

Kakusoku (Enlightenment, Awakening, Realization)

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The word “kakusoku” is one that until recently has rarely been discussed either in terms of Soto Zen doctrine or as part of Soto Zen studies. Very few Soto Zen priests understand what is meant by the expression “Zazen is kakusoku.” It has only been noted that this word “kakusoku” was used four times in Keizan Zenji’s *Transmission of Light* (*Denkoroku*) and one time in *Precautions for Zazen* (*Zazen Yojinki*), while Dogen Zenji never used this word in any of his writings.

Nevertheless, we can understand the importance of this word if we look at those passages in the *Transmission of Light* where it is used.

Chapter Four in the *Transmission of Light* “Upagupta” (Ubakikuta Sonja)

When you reach this point, Upagupta no longer exists nor does Shanavasa (Shonawashu); therefore they no longer are active or still, they neither come nor go. Even if there were “is” and “is not”, “self” and “other”, it is like sound underwater, like the boundlessness of space. Furthermore, if you do not experience (kakusoku) this one time, then even a million teachings and countless subtle principles will end up uselessly as the flow of karmic consciousness.

Chapter Eleven in the *Transmission of Light* “Punyayasha” (Funayasha Sonja)

This is why Parshva (Barishiba) said, “You are not all buddhas.” This is not something that can be understood through reason, nor can it be known in terms of “the formless.” Therefore, it cannot be known through the wisdom of all buddhas, nor can it be fathomed through your own intelligence or perception. After hearing Parshva’s words, Punyayasha practiced without ceasing for three weeks and finally one day he was enlightened (kakusoku), forgetting his own mind, and liberated from all buddhas. This is called “awakening acceptance of the uncreated.” Finally, he grasped this principle and because there was neither outside nor inside, nor any limit, he expressed his attainment with the words “all the buddhas are not venerable ones.”

Let’s also look at a similar passage in Chapter Five in the *Transmission of Light* “Dhrtaka” (Daitaka Sonja)

Even if you grasp all principles and completely comprehend the Way, you must still become greatly enlightened before attaining it for the first time. If you are not once greatly enlightened, you will vainly become a mere intellectual and never penetrate the ground of Mind. For this reason, you are not yet rid of the views of “Buddha” and of “Dharma.” So when will you escape being bound by self and others?

From these examples, you would be right to think that “kakusoku” is used with the same meaning

as “great enlightenment.” However, looking at the way this word is used in many of the Chinese Zen records, “kakusoku” is almost always used to express the bodily sensation of perception. In this respect, it would seem that this same word “kakusoku,” as used in the following passage from *Precautions for Zazen*, is closer to this sort of usage.

The way of regulating the breath is to open your mouth letting the breath be long if it is long and short if it is short, gradually harmonizing it. After following the breath for a while, when a sense of awareness (kakusoku) comes, the breath is naturally in tune. After that, allow the breath to pass through the nose.

While Keizan Zenji used this word in the *Transmission of Light* with a meaning that was deeper than the way it was used in the Chinese Zen records, the point can be made that we can see a similar usage of the word in the teachings of the Chinese Tendai priest, Zhiyi (Chigi) such as “Entering the Gate of the Samadhi of Buddha’s Awakening, Number Five” (*Shaku kakui zanmai nyukan mon dai go*) in the “The Samadhi of the Meaning of Awakening in the Buddha’s Great Wisdom Sutra” (*Shaku maka hannya haramitsu kyo kakui zanmai*).

As is seen from the above, “kakusoku” is an important term with regard to Soto Zen doctrine. But why is it that this word has been so rarely used? It would not seem to be the only reason is simply that Dogen Zenji did not use this word in any of his writings. Isn’t it rather that one contributing factor has been that “Soto Zen doctrine,” which has been built up over the past centuries through Soto Zen studies, has hesitated to speak about the experience of great enlightenment? [From this point on in the article, I have put quotation marks around the term Soto Zen doctrine to denote the potentially problematic nature of traditional Soto Zen doctrine.]

The essential Soto Zen doctrine must be the distillation of Dogen Zenji’s words. And yet, it often seems to be the case that current “Soto Zen doctrine” has been created such that many of Dogen Zenji’s important words have been omitted. Surely many scholars have experienced cases where what has come to be taught as “Soto Zen doctrine” is different from the words of Dogen Zenji.

The “Soto Zen doctrine” is summarized with the word “shikantaza.” This is the idea that truth appears within just sitting single-mindedly. In other words, zazen itself is to cast off body and mind. And, enlightenment is not a goal in zazen. Zazen is perceived to be “nothing to attain, nothing to realize.” It is said to be the “undefiled practice and enlightenment.” Zazen is taught to be “practice and realization are the same” and that verification of enlightenment is provided within the practice of zazen. This “Soto Zen doctrine” which does not divide practice and enlightenment is also stated as “subtle practice within original enlightenment.”

The result is that zazen is understood to be “the practice of a buddha,” something which transcends the usual meaning of “practice.” Furthermore, this “practice of a buddha” is done within the “continuous practice” (*gyoji*) of everyday life. There, the aspiration to realize the Way, practice, enlightenment, and nirvana of “continuous practice is the circle of the Way” is attained. Thus, the practice of acting as a buddha and the way of living which is in accord with the Buddhadharma, as well as the desired actions which make up the dignified behavior of a buddha is based on all aspects of everyday life and practice in a Zen monastery. The Sotoshu style, which places much value on

“continuous practice,” has therefore been customarily explained as “Dignified conduct is the Buddhadharma; the proper way something is the Soto Zen doctrine.”

However, (1) standing on the teaching of “the undefiled practice and enlightenment,” the “Soto Zen doctrine” maintains that zazen which does not seek enlightenment is the practice of a buddha, saying nothing in particular about the state within zazen, and yet Dogen Zenji said all kinds of things about the state of the buddhas within zazen.

Also, (2) the “Soto Zen doctrine” which states that “shikantaza” is the real nature of zazen in which body and mind is cast off does not speak about the moment when enlightenment takes place within zazen, and yet Dogen Zenji clearly states that it is by means of zazen that enlightenment is reached.

Furthermore, (3) within the “Soto Zen doctrine” which calls for zazen in which “there is nothing to attain, nothing to realize,” there is no particular explanation of the awakening experience, and yet Dogen Zenji does not deny an experience of awakening or enlightenment. Moreover, he gives detailed explanations of the sphere or state of enlightenment.

Additionally, (4) in this “Soto Zen doctrine”, not only is zazen in which mind and body are cast off not spoken about, the time or opportunity of enlightenment is also not spoken about either, and yet, within Dogen Zenji’s teachings, he often mentions the time a person was enlightened outside of zazen. In particular, he was fond of using the stories of Xiangyan (Kyogen) attaining enlightenment on hearing a stone hit a piece of bamboo and Lingyun (Reiun) who attained enlightenment on seeing peach blossoms.

As just described, Dogen Zenji taught about the state of zazen while sitting as well as speaking about the awakening experience, and yet, it would not be an exaggeration to say that present day “Soto Zen doctrine” deliberately ignores his teachings because this “doctrine” has deviated from the logic of “nothing to attain, nothing to realize” and the “undefiled practice and enlightenment.” Put simply, it would be hard to say that present day “Soto Zen doctrine” has thoroughly explained and taught about the relationship between zazen, enlightenment, and practice.

Nevertheless, the unclear points within this sort of “Soto Zen doctrine” are superbly resolved in the “Dharma Words of Keizan, Founder of Yokoji Temple” (*Tokoku Kaisan Keizan Osho no Hogo*), a teaching given by Keizan Zenji in his later years. Keizan Zenji says “There are two paths within wisdom.” The first wisdom is the mind of all buddhas which everyone tastes within zazen. The second wisdom taught by Keizan Zenji occurs during your daily activities when you are not sitting in zazen. This is where you have the opportunity for great enlightenment through the method of “focusing the mind” such that you never forget the mind of sitting even for a moment.

Thus, according to Keizan Zenji’s “Dharma Words of Keizan, Founder of Yokoji Temple,” it is clear that the Sotoshu’s enlightenment within the state of sitting in zazen and the great enlightenment attained by the method within everyday activity (i.e. when you are not sitting in zazen) is twofold (not two-step). Furthermore, it is known that the path from continuous practice to great enlightenment, which is not clear in Dogen Zenji’s teachings, is demonstrated here. [For more detail, refer to “The Samadhi of Receiving and Using the Self” (*Jijuyuzanmai*)]

In fact, what in this “Soto Zen doctrine” is said to be zazen itself is the real nature of body and mind cast off is, for the first time attained with the experience of awakening, so that one can be sure

that the state of all buddhas is not outside this state as defined here. Nevertheless, if those people who have experienced this awakening and are certain the time will come do not express this in words, it will probably be the case that in due course those students of the Way will continue to have doubts and finally will give up their search for enlightenment. The true nature of a Zen monk is to aspire for enlightenment. “Waiting-for-enlightenment Zen,” which both of the Two Founders (Dogen Zenji and Keizan Zenji) criticized is a separate issue.

Keizan Zenji used the word “kakusoku” to express the experience of enlightenment. How, then, did Dogen Zenji express the experience of great enlightenment?

In the “Great Enlightenment” chapter of *The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye (Shobogenzo)*, Dogen Zenji quotes the following story in which a priest named Jingzhao Mihu (Keicho Beiko) sent one of his disciples to Yangshan Huiji (Kyozan Ejaku 807-882) and had him ask, “These days, do people depend on enlightenment or not?” Yangshan said, “It’s not that they do not depend on enlightenment, but how can they avoid falling into what is secondary?” Here, with regard to Jingzhao’s question, “Do people depend on enlightenment or not?” Dogen Zenji then says that this has the same meaning as “How are people these days enlightened?” Thereafter, Dogen Zenji goes ahead and offers the following commentary on this expression, even if it might seem to be awkward.

If you speak, for example, of attaining enlightenment, you may think that you usually don’t have enlightenment. If you speak of enlightenment having come, you may wonder where it comes from. If you speak of having become enlightened, you may think enlightenment has a beginning. Jingzhao did not speak this way. Even so, when he spoke of enlightenment, he simply asked if we need to depend on enlightenment.

If a person who has experienced enlightenment tries to speak to another person about that experience, then in the same way as expressed here, he or she will always confront this dilemma. Even if an unshakeable confidence is born through this awakening experience, one moment after that experience it is nothing more than the memory of a past moment. It is nearly meaningless to continue holding onto the cherished memory of an enlightenment experience. The reason is that immediately afterward, enlightenment, even though it is the Dharma, disappears because there is nothing other than living everyday life. This dilemma is well expressed in this chapter, “Great Enlightenment.”

Also, with regard to the moment directly following great enlightenment and the specific thing that set off the enlightenment experience as well, even if it was for that person an earth-shattering matter, putting the experience in words only ends as a thing or episode that seems worn out and featureless. It is also for this reason that there must be some hesitation to speak to another person about an enlightenment experience.

How, then, does Dogen Zenji speak about this fear of “falling into the secondary” which he says is to speak about enlightenment?

Thus, with regard to enlightenment, Yangshan has said, “How can they help but fall into the secondary?” This means that the secondary is also enlightenment. “The secondary” is like

saying “to become enlightened,” “to attain enlightenment,” or “enlightenment has come.” This means that “becoming” and “coming” are enlightenment.” So, while it may seem as if Yangshan regrets falling into the secondary and is denying that the secondary exists, the secondary that becomes enlightenment is no other than the secondary that is true enlightenment. This being so even the secondary, the hundredth, or the thousandth is also enlightenment. It is not the case that the secondary may be left over from the primary. For example, don’t say that yesterday’s self was the true self but today’s self is secondary. Don’t say that enlightenment just now was not there yesterday. It is not that enlightenment has begun this moment. Study in this way.

A person who has attained enlightenment must not be afraid of speaking about enlightenment. The secondary is also the Dharma. This is what Dogen Zenji is expressing here.

“Kakusoku” is a word that Keizan Zenji used to express great enlightenment. Clearly expressing in this way that there is an awakening experience has the great significance of compelling Zen monks, who are students of the Way, to reaffirm the need of having the aim of realizing great enlightenment.

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