

DHARMA EYE



法眼

News of Soto Zen Buddhism: Teachings and Practice

A Greeting

Rev. Yoyu Miyashita
 Director, Education Division
 The Administrative Headquarters of Soto Zen Buddhism



I am glad to hear that things are going well of each of you. I would like to express my gratitude for all of your efforts. I would also like to thank you for your ongoing subscription to this Newsletter.

On June 15, 2007, I was appointed as the successor of the late Rev. Wafu Takizawa to be the Director of the Education Division. Now, at the forefront of Sotoshu dissemination and teaching activities, I am struggling to not be crushed by the burden of my new responsibilities as director of this division. Society is changing moment by moment. This is the nature of “all things are impermanent.” Yet, this is something that is truly difficult for us as we consider how Sotoshu teaching activities should respond to this continual change. I think we must practice the teaching of the Buddhas and Ancestors and look at things with the vast vision of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva who saves all sentient beings.

Since November 2006, we have been displaying our multilingual Soto Zen website (sotozen-net.or.jp) in six languages: English, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, and German. We hope to maintain a website that improves access and is easy to use for a wide variety of people. This year, we plan to offer on this website the talks of Dogen Zenji which were recorded by his disciple, Ejo Zenji, in *Shobogenzo Zuimonki* (only in English). What is the Sotoshu? What are the two head monasteries, Eiheiji and Sojiji, like? We also plan to distribute a video called *A*

Life of Zen that introduces what Zen life is like (this will be available in several languages), as well as an easy-to-understand introduction in cartoon form of the life of Shakyamuni Buddha called *Shakyamuni Buddha Comics*.

While taking into consideration the characteristics of each world region and grasping the situation in each area, I think we must teach in a way that is based on the hopes and aspirations of actual places. Here in Japan as well as abroad, there is a mountain-high pile of tasks which Sotoshu must respond to. I think we must undertake them as soon as possible, communicating closely with the institutions concerned.

One of those tasks is concerned with the system for overseas priests. We are proceeding in consolidating the Regulations for Dendoshi and Dendokyoshi with the Regulations Concerning the Ranks of Priests and Ranks of Kyoshi of the Sotoshu. In fact, from July 1, 2007, applications for overseas priests have been temporarily stopped so that we can get this information in order. When this information is put order and the regulations are standardized, I am confident that there will much progress in terms of Sotoshu teaching activities.

Furthermore, I think everyone connected with Sotoshu must be happy about the prospects of the plan to open a Sotoshu training monastery for three months, from

September 15th to December 15th of this year, at La Gendronniere in France. This has already been announced in the July issue of *Soto Shuho*, the monthly Sotoshu journal published in Japan. The Soto Zen Buddhism International Center, as well as the International Regional Offices in Hawaii, North America, South America, and Europe have also been notified and applicants who wish to participate in this monastery are now being recruited. The number of participants will be limited, so it may not be

possible to accept all applicants. Nevertheless, we plan to continue providing monastic training overseas, so I ask that you understand our situation.

As a person who is engaged in teaching activities, I plan to convince as many people as possible. Finally, I would like to conclude this greeting with a prayer that the teachings of the Buddhas and Ancestors may spread deeply and widely among the peoples of the world.

The Fortieth Memorial Celebrations of Soto Zen teaching activities in Europe were held over a three-day period from June 8th through June 10th, 2007 at La Gendronniere in France. Around 500 people from Europe, Japan, North America, and South America participated.

The memorial celebrations included a memorial service for Deshimaru Taisen Roshi, the first Kokusaifukyo Sokan of Europe (Officiant: Rev. Genshu Imamura, Director of Soto Zen Buddhism Europe Office); a memorial service for those who have rendered distinguished service teaching in Europe (Officiant: Rev. Eitoku Fuchi, President of the Administrative Headquarters of Soto Zen Buddhism); and the 40th Memorial Tanbutsu Ceremony (Buddha praising ceremony; Officiant: Rev. Doko Triet, President of Association Zen Internationale) were solemnly performed. There was also a memorial symposium, the theme of which was: Universality of Buddhism, in which eight lecturers made presentations.

Rev. Shohaku Okumura (Director of the Soto Zen Buddhism International Center)

“The Vast Gate of Compassion: Uniqueness and Universal Validity of Dogen Zenji’s Zazen”

Referring to the matter of the uniqueness in Dogen Zenji’s zazen, the zazen of the three types of learning (precepts, samadhi, and wisdom), zazen in which no techniques are used, the teaching of “the oneness of practice and verification”, Rev. Okumura explained how these teachings are connected with the essence of Shakyamuni Buddha’s teaching by quoting from Sutta-Nipata and so on. Using the expression “the vast gate of compassion” to explain the universality of Dogen Zenji’s zazen, he encouraged the listeners to continue asking themselves the question of how this comes to life within each one of us.

Rev. Yuno Rech, Dendokyoshi (Gyobutsuji, France)

“From the experience of non-duality to the re-founding of ethics”

By reflecting on the importance of living in modern society through discovering the teaching of “the oneness of body

and mind” and “the oneness of practice and realization”, Rev. Rech explained from various angles about Soto Zen practice as being the best possible practice in a world which develops from the discrimination of life.

Rev. Taiten Guareschi, Dendokyoshi (Fudenji, Italy)

“Continuity in discontinuity across time, Unity in diversity of charisma”

Discovering the elements of ceremony, scripture, and monkhood placed with the system of Buddhism as religion and interpreting the ideology of continuity and discontinuity based on the teaching of emptiness in the Hannya Shingyo, Rev. Guareschi said the traditional Soto practice of “the oneness of practice and verification” is the practice of those teachings.

Rev. Shundo Aoyama, Abbess of Aichi Senmon Nisodo (Nagoya, Japan)

“The Truth is One”

Through explanations that the conventions of human beings change with time and place, that truth is eternal,

the question of “What is truth?”, Dogen Zenji’s teaching of Buddha-nature, and the teaching of causality, Rev. Aoyama explained that while the shape of cross-sections vary through the influence of cultures and so forth and that while truth is essentially one, it is important to value the differences of those cross-sections. Finally, she spoke about the attitude of practice.

Rev. Yushin Marassi, Kokusai Fukuyoshi (Lecturer of Urbino University, Italy)

“The Universality of Buddhism or the Path towards Integrating Identity into the Absolute”

Explaining the universality of Buddhism by using different documents including *The Awakening of Faith*, Rev. Marassi spoke about the universality of Buddhism within foreign cultures, explaining these concepts based on the historical background.

Rev. Reigen Wang-Genh, Dendokyoshi (Ryumonji, France)

“Four Noble Truths”

On the basis of historical currents and through the

teaching of the five skandhas in the *Heart Sutra*, Rev. Wang-Genh explained the universality of the teaching of the Four Noble Truths.

Rev. Tenryu Tenbreul, Dendokyoshi (Jakkoji, Germany)
“GOING BEYOND - TRANSCENDING”

Discussing zazen (shikantaza) and the records of the ancestors, Rev. Tenbreul spoke of the importance of the appearance of the true “Self” through the elimination of the “self” in zazen.

Rev. Taiken Yokoyama (Responsible for general affairs, Soto Zen Buddhism Europe Office)
“Soto Zen throughout the World”

Based on his own experiences of Soto Zen in Japan, North America, Europe, and around the globe, Rev. Yokoyama gave an explanation of the developments of Soto Zen Kokusai Fukyo, and also encouraged the listeners to pursue the question of how Soto Zen should develop from now on.

Here, we print two of these presentations.

The Truth is One

By Rev. Shundo Aoyama
Abbess of Aichi Senmon Nisodo



My name is Shundo Aoyama. I am the abbess of one of the few existing Soto Zen training facilities for nuns in Japan. I received tokudo at the age of sixteen and I was very lucky to have met Sawaki Kodo Roshi that same year when he came for the first time to be the teacher of the Rohatsu sesshin. Eighteen years have passed since Sawaki Roshi passed away. For more than thirty years, I was taught by my other teacher, Uchiyama Kosho Roshi. It is now sixty years since I became a nun and during that time I feel that I have always been following these two great teachers’ words and deeds.

As Deshimaru Roshi was in the lineage of Sawaki Roshi and Uchiyama Roshi, it is a great honor that I am invited

for this Fortieth Memorial Commemoration since Deshimaru Roshi came to Europe. Europe is the place Deshimaru Roshi spent his life and energy planting the Buddha’s teaching. I am grateful to you all that I can come here today.

I. The Truth is One

1. The truth is one - there is no need to argue about the different ways of seeing it.

Whenever I go to countries with different cultural backgrounds such as the United States or Europe, or even when I visit different religious groups, tea groups or flower arrangement groups in Japan, I always keep in mind one phrase, “The truth is one - there is no need to argue about

the different ways of seeing it’.

Let me give you an example. Suppose you have a cylindrical tea container and you lay it lengthways on a table and cut it vertically - it would appear round. If you were to cut it horizontally, it would be rectangular. If you were to cut it diagonally it would be oval in shape. The shape of the cutting surface would depend on how you cut it. (I will refer to this analogy of *‘the cutting surface’* ‘throughout my talk.)

It certainly would be confusing if there were more than one truth. Of course there is always one truth if we can see truth with an overall view. The difference between the present time and a couple of hundred or a couple of thousand years ago, or the difference between Japan and Europe, are the rules decided by human beings. These rules are called moral codes. They are subject to change from time to time and from place to place. However, there is one law or principle that has existed before mankind and will continue beyond time - this is called the Truth.

In the Japanese writing system there is a Kanji (Chinese character) that represents “the Truth” (法-Ho). The left side of character means ‘water’ and the right side denotes ‘going away’. Therefore, the truth is symbolized by the character ‘water flowing away’. On earth, with its gravitational pull, water flows from high to low. This was not a rule decided by people. This is the law of the universe, the Truth. This same character is used for the ‘Dharma’ part in the term ‘Buddha Dharma’ and is read BUPPO. In Japanese, the word for “law” is “HORITSU”. This word originated from the Buddhism term. HO which means Truth, is compared to *warp* - the threads that pass over and under to make fabric on a weaving loom. RITSU refers to the rules among people (moral codes), which are subject to change depending on time and place. This is likened to *wefi* - the threads which pass under and over in the weaving process. The woven tapestry, therefore, is a combination of the Truth as HO, which is not influenced by time and place, and moral codes, which change from time to time and from place to place.

Sawaki Kodo Roshi once said ‘there is no difference in the way the stomach digests tea, even though there are

various ways to drink it.’ There are a lot of tea ceremony groups such as Omote-Senke and Ura-Senke, but the stomach digests tea the same way regardless of the group. This saying “the way the stomach digests” is equivalent to the Truth in the above and, “the different tea ceremonial groups”, corresponds to moral codes in different times and in different locations. Standing firmly rooted in this one Truth, our attitude as individuals should be flexible. When you attend a tea ceremony held by Omote-Senke, you take tea the Omote-Senke way, and likewise, if you take part in one held by Ura-Senke, you do things their way. Without insisting on doing things your own way, you just go along with the local rule.

Tachibana Takashi, a social commentator, once published a book called “The return from the cosmos”. The book contained interviews with astronauts who had experienced the extraordinary view of mother earth from space and the moon, and talked about their experience in a very religious way. “Once we saw the place where the Buddha was born, seconds later we passed the place where Jesus was born”. Only one truth exists. The truth was discovered by different people, given different names and written in different characters. After concluding the interviews, Tachibana wrote in his book that he realized the astronauts were people who had experienced God’s view.

I would like you to learn from this. The point is that we can only see ourselves, our true selves, from a distance, if we are to be perfectly objective. We can only see the whole picture of the earth once we are away from it. We have to be out of the woods to see the woods. We are unable see the whole picture of the woods when we still are in it.

In ancient China, there were two very famous Zen masters, Nangan and Joshu. Dogs and cats are often mentioned in their koans. You are probably familiar with some of them, such as ‘killing the cat’ or ‘Does a dog have Buddha Nature?’ In the story of killing a cat, Joshu said that if you could leave the human form, you would be able to understand humans more clearly. I have two cats in my own temple and I sometimes wonder how we are viewed through their eyes. We humans spend so much time either getting excited or depressed about quite trivial matters. However, if we saw things from a distance through the

eyes of a dog or cat, things may look totally different.

In Zen we often use the expression “before your parents were born”. The literal translation refers to the period of time before your parents were born; yet this saying is not about time. It requires us to see things objectively without prejudice and moral judgment, in which we are so firmly rooted.

One of my teachers, who I have respected through my life, was Uchiyama Kosho Roshi, a disciple of Sawaki Kodo Roshi. He once said that we have all placed a coffin in an alcove in a room, and that we put ourselves in it when we lose our temper or when we have lost our way in life. You can reflect and be retrospective your whole life. This means that you should see and reflect on your own life from the viewpoint of the dead. You can clearly see how life should be, once you are free from selfish attachments. As you probably know, Uchiyama was once a teacher in a Catholic seminary.

He also stated the same thing in a slightly different way. He said for example that “zazen is to hang your selfish ego on a cross and to be reborn in a selfless state”. This way of life is, in Zen terms, called ‘opening your eyes to a world before your parents were born’ and allows you to see your life, mankind and mother earth in a new light. From this viewpoint, you can clearly see for the first time what the life is about.

2. Be humble and realize that you are only capable of seeing one side of the whole truth.

It is very important to be humble and to keep in mind that our view of the Truth is one-sided. We can merely see, hear and judge things within the limits of our own capacity. We can only receive information and knowledge according to the depth of our own understanding. If we keep a modest attitude, we will realize that our judgment is restricted by our own narrow experience, thus avoiding discord.

I would like to relate a funny experience I once had. I received an invitation from a cosmetic company and was asked to give a talk. The company held an annual series of lectures for its retailers. The theme for the lectures was

“For the beautiful person”. Prior to my talk, there were two hours of presentations concerning new cosmetic products. When my turn came, I spent a further two hours talking about the fact that beauty had nothing to do with the use of cosmetics. I quoted one of Walt Whitman’s poems:

*Women sit, or move to and fro—some old, some young;
The young are beautiful—but the old are more beautiful
than the young.*

I told them that true beauty is more than skin deep. It’s not something you can paint on and wash off. A person is beautiful not just because of the absence of wrinkles or gray hair. Everyone experiences hard times at some stage in their lives, but how one overcomes those difficulties shows in one’s attitude and shines through wrinkles and grey hair. This glowing personality emanates from the inside and is the source of true beauty rather than a mere skin deep cosmetic application.

After my talk, a couple of people raised their hands and asked me how I applied everyday skin care. I was devastated by the realization that they had not listened to a word I had said for the entire two hours. However, this experience taught me that we can only see and hear within our own capacity. People who have spent their entire lives thinking about how to apply cosmetics can only perceive things from that standpoint.

Let me now share a little joke with you. My temple is situated in Nagano prefecture, surrounded by over 3,000 meter high mountains. One day a charcoal maker from this area and a fisherman from Sado Island went to visit Senso-ji (*a famous temple for Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva*) in Asakusa in downtown Tokyo. While they were staying at an inn, they got into a heated argument concerning where the sun rose and set. The charcoal maker insisted that the sun rose from the mountains and set in the mountains. However, the Fisherman was adamant the sun rose from the sea and set in the sea. After a long quarrel, they decided to seek impartial advice and asked the head clerk at the inn for his opinion. He told them that the sun rose from the roof and set on the roof. We should pay particular attention to this point, because this is exactly what we do everyday.

From the large scale, such as the collective view of the nation, to the small scale, such as individual view, everyone sees and thinks according to their own experience and their own up bringing. We may believe we see the same things, but we actually see them quite differently. Even though we can only see one of the 'cutting surfaces', most of the time we are unaware of the fact. We think we see correctly, therefore we tend to force our views upon others, demanding they correct their views if they differ from ours. This inevitably leads to conflict among people. However, if we retain a humble attitude and realize that we are only capable of having a one-sided view, no matter how hard we try, we can avoid unnecessary conflict.

Dogen said in the Shobogenzo "Genjo Koan (Manifestation of reality)" that, "we should understand and realize we can only see things so far our eyes can reach". We are the product of our past experience and it is limited. There is a Zen saying, "The Buddha's teaching has no end". Everyday, we keep striving to reach a little farther and little higher than the previous day.

3. Respect our differences and learn from each others.

The important thing is that we respect each other's differences and learn from one another, with the understanding that differences come from necessity. There is an expression in China, 'ships in the south and horses in the north.' Due to the vast size of its country, the south is mainly an agriculture region, subject to monsoons and the people are mainly vegetarian. This is called 'the culture of ships and water' and it has mild weather. They refer to the sun as 'the motherly sun'. They emphasize the gentleness of the mother.

In contrast, the north consists of mainly mountains and deserts. The people are nomadic and horses are the principal means of transportation. They live in a harsh environment compared to the south, and they are mainly meat-eaters. Their culture is described as *linear*, whereas the south's is said to be *curved*.

India is also monsoon region. Buddhism was born in India and was later transported to Japan through southern China. When Buddhism first arrived in China, Taoism

was popular. The meeting between the two traditions gave rise to a new style of Buddhism, with many Taoist terms and expressions being assimilated into Buddhism. This is the Buddhism that later came to Japan. Japan is an agricultural country with an abundance of green and doesn't have any deserts.

In comparison, Christianity and Islam are from desert countries. They refer to the sun as 'the fatherly sun'. This is in stark contrast to Japan. In Japan, the deity that represents the sun is female and is called Amaterasu Oomikami.

It is only natural that we use different names and characters depending on the location, the surroundings, the environment and the people who found it. In any area, the environment has a big influence on the people living there and contributes to the development of a unique culture. We should respect each other's differences and learn from one another.

For example, Japan has four distinct seasons and the seasonal changes are reflected in the words that are used to describe how flowers bloom. We say the flowers from a cherry tree and a plum tree "scatter", those from a camellia "drop", peony flowers "crumble", lespedeza "spill" and morning glory "shrive". We differentiate the usage of words for different flowers on different occasions. On account of the abundance of green and a fairly temperate climate, we have developed this sensitivity to the natural environment around us. However, this does not apply to a desert country. In stead, I hear they have many words for describing sand. The difference of the 'cutting surface' comes from necessity and it feels quite natural for people who are raised in those circumstances.

The Meiji era's writer, Shimazaki Toson said, "Home is connected to blood, the heart and words". Although the emotion connected to one's own country is natural, it is not rational. It is a feeling. Bearing this in mind, we should accept differences and learn from one another.

II. We are brothers and sisters raised together from one Life Everything is Buddha Nature

Now, I would like to touch upon Dogen's teaching, "everything is Buddha Nature", which will lead us in the right direction in the foreseeable future. In Zen Buddhism, it is frequently read and understood as "everything has Buddha Nature". If we read and understand it this way, it implies dogs and cats have Buddha Nature, the same as you and I, like a stone in a plum. This would suggest a person's existence consists of Buddha Nature and non-Buddha Nature, and that therefore a person is precious because of the Buddha Nature inside.

Dogen did not translate it that way. He read "everything is Buddha Nature". The Japanese word for everything is "Shittsu". The second character "Tsu" is the same character as the "U" (although read differently) in Uji ('Being time' from the Shobogenzo), and means *'things exist.'* Buddha Nature is every existence, not part of it. Everything is the manifestation of Buddha Nature in different forms. Nothing exists in non-Buddha Nature from Dogen's point of view.

Then what is Buddha Nature? According to Yuishiki (vijñapti-matrata), the "consciousness-only" theory of one of the oldest Buddhist schools, Buddha Nature has a theoretical and a practical meaning. Dogen's grasp of Buddha Nature is a theoretical one, I think. Thus, the aforementioned translation of Buddha Nature as "*has and has-not*" is a practical interpretation.

Dogen's Buddha Nature is "ENGI" or "causality." In Buddhism it is said everything is interrelated and that this leads to cause and effect. This relationship is often compared to the mesh of a net, everything is one and one is everything. It means that if you pick up one strand of mesh, the net is connected to it. For example, I can exist and feel comfortable here and now only with the maximum help and support of about sixty trillion cells in my body. On a larger scale, this can only occur with the blessing of the interrelationship of everything such as the sun, the stars and the galaxies. This is what the Buddha said about ENGI or "causality." Let me just take one example from the viewpoint of space. I exist because the entire universe is wholeheartedly willing my existence. When we awaken to this fact, we become aware how precious life is. This has the same meaning as the Buddha's

famous teaching at birth. "In the whole world I am the only venerable one".

Uchiyama Kosho Roshi talked about this and gave an interesting example. He said that one day he heard a noise coming from the back garden of his temple. When he went to see what it was, he saw all the pumpkins fighting each other. He told them to be quiet and do zazen. After they had done zazen and managed to calm down, he then told them to put their hands on their heads. They soon realized that the stalk was connected to all of them and in fact they were all brothers. We are all connected to each other. We all receive the gift of life, not only us humans, but also dogs and cats - the flowers of Buddha Nature. Every existence is Buddha Nature. And we are all equally existing, as brothers and sisters. This is what Dogen meant by the term "Everything is Buddha Nature". .

We should realize we are all brothers and sisters, each of us connected, despite conflict and discord, which exists between countries, races and people. The Buddha's teaching says we should live in harmony, helping each other to break down the boundaries and walls that divide us, and to help mankind rid itself of its arrogant notion of superiority.

III. Living our whole lives in accord with the Buddha's teaching

How we live at this moment – the practice of Zen in everyday life

Next, I would like to mention one thing that is related to the everyday practice of Zen. In short, if you understand the principle state of the world, and how our lives are related to it, the question of how to live can be automatically deduced. Everything, yes everything, even the minutest things are interrelated, inter-supported and influence each other and there is nothing that can escape this fact. As I mentioned earlier, "ENGI" or "causality" itself is Buddha Nature.

As I am talking to you now, you are listening to me, we are both breathing and our hearts are beating. We will feel hungry when the time comes, we will digest food and it will become part of us, and the rest will be eliminated as excretion. This is all the working of the Buddha. Sawaki

Kodo once said, “Even getting old is not under my control”. Every activity in the day is the work of Buddha Nature. Therefore we are required to follow Buddha Nature’s law at every moment and not to give in to our selfish egos. We have to think and act as if we live our lives on a scale similar to that of a whole nation or mother earth.

If our lives are lived on that kind of scale, we have to think and act likewise. We have to think and act on a scale of a nation and the earth, rather than paying heed to our own selfish individual needs. Sawaki said that in Buddhism our whole lives are directed by the Buddha. Every single moment of the day and every phase of our lives can only exist with the help of Buddha Nature. This is not a 9 to 5 way of life. This way of life is not just about doing zazen, reading sutras or doing things only on special occasions. Dogen’s attitude towards practice is not one with a time limit or with special occasions. We practice Zen in every waking moment of our lives - wholeheartedly. This is what Sawaki meant when he said, “in Buddhism our whole lives are directed by the Buddha”. We sleep, wash our faces, go to toilet, eat and do zazen - Every single moment is the work of Buddha Nature. We live here now by following this truth. The practice of everyday of life is mentioned in “Washing the Face” and “Washing” in the Shobogenzo and the Tenzo-kyokun (The instructions to the cook) and the Fushuku-Hampo (Regulations for Taking Meals) in the DAISHINGI (Standards for the Monastery) As Dogen said in the Genjo Koan (Manifestation of Reality), “encounter one, practice one”. This is a 24-7 way of Zen life, living fully in the present moment.

IV. Getting rid of all barriers

In the *Tenzo Kyokun*, Dogen Zenji said “Without any biases or belonging to any particular groups”. He warned us not to be one-sided and not to be dependent on other things. Sawaki Roshi explained this more directly, saying “never be part of any group.” His aim was to follow Buddha’s way without belonging any sect or group. Furthermore, I interpret what he said as to look where Buddha looked and to walk the path where Buddha wanted to walk.

In the *Gakudo-yojinshu*, Dogen Zenji said, “If you can’t find a true teacher, you would be better off not to practice.” On the other hand, he said “When you meet a teacher, do not judge him by his face nor dislike his faults. Do not think about his conduct. Judge him only by whether he respects Buddha’s teaching or not.” Buddha himself said “Follow the Dharma instead of following a teacher”. Sawaki Roshi said “Don’t be a dog-like follower, who follows a friendly teacher. Do not be a cat-like follower who is attracted by the surroundings of a teacher and not the teacher himself.” Choosing the teacher and following him faithfully is of course very important for Zen practice. But this is not just following him blindly. Dogen Zenji’s words “if you can’t find a true teacher, you would be better off not to practice” means that you should follow a teacher with sound judgment and aim to follow the Dharma which your teacher himself follows, and that this is something you always keep in mind.

The ultimate goal that the Buddha found is called “the Dharma” or “the Truth.” We Buddhists call this “Buddha’s teaching” but it may not be necessary to call it “Buddha’s teaching” nowadays. I think that just calling it “the teaching” is enough. When we add the word “Buddha’s”, we have to differentiate between Christ’s teaching and Mohammed’s teaching and so on. The teaching is just one teaching which shows us the ultimate goal of life and that is where we belong. Compared to a tree, this teaching is the roots underground which support the tree above the ground.

Keeping this in the center of our view, we can create a new sangha by emphasizing the common values we share instead of the small differences we have. This attitude is actually to show our gratitude to Deshimaru Roshi, to Sawaki Roshi, to Dogen Zenji, and finally to Buddha.

Today, I have talked, to the best of my ability, on four points: Buddhism, Zen, and Dogen’s teaching.

Thank you very much.



La Gendronniere



Memorial Service at Fortieth Memorial Celebrations of
Soto Zen teaching activities in Europe

The Universality of Buddhism or the path towards integrating identity into the absolute

By Rev. Yūshin Mauricio Marassi
(Translated into English by Mr. Carlo Geneletti)

1) *The titles*

The title of my presentation has been pilfered from the English translation of *Dasheng Qixinlun*¹, or *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*, which I consider the most important literary contribution to the development of Mahāyāna in East Asia. In translation², the sentence I had in mind reads like this: “The process of actualization of enlightenment is none other than [the process of integrating] the identity with the original enlightenment”. For those who understand Japanese, the text is this: 始覺は即ち本覺に同じきをもって成り³.

I used this quote to have a chance to introduce this ancient text, but, to judge from my own experience, it would have been more accurate to speak of a “process of melting -- rather than integration -- of the individual identity into the absolute”. Perhaps I should have used

another heading for this presentation after all!

In the same line of thought, I would like to congratulate the organizers on the choice of a very appealing title for this colloquium. The “universality of Buddhism” is truly a magnificent subject.

But what do we mean by universality? At the risk of imitating Lapalisse, “universality” derives from “universe”, which, in turn, literally means “that which is only one”, or, “that to which there is no alternative”. Does it refer to “something that is forever, everywhere, for everybody” and, if so, is universality a property of Buddhism?

Or do we want to say instead that Buddhism is a particular form of universality? After all, to be actualized, the *universal* must become particular, it must take on a

specific form.

Yet again: how can we look for universality in Buddhism? Buddhism does not exist: it is a figment of our imagination. It is a fiction. There is nothing that I can grasp – even conceptually – and bring before you and say: “Here it is, this is Buddhism, what do you think?”.

We can say the same about the Buddhists. We are not an anthropological category, or an ethnic group, or people who share the same aspect, whom someone can put under a magnifying glass or display pinned to the bottom of a showcase.

To begin addressing some of these issues, we shall explore the ways in which Buddhism and universality overlap. We will outline the historical process that, starting centuries ago and reaching up to our own times, brought a part of mankind to give universality the names of *buddhadharma*, *fofa* (仏法), *fo dao* (仏道), *buppō* (仏法) and *buddhism*; in other words our hypothesis is that *buddhism* is one of the languages spoken by Universal. Be aware, though, that *buddhism* is not a Buddhist term. It was dreamt up by the British. After they conquered India, they found it convenient to classify the Indian religious experience and, for simplicity’s sake, they came up with these three categories, *jainism*, *hinduism* and *buddhism*.

II) *The journey of mankind towards the absolute*

Let’s go back to where it all started.

The archaeological finds of Harappā and Mohenjo Daro, on the Pakistani banks of the Indus have confirmed what years ago could only be conjectured. Before it was finally brought down by foreign conquerors, called Arians –from *arib*, the Sanskrit root for “foreigner”- a highly complex culture flourished in this area; a culture that, at that time, went further than any other in developing the capacity to enter into communication with the absolute through the body⁴. I am talking of a practice that plies the body to a religious end, that makes it the place, the very spot where the earthbound and the infinite meet.

In this culture, the early growth of Religion, its very birth perhaps, coincided with the process whereby the shamans turned ascetics. In this process, they developed

the capacity to enter into contact with the absolute through their bodies, thanks to special practices and bodily gestures that they had identified through trial and error as the most effective to establish that contact. These practices centred on the cross-legged position, which had been proven even earlier than 1000 b.C. to be the most conducive to transform the human body into the abode of god.

At least for what concerns its physical aspects, this is the origin of what many centuries later would be called *yoga*, “unity [with the absolute]”, and after an equally long evolution, of what we now call “zazen”.

Through one of the paths taken in the long and original process of refining the Dravidic cult of the Mother Goddess, this culture also built the foundations of the religious pantheon that contributed the figure of Śiva⁵ and many centuries later bestowed to Buddhism the figure of Avalokita Īśvara, latterly Kuanyn and, more recently, Kannon or Kanzeon⁶. From the original core of protoyoga and protoshivaism also bloomed the practices that, many centuries on, led to tantrism, to Vajrayāna and Tibetan Buddhism, to Shingon, and so on and so forth.

When Śākyamuni withdraws into the forest, he enters a space that had been inhabited for centuries by ascetics, the *śrāmaṇa*, “those who strive” searching for the absolute through their bodies. And this is not enough.

When he who would become Buddha, the Awakened, he who penetrated and revealed to himself the gateway to the new gospel -- which consists in allowing the world to fade away instead of trying to abolish it – when Buddha began his apprenticeship of the *Upanishad* and of the *Sāmkhya* with the forest teachers, that world had expanded to include many new elements, the most important of which I will speak of presently.

After the gradual expansion of the neolithic settled communities, the most ancient civilization, complete with a religion, a writing system and complex government structures so far discovered by archaeologists, had two separate centres, in Mesopotamia and in Egypt. The protracted interaction between these two highly refined cultural hubs in the end brought to the development of the

languages, the writing systems, the myths and the religions that constitute the embryo of a large part of our own intellectual and symbolic world today⁷.

This bipolarism lasted about two millennia in a relative balance, until the migration towards Egypt and Europe of Semitic and Accadic peoples gave origin respectively to Hebraism and the Greek and Latin civilizations, which in turn, constituted the hotbed from which Christianity and Islam rose in more recent times. Here, from the very beginning, Religion meant above all gnosis and ethics. At the time of king Sargon the Great, in 2350 b.C. the Accadian's empire extended from the Mediterranean in the West almost to the edge of the Gandhara region in the East⁸. Then, in a later period, the *Veda* and the *Upanishad* sprouted from the knowledge rooted in the *Avesta*⁹.

The complex of religious ideas that flows from the *Avesta* and emerges refined and structured in the *Veda*, shared the insight of a relationship between man and the absolute which the *Upanishads* express in the very forceful statement “*so ham*” “I am That”. The awareness that there is a gesture, a bearing of the body that moulds it after the absolute was matched by the conscience that human nature in its essence is in God.

III) *The trace of words*

The most ancient (written!) vestige of a moral statement in the deepest religious sense is to be found among the aphorisms of the Egyptian Amen-en Apt, who lived during the eight dynasty (1500-1360 b. C.)¹⁰: “It is better to be a beggar in God's palms than a rich man under the shelter of a roof”. The moral ethics shared by all Indian religious forms before the coming of the Buddha is very similar to those developed by the civilization that was born between the Euphrates and the Nile.

So here we have the three basic early elements -the practice with the body, deep religious knowledge and moral ethics – which, in several combinations and articulations, made up the Indian religious world. This includes Buddhism; no ancient sutra fails to exalt ethics, ascetics and deep wisdom, with lofty results in the literary and religious fields.

The gradual refinement of language brought to light words that, once, consolidated, now allow us to follow the history of religious thinking. In ancient times, the basic note concerning the practice was *naishkramya*¹¹, “not beginning” “not commencing”, “letting go of”. Much later, as language became subtler, thanks to the texts of the *prajñāpāramitā*, -which, with the *Lotus Sutra* constitute the maturity of the enculturation of Buddhism in India- we encounter the *Diamond Sutra* with its invitation to “give rise to a non sustained thought”: a positive and therefore completely unusual statement that calls attention to a connection-less thought, one that breaks any links with logic and the reality of the phenomena.

In the early years of Buddhism's Chinese adventure, the insistence that came from India on the need to keep at sitting had a very rapid diffusion because of its affinities to Daoist mysticism, which preached “resting in the mould of the Sky” or “sit like spent ashes”, “sit like a dry stick”¹², and thanks to the insistence of Chinese culture on the significance of “learning with the body”.

But when it was breaking into China, the “stay seated”, the practice, usually called *dhyāna*, had at least ten centuries of history in the Vedic and pre-Vedic religious culture and six centuries in the Buddhist tradition. Not only had the inner posture of that “stay seated” reached high levels of refinement. Also, by that time, profound - and at times irreconcilable – differences had grown solidified, between the Buddhist and the other Hindu traditions, and within the Buddhist tradition itself concerning how to bring to life this act that may seem always the same.

Therefore, in China, the “stay seated” in the Buddhist tradition for a very long time did not have a clear and coherent development. The words employed to describe that form of sitting kept changing for centuries until translations from ancient Buddhist texts¹³ began to put things back in order. But it was only starting from the fourth/fifth century¹⁴ that the “stay seated” we have learnt from the Japanese Zen tradition, was finally grasped and handed down from one generation to another.

Linguistic archaeology, which examines the footprints left by words, witnesses the progressive unfolding and the

in-depth elaboration of the Indian tradition that was brought about by the Chinese appropriation of the *Lankāvatārasūtra*, of the *Lotus Sutra*, of the *Nirvana Sutra*, of the *Sutra of Vimalakīrti*, of the *Diamond Sutra* and of the *Heart Sutra*. This process led first to approaches somewhat swinging between the emptiness of the *Mādhyamika* school and the idealistic phenomenology of the *Vijñānavāda-Yogācāra* and then to the autonomous and original production of important texts, like the *Dasheng Qixinlun* already quoted, and the *Zhengdaoge*¹⁵, *The song in witness to the path*.

So we go from Niutou (“Oxhead”) Farong’s¹⁶ “there is neither spirit nor Buddha” to its antithesis, “be spirit, be Buddha” by the great Mazu Daoyi¹⁷. In the process we walk by Shitou (“Rockhead”) Xiqian¹⁸ who, describing his own inner experience, said : <The boundless sky does not hinder the floating white clouds>. Let’s recall also the “shine in silence”¹⁹ championed by Hongzhi Zhengjue²⁰. To arrive, in the 13th century, to Tiantong Roujing and Dōgen’s “free yourself of body and mind: body and mind freed”. In more recent times, we have heard Uchiyama Kōshō’s “open the hands of thought”²¹ and “to sit zazen: end-all”²² the well known “motto” of his predecessor Sawaki Kōdō. And here we are now.

While following the traces of the words between *naishkrāmya* and Uchiyama, we have neglected the two other faces of the triad that have always composed the *universal* as it can be expressed in human terms: the shape of the body and the moral ethics.

Insofar as the former -the “stay seated”- is concerned, there is a painstaking string of information and face-to-face transmissions along the centuries. Therefore those who, like we, belong to Dōgen’s school can be serenely confident that the way we sit is probably the most refined way possible in this art. Insofar as the ethics is concerned, instead, I am afraid there are problems.

IV) Ethics: is it optional?

Buddhism in isolation does not exist. It has neither a substance that can be grasped nor clear boundaries. Since it is not of “this world”, it would be invisible if it did not cover its nudity. It has to change appearances at every

cultural setting it comes into contact. This capacity and necessity to adapt has resulted in the emergence of many local forms of Buddhism. It is so that, perhaps one should not speak of “*buddhism*”, but of “*buddhisms*”, in the plural. Of course, these forms may well be different in their external manifestations, but are identical at the same time, and it could not be otherwise, for they all sprout from the very same tree. So, when Buddhism came to a new life in China, it has used the Chinese clay.

At the end of the long and difficult process we mentioned above -hundreds of years where the inner forms of sitting were deeply experienced- the way of “stay seated” born during the Śākyamuni waking under the *bodhi-tree* has not changed, except insofar as the dress and the body shape of the practitioners.

For what concerns the knowledge around the relation between man and the absolute ... you all know that China was not in any way lagging behind India. The ancient and profound Buddhist knowledge could be born there again, if any, even fresher. Only the ethics question remains. The fact is that, West of the Himalayas, the concept of ethics, of right and wrong, of good and bad is profoundly different from the concept of ethics that was influential East of the Himalayas. Therefore, when Buddhism spread through the bones and marrow of the Chinese culture, this difference penetrated deeply into its flesh.

To keep within the time allotted to me, I will give only one example among the many²³ that come to mind. In the *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*²⁴ Dōgen writes: “Therefore an ancient said: ‘Empty inside, following along outside’²⁵”. This phrase is drawn from the last chapter of the *Zhuangzi*²⁶. The first part of this sentence expresses the transcendental wisdom that zeroes in what is the highest potential of being human which is in letting oneself be empty. This deep and formless wisdom can be easily assimilated to Nāgārjuna’s *middle way*, which, in turn, derives from the *middle way* championed by Buddha in the *Dhammacakkapavattanasutta*²⁷. But the second part of the sentence quoted above, which we can translate also as “meekly yielding outside” has nothing to do with the Buddhism we have mentioned above: the invisible one that lives in and through us all.

The suggestion that we should go meekly with the flowing reality instead of cutting through it and turning it over like a plough does to earth, is often doubtlessly very wise. However, with equal certainty, it is a product of the confucian-daoist ethics, based on ancestors' veneration, on obedience to the established order, on the aversion to defying it, and on the attempt to go along with – rather than to distinguish oneself from – the eternal flowing mutation of each and every thing. It is the type of sentence that best expresses the principles of the social ethics dominant since centuries in the area influenced by the Confucian culture, whose sway over the far Eastern people make them seem to us particularly compliant and submissive.

This particular enculturation explains why, when we speak of the inner attitude that characterizes the life of a zen practitioner – of “kokoro”, as the Japanese say – we are always reminded that gratitude towards our instructors and obedience towards all elders are among its essential and universal imperatives. These are undoubtedly good suggestions, above all insofar as they contribute to maintaining peace in a closed and centralized community. But they are not at all universal. For instance, in the early Indian communities, the vow of obedience was mandatory only for those of very young age, who were entrusted to a tutor, *upādhyāya oācārya*, before their ordination. The obedience to precepts was and is a personal matter. They are tools for monks' liberation -this is the meaning of *bhikṣu pratimokṣa*. Quite another matter is the obedience to those rules that are mandatory because they are required for the smooth functioning of a monastery.

To conclude: sometimes what is presented as “buddhist ethics” is in reality Confucian, amoral and often nomocratic²⁸. The ethics that constitutes one of the three pillars of Buddhism is quite another thing²⁹. It is not made up of normative injunctions, but is the difficult search for virtue in everyday's life. There is only one, firm, uncompromising commitment to friendliness towards everything and everyone. A dramatic example of this demanding form of ethics beyond formulae and norms is the story of how “Nanquan Puyuan cut the cat” mentioned, among others, by Dōgen in the *Zuimonki*³⁰, where, quoting from the *Blue Cliff Records*³¹, he explains: <When the great-function [the universal, we could say]

manifests itself no fixed rules exist>.

I should like to point out that I insist that moral ethics, with knowledge and body practice, is a precondition for Buddhism to be universal, not because this is some kind of Buddhist dogma or because the Indian, or Western, influence over early Buddhism makes this implication unavoidable. It is what the experience of generations of men and women deeply, assiduously and unselfishly committed to religion tells us in the clearest possible terms.

For instance, we have all made this experience; with the heart full of hate, or after causing pain and having fought bitterly with our wives, or husbands, we practice a zazen that, for a longer or shorter period, is without universality, except for the universality of the ancient, endless prattling of our minds. Zazen practitioners realize that, in the deep³², the spirit of *maitrī*, *karunā* and *ahimsā* is of the same substance as zazen and that zazen permeates our lives with the same fresh and light spirit. But also the opposite is true. It is that spirit present in our life that produces the open-mindedness required for our sitting and our living to be one with the universe. Instead, an immoral and evil life generate a zazen that, at best is some kind of physical exercise. Hate, greed and envy harden the soul.

From the religious point of view, evil is all that keeps us apart, all that encircles us in a sham segment of reality, cuts us off from the infinite and prevents us from melting into it. Self-centeredness, greed and attachment are drives that close in the area of “me”; they prevent this “me” from bursting all boundaries. Clearly, if we want to give a chance to this effort to free human nature from its limits, we must also give up those forms of behaviour and motivations that push in the opposite direction. As a result, generosity, kindness and goodwill are the normal virtues of a religious life. This is so simply because there is no other way. Or, better, because all other ways push us farther and farther away, instead of leading us nearer the sea in which we wish to immerse ourselves to be water in water.

This dynamic relation between life and zazen is not underlined only in the ancient sutras, like the *Dhammapada*. It is also explained in much detail in the already mentioned *Dasheng Qixinlun*³³, a treatise produced

in the VI century a.D. by an author whom all scholars now believe to be Chinese.

To avoid all misunderstandings, let me make clear that my words are not critical of Dōgen's zen, but of the attempt to export the form in which Buddhism was shaped in one cultural area as if this form were the Universal. Dōgen knew that the Confucian ethics was not up to the task of placing and keeping us tuned in to the divine in our soul, because that ethics pertains to the field of human relations, and to the social behaviour: "soto shitagau" (外従う) means "outside, in the sphere of the world, give into"³⁴.

Dōgen's authentic thought is clearly expressed in works like *Shōbōgenzō Bodaisatta Shishobō*³⁵ or the Tenzo *Kyōkun, Instructions for the zen cook*³⁶ which recommends that three forms of love should mould all our existence, both when conditions are such that one should obey others as when it is instead necessary to rise up against them or even to exercise command over them.

I would also be misunderstood if I was believed to be saying that, since Buddhism is an Indian matter, only Indian cultural categories can contain it. It is not so. From the very start Buddhism presents itself as *paṭisotagāmin*³⁸ "[that who] swims against the tide, goes upstream" and this is true both in the deeper sense of "giving up the aimless wandering (*samsāra*)", in the sense of "keeping apart from the flow of thoughts and desires", and in a the more self-evident sense of "being always a foreigner, an alien to every way of thinking"³⁹. Buddhism does not belong therefore to any culture in particular. Even in India it had to become enculturated, and it took more than three centuries. Almost as much as it took in China.

V) Zazen is not enough for zazen

As we already said, *Universality* does not exist in the naked, if it wants to become visible, it has no choice but to cloth itself with what is supplied by the culture within which it is (re)born at that time. The thing is that, dressed up that way in that instant may be particular, but is truly universal. However, if we act on the presupposition that the specific form in which the infinite reveals itself in that moment is authentic and good, and try to transplant it, to

give it life in another environment, where culture and sensitivities are different, that which was authentic Zen at home, it no longer is: it is an ethnic play-acting empty of any religiosity and universality.

I am not thinking only of the tea ceremonies portrayed as if they were "zen rituals", of the oriental-looking decor of meditation halls, the somewhat silly, incessant repetition of Japanese or Chinese terms in Western contexts that clash head on with these mannerisms. I am referring to more significant forms of this incongruence. Western culture has made individualism, the pursuit of uniqueness and originality the yardstick of man and the standard value of its existence. To portray meek obedience and conformity as the perfect and doctrinally appropriate embodiment of the emptiness preached by the Middleway is the opposite of an attempt of enculturation. If we do this, we are advocating neither for Buddhism nor for universality but for a cultural project, that is foreign to the context in which we propose to nurture it. Over the long run, the enthusiasm for things foreign is certain to be replaced by rejection and boredom.

Universal is in the effort to redefine what is universal over and over again. Universal is the capacity for universality that is born again and again in every person that begins to live it, or, more generally, in every generation that (re)discovers it, interpreting it anew in the light of his culture. The opposite of "universality" are imitation and the adoption of conventional and orthodox views. We can talk of universality in Buddhism only when every man, every generation and every culture can develop his own Buddhism, and, at the same time, no Buddhism excludes the other, when every mountain is visible by all others.

Side by side to very strong expressions, like "zazen shitara oshimai!"⁴⁰, it is opportune to place emphasis with equal strength on the two other elements of man's endeavour to sink into the universal. The awakening to the emptiness of the self is the state of impermanence in which the world fading away to the world in the world becomes one with *nirvāṇa*. The other is a spiritual ethics that consists in constructing a vibrant reality of the same substance as that of the world while the world fades away: "Make haste in doing good; check your mind from evil; for the mind of

him who is slow in doing good delights in evil”⁴¹.

Without awakening to the fading world and spiritual ethics, even if “the correctly transmitted dharma from Buddha to Buddha and from patriarch to patriarch has always been just to do zazen”⁴² and “zazen itself is the posture of awakening”, zazen may end becoming a technique for psycho-physical relaxation or a tool of those who want to become “someone” or something “special”.

¹ 大乘起信論, better known in the Japanese religious literature as *Daijō Kishinron*.

² Hakeda Y.S., *The Awakening of faith*, Columbia University Press, New York 1967, 37.

³ Transliterated with the Hepburn system: “shikaku wa sunawachi honkaku ni onajiki wo motte nari”.

⁴ Parenthetically, I am using the word “absolute” in its original etymological meaning, which is “untied, free from any straitjacket, beyond any limit”.

⁵ Cf. A.C. Bouquet, *Comparative Religion*, Penguin Books Ltd., Middlesex 1963⁷, chapter VII.

⁶ Cf. L. De La Vallée Poussin, entry: “Avalokiteśvara”, in Subodh Kapoor, *The Buddhists: encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi 2001, I 122 n.9.

⁷ Cf. Giovanni Semerano, *Le Origini della Cultura Europea*, Olschki Ed., Firenze 2002² and cf. Norman Davis, *Europe: A History*, Harper Perennial, London 1998. From another point of view see A.C. Bouquet, *Comparative Religion*, Penguin Books Ltd., Middlesex 1967⁷, chapter V, and Stephen Oppenheimer, *The Origins of the British: A Genetic Detective Story*, Carrol & Graf, New York 2006.

⁸ A very interesting sign of the osmotic relations that existed between the Mesopotamian and Indian cultures, is in the very word “Gotama” (also Gautama or, better, *Gòtamah*), whose root is the Assirian word *gadāmu*, “to cut [one's own] hairs, to shave”, cf. Giovanni Semerano, *L'infinito: un equivoco millenario. Le antiche civiltà del Vicino Oriente e le origini del pensiero greco*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano 2004², 73 n.142.

⁹ Cf. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. I, Allen & Unwin, London 1932¹, chapter II and especially: Giovanni Semerano, *Le Origini della Cultura Europea*, Olschki Ed., Firenze 2002², II, XXXVII ss.

¹⁰ Cf. A.C. Bouquet, *Comparative Religion*, Penguin Books Ltd., Middlesex 1963⁷, chapter V.

¹¹ *Nekkhamma* in pāli. This term goes back at least to the fifth century b.C.

¹² Cf. *Zhuangzi*, 莊子, cap. II e VI. These affinities between the Indian and the Daoist philosophies and practices should not come as a surprise. “Daoism, to some extent, was born from the panasian shamanic humus. This is why certain similarities between yoga and daoist practices are not surprising”, cf. L.Lanciotti, *Introduzione a Chuang Tzu*, a c. di F.Tommasini, ed. TEA, Milano 1989, VIII.

¹³ The most ancient translations into Chinese of texts that mention the “sitting” are, perhaps, those of the Buddhist monk from Sogdiana Kang Seng-hui who, between the third and fourth century, translated the *Sūtra of sitting in dhyāna with the title Zuo chan jing* 坐禪經. Kumarajīva, perhaps in 402, translated the *Sūtra of samādhi of sitting in dhyāna with the title Zuo chan sanmei jing* 坐禪三昧經.

¹⁴ The zazen practice, together with the study of the texts of the *prajñāpāramitā* began, perhaps, in the Huiyuan, 慧遠 344-416, monastery. Huiyuan stressed the distinction between the Buddhist spiritual ethics from the Confucian ethics based on social relations.

¹⁵ 証道歌, it is known under the Japanese name of *Shōdōka*, attributed to Yongjia Xuanjue (in Japanese Yōka Genkaku), 665-713.

¹⁶ 594-657, in Japanese Gozu Hōyū, a disciple of the fourth patriarch of the Chan school, Dayi Daoxin (580-651). His statement reminds one of the negation of Nagarjuna and of the Madhyamaka (or Mādhyamika), “those of the middle”.

¹⁷ 709-788, in Japanese Baso Dōitsu, perhaps Chan's greatest figure.

¹⁸ 700-790, in Japanese Sekitō Kisen, author of *Can Tong Qi, Understanding the one and the many; in Japanese Sandōkai*.

¹⁹ 默照, “mokushō” in Japanese.

²⁰ 1091-1157, in Japanese Wanshi Shōgaku.

²¹ In Japanese “atama no tebanashi”, or: 頭の手離し.

²² In Japanese “zazen shitara oshimai”, or: 坐禅したら 御仕舞い.

²³ Another pertinent example is constituted by the almost uncritical assimilation of Judō (literally: “the way of softness”) into Zen Buddhism. Judō comes from *Laozi*, 老子 (or *Daodejing*, 道德經), as *rou dao* 柔道 “[prevail by] giving in, yielding”. It is perhaps unnecessary to recall that Zen does not aim either at prevailing, or yielding or resisting.

²⁴ *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*, 2-10.

²⁵ I am quoting from Shohaku Okumura and Daito Tom Wright English translation: *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki, Sayings of Eihei Dōgen Zenji recorded by Koun Ejo*, Kyoto Soto-Zen Center, Kyoto 1987. In Japanese this sentence reads as: “Shikareba konin no iwaku: uchi munashiku shite, soto shitagauto”, or: 然あれば 古人の云く: 内ち空しふして、外したがふと.

- ²⁶ Zhuangzi, cap. XXXIII, 6.
- ²⁷ *Setting the wheel of Dhamma in motion.*
- ²⁸ Legism or nomocracy, “fajia”, 法家, in Chinese.
- ²⁹ For the moment we call it “moral or spiritual ethics” to distinguish it from the other.
- ³⁰ Cf. *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki* 1-6.
- ³¹ *Bijan-lu*, 碧巖錄, third case.
- ³² “Oku”, 奥, in Japanese.
- ³³ *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*. In Hakeda’s already mentioned translation: cf. 56 ss. and 81 ss.
- ³⁴ In this case, I do not believe that Dōgen meant “adapt to the circumstances, obey when it is appropriate that you should, rebel and do it your way when it is necessary”. His own explanation of this statement is very clear in this regard: “Gesō wa tani shitagai (外相は 他に従い)” which means: “Getting along with others outside” (*Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki* 2-10).
- ³⁵ *For Dimensions of a Living Bodhisattva Spirit.*
- ³⁶ Cf. E.Dōgen-K.Uchiyama, *Refining your life*, Weatherhill, New York-Tokyo 1983, translation by Daito Thomas Wright.
- ³⁷ “Rōshin” 老心, “kishin” 喜心, “daishin” 大心, or: “fatherly (motherly) heart”, “joyful heart”, “noble heart”.
- ³⁸ Cf. *Khuddakanikaya*, 4: *Itivuttaka* IV. 10 (109) where *patīsotagamin* is employed as a synonym for *nekkamma/nai kramya* or “letting go” which constitutes the intimacy of staying seated. See also: J.Hubbard & P.L.Swanson, *Pruning the Bodhi Tree*, University of Hawai’i Press, Honolulu 1997, 94.
- ³⁹ The statement “*anatman*”, very shocking in that contest, is the clearest sign of this going against the stream.
- ⁴⁰ “To sit zazen: end-all”. Cf. n.20.
- ⁴¹ *Dhammapada*, 116.
<http://www.serve.com/cmtan/Dhammapada/evil.html>.
- ⁴² *Eihei Kōroku*, section IV.
- ⁴³ *Eihei Kōroku*, section IV.

Shobogenzo Zazenshin - A Free Translation (1)

Rev. Issho Fujita

Introduction

Thus far, I have been writing *My Zazen Notebook* in which I attempted to describe my various observations about zazen. I collected these essays in a series in which I freely expressed in my own way my personal experiences of zazen. Those articles were written in Japanese about ten years ago and looking back at them now, there are many places I would like to rewrite and new ideas have also arisen in the meantime. Nevertheless, I did introduce them in *Dharma Eye*, thinking that they were not a bad record of me in my forties.

What was the zazen that Dogen Zenji intended to encourage all people to practice? From now on, I would like to continue making the effort to express in my own words, as accurately as possible and with deep understanding, the answer to that question.

I have received an offer from the *Dharma Eye* editors to begin a series with a new theme. So, I would like to begin with a free and colloquial translation of *Shobogenzo Zazenshin*, a chapter that I have been giving teisho on once a month at a Zen temple in Tokyo. I have finished a series of teisho on *Fukan-zazengi* that took about a year and a half, choosing this text because I thought it was important for the practitioners to have an understanding of the concrete method of zazen. The reason that I have chosen *Shobogenzo Zazenshin* next is because in this text Dogen Zenji focused on aspects of the internal attitude of zazen using Yakusan’s “Beyond Thinking,” Nangaku’s “Polishing a Tile,” Wanshi’s *Zazenshin*, as well as Dogen Zenji’s *Zazenshin*.

Since long ago, it has been said that this chapter of *Shobogenzo* is difficult to understand and even if commentaries are consulted, there are many places where there isn’t agreement. Nevertheless, as many very important questions are addressed in *Shobogenzo Zazenshin* which we as practitioners cannot avoid, I will do my best to write about this text, despite my limitations.

The translation I have made is not literal, but rather one in which I have added words, lines and brief comments to help in understanding the meaning so that it can be understood reading the text as it is. I hope that with study and reflection on this translation you readers will be able to taste *Shobogenzo Zazenshin* for yourselves. Please send any questions or comments to me in care of the editorial department of *Dharma Eye*.

The chapter as an acupuncture needle to heal the fatal disease of failing zazen

(What is the appropriate way of practicing zazen like an acupuncture needle curing the fundamental human illness?)

First of all, let us consider two treasured koans. This is because these two koans are the best to elucidate what zazen is all about and to teach us the standard for the correct way to practice zazen.

The first one is “Yakusan’s *Hishiryō* (beyond thinking)” which is number 14 in the *Keitoku Dentoroku* and number 129 in Dogen Zenji’s *Shinji Shobogenzo*.

One day, Yakusan (745-828) was sitting in zazen and a monk who saw him sitting said the following. (At first glance, this dialogue seems to be a question-and-answer between master and disciple. But according to Dogen Zenji, this was not the case. He thought both Yakusan and the monk had equally an excellent and deep understanding of zazen and that we must understand this story as a lively exchange of wonderful expressions that highlight zazen in their individual ways).

The monk said, “When you are sitting zazen in that upright, immovable position, you keep indefinitely leaving thoughts that appear naturally come and go without chasing after them or driving them away (just like clouds that float through the blue sky and then disappear) and carefully entrusting the body to the upright sitting posture. So, when sitting in zazen, our thoughts are not forming an ordinary thinking process of ‘me’ trying to intentionally think of something as our own project. Rather, it is the unlimited spontaneous function of Nature itself, like naturally breathing in and out while being deeply asleep. Therefore, it isn’t possible to describe the thoughts during zazen by

assuming in words that people have made up, such as ‘In zazen, I am thinking about such and such.’ However, if I had to say something, there is no choice but to use the interrogative ‘What? (*nani* in Japanese. This is not used to ask a question but rather a creative and original use of the interrogative form in Zen tradition to indicate what is beyond conceptual limitation).’ And so, I say to you, ‘In zazen, our thinking (*shiryō*) is (the manifestation of) What.’”

In response, Yakusan said, “Well, that is a very subtle way of stating your understanding of thinking during zazen. For myself, though, I would like to put it this way, focusing on the ground from which thought appears. ‘When we are practicing zazen such that all thoughts are let go of, it is only a matter of surrendering to each thought as it arises and disappears, which is not-thinking. There, any thought appearing and disappearing is the function of Life as not-thinking (*fushiryō*), which is prior to the division into self and other. So in zazen, thinking itself is (the work of) not-thinking.’”

Then, the monk said, “I see. It is certainly as you say, master, that not-thinking actually doesn’t exist outside the individual thoughts appearing and disappearing. The only way to express the nature of ‘not-thinking, which is not separated from thinking’ is by using the interrogative ‘in what way (*ikan* in Japanese. This is another unique way of using the interrogative to express what can not be expressed through words)?’ So I would like to say it this way, ‘Not-thinking (*hishiryō*)’ is (truly the lively, dynamic flow of) ‘thinking-in-what-way (*ikan shiryō*)’.”

Yakusan wrapped up this dialogue this way.

“You’ve really delved into this matter and expressed it very well. But there is not any more need to continue this dialogue with those dualistic terms such as thinking/not-thinking and that is because ‘thinking is not-thinking’ and ‘not-thinking is thinking-in what-way.’ In a word, zazen is beyond thinking (*hishiryō* in Japanese, something that cannot be grasped by thought). So, the only thing we can do is to make every possible effort to actually practice zazen with both body and mind, all together. Zazen is nothing other than the stance of endeavoring in the posture of body-mind single-mindedly, prior to discriminative

activity.”

With clear understanding, through own practice, of what this great teacher Yakusan Kodo taught with these words, we must practically study zazen. And we must also correctly transmit zazen to other people. This is precisely the way of studying zazen that has been passed down through an unbroken chain of people in Buddhism.

There have been many examples of people who explored zazen. And certainly, Yakusan isn't the only one. However, his words truly stand out and are of the first magnitude. That was his expression, “thinking is not-thinking.” (Whatever thought there is is itself not-thinking). Thinking in this sense is the total reality of the self's body /mind and not-thinking as well is the total reality of the self's body and mind (Thinking and not-thinking have the same meaning). It is only depending on which angle it is looked at that we could say it is thinking or not- thinking. Both expressions equally point to the whole practice of zazen. Let's look at the words which the monk said, “Not-thinking' is truly the lively, dynamic flow of 'thinking-in-what-way” Certainly the words “not-thinking” point to our eternal, unchanging nature, to our original reality. But the monk was not satisfied with this and without stopping there he proceeded one step further and said, “thinking-in-what-way.” Here, he presented his own lively view based upon the actual practice here and now. It isn't that there is no thought in zazen. Zazen is to continue aiming at a dynamic posture. And it is the activity of unending awakening to the reality of life right here, right now. Therefore, zazen as the activity of Life that is continuously going beyond itself (*kojyo* in Japanese) and is free with no stagnation. Consequently, if this monk is not a low-down fool who can only see what is right in front of him, someone who is content with a casual understanding of zazen, then he should have the power to dig a little deeper, questioning and clarifying zazen. It is only natural that there would be this kind of exploration.

Next, let's study Yakusan's words “beyond-thinking (*bishiryō*)”. The working of beyond-thinking is, in other words, the function of Life as-it-is is completely transparent like a jewel, without a speck of cloudiness or muddiness (invisible). It is so free and unrestricted that it cannot be captured with a fixed shape. Beyond-thinking is

beyond perception. Nevertheless, when we are in the state of “thinking is not-thinking” (practicing to realize our natural and original state of body-mind which cannot be grasped by thought), in other words when we are practicing zazen, then certainly we are sitting there with the life power of “beyond-thinking.” It isn't possible to sit in zazen without using that power. The reality of beyond-thinking has the clear structure of thinking/not-thinking.

So, within beyond-thinking, there is the structure of “whom” (*tare* in Japanese, referring to thinking/not-thinking), and that structure safeguards “I” (*ware* in Japanese, referring to beyond-thinking). Since zazen is the activity of beyond-thinking itself (“I”), it isn't only thinking but rather zazen appears as zazen by means of the structure of “thinking is not-thinking”. Then with regards to that zazen which appears, ultimately we can only say that zazen is zazen. So, in actual zazen, it is sufficient for us to completely dedicate ourselves to zazen. Here, there is no need to repeatedly discriminate about zazen as an object, thinking this and that about it. To the extent we do such unnecessary things, we deviate from zazen. Zazen can never see zazen itself.

For that reason, zazen is something that cannot be measured by any kind of yardsticks, whether it is in terms of buddha, dharma, satori, understanding, and so forth. It is something that far transcends the frame of all conceptual and speculative limits and standards. It is immeasurable and boundless. Yakusan was a great man of zazen who belonged to the Dharma lineage in which such zazen with no limits had been transmitted through the intimate relationship between master and disciple, as if water had been poured from one vessel to another. He was the 36th Ancestor in the lineage of successive generations who had continued this unbroken transmission straight back to the source of the water, Shakyamuni Buddha. Tracing back 36 generations from Yakusan, there was Shakyamuni Buddha. It was precisely “thinking is not-thinking”, in other words, zazen that was correctly handed down in this face-to-face transmission. This is called “correctly-transmitted zazen” or “shikantaza.”

Nonetheless, there are fools these days who bandy about half-baked things. They say, “The aim of zazen practice is to attain a peaceful state of mind that is clear and in which

there are no random, delusive thoughts”. Someone who sets the final goal of zazen practice at attainment of some personal skills or some temporary, special mental state has a crooked, half-baked way of thinking; it is a shallow understanding that doesn’t even reach the standpoint of someone who is practicing Hinayana Buddhism. What is more, it is far inferior to the two lowest ranks of the Five Vehicles: the Vehicles of human beings, celestial beings, sravakas, pratekya-buddhas, and bodhisattvas. That crowd can definitely not be called “people who study the Buddhadharma.” Unfortunately, there are now many people in China who practice with this way of thinking. I can’t help but feel sad that the correct way of zazen, which the Buddhas and Ancestors have carefully transmitted, has fallen into such ruin.

There are also people who tell everyone, “As a way of studying Buddhism, zazen practice is an important tool only for beginners and older people. It isn’t something necessarily practiced by the Buddhas and Ancestors. Once a person has had satori, then it isn’t necessary to practice zazen. For those people on such a high level, walking is Zen and sitting is also Zen. For such people, the body and mind is peaceful regardless of whether they are speaking or silent, moving or sitting quietly. So, there is no need to be concerned only about the practice of zazen.” Many people who proclaim themselves to be affiliated with Rinzai Zen think like this. The true teaching of Buddha has not been transmitted to them, so they are stuck in a truly poor understanding of the Buddhadharma. And so, they spew out these kinds of astonishing remarks that are flagrantly mistaken. “A beginner?” They talk as if they understand what a beginner is, but what really do they think it is? Do they mean someone who has just learned something? If we say “a beginner,” isn’t that everyone is a beginner? Is there anyone who isn’t a beginner? These people don’t understand the true meaning of being a beginner. Where does being a beginner begin and end? They say such things because they don’t know the most fundamental point of Buddhism which is “Practicing the Way as a beginner is already the whole of original realization.”

(To be continued).

Shobogenzo
Treasury of the Eye of the
True Dharma
Chapter 40
Hakujushi The Cypress Tree

Translated by

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INTRODUCTION

This short text was composed in 1242, at Kōshōji, Dōgen’s monastery just south of the capital at Heian-kyō (present-day Kyoto). It occurs as number 40 in both the 75-fascicle and 60-fascicle redactions of the *Shōbōgenzō*.

The text takes its title from a saying by the famous Tang-dynasty Chan master Zhaozhou Congshen (778-897). Rather than launching directly into his comments on this saying, Dōgen devotes the first half of his essay to a treatment of the figure of Zhaozhou himself, as revealed in his biography and poetry. He tells here the story of Zhaozhou’s encounter with his master, Nanquan Puyuan (748-834), and goes on to praise the strict austerity of his later life as abbot of Gyanyin yuan, where he served till his death at the remarkable age of 120.

Dōgen then turns to the title theme of the essay, the meaning of Zhaozhou’s mysterious remark, “the cypress tree at the front of the garden,” in response to the question of why Bodhidharma brought the Zen tradition to China. He goes on to discuss a second saying of Zhaozhou, that the cypress tree has the buddha nature and will become a buddha “once space falls on the ground.” Dōgen’s comments in this section are sometimes quite difficult to interpret and may well leave some readers asking the question with which the essay closes: “what about it?”

This translation is based on the text appearing in Kawamura Kōdō, *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, volume 1 (1991),

pp. 436-442. A more fully annotated version can be found on the website of the Soto Zen Text Project: <http://scbs.stanford.edu/sztp3>. Other English renderings of this text appear in Kōsen Nishiyama and John Stevens, *Shōbōgenzō*, volume 2 (1977), pp. 29-32; Yuho Yokoi, *The Shobo-genzo* (1986), pp. 489-495; and Gudo Nishijima and Chodo Cross, *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo*, Book 2 (1996), pp. 227-235. The translator expresses his debt to the members of the 2007 Seminar in Japanese Buddhist Texts, with whom he read the text at Stanford.

Text of *The Cypress Tree*

The Great Master Zhenji of Zhaozhou [i.e., Zhaozhou Congshen (778-897)] was the thirty-seventh generation from the Tathāgata Śākyamuni. At the age of sixty-one, he first “produced the thought” [of enlightenment] and, leaving home, studied the way. At this time, he made a vow, saying, “Even if they are one hundred years old, if they are inferior to me, I will teach them; even if they are seven years old, if they are superior to me, I will inquire of them.” Vowing thus, he wandered south. As he went inquiring of the way, he reached Nanquan and paid his respects to the Reverend Preceptor Yuan [i.e., the Chan master Nanquan Puyuan (748-834)].

At the time, Nanquan was in the abbot's quarters, where he had been lying down. When the master approached, he [i.e., Nanquan] asked, “Where are you coming from?”

The master said, “Ruixiang [‘Auspicious Image’] cloister.”

Nanquan said, “And have you see the auspicious image?”

The master said, “I haven't seen the auspicious image, but I have seen a recumbent tathāgata.”

Thereupon Nanquan promptly arose and said, “Are you a *sramanera* with a master, or a *sramanera* without a master?”

The master replied, saying, “A *sramanera* with a master.”

Nanquan said, “Who is your master?”

The master said, “It is the first of spring and still cold. I trust the Reverend Preceptor's health is blessed.

Nanquan called the rector and said, “Assign this *sramanera* somewhere.”¹

Thus he lodged at Nanquan and, without traveling anywhere else, pursued the way with concentrated effort for thirty years. Without wasting “an inch of shadow,” he had no extraneous activities. Eventually, after transmission of the way and reception of the work, he resided at Guanyin cloister in Zhaozhou for another thirty years. The character of his abbacy was not like those of the usual places.

On one occasion, he said,

Smoking fires – I futilely gaze on the neighborhood;
Parted from buns and dumplings last year.
Thinking of them today, I swallow my spittle in vain;
Rarely maintaining my thoughts, repeatedly sighing.
There's no good person in a hundred households.
The ones that come say they're just looking for tea;
If they don't get their tea, they go away angry.

What a pity. His smoking fires are few; he rarely has a single taste; he has not met a varied taste since last year. When the people of the hundred households come, they are seeking tea; those not seeking tea do not come. There is likely no one in the hundred households who brings him tea. There may be “clouds and water” that “meet the wise,” but there are likely no “dragons or elephants” that “think to equal him.”²

On one occasion, he also said,

Thinking of those who've left home in this realm,
How many could there be with an abbacy like mine?
An earthen bed with a tattered reed mat,
An old elmwood headrest with no cover at all.
At the icon, I don't burn the incense of Arsaces,
In the ashes, I just smell the odor of cow dung.

From these sayings, we can understand the purity of his cloister. We should study these traces. That his monastic assembly was not many, said to have been less than twenty, is because “being able to do it is hard.” The sangha hall was not large and lacked both front shelving and back shelving. There was no lamp light at night and no charcoal fire in winter weather. One could say it was a pitiful life for an aged one. Such was the conduct of the old buddha.³

Once, when the leg of the joined platform was broken, he spliced it by binding twine to a piece of burned wood [and continued to use it] for months and years. When the stewards reported it to be replaced, the master would not permit it. [This incident] is an excellent vestige, rare throughout the generations.

As a rule,

In the breakfast gruel, there isn't any grain of rice;
I vacantly face the quiet window and the dust in the cracks.

Or he would pick up nuts, and both he and the monks would live on them as their daily fare. Late comers now eulogize this conduct, and, though they do not reach the master's conduct, they assume the attitude of “longing for the ancients.”

On one occasion, he addressed the assembly, saying,

In the thirty years I was in the south, I exclusively practiced seated meditation. If you all think to get this prime “great matter,” you should try investigating the principle and practicing seated meditation. If, in three years, or five years, or twenty years, or thirty years, you haven't attained the way, you can take [this] old monk's head, make it into a ladle, and scoop piss [with it].

He made such a vow. Truly, pursuing the way in seated meditation is the direct path of the way of the buddha. We should investigate the principle, sit and see. Later, people said, “Zhaozhou is an old buddha.”

* * * * *

The great master was once asked by a monk, “What is the intention of the ancestral master's coming from the west?”

The master said, “The cypress tree at the front of the garden.”

The monk said, “Reverend Preceptor, don't show a person with an object.”

The master said, “I don't show a person with an object.”

The monk said, “What is the intention of the ancestral master's coming from the west?”

The master said, “The cypress tree at the front of the garden.”⁴

This one kōan, though it is said to have originated from Zhaozhou, is in the end something authored by the whole body of the buddhas. Who is “the one in charge”? The principle we should understand here is the point that “the cypress at the front of the garden” is not “an object,” the point that “the intention of the ancestral master's coming from the west” is not “an object,” the point that “the cypress tree” is not the self; for [it is said,], “Reverend Preceptor don't show a person with an object”; for [it is said,] “I don't show a person with an object.” Which “Reverend Preceptor” is impeded by “Reverend Preceptor”? If he is not impeded, he must be “I.” Which “I” is impeded by “I”? Even if it is impeded, it must be “a person.” Which “object” is not obstructed by the “intention in coming from the west”? For the “object” must inevitably be the “intention in coming from the west.” Nevertheless, the “intention in coming from the west” is not dependent on the “object.” “The intention of the ancestral master's coming from the west” is not necessarily “the treasury of the eye of the true dharma, the wondrous mind of nirvana.” It is “not the mind”; it is “not the buddha”; it is not “not a thing.”⁵

[The monk's] saying here, “what is the intention of the ancestral master's coming from the west?” is not merely a question; it is not merely that “both people can see the

same.” Precisely at the time he asks, he cannot see anyone; how much of himself can he get? Going further, [we can say,] he is without fault. Therefore, it is “mistake, mistake.” Because it is mistake, mistake, it is “taking a mistake as a mistake.” Is this not “to accept the hollow and entertain the echo”?⁶

Because “the all-pervading spiritual root turns neither toward nor away,” it is “the cypress tree at the front of the garden”: if it is not an “object,” it cannot be a cypress tree; even if it is an object, it is [said,] “I don’t show a person with an object,” and “Reverend Preceptor, don’t show a person with an object.” It is not an old ancestral shrine. Since it is not an old ancestral shrine, he goes on burying. Since he goes on burying, it is “return my concentrated effort.” Since it is “return my concentrated effort,” it is [said,] “I don’t show a person with an object.” Then what else does he use to “show a person”? It must be “I’m also like this.”⁷

* * * * *

The great master was asked by a monk, “Does the cypress have the buddha nature or not?”

The great master said, “It does.”

The monk said, “When does the cypress become a buddha?”

The great master said, “Once space falls on the ground.”

The monk said, “When does space fall on the ground?”

The great master said, “Once the cypress tree becomes a buddha.”

We should not hear the saying of the great master here and discard the question of this monk. The great master’s words, “once space falls on the ground,” or “once the cypress becomes a buddha,” are not mutually dependent sayings. They are questioning “the cypress,” questioning “the buddha nature”; they are questioning “becoming a buddha,” questioning the time [“once”]; they are

questioning “space,” questioning “falling on the ground.”

In the great master’s speaking to the monk here, when he says, “it does,” he means the “existence of the buddha nature of the cypress.” Mastering these words, we should penetrate the vital artery of the buddhas and ancestors. That the cypress tree has the buddha nature usually cannot be said, has never been said. It has the buddha nature; so we should clarify its state. It has the buddha nature; how about the height of its ground and stage? We should inquire into the length of its life and physical dimensions; we should ask about its family and clan. Further, in a hundred thousand cypress trees, are they all of the same family, or are they of distinct familial lines? Should there be cypress trees that become buddhas? Cypress trees that practice? Cypress trees that “produce the thought” [of enlightenment]? Does the cypress tree, although it becomes a buddha, not fulfill practice and production of the thought? What is the causal relationship between the cypress tree and space? Does the fact that the cypress tree’s becoming a buddha is definitely “once you fall on the ground” mean that the cypress tree’s virtue as a tree is necessarily space? Regarding the ground and stage of the cypress tree: is space the first ground? Is it the effect stage? We should make concentrated effort to study this in detail. I ask you, old man Zhaozhou, “Did you convey such business because you are yourself one dead cypress tree?”⁸

In general, that the cypress tree has the buddha nature is not in the realm of the alien ways or the two vehicles⁹, is not seen or heard by the sutra masters or treatise masters. How much less is it proclaimed in the “word flowers” of “dead wood and cold ashes.” Only a type like Zhaozhou studies and investigates it. Zhaozhou’s saying here that the cypress has the buddha nature is [asking], is the cypress obstructed by the cypress, is the buddha nature obstructed by the buddha nature? This saying is something not yet fully exhausted by one buddha or two buddhas. Even those with the face of a buddha are not necessarily able fully to exhaust this saying. Even among the buddhas, there will be buddhas who can say it and buddhas who cannot say it.

[The phrase] “once space falls on the ground” is not saying something that could not be the case: every time the cypress tree becomes a buddha, space falls on the

ground. The sound of its falling on the ground is not hidden: it exceeds a hundred thousand claps of thunder. The time when the cypress becomes a buddha, while for the time being is within the twelve periods, is further within thirteen periods. The space that falls on the ground is not just the space seen by commoners and sages: there is an additional piece of space, “something not seen by others”; Zhaozhou alone sees it. The ground where space falls is also not the ground occupied by commoners and sages: there is a further piece of ground, “something not reached by *yin* and *yang*”; Zhaozhou alone reaches it. At the time space falls on the ground, though they be the sun and moon, mountains and rivers, they must be “once.” Who says that the buddha nature necessarily becomes a buddha? The buddha nature is an adornment after one becomes a buddha; further, there must be a buddha nature that is born together and studies together with becoming a buddha.

Therefore, the cypress and the buddha nature are not “different notes with the same tune.” What we say is, since it is “why so?” we should investigate it [asking,] “what about it?”

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HAKUJUSHI NOTES

1. A *sramanera* is a novice, who has not taken the full precepts of the monk.
2. “Clouds and water” is a common term for Buddhist monks; “dragons or elephants” are superior religious practitioners. The sentence draws on the Confucian saying, “when one meets the wise, think to equal him; when one meets the unwise, then look within oneself.”
3. The phrase “being able to do it is hard” comes from the saying, “knowing it is not hard; being able to do it is hard.” The sangha hall is the monks’ quarters, which typically had shelves at the front for food service and in back at the lavatory.
4. To “show a person with an object” means to use a thing to teach people.
5. The terms “impeded” and “obstructed” in this difficult passage might be understood as “identified” or “defined.” The “treasury of the eye of the true dharma, the wondrous mind of nirvana” indicates the tradition of Zen that Bodhidharma is said to have brought to China.
6. “To accept the hollow and entertain the echo” usually means something like “to take seriously what is vacuous”; most interpreters take it in a positive sense here.
7. “The all-pervading spiritual root turns neither toward nor away” is a line from the Chan master Shitou’s “Song of a Grass Hut (*Caoan ge*). “Burying” here is probably a term for Zhaozhou’s teaching practice. “I’m also like this” is from the Sixth Ancestor, Huineng’s, description of “undefiled practice and verification.”
8. The “first ground” and “effect stage” refer respectively to the beginning and end of the bodhisattva path.
9. “Alien ways” refers to non-Buddhists; “the two vehicles” are non-Mahayana traditions of Buddhism. “Dead wood and cold ashes” usually refers to practitioners of contemplative trance.

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Place: La Gendronniere, France

Date: June 8, 9, and 10, 2007

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