

*Selections from:*

## ***Shōbōgenzō Bendōwa: Talk on Wholehearted Practice of the Way***

Translated by Shohaku Okumura and Taigen Dan Leighton

All buddha-tathagatas together have been simply transmitting wondrous dharma and actualizing *anuttara samyak sambodhi* for which there is an unsurpassable, unfabricated, wondrous method<sup>1</sup>. This wondrous dharma, which has been transmitted only from buddha to buddha without deviation, has as its criterion *jijuyū-zanmai*.<sup>2</sup>

For disporting oneself freely in this samadhi, practicing *zazen* in an upright posture is the true gate.<sup>3</sup> Although this dharma is abundantly inherent in each person, it is not manifested without practice, it is not attained without realization.

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For all ancestors and buddhas who have been dwelling in and maintaining buddha-dharma, practicing upright sitting in *jijuyū-zanmai* is the true path for opening up enlightenment.<sup>4</sup> Both in India and in China, those who have attained enlightenment have followed this way. This is because each teacher and each disciple has been intimately and correctly transmitting this subtle method and receiving and maintaining its true spirit.

According to the unmistakably handed down tradition, the straightforward buddha-dharma that has been simply transmitted is supreme among the supreme. From the time you begin practicing with a teacher, the practices of incense burning, bowing, *nembutsu*, repentance, and reading sutras are not at all essential; just sit, dropping off body and mind.<sup>5</sup>

When one displays the buddha mudra with one's whole body and mind, sitting upright in this samadhi even for a short time, everything in the entire dharma world becomes buddha mudra, and all space in the universe completely becomes enlightenment.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it enables buddha-tathagatas to increase the dharma joy of their own original

grounds and renew the adornment of the way of awakening. Simultaneously, all living beings of the dharma world in the ten directions and six realms become clear and pure in body and mind, realize great emancipation, and their own original face appears. At that time, all things together awaken to supreme enlightenment and utilize buddha-body, immediately go beyond the culmination of awakening, and sit upright under the kingly bodhi tree.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, they turn the incomparable, great dharma wheel and begin expressing ultimate and unfabricated profound *prajna*.

There is a path through which the *anuttara samyak sambodhi* of all things returns [to the person in *zazen*], and whereby [that person and the enlightenment of all things] intimately and imperceptibly assist each other. Therefore this *zazen* person without fail drops off body and mind, cuts away previous tainted views and thoughts, awakens genuine buddha-dharma, universally helps the buddha work in each place, as numerous as atoms, where buddha-tathagatas teach and practice, and widely influences practitioners who are going beyond buddha, thereby vigorously exalting the dharma that goes beyond buddha.<sup>8</sup> At this time, because earth, grasses and trees, fences and walls, tiles and pebbles, all things in the dharma realm in 10 directions, carry out buddha work, therefore everyone receives the benefit of wind and water movement caused by this functioning, and all are imperceptibly helped by the wondrous and incomprehensible influence of buddha to actualize the enlightenment at hand. Since those who receive and use this water and fire extend the buddha influence of original enlightenment, all who live and talk with these people also share and universally unfold the boundless buddha virtue and they circulate the inexhaustible, ceaseless, incomprehensible, and immeasurable buddha-dharma within and without the whole dharma world. However, these various [mutual influences] do not mix into the perceptions of this person sitting, because they take place within stillness without any fabrication, and they are enlightenment itself. If practice and enlightenment were separate as people commonly believe, it would be possible for them to perceive each other.<sup>9</sup> But that which is associated with perceptions cannot be the standard of enlightenment because deluded human sentiment cannot reach the standard of enlightenment.

Moreover, although both mind and object appear and disappear within stillness, because this takes place in the realm of self-receiving and self-employing (*jijuyū*) without moving a speck of dust or destroying a single form, extensive buddha work and profound, subtle buddha influence are carried out.<sup>10</sup> The grass, trees, and earth affected by this functioning radiate great brilliance together and endlessly expound the deep, wondrous dharma. Grasses and trees, fences and walls demonstrate and exalt it for the sake of living beings, both ordinary and sage; and in turn, living beings both ordinary and sage, express and unfold it for the sake of grasses and trees, fences and walls. The realm of self-awakening and awakening others is fundamentally endowed with the quality of enlightenment with nothing lacking, and allows the standard of enlightenment to be actualized ceaselessly.

Therefore, even if only one person sits for a short time, because this *zazen* is one with all existence and completely permeates all time, it performs everlasting buddha guidance within the inexhaustible dharma world in the past, present and future. [*Zazen*] is equally the same practice and the same enlightenment for both the person sitting and for all dharmas<sup>11</sup>. The melodious sound continues to resonate as it echoes, not only during sitting practice, but before and after striking *sunyata*, which continues endlessly before and after a hammer hits it.<sup>12</sup> Not only that, but all things are endowed with original practice within the original face, which is impossible to measure.

You should know that even if all the buddhas in the 10 directions, as numerous as the sands of the Ganges River, together engage the full power of their buddha wisdom, they could never reach the limit, or measure or comprehend the virtue, of one person's *zazen*.

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Now we have heard that the virtue of this *zazen* is immense. Stupid people may question this by asking, "There are many gates to the buddha-dharma. Why do you only recommend *zazen*?"

REPLY:

It is because this is the true gate to buddha-dharma.

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Why is this alone the true gate?

REPLY:

Great Teacher Shakyamuni correctly transmitted the wondrous method for attaining the Way, and the tathagatas of the three times (past, present, and future) also all attain the Way through *zazen*. For this reason, [*zazen*] has been conveyed from one person to another as the true gate. Not only that, but all the ancestors of India and China attained the Way through *zazen*. Therefore I am now showing the true gate to human and celestial beings.

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As for the practice of *zazen*, people who have not yet realized buddha-dharma should attain enlightenment through practicing the way of *zazen*.<sup>13</sup> But what could those who have already clarified the true buddha-dharma expect from doing *zazen*?

REPLY:

Although it is said that one should not relate dreams to fools and it is useless to give oars to mountain folks, I will give you further instruction.

Thinking that practice and enlightenment are not one is no more than a view that is outside the Way [that is, deluded]. In buddha-dharma, practice and enlightenment are one and the same. Because it is the practice of enlightenment, a beginner's wholehearted practice of the Way is exactly the totality of original enlightenment. For this reason, in conveying the essential attitude for practice, it is taught not to wait for enlightenment outside practice. This must be so because [this practice] is the directly indicated original enlightenment. Since it is already the enlightenment of practice, enlightenment is endless; since it is the practice of enlightenment, practice is beginningless. Therefore, both Shakyamuni Tathagata and Venerable

Mahakashyapa were accepted and used in the practice of enlightenment, and in the same manner Great Teacher Bodhidharma and Great Ancestor Daikan [the Sixth Ancestor] were pulled and turned in the practice of enlightenment. Traces of dwelling in and maintaining buddha-dharma are all like this.

Already there is practice not separate from enlightenment, and fortunately for us, this wholehearted engaging the Way with beginner's mind, which transmits the undivided wondrous practice, is exactly attaining undivided original enlightenment in the ground of nonfabrication. We must know that, in order not to allow defilement of enlightenment inseparable from practice, the buddha ancestors vigilantly teach us not to slacken practice.<sup>14</sup> When wondrous practice is cast off original enlightenment fills our hands; when we are free from original enlightenment wondrous practice is carried out through the whole body.

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- 1 Tathagata is one of the 10 epithets for Buddha; it literally means “thus come, thus gone.” It is used together with buddha for emphasis.

“Simply transmitting” is *tanden* (単伝), literally single or simple transmission, which implies that the transmission is direct between buddhas, that only the dharma is transmitted, and that it is transmitted completely.

*Anuttara samyak sambodhi* is incomparable awareness, the supreme enlightenment of Buddha. “Wondrous dharma” is *myōhō* (妙法); *myō* means “wondrous, subtle, excellent, ungraspable”; *dharma* refers to truth or reality, the elements or objects of reality, or the teaching about reality. *Myōhō* is one translation of *saddharma*. *Saddharma* is also translated as *shōbō*, true dharma, the *shōbō* of Dōgen's masterwork *Shōbōgenzō*. The “wondrous method,” *myōjutsu*, might also be translated as “subtle craft.” Although this practice might be said to have a method, craft, or criterion, this term as used here by Dōgen is provocative and even ironic, as it is not a method or technique to arrive at some dualistic result not already present, and is not separate from the “wondrous dharma” itself.

- 2 *Jijuyū-zanmai* is literally the “samadhi of self-fulfillment” or “self-enjoyment,” or the “samadhi of self receiving or accepting its function.” *Ji* is “self”; *juyū* as a common compound means “fulfillment or enjoyment.” *Ju* alone is “receive” or “accept”; *yu* alone is “function” or “use.” *Zanmai* is samadhi, or concentration. So we can understand this samadhi of self-fulfillment and enjoyment as the samadhi or concentration on the self when it simply receives and accepts its function, or its spiritual position in the world. The important point is that this is not the self that has an object. There is nothing other than or outside of this self. The enjoyment, fulfillment, or satisfaction is the samadhi of the self, of which there is no other. This is not an experience that is somewhere other than here and now, it is not something to be acquired or gained. *Jijuyū* is often contrasted with *tajuyū*, others receiving the enjoyment of dharma. Historically, *tajuyū* refers to other beings receiving the benefits of bodhisattva practice. In the case of Dōgen Zenji’s *jijuyū*, there is no *ta*. *Ta* is included in *ji*. Everything becomes everything, all becomes all. *Jijuyū* samadhi is buddha’s practice. In *Shōbōgenzō Genjōkoan*, Dōgen Zenji says, “To study the buddha way is to study the Self; to study the Self is to forget the Self; to forget the Self is to be enlightened by myriad dharmas; to be enlightened by myriad dharmas is to drop off the body and mind of self and others.” This is *jijuyū-zanmai*. This actually occurs in *zazen*.
- 3 “Disporting oneself freely,” *yuge* (遊戯), could also be translated as “play freely.” The characters in a later version of the text are *yuke* (遊化), which means “to go out and expound the teaching.”
- 4 The section beginning with this sentence, “For all ancestors and buddhas who have been dwelling in and maintaining buddhadharma...” and going to the first question below is chanted daily as a separate text in Sōtō Zen temples and referred to as the *Jijuyū-zanmai*, or Samadhi of Self-fulfillment.
- 5 *Nembutsu* was originally the practice of chanting the name and

visualizing the image of any buddha or buddha land, and only later, in Pure Land Buddhism, came to mean chanting the name of Amitabha; repentance, *shusan* (修懺) in Japanese, refers to the *fusatsu* (*posadha* in Sanskrit), a ceremony of repentance and taking vows and refuge that occurs regularly in Buddhist communities. “Dropping off body and mind” is an important term for Dōgen. Dōgen indicates here that these practices should come from *shinjin datsuraku* (dropping off body and mind), in other words *zazen*; they should be expressions of *shikantaza* (just sitting); otherwise they are meaningless.

This could also be read literally as “From the time you begin practicing with a teacher, do not use [these practices], just sit, dropping off body and mind...” This is to say that such practices should not be *used as instruments* to attain spiritual advancement. Rather, they should be enacted as expressions of self-fulfilling samadhi. In his own practice Dōgen continued to engage in all of these specific practice activities with this attitude.

- 6 “Whole body and mind” is literally “body, speech, and mind.” This complex passage, beginning “When one displays the buddha mudra, ...” reflects the non-anthropocentric basis of Buddhist thought and practice. The active realization embodied and supported in self-fulfilling samadhi includes not only humans and other creatures, but even the land and soil, and the “grasses and trees, fences and walls, tiles and pebbles” Dōgen mentions below. Even things usually considered inanimate objects in Western philosophy vitally partake of this awakening and mutually resonate to encourage the subtle, mysterious buddha guidance or influence in all of us. This Buddhist view of our environment and all the things that make it up as alive and intimately connected with us rather than a collection of dead objects, has become of great interest to modern thinkers concerned with the threats of environmental degradation and the underlying attitudes that have helped endanger our ecology.
- 7 The six realms are hell, the realms of hungry ghosts, of animals, of *asuras* (titans), of human beings, and of heavenly beings. “Supreme

enlightenment” in this sentence is *shōgaku* (正覺) in Japanese; this refers to anuttara samyak sambodhi.

- 8 “Each place” is *dōjō* (道場), a place where buddha-tathagatas practice and manifest the buddha-dharma.
- 9 The somewhat ambiguous phrase, “It would be possible for them to perceive each other,” might be interpreted as “It should be possible for practice and enlightenment to be perceived separately.”
- 10 “Mind and object” could be understood as subject and object. “Appear and disappear” is a translation of *shō nyū go shutsu* (証入悟出), literally “enlightened entering and enlightened leaving.”
- 11 Dōgen says literally, “Equal same practice and same enlightenment for both this and that.” The understood subject is *zazen*, or the whole activity of buddha work which Dōgen has been describing. We have translated “this and that” or “it, it” as “the person sitting and all dharmas.” However, these words may also imply the distinction of ordinary people and sages, as well as that of subject and object represented by the person sitting and all phenomena.
- 12 *Sunyata* is literally “empty space.” Dōgen refers to the Buddhist teaching of *sunyata*, sometimes translated as emptiness; however, it actually means the complete interdependence of all things. With this image Dōgen recalls the poem “Windbell” by his teacher, Tendō Nyōjō:

*The whole body of a windbell, like a mouth hanging  
in emptiness (sunyata),  
Without choosing which direction the wind  
comes from,  
For the sake of others equally speaks  
prajna (wisdom)... [our translation]*

- 13 The character for enlightenment here is *shō* (証), which also means

verification, proof, or authentication. This character is used for enlightenment throughout Dōgen's reply.

- 14 This refers to a dialogue between the Sixth Ancestor and Nangaku Ejō (677–744, Nanyue Huairang in Chinese). The Sixth Ancestor asked, “What is this that thus comes?” After eight years Nangaku was able to answer, “Any explanation misses it.” The Sixth Ancestor asked, “If so, is there practice and enlightenment?” Nangaku responded, “It is not that there is no practice and enlightenment, but only that they cannot be defiled.” The Sixth Ancestor agreed, saying, “It is just this nondefilement that all buddha ancestors maintain.”

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