

Bendōwa

A Talk about Pursuing the Truth

Translator's Note:

Ben means "to make an effort" or "to pursue," **dō** means "the truth," and **wa** means "a talk" or "story." Master Dōgen usually used the word *bendō* to indicate the practice of zazen, so *Bendōwa* means a talk about pursuing the truth, or a talk about the practice of zazen. This volume was not included in the first edition of the *Shōbōgenzō*. It was found in Kyoto in the Kanbun era (1661–1673), and added to the *Shōbōgenzō* when the ninety-five-chapter edition was edited by Master Hangyō Kōzen in the Genroku era (1688–1704).

Introduction

A. When the buddha-tathāgatas, each having received the one-to-one transmission of the splendid Dharma, experience the supreme state of bodhi, they possess a subtle method that is supreme and without intention. The reason this [method] is transmitted only from buddha to buddha, without deviation, is that the samādhi of receiving and using the self is its standard. For enjoyment of this samādhi, the practice of [za]zen, in the erect sitting posture, has been established as the authentic gate. This Dharma is abundantly present in each human being, but if we do not practice it, it does not manifest itself, and if we do not experience it, it cannot be realized. When we let go, it has already filled the hands; how could it be defined as one or many? When we speak, it fills the mouth; it has no restriction in any direction. When buddhas are constantly dwelling in and maintaining this state, they do not leave recognitions and perceptions in separate aspects [of reality]; and when living beings are eternally functioning in this state, aspects [of reality] do not appear to them in separate recognitions and perceptions. The

effort in pursuing the truth that I am now teaching makes the myriad dharmas real in experience; it enacts the oneness of reality on the path of liberation. At that moment of clearing barriers and getting free, how could this paragraph be relevant?

B. After I established the will to pursue the Dharma, I visited [good] counselors in every quarter of our land. I met Myōzen of Kennin [Temple]. Nine seasons of frosts and of flowers swiftly passed while I followed him, learning a little of the customs of the Rinzai lineage. Only Myōzen had received the authentic transmission of the supreme Buddha-Dharma, as the most excellent disciple of the founding master, Master Eisai - the other students could never compare with him. I then went to the great kingdom of Song, visiting [good] counselors in the east and west of Chekiang and hearing of the tradition through the gates of the five lineages.

C. At last I visited Zen Master Nyojō of Daibyakuhō Mountain, and there I was able to complete the great task of a lifetime of practice. After that, at the beginning of the great Song era of Shōjō, I came home determined to spread the Dharma and to save living beings - it was as if a heavy burden had been placed on my shoulders. Nevertheless, in order to wait for an upsurge during which I might discharge my sense of mission, I thought I would spend some time wandering like a cloud, calling here and there like a water weed, in the style of the ancient sages. Yet if there were any true practitioners who put the will to the truth first, being naturally unconcerned with fame and profit, they might be fruitlessly misled by false teachers and might needlessly throw a veil over right understanding. They might idly become drunk with self-deception, and sink forever into the state of delusion. How would they be able to promote the right seeds of prajñā, or have the opportunity to attain the truth? If I were now

absorbed in drifting like a cloud or a water weed, which mountains and rivers ought they to visit? Feeling that this would be a pitiful situation, I decided to compile a record of the customs and standards that I experienced firsthand in the Zen monasteries of the great kingdom of Song, together with a record of profound instruction from a [good] counselor which I have received and maintained. I will leave this record to people who learn in practice and are easy in the truth, so that they can know the right Dharma of the Buddha's lineage. This may be a true mission.

D. [The sutras] say: Great Master Śākyamuni at the order on Vulture Peak transmitted the Dharma to Mahākāśyapa. The Dharma] was authentically transmitted from patriarch to patriarch and it reached Venerable Bodhidharma. The Venerable One himself went to China and transmitted the Dharma to Great Master Eka. This was the first transmission of the Buddha-Dharma in the Eastern Lands. Transmitted one-to-one in this manner, [the Dharma] arrived naturally at Zen Master Daikan, the Sixth Patriarch. At that time, as the real Buddha-Dharma spread through the Eastern [Land of] China, it became clear that [the Dharma] is beyond literary expression. The Sixth Patriarch had two excellent disciples, Ejō of Nangaku and Gyōshi of Seigen. Both of them, having received and maintained the posture of Buddha, were guiding teachers of human beings and gods alike. [The Dharma] flowed and spread in these two streams, and five lineages were established. These are the so-called Hōgen sect, Igyō sect, Sōtō sect, Unmon sect, and Rinzai sect. In great Song [China] today the Rinzai sect alone holds sway throughout the country. Although there are differences between the five traditions, the posture with the stamp of the Buddha's mind is only one. Even in the great kingdom of Song, although from the Later Han dynasty onward philosophical texts had been disseminated

through the country, and had left some impression, no one could decide which were inferior and which were superior. After the ancestral master came from the west, he directly cut to the source of the confusion, and spread the unadulterated Buddha-Dharma. We should hope that the same thing will happen in our country. [The sutras] say that the many patriarchs and the many buddhas, who dwelled in and maintained the Buddha-Dharma, all relied on the practice of sitting erect in the samādhi of receiving and using the self, and esteemed [this practice] as the right way to disclose the state of realization. Human beings who attained the truth in the Western Heavens and Eastern Lands followed this style of practice. This [practice] relies on the mystical and authentic transmission of the subtle method from master to disciple, and the [disciple's] reception and maintenance of the true essence of the teachings.

E. In the authentic transmission of [our] religion, it is said that this Buddha-Dharma, which has been authentically and directly transmitted one-to-one, is supreme among the supreme. After the initial meeting with a [good] counselor we never again need to burn incense, to do prostrations, to recite Buddha's name, to practice confession, or to read sutras. Just sit and get the state that is free of body and mind. If a human being, even for a single moment, manifests the Buddha's posture in the three forms of conduct, while [that person] sits up straight in samādhi, the entire world of Dharma assumes the Buddha's posture and the whole of space becomes the state of realization. [The practice] thus increases the Dharma joy that is the original state of the buddha-tathāgatas, and renews the splendor of their realization of the truth. Furthermore, throughout the Dharma worlds in ten directions, ordinary beings of the three states and the six states all become clear and pure in body and mind at once; they experience the state of great liberation, and

their original features appear. Then all dharmas experience and understand right realization and myriad things each put their Buddhist body into practice; in an instant, they totally transcend the limits of experience and understanding; they sit erect as kings of the bodhi tree; in one moment, they turn the great Dharma wheel which is in the unequalled state of equilibrium; and they expound the ultimate, unadorned, and profound state of prajñā. These balanced and right states of realization also work the other way, following paths of intimate and mystical cooperation, so that this person who sits in zazen steadfastly gets free of body and mind, cuts away miscellaneous impure views and thoughts [accumulated] from the past, and thus experiences and understands the natural and pure Buddha-Dharma. Through-out each of the infinitesimal, innumerable seats of truth of the buddha-tathāgatas, [the practitioner] promotes the Buddha's work and spreads its influence far and wide over those who have the ascendant makings of a buddha, thus vividly uplifting the ascendant real state of a buddha.

F. At this time, everything in the universe in ten directions - soil, earth, grass, and trees; fences, walls, tiles, and pebbles - performs the Buddha's work. The people that receive the benefit thus produced by wind and water are all mystically helped by the fine and unthinkable influence of the Buddha, and they exhibit the immediate state of realization. All beings who receive and utilize this water and fire spread the influence of the Buddha in the original state of experience, so that those who live and talk with them, also, are all reciprocally endowed with the limitless buddha-virtue. Expanding and promoting their activity far and wide, they permeate the inside and the outside of the entire universe with the limitless, unceasing, unthinkable, and incalculable Buddha-Dharma. [The state] is not dimmed by the views of these individuals

themselves, however, because the state in the quietness, without intentional activity, is direct experience. If we divide practice-and-experience into two stages, as in the thoughts of common folk, each part can be perceived and understood separately. [But] if perception and understanding are mixed in, that is not the standard state of experience, because the standard state of experience is beyond deluded emotion. Although, in the quietness, mind and external world enter together into the state of experience and pass together out of the state of realization, [those movements] are the state of receiving and using the self.

G. Therefore, [movements of mind and the external world] neither stir a single molecule nor disturb a single form, but they accomplish the vast and great work of Buddha and the profound and fine influence of Buddha. The grass, trees, soil, and earth reached by this guiding influence all radiate great brightness, and their preaching of the deep and fine Dharma is without end. Grass, trees, fences, and walls become able to preach for all souls, [both] common people and saints; and conversely, all souls, [both] common people and saints, preach for grass, trees, fences, and walls. The world of self-consciousness, and [the world] of consciousness of external objects, lack nothing - they are already furnished with the concrete form of real experience. The standard state of real experience, when activated, allows no idle moment. Zazen, even if it is only one human being sitting for one moment, thus enters into mystical cooperation with all dharmas, and completely penetrates all times; and it therefore performs, within the limitless universe, the eternal work of the Buddha's guiding influence in the past, future, and present. For everyone it is completely the same practice and the same experience. The practice is not confined to the sitting itself; it strikes space and resonates, [like] ringing that continues before and after a bell. How could

[the practice] be limited to this place? All concrete things possess original practice as their original features; it is beyond comprehension. Remember, even if the countless buddhas in ten directions, as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, tried with all their power and all their buddha-wisdom to calculate or comprehend the merit of one person's zazen, they could not even get close. Now we have heard how high and great is the merit of this zazen.

Questions & Answers

1. [But] some stupid person might doubtfully ask, "There are many gates to the Buddha-Dharma. Why do you solely recommend sitting in zazen?"

I say: Because it is the authentic gate to the Buddha-Dharma.

2. [Someone] asks, "Why do you see it as the only authentic gate?"

I say: Great Master Śākyamuni exactly transmitted, as the authentic tradition, this subtle method of grasping the state of truth, and the tathāgatas of the three times all attained the truth through zazen. Thus the fact that [zazen] is the authentic gate has been transmitted and received. Furthermore, the patriarchs of the Western Heavens and the Eastern Lands all attained the truth through zazen. Therefore I am now preaching [zazen] to human beings and gods as the authentic gate.

3. [Someone] asks, "That which relies upon receiving the authentic transmission of the subtle method of the Tathāgata, or upon following the traces of the ancestral masters, is surely beyond the intellect of the common person. Reading sutras and reciting the names of buddhas, however, may naturally become the causes and conditions of enlightenment. But as for just idly sitting without doing anything, how can that be the means of getting enlightenment?"

I say: If you now think that the samādhi of the buddhas, the supreme and great Dharma, is idle sitting without doing anything, you are a person who insults the Great Vehicle. [Such] delusion is so deep that it is like being in the ocean and saying there is no water. [In zazen] we are already seated, stably and thankfully, in the buddhas' samādhi of receiving and using the self. Is this not the accomplishment of vast and great virtue? It is pitiful that your eyes are

not yet open and your mind remains in a drunken stupor. In general, the state of the buddhas is unthinkable: intelligence cannot reach it. How much less could disbelief or inferior wisdom know the state? Only people of great makings and right belief can enter into it. For people of disbelief, even if taught, it is difficult to receive the teaching - even on Vulture Peak there were people [about whom the Buddha said,] "That they withdraw also is fine."

As a general rule, when right belief emerges in our mind, we should do training and learn in practice. Otherwise, we should rest for a while. Regret the fact if you will, but from ancient times the Dharma has been dry. Further, do you know for yourself any virtue that is gained from practices such as reading sutras and reciting names of buddhas? It is very unreliable to think that only to wag the tongue and to raise the voice has the virtue of the Buddha's work. When we compare [such practices] with the Buddha-Dharma, they fade further and further into the distance. Moreover, we open sutras to clarify the criteria that the Buddha taught of instantaneous and gradual practice, and those who practice according to the teaching are invariably caused to attain the state of real experience. This is completely different from aspiring to the virtue of attainment of bodhi by vainly exhausting the intellect.

Trying to arrive at the Buddha's state of truth [only] through action of the mouth, stupidly chanting thousands or tens of thousands of times, is like hoping to reach [the south country of] Etsu by pointing a carriage toward the north. Or it is like trying to put a square peg into a round hole. Reading sentences while remaining ignorant of how to practice [is like] a student of medicine forgetting how to compound medications. What use is that? Those who chant endlessly are like frogs in a spring paddy field, croaking day and night. In

the end it is all useless. It is still more difficult for people who are deeply disturbed by fame and gain to abandon these things. The mind that craves gain is very deep, and so it must have been present in the ancient past. How could it not be present in the world today? It is most pitiful. Just remember, when a practitioner directly follows a master who has attained the truth and clarified the mind, and when the practitioner matches that mind and experiences and understands it, and thus receives the authentic transmission of the subtle Dharma of the Seven Buddhas, then the exact teaching appears clearly and is received and maintained. This is beyond the comprehension of Dharma teachers who study words. So stop this doubting and delusion and, following the teaching of a true master, attain in experience the buddhas' samādhi of receiving and using the self, by sitting in zazen and pursuing the truth.

4. [Someone] asks, "The Flower of Dharma and the teaching of the Garland [Sutra], which have now been transmitted into this country, are both ultimate expressions of the Great Vehicle. Moreover, in the case of the Shingon sect, [the transmission] passed directly from Tathāgata Vairocana to Vajrasattva, and so [the transmission from] master to disciple is not at random. Quoting the principles which it discusses, that "Mind here and now is buddha" and "This mind becomes buddha," [the Shingon sect] proclaims that we realize the right realization of the five buddhas in one sitting, without undergoing many kalpas of training. We can say that this is the ultimate refinement of the Buddha's Dharma. What is so excellent then about the practice which you now solely recommend, to the exclusion of these other [practices]?"

I say: Remember, among Buddhists we do not argue about superiority and inferiority of philosophies, or choose between shallowness and profundity in the Dharma; we need only

know whether the practice is genuine or artificial. Some have entered into the stream of the Buddha's truth at the invitation of grass, flowers, mountains, and rivers. Some have received and maintained the stamp of Buddha by grasping soil, stones, sand, and pebbles. Furthermore, the vast and great word is even more abundant than the myriad phenomena. And the turning of the great Dharma wheel is contained in every molecule. This being so, the words "Mind here and now is buddha" are only the moon in water, and the idea "Just to sit is to become buddha" is also a reflection in a mirror. We should not be caught by the skillfulness of the words.

Now, in recommending the practice in which bodhi is directly experienced, I hope to demonstrate the subtle truth that the Buddhist patriarchs have transmitted one-to-one, and thus to make you into people of the real state of truth. Moreover, for transmission of the Buddha-Dharma, we must always take as a teacher a person who has experienced the [Buddha's] state. It is never enough to take as our guiding teacher a scholar who counts words; that would be like the blind leading the blind. In this, the lineage of the authentic transmission of the Buddhist patriarchs, we all revere wise masters who have attained the truth and experienced the state, and we cause them to dwell in and to maintain the Buddha-Dharma. This is why, when Shintōists of [the lineages of] yin and yang come to devote themselves, and when arhats who have experienced the fruit come to ask for Dharma, we give each of them, without fail, the means of clarifying the mental state.

This is something that has never been heard in other lineages. Disciples of the Buddha should just learn the Buddha-Dharma. Furthermore, we should remember that from the beginning we have never lacked the supreme state of bodhi, and we will receive it and use it forever. At the same time, because we cannot perceive

it directly, we are prone to beget random intellectual ideas, and because we chase after these as if they were real things, we vainly pass by the great state of truth. From these intellectual ideas emerge all sorts of flowers in space: we think about the twelvefold cycle and the twenty-five spheres of existence; and ideas of the three vehicles and the five vehicles or of having buddha[-nature] and not having buddha[-nature] are endless. We should not think that the learning of these intellectual ideas is the right path of Buddhist practice.

When we solely sit in zazen, on the other hand, relying now on exactly the same posture as the Buddha, and letting go of the myriad things, then we go beyond the areas of delusion, realization, emotion, and consideration, and we are not concerned with the ways of the common and the sacred. At once we are roaming outside the [intellectual] frame, receiving and using the great state of bodhi. How could those caught in the trap of words compare [with this]?

5. [Someone] asks, "Among the three kinds of training there is training in the balanced state, and among the six pāramitās there is the dhyāna pāramitā, both of which all bodhisattvas learn from the outset and all bodhisattvas practice, regardless of whether they are clever or stupid. The zazen [that you are discussing] now is surely [only] one of these. Why do you say that the Tathāgata's right Dharma is concentrated in this [practice of zazen]?"

I say: The question arises because this right Dharma-eye treasury, the supreme and great method, which is the one great matter of the Tathāgata, has been called the "Zen sect." Remember that this title "Zen sect" was established in China and the east; it is not heard in India. When Great Master Bodhidharma first stayed at Shaolin Temple in the Songshan Mountains, and faced the wall

for nine years, monks and laymen were still ignorant of the Buddha's right Dharma, so they called [Master Bodhidharma] a brahman who made a religion of zazen. Thereafter, the patriarchs of successive generations all constantly devoted themselves to zazen. Stupid secular people who saw this, not knowing the reality, talked at random of a zazen sect.

Nowadays, dropping the word "za," they talk of just the Zen sect. This interpretation is clear from records of the patriarchs. [Zazen] should not be discussed as the balanced state of dhyāna in the six pāramitās and the three kinds of training. That this Buddha-Dharma is the legitimate intention of the one-to-one transmission has never been concealed through the ages.

In the order on Vulture Peak in ancient times, when the Tathāgata gave the Dharma to Venerable Mahākāśyapa, transmitting the right Dharma-eye treasury and the fine mind of nirvana, the supreme and great method, only to him, the ceremony was witnessed directly by beings among the celestial thronings which are present in the world above, so it must never be doubted. It is a universal rule that those celestial beings will guard and maintain the Buddha-Dharma eternally; their efforts have never faded. Just remember that this [transmission of zazen] is the whole truth of the Buddha's Dharma; nothing can be compared with it.

6. [Someone] asks, "Why, in discussing entry into the state of experience, do Buddhists recommend us to practice the balanced state of dhyāna solely by sitting, which is [only] one of the four forms of conduct?"

I say: It is difficult to calculate all the ways that buddhas have successively practiced since ancient times to enter the state of real experience. If we want to find a reason, we should remember that what Buddhists

practice is reason in itself. We should not look for [a reason] besides this. But an ancestral master has praised [sitting] by saying, "Sitting in zazen is the peaceful and joyful gate of Dharma." So in conclusion the reason may be that, of the four forms of conduct, [sitting is the most] peaceful and joyful. Furthermore, [sitting] is not the way practiced by one or two buddhas; all the buddhas and all the patriarchs possess this way.

7. [Someone] asks, "In regard to this practice of zazen, a person who has not yet experienced and understood the Buddha-Dharma may be able to acquire that experience by pursuing the truth in zazen. [But] what can a person who has already clarified the Buddha's right Dharma expect to gain from zazen?"

I say: We do not tell our dreams before a fool, and it is difficult to put oars into the hands of a mountaineer; nevertheless I must bestow the teaching. The thought that practice and experience are not one thing is just the idea of non-Buddhists. In the Buddha-Dharma practice and experience are completely the same. [Practice] now is also practice in the state of experience; therefore, a beginner's pursuit of the truth is just the whole body of the original state of experience. This is why [the Buddhist patriarchs] teach, in the practical cautions they have handed down to us, not to expect any experience outside of practice. And the reason may be that [practice itself] is the directly accessible original state of experience.

Because practice is just experience, the experience is endless; and because experience is practice, the practice has no beginning. This is how both Tathāgata Śākyamuni and Venerable Patriarch Mahākāśyapa were received and used by the practice that exists in the state of experience. Great Master Bodhidharma and the Founding Patriarch Daikan were similarly pulled and driven by the practice that exists in the state of experience.

The examples of all those who dwelled in and maintained the Buddha-Dharma are like this. The practice that is never separate from experience exists already: having fortunately received the one-to-one transmission of a share of the subtle practice, we who are beginners in pursuing the truth directly possess, in the state without intention, a share of original experience. Remember, in order to prevent us from tainting the experience that is never separate from practice, the Buddhist patriarchs have repeatedly taught us not to be lax in practice.

When we forget the subtle practice, original experience has filled our hands; when the body leaves original experience behind, the subtle practice is operating throughout the body. Moreover, as I saw with my own eyes in great Song China, the Zen monasteries of many districts had all built zazen halls accommodating five or six hundred, or even one or two thousand monks, who were encouraged to sit in zazen day and night. The leader of one such order was a true master who had received the Buddha's mind-seal.

When I asked him the great intent of the Buddha-Dharma, I was able to hear the principle that practice and experience are never two stages. Therefore, in accordance with the teaching of the Buddhist patriarchs, and following the way of a true master, he encouraged [everyone] to pursue the truth in zazen; [he encouraged] not only the practitioners in his order but [all] noble friends who sought the Dharma, [all] people who hoped to find true reality in the Buddha-Dharma, without choosing between beginners and late learners, without distinction between common people and sacred people.

Have you not heard the words of the ancestral master who said, "It is not that there is no practice-and-experience, but it cannot be tainted." Another [master] said, "Someone

who sees the way practices the way." Remember that even in the state of attainment of the truth, we should practice.

8. [Someone] asks, "The masters who spread the teachings through our country in previous ages had all entered Tang China and received the transmission of Dharma. Why, at that time, did they neglect this principle, and transmit only philosophical teaching?"

I say: The reason that past teachers of human beings did not transmit this method was that the time had not come.

9. [Someone] asks, "Did those masters of former ages understand this method?"

I say: If they had understood it, they would have made it known to all.

10. [Someone] asks, "It has been said that we should not regret our life and death, for there is a very quick way to get free of life and death. That is, to know the truth that the mental essence is eternal. In other words, this physical body, having been born, necessarily moves toward death; but this mental essence never dies at all. Once we have been able to recognize that the mental essence which is unmoved by birth and decay exists in our own body, we see this as the original essence. Therefore the body is just a temporary form; it dies here and is born there, never remaining constant. [But] the mind is eternal; it is unchangeable in the past, future, or present.

To know this is called 'to have become free of life and death.' Those who know this principle stop the past [cycle of] life and death forever and, when this body passes, they enter the spirit world. When they present themselves in the spirit world, they gain wondrous virtues like those of the buddha-tathāgatas. Even if we know [this principle] now, [our body] is still the body that has been shaped by deluded behavior in past ages, and so we are not the same as the saints. Those who do not know

this principle will forever turn in the cycle of life and death. Therefore we should just hasten to understand the principle that the mental essence is eternal. Even if we passed our whole life in idle sitting, what could we expect to gain? The doctrine I have expressed like this is truly in accord with the truth of the buddhas and the patriarchs, is it not?"

I say: The view expressed now is absolutely not the Buddha's Dharma; it is the view of the non-Buddhist Senika. According to that non-Buddhist view, there is one spiritual intelligence existing within our body. When this intelligence meets conditions, it can discriminate between pleasant and unpleasant and discriminate between right and wrong, and it can know pain and irritation and know suffering and pleasure - all [these] are abilities of the spiritual intelligence. When this body dies, however, the spirit casts off the skin and is reborn on the other side; so even though it seems to die here it lives on there. Therefore we call it immortal and eternal. The view of that non-Buddhist is like this.

But if we learn this view as the Buddha's Dharma, we are even more foolish than the person who grasps a tile or a pebble thinking it to be a golden treasure; the delusion would be too shameful for comparison. National Master Echū of great Tang China strongly cautioned against [such thinking]. If we equate the present wrong view that "mind is eternal but forms perish" with the splendid Dharma of the buddhas, thinking that we have escaped life and death when we are promoting the original cause of life and death, are we not being stupid? That would be most pitiful. Knowing that this [wrong view] is just the wrong view of non-Buddhists, we should not touch it with our ears.

Nevertheless, I cannot help wanting to save you from this wrong view and it is only compassionate [for me] now [to try]. So remember, in the Buddha-Dharma, because

the body and mind are originally one reality, the saying that essence and form are not two has been understood equally in the Western Heavens and the Eastern Lands, and we should never dare to go against it. Further, in the lineages that discuss eternal existence, the myriad dharmas are all eternal existence: body and mind are not divided. And in the lineages that discuss extinction, all dharmas are extinction: essence and form are not divided.

How could we say, on the contrary, that the body is mortal but the mind is eternal? Does that not violate right reason? Furthermore, we should realize that living-and-dying is just nirvana; [Buddhists] have never discussed nirvana outside of living-and-dying. Moreover, even if we wrongly imagine the understanding that "mind becomes eternal by getting free of the body" to be the same as the buddha-wisdom that is free of life and death, the mind that is conscious of this understanding still appears and disappears momentarily, and so it is not eternal at all.

Then isn't [this understanding] unreliable? We should taste and reflect. The principle that body and mind are one reality is being constantly spoken by the Buddha-Dharma. So how could it be, on the contrary, that while this body appears and disappears, the mind independently leaves the body and does not appear or disappear? If there is a time when [body and mind] are one reality, and another time when they are not one reality, then it might naturally follow that the Buddha's preaching has been false.

Further, if we think that life and death are something to get rid of, we will commit the sin of hating the Buddha-Dharma. How could we not guard against this? Remember, the lineage of the Dharma which [asserts that] "in the Buddha-Dharma the essential state of mind universally includes all forms," describes the whole great world of Dharma inclusively, without dividing essence and form, and

without discussing appearance and disappearance.

There is no [state] - not even bodhi or nirvana - that is different from the essential state of mind. All dharmas, myriad phenomena and accumulated things, are totally just the one mind, without exclusion or disunion. All these various lineages of the Dharma assert that [myriad things and phenomena] are the even and balanced undivided mind, other than which there is nothing; and this is just how Buddhists have understood the essence of mind. That being so, how could we divide this one reality into body and mind, or into life-and-death and nirvana? We are already the Buddha's disciples. Let us not touch with our ears those noises from the tongues of madmen who speak non-Buddhist views.

11. [Someone] asks, "Must a person who is devoted to this zazen always adhere spotlessly to the precepts?"

I say: Keeping the precepts, and pure conduct, are the standard of the Zen lineages and the usual habit of Buddhist patriarchs. [But] those who have not yet received the precepts, or who have broken the precepts, are not without their share [of the benefit of zazen].

12. [Someone] asks, "Is there nothing to prevent a person who practices this zazen from also performing mantra and quiet-reflection practices?"

I say: When I was in China, I heard the true essence of the teachings from a true master; he said that he had never heard that any of the patriarchs who received the authentic transmission of the Buddha-seal ever performed such practices additionally, in the Western Heavens or in the Eastern Lands, in the past or in the present. Certainly, unless we devote ourselves to one thing, we will not attain complete wisdom.

13. [Someone] asks, "Should this practice also be undertaken by laymen and laywomen, or is it performed only by people who have left home?"

I say: An ancestral master has been heard to say that, with respect to understanding of the Buddha-Dharma, we must not choose between men and women, high or low.

14. [Someone] asks, "People who leave home get free of all involvements at once, so they have no hindrances in practicing zazen and pursuing the truth. How can a busy layperson devotedly do training and be at one with the unintentional state of Buddhist truth?"

I say: In general, the Buddhist Patriarch, overfilled with pity, left open a wide and great gate of compassion so that all living beings could experience and enter [the state of truth]; what human being or god could not want to enter? Thus, when we study the past and the present, there are many confirmations of such [experience and entry]. For instance, Taisō and Junsō were, as emperors, very busy with affairs of state [but] they pursued the truth by sitting in zazen and realized the Buddhist Patriarch's great truth. Both Minister Ri (Ch. Li) and Minister Bō (Ch. Fang), serving as [the emperor's] lieutenants, were the arms and legs of the whole nation [but] they pursued the truth by sitting in zazen and experienced and entered the Buddhist Patriarch's truth.

This [practice-and-experience] rests only upon whether or not the will is present; it does not relate to whether the body stays at home or leaves home. Moreover, any person who profoundly discerns the superiority or inferiority of things will naturally have belief. Still more, those who think that worldly affairs hinder the Buddha-Dharma only know that there is no Buddha-Dharma in the world; they do not know that there are no worldly dharmas in the state of Buddha. Recently in

great Song [China] there was [a man] called Minister Hyō (Ch. Feng), a high-ranking official who was accomplished in the Patriarch's truth. In his later years he made a poem in which he expressed himself as follows:

When official business allows, I like to sit in zazen. I have seldom slept with my side touching a bed. Though I have now become prime minister, My fame as a veteran practitioner has spread across the four seas.

This was somebody with no time free from official duties but, because his will to the Buddha's truth was deep, he was able to attain the truth. We should reflect on ourselves [in comparison] with him, and we should reflect on the present [in comparison] with those days. In the great kingdom of Song, the present generation of kings and ministers, officials and commoners, men and women, all apply their mind to the Patriarch's truth, without exception. Both the military and literary classes are resolved to practice [za]zen and to learn the truth. Those who resolve it will, in many cases, undoubtedly clarify the mental state.

Thus, it can naturally be inferred that worldly affairs do not hinder the Buddha-Dharma. When the real Buddha-Dharma spreads throughout a nation the buddhas and the gods guard [that nation] ceaselessly, so the reign is peaceful. When the imperial reign is peaceful, the Buddha-Dharma comes into its own. Furthermore, when Śākyamuni was in the world, [even] people of heavy sins and wrong views were able to get the truth, and in the orders of the ancestral masters, [even] hunters and old woodcutters entered the state of realization, to say nothing of other people. We need only study the teaching and the state of truth of a true teacher.

15. [Someone] asks, "Even in the present corrupt world in this latter age, is it still

possible to realize the state of real experience when we perform this practice?"

I say: Philosophers have occupied themselves with such concepts and forms, but in the real teaching of the Great Vehicle, without discriminating between "right," "imitative," and "latter" Dharma, we say that all those who practice attain the state of truth. Furthermore, in this directly transmitted right Dharma, both in entering the Dharma and getting the body out, we receive and use the treasure of ourselves. Those who are practicing can naturally know whether they have got the state of real experience or not, just as people who are using water can tell by themselves whether it is cold or warm.

16. [Someone] asks, "It is said that in the Buddha-Dharma once we have clearly understood the principle that mind here and now is buddha, even if our mouth does not recite the sutras and our body does not practice the Buddha Way, we are not lacking in the Buddha-Dharma at all. Just to know that the Buddha-Dharma originally resides in each of us is the whole of the attainment of the truth. There is no need to seek anything else from other people. How much less need we bother about pursuing the truth in zazen?"

I say: These words are extremely unreliable. If it is as you say, how could any intelligent person fail to understand this principle once it had been explained to them? Remember, we learn the Buddha-Dharma just when we give up views of subject and object. If knowing that "we ourselves are just buddha" could be called the attainment of the truth, Śākyamuni would not have bothered to teach the moral way in the past. I would like now to prove this through the subtle criteria of the ancient patriarchs:

Long ago, there was a monk called Prior Sokkō in the order of Zen Master Hōgen. Zen Master

Hōgen asks him, "Prior Sökkō, how long have you been in my order?"

Sökkō says, "I have served in the master's order for three years already."

The Zen master says, "You are a recent member of the order. Why do you never ask me about the Buddha-Dharma?"

Sökkō says, "I must not deceive you, master. Before, when I was in the order of Zen Master Seihō, I realized the state of peace and joy in the Buddha-Dharma."

The Zen master says, "Relying upon what words were you able to enter?"

Sökkō says, "I once asked Seihō: Just what is the student that is I? Seihō said: The children of fire come looking for fire."

Hōgen says, "Nice words. But I am afraid that you may not have understood."

Sökkō says, "The children of fire belong to fire. [So] I understood that their being fire yet looking for fire represented my being myself yet looking for myself."

The Zen master says, "I have become sure that you did not understand. If the Buddha-Dharma were like that, it could never have been transmitted until today."

At this Sökkō became embarrassed and distressed, and he stood up [to leave]. [But] on the road he thought, "The Zen master is [respected] throughout the country [as] a good counselor, and he is a great guiding master to five hundred people. There must surely have been some merit in his criticism of my wrongness."

[Sökkō] goes back to the Zen master to confess and to prostrate himself in apology. Then he asks, "Just what is the student that is I?"

The Zen master says, "The children of fire come looking for fire."

Under the influence of these words, Sökkō grandly realized the Buddha-Dharma. Clearly, the Buddha-Dharma is never known with the intellectual understanding that "we ourselves are just buddha."

If the intellectual understanding that "we ourselves are just buddha" were the Buddha-Dharma, the Zen master could not have guided [Sökkō] by using the former words, and he would not have admonished [Sökkō] as he did. Solely and directly, from our first meeting with a good counselor, we should ask the standards of practice, and we should single-mindedly pursue the truth by sitting in zazen, without allowing a single recognition or half an understanding to remain in our minds. Then the subtle method of the Buddha-Dharma will not be [practiced] in vain.

17. [Someone] asks, "When we hear of India and China in the past and present, there are those who realized the state of truth on hearing the voice of a bamboo, or who clarified the mind on seeing the colors of the flowers. Furthermore, the Great Teacher Śākyamuni experienced the truth when he saw the bright star, Venerable Ānanda realized the Dharma when a temple flagpole fell, and not only that: among the five lineages following from the Sixth Patriarch many people have clarified the mental state under the influence of a single word or half a line of verse. Had they all, without exception, pursued the truth by sitting in zazen?"

I say: We should know that these people of the past and present who clarified the mind on seeing forms and who realized the truth on hearing sounds, were all without intellectual doubt in pursuing the truth, and just in the moment of the present there was no second person.

18. [Someone] asks, "In India and China, the people are originally unaffected and straight. Being at the center of the civilized world makes them so. As a result, when they are taught the Buddha-Dharma they understand and enter very quickly. In our country, from ancient times the people have had little benevolence and wisdom, and it is difficult for us to accumulate the seeds of rightness. Being the savages and barbarians [of the southeast] makes us so. How could we not regret it?"

Furthermore, people who have left home in this country are inferior even to the laypeople of the great nations; our whole society is stupid, and our minds are narrow and small. We are deeply attached to the results of intentional effort, and we like superficial quality. Can people like this expect to experience the Buddha-Dharma straight away, even if they sit in zazen?"

I say: As you say, the people of our country are not yet universally benevolent and wise, and some people are indeed crooked. Even if we preach right and straight Dharma to them, they will turn nectar into poison. They easily tend toward fame and gain, and it is hard for them to dissolve their delusions and attachments.

On the other hand, to experience and enter the Buddha-Dharma, one need not always use the worldly wisdom of human beings and gods as a vessel for transcendence of the world. When the Buddha was in [the] world, [an old monk] experienced the fourth effect [when hit] by a ball, and [a prostitute] clarified the great state of truth after putting on a kaṣāya; both were dull people, stupid and silly creatures. But aided by right belief, they had the means to escape their delusion. Another case was the devout woman preparing a midday meal who disclosed the state of realization when she saw a stupid old bhikṣu sitting in quietness.

This did not derive from her wisdom, did not derive from writings, did not depend on words, and did not depend on talk; she was aided only by her right belief. Furthermore, Śākyamuni's teachings have been spreading through the three-thousand-world only for around two thousand or so years. Countries are of many kinds; not all are nations of benevolence and wisdom.

How could all people, moreover, possess only intelligence and wisdom, keenness [of ear] and clarity [of eye]? But the right Dharma of the Tathāgata is originally furnished with unthinkably great virtue and power, and so when the time comes it will spread through those countries. When people just practice with right belief, the clever and the stupid alike will attain the truth. Just because our country is not a nation of benevolence or wisdom and the people are dull-witted, do not think that it is impossible for us to grasp the Buddha-Dharma. Still more, all human beings have the right seeds of prajñā in abundance. It may simply be that few of us have experienced the state directly, and so we are immature in receiving and using it.

Conclusion

The above questions and answers have come and gone, and the alternation between audience and speaker has been untidy. How many times have I caused flowers to exist in flowerless space? On the other hand, the fundamental principle of pursuing the truth by sitting in zazen has never been transmitted to this country; anyone who hoped to know it would have been disappointed.

This is why I intend to gather together the few experiences I had abroad, and to record the secrets of an enlightened teacher, so that they may be heard by any practitioner who desires to hear them. In addition, there are standards and conventions for monasteries and temples but there is not enough time to teach them

now, and they must not be [taught] in haste. In general, it was very fortunate for the people of our country that, even though we are situated east of the Dragon Sea and are far separated by clouds and mist, from around the reigns of Kinmei and Yōmei, the Buddha-Dharma of the west spread to us in the east. However, confusion has multiplied over concepts and forms, and facts and circumstances, disturbing the situation of practice.

Now, because we make do with tattered robes and mended bowls, tying thatch so that we can sit and train by the blue cliffs and white rocks, the matter of the ascendant state of buddha becomes apparent at once, and we swiftly master the great matter of a lifetime of practice. This is just the decree of Ryūge [Mountain], and the legacy of Kukkuṣapāda [Mountain]. The forms and standards for sitting in zazen may be practiced following the Fukanzazengi which I compiled in the Karoku era.

Now, in spreading the Buddha's teaching throughout a nation, on the one hand, we should wait for the king's decree, but on the other hand, when we recall the bequest of Vulture Peak, the kings, nobles, ministers, and generals now manifested in hundred myriad koṭis of realms all have gratefully accepted the Buddha's decree and, not forgetting the original aim of earlier lives to guard and maintain the Buddha's teaching, they have been born. [Within] the frontiers of the spread of that teaching, what place could not be a buddha-land?

Therefore, when we want to disseminate the truth of the Buddhist patriarchs, it is not always necessary to select a [particular] place or to wait for [favorable] circumstances. Shall we just consider today to be the starting point? So I have put this together and I will leave it for wise masters who aspire to the Buddha-Dharma and for the true stream of

practitioners who wish, like wandering clouds or transient water weeds, to explore the state of truth.

Colophon

Mid-autumn day, 1231 [third year of] Kanki.

Written by the śramaṇa Dōgen, who entered Song [China] and received the transmission of the Dharma.

Source

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Translated by Gudo Nishijima & Chodo Cross

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Editorial comment

Gudo Wafu Nishijima Roshi (1919-2014) was a student of Kodo Sawaki Roshi as a young man, & was later ordained a monk by Master Rempo Niwa in 1973 - receiving dharma transmission from him in 1977.

He worked for twenty-two years to produce his *Shobogenzo*, firstly translating medieval Japanese into modern Japanese, and then translating that version into English. We owe a massive debt of gratitude for his *gyoji*.

An alternative version of *Shobogenzo Bendowa*, by Rev. Hubert Nearman of Shasta Abbey, is available online. In fact, his entire *Shobogenzo* translation can be found chapter by chapter by exploring the websites at <https://shastaabbey.org> & <https://thezensite.com>

John Brown (Ed.)