

## Instructions for the Zen Cook

### *Tenzo Kyōkun*

**1a.** From ancient times, in communities practicing the Buddha's Way, there have been six offices established to oversee the affairs of the community. The monks holding each office are all disciples of the Buddha and all carry out the activities of a buddha through their respective offices. Among these officers is the tenzo, who carries the responsibility of preparing the community's meals.

It is written in the *Chanyuan Qinggui* that "the function of the tenzo is to manage meals for the monks."

This work has always been carried out by teachers settled in the Way and by others who have aroused the bodhisattva spirit within themselves. Such a practice requires exerting all your energies. If a man entrusted with this work lacks such a spirit, then he will only endure unnecessary hardships and suffering that will have no value in his pursuit of the Way.

The *Chanyuan Qinggui* also says, "Put your awakened mind to work, making a constant effort to serve meals full of variety that are appropriate to the need and the occasion, and that will enable everyone to practice with their bodies and minds with the least hindrance."

Down through the ages, many great teachers and patriarchs, such as Guishan Lingyou and Dongshan Shouchu, have served as tenzo. Although the work is just that of preparing meals, it is in spirit different from the work of an ordinary cook or kitchen helper.

When I was in China, I talked in my spare time with many older monks who had years of experience working in the various offices. They taught me a little of what they had learned in their work. What they had to say must surely be the marrow of what has been handed down through the ages by previous buddhas and patriarchs settled in the Way.

**1b.** We should thoroughly study the *Chanyuan Qinggui* concerning the overall work of the tenzo, and moreover, listen closely to what those who have done this work have to tell us regarding the details.

I shall now take up the work of the tenzo covering a period of one complete day. After the noon meal the tenzo should go to the *tsūsu* and *kansu* to get the rice, vegetables, and other ingredients for the following morning and noon meals. Once he has these, he must handle them as carefully as if they were his own eyes. Renyong of Baoneng said, "Use the property and possessions of the community as carefully as if they were your own eyes." The tenzo should handle all food he receives with respect, as if it were to be used in a meal for the emperor. Cooked and uncooked food must be handled in the same manner.

Next, all the officers meet in the kitchen or pantry and decide what food is to be prepared for the following day, for example, the type of the rice gruel, the vegetables, the seasoning. In the *Chanyuan Qinggui* it says: "When deciding on the amount of food and number of side dishes for the morning and noonday meals, the tenzo should consult with the other officers. They are the *tsūsu*, *kansu*, *fūsu*, *ino*, and *shissui*. When they have chosen the meals, the menus should be posted on the notice boards in front of the abbot's room as well as in front of the study hall."

When this has been done, preparations for the next morning's meal may begin. You must not leave the washing of rice or preparation of vegetables to others, but must carry out this work with your own hands. Put your whole attention into the work, seeing just what the situation calls for. Do not be absent-minded in your activities, nor so absorbed in one aspect of a matter that you fail to see its other aspects. Do not overlook one drop in the ocean of virtue [by entrusting the work to others]. Cultivate a spirit which strives to increase the source of goodness upon the mountain of goodness.

**2a.** Again, in the *Chanyuan Qinggui* we find, “If the tenzo offers a meal without a harmony of the six flavors and the three qualities, it cannot be said that he serves the community.”

When washing the rice, remove any sand you find. In doing so, do not lose even one grain of rice. When you look at the rice see the sand at the same time; when you look at the sand, see also the rice. Examine both carefully. Then, a meal containing the six flavors and the three qualities will come together naturally.

Xuefeng Yicun was once the tenzo under Dongshan Liangjie. One day while Xuefeng was washing the rice Dongshan happened to pass by and asked, “Do you wash the sand and pick out the rice, or wash the rice and pick out the sand?” “I wash and throw away both the sand and the rice together,” Xuefeng replied. “Then what on earth do the residents here eat?” Dongshan pressed again. In reply, Xuefeng turned over the rice bucket. On seeing that, Dongshan said, “The day will come when you will practice under another master.”

In this same way, the greatest teachers from earliest times who were settled in the Way have carried out their work with their own hands. How are we inexperienced practitioners of today able to remain so negligent in our practice! Those who have come before us have said, “The Way-Seeking Mind of a tenzo is actualized by rolling up your sleeves.”

In order not to lose any of the rice when picking out the sand, do it carefully with your own hands. Again, in the *Chanyuan Qinggui* we find, “Pay full attention to your work in preparing the meal; attend to every aspect yourself so that it will naturally turn out well.”

Next, you should not carelessly throw away the water that remains after washing the rice. In olden times a cloth bag was used to filter out the water when it was thrown away. When you have finished washing the rice, put it into the cooking pot. Take special care, lest a mouse accidentally falls into it. Under no circumstances allow anyone who happens to be drifting through the kitchen to poke his fingers around **2b.** or look

into the pot.

Prepare those vegetables that will be used in a side dish for the following morning’s meal. At the same time, clean up the rice and leftover soup from the noon meal. Conscientiously wash out the rice container and the soup pot, along with any other utensils that were used. Put those things that naturally go on a high place onto a high place, and those that would be most stable on a low place onto a low place; things that naturally belong on a high place settle best on a high place, while those which belong on a low place find their greatest stability there.

Clean the chopsticks, ladles, and all other utensils; handle them with equal care and awareness, putting everything back where it naturally belongs. Keep your mind on your work and do not throw things around carelessly.

After this work has been done it is time to prepare for the following day’s noon meal. First of all, check to see whether there are any insects, peas, rice-bran, or tiny stones in the rice, and if so, carefully winnow them out.

When choosing the rice and vegetables to be used, those working under the tenzo should offer sutras to the spirit of the *kamado*. Then, begin preparing the ingredients for whatever side dish and soup there might be, cleaning everything thoroughly of any dirt or insects.

When the tenzo receives the food from the *kusu*, he must never complain about its quality or quantity, but always handle everything with the greatest care and attention. Nothing could be worse than to complain about too much or too little of something, or of inferior quality.

Both day and night, allow all things to come into and reside within your mind. Allow your mind (Self) and all things to function together as a whole. Before midnight direct your attention to organizing the following day’s work; after midnight begin preparations for the morning meal.

**3a.** After the morning meal, wash the pots and cook the rice and soup for the noon meal. When soaking the rice and measuring the water, the tenzo should be present at the sink.

Keep your eyes open. Do not allow even one grain of rice to be lost. Wash the rice thoroughly, put it in the pot, light the fire, and cook it. There is an old saying that goes, "See the pot as your own head; see the water as your lifeblood."

Transfer the cooked rice into a bamboo basket in summer or a wooden container in winter, and then set it on the table. Cook the rice, soup, and any side dish all at the same time.

The tenzo must be present, paying careful attention to the rice and soup while they are cooking. This is true whether the tenzo does the work by himself or has assistants helping him either with the cooking or the tending of the fires. Even though in the larger monasteries recently people have been placed in charge of cooking the soup or the rice, the tenzo should not forget that these people are assistants working under him and cannot be held responsible for this work. In olden times the tenzo was completely in charge; there were no such assistants.

When you prepare food, never view the ingredients from some commonly held perspective, nor think about them only with your emotions. Maintain an attitude that tries to build great temples from ordinary greens, that expounds the *buddhadharma* through the most trivial activity. When making a soup with ordinary greens, do not be carried away by feelings of dislike towards them nor regard them lightly; neither jump for joy simply because you have been given ingredients of superior quality to make a special dish. By the same token that you do not indulge in a meal because of its particularly good taste, there is no reason to feel an aversion towards an ordinary one. Do not be negligent and careless just because the materials seem plain, and hesitate to work more diligently with materials of superior quality. Your attitude towards things should not be contingent upon their quality.

**3b.** A person who is influenced by the quality of a thing, or who changes his speech or manner according to the appearance or position of the people he meets, is not a man working in the Way.

Strengthen your resolve, and devote your life spirit to surpassing the refinement of the ancient patriarchs and being even more meticulous than those who came before you. How do we apply our life aspiration so that it will function for the Way? If great teachers in the past were able to make a plain soup from greens for only a pittance, we must try to make a fine soup for the same amount. This is very difficult to do. Among other things, there are great differences between ages past and today, so even hoping to stand alongside the teachers of former times is no simple matter. Yet, being scrupulous in our actions and pouring our energy into those actions, there is no reason why we cannot equal the ancient masters. We must aspire to the highest of ideals without becoming arrogant in our manner.

These things are truly just a matter of course. Yet we remain unclear about them because our minds go racing

about like horses running wild in the fields, while our emotions remain unmanageable, like monkeys swinging in the trees. If only we would step back to carefully reflect on the horse and monkey, our lives would naturally become one with our work. Doing so is the means whereby we turn things even while simultaneously we are being turned by them. It is vital that we clarify and harmonize our lives with our work, and not lose sight of either the absolute or the practical.

Handle even a single leaf of a green in such a way that it manifests the body of the Buddha. This in turn allows the Buddha to manifest through the leaf. This is a power which you cannot grasp with your rational mind. It operates freely, according to the situation, in a most natural way. At the same time, this power functions in our lives to clarify and settle activities and is beneficial to all living things.

**4a.** After all the preparations for the meal are complete, clean up thoroughly, putting everything back where it ought to be. When the drum sounds and the bell rings both morning and evening, be sure not to miss zazen nor going to see the master to receive his teaching.

When you return to your room, shut your eyes and count the number of people in the *sōdō*. Do not forget the elder priests and retired monks, plus those living in single rooms. Include those in the infirmary or any other elderly people. In addition to these, any monks who are on leave and others who may have just arrived but are not yet living fully within the community should be taken into account. And finally, those living in any of the subtemples within the complex must be added. If there are any doubts, check with the heads of the offices or those in charge of the various residences where people might be staying.

When you know the exact number in the community, then calculate the amount of food to be cooked. For every grain of rice to be eaten, supply one grain. In dividing one grain, the result may be two half-grains, or possibly three or four. On the other hand, one grain might equal a half-grain or perhaps two half-grains. Then again, two half-grains might be counted as one whole grain. You must be able to see clearly how much of a surplus will be created if you add one unit of rice, or whether there will be enough if you take away one unit.

When you eat a grain of Luling rice you may become the monk Guishan. When you add a grain, you may become the cow. Sometimes the cow eats Guishan, sometimes Guishan pastures the cow!

Consider whether you have thoroughly understood these matters and are able to make these calculations. Go back over everything again, and when you have understood these details be prepared to explain them to others according to their capacity to understand. Use ingenuity in your practice; see the cow and Guishan as one, not as two, even though temporarily they appear that way. In your

day-to-day life, do not forget this even for a moment.

If someone comes to make a monetary donation for the food, consult the other officers concerning how that money is to be used. This has been the custom in Buddhist communities down through the ages. As for other kinds of donations to the community, such as items which will be distributed among the residents, again, consult the other officers. In other words, do not infringe on the authority of other officers or make decisions outside the boundary of your responsibility.

After each meal has been carefully prepared, place it on a table. Put on your *kesa* and spread out your *zagu*. Facing the *sōdō*, where everyone does zazen, offer incense and bow nine times. Afterwards, carry the meal into the *sōdō*.

All day and all night, the tenzo has to make arrangements and prepare meals without wasting a moment. If he throws all his energy into whatever the situation truly calls for, then both the activity and the method by which he carries it out will naturally work to nurture the seeds of the *buddhadharma*. Just taking care of the function of the tenzo enables all the residents in the community to carry on their practice in the most stable way.

It has been several hundred years since the *buddhadharma* was introduced into Japan. Yet, no one has ever written about the preparation and serving of meals as an expression of *buddhadharma*, nor have any teachers taught concerning these matters. Much less has there been any mention of bowing nine times prior to offering the meal to the residents. Such a practice has never entered the minds of people in this country. Here people think nothing of eating like animals with no concern for the way they eat. What a pathetic state of affairs. It truly saddens me to see things this way. Why must it be so?

**5a.** When I was at Mount Tiantong, a monk called Lu from Qingyuan Fu was serving as tenzo. One day after the noon meal I was walking to another building within the complex when I noticed Lu drying mushrooms in the sun in front of the *butsuden*. He carried a bamboo stick but had no hat on his head. The sun's rays beat down so harshly that the tiles along the walk burned one's feet. Lu worked hard and was covered with sweat. I could not help but feel the work was too much of a strain for him. His back was a bow drawn taut, his long eyebrows were crane white.

I approached and asked his age. He replied that he was sixty-eight years old. Then I went on to ask him why he never used any assistants.

He answered, "Other people are not me."

"You are right," I said; "I can see that your work is the activity of the *buddhadharma*, but why are you working so hard in this scorching sun?"

He replied, "If I do not do it now, when else can I do it." There was nothing else for me to say. As I walked on along that passageway, I began to sense inwardly the true significance of the role of tenzo.

I arrived in China in April 1223, but, being unable to disembark immediately, I stayed on board ship in the port of Ningbo. One day in May, while I was talking with the captain, an old monk about sixty years of age came directly to the ship to buy mushrooms from the Japanese merchants on board. I invited him for tea and asked him where he was from. He said he was the tenzo at the monastery on Mount Ayuwang and added,

"I am originally from Xishu, although I left there over forty years ago. I am sixty-one this year and have practiced in several Zen monasteries in this country. Last year, while living at Guyun, I visited the monastery on Mount Ayuwang, though I spent my time there totally confused as to what I was doing. Then, after the summer practice period last year, I was appointed tenzo. Tomorrow is May 5th, but I have nothing special to offer the monks. I wanted to prepare a noodle soup, but as I did not have any mushrooms to put

**5b.** in it, I came here to buy some."

I asked, "When did you leave Ayuwang?"

He replied, "After lunch."

"Is it far from here?"

"About fourteen miles."

"When will you go back to the temple?"

"I am planning to return as soon as I've bought the mushrooms."

"You can't imagine how fortunate I feel that we were able to meet unexpectedly like this. If it's possible, I wish you would stay a while longer and allow me to offer you something more."

"I am sorry, but that is impossible just now. If I am not there tomorrow to prepare the meal, it will not be made well."

"But surely there must be others in a place as large as Ayuwang who are capable of preparing the meals. They will not be that inconvenienced if you are not there, will they?"

"I have been put in charge of this work in my old age. It is, so to speak, the practice of an old man. How can I entrust all that work to others. Moreover, when I left the temple, I did not ask for permission to stay out overnight."

"But why, when you are so old, do you do the hard work of a tenzo? Why do you not spend your time practicing zazen or working on the koans of former teachers? Is there something special to be gained from working particularly as a tenzo?"

He burst out laughing and remarked, "My good friend from abroad! You do not yet understand what practice is all about, nor do you know the meaning of characters."

When I heard this old monk's words I was taken aback and felt greatly ashamed. So I asked him, "What are characters and what is practice?"

**6a.** He replied, "If you do not deceive yourself about this problem, you will be a man of the Way." At the time, I was unable to grasp the meaning of his words.

"If you do not understand, please come to Mount Ayuwang sometime and we will talk about the nature of characters more fully." With that he rose quickly. "It is getting late and the sun is about to set. I am afraid I cannot stay any longer." Then he left for Mount Ayuwang.

In July of the same year, I stayed on Mount Tiantong. One day the tenzo from Ayuwang came to see me. He said: "As the summer practice period has ended, I shall be retiring as tenzo and plan to return home. I heard that you were here and wanted very much to talk with you and see how you were doing."

I was indeed happy to see him and received him cordially. We talked about various things, and finally came to the matter he had touched on aboard the ship concerning the practice and study of characters.

He said, "A person who studies characters must know just what characters are, and one intending to practice the Way must understand what practice is."

I asked him once again, "What are characters?" "One, two, three, four, five," he replied.

"What is practice?"

"There is nothing in the world that is hidden." Although we talked about many other things I will not mention them here. Whatever little bit I have learned about characters and practice is largely due to that tenzo. When I met again with my teacher Myōzen, who later died in China, and told him of my meeting with the tenzo from Mount Ayuwang, he was extremely happy to hear about it. Later on, I came across a *gāthā* Xuedou had written for one of his disciples:

**6b.** *One, seven, three, five—*

*The truth you search for cannot be grasped.  
As night advances, a bright moon illuminates the  
whole ocean;  
The dragon's jewels are found in every wave.  
Looking for the moon, it is here, in this wave, in  
the next.*

It dawned on me then that what the tenzo I had met the previous year had said coincided perfectly with what Xuedou was pointing out through his *gāthā*. I realized more than ever that the tenzo was a man fully living out the *buddhadharma*.

I used to see the characters one, two, three, four, and five; now I also see six, seven, eight, nine, and ten. Future students must be able to see that side from this side as well

as this side from that side. Practicing with intense effort, using all your ingenuity, you will be able to grasp genuine Zen that goes beyond the surface of characters. To do otherwise will only result in being led about by variously tainted Zen that will leave you incapable of preparing meals skillfully for the community.

Regarding the office of tenzo, stories such as those I mentioned previously about Guishan and Dongshan have been passed down through the ages. In addition to the monks from Mount Tiantong and Mount Ayuwang, I met and talked with monks who served as tenzo from other monasteries. If we look closely into some of these stories we will realize the meaning of characters and the nature of practice. Actually, just working as tenzo is the incomparable practice of the Buddhas. Even one who accedes to the head of the community should have these same attitudes.

In the *Chanyuan Qinggui* we find: "Prepare each meal with meticulous care, making sure there is enough. Do not be remiss in the four offerings of food, clothing, bedding, and medicine. Shakyamuni was to have lived to one hundred years of age, but died at eighty, leaving twenty years for his disciples and descendants. We today are living in the favor of this merit.

**7a.** If we were to receive even one ray of light emitted from the *byakugōkō* between his eyebrows, we would be unable to exhaust its merit." The text goes on to say: "You should think only about how to best serve the community, having no fear of poverty. As long as your mind is not limited you will naturally receive unlimited fortune." The head of the community should generate this attitude towards serving the residents.

In preparing food for the community, it is crucial not to grumble about the quality of the ingredients, but rather to cultivate a temper which sees and respects them fully for what they are. Look at the story of the old woman who gained great merit in future lives by offering to Shakyamuni the water she had just used to wash the rice. Or reflect on the final deed of King Asoka, who on his deathbed gladly offered half a date to a temple from off his table. From this it was foretold that the king would reach nirvana in his next life. The true bond established between ourselves and the Buddha is born of the smallest offering made with sincerity rather than of some grandiose donation made without it. This is our practice as human beings.

A dish is not necessarily superior because you have prepared it with choice ingredients, nor is a soup inferior because you have made it with ordinary greens. When handling and selecting greens, do so wholeheartedly, with a pure mind, and without trying to evaluate their quality, in the same way in which you would prepare a splendid feast. The many rivers which flow into the ocean become the one taste of the ocean; when they flow into the pure ocean of the dharma there are no such distinctions as delicacies or plain food, there is just one taste, and it is the *buddhadharma*, the world itself as it is. In cultivating the germ of aspiration to live out the Way, as well as in practicing the dharma, delicious and ordinary tastes are the same and not two. There is an old saying, "The mouth of a monk is like an oven." Remember this well.

**7b.** Likewise, understand that a simple green has the power to become the practice of the Buddha, quite adequately nurturing the desire to live out the Way. Never feel aversion toward plain ingredients. As a teacher of men and of heavenly beings, make the best use of whatever greens you have.

Similarly, do not judge monks as deserving of respect or as being worthless, nor pay attention to whether a person has been practicing for only a short time or for many years. Without knowing where to find our own stability, how are we to know where someone else would be most stable? If the standard with which we evaluate others is incorrect, we are likely to see their good points as bad, and vice versa. What a mistake to make!

There may very well be differences between those who have been practicing over many years and those who have just begun, or between those gifted with great intelligence and those not so gifted. Even so, all are the treasures of the *samgha*. Though someone may have been mistaken in the past, he may very well be correct in the context of things now. Who is to say whether someone is a fool or a sage?

The *Chanyuan Qinggui* says: "Whether a person be stupid or wise, to the extent he is a monk, he is a treasure to all people and to all the various worlds." Even if there may be right or wrong, do not cling to that judgement. The aspiration to follow this attitude is itself the very functioning of the Way that actualizes incomparable wisdom. Despite the fact that one has had the good fortune to encounter Buddhism, to follow a false step concerning this point will result in completely missing the Way. The marrow of the great practitioners of former times lay in their putting this spirit into all their activities. Brothers and sisters in future generations who serve as tenzo will touch on the essence of this Buddhist teaching only when they practice in a manner consistent with this attitude. The regulations of the great teacher Baizhang Huihai are not something to be taken lightly.

**8a.** When I returned to Japan I stayed at the temple Kennin-ji for about two years. They had the office of tenzo, but in name only; there was no one who actually carried out the functions of the office. Since no one clearly saw that the work of the tenzo itself is the activity of a buddha, it should not be surprising that there was no one capable of functioning with conviction through this office. Despite the fact that he had had the good fortune to succeed to the office of tenzo, since he had never encountered a living example of a tenzo functioning as a buddha he was only wasting his time, carelessly breaking the standards of practice. It was a truly pathetic situation.

I closely observed the monk who was appointed to the office of tenzo. He never even helped to prepare the meals, but entrusted all the work to some absent-minded, insensitive servant, while he merely gave out orders. Never once did he check to see if the work was being done properly. It was as if he thought that watching carefully to see how the rice and vegetables were being prepared was somehow rude or shameful, like peering into the private room of a woman living next-door. He spent his time in his room lying around or gabbing with someone. Or he busied himself reading or chanting sutras. I never once saw him approach a pot, much less make any effort to obtain the necessary supplies or think at all about the overall menu of the temple. He did not know that taking care of these matters is itself Buddhist practice. Nor, apparently, did the practice of putting on his *kesa* and bowing nine times prior to serving each meal ever occur to him, not even in a dream. And, as he himself was not aware of these things, he was hardly in a position to go around teaching the younger monks, even though officially that may have been his duty. It was a pathetic and sad state of affairs.

Though a person might be fortunate enough to be appointed to the office of tenzo, if he lacks the aspiration to walk the Way, he will return empty-handed from the mountain of goodness and the ocean of virtue. Yet, though a person may not have awakened the spirit of a

**8b.** bodhisattva within himself, if he encounters someone who has done so it will be possible for him to practice the way of life of the Buddha. Or, even if he does not encounter an awakened teacher, if he has a deep aspiration to live this incomparable way of life, surely he will become familiar with the practice of such a Way. However, if both these conditions are lacking, how could anyone possibly function within the way of life of a buddha?

In all the many monasteries located on the various mountains I have visited in Song China, the monks holding the respective offices worked in their capacity for one year at a time, yet they always maintained and exhibited the same attitude as the head of the community, applying that attitude appropriately to the time and circumstances. The three aspects of this attitude are to see that working for the benefit of others benefits oneself; to understand that through making every effort for the prosperity of the community one revitalizes one's own character; and to know that endeavoring to succeed and to surpass the patriarchs of past generations means to learn from their lives and to value their examples.

Be very clear about this: A fool sees himself as another, but a wise man sees others as himself.

As an ancient teacher has said:

*Two-thirds of our days are already over,  
And we have not practiced clarifying who we are.  
We waste our days in chasing satisfaction,  
So that even when called, we refuse to turn  
around. How regrettable.*

Not to encounter a true teacher will result in being led around by your feelings and emotions. The case of the foolish son of a wealthy man leaving home with the family treasure and throwing it away like so much rubbish is truly a pathetic one. Likewise, to the extent that we are familiar with what the work of the tenzo is we must not squander it.

**9a.** In reflecting on those who have labored as tenzo with an attitude of practicing the Way, we see that in every case the manner in which they carried out their work coincided exactly with the virtues of their character. Daigui's enlightenment came at a time when he was working as the tenzo under Baizhang. The incident of Dongshan's three pounds of sesame took place when he was a tenzo. Is there anything of greater value than realization of what the Way? Is there any time more precious than the time of realizing the Way?

To cite one example of a person longing for the Way, there is the boy who made an offering of sand as if it were a great treasure. The case of what good fortune would befall one who made images of the Buddha and showed an attitude of reverence before them also illustrates this same spirit. The duties of the office right down to the name "tenzo" are the same as they were hundreds of years ago. If the attitude and activities of the office have not changed, how can we fail by functioning as tenzo to actualize its marvelous nature and the Way in the same way those of ancient times did.

Actually, when working in any position of responsibility, not only as tenzo, but as any officer or assistant, strive to maintain a spirit of joy and magnanimity, along with the caring attitude of a parent.

A joyful spirit is one of gratefulness and buoyancy. You should consider this carefully. If you had been born into some heavenly realm, you would most likely have only become attached to the pleasures of that realm, taking neither time nor opportunity to awaken the *bodhi*-spirit, nor would you be likely to feel any particular necessity for practicing the *buddhadharma*. Much less would you be able to prepare meals for the Three Treasures despite their being the highest and most worthy of all things. Neither being Śakro-devānām-indrah nor a *cakravartin* compares with the Three Treasures.

In the Chanyuan Qinggui we find this passage: "The *samgha* is the most precious of all things.

**9b.** Those who live in this community are unfettered by the pettiness of social affairs. Such a community manifests a refined posture devoid of fabrication about the world."

How fortunate we are to have been born as human beings given the opportunity to prepare meals for the Three Treasures. Our attitude should truly be one of joy and gratefulness.

We should also reflect on what our lives might have been had we been born in one of the realms of hell, as an insatiable spirit, as some lowly animal, or as a demon. How difficult our lives would be if we suffered the misfortunes of these four circumstances or any other of the eight misfortunate conditions. We would be unable to practice the dharma with the strength of the community even though we had a mind to do so. Much less would be able to prepare food with our own hands and offer it to the Three Treasures. Our bodies and minds would be bound by the limitations and afflictions of those worlds and would have to suffer their burdens.

Therefore, rejoice in your birth into the world, where you are capable of using your body freely to offer food to the Three Treasures: The Buddha, the Dharma, and the *Samgha*. Considering the innumerable possibilities in a timeless universe we have been given a marvelous opportunity. The merit of working as a tenzo will never decay. My sincerest desire is that you exhaust all the strength and effort of all your lives-past, present, and future-and every moment of every day into your practice through the work of the tenzo, so that you form a strong connection with the *buddhadharma*. To view all things with this attitude is called Joyful Mind.

The deeds of even a benevolent ruler disappear quickly like foam on water or the windblown flame of a candle. Rather than be as such a ruler, it would be of more value to the *buddhadharma* for you to prepare meals and offer them to the Three Treasures.

**10a.** *Rōshin* is the mind or attitude of a parent. In the same way that a parent cares for an only child, keep the Three Treasures in your mind. A parent, irrespective of poverty or difficult circumstances, loves and raises a child with care. How deep is love like this? Only a parent can understand it. A parent protects the children from the cold and shades them from the hot sun with no concern for his or her own personal welfare. Only a person in whom this mind has arisen can understand it, and only one in whom this attitude has become second nature can fully realize it. This is the ultimate in being a parent. In this same manner, when you handle water, rice, or anything else, you must have the affectionate and caring concern of a parent raising a child.

Shakyamuni took twenty years off his life expectancy to care for us in later generations. What is the significance of this? It was simply a demonstration of Parental Mind. The Tathagata did not do this in expectation of some reward or fame. He did it unconditionally, without thought of profit or gain.

Magnanimous Mind is like a mountain, stable and impartial. Exemplifying the ocean, it is tolerant and views everything from the broadest perspective. Having a Magnanimous Mind means being without prejudice and refusing to take sides. When carrying something that weighs an ounce, do not think of it as light, and likewise, when you have to carry fifty pounds, do not think of it as heavy. Do not get carried away by the sounds of spring, nor become heavy-hearted upon seeing the colors of fall. View the changes of the seasons as a whole, and weigh the relativeness of light and heavy from a broad perspective. It is then that you should write, understand, and study the character for '*magnanimous*'.

**10b.** If the tenzo of Jiashan had not known the deeper implications of magnanimity, he never would have been able to help Fu Shangzuo of Daiyuan on his way toward actually practicing the dharma through his sudden burst of laughter during one of Daiyuan's lectures. If Guishan had not been able to write the character for '*magnanimous*', he would undoubtedly not have demonstrated his deep understanding before his master by picking up a piece of dead firewood and blowing on it three times before returning it to the master. Nor would Dongshan, if he had not thoroughly understood magnanimity, have responded to the question of what the Buddha is by his now famous act of picking up three pounds of sesame.

Be very clear about this. All the great teachers down through the ages have learned the meaning of magnanimity not merely from writing the character for it, but through the various events and circumstances of their lives. Even now we can clearly hear their voices expounding the most fundamental truths and the ramifications of those truths for our lives. They were men whose eyes were opened to what is most vital in a life of practice, enabling us to have contact with the buddha [the Reality of life]. Their very lives manifested the sole purpose of the true Self. Whether you are the head of a temple, a senior monk or other officer, or simply an ordinary monk, do not forget the attitude behind living out your life with joy, having the deep concern of a parent, and carrying out all your activities with magnanimity.

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*Written by Dōgen in the spring of 1237 at  
Kōshō-ji for followers of the Way in  
succeeding generations.*