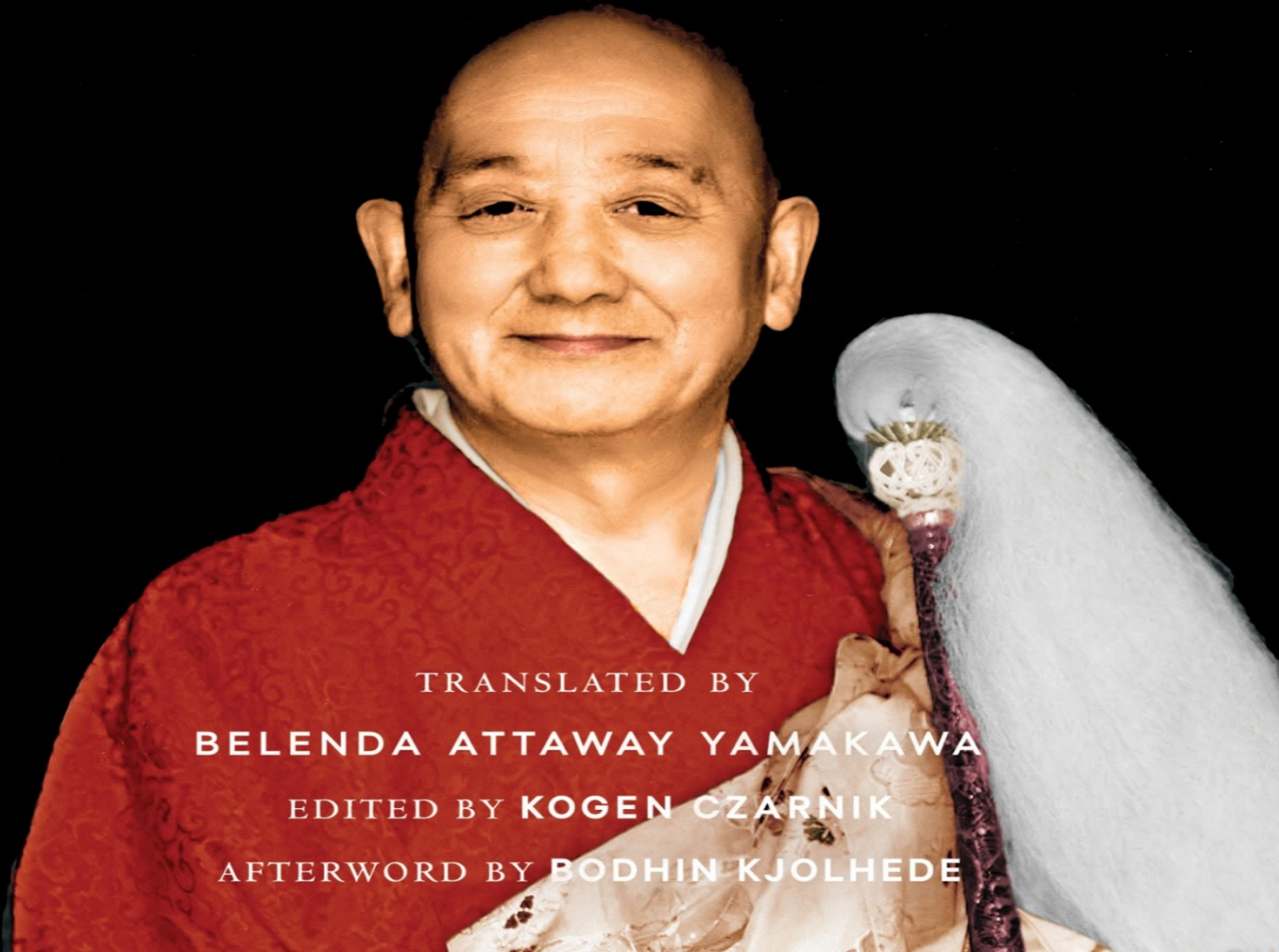


THROW YOURSELF INTO THE HOUSE OF BUDDHA

THE LIFE & ZEN TEACHINGS OF
TANGEN HARADA ROSHI



TRANSLATED BY
BELEND A ATTAWAY YAMAKAWA
EDITED BY KOGEN CZARNIK
AFTERWORD BY BODHIN KJOLHEDE

“This is a precious book. First you encounter the astounding story of how Tangen Harada Roshi twice narrowly escaped death, his subsequent vow to dedicate his life to ‘the Great Matter of life and death,’ and his ferocious Zen training under Master Daiun Harada Roshi. The second half of the book contains twenty-four pithy but eloquent Dharma talks on subjects such as Samadhi, Investigation, Repentance, and Vow. Many of the talks contain charming anecdotes—like his encounter with a cockroach on his lunch bun—that he uses to illuminate a Dharma theme but that also illuminate the all-pervading quality of Harada Roshi’s realization. I suspect that each reader will carry away a few of Roshi’s incisive sayings. Mine is: ‘The step that you take is never lost; just carry on.’”

—Jan Chozen Bays, author of *Mindful Medicine* and *Mindful Eating*

“Overflowing with practical advice, words pointing out awakening, and very human warmth, this profoundly moving book is an important addition to Zen literature in the West. Now at last we can all encounter Tangen Roshi, among the most beloved and deeply realized masters of the past century. Zen students everywhere will be the better for it.”

—Meido Moore, author of *Hidden Zen* and *The Rinzai Zen Way*

“What a wonderful book—delightful, simple, clear, humble, and radiant on every page with the one true freedom that a life of practice deeply lived promises both to lead us to, and to be an expression of. A glittering example for all devoted seekers, and an inspiration for all those interested in the deepest possibilities of human wellbeing and the boundless compassion that deep, clear dharma practice can open. An irresistible read.”

—Henry Shukman, author of *One Blade of Grass*

“Having spent a year at Bukkoku-ji with Tangen Harada Roshi-sama twenty-five years ago, my heart is deeply moved by reading this collection of his talks, masterfully translated by his late student, Belendasan. When she would read her translations of sesshin talks to the foreign students at the end of each sesshin day, I and the others listening would sometimes be moved to tears, even without Roshi-sama in the room. His sincere disciple Kogen Czarnik has devotedly collected and edited these translations, arranging them into a book that directly expresses the Old Buddha’s Zen heart. May these stories and practice encouragements continue to inspire Zen practitioners to throw themselves into the house of Buddha. I offer nine prostrations to Roshi-sama and all his students of the wholehearted Way.”

—Kokyo Henkel, wandering patch-robed disciple, currently residing at Green Dragon Temple, CA



Tangen Harada Roshi (1924–2018)

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Daisetsu Tangen Harada Roshi,*called “Roshi-sama” with respect and affection by his students, was born as Usao Abe in the city of Niigata on August 24, 1924.† Narrowly surviving World War II, he was haunted by his war experiences, human suffering, and the question of life and death. He entered Hosshin-ji, a famous Zen monastery in the town of Obama, where he practiced under one of the most significant Zen masters of modern Japan, Daiun Sogaku Harada Roshi,[\[1\]](#) who ordained him and gave him the name Tangen. After intense training his realization was confirmed, and he received Dharma transmission and *inka shomei** at the age of twenty-seven. Tangen Roshi then served as a personal attendant to Daiun Roshi for several years, coleading practice at Hosshin-ji while living together with his teacher in a small hermitage just outside the gate. In 1955, Tangen Roshi became the abbot of the neighboring temple of Bukkoku-ji at the request of his teacher.

From that time on, for almost sixty years, Tangen Roshi received at Bukkoku-ji anyone who was willing to follow his austere lifestyle and his guidance in practice, not discriminating between lay and monastic or by gender or nationality. He didn't travel the world to spread the Dharma; he just sat in his small temple nestled in the shadow of a little mountain on the outskirts of a fishing town by the Sea of Japan. Yet slowly word of him spread around the world, bringing thousands of people from all continents to practice there.

Tangen Roshi taught tirelessly; he gave countless *teisho** during *sesshin*,* monthly public Dharma talks on the day celebrating the bodhisattva *Kannon*,* and at formal tea on “bath days” as well as on

other occasions.^[2] Unlike the customary Japanese teisho, which is traditionally a commentary on a classic text, most of Tange Rōshi's talks were not based on the Zen canon but were spontaneous expressions of his realization, delivered without any preparation. Depending on the audience, the tone of his talks differed. When speaking during sesshin to his own students who were undergoing training, Tange Rōshi was more intense and strict, directly pointing out both realized perspective and delusion, trying to push his listeners beyond their limits. When giving talks to a general audience—for instance, speaking to rice farmers from the neighborhood—he was much gentler and emphasized the inherent perfection underlying all existence.

Since the readers of this book in the West will most likely be Zen or Buddhist practitioners, the talks presented here are mostly excerpts taken from teisho given to students at retreats. As these teisho were intended to be an encouragement for the whole day of practice, it might be that instead of reading this book in a day or two from beginning to end, the best way of engaging with these teachings would be to read one talk at a time, reflect on it, and put it into practice.

Trying to do justice to Tange Rōshi's teachings is not an easy task, primarily because when listening to him, it was always very clear that the words, even if often beautiful and poetic, were of secondary importance. What was most important was the place from which he was speaking—the depth of his wisdom, the boundless compassion and warmth he radiated, as well as the great Dharma energy expressed in his voice. Always during sesshin, in the middle of teisho, one of the monks had to go out of the zendo and strike the main temple bell at 11 a.m. Once when I was assigned this job, I was leaving the zendo as Tange Rōshi was speaking and I looked up and saw a row of foreigners on the meditation platform next to the stairs. None of them understood Japanese, but all of them had tears

flowing down their cheeks. My hope is that some of this presence may be conveyed to the reader from the words on these pages.

For someone who never met Tangen Roshi, his talks may sound like they speak of a far-off unreachable ideal. But the complementary part of those teachings was living with him and seeing that during practice, work, meals, drinking tea, or begging, he was living to the letter everything he was preaching. All those big words were perfectly translated into all the small situations of his daily life. When a young girl from the neighborhood came and asked him to perform a funeral for her dead rabbit, Tangen Roshi put on his best robes and conducted a beautiful full-length funeral service. When a senior monk wanted to check his understanding, Tangen Roshi would be ready to see him in *dokusan** at any time. When there was temple-related office work to do, Tangen Roshi would work late into the night alone, enabling his students to focus only on their practice. When one of his students would snooze during zazen, Tangen Roshi would get up himself and strike the person with the *kyosaku*.* He did so forcefully but at the same time with deep compassion and kindness. When a kitten would lay on Tangen Roshi's cushion in the *hondo** before the start of morning chanting, he would spread his *zagu** on bare tatami and let the kitten continue to sleep on his place through the chanting. Tangen Roshi saw a buddha in everyone and everything. He treated those he encountered in this way without differentiating between big and small, important and not important, enlightened and deluded. Yet at the same time, Tangen Roshi would tirelessly guide his students to what he himself had realized, demanding that they give their all to their practice, just as he did. No matter if someone stayed at Bukkoku-ji for thirty years or just for one day, everybody was struck by his living example of bodhisattva life.

The first section of this book narrates Tangen Roshi's life story in his own words. It was constructed from several different talks. At times, Tangen Roshi would recall his experiences from his training at

Hosshin-ji or during World War II in order to illustrate a teaching point, but he didn't like to talk about himself at great length. His life story, however, is as extraordinary as he was and hearing his own telling of it affords the reader an intimate account of the events and circumstances that shaped Tangen Roshi as a person and as a teacher.

The source material for this book came largely from translations of Tangen Roshi's talks by Belenda Attaway Yamakawa. She was a lifelong student of Tangen Roshi's who for decades translated his talks and dokusan at Bukkoku-ji. Arriving at the temple at the beginning of the 1980s, Belenda was the first woman and one of the first foreigners to train at Bukkoku-ji. She moved out when she married the abbot of Jingu-ji, a temple located a short driving distance from Bukkoku-ji, but she continued for close to three decades to return to Bukkoku-ji to provide translations to the foreign students, who often didn't know any Japanese. She was hoping to compile a book of Tangen Roshi's teachings herself, but, sadly, she died of cancer before she was able to do so. Belenda's oral translations were recorded and transcribed by various students over the years. Since sometimes she was under a time pressure to give her translations, it was necessary to check and correct her versions against the original tapes in Japanese and edit them to suit the written form.

The work of this project was challenging without the guidance and advice of Roshi-sama, who passed away on March 12, 2018. However flawed this work may be, it was done in the spirit that Roshi-sama always taught of repaying gratitude for all things received—from him, and from all of life.

Gassho,
Kogen Czarnik

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A project like this publication is never possible without the help of many people who contribute their wisdom, experience, and kindness.

First and foremost, I would like to thank Rev. Kogaku Harada, the current abbot of Bukkoku-ji, for his support, and Rev. Sonjo Yamakawa of Jingu-ji, Belenda Attaway Yamakawa's husband, for his permission to use her invaluable translations.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Rev. Esho Sudan, who provided editorial assistance, patience, and encouragement throughout. This work could not have been done without her help.

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Lastly, I would like to offer heartfelt thanks to all those who helped with photos, calligraphies, transcriptions, proofreading, and the other resources necessary for this publication, especially to: Rochester Zen Center, Rev. Jiku Goycoolea, Rev. Zenkai McInnes, Rev. Genpo Pluta, Rev. Dosho Port, Rev. Kokyo Henkel, Rev. Eiju Perez, Rev. Jiko Barrow, Rev. Nyogen Nowak, Ewa Myoshin Hadydon, Tzela Jishin Hayut, Geni Juko Stephenson, Julie Myoe Martindale, Chee Hau Gan, Mei Lim Ling, Li Chun Tenko Oh, and to all members of the Bukkoku-ji Sangha.

PART ONE

LIFE STORY

平成二十一年七月十八日

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玄

Mother's grace

1

THE GIFT OF LIFE

I CAME INTO THIS WORLD with a great debt—my mother gave her own life in order to give birth to me. She already had three children, and when she was pregnant with me, she was diagnosed with stomach cancer. The doctor urged her to apologize to the baby and to have the cancer removed from her stomach. Those around her, my father as well, tried to persuade her to do it, but she stood firm, vowing, “This baby in my belly is going to be born.”

I was born on August 24, the day we worship Jizo Bodhisattva.* After that it was too late for the surgery. Just before she died, she very clearly expressed herself to those close to her, “Even after I die, I will care for and protect this child.” She must have prayed fiercely for my protection. She died before my first birthday and left me in the care of Jizo Bodhisattva.

When I was still very young, when I came to understand what my mother had done for me, I wrote on a piece of paper, “My mother laid down her life for me. What does she mean for me to do with this gift?” I continuously wondered what it was that I should do with this life. What was my mother telling me?

Yet I was terribly dissatisfied as a child; I could not be calm. Of course, I was guided by greed, anger, and ignorance. I was overtaken by wants, creating seeds for pain. I lived immersed in dualistic thinking; it was a miserable childhood.

When I was about twelve years old, a deep questioning arose in me. Whenever I felt a touch of wind or looked up at the sky

overhead, I would ask myself, "What is there down deep beneath the surface of things?" When I would eat an orange, for instance, I wouldn't think of its taste or color, but I would wonder, "What is there? There is something I feel but don't understand. I sense its presence but can't take hold of it." My inability to answer those questions was a source of such discontentment that I always felt separated from people and things.

Around that time I was playing tennis, and as I was good at it, I was asked to join the team. I gave my all to practice. Even in the rain or when it grew dark, I would stay with it. I would ride home on a bicycle after dark, past shops with their lights shining brightly. The streets were still bustling with people at that time. There were old people, young people, people in between, and as I rode through the streets, with groups of people passing under the bright lights, I would be asking myself, "There is life, and all these people are living it. But what is this life? There is something, there is something..."



草の庵に立ちても

居ても祈ること

我より先に人を渡さん

道元禪師のお歌

辛成十九年
一月十八日

玄弓



In a grass hut, whether awake or asleep, I pray to bring all others
to the other shore before myself.

2

BE LIKE A CHAIR

I WAS STILL YOUNG when I vowed to myself that I would always do what really needed to be done, that I would pour myself into whatever was before me to do. At about sixteen years old, I became driven to really question myself, to reflect upon myself, asking, “Who is the most good-for-nothing person around; the weakest, the laziest, the most useless one around?” I knew deep in my heart that it was I, the weakest-willed one of all, and I beat myself up over this. There was a time I struggled so hard that I actually managed to knock my own jaw out of place. I couldn’t stand myself for thinking ill of others; I couldn’t stand it that I would dislike others. I saw myself as so pitiful. My own habits, my own character were unbearable to me.

At seventeen years old, I had the good fortune to read a book called *Inshitsu-roku* by En Ryobon, a noted scholar from the Ming dynasty.^[3] This is a book of instruction the author compiled for his son Tenkei. The term *inshitsu* means “to be decided without one’s being aware of it.” That is to say that the fortunes that befall a person—sunshine and shadow, ups and downs—are naturally determined, without his knowing it, by his own past actions, virtue, and vice. Upon carefully reading this book, it became clear to me that there is a path to be followed, and I resolved then to follow that path. According to the book, En Ryobon first came to deeply believe in karmic retribution through a fortune teller named Ko. He then met with Zen Master Unkoku, who impressed upon him that karma is only one side of the picture. Thus he writes to Tenkei that one can

take responsibility for the construction of one's own world. It is not a matter of living out one's life, wedged into a predetermined mold, but rather, by virtue of one's own efforts, it is possible to move, if even just a step, closer toward one's aim.

From childhood on, I had been in search of something and had always been a rather rebellious youth. I kept thinking that I had never really been given the opportunity to understand the reason for living. I did not much care for Buddhist priests. I had the preconceived idea that they wore funny clothes, talked a lot of nonsense, and led lives of comfort and ease. But En Ryobon's book really addressed itself to that *something* I had been searching for, and it surprised me to realize that the lesson came through a Buddhist priest. Although *Inshitsu-roku* is at heart a Confucian text rather than Buddhist, it is a Zen master who clearly points the way. Incidentally, the man who translated the book into Japanese, Daiun Harada Roshi, was to become my Zen teacher five years later.

I then resolved to become like a chair. A chair doesn't refuse its services to anybody; it just takes care of the sitter and lets them rest their legs. After it has served its purpose, no one gets up and gives thanks or offers words of kindness to the chair. It will more likely get kicked out of the way. The chair doesn't grumble or complain or bear a grudge, but just takes whatever is given. A chair doesn't plop itself down on top of the sitter, right? When there is a job to be done, it puts forth all its energy without picking and choosing according to its desires. I thought, "Wouldn't it be great to have such a heart?" I wrote on a big sheet of paper, "Be like a chair," and every day I took note of how close I came. If even a little dissatisfaction arose, I would regard that as a disgraceful state of mind for a chair. I considered how thoroughly I was of use to others. What was positive about all this was that, if I possibly could, I wanted to put others before myself. The endeavor was not at all forced or unnatural; it arose from life itself and was enjoyable, not painful.

During the time I was following this practice, I went to climb Mount Kinpoku, a rather small mountain of the Jukkoku Pass near the town of Yugawara. As I climbed that day, I could think of nothing but my own selfishness. Shedding tears, I repeatedly reflected and repented, thinking, “I’m no good, I’m no good,” as I made the thirty-minute ascent on the mountain trail. There was a large stone statue on the flat crest of the mountain. If I saw it today, I might know what it is, but at that time I had no idea. Along the way there had been a number of figures of Kannon, so I think perhaps this statue was of Shakyamuni Buddha. In those days I knew nothing of Buddhism or of paying homage to its founder. I had, however, committed to memory a text by Shoin Yoshida^[4] that was inspiring to me, and I began to chant it in front of the Buddha statue. Through chanting I must have entered into a purer state of mind.

Then I crossed to the other side of the mountain, which formed a precipice. A valley had been gouged out below, and beyond the valley stretched the Pacific Ocean. To one side I could see the rolling hills of the Izu Peninsula. Transfixed by the mountain landscape, I was standing just on the edge of the cliff. There I was asking for nothing—I wasn’t thinking or analyzing—I was adding nothing. The wind began to gust up toward me from the valley below. I became enveloped by the wind. I felt as if I were growing bigger and bigger. At that moment, I realized that I was supported by heaven and earth, by all things. I was being told, “All things are becoming you, nurturing you.” Looking at the mountain, the mountain was me. The wide, wide valley became me. I realized then that whatever I heard, whatever I saw—everything—is always and forever supporting me, caring for me. Happiness gushed from the depths of my belly.

My joy was uncontainable. I began to shout my own name at the top of my lungs, seven or eight times. My name rang out over the horizon, over and over. I could not stay still. It was with unsuppressed joy that I began to race back down the mountain. It could have been dangerous, but my steps were natural, my feet

were sure. I sped down the mountain with such force; it was my body moving, but not my own body at the same time. I ran down to the town of Atami, where I boarded the train for home—but my world was changed. Everything was now so intensely intimate, everything that I encountered was so profoundly close. I remember picking up a small stone beside the path and carefully holding it and turning it in my hands, as I encouraged it to be strong and steady, “Good, good.” Then I laid it carefully back down in its place. A bright and changed world unfolded before me. For one or two months after that experience, everything, down to the pebbles along the roadside, brilliantly glistened. I thought, “It is an intimate, friendly life.”

I was filled with the knowledge of being together with all things, part of the same life. At the time, I still knew nothing of zazen, but the walls separating me from others had collapsed. My world had become somehow without discrimination, so I felt as if I could even chat with the chirping sparrows. Without any theoretical understanding and without being able to explain what had happened, I had tapped into the very joy of life, and I determined from then on that I would dedicate my life to repaying my gratitude.

I returned to the preparatory school where I was boarding. Everything had become different. I had no feeling of dissatisfaction or disharmony with others; I only wanted to help everyone however I could. Everything was so much fun; I was filled with energy and enthusiasm. At that time, I was living in a dormitory room with three or four other boys. In the mornings when my roommates and I would get up and they were slow to get into the day, I would bounce up, fold and put away their futons while they got ready, and do my own last. I would be the last one out to put on my wooden sandals, but I had so much energy that I would still arrive at the sports field first. I was propelled by a joyous life force.



以和為尊

平成二十一年六月六日





Peace is most precious.

3

WARTIME

THEN THE WAR BEGAN. We were told by the government that Japan was in real danger. We had to fight against enemies who were portrayed by military propaganda as if they were devils themselves. My perspective was severely limited. I had the sense that I must give my own life to protect those close to me—my parents, my siblings, my teachers, my friends, my fellow countrymen. I was still bound, tied down by a false sense of place, attached to boundaries, to *us versus them*. I believed that there was an enemy. Yet I didn't have a sense of wanting to kill or to save my own life. I just wanted to give my life to protect others.

I volunteered to fly as a kamikaze pilot. My goal in life was already to be of service to others, so sparing my own life was not a factor for me. I gave myself to the training that was required.

The test was really difficult, geared as it was for university graduates,

Usao—the future Tangen Roshi—was seventeen years old when Japan joined World War II. In the later stages of the war, as was true for every man aged fifteen to sixty, he had to join the army. He wasn't yet a monk then, nor even a Buddhist. When asked later in his life if he would ever go to war, he immediately replied, "No, I am definitely opposed to war. After I began to practice, I came to understand that all beings are brothers and sisters, and even if one were to be killed, one should not kill another." but I was able somehow to pass. I was

only nineteen, the youngest one in my company. The training was very strict; they didn't give us any leeway at all—the slightest mistake and we were out. They were not worried about the human life involved, but they wanted to protect the airplanes. So to get the license you had to be extremely careful. We had to line up in front of the military officers responsible for our training, and I was asked, "What is your weak point?" I answered that I was prone to act on my own authority, to decide on my own to do something and do it. "That's not a shortcoming," I was told. "When the control stick is in your hand, any number of things can happen, and you have to be able to decide and react immediately. You won't have any time to consult anyone else. You must act on your own authority. So it is a strength," they said. Then they asked me what my strength was. "Acting with resolve," I said. "When I commit to doing something, I don't back down or get discouraged midway. I definitely carry through with my goal." But now I see, this wasn't that much of a strength, because not knowing what's right, you can carry through with the wrong aim. I see now that not wanting to listen to good advice if there is any available is ridiculous. Having the right goal is so important.

We all wrote our last words, which were carefully folded, wrapped, and carried by the commander of our battalion. I wrote that I was ready to die for my country at any time, that even knowing I might die in training, I felt no remorse. We trained hard, finishing in just one year a course that should have taken much longer. We were up against a large, strong country with powerful weaponry. Our hastily and poorly built planes were no match in combat for their fine ones. So our battalion was moved to Manchuria, where the pilots would wait for their orders to fly from there. One by one, the pilots would board airplanes loaded with explosives, take off, and aim for large ships. If just one would hit right, a large aircraft carrier with one hundred or so planes could be sunk in one blow. That was what we were studying to do.

It was only five days after my graduation, August 15, 1945, that I was supposed to take my final flight. Other pilots went before me, giving their lives, and I waited my turn. Since I was the youngest, our commander was keeping me last in line. I had my last ritual sake cup. Just when I was on the verge of setting off, we heard the emperor on the radio announcing the unconditional surrender of Japan and the end of the war. I couldn't believe my ears. I was devastated, because I was not able to do anything to protect my country.

Later we learned that we had been deceived by our leaders and that it was Japan who was the aggressor. I was shocked. All my comrades had given their lives, and here I was, still alive, but to what purpose? Nothing made sense to me. It was then that I tasted the bitter pain of living. I suffered the anguish of being alive when so many were dead.

Japan surrendered on August 15. If the war had ended even one day later, I would have flown my final flight, and I wouldn't have been able to meet with the teachings of the *Buddhadharma** in this lifetime.

I was in the 24th Company, which is the number of Jizo. The bodhisattva must have followed me right into the army, because I was saved many times over. When the war ended, I was sent to a Soviet prisoner of war camp for almost a year. Many of my friends died there. I was working in the hospital and we had to bury the dead, yet the ground was so frozen that we couldn't. So many soldiers died there, most of them in their twenties, dreaming of their homelands and their families. Then one day, one of the Soviet soldiers asked me to drink alcohol with him. He wouldn't take no for an answer, so I had no choice but to join him. Since I was so weak and had almost never drank alcohol before, I got very sick, and I was left in bed in the hospital. The next morning most of my fellow soldiers were sent to the labor camps in Siberia where most of them

died. Just on the brink of death, again my life was miraculously spared. I was taken care of.

My life was spared over and over, and yet I couldn't rejoice in this. I couldn't appreciate it, not yet. I felt only anguish and despair. Those who had died, was their death in vain? Did they die and that was it? What is the meaning of life? These questions stayed with me. They took over my mind. I had to find out what I could do, what was in my own power to do, to somehow, in some way, make it up to all those young men who had given their lives.

I returned to Japan on a boat that arrived at the port of Hakata on Kyushu Island on June 9, 1946.





正法

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平成十六年六月十八日

大松湛玄





To hear true Dharma

4

MEETING DAIUN ROSHI

I SPENT THE NEXT YEAR in suffering. Just at that time of greatest pain and anguish, a concerned friend arranged for me to see a Buddhist nun. Her name was Sozen Nagasawa Roshi, and she was the top female disciple of Sogaku Harada Roshi.^[5] She told me that there was a very wise man to whom I could take my questions, someone who could help me find the answer, to help me understand the meaning of life. She arranged for me to attend the November sesshin at Hosshin-ji, but because I wanted to go sooner than that, she told me to come and sit the October sesshin at her zendo at Kannon-ji in the town of Mitaka, near Tokyo, which I remember she described as more like a hut. When I first met Sozen Roshi, I knew nothing about Buddhism and I wasn't even particularly interested in it, but thanks to that meeting and to her, I was able to connect with the Buddhadharma.

At sesshin, Sozen Roshi showed me the lotus position. "Zazen is sitting full lotus; zazen equals full lotus," I was told. So I jammed my legs into a full lotus position, and the pain was intense—I was in hell after thirty minutes. The pain ran through my body, as if my legs were being sawed off at the knees. One minute was eternity, but what an incredibly good thing it was that I practiced as I was instructed, without trying to sneak away from it. Fortunately, I was told to count my breaths. The practice in her temple was to count out loud during sesshin, and I counted so enthusiastically that the glass of the windows rattled. The children who were out playing near the

zendo could hear each count, and they came up to the window and peered through the curtain at me. Then I was asked to count in a softer voice. The zazen of even a beginner manifests the whole essential nature.

That October sesshin and the teachings about the Buddha Way that I received from Sozen Nagasawa Roshi had a deep effect on me. It must have been around late October 1947 that I went to Hosshin-ji, and I was fortunate to be given an audience with the great master who was to become my teacher, Daiun Sogaku Rodaishi.*

He was tiny and very thin, but he had an enormous surging power. I openly talked to him about my problem, asking: "I just can't live knowing that there were so many that had to die. What can I do in atonement?" He told me that he understood my suffering, that I could come to be at peace, that there was a way to solve the problem of life and death at its root. He said:

You yourself, you are still alive, so that you can forever and ever follow the path of giving. You can steadily, evermore, give your life to save others. Even with the death of this body, genuine life continues. There is something that does not die. True nature does not disperse like a mist. Knowing true life, you can be at peace. If you really want to understand the meaning of life, true life, it will take all the determination and effort that you can possibly muster. You will not realize the truth if your aim is unclear and if your practice is weak. Your resolve must be absolute. You must be prepared to persevere with single-minded conviction and effort. If you can really commit yourself to seeking this truth, to this one important thing, then you can stay here. But if you are not earnest and sincere, if your commitment is lukewarm, if you won't be able to make a complete, whole commitment, then you can go home now.

When Daiun Roshi laid down these conditions, I vowed then and there to awaken to truth, to come to realize my true nature. I had no doubts. There was no question that I would make that commitment. I had already resolved to give my life once in the war, so putting my life on the line wasn't a problem for me. When I heard his words, I was ready and willing to practice, and I answered from the bottom of my heart, "I will give it my all, to practice just as you show me."

I will never forget the look in his eyes at that time, when he stared right into me—this kid, still well behind in years, who knew nothing—as I vowed to follow his teaching. His eyes were small and black as coal. How they shone when he said simply, "You may stay. The Way is one. You follow this one Way, this one practice. Don't allow your value judgments to enter into it. Be a pure white sheet of paper. Let go of everything. That is the only way."

What good fortune that I was able to still be alive to hear his teaching, to receive his guidance. From then on, I did give it my all. Of course, my practice was still greedy, immature, far from perfect—but I practiced just as I was instructed. Doing each one thing, this one thing, I poured my entire being into it. I hurled myself into zazen without knowing anything about ordination, without even considering the possibility of becoming a monk myself. I simply tried to listen to the teachings and my teacher's instructions without adding on my own ideas. In this way I could hear his teachings with a deep familiarity and respect.

Then the November sesshin came and I was given the koan* Mu. [6] Daiun Roshi told me, "Give your life to this one Mu till everything becomes Mu. Do not give your energy to anything else. No matter what arises, neither grasp it nor reject it. Just be this one being; do this one-doing. Stay centered in your *tanden** and just do Mu."

I gave myself to Mu. During that first sesshin, I sat next to the president of a big candy company. He had been working hard at his practice for ten or twenty years, but his mind's eye was still not open, so he was pouring himself into it with a ferocity that was contagious.

When the *junko** would pass behind him, he would invariably gassho and ask for the *kyosaku*, and I followed his guidance in receiving it. He was a great example for me. How fiercely I was struck over and over, and the atmosphere of the *zendo* was electrifying. Everyone was so intensely devoted—the power of the one, the power of the group. I hope I wasn't an obstacle to anybody in my enthusiasm, but at that time the only thing on my mind was doing what Daiun Roshi had told me to do—just staying with this one thing.

In the evening, we had a twenty-minute period in which we were allowed to do Mu out loud. How this sixty-year-old man beside me burned, his entire being becoming Mu, this one Mu. I remember so well the intensity of his practice, how it touched me. Having just received the koan Mu, I also was determined to give my life to it. I had no thought of “Can I do this practice?” or “How do I do this practice?” or “Am I doing this practice right?” Rather, from the depths of my gut, I threw myself into this Mu, only Mu. And that very sesshin, Mu opened its door to me. Without calculation I became one with Mu, everything became Mu. The *oryoki** bowls on the shelf before me became Mu, one with me. No matter what I saw or heard it was just this one Mu; there was no other response, no other. Everything was Mu. Mu mountain, Mu ocean, great Mu skies, tiny Mu stone, tiny Mu ant. There was nothing that was not Mu.

When I took that Mu to Daiun Roshi, he told me, “So now, your practice begins.” How right he was. He cautioned me still more strictly, “Not yet, not yet. Stay with it. Do not try to lay back and rest in your experience. Do not become complacent. Stay with this. Always new, always fresh. Carry on, carry through.” If I became arrogant or complacent, he would not tolerate it. He would growl and shout at me to go deeper still.

After the November sesshin, we did *rohatsu**, and then the following year I attended a great precepts ceremony, where we heard talks on *Shushogi*.* I was able to take lay precepts and was

given the name Kaien Shinko. My resolve to do zazen became stronger and stronger.

On the first day of each sesshin, we were told, “Those who have resolved to break through during this sesshin, make gassho.” I had made up my mind, of course, to go for it, so my hands would always come together. But we couldn’t get by carelessly making gassho, whether we meant it or not. If you did gassho at that time, it meant you were prepared to give your life in practice. You would break through even if it would cost you your life. You weren’t permitted the luxury of that gassho unless it was life or death.

The zendo was set up to make sure that we didn’t look off from our practice. The head of the zendo was Daiun Roshi, but he was not there with us most of the time. We had other zendo leaders who were very strict, and at any given time, several monitors patrolled the hall, ready to strike anyone who was looking off in distraction. The sound of the kyosaku could always be heard, cracking, urging us to stay with it, to remain attentive to our practice. From the first round of the morning till the last round at night, we were given no slack. The atmosphere was taut. When we would become sleepy, foggy, or unclear, the encouragement was always there to get clear and stay firm.

I remember going for dokusan with Daiun Roshi. He could be really frightening. He never smiled. With just a phrase, one word from him, sweat would pour down my back. One day I remember going into dokusan, and I sniffed through my nose. I was intending to be practicing wholeheartedly and that sniff was part of it, but it must have been posturing wholehearted practice. “What’s this? Coming in here to sniffle?” he growled at me and immediately rang me out before I had even finished my prostrations. If I didn’t put myself into it 100 percent, I was not allowed to come into the room. An instant of carelessness, grasping, or holding, and immediately—*clang, clang, clang*—I was out. I often thought, “He sure can see it like it is, can’t he.”

When Daiun Roshi would come into the zendo, he would walk around hitting everybody with the kyosaku himself. He would shout, "You have all your meals provided for you, breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Your futon is ready for you to rest; you can sleep at night. So what are you dawdling over? Get on with it!" And then this long stick would fall on our shoulders. Four or five times during each round of zazen, I would ask for the kyosaku when the monitor would come by, and I would feel the blow from the tip of my head right down to the tailbone. It was easy to be zealous. At night, after the last round of zazen, I would go to the graveyard or to the forest or mountain and do Mu. In wintertime if I would grow sleepy during *yaza*,* I would break a hole in the ice of the pond and jump in, then go back and continue my sitting. I made efforts in a way that I would not want anyone to try to imitate. I thought, "I would concede my very life for the sake of Dharma."

That is not to say that it was always easy for me. I struggled mightily, but I stuck with the practice, the one single way of practice. I made no excuses for myself. I did not allow my practice to fade from feelings of discouragement. There were rough, rough times, even times when I thought I was not going to live through it. There were times when I could no longer breathe, times when all went dark before my eyes, times when I thought I was going to pass out. I wore myself out until I was exhausted; I thought I would die from unyielding effort. It was that rough, that trying, but I refused to look away. I did not involve myself with anything else, only followed my teacher's instructions.


I have to mention as a caution that giving my all to this practice, I went overboard and ruined my health. That was not good, so Daiun Roshi told me to leave Hosshin-ji until I had recovered. While I was ill, I was blessed to meet and develop an acquaintance with Tenshu Nakano, an older monk and student of Daiun Roshi who took me under his wing and cared for me in his temple. That monk skillfully

led me to become a monk myself. So when I got better, I returned to Hosshin-ji and was ordained as a monk by Daiun Roshi on November 8, 1949.



一心欲見佛
不自惜身命

平成十七年三月十八日 大拙湛玄



Single-mindedly wanting to see buddha, not sparing one's life for it

5

REALIZATION

I CONTINUED TO GIVE MYSELF to the practice more and more. Daiun Roshi was very strict with me. It was taking me a long time. He continued pushing, refusing to recognize my experience, any experience that was not thoroughgoing. I made my final resolution to break through. This time I would break through during the next sesshin or die. I was really serious about it; I knew it came down to this last sesshin. Practicing with all my might during that sesshin, the days were passing in life-or-death practice.

It must have been the seventh day of sesshin. I can never forget that morning as I continued to sit, unaware that the dokusan bell had been sounded. I was sitting absorbed in the samadhi of one-doing, unaware of my surroundings. The *tanto** at that time was very sharp. He must have moved through the zendo toward me very quietly. The zendo was practically empty, I later realized, as everyone had run to dokusan. The tanto tapped my shoulder very gently, just a light touch—but a touch with a vast resonance. My mind opened. Even a gentle touch of encouragement can be received, can resonate unutterably, as it did for me that morning.

I flew to dokusan boldly and surely, just naturally, differently from any other time before. Up until then, if I went into dokusan and tried to say anything, Roshi would immediately ring his bell. But this time I just glided in, and Daiun Roshi breathed in deeply, swallowing me up. He stared into my eyes fiercely. For the first time a half smile appeared on his face. That time I didn't have to hear a bell ringing;

instead my teacher said, "Let's check you." My responses were spontaneous, uncontrived.

That was when he verified my understanding. "At last, moderate understanding," he said, "at last." I was so fortunate to be able to practice under a teacher so strict and so exacting, a teacher who had himself profoundly done the practice of Shakyamuni Buddha and profoundly experienced the teaching of the Buddha.

That night I did not go to evening dokusan. I was in the temple office, as I had a duty there. I was so filled with pure happiness that I couldn't sleep, but I might have been dozing off and on in a state of wakeful sleep. I didn't know if I was dreaming or not when my own mother, whom I had never seen, came to me. From behind she wrapped her arms around me and took my hands in hers. Together, we rose into the sky. Flying through the sky, I could feel the cold air on my cheeks. My mother was like an angel. As we flew, she communicated this to me, though not in words but through her life, "I'm very glad; I'm so glad."

If I had not been ripened and mature in my practice at the end of that sesshin so that Roshi would verify my understanding and confirm that I had broken through to his satisfaction, I would not have been alive that night. I had made the final determination. I believe that to my mother, the most important thing was not that I had satori but that I had not lost my life. I believe she was expressing her deep wish that I would be protected: "I'm very glad; I'm so glad." A mother's mind is universal.

After that sesshin, my world was transformed. All stingy grasping fell away; all distinctions melted away. I continued to practice as Daiun Roshi instructed me, but now even if I wanted to look away, I could no longer do so. I just continued my practice. I knew true peace, that all is well. There is no inside, no outside. All is one—one all-encompassing one. This truth that I was able to accept and receive holds true, remains steady anytime, anywhere, wherever I

walk on this wide, wide planet. This truth is universal. Wherever you find yourself, there is only this one truth.

Now I've told you the story of my experience in Zen practice, but there is a danger here. The danger is that you might get the discouraging idea that my story and experience were too dramatic and special and that you yourself could never hope to experience anything like it. This is not true. I just did the one and only thing I was told to do. I did it to the best of my ability. You cannot do what you cannot do, but you can do this one thing to your utmost. Regardless of what I did in my practice, the key remains the same for everyone—complete sincerity. You must give your all. Holding on to nothing, you must become your practice. So from my own experience, I can say to you, “If you set out to do it, it will be done—if you don't, it won't be done; when something isn't done, it is because you didn't resolve to do it.”

平成十四年十二月十六日



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Here, now, we are always together. There is no separation, even through the longest kalpa.

6

BUKKOKU-JI

I BECAME THE ABBOT here at Bukkoku-ji on March 15, 1955. I was thirty years old. And lo and behold, I am now already over eighty! That is just fine. There is pain in aging, though I am not really suffering it myself because I live life openly committed to receiving each thing as it occurs. My attitude toward illness has always been “Just leave it be. Doing zazen will take care of it. All is well.” But even so, aging is a fact, as is illness. My only goal through this life is to be of help, to offer whatever I can to all beings. I cannot realize my aspiration to the fullest, but it was always my desire to do whatever I can. Whenever my affinity with this life ends, that’s just fine. All beings are born out of causes and conditions. All that arises is in perfect interdependence, working together in perfect harmony. All things exist in mutual dedication, mutual support. All beings are alive in the shelter of all beings.

Together with you all, I am now here, believing, knowing ever more deeply that all beings are buddha, original buddha-nature. Together with you, as one, we repay our debt of kindness, and express our gratitude for all we receive from the universe. Together we realize our inherent buddha-nature.

PART TWO

ZEN TALKS

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平成四年一月十八日

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Inherent buddha-nature

INHERENT BUDDHA-NATURE

AFTER LONG YEARS OF PRACTICE, Shakyamuni Buddha sat under the bodhi tree. He sat for a long time, unmoving, immersed in his intense investigation. Then one morning, he looked up and saw the morning star. In this instant he was able to wake up and perfectly see right into true self—original mind, buddha-nature. He exclaimed, “Wonder of wonders! Wonderful! All beings without exception are endowed with the wisdom and virtue of Tathagata.”^[7]

All beings are buddha. All are intertwined, interconnected, one with all things. I am one truth—limitless, unfathomable, universal, without self, complete, and perfect. Nothing is in excess; nothing is lacking. This is the realization of Shakyamuni, the World-Honored One, and his first words were: “Wonder of wonders!”

With what wonder and amazement he must have seen and exclaimed! Those words must have sprung forth mixed with tears—the tears of joy, the tears of life. How deeply he was moved, body and mind reborn at the core, life burning brightly! Here was a human being, who for a long time had carried forth his vow—to save and to bring great true peace of mind to all beings. This vow was his life. Even so, he could not help but exclaim in marvel, “Wonder of wonders!” Even for one of such karmic ripeness and compassionate character as the Buddha, the truth that he saw upon enlightenment was a wonder.

This wonder is right here, right now. All beings are buddha, endowed with buddha-wisdom, buddha-virtue. These words do not

imply that some day in the future we *will be* endowed with buddha-wisdom. Now, as you are, as it is, all beings are buddha; all things are one buddha-mind alone.

Buddha-mind changes constantly, taking form in accordance with causes and conditions, and each form is replete with timeless, true mind. We use the word *mind*, but in this context, I am speaking about your true, genuine self, your life. Your mind, your life, is the whole universe. It fills the Dharma realm, and it exists right here and now. All phenomena are sacred forms of this true life. Life arises and takes form in accordance with karmic causes and conditions. A sound is made; it reverberates; it is heard. It is so simple. You can hear; you can see. It is very straightforward, very honest. In the winter, it is a cold wind and a warm cup of tea. It appears as each and every thing.

However it appears and whenever it appears, this is buddha-mind. All phenomena, everything is perfectly honest. All is timeless and empty, with no going and no coming, so you have no need for worries. The Way, your true mind, buddha-heart, is absolutely perfect, flawless. It has no birth and no death. It cannot be conceived through the discriminating intellect. You could spend eons at it, but never in a million years would that rationalizing, thinking process come close to touching, to comprehending your true nature. There is only to wake up to it, just as the Buddha did.

Wake up, and you can say for yourself, “The sun is my eye, the wind my breath, all of space my heart, the mountain and ocean my body. The sun shining brightly, vividly, is the eye of my life; the vastness of the sky is my heart.” Who is the master of this boundless heart? No one else but you, this is your reality. Heaven and earth; same root. All the myriad things; one body.^[8]

This truth is the source of your freedom, your liberty—and the freedom of each and every one of us. Wonderful! Wonder of wonders! No matter how deeply we worship, no matter how reverently we sing its praises, we could never begin to pay homage

to this wonder. All beings are right here in the midst of truth, this one truth, and all beings are saved. There are no restraints on your freedom.

The birth of one buddha is the birth of all buddhas. We are indelibly, perpetually interconnected. No one is cut off, isolated, apart from the whole. We are not *this* as opposed to *that*. There is no distance. This is the wonder that was revealed to Shakyamuni Buddha.

Awakening is wonderment, total inside-outside transformation, complete peace. Shakyamuni Buddha was able at last to verify this truth for himself. He reached his goal and fulfilled his aspiration. At long, long last he understood—all beings are buddha. But he had something to say in addition to this, and how thankful we can be for the Buddha's addition. He said, "But because the minds of beings have become inverted through delusive thinking, they fail to perceive their own inherent buddha-nature."^[9] Brilliant truth is the heritage of all beings, but they don't know it. They suffer in spiritual darkness.

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平成四年二月十八日

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The source of suffering; the illusion of separate self

8

THE ILLUSION OF SEPARATE SELF

HOW DOES IT HAPPEN? How do we fail to see our essential nature? When we were babies, we had no sense of opposition. For a baby, everything is *me*; there is no division, no duality. When it is hungry, it eats; when it is sleepy, it sleeps. Is the baby awakened? Of course, the baby is not lost in a dream of separation, but its state is not complete. A baby is totally self-absorbed. It must steadily grow. Yet with growth, the child learns to live by the discriminating mind and develops a sense of *I*. With growth comes the growth of the intellect and ego-grasping. The sense of self and separation increases as we learn language. Everything that is not *me* is *other*—opposition, duality. We come to perceive everything to be outside ourselves. “I want what is over there. I want this. I want that.”

The child becomes smarter and smarter. A sharp mind and exacting intellect mean a lot in this world—being smart you can get ahead materially. You can make a name for yourself; you can rise to a high position. Is that bad? It’s not a question of good and bad. Some use their intellectual growth for good, and some don’t—that depends on the aspiration and intention of the individual. But everyone falls into the trap of dividing reality into pieces. There is an old saying: “As a child learns to live by its mind, it moves farther and farther from buddha.” We simply learn to treat this little *I* idea as the host, as the center of the universe. We just can’t help but to favor and indulge this self that we imagine to exist.

Almost everyone, as they reach adulthood, carries inside them a sense of lack. Something is missing; something is not quite right. At first we try to satisfy our myriad desires to get rid of this sense of lack. “If only I could have things my way, I would have no further complaints. I know exactly what I need.” But if you get one, you desire two—if you get two, you desire three, four—it is never enough. We cannot ultimately be satisfied by getting what we want, and yet some people spend all their lives thinking that gratifying desires is what being human is about.

Then, once we have been able to polish our special talents and strengths, been able to study and to learn, had jobs that we have given our all to—we have made our way in the world. We have looked at things from all angles, seeking to understand what it is all about. We have seen how painful it can be to make our way in life. We have experienced the difficulty of human relationships—it should be easier, but somehow it just isn’t. Those people who humor us, those whom we perceive to be of benefit to us, we like and favor and become attached to them. On the other hand, there are those people who do not particularly recognize us, who overlook us or ignore us, who do not treat us as we would like to be treated, or that are just not the way we want them to be. These people we regard to some degree or another as enemies, as those who are against us. We don’t like them—they irritate us and get on our nerves.

Then we try various ways of self-improvement, self-help. “Help yourself to grow, take good care of yourself, and you will be a happier person”—this is the message. There are all sorts of examples of this way of thinking, and there is nothing really wrong with it. But of course, the object of self-improvement is the imagined limited *self*, and we are still grasping at it for all it’s worth.

We have tried to be kind and caring; our intention is to be of service to others. Even so, we are still working from the standpoint of ego. As long as we are attached to a separate self, we cannot live in clarity, and dissatisfaction remains. If we didn’t have this human

body and mind, we wouldn't be able to reflect on ourselves in this way. In a sense, it is more comfortable to be a cat or some other animal without self-awareness that can live more or less happily idle.

The source of all this anguish is the sense of separation. We have this illusion of a separate self, and we mistake this shadow for the real thing. Thus we cannot possibly help but imagine separation. We cannot help but create barriers. Our seeing is limited, and limits are what we see. While every human being is in fact reality itself, almost all of us live in such a way that we cast aside this precious life. Most people don't understand that they are turning their backs on life, and so they are blown this way and that by the winds of circumstance. Lost in discrimination, judgment, and confusion, one becomes resigned to this fate. How sad that almost everyone meets their death in this way.

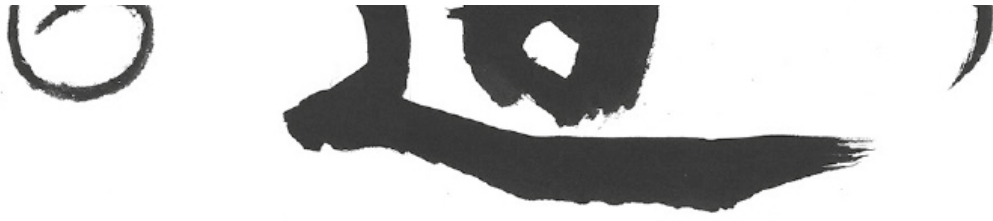
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平成四年九月十八日

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The unexcelled Way; just doing

THE BUDDHA WAY

EVEN WHILE LIVING LOST in ignorance, there remains hidden in the belly of life itself—in *your* belly—the one who cannot help but seek to know true nature. Don't forget this one, who never lets you forget. This true one is always close by, urging you on, calling upon you to open your eyes. This one prompts you toward a way of being that is genuine, urging you to walk the Buddha Way. The genuine seeks to awaken to the genuine.

There are people who say that it is greedy or wrong to desire the realization of our inherent nature. They say that Shakyamuni Buddha has awakened for us and that is enough, or that our state of mind is not important as long as we physically sit zazen, so there is no need for realization. Those beliefs make the Buddha's teaching small and insignificant. The passionate desire to know true nature is inherent in all human beings. It is life's very working. So if you desire to awaken, please never think that is wrong. "I will without fail awaken to true nature"—with this mindset, we walk the Buddha Path. The belief that you cannot attain awakening is a refusal to fulfill the reason for being alive, to repay your gratitude. If you do not practice, you will not awaken to reality, to your very own reality. No one can do it for you. No one can see into truth for you. It is your world, solely your world.

Do you want to continue to live in delusion? If we spend this lifetime only seeking pleasure, singing and dancing, drinking and making merry, when the end comes, we will know that we didn't

resolve this one important matter. It is necessary to clearly resolve and determine to wake up to original life, your true nature.

In our temple, each morning we chant the lineage of buddhas and great teachers who guide us in our practice. Thanks to their great vow, to the great noble intention of each and every one of them, and thanks to their diligent practice, each one was able to hit the mark, to attain the Way. Each of them received the teaching and directly experienced this same truth, just as water is poured directly from one cup to another.

Everyone is able to do the same; no one is left out. Freedom is our essence. If the Dharma weren't universal, what would be the value in it? If the Dharma were only for the chosen few, where would be the value in pursuing it? If the Dharma could be obtained and lost, I would not be here urging you to deepen your faith beyond all doubt and to let go of body and mind; I would not be here begging you to give it your all. The Dharma is absolute, perfect, all-pervading, all-inclusive, all-embracing. Liberation is yours from the beginning. We are altogether in essence free; all-being abides in the radiance of Buddha-nature. All-being *is* the radiant light of buddha. "Together with all beings, sentient or insentient, with grasses and trees, together with the great earth, I attain the Buddha Way," uttered Shakyamuni Buddha. With his great enlightenment, Shakyamuni, the World-Honored One, attained perfect liberation. He came to life, to true life, to liberation—which is our birthright, our essence.

Yet how easily we doubt, how quickly we forget. "I don't know if I have what it takes to awaken. Maybe I am not ready. Maybe I can't do it." Those doubts are utterly unfounded. This one truth is just as true for you as it is for all the buddhas. In the Buddha Way, in reality, there are no exceptions. Each of you now receiving these words is blessed with this sacred reality. It might sound even too good to be true to you. "How can it be that I am so blessed when I don't even feel good about myself?" I could repeat it for you a million more

times, and it would still not even begin to express the absolute perfection with which we are blessed.

Because of upside-down false perceptions, we fail to see this inherent buddha-nature. We are just looking off at the play of our discriminating mind, and that is taken to be the host. For once, realize the true host! Become one with who you really are, and all is well. What a shame for you not to awaken to this wonder, not to prostrate yourself before it, before everything in the universe—not to come to appreciate, to celebrate real life.

For that we are doing our practice. We start with what we have got to do, right here, right now. The aim is to come to awaken, to know yourself, to see what life is really about, and this one-way path is the universal Way, which includes all beings. It is not only for our own small liberation; it is for the liberation of all beings. We start out with this as our aim.

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平成十六年八月十八日 玄馬

The merit of one sitting

10

ZAZEN

HOW SHOULD WE PRACTICE? What is the path? Zazen is the foundation of our practice. We start out by learning to do zazen correctly, following the guidance of a teacher. To settle the body, settle the breath, settle the mind. Essentially the body, breath, and mind are not separate, just one. But provisionally, we can divide this into three parts in order to explain it.

BODY

Check your posture, making sure that you are properly positioned on your cushion. Your bottom is a little farther than halfway forward on the *zafu*.^{*} After arranging yourself properly on the cushion, cross your legs and lean your whole body forward toward the ground. Then bring your body slowly back up, taking care to leave the lower back straight. Now you will be centered in your tanden, with the spine straight, the hips back, and the belly forward. This naturally happens when you are in a lotus position, but however your legs are crossed, it's very important that you don't let your lower back sink down. Sit upright, leaning neither to the left nor to the right, neither forward nor back. Your ears should be on the same plane as your shoulders and your nose aligned with your navel. The back of your neck is straight so that your head is suspended, as if a string from the heavens were

pulling up the top of your head. This way the chin will be aligned in the correct place.

This is not to say that your posture is forced; it is very natural. You don't need to put any tension anywhere; shape it with your mind, not your muscles. Just do your best to work toward a good posture. Even if your body resists, keep your mind open. Remember that it is alright. Simply work with what you've got; simply work where you are. Keep your eyes half open, naturally gazing softly at the floor in front of you. Place your left hand on the top of your right hand and join the thumbs together, resting them on your feet if you are sitting in lotus posture, right in front of your tanden. Again, the most important thing is the lower back—if it is as straight as it should be, your tanden becomes full of energy. Place your heart-mind, your mind's eye, in the tanden. If you don't keep your focus in your tanden, you will find yourself operating more and more in your head. That leads to confusion—it leads to becoming sidetracked, distracted.

If you do this with attention, you will be able to sit well. Discriminating thought is abandoned. True nature is one with itself most naturally in this posture. True dignity is true mind. Sit in the form of true mind.

BREATH

The breath flows in and out from the bottom of your belly; you are breathing from your tanden. You can become settled in this way. Patiently breathe this one breath, deeply from your lower belly. Your tanden becomes your center, naturally. The bottom of your belly is where you are the stablest. The breath goes in, the breath goes out. Pour all your body, all your spirit into this one breath. There is nothing outside of it. Just breathe this one breath—this is all there is. Give it your all. You are one with the breath, the Way is one.

Even if you are not thinking about taking this breath, the breath is breathed for you. You are perfectly nurtured like the baby is nurtured by its mother. There is nothing to figure out. You are naturally cared for. When you go to sleep at night, are you directing your breath? Since you were born, twenty, forty, seventy years ago, 365 days a year, how many times in one night alone has this breath been breathed? Always it has been natural; you have never had to will it to be. So who is breathing for you? Who is breathing this breath? Don't look away. This breath is true life; this breath is everything. This breath is perfectly receiving all things; this one breath is repaying all the goodness of the universe. This is the heart of all the cosmos: there are no boundaries to this one breath. The host is here. Who is the host? Can someone take this breath for you? This is total mutual support and sustenance; the heart of all being is now here in this one breath.

MIND

Various ways of practice are given to us. There is a practice just right for you: the practice that will reveal to you this one-way path. There is no question of comparing and saying, "This is a good practice, but that one is not so good." It is just like the Olympics—you have the one-hundred-meter race, the one-thousand-meter race, and the marathon. Depending on the way you are able to practice, one practice will be better for you than another. It is only if you are not giving yourself completely to the practice that you will become dissatisfied with it. There is counting the breath, following the breath, *shikantaza*,* Mu, the sound of one hand clapping, your original face, or many other koans. The teaching is the same, and each practice reveals one and the same thing.

Counting the breath is the perfect practice at the beginning. Shakyamuni Buddha himself taught this practice; we have example

after example of it in the sutras. Starting with a few deep abdominal breaths, your mind's eye settles in your lower belly. Counting on the exhale, just count *ooone*. There is no separation, just doing, just being the breath, being the count. Two—just *twooo*. Count to ten and naturally start from one again. Earnestly count this one breath; do not let yourself be bothered by thoughts and feelings. If you fall off the count, you pull yourself together and go back to counting your breath. Many thoughts arise in the brain; just let them be. The brain is actively going all the time, which is neither good nor bad. Whatever arises, no matter how inviting it appears, neither entertain it nor reject it. This is the key. Be strong on this point. Be firm and determined; be resolved. The host is not the discriminating consciousness—the host is true self. All of heaven and earth—same root. All the myriad things are one body, the true nature. Openly, obediently, be pure. Grasp nothing; hold nothing; rest nowhere. Let go of everything. You are the embodiment of truth, just as you are. Stay in your tanden; do this one-doing. What is one-doing? You can only answer this for yourself by doing it. Simply count this breath.

One wholehearted breath is a step taken. This is the law of karmic inevitability. The step that you take is never lost; just carry on. Give it your all, then give it some more—clearly, decisively. Settled in this one breath, nothing agitates you. Counting the breath is the perfect practice of truth; you need not entertain any ideas of gain, of getting something. Everything that you need is right here—everything you need to know, you know already. If you practice counting the breath, you will become very calm in this practice, unflustered by anything that arises.

You are giving your life over to this, practicing in such a way that there is no tomorrow. Thinking that you still have time is a loss of valuable time. Depending on having tomorrow to deepen your practice is not giving over your life to practice. There is only today, only this one period of meditation. Actually, there is only this one

breath. There is only this one-doing, this one single point. This is all there is.

Whether it is counting the breath, following the breath, Mu, or shikantaza, burn within that practice, and your practice will take care of itself. Practice nurtures practice. First and foremost, believe with all your life that you are immersed in the Buddha Way, here and now. We walk this one path. Purely throwing all of your might into it, maintain this one straight path, this one practice you have been given to do. If you practice in this way, you won't have the possibility of regret later. When your practice is wholehearted like this, everything comes together to support you—there is no more separation. There is no room for any reasoning or conceptualizing or trying to figure it out. If you throw everything into your practice, then everything gives itself to you to make one whole, pure doing. But if you don't really do it wholeheartedly, then you won't be able to appreciate the intimacy of buddha-heart. Even though we are always and equally receiving and living out this treasure, we are eating a feast without even tasting it. That is a real waste.

It is so difficult to attain a human birth. And as human beings, does everyone have this opportunity to hear the teachings of Buddhadharma in this life? Certainly not. “The Dharma, incomparably profound and minutely subtle, is rarely encountered even in hundreds of thousands of millions of *kalpas*.”^[10]

Happily, we are blessed with this human body—happily, we are able to meet with Buddhadharma. True nature meets with itself. Self-awareness is possible—we have this capacity, and we are in a position to attain liberation. At the same time, we have an infinite capacity to use our wits to be clever and judgmental, to look away from the reality of our own being. Lay down your self-cherishing; throw yourself into the house of Buddha—then everything is done by Buddha.^[11] Release the hold of the small self and know how vast you are. Just practice and know how vast and wonderful the Way is.

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平成十三年七月十八日

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Making a vow

11

VOW

THERE IS A TEACHING THAT SAYS, “If your original aspiration is incorrect, all the myriad practices will be in vain.” If your aim is incorrect, whatever you do will be of no use. So the mind with which we set out to practice Zen is all-important. Practice comes to life in your vow, so please reflect and ask yourself, “What is it that I vow? What do I pray for?”

You are a baby, then a teenager, and then soon a young adult. Day by day, month by month, year by year, your life marches on. No one wants their life to pass by swiftly, but how swiftly this life does pass. There is no respite, no stopping the flow of moments, days, years—before you know it, you are twenty years old, thirty, forty. Can it be fifty already? Sixty—oh maybe that’s enough. Seventy—there is no slowing it down.

In olden days, it was rare to live to be seventy years old, and in so many countries in the world this is still true. It is said that Japan has the longest life expectancy in the world now. But the mere numbers of days and years don’t tell us much. The question is: What do you do with these fleeting days? What do you seek? What is it that you truly desire? What is your prayer, your vow in life?

You must look into yourself to answer this question. “What am I working toward? What do I live for? What have I done with my life?”

Some people would probably honestly answer that they have wanted many different things, and up until now they have followed their desires. Confronted with these questions, you may experience

some sense of regret if your starting aim is not correct. But if your aim is correct, each endeavor is the real endeavor—each endeavor is sincere, true, with no regrets. Truth is brought to life in your vow.

Recently, when I was going through my room, I came upon a piece of paper, something I wrote long ago—it's dated October 15, 1947. I wrote it at the time of my first opportunity to meet with Buddhadharma. The war had ended on August 15, 1945, and after I came back to Japan, I went to Sozen Nagasawa Roshi's temple for my first sesshin. Right after that first sesshin, just before I went to meet my teacher Daiun Roshi for the first time at Hosshin-ji, this is what I wrote:

The One Way path of repaying my gratitude for all things received:
the purpose of human life.

I will perfect my character, that is to say, become a living buddha. I will arouse the bodhi-mind* and devote myself to zazen so that I can awaken to the truth of the great universe as soon as possible. I won't let anything distract me from realizing absolute self.

Each day, I will accumulate merit both hidden, unnoticed, and not hidden, increasing my store of blessings and capabilities so that I can carry on the great work.

And then I wrote a poem:

With yearning
I vow to follow the jeweled vision
Of all the gods of heaven and earth.

On a second page I wrote:

I vow with all my heart, if there is good and evil, to always pursue good with my true heart. To give me the means to do this, I will follow a true teacher, keep true friends, and read true texts.

To stay on the straight path without weakening, I will use the whip to encourage myself. Even if I am coughing up my own blood, I

promise with all my heart to sincerely lay down my life for this.

I must have written this with all my heart. On the next line I wrote and underlined with small dots:

Burning zealously like the sun, bright and broad-minded like the vast skies, settled and unmoving like the mountains, growing pure like flowing water, being like great nature.

This is dated and signed with my lay name. That was some fifty-five years ago, and it seems I didn't know a thing about Buddhadharma. What I wrote then now seems somehow cute and innocent—it was where I was at that moment—but it was not without meaning, because everything depends upon our vow, our sincere commitment to follow the Dharma. When we arouse the thought of realization, the determination to attain realization, everything that we do becomes a manifestation of realization. Each step, this one step.

Everything depends upon your vow. How alive, how vital is your aim—the aim with which you vow to live your life? If you're living your life with the vow to attain realization, all is lively. Your vow is clear; your purpose is clear. Of course, this vow has to include all beings. Your promise is not a stingy one. There is no such thing as realization for one's personal benefit. As long as you are considering your own personal well-being first and foremost, how small, how lonely, how weak and ineffectual you are. But once you've made the commitment to attain realization, which necessarily includes all beings, your foundation is no longer self-centered. You no longer grasp this *I, me, mine* as your reason for being. Your vow is together with all beings.

Here, right from the start, we find the conclusion of our journey, which is oneness with all beings. Without the *I* there is no all beings. Without all beings, no *I*. There is no division, no separation, no duality in truth.

“May all beings attain liberation; may all beings awaken to the reality of their inherent nature, of their inherent perfection.” This is your vow, and your vow is ultimately realized. All beings, sentient or not, simultaneously attain the way—grasses, trees, and the great earth—everything becomes buddha, pure truth. Truth is not touched by discriminating consciousness; truth is absolute, beyond conditions. It is original nature, perfect virtue. That which you long to meet is right here, right here and now. You can verify it for yourself.

Please see for yourself—come to life in this profound rebirth. What else could there be for you to desire? What else could you vow to do? Let go of any aim that diverges from truth. Clearly, firmly, make up your mind to practice the teaching of truth, and follow through with your practice. Each step is one with truth, one with life. Just be loyal to this one breath, this one step. With each breath, truth is realized; truth is practiced. Continuing, there is just to continue. “The one who simply continues is the master among masters.”^[12]



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平成二十二年五月十八日玄





Perceiving impermanence

12

IMPERMANENCE

*The heart believes in tomorrow's cherry blossoms,
the storm comes at night and blows them away.*

THIS IS A POEM composed by Shinran Shonin (1173–1263), the founder of Jodo Shinshu, at age nine.^[13] When he was a young boy, both his parents died. Feeling urgency to understand the great matter of life and death, at nine Shinran went to Shoren-in in Kyoto. He arrived at the temple somewhat late, perhaps in the evening, and asked the head priest Jien to ordain him as a monk. When Jien told him that he would ordain him the next day, Shinran replied:

The heart believes in tomorrow's cherry blossoms,
the storm comes at night and blows them away.

Hearing his urgency, Jien fulfilled his request the same night.

It is necessary for a practitioner to have a persistent sense of impermanence—not just intellectually, but a felt sense of it. We cannot be carefree; there is no time to waste. Very often we spend our time in a leisurely way as if we were going to live forever, thinking that there won't be anything to worry about tomorrow. Even if we don't consciously think that way, in some place deeper than conscious thought, we carry this conviction. Rarely do people live with the mindset of "There is no tomorrow."

Most people experience a lot of suffering in their lives, but there are people in this world able to live somewhat calm, trouble-free, happy lives. Even for such people, will there always be serenity? Will there always be this calm happiness? Certainly not. Worry, anxiety, and trouble take so many forms and wear so many faces. Suffering can leap out at you in so many ways.

One woman I know had a life that had been so smooth and joyful, a perfect example of the heavenly realm. She was the mother of three sons, each of whom had always been kind, considerate, and bright, and she was close to them. Each was accomplished in his field; they were all doctors or university professors. And while she had no daughters, she was blessed with three daughters-in-law she got along well with, all warm, kind, and considerate people. These various families seemed to be so content with their lives. This woman was very healthy and living a life that others might envy; she herself could see that she had been so blessed. She was a person many others would approach when they had problems. But one day, she told me in tears that suddenly without any explanation or any farewell note, her oldest son had left his house and gone missing, just disappeared.

She experienced anguish so intense that it didn't allow her to sleep, and her time awake was pure suffering. No matter how she thought about it or how she looked at it, she couldn't figure out what was going on. I couldn't help but feel deep, deep sympathy—from heaven, she fell straight to the bottomless suffering of hell. So even though people are blessed and joyous, it doesn't mean that they necessarily have true peace of mind—not deeply, unconditionally.

The heart believes in tomorrow's cherry blossoms,
the storm comes at night and blows them away.

By the front gate at this temple, there are many gravestones piled high in the shape of a mountain. People usually call them “the

graves of people who have no relations.” Of course, that expression is erroneous because there is not a single person and no thing without relations—we are so incredibly related in every way. This stupa was erected from the many graves of people whose family lines had all died out a long time ago. It is called the Stupa of All Spirits, or more simply, Great Buddha.

On the path to the graveyard, there is a rather large stone, just my height. On its side is a written request asking everyone who comes to see their ancestors' graves to bow first to the Stupa of All Spirits. On the front of this stone these words are carved: “We were once just as you are now...” Those upon whose graves you now gaze were in the past just exactly like you—healthy, full of happiness, enjoying their lives. A young, joyful-looking couple arriving to pay tribute to their ancestors can read those words. Then there is a second line that reads, “You will become just as we are now.” Impermanence is swift—this is the reality. No matter how blessed you are now, how easygoing, how worry-free and happy, you cannot keep this situation—it will be taken away from you. Impermanence is swift. You have to resolve the problem of life and death for yourself, and no one can do it for you.

Everything is impermanent. Change is constant; it waits for no one. You don't even have the time to sit around and lament impermanence, to think of it as a concept, to dwell on it—there is no time to dwell on anything. There is a constant sermon of change—truth is being revealed completely. It is always laid out before us, undisguised, right here and now. Always and ultimately, life is fresh and new. Always and ultimately, this true life is revealed. Life is not a solid, fixed thing—there is no self in it. This fact, this reality, has to be pounded in, until you know it in your guts, until it is a persistent sense. No matter how carefully you try to hold on to something, no matter how carefully you try to make this life last, you are going to lose it.

The heart believes in tomorrow's cherry blossoms,
the storm comes at night and blows them away.

The only thing then for you to do is to seek that which cannot be taken away, that which cannot be lost. The only thing for you to do is to see clearly that which you can utterly and absolutely rely on, no matter how the winds blow. What I am telling you right now is: meet with it! In fact, you are now living it. This most precious thing is right here under your feet. When you meet with it, you know that there is no dying; that which cannot be lost or destroyed is your original life. You cannot rely on somebody else to live it for you; you have to walk it with your own steps. Morning turns into noon, noon into evening, evening into night—there is continual birth and death. This truth cannot be taken away—it goes nowhere. Everything is just alright. Everything is just buddha-nature, buddha life.

Buddha simply means “awakened one,” the one awakened to truth. When you awaken to truth, even should Shakyamuni Buddha appear to take this away from you, it cannot be taken away, because you are one and the same as Shakyamuni Buddha. It's your reality, the reality of every single one of you. If you don't awaken to this, then you will continue through a never-ending cycle of lifetimes, but you are not really living. You must abandon the heart that believes in the cherry blossoms of tomorrow, the heart that takes it for granted that you will have tomorrow to practice and attain liberation.



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The roots of great faith

GREAT FAITH, GREAT DOUBT, GREAT DETERMINATION

THERE ARE THREE POINTS that are essential for Zen practice. All the great practitioners from times of old have stressed the necessity for these three basic elements.

The first one is *great faith*. When we say *great faith*, it is not the *great* of great and small. It is a bottomless great, a great that is beyond comparison, including everything. Generally we use the word *faith* to describe something far less, such as “I believe you.” That kind of faith can easily become “I don’t believe you,” which is a disbelief. It is the same as saying, “I think so.” True faith is far deeper than “I think so.” True faith is not something that is subject to change. In Japanese we call it literally “the roots of great faith.” Roots symbolize something really grounded. Once a great tree fell in a landslide here on the mountain behind our temple. It had been there for hundreds of years. The roots were still deep in the ground after it fell, and we tried to pull them out. It was impossible, so we had to take a chain saw and cut through them. Roots are that strong. Deep faith is firmly rooted, absolutely unmoving.

So what is this faith *in*? It is the faith that all beings are buddha; it is trust in inherent buddha-nature; it is faith that everything is perfect just as it is. that everything is perfect just as it is. Nothing is in excess, nothing is lacking—everything is in itself perfect virtue, absolute merit. Even though the mind’s eye, the eye of truth, is not

yet open, not yet far-seeing, we can have faith. We have faith in the teachings of truth, faith that penetrates the marrow. Faith in inherent nature is firm, unmoving.

I am buddha-nature. My true self is heaven and earth, one root. There is no thing in opposition to any other thing, no self versus other. We are all one, one root. It is not possible to divide original buddha-mind.

Shakyamuni, the World-Honored One, affirmed this truth through personal experience. "Wonderful, wonderful! Wonder of wonders! All beings are buddha, endowed with buddha-virtue, buddha-wisdom." This points to our original nature: not any individual state of mind but the true essence of mind. Of course, this is not only about human beings. Everything is, as it is, buddha.

So why do you feel truth to be so distant, so separate, something that you have to reach out and try to get? As long as you perceive yourself to be alienated from reality, there will be, as the old saying goes, "one joy to one hundred sorrows." Until you have realized your true nature, the time of tranquility that you enjoy now and again will be followed by times of unease, restlessness, dissatisfaction, ups and downs.

Here is where *great doubt*, the second essential point, comes in. Of course, your faith in buddha-nature is not in doubt. In fact, your faith in buddha-nature is so certain that you cannot help but ask, "If I am really a buddha, then why am I not realizing this? Why do I feel so separate? Why can't I see?" This great mass of doubt grabs everything out from under you, everything that is not essential. What is essential? That you awaken to your inherent buddha-nature.

You have taken this question, this problem, upon yourself. It is your driving question. In Japan we have this thick slug that is said to have special medicinal qualities. When I was a child and suffering from lung disease, I was told to eat it. I remember well swallowing one of those things; I could feel the slug growing inside my throat as it was sliding down. I couldn't get it down: I couldn't swallow it, nor

could I spit it up. I stopped breathing and just screamed. You can't explain it—it is too immediate. This immediacy is right here and now, and there is nothing outside it. That is how *great doubt* seizes you.

Another example we could use is that of a baby whose mother has left the room and will not come back for some time. A baby can't be at peace, only asking with all its being, "Where is Mother? Where is she?" A baby looks around, seeking, they can't help it. They forget everything else and just cry and cry for their mother, whether they're awake or asleep. They cry wholly, completely for their mother, just absolute crying, nothing outside of it. Nothing can stop the baby from crying for their mother.

Just practice like this baby who is crying for their mother. This kind of practice is the most earnest, most honest, most direct way to pursue what you want with all of your heart. How relentlessly can you pursue this problem? How great is your doubt? Pursuing it off-again and on-again is not enough. You must be single-minded. You must not be thrown off track—you must not waste even a single breath.

There is no time to dillydally—this is the time to get on with it, to cut the thread of ignorance. That energetic determination is the third element, which we call *great determination*—fierce determination like that of a lion or a tiger. When the animal sits still, it is settled and completely quiet, but when the great cat strikes out—how its true nature is revealed! The energy is indescribable. This spirited force naturally arises in your practice from *great faith* and *great doubt*. Practice with energy, burning zestfully—when you hurl yourself full force into life, all of life trembles. Great determination does not permit you to falter. It is not just words, and you are not just an onlooker—your reality, your present reality, is the reality of the universe—one truth, one sole truth.

Please know in your bones, "I can realize it."

These three keys to practice are in your hands—the roots of great faith, the great mass of doubt, the great fierce determination.

You cannot wait to be forced to practice by some external stimulus. This faith, this doubt, and this determination come from the source, and the source is within you yourself; the source of life is giving it. Don't hesitate to use it. If you practice these three points, there is no way in the world that you can fail to realize your true nature and fail to realize the great matter.



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平成十八年六月十八日

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One-doing

SAMADHI

IN THE BEGINNING IT SEEMS that there is self-will. There is a *me* doing this practice: *I* am practicing. This is *my* aim. This is *my* own effort, *my* own practice. You append this *I* to everything you are doing. The notion that *I am* carries with it delusion, division, and separation. But mysteriously along the way, what seems to be your self-will practicing comes to be practice practicing itself. When you are really practicing, you become one with what you are doing. There is no room for *I*, *me*, or *mine* to show its face. This is forgetting body and mind, becoming one with your practice, until your practice is all there is. This happens naturally, growing out of your steady, continuous effort. The personal will becomes the will of the Dharma. What you first regard as your own effort—your effort as this human being—comes to be unconditional Dharma at work.

Before I even knew anything about zazen or practice, I had a glimpse of this. During World War II, we were required to strengthen our bodies and our willpower. We were told that if the youth of the country weren't strong, then we wouldn't be able to protect our country. So at school, rather than learning theoretical subjects, the emphasis was on strengthening body and mind. The teachers were very strict at this time, driving us to run faster and farther every day. I was quite affected by something I had read in a Chinese classic, and I chanted this chant in my belly wholeheartedly before and as I ran. One time it brought out a great power—greater than the self-will I felt I had.

All of us boys who were running were at about the same level of fitness. But this day, my running was different from what it had ever been before. First, it was painful, but soon the pain was forgotten and, through some strange power, I was sped along. After about four kilometers or so, the body was lost, forgotten. It was like riding a wind, not running on legs. I zoomed in well ahead of anyone else, without any bit of pain or fatigue. There was not any feeling of having forced myself to do anything. When the others came in, they were drenched in sweat and puffing. It was not my usual way of making that run. That was a running samadhi, a samadhi power—so I remember that experience well.

In the beginning, practice seems to be a matter of personal will, but along the way, it clearly becomes the will of the Dharma. There are limits to your own personal will—from the outset you decide how much you can do, how far you can go, how much strength you have, and you restrict yourself. And in restricting yourself, you start out in your practice already defeated even while you are practicing something that is unrestricted and limitless. The real way to start in practice is by dropping off body and mind. Let go from the beginning. Of course, your mind will still try to haggle and struggle, and it will still be painful physically—running and zazen are the same in that way. Cast off body and mind; forget about them; throw yourself into the house of Buddha and everything is done by Buddha. Then zazen simply does zazen; there is no controlling.

On the cushion in zazen, we settle into this practice, become one with it, are permeated with it. Off the cushion, we continue to practice while acting in accordance with the time, place, and circumstances, doing what there is to be done. So maintain your practice no matter where you are or what you are doing. It always comes down to just becoming one with it—now, here; now, here. Naturally, we continue our practice.

This is what we call samadhi. This samadhi, or this life-functioning, is always working in everyone. Everyone is endowed

with Buddha-wisdom, buddha-virtue. Essential mind is essential oneness. In essential mind there is no separation of subject and object—this is samadhi. Throwing yourself wholly into one-doing, you become this one-doing. This truth comes to you in a flash; you can realize it suddenly for yourself. Isn't everything a flowering of samadhi? The floors are horizontal; the pillars are upright. The willow is green; the flower is red. The sun becomes the sun; the Earth, the Earth; the pillar, the pillar. When the rain falls, it's falling; when the wind blows, it's blowing—north, south, east, west—absolutely free.

Whatever is revealed, that revelation is a revelation of itself—one with itself, clearly. The essence is simple, single. Everything is just one with itself. Be simple; simply do your practice. There is nothing in excess, nothing lacking. Can you see this for yourself? The splendid brilliance of one truth is penetrating all of heaven and earth.

寶真花開
又開如意

平成八年二月十八日

玄白

The treasure house will open by itself, and you will use it at will.

INVESTIGATION

HUMAN BEINGS are thinking creatures, always thinking. We are free to think, but it creates in us this notion that this being who thinks is a solid and fixed *me*, separate from everything else. We get lost in discriminating thought, falsely perceiving something that does not exist. This perspective, from which most people look, is what we call delusion. It is easy to make the mistake of thinking, “This is me, my body. I am here. I have a certain amount of knowledge. I have the habit of doing this and that. I have certain skills I can use to get things done.” We believe it, we hold on to it, and then we feel incomplete, estranged from something fundamental. To fill this void, we look outside for the things we want, worldly things. We spend our whole life in pursuit of things that will not satisfy us, that will not solve this big problem. All suffering originates with the notion of a separate self. But when you do suffer, that is when you start to seek liberation from suffering. So all is well. It all leads to the truth.

In the beginning, we are absorbed in ego-self, and we fail to see our true nature. We feel happy and sad; we cry and we get angry. We think that there is a stable, steady, fixed master who is experiencing all of this. But it is not so; it is all a drama. We come out on a stage and play our role, and when the drama is over, we change our clothes, take off our makeup, drop all of that, and return to the form of the actor outside the role. One way of looking at it is that we have been acting all our life, since we were born. So who is acting? True nature. An ancient teacher had this to say: “The

moment there appeared that which I thought not to exist, that which I always thought to exist no longer was.”

Before teisho I thought that I would get something to drink. My throat was a little irritated, and I didn't want to subject my students to that voice. The kettle was full and there beside it was a big cup. I started to pour from the kettle and I found that the cup was full of milk. “Wow, somebody has left me a big cup of milk,” I thought. I haven't had a cup of milk for several months. “Wow, this is great,” I thought to myself. I reached for it only to find it wasn't a cup of milk at all. It was a pure white saucer laid over the cup to cover it. When I poured the tea in and it was immediately full, I came under the impression that it was a big cup of milk.

To be under the wrong impression—that's how most people live. They are under the wrong impression morning to night, night to morning. And before coming under the wrong impression, before misunderstanding, there is wrong seeing, not recognizing what is, taking one thing to be another. I'm a good example of that, mistaking a saucer for milk. That's why we have to investigate closely what is: to see through this wrong impression.

Mindfully, we are taking a breath. What is the self that breathes this breath? Who is breathing this breath? Some of you will be tempted to answer, “I am breathing” and leave it at that. *I*? That *I* that takes things for granted, the swaggering *I* that is easily irritated when things don't go its way? When you go to bed at night, as you sleep, where is this *I*? Do you will yourself to breathe? “Inhale now—okay, exhale now.” Of course not. Who is breathing? “*I* am breathing.” Who are you? Who is breathing this breath?

This notion of *I*—what is it? What is behind this notion? If you can find it, please show me. You might say, “Well, there's this body here.” Really? Isn't this in part the rice gruel from this morning? You cannot put that rice gruel aside and come here and say, “This is me.” If you look into it very closely, you find that you can put nothing aside and

say, “This is me.” Nothing can be put aside. We exist thanks to everything, interdependent with all things.

How do you answer when you are faced with a question about this *I*? Is this *I* big or little? Is it long or short? Where is this *I* when no thought arises? If you see clearly through this small notion of *I* and look from the perspective of true mind without the clouds of delusion, then your ability to think will be just one more shining facet of life. That’s why all that is needed is for you to cut through discriminating thought. That is why you must investigate very carefully this notion of *me*. Your investigation is a form of one-doing. The zazen posture is the most settled, quiet posture for this investigation, but you can do it anywhere, anytime. Boil down your investigation to the most basic question in order to discover whether or not there is a self. “What is truth?” “What is life?” “What am I?”

Reach the point where you ask this question, where you are no longer able to look away, to look *out there* to some other place for the answer. Each person has some pain, some suffering that fuels their aim to solve this problem, which forces them to seek the answer—it’s a fire burning inside. You have to solve this problem. Who is breathing this breath? Who or what or where is your sanctuary, your guardian, your truth? Truth is limitless, beyond duality, beyond inside and outside. You won’t meet with truth or answer your question by searching restlessly, dualistically. You must *become* this breath. The fathomless universe is this one breath, and you can meet with the one who nurtures you—you can meet with the one who breathes this breath.

Be like a fool, an idiot, a child—but even more of a child than a child. Investigate this one matter. If you continue this way without rest, your mind will suddenly become bright, like a flash of light in the dark. Take a room that was dark for a hundred years, or a black cave dark for thousands of years, and light a candle. There, in an instant, the cave is enlightened. Wonderful, indeed!

Then you are free. The notion of a separate *me* drops away in the letting go of body and mind. Free, you move about in a samadhi of play, a samadhi of innocent delight—you are blended totally with whatever you encounter. When you reach this point for yourself, there is no more separation, just the genuine one using the discriminating function when needed. Anytime, anywhere you stride along, your arms swinging, you are leisurely composed. You are moving in reverence, in worship of everything. The samadhi of play doesn't mean that you play in order to escape something; it doesn't mean that you are trying to satisfy your own notions of what you think would make you happy. It is pure play. Blending as one with whatever you encounter, the genuine one is at play yet taking full responsibility for the world, doing what needs to be done.



法門
無量

平成十六年七月十八日

玄

Dharma gates are boundless.

INTELLECTUAL STUDIES

THERE ARE THOSE who have been studying the Way for years, who have read everything they can, but for whom truth is somehow still beyond reach. You can take any Buddhist text and read it and interpret it—every word of the Buddhist teachings is an exposition of truth—but you have to penetrate that exposition. Truth is not mere explanation—it's what is happening always and forever, what is happening right now. For that you have to let go of self-grasping and release the desire to look this way and that way outside of yourself, the desire to *arrive at* the answers rather than to *be* the answer.

It is far better than reading volumes of books to understand fully just one line, just one single word. Like counting the breath, following the breath, shikantaza, your original face before your parents were born. What is the sound of one hand? Just this, just Mu—the brave will find enlightenment in one instant. Open your palms wide and release your hold. You won't be satisfied by just words; they will always seem foreign, faraway, separate. You must receive truth fully, wholly—you have to become it.

I am always saying one thing and one thing only. Even though you may be hearing it as if I am bringing up various points, expounding on this and that, there is only one point—just this one great matter of life and death. It is so very rare, almost impossible, to meet with the genuine through reading and studying. People hold on to what they have learned or heard as if it were a dear treasure, getting trapped in ideas, pictures of truth, and philosophies. Please

maintain your quest for liberation and maintain your solid intent to earnestly practice the Way, and your practice will maintain and nurture your intent. As you practice, you come to realize that the path is great, vast, limitless, all-inclusive. This Dharma gate is boundless. Yet when you spread yourself too thin seeking Buddhadharma here and there, it may feel like you are getting somewhere, gaining a deeper understanding. Actually, the foundation of your understanding is the ego idea, your own misguided notions and judgments, and even the teachings you receive become inextricably mixed up with that. Of course, you tend to value what suits your small self the most, and that is what you will tend to believe. To live intoxicated by your own ideas of truth is not the way of one who is walking the path.

Truly, no knowledge is required for you to attain enlightenment. We have a very good example of this in the sutras with one of Shakyamuni Buddha's own disciples named Shurihandoku.^[14] He couldn't remember the sutras, much less understand their meaning. He would listen to a Dharma talk, but it would go in one ear and out the other. He was even said to be so dull that he couldn't remember his own Dharma name. Shurihandoku was always scolded by his older brother, who was also a monk, for being such an idiot and not being able to get anything right, and he felt downhearted.

The Buddha came upon Shurihandoku one day when Shurihandoku was crying. The Buddha asked, "What happened to you?" Of course, the Buddha didn't really have to ask that question. The state of a practitioner's mind is obvious to the teacher in the way this person walks, sits, or makes prostrations, and Shurihandoku's state of mind was obvious from his scattered appearance. Shurihandoku answered, "I can't understand any instructions. I'm never peaceful, and my practice just doesn't get anywhere. Things just aren't going right. I can't practice. I can't attain liberation. That's really what I am crying about." When your stomach is really aching for food, how one warm, steaming rice ball set before you can make

you feel! That's how it must have been then when Shurihandoku suddenly felt himself in the Buddha's embrace. Shurihandoku entrusted his entire being to Shakyamuni Buddha. He became like a clean, clear, white sheet of paper, so that he could entirely accept the Buddha's instructions, and that acceptance was revealed so clearly in his practice.

The Buddha taught him to remember just two words: "*Sweep clean*. Take a broom and work with it steadily; continuously sweep. Look right at your feet, and sweep the dust, stroke by stroke. Devote yourself to this one task only, this one stroke. Don't look off. Don't look away from what you are doing, and don't try to do more. Just devote yourself to the sweeping, to this one stroke. Just sweep. Sweep clean." And that's just what Shurihandoku did. Inside and out. Repeating, continuing steadily. Wherever he stepped, wherever he went, there was just this broom. One stroke, one stroke.

Shurihandoku swept all of the grounds around Shakyamuni Buddha's gathering place, and he swept around the gate and then outside the gate—and not little *swish swish swishes* but strong decisive *whoooosh whoooosh whooooshes*. From the beginning, Shurihandoku gave his small judging mind into Shakyamuni Buddha's keeping. He didn't hold on to any baggage, just this stroke, unbroken, this one-doing. He was able to hear the Buddha's message and practice it faithfully. And one day while sweeping, he was able to awaken to his original nature.

So here was someone who could hardly remember his own name, but his name has come down to us. A real practitioner has to become in a sense like Shurihandoku. You have to become a fool.

The only thing demanded of you is your noble urgency. Dogen Zenji^[15] said that one has to practice with the urgency of someone whose head is on fire and who is trying to put it out—this is real urgency.

Even if you want to forget about the necessity to wake up, you just can't forget it—it's always with you. You know that there is no

excuse not to do it, not to wake up. This is what I call noble urgency. When this attitude slowly wells up in you, your step is sure, your eyes shine bright; life looks different when your aim to reach enlightenment is steady and urgent. You are throwing down your little selfish attitude and desires in front of this one great matter. You are leaving your discriminating intellect behind and, like a fool, pouring everything into this one step. We know that it worked for Shurihandoku, and it will work for you, if you will give it your all.



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平成十三年八月十日
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Limitless lotus ocean

SUFFERING

A LONG TIME AGO, an ancient king of Persia assembled all the sages and great minds of his time to investigate the meaning of human life. The king was impatient for the answer, but this investigation takes time, he was told. As the years passed and he waited to receive the fruit of their discussion, he grew old—it took almost all his lifetime. When his death was approaching, he demanded to hear the answer in a nutshell. What is it to be human? This was the answer: “A person is born, suffers, and dies. And there is no knowing what comes after that.” He must have been shocked. But we cannot deny that for most people that is true.

The pain and suffering that each person feels are different, uniquely their own. Suffering comes in endless varieties, endless levels and degrees. There is the suffering of not getting what you want, the suffering of getting what you don't want, the pain of being separated from those you love—and the opposite pain of having to be with someone you can't stand. There is also the pain of not being recognized, causing dissatisfaction and frustration. There are forms of suffering far more extreme than what most people experience in their lives. Suffering can be so intense that even though you need and desire to sleep, you can't. You can't eat because the food won't pass down your throat. You know what it is that you are supposed to do when you wake up in the morning and go through your day, but you can't do it, can't even remember how it's done. You are unable to settle down and concentrate on anything. Such a degree of

suffering can come to you, and can become your life. There are those who meet with this type of deep suffering even as children. Others might meet it in adolescence; something might happen at that time that causes a person to stop believing in life, to fail to see the value of it. Many people go through this—getting up in the morning, going to work, filling their stomachs when they have to be filled—but even if desires are gratified, it doesn't mean anything. Desires are self-propagating, and there will always be the continuation of wanting. The seeds of pain are boundless, but the root of all of them is grasping at *I, me, mine*—the misconception of a self.

Each and every person has problems. Everyone holds something in their heart, and this becomes baggage. These bags become heavy, and living becomes the pain of not being able to lay down those heavy bags for even an instant. Some people's baggage is heavier than others. Some people's suffering is deeper than others. But if you are a human being, that is just equal to saying you are already carrying baggage.

Somebody arrived here at Bukkoku-ji to do zazen for the first time. He had a backpack on his back and bags in both hands. I told him to come in and have some tea with the others, and he proceeded to go and have tea still carrying his bags. That made sense, because he didn't know yet east from west, and he hadn't been told where he was going to rest. So I indicated to him that he could put his bags down there. He put down the bags he was holding, but he still kept the bag on his back. So I figured he had forgotten he was carrying it. He finally noticed that he needed to take his backpack off, and he did. Then I told him, "You still have one more burden you are carrying around, don't you?" He answered, "That bag isn't so easy to lay down." It was good to hear that: it meant that he had reached the point where it would be easy to show him the way, where he could reflect on this heaviness, this burden. Many people still don't realize what they are carrying around and that suffering is the fabric of their lives. The Buddha used to say that this

world is an ocean of suffering. But that is only if you grasp at the waves—the ocean in essence is great freedom.

There are waves upon waves in the great ocean. All kinds of waves appear. You may grasp the crest of a wave and assume that this is *me*. The water of the great ocean certainly appears as waves, but there is no need to grasp at them. The wave is in essence the water of the great ocean. The wave can sometimes seem happy, sometimes fortunate. Other times we may grasp at the wave of bitterness, unhappiness, and pain and think that's all we are. Up and down and up and down—are you satisfied with passing your whole life and dying like this? Grasping at the waves, you will know plenty of worry, plenty of dissatisfaction, and plenty of frustration, because darkness is just a part of the package. Really the waves, the myriad forms, are all a part of the great ocean, encouraging you to wake up to your true nature. Wave after wave after wave are encouraging you, pushing you. The more painful the experience you have, the more it can be a seed for your awakening. You know how easy it is to get caught up in a certain degree of happiness, in a heavenly realm, pleasant and fun. Distracted in this way, you could pass a lifetime. So the waves of pain and bitterness may especially encourage you. Everything is urging you, “Awaken to life! It's your own reality!”

Sometimes it's hard; sometimes it's trying. When the struggle is bitter, the struggle is bitter. This hardship is you; it is your life—you cannot avoid it. The tears of struggle that wet your sleeves—no matter what comes up, it is just as it is. It is your life; there is nothing outside your life. Practice what cannot be practiced; endure what cannot be endured. Resolve to work in this way, and strengthen and freshen your resolve. You will know that your tears were not in vain. You will know that they were not wasted. If you give your all, you will receive all. The tears of pain will become the warm tears of Dharma joy and gratitude. When tears have rotted away the sleeves of your kimono, where will you be able to put all your joy?

懺悔滅罪

慈心門

平成五年六月十八日
玄也

Gate of compassion: repentance removes transgressions.

REPENTANCE

REPENTANCE IS THE MOST proper attitude for a practitioner. Considering your own shortcomings, your own faults, and not laying the blame on somebody else, you can apologize to the one you are opposing. If you are thorough in your practice, you see at once that there is no one opposite, and from that realization you may operate clearly. Perhaps it seems to you that somebody else is obviously 99 percent at fault. But if you can see even the 1 percent where you yourself were at fault, then you can concentrate on this one mistake and you can repent: "I was wrong." A practitioner has to be able to do that. If you can make up your mind to live like this, your sense of having an opposite, or enemy, may just melt away. Some people see this as a weakness and cleverly seek to pin the responsibility on somebody else, but a practitioner has to go beyond this.

We can be very demanding of others, very harsh like a cold, biting autumn wind in our criticism. But toward our own shortcomings, we are like a warm spring breeze, easily excusing ourselves or covering up for our behavior, even while we don't permit the same behavior in others. All humans have this habit. We have to see this for ourselves in ourselves. It's necessary to come to the point where you can shed a tear of apology—even ten thousand liters of tears. If you really have this spirit, then the world changes drastically. Your appearance, your voice, the look in your eyes gradually become softer. More and more, you appreciate the softness.

On the pillars before the altar in the Bukkoku-ji hondo there is an inscription of my teacher's writing. These phrases are the *Verse of the Seven Buddhas*: "Commit no evil. Perform all good. Purify the mind. This is the teaching of all the buddhas." Do not do evil; do good—this is our natural aim. Life is originally pure, and we naturally strive to be in tune with what is. This is both our aim and our starting point. You can ask, "What are good acts and what are bad acts?" The perception of good and evil is different for everyone. Each person has their own standard. So what is good or bad? Good and evil are a function of time, place, and circumstances. Good and bad depend upon what situation a person is encountering. Time, place, and circumstances are showing us frankly what is good and what is evil. The source of time, place, and circumstances is timeless, original mind, clearly revealing itself as it is. True mind is never out of balance or off the mark—but it is not always perceived that way.

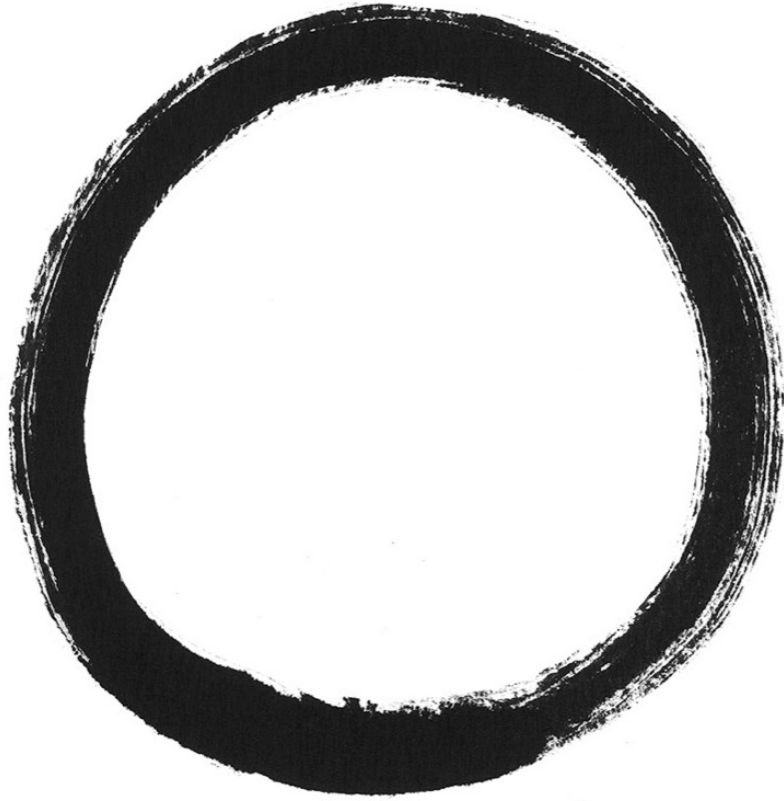
Self-clinging and discriminating intellect are what conceal the original mind. We are always dividing our world, seeing it dualistically, and blaming others for everything. See into your true nature: everything is in essence one. Your accumulated wrongdoings arise from the mind that observes duality—see through that. Repentance is where you see that you were wrong. There is no need to put yourself down, to feel inferior, nor is there need to feel arrogant. As long as you still feel inferior or superior, then you don't see it. Even though you can repent, the habit of clutching at a self is stubborn. It is cold, solid, like ice, so for a time your heartfelt repentance will alternate with instantaneous ego clutching. Fall down, get up, fall down, get up. Repentance, repentance, repentance.

The source of absolute thoroughgoing repentance is zazen itself. Zazen is the practice of repentance. If you truly desire to repent, do zazen. See into true nature, and all wrongdoings are like the dew on the grass under the sunshine of wisdom.^[16] The karmic accumulation of wrongdoing is washed clean. This is true

repentance. In truth there is no self, no *me, me, me*—that is what you have to see. It is just the breath going out, the breath going in.

Recently I was writing calligraphy with a big brush. After I was finished, I went to the sink outside to wash the ink off. I put the brush under the running water, and the water that was flowing down from the brush was black. I stood there for quite a while, but the water colored black continued to flow and flow and flow. It took a really long time before finally the water started to be cleaner and cleaner, and eventually it became completely clear. Sometimes it takes a while to break our karmic tendencies.

We have come a long way fooling ourselves that this *I, me, mine* is real. Because it seems so real, we always pay attention to it, and we always seek to satisfy it. But because of this topsy-turvy delusive thinking, we don't realize our buddhahood. When you look closely at the ego and its workings, then you can realize, "I was wrong; I misunderstood." A tear of repentance will flow down your cheek, thinking, "There is no excuse for that way of being." And now the tears of joy, of gratitude, may begin. Whatever you see, there is this feeling of thanks. Whatever you have seen as being in opposition to you up until now, you can see as your dear, dear child.



平成十九年十一月十八日

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All is well.

ALL IS WELL

“THIS LIFE, ALL IS WELL.” I wrote this with a brush under an *enso** to print and hand out during our rounds of *takuhatsu** to all the people with whom we have a connection, mutually supporting each other. “This life, all is well.” Can we really say this? Is it alright to say that life is good? These days, we hear continuously of people committing various crimes, people of all ages—elders, adults, and youngsters—doing things that we never would have imagined before.

There was a seventeen-year-old boy who came from a very respected family. Both his father and his uncle were doctors. He was good at school, set to go to a prestigious university, and had never presented any discipline problems at home or at school. Then suddenly one day, he entered the home of a couple who were blessed with a peaceful and happy life with their daughter, and he stabbed the woman to death while her husband narrowly avoided the same fate. Afterward, this boy said that he just wanted to see what it would be like to murder somebody. He wondered how it would feel.

“This life, all is well.” “This life is good.” I say this in my talks; I draw it and pass it out. How can I even say this? What about the child, the daughter of the murdered woman? Can I say to her that life is good? The boy didn’t even know them. He just found a house that was open and looked easy to enter, then he started stabbing the two of them.

Can her daughter permit me to say all is good? Shedding many tears, I asked myself this question in deep reflection. And yet I could

only answer, “Yes, all is well.” Of course, tragedy is tragedy and pain is pain, but the essence of life is never touched.

My teacher Daiun Roshi sometimes used to say, “Even if an atomic bomb fell, I wouldn’t be harmed.” Maybe that sounds to you like he was just feeling good about himself, sitting back and enjoying his own realization. But this / he was talking about was not the little / that people cling to and feel limited by. He couldn’t help but try to show us this most precious truth of all beings—all is well.

You might think that this insistence that goodness is universal is arrogant, that it’s easy for me to say everything is just fine, because I have never experienced the horror that family had to experience. But this is not exactly true. The nonduality of self and other is what you wake up to. As Shakyamuni Buddha said, “All beings are my dear and beloved children.”^[17] Their pain is my pain. But simultaneously you also realize—all is well.

Shakyamuni Buddha saw into truth’s foundation thoroughly and profoundly and verified for us that this life, at the source, no matter what happens, does not perish. True life is unborn, timeless. From the beginningless beginning—past, present, and future—the continuity of life is never interrupted. Life is imperishable. You may still see life as something that you would not want to live eternally, but it looks that way only if you view it from the mistaken perspective of a separate self.

Shakyamuni Buddha spent lifetime after lifetime shouldering the suffering of all beings as his very own. His heartfelt, intense aspiration was to somehow attain liberation for the sake of suffering beings. He gave his life over and over to this aspiration. It is said that he took human birth eight thousand times in this world of affliction and pain, laying down his life in the service of others, not caring for personal liberation. As a result, he attained profound realization, thorough awakening to the fact that all beings are buddha. He broke through ignorance for us—to show us the Way.

Die completely the Great Death and you will see how it is to be calm, to be at ease. The Great Death is not throwing away this body—that is an utterly selfish thing to do, the product of the ego. It is tying yourself to a worldly death. True Death in practice is dedicating body and mind—making of them an offering, letting go of selfishness entirely, as your offering. Until you've done so, you can't even imagine it. In the Hannya Shingyo^[18] it says, "No birth, no death." So where did you come from? Always, always, now, here—this one great matter is the one thing for which you can willingly sacrifice your life. It is inherent buddha-nature. Where is the proof? It fills the eyes; it fills the ears. Life is full, but if you cling to the small self, you just can't see it. This is simply karmic inevitability. What is sown is reaped; it is so straightforward. This world is a great exhibition of karmic tendencies, and everyone is unique in their combination of habits. This world is continuously constructed; worlds are continuously constructed from our thoughts, words, and actions—but our foundation, life, is timeless.

All the buddhas and ancient teachers exist here for you. These are our teachers, our guides, who have awakened and refined and polished that awakening, who are pure, great illumination. We are bathed in that great light, all beings are bathed in the radiant light of awake nature. All is well.

安忍



昭和五十六年一月十八

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Patience

PATIENCE

THERE IS A LINE from the sutras that says, “One who practices patience is a great being of deep strength.”^[19] What is being patient? Patience, calm endurance, is doing what needs to be done without looking away. To put it more concretely, it is casting off selfishness. The buddhas and ancient teachers have taught that the person who practices patience is a person of enormous power, but the trend is definitely going in the opposite direction: not toward being patient and enduring but rather being self-indulgent and self-serving. “It’s never enough; it’s never quite right.” That is the basis of our culture and our civilization. Our civilization is one in which we seek to always have it easy, to have it be more comfortable.

This world is one that demands patience. When you come to see things as they are, you will see that it is only humans who are so impatient. The whole world is practicing perfect patience. The pillar that holds up the roof stands tall, appearing to be nothing special. Suppose, though, that the pillars here convened in order to complain of being overworked and undervalued. “Nobody ever says *thank you*.” Suppose that they decided to fall down on the job on all our heads—*boom!*—then their work would be appreciated for the first time. The great bodhisattva pillar is practicing patience, buddha life directly revealed, working all the time for the benefit of others. The pillar never complains. The tatami flooring never discriminates against anyone, picking and choosing who can sit here. A single flower blooms with all its might for whoever happens to look at it.

Everything is buddha. Buddha is no objections—just pure, unbounded freedom. Everything is free. You might ask, “Is this pillar, forced to stand hundreds of years in the same place, free?” Ask the pillar, and you will see a smile, “When you understand things the way they are, you will appreciate how free I am.” The lamp, the pillar, the cushion, the tatami, the candlestick are all so kindly showing us that everything is our great teacher, practicing the *paramita** of patience.

Morning to night, night to morning, each being is simply dedicating itself and receiving the total dedication, the total support, and the perfect nurturing of all-being. There is perfect dedication, perfect obedience. *Obedience* is another word that people these days don't like to hear—we hear it and think, “That sounds weak or spineless.” Actually, there is nothing more precious than open-minded obedience. Obedience means a lack of solidity, a freedom from fixations. Genuine life is perfectly obedient, utterly open—it is a pure, direct response. When you hit the floor—*whack!*—there is a sound. How straightforward, how immediate, how noble! You have only to awaken to what is genuine. To awaken, and to be filled with wonder and gratitude, to know that you can't help but work for the sake of all-being, just as all-being is caring for you. How kindly you are cared for.

Once you have seen into the whole, you can't help but feel immense gratitude. Your tears then will never be tears of loneliness and isolation. The burning fire that you feel will not be the flame of anger. It can't be spoken of, cannot be imagined, but I must try to put some words to it. Anytime, anywhere, every time, everywhere—no matter what you encounter, whatever the time, place, and circumstances, you are touched by deep compassion. Boundless reverence and gratitude naturally arise.

When you finally realize just how caring the universe is, it won't be a matter of three prostrations or nine prostrations. Rather, there will be continual worshipping—worshipping of everything and everyone you encounter. Continual reverence will still not be enough

to fully express what you have realized. I pray that you will dedicate your all, body and mind, in this kind of worship. How can you help but do this? How can you not welcome everything? All-being is supportive, calm endurance and great patience. There is no solidity, nothing fixed, no one who is here, no one at worship—there is just worship. There is only truth, one timeless truth. Continuous patience is your reality.

One who practices patience is a great being of deep power, of great strength, who cannot help but work for the salvation of all beings. “Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to save them”^[20]—the person who is living this vow is practicing calm endurance. Don’t worry that there will be nothing for you to do when you have cast off all selfish desires. With each movement you make in accord with time, place, and circumstance, with each lifting and lowering of your hand, you can worship.

Obediently, nobly, urgently throw yourself into your practice. Determine to practice in this way, and your practice is precisely that of calm endurance. The true self is laid bare, revealed brightly in this one-doing.

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己がなさぬなりけり

平成二十年四月十八日 玄馬

If you set out to do it, it will be done—if you don't, it won't be done;
when something isn't done, it is because you didn't resolve to do it.

THE POWER OF A DAFFODIL

IF YOU SET OUT to do it, it will be done—if you don't, it won't be done; when something isn't done, it is because you didn't resolve to do it. *Can't* never *can*. Indeed, that's the way it is. This one truth is very straightforward: *can't* never *can*.

Everybody has times when they feel and say to themselves, "Somebody like me, I just can't believe that I can really awaken. I can't believe that I, as I sit here, just as I am, am a buddha." We all make excuses for ourselves sometimes. It arises from a sort of intelligent questioning, but this is intelligence in a small sense—we are trusting in our own small judgment, our own small experience, as being infallible. "In this lifetime, I'm just not going to make it." Does that sound familiar? Do you find yourself making these kinds of excuses?

There is a stone in front of my temple that says: "Fukuo-zan Bukkoku-ji." Under the foundation of this stone, we had to put in a thick layer of asphalt in an unplanned sudden repair. The year before, daffodils grew there in the soil, and they bloomed beautifully. If I had remembered, I would have transplanted them elsewhere, but in the rush, we forgot about them—and their bulbs were buried under the thick asphalt. Then in the springtime, as I was passing by one day, I noticed a little light green sprout had broken through—from under that asphalt that even a strong blow from a hammer could hardly budge. The delicate green sprout grew each day, becoming longer and longer, and then sending out a cute little leaf. One week,

two weeks, one month passed—then from the stem, a flower emerged and beautifully bloomed. In the spring breeze, it gently waved.

Every day I went to greet that daffodil in deep reverence. “Where did you get such great power from?” Looking at the little flower, I couldn’t help but cry. “Where did you get such power?” It was so straightforward, the tips of its leaves peeping out as they first emerged from the asphalt, sort of shy but not giving in to the weight of the heavy material above them, not giving in to any obstacle. They gave their all and burst right up and stretched out, but there was no hint in them of haughtiness or self-importance. They weren’t saying, “I came up through this hard asphalt; I broke through, look at me!” No notion of, “Ah, I hate this hard asphalt, and I sure would like to be some place softer.” No taint of superiority, no hint of inferiority—just as it is.

This pretty little daffodil’s effort, its power, this force of the gentle sprouting of its green leaves from their bulb, this noble strength—what is it? Just earnestly, obediently receiving all that there is to receive, just growing and not setting limits upon itself. We have to revere this one little daffodil. Shining in the sunshine, it is truly noble, selfless.

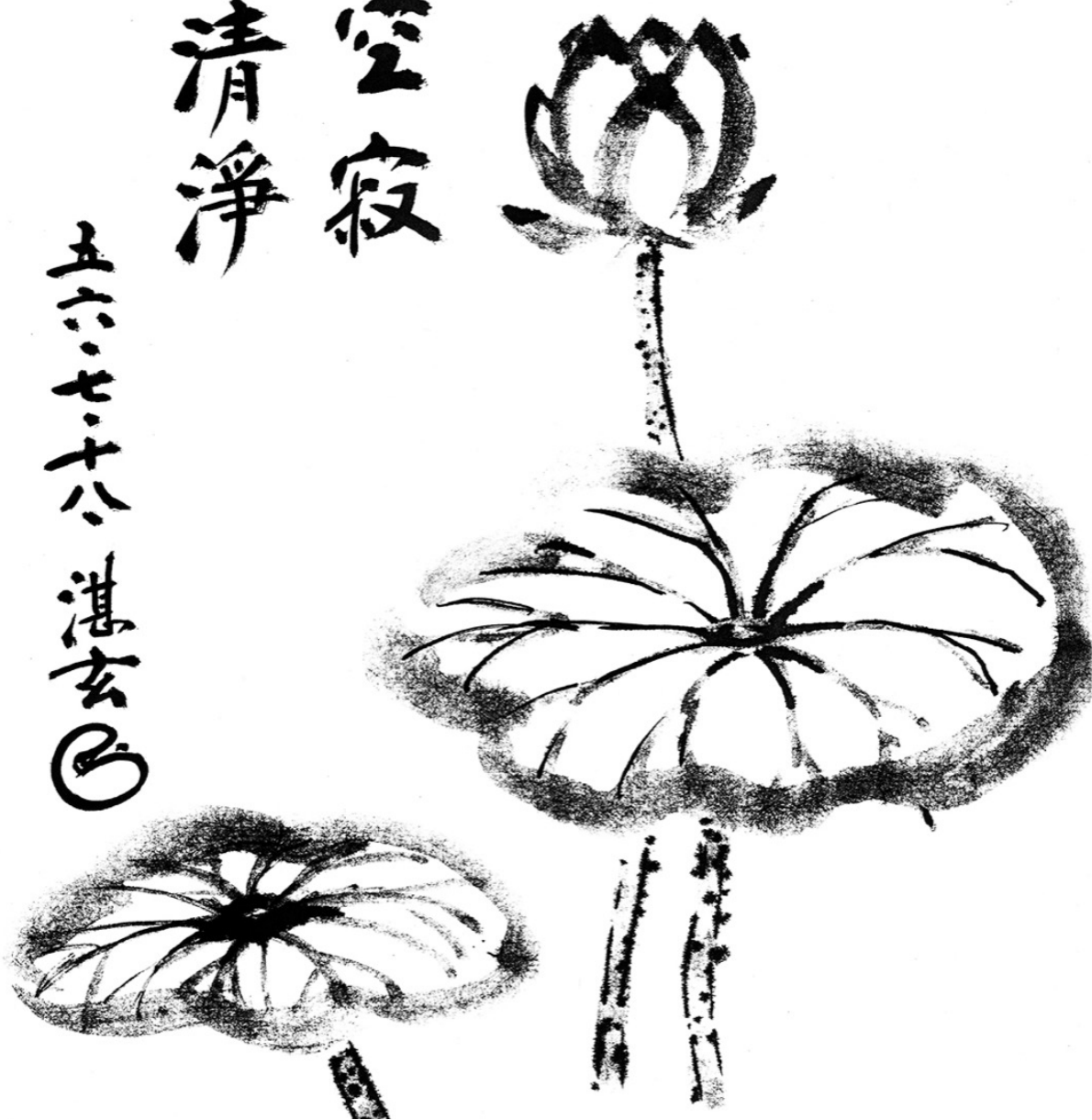
It is not difficult to break through the illusory wall of a separate self. What is difficult is to vacillate. It is so difficult to try to cling to your small ideas of “I can only go this far.” In truth, there is no one who can belittle oneself. There is no *me* to limit you. You can awaken to the life in which everything is revered, because you have this power—you have the same power as the daffodil. The time will come when true nature reveres itself.

Excuses will arise: “My practice just doesn’t seem to cut it, to match up to what it should be. I’m not practicing the way I’m supposed to.” Good, that’s good. Just practice this, here and now, as you have been instructed. Don’t listen or attach to any thoughts or self-judgments. Just do this practice that isn’t what it should be—just

do it, now and here. No matter what comes up, just accept it; just step as you are shown to step, and that means just do this one step. There is no point in ever comparing ourselves to others or imitating others. Just obediently, openly accept it for yourself—with care, make every possible effort. Be totally dedicated, wholly endeavor—don't hold back, cutting through every obstruction. You can do that because you have this power, this great power. Everything—right down to the tiniest weed that grows in the earth, each grain of sand—has this power. Nothing is outside. We are all endowed with it; we receive it all. The power is yours, always and forever. This is your true life. Give it your all.

一切空寂
一切清淨

五十六
湛玄





All is empty; all is pure.

EMPTINESS

DURING THE FIRST DAYS of the New Year, we hold the *Daihannya* ceremony* in the hondo. We take all six hundred volumes of the Maha Prajna Paramita Sutra, and during the morning chanting we fan through them. Pages of sutra are flying in the cold morning air in front of our eyes. It's too fast for the intellect to understand what is written, but the wind spreads the true meaning of the teachings. While doing that, we chant this short *gatha*.*

All phenomena arise from causes and conditions.
Arising from causes and conditions, they have no self-nature.
Having no self-nature, they neither come nor go.
As they neither come nor go, there is nothing to gain.
There being nothing to gain, therefore all is emptiness.
All being emptiness, we call it Prajna Paramita.

This is exactly describing reality. There is a famous waterfall offshore here in the town of Obama, and boats go there to show people the white water falling like a cascading silk cloth. Life is like the rushing water of the waterfall. From a distance it appears solid, but when you look closely, you see that it is in constant movement, continuous change, rushing like a cascade of long white rope. It seems to be there always, but it is not solid. The water that you see in the waterfall has already rushed to the great ocean. Life is alive; it's not stagnant and it's not solid. It has no self-nature. This is perhaps the

easiest way to describe life—it is limitless space, limitless time, never the same state, instant by instant by instant by instant, fresh and new. Birth and death, birth and death, constantly continuing, constantly changing, now, here.

When one is in accord with time, place, and circumstances—now, here—where is there any solidity? Fundamentally no thing abides even for an instant. There is no solid form. All limitless time is just this one instant, body and mind, earnestly in accord, now and here. Everything is open and honest, altering form in accordance with changing conditions. The multitude of forms that appear are not solid. There is just a constant dance of form and function. “All phenomena arise from causes and conditions. Arising from causes and conditions, they have no self-nature.”

When conditions come together, a form comes into being. When conditions change, the thing disappears. Each dot, each speck, is born of causes and brought to life in circumstances. Born of causes and conditions, the world is perpetually fresh and new. Certainly there is no fixed permanent self, and this doesn't apply only to things that you think are outside of you—the very same thing applies to you yourself. There is no self. Yes, there are thoughts, but they are all learned from other people. When you were born, you didn't have any thoughts. Yes, there are feelings. But feelings never appear without an external stimulus; they always arise in relation to circumstances. There is not even “my body.” This body, if we were keeping track of it, would be 240 bags of rice, 450 bottles of milk, 275 carrots, 190 radishes, and so forth. Far from being an independent, separate self—everything is received, given. Trace your steps: How did you get here? Step by step by step, you are dependent on the great earth.

We are always thinking, “I made this; I did that.” Look closely at just one case of “I made this” or “I did that” and you can see that it's all being received, coming together. All things arise through causes and conditions; nowhere is there any solid and abiding self. There is

simply a crystallization of indebtedness, a gift of heaven and earth, thoroughly protected and cared for.

Seeing into the reality of emptiness, no matter what happens, no matter when, where, or how—it is always only perfect original mind. Nothing is in excess, nothing is lacking. Complete virtue, perfect merit. Everyone is receiving all, no matter what form is taken, no matter how it appears. So how can anyone judge and compare and feel envious? Self and other are not two. No self, no other. This / that has been so miserable does not exist. There is nothing artificial in truth—in truth, all is truth. How intimate, how close—this one life can never be taken away, never harmed. This one truth is universal.

Every day, everything appears to be changing, but as long as we continue to think that there are *things* that keep changing, we will see only change. If we are taken in by the surface, by superficial, everchanging conditions, we will always have objections and anxiety. But the source of the source, the truth of truth is immovable; it is universal. This is what we chant in the Hannya Shingyo: “All things are essentially empty. Not born, not destroyed, not stained, not pure, not increasing, not decreasing.” All things are always just one. Above and below the heavens—just one’s self. This life can never be taken away; this life is never lost; this life is never deluded.

True emptiness is wonderful existence. Emptiness is your nature—and what arises and flowers from this emptiness is truth. This emptiness is truly ever fuller and fuller, complete potential. In true emptiness everything can be revealed. True emptiness, absolute emptiness is not separate from this wonderful existence. The absolute and the relative are one. One truth. One breath. This one breath.

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てん ち ど う こ ん

平成十三年二月十八日

玄馬

Heaven and earth—same root, all things—one body

EARTH

HUMANS ARE the smartest of all animals. But we are using this intelligence based on a partial view. We see only differentiation; we see only ten thousand things separate and divided, each and every one in opposition to everything else. Our world is one of duality. “Is— isn’t,” “gain—loss”—we always prefer one of those opposites, and when things don’t go our way, we are upset, irritated, or angry. We are always at war with what is. We are creating suffering for others, and in this way we are creating suffering for ourselves, because there is no other. If we would only create misery for ourselves, then it wouldn’t be as bad—but that’s not the case. We are causing everyone to be miserable.

On this Earth, humans are the beings who are the most arrogant and self-cherishing. This selfish indulgence drags down everything with us, wrecking everything on this planet. How many are the things we do that bring destruction! Whatever we do affects all things. In truth, we should repent and apologize before all beings. But not realizing this, we are trying to have our way with everything, and we are ready to harm whatever we see as standing in our way. We have reached a very dangerous situation: we could conceivably shatter our dear Earth. Because we are mistaken in our vision, we think that the Earth is our possession to make decisions for and to use as we see fit, when in truth we are here thanks to everything, thanks to the Earth, thanks to the sun, thanks to the moon. We are protected and

cared for and given life by everything. We just have to shift our perspective from self versus other to the oneness of all things.

Recently, a spaceship took off in order to orbit just around three hundred kilometers above the Earth's surface. Those aboard could look down from that small distance. When asked how it felt, an astronaut said, "Space is vast and completely dark black. There are bright forms, but no twinkling at all. Looking at the Earth in this way—how precious, how warm it is. This is the chance to appreciate and see life deeply in all its vitality." This astronaut spoke with the spirit of seeing and worshipping the Earth itself as the one mother of life. All things are friendly—as the seas deepen inwardly, as the mountains and earth deepen to greenness, lively shining bright blue. He was deeply moved and changed by this encounter.

In its essence, all of life is in harmony, getting along, working together, mutually helping and protecting each other. Everything and everyone is doing its best, being itself, together with all beings. This abundance that we are blessed with, this reality, can't be expressed. But how wonderful it is to be able to deeply appreciate, right in your bones, this blessing that is our Earth. I wish everybody could have a chance to go up into space and look back, to be able to see how wonderful our world is, how superb and beyond complaints. We are actually the whole universe as we are now, as we sit here receiving all of life—and we are responsible for the world. We can't help but answer to this great wonder, "Everything is myself!"

Some years ago, it appeared in the newspaper that American astronomers had located galaxies thirteen times bigger than our Milky Way by means of powerful telescopes. Since then many other discoveries—discoveries of vastness, discoveries of limitlessness—have been made. I feel so happy when I read these things. Of course, everything is limitless! This limitless one truth is right here. It's not some place on the far side of a telescope: this limitless one truth is right here and we are living it. It's a wonderful life. What if you could see that this whole Milky Way is right here in your belly?

The discriminating intellect doesn't begin to approach this. But on a little trip just above the Earth, we have the opportunity to suddenly appreciate—even just through human emotions—what we have: this precious world floating in limitless space! The astronaut's view of life must have suddenly changed. Living here on this Earth, we are lost in questions of this and that, good versus bad, gain versus loss, delusion versus enlightenment, all caught up in discrimination and opposition. But we are able to do this practice and experience the inherent oneness for ourselves right here. It is not a question of being a few kilometers above the Earth, appreciating it through artificial means like the astronaut. It is about being empty, not grasping, seeing the world as it is. You will be able to see this world is this big, this free, this precious. Heaven and earth; same root. All the myriad things; one body. You can know it for yourself; you can be reborn to the world as it is.

全てを裁断し全てを悦ぶ

七

心

平成六年五月十八日

玄馬

Joyful mind; gratitude for everything, enjoyment in everything

GRATITUDE OF A COCKROACH

NOT KNOWING THE MEANING of human life, most people become engrossed in all sorts of pursuits, trivial things that they get completely lost in because they are unaware of the one important matter: the great work of awakening to one's true nature. Not even in their dreams do they imagine that such a great matter exists, that such important work can be done with this human body, with this life. This inability to meet with the teaching may continue for countless lifetimes. There is an ongoing inability to appreciate this life that we receive, to know gratitude and to repay our debt of gratitude.

I just feel so blessed to be alive. Thanks to the inner harmony, the interdependence of the total universe, I am alive. Everything in the universe is working together, dedicating itself completely so that I am nurtured and protected. Life is bright; life is dear; life is a boundless, priceless, perfect jewel. You have been born as a human being so you can attain this understanding: "Thanks to everything, I have this life." When you finally grasp things in this way, then you are finally fully human. You are indebted deeply to each and every other human being; there are no enemies and no one to be despised. This is not an idealistic view. I have known even four-year-olds who are aware of their deep connection with others, grateful for the blessings they receive, and live their lives with this in mind. I know sixty-something-year-olds who still hold themselves to be the dearest in the world, with no time to consider others and spending their days trying to have it easy, eat good food, and arrange everything to suit

themselves. How about you? Are you reverent toward all of life? Are you grateful to all things? True gratitude is gratitude for all of life, whatever form it may take. How sad it would be to spend this life without appreciation and gratitude.

In this modern world, wrapped up in all the luxury and convenience that we have, many people are still unable to appreciate how blessed we are. That is very true in Japan. Our hearts did not become rich when our country became rich. Too much material wealth makes the heart poor. We need to reassess the situation and reassess our lives. We consider ourselves the most evolved of life-forms, and yet we act like we are the most disconnected from the whole of life. We take everything for granted, and we don't show gratitude for all the blessings we receive. Sometimes when people say thank you, it sounds like they don't really mean it. It is a real pity.

Let me tell you one story about a little insect from whom we could all learn something.

I missed breakfast one morning when we were going to pay a visit to an elderly couple who were moving to live with their children. We were going to pray at their family altar, which they had devotedly tended for many years. We would then move it to the new location in their children's home. I had left a steamed bun in my room uneaten, and before departing from Bukkoku-ji, I packed the bun in my bag, planning to eat it on the road. Later, when I got hungry in the car, I pulled it out of my bag and started to unwrap it, and there I found a little cockroach munching away on the bun. We stopped the car, and I was just about to put the cockroach and the bun outside in the grass when I realized what I was doing. As long as he was happily munching away, the little cockroach would be fine. But once his stomach was full he would look around and find himself in a strange place, out in the world all by himself, where he might find himself lost and lonely without his mother and father and brothers and sisters. I

put him back into my bag, wrapping him loosely in the paper with the bun, saying, "You come on this trip with me."

We went about our day praying at the altar in both its original home and in the new one. The children treated us to a nice meal, and we drove back to Bukkoku-ji. As soon as I returned to my room, I opened the paper with the bun in it to find that the cockroach wasn't crushed, and I was very glad. I apologized to it for dragging it off on this long, tiring journey, and together with the bun I put him in the corner of my room, just as he had been.

When I sat down to work at my table, I heard a rustling sound. I looked down to see the little cockroach come right before me on the table, directly before me, and facing me, it stopped. Then it seemed to lower its head as if to bow and say, "Thank you." I put it back in the corner with its bun, and I went back to what I was doing—but again, I looked down to see that it had followed me back and was standing straight before me again with an attitude of gratitude, as if to say, "Thank you for caring for me; thank you for guarding me this day." There was no doubt that the cockroach was expressing its gratitude to me for having safely brought it home. It had understood and appreciated the compassion shown to it. I took it back to its bun again, saying, "I understand what you are saying. It's okay. It's okay." It didn't come back again, and later on I saw that it was enjoying its family, the ten or so cockroaches who were living in the corner of my room.

I was amazed and moved. The cockroach understood and made an effort to come right in front of me to say thank you. Its attitude of gratitude was so sincere, I couldn't help but think that here we are, human beings blessed with so much goodness and care, and we often spend our days complaining and dissatisfied. We could learn something from that cockroach. If we are embroiled in dissatisfaction and objections, even this little cockroach could laugh at us. We have a saying: "Those who appreciate blessings are few." Those who realize the value of sacred life are few indeed.

That is why we have to give our all to practice. We have to break through our selfish disposition and be able to appreciate all the things we are blessed with, appreciate life itself. Giving our all to zazen is showing gratitude. We have to be able to practice in this way. During zazen, a kind heart must fill your every breath. Each one-doing is repaying the debt of gratitude to all the mothers and fathers who have given us birth.



平成十四年六月十八日

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Mind of the Way

LEAVING HOME‡

QUITE OFTEN PEOPLE talk to me and complain about their life situation. Some of them say, “If I didn’t have so many duties, surely I could go deeper in my zazen.” Or, “If only I could become a monk, then I could practice seriously.” Of course, that is not to say that you shouldn’t make changes in your life that would support your practice. Following the guidance of a realized teacher is indispensable. Being able to attend sesshin is also a great blessing. To join this gathering of people who come together with the aim to understand this most important matter, this great matter, is a precious opportunity. However, when people bring these types of complaints to me, I try to point out to them that the only real obstacle they have is that they blame their life circumstances for their inability to practice wholeheartedly and awaken. Becoming a monk or not is not the most important factor.

We have two extreme examples that point this out. The first is of someone who had a deep, deep karmic connection with the Buddha himself—his own cousin Ananda. For many years, Ananda stayed by Shakyamuni Buddha’s side as his attendant, hearing his teachings and

‡ The word *shukke* (出家) in Japanese means literally “leaving home,” but it is also synonymous with “becoming a monk.” Both translations are used interchangeably in this chapter.

receiving Shakyamuni's instructions from morning to night, day after day. He was very bright and had a great memory. He could hear Shakyamuni's words once and record them perfectly, like a computer, and he could repeat them entirely if needed. He was right at the Buddha's feet, and although he could feel the breath from Shakyamuni's nose as he breathed, Ananda could not let go. He was not able to receive the transmission of truth from the Buddha. He grasped for dear life at the idea of self, and when Shakyamuni was on his deathbed, Ananda cried in great despair, and cried himself into oblivion. We see his reclining form in the paintings that depict the Buddha's nirvana. Everyone is crying as Shakyamuni gives his last sermon, but they are listening intently. Ananda had not been able to awaken yet, and the Buddha was dying. Ananda was concerned with his own welfare, and this is clearly the reason why he could not awaken to Shakyamuni's Dharma teaching. He had the intention to listen and practice sincerely and wholeheartedly, but he continued to hold himself most dear. He continued to see himself as the center of the world.

When the council met after the Buddha's death in order to record the teachings, all those who had awakened to Shakyamuni's teachings were invited. But Ananda could not join them, even though he would have been able to repeat all the Buddha's words. If one joined who had not received the very life of the Buddha, that unawakened student's words could not be completely trusted. Mahakashyapa, the Buddha's senior disciple, knew he had to do something to help Ananda awaken. Mahakashyapa was inside a room with the door locked and told Ananda to come in, and Ananda easily entered through the keyhole. The meaning is that if you are grasping at an idea of self, you won't be able to enter—if you have cast off body and mind, then you can come on in. Ananda finally saw that there was something more important than his own life—all of Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings were at stake. Now Ananda was invited to the council, and he was able to faithfully repeat the

Buddha's words. All those present nodded in assent to Ananda's recitation. But his awakening didn't come through being blessed with a perfect practice situation—it came from his final resolution after the Buddha had already passed away.

On the other hand, there was an elderly woman in the hospital for stomach surgery. Her priest, a member of the Pure Land school,* told her to chant *Namu Amida Butsu* over and over. He came to call on her in the hospital a week later and saw that her practice wasn't going well. She didn't have the strength to move her mouth and repeat the chant. He then told her to just be one with the noisy alarm clock at her side—*tick, tick, tick*—and so she did just that. Carefully, with full attention, she continued to be one with the clock—she did it with all her heart. And she attained realization. The priest came to visit her again, and she thanked him from the bottom of her heart. “Thanks to you, thanks to everything,” she was able to say. She could continue to live in the Pure Land, now, here. She was an extremely ill elderly woman who had just had major surgery, but it didn't stop her from realizing the Way.

Walking the path of practice sincerely, step by step—this is what leaving home really means. We usually act from the standpoint of self. We believe ourselves to be independent, fixed entities making our way through this world, and we seek only to defend, pamper, and nurture ourselves. Leaving home is renouncing that self-centeredness. That pent-up, pitiful, enclosed *me* is dropped. Becoming a monk means vowing to work for all beings, not for some falsely assumed and enclosed *me*. It means opening your heart to all beings. This is the decision that is made to work for the benefit of all beings. It is the most natural decision, because true life is the perfect interdependence of all beings—each being arises thanks to all beings. When you have realized this, when you have accepted this, you can't help but want to be here for all beings. This world of blessings that you receive is naturally transformed into devotion.

Devotion is expressed through your dedicated practice. This devotion is making this one step. Regardless of your outer garments, this is the meaning of leaving home. In doing this practice, the *me* notion is dropped. If one person has this aspiration, giving their life in devotion to this one truth, to the deep faith in the teaching of all the buddhas, that person has left home. This is becoming a monk in your heart. There is also physically giving one's body to becoming a monk, but following the path of liberation is truly leaving home. We walk the Buddha Way; we are in the process of attaining the Way—this is the path of awakening. When you have resolved to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings, once your aspiration is true and genuine, then true and genuine practice is certain to follow. If your aspiration is not genuine, your practice will not become genuine. It's very straightforward.

It is said that when one sole person becomes a monk, nine generations of relations attain rebirth in heavenly realms. *Relations* here means people with whom you have close karmic connections—parents, children, siblings—but far more others, distant relations too, are saved by this one truth brought to life. All beings are working together in mutual devotion; all beings are deeply, fundamentally related. Through your deep aspiration, your intense practice, and your awakening, you can protect all beings. The great example is Shakyamuni, the World-Honored One: “All the three worlds are my own home; all living beings are my dear beloved children.” The vow to let go of everything is made for all time. If you earnestly desire to lay down everything to know truth, that desire reverberates through all lifetimes and it is never lost. If you practice with this mind, no matter what your circumstances are, you will be able to awaken to your essential buddha-nature.



平成五年二月十八日

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The one great matter

LOST TREASURE

USING AN ANALOGY from worldly common sense, if I ask, “What is the treasure of all treasures?” someone might say that it is something like a ring with a giant diamond. Probably if you are practicing the Dharma, you don’t care much for material things like diamonds, but please bear with me. Suppose you are at a festival in the middle of an enormous crowd, and this ring that means so much to you suddenly slips off your finger and falls to the ground. What do you do? Do you think casually, “Well, I dropped my ring.” Or do you think, “When the carnival ends and all the people leave, I will come and look for my ring”? Or maybe you gingerly poke around looking for it, embarrassed what people might think of you. Is this what you *really* do? No, you let go of everything and just dive immediately and start searching. You forget yourself in pursuit of that thing that is so precious to you. You don’t care who is looking at you, how you look, or what anybody thinks.

When you compare this to practice, how many people are there who let themselves drift on the cushion, getting carried away enjoying their thoughts and only doing practice when they happen to remember it? Those who practice in this way won’t find the treasure. You have to go after it single-mindedly. You forget yourself—until you have the treasure in the palm of your hand, you are not interested in anything else. There is no time to cling to anything, to follow your thoughts and notions and dreams, and to reject anything. It is just as if you had lost the treasure that is you yourself.

Maybe sometimes a thought comes up, a feeling like, “Oh today I am not feeling so well; I am just not at my best. There is no use in practicing when I am like this. When I feel better, I can practice strongly.” You might just like to take a break, sit back, and start to convince yourself that it’s a waste of time. But there is no question of waiting for the situation to get better. There is only practice now, as you are, as it is. You are practicing that which is beyond conditions. Daiun Roshi used to say during sesshin, “What is wrong with everybody? You are not getting serious about this! Right where you are standing, just some meters beneath you, there is a big treasure box—all you have to do is dig and it’s yours. People who are interested in a worldly, material treasure box wouldn’t think of this or that, or be carried about by moods and emotions—they would just dig.”

As you seek the treasure of true nature, you must be this single-minded. There is no need to take breaks; there is always and only just now. Practice is now. There is no time to indulge in likes and dislikes, no time to pay attention to your moods and physical condition, no time to make excuses. All those things are what we call *attachment*. If you are practicing sincerely, that means nonattachment. The example of a diamond ring or a treasure box is weak, because the treasure of yourself is beyond comparison. You are in possession of this treasure *now and always*. It is the nagging feeling that there is something underneath the surface, and this something is true nature. There is only one thing to do in this life—it is to meet with your true self. It would be a great shame if you did not awaken to this wonder, if you did not prostrate yourself before this wonder which is all, which is everything in the universe. It would be a shame not to come to appreciate and celebrate real life.

On the bottom of the great wide ocean, there is said to live a turtle who comes up to the surface for air once every ten thousand years. The likelihood of this turtle coming up for air just as a particular floating log with a hole in it comes passing by and then

poking its head in the hole is pretty slim. But to poke its head through the hole in this log is what the turtle has longed for for eons. We are all in the process of buddhahood. The likelihood of you being able to be born human and to hear the Dharma and practice it as you are doing right now is about that slim. But look—here you are, listening to the teaching and practicing it. Please understand that everything has come together in such a way so that you are able to practice. Everything is united behind you within this one step that you make. And you are taking that step. Do not waste this precious opportunity.

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平成元年八月十六日



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Bodhi-mind: once you have determined to walk this path, even with the pace of a snail,
great happiness. great happiness

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BODHI-MIND

A YOUNG GIRL once told me that she wanted to be able to live to be a hundred years old. I asked her why, and she replied that she wanted to be able to help others who are suffering for as long as she could. A woman of sixty-two on hearing about this young girl's vow from me was very moved. She had never had that aim herself in all her years—that desire to live to work for others. The young girl's wish caused the older woman to reflect on herself and to reflect on her reason for living.

What is our reason for living? “I vow not to cross over to the other shore until all beings have crossed before me.” With the feeling of wanting to live to be a hundred years old for the sake of others, the groundwork is laid for the bodhisattva vow: “I vow not to cross over to the other shore until all beings have crossed before me.”

Many people in the world live only with the desire to be in a good place themselves, wanting their own tranquility. But when we raise the bodhi-mind, there is the desire for others, all others, to have tranquility, peace of mind, and happiness. This isn't just a superficial kind of happiness that turns with the tide in and out of sadness—it is real peace of mind that can't be lost, can't be shaken; which has no lack, dissatisfaction, or anxiety.

What is the situation that we see around us? Lots of pain and suffering. Everyone is in some form of pain. There is a story from one of Shakyamuni Buddha's past lives: There was a great fire in the forest. All the creatures living in the forest ran and ran to escape.

One little parrot flew to a nearby lake and filled its beak with water, then she flew toward the fire, carefully trying not to lose any, and dropped the little bit of water on the fire. She flew back and forth, carrying a drop of water in her beak, each time to drop on the blazing forest. “What good will it do, little parrot? How can you put out the blazing fire with a tiny drop of water?” the demons asked her, trying to make her doubt herself. But she didn’t let those words into her heart. She just single-heartedly continued, back and forth, back and forth, putting all her energy into extinguishing the flames. Finally, exhausted from her efforts, she dropped into the fire and burned to death. But a god in the sky saw her courage and dedication to put out the forest fire and was filled with such compassion for the little parrot and a grief so deep that he shed a great, great tear—which extinguished the flames of the forest.

This is our practice. Our every breath in zazen is a tiny drop in the parrot’s beak. It is not useless; it is not wasted. Every effort you put in is not a waste. There is nothing else for you to do. Because if you don’t, the fire of delusion—the fire of ignorance, of spiritual darkness—still continues to blaze.

It is said that the practice of even a beginner is itself the entire original realization. Even if you are not awake yet to your essential nature, your true nature is absolutely awake, and from that awakened nature wells up the vow to put others first. Having made that vow, you stay with it, with this practice that you have been given to do. You don’t stop to consider whether or not things are going your way. You’re not finding yourself consumed by displeasure and dissatisfaction, wanting things to be different. Always, strongly in your heart is the vow: “I want to give myself to others; I want to give others peace of mind.”

This is the Dharma gate of liberation, the gateway to great peace. It is the practice of Buddhadharma as it has been transmitted. It is the correct zazen posture—settle the body, settle the breathing, settle the mind. When you practice this way, you enter the Dharma

gate of peace. This is a fact. It is the teaching of Dogen Zenji and the teaching of all the ancient teachers from the time of Shakyamuni Buddha.


Everyone should make a vow not to cross over to the other shore before all beings have crossed. Though of humble appearance, the person who has awakened to bodhi-mind is already a teacher of all humankind.^[21] Even a girl of seven becomes a teacher of the four classes of seekers^[22] and the compassionate mother of all beings—for in the Buddha Way, men and women are completely equal. This is one of the highest principles of the Way.^[23]

Once you have awakened to the bodhi-mind, even wandering in the six realms of existence^[24] and four forms of life^[25] becomes an opportunity to practice this altruistic vow. You have no need to be concerned—just do this one-doing; just take this one step. Even if until now you have vainly wasted your time, you should quickly make this vow. When you have acquired sufficient merit to realize buddhahood, you should place that merit at the disposal of all sentient beings in order for them to realize the Way. Throughout time immemorial, there have been those who have sacrificed their own freedom in order that their life might be of benefit to all sentient beings, to help them to cross over first to the other shore.

Look at the ant. What a wonderful example in practice the ant can give us. On a hot summer day, you can see the ants making their way, hauling a load many times their weight with all their might. It is not just the food for this one ant's stomach; rather, the ant puts its entire being into carrying this burden of food for the group to eat. On a rainy day, the water gushes and forms a little river on the path where the ants are carrying their food. At that time, ant after ant after ant will give up their lives to form a bridge so the others following behind can cross safely. "I vow not to cross to the other shore before all beings have crossed before me." This is the ant's practice—letting go of attachment to the body, letting go of the body. The ant is the teacher of all teachers.

南無佛

平成十九年五月十八日 福應山佛國寺



Taking refuge in the Buddha

TAKING REFUGE

ON MANY OCCASIONS, like the precepts ceremony, we start by taking refuge in the Three Treasures. We say, “*Namu kie butsu, namu kie ho, namu kie so,*” meaning “I take refuge in Buddha; I take refuge in Dharma; I take refuge in Sangha.” It is said in the *Shobogenzo** that the buddhas and ancient teachers in both India and China correctly transmitted this practice of reverently taking refuge in the Three Treasures. Taking refuge is at the heart of Buddhism, and it’s presented to us very clearly so that we can walk the Way without getting lost, sidetracked, or confused. We take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha.

The word *namu*, which comes from Sanskrit, and the word *kie*, which is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese word, both have the same meaning—to entrust our body, mind, our whole being to Buddha. In other words, we go back to our true home. Everyone should be taking refuge; there is a great, mysterious power in that practice.

Some time ago, we had a dog here named Koro. Eventually, one autumn he got sick, and he was lying before the temple gate in the only bit of sun that shines here at that time of year. I just happened to be seeing a guest off at the gate, and I found Koro lying there. I checked and realized that he had stopped breathing. I held him in my arms on my lap and chanted, “*Namu kie butsu, namu kie ho, namu kie so.*”

And Koro, who had stopped breathing, opened his mouth after I finished chanting the three refuges and howled—he answered! Again, I chanted the three refuges, and again he howled after me, and it was the same after the third time. His mouth opened wide in order to howl, and then he was cold, not breathing. With his dog's body, he had this close karmic relationship with Buddha. He was eating buddha food, the source of all existence, the source of life, the light of all life, the Three Treasures—Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. “You are the master of life. Be in peace; go in peace; practice in peace”—Koro heard the three refuges just marvelously; he took the three refuges just marvelously. How could he so perfectly return to the source, to this truth, the truth of our oneness, spread out wide before us? Nothing is missing.

So when we say, “I take refuge in Buddha”—what do we mean here by *Buddha*? What is it that we really take refuge in? Several times a day during chanting, we chant, “*Ji Ho San Shi I Shi Fu*,” and we tend to understand it as “In the ten directions, the three worlds, all of the buddhas and bodhisattvas.” But when you look into it more clearly, becoming more intimate with this, you see that the three worlds, the ten directions—all is buddha, all is bodhisattva. All space and all time is buddha—from the very beginning it has been so; now it is so. That's what Shakyamuni said when he finally came to see, “It has always been so; I just couldn't see it. Listening to it all the while, I couldn't hear it. My sense of the world was mistaken. The world I have now awakened to is buddha-nature. All beings are endowed with buddha-wisdom, buddha-virtue. All beings, sentient or not; the grasses, the trees, all beings are realized buddha-mind.”

We receive the blessing of the sun all the time. The sun is just one obvious example of bodhisattva work. We receive all the blessings of this sunshine, but look how we complain, just because it's a cloudy day. We get no bill to tell us what our debt is, so we are all taking it so easy. Suppose a bill came to us from the sun for its services. What would it say? We are all depending on the sun. You

might refuse to consider such a question because you think it's silly, but without the sun, you wouldn't have a single thread of life. So a bill from the sun might read, "Your life." The sun, great bodhisattva, is burning its body for the warmth and life of all beings. It's the same with this Earth—it is supporting all of us, nourishing us.

All the ten directions, the three worlds, are all-buddha, all-bodhisattva—this is what I want you to open your eyes to and see. All is perfect harmony, complete. But this bodhisattva work isn't thrust into your face—it just quietly and unobtrusively shines throughout your world.

It is said that when Shakyamuni Buddha was born, he walked in all the directions freely, without limits. With his left hand pointing directly at the earth, and his right hand toward the heavens, he said, "Above and below the heavens, I alone am the Honored One." Some people are so literal, asking, "How could a baby do that?" So I will give you the answer—he was born and he gave a great cry: *WHAAA!* Originally, always, life is noble—this is his cry. Of course, one person saying that he alone is great—this kind of arrogance is not what Shakyamuni Buddha meant: All the universe, this world, alone, is the Honored One.

One *bonsho** strike—*bom!*—is heard above and below the heavens: bonscho-buddha. The accompanying chant says, "Hearing the one sound of the bell, I vow together with all sentient beings to leave the world of suffering and attain realization." The sound of the bonscho is a crystal clear Buddha sermon, the voice of Shakyamuni. "Above and below the heavens, I alone am the Honored One." The bonscho is proclaiming this to you, about you—these are the words of your freedom, your reality. The wind blows and the ginkgo nuts fall, landing on the roof and announcing, "Above and below the heavens, I alone am the Honored One." Carpenters have been working on the shrine next door—*kan, kan, kan, kan*—pounding with their hammers. They came during sesshin, teaching very energetically—*kan, kan,*

kan—I am so grateful to them. “Don’t you realize it yet? Don’t you see it yet?” Everything is asking us this question.

You are being encouraged constantly, reminded that this is it. You are continually urged by everything in the world not to look away. Encouragement is coming your way nonstop. *Don’t you realize it yet?* The entire world, everything you see, all that surrounds you, all that you are, is the true teaching laid down for you. The ten directions, three worlds, all is buddha, all bodhisattva. All gates are open; nothing blocks the way.



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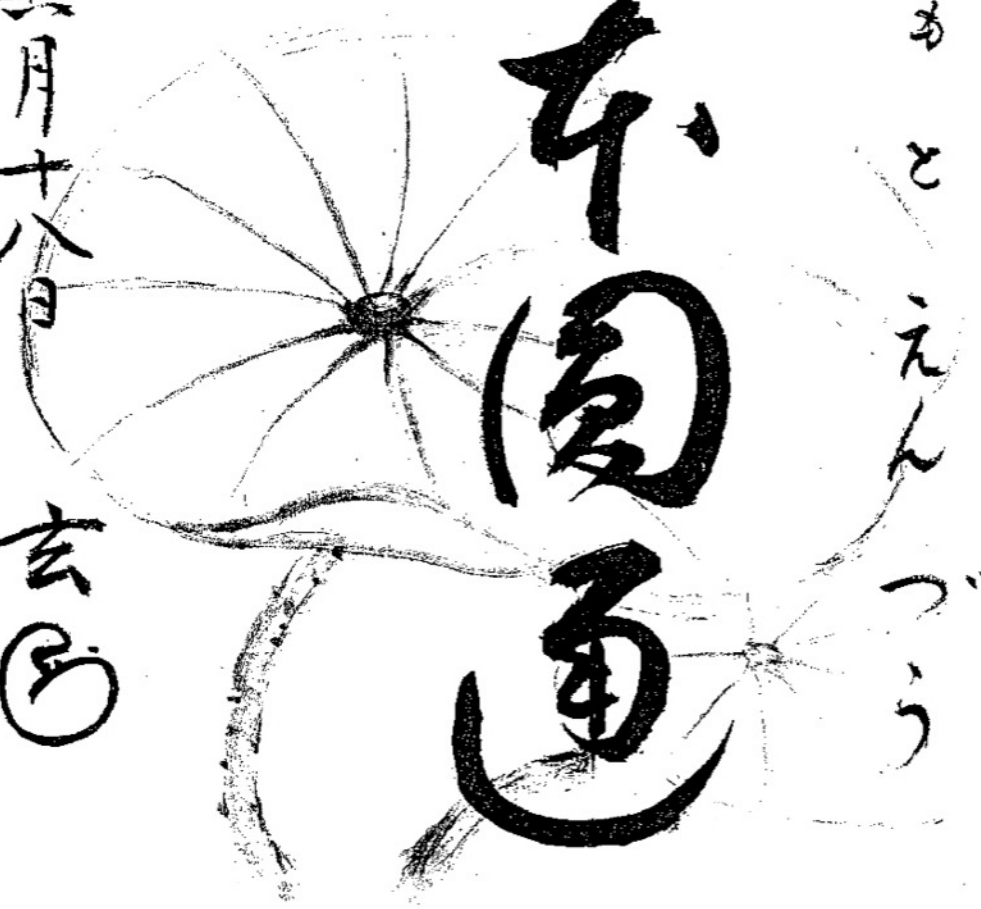
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The Way is originally perfect and all-pervading.

SELLING WATER BY THE RIVER

“THE WAY IS ORIGINALLY perfect and all-pervading.” These are the first words from Dogen Zenji’s *Fukanzazengi*.^{*} There is a big calligraphy piece carved in wood hanging above the zendo entrance here at Bukkoku-ji with those exact words. They describe your reality. “The Way” means truth, your true nature, your reality, the genuine you. Already, before you make any effort, the Way is as it is, perfect and universal. Originally, essentially, by nature, the truth is your nature as it is—you are perfect and all-pervading. This is a description of who you really are, of your original mind. This is the same thing Shakyamuni Buddha said after his awakening: “Wonder of wonders! All beings, without exception, are endowed with the virtue and wisdom of Tathagata!”

So why practice then? What is practice all about? This is a good question. It is a question that has to come to you at some point. It has been asked before. “If everything is inherently perfect and complete, why is it necessary to undergo any training?” Dogen posed this question to his elder brother in the Dharma and later to any teacher he could find, but he wasn’t satisfied by the answers. So he didn’t just sit there and think about it. If you try to figure it out intellectually, logically, through discriminating thought, you are turning your back on truth. Dogen went to China and trained very hard, sitting zazen day and night until the answer came through his practice. Later he wrote, “Though each person has the Dharma in

abundance, without practice, it won't appear. Without realization it can't be obtained."[\[26\]](#)

Sometimes comparing it to something as simple as food makes it easier to understand. If it were a food, it would be a heavenly sweet ambrosia—it is a real feast. And it is all yours, prepared just for you—but if you look at it as if it is faraway, outside of yourself, then you don't know what you have. If you don't bite into it, you won't be able to taste it. And if you don't taste it, you won't be fulfilled. That's why we say, "Do zazen." Only then can you appreciate this feast.

This feast is beyond conditions. It nourishes you always, but you never get overly full. You are always being nurtured just perfectly, just right. This feast is bottomless. You can take it in with peace of mind and without hesitation. This feast is both grand and minute. You can taste it and taste it and taste it in limitless flavors, and it is all for you. What a waste it would be not to receive it. "The Way is originally perfect and all-pervading." When you finally open your mouth and accept the feast, you will see for yourself that in fact originally there was nothing difficult about it—it is the reality, originally perfect and universal. It applies to each and every being. There is absolutely no reason for you to hesitate or look away—there is nothing for you to worry about. You are not trying to get somewhere; your original nature is complete. You are blessed; you are blessed; you are blessed. Treat this great feast with kind and loving care. You are always and forever feasting just right. So who is it who is looking hungry? Are you eating your fill and looking like you are getting nothing? Come on—chew it well; taste it well. Send it to your stomach to be digested. It's all being taken care of for you. You are nourished; this feast gives you life.

Daiun Rodaishi used water as an example instead of a feast. In his last words in this life he said:

For forty years, selling water by the river.
HA HA HA! All my efforts had no merit.

*KATZ!**

No merit—great merit. Do you know it or not?

Struggling to sell water by the river, he had just this one wish: “I want you to drink this water.” Gulp it down; become the water—it flows always fresh and alive. You are the great river, right from the beginning. This is what Daiun Roshi could belly-laugh about, and that belly laugh says, “All my efforts had no merit.” I was just wasting time, but this waste is also something to laugh deeply over. “No merit—great merit. Do you know it or not?”

Do you need any water? Are you still thirsty? All the thousand buddhas and the ten thousand ancestors spent their lives busily selling water by the great river. You, here, don’t hesitate—please, drink the pure Dharma water—just gulp it down. Intimately receive life as it is, all of life. Let true nature be itself—let yourself receive it all openly. Receiving this water, you become lively, clear, and bright. Each step can be made in a spirit of appreciation, repaying the kindness you receive. You may accuse me of saying the same thing over and over, but nothing in the universe is ever repeated. It is always perfectly new and fresh—always.

Everything, everyone is precious. Everyone is, just as they are, the perfect revelation of truth. But living in the shadow of a lighthouse is dark for a time. Just do your practice—everything is fine. You are the treasure; you are the jewel of all jewels already. You have no need to restlessly seek about. Do not grasp; do not hold; do not linger—let go of everything. Do not grasp even letting go. Just do your practice with joy and confidence.

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The process of buddhahood; every day is joy.

THE PROCESS OF BUDDHAHOOD

SOMEONE WHO HAD PRACTICED at my temple several years ago asked to come back for a time. “My life is miserably unhappy, and sometimes I feel like dying,” he said. I responded, “If you want to find peace, you are welcome here. If you want to do zazen, if you want to eat the most delicious of all feasts, come. But you shouldn’t come if you are of two minds. If you are insincere, it won’t do you any good to be here. But it may be that your practice will be pure and simple, the one single color of practice—you may be able to awaken, if your vow is right. When you were here before, you were very rebellious. Watch it this time that you don’t rebel against the teaching. If there is a karmic affinity, then that rebellion that you may still be holding could just slip and slide away.” Where the potential for evil is great, there is a good chance that the potential for good is also great—strong bad, strong good. If the duality of good and bad is broken through, then there will be real good.

He came back after ten years, and he practiced right together with us, just as if he had never left, as if he had been practicing with us all along. He was so grateful to be here and much warmer than before. He practiced clearly and strongly. During autumn sesshin, that person had been pouring his entire being into his practice, devoting his life energy to the practice, to the great Dharma. Within his gut, although he was unconscious of it, he knew that everyone is part of the great, warm universe in which everything is protecting and caring. And one day as he left the hondo heading for the zendo,

something lightly brushed his face. “Ahhh! That’s right, nothing is separate; nothing is apart.” It was a leaf, maybe from the ginkgo tree, and when it brushed his cheek, he saw that all the universe in all its myriad forms are one. Life made itself known; that leaf was intimate. He was able to receive life in all its fullness.

“I have found what I was seeking,” he realized. Finally when you can come to the teacher and honestly ask, “This is what I see; am I right?” the teacher has to be very sound, very reliable to be able to answer you, “You are absolutely right and at the same time absolutely wrong.” If you have just caught the ox,^[27] you are only at the front gate. Then you have to resolve not to back down and not to slip back. There are many levels of satori, and we can’t be too careful on this point.

After a *kensho** experience—after a little opening—you have to deepen your resolve. It happens even with those who have come to sesshin only once or twice. There is an opening; there’s no duality: “Everything is right here in my own belly.” It’s a joyful experience, but if you hang that experience at the tip of your nose like a cow’s ring and you think you have finished your practice, then you are mistaken. You have been rewarded with a little prize—you have been able to see truth as a little glimmer, just a glimpse. This experience is important in that it can help you to strengthen your faith that all beings are buddha, that you can realize the great Way. The experience should encourage you to practice grasping nothing, holding nothing, not sitting back and lingering in some state.

It’s very important to look upon yourself with the knowledge that there is still a lot of work left to do. Awakening is to be deepened and deepened—awakening upon awakening. No matter how profound the awakening, there is only to awaken ever more profoundly. It is never exhausted. True nature is ever more insistent: “Please polish, refine realization.” Thanks to this ever-still-more, ever-still-more, the character of understanding can be infinitely deepened. So this continual polishing and refining—is that what it really comes down

to? Yes. The myriad buddhas and great teachers are just now in the midst of practice. This is what we call the process of buddhahood: complete and perfect enlightenment continually unfolding. There is no lingering anywhere, no coasting. If you sit back, trying to maintain any state, you are just going to rot there. If you grasp it, it has become worthless.

Be careful of half-baked insight—with half-baked insight, you might get full of yourself and think that you are somebody. If there is any trace of arrogance, it means that you are not yet liberated—you are just caught up in the scenery along the way. Arrogance is a dangerous thing and a frightening place to be stuck. If you truly awaken, then you are like the rice stalks when they mature—as they mature fully, they bow their heads. You will wholeheartedly repent before all beings, you will repent how immature, how unclear, how selfish you have been. There will be no pride or arrogance. There is just the humility of a full, mature rice stalk.

Great Zen Master Joshu had his first deep awakening at eighteen years old, but he continued to deepen and polish his insight until he was sixty. Then as he departed on pilgrimage, he said, “If a girl of eight can teach me something, I will study at her knee. If I can show the Way to an old man of eighty, I will hold nothing back.” That’s the spirit!

The practitioner should be the humblest of people. This doesn’t mean self-deprecating or feeling inferior. Self-deprecation is just another form of pride—it appears to be very modest and humble, but inside you are clinging tightly to ego. It’s altogether different from humility. “For the sake of others, for the sake of all, I give my life”—this is the spirit in which you should be taking your first step in practice, and you need to keep this spirit up forever.

The only thing for you to do is to give your all to practice. It is not always easy, but often the times of trial are the most fertile ground for awakening. Mysteriously, when you are driven into a corner, you find the way—when you exhaust your efforts, it’s very possible that

the genuine will leap out at you. Everybody's karma is different; due to some stimulus, impossible to predict, some propitious combination of conditions arises and you suddenly awaken. Don't think that if you seem to be a slow or dull person, your time of opportunity and ripening can't possibly come in this lifetime. Others who really appear to be trying to hasten their time of awakening can often just remain always in a state of hurry and flurry. But at the right time, there is awakening. So what is there for you to do? Just practice sincerely.

This one noble step that you take is very straightforward. It is never to be lost; it is timeless—so there is nothing you should worry about. Just take this one noble step, right at your heel; this is the supreme Way. One day, the light will suddenly shine and you, too, will marvel, "Wonder of wonders! The exquisite reality of life is so beautiful!" Looking at the sky—vast and timeless—the little clouds float by. The mountain rises high; the sea is full; the willow is green; the flower is red. Morning until night, night until morning, it fills the eye. Every voice is the voice of the Buddha, every form is buddha form.

*May this merit extend and reach everywhere, to everyone, so that
we together with all beings perfectly realize the Buddha Way.*

AFTERWORD

Although he never traveled to the West and is, therefore, much less known here than figures such as Shunryu Suzuki Roshi or Philip Kapleau Roshi, the late Japanese master Tange Harada Roshi stands among the great figures of twentieth-century Zen. Though he did not travel to teach, Zen centers run by his students now operate in countries around the globe. The harrowing and remarkable story of Tange's childhood and service in the Japanese military during World War II has been told in the preceding pages. In this afterword, I will focus on his connection to my own teacher, Philip Kapleau Roshi, as well as on my time at Tange Roshi's temple, Bukkoku-ji, in the mid-1980s.

In 1953, at age twenty-nine, Tange was the head monk at Hosshin-ji, the monastery led by his teacher, Daiun Sogaku Harada Roshi. That was the year when Philip Kapleau first walked through the monastery gates. Kapleau's studies in Zen philosophy under D. T. Suzuki in New York had convinced him of the Zen saying, "A picture of a cake doesn't satisfy hunger," even as it left him brimming with concepts about Zen. But Tange, having gone through years of rigorous training, had developed the insight to see through Kapleau's intellectual pride and brashness, recognizing beneath it the same anguished searching of his own youth. Their countries had been mortal enemies, leaving them both scarred and dedicated to realizing that which united them: their innately enlightened nature.

Tange's demands on Kapleau matched his faith in him. Once, when the American newcomer was sitting in the dokusan line, Tange, who alone at the monastery had learned a little English, was

sitting behind him ready to go in with him as his interpreter. No sooner had Kapleau struck the bell and stood up than Tangen, without warning, struck him violently behind the ear. Kapleau, enraged, took a swing at him, but with no time to lose, stormed straight in to see Harada Roshi. For the first time, Kapleau was able, in his aroused state, to respond to the Roshi no-mindedly, from the guts rather than the head. Harada Roshi signaled his delight. From then on, Kapleau found himself “operating on a higher energy level, and at dokusan was no longer afraid of the roshi.” Tangen had known well that compassion can take the form of harshness.

Tangen meted out his special compassion for the American even when doing so cost him precious sleep. On the last night of a seven-day sesshin, after the formal schedule had ended for the day, Kapleau secluded himself in the bathhouse to continue his sitting. Tangen, ever solicitous of his struggling foreign charge, followed him in and spent hours urging him on with the kyosaku. By the end of the night, they had bonded to a degree unique to such shared exertions. As dawn broke, they silently embraced, and Kapleau remained even further indebted to his mentor, friend, and Dharma brother.

In 1955, Sogaku Harada Roshi sanctioned Tangen as a teacher and sent him to the dilapidated old temple of Bukkoku-ji, half a mile from Hosshin-ji, to begin teaching. Just thirty years old then, Tangen spent his days rebuilding and repairing the temple, conducting ceremonies, and going on takuhatsu to raise money before sitting in zazen into the night.

Although Bukkoku-ji was not a fully certified training temple, Tangen Roshi's reputation as a teacher and example of compassion and wisdom gradually spread internationally by word of mouth. By the mid-1990s as many as sixty participants from around the world were crowding into his sesshins. Eventually he was offered a senior position at Eihei-ji, one of the two mother temples of the Japanese Soto Zen school, but he politely declined.

In March, 1985, I arrived at Bukkoku-ji for three months of Zen training. Bukkoku-ji was one of the few residential training temples in Japan that accepted *gaijin* (foreigners), most of whom arrived there seemingly as ignorant of Japanese Zen monastic rules as of Japanese culture generally. Tange Rōshi was willing to go the extra distance to give even those with no Zen experience a shot. There was a young American woman at Bukkoku-ji at that time who knew enough Japanese to sometimes interpret for Tange Rōshi in *dokusan*—that was Belenda Attaway Yamakawa, the translator of this volume.

At Bukkoku-ji *sesshins*, the *kyosaku* was used noticeably less than it was in Rochester at the time, and drastically less compared to Hosshin-ji in the 1950s, when Tange-san was the head monk. When I marveled at this change in *kyosaku* culture from that of Tange-san of the 1950s to Tange Rōshi of 1985, I heard that Tange Rōshi had said, “When Daiun Rōshi died, the training at Hosshin-ji fell apart. I realized that it was because the discipline was all from the outside. So now I think the discipline should come from the inside. I used to hit the monks terrifically hard with the *kyosaku*, but now I hit like a baby.”

Although in some ways looser than my own training under Kapleau Rōshi, training at Bukkoku-ji was in other ways quite strict. Obedience to Tange Rōshi was non-negotiable. No one was permitted to go outside the walls of the temple without his explicit permission. We mostly lived in silence, the exception being the daily tea meeting with Tange Rōshi. There were no days off from the schedule of morning and evening sittings, with wake-up always at 3:45 a.m. The three meals each day were mainly rice. Before going out on *takuhatsu*, we had to submit to his meticulous inspection of our attire—after all, we were representing the Dharma to the public—and he once adjusted my undershirt at the throat to make an exposed quarter-inch of it disappear.

One day during the tea meeting, Tangen Roshi told us of a woman who had just joyfully informed him that her husband—recently operated on for stomach cancer—had been pronounced cured. When the wife had first learned of his diagnosis, Tangen Roshi said, she came to him overwrought with concern. “What do you think I told her?” he asked us. Someone guessed, “*Kannon-do* (Kannon Hall).” “That was the second thing I told her,” he smiled. “What was the first thing?” Finally, he told us: “Surrender.”

At the tea meeting on my first day at Bukkoku-ji, Tangen Roshi passed around maple sugar candies that I had brought him from Rochester. This reminded him, he said, of the deep karma he felt with a maple tree that had saved his life right after taking charge of Bukkoku-ji. While hiking on the mountain behind the temple, he had slipped and fallen over a precipice. About thirty feet down he was caught in his midsection by the single branch left on the tree, which left him with permanent pain in his hip. But it saved him from almost certain death. While falling, he said, he realized, “Ego... unnecessary....” Then he brought out the branch itself, which someone, to his regret, had cut off to present to him.

It is hardly surprising, given Tangen Roshi’s three narrow escapes from death—the war ending moments before his kamikaze mission was to happen, his survival as a prisoner of war, and his fall at Bukkoku-ji—that his faith in the grace of Kannon was unwavering. Whereas the Buddha’s birthday and Jukai were both minor observances, the Kannon Day ceremony, held every month, lasted two and a half hours. Beyond that, in his own person he proved himself, every day from before dawn until after dusk, the flowing embodiment of compassion. Just as Kannon figures are sometimes shown with many heads and arms, he seemed to notice everything about his students and respond to them according to their needs, whether sternly or tenderly.

When taking leave of Tangen Roshi and Bukkoku-ji on the day after a seven-day sesshin, I was mortified to see Tangen Roshi wake

all the residents from their deep, hard-earned naps to see our group off at the temple gate. Later I came to see this gesture as not just Japanese etiquette but a tribute to us that signaled the same faith he had in everyone—“all buddhas, bodhisattva-mahasattvas.” No doubt he hoped that it would leave us determined to live up to his respect. That morning, over tea with us, he had said, “Zen is dying in Japan and being reborn in America.” His life of exertion has done much to keep the flame of the Dharma alive in both the East and the West.

—Bodhin Kjolhede Roshi,
Rochester Zen Center

TIMELINE OF THE LIFE OF TANGEN HARADA ROSHI

August 24, 1924: Born as Usao Abe in the city of Niigata.

July 19, 1925: Mother dies of stomach cancer.

April 1943: Enters Koa Senmon Gakko, a progressive boarding college in Musashino based on principles of Shoin Yoshida. During this time he has his first major spiritual experience at Jukkoku Pass.

August 14, 1944: Volunteers to join the kamikaze division of the special attack units and passes the exam.

August 10, 1945: Graduates from kamikaze training and is moved to Manchuria.

August 15, 1945: Just before Usao's scheduled flight from Dalian airport, Emperor Hirohito announces the unconditional surrender of Japan.

1945–46: Spends about nine months in a Soviet prisoner-of-war camp in Manchuria.

June 9, 1946: Returns to Japan in one of the first transports of repatriated soldiers, arriving by boat in the port of Hakata.

Early October 1947: Visits Kannon-ji in Mitaka and learns zazen from Sozen Nagasawa Roshi.

Late October 1947: Becomes a student of Sogaku Harada Roshi and enters training at Hosshin-ji.

November 8, 1949: Receives ordination as a monk and the name Tangen from Sogaku Harada Roshi.

December 8, 1951: Receives Dharma transmission from Sogaku Harada Roshi.

1952–55: Serves as personal attendant to Sogaku Harada Roshi and coleads the training at Hosshin-ji.

1954: Sogaku Harada Roshi formally adopts him as his son, hence his name becomes Harada.

March 15, 1955: Becomes the abbot of Bukkoku-ji.

November 30, 1975: Completes construction of new zendo at Bukkoku-ji.

November 16, 1980: Completes construction of new bonsho pavilion at Bukkoku-ji.

1991: Completes construction of new kitchen and living quarters at Bukkoku-ji.

2003: Receives from the Soto school the honorary title of Gon Daikyo-shi.

May 2012: Because of health issues, retires as abbot of Bukkoku-ji.

March 12, 2018: Passes away at Bukkoku-ji.

PHOTOS

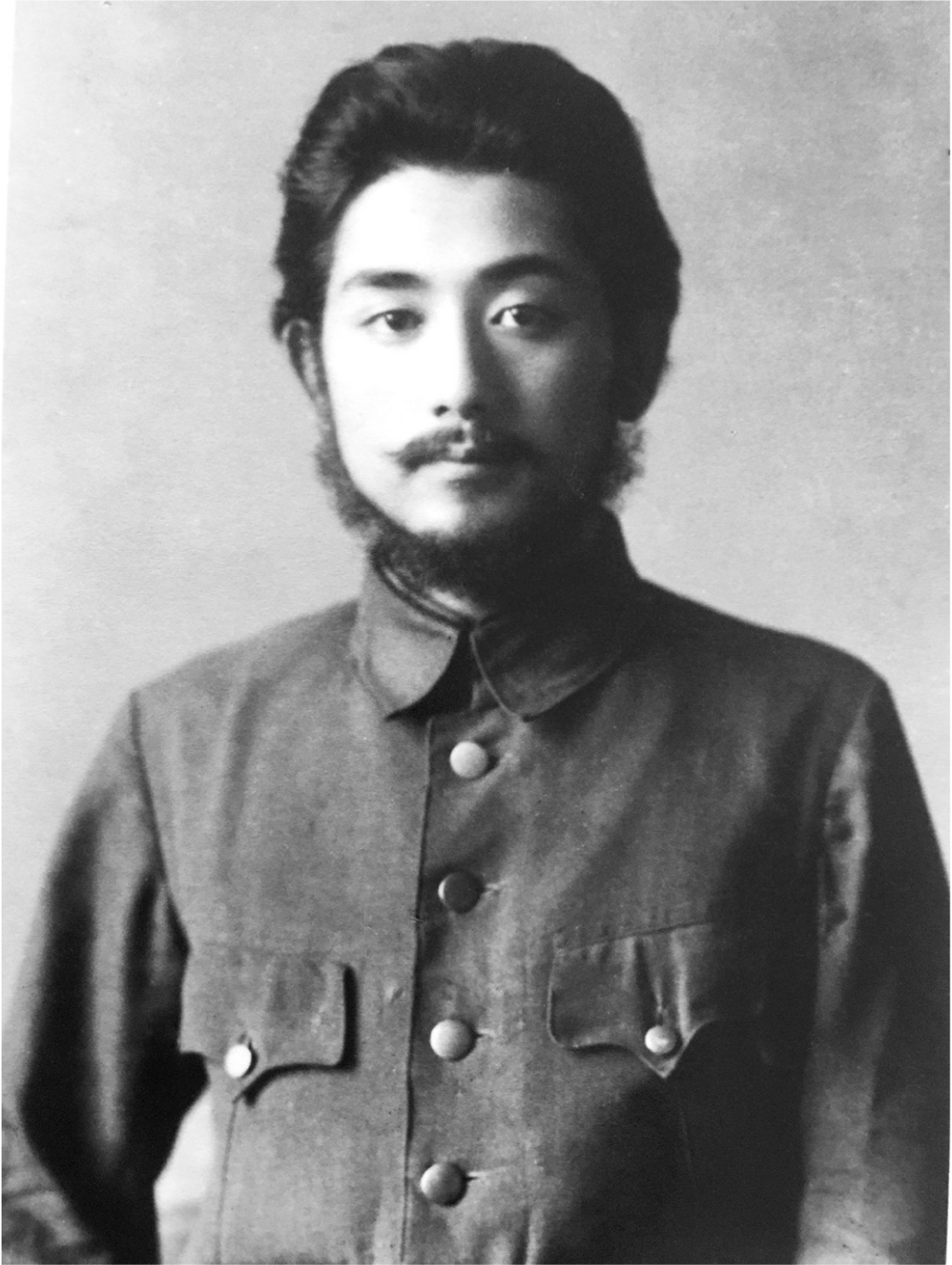


Usao Abe when entering college in 1943





Usao Abe while serving in the Japanese Army, c. 1944



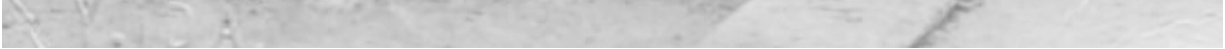
Usao Abe after returning to Japan from war in 1946



Tangen Roshi in a group of monks about to depart for takuhatsu, soon after his arrival at Hosshin-ji, on December 17, 1947. Sogaku Harada Roshi is in the front row (center right), with his successor and abbot of Hosshin-ji, Sessui Harada Roshi (center left).

Tangen Roshi is first on the right in the third row of novices.





With foreigners practicing at Hosshin-ji. Philip Kapleau (later, Kapleau Roshi) to the right and Beverly White to the left in 1953



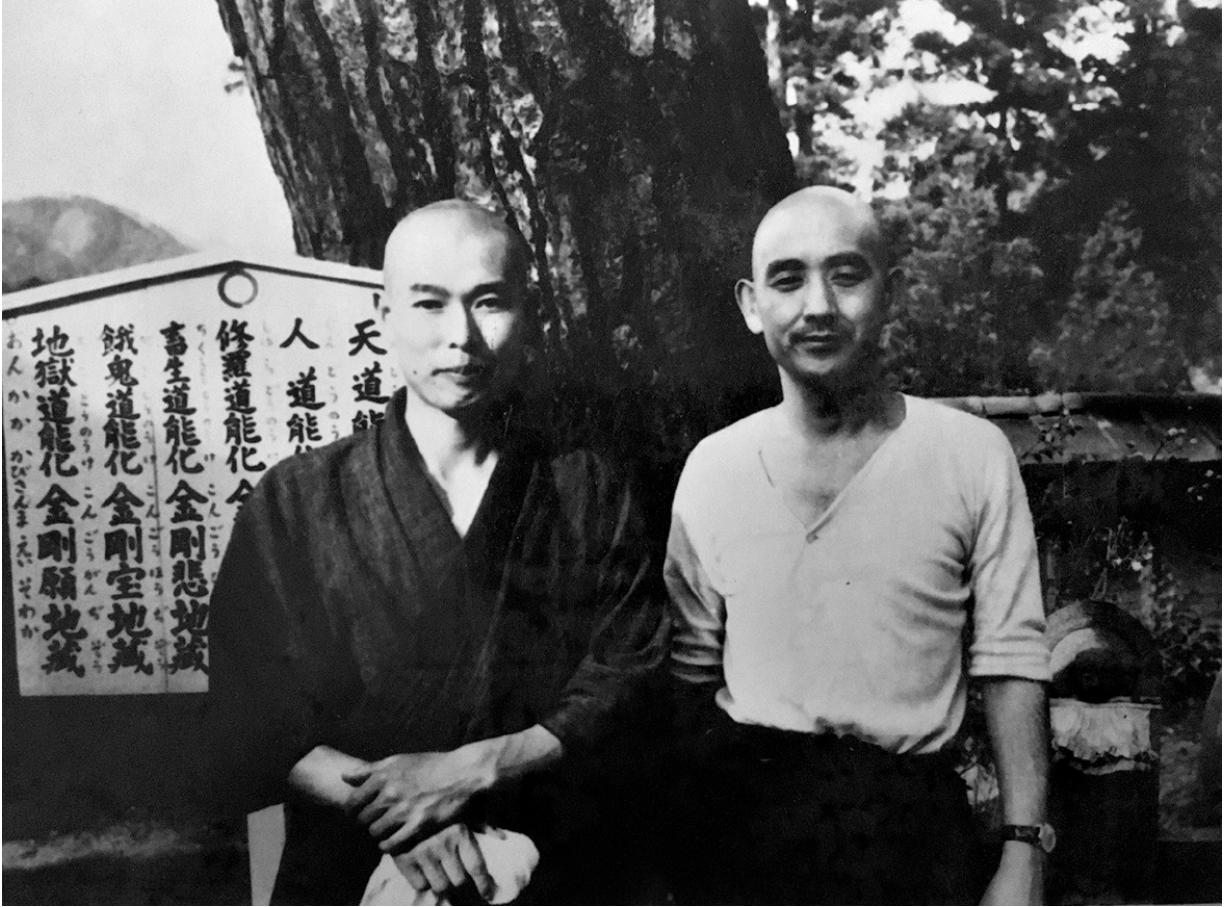
Sogaku Harada Roshi (center right) with three of his inka disciples: Sozen Nagasawa Roshi, who introduced Tangen Roshi to Zen practice (center left), Tomiko Shiroyama Roshi (left) and Tangen Roshi (right) at Kannon-ji in Mitaka, c. 1953



Serving as a personal attendant to Sogaku Harada Roshi during a teaching trip in 1954



Shinzanshiki (abbot installation ceremony) for Tangei Roshi at Bukkoku-ji, March 15, 1955. Sitting in the center is Sogaku Harada Roshi, to his left Sessui Harada Roshi, to his right Tangei Roshi.



Tangen Roshi during work with one of the first disciples, Hogen Yamahata (later, Hogen Roshi), in the 1960s



With a group of students in 1985. Bodhin Kjolhede (later, Bodhin Roshi) sitting left of Tangen Roshi. Belenda Attaway Yamakawa sitting in the second row, fourth from the left.



Tangen Roshi in his sixties, holding temple kittens



Tangen Roshi in his seventies sitting in the dokusan room



Tengen Roshi in his late eighties, wearing formal vestments

GLOSSARY OF BUDDHIST AND JAPANESE TERMS

bonsho—A large temple bell

Buddhadharma—Teachings of the Buddha

Daihannya ceremony—A special ceremony in Japanese temples performed at the New Year and other important occasions using the text of the Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra, the longest text in Buddhist canon

dokusan—A formal, private meeting between teacher and student

enso—A circle, a common Zen symbol signifying the unity of emptiness and form, among other meanings

Fukanzazengi (Universal Recommendations for Doing Zazen)
—A text by Eihei Dogen about sitting meditation

gassho—Gesture of putting palms together

gatha—Skt. Verse, a short chant used in monasteries on various occasions

hondo—Main temple hall for ceremonies

inka shomei—Authorization to teach independently after completing the post-awakening koan training

Jizo Bodhisattva—Japanese name for the bodhisattva Ksitigarbha, protector of women, children, and the earth

junko—A monk, walking with a stick, monitoring the zendo to make sure no one is sleeping during meditation

kalpa—An eon in Buddhist cosmology

Kannon—Japanese name for Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion

KATZ!—A shout used in the Zen tradition as a teaching tool to cut through the discursive thinking of students

kensho—Literally “seeing nature,” sometimes used synonymously with *satori*, other times referring to an initial breakthrough experience.

koan—A form of meditation with a question or situation that requires an experiential answer from a student

kyosaku—Stick used in monasteries to wake up sleeping monks during meditation

oryoki—Literally “right amount vessel,” a set of nested bowls and other eating utensils used in the Zen monasteries for formal meals

paramita—Skt. Perfection

Pure Land school—A form of Mahayana Buddhism that teaches that, through invoking the name of Amithaba Buddha, one can gain rebirth in the Pure Land, a realm in which practice and attaining liberation is much easier than in the human realm on Earth

Rinzai school—One of the major schools of Zen in China and Japan, deriving its name from Linji Yixuan (Jap. *Rinzai* Gigen, ?–866)

Rodaishi—Literally “old great teacher,” a title of utmost respect for a teacher in the Zen tradition,

rohatsu—Annual intensive sesshin, usually ending December 8, commemorating the Buddha’s day of enlightenment

Roshi—Literally “old teacher,” a respectful title for a teacher in the Zen tradition

sesshin—Intensive meditation retreat, usually around one week long

shikantaza—A form of meditation mostly associated with the Soto school, without any particular object of concentration, often translated as “single-minded sitting,” or “just sitting”

Shobogenzo (Treasury of the True Dharma Eye)—A major text written by Eihei Dogen

Shushogi (The Meaning of Practice and Verification)—

Published in 1890, a compilation of excerpts from Eihei Dogen's *Shobogenzo*; widely used as a condensed version of Soto school teachings for lay followers

Soto school—One of the major schools of Zen in China and Japan, deriving its name in part from Dongshan Liangjie (Jap. Tozan Ryokai, 807–869)

takuhatsu—Mendicancy practice in which monks from a monastery depart together and chant in front of neighboring houses to receive alms

tanden—An energy center located in the lower belly

tanto—Senior monk responsible for training of novice monks

teisho—Formal Dharma talk

yaza—Informal night sitting after the end of the regular schedule in the monastery

zafu—A round cushion used in monasteries for sitting meditation

zagu—One of the “three robes of a monk,” a rectangular-shaped cloth for bowing on and also used to sit on during chanting

NOTES

1. Daiun Sogaku Harada (1871–1961), a famous teacher in the Soto Zen tradition who, after training under both Soto and Rinzai* teachers, used methods from both schools.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 1](#)

2. Bath day, in Japanese called *shikunichi* (literally, “4 and 9 day”) is part of the monastic life cycle where every five days, each day with the digits 4 and 9 in the date except for retreats, monks take a bath and shave their heads. Unlike at most Soto-school monasteries, where there is a formal tea every morning, at Bukkoku-ji formal tea was only on the bath days, during which Tengen Roshi would give a Dharma talk.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 2](#)

3. En Ryobon is the Japanese name applied to Yuan Liao Fan (1533–1606). The book’s title in English is *Liao Fan’s Four Lessons*.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 3](#)

4. Shoin Yoshida (1830–1859), one of the most distinguished intellectuals in the late years of Tokugawa shogunate.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 4](#)

5. Sozen Nagasawa Roshi (1888–1971) received Dharma transmission and inka shomei from Sogaku Harada Roshi. She was the only female teacher in the Soto school at the time to

independently teach at a training monastery for nuns, Kannon-ji. She also played a major role in nuns gaining equal rights to monks in the Soto school.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 5](#)

6. What Tangen Roshi here refers to as “the koan Mu” is the first koan from the Mumonkan collection, “Joshu’s Dog.”

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 6](#)

7. Quote from the Avatamsaka Sutra, chapter 37.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 7](#)

8. “Heaven and earth; same root. All the myriad things; one body,” is a famous teaching phrase of Sengzhao (384–417).

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 8](#)

9. Second part of the quote from the Avatamsaka Sutra, chapter 37.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 9](#)

10. The first line from the Gatha of Opening the Sutra.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 10](#)

11. An allusion to a quote from Eihei Dogen’s Shobogenzo, “Birth and Death” fascicle.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 11](#)

12. Last line from *Hokyozanmai*, a teaching poem by Dongshan Liangjie (807–869).

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 12](#)

13. Jodo Shinshu, also known as Shin Buddhism or True Pure Land Buddhism, is one of the sects of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism and is the most widely practiced branch of Buddhism in contemporary Japan.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 13](#)

14. Shurihandoku (Skt. Chulapanthaka) was one of the arhats mentioned in various scriptures.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 14](#)

15. Dogen Zenji (Eihei Dogen, 1200–1253) founded the Japanese Soto school of Zen.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 15](#)

16. Quote from the Lotus Sutra.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 16](#)

17. An allusion to a famous line from the Lotus Sutra, chapter 3.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 17](#)

18. Maka Hannya Haramita Shingyo is a short text recited in Zen monasteries on a daily basis, in English it is commonly called by its abbreviated name, the Heart Sutra.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 18](#)

19. Quote from the Sutra of the Buddha's Bequeathed Teachings.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 19](#)

20. The first of the four great vows of a bodhisattva.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 20](#)

21. Quote from Eihei Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "Arousing Bodhi-Mind" fascicle.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 21](#)

22. In Buddhism, the four classes of seekers are monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 22](#)

23. Quote from the *Shushogi*.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 23](#)

24. In Buddhism, the six realms of existence are hell, hungry ghost realm, animal realm, human realm, asura or fighting gods' realm, and heaven.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 24](#)

25. In Buddhism, the four forms of life are womb-born, egg-born, moisture-born, and miraculously born.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 25](#)

26. A quote from *Bendowa*, an essay by Eihei Dogen.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 26](#)

27. A reference to the Ten Oxherding Pictures, where the ox symbolizes true nature.

[BACK TO NOTE REFERENCE 27](#)

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