five aggregates can be the source of suffering. When we practice zazen, then these aggregates are themselves zazen and Buddhadharmas. In *Shobogenzo Zanmai-O-zanmai* (King of Samadhi), Dogen Zenji wrote, "We sit in kekkafuza (full-lotus position) with this human skin, flesh, bones, and marrow, actualizing the king of samadhis."

This zazen of letting go of all conditioned thoughts which come from karmic consciousness is itself clear-seeing. And this clear seeing is itself *prajna*. It isn't that we as a deluded human being become free from delusion and attain *prajna* and then we awake and clearly see the truth as an object. Letting go of thought, moment by moment, is itself clear-seeing.

(Text)

To unfold and manifest this essential truth, [the Heart Sutra] states that "form is emptiness; emptiness is form." Form is nothing but form; emptiness is nothing but emptiness -- one hundred blades of grass, ten thousand things.

Here, Dogen introduces one of the most well-known phrases in the *Heart Sutra*, "form is emptiness; emptiness is form. (shiki soku ze ku, ku soku ze shiki; 色即是空、空即是色)" However, he makes another twist. The *Heart Sutra* says, "O Shariputra, form does not differ from emptiness; Emptiness does not differ from form. That which is form is emptiness; that which is emptiness is form. The same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses, and consciousness."

The five elements of our life are all empty and emptiness is those five aggregates. The phrase "form is emptiness and emptiness is form" is a repetition. If we interpret these sentences with simple logic it says "A is B and B is A." Since A is not different from B and B is not different from A, A is B and B is A. It is very simple. But the people who wrote this sutra wanted to convey

something more complex. In the larger version of the *Heart Sutra*, this part is: "There are the five skandhas and those he sees in their own beings as empty. Here, O Shariputra, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form. Emptiness is no other than form. Form is no other than emptiness. Whatever is form that is emptiness. Whatever is emptiness that is form."

The first sentence says that there are five skandhas (aggregates), and they are empty. This sentence is very important to our understanding of the *Heart Sutra*. In some of the very earliest Buddhist writings such as the Pali Nikaya, it says that nothing has substance. In the case of human beings this means there is no ego as a fixed independent entity. The Buddha said that there is no ego and we are only collections of five aggregates. Ego (*atman*) means something unchanging and singular which owns and operates this body and mind. The Buddha taught there is no such thing. In order to express the reality of no-atman (*anatman*) he said that only the five aggregates exist and these various elements form the temporal being as a person. But later the Abhidharma philosophers thought that the ego or atman doesn't exist but that the five aggregates really do exist. They analyzed the five aggregates into seventy five elements (*dharmas*) in the *Abhidharma Kosa*. A particular combination of different elements makes this being exist as a unique person. When even one of the elements changes, this body and mind must change or even disappears.

It is like the atomic theory. Science says this body, desk, or notebook can be divided. When we divide it into smaller and smaller pieces we eventually come to something which cannot be further divided. Greek philosophers called this the atom. You cannot divide it any further. Until recently, people thought that the atom could not be split, but now we know it can. The atom is not the ultimate particle any more. The *Heart Sutra* says the same thing about human beings. It says that each being is made up of five aggregates, and yet these five aggregates are empty. This is a criticism of the Abhidharma philosophy which said the dharmas that are the elements of all beings exist as substance forever. That is the historical context of this statement.

Mahayana Buddhists criticized this idea. They see the five aggregates are empty. The aggregates are a matter of

causes and conditions and have no existence independent from other things. Nothing exists except in relationship with all other beings. This basic teaching of Buddha is called interdependent origination.

Nagarjuna's two truths

One of the greatest Mahayana Buddhist masters, Nagarjuna, wrote about two levels of truth. Dharma as taught by the Buddha is not some kind of objective reality. It is the reality of our own life based on two truths, the relative truth and the absolute truth. He said, "Those who don't know the distinction between the two truths cannot understand the profound nature of Buddha's teaching." In order to understand Buddha's wisdom, we have to clearly understand this distinction between absolute and relative truth. Nagarjuna continues, "Without relying on everyday common practices..." Common practices means the relative truth, the way we commonly think in our day to day lives using words, concepts and logic. For instance, "I am a man. My name is Shohaku Okumura. I am a Buddhist priest. I was born in Japan and came to America, ---and so on." This is our common way of explaining who we are. When I say that I am Japanese that means I'm not American or French. My name is Shohaku Okumura that means I'm not someone else. I'm a man that means I'm not a woman. These are relative.

Nagarjuna says, "The absolute truth cannot be expressed without relying on relative truth." The absolute truth is beyond words, beyond relativity. That is emptiness. He says, "Without approaching the absolute truth *nirvana* cannot be attained." As long as we stay only in the conventional way of thinking, we cannot move toward *nirvana*. Nirvana is the most peaceful foundation of our life. In the realm of relative thinking, this body and mind, this person changes with the situation, with each new encounter. We are always thinking about how to behave in this situation, always adjusting ourselves. We begin to compare ourselves with others and compete with them. There is no final peacefulness in that way of life. We have to be very careful, to defend ourselves, or sometimes be aggressive in order to keep up with other people. It's a restless way of life. Nirvana is beyond the relativity of subject and object.

Nagarjuna continues, "We declare that whatever is relational origination is *shunyata* (emptiness)." Relational origination is another translation of interdependent origination. Everything is interconnected and because of certain causes and conditions this person exists for a while. Because of relational origination nothing exists independently. This is the meaning of emptiness. The elements of this provisional existence are called the five aggregates. The existence of the five aggregates and emptiness contradict each other. If the five aggregates exist, there is no emptiness and if all is really emptiness there are no five aggregates. This simple sentence in the *Heart Sutra* is an important point to understand.

Form is one of the five aggregates. In the case of human beings, it means our bodies. To say this body is empty means it looks like existence but doesn't actually exist. In a sense, "Form is emptiness" means form is not form. "Emptiness" means there is no form and "form" means there is form. This is not A is B but rather A is non-A. This is not simple logic at all. Nagarjuna says, "We declare that whatever is relational origination is *shunyata*. It is a provisional name."

All five aggregates are provisional names; names without substance. They are thought constructions created by our minds. Shohaku is a provisional name. A priest is a provisional name. Japanese is also a provisional name. Nagarjuna says, "For it is a provisional name for the mutuality of beings." "For the mutuality of beings" means nothing can exist by itself but it can exist only in relationship with other beings. And he said, "*Indeed it is the middle path.*" Everything is empty, a provisional name, that exists temporarily as a collection of the five aggregates. And even the five aggregates are empty. This is the middle path.

Nagarjuna said there are two levels of truth: absolute truth, the *shunyata* and conventional truth or provisional being, a collection of the five aggregates. We must see this reality from both sides. We must see it as emptiness and as a provisional name for the collection of the elements. This is the middle path. By seeing things from both sides, we can see reality without being caught up in either side. The *Heart Sutra* says, "*Form is not different from emptiness.*" This means form is a provisional name. This

person Shohaku Okumura is just a provisional name and doesn't actually exist. That means emptiness. Therefore a form is not different from emptiness. This is one way of seeing. This is negation of form. This being looks like it exists but it doesn't. By negating this being, we become free from attachment to this body and mind. This is the most important point. If we don't see the reality of emptiness we cannot become free from clinging to this tentative being defined by relative concepts. Through the wisdom of seeing this being as empty and impermanent, we can be free from clinging. This is the meaning of "form is emptiness." To see that form is emptiness means to negate attachment to this collection of five aggregates. Even though we cling to this body and mind, sooner or later it is scattered. If we really see the reality of emptiness we become free from ego attachment. This is the meaning of the sentence, "*Form doesn't differ from emptiness.*" This is the way to negate the relative way of seeing things and enable us to open our eyes to absolute reality.

It is not enough to become free from attachment to this body and mind. Once we actually see the absolute reality that is emptiness we have to return to conventional reality. That is the meaning of "*Emptiness does not differ from form.*" When we really see the emptiness, we become free from this body and mind. That is okay but then how shall we live? We cannot live within the absolute truth because there is no way to make choices. To make choices we have to define who we are and what we want to do. To accomplish things, to go somewhere, we have to make choices. If we have no direction, there is no way to go. In order to live out our day-to-day lives we have to come back to the relative truth.

We could become irresponsible. Freedom and irresponsibility can be the same thing. But Buddha's compassion means to be free from attachment and yet responsible to everything. Through wisdom we see that everything is empty. Through compassion we come back to the conventional truth. We must think, "How can I help others?" This is what Buddha taught. To be responsible to whatever situation surrounds us, we have to become free from emptiness. We have to come back to the relative truth of day-to-day activities and take care of the things with which we are involved.

Therefore this is not just a formal, simple logic, A is B and B is A. In order to say "form is emptiness" we have to negate this body and mind. In order to understand that "emptiness is form" we have to negate the emptiness. To negate means to let go. Letting go of thought means to become free from either side. Then we can see the reality from both sides without being attached to either. The wisdom of Avalokiteshvara sees the middle way which includes both sides. It is not something between this side and that side. To walk on the middle path is to do things seeing the reality from both sides, relative truth and absolute truth. In a sense, we simultaneously negate and affirm both sides. Letting go of thought means to become free from either way of seeing things and just be in the middle (reality).

Form Is Form; Emptiness is Emptiness

According to Dogen, zazen, sitting in this posture and letting go of thought, is itself Buddha's wisdom, prajna. Prajna is not a particular state of mind or way of thinking. To express that middle path, Dogen twists the expression in the *Heart Sutra* and says, "Form is form, emptiness is emptiness. (*shiki ze shiki, ku soku ku, 色是色、空即空*)." When we say, "Form is emptiness," there is still separation between two things or concepts; form and emptiness, or between relative truth and absolute truth. And we try to make these two things into one by putting them together. When we really see the middle path, we don't need to say, "Form is emptiness or Emptiness is form." If form is truly emptiness, when we say "form," emptiness is already there. We don't need to say, "Form and emptiness are the same." When we say so, we are still comparing form and emptiness and thinking these two are one. This is still a relative way of thinking. Thus, Dogen says, "Form is form and emptiness is emptiness." This is our practice of zazen based on Mahayana philosophy. Both form and emptiness are there at the same time; however, because these are completely one, these never meet each other.

And this is not true only of our body and mind. *One hundred blades of grass, ten thousand things*, each and everything in the universe is *prajna*. They are all expressing the true reality of all beings; impermanence, egolessness (without substance) and interdependent origination. All beings are Buddhadharma as Dogen says at the very beginning of the *Genjo-koan*.

Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma

Book 61

Song of the Dragon

Ryūgin

Translated by Carl Bielefeldt

INTRODUCTION

This fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō* was composed in the winter of 1243, at a small temple at Yamashibu, in the province of Echizen (modern Fukui prefecture). It occurs as book 61 in the 75-fascicle redaction of the *Shōbōgenzō* and as book 51 in the 60-fascicle redaction.

The text, one of the shortest in the *Shōbōgenzō*, represents a commentary on two sayings on the phrase, “the song of the dragon in the dried tree”—a common Zen metaphor for vitality within repose (or the spiritual functions of a Zen master), reflected in similar expressions in our text: “the roar of the lion in the skull,” “the eyeball in the skull,” “the pregnant column.” Dōgen begins his comments by distinguishing the “dried tree” in these sayings from the common phrase “dried tree and dead ashes,” often used to represent a state of mental quiescence. Unlike such a state, Dōgen says, the “dried tree” of the buddhas and ancestors can “meet the spring” and “sprout.” This “sprouting” is “the song of the dragon,” and it is precisely the state of being “dried” that enables one to sing it. He concludes his brief remarks by identifying the Zen masters’ talk about “the song of the dragon” with the countless tunes sung by the dragon.

This translation is based on the edition of the text in Kawamura Kōdō, *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, volume 2 (1993), pp. 151-154. A more fully annotated version appears on the website of the Soto Zen Text Project, at <http://scbs.stanford.edu/sztp3>. Other English renderings of this work can be found in Kōsen Nishiyama and John Stevens, “The Roar of a Dragon,” *Shōbōgenzō*, volume 1 (1975), pp. 111-113; Yuho Yokoi, “A Mysterious Sound Made by the Wind Blowing round a Dead Tree,” *The Shobo-genzo* (1986), pp. 707-710; Francis Cook, “Dragon Song,” *Sounds of the Valley Streams* (1989), pp. 97-100; Thomas Cleary, “The Dragon Howl,” *Rational Zen: The*

Mind of Dōgen Zenji (1992), pp. 104-107; Gudo Nishijima and Chodo Cross, “The Moaning of Dragons,” *Master Dogen’s Shobogenzo*, Book 3 (1997), pp. 227-231; and Hubert Nearman, “On the Roar of the Dragon,” *The Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching* (2007), pp. 741-745.

Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma

Book 61

Song of the Dragon

(Ryūgin)

Once a monk asked the Chan Master Ciji of Mt. Touzi from Shuzhou [i.e., Touzi Datong (819-914)], “Is there the song of the dragon in the dried tree?”

The master said, “I say there’s the roar of the lion in the skull.”

Talk of “dried trees and dead ashes” is originally a teaching of the alien ways [of non-Buddhists]. Nevertheless, there should be a big difference between the “dried tree” spoken of by the alien ways and the “dried tree” spoken of by the buddhas and ancestors. While the alien ways talk of “dried trees,” they do not know “dried trees,” much less do they hear “the song of the dragon.” The alien ways think that the “dried tree” is a rotted tree; they study that it cannot “meet the spring.”¹

The “dried trees” that the buddhas and ancestors speak of is the study of “the ocean drying up.” The ocean drying up is the tree drying out; the tree drying out is “meeting the spring.”² The tree not moving is “dried.” The present mountain trees, ocean trees, sky trees, and the rest—these are the “dried tree.” The germination of a sprout is the “song of the dragon in the dried tree”; though it may be a hundred, thousand, myriad in circumference, it is the progeny of the dried tree. The mark, nature, substance, and power of “dried” is “a dried post” and “not a dried post,” spoken of by the buddhas and ancestors.³ There are trees of mountains and valleys; there are trees of paddies and villages. The trees of mountains and valleys are known in the world as pines and cypress; the trees of paddies and villages are known in

the world as humans and devas. “The leaves are spread based on the root” — this is called the buddhas and ancestors; “root and branch return to the source” — this is our study.⁴ Being like this is the dried tree’s long dharma body, the dried tree’s short dharma body. One who is not a dried tree does not make the song of the dragon; one who is not a dried tree does not lose the song of the dragon. “How many springs has it met without changing its mind?”—this is the song of the dragon entirely dried. Though it may not be versed in the notes of the scale, the notes of the scale are the second or third sons of the song of the dragon.⁴

Nevertheless, this monk’s saying, “is there the song of the dragon in the dried tree?” is the first appearance of the question in countless æons; it is the appearance of a topic. Touzi’s saying, “I say there’s the roar of the lion in the skull” is “what’s been concealed?” It is “never ceasing to humble oneself and promote others”; it is “skulls fill the fields.”⁵

A monk once asked the Great Master Xideng of Xiangyan zi [i.e., Xiangyan Zhixian (d. 898)], “What is the way?”

The master said, “The dragon song in the dried tree.”

The monk said, “I don’t understand.”

The master said, “The eyeball in the skull.”

Later, a monk asked Shishuang [i.e., Shishuang Qingzhu (807-888)], “What is the dragon song in the dried tree?”

Shuang said, “Still harboring joy.”

The monk said, “What is the eyeball in skull?”

Shuang said, “Still harboring consciousness.”

Again, a monk asked Caoshan [I.e., Caoshan Benzhi (840-901)], “What is the dragon song in the dried tree?”

Shan said, “The blood vessel not severed.”

The monk said, “What is the eyeball in the skull?”

Shan said, “Not entirely dried up.”

The monk said, “Well, can anyone hear it?”

Shan said, “On the whole earth, there isn’t one who can’t hear it.”

The monk said, “Well, what passage does the dragon sing?”

Shan said, “I don’t know what passage it is.

Everyone who hears it forfeits his life.”⁶

The hearer and singer spoken of here are not equal to the singer of the dragon’s song; this tune is the dragon’s singing.⁷ “In the dried tree,” “in the skull”—these are not about inside or outside, not about self or other; they are the present and the past. “Still harboring joy” is a further “horn growing on the head”; “still harboring consciousness” is “skin entirely shed.”⁸

Caoshan’s saying, “the blood vessel not severed,” is speaking without avoidance; it is “turning the body in the stream of words.”⁹ “Not entirely dried up” is “when the ocean dries up,” it does not entirely [dry] to the bottom. Since “not entirely” is “drying up,” there is “drying up” beyond “drying up.” His saying, “can anyone hear it?” is like saying, “is there anyone who can’t?” About “on the whole earth, there isn’t one who can’t hear it,” we should ask further: leaving aside “there isn’t one who can’t hear it,” when there isn’t any whole earth, where is the song of the dragon? Speak! Speak! “Well, what passage does the dragon cry?” should be made a question. The crying dragon is itself raising its voice and bringing it up within the mud, is breathing it out within its nostrils. “I don’t know what passage it is” is a dragon within the passage. “Everyone who hears it loses his life”: what a pity!

This song of the dragon of Xiangyan, Shishuang, and Caoshan forms clouds and forms water. It does not talk about the way; it does not talk about the eyeball or skull: it is just a thousand tunes, ten thousand tunes of the song of the dragon. “Still harboring joy” is “the croaking of frogs”; “still harboring consciousness” is “the murmuring of worms.” By these, “the blood vessel is not severed,” “the bottle gourd succeeds the bottle gourd.” Since it is “not entirely dried up,” the columns conceive and give birth, the lanterns face the lanterns.¹⁰

Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma
The Song of the Dragon
Book 61

Presented to the assembly twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month of the first year of Kangen (*mizunoto-u*) [i.e., 1243], beneath Yamashibu, in the domain of Etsu

Copied this on the fifth day of the third month of the second year of Kōan [i.e., 1279], at Eiheiiji

Song of the Dragon
(*Ryūgin*)

NOTES

1. The expression “dried trees and dead ashes” (or, as we might say, “dead wood and cold ashes”) is regularly used in Zen texts, often in a perjorative sense, to indicate an immobile state of meditation. This use goes back to a passage in the Daoist classic *Zhuang zi*.
2. The phrase “the ocean drying up” reflects a saying, drawn from a verse by the poet Du Xunhe (846-907), that occurs often in Zen literature and in Dōgen’s writings: “When the ocean dries up, you finally see the bottom; when a person dies, you do not know his mind.”
3. The expressions “a dried post” and “not a dried post” come from a saying by Sushan Guangren (or Kuangren, 837-909):

Sushan addressed the assembly, saying, “Before the Xiantong years [860-873], I understood things in the vicinity of the dharma body; after the Xiantong years, I understood things beyond the dharma body.”
Yunmen asked, “What are things in the vicinity of the dharma body?”
The master said, “A dried post.”
[Yunmen] asked, “What are things beyond the dharma body?”
The master said, “Not a dried post.”
4. “The leaves are spread based on the root”; “root and branch return to the source”: From the famous poem *Cantong qi*, by Shitou Xichen (700-790). “Long dharma body”; “short dharma body”: From the Zen saying, “the long one is a long dharma body; the short one is a short dharma body.” “How many springs has it met without changing its mind?”: From a verse by Damei Fachang (752-839): “Broken dried tree keeping to the cold forest; how many springs has it met without changing its mind?”
5. “What’s been concealed?” reflects another saying of Touzi: “[Someone] asked, ‘What is the body hidden within flames?’ The master said, ‘What’s been concealed?’” Similarly, “Never ceasing to subdue oneself and promote others” recalls Touzi’s response to a question: “[Someone] asked, ‘The Seven Buddhas are the disciples of Mañjuśrī. Does Mañjuśrī have a master?’ The master said, ‘To talk this way is just like humbling yourself and promoting another.’” “Skulls fill the fields” is a Zen expression usually lamenting “dead” learning; here, most likely ironic praise for Touzi’s remark on the skull.
6. “The blood vessel” (or “vital artery”) is a standard Zen expression for the lineage of the buddhas and ancestors.

7. A tentative translation of a passage subject to interpretation. The sentence might also be read, “the hearing and singing they seek to speak of here is not equal to the singing of the singing dragon.” The antecedent of “this tune” is unclear; it could refer either to the quoted passage or to Dōgen’s comment on it—or to neither.
8. A “horn growing on the head” is a colloquial Chinese expression usually indicating something impossible or worthless, as in the Zen saying “where wisdom doesn’t reach, speech is prohibited; speech is a horn growing on the head.” “Skin entirely shed” may reflect a saying of Yaoshan Weiyān (745-828): “Skin entirely shed, there’s just a single reality.”
9. The expression “turning the body in the stream of words” combines two common Zen images, one positive, the other negative: “to turn the body,” in the sense of a spiritual “turning”; and “to turn (or be turned or controlled),” as in the saying, “even the immeasurably great person turns round in the stream of words.”
10. “The croaking of frogs” and “the murmuring of worms” are from a verse by Dōgen’s teacher Tiantong Rujing (1163-1228):
Heavy rain for days on end,
Opening up to great clear skies.
Frogs croak and worms murmur.
The old buddhas have never past away;
They show their diamond eyes.
Drat!
Entanglements, entanglements.

The expression “the bottle gourd succeeds the bottle gourd” is similarly a variation on Rujing’s saying, “the bottle gourd vine entwines the bottle gourd.” The “columns” and “lanterns” mentioned here are regularly used in Zen writing as synecdoches for the monastery (and, more broadly, for the concrete reality of the immediate surroundings); “columns pregnant,” also commonly found in Zen texts, seem to function rather like the “dragon song in the dried tree” to suggest vitality within a seemingly lifeless object.



Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma Book 62

The Intention of the Ancestral Master's Coming from the West (*Soshi seirai i*)

Translated by Carl Bielefeldt

INTRODUCTION

This fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō* was composed early in 1244, probably at Kippōji, the monastery in the province of Echizen (modern Fukui prefecture) where Dōgen was residing at the time. It occurs as book 62 of the 75-fascicle redaction of the *Shōbōgenzō* and book 52 in the 60-fascicle redaction.

Like several of the *Shōbōgenzō* texts from this period, the work is rather short. It focuses on a single episode in the Zen literature: the famous problem, posed by the ninth-century Zen Master Xiangyan Zhixian, of the person, hanging by his teeth from the branch of a tree over a thousand-foot precipice, who is asked the intention of Bodhidharma's bringing the Zen tradition to China from India. Though this problem was very well known and often discussed by subsequent masters, Dōgen explicitly rejects the commentarial tradition as rarely having anything significant to say about the problem. At the end of his piece, he does, however, offer a remark on one comment, by the eleventh-century figure Xuedou Chongxian.

Dōgen begins his own comments with the advice that the problem should be addressed by thinking of "not thinking" and thinking of "non-thinking" while "sitting fixidly" on the same meditation cushion as its author, Xiangyan—a reference to the famous statement, much admired by Dōgen, of Yaoshan Weiyan (745-828) that his practice was "sitting fixidly," "thinking of not-thinking." Dōgen then goes on to question the meaning here of the "person" and the "thousand-foot precipice"; to identify the person's mouth with the branch he bites, and the act of his questioner with biting the branch. In the

end, Dōgen "solves" Xiangyan's problem by rejecting the distinction between the man's biting the branch and his opening his mouth to answer the question: both biting the branch and answering the question are Bodhidharma's intention in coming from the west.

This translation is based on the edition of the text in Kawamura Kōdō, *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, volume 2 (1993), pp. 155-159. A more fully annotated version appears on the website of the Soto Zen Text Project, at <http://scbs.stanford.edu/sztp3>. Other English renderings of this work can be found in Kōsen Nishiyama and John Stevens, *Shōbōgenzō*, volume 1 (1975), pp. 114-116; Yuho Yokoi, *The Shobo-genzo* (1986), pp. 711-714; Gudo Nishijima and Chodo Cross, *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo, Book 3* (1997), pp. 241-246; and Hubert Nearman, *The Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching* (2007), pp. 755-759.

Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma Book 62

The Intention of the Ancestral Master's Coming from the West (*Soshi seirai i*)

The Great Master Xideng of Xiangyan zi (succeeded Dagui; known as Zhixian) [i.e., Xiangyan Zhixian (d. 898)] addressed the assembly, saying, "A person is up a tree above a thousand foot precipice. His mouth bites the tree branch; his feet don't stand on the tree; his hands don't hang on a branch. All of a sudden, a person beneath the tree asks him, 'What is the intention of the ancestral master's coming from the west?' At that time, if he opens his mouth to answer him, he forfeits his body and loses his life; if he doesn't answer him, he flunks his question. Tell me, what should he do?"

At that time, the senior monk Hutou Zhao came forth from the assembly and said, "I'm not asking about when he's up the tree; please tell us, Reverend, how about when he's not yet up the tree?"

The master gave a great laugh, "Ha ha."

Although there have been many discussions and comments on the present episode, those that can say something are rare. Generally speaking, they all seem to be at a loss. Nevertheless, when we take up “not thinking,” when we take up “non-thinking,” and think about it, we will naturally have concentrated effort on the same cushion as old Xiangyan. Since we are sitting fixedly on the same cushion as old Xiangyan, we should go on to a detailed investigation of this episode before Xiangyan has opened his mouth. Not only should we steal old Xiangyan’s eye and look at it; we should take out “the treasury of the eye of the true dharma” of the Buddha Śākyamuni and look through it.

“A person is up a tree above a thousand foot precipice”: we should quietly investigate these words. What is the “person”? If it is not a column, we should not call it a post. Though it be the face of a buddha and the face of an ancestor breaking into a smile, we should not be mistaken about the meeting of self and other.¹ This place where “a person is up a tree” is not the entire earth, not “a hundred foot pole”; it is “a thousand foot precipice.” Even if he drops off, he is within “a thousand foot precipice.” There is a time of dropping, a time of climbing. Where he says, “A person is up a tree above a thousand foot precipice,” we should realize that this is saying there is a time of climbing. Consequently, ascent is a thousand feet, descent is a thousand feet; left is a thousand feet, right is a thousand feet; here is a thousand feet, there is a thousand feet. “A person” is a thousand feet; “up a tree” is a thousand feet. So far, “a thousand feet” should be understood like this. But now, what I ask is, “what size is a thousand feet?” It is the size of “the old mirror”; it is the size of “the brazier”; it is the size of “the seamless pagoda.”²

“His mouth bites the tree branch.” What is the “mouth”? Even though we do not know the whole mouth, the whole vastness of the mouth, we will know the location of the mouth by starting from “the tree branch” and “searching the branches and plucking at the leaves” for a while.³ By grasping the branch for a while, the mouth was made. Therefore, the whole mouth is the branch; the whole branch is the mouth. It is the mouth throughout the body; throughout the mouth is the body. The tree stands on the tree; therefore, it says, “his feet

don’t stand on the tree,” as if his feet themselves stand on his feet. The branch hangs on the branch; therefore, it says, “his hands don’t hang on a branch,” as if his hands themselves hang on his hands. Nevertheless, his feet still “step forward and step back”; his hands still make a fist and open a fist. We and others sometimes think he is “hanging in space.” However, can “hanging in space” compare with “biting the tree branch”?⁴

“All of a sudden, a person beneath the tree asks him, ‘What is the intention of the ancestral master’s coming from the west?’” This “person beneath the tree” is like saying “a person within the tree,” as if it is a person tree. “All of a sudden a person beneath a person asks him”—this is what this is. Therefore, the tree asks the tree; the person asks the person. They raise the tree and raise the question; they raise “the intention of coming from the west” and question “the intention of coming from the west.” The questioner also asks the question with “his mouth biting the tree branch.” If his mouth were not biting the branch, he could not be questioning; he would have no sound filling his mouth; he would have no mouth filled with words. When he asks about “the intention of coming from the west,” he asks while biting “the intention of coming from the west.”

“If he opens his mouth to answer him, he forfeits his body and loses his life.” We should become familiar with these words “if he opens his mouth to answer him.” It sounds as if there must also be “not opening his mouth to answer him.” If such is the case, he should not “forfeit his body and lose his life.” Even if there is opening the mouth and closing the mouth, they should not prevent “his mouth bites the tree branch.” Opening and closing are not necessarily the whole mouth, though the mouth does have opening and closing. Therefore, biting the branch is the everyday fare of the whole mouth; it should not prevent opening and closing the mouth. Does saying “he opens his mouth to answer him” mean that he opens “the tree branch” to answer him? He opens “the intention in coming from the west” to answer him? If it is not opening “the intention of coming from the west” to answer him, it is not answering [the question of] “the intention of coming from the west.” And, since it is not answering him, this is “his whole body protecting his life”; we cannot say that “he forfeits his body and loses his

life.” If he had already “forfeited his body and lost his life,” he would not answer him. Nevertheless, in Xiangyan’s mind, he does not avoid answering him; it seems he has simply “forfeited his body and lost his life.” We should realize that before he has answered him, he is guarding his body and protecting his life; once he suddenly answers him, he is flipping his body and restoring his life. Thus, we know that each person with a mouth full is saying it: he should answer the other; he should answer himself; he should ask the other; he should ask himself. This is the mouth biting the saying; his mouth biting the saying is called “his mouth bites the branch.” If he answers him, he opens a mouth on top of his mouth; if he does not answer him, though “he flunks the other’s question,” he does not flunk his own question.

Therefore, we should realize that all the buddhas and ancestors who answer [the question of] “the intention of coming from the west” have been answering it as they encounter the moment of “up a tree, his mouth biting the tree branch”; all the buddhas and ancestors who ask about “the intention of coming from the west” have answered it as they encounter the moment of “up a tree, his mouth biting the tree branch.”

The Chan Master Mingjue of Xuedou, the Venerable Chongxian [i.e., Xuedou Chongxian (980-1052)], said, “To say something up a tree is easy; to say something down a tree is hard. This old monk is up a tree. Bring me a question.”

About this “bring me a question,” though we bring it with all our might, the question will arrive too late; I regret that we will have brought the question after the answer [has been given]. I ask the “venerable old awls” everywhere in past and present: Xiangyan’s great laugh, “ha ha” — is this “saying something up a tree,” or is it “saying something down a tree”? Is it answering “the intention of coming from the west,” or is it not answering “the intention of coming from the west”? Try saying something.⁵

Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma
The Intention of the Ancestral Master’s Coming from the
West
Number 62

Presented to the assembly on the fourth day of the second month of the second year of Kangen (*kinoe-tatsu*) [i.e., 1244],
in the deep mountains of the region of Etsu

Copied on the twenty-second day of the sixth month of the second year of Kōan (*tsuchinoto-u*) [1279],
at Eihei Monastery, Mt. Kichijō

The Intention of the Ancestral Master’s
Coming from the West
(*Soshi seirai i*)

NOTES

1. One possible interpretation of these obscure remarks is that the “person” up a tree is neither object (“a column”) nor subject (“buddha” and “ancestor”).
2. References to two conversations between Xuefeng Yicun (822-908) and his disciple Xuansha Shibe (835-908): in the first, when Xuefeng said the whole world was the size of the old mirror, Xuansha pointed at the stove and asked what size it was; Xuefeng said it was also the size of the old mirror. In the second conversation, Xuansha asks Xuefeng what size his memorial stone (“seamless pagoda”) should be; when Xuefeng just looked up and down, Xuansha rejected his answer and proposed seven or eight feet.
3. Quoting the famous verse “Song of Enlightenment” (*Zhendao ge*) attributed to Yongjia Xuanjue (d. 723): “Just cutting off the root source—this is sealed by the buddha; plucking at the leaves and searching the branches—this I can’t do.”
4. “Hanging in space” reflects a line in a verse on the preaching of the wind chime by Dōgen’s teacher, Tiantong Rujing (1163-1228): “its entire body is like a mouth hanging in space.”
5. “Venerable old awls” is a common expression for a Zen master.



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NEWS

Sept. 1, 2008

Rev. Jiho Machida stepped down as Director of the Soto Zen Buddhism Hawaii Office. Rev. Shugen Komagata was appointed as the new Director of the Soto Zen Buddhism Hawaii Office.

Sept. 5 – Dec. 5, 2008

A three-month long ango (training period) will be held at La Gendronniere, France, from Sept. 5 through Dec. 1, 2008. This will be the second officially recognized Sotoshu training monastery ango to be held in the West.

Sept. 27 – 28, 2008

The annual liaison conference of the Japanese-American temples in California was held at Sokoji, San Francisco, CA.

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