

# *Shusho Itto* (Oneness and equality of practice and realization)

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*Shusho Itto* (修証一等) succinctly embodies Dogen Zenji's viewpoint about practice and realization. *Shu* (修) means "practice" and *sho* (証) means "realization as the fruition of practice." *Itto* (一等) means "oneness and equality." The four words together mean "oneness and equality of practice and realization."

Generally speaking, religious practice aims at improving the practitioner's religious qualities. In that case, the relationship between practice and realization is considered to be that of cause and effect. But *shusho itto* radically demolishes this generally accepted relationship between practice and realization. It states that they are one and inseparable. This idea is based on the concept of "the self is originally buddha", the philosophical foundation of the southern school of Ch'an which takes all living beings as originally buddha.

Therefore, we should understand that *shusho itto* is not merely a philosophical idea unique to Dogen Zenji, but a common view in Zen about practice and realization. In fact, although not expressed explicitly, some other Zen masters, contemporaries of Dogen Zenji, also shared the same philosophical background. This has been pointed out by scholars like Sokuo Eto (*Shobogenzo Josetsu*, Iwanami Shoten, 1959) and Makoto Funaoka (*Shusho Ittoron no Shuhen*, Hokkaido-Gakuen University Studies in Culture No. 2, 1994).

However, Dogen Zenji was deeply concerned that the teaching of "the self is originally buddha" might lead people to disregard practice. He strongly emphasized the necessity of active practice on the grounds that "we practice precisely because we are already buddha." Therefore, in addition to the term "*shusho itto*," we also use the expression *honsho myoshu* (original realization wondrous practice) to emphasize the uniqueness of his viewpoint on practice and realization. Keizan Zenji inherited this teaching of *shusho itto* together with the emphasis on *zazen*. It became the very foundation of Soto Zen doctrine.

## Origin of the term

This four-Chinese-character phrase is defined by Dogen Zenji in the eighth question and its answer in *Bendowa*.

To suppose that practice and realization are not one is a view of those outside the way; in Buddha Dharma they are one and the same. Because practice within realization occurs at the moment of practice, the practice of beginner's mind is itself the entire original realization.

As we can see here, Dogen Zenji portrays separation of practice and realization as "a view of those outside the way" and sees the oneness and equality of the two as basic to the Buddha Way. He also emphasizes this unity of practice and realization with the notion of *shojo no shu* (practice within realization). He says this is why all of our qualities as buddha are fully manifested even when we

are just starting to practice the Buddha Way.

Tracing back the origin of *shusho itto* in the history of Chinese Zen thinking, such scholars as Sokuo Eto (*Shusotoshiteno Dogen Zenji*, Iwanami Shoten, 1944), Kodo Kurebayashi (*Dogen Zen no Kenkyu*, Komazawa Daigaku Zengaku Kenkyukai, 1963) point out that the dialogue between Daikan Eno, the Sixth Ancestral Teacher, and Nangaku Ejo over “nondefilement of practice and realization” provides a backdrop to this concept.

I would like to introduce the dialogue between Eno and Nangaku by quoting from Dogen Zenji’s *Eihei Koroku*, vol. 9, *Juko* no. 59.

Zen master Nangaku Ejo once visited the Sixth Ancestor (Eno). The Ancestor asked him, “Where are you from?” Ejo answered, “I came from the place of National Teacher An at Suzan.” The Ancestor asked, “What is this that has thus come?” Ejo had no answer. He served Eno for eight years and clarified that question. Then he told the Ancestor, “I can now understand the question, ‘What is this that has thus come?’ that you asked me when I first arrived.” The ancestor said, “How do you understand it?” Ejo said, “To explain it in words would totally miss the mark.” The Ancestor said, “If so, is there practice and realization, or not?” Ejo said, “It is not that there is no practice and realization, but they cannot be defiled (by delusions).” The Ancestor said, “This nondefilement is exactly what the buddhas have been protecting and caring for. I am thus, you are thus, and the ancestors in India also are thus.”

Dogen Zenji quotes this dialogue many times in his writings. He shows, using the expression, “To explain it in words would totally miss the mark,” that Buddha Dharma cannot be defined in terms of fixed words and that it is necessary to have practice and realization undefiled by delusions (practice and realization of nondefilement) in order to understand it.

But the primary meaning of “they cannot be defiled” was slightly different from Dogen Zenji’s interpretation. It initially meant that it was not necessary to have “a practice as a process toward realization” because we are originally buddha. Dogen Zenji inverts it to mean that it is necessary to have a practice without anticipating realization. By this inversion, both practice and realization are put into the same category of nondefilement. This is the source of the expression, *shusho itto*.

All the quotations of this dialogue in Dogen Zenji’s writing assumes, like the above quotation from *Eihei Koroku*, *Juko* no. 59, that Nangaku Ejo established his understanding of Buddha dharma after practicing under the Sixth Ancestor for eight years. It is a description found in *Tensho Kotoroku*, vol. 8. But according to the description in the Chinese *Keitoku Dentoroku*, Ejo responded to Eno with an appropriate answer at the moment they met. So Dogen Zenji intentionally chose to add a description which says that practice over eight years was necessary for Ejo to be able to give that answer. By doing so, he tried to emphasize that it is necessary to have a continuous practice to activate realization. This idea is also shown in *Bendowa*: “Although this inconceivable dharma is abundant in each person, it is not actualized without practice, and it is not attained without realization.”

## Practice within realization and the story of polishing a tile to make a mirror

As for Dogen Zenji's treatment of *shusho itto*, I pointed out that "practice" is understood as "practice within realization" in *Bendowa*. In this regard, a very characteristic expression is found in the story of Nangaku's polishing a tile to make a mirror in *Shobogenzo Zazenshin*.

This story concerns a dialogue between Nangaku Ejo and Baso Doitsu. Basically, the point of the story is that Baso was attached to doing zazen to become a buddha and Ejo, by showing him that a tile never becomes a mirror by being polished, turned down a form of practice, zazen, as unnecessary based on a claim that he is originally buddha. Shudo Ishii, in his article "Dahui Zonggao's "Observing the Critical Phrase" (*kanna*) and his "Explanation of the Story 'Polishing a Tile to make a Mirror'" (Annual of Komazawa University Zen Institute, vol. 9, 1998), wrote that the initial intent of the story is different from Dogen Zenji's emphasis on zazen as a practice without the goal of becoming a buddha.

The idea that one's own mind is buddha is expressed as "The mind itself is buddha." And it develops into the idea that all everyday activities are the Way, denying that this kind of mind can be manifested only through a special form.

But Dogen Zenji does not take this story that way. He interprets it as emphasizing the necessity of zazen precisely because we are buddha. To emphasize this point, Dogen Zenji radically altered the premise of this story, as Genryu Kagamishima points out in his book, *Dogen Zenji to Inyokytengoroku no Kenkyu* (Mokujisha). Dogen Zenji introduces this story in *Shobogenzo Zazenshin* in the manner below:

Baso, Zen Master Daijaku of Kosei, studied with Nangaku, Zen Master Daie. After intimately receiving Nangaku's mind seal, Baso was continuously engaged in zazen.

Dogen Zenji added the underlined part himself. We cannot find any other sources containing this sentence. It is just a few words, but this addition leads us to believe that Baso was sitting zazen after he received *inka* (certification) from Nangaku. In other words, because of this added premise, the rest of the story unfolds based on the assumption that Baso's zazen was "practice within realization."

With this addition, the dialogue which initially denies the necessity of zazen is made to emphasize the necessity of zazen to be practiced as a buddha.

## ***Honsho Myoshu* (Original realization wondrous practice)**

So far I have talked about *shusho itto* based on Zen thinking in general and its unique development in Dogen Zenji's Zen. There is another phrase, *honsho myoshu* - 本証妙修), which involves the same concept as *shusho itto*. This phrase comes from a line in *Bendowa*: "Release this wondrous practice and original realization fills your hands. Liberate original realization and wondrous practice is upheld throughout your body."

*Honsho* (original realization 本証) is "intrinsic state of awakening" and *myoshu* (wondrous practice 妙修) is "practice totally unified with original realization." So *honsho myoshu* means

something very similar to *shusho itto*. However, while *shusho itto* simply shows the oneness of these two, *honsho myoshu* is an expression placed against the background of the Japanese Tendai School's doctrine of original enlightenment (*hongaku* 本覺). *Honsho myoshu* has a history of being used with a nuance of "practice performed after perfection."

But Noriaki Hakamaya, in his article "A Critical Viewpoint for Understanding Dogen" (*Shugaku Kenkyu* vol. 28, 1986 *Hongakushiso Hihan*, Daizo Shuppan 1989), claimed, from the position of critical Buddhism, that Dogen Zenji himself had never used the term *honsho myoshu*. He also pointed out that *honsho myoshu* is exactly the concept that Dogen Zenji strongly criticized as a thought of original enlightenment. Later Genryu Kagamishima discussed this matter in his article "Notes on *Honsho Myoshu*" (*Komazawa Daigaku Bukkyo Gakubu Ronshu*, vol.18, 1987). He concluded that both terms, *shusho itto* and *honsho myoshu*, represent Dogen Zenji's philosophical stance but that *shusho itto* could be understood as a philosophical term characteristic of what he learned in China, including Zen, and that *honsho myoshu* is an appropriate term to express the essence of Dogen Zenji's viewpoint on practice and realization in the background of the Japanese Tendai School's doctrine of original enlightenment.

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