

# 弁道話

## *Bendō-wa*

### Dialog on the Path of Devotion<sup>1</sup>

- 1 SAGES<sup>2</sup> ONE AND ALL uphold the simple message<sup>3</sup> of the wonders of truth<sup>4</sup> with an amazing, unique, natural<sup>5</sup> technique for reaching the pinnacle of enlightenment<sup>6</sup>. Its hallmark is deep inward rapture<sup>7</sup>. Its essence has been passed down unchanged to each of these enlightened ones<sup>8</sup> in turn.

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<sup>1</sup> Lit. “exert-path-talk”. Normally when Dōgen strings together three or four Chinese characters there are half a dozen possible parsings, here there seem to be just two: the adjective/noun combination “path of/involving/based-on endeavor/exertion” and the verb/object combination “exerting [yourself] on the path.” I’ve chosen the former interpretation.

[Uc] has “The Wholehearted Way,” omitting the “talk” element, while [Ta] “On the Endeavor of the Path”; but “wa/話/talk” seems more informal to me than “On the...”, which would be how 論/theory would typically be translated when occurring in a title like this. I’ve chosen “dialog” since it’s closer to the nuance in “wa/talk” and since much of the content occurs in a Q&A format.

Note that the word “bendō-wa” also occurs upwards of a dozen times through the document. We need a translation which works well when Dogen uses it to refer to his particular path, and for this “path of devotion” seems to do the job.

Note also that in some texts the “ben” is written with an alternate character containing “katana/刀/sword” as its middle radical, still pronounced “ben.” That character would mean to cut, or by extension to distinguish, so the meaning of the title becomes “talk on distinguishing the way”. However, that would not seem to match well the way “bendō-wa” is used within the text. [Wa] uses this character and translates the title of the essay as “Negotiating the Way.”

<sup>2</sup> shobutsu nyorai. In Zenki, [Ta] translates as “various Buddhas and Tāhagatas”. Here he translates it as all bud-dha tāhagatas.

<sup>3</sup> tanden/単伝, lit. “simple-transmit”.

<sup>4</sup> myōhou/妙法/wonderful-law.

<sup>5</sup> Mui/無為; some translators have “unconstructed.”

<sup>6</sup> Orig. “anokubodai wo shō-suru” 阿のく 菩提を証する. [Ta]: “actualize supreme, perfect enlightenment.” Skt. “anuttara samyak sambodhi.”

<sup>7</sup> jijuyū zanmai/自受用三昧. Lit. “self-recvie-employ samadhi.” Self-fulfilled samadhi. Self-joyous meditation.

<sup>8</sup> hotoke/ほとけ.

- 2 REVELING IN THIS DEEP rapture begins<sup>9</sup> with sitting upright in zazen meditation. Now, truth<sup>10</sup> is abundantly present in all of us, but to raise it up we must practice it; to make it our own we must validate it<sup>11</sup>. Truth fills your hand even as you let it go; it is neither one nor many. It fills your mouth even as you speak of it; it has neither height nor breadth<sup>12</sup>. For holy ones<sup>13</sup>, no perception remains in any direction as they reside in this truth; for others<sup>14</sup>, no direction appears in any perception as they exploit it.
- 3 THE WAY OF DEVOTION I am teaching brings forth all things in enlightenment and acts out the oneness of reality<sup>15</sup>. But these will become mere fancy words of no concern to you when the time comes that you jump in and let go<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Orig. shōmon/正門, “main gate”. Some translators have “true gate”, but I think the common usage dominates. Other gates are not “false gates”, they are just not the main gate. “Front gate” has the connotation of the most direct way into the temple compound.

<sup>10</sup> hō/法/dharma/law.

<sup>11</sup> shō/証/affirm-authenticate-prove.

<sup>12</sup> or, “is neither horizontal nor vertical.”

<sup>13</sup> shobutsu/諸仏

<sup>14</sup> shujou/衆生/sentient beings

<sup>15</sup> ichinyo/一如. I've omitted shutsuro/出路/exit-road at the beginning of this phrase since I don't know how to translate it.

<sup>16</sup> This sentence is very hard to understand. [Ta] has “passing through the barrier and dropping off limitations, how could you be hindered by nodes in bamboo or knots in wood?”. However, this ends up not being compatible with a later use of “sechimoku” in this document, where Dogen is discussing how the arrival of true Buddhism in China helped people move away from dry scriptural formulations. [Mi]'s translation at least tries to connect to the previous sentence, paraphrasing as “when you overcome the barrier separating the enlightenment and [path of escape], and drop off body and mind, these divisions (setsumoku) will become of no concern.” [Sa] as usual has a very abstract commentary, but seems to be saying that it is the associations which are being dropped off, or something. [Ze] has “And when you thoroughly understand, why cling to such trifles as these?” [Ni] goes with “At that moment of clearing barriers and getting free, how could this paragraph be relevant?”

I think this sentence has to put in context. Dogen is talking about very simple ideas like the primacy of sitting practice. It's unlikely that he would suddenly toss in a “dropping off body and mind” type of concept. Remember, he's talking to newcomers and skeptics. I therefore think he's referring to the barrier between potential practitioner's current lives and their future zazen life, and jumping over that barrier; and “dropping off” their current life style to practice zazen.

ssible structures. Assume the four characters are A, B, C and D. The grouping is almost always (AB)(CD). However, the meaning could be any of “(AB) and (CD)”; “(CD)ing the (AB)”; “the (AB) type of (CD)”, “the (CD) for (AB)ing”, and so on. Considering this, it seems possible to me that Dogen was intending something along the lines of “slipping and sliding around the checkpoint”.

- 4 MY OWN HUNGER FOR the truth<sup>17</sup> drove me to crisscross Japan in search of knowledge, during the course of which I encountered the teacher known as Myōzen<sup>18</sup>, at Kenninji Temple, and began studying with him. Before I knew it, nine years<sup>19</sup> had passed. It was during that period that I learned something of the Rinzai style. As the senior disciple of the revered master Eisai<sup>20</sup>, Myōzen carried the true message<sup>21</sup> better than the other disciples or anyone else.
- 5 NEXT I HEADED TO China<sup>22</sup> where I continued my search in both parts of Zhejiang<sup>23</sup>, learning the teachings of the five schools. At last, I attached myself to Zen master Nyojō<sup>24</sup> of Taibō Peak<sup>25</sup>, and there, was able to accomplish the great task<sup>26</sup> to which one devotes one's life. In 1227<sup>27</sup>, I returned to Japan with the intent of spreading the truth and saving others. I felt a heavy weight on my shoulders.

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<sup>17</sup> hosshin/発心.

<sup>18</sup> Butsujubō Myōzen 仏樹房明会, 1184-1225.

<sup>19</sup> seasons of frost and flowers.

<sup>20</sup> Myōan Eisai, 1141-1215.

<sup>21</sup> shouden/正伝/true-transmit. But I am tired of mechanically translating anything involving the character den/伝/transmit as “transmit/transmission.” I understand that this has a particular meaning in the context of Buddhism, which should not be diluted by randomly paraphrasing it, but isn't “transmit” something that you do with a disease? I think “message” is often a better way to express this.

<sup>22</sup> Great Song 大宋国.

<sup>23</sup> J. setsu-kou.

<sup>24</sup> Tendō Nyojō; C. Tiantong Rujing, Ju-tsing.

<sup>25</sup> 太白峰. Jap. “taihaku-hou”, apparently part of Tendōzan (C. Mt. Tien-tung).

<sup>26</sup> Original “daiji” 大事; lit. “big thing”; [Ta] has “great matter”.

<sup>27</sup> “At the beginning of the Sheting (J. Shōtei) era.”

- 6      HOWEVER I ENDED UP deciding to put off actively propounding the truth until a more propitious time; instead, for the time being, I would simply wander about in the spirit<sup>28</sup> of the wise men of old, floating like a cloud and drifting like a leaf. But then my thoughts turned to those seekers of truth who, although unconcerned about fame or fortune and focused above all on the way, might nevertheless be led astray and deceived by charlatans and sink into extended confusion. They might never find how to grow the true seeds of wisdom and gain the way. They might never know what mountain the cloud was floating over or river the leaf was drifting down. Heartbroken at this thought, I resolved to gather and record the essential approaches used in the Zen monasteries in China as I experienced them personally, as well as the profound essence of Buddhism that I received from the my Buddhist teachers, so that those studying and resting in the way<sup>29</sup> might know the true law of the Buddha's house<sup>30</sup>. This is the essence of the truth<sup>31</sup>.
- 7      LEGEND HAS IT THAT Shākyamuni Buddha entrusted the truth to Mahākāshyapa at the assembly on Vulture Peak; it was then passed on faithfully, master to master, down to Bodhidharma. The latter betook himself to China<sup>32</sup>, where he bequeathed the truth on the great master Eka<sup>33</sup>. This was the beginning of Buddhism's spread throughout eastern Asia.

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<sup>28</sup> Orig. 先哲の風をきこえむ, lit. "hearing the wind of former philosophers". [Ta] has "studying the wind of the ancient sages", [Mi] "teach what the predecessors did". I don't think anyone knows what studying "wind" means, nor why Dogen would feel the need for additional study at this point in his life. At the same point, "drifting and floating" seems to contradict the idea of "teaching" in [Mi].

<sup>29</sup> Orig. "sangaku-kandō" 参学閑道, lit. "participate-study-calm/easy-path". [Ta] has "students of the way". [Mi] glosses the 閑 character as meaning "study" in this case. [Ni] tries "people who learn in practice and are easy in the truth". [Ok] has "practitioners of the way of serenity."

<sup>30</sup> Orig. "bukke" 仏家, lit. "Buddha-house". Some translators have "Buddha's lineage".

<sup>31</sup> Orig. shinketsu 真訣, lit. "truth-parting" or "truth-point". [Ta] has "This is indeed the essence". But what is Dogen trying to say here? Why would he be saying here, as [Mi] has it, "This indeed is the mystery of the truth.", reading the word 秘訣 hiketsu into Dogen just from the presence of the 訣 character? What is true? What he wrote here? Is he trying to say that his story told in this paragraph is the truth?

<sup>32</sup> 神丹国 (J. "shindankoku").

<sup>33</sup> Hui-k'o (487-593) (J. Teisho Eka, Jinko), 2nd Chinese Zen patriarch accepted as a disciple by Bodhidharma at Shaolin Monastery, China [acc to Japanese tradition]. Also Huike.

- 8 IN THIS WAY THE simple message<sup>34</sup> found its way to the sixth patriarch, Zen Master Enō<sup>35</sup>, driving out the idea that Buddhism was a matter of theoretical formulations<sup>36</sup>, and flourishing throughout the land. Enō's two outstanding disciples, Ejō<sup>37</sup> and Gyōshi<sup>38</sup>, both received and upheld the mark of the Buddha, both became masters of beings terrestrial and celestial. Their teachings spread and gave birth to five schools: Jōgen, Igyō, Sōtō, Unmon, and Rinzai<sup>39</sup> (although at present in China only the Rinzai school remains popular). But although there were five different schools, there was but one single mark of the Buddha mind.
- 9 IN CHINA AS WELL, in their case starting in the later Han<sup>40</sup> period, there were plenty of holy writings, but still no clear idea which were worth studying and which not. It was not until Bodhidharma's arrival in China that the creeping vines of confusion could finally be cut off at the root, allowing a single, pure doctrine to spread. We can only pray that the same scenario unfolds here in Japan as well.
- 10 SITTING UPRIGHT IN DEEP inward rapture is the true path to enlightenment, said to have been followed by all teachers and holy ones who have mastered truth. In India to the west and China to the east, all those attaining enlightenment followed this way. And this was made possible by teachers carefully imparting the exquisite technique to their students, who in turn received it and made it their own.
- 11 IN OUR RELIGION THE REAL MESSAGE is that this truth, as simple and straightforward as it is, takes absolute precedence. From your first encounter with a teacher just sit, letting your body/mind drop away. Make no use of incense or bowing or chanting or ceremonies or scriptures.

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<sup>34</sup> tanden/単伝, lit. "single-transmit".

<sup>35</sup> Dajian Hui-Neng (638 - 713); J. "Taikan Enō" or "Yenō".

<sup>36</sup> sechimoku/節目.

<sup>37</sup> J. (Nangaku) Ejō, C. Nanyue Huairang.

<sup>38</sup> C. Qingyuan Xingsi; J. Seigen Gyōshi.

<sup>39</sup> C. Fayān, Guiyang, Ts'ao-tung, Yunmen, and Linji

<sup>40</sup> AD 25–220

12    WHEN YOU SIT UPRIGHT in rapture, even once, imprinting the mark of truth on your body, speech, and mind, you imprint that same mark of truth on all known worlds, flooding the emptiness with light. Thus the sages rejoice, and renew the splendor of the path to satori<sup>41</sup>. Beings throughout earth, heaven, and hell are purified and cleansed, affirm their absolute liberation, and show their original visage. All things attest to and engage the buddha's true insight. Finally you transcend the realm of perception to become the king at the foot of the *bodhi* tree in seated meditation, instantly turning the incomparable wheel of being and unfolding the ultimate wisdom.

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<sup>41</sup> [Ni] "renews the splendor of their realization of the truth". [Le] "and renew the adornment of the way of awakening."

13 THIS ENLIGHTENED WORLD CIRCLES BACK to sustain the zazeners<sup>42</sup>, that they might completely drop off body/mind, disconnect from random, impure perceptions and thoughts, affirm and enter<sup>43</sup> into the intrinsic truth of Buddhism, raise up the teachings at countless places of practice, and bequeath widely<sup>44</sup> the chance for surpassing holiness<sup>45</sup> and proclaim its law. As they do, soil and earth and grass and trees, fences and walls and tiles and pebbles throughout this world exude holiness<sup>46</sup>. Blessed by the wind and water at the wellsprings of this outpouring, and graced<sup>47</sup> by the incomparably subtle and inconceivable teaching, they soon arrive at enlightenment<sup>48</sup>. Those taking up<sup>49</sup> this water and fire endow themselves and everyone with whom they live and speak with endless virtue<sup>50</sup> by spreading the teaching of original awakening, their efforts have wide effect, and imbuing the entire universe, within and without, with inexhaustible, indestructible, inconceivable, and immeasurable<sup>51</sup> truth. But yet we don't perceive these things while sitting—because in the stillness, stripped of artifice<sup>52</sup>, we experience direct affirmation. Many hold the view that practice is one step, perfection<sup>53</sup> a second; but this would imply that these two are perceived separately. Yet if

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<sup>42</sup> zazenjin 座禪人; “zazen people”.

<sup>43</sup> shō-kai 証会.

<sup>44</sup> kaiburashimeru: translated as “extend” in Tanahashi’s “Sansuikyō” (extend virtue)

<sup>45</sup> bukkōjō 仏向上: going beyond buddha, ongoing buddhahood, buddha going beyond

<sup>46</sup> butsuji 仏事をなす

<sup>47</sup> myōshi 冥資. [Mi] translates this religiously as “aided” (tasukerareru). 冥 means dark, meditative, Buddhist, while 資 means finance or contribute.

<sup>48</sup> Why should chikaki/ちかき mean “intimate” ([Mi] & [Ta]), and not “near” or “soon”?

<sup>49</sup> juyū/受用. Glosses directly as “receive and use”. Same as last two characters of “jijūyū” in “jijūyū zanmai”. [Ta] has “receive the benefit of”.

<sup>50</sup> buttoku 仏徳. Buddha merit

<sup>51</sup> immeasurable: [Ta] has “unnameable”, but original is “fukashouryō”, which glosses directly “amount cannot be named”; [Mi] has “cannot be measured”.

<sup>52</sup> muzōsa/無雜作. [Ta] has “unconstructedness.” Note that the second character in this case is not that for “construct”, but rather that for “random”.

<sup>53</sup> perfection, in last two sentences: shōsoku, which [Ta] translates as just “realization”, while [Mi] has “shinjitsu no jishō no gensoku”, or “principle of true realization”.

perception is involved, it cannot be perfection. A mental muddle<sup>54</sup> cannot bring us to perfection.

- 14 AS YOUR MIND AND surroundings<sup>55</sup> sit together in stillness, awakening<sup>56</sup> flows in, affirmation<sup>57</sup> flows out. As you approach the boundary of self-rapture, you embody boundless truth and the profound and subtle teaching. Not a particle is moved nor aspect of reality disturbed<sup>58</sup>. Wherever nature<sup>59</sup> is touched by this teaching, a great light emanates, forever illuminating<sup>60</sup> the profundity and strangeness<sup>61</sup> of its truth. Earthly objects<sup>62</sup> hold forth<sup>63</sup> on behalf of sages and fools, and in return the sages and fools raise their voices on behalf of the earthly objects. Intrinsic to the world<sup>64</sup> of realization of self and others is that we are fully endowed with an enlightened nature<sup>65</sup>; we unfailingly carry ourselves according to enlightened law<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> mental muddle: meijō 迷情; [Ta] has “delusion”, of course. [Mi] paraphrases, referring to distinction and judgement.

<sup>55</sup> shinkyō 心境: [Mi] has a complicated discussion involving “rokkyō”.

<sup>56</sup> perfection: shō 証

<sup>57</sup> satori. [Ta] has “enlightenment”.

<sup>58</sup> issō wo yaburazu: [Ta] has “disturbing its quality”; [Mi] has “genjitsu...no issō”. I’ve added “reality” for clarity and readability.

<sup>59</sup> nature: Dogen has sōmoku-doji, lit. “grass-trees-earth-soil”. [Ta] has “grass, trees, and lands”. I intuit Dogen is trying to refer to nature in general here rather than referring specifically to grass, trees, earth, and soil.

<sup>60</sup> illuminating: original is “toku とく”. This is the word typically used for teaching or preaching. It also has a more general meaning of solving (such as a puzzle), or even melting. [Ta] translates this literally as “expound”. The image of nature expounding something is intriguing but my guess is that this is not really what Dogen meant, other than in a very abstract way. I think “illuminate” is true to Dogen’s intent and also works well with the great light.

<sup>61</sup> strangeness: myō 妙, of course. [Ta] has “inconceivable”.

<sup>62</sup> earthly objects: sōmoku-shōheki, lit. “grass-tree-fence-wall”. My interpretation here as well is that Dogen is referring to natural and man-made objects around us, rather than trying to make some specific point about grass or trees or fences.

<sup>63</sup> [Ta] has “bring forth the teaching”, but I note that Dogen does not explicitly say “teaching” in this sentence. [Mi] adds “hō wo” (dharma) in his search for a direct object. I chose to follow Dogen more closely here by omitting the object.

<sup>64</sup> kyōkai: In modern Japanese, this is quite clearly “boundary”. Mi leaves it as is, resulting in a sentence that doesn’t make sense -- how can a boundary have intrinsic realization? If it’s a boundary, is it the boundary between “jikaku-kakuta” and something else, or the boundary between “jikaku” and “kakuta”? Ta goes for “realm”.

<sup>65</sup> 証相. [Mi] gives “shō no sugata”. [Ta] has “mark of realization”. The dictionary for this character shows meanings such as “mutual, aspect/phase/countenance, affinity”.

<sup>66</sup> Shōsoku/証則 is “enlightenment-principle”; [Ta] has just realization, whereas [Mi] gives “principles of true realization”. In any case, it seems clear to me that Dogen is contrasting “Shōsō” here with “shōsoku” in the next

- 15 SO ZAZEN—EVEN THAT of a single person, sitting a single time—joins with all things in contemplation and calmly connects with all moments of time, thus embodying the eternal divine teaching throughout time and space<sup>67</sup>. Each experience of zazen<sup>68</sup> is identically practice, identically realization<sup>69</sup>. Practice is not just sitting on your cushion. It is the echo of emptiness being struck<sup>70</sup>, the strange, sonorous, silken<sup>71</sup> subtones before and after the mallet meets the metal of the bell.<sup>72</sup> And true practice, unjudged and unjudgeable<sup>73</sup>, is intrinsic to the true visage of each and every individual.
- 16 PUT IT THIS WAY: not even the collected power and wisdom of gods as numerous as the grains of sand on the shore of the Ganges could begin to comprehend the virtue in the zazen of one man.

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phrase. “shōsō” is something that someone (we?) are intrinsically fully endowed with, whereas shōsoku is something that is unfailingly occurring. I’ve gone out on somewhat of a limb here to get “enlightened nature” and “enlightened law”. And of course deciding that the subject is “we”.

<sup>67</sup> The original enumerates “past, future, and present”, and “the limitless dharma world”.

<sup>68</sup> Original *hihi* 彼彼. Meaning unclear. I’ve followed [Ta] who has “each moment of zazen”, whereas [Mi] has the opaque “*sorera no doremodoremo*”.

<sup>69</sup> Or, according to [Ni], “For everyone it is the same practice and and same experience”.

<sup>70</sup> Is this what the sentence is saying? That practice is like striking emptiness? Ta avoids the issue with its usual “word soup” approach. Mi’s modern J translation glosses as “not just the *TIME* of zazen practice, but...”. In general, I don’t understand how this sentence connects to the previous, or the next.

<sup>71</sup> Original “*menmentaru*” 綿々たる. [Ta] renders this as “everywhere” [Mi] has “continues without dying out”. I’ve translated it literally.

<sup>72</sup> このきはのみにかぎらむや. [Ta] has “Why should it be limited to this moment?”, while [Mi] has the この程度ではない (it is not just this). I’ve omitted it.

<sup>73</sup> \*What cannot be judged or measured? True practice, or true visage?

- 17 **Q1.** YOU'VE CERTAINLY MADE THE case that zazen has a great many advantages. But a stupid man might wonder on what basis you recommend zazen as the be-all and end-all, since there are many ways to approach the truth.
- 18 **A1.** I'D TELL HIM ON the basis that it's the right way to approach it.

19 **Q2.** AND WHY WOULD ZAZEN alone be the right approach?

20 **A2.** BECAUSE IT IS PRECISELY the approach the historical Buddha passed down to us as the way to find truth. Because all enlightened ones<sup>74</sup> did find, do now find, and will in the future find truth through zazen. Because the church fathers in India and China all found the truth though zazen. That's why I present it as the right approach to men and angels alike.

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<sup>74</sup> 如来 nyorai; tathāgatas

- 21 **Q3.** LET'S SAY THAT THIS wondrous prayer technique has in fact been passed down correctly and was practiced by the ancient fathers, even though that seems far-fetched. But enough reading of the scriptures or chanting<sup>75</sup> itself can also get you saved, right? How can just sitting by yourself doing nothing get you any closer to salvation?
- 22 **A3.** YOUR ASSERTION, THAT THE rapture of the sages and their matchless technique is merely sitting by yourself doing nothing, is an insult to our entire religion<sup>76</sup>. You could hardly be more confused if you sat in the middle of the ocean claiming there was no water. If you practiced zazen you could already be sitting in the carefree self-rapture of the buddhas. Wouldn't that be far better? It breaks my heart that you remain so blind and hypnotized.
- 23 THOUGHT CANNOT PENETRATE THE realm of the buddhas. Consciousness cannot approach it. How unlikely then that it could be known by the skeptical or the naïve! Only those of pure and great faith can enter it. Those who doubt will have difficulty receiving the teaching no matter how much they are taught. Even on Vulture Peak there were some of whom the Buddha said, "It may be best for them to depart". So when faith arises in your mind then practice and study. If it does not then do not, bewailing the fact that after all this time truth has still not bestowed its fruits upon you.

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<sup>75</sup> 念仏 nenbutsu, chanting the name of Buddha

<sup>76</sup> 大乘 Great Vehicle

24 DO YOU REALLY IMAGINE THAT you understand what doing things like reciting scriptures or chanting God's name is supposed to get you? The notion that merely moving your tongue or raising your voice could bring God's grace is irrational. Time will show clearly how far these practices are from Buddhism. Scriptures serve only to document the teachings of the Buddha regarding practice<sup>77</sup> that we need to follow in order to accomplish our goal. Do not tax your paltry intellect in the vain hope that you might thereby be able to attain wisdom. You have no more chance finding the truth by flapping your gums reciting ten million Hail Marys than you would trying to get south by driving north. It's like trying to put a square peg in a round hole. Reading a scripture without understanding how to practice is like reading a prescription but forgetting to take the medicine—it accomplishes nothing. And neither do sounds issuing incessantly from your mouth, like toads croaking day and night in the spring rice paddies. People enthralled by fame and fortune find these practices especially difficult to discard, because of the depth of their avarice. Such people existed in the past, as well as today. It's heartbreaking.

25 LET ME BE CLEAR ABOUT one thing. The wondrous truth of the seven buddhas must be conveyed from master to student, the master having attained the way and clarified his mind, the student realizing his nature and affirming his being. That is how this truth is revealed and maintained. It is not something that can be grasped by our brothers who base their study on the written word. So cast aside your doubts; follow the teachings of a true teacher; devote yourselves to the way of zazen; and validate the self-inward rapture of the buddhas<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> Orig. "tonzen-shugyō" 頓漸修行. I have omitted the "tonzen" part. Many translators have "sudden and gradual practice". [Mi] elaborates as "practice suited for those of sudden enlightenment and those of gradual enlightenment."

<sup>78</sup> shobutsu/諸仏.

26 **Q4.** THE TENDAI<sup>79</sup> AND KEGON teachings now popular in Japan are among the finest in Buddhism. Then there is Shingon<sup>80</sup>, passed down directly and unblemished by Vairocana<sup>81</sup> Tathagata to Vajrasattva<sup>82</sup>. Its teachings, summed up as “Thus Mind Is Buddha; Being Mind Makes Buddha”, do not require passing through eons of training; instead, a single sitting results in the enlightenment of the five Buddhas<sup>83</sup>. Certainly this doctrine represents the mystery of Buddhism at its best. What is so good about your type of practice that you recommend it to the exclusion of all these other teachings?

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<sup>79</sup> Japanese school of Buddhism which was a descendant of the Chinese Tiantai school, initially brought to Japan in the middle of the 8th century. Mt. Hiei (比叡山), where Dōgen studied at the beginning of his career, became a center for the study and practice of Tendai in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The Tendai sect enjoyed the patronage of the emperors and aristocrats.

<sup>80</sup> Referred to as “Hokke” 法華 by Dogen. A major school of Japanese Buddhism, also known as Mantra; brought to Japan from China by the monk Kukai in the Heian period (794-1185). Centered on the cosmic Buddha Vairocana. Shingon holds that enlightenment is possible within this life, with the help of a genuine teacher and through properly training the body, speech, and mind.

<sup>81</sup> J. biroshana, Dainichi Nyorai

<sup>82</sup> J. kongōmatta or Fugen Bosatsu

<sup>83</sup> Referring to a teaching of the Shingon school. According to Uchiyama, these are the buddha of the wisdom of action, buddha of the wisdom of well observing, buddha of the wisdom of equality, buddha of the wisdom of the great mirror, and buddha of the wisdom of the dharma universe.

27 **A4.** LET'S BE CLEAR ABOUT what is important in Buddhism. It's knowing whether practice is genuine, not debating the relative superiority or inferiority of one doctrine to another, or pointing out the supposed shallowness of one belief or the profundity of another. It could be plants and flowers and mountains and rivers that draw you into merging with the Buddha way. It could be grasping earth, stones, sand, or pebbles that brands you with the Buddha's seal<sup>84</sup>. But all the phenomena of nature can be swamped by torrents of words; the wheel of dharma can turn within a speck of dust. I could just as easily say "Thus Mind Thus Buddha,<sup>85</sup>" but this would just be the moon reflecting in the water; I could just as easily tell you "Thus Sitting Becomes Buddha," but that would just be an image in a mirror. Do not be distracted by eloquent words. I recommend the practice where you experience enlightenment<sup>86</sup> directly so that you may know the wondrous path passed down directly from our predecessors in the faith and become people of the true path.

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<sup>84</sup> Most translators don't understand the connection between this and the following sentence and the paragraph as a whole. I don't either, but I suspect that the 象 of 万象 below (natural phenomena) is referring to the plants-trees-mountains-waters-earth-stones-sand-pebbles here

<sup>85</sup> Here and in the following Dōgen is making obvious fun of the Shingon sect's slogans such as "instantly mind becoming Buddha". He clearly does not intend these to be some statement of his version of truth, as some translators would appear to think, but rather as nonsense phrases.

<sup>86</sup> jiki-shō-bodai 直証菩提, lit. direct-validate-bodhi. Several translators have "immediate", but this would seem to be misleading at best.

28 AND A RELIGIOUS TEACHER aligned with the truth<sup>87</sup> is indispensable for Buddhism to be taught and learned. Academics with their nose buried in the scriptures cannot shepherd our flock<sup>88</sup>; that would be a case of the blind leading the blind. One of the bulwarks of Buddhism is that all those following the teachings handed down by the church fathers respect the master who has attained the way and is aligned with the truth. Both to unbelievers<sup>89</sup> who come seeking refuge, and students of other faiths<sup>90</sup> who come questioning the truth, he holds out his hand that they might open and illuminate their mental state<sup>91</sup>. This is unheard of in other sects. Disciples of the Buddha should simply learn<sup>92</sup> Buddhism.

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<sup>87</sup> shōkei 得道証契. I see no consensus on how to translate this. 証 is of course “validation” or “affirmation”, often translated as “enlightenment” or “realization”, but what about 契? In modern Japanese it’s commonly used in the term 契約 or contract; modern Japanese dictionaries give as other senses “understanding (as in agreement)”, promise, opportunity. Some translators have “merge”, others “accord”.

<sup>88</sup> Orig. 導師, “guiding teacher”, used as I understand it to refer to a head monk kind of role.

<sup>89</sup> myōyō noshintō 冥陽の神道. [Ta] has “spirit beings of the visible and invisible realms”. [Mi]’s modern Japanese translation gives “non-human gods of the visible and invisible worlds”, Following this [Uc] has “deities from seen and unseen realms.” I would question, though, why Dogen would here, in the middle of a rather concrete discussion of what kind of teacher you should have and the problems with an overly academic orientation, suddenly start talking about spirit beings. Here and below I follow [Ni], who believes that Dogen is categorizing various kinds of people who might be looking for the truth.

<sup>90</sup> Shōka no rakan 証課の羅漢. Arhats who have “attained the fruits of realization” ([Ta]); “people who have actualized the rank of arhat” ([Uc]). Dogen is probably using arhat here in the negative sense sometimes encountered in Mahayana literature of those engaged in practices that are self-centered and incomplete, with a view toward practice and enlightenment which will not permit them to reach the level of Buddhahood.

<sup>91</sup> Shinji kaimei 心地開明. Shinji is literally “mind-ground”. Kaimei glosses as “open-light”; it’s a common word in contemporary Japanese meaning to expose, such as a scandal.

<sup>92</sup> Narau/ならう.

- 29 INTRINSICALLY, WE ARE ALL COMPLETELY and perfectly sane<sup>93</sup>. We are enveloped and imbued<sup>94</sup> by this sanity. But unable to bring ourselves to acknowledge this, we hatch a hodgepodge of beliefs which we embrace and then chase as if they were real, stumbling and falling on the great way. These beliefs embroider the entire sky with their flowery efflorescence. Otherwise, people would not have dreamed up the twelve-fold chain of causation, or the twenty-five realms of existence, or the doctrines of three vehicles and five vehicles or buddha's existence or non-existence. Do not confuse learning these doctrines with the true practice of Buddhism.
- 30 WHEN YOU NOW RELEASE everything<sup>95</sup> and sit single-mindedly in zazen, departing the realm of delusion, enlightenment, emotion, and intellect<sup>96</sup> and leaving aside paths sacred or mundane, instantly you find yourself enveloped by and imbued with sanity, on a leisurely stroll outside of the matrix<sup>97</sup>. Those entrapped<sup>98</sup> in the snare of words have nothing to compare with this.

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<sup>93</sup> Wait a minute! I don't think Dogen used a word like "sane", did he? Actually, he used the word "bodhi 菩提".

<sup>94</sup> Our old friend juyū 受用, lit. "receive-use".

<sup>95</sup> Orig. has "butsuin ni yorite", "by virtue of the buddha seal".

<sup>96</sup> [Uc] has "sentimental judgements about delusion and enlightenment"

<sup>97</sup> kaku-gai ni sō-ō/格外. [Ta] has wander freely outside ordinary thinking". [Ni] "roam outside the intellectual frame", [Uc] "stroll beyond classification".

<sup>98</sup> sentei ni kakaharu. [Mi] gives a lengthy gloss involving "cages for catching rabbits and nets for catching fish".

- 31 **Q5.** ZEN IS ALREADY INCLUDED in The Three Learnings, namely Precepts, Meditation, and Wisdom<sup>99</sup>, since the the “jō (meditation)” part of the Japanese version “kai-jō-e” is short for “zenjō.” And it’s already included in the Six Paramitas<sup>100</sup>, since one of them is “dhyana paramita”, the perfection of meditation, where “dhyana” is the Sanskrit precursor of the Chinese term “chan” and the Japanese “zen”<sup>101</sup>. All Buddhas-to-be<sup>102</sup> learn about both of these as beginners in the search for truth and practice them through thick and thin. So your “zazen” would seem to be just one principle of many. On what basis are you claiming it brings together the true dharma of the tathāgatas?
- 32 **A5.** THIS QUESTION MAY ARISE from confusion caused by the fact that the name “Zen” has come to be applied to this Treasury of the True Dharma Eye on the Tathāgata’s Great Question, the matchless Great Law.

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<sup>99</sup> Skt. shila, samadhi, and prajna.

<sup>100</sup> Six perfections, including generosity, skillful conduct, forbearance, diligence, meditation, and wisdom (Skt. dana, shila, kshanti, virya, dhyana, and prajna).

<sup>101</sup> With all due respect to the other translators, it seems to have occurred to none of them that Dogen’s answer—that the question is based on confusion caused by the name “Zen” applied to his sect—makes sense only if the question is picked apart into its component Sanskrit and Japanese parts.

<sup>102</sup> bodhisattva

- 33 THE TERM "ZEN" AROSE in China; it was never used in India. During the great master Bodhidharma's nine years of wall-gazing at Shaolin Temple<sup>103</sup> on Mt. Song, neither monks nor laypeople understood the Buddha's true teaching as yet so they simply referred to him as "that Indian monk who makes a religion of zazen." The following generations of church fathers all focused exclusively on zazen, as evidenced by the fact that common folk, unaware of the reality, dubbed them the "Zazen Church." In today's world people have come to drop the "za" and now simply use "Zen" to refer to the sect or religion. But the pronouncements of our forebears make it clear where the roots<sup>104</sup> of this word lie<sup>105</sup>. Zazen must not be considered in the same sense as the "zen" concentration or meditation in the Three Learnings or the Six Paramitas<sup>106</sup>.
- 34 THE BUDDHA'S LAW HAS been seamlessly passed down across the generations without a single gap. The heavenly hosts bear incontrovertible witness to the ceremony on Vulture Peak where Shākyamuni Tathagata conveyed to Mahākāshyapa the treasury of the true dharma eye, the wondrous mind of nirvana, the great truth. Those same multitudes of angels will hold and protect the Buddha-dharma into eternity, with effort unflagging.
- 35 LET ME BE PERFECTLY clear. This is the entire road of the Buddha Law. It brooks no comparison.

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<sup>103</sup> J. Shōrinji.

<sup>104</sup> kokoro, heart

<sup>105</sup> In other words, in the word "zazen".

<sup>106</sup> Original given by [Mi] has "narabete", that by [Na] has "naratte".

36 **Q6.** WHAT IN BUDDHISM<sup>107</sup> LEADS you to recommend meditation in the seated posture, in preference to the other four postures<sup>108</sup>, for entering enlightenment?

37 **A6.** I DO NOT CLAIM TO know everything about the way in which each successive buddha of old practiced and entered enlightenment. If you need a reason for seated meditation, think of the reason as being that that is what is used in the Buddha's mansion<sup>109</sup>. And that is reason enough. But another reason for you is that one ancestor<sup>110</sup> described zazen approvingly as "approaching the truth<sup>111</sup> in joyful repose<sup>112</sup>," and you can deduce for yourself that sitting is the posture that fits the bill best. I would also emphasize that this is the path of all buddhas that have preceded us, not just one or two.

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<sup>107</sup> Orig. is "bukke nani-ni yorite ka", lit. "buddha-house what based-on?". One translator has "why does Buddhism", another things that the "bukke" applies to the four postures, giving "four postures taught in the Buddha's house". I believe that this construction is correctly read as "what in Buddhism", or "What in the Buddha's house".

<sup>108</sup> shigi 四儀; walking, standing, sitting, lying down. 行・住・坐・臥.

<sup>109</sup> bukke 仏家, lit. "buddha-house"

<sup>110</sup> Nagarjuna.

<sup>111</sup> Hōmon 法門, lit. "law-gate". Dharma gate.

<sup>112</sup> anraku 安楽, lit. "peace-joy/fun/easy". Other translators have "ease and delight", "ease and joy", "peace and joy". Cf. modern 安樂椅子, "easy chair."

- 38 **Q7.** THIS ZAZEN MAY BE something that people who have not yet reached an internal affirmation<sup>113</sup> of Buddhism can devote themselves to in order to get that affirmation. But what does it offer to those who have already reached clarity on the Buddha's true law?
- 39 **A7.** AT THE RISK OF CASTING pearls before swine<sup>114</sup>, or trying to give an oar to a woodcutter, let me expand on this point.

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<sup>113</sup> shōkai 証会

<sup>114</sup> In the original, "talking about your dreams to a fool."

40 THINKING OF PRACTICE AND enlightenment as two separate things is just wrong<sup>115</sup>. In Buddhism, practice and enlightenment are identical<sup>116</sup>. You can experience this practice within enlightenment even now by assuming a beginner’s mind and devoting yourself to the way; this is the entirety of intrinsic enlightenment<sup>117</sup>. Why do we recommend in the instructions for practice not having any expectation of enlightenment? Because practice is already the intrinsic realization that points directly<sup>118</sup> to your true self. Enlightenment is practice, so it has no end; practice is enlightenment, so it has no beginning. Shākyamuni Tathāgata and venerable Mahākāshyapa were both filled and enriched<sup>119</sup> with practice within realization, and practice within realization also drove<sup>120</sup> great master Bodhidharma and venerable Enō. After embracing Buddha’s truth, it is like this for everyone<sup>121</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> gaidō/外道, lit. “off-path”. Meaning is apparently “non-Buddhist philosopher”. Some translators have “heretical”, which seems heavy-handed to me.

<sup>116</sup> ittō/一等. One and the same; the same; inseparable; completely the same.

<sup>117</sup> One of the trickier sentences in Bendōwa. [Ta] has “Because practice of the present moment is practice-realization, the practice of beginner’s mind is itself the entire original realization.” Part of the problem here is the translation of the first phrase in the original, namely “ima mo (even now)”. [Ta] has tried to make that into the “present” of “present moment”, but the Japanese doesn’t parse that way. Remember Dōgen is speaking to experienced Buddhists. So I think this “even now” has the implication of “even now, after all the practice you have done”; and then the sentence proceeds to interpret itself quite nicely; he is not merely discussing beginner’s mind but rather encouraging his listeners to return to it.

<sup>118</sup> jikishi/直指, lit. “direct-point”. For some reason [Ta] condenses this down to just “immediate”. [Uc] has “directly indicated.” My translation requires adding a direct object of “true self.”

<sup>119</sup> juyū/受用, “receive-use”

<sup>120</sup> inten/引転, lit. “pull-rotate”. Various translators have “turned”, “pulled and turned”, “pulled and driven”, “moved”. I have an image of the pulling motion that might start a prayer wheel in motion. Or pulling a dance partner to spin her. But I have no idea what it really means or how to translate it.

<sup>121</sup> Orig. is “buppō ōji no ato”, which [Uc] turns into “the traces of dwelling in and maintaining buddha-dharma”; and then assumes the “mina” indicates *all* traces. [Ta] has “tradition of abiding in buddha-dharma”, but then has nowhere to go with the “mina” so leaves it out. [Ni] has “examples of all those who...”, but I can’t see where “examples” comes from. I think this sentence is more straightforward than it might look, and means what it says.

- 41 PRACTICE HAS NEVER BEEN separate from enlightenment. With each slice of that unique practice which you gratefully learned one-on-one, of your beginner's mind devoting itself to the way, comes a slice of intrinsic enlightenment in its natural habitat<sup>122</sup>. Our church fathers admonished us to maintain a robust practice in order to avoid defiling the enlightenment from which it cannot be separated. As your hands release ineffable practice, intrinsic enlightenment will fill them; as intrinsic enlightenment passes from your body, ineffable practice will course through it.
- 42 I SAW FOR MYSELF that temples everywhere in China have halls for zazen accommodating five hundred, six hundred, a thousand or two thousand monks, encouraged to do zazen day and night. When I asked the head monks<sup>123</sup> about the true meaning of Buddhism, these keepers of the Buddha's seal informed me that it lay in the identity of practice and enlightenment.
- 43 THAT IS WHY I call on not just those studying here<sup>124</sup>, but all worthy seekers of truth, all who long for the reality within the Buddha Law, be they new or old, saint or sinner, to follow the path of the masters and devote themselves to the way of zazen as the sages before us have taught.
- 44 I'M SURE YOU'VE HEARD of the old master<sup>125</sup> who said "There's no point in making light of practice and enlightenment. They're here to stay anyway."<sup>126</sup>
- 45 THEN THERE WAS THE one who said "See the way, walk the way<sup>127</sup>." The implication is clear: you must practice within attainment of the way.

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<sup>122</sup> "mui no chi ni" 無為の地に, lit. "no-intention-ground". Others have "on unfabricated/unconstructed/non-intentional ground."

<sup>123</sup> Did Dōgen ask the head monk at a particular temple, many, or all?

<sup>124</sup> Presumably at the temple where Dōgen is holding this dialog.

<sup>125</sup> Nangaku Ejō

<sup>126</sup> In Chinese, 修証不無、染汚即不得. Other translations include "It is not that there is no practice and enlightenment, but only that it cannot be defiled," and "it is not that there is no practice and no realization, it is just that they cannot be defiled." I find these translations both incomprehensible and wrong.

<sup>127</sup> Shikū Honjō (C. Sikong Benjing), 667-761. Disciple of Eka.

- 46 **Q8.** PAST TEACHERS OF BUDDHIST doctrines in Japan all visited China and heard the true message there. Why did they bring back only the doctrinal teachings and not the framework<sup>128</sup> you are speaking of?
- 47 **A8.** THESE ANCIENT TEACHERS OF men did not bring back the Law because the time had not yet arrived for them to do so.

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<sup>128</sup> mune むね; could also be “principle”. [Ta] has “practice” but that seems limiting to me.

48 **Q9.** DO YOU THINK THOSE teachers of old grasped the Law?

49 **A9.** IF THEY HAD UNDERSTOOD it, it would have spread.

50 **Q10.** IT HAS BEEN SAID:

*“Bemoan not mortality<sup>129</sup>; the path to escape it is at hand, and it is to realize the eternal nature of spirit. The body shall die just as surely as it is born, but not so the spirit. Realize that the immortal spirit exists within, and that therein lies thy essential nature, the body a mere temporary abode, ephemeral, dying here, reborn there. Mind endures unchanging, throughout past, present, and future. To understand this is to be liberated from mortality. Those who do so put an end to the living and dying of the past and, when they cast off their mortal form, enter the ocean of nature. As they do so verily they are endowed with the same sacred virtue as the buddha tathāgatas. Those who have not yet learned this principle are damned to repeat their experience of mortality forever.*

51 *The only possible conclusion is that we must hasten to comprehend that mind endures. What on earth is to be gained by wasting your time sitting on a cushion?”*

52 IS THIS LINE OF thinking in accord with the way of the buddhas and patriarchs?

53 **A10.** NOT IN THE LEAST. It’s the heresy of Senika<sup>130</sup>.

54 ACCORDING TO THIS HERETICAL view, lurking in your body is a sort of ghostly intelligence<sup>131</sup>, which can tell good from bad, right from wrong. The ability to know pain and pleasure, suffering and delight is due to this ghostly intelligence. And what’s more, this ghost-like nature can slip out of a dying body and be reborn over yonder, Just when you think it’s dying, it manages to get itself reborn somewhere else and thus hangs on through all eternity.

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<sup>129</sup> “Seishi”, lit. “life-death”. Has a variety of nuances depending on the context, but here the focus is on actually birth and death.

<sup>130</sup> J. “senni-gedō” 先尼外道. Senika was an Indian philosopher living around the time of Gautama.

<sup>131</sup> “rei-chi”

55 THAT'S WHAT THE HERESY says.

56 Believing such nonsense to be Buddhism is more foolish than grasping tiles and pebbles and imagining that they are golden jewels. The utter stupidity of such views leaves me at a loss for an analogy. National Master Echū<sup>132</sup> of Great Tang China rebuked them strongly. How laughable—raising to the level of the subtle truth of the buddhas the belief that the soul endures and the body perishes, thereby promoting the basic cause of the very mortality that you are trying to escape? It's pitiful. Know that this is pure heresy, and pay it no heed.

57 THERE'S NO POINT IN stopping here. If you really want to be saved from this heresy, know that the teaching is that in the Buddha's Law body and mind are intrinsically unified, nature and aspect are indivisible; the same is known throughout China and in India, and shall never be violated. If a religion teaches permanence then everything is permanent and it is impossible to separate body and mind. If a religion teaches evanescence then everything is evanescent and it is impossible to separate nature and aspect<sup>133</sup>. In either case, it cannot possibly be true that the body perishes while the spirit lives on. Realize that mortality is in fact exactly nirvana. Nirvana has never been discussed outside the context of mortality. And let me say, the mind which tries to arrive at a supposed Buddhistic wisdom which avoids mortality, based on the idea that mind is separate from body and endures forever, is an understanding and perceiving mind which is itself subject to mortality, thus violating the premise of eternity. This is undeniable.

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<sup>132</sup> J. Nanyō Echū 南陽慧忠 C. Nanyang Huizhong/Hui-chung. 675-775. This admonition is discussed by Dōgen Zenji in Shōbōgenzō Sokushin Zebutsu. Echū is a dharma-heir of Hui-neng, the Sixth Ancestor. After receiving the Transmission he went into hermitage on Baiya shan (Hakugai san) in Nanyang. Emperor Suzong had him dragged from his hermitage in 761 when Huizong was about 81 and had him installed as the court Chan Master. He also served as the Teacher of Suzong's successor Daizong. Commonly referred to as the National Teacher (guoshi or kokushi) in Zen texts. He appears in Blue Cliff Records 18, 69, 99, Records of Silence 42, 85 and Gateless Gate 17. (Source: <http://www.angelfire.com/nc/prannn/nanyang.html>)

<sup>133</sup> [Uc] has "in the gate of speaking of permanence", "in the gate of speaking of impermanence", but I think it is clear here that the "gate" refers to "school" or "sect". [Ta] has "the teaching about permanence", "the teaching about impermanence". Both make it appear as if both teachings are valid and have reasonable consequences. Instead, I believe Dogen is saying that teaching either permanence or evanescence is limited and limiting and ultimately self-contradictory.

- 58 LOOK CLOSELY, AND YOU'LL see that Buddhism has always taught that body and mind are unified. So why on earth should the mind take off and detach itself from the body and survive when the body goes down? That would imply that body and mind are unified sometimes and not unified other times, meaning that Buddhism is just a big lie. Those who think the idea is to eliminate mortality are guilty of hating Buddhism. We must tread carefully here.
- 59 THE GATE TO THE TRUTH that Buddhism talks of as “the nature of mind being the great overall aspect<sup>134</sup>” refers to the entire phenomenal world, without separating nature and aspect, without speaking of living and dying. Everything, up to and including bodhi and nirvana, is mind essence. Each and every thing and phenomenon is this one mind, excluding nothing, disconnecting nothing. All of the gates to the truth are equally one mind. To preach that there is absolutely no difference among them truly is the mark of knowledge of the mind nature of the Buddha house.
- 60 AND THUS IN THIS single law, it is not possible to think of body and mind separately, or to distinguish between mortality and nirvana. We are born children of the Buddha. and must not lend our ears to the jumbled mumblings of the non-Buddhist philosophers.

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<sup>134</sup> “dharma gate of the vast total aspect of mind essence”, J. 心性大総相の法門, quotation from [Daijō Kishin Ron](#) 大乘起心論 (Awakening of faith of Mahayana).

61 **Q11.** MUST THOSE PURSUING THIS zazen strictly abide by the precepts<sup>135</sup>?

62 **A11.** FOLLOWING THE PRECEPTS AND leading a pure life<sup>136</sup> is indeed basic to the Zen school and the traditions of our Buddhist patriarchs, but even those who have not yet received the precepts or who have broken them may still benefit from zazen.

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<sup>135</sup> kairitsu/戒律. Precepts (skt. shila) and regulations (skt. vinaya).

<sup>136</sup> bongyō/梵行.

63 **Q12.** CAN SOMEONE PRACTICING THIS zazen also engage in Shingon<sup>137</sup> and/or Shikan<sup>138</sup>?

64 **A12.** THE ENTIRE TIME THAT I was in China<sup>139</sup>, the masters there whom I met and of whom I inquired the truth<sup>140</sup> told me that of all the patriarchs, past and present, East and West, who carried the true message of the Buddha seal, they had never heard of one who combined practices as you propose. Attaining a singular wisdom requires taking a singular approach.

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<sup>137</sup> mantra.

<sup>138</sup> (Tendai-like) reflection, Vipassana, calm and introspection.

<sup>139</sup> Tang 唐.

<sup>140</sup> shinketsu 真訣.

65 **Q13.** CAN MEN AND WOMEN in the material world follow the practice you describe, or is it limited to those who devote themselves to it monastically?

66 **A13.** THE PATRIARCHS HAVE TOLD us that the Buddha Law makes no distinctions of gender or status as to who can grasp<sup>141</sup> it.

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<sup>141</sup> kaitoku 会得

- 67 **Q14.** BUT MONKS CAN LEAVE behind all the cares of daily life and devote themselves to the way of zazen without impediment. How can those pursuing the affairs of the material world dedicate themselves to practice and fulfill the natural<sup>142</sup> Buddha way?
- 68 **A14.** THE PATRIARCHS HAVE IN their great benevolence opened to us the vast gate of compassion, that each and every living being<sup>143</sup> might achieve realization<sup>144</sup>. The gate is open to man and angel without exception. And many are those who have entered it and are entering it now. For example, the Tang emperors Dai Zong and Shun Zong,<sup>145</sup> although preoccupied with affairs of state, nevertheless devoted themselves to the way of zazen and penetrated<sup>146</sup> the great path of the patriarchs. Prime Ministers Li and Fang<sup>147</sup> were both trusted aides to their emperors and the legs and arms of the nation, but still devoted themselves to the way of zazen and achieved realization<sup>148</sup> onto the great path of the patriarchs. So it simply depends on your commitment, not on whether you have left the world behind to become a monk or not. Anyone possessed of a keen ability to discern excellence will be drawn to believe. Those who imagine that daily activities will interfere with the Buddha Law are stuck in the belief that there is no Law of the Buddha in the midst of the world, having not yet realized that there is no Law of the world in the midst of the Buddha<sup>149</sup>.

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<sup>142</sup> mui 無為 lit. “no-intent”, sometimes “unconstructed”, “unintentional”

<sup>143</sup> shujō 衆生 sentient beings

<sup>144</sup> shōnyuu 証入. Does this mean “entering enlightenment”, or “becoming enlightened and entering the way”, as [Mij] would have it?

<sup>145</sup> 代宗 and 順宗. Tang emperors who ruled in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>146</sup> kaitsuu 会通, lit. “meet-penetrate”

<sup>147</sup> 李 and 防, J. Ri and Bo.

<sup>148</sup> shōnyuu 証入

<sup>149</sup> A typical Dōgen construction. Buppō 仏法 “Buddha-dharma” and sechuu 世中 “in this world” are normal constructions, but Dōgen inverts them to get Sehō 世法 “world-dharma” and 仏中 “in the Buddha”. Hopefully the translation captures this word play.

69 RECENTLY IN CHINA THERE was a Minister of State named Feng., a high-ranking official experienced in the way of the patriarchs. He wrote the following poem to express himself:

*When duties permit, I delight in zazen;  
Seldom do I sleep my shoulders touching the bed.  
And although I appear to be a minister,  
My name is known across the four seas as a senior adept.*

This man was constantly occupied with his official duties, but was able to attain the way due to his deep commitment to it. Based on others, cast your eyes on yourself. Based on the past, reflect on the present.

70 IN GREAT SONG CHINA, the Emperor, his ministers, aristocrats and commoners, men and women all have minds which linger in the way of the ancestors. Warriors and scholars alike are committed to joining in and studying the way. That many of those so committed will illuminate the ground of their mind is beyond doubt. From this alone you can see that daily affairs do not interfere with the Buddha Law.

71 WHEN TRUE BUDDHA-dharma spreads throughout a nation, the buddhas and angels protect it, and the reign of the emperor proceeds in peace. As the reign of the holy proceeds in peace, the Buddha's truth gains in strength.

72 AND WHEN SHĀKYAMUNI WAS alive, criminals<sup>150</sup> and heretics gained the way. In the congregations of the ancient church fathers satori opened to hunters<sup>151</sup> and woodcutters<sup>152</sup>, So there is no reason this is impossible for anyone. All that is necessary is to seek the guidance of a true teacher.

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<sup>150</sup> Believed to refer to King Ajatasatru, who killed his own father, King Bimbisara.

<sup>151</sup> Sekkyō Ezō (Shigong Huican), a disciple of Baso Doitsu (Mazu Daoyi).

<sup>152</sup> The Sixth Ancestor, Enō, of course.

73 **Q15.** CAN THIS PRACTICE BRING us enlightenment even in these final days of our degenerate society?

74 **A15.** IT IS THE DOCTRINAIRES, who specialize in naming and classifying things, that have invented the phases of True Dharma, Semblance Dharma, and Final Dharma<sup>153</sup> you allude to; the actual teachings of Mahayana Buddhism teach no such thing. They simply say that anyone who practices will attain the way. In fact, whether you are starting on the path or completing it<sup>154</sup>, the simple message of the truth is just to gather the same rare family treasures and fill yourself<sup>155</sup> with them,. The person doing the practicing himself knows whether or not he is enlightened in the same way that a person drinking water himself can tell whether it is tepid or cool.

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<sup>153</sup> 正像末法. Refers to a theory that Buddhism will unfold in stages, starting with a 500-year phase where it is practiced correctly (shouhou), followed by another 500-year phase where just the forms remain (zouhou), and a final 500- or 1000-year phase where it dies (mappou). Dogen's era was supposed to be mappou.

<sup>154</sup> 入法出身, lit. "enter-law-leave-body." [Ta] has "entering dharma and leaving bondage behind"; [Ni] has "entering the dharma and getting the body out"; [Uc] tries "entering dharma and...embodying it freely. Since the next phrase begins with "onajiku" (identically) whatever two phenomena Dogen is trying to refer to here they both need to be something that can involve receiving and using the rare treasure of your own house, a point [Ta] seems to miss. [Mi] has the most inventive translation, glossing as "entering the dharma and transcending it." [Na] concurs. [Sa] claims that this refers to a distinction between people starting and completing the path; I've adopted his interpretation.

<sup>155</sup> juyū, again; lit. "receive-use".

75 **Q16.** IT HAS BEEN SAID:

*In Buddhism, nothing is required except to fully grasp the principle of “Thus Mind Is Buddha”; no sutras need pass your lips, no trappings of Buddhism adorn your body<sup>156</sup>. Knowing that Buddhism is intrinsically within you—this completes the circle of attaining the way. Nothing remains to be sought from others. Why, then, must we go to all the trouble of following the zazen path of devotion?*

76 **A16.** THIS STATEMENT LACKS ALL rhyme and reason. If what you said were even remotely true, then anyone with mental function could obtain knowledge simply by being taught this idea.

77 You need to let go of other people’s beliefs and your own<sup>157</sup> in order to study Buddhism. If you could attain the way just by understanding “Self Equals Buddha” then Shākyamuni would not have bothered to give us his teachings.

78 Let me illustrate this with an excellent example from an old master.

79 Long ago, there was a director monk named Gensoku<sup>158</sup> in the congregation of Zen Master Hōgen<sup>159</sup>, who asked him, “Gensoku, when was it again that you came to this temple?”

80 Gensoku replied, “Three years have passed since I arrived here.”

81 The Zen Master said, “You’re fairly new here then. Why haven’t you ever asked me about Buddhism?”

82 Gensoku replied, “I cannot lie to you, Master. Actually I already reached the state of joyful repose in Buddhism, while I was studying with Zen Master Seihō<sup>160</sup>.”

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<sup>156</sup> mi ni butsudou wo gyō-zuru. [Na] has “practice the Buddha way with mind and body”.

<sup>157</sup> Some translators have something along the lines of “giving up the view of self and other”, but in context, it seems clear that Dogen is saying practitioners need to give up views held by themselves and others (like the one just proposed by the questioner).

<sup>158</sup> Hōon Gensoku (C. Baoen Xuanze).

<sup>159</sup> 法眼. Also known as Moneki 文益; C. Fayan Wenyi, 885-958.

- 83 The Zen Master asked, “And through what words was it that you were able to obtain that entrance?”
- 84 Gensoku answered, “I asked Seihō, ‘What is the nature of the self of this student?’ And he replied, ‘Fili Vulcani veniunt ignem petentes. (The children of Vulcan come seeking fire.)’”<sup>161</sup>
- 85 Hōgen responded, “Fine-sounding words. But perhaps you didn’t really understand them.”
- 86 Gensoku said, “But Vulcan is the Roman god of fire. I understood that searching for fire with fire was similar to searching for the self with the self.”
- 87 The Zen Master replied, “Now I see that you in fact don’t get it. If that was all there was to Buddhism then there is no way it would have been passed all the way down to us today.”
- 88 Devastated, Gensoku stomped out of the meeting. But halfway back to his quarters he thought, “The Zen Master is famed as a top teachers, and the spiritual leader of 500 souls. There must be something to his criticism.” He returned to the Zen Master, apologizing for his rudeness, and asked him, “What is the nature of the self of this student?”
- 89 The Zen Master replied, “Fili Vulcani veniunt ignem petentes.”
- 90 Upon hearing this, Gensoku had an immense satori experience.

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<sup>160</sup> Qingfeng (Baizhao Zhiyuan) 青峰.

<sup>161</sup> Orig. “heitei-douji-rai-kyuu-ka” 丙丁童子来求火, lit. “heitei-douji come looking for fire.” [Uc] says that heitei-douji refers to the novice in the monastery who carries around a flame to light the lamps. Heitei refers to fire in its role in Chinese cosmology. Other translators give constructions such as [Ta] “The fire god is here to look for fire.” Please pardon my transporting China to ancient Rome, the Chinese language to Latin, and Chinese cosmology to Roman mythology.

91 IT'S CLEAR, THEN, THAT you cannot claim to have understood Buddhism by virtue of superficially comprehending a formula like "Self Equals Buddha". If superficially comprehending "Self Equals Buddha" is Buddhism, our Zen Master above would have given neither the guidance nor the admonition that he did. From the first time you meet your teacher, just learn the rules of practice and single-mindedly follow the zazen path of devotion, without letting fragments of knowledge and half-baked concepts<sup>162</sup> stick in your mind. Then Buddhism's wonderful technique will not be in vain.

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<sup>162</sup> ichi-chi-han-ge, lit. "one-know-half-comprehend".

- 92 **Q17.** WE HEAR STORIES FROM ancient India or China where people realized the way on hearing the sound of bamboo being struck<sup>163</sup>, or cleared the mind on seeing the colors of a flower<sup>164</sup>, and the Great Teacher Shākyamuni affirmed the way upon seeing the morning star, while the venerable Ānanda<sup>165</sup> attained clarity in truth when told to take down the banner pole<sup>166</sup>; during the period of the five Zen schools following the sixth patriarch Enō for many a single word or half a phrase was enough to illuminate the foundation of the mind<sup>167</sup>, yet not all of these people had been practicing the zazen way of devotion, had they?
- 93 **A17.** YOU MUST REALIZE THAT now or in the past, those who seeing colors clarified their mind, or hearing sounds realized the truth, were, one and all, exactly those who did not doubt, debate, or deconstruct<sup>168</sup> the way of devotion<sup>169</sup> and were at one with themselves in the moment<sup>170</sup>.

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<sup>163</sup> Zen Master Kyōgen Chikan (C. Hsiang-yen Chih-hsien, Xiangyan Zhixian, d. 898, 經源), who was enlightened while living as a hermit on Mount Buto when his broom whisked a piece of tile against a nearby bamboo tree.

<sup>164</sup> Reiun Shigon, C. Lingyun Zhiqin, 9<sup>th</sup> century Zen Master who was enlightened when he saw a flowering peach tree.

<sup>165</sup> First cousin of Shākyamuni, his personal attendant, and one of closest disciples.

<sup>166</sup> Some translators have “a banner-pole fell down”, or “the banner pole toppled”. “a stick falling”, “a temple flag-pole fell”. The story is that in his old age, long after the Buddha’s death, Mahakashyapa one day told Ānanda that it was time to lower the banner. The banner is hoisted in the monastery every time somebody is teaching. By saying that he should lower the banner Kashyapa suggested that it was due time for Ānanda to let go of his learning, abandon all the proud ambitions about theoretical mastery. Then finally he was awakened, it is told.

<sup>167</sup> shinchi 心地, lit. “mind-ground.”

<sup>168</sup> Orig. 擬議量, lit. “doubt-discuss-measure”. [Ta] has “intellectual thinking,” [Uc] “vacillating deliberation,” [Ni] “without intellectual doubt”. [Ze] has “zazen without zazen.” I’ve assumed that each of the three characters should be interpreted separately.

<sup>169</sup> Of zazen.

<sup>170</sup> 直下に第二人なき. Chokka could possibly mean either “directly below” or “right now”. The phrase could mean “right away they had no secondary person ([Uc]),” “immediately became unexcelled ([Ze]),” “any self besides their original self ([Ta]) (who omits ‘chokka’).”

94 **Q18.** PEOPLE FROM INDIA AND China are sincere by nature. Living in the center of civilization as they do, they are more receptive to Buddhism when it is taught. In Japan, people have always lacked virtue and wisdom, making it difficult for the seeds of truth to grow. It is deplorable that we are such barbarians. Our monks can't even measure up to the laypeople in India and China. Our world is obtuse and small-minded. We spend all our time trying to make ourselves look good and adore superficiality. I doubt if even zazen can help people like this grasp Buddhism.

95 **A18.** YOU'RE RIGHT. THE PEOPLE in our country are twisted, and still lack virtue and wisdom. Teach them the honest truth and they manage to turn its heavenly nectar into poison. They are quick to go running after fame and fortune, slow to dissolve their confusion and attachments. However, the worldly knowledge of men and angels is not the vessel in which we make the voyage to entering and affirming the Buddha's truth. When the Buddha was alive, someone attained the fourth stage<sup>171</sup> by being struck by a ball; while someone else illuminated the great way when she put on an monk's robe as a joke<sup>172</sup>, even though both were stupid, crazy animals. True belief was what helped them leave confusion behind. There was the lay woman who experienced satori when she offered a meal to a senile old priest that just sat there saying nothing; this was not based on knowledge, not based on learning, not relying on words, not relying on stories, just sustained by true faith.

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<sup>171</sup> of arhathood.

<sup>172</sup> A woman who in a past life had been a prostitute.

96 SHĀKYAMUNI'S TEACHINGS HAVE NOW been spreading throughout the billion worlds<sup>173</sup> for more than two thousand years. The many lands they have reached include some where virtue and wisdom do not prevail and some where the people are not necessarily sages. But the miraculous great power of good intrinsic to the true law of the tathāgata will allow it to spread in each land when the right time arrives. People of true faith and diligent practice will obtain the way, regardless of their level of intelligence. Do not think that our people should not encounter Buddhism because they are stupid or our country is short on virtue and wisdom. The seeds of true wisdom are abundant in all of us. It's just that we rarely acknowledge that they are<sup>174</sup> and have not yet taken them up and made them our own.

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<sup>173</sup> san-zen-kai 三千界, lit. "three-thousand-worlds." Trichiliocosm.

<sup>174</sup> 承当. [Sa] says this means the same as 承知, or understand. [Ni] has "experience (the state directly)", [Ta] hit the mark", [Uc] "accept."

- 97 PERHAPS THIS QUESTION-AND-ANSWER approach, with me asking the questions and then turning around and answering them, has proven somewhat confusing. To what extent have I been creating flowers in the flowerless sky<sup>175</sup>? But it is sad for those possessing the will to know the real meaning of the zazen path of devotion that it has still not been brought into our country. That is why I decided to answer the prayers of aspiring practitioners by gathering the things I saw and heard in a foreign land, and recording the truths of the clear-eyed masters. Other rules of practice and temple regulations need to be written down as well, but that deserves more time than I have now.
- 98 ALTHOUGH OUR COUNTRY LIES east of the Dragon Ocean, far beyond the clouds and mist, its people were indeed blessed by Buddhism being brought from West to East around the time of the Emperors Kimmei<sup>176</sup> and Yōmei<sup>177</sup>. But the corruptive focus on names, appearances, and rituals has relegated practice to a position of unimportance. Choose instead, now, to don a torn robe and eat from a patched-together bowl for the rest of your life<sup>178</sup>, build a straw hut by the mossy crags and white cliffs, and practice sitting upright, whereupon going beyond Buddha<sup>179</sup> will be immediately revealed and the great task of your life of study instantly accomplished. This is exactly the teaching of the dragon's tusk<sup>180</sup> and the legacy of the chicken's foot<sup>181</sup>. The rules of zazen which you should follow can be found in "Fukan-zazengi," which I compiled in the Karoku era<sup>182</sup>.

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<sup>175</sup> See §29.

<sup>176</sup> r. 540-571.

<sup>177</sup> r. 586-588.

<sup>178</sup> Or "make a torn robe and patched-together bowl the rest of your life."

<sup>179</sup> 仏向上, butuskoujou

<sup>180</sup> Zen Master Ryūge Koton 龍牙古遁 (C. Longya Juden), lit. "dragon-tusk", 835-923, famous for his ascetic practices. Ryūge is also reported to be the name of a mountain where he practiced.

<sup>181</sup> kukkutupada (J. "keisoku" 鷄足, lit. "chicken foot"). Mountain in central India where Mahakashyapa died.

<sup>182</sup> 1225-1227.

99 NORMALLY WE WOULD AWAIT the emperor's edict to spread Buddhism throughout our country, but it is the edict<sup>183</sup> that the Buddha left on Vulture's Peak that should be graciously received by emperors, ministers, nobles, and generals of one hundred billion lands, who have not forgotten how in their past lives they protected and maintained Buddhism. Everywhere the teachings spread<sup>184</sup> becomes Buddha-land<sup>185</sup>. So spreading the word of Buddhism does not necessarily require choosing the right place or waiting for the right circumstances. Why don't we just start today?<sup>186</sup>

100 THUS I GATHER THESE thoughts and leave them for distinguished seekers after truth as well as those who wander, like drifting clouds or floating weeds, in search of the Way.

101 Written this mid-autumn day<sup>187</sup>, the third year of Kangi (1231), by the mendicant<sup>188</sup> Dōgen, Visitor to China, Messenger of the Truth<sup>189</sup>.

*Translated by Bob Myers, October 2003 ([license information](#); [donate](#))*

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<sup>183</sup> I search in vain for other translations that have picked up on the obvious parallelism that Dōgen intends between the emperor's edict and that of the buddha. Dōgen is making a not-too-subtle claim that the authority of the Buddha takes precedence over that of secular authorities, which he hopes to get on the good side of by pointing out their supposed virtue in past lives.

<sup>184</sup> Some translators have "everywhere the emperors etc. control."

<sup>185</sup> 仏国土. A neologism of Dogen's.

<sup>186</sup> [Ta] has "Just think that today is the beginning," and [Mi] concurs, while [Uc] has "Only do not think that today is the beginning.", and [Ze] has "do not think that today is the beginning," [Wa] "And you must never think that you are starting new from today." The negative interpretation seems suspect in the light of the fact that the entire thrust of this fascicle is to start introducing Dogen's Buddhism in Japan. I agree with [Ni] who believes this is a question.

<sup>187</sup> [Uc] says this is the full moon day of the second month of autumn, the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month.

<sup>188</sup> Shamon (沙門, Skt. shramana)

<sup>189</sup> denhō, lit. "transmit(ter)-law"

## References

I've consulted the references below marked with an asterisk. My translation owes much to each of them. I've also borrowed notes from some. I'd like to thank the translators and commentators for their great efforts.

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