

Shinjin Datsuraku: Shedding Body-Mind

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Shinjin datsuraku is the term that Dogen Zenji (1200-1253) used to describe the state he experienced after intensive Zen practice under the guidance of his Chinese master Nyojo (1163-1228) at Mt.Tendo in China. Its literal meaning is “sloughing off of body-mind”. In “*Shobogenzo Genjo Koan*,” Dogen explains it as follows:

To study the Buddha Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be proved by the myriad things. To be proved by the myriad things is to let the body-mind of the self as well as the body-mind of others be shed.

Here he means that to practice the Buddha Way is to study the self and to forget the self. “To forget the self” does not mean to deny the self but “to be proved by the myriad things”, that is, to be authenticated by everything. According to Dogen Zenji, that is what “shedding of the self and others” means. Therefore we should not understand that “shedding” is to bring about an inherent substance by removing the impure superficial layer or to reduce the self to nothing by denying its existence. “Shedding” is a term pointing to the situation in which the world of “Genjo Koan” (all things being authenticated by all things) is clearly manifested.

He also talks about letting “the body-mind of the self as well as the body-mind of others” “be shed.” It does not imply that “shedding” simultaneously happens to the “body-mind” of multiple others, but that when “shedding” occurs there is, in the first place, no distinction or conflict between the self and others.

Shinjin Datsuraku and Shikantaza

As we can see, *shinjin datsuraku* cannot be separated from practice. It should be considered as paired with *shikantaza*, which represents Dogen Zenji’s view of practice-realization. In *Shobogenzo Zanmaio Zanmai*, he writes about it as a teaching explicated by Nyojo.

My late master Old Buddha (Nyojo), said, “Practicing Zen (zazen) is shedding body-mind. It can only be done through *shikantaza*. Incense offering, bowing, chanting nenbutsu, repentance, and sutra reading are not pivotal.”

This statement by Nyojo also often appears in *Hokyoki* (Dogen’s journals during his study in China). It clearly shows that zazen is a straightforward practice for understanding and expressing the reality of the self.

Moreover, this practice of “shedding” can be applied to other forms of practice in addition to zazen. Here is an example from *Shobogenzo Henzan* :

“Henzan” (All-inclusive Study) is just shikantaza, shedding body-mind.

***Shinjin datsuraku* and *Satori* (enlightenment)**

The nuance within the words *shinjin datsuraku* is very similar to that of *satori* as used in Buddhism in general. But Dogen Zenji used *shinjin datsuraku* instead of *satori* because *satori* carries the nuance of being the “last stage” of practice. If it is the last stage of practice, further practice would be unnecessary after attaining *satori*. He intended to avoid giving rise to such a misunderstanding. That is why he did not use the term *satori* to express his religious conviction.

His definition of *satori* in the manuscript of *Shobogenzo Daigo* clearly shows this intention.

Even if you attain complete *satori* about the Great Way, it is still a tentative state.

Dogen Zenji tried to avoid the danger of overestimating the “experience of *satori*” by defining it as a tentative state. It could be understood that insight into its tentativeness is itself shedding of body-mind. Dogen Zenji takes a cautious attitude toward the experience of *satori* because he strongly disapproves of *kanna Zen* (phrase-observing Zen) which emphasizes *satori* or *kensho* (seeing one’s own nature).

Kanna Zen was initiated by Daie Soko (1089-1163). This type of Zen assumed that we are fundamentally deluded and it emphasized the attainment of an explosive experience of *satori* through continuously focusing on a phrase (koan) with all one’s heart and strength. This experience is called *kensho*, which means to see through one’s essence. In this way Daie overcame the defect of Zen in Sung Dynasty that failed to find a positive meaning in practice itself. However, Dogen Zenji strongly rejected this approach as going against the fundamental principles of Zen. He makes the point that it is possible to recognize the reality of the self only through continuous practice.

***Shinjin Datsuraku* : Shedding Mind-dust**

As I mentioned before, Dogen Zenji wrote that the term *shinjin datsuraku* had been communicated to him by his late master Nyojo. But we cannot find this expression in *The Recorded Sayings of Nyojo* or any other records of his sayings and doings. We see only one example in *The Second Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Nyojo*. However, this book was compiled in Japan after Dogen Zenji passed away, so it is difficult to believe it is really a record of what Nyojo said.

It was formerly speculated that this phrase *shinjin datsuraku* might have been a teaching that Nyojo privately delivered only to Dogen Zenji. This speculation is based on the fact that this expression frequently appears in *Hokyoki*, the record of the intimate exchange of questions and answers between Nyojo and Dogen.

In regard to this point, in “*Kobutsu no Manebi: Dogen*” (Imitation of the Old Buddha: Dogen), Prof. Jikido Takasaki proposed a hypothesis that Dogen Zenji might have misheard *shinjin datsuraku* (心塵脱落 shedding mind-dust) as *shinjin datsuraku* (身心脱落 shedding body-mind). This hypothesis was based on the fact that the phrase “shedding mind-dust” appears at just one place in *The Record of Nyojo* and the phrase “shedding mind-dust” also appears in the preface to *The Recorded Sayings*

of *Dogen Zenji* contributed by Nyojo's dharma heir, Gion Mugai (date of birth and death unknown). Prof. Takasaki's proposal was intensely debated and was not well accepted. Other scholars noted that the Chinese pronunciation of mind-dust is completely different from that of body-mind. However, later detailed academic research has been developed concerning the difference between Nyojo's words as described by Dogen and Nyojo's actual words. It was also pointed out that in the area of Sekko in China both words were pronounced very similarly. Anyway for now, the explanation is that Dogen Zenji broadly and creatively interpreted Nyojo's expression of *shinjin datsuraku* (shedding mind-dust) as *shinjin datsuraku* (shedding body-mind).

***Hifu datsuraku*: Shedding the Skin**

We cannot find the source of *shinjin datsuraku* in any Chinese Zen texts. But when we consider the meaning of the phrase, we should touch upon the word *hifu datsuraku* (shedding the skin), that is said to have been coined by Yakusan Igen (751?-834?).

One day, Baso asked Yakusan, "What is your understanding these days?" Yakusan answered, "All of my skin has been completely shed and only one truth remains." Baso said, "Your acquired understanding can be said to be perfectly harmonious with mind and body and it permeates through up to the tips of your four limbs. You are already like that. So wrap up your belly with three bamboo ropes (hide yourself from the secular world) and dwell in the mountain wherever it is" (*The Recorded Sayings of Baso*).

The expression "All of my skin has been completely shed and only one truth remains" originated from "the tree is old and decayed. Its skin, branches, leaves are all dropped off. Only the truth remains." in the "Maha Parinirvana Sutra," vol. 39 (*Taisho* 12.97a). It originally meant that innate truth is manifested by peeling off impure superficial layers. But as we can speculate through Baso's comment "... to be perfectly harmonious with mind and body and it permeates through up to the tips of your four limbs," Yakusan's answer should not be understood to literally mean casting away body-mind.

Dogen Zenji was keenly aware of this expression and at his *jodo* in *Eihei Koroku* vol. 6, 424 he said

An ancient worthy (Yakusan) said, "The skin is completely shed." My late master (Nyojo) said, "Body-mind are shed." Already having arrived here (Eihei-ji), how is it?

In order to make a point by creating a unique expression out of "Here and Now," he arranged "The skin is completely shed" in parallel with "Body-mind are shed." He treated both expressions as unique expressions to describe reality. Here Dogen Zenji introduced *shinjin datsuraku* as Nyojo's statement. But it was actually his own unique expression emerging from "right here right now." *Shinjin datsuraku* was an expression created from the concept of "the oneness and sameness of practice and realization" in which "shedding" is not the final "*terminus ad quem*," but in which practice is an endless expression of the truth.

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