

On the Endeavor of the Way

Shōbōgenzō Bendōwa

辨道話

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All buddha tathagatas, who directly transmit inconceivable dharma and actualize supreme, perfect enlightenment, have a wondrous way, unsurpassed and unconditioned. Only buddhas transmit it to buddhas without veering off; self-fulfilling samadhi is its standard. Sitting upright, practicing Zen, is the authentic gate to the unconfined realm of this samadhi. Although this inconceivable dharma is abundant in each person, it is not actualized without practice, and it is not experienced without realization. When you release it, it fills your hand – how could it be limited to one or many? When you speak it, it fills your mouth – it is not bounded by length or width. All buddhas continuously abide in it, but do not leave traces of consciousness in their illumination. Sentient beings continuously move about in it, but illumination is not manifest in their consciousness. The concentrated endeavor of the way I am speaking of allows all things to come forth in enlightenment and practice, all-inclusiveness with detachment. Passing through the barrier and dropping off limitations, how could you be hindered by nodes in bamboo or knots in wood?

After the thought of enlightenment arose, I began to search for dharma, visiting teachers at various places in our country. Then I met priest Myozen, of Kennin Monastery, by whom I was trained for nine years. Thus I learned a little about the teaching of the Rinzai School. Priest Myozen alone, as a senior disciple of ancestor Eisai, correctly transmitted the unsurpassable buddha-dharma; no one can be compared with him. Later I went to Great Song China, visited masters on both sides of the Zhe River, and heard the teaching of the Five Schools. Finally I studied with Zen master Rujing of Taibo Peak and completed my life's quest of the great matter. Then at the beginning of Shaoding Era (1228-33) of Great Song, I came back to Japan with the hope of spreading the teaching and saving sentient beings – a heavy burden on my shoulders. However, I will put aside the intention of having the teaching prevail everywhere until the occasion of a rising tide. I think of wandering about like a cloud or a water-weed, studying the wind of the ancient sages.

Yet there may be true students who are not concerned with fame and gain and who allow their thought of enlightenment to guide them, and they may be confused by incapable teachers and obstructed from the correct understanding. Indulging in smug self-satisfaction, they may sink into the land of delusion for a long time. How can they nourish the correct seed of prajna and have the opportunity to attain the way? If I am wandering about, which mountain or river can they call on? Because I feel concerned for them, I would like to record the standards of Zen monasteries which I personally saw and heard in Great Song as well as the profound principle which has been transmitted by my master. I wish to leave for students of the way the teaching of the buddha's house. This is indeed the essence.

Now, the great master Shakyamuni entrusted the dharma to Mahakashyapa at the assembly on Vulture Peak; it was then correctly transmitted from ancestor to ancestor down to venerable Bodhidharma. Bodhidharma himself went to China and entrusted dharma to the great master Huike; this was the beginning of dharma transmission in the eastern country. In this way, by direct transmission, it reached the Sixth Ancestor, Zen Master Dajian. Then the true Buddhist teaching spread in China, and the teaching that is not concerned with theories took form. At that time there were two outstanding disciples of the Sixth Ancestor, Nanyue Huairang and Qingyuan Xingsi. They both equally received the buddha's seal, as masters of human beings and devas. Their two lineages spread, and later the Five Gates opened: the Fayan School, the Guiyang School, the Caodong School, the Yunmen School, and the Linji School. At present in Great Song China only the Linji School prospers throughout the country. But in spite of their different styles, each of the Five Houses holds the single seal of the buddha mind. In China after the Later Han Dynasty, the teachings of Buddhist scriptures were introduced and spread all over the land, but there was no conclusive teaching as yet. When Bodhidharma came from India, the root of twining vines was immediately cut off and the pure, single buddha-dharma spread. We should hope that it will be like this in our country.

Now all ancestors and all buddhas who uphold buddha-dharma have made it the true path of enlightenment to sit upright practicing in the midst of self-fulfilling samadhi. Those who attained enlightenment in India and China followed this way. It was done so because teachers and disciples personally transmitted this excellent method which is the essence of the teaching. In the authentic tradition of our teaching, it is said that this directly transmitted, straightforward buddha-dharma is the unsurpassable of the unsurpassable. From the first time you meet a master, without engaging in incense offering, bowing, chanting Buddha's name, repentance, or reading scriptures, you should just wholeheartedly sit, and thus drop away body and mind.

When even for a moment you express the buddha's seal in the three actions by sitting upright in samadhi, the whole phenomenal world becomes the buddha's seal and the entire sky turns into enlightenment. Because of this all buddha tathagatas as the original source increase their dharma bliss and renew their magnificence in the awakening of the Way. Furthermore all beings in the ten directions and the six realms, including the three lower realms, at once obtain pure body and mind, realize the state of great emancipation, and manifest the original face. At this time, all things realize correct awakening; myriad objects partake of the buddha body; and sitting upright, a king under the bodhi tree, you immediately leap beyond the boundary of awakening. At this moment you turn the unsurpassably great dharma wheel and expound the profound wisdom, ultimate and unconditioned.

Because such broad awakening resonates back to you and helps you inconceivably, you will in zazen unmistakably drop away body and mind, cutting off the various defiled thoughts from the past, and realize essential buddha-dharma. Thus you will raise up buddha activity at innumerable practice places of buddha tathagatas everywhere, cause everyone to have the opportunity of ongoing buddhahood, and vigorously uplift the ongoing buddha-dharma.

Because earth, grass, trees, walls, tiles, and pebbles all engage in buddha activity, those who receive the benefit of wind and water caused by them are inconceivably helped by the buddha's guidance, splendid and unthinkable, and awaken intimately to themselves. Those who receive these water and fire benefits spread the buddha's guidance based on original awakening. Because of this, all those who live with you and speak with you will obtain endless buddha virtue and will unroll widely inside and outside of the entire universe, the endless, unremitting, unthinkable, unnameable buddha-dharma.

All this, however, does not appear within perception, because it is unconstructedness in stillness – it is immediate realization. If practice and realization were two things, as it appears to an ordinary person, each could be recognized separately. But what can be met with recognition is not realization itself, because realization is not reached by a deluded mind. In stillness, mind and object merge in realization and go beyond enlightenment; nevertheless, because you are in the state of self-fulfilling samadhi, without disturbing its quality or moving a particle you extend the buddha's great activity, the incomparably profound and subtle teaching.

Grass, trees, and lands which are embraced by this teaching together radiate a great light and endlessly expound the inconceivable, profound dharma. Grass, trees, and walls bring forth the teaching for all beings, common people as well as sages. And they in accord extend this dharma for the sake of grass, trees, and walls. Thus, the realm of self-awakening and awakening others invariably holds the mark of realization with nothing lacking, and realization itself is manifested without ceasing for a moment.

This being so, the zazen of even one person at one moment imperceptibly accords with all things and fully resonates through all time. Thus in the past, future, and present of the limitless universe this zazen carries on the buddha's teaching endlessly. Each moment of zazen is equally wholeness of practice, equally wholeness of realization. This is not only practice while sitting, it is like a hammer striking emptiness: before and after, its exquisite peal permeates everywhere. How can it be limited to this moment? Hundreds of things all manifest original practice from the original face; it is impossible to measure. Know that even if all buddhas of the ten directions, as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges, exert their strength and with the buddhas' wisdom try to measure the merit of one person's zazen, they will not be able to fully comprehend it.

Question 1: We have now heard that the merit of zazen is lofty and great. But an ignorant person may be doubtful and say, "There are many gates for buddha-dharma. Why do you recommend zazen exclusively?"

Answer: Because this is the front gate for buddha-dharma.

Question 2: Why do you regard zazen alone as the front gate?

Answer: The great master Shakyamuni correctly transmitted this splendid method of attaining the way, and tathagatas of the past, future, and present all attain the way by doing zazen. For this reason it has been transmitted as the front gate. Not only that, but also all ancestors in India and China have attained the way by doing zazen. Thus I now teach this front gate to human beings and devas.

Question 3: We understand that you have correctly transmitted the tathagatas' excellent method and studied the tracks of the ancestors. It is beyond the reach of ordinary thoughts. However, reading sutras or chanting Buddha's name of itself must be a cause of enlightenment. How can zazen, just sitting uselessly and doing nothing, be depended upon for attaining enlightenment?

Answer: If you think that the samadhi of all buddhas, their unsurpassable great method, is just sitting uselessly and doing nothing, you will be one who slanders the Great Vehicle. Your delusion will be deep – like saying that there is no water when you are in the middle of the great ocean. Already all buddhas graciously sit at ease in self-fulfilling samadhi. Is this not producing great merit? What a pity that your eyes are not yet open, that your mind is still intoxicated! Now, the realm of all buddhas is inconceivable. It cannot be reached by consciousness. Much less can those who have no trust, who lack wisdom, know it. Only those who have right trust and great capacity can enter this realm. Those who have no trust will not accept it however much they are caught. Even at the assembly on Vulture Peak, there were those who were told by Shakyamuni Buddha, "You may leave if you wish." When right trust arises, you can practice and study. If not, you may wait for a while and regret that you have not received the benefaction of dharma from the past.

Also, do you understand the merit attained by the act of reading sutras, chanting Buddha's name, and so on? It is hopeless to think that just moving the tongue and making a sound is meritorious Buddhist activity. If you regard these as the buddha's teaching, the buddha's teaching will be further and further away. Actually, the meaning of studying sutras is that if you understand and follow the rules of practice for sudden or gradual realization taught by the buddha, you will unmistakably attain enlightenment. In studying sutras you should not expend thoughts in the vain hope that they will be helpful for attaining wisdom. To try foolishly to reach the buddha way by the practice of chanting myriad times is just like trying to go to the southern country of Yue with your spear heading towards the north, or to fit a square post into a round hole. To look at letters but be ignorant of the way of practice is just like a physician forgetting how to prescribe medicine; what use can it be? People who chant all the time are just like frogs croaking day and night in spring fields; their effort will be of no use whatsoever. Even worse off are those who, deluded by name and gain, cannot give up such practices, because their greed for gain is so deep. There were such people in the past. Are there not even more? What a pity, indeed!

Just understand that when a master who has attained the way with a clear mind correctly transmits to a student who has merged himself with realization, then the inconceivable dharma of the Seven Buddhas, in its essence, is actualized and maintained. This cannot be known by monks who study words. Therefore stop your doubt, practice zazen under a correct teacher, and actualize the self-fulfilling samadhi of all buddhas.

Question 4: The Lotus School and the Avatamsaka School, which have been transmitted to Japan, are both the ultimate of Mahayana teaching. Furthermore, the teaching of the Mantra School was directly transmitted by Vairochana Tathagata to Vajrasattva, and its lineage from teacher to disciple has not been disturbed. This teaching explains that "mind itself is buddha; everyone's mind becomes buddha." They also advocate the Five Buddhas' correct enlightenment within one sitting, instead of practice through many eons. It should be regarded as the supreme buddha-dharma. So, which good aspect of the practice you mention makes you recommend it, ignoring the practice of other schools?

Answer: You should know that in the buddha's house we do not discuss superiority or inferiority of the teaching; nor do we concern ourselves with the depth or shallowness of the dharma, but only with the genuineness or falseness of practice. There are those who, attracted by grass, flowers, mountains, and waters, flow into the buddha way. And there are those who, grasping earth, rocks, sand, and pebbles, manifest the buddha's seal. In fact, although the boundless words of the buddha overflow among myriad things, the turning of the great dharma wheel is contained inside a single particle. In this sense, the words "Mind itself is buddha" are like the moon reflected on water; the teaching "Sitting itself is becoming buddha" is like the reflection in the mirror. Do not be concerned with the splendor of the words. By showing the excellent way of direct transmission by buddha ancestors, I am just recommending the practice of the immediate realization of wisdom, hoping that you will become true practitioners of the way.

For the transmission of buddha-dharma, the teacher should be a person who has merged with realization. Scholars who count letters cannot do it; it would be like the blind leading the blind. Those within the gate of the correct transmission of buddha ancestors venerate an accomplished artisan who has attained the way and merged with realization, and entrust him with the upholding of buddha-dharma. Because of this, when the spirit beings of the visible and invisible realms come to pay homage, or when the arhats who have attained the fruits of realization come to inquire about the dharma, this master will not fail to give the means to clarify their mind-ground. This is not known in other teachings. So the buddha's disciples should study only the buddha's teaching.

You should also know that we do not originally lack unsurpassed enlightenment, and we are enriched with it always. But because we cannot accept it, and we tend to create groundless views, regarding them as actual things, we miss the great way; our efforts are fruitless. Because of these views, illusory flowers bloom in various ways. You tend to imagine inexhaustibly the twelvefold causation of rebirth, or twenty-five existences, or such views as the Three Vehicles, Five Vehicles, buddha existing or not existing. But do not take up these views and regard them as the correct way of practicing buddha-dharma. Instead, sit zazen wholeheartedly, forming the buddha's seal and letting all things go. Then you will go beyond the boundary of delusion and enlightenment, and being apart from the paths of ordinary and sacred, immediately wander freely outside ordinary thinking, enriched with great enlightenment. If you do this, how can those who are concerned with the fish trap or hunting net of words and letters be compared with you?

Question 5: Among the three learnings, there is the learning of samadhi. Among the six perfections, there is the perfection of meditation. Both of these have been studied by all the bodhisattvas from the moment of arousing the thought of enlightenment, and both are practiced by the clever and dull. The zazen you are speaking of seems to be something like this. Why do you say that the true teaching of the Tathagata is contained in it?

Answer: Your question arises because the treasury of the true dharma eye, the single great matter of the Tathagata, the unsurpassable great dharma, has been named the Zen School. You should know that the name "Zen School" appeared in China and spread eastwards. It was not heard of in India. When the great master Bodhidharma was sitting facing the wall at Shaolin Monastery, Mt. Song, for nine years, neither monks nor lay people knew the buddha's true teaching. So they called him the Brahman who concentrated on zazen. Later, all the ancestors of every generation always devoted themselves to zazen. Foolish lay people who saw them, without knowing the truth, informally called them the Zazen School. They have dropped the word *za* – sitting – and nowadays call it the Zen School.

The meaning of this teaching is clear through the discourses of various ancestors. You should not compare this with the meditation of the six perfections or the three learnings. The authenticity of the transmission of this buddha-dharma is unhidden through all time. Long ago at the assembly on Vulture Peak the Tathagata entrusted venerable Mahakashyapa alone with the unsurpassable great teaching, the treasury of the true dharma eye, the inconceivable mind of nirvana. This event was witnessed by devas still alive in the heavenly world; you should not doubt it. Now the buddha-dharma is to be protected forever by these devas. Its merit has not decreased. You should know that this is the entire way of buddha-dharma and it cannot be compared with anything else.

Question 6: Why, from among the four postures taught in the buddha's house, do you emphasize sitting, recommend Zen meditation, and expound entry into realization?

Answer: It is impossible to know completely the methods by which all buddhas from the past practiced and entered realization one after another. If you wonder about the methods of all buddhas, you should know that whatever was used in the buddha's house are their methods. But an ancestor (Changlu Zongze) said admiringly, "Zazen is the dharma gate of ease and joy." Among the four postures, sitting has these qualities. Also, it is not only the practice of one or two buddhas; all buddhas and ancestors follow this way.

Question 7: Those who have not realized buddha-dharma should practice zazen and attain realization. But what of those who have already understood the buddha's correct teaching? What do they expect from zazen?

Answer: Although we should not talk about dreams in front of ignorant people, or give an oar to a woodcutter, nevertheless I will give instruction about this. To suppose that practice and realization are not one is nothing but a heretical view; in buddha-dharma they are inseparable. Because practice of the present moment is practice-realization, the practice of beginner's mind is itself the entire original realization. Therefore, when we give instructions for practicing, we say that you should not have any expectation for realization outside of practice, since this is the immediate original realization. Because this is the realization of practice, there is no boundary in the realization. Because this is the practice of realization, there is no beginning in practice.

In this way, Shakyamuni Tathagata and venerable Mahakashyapa were both enriched with practice on realization; great master Bodhidharma and venerable ancestor Dajian also were turned by practice on realization. The tradition of abiding in buddha-dharma is like this. Already there is practice which is not apart from realization; fortunately each of us has individually inherited the inconceivable practice. Beginner's practice is individually to attain original realization on the ground of the unconstructed. You should know that in order not to defile realization, which is inseparable from practice, buddha ancestors always caution you not to be slack in your practice. If you release the inconceivable practice, the original realization fills your hands; if you become free from the original realization, the inconceivable practice is upheld with your whole body.

Again, as I personally saw in Great Song, the Zen monasteries in various places all had meditation halls, where there were five hundred, six hundred, one or two thousand monks, and where the practice of zazen day and night was encouraged. When I asked the abbots of these monasteries, masters who had inherited the seal of buddha mind, about the essential meaning of buddha-dharma, I was told that practice and realization are not two different things. Therefore, I recommend to students who are already studying with a teacher, as well as all those distinguished people who wish for the truth of buddha-dharma, to do zazen and endeavor in the way, depending on the teaching of the buddha ancestors, under the guidance of a teacher, without distinguishing between beginning or advanced, and without being concerned with ordinary or sacred. Have you not heard that an ancestor (Nanyue Huisi) said, "It is not that there is no practice and no realization, it is just that they cannot be defiled." It is also said (by Sikong Benjing), "Someone who understands the way practices the way." You should know that practice is done in the midst of attaining the way.

Question 8: Various teachers who went to Tang China spread the scriptural teaching in Japan in the past, and they introduced the teaching here. Why did they ignore a practice such as you have described and introduce only scriptural teaching?

Answer: The reason why these ancient teachers did not introduce this practice is that the time was not yet ripe.

Question 9: Did those masters in ancient times understand this teaching?

Answer: If they had understood it, it would have spread.

Question 10: One master said: "Do not grieve over birth and death. There is an immediate way to be free from birth and death, namely, to know the principle that the nature of mind is permanent. It means that because this body is already in birth, it is brought to death, but the mind-nature will not perish. You should recognize that you have in your body the mind-nature, which is not affected by birth and death. This is the inherent nature. The body is a temporary form; it dies here and is born there, and is not fixed. Mind is permanent; it does not change through past, future, or present.

"To understand this is to be free from birth and death. Those who recognize this principle end birth and death forever. So when your body ends, you enter into the ocean of nature. When you flow into the ocean of nature, you attain wondrous virtue just as all buddha tathagatas. Even if you know this now, because your body is formed as a result of deluded actions from past lives, you are not the same as all sages. Those who do not recognize this principle will go around in birth and death forever. Therefore you should hasten to understand that mind-nature is permanent. If you just spend your whole life leisurely sitting, what can you expect?"

Does such a statement as this accord with the path of all buddhas and ancestors?

Answer: The view you have mentioned is not at all the buddha's teaching, but rather the view of the heretic Senika. He said: "There is a soul in one's body, and this soul, on encountering conditions, recognizes good and bad, right and wrong. To discern aching and itching, or to know pain and pleasure, is also this soul's capacity. However, when the body is destroyed the soul comes out and is born in another world. So it appears to be dead here, but since there is birth in another place, it is permanent without dying."

To follow this view and regard it as the buddha's teaching is more foolish than grasping a tile or pebble and regarding it as gold. Such shameful ignorance cannot be compared to anything. National Teacher Huizhong of Great Tang criticized this deeply. To take up the wrong view that mind is permanent and forms perish, while regarding this as equal to the inconceivable teaching of all buddhas, or to create the causes of birth and death while wishing to be apart from birth and death – is this not foolish? It is most pitiable. Just understand it as the wrong view of heretics and do not listen to it.

I cannot refrain from being sympathetic; let me rescue you from your wrong view. You should know that in buddha-dharma it is always being said that body and mind are nonseparate, nature and characteristics are not two. This was known both in India and China. So there is no room for mistake. In fact, the teaching about permanence says that all things are permanent, without dividing body and mind. The teaching about cessation says that all things cease, without separating nature and characteristics. How can you say body perishes but mind is permanent? Is it not against the authentic principle? Not only that, you should understand that birth-and-death is itself nirvana. Nirvana is not explained outside of birth-and-death. Even if you understand that mind is permanent apart from the body, and mistakenly assume that the buddha's wisdom is separate from birth-and-death, this mind of understanding or recognizing still arises and perishes and is not permanent. Is it not ephemeral? You should know that the teaching that body and mind are one is always being explained in the buddha-dharma. Then how can mind alone leave the body and not cease when the body ceases? If body and mind are nonseparate sometimes and not nonseparate some other times, the buddha's teaching would be false. Again, to think that birth-and-death has to be rejected is the mistake of ignoring buddha-dharma. You must refrain from this.

You should know that the so-called "dharma gate of the whole reality of mind-nature" in buddha-dharma includes the entire phenomenal world without dividing nature from characteristics or birth from death. Nothing, not even bodhi or nirvana, is outside of mind-nature. All things and all phenomena are just one mind – nothing is excluded or unrelated. It is taught that all the dharma gates are equally one mind, and there is no differentiation. This is how Buddhists understand mind-nature. How can you differentiate this into body and mind, and divide birth-and-death and nirvana? You are already the buddha's child. Do not listen to the tongues of madmen, who quote heretical views.

Question 11: Should those who are entirely engaged in zazen strictly follow the precepts?

Answer: Holding to the precepts and pure actions is the rule of the Zen Gate and the teaching of buddha ancestors. Even those who have not yet received the precepts or have broken the precepts can still receive the benefit of zazen.

Question 12: Is it all right for those who study zazen also to engage in chanting mantras or in the practice of calm and introspection?

Answer: When I was in China and inquired of masters about the essence of the teaching, I was told that none of the ancestors who correctly transmitted the buddha's seal in India and China in the past or present had ever engaged in such a combination of practices. Indeed, without devoting yourself to one thing you cannot reach the one wisdom.

Question 13: Should zazen be practiced by lay men and women, or should it be practiced by home-leavers alone?

Answer: The ancestors say, "In understanding buddha-dharma, men and women, noble and common people, are not distinguished."

Question 14: Home-leavers are free from various involvements and do not have hindrances in zazen in pursuit of the way. How can the laity, who are variously occupied, practice single-mindedly and accord with buddhadharma which is unconstructed?

Answer: Buddha ancestors, out of their kindness, have opened the wide gate of compassion in order to let all sentient beings enter realization. Who among humans and heavenly beings cannot enter? If you investigate olden times the examples are many. To begin with, emperors Daizong and Shunzong had many obligations on the throne; nevertheless, they practiced zazen in pursuit of the way, and penetrated the great way of buddha ancestors. Ministers Li and Fang both closely served their emperors but they practiced zazen, pursued the way, and entered realization in the great way of buddha ancestors. This just depends on whether you have the willingness or not. It does not matter whether you are a lay person or home-leaver. Those who can discern excellence invariably come to this practice. Those who regard worldly affairs as a hindrance to buddha-dharma only think that there is no buddha-dharma in the secular world, and do not understand that there is no secular world in buddha-dharma.

Recently, there was a high official of Great Song, Minister Feng, who was advanced in the ancestors' way. He once wrote a poem concerning himself:

I enjoy zazen between my official duties, and seldom sleep lying on a bed.

Although I appear to be a minister, I'm known as a Buddhist elder throughout the country.

Although he was busy in his official duties, he attained the way because he had a deep intention towards the buddha way. Considering someone like him, you should reflect on yourself and illuminate the present with the past. In Song China, kings and ministers, officials and common people, men and women, kept their intention on the ancestors' way. Both warriors and literary people aroused the intention to practice Zen and study the way. Among those who aroused their intention, many of them illuminated their mind-ground. From this you know that worldly duties do not hinder the buddha-dharma.

If the buddha's true teaching is spread widely in the nation, the rule of the king is peaceful because all buddhas and devas protect it unceasingly. If the rule is peaceful the buddha's teaching gains power. When Shakyamuni Buddha was alive, even those who committed serious crimes or had mistaken views attained the way. In the assemblies of ancestors, hunters and woodcutters attained realization. If it is so for them, it is so for others. You should just seek the teaching of an authentic master.

Question 15: Can we attain realization if we practice, even in this last age of decline?

Answer: In the scriptural schools they explain various names and aspects, but in the true Mahayana teachings dharma is not divided into periods of truth, imitation, and decline. Instead, it is taught that everyone attains the way by practice. Particularly in this correctly transmitted teaching of zazen, you are enriched with the treasure of yourself, entering dharma and leaving bondage behind. Those who practice know whether realization is attained or not, just as those who drink water know whether it is hot or cold.

Question 16: Someone says: "In buddha-dharma, if you comprehend the meaning of 'Mind itself is buddha' that will be sufficient without any chanting of sutras or practicing the buddha way. To know that buddha-dharma originally lies in the self is the completion of attaining the way. Other than this, you need not seek from anyone else. Why should you be troubled with practicing zazen and pursuing the way?"

Answer: This statement is entirely groundless. If what you say is true, then everyone who has a mind would immediately understand the meaning of buddha-dharma. You should know that buddha-dharma is to be studied by giving up the view of self and other. If the understanding of "Self itself is buddha" were the attaining of the way, Shakyamuni Buddha would not have taken the trouble to explain the way. Now let me illuminate this explanation with an excellent case of an old master:

Once a monk called director Xuanze was in the assembly of Zen master Fayan. Fayan asked him, "Director Xuanze, how long have you been in my community?"

Xuanze said, "I have been studying with you for three years."

The master said, "You are a latecomer. Why don't you ask me about buddha-dharma?"

Xuanze said, "I cannot deceive you, Sir. When I was studying with Zen master Qingfeng (Baizhao Zhiyuan), I mastered the place of ease and joy in buddha-dharma. "

The master said, "With what words did you enter this understanding?"

Xuanze said, "When I asked Qingfeng, 'What is the self of a Zen student?', he said, 'The fire god is here to look for fire.'"

Fayan said, "That is a good statement. But I'm afraid you did not understand it."

Xuanze said, "The fire god belongs to fire. So I understood that fire looks for fire and self looks for self."

The master said, "Indeed, you did not understand. If buddha-dharma were like that, it would not have been transmitted until now."

Then Xuanze was distressed and went away. But on his way he said to himself, "The master is a renowned teacher in this country, a great leader of five hundred monks. His criticism of my fault ought to have some point." He went back to Fayan, apologized, and said, "What is the self of a Zen student?"

Fayan said, "The fire god is here to look for fire."

Upon hearing this statement, Xuanze had a great realization of buddha-dharma.

In this way, we know that mere understanding of "Self itself is buddha" is not knowing buddha-dharma. If the understanding of "Self itself is buddha" were buddha-dharma, Fayan would not have given such criticism or guidance. You should just inquire about the rules of practice as soon as you meet the master, single-mindedly practice zazen, and pursue the way, without leaving a half-understanding in your mind. Then the excellent art of buddha-dharma will not be in vain.

Question 17; We have heard that in India and China there have been people in the past and present who realized the way on hearing the sound of bamboo being struck, or who understood the mind seeing the color of blossoms. Great Master Shakyamuni was awakened to the way when he saw the morning star, and venerable Ananda understood the dharma when a banner-pole fell down. Not only that, but after the Sixth Ancestor, in China, among the Five Schools, there were many who understood the mind-ground with one word of speech or half a phrase. Not all of them necessarily did zazen in pursuit of the way, did they?

Answer: Of those who understood the way upon seeing a form, or who realized the way upon hearing a sound, not one had any intellectual thinking regarding the endeavor of the way or had any self besides their original self.

Question 18: People in India and China by nature are refined. Since they are in the center of civilization, when buddha-dharma is taught to them they can immediately enter it. People in our country from olden times have had less wisdom, and it is difficult for the right seed of prajna to be nourished. This is because we are uncivilized. Is it not regrettable? Thus, the monks in our country are inferior to even the laity in those great countries. Our entire nation is foolish and narrow-minded, and we are deeply attached to visible merit and are fond of worldly excellence. If such people as we do zazen, can we immediately realize buddha-dharma?

Answer: What you say is correct. Among people in our own country wisdom does not prevail yet, and their nature is rather coarse. Even if the correct dharma is explained to them, its nectar becomes poisonous. You easily pursue name and gain, and it is difficult for you to be free from delusion. However, entering into realization of buddha-dharma does not require the worldly wisdom of humans and devas, as a boat for fleeing the world. When Buddha was alive, someone realized the four fruits when he was hit by a ball; someone else understood the great way by wearing a robe in fun. They were both ignorant people, like beasts, but with the aid of right trust they were able to be free from delusion. A lay woman serving food to an ignorant old monk, who was sitting in silence, was enlightened. This did not depend upon wisdom, scripture, words, or speech, but it was only brought about by right trust.

Now, Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching has been spread in the trichiliocosm for about two thousand years. Those countries are not necessarily the countries of wisdom, and the people are not necessarily sharp and intelligent. However, the Tathagata's true dharma in essence has a great inconceivable meritorious power, and spreads in those countries when the time is ripe. If you practice with right trust, you will attain the way, regardless of being sharp or dull. Do not think that buddha-dharma cannot be understood in this country because this is not a country of wisdom and the people are foolish. In fact, everyone has in abundance the correct seed of prajna, but it rarely hits the mark and enriches us.

This exchange of questions and answers may have been rather confusing; a number of times sky-flowers were made to bloom. However, since the meaning of zazen in pursuit of the way has not been transmitted in this country, those who wish to know about it may be regretful. Therefore, for the sake of those who wish to study, I have recorded some of the essential teachings of the clear-eyed teachers, which I learned in China. Besides this, the rules in the practice places and the regulations in the monasteries are more than I can mention now. They should not be discussed hastily.

Now our country lies to the east of the dragon ocean, far from China. But the buddha's teaching was transmitted eastward, about the time of emperors Kimmei and Yomei. This is the good fortune of our people. Yet the philosophy and rituals have been entangled, and real practice was missed. Now if you make torn robes and mended bowl your life, build a grass-roofed hut near a mossy cliff or white rock, and practice sitting upright, you immediately go beyond buddha and directly master the great matter of your life's study. This is the admonition of Dragon Fang (Longya Judun), the transmitted way of practice of Rooster-foot (Kukkutapada, Mahakashyapa's mountain). Concerning the method of zazen, I would refer you to the "Broad Recommendation of Zazen" (Fukanzazengi) which I wrote during the Karoku Era (1225-27).

Although the king's edict is needed for spreading dharma in the country, if we think of the Buddha entrusting the dharma to kings and ministers on Vulture Peak, all the kings and ministers who have appeared in the trichiliocosm are born because of their wish from a previous birth to protect and guard buddha-dharma. Nevertheless, spreading the way of buddha ancestors does not necessarily depend upon place or circumstances. Just think that today is the beginning. Thus I have written this to leave for people of excellence who have a wish for buddha-dharma and for true students who, wandering like water-weed, seek the way.

Mid-autumn day, in the third year of Kanki (1231), by Dōgen, who has transmitted dharma from Song China.

自受用三昧

Jijuyū: self-fulfilling, self-enjoyment, self-receiving-and-employing, self-receiving its function, naturally receptive

Zammai: samadhi, absorption, concentration, one-pointedness, awareness, presence