

Kidō Inoue

For Those Who Want to Practice *Zazen*

**Learning from Master Dōgen
For Living a True Life**

This book was originally written in Japanese and has been translated into English by Branka Takahashi, with editorial support provided by Vesna Pavlovich

“All human beings are endowed with the buddha-nature by birth, but it will not reveal itself, unless we practice *zazen* and experience enlightenment.”

Master Dōgen

From a Long-Term Zen Practitioner

It all began with one book. It was Kidō Inoue's "Zazen—The Way to Awakening." The name of the master Kidō Inoue was absolutely unknown to me. I read the book with the greatest admiration, and could not help knocking on the master's door.

I would like you to speculate for a while on what you think about our society, about our world today. The wish of the whole human kind is that everyone leads a meaningful, peaceful life, aiming a community in which all people will "truly" interact with each other. That is the most human-like, the most natural way of living.

In order to achieve that goal, people have taken great pains with estimating what that "true" is. I myself am one of them. Unless we understand what "true" means, there can be no real happiness for the society. The answer is unexpectedly easy: *one should know one's real self.*

The first stay in the zazen *dōjō* always lasts a week. It was just one week, but I had a wonderful experience. I experienced a bit of the "emptiness," a deep religious truth that changed my previous perception of myself. When one's core is shaken, one should go back to that state, to get saved.

I don't know whether this expression is correct, but I will call it "the transcendental world of being unlashed from everything." The existence of this world of the utmost happiness is a big surprise, and at the same time the biggest treasure that could have been endowed to a human. Being able to have a glimpse on it decisively casts an anchor to this life of ours.

One day, as I came to the temple gate together with master Inoue, I got out of the boundaries of theoretical religion and there wasn't me anymore—I became one with everything around myself, and the purity and vastness of that world left me

breathless. I experienced my *self* with no stains, my *self* before acquiring knowledge and the language. It assured me that this was a real peace and eternal “truth.” It was a feeling of getting in touch with the God’s profound benevolence that is beyond human knowledge, competing, and self-interest.

From that moment on my life became steady. I decided to pursue the Path to Enlightenment, to live with sincere heart and in sincere learning, to apply my own experience in an active and universal manner.

The aim of the zazen training is exploring the source of the man’s mind which bears competing and self-interest. It means overcoming one’s self, the real shape of the “truth.” What surprised me even more was that the way of achieving it was so simple.

It is something that we all do—breathing. All that we have to do is to become *one* with the breathing. By doing that I let out my worries, my mind became clear and free of its dark side. *Anyone can do it.* I became sure that by continuing this simple effort I can open myself.

You may think, ‘Oh, really?’ and I don’t blame you. I will share with you a little about the beginning of my zazen training.

Concentrate your spirit in *now* and neaten your wandering thoughts. This is the starting point and the gist of the zazen training. It amazed me that it was also a concluding point, too. From my own experience I can say that the lofty realm of *zazen* opens to you with the perceiving of the simple and clear *now*. That occurs in the moment you break free from the past. It goes across your brain, and the restraint of various kinds of knowledge falls off. I knew I came to the eternal and immovable *state of oneness*.

It is wonderful to be able to listen to master Inoue’s teaching. But it is mere teaching. The practicing and acquiring enlightenment is something you have to do on your own. Your

sincere belief, the strength to brush up the treasure you're endowed with is the genuine religion and the true aim of the zazen training. Now I am perfectly sure of that.

When I look back, I remember that it took me a few days to find a clue during my first stay at the *dōjō*. I had to put some effort that is typical for Zen; human knowledge is for circulating thoughts, whereas breathing is extremely simple and natural. Zazen training leads us to the reality as it is, and that has nothing to do with the knowledge. I have to be honest: finding a clue of overcoming the knowledge was pretty hard. Getting to that point troubles everybody. The reason is our poisoning with ideas and concepts.

From the standpoint of the awakened one, a beginning practitioner looks like a man who has something in his hand and keeps on searching for that, or a silly person who cries in his sleep. I feel embarrassed when I think about that period.

I was doing, with all my heart, something that was wrong in its core, and remembering master's words saved me. "Do your best to become *one* with your breathing," said he, and I was smart enough to listen to him, and get back to the breathing.

In more concrete terms, I was "just" breathing, without adding knowledge to that, without searching for the knowledge. In my whole life I was never so sincere, so devoted to something as simple as this breathing. Now I realize how important it was. What I am and have now is thank to that effort.

I have reached the world of "emptiness," where there are no words, thoughts, and images. And this is what we call "truth." I can't find words to express what I felt when this fact became clear; the personal experience was astonishing, so far away from any philosophical construct.

If you don't seek you will not find it, if you seek you will not find it either—I'm aware of the absurdity of this statement, but it is the only way to explain how to acquire the truth. Here lies the

difficulty in investigating the self. You cannot inquire it without Zen, and Zen is considered difficult. You cannot solve this problem without a proper teacher.

It happened on the fifth day of my training: the sound of the rain beating the galvanized-iron roof of the *dōjō* knocked out my delusions. I became *one* with the rain, and after some time I sensed a firm stillness. Then one drop of the sweat, and another one, and another one ran down from my body to the tatami of the *dōjō*.

This inexplicable sensation of pureness that I had when I overcame knowledge and became one with Nature became the absolute value in my later life.

The next day, invited by master Inoue, I went to the garden for the first time in a while. There I had another strange sensation: after a few steps in master's wooden *geta* slippers I felt in my whole body something that I had never sensed before.

“Heavy... the Earth is so heavy... and I have walked around without noticing it!” On the realization that I was *one* with the Earth, deep emotions raised from within.

This profound truth is at the core not only of my being, but of the whole world and life itself. I was deeply moved for a long time. I have never sensed before such a unity with the universe, such transcendence of myself.

The next moment I noticed master Inoue, standing beside me with no expression on his face. He then raised his right hand and pointed at something with his finger. There were trees, and all those leaves dyed me, too, green.

“The reality of our world is so beautiful, so holy!” I looked around. The world outside me, and my inner world vibrated together and sang harmoniously. I understood what they mean when they say “everything can become a buddha.” It was a sublime experience of overcoming *self*.

This feeling was a gratitude to the earth; our chests were filled

with that emotion that we almost cried. We were standing there, in silence, for quite some time.

What goes after you enter the temple gate, if you follow your teacher, is the sure way to deliverance from worldly attachments. And breathing is all you have to do. Master Inoue keeps on saying: “The deliverance of one individual is the fastest way of solving a problem of the whole world, of the whole humanity.”

Since then I have put some effort in practical learning. In order to expand the practical learning of this magnificent selflessness, on November 3, 1989 I started up Kyoto Forum (the non-profitable organization for peace and prosperity in whole world). I asked professor Shimizu, whom I admire, to become a president, while I took over a post of a secretary/administrator.

The encounter with one book led to meeting master Inoue, and then grew up into Kyoto Forum.

Thirty years have passed. The deepening of selflessness, together with the “truth” led to the Kyoto Forum. Things are developing themselves in various directions and it gives me—and many other people—purpose in this life. Our project has helped many generations to pursue happiness in their lives.

Well known master Dōgen teaches the “truth.” Master’s main work “Fukan Zazengi” (“Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen”) is something I would like everybody to read in order to awake to the “truth.” Arranged by master Inoue, this profound benevolence of master Dōgen is now to be presented to the world. Master Inoue has untied this string that is originally very hard to understand in a very popular and even funny way. Master Inoue is a person of rare qualities, and stands out among other Buddhist priests—his vivid and witty style you will find all over the book. His strong passion for all people—pardon me my audacity—corresponds to mine, and that is why I nodded so many times while reading. *Mondō* (Q & A) part of the book made it easy to understand; it delighted and encouraged me. Therefore,

it was with great pleasure that I accepted master Inoue's plea to write a preface to this book. I can assure you that you will not find a similar book in the whole Buddhist literature. I took the task very seriously and read the whole text one more time.

We are dealing with the matter that is not teachable as some knowledge, using a language. This is something that changes people's lives fundamentally. Master Inoue shows us the simplest way to get to that extremely subtle ground after he himself searched (and found) it.

I know of no other book that reveals our minds and hearts in such a detailed manner, and explains in such plain words how to win over our *bon-nō* once and for all.

I hope you will understand my earnest wish to recommend this book, since I was blessed to get to know the "truth"; I want that the whole humanity awakens to the world of the "truth" and enjoys happiness.

I beg you to take this book into your hands and to read it wholeheartedly, for it will lead you to the awakening of your true heart and mind, and allow you to live your life fully, with no regret. The "truth" is there where you yourself earnestly seek it.

Zen practitioner Dōnen

Glossary

Dear reader,

A number of Japanese words will be used throughout this book. Their one-word English equivalents often obscure their true meanings, and replacing them with English phrases would overly complicate the sentences. You are therefore invited to learn the following Japanese words, as they will be used in this book:

Bodhaishin Seeking *satori*, the mind that seeks enlightenment, striving towards awakening

Bon-nō is every psychological obstacle to *satori* (enlightenment). Our needs, though necessary for our survival, often trouble us, disturbing our bodies and minds. The root causes for many *bon-nō* are greed, ill-will, and folly. Since they block us in our path towards *satori*, we must learn to neutralize them in the course of our training.

Emptiness is not a negation of the existence itself, as it may look. It is the non-existence of non-changeable things and phenomena, i.e. everything is (constantly) changing; there are no eternally unchanging things and phenomena. In other words: the universe is *empty* of eternally unchanging things.

En considers that everything (literally everything: you and I, stars and earthquakes, flowers, love, hate ...) exists due to *in* (a direct cause) and *en* (an indirect cause, a set of circumstances that lead to something). They are often used in pair (*in-nen*), but on most occasions, solely *en* would be mentioned as a cause for

something. For example: you are the way you are because, first of all, your parents met (that is *in*, the direct cause for your appearance on the planet), and because you lived in a specific neighborhood, went to a certain school, got a particular job, etc. (these are all circumstances that have shaped you further, after you were born, and that is all *en*).

Jiga/gaken “Jiga” and “gaken” have a very similar meaning, therefore almost always come in pair. In Western literature about Buddhism “jiga” and “gaken” are usually translated as “ego,” which we—the author and the translator of this book—(like anyone who has some basic knowledge of psychology and therefore wouldn’t make ego seem bad and annoying) find unacceptable. We suggest “**troubled/troublesome self.**”

Nirvana is, basically, the same as enlightenment (*satori*) and emancipation. In Sanskrit, it literally means “to blow out” (the candle). By blowing out the desires one becomes a buddha. This is the path that leads to emancipation from the cycle of suffering and delusion. “Attaining *satori*” and “nirvana” are synonymous in the modern English language.

Satori—enlightenment, awakening, getting to know things as they are.

Shikan-taza Shikan—“just that, that only, that and nothing else,” *taza*—“sitting.” Together it means “just sitting,” “sitting wholeheartedly,” without any thoughts or feelings, attention is not focused on any particular object. Word *shikan* could be attached to any word meaning some activity, and then that activity would become pure, “just” that (*shikan*-cooking, *shikan*-studying, etc.)

Toraware is a state of captivity, the state of not being free (from

greed, ill-will, folly, prejudices, stubbornness ...)

Preface

I am neither a philosopher nor a scientist. I am merely a practitioner of Zen. As a practitioner I should not indulge myself in a wordplay, and as a Zen-Buddhist priest I should devotedly perform my duty. My duty is helping people who suffer to open their “mind’s eye,” take away their troubles and lead them to the state of tranquility. There is no meaning in living a life full of suffering.

In other words, my duty is to show them real values of life. In order to do so we practice the truth of *now*—we do not debate about it. This is something that I want you to understand at the beginning, and that is not easy at all, since there is no objectivity in it. Everyone tries to grasp it with its intellect, and my task—extremely hard task! —is to show them that it is a wrong way.

On the other hand, as you all know, in a real world, in our society, there is an increase in numbers of people who end their lives by suicide, people with developmental disorders, an increase of horrible crimes, and people who withdrew from their surroundings. Tensions between countries are raising, the ship “Japan” is having a rough passage, and spaceship “Earth” is heading to a dark and bumpy God-knows-where. Disaster can happen any minute and we cannot afford to belittle the danger.

Needless to say, we have to avoid the catastrophe (human extinction) at any cost. My (and my colleagues’) duty is to find out what psychogenic elements are behind it, and to present measures for solving the problem.

What brought us here, to this threatening situation? It is hard to say because many different elements intertwine. Without knowing the cause, it is hard to suggest improving measures. But, one thing is sure: uncontrolled economic supremacy, caused

by unsolved problems of the spirit (of our *souls*, if you prefer this word) has led to all kinds of horrendous inequalities and the gap between the rich and the poor.

I may sound a little harsh, but when an individual or a state lose responsibility and sincerity, which are the ground for the reliance, there start decadence and a lack of self-sufficiency; it is pretty hard to express good will in such circumstances.

All this derives from the decay of true religion, the educational system, and the state policy. If we all—every single one of us—do not reconsider our past conduct, the situation may swell into an unmanageable torrent. This is a dangerous torrent that can dehumanize us, take the backbone out of us, so that we cannot say right from wrong, and decide whether to act or no. Such a future seems rather disastrous.

With such prospects one starts to worry whether there is a way of salvation. Yes, there is: live fully in *now*, and take responsibility for all your deeds! Move your soul from things to beings, from “have” to “have not,” from outside to inside. When you succeed in that, you will break free from the invisible chains of your *jiga/gaken*, and your mind's eye will open. At the same time the problem of your underdeveloped spirituality will resolve. The awakening you are going to experience is as bright as sun at noon, and as beautiful as moon at night. In that moment a serpent transforms itself into a dragon.

A fight with one's self is very lonesome. There is nothing spectacular in reflection (introspection) and everyday effort, but they are a true way of bringing the awareness and common sense out of us. This wonderful ability is what makes us human. And the result is the realization that the right answer is you yourself *now*. We also call it *satori* (awakening).

Everyone wants to get free from anxiety, and to really enjoy life, therefore people all over the world seek for the way to lead a full life through philosophy and religion. Mindfulness and

meditation are the most popular ways/tools for achieving that goal. Scientists use MRI, EEG, and near-infrared spectroscopy in their research of the effect of these techniques on human brain. The results of these researches can be widely applied in medicine and education, and I'm looking forward to hearing about new breakthroughs.

What needs to be done is cultivation your self-awareness, and inquiry of your mind. If you succeed in becoming 100% one with *now*, the state of emptiness will open to you and solve your problem.

One of the biggest pleasures for every human being is taking away pain of other human fellow and changing it into joy. The joy of that person will call the joy of some other one, and so on and on—before you know it, there is a chain of happiness and satisfaction. I cannot imagine a thing that could give me bigger bliss. But, in order to be able to help people, one first has to have opened one's own mind's eye, i.e. to experience *satori*.

There is no such trouble as mind, and there is no such great thing as mind. Because it has no substance it can become anything, according to *en*. One feels at the top of the world when one is loved, but when betrayed, anger and jealousy can drive one to a murder. What is going on?

There is only one "mind." Or, rather... since it has no entity, we cannot say "there is" or "there isn't," therefore it can become a god, as well as devil. But, don't worry: you were born with this absolute ground; all the rest depends on your effort. Here is what master Dōgen says:

"All human beings are endowed with the buddha-nature by birth, but it will not reveal itself, unless we practice *zazen* and experience enlightenment."

This saying reveals our mind, and shows us the Way to experiencing the real peace, joy and relaxation.

The book begins with a chapter titled "Beauty and the Priest."

There is a reason for that: a young girl whom we will call “the Beauty,” coming from a noble family, highly educated, with multiple talents, poses a lot of clever and stimulating questions. You cannot read our conversation without smiling, as she was after me so mischievously sometimes, that I had to be very careful.

Then, there are two chapters of “Q&A”-s. There you can hear vivid voices of those who practice while living in a real world. I can assure you that their seriousness can give you good example if you are a seeker of the Way. On the other hand, to those who find no value in living a life of profound sincerity, this book is worthless.

Further on, you will meet an exquisite figure, a man that our country is proud of: master Dōgen. He is the superior leader in the questions of the mind. I would like you to learn all about mind in master Dōgen’s finest work “Fukan Zazengi,” but first I will give you some basic information about the master. I suppose everybody wants to know what created such a great man, so I wrote briefly about his life of a superhuman seeker. I hope you will get an image of how to receive as much as possible from a proper teacher.

“Fukan Zazengi” is one massive piece of work; in order to make it more attainable to the readers of our days I separated it in smaller portions and put subtitles. One gladly undertakes such an effort, for it is a scripture that contains a whole Buddhist teaching, indeed one profound work. If you read it attentively together with the practicing, it will show you its depths even more. I avoided difficult terms as much as possible, therefore I believe you will read it easily.

Zazen that contradicts master Dōgen cannot be the right *zazen*. I must say, though, that *zazen* is *zazen*, therefore there cannot be good and bad *zazen*, but very often there are many trifles in proposed ways of practicing, so I hope you will use this

work in order to avoid possible errors.

Scientists all over the world use the newest technologies, publish works in the field of ‘Brain and Mind,’ ‘Zen and Mind,’ trying to reveal the nature of our mysterious heart/soul/mind.

Investigating things is the job of scientists, but mind is not a thing, and has no substance, therefore they cannot reveal its true nature. Their effort is worth of praise, but unless they get to know the true shape of their minds, they cannot approach to the core of it. If you don’t lick the salt, you won’t know the taste of it, and even if you know it, you are not able to explain it to the others (who haven’t tried it).

Because the mind/heart/soul (choose the way you want to call it) of humanity is in this kind of state, the world is experiencing a crisis. Revealing the mind’s truth is, undoubtedly, the hardest among hard tasks, but united research of Zen and science is highly likely to give some answers. What I mean is: training and its scientific backing up. After that, we need to find, as soon as possible, everlasting measures. I am not the only one to cherish that.

This problem became even more interesting since one great scientist, with a rare personal experience, deals with it. This scientist, Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, experienced for an instant the correlation of the “bliss” and the “state of oneness.” Her story attracted attention of many people.

Right now, the new coronavirus is shaking up the entire world. You may say that it is a purely medical issue, but I have included “The Zen Buddhist Priest’s View on Coronavirus” to this book. For all the talk about joyous, meaningful life is pointless without physical and spiritual health.

Our main goal is to grasp what true mind is. When you succeed in that, you will feel yourself relieved. The reason I wrote this book is that I want you to grasp the gist as soon as possible, raise the “performance” of your mind’s eye, while

enjoying your everyday life, contributing to the purification of society and world peace.

If you are satisfied with yourself and don't envy others, you enjoy everyday life. Enjoying every day, being the winner—in order to reach that, I would like you to devote yourself to striving towards awakening, to give yourself to stillness.

If you enjoy the Path, you enjoy life itself, and have a lot of fun. The Path does not discriminate life and death; live in accordance with the Path and you will have no fear of death, for it is a mere part of life.

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THE BEAUTY and THE PRIEST

Why Should One Practice Zazen?

Q It has been a while since we last met and I am glad to see you. My father sends his best regards. Let me get straight to the point: why should one practice *zazen*?

A It is a pleasure to see that you are straightforward as usual. The first goal is to know your true *self* and to live in peace.

Q I do want to live in peace. But still, I would like to know why we become anxious. Life would be great if there was no anxiety. Where does it come from?

A You are actually getting to the gist! *Zazen* tackles that problem.

Q You mean it explores one's true *self*?

A That is correct.

Q But the mind, or rather brain, has already become a subject of scientific research. EEG or CT or MRI.

A That is right. We should leave the scientific approach to scientists. Our mind (I mean the soul part, the spirit) is not what they think it is.

Q What do you mean?

A What we call *mind* changes from moment to moment; you cannot touch it or catch it. That is why we say 'it has no entity.' It is maybe difficult for you to understand at this point, but no matter what your mind comes with—various thoughts and feelings like joy and sorrow, etc. —it (mind) has no entity (substance).

Q I see... I'm not sure what you mean by "entity."

A Our thoughts and emotions rise one after another, right?

If they had substance, entity, they would pile up and you would have to remove them to make place for the new ones. Otherwise, your rationality and the ability to think logically would collapse. What's the use of such an intellect?

Q I'm getting your point. They actually do not pile one on top of the other. I can see why you say 'it has no entity.'

A No matter how happy, sad, or angry you are, no matter what you think or feel, there is absolutely no entity there, and when you realize that, you'll see that there is no need to suffer anymore. Isn't that wonderful?

Q Is it really possible to have such a life? And what is the actual *mind* then?

A I just told you a minute ago. It has no substance. *Zazen* leads to the realization of that truth. It isn't something that could be explained in words or understood intellectually. You have to learn the right way, to practice, and to attain *kenshō*.

What is Kenshō?

Q What is *kenshō*?

A It is obtaining deep insight into what thoughts and feelings really are.

Q Rōshi, please excuse me, but I don't understand a word you are saying.

A All right then, tell me how do you know that you don't understand what I'm telling you.

Q Well, that is an unusual question! I do not understand and I'm just saying that I do not understand. What is strange about that?

A Where does the understanding of *not understanding* come from? From the existence of the one that knows, right? There is someone who sorts out understanding and non-understanding.

Q Well, yes....

So?

A We observe and listen, therefore we know: ‘Oh, that’s a dog,’ or ‘Oh, that’s a bicycle.’

Q What are you trying to say? Those are obvious things!

A Knowing is sorting things out (making distinctions). We use our intellect to think and consider things.

Q Yes, of course. What is wrong with that?

A Do you sometimes suffer, embrace dilemmas and hesitate?

Q Yes, pretty often. I can be anxious even if I know it’s just a trifle. But that is so common, we all do that, don’t we?

A That’s right. Exploring the real nature of that anxiety and suffering is *kenshō*.

Q Oh, so that is the “exploring of one’s true *self*” we mentioned a moment ago!

A Yes. And *zazen* is to be practiced in order to acquire *kenshō*. When you attain *kenshō*, you will know your true self and the mind will give you no more trouble. When you stop being picky and attached, that will mean you got to know your real *self*, the secret of your mind.

Q You say that attaining *kenshō* is understanding that the mind has no substance?

A That is right. There is no before and after, it works only for a glimpse and nothing else exists. Realizing that truth is called *kenshō*. And that surprising moment of realization we call *satori*. That is all—there is nothing supernatural in it. It only means understanding reality.

Who Are the Founders of the Teaching?

Q Oh, I am so far away from it at this point! But I understand that the mind does not make problems once we attain *kenshō*. I can also nod to the fact that peace and self-confidence come after that stage. I am glad to know that there is a way to salvation. So,

what should we do to achieve *kenshō*?

A Get rid of your mind's bad habits. We also call that "killing *jiga*."

Q What are the mind's bad habits?

A Looking at the world through phenomena of gain and loss, being overly attached to your own theories, etc. When we observe things, we usually want to say something. We have the tendency to criticize or to make objections, to express our standpoint.

Q What is wrong with that? We have reason to control it. That is what makes us human.

A That is correct, but more often than not we fail to see the true shape of things, the way they essentially are.

Q What do you mean?

A First of all, I mean being picky and greedy, which causes dissatisfaction and confrontation. *Toraware* is a big problem. This is a bad habit of ours, the thing we, Buddhists, call *jiga*.

Q I beg your pardon?

A When we are under the influence of *toraware*, we tend to confront others, and when it escalates, it can even lead to wars and terrorism. As long as this bad habit plays with our mind (heart, spirit—whatever you call it), we cannot get free from the polarity "I'm right, others are wrong." Here lies the horror of this bad habit: it makes us stray and suffer.

Q ???

A To put it simply: the *state of oneness* is the state before *jiga* arises. When we advance to the perfection of this state, we free ourselves from our bad habits and realize that there is no such thing called "mind." This is *kenshō*—you got that already, right? In order to attain *kenshō*, we have to take away the *clouds* from our mind, i.e. to liberate ourselves from our bad habits. This is the goal of *zazen* training.

Great masters, the founders of the teaching, are people who have liberated themselves from common bad habits, who have

attained *kenshō*, and discovered the true nature of mind.

Q I roughly understand what you are saying. I see how magnificent the great teachers are and the importance of doing *zazen*, but I'm still not sure I understand "bad habits" and *kenshō* correctly. Can you be more specific?

The Truth and the Falsehood

A All right, I'll ask you an easy question: what does two plus three make?

Q Five. Isn't that too easy?!

A Five, you say. So let me ask you another question: did your ears hear me saying "five"?

Q No. Wait! I don't understand.

A Answer honestly: what did you hear?

Q "What does two plus three make?"

A Yes! That is a fact and the truth. What else could there be?

Q Really.... There is nothing else.

A You see? If there was something else, it was solely made in your head. People do not grasp the difference between facts and falsity, therefore believe in an imaginary, man-made world. We usually call it "perception."

Q I see... although vaguely, I begin to realize that the problem is in the fundamentals of mind. And the way to solve the problem is *zazen* and *kenshō*?

A That is correct. Note that *zazen* is not a religion or a matter of belief—it is a practice toward the truth.

Q Pardon me, but *zazen* seems so funny! It can solve the problems of the mind!

A That aside—did you understand the mistake of your intelligence from a moment ago?

Q No. So, I was wondering.... Can you explain it to me, please?

A The mind gets bound by something it has created, something

that does not exist (namely, that has no entity). This is our mind's bad habit. Do you understand now?

Q I am slightly bewildered.... I kind of understand—I mean rationally—but....

What Is Walking?

A It is a common thing. When people succeed in realizing this truth, there will be no more conflicts within them. Not only does everyday living become easier, but people start helping each other, and society becomes healthier. When each individual is honest, we can all put the resources of our intelligence, experience and technical knowledge into practice. It is highly pleasant to live that kind of life. And raising children becomes such a pleasure!

Q I'm not sure I....

A I would really want you to understand, so let me ask you one more question: what is walking?

Q Oh, God.... It is altering the left and the right leg and moving towards some place or goal.

A It is a very precise explanation, but not more than an explanation. You have no idea about walking, so you did not answer me.

Q I beg your pardon?! My heart is beating like crazy. You are mocking me, aren't you?

A You look upset. Are you all right?

Q Of course I'm upset! You asked me a simple question, I answered, you denied it. You are making a fool of me!

A That's the spirit! You must earnestly seek answers. But tell me: do you really think you know? That was all you could come up with? And you were among the best students in your school!

Q Well, you really know how to be unpleasant! (*She sits for quite some time with an angry face.*)

A All right.... I have things to do and this is clearly a waste of time. You may leave.

Regretful Tears

Q I will leave, but let me ask you before we part: what is walking?

A You have a meek side, but a rebellious one, too. Can't you admit that you do not know, say you're sorry for getting angry, and ask for an explanation? You are smart and pretty, but you ruin everything with your attitude.

Q Well, let me tell you: if you were not a rōshi, I would throw this tea right into your face! You are humiliating me, look, I started crying! Will you finally tell me what is walking?

This, This, This

A Now you are getting serious. Of course, I will tell you, but first you tell me: have you ever walked since you were born?

Q Naturally I have!

A Stop trembling in anger, stop crying! I didn't intend to ridicule you. Pardon me for saying so, but you are one big *jiga/gaken*! What on earth is walking?

Q (She stands up and walks.) This! This is walking!

A Of course! What else could it be? And this? (*claps his hands*)

Q (*She cries but claps her hands immediately.*) This!

A There is no need for "this." It is redundant and it proves excessive thinking.

Q Oh, I see! (*She claps her hands.*) So, that is what you meant. It's clear now. (*She is beautiful even when she cries.*)

A You see? It is easy. You freed yourself from your bad habit of rationalizing. All right... then, what is this? (*raises up his index finger and glares at her*)

Q (*She immediately straightens her back, gives him a glaring look back, while raising her index finger.*)

A What are you doing now?

Q (*She smiles and waves her finger slowly.*)

A Good! (*He waves his finger.*) So—is this true or not?

Q (*She also waves her finger.*) It is a fact and the truth.

A Are there any obstructive thoughts?

Q Thoughts? No.... Funny, but I have no thoughts.... How come?!

A This is a state with no thoughts; in Buddhism we call it “muga-mushin.” A pure mind. But hold your breath: this is only the first step.

Q Rōshi, please allow me to cry for a while. I haven’t been so overwhelmed for such a long time.... (*She buries her face into her palms and cries, her shoulders trembling in soundless sobs.*)

A Take as long as you need. I’m glad you understood this important matter.

Intelligence and Virtual Images

A You have been walking quite a lot and it seems you enjoy that light-footed walking, as if you got something off your chest.

Q Yes, indeed. Please, excuse my behavior. I am very grateful to you for making me aware of the depths of my mind. I find enormous worth in every single step. And your harsh tutoring was actually full of love and kindness. (*She joins her palms and bows her head.*)

A Nothing is more beautiful than the smile of a person who has had a good cry! You realized that you need to explore your mind. Now I will give you a more complete explanation. When you hear something, you react to its sound. Your mind starts sorting out all related data from the past. As a result, you come up with words as the correct answer.

Q I see.

A It is “five,” and the verbal explanation of walking from our previous conversation.

Q Now I understand how it differs from the facts.

A Our intellect changes facts into virtual images in a split second. This is our intellect’s job—pay closer attention, I’m not telling you *it is wrong!* It becomes a problem once we begin to believe that these virtual images are the truth. There can be only one truth. However, most of the people operate not with this truth but with its various virtual images, claiming they are true, and so they end up quarreling and fighting. That is why we see so many clashes all around the world.

A Ground for Fighting

Q I understand very well (*she joins her palms*).

A These things ceaselessly control our mind, that is why we say “the mind of bad habits,” to differ it from the pure mind. These bad habits (called *jiga/gaken* in Buddhism) are the grounds for all troubles. We practice *zazen* to liberate ourselves from them.

Q This is so unexpectedly big and interesting. Please, tell me more!

A All right. You understood that intelligence is a function that doesn’t know it is virtual.

Q Yes!

A We can have an undeniable fact in front of our eyes and still not get it because those bad habits occupy our minds. Two people can endlessly argue about something, both claiming to know the truth. In the end, they may even start a war. Knowing the mechanism which leads to clashes is of utmost importance.

Q I see. I think I understand the perplexities of mind, but I would like you to tell me more about these *virtual images*.

A Shock

A All right. Let's say we have a mirror. It shows us various things, but none of them can be taken out of the mirror. Why? Because they are all virtual—they have no substance. Our mind, with all our senses, is the same. Admit, you are surprised!

Q 'Shocked' would be a more suitable word! Everything I believed I knew was actually virtual. I have held onto the things that have no entity. I also understand now that there is nothing eternally stable, and the mechanism of becoming anxious over some petty things is pretty clear to me.

A Look how social you can be!

Q I want to make sure I got it correctly: it is wrong to get attached to the perception, for it has no substance?

A Yes, you got it absolutely right. It is nonsense, like wrestling with the wind, like pouring water into a sieve, like peeing in a dream. But people do that, believing it is true.

Q Rōshi, since I am a woman, this last metaphor is slightly inappropriate, but I understand what you are trying to say.

A This is not the time and place to choose words. You should *just* listen and absorb. Being picky about expressions is *jiga/gaken*, a bad habit we have been talking about a lot today.

Q Oops, I did it again! All right; if all of these images are false, what can we believe to be the truth without a doubt?

A Here we come to the essence. Even to a small child "two plus three" is "two plus three." That is the only fact. The fire is hot, the ice is cold. Undeniable, isn't it? Do you understand up to this point?

Q Yes. The truth exists before calculation and verbalization.

A Exactly. It means that the moment one understands this is the only truth, one realizes that all the rest is virtual, false, and the bad habits fall off. This undeniable realization is called *kenshō*. *Kenshō* cannot be attained by rational calculation.

The Fearfulness of Intelligence

Q I see. Not knowing that most of it is virtual, we believe that what we hear and see is the truth itself. This is the mind's bad habit, so-called *bon-nō*. Having said that, *bon-nō* has no substance either, right?

A Exactly. You understand—though only theoretically at this point—that our intelligence works with virtual images. You are a highly promising being!

Q I have to admit that I thought intelligence was the base of true knowledge. It didn't occur to me that, as long as we cling to the mind's bad habits, intellect will be in the core of straying, suffering, and conflicts.

A Take a good look at the people around you. Intelligence is very important, but bad people use intelligence for bad purposes, good people use it for good purposes. What I want to say is that intellect does not make a distinction between good and evil, it is a tool for fulfilling the aims of its "owner."

Q Yes, I understand your point very well. It is pure egoism.

A Intellect has no sense of justice or remorse, it is a "computer" without a soul. An education that places the greatest importance on intelligence is scary.

Q Yes, indeed. I heard about many smart people who committed various kinds of crimes.

A You are perfectly right. But intelligence is not bad. Quite the contrary—the higher the better. Intelligence makes us ambitious, but if our mind is preoccupied with bad habits, it can easily make us go astray, too. It is the cause for absurd, illogical behavior even among people who have a broad perspective. Unfortunately, there is nothing a common person can do about it. It is important to have a will for improving oneself.

Q This makes me think about my own deeds. Without the

purification of people's minds, there cannot be peace in the world. I intend to pay attention to my behavior.

A I do not worry about you. You understood that all we see and hear, and is afterwards processed into concepts, is virtual; you also understood the purpose and the importance of practicing *zazen*. It is clear to you now that after attaining *kenshō* life will become incomparably easier.

Q Yes, I understand the greatness of *kenshō*, but it would mean a lot to me if you could explain about the problems with intelligence in more detail.

Bug Droppings and the Truth

A Can you tell me why fire is hot and ice is cold?

Q Fire is hot because it is hot, and ice is cold because it is cold. That is all I know.

A Exactly. That is the answer. All above that is an argumentative construction. It is not that they are hot or cold because we explained it, and they are not going to cease to be hot or cold because we couldn't give a scientific explanation. Will you get burnt if you say, "I touched fire. It is hot"?

Q No, I won't.

A Why not?

Q Because words and facts are not the same thing.

A Correct. That is something everybody knows, yet most people will start long and complicated verbal explanations. This is our mind's tendency towards virtual existence. And once it's started, one cannot easily stop. Soon we have conflicts and other undesirable outcomes.

Q Yes, I understand that. Please, continue!

A Natural phenomena exist before their scientific explanations. Fire is hot from the beginning, and ice is cold from the beginning, as well. There cannot be cold fire and hot ice. People who do not

understand that a stone, or bug droppings is *the Truth*, start to look for ideas and images. They delude themselves, so it's no wonder that they produce bigger and bigger problems.

Q If I understand correctly, you are saying that fire is originally hot, and ice is originally cold, so it would be wrong to inquire about these facts?

A Not *wrong* but it's *useless*. There is nothing more in these facts. Inquiry or not, fire is hot, ice is cold. It is the same as an apple and a picture of an apple. You cannot eat the latter one. People don't recognize the difference between facts and images, and often become disturbed for wrong reasons. If they knew *the Truth*, they wouldn't behave in such a silly way.

The True Nature of Falsification

Q But shouldn't we deepen our scientific knowledge?

A By all means! Especially in the material world—we cannot exist without science and technology.

Q Exactly! That is my point.

A I thought so. However, facts come first and then their scientific understanding. There are things that could be easily apprehended, and there are those we're not sure we understand correctly. In other words, it is possible that we do not understand something or that we understand it only partially. It is dangerous to put too much faith in scientific apprehension. This is where delusions and falsifications come from.

Q Under the pretext of deepening the knowledge of the truth, people explore what *they call* the truth, right?

A Not always, but it happens pretty often when they want to build theories at any cost. When a theory seems logical enough, people start believing in it before having a clear understanding of the truth itself. They would bend the truth to make it fit into their theory. This is a pitfall of intelligence. There are people who

lie and falsify in order to show themselves as the first ones to discover the truth. It is outrageous.

Q It's scary. And it is blasphemy against science. This is clearly a problem of the mind and the human values of those scientists.

A Perfectly correct. Unless they realize their flaws, they will endlessly repeat this kind of conduct. They live in the world of ideas, that is why they cannot find peace and stop deceiving themselves.

Q True... Now I realize that the big part of perception is based on ideas. Your message is, "Before you start searching around, get to know the facts," isn't it?

A Yes. *Zazen* teaches you that facts are the only existing reality. When you get free from the bad habit of searching for "something more," facts will become clear to you, and you will lead a life with no falsifications.

Q I don't know what to say! I guess I understand, but at the same time not exactly...

A I like your honesty! Here is what I'm saying: Get to know the truth *now*. In real life there is only *now*. Once *now* becomes precise, there will be no need to go in circles and make images anymore. Living a life like that is pure joy!

How Stupid!

Q I'm getting more and more interested. Are you saying that *zazen* makes you free from the restraint of words and images? And that means the real *now*?

A That is right. For our sense of hearing, the *now* ends with the question *what-makes-two-plus-three?* There is nothing else. Only that which happens in one instant. This is what you should understand.

Q I understand that. What is next?

A Take a good look at the facts. They appear, and then they

disappear the next instant. They have to—otherwise there would be no place for a new sound or a fresh view. And it is not only about what we see or hear—it concerns the whole body and mind function. It all happens in a moment, and is gone the next. There is nothing to bother us or make us worry. People do not realize this simple fact and stray in forcing themselves to search for more and more.

Q Yes, I see. But when it comes to “What makes two plus three?” it has to be five, isn’t it?

A Naturally. Whoever does the math, no matter when or where, the result will always be five. That is a social and cultural fact, but you have to understand that it has nothing to do with what our ears hear. Problems arise when we let the virtual images take the place of facts. If you are aware of the original fact, you will smoothly do the mathematics, without mixing it with unnecessary images. No one is such a fool to stay attached to something virtual, knowing it is virtual.

Q Yes, of course. Now I understand it very well.

War and Peace

A As long as you have this bad habit of transforming a fact into virtual reality, your mind will be clouded over, and there will never be any relief and peace. Why does this happen? —Because the data from the past come entangled and occupy you in the *now*. You cannot find peace of mind in such circumstances. Imagine you are alone at home, at night; scratching sounds are coming from the ceiling. You are frightened, but this is a result of your fantasies and delusions. Should you *just* listen, nothing will happen. I am sure you understand by now that everybody is frightened due to these bad habits.

Q Yes, I can clearly see the depths of my mind. And now I can say that one who does not know “what walking is” has to live

with his or her chaotic mind, clueless about what action to take. Jumping at shadows, evaluating gains and losses, and other kinds of opposing dualities can bring various disasters, including wars. If one mind is in such chaos, then the entire world is in a great mess.

A Yes, this is the reality of our world. It is a cluster of people who do not realize these simple things, so the clash of egoisms is inevitable. If we do not overcome the weighing of gains and losses, our likes and dislikes, we will never have empathy for a fellow human being.

Q Yes, I understand.

A As long as egoism is the main driving force of one's mind, one is going to be highly self-righteous.

Q Yes, indeed.

A Millions of egoisms are clashing against each other—I am worried about the future of the human race. And you almost splashed tea on me! It is dangerous to lose your temper like that. But everything happens as a result of something before it, and I suppose you could not have controlled yourself.

The Ultimate Solution

Q Please, let's not mention that episode anymore. I will never say anything that rude. I beg you (*joins her palms and lowers her head*).

A All right... I will not mention it again...*perhaps*.

Q Oh, come on! But, seriously, it is horrible to lose it like that. I don't want to drag this problem through my whole life. Is there an ultimate solution for that?

A Of course there is. Since it is a problem of mind, you know what you should do.

Q Problems are the bad habits of our mind, so we—I—should solve those problems. By doing *zazen*?

A That is correct. *Zazen* is the fastest method, a superior way in dissolving bad habits.

Q Why is it superior?

A This is a good question. Nothing can be fixed without knowing the cause of the problem, right? First, we have to calm our restless mind. When we make it calm, we will have a good view of it. So, do not engage in difficult thinking, just relax for starters.

Doing Nothing

Q I get that, but why is *zazen* the fastest, the best way?

A Because both your body and mind are still. You do not move them. *Zazen* has no goals. And with no goals ahead, you don't activate your body and mind. When you do nothing, you naturally become peaceful. Imagine you are walking around with a bucket full of water. The water will make waves, right? But when you leave the bucket on the ground, it will become still after a while. The same is with the mind.

Q I see. Doing *zazen* means doing nothing with both body and mind. *Observe, listen, but don't make waves in your mind.* That is why 'what does two plus three make?' is just 'what does two plus three make?' Becoming nature itself, that is the purpose of *zazen*—am I getting it right?

A Yes, you are right. But you mustn't sit (do *zazen*) and tune out! This is something you must avoid for it makes *sitting* absolutely fruitless. You can spend all your life doing *zazen* and achieve nothing: neither extinguish a fire in your mind, nor help others find peace of mind. It is very important that you know this from the start and to make sure you're not doing it. Because daydreaming or tuning out while sitting is not *zazen*—it is a pure waste of time.

The Essence of Zazen

Q I'm already kind of relieved, for I pretty often have this sense of insecurity, or judge myself and others....

A Don't worry. Everything will be all right once you get free from those bad habits. In order to get there, you have to have a sharp eye and guts! An enemy within you appears and disappears in a split second. You have to be alert all the time.

Q Doing *zazen*, having no aim, and not moving doesn't seem to match with "being alert."

A The goal is to attain *kenshō*. In order to succeed, you must wholeheartedly become *one with* (with whatever you are doing). You should dedicate yourself to *zazen*. When your whole being is concentrating on something (*sitting* or whatever), bad habits just fall off.

Q I see. Another question: what results from *sitting (zazen)*?

A The essence of *zazen* is *zazen*. Therefore, the result of *zazen* can only be *zazen*. There is nothing more to search for. This is the whole truth. We do *zazen* in order to realize the fact that there is nothing more. That is why you shouldn't search for more, or be out of it. Your goal should be a realization that *zazen* is "just" *zazen*.

Q Wow.... You lost me again. Can you explain it in simple terms?

A When you're "just" doing *zazen*, you're bringing nothing to it, there is nothing redundant in it. It is pure, genuine—it is *true*. Pure *zazen* is true; if you concentrate entirely on *zazen*, it will show you that it is true.

Q Oh, I see! I should do *zazen* 100%, and virtual reality will disappear.

A Yes. Should you do it properly, you will undoubtedly realize that *zazen* is true. Only walking can be true walking, so you should "just" walk. Do you understand that?

Q Yes, I understand it very well!

Super-Science and Super-Reason

A When one says “true,” people imagine all sorts of things that are sublime. But all that we have are thoughts, and thoughts are virtual. They have nothing to do with the truth. When you awaken to the real *now*—which has no past and future—you will not need words and ideas anymore (for they are a product of the past). When the obstacles (words and images) fall off, you will clearly realize that each and every *now* is true.

Q Oh, that is the “truth” you are talking about! I hope to get there. But what will I realize then?

A You are persistent, aren’t you?!

Q I am so sorry, but this is very important to me, and I want to be sure.

A I understand. When one puts one’s heart and soul into something, one sees nothing else, even oneself.

Q Pardon?

A “Forgetting oneself.” This is what happens when you *become one* with what you are doing. Zen is about being *one with*.

Q Er.... What does that mean?

A When you’re doing *zazen*, after a while you forget you are doing *zazen*. You forget about your own body and mind.

Q This is super-science and super-reason! To turn off all mental processes while awake!

A Absolutely correct.

Dying While Being Alive

Q This is amazing! Having no awareness about time and space, and even about oneself—how can you say you’re alive?! It is the same as being dead!

A True. You have to go through this experience because it is an absolute requirement for eliminating bad habits. When you do not know that you have completely dissolved in the *now* completely, you are in the *state of oneness*. If you do not put your heart and soul in it, the past will not let you go—meaning: old bad habits won't go away.

Q The *state of oneness* is that great? Worth of 'dying alive!' I bet nobody believes it is possible. But if it does exist, what happens next?

A Oh, this is what you are interested in!

Q But of course! It is not a joke, to 'die alive.' Nobody would believe in such a thing. Everyone will tell you 'no chance!' If this is really possible, the world will turn upside down!

A Well, go and try it, and we will see whether the world will turn upside down! You think, 'If this really happens, what would become with intelligence, with knowledge, and experience? People will start doing God knows what. There will be chaos everywhere"—am I right? I get the picture. People who haven't experienced the *state of oneness* cannot possibly imagine it.

Who is the Buddha?

Q Can you give me an imaginable example of achieving the *state of oneness*?

A All the great teachers, starting with the Buddha, have achieved it. After him was Mahakasyapa, then Ananda. Bodhidharma introduced the teaching to China, and master Dōgen was the first to teach it in Japan.

Q Oh, God! I just said it as a little joke, while it seems that everyone can experience the same thing as the Buddha, should they *become one with* and get free from old bad habits.

A Is it *that* surprising?

Q Well, yes. I mean—the Buddha! Can you tell me a little more

elaborately about the connection between: *putting one's whole heart and soul into it-the state of oneness-the now-and the Buddha?*

A That is the best question until now. I will gladly answer. Are you familiar with the Buddha's life?

Q I know that he was born as a prince, that he got married and had a nice life, but then started feeling sorry for the people who suffer, physically and psychologically; he had left his home to search for deliverance, trying various approaches, including a severe asceticism, and in the end, December 8, with the morning star, he experienced *daigo*, or big *satori*.

A I'm amazed! It must be your father's influence. Simply marvelous! That is all correct. You mentioned *daigo*; well, *daigo* is a sensation that one has after becoming fundamentally *one with*, then fundamentally dying (so to speak) and then becoming an utterly different person, an awakened one.

Q I kind of understand, but still....

A Let me tell you about the meaning and importance of fundamentally becoming *one with*. When you become totally *one with*, both your body and mind cease to exist, *you* cease to exist.

Q I've heard that many times, so I understand it.

A Is that so? Well, then, you know that what we call 'universe' is time and space.

Q Yes, it is represented by various phenomena. What does that have to do with utterly becoming *one with*?

A That said, in terms of time, it is, for example, "now," and in terms of space, it is "here, this thing, this phenomenon," right? In terms of humans it is "one body." This is all there is. "Now, this thing" represents the universe. Big, small—it doesn't matter; all these various things now make one (the universe). The universe (the whole) consists of all these fragments. If you don't even have one yen, you will never make one million yen—in the same way if there wasn't "this thing" "now," there wouldn't have been a

universe. As a matter of fact, this is all one thing: emptiness.

Q This is a rather mind-blowing matter you are telling me, but I think I understand. However, we lost the Buddha somewhere, don't you think? What does "becoming one" mean here?

A As I told you, when you *become one*, there is only *now*. It is when we are talking from the standpoint of time. "Only this thing"—from the standpoint of space. When you *become one with*, there is no more "now," "phenomenon," "past," "yourself"—nothing, which means: *everything, the whole universe*. When you become *one with*, you will achieve *satori*, as the Buddha did.

Q You are saying that, since *now* is endless, I can experience the same *now* as the Buddha?

A Exactly. *Now* has no before and after, no beginning and no end; this is an absolutely unchangeable truth. Since there was no one else like the Buddha Shakyamuni, we cannot have the exact same experience, but—yes, *now* is *now*, the Buddha's *now*, the *now* of the great teachers', and our *now*. When we become *one with*, we forget our *self*. In Buddhism we also say that we *die*. What do you say about that? Did the world go upside-down?!

Q Mine did! Gosh! I think I understand what you have in mind when you say "to die" in Zen Buddhism, and how important it is. *Be wholeheartedly in the now, and you'll become the same as the Buddha!*

A Correct.

Q To me, "dying" used to be one of the most frightening ideas. Because I thought of it in terms of cremation and the end of everything. But "to fundamentally die"—I kind of like it! Dying has nothing to do with thoughts and words. When you are 100% in the *now*, you don't have time to speculate.

A That's my girl! You got it. Let me give you one interesting example. Are you ready?

Q Yes, please, let me hear it!

A There was this old lady, an earnest *zazen* practitioner. One

day her grandson came for dinner. The grandmother looked at him and asked, “Who are you?” She was “just” looking at him, without bringing out her past knowledge. This is the state of not-sorting-things-out. The state of “forgetting *self*,” or “dying of self-awareness.” And the grandson said, “Granny, it’s me, your grandson!” Poor boy, he thought his grandmother had lost her mind. And who could blame him!

Q What happened then?

A She said, “Oh, that’s right,” and went to their family Buddhist altar. The moment she lit the incense stick, she experienced awakening.

Q I see. It could happen, why not? *Going all the way through* and not-sorting-things-out looks like the inside and the outside of the same thing, am I right?

A It is rather one and the same thing. Since there is no before and after, there is no past—only *now*. When one “just” listens, one has no sense of *self*. He or she may not even answer when spoken to—going all the way through and *becoming one* with a thing can make people come into a state of numbness. But experiencing it for a moment is not enough. Our *half-dead-half-alive* bad habits stay with us and emerge frequently, causing mess in our mind.

“Just” Doing with One’s Whole Heart

Q This is all so surprising! But I see it is possible and feel that *satori* is close. I have also had those moments of forgetting about myself.

A Yes, you have had them without a doubt. Many people have them. However, their experience cannot be called *satori*.

Q But why not?

A They do not know the teaching, therefore, they do not strive for awakening. If they knew the teaching, they would know the importance of *becoming one with*. It is knowing that lightness,

that pleasure, that deep taste we experience every time we *become one with* which makes us continue and put more effort. People who do not take things seriously lack earnestness, therefore, cannot perceive their bad habits. Even if they practice *zazen*, they achieve little because they do not realize the seriousness of the matter. It is such a shame.

Q I am taking it very seriously now. It is true what you say—it's such a shame that I've wasted my time earlier.

A It is important to reflect upon it. It allows you to grow. Tell me more about those moments when you were forgetting yourself.

Q I was just fully absorbed in it.... Oh, I know what you mean! When I was studying hard, isn't it?

A Yes, that's right. You said that the state beyond intellectual functions resembles death, right? What you did was *just* studying.

Q Oh, yes, I've experienced that many times. Oh, boy... there is nothing really special about it! Just doing it wholeheartedly.

A Right. You know that state of mind and you know how important it is.

Q You are saying that doing everything wholeheartedly *now* as in hard studying has something to do with Zen?

A It's not that it "has something to do with Zen"—it is Zen itself. Everyone experiences these moments now and then, but most of the people do not know their significance, and for them the thing ends before it even begins.

Q The granny you have mentioned became *one with* and achieved *satori*; can you tell me what happened at that moment?

A Good, important question! The one who attains *satori* comes to his or her senses through some sight or sound. It happens in the blink of an eye. The old lady came back to reality after her grandson called her. Master Dōgen came to his senses after a priest, who was meditating beside him, got hit with a bamboo

stick. That sound brought master Dōgen back from “death.”

Q What do you mean by that? As a ghost? Oh, that would be awesome!

A Ha-ha-ha! You’re saying funny things! But let’s pay some respect to the great master Dōgen.

Q Oh, I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean to be disrespectful. So, what happened then?

A When master Dōgen came back to reality, he noticed that the attachment and other bad habits of his past ceased to exist. He then shouted, “I’m free from my body and mind!” This is the meaning of the expression “to die and to come back.” Just like the Buddha, he experienced *satori*.

Along the Way

Of course, there is a constant flow of moments of realization, moments in which one achieves something new and unknown before. Those are very joyful moments. In old times, people called those achievements “small *satori*.” It is still not the time to cry out loud, “I am the awakened one!”

Q What do people realize along the way, after attaining small *satori*? Do they get insight into the world of the dead, or something?

A You funny girl! They start to feel relief after some restless situation. What they see, hear, think—or, on the contrary, the things they do not think about—all become clear. The sensations are brighter, as if your eyesight became sharper. Your head is clear. Many things become easier, so you are not troubled by what you like and dislike, your relationships with others get simpler, better.

Q That sounds wonderful! I’m sure everybody wants to achieve that. May I ask you more?

A Yes, of course. You need to know more. Master Dōgen wasn’t

satisfied with these small achievements, that is why he attained big *satori*.

Q Master Dōgen aside, I would like to know what happens with the people who are still walking the path.

A Even those small achievements have significance. The sutras, that used to be so difficult to understand, now become interesting to read. The *fog* that was scattered all over one's mind is lifted—it is freedom, it is joy!

Q Oh, I know—one starts to understand incomprehensible things like that famous *kōan* about a buffalo and its tail!

A You really know many things!

Q My father gave me “Mumonkan” to read. It is so completely illogical, I understood nothing. Do these *small-satori-people* understand such things beyond reason?

A Yes, more or less. By reading “Mumonkan” and suchlike, one corresponds to the great masters. I find them interesting to read. They are all about the human soul.

Q Sounds appealing. All right; what happens next?

A One gets freed from an obsession, for example. If it is a woman, she can go out dressed in her working clothes and with no makeup. One becomes able to regard things that seemed very important before philosophically and remotely.

Q Such women really exist?

A Of course. Buddhist priests' wives... or... oh! I know a scientist! She goes to the university she teaches at and to her lab—in *samue* (monk's working clothes). She does not have the need to attract people's attention and to decorate herself. It shows how comfortable she feels. She says, “I feel relaxed and spend little money.” When your mind is not preoccupied with trifles, you have a great reserve of energy. The people who are at that stage say they are very efficient at work. Their concentration is at a completely different level. They make fewer mistakes, which enables them to work in a more relaxed manner

and to have more pleasure in the process.

The Blind Spots of Zazen

Q Emotional balance sounds very appealing. What else happens?

A I already told you about the many changes. However, you must not be happy and satisfied with such a minor achievement. Because it is not the real thing. You have to listen to the master, otherwise it can become dangerous.

Q Oh... one understands and feels relaxed and is confident.... How dangerous can it be?

A When you think you understand something, you become satisfied, and you stop striving. In more severe cases, people become so confident that they preach to others and even stop listening to the teacher. Some even become life coaches and make money selling their version of Zen.

Q It would be awful to trust such a person! But I can see why people believe when somebody, full of confidence, tells such incredible stories about the things they know nothing about.

A From ancient times the masters warned us: *Do not fall for this small satori, it will misguide you.* If your *bodaishin* is not firm enough, you will hardly escape this trap. In that case it is wiser not to do *zazen* at all—you won't go around with an arrogant face of a "*zazen*-connoisseur."

Q Does *zazen* really have that aspect, too? By the way, there are plenty of books about *zazen*—what is your opinion on that matter?

A They are alright in general. However, when it comes to the gist, one can find many ridiculous things.

Q You mean, they can delude the reader?

A If it is only to get to know things, then it's alright, but one has to be careful to discern the truth from the rubbish should he

or she seek true peace of mind.

Q But it is so difficult to distinguish between the truth and falsehood. What should we do?

Complete Abandonment

A *Bodaishin* has a decisive role in it. You should set clear goals, and if your *bodaishin* is proper, your heart will “ring” differently to the right thing. Surprisingly, it works!

But first concentrate on the *now*, abandon all your attachments and “just” do whatever you do, wholeheartedly. The “fog” will lift, and you will understand some important points of the teaching, but you must continue being present in the *now*. This is the way to avoid mistakes.

Q I’m asking the same thing again, but I need a confirmation: what will happen if I continue to “just” be in the *now*?

The Mind Without the Mind

A You are funny, but a little bit persistent. Although, this persistency is not that bad.

Q Please, forgive me. (*she joins her palms and smiles*)

A Thoughts and emotions appear and go away the next moment, so you will grasp them all, but you will not get caught by them. Or, we may put it in simpler terms: your mind will stay dry, and your emotions won’t influence you.

Q That is great! It is presumptuous of me to say, but I feel much lighter now, I feel as if I’ve been saved. May I ask you another question?

A Go ahead.

Q There is no life without people, society, and things, right?

A Yes, of course.

Q And we all have our views on gains and losses, we have

emotions, we struggle with our past. “Not getting caught by them”—can you tell me about that in more concrete terms? How do we “just” live in the *now*?

A Since we have eyes and ears, we, naturally, observe and listen to what others say. We also read stuff (books, etc.) and try to understand it. The moment we are through with that, the new *now* starts. This is what I mean when I say, “Do not mind, do not get dragged.”

Q Oh, I see! We don’t get attached because we “just” live in the *now*.

A Correct.

Q I’m glad I asked you! I finally understand the essence of attachment. The genuine relief comes from the instantaneous perishing of our thoughts and emotions. There is simply no room/time to get attached. It would be great to live in such a mental state. I bet everything becomes joyous!

A You got it perfectly right. The state of mind which is free from various sorts of emotional turbulences is called “the state of oneness.” Or “the mind without the mind.” There is nothing you can stumble over.

The World of Non-Existence

Q Let me summarize: I come to this “state of oneness,” then I put all my efforts to stay in it, for if I don’t consistently stay focused on the *now*, I won’t be able to know my mind’s “landscape” before the rising of the turbulence. When my bad habits fall off, I realize that my *now* is pure Buddhahood. Consequently, I mustn’t think that I got there after I just shortly peeked inside the *state of oneness*—am I getting it right?

A Yes. You know a lot about the Buddhahood!

Q Actually, I know very little, but I know that the most important thing in *zazen* is to go all the way through. Letting go

of the past will liberate me. Only if I become one with the *now*. Am I right?

A Precisely!

Q I feel such lightness and even greater interest! I know I'm tedious, but, please, tell me: what happens next?

A I'll use slightly difficult terms now.

Q I hope I can understand....

A The "world of non-existence."

Q Oh.... What is the "world of non-existence?"

A There is no way to name something that doesn't exist, right? If we turn this statement inside out, we can say that *everything exists*. The great abundance. The "absence" means the "absence of the absent things," or "non-existence of nothingness." It is the transcendence of existence. When you really get that, you will attain *satori*. This is the reason why you must become *one with*. Unless you truly forget your body and mind, you won't be able to become one with the *now*, or, in other words, to understand the "non-existence."

Q I feel as if something is melting inside my heart. Please, tell me more! I have never heard about the "world of non-existence." And that it is the true *now*!

The Sea and the Waves

A It is important to become *one with*. Everything you do will have billions of shapes of the constantly changing *one*. It is like the relationship between the sea and a wave. Every wave is a part of the sea. Seawater takes the shape of the wave, it exists for a while and then it dissolves. In other words, *it is, but it isn't*. *It exists, but it doesn't exist*. Everyone must admit that.

Q The true *now* is a remarkable world! I also want to become *one with*! Can you give some more concrete examples for people who are mediocre, like me?

A What else do you want to know?

Q About true peace of mind.

A When you become *one with*, there is no duality, therefore no room for self-contradicting. This state of mind is individual and different for everybody. There is no recipe I could give you.

The True Nature of Salt

No matter how far the progress of science and technology has come, there is still no way to look inside the mind and measure it. Everything in it changes from one moment to the next, it has no substance, you cannot catch it. I can give you an example of taste or sound. We often say, "It is tasty," or "It has a nasty taste," but there is no such substance that we can call "taste." If someone asked us to show him a particular taste, we couldn't do that.

Q I kind of understand, but not completely....

A All right; I'll be more specific. Let's say you have some salt or sugar in front of you. You won't know what it tastes like until you try it. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Q I do. You mean: I could measure saltiness and sweetness by using a machine in a lab, but I wouldn't be able to experience the sensation of taste. Am I correct?

A Yes, you are. This is the absolute truth. We can also say that about sound. It has no entity, so, unless there is *en*, you cannot experience it, let alone keep it. It is here one moment and gone the next.

Q I get that!

A Taste is a phenomenon that arises only with an encounter of a certain substance and the tongue. I suppose you now understand the meaning of "it has no substance (entity)."

Q Yes, I do. I understand about the sense of taste, sight and sound. You cannot hold them. It is a world of the absolute, for

each and every individual.

A And not only them! Pain and hardships, joy and wanting—they all come either from our senses or from our minds. There is no substance called “pain” or “greed.” This is the truth about the mind. It *does not exist*, but it creates all sorts of trouble.

Q I see.... And *zazen* makes us realize all that? It sounds great!

Existent Facts, Non-Existent Facts

A These are the facts, and everybody who gets free from nasty habits can realize it. Precisely that is the aim of *zazen* training. When you realize that there is no unchangeable reality, that the *now* is the ultimate truth, you will relax.

Q It sounds so easy when you say it, but people don’t know this. I am amazed that it is possible to attain it naturally.

A With proper effort everybody can achieve it. Of course, naturally. If it were attainable through science, it would be digital, virtual, pseudo-Zen. Pay attention: when we perceive something in the *now*, that something has already ended. We can translate it into impulses, but it will be virtual again, won’t it? Do you understand?

Q Yes, I know what you mean. It’s interesting. It has ended; it isn’t there anymore, and thanks to that everything else can take place. We can hear new sounds, receive fresh sights, and taste new flavors.

A If the previous flavor was still there (in your mouth), you wouldn’t be able to recognize the recent one. Imagine the chaos we would find ourselves in should all sights, sounds, tastes, etc. pile up! This is the principle upon which the universe functions: *all existent facts don’t exist*. That is why it is called “emptiness.” You ate something, it isn’t there anymore, but it gives you pleasure which is an undeniable fact. It sounds complicated, but

it's not, it is interesting and funny.

Q Wow! I asked you about the mind, and your answer was about the taste, and how it *is*, although it *isn't*. It was there a minute ago, but you are pleased with its taste. So, can we say that this pleasure also has no entity?

A Precisely. That is why you must not linger over satisfaction, or over winning or losing, etc. It is a direct way of straying from the Path.

Q And awakening to the *now* is the only way to salvation. Becoming *one* with the pure, plain *now*, right?

The Awakening from a Dream

A The *past* doesn't exist by definition, but people get muddled for they lack awareness of that non-existence. Should they awaken to the *now*, the problem would disappear. And they would acquire peace of mind.

We may get scared or sad in a dream, but when we wake up, the fear and the sadness vanish. Great masters preach *zazen* because it takes us to the state of awakening. When we wake up from a dream, we don't bring that dream's content into the reality. We don't say things like, "In my dream you promised to give me a million yen, so come on, give it to me!" to people.

Q Ha-ha-ha ! Definitely not.

A Promises aside, bringing the past to the real *now* is the same as living a dream. On the other hand, promises between people are particular things, they shouldn't be mixed up with dream-like contents.

Q Oh, yes, of course, it wouldn't be funny at all. But, seriously, come to think of it, all that I consider and talk about is based on the past.

A This is where our self-contradictions derive from. If you knew the truth, you wouldn't try to "pull things out of the mirror."

Q Rōshi, your examples and metaphors are so clever! The metaphor about the dream and the mirror, as well as the sounds and tastes lacking substance—they are all from our everyday life, and I understand them well.

A *Zazen* is supreme because it helps us wake up from the dream and stop doing foolish things. The Buddha's *shikan-taza*, Bodhidharma's nine years of wall-gazing, master Dōgen's "Fukan Zazengi" were undertaken to achieve that: *to wake up from a dream*.

Q Yes, of course. But there are various ways of doing *zazen*, aren't there?

A Yes, there are—if your goal is relaxation, or getting healthy, or killing time. But if you think that you will express your gratitude to the old masters by simply sitting, you are wrong. The only way to thank them is to train wholeheartedly and to become the light of the world. This is why the masters passed on the Buddha's teaching to us.

It Is Easy but Difficult

Q I have come to understand the value and the importance of *zazen* very well. So, why is *zazen* the best way of breaking free from our bad habits?

A In order to break free from bad habits one has to go all the way through. You already know that. And how can one go all the way through?—By becoming one with the *now*. You know that, too.

Q Yes, I know. "There is just one thing in the *now*."

A But, can you really devote yourself to this one thing in the *now*?

Q I know that I should, but my mind wanders, and I usually find it difficult to focus on one thing. All kinds of thoughts arise and bother me. This is one of those bad habits we are talking

about, isn't it?

A Yes. Those bad habits are the problem. If you don't "dismiss" them the minute they appear, they will drag you into the endless cycle of distracting thoughts and *bon-nō*. You understand this mechanism, don't you?

Q Yes, I do. One wandering thought brings another one, they pop up in this *now* and in the next *now*, and so on, endlessly.

A Correct. Your bad habit reveals itself persistently in every *now*, and if you don't have an oversight of your mind in every present moment, you will not be able to solve the problem. It is not easy to stay focused on the *now*.

Q I'm completely aware that it isn't easy at all.

A The gist of *zazen* is aiming for nothing, doing nothing, "just" sitting. Doing nothing is really difficult. There is no bad habit that will let you do what you want the minute you want it. You should know that you are dealing with a horrendous enemy. And *zazen* is precious for letting you get rid of bad habits in a natural way—but only if you perform it wholeheartedly. If you are truly living in the *now*, you will notice both appearing and disappearing of all your thoughts.

Chewing and Zen

Q One doesn't have to think much to understand how important it is to cherish the *now*. For there is only *now*. Our lives are made of *nows*.

A Exactly. I cannot think of an example of achieving something without cherishing the *now*. All successful people become successful because they value every instant of their time.

Q Does that mean that ordinary people, like myself, can free themselves from the unwelcome habits if they treasure every *now* in their lives?

A Yes. You should carefully take one step at a time. Inhale,

exhale, naturally, without stumbling. You may say you have advanced pretty much when you become able to perform one bite for a long time.

Q How are the endless biting and advancing in Zen connected?

A If you can calmly chew, one bite *now*, the next bite in the next *now*, it is because your mind is focused, your thoughts are not flying around.

Q Does it mean that the mind is focused on every single bite?

A Yes. When do you chew?

Q Now.

A How many times can you chew (bite) in the *now*?

Q Once. Oh, I got it! Being able to perform one bite at a time means that I'm completely in the *now*! It is so clear!

Acting Like an Animal

A Do you now understand the importance of each bite and each breath?

Q Yes, I do. I remember how once I ate slowly, elegantly, chewing every bite for a long time. I surprised myself. And I remember the stillness of the mind I experienced then. It was such a pleasant mood that I will never forget it. It happened quite naturally, but as if it wasn't me. What do you think it was?

A It is a good question. You were "just" chewing. Your whole being was equal to chewing, i.e. your attention started with the chewing and ended with it. There was nothing redundant in it. It was the real, pure *now*.

Q Was that a Zen training?

A Yes, it was. Without a doubt. It was *you=chewing*.

Q So... if I had continued chewing, perfectly focusing on every single bite, I might have even attained *satori*?

A Exactly. And not "might have," but surely, for *satori* is what comes unquestionably if you go all the way through.

Q So our daily food routine is a necessity; it is the same as the one of cats' and dogs'?

A You noticed a very important thing. To the common people what they eat is not *food* but *feed*. It is because they are driven by the survival instinct, i.e. by the past. Most of the people do not notice this, and that is why they cannot snap themselves out of this confusion.

Q I understand that well now. I did it for a brief time then, but, by becoming *one* with the chewing, I disconnected myself from the past, didn't I?

A That is right. You are doing pretty well! Things got quite clear and sorted out in your head, haven't they?

Q Yes. I realized how precious I am, and what it really means to "cherish oneself." And not just myself and other human beings, but all creatures and everything there is. I'm overwhelmed with gratitude! Now I feel abundant happiness. Is this my true self?

Zen Is the Simplest Way

A Yes. You just became sincere, genuine. Everyone finds their true self after "peeling off" their mental nuisances.

Q So, we should be genuine, we should be... *the way we are*, that's all, right? I became genuine, sincere because I "just" chewed!

A Whatever you do, just do it wholeheartedly, completely focused on that one thing, and you will always find your genuine self. Our goal is to get free from bad habits. We can't afford to be careless in any single *now*. As you bring food to your mouth, you should completely focus on chewing—forty bites! While you chew, you should put chopsticks or a knife and fork on the table, hands still. All movement besides chewing must resume. *Zazen* disentangles snarled brain circuits. It helps us cut away the past and simply reside in the *now*.

Q I see. It's surprisingly simple. This means to "do something wholeheartedly!"

A Right. "One bite" is a superb way of practicing Zen. If you silently perform one bite at a time, you will undoubtedly *become one* with the *now*. And when you come to this point, all the things that didn't let you relax—vanish! You become able to perform almost everything simply, without unnecessary thoughts. This is the proof of progress. Imagine that you are cutting some vegetables on a chopping board: all your attention is there, your heart beats calmly, your moves are elegant, and the vegetables are cut into even pieces. This is an everyday Zen practice.

Q And I plan on implementing it right away! I can't wait to start!

A If you vacuum, do it with all your heart, concentrate on it. If you walk, make one graceful step after another. When you focus completely on what you do, there will be a moment when you realize: the *state of oneness*!

This is a state in which there is nothing to stumble on. Everything is flat, smooth. As you continue to make efforts not to lose the *state of oneness*, you'll become attentive to everything you think and do, and you will have a perfect overview of yourself. All your gestures will become smooth and beautiful. The simple things, such as opening and shutting the door, for example, will be elegant and would make a good impression on people around you. When your *bodaishin* comes to this level, you will have fewer dreams during the night, and your sleep quality will improve.

Q Pardon? Zen influences dreams?! In what way?

A Dreams that we usually have are strange, chaotic stories. However, when you advance in *zazen* practice, your reasonable thinking applies to your dreams, too, and you start having "logical" dreams. But there must be your *bodaishin* in the first

place.

Beautiful Transformation

Q Wow, this sounds great! I'd like to experience it as soon as possible. What else is there in prospect?

A There are many things. If I start to name them all, it will last forever.

Q For example?

A You'll start doing things unhurriedly, which will spare your nerves. That affects the way you look: your eyes will be bright and your expression friendly and welcoming.

Q Wow, Zen will make a beauty out of me! I mustn't miss that!

A There is more: your back will straighten up, your whole appearance will become graceful. It will become obvious in your table manners the most. People who have experienced it can recognize it on the first glimpse: *he (she) has come this far*.

Q I can't wait!

A Here is one more example: your handwriting will become neater. Relief and relaxation, gracefulness and readable letters—it all comes from a collected mind. And to have a collected mind you have to be always *one with the now*.

Q I also noticed that my letters are neat, readable when I'm settled down. There are so many rewards for *being one with the now* that I truly intend to do my best.

Something tells me that neurology can prove this state of mind. Or is it unnecessary?

Changing the Brain

A The Medical Department of Hiroshima University is working on that, in cooperation with our *dōjō*. They take MRI pictures before and after *zazen* practice. There are visible

changes in the brain.

Q Really? This is a “scientific” *dōjō*! What sort of changes have been recorded?

A For example, during MRI observations a researcher would pinch a research subject. The scanner shows a reaction in the brain. Now comes the important moment: in people who train *zazen* the time of getting back to the normal state (after this unpleasant reaction) is shorter than in people who don’t practice. Actually, it is almost instantaneous.

Q What does that show?

A It shows that people who practice *zazen* are not attached to anything. The MRI clearly shows that it isn’t merely a psychological effect, but that *zazen* also causes a neurological change. A person who practices *zazen* shows both psychological and neurological calmness, which is healthy, without a doubt.

Q Zen directly affects the brain?

A Yes, and it is quite logical: when your mind is collected, you stop being anxious. Before you know it, you become self-confident and free of pressure, which makes you, further, warm and generous.

Q This is how people’s characters grow!

The Limitations of Science and Technology

A However, this cannot be proven solely by MRI pictures. And why?—Because there is only one scientist who has experienced the *state of oneness*. It is an immense amount of work for one person.

Q But there are plenty of data, aren’t there? Since it is an objective matter, specialists from that area should be able to process it....

A It looks like that, but, in fact, they can’t. In order to see the changes on MRI pictures, one has to know the changes that had

occurred in the mind of the research subject.

Q Come to think of it—yes.... What could be done with that?

A It's easy: the researcher him(her)self should practice *zazen*. And take MRI images at the same time under the same external conditions. The researcher him(her)self is the only person who can notice and explain those subtle changes. Zen is not only about achieving calmness, which can be easily verified on MRI pictures. Zen is *that* plus the changes in human character, in our morality. It is practically impossible to make 100% objective claims when it comes to that. The one, whose mind hasn't changed, cannot understand those changes in another man's mind. So, the best way is that a few (many!) scientists practice *zazen* themselves, take pictures and find the changes common to the most of them. This will emboss the area in the brain where those changes occur.

However, when it comes to the objective numbers that measure the amount of those changes, I think they are impossible. Human being's dignity has no substance and cannot be measured.

Q Yes, the human mind is too deep and complex.... I cannot imagine how could another person or a machine measure the level of someone's willpower, wish, or conviction.

A Perfectly correct. All one can do is train to perfection and realize it for oneself. Rōshi will then examine him or her and say whether it is the real thing. The world of Zen functions in this way.

Q What is possible at this stage is to come up with rough numbers that rather show tendencies and to try to implement Zen in education and treating some psychological disorders. I think it is wonderful enough!

A It is pretty good for the time being. But we must have more researches, more data. Specialists who are concerned about humanity's future must know how important the quality of

human's psyche is. I would like to see them demonstrate the excellence of Zen and prove it to be effective in practice, based on their own experiences.

If you can't put out the fire in your own mind, how will you study this *substance-less* mind of others'?

The problem is that most scientists regard the human mind as a purely material thing. Whereas without *bodaishin* they cannot go far. Zen's true and effective implementation will be possible only if the specialists from this field of science start practicing *zazen*.

Body and Mind Are One

Q Excuse me for asking the same question: Should I "just" go all the way through?

A Yes. If you continue wholehearted practice, there will come a moment in which you'll realize that your mind is what you do and what you do is your mind.

Q Oh, boy.... Here we go again—the phrases that are too deep and impossible to understand for a common human.

A Alright. There is no need to talk about that now. You will understand that in the course of time.

What is important to know is that there is no mind outside the body. It means that what you do now, all that you see and hear, is your body and mind of that moment (*now*). To dissolve bad habits means to lose the distance between the body and the mind. There shouldn't be any distance between them. They are originally *one*.

As a result, you will realize that *bon-nō* (the villain) is actually the ray of light, the truth.

Q So, the moment I become *one with*, the bad habits I had considered an obstacle become *one with me*, too, and I'll have a powerful ally!

It means that I will realize that I of the *now* am true, and from

that moment I will start blooming, right?

A Well put! The blooming of personality. The poetry of the soul!

Q Rōshi, you are a poet! I like the way you can be impish sometimes.

A I beg your pardon?

Q Oh, nothing. Forget it!

A Okay. Just remember that the bad habits are *bon·nō* and a nuisance. But the moment you dissolve them, they become a ray of light. When the *fog* lifts, you won't *stray* from the *path* anymore.

Expiration of a Tomboy

Q I feel more and more uplifted. As if something that I've been fixated on has let me go.

A I'm glad to hear that. Listening to the teaching of the Path is useful. It helps *bodaishin* grow.

Q Being this serious about something is new to me. I was superficial and loose before, but I really want to take better care of myself now.

A It is important to be relaxed, but one must be very careful not to slip into indolence.

Q I'm slightly proud of myself for becoming this serious now, thanks to you, rōshi.

A Really? But you wanted to throw tea into my face! A tomboy is transforming into a lady.

Q Oh, rōshi, you said you wouldn't mention that again! I beg you not to bring it up anymore! (*she joins her palms*)

A Alright, I may forgive you at last, ha-ha-ha. (*he joins his palms*)

An Important Realization

By the way, a dog barks “woof;” what is “hō-kekyō?”

Q Hō-kekyō.

A What is three hundred eighty-nine?

Q Three hundred eighty-nine.

A What is this? (*he puts a teapot in front of her*)

Q (She puts the teapot back to rōshi and smiles.)

A Nice. You “just” did it, without an explanation. When we become natural, we need no words.

Q Exactly! I didn’t think, I just took the teapot. As if it wasn’t me who did it. It is so easy! Oh, this is “**just**” doing! What—that’s it? Purely natural acting. This means “to be one with a thing, *now!*”

A Yes, you realized an important thing: there is nothing out there, nothing special. Just the act of observing and listening to things reveals them naturally to us—there is no need to *think*.

Q The world of the mind is surprising, unusual! I think I understand the *now* and “just.” It is such a pleasant feeling.

A Understanding is not enough. You should prove you have awakened. The phenomenon of “just” is deep, and you will go through many changes.

Q You mean *kenshō* (the self-awareness)!

A Yes. There is only one truth. Everything is one, one is everything. The truth has no before or after. *Zazen* is the training that brings you to the awareness of that, to the awareness of the same mind as of the old teachers’.

Q I see.

A We all have eyes, and ears, and hands, and legs—exactly as the old masters had. Through the awareness of the *now* you will realize that our minds are also the same as theirs.

Q I see. But there is one thing that bothers me....

A And that is?

One Truth

Q You often say that “everything is one thing.” I kind of get what you mean, but since it is very important to understand it correctly, I would like you to elaborate on that for me.

I realize that we all experience various phenomena. They are a manifestation of the *now*, of the truth, they are the reality, the life, and there is nothing else above or apart from it. However, I don’t quite understand how everything is ONE. If I understood this, I think I could wholeheartedly focus on the now. Please, explain this important thing to me.

A Your *bodaishin* is stunning! It is a pleasure to deal with people of such passion. You asked that because you came closer to understanding of the phenomenon of *now*. It is proof that you have surpassed the theoretical part. So, let’s get back to the examples that you already know.

Remember what you do when you eat. You hold your chopsticks, pick up some food and bring it to your mouth. Let’s say you eat rice, some fish, and a salad. Whatever your chopsticks grab, the process of picking it up and bringing it to your mouth is always one and the same.

Q Oh, I get it! Whatever is in my mouth, the process of chewing food is (always) one and the same. *Being one with* the chopsticks means that to the chopsticks it’s all the same, whatever they grip.

A Perfectly right!

Q The mouth also doesn’t care what it contains—it chews whatever that may be. All that exists is one bite at a time. The same is with cleaning, walking, listening, etc. If you “just” do it (walk, listen, observe) in the *now*, that is the only thing. The *now* exists unconditionally, our ears and eyes also “just,” unconditionally, *are*.

The Now of Great Teachers

A Yes, that is perfectly right! That is what you must pay your attention to. If you realize this, life becomes lighter and funnier. Whatever you do, “just” do it in a detached manner, and the truth will reveal itself without doubt.

Q I get it! I should be *one with* (a thing) until the end and *die* until the end (forget myself completely)!

A Right!

Q I want to say something, but you may find me arrogant.... May I still say it?

A Yes, of course.

Q I realized, without any doubt, that the Buddha and the other great masters were people who got free from the bad habits “just” by becoming *one with* the *now*.

A You are not arrogant at all. That is true. Why did you realize that?

Q A while ago you were testing me with the dog barking, with the three hundred eighty-nine, and with the teapot. And now you gave me some more explanations. My mind was surprisingly clear, transparent, with no self-consciousness. That is when I realized: This is just this! (*she moves her forefinger from left to right and looks at it expressionlessly*.)

A Bravo! You are really lucky.

Q It was for a very brief moment, but I really *became one with* the emptiness. I realized that one can really perceive the truth only by emptying oneself completely. In that moment nasty habits fall off. This must be *kenshō* (the self-awareness)! And the people who acquired it were the great masters, right?

A Perfectly right. You really get it all, both theoretically and practically, though the latter one just for a short instant. Now you know what a state free of bad habits looks like. You have noticed this crucial thing and can imagine to some extent what it is like inside the great teachers’ minds.

Q I don't think that I really *got it*, but I feel fulfilled now as I have never felt before. There is no anxiety, disapproval, or lack of anything in me now. If I perfect this state, I'll be the same as the great teachers, won't I? At first, I had no clue what *emptiness* was, but now I think I understand.

A I am glad to hear that. It is all thanks to your honesty, diligence, and striving for perfection.

Q If the mind becomes this "fresh," I'm sure I can enjoy everything I do. I should maintain the *now* like this. Everything has only this *now-reality*, and we can experience the utmost freshness by "just" doing what we do. We should do only that, or, rather: *there is only that*.

A Perfectly right. Great masters were always completely in the *now*, and that is why they went all the way through. You will also get there if you continue to practice, never letting your guard down.

Now is always *now*, everything depends on the *now*: your striving, your efforts—literally everything. And it applies to everyone. Those who have *bodaishin* and are not lazy to practice will get there!

Simply Zen, All-Around Zen

Q Yes! There is nothing other than *now* (the present moment); if our *now* is fresh and lively, we can really enjoy our lives. This is Zen, isn't it?

A Yes, it is!

Q I have never imagined that *zazen* training was so close at hand, and that it will make me this uplifted. Everyone should know how simple it is to achieve the lightness of being, everyone should try it. It is deep and funny! I like the way it makes me light and straightforward.

Whatever one does wholeheartedly, it is Zen. I know without a

doubt that *zazen* training is about “just,” and the *now*: we should simply “just do” whatever we do in every given *now*.

A You probably haven’t noticed, but you became pretty bold.

Q Well, now that you mention it...you’re right! I’m past caring about small things. I feel excited and have no fears whatsoever. I like this!

A You are about to start training every day. You already have the basics down, so to speak, and they won’t let you become lazy or idle. If you continue to bear all this in mind, your practice will give more and more pleasure and lightness every day.

Q I’m sure it will. Doing my best not to lose the *now* out of my sight—that is what I plan to be careful about.

A As you noticed, there is nothing complicated in *zazen* practice.

Q I will do my best. Be my guide, please! (*she joins her palms and bows*)

Er... there are two more things I’d like to ask you.

The Most Difficult Thing

A Go ahead!

Q The first one is: What is the most difficult part of the training?

A Staying in the *now*. In other words: *staying with yourself*.

Q That means that guarding the *state of oneness* is difficult, right?

A Yes. Even you will have to endure some hardships.

Q I’m ready to face them! What sort of knowledge and ability do I need to deal with them?

A Imagine you are holding a cup full of water with both hands, and you walk, trying not to spill even a drop. This is how you should handle them. With the utmost seriousness. This seriousness will eliminate bad habits. I have told you many

times, but I will repeat: *bodaishin* is the absolute condition.

Q I understand. Cherish every moment.

A Yes. “Just” do everything you do *now*.

Q I got it. Thank you very much (*she bows with her palms joined together*).

One Moment as a Whole Life

A And the second question?

Q It is about a moment. The moment I see or hear something, words and images arise and they invite “their friends,” so I don’t know what to do with them. I try to get rid of them, but it causes an even bigger entanglement. What should I do?

A You are really one serious practitioner. Should you have not paid utmost attention to the *now*, you wouldn’t have asked this shrewd question. And why do I say that? Because, if your dispersing mind hadn’t started to settle down, you wouldn’t have noticed this phenomenon. You were in a constant flow of distracting thoughts before, and you couldn’t notice what was actually happening in any given moment.

Q Yes, I think so, too. Rōshi, what did you do to overcome it?

A To be honest, I also struggled. There was this construction site near our *dōjō*, and I was watching it every day. It didn’t bother me while I was leading a life full of “normally” chaotic thoughts and images, but as I came to this stage of the training when I could mark the appearance of the images, when my five senses sharpened, I became very sensitive to everything that was happening inside my mind and in my surroundings.

Q I know what you mean. All those things are now bothering me, too.

A Isn’t it funny? On one side, we succeed in calming our minds, but on the other, due to this calmness, we have to deal with this additional problem.

Q I can't believe it! When you come to know, you *know that you know nothing!*

A Indeed. And when you hear the scratching, squeaking, buzzing, and suchlike sounds, all that produces them stands out in front of your mind's eye.... This really gave me, too, trouble at that stage of practice.

Illness Without the Illness

However, in your ear there is only a sound. Now that you know that, you notice this unnatural phenomenon of non-existent images accompanying existent sounds. Formerly, you didn't notice it, it was normal to you. We do nothing about that because we are not aware that we have a problem.

This state we call "illness without the illness." Since we don't perceive ourselves as needing to improve, we do not notice this huge flaw, so we spend our whole life dragging our bad habits around. Those who have no doubts lurking in their souls cannot ever be cured.

Q Rōshi, if I hadn't met you, I would have lived my life without noticing it. What a horrible perspective! That is why I really want to know how to solve this problem.

The State of Oneness

A You have only one instant. The sound you hear must end with that one instant and without letting the distractions take your attention away. This was pretty difficult for me.

Q What in particular did you do?

A What a straightforward and good question! I overcame it by focusing on the repetition of inhaling and exhaling. A lot was arising in my head—images, words, and suchlike, but I cut them off without a moment's delay and stuck to the breathing. The

most important thing here is a complete dedication to this one thing.

Q How long did it take you to overcome it?

A From the moment I realized the existence of the problem (of *bon-nō*), i.e. from the start of the actual, focused training, it took me one week. One week of literally twenty-four hours per day.

When I became able to ignore everything around me, I stepped on the path of sure liberation from *jiga/gaken*. That is when I really started to breathe naturally, when I achieved the *state of oneness*. I was “just” observing and “just” listening, and I also understood how important that was.

Q I hope you don’t mind me asking: How and what did you feel in those moments?

A The training itself was very hard. It was as if I was fighting for my life. But then, like a ripe apple that falls from the tree, naturally, effortlessly, it just fell off. In that moment the *fog lifted*, everything became clear and easy.

The Actual Practice

Q How did you change after that? Excuse my persistence!

A I realized that this was the proper way of training, but I still didn’t go all the way through, so images kept on popping out every now and then. It still wasn’t the *absolute now*, and I still hadn’t eliminated my bad habits.

However, I was on the right path: I knew I had to guard my *state of oneness*, and that by doing that, everything redundant will automatically fall off. There was no need to do anything special. My practice became much, much easier—I couldn’t believe I had had trouble practicing before. And it wasn’t just me: everybody could experience that. So, from that moment on, the actual practice had begun.

Q Oh.... What does that mean?

A It means that I noticed the point where bad habits get beaten up, but I hadn't beaten them up definitively. If you don't guard your *state of oneness*, if you do it partially, you achieve nothing. Only a 100% guarding of the *state of oneness* can give results.

It applies to you, too. You came pretty far, and it would be a shame to let your bad habits ruin what you have achieved. You mustn't loosen control. This is the phase where most people fail.

Q I heard what I had to hear! I decided to "just" be in the *now*.

A Good!

Q Thank you very much! (*she joins her palms together and bows*)

A Necessary Man

A Looking at you, so full of energy and determination, makes me very thrilled. I wonder if you have a sweetheart....

Q No. I had one, but he left me. Wow, you took me by surprise! Why this sudden change of subject?

A Oh, well... I got curious, it's natural.

Q Speaking of nature, no wonder he left me—I'm full of shortcomings.

A You mustn't talk about yourself with such self-deprecation. If he left you, then it just wasn't meant to be.

Q I can be childish sometimes and don't have a good eye for men. I would like to get married but don't know what to pay attention to in men.

A I won't tell you anything new if I say that compatibility, the way you get along, is what matters. He can be great in every respect, but the way he talks to you can make you sick or angry. Or, on the other hand, he can indicate some flaw of yours, but it may not get on your nerves. That is very important in the long run.

If he suits you, you'll feel at ease with him, no matter what he

says or does.

Q I see.... I know very little about men, especially when it comes to their human nature. What should I consider ideal?

A Well, we all differ, and your perception may be something quite different than mine, but I would say that a man should be, first of all, honest. He should have just a bit of wildness in his character, be a grown-up and have paternal instinct, so that he wants to and can protect his family. Also, he should have a sense for justice and friendship.

Q I see....

A Paternal instinct is as important as the maternal one. We now live in pretty unhealthy times, so too many men are underdeveloped when it comes to the paternal instinct.

Q I totally agree on that! There are too many un-manly men, worried about their appearance and lacking masculinity. I'll be brutally honest: they don't have what it takes to attract women.

A You're right. There are too few healthy, grown-up relationships. Even if they get married, both men and women lack the ability to adjust, so they easily divorce.

Q Yes, too many couples either divorce or start extramarital affairs.

A Absolutely right. They lack self-confidence and are afraid to have children, and for that reason many avoid marriage. And if they marry and have children, they often abuse them. The root of the problem is in the lack of self-control.

Q I've been nodding the whole time. I see where you are heading to.

A If two people are mature, they will soothe each other and solve any problem thanks to their deep bond. I'm sure you understand me.

Q Yes. If the two are not mature and cannot take care of each other, how will they raise children, right?

A Perfectly right. And besides that, being apt to some thrill and

suspense can add spice to the relationship and make it always fresh and challenging.

Q Believe me, I dream about such a man!

A Such a person is creative, you never know what he or she is going to do next. It can be slightly scary sometimes, but at the same time it gives you reason to expect something extraordinary from him or her. One can never get bored with such a person. He or she is mobile: you can call them in the middle of the night and tell them that you want to go for a night swim, and they will not hesitate to take you to the seaside. It is pure pleasure to know somebody like that!

Q Oh, yes, I'd love to meet such a man!

A They are flexible, able for both big and small actions, always full of fresh ideas. With such a person you can keep on growing. Two people like this make an ideal couple. These qualities are the most important ones; judging people by their appearance or academic background gives no results.

Before You Ask Too Much

Q I'm glad I asked you! It gives me much to think about. Are there any other characteristics that could be called ideal?

A *Zazen* training became a consultation on life! Well, I'll tell you: burning passion (although it is very rare), cutting intelligence, coolness; being always ready to act and treat others gently. You know, people who have these qualities are easily moved to tears.

Q That sounds wonderful! Do men like that exist?

A If you are like that, you will find that kind of a man—*en* works that way. And even if you are not similar originally, if you are willing to be together, at some point you will start to be alike. But, before you ask too much, you need to hurry up and become such a person, so that you get chosen by a superb man.

Q Oh, my God, I started sweating! This really makes one shape up. I will do my best to be an ideal wife... of an ideal husband!

On Being Refined

A That's the spirit! I'm sure that a suitable person will appear in your life.

Q Really? That would be great! I would gladly commit to such a man.

A Being refined in Japan means to know the tea ceremony, calligraphy, then how to make ikebana.... You should learn it! You may well use it in your everyday life, but even if you never do, knowing them will nourish you and make you a highly refined person.

Culture is the source of a beautiful, refined public spirit. And it enriches human relations.

Q I agree. And on my parents' recommendation I have been learning a little bit of everything. Right now, I'm learning karate.

A Well, that is wonderful! Do whatever you can so as to become a trustworthy person, needed by many people. I would also like you to become a mother, and a good one, too.

You know what I do? I give my trainees to read and write Sōrō-style texts. Do you know what they are?

Q Yes. Those refined letters from a few centuries ago. The ones that have something like 'Godzasōrō' at the end of sentences, right?

A Exactly. The truth is that even if you wrote them, nobody could read them, so, that ability has no practical use. But the fact is that there are plenty of those letters, and the ability to read them or to write in that style really makes a difference. It adds cultural depth to the one who can.

Culture nourishes our souls. Doing something because we'll get something material in return is a typical economic way of

thinking. That is why our hearts are so muddy.

If someone who is considered to be cultured does something immoral, that is because he or she is not actually cultured.

We should lead a modest life and not let all kinds of fashion make us lose our minds. And we should never forget to be kind and obliged.

Plus, honest and hardworking. Do you get my point?

Q Yes! I will do my best. Listening to these kinds of things benefits me greatly. Do you mind continuing in that fashion?

The Greatness of the “Imperial Rescript on Education”

A Oh, how can I refuse such a charming young lady?!

So, the most important attributes are human qualities.

Q I have heard that many times from my parents, too. How can one learn “human qualities?”

A For example, from the “Imperial Rescript on Education.” It was even presented at the University of London in 1907. It represents a superb model of society and democracy. If one takes it as the base for his or her conduct, he or she will develop great human characteristics, by all means, and a society made of such people is stable.

Q My father says the same thing. And I also think we should cherish it.

A It is obvious that you respect your parents. That is wonderful.

And you know what is even more interesting about this *Rescript on Education*? That its essential part was taken from the Buddha’s preaching in the kingdom of Magadha.

Q Really? I didn’t know that. So, the “author” is the Buddha himself! It just couldn’t have been a bad piece of work!

A There’s more!

Q I certainly want to hear it!

A As you know, Japan has defeated the Baltic fleet in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. It was the age when European countries, the countries where people eat meat, made Asian countries, whose population is vegetarian, their colonies. Japan has no natural resources and for that reason, among others, focused on economic and military empowerment. As you know, Japan was the only Asian country that wasn't colonized. The ruthless competition in a world where the weak are the victims of the strong led to the First World War. But, let's get back to the battle between the Imperial Japanese Navy and the Baltic Fleet; there was this Russian man who carefully observed the strategy of the Japanese side and the way it pursued the battle. It was Anatoly Lunacharsky, a playwright and the Minister of Education. Impressed by the courage and discipline of the Japanese Navy officers, he researched about our strength and came to the Imperial Rescript of Education. He was an intellectual par excellence. After the Russian Revolution, he implemented some parts of the Rescript into the Russian educational system. If Russia hadn't become a communist country, its national character would have been the closest to ours. And the problem concerning the Kuril Islands wouldn't have arisen.

Q I see.... And what about today's Japan?

Monster Parents

A There is a bunch of arrogant people in our country today, people that only look for flaws in everything. Their view on the Imperial Rescript on Education is negative. They are the so-called "thinkers" and "intellectuals" who try to deny even Prince Shotoku, one of the greatest figures in our history. Beware of such teachers!

Q My father also says that!

A Our country has an enormous problem in its educational system. One of the results are the so-called *monster parents*, people who are pathologically offensive when it comes to their children.

Q Yes, I agree and feel sorry for the school teachers.

A These “specialists” write history textbooks and we have complete chaos in that field. Of course, people who authorize these textbooks are also part of the problem. Schools that use stupid books are damaging our children. These children then become parents, and what we have are grown-ups with problems, i.e. monster parents. You see—the Japanese people are ruining Japan. You mustn’t listen to them because your soul will rot like theirs.

Q I will be careful. My father has also recommended the “Imperial Rescript on Education,” and the more I know about it, the bigger respect I have for it. I hope that someday it will be needed throughout the world.

Parents’ Treasure, Children’s Treasure

A You are one wonderful young person! You are blessed with marvelous parents and teachers.

Q I’m proud of my parents. My mother has also taught me many things.

A If it’s not a secret, I would like to know what your mother has taught you.

Q Well, for example, “A host does his best to treat his guests properly, guests do their best to properly treat their host,” or “Mismanaged children are a disgrace to parents,” or “One man’s fault is another man’s lesson.” My mom has also guided me to be the last one when entering someone’s home with other people and to put my shoes together in the entrance. Oh, and this one, too: when I finish my meal at someone’s home or at the

restaurant, to gather dishes compactly, so that the host, or a waitress, can easily clean up. To think about other people, for sometimes I will be in their position. Then... that taking really good care of oneself means not to embarrass him or herself, as well as others, too. And to always think about my words and deeds. Things like that.... When I was small, I didn't quite understand what she meant.

Thanks to this advice I have never been rough with other people and always did my best so as not to embarrass my parents. My mother passed away, but she continues to be my big support. She is my treasure.

A Truly wonderful parents!

Q My father has taught me a lot, too.

A Yes, I would certainly say so. If you don't mind my asking: what kind of things?

Q “Sho wa sansha wo hete, uenba to naru.” I remember that one most vividly because I didn't understand a word of it. It didn't even sound like the Japanese language!

A Ha-ha-ha, your father is an educated man and a good father. So, do you understand it now?

Q Yes, my father explained it to me; it says how dangerous hearsay can be. The literal meaning of the proverb would be something like “Let three men write the same phrase, and you'll have a horse instead of a bird.” The ideograms for bird, horse and the third ideogram (“en”) are similar, but “en” alone has no meaning; so, with every transcript you will get a slightly different version. This is what happens when you pass on what you had heard from someone who also hadn't seen it with his own eyes or heard with his own ears.

A Exactly!

Q There was this one, too: “People talk seventy-five days.” I'm not sure whether the number is correct, but it is supposed to mean that, whatever people say to you or about you, unless you

personally feel ashamed or have done something wrong, just don't need to pay attention to them. It says that you should always firmly do what you consider being right.

A What your father has taught you is the real culture and it will protect you throughout your entire life.

You are obviously an absolute treasure to your parents. You were lucky to have wonderful parents, and your children will be blessed with a brilliant mother. I can't tell you enough how much that makes me happy!

Is there anything else you would like to ask?

Abortion: Pros and Cons

Q As a matter of fact, there is. But it is quite different from what we are talking about, so I don't know....

A It's not like you to hesitate. Go ahead!

Q Thank you. Alright then: about abortion. I would like to know what you, rōshi, as a cleric, think of it.

A Oh, my goodness! This is one of the most important topics in politics, sociology, ethics and philosophy. From a religious and moral point of view it is wrong to end a life, even the prenatal one. However, should that have been absolutely banned throughout the world, with no exceptions, the population on Earth would have grown to tens of billions of people, in the blink of an eye. What kind of life would we have then? Can you imagine that?

Q I think it would be impossible to live. There would be simply no room for the future generations, let alone a good quality of life.

A Naturally. The shortage of food, natural resources, wars... that is what would inevitably happen. The ecological situation on the planet is already serious, it would only grow and jeopardize our survival.

Q I think so too.

A The progress of science and technology will help to some degree, but, on the other side, our ecological consciousness will continue to decrease, so I'm pretty pessimistic when it comes to the future of the human race.

Q I agree. This is the current state of the world.

A In my humble opinion, things will develop in a very simple and predictable way. With the doubling rate of the population, there will be twice as many good and bad people. The traffic of people and things will also double, as well as the number of accidents, the lonely people and people who cannot stand the pressure of this ever-speeding rhythm. As the level of civilization goes higher, our everyday lives will become more and more comfortable, and, on the flip side, we'll have more cyber-crime, cyber-terrorism, and also deception schemes that grow more skillful every day. I'm sure you understand what I'm saying.

Q Oh, yes, I do. And I'm pretty scared of such prospect.

A People will be too busy protecting themselves from all that, everybody will be too tense. That can only have a bad impact on our race, it can easily lead to chaos. It will be more and more difficult to solve the situation. So, to get back to the beginning of this story, this is what can happen due to increased population and scientific progress.

Q Oh, I didn't think of it that way. But, yes, really....

A We will all eventually die. It is a big problem when one who is supposed to die—doesn't die. Technical progress allows doctors to keep alive the people who are at the end of their road. The population increase plus human greed and technical possibilities cause the ever-increasing consumption of energy, and, little by little, the need for nuclear power plants. As you can see, the population increase and the technological progress don't care about morality. Even if one is against abortion, one can do nothing against constant obstruction of life.

Q True....

A If you want to know my opinion concerning abortion, I will tell you: in order to prevent an absolute disaster, some sacrifices are inevitable. And abortion is not the only problem. To deny it is easy and sounds noble, but it means to avoid taking responsibility for the sake of our future, and that is a sin, if you ask me.

I am not *for* abortion, but there are situations when it's necessary. You probably know the proverb, "To make a costly sacrifice in the course of justice."

Q Yes, I know.

A In order to preserve the whole, one must swallow the tears and endure pain for losing the part of the whole. Only those who can do that can call themselves grown-ups.

Look at all the smart people with high education: nobody finds so many flaws in everything like they do. Their arguments *for* and *against* something sound solid if you take them away from the big picture, but they are fragmentary and lack maturity.

Q Yes, I agree. In the course of our lives, we encounter unavoidable afflictions, but we must be patient and endure them, never forgetting gratitude and our obligations.

A Most certainly. There is one more thing I'd like to say. Human race continues to exist thanks to the birth of children. For that, people need to get intimate and they are granted that right. Since that act is linked with life, a couple has religious, moral and social responsibilities. It is important that we do not forget this fact because this is a condition for our existence.

Overpopulation and mechanisms to prevent it are a matter of lust, responsibility and wisdom, so the key to solving the problem is in the autonomy of every single individual. Outer measures, such as human laws, do not deal with the fundamental part of the problem and cannot solve it.

Nowadays, the education we have in our schools primarily

valuates intellectual development, and that is a problem, if you ask me.

Intentional Harm

Q I understand. But what would you say about this one...?

A Which one?

Q Contemporary medicine is able to determine not only the gender of an unborn child but also its malformations and even to perform intrauterine operations. What, in your opinion, must be done, should some of these malformations get diagnosed?

A When new life is conceived, this is the biggest concern and fear for future parents. “What if...?” is a thought that crosses everybody’s mind. We all hope to have healthy children. Back in the old days we didn’t know whether it was healthy or not until it was born.

If it wasn’t sound in wind and limb but was born alive, it must have needed us, and it was probably a child with strong *bodaishin*. In that case we must do everything to justify its expectations—that is what me and my wife agreed upon and were looking forward to seeing its growth.

Q But it can be diagnosed in the uterus now. I’m curious what you think about that case.

A Oh, I see. Let’s say the child is born handicapped. It is more or less alright while its parents are alive, but when it’s all alone, when it has to cope with its disabilities on its own or with the help of other people—what then? It will lead a life full of suffering. Moreover, it will be a burden to all related people. And in the end it will die, like all the other living beings.

Since it is born, it has all human rights. But there are parents who, while knowing that, also apprehend the difficulties of raising such a child and what a big burden to society it will be—and choose abortion.

Q Exactly that is my question. Please, tell me your view on that.

A It partly overlaps what I've been telling you and is partly different from it.

Q What is the overlapping part, and what is the difference?

A It is one of those things that can't be helped. Nobody will perform them willingly. In every case, it is the parents who decide what to do. I cannot blame them for terminating such a pregnancy, but I feel sorry for the baby. On the other hand, if they know that their baby is severely damaged and still decide to give birth, they sentence it to a miserable life. They do that knowingly. Science and technology progress little by little, but constantly. And now people know many things in advance and to fuller extent, but they suffer more.

Q Yes.... Whose fault is that?

A It is nobody's fault, but, one way or another, the decision is on the (two) people who are in question. If they choose abortion, they have to be prepared to suffer together.

If they decide to keep it, they will suffer, if they choose to terminate pregnancy, they will also suffer. That is the reality of the world we live in. That is why we have to understand them and feel compassion, and also to embrace doubts about the progress of technology and civilization.

Q You want to say that in each case it is difficult to decide, am I right?

A Yes. It is human life we are talking about. Parents, brothers and sisters are put in a very harsh situation. And here come some people who have never met them, and they start talking about ethics, naming reasons that sound noble, but are, in fact, general and idle. The parents, who are facing an extremely painful decision, suffer even more thanks to these "highly moral" theorists. What these people do is hypocritical and cruel.

They should honestly think about what they would do, if they

were in these parents' shoes. To know, to understand is not enough, and, moreover, it is counterproductive in some situations. Knowledge and words become a weapon sometimes. We can seriously damage our fellow human beings and deprive them of basic rights by our selfish interpretation of ethics.

Q Oh, God... that is so sad. I can understand both *pro and con* reasons, and also don't like either one. I agree with neither of them. Am I being irresponsible?

A No, no, you're just a human being like the rest of us. This kind of serious and, I would even say, tragic thing can happen to anybody. People, struck by such misfortune, have a really hard time, and all we can do is be compassionate and keep our opinions to ourselves.

Q The more I think, the sadder I become.... Can we change the subject?

Same-Sex Marriage—Yes or No?

A Of course.

Q About the same-sex marriages. I don't know if it's appropriate to talk about something like that to you, rōshi, but still....

A It is alright. As the previous one, this is also a human and a social problem. You are aware of the reason why a marriage of a man and a woman is welcomed by a state, aren't you?

Q Well... I think so....

A The continuation of the human race is at stake, so the marriage is not merely a private matter; every state actively welcomes and promotes it. The two who are getting married have three obligations: to have children, to raise those children, and to support each other until *death do them part*.

Q Let me make sure I understand: you are saying that this is a healthy couple's responsibility towards society?

A Yes. Pardon my unrefined expression, but the two should be busy procreating until, approximately, forty-five, forty-six; after that children go their ways and the two stay together and look after each other. You are grown-up enough to know that, right?

Q Yes, of course.

A After a couple has raised children, they should be there for each other. But for that function, i.e. being there for mutual support, it is unnecessary to have a man and a woman. It can be two friends, or brothers and sisters—whoever. It is important to make it easier for the state (otherwise the state has to take care of them), and to enjoy life. Especially in these dangerous times we are living in! Isn't it easier, cosier, nicer... when one has somebody on his or her side, somebody to ask for advice, to laugh together, etc.

Q I understand! Couples that don't give offspring, but care for each other and want to be together, may as well be approved as the married ones, right?

A I think they have the right to be accepted. The state can draw a line between them and traditional married couples, it can favor regular man-woman couples, but I think it should approve same-sex marriage. Marriage is very important, and people should not be picky about the linguistic nuances. It doesn't have to be a legal bond between a woman and a man, it can be a legal bond between two persons. We mustn't forget that there are many heterosexual couples who cannot have children.

Q You are saying that the definition of marriage should be altered?

A Yes. It will take a long time. People in question are a minority and they have to be very patient until things start to change. But we should all talk about it.

It is sad and lonely to live alone. Humans need the opportunity to dedicate themselves to other beings and also to see that their feelings and actions are appreciated. It gives us strength and will

to go on. We all grow old, lose our dear ones, at some point we live alone. First and foremost, it is dangerous and it could be fatally late, should something happen.

Heterosexual couples and the same-sex couples have differences, but also similarities. However, if we look at the love and support that people of the same sex give to each other, at the role that this kind of bond can have in the society, I think it should be accepted.

Q Rōshi, you are revealing the sides I wasn't aware of. I feel that I'm becoming more mature thanks to this talk with you. Everything looks so clear and simple now. Thank you very much!

Japan's National Security

A You look as if you want to talk about something else.

Q Oh, you read me like an open book! As a matter of fact, I do....

A Go ahead!

Q You know, my father asked me something that I couldn't answer. We were talking about the aftermath of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, about the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, and then we came to the topic of Japan's national security.

A Oh, yes, that sounds like your father! These are all very important things.

Q Our country is under America's defense shield, which contains nuclear armament, too. That is one thing. There are some other things, like the relationship with the neighboring countries that also possess nuclear weapons. There's also the problem of the US military base on Okinawa island. That is so complicated altogether, and I still don't have a firm and grown-up opinion. My father told me to think about all that, seriously.

I feel these problems are too big for me and wonder what you

would say, as a professional in spiritual matters.

A To be honest, I cannot guarantee a definite opinion either, but if you still want to hear it....

Q Yes, I would like to hear your opinion. Being a Japanese and a grown-up, I should have some thoughts about these matters.

A You know why wars start, don't you?

Q I suppose I do. There is greed, betrayal, and a grudge in the background. Then, the peoples of two countries start to quarrel over the dignity of their nations. And soon it is not just a clash of opinions.

A Exactly! If people had faith in each other, kept their promises, helped and respected each other, they couldn't invade and kill each other. If all countries had an educational system which would cultivate psychological independence and self-respect in every individual, there would be no need for national security treaties.

Q I believe so, too. But that is pure idealism, a dream. I would like to hear a realistic opinion. We live in a world in which not all states have good sentiments towards Japan. What does our country need as a deterrent against these threats?

A Oh, that is what you wanted to hear! Well, it must be something that doesn't jeopardize people's lives and doesn't cost the state too much. Is it also idealism and a dream to you?

Q Well, yes. How can something like that work?

A It can work, I assure you. Everyone should raise the awareness of his or her country's strong points.

Q Tell me more....

A Here in Japan we should revive the Imperial Rescript on Education, raise the flag and sing the anthem more often. This is the best deterrent. The role of deterrent is to suppress the wish to attack others. Weapons are the most common deterrent, but they cost a lot and take lives on both sides. What leads to war is hatred; never ending suspicion, and weapons are not the way to

stop that.

Q And you suggest...?

A I suggest a revival of self-respect and the spirit of the country with an extensive history, under the emperor from the same dynasty. Then, a revival of the culture that comes from the long tradition, and also technical skills.

A neat and honorable nation that sticks together—this is Japan's most potent weapon. All that I just mentioned—the traditional background, the highly skilled professionals and the united nation that has self-respect—is the force able to deter anybody who has indecent intentions towards Japan.

Q You mean: with a robust economy and technical skills, together with an unwavering samurai spirit, we send the message, "Don't mess with Japan!"

A Yes! No bloodshed, and it doesn't cost much. At the same time, it will help lift up the psychological autonomy of Japanese people. It has been sinking for quite some time....

Using weapons may give some short-term results, but it brings too much pain and the losses on both sides are big. Cleaning of post-war mess is horrible, and the root of the problem stays there, deep in the "soil," unsolved.

A security treaty works when both countries keep their promises and respect each other. Every country should cultivate that quality in its nation. If Japan succeeds in it, it will be loved and respected even more. And many countries will learn from us, too.

Q At the beginning of this talk I was slightly bewildered, but now I think how great it would be to implement your suggestion. I agree it is productive, and it has a much bigger impact on the people's spirit than the nuclear weapon.

A From now on, people from all over the world will come to Japan not only for its beautiful nature, but also for its tradition and culture, refined manners and cleanliness. They will come

here and learn our way. Raising morality and all other human qualities changes people: instead of confrontation they start to respect each other, instead of ruminating over the past, they start thinking about the future. Their spirits naturally become calm and peace-oriented.

The Limitations of Democracy

Q It would be great should it all happen the way you said! But, rōshi...!

A A new question?

Q From the perspective of defense, Okinawa is very important to Japan. What should we, people from other prefectures, do for Okinawa?

A Again a question that is hard to answer and is not for me to talk about, but if you insist.... I deeply sympathize with Okinawa. Country's defense is a matter of all of us, not only Okinawa.

Q And that means...?

A Okinawa is the most vulnerable place in Japan. Our entire population should think about how to keep Okinawa safe, because it means keeping Japan safe. Therefore, it cannot be the problem of one prefecture only. I am talking solely about the defense; other Okinawa topics—and there are a few that require some serious consideration—are now out of the picture. Should there be an attack from some outer force, the population of Okinawa will be the first to suffer casualties.

Q And it is the state that has to be prepared for all kinds of unforeseen situations.

A Exactly. There is also a relationship with the US, our ally. Many elements should be taken into consideration. In a state of emergency people become exceedingly emotional and overreact, there is always someone who stirs up ill feelings, and the situation easily gets out of hand.

Q By the way, from time to time it happens everywhere. It happens in Great Britain, in China, Korea and North Korea.... People get brainwashed over some period, or manipulated shortly but powerfully.

A Yes, that is true. In Okinawa's case, many call for elections. Because it sounds nice. But: *how many Okinawan people vote? How many of them vote, having a broad view on the future? Can we act upon these numbers, for the voter turnout is pretty low?* Those are some questions and dilemmas concerning elections. In the end, the important things, and this one is certainly a matter of great importance, get decided under majority rule. Democracy has its flaws and limitations, and we all should be aware of them.

Q I see.... My father says that letting some other nation defend your country is a disgrace. Come to think of it, the parents and siblings of young American soldiers must hate the idea of their loved ones dying for Japan. I think that every country should be defended by its own people.

A Of course. Speaking of America, whenever the topic of nuclear armament ban is discussed, Japan should be the first to raise its hand. However, that never happens. It is because Japan has to follow America. This is what it means to be allies. There is nothing we can do for the time being. I find that to be Japan's big shame, being the only country that experienced nuclear bombing. Although it must have been painful for our administration to vote that way.

Q I'm sure it was.

A But if we make a way to prevent war, we could persuade America. If all of our citizens reassure themselves of the glorious history of our country and of the cultural level of our everyday living, we can proudly speak our minds when we encounter other nations.

Q My father also wishes that to come true.

A If we succeed in becoming such a nation, other "normal"

countries will follow us and help us when it's necessary. We can be that nation, and we can help build peace all over the world. To summarize: the consciousness of a nation is the decisive factor. And it starts with the consciousness of every individual.

The world is supposed to become one, based on trust, honesty, and cooperation.

Q I would like Japan to be such a country!

A Japan, with its unique history and unique quality, should be a role model to others.

Getting back to Okinawa one more time: people in Okinawa see themselves as US victims and therefore do not recognize crafty aspirations from the neighboring countries. China, for example, has obvious intentions towards Okinawa. The sooner Japan realizes that, the better it will get along with its ally. People have a problem when they don't realize that they have a problem.

I know the sentiments of Okinawan people towards the US military base, and I understand them. However, should the US withdraw its military base from Japan, we would instantly find ourselves in danger.

Q Which is to say that topics related to a country as a whole should be decided by the state.

A Exactly. There will inevitably be some individual damage and that should be handled with scrupulous care, but we mustn't lose sight of the bigger picture. Members of a family that is not harmonious spend time on their own, away from home. There is no centripetal force that keeps them together. It shows that they do not know what is really important in life, and that they didn't mature.

Q I understand your point and have a feeling I have grown up. Thank you very much!

...Oh, boy... there is this bad habit of mine again....

A You want to ask something else? It is true that it might be bothersome, but it is not wrong altogether. So, speak up!

Q Oh, but look at the time! I better hurry, I will miss my flight! Rōshi, let me come again.

A Well of course. I'm looking forward to seeing your growth. Don't forget to "just" do whatever you do! And remember: a woman's greatest weapon is her smile, patience, and her lovely vulnerability.

Q Rōshi, thank you very much! But, oh...! What is a "lovely vulnerability?"

A Let's leave that for next time. Better hurry up!

Q Thank you once again, and good-bye!

A Take care!

SERMONS and CONVERSATIONS Part One

A Knowing of Not Knowing

Advanced trainee

I would like to ask those of you for whom this was the first *zazen* session: what are your impressions? Were you able to notice the state your mind is in?

Participant A

I haven't noticed anything at all, but since I have never sat for such a long time without thinking, it was a pretty good experience. You know, *thinking* is my work.

Advanced trainee

I suppose that the minute you sat, a whole bunch of thoughts started circling. Did you notice that they were pulling you around?

Participant A

Yes, I noticed some distracting thoughts. I wasn't sure if I was breathing properly and the chaotic thoughts were circling in my head, indeed. The things I had forgotten long ago came back into my mind, and I was pretty bewildered.

What Is Walking?

Rōshi

I bet you were. You have been told to "just" breathe, but you don't know what breathing is, so you got confused. This fact shows that you don't know yourself. And if you do not know yourself, you know nothing at all. Do you know what is walking?

Participant A

I do it so naturally that it is hard to describe.

Rōshi

That is right. Dogs and cats walk. You also walk. It is natural, it is true. It exists before consciousness, and has nothing to do with intellect, it is autonomous. It transcends reason and explaining. Acquiring this truth is the aim of *zazen*.

Participant A

By this “transcending” you mean transcending of thoughts and images that pop into our mind.

Rōshi

In this case it means that you will go beyond the tricks that your mind plays on you. Saying that you will transcend it, or, in other words, overcome it, means that you will be able to ignore nasty habits of your mind and not let them force you to interact with them.

Participant A

What you have said—that I don’t know what breathing and walking are—does that mean that my “bad habits” are making a fool out of me? My consciousness is playing tricks on me?

Rōshi

Yes. You should realize the undeniable facts, but unless you take off the haze that is covering them, you won’t see them. Your consciousness plays tricks on you through the terms of “knowing” and “not knowing.”

Participant A

When you say “facts,” I should understand that as “now?”

Rōshi

Listen to yourself! That’s right. *If it’s not now, then it cannot be a fact.* Everything that is in the *now* is a fact. Breathing, walking, eating... everything is in the *now* and everything is a fact. All these things have nothing to do with reasoning and thinking. All humans do that naturally from the beginning, but many are not aware of it. That is what I mean when I say that you don’t know yourself.

(*rōshi addresses another participant*) What is walking? (*the*

man stands up and walks) You see? Just that.

Participant A

Oh, I see.... This is the fact. What happens *now* is the actual fact.

Rōshi

You see—this is the fact, and it exists before “I know” and “I don’t know.” The question is whether you realize this natural truth or not. Because if you do not realize it, you are “sentenced” to straying.

Not knowing what you are doing is a serious problem. First of all, if you do not have a clear understanding that *this* is real, your mind will go back and forth, and you will constantly be restless. What you have before your eyes is an undeniable fact that exists prior to knowledge. Do you understand?

Plain Practice

Participant A

It is all so new and unusual. I think that I’m beginning to understand. Due to not knowing the thing *as it is*, one gets restless, unsatisfied, and pays too much attention to what others say or do. The genuine *self* exists before all thoughts and words. It makes me kind of relieved to hear that.

Rōshi

You were about to spend your whole life not knowing the real thing. But I suppose you started to see your true *self*.

Participant A

Yes, I got a clear view of my breathing, and I am not entangled with my thoughts anymore... it is refreshing. Thank you very much! I suppose I should continue to guard and protect this “true breathing.”

Rōshi

Exactly. But first get to know yourself. After you succeed, you

will naturally realize the meaning of breathing, observing, walking, eating, etc. That will help you see inside yourself even better. Your mind will stray less, therefore your everyday life will become simpler and relaxed.

You don't have to *understand*. The important thing is to do what you do wholeheartedly, without excessive thoughts. Practice is a fact and reality, and the result is something that inevitably comes at some point. If you "just," plainly and wholeheartedly, do whatever you do, the result will naturally come along. You will start seeing the *now* as it is. This is something that only Zen can give you.

Participant A

So, I don't need to know *why*—I should just do as I was told, right?

Rōshi

I was watching you. When I told everybody to twist their lower back—we sit for a rather long time and we need it; besides, it is an additional thing that is good to concentrate on, to become *one with*—everybody did it except you.

You probably have a reason why you didn't do what you were told. Unless you find out what that is, it will bother you and prevent you from the right practice.

Zazen helps you liberate yourself from your mind's bad habits. As long as there are shyness, repulsion, or I *don't-get-it, so-I-won't-do-it*-kind of emotion, you will not be able to practice in a detached manner. This is an emotional problem that we, in Buddhism, call *jiga/gaken*, and we strive to liberate ourselves from it. This *obstructive element* goes away naturally if one practices plainly, wholeheartedly.

Participant A

I feel so ashamed. *Jiga* is consuming my soul, and I haven't noticed it. Whereas you, rōshi, read me like an open book!

If I don't observe my mind closely, every instant of the *now*, I

won't be able to "catch" my *jiga*. I see how disobedient I am. Rōshi, thank you for helping me realize it!

Rōshi

Oh, no, you are gentle and seem to have natural aptitude for *zazen*. It should be easy for you: you just have to relax your body and soul, and try to do whatever you do, in a detached manner. Everyone can do it—you should do it, too. First of all, it will make you feel good. Gradually, you will notice that your body and mind become lighter and more relaxed. Believe and practice.

You will experience violent fluctuations again and again, and that is normal. Ignore whatever appears; focus on the *now*. The thing is: you should stick to the facts. Zen is all about being perfectly true, it is all about becoming *one with* (a thing, an activity, etc.). And do you know what awaits you when you become perfectly true? – *Muga*. You, emptied of your *self*... A *no-self* you. A total identification with what you are dealing with.

Participant A

I understand how I should practice during my everyday routine. We live only once so we should cherish our lives. Thank you very much!

The Return to Nature

Rōshi

Our fellow practitioner, the Psychiatrist, is with us again. Doctor, please share your views on Zen with us, from the standpoint of your profession.

Participant B

This is a quite difficult question to answer.... As you said, rōshi, our body and mind should function in harmony with each other, but, as we can see and experience in our everyday lives, it is highly unlikely to be the case. Very often, this causes various psychological problems and even diseases.

A healthy person is someone who is in his or her pristine state. If something gets added—we have a disease. If that “something” gets removed—one is healthy again. Being in accordance with nature is the best way to stay healthy, both physically and mentally.

By practicing *zazen*, one returns to the simpler, more natural version of his or herself, and the body and mind reunite. If I should define *zazen*, I would say, it is a “returning to our natural state.”

Rōshi

Brilliant! Perfectly correct. You have reached the core. By being the way we are, before reason takes over, we return to nature and become genuine again. Why did our body and mind part? We were talking about that many times, but, apparently, there is a need for repetition.

This is our, human, characteristic and fate. We have intellect, emotions, and will, and that is marvelous. But we have also built up a bad habit of being aware of all those qualities.

As a baby grows up, it becomes aware of its self. Then it starts noticing others. While it is unaware of its surroundings, there is no discrepancy in its consciousness. It doesn't think like we, adults, do. It doesn't understand the existence or the non-existence of things. There is no mental (or we can say, *premeditated*) differentiation between *this* and *that*, there is only one reaction to *this* and a different one to *that*.

However, as our infant grows, it learns words and ideas, and the difference between things that exist/don't exist and the things it loves/hates. It starts to compare things. It becomes aware and starts differentiating between itself and others, which results in body-mind separation....

From this age on, our mind has a life of its own. We get sensations from the external world through our ears, eyes, etc., and we cannot resist that world. Our constant attraction to the outer world is the base for forming false perceptions, delusions,

and obstructive thoughts, or, as we in Buddhism say, *bon-nō*.

Zen “removes” these unnatural and bad habits of ours, it is a way of getting back to the genuine unity of body and mind—to that time when we “knew” what walking, listening, observing was.... To the time when there was no *before* and *after*, *self* and *other*, reasoning and straying in our mind. We were one in every given moment. When you are one with everything, there is no other. There is nothing to compare, to value as better or worse, there is no ground for a rise in conflict. Doctor, you named that simply—and absolutely correctly—“the return to nature.”

We practice *zazen* so as to liberate ourselves from our excessive self-awareness, to reunite body and mind, and then, light and free of nasty habits, help other people who suffer, and also experience this “unbearable lightness of being.” This is both the path and the goal of the path for all of us.

I apologize. My monologue became quite long.

Bodaishin

Participant C

Rōshi, your explanation is very easy to understand. I will make an effort not to let bad habits find a *crack* in my guard. Recently, my legs ache, and I cannot sit the way I used to, but I know that the form is not essential and always try to find new ways of sitting and doing my *zazen*. I’m looking forward to continuing my *zazen* gatherings with you.

Rōshi

You are right: the form isn’t important. Many practitioners sit properly, but never reach *satori*. Have one thing on your mind and keep your mind within reach, don’t let it “walk” around. Take care of your *bodaishin*.

Your body and mind should always be *one*. When master Dōgen said: “To acquire the Buddha’s way, you have to perfect yourself,”

he meant, ‘Beware of losing your *self* out of sight, do not let it walk away from the *now*.’ In other words: *there mustn’t even be a moment of non-awareness*. You must hold yourself accountable at all times. You have to know where your *self* is every minute and what it is doing. To prevent yourself from neglecting practice, a certain tension is necessary. This is *zazen* training.

Master Dōgen also said: “To perfect yourself, you have to identify with what you are doing until you forget yourself.” While you earnestly do something, your wandering mind will come back to you. When your body and mind are connected, “on the same task,” we say that you are doing it *wholeheartedly*, as you have heard many, many times. And when you are doing something wholeheartedly, you have no thoughts such as “I’m doing this” in your mind. Because you forget yourself, i.e. it is the *doing you*, not the *thinking you* in action. This is very important, so pay attention to it.

“Identifying yourself with what you are doing until you forget yourself means becoming one with the universe,” master Dōgen said next. If “universe” sounds exaggerating to you, let’s say “surroundings.” When you become *one* with a thing, or your surroundings, you stop paying attention to time and space, in other words: they cease to exist. That is proof that your bad habits have left you alone. Furthermore, master Dōgen said: “You become *one* with the universe when you realize that everything, including you, is empty, and everything stops bothering you.” Then, you awake for the real *now* and start to “just” live. That means: you achieve *satori*. This will all happen with the right *bodaishin*, and the right effort. Keep practicing.

Practitioner C

I will. Thank you very much. (then all participants bow their heads deeply)

SERMONS and CONVERSATIONS Part Two
(with different members)

Not feeling at Ease Is the Ultimate Ease

Rōshi (to the Participant A)

How are you doing lately?

Participant A

I am doing my best to keep my beginner's passion for training alive. When I'm in good shape, I don't care whether or not some image pops up. I'm able to accompany every single breath. Sitting for a whole hour, not missing anything that appears and disappears, is pretty easy for me now. Not every time, though....

Rōshi

It shows that you practice diligently all the time. Your progress is increasingly apparent to me every time we meet. I can see that a lot of your nasty habits have dissolved. You know what it is like to *be one with* something, and I'm sure that you experience new lightness in your everyday life. You have become quite familiar with *zazen*, and I can say that you are *one with* the world that surrounds you.

Participant A

That is true. I experience the biggest ease when I don't even feel that ease, when nothing is happening in my mind. My brain rests; it is as if I am sleeping. And I don't even think that I'm not asleep. When I "just" do *zazen*, I understand what you mean by, "The Buddha's teaching leads you to relief." When I'm sleepy, I take a nap. After a short sleep, the quality of sitting apparently improves.

One Place, One Time

Rōshi

That is just fine. If you are able to *sit* without much effort, then you must be doing everything else in your life with ease. There are no *before* and *after* anymore, perception comes from a clear and calm mind by now, everything is as it is, according to *en*. You are a mere echo of what you hear, observe, touch, etc. Just continue in that fashion.

The perfect state is the one with no *before* and *after*, with no added elements, *just that one thing/action*. You should entrust yourself to the changes that happen in that one time and in that one place. It is the *state of oneness*. *There is no actual practice* in the practice. This means that *everything is practice*.

Participant A

There is no *just*, there is no *now*, I breathe and that is all. That is how I understand *zazen*. Am I right?

Rōshi

Yes, you are.

Participant A

I often walk paying the minimum required attention to my personal safety, naturally. I'm all into walking, *I equal walking*. Is this how it should be?

Rōshi

Yes. If your attention is drawn to the *now* properly, you will secure your safety naturally, because unconsciously you get a grip on the entire situation. You automatically react to the needs of that moment and of that place. All you have to do is to continue in that manner.

Participant A

When I look back, I realize how good it is that I have continued *zazen* practice. One has to have a firm goal from the beginning and to be careful not to allow unrelated images intrude. This is surely the key to achieving something.

Rōshi

Zazen is the best. It is the core of all things and their foundation. Whatever you do, if you don't let unrelated thoughts take your attention away, the discrepancy between you and what you do will dissolve. Hold no expectations, "just" sit or do what you have to do!

The Right Way, the Effort, and Continuity

Participant A

In short: everything should be "just" done, without making room for unrelated images, right?

Rōshi

That is absolutely right. If something pops up in your mind, you should cut it off right away and get back to the *now*. The more something tries to get between you and what you do, the stronger you must become *one with* (what you do). Otherwise, you'll waste your time arguing with it, and that will only "feed" your bad habits, not make them vanish. In order to get back to that original state of body-mind oneness, you should wholeheartedly "just" do what you do *now*, leaving everything else out. You must be *one with it* to the fullest extent. Once you succeed, the thought that you have to be *one with it* will evaporate naturally. And then the perception that you are *one with it* will disappear too.

Participant A

In other words: This effort is just a part of the training, but as it advances, "pushing hard" naturally becomes unnecessary?

Rōshi

Correct.

Participant A

At the beginning, I fully focus on the breath, but now I'm *one with the breath* without conscious effort. I suppose I should continue that way: while not loosening the grip on that *oneness*, "just" do whatever I do, with all my heart?

Rōshi

Absolutely. If the results do not appear, it means that the required conditions are not fulfilled. And these conditions are: the right way, the effort and continuity. It is an effort to keep doing it the right way until the result comes out. The result will come out naturally, when your continuous effort ripens. As master Dōgen said, “Your genuine *self* will naturally appear in front of you,” and master Dōgen was never wrong.

Participant B

Results depend on our effort. That is to say, on *bodaishin*.

Immersion

Rōshi

Yes. It depends on getting to the root of thoughts and images. The sooner the better. When you get there, you will see that ideas/images have no *before* and *after*. They have no continuity. You will see this clearly. Or, to put it more simply: the *now* has no *before* and *after*. And you will realize that everything starts in the *now* and ends in the *now*. *Now* has neither beginning nor end, it lasts forever.

Participant A

I get your point.

Rōshi

Apprehending emptiness is *satori*. You cannot apprehend emptiness unless you *become one with* and forget about your *self*. Everything that exists is constantly spinning *one* (thing, phenomenon). Relax and dedicate yourself to every single breath. Breathing will bring results.

Participant A

I know that without experiencing it one cannot have confidence and peace of mind, so I will continue my committed practice. Pardon my persistent asking, but how does breathing bring

results?

Rōshi

Breathing is true. It cannot be false. There are no impurities of any kind in it. Breathing is breathing, nothing more, nothing less. It has nothing to do with consciousness and imagining. Whatever you say about it, all that you can conclude is: breathing is just breathing.

Participant B

You mean to say that we should fully immerse ourselves into breathing; if it's not "just" *zazen*, it is not true *zazen*—am I right?

Rōshi

Yes, that's perfectly right. When you play around with thoughts, emotions, and images, your bad habits have you under their control, and even though you may sit, it is not *zazen*. You really need to understand what master Dōgen meant by "*zazen* with a still mind, without thoughts and images."

Satori

Participant B

I get it. May I ask another question?

Rōshi

Go ahead.

Participant B

It is about words: you often say "to forget your *self*." How should we understand that? If I say "Oh, I'm not thinking about my *self* anymore," it means that I'm very much still aware of my *self*. Is it something like: you don't know whether you are thinking about yourself or not? Like when you're asleep, and have no thoughts whatsoever?

Rōshi

No, it is quite the opposite. Here lies the difference between illusions and dreams on one side and the Teaching on the other,

the truth on one side and falsehood on the other. You will know when you acquire *satori*, and that is possible only if you sink to the bottom in your practice. You will then notice the border line between straying and the right way.

If you don't climb to the mountain top, you will not know what it looks like along the way and what kind of view will open to you from up there. The only way to get there is to dedicate yourself to it completely, and that is what *zazen* practice is.

To forget your *self*, you have to become *one with* (what you're doing). To identify with it. If we are talking about breathing, then you have to *become breathing*. When you do that, when you become one with breathing (for example), you will know without a doubt.

Imagine that your mind is completely empty, there is not a thought or an image in it—and you touch a fire. Without a moment's delay you know that you burned yourself. It is something that doesn't need mental processing. In the same fashion you will know that you “forgot” your *self*.

Participant B

I will “just” be aware that I burned myself, it is not a matter of *knowing*. And that is all, you say?

Rōshi

Yes. No matter whether you know it or not, the “heat” is there. Fire is hot without your perception. There is no need to “know” that. When you touch a fire, you instinctively pull your hand away, before you get to say “oh, it's hot!”

It is something that happens naturally to anyone, anytime, anywhere, but if we are ruled by our nasty habits, we process it mentally and then the words also appear and bring absolute mess.

Participant B

That means that I won't know whether I forgot my self unless I carry on....

Rōshi

True. There are different levels of perfection—some go deeper than the others, but basically, you recognize the taste of food if you eat it, without deploying your intellect. If you touch fire or water, you know it, without mental processing. These are all senses that come into action before we begin processing the information, and it all happens without the *self*.

Participant B

I now understand how important it is to “forget” the *self*. And to forget the *self* means not to add mental activity to facts. Since there is no burden of the past, everything becomes dramatically lighter and easier. In short: I should be *one with*.

Rōshi

Listen to yourself! What you are saying is extremely important. Are you aware of that?

Participant B

No. I was just making a logical statement. But I feel unusually light. Something tells me that, altogether, it’s not especially hard to achieve.

Rōshi

True! All you have to do is wholeheartedly perform what you do within any given moment. “Just” do what you do *now*. The vanishing of troublesome habits and forgetting the *self* happen simultaneously. And it is not vague or hard to realize whether you have forgotten your *self* or not.

The purpose of the Buddha’s six-year long *shikan-taza* is this great realization. Without this preparatory work, *zazen* is unthinkable. Master Daie called this “*zazen* of a stone statue,” and for master Hakuin it was “*zazen* of a withered tree.” This kind of *zazen* is pure waste of time. But, unfortunately, I have to say that today’s Zen-world is full of it. Be careful.

A Brief Encounter

Participant B

We have heard the word “just” many times. “Just” listen, “just” observe, etc., and I understand how important that is. However, when it comes to listening to words, our mind reacts to them, doesn’t it? Is it possible to “just” listen to the words?

Rōshi

That is a very important question. Listen carefully: it is not a matter of possibility. Now, when I speak, even if you don’t want to listen to me, my voice naturally enters your ears, am I right? (all participants nod their heads) It enters your ears, no matter what. And it is there. It definitely **is** in your ears. This is the way it works. What is hearing? It is an encounter of ears and sounds. That’s all. You should “just” listen, and if you know the words or if you are familiar with the topic, you will understand the meaning, if not—you will not understand, but you will continue to listen.

However, if you let your troublesome habits enter “the game”—the game of “I understand,” “I don’t understand,” “I like,” “I hate”—the true meaning falls into the darkness of non-listening. Words that you don’t know or don’t like entangle with your emotions and blur the picture.

Bon-nō arises from these bad habits of our mind. You shouldn’t forget that we practice in order to remove this obstacle out of our way. If you go all the way through, you will remove it and acquire your genuine *self*.

Participant B

I see. And to conclude: in order to cure ourselves from bad habits, we “just” do, we wholeheartedly perfect the *now*. Is it something like that?

Rōshi

Yes, it is.

Leave it to...

Participant C

I suppose we can say, “Leave it to your ears,” “Leave it to your eyes,” “Leave it to your mouth,” “Leave it to your body”—*now*. Add no ideas, leave it to *en*, because it is what we call “just” doing and forgetting the *self*.

Rōshi

That is correct. When your intellect intervenes, you get something different from the pure information you receive through your senses. As you become able to distinguish these two, you will know the difference between the factual *now* and the virtual image, and after that you won’t stray.

Participant C

And that clear realization is *satori*, I suppose?

Rōshi

Well, it is a big step, it is a realization of the differences between words and facts, but it is still early to call it *satori*. Until recently, you didn’t know what *now* was, what “just walking” and “just breathing” was. And now you can exclaim: “It’s this!” But there is a long way to go before you achieve *satori*. However, without this important realization you cannot make a distinction between the truth and falsehood, and liberate yourself from your annoying habits.

Participant C

I see.... Without fundamental perfection, annoying habits don’t go away. A small realization and perfection until you forget your *self* are poles apart. I can get free from *toraware* only after I become able to “just” do everything?

Rōshi

Yes. When you forget your *self*, you will awaken to your Buddhahood. To your “united body and mind” origin. Until you “knead” the *now* and kill your bad habits, you will not go back to your genuinely united body and mind.

Participant D

I have been listening to all of you, and I think I understood the purpose and the way of doing *zazen*, as well as the decisive difference between the truth and falsity. To me, this realization is immense. And I have a question about this “just doing.” As you, rōshi, have repeated time and time again, “just doing” is a natural state, the state before mental processes take place. If “just doing” is free of sorting things out and deliberate actions, doesn’t it obstruct normal life and work?

The Limitations of Intellect

Rōshi

This is an example of logic showing limitations of the intellect. Let me ask you: without intellectual sorting out, you do **not** make distinction between human and cat’s voices? Or, if a mother and a child bump into each other in a crowd, they **don’t** recognize each other without a few moments of thinking? Without deploying your intellect, you **don’t** differentiate rice from miso soup and day from night, you **can’t** stand up and walk?

Participant D

I see.... It means that “just doing” is the state in which one is figuring out the right moves before mental processes take place, and this is the key point of Zen, am I right? In other words: it is dry reality without redundant knowledge—correct?

Rōshi

Well put! That is reality, and the purpose of *zazen* is to make you experience it as the true reality. You must feel light now, after you put some order into your views!

Participant D

You see through me! I feel transparency and lightness right now, and I’m full of gratitude.

Rōshi

I'm glad to hear that. It proves that you see your depths and feel relieved. I'm sure that you realize 'this is this, in this moment of *now*.'

Participant D

I have no more words. Zazen is so precious and makes me feel hopeful.

The Top of Top-10 Difficulties

Rōshi

In order to achieve *satori*, you must “knead” your practice to the maximum. The problems are troublesome habits that stick to you persistently. You must empty your *self* entirely, fundamentally. To become *one with*, you must say ‘goodbye’ to everything you considered true and important before. And you need a hell of *bodaishin*, too. Letting go of this invisible part of you is the top of the top-10 difficulties. This is the core of the *zazen* training.

If you feel confident, happy, and joy for understanding the theory of *zazen*, a new annoying thing—*jiga/gaken*—appears, and my advice to you is to part from all that, no matter how pleasant it is. If you consider that you gained something, you're in trouble.

Participant D

I understand. I'll do my best to “knead” the *now*.

Rōshi

Most practitioners—especially scientists and other highly educated people—believe that in order to understand something, we must use our cognitive abilities. They think that we can understand everything—all we need is knowledge and proper thinking. These adepts of “Intelligence religion” always have a ready theory to use in the discussion. If the opponent's view agrees with theirs, they accept it, if not—they reject it. Since they cannot get out of the cocoon of their firm beliefs, there is no chance that they can even listen to our teaching. The stronger the bad habits,

the weaker *bodaishin*.

It is very important to have a will to change and improve, and to try to put your “gear” into a neutral position. When you manage it, it will be a sign that your disturbing habits fell off and your mind has returned to its genuine shape again.

Isn’t that great? Life is wonderful, and *zazen* is joyous.

Exists not, but acts

Participant E

If I understand correctly, *kenshō* is the realization of one’s true mind....

Rōshi

Exactly.

Participant E

Concerning that, the sixth patriarch Enō said that it (mind, spirit) has no substance, but according to *en*, it appears, and I understand that, I mean—I understand the words but wonder if you can tell us more concretely how to have a real experience.

Rōshi

What is your name?

Participant E

I’m Murata.

Rōshi

Mister Murata!

Participant E

Yes?

Rōshi

What made you say “yes?”

Participant E

Pardon?

Rōshi

Mr. Murata, please close that door. (*the man stands up and*

walks toward the door)

Rōshi

Mr. Murata, this is you responding to *en*. A spirit (or mind) is not a material thing, but it works, it acts.

Participant E

Oh...? (*he says and stops*)

Rōshi

What are you doing now?

Participant E

I was about to close the door....

Rōshi

Who is closing the door?

Participant E

Me.

Rōshi

Is there a spirit that moves you?

Participant E

?

Rōshi

Close the door.

Participant E

(*closes the door*)

Rōshi

You stood up, closed the door, got back, and sat. This is your mind, or spirit if you prefer. It doesn't reside in any specific place, but it exists. It appears in one moment, and is gone in the next. Without a trace. It doesn't exist, but it acts. It is there, but it *isn't*. It isn't there, but it *is*. This is the spirit (the mind).

Participant E

Wow! I see. Mental functions are a natural response to the world that surrounds us. We call that "mind," but there is no such entity as mind. We just think that there is something in the background, making us do this and that.

Rōshi

Exactly. Our consciousness and intelligence make us believe that a thing called “mind” (or spirit) exists. *Zazen* practice helps us get free from this false belief. Do you now realize how great “just” doing, “just” being is?

Participant E

This is what you mean by “the mind resides nowhere, but is!” We all move forward in our thinking, imagining this and that, but the truth about our mind is unclear to us.

Rōshi

Yes, unfortunately, our spirits are tied up by reasoning and cannot move freely. Our true spirits will reveal themselves to us when we untie them. As soon as you notice the bad habits of your mind, get back to the *now*. This is what master Dōgen had in mind when he said, “Knowing the Way is knowing yourself.”

A Chaotic Mind and Kenshō

Participant E

I understand. I’ve never felt so light and relieved. Thank you very much.

Participant F

Rōshi, your sermon is rather dramatic. I have a question: is it the same as master Nansen’s “The Way is a place where your usual *self* is”? Chaos in our mind (or that what you call “bad habits” of our mind) is due to trails of our thoughts (not the actual thoughts), the shadows of our thoughts?

Rōshi

Exactly. What we call the “mind” is our psyche at work. Originally, there was no chaos of distracting thoughts in our heads. But we produced it, and it caused separation of body and mind, which further resulted in false perceptions, delusions, and obstructive thoughts. Practicing *zazen* is the way to break free

from it.

Participant F

I've been told by one rōshi, "When you realize that you have distracting thoughts, they cease to be distracting thoughts." Was he wrong?

Rōshi

No, he was right. Think of it in a linear time perspective: the moment you get conscious of the distracting thoughts, they are already over, they do not exist anymore. It is important to understand the following: we say "distracting thoughts," but when we notice them, they are gone, and it is a new *now*.

Since it is the way our psyche works, it's neither good nor bad. However, many thoughts egotistically pop in our mind when it's neither the time nor the place for them, they take us away from the *now*, and that is bad. That is why we have to do something with it.

Nothing remains still in this world. Everything circles, rotates, changes shapes. A distracting thought switches into realization in the next moment. The whole life is a rotation of one thought. The moment you realize that, you'll experience *kenshō*.

The Right Mindfulness

Participant F

Does that mean we do not have to cast out distracting thoughts, that they naturally vanish? I've been told that an effort to get rid of them is, on the contrary, distracting.

Rōshi

That is right. But you have to clearly see a distracting thought first so that you can perceive it as such. You have to step away from it in order to see it. You can make a distinction between them only in the right mind, the mind without distracting thoughts. Nothing can be done before you reach the state of right

mindfulness, free of chaotic thoughts.

Participant F

I understand your point very well. “Just” doing is in the core of everything. There is no need to cast out excessive thoughts at any cost. Give your best in “just” doing everything, always and everywhere—that is the gist of *zazen* practice.

Rōshi

The most important thing is to guard and protect your right mindfulness every second. Keep your eye on every given *now*. If you do it diligently, you will notice a thought the moment it appears and also, its disappearing.

Participant F

I see. If I keep my eye on the *now* and “just” do whatever I do, my nasty habits will naturally vanish. And I’ll be free from confusion and conflicts.

Rōshi

That’s absolutely right. At first you will treat your distracting thoughts as evil and do your best to cast them out. You will successfully cast them out by guarding your *now*. This is the right way of training. It is always *now*, so you should completely dedicate yourself to that what you do, all the time.

Some say they do ‘*shikan-taza*,’ but allow distracting thoughts to keep on appearing, since they are also natural phenomena. Let me tell you something: that is not *shikan-taza*. “Effortless Zen,” and “enduring Zen” are recent fashion. Stay away from them.

The Sun of Your Mind

Participant A

This helped me a lot. I have been practicing *zazen* for two weeks now. My distracting thoughts were far more hideous than I ever imagined, but I kept doing as rōshi taught me. The struggle gradually weakened, I became calmer and, at the same time,

started seeing things clearly.

The biggest merit is that now, solely by entering the dōjō, my mind gets settled and I feel completely relaxed. I think that everybody can relate to that. “Guarding *now*” is what I’ve earned from *zazen* practice.

Rōshi

That is the most important thing. You are obviously training hard.

Participant A

Before, I was training at a different *dōjō*, but nobody told me how important it is to “guard *now*,” nor the way to do it. All my efforts were in vain. I would sometimes, by chance, get to the right state, but then consciously tried to keep it, made images, rejoiced, or, when things didn’t work well, felt bitterness. Both happiness and sadness dragged me away from the *now* and into an endless loop I got stuck in. Nobody told me how to get out of it.

Rōshi

That’s unpleasant. I’m sorry to hear that.

Participant A

Thanks to your tutelage, rōshi, I became able to see my *self* clearly. I realized that I’m in good shape when I’m absorbed by the “*now* of one breath.” Thanks to your explanations I am now able to make distinction between these moments and the time when my mind wanders off uncontrollably. The understanding that all I need to do is to guard *now* is like the sun shining inside me. My everyday life has become stable, there are no weird moments of anxiety. I’m glad I practice *zazen* and plan to continue “just” doing whatever I do.

Participant B

Can I ask you something?

Participant A

Yes, of course.

A Horrible Knowing

Participant B

You said you have trained for two weeks; what kind of changes did you notice after one week?

Participant A

At the beginning, as rōshi taught us, I was “just” focusing on one breath at a time. I was afraid that I will crack under distracting thoughts, so I took care not to lose that one breath, with all my might. I suppose that everyone who has experienced *zazen* knows how annoying it is when you cannot breathe properly. It is your own breathing, but the more you control it, the odder it becomes, and these chaotic thoughts circling in your head.... Rōshi, as if he was seeing through me, asked me some things at the right moment. For example: my hand with chopsticks was on the move towards food, and rōshi asked, “What are you doing?” Or, one day, as I walked into the dining room, absorbed in walking, he asked me, “How many steps did it take from the *dōjō* to here?” Or, “Who is breathing?” Those questions made me more aware of the *now* and realize the point where I pull out from the distracting thoughts.

For a person who is not seeking the Way, this would be a chance to show off his or her logic and reasoning. This was my case some time ago. But the difference between the one who practices, trying to liberate him or herself of unnecessary reasoning, and the one who does nothing but pile up logical arguments, is like the difference between peace and a clash.

Of course, distracting thoughts kept on appearing, but I was able to focus on the *truth of breathing* and not let them swirl me. This is not possible without a proper tutor. I was amazed at how light and bright I became!

I couldn't understand why I had had trouble with something so easy and axiomatic as my own breathing. As rōshi often says, bad

habits of thinking and imagining took control over my mind. When I realized that as a fact, I felt huge relief. If I hadn't met rōshi, I would probably have spent my time in vain, doing fruitless *zazen*.

However, after I took a grip on my breathing, I started having psychological hardships. Probably because I had a clear goal while fighting with chaotic thoughts. Once I cast out these thoughts and became quiet, I found myself in a strange state of mind: there I was totally, effortlessly focused on the *now*, when this unexpected thought popped up in my mind, "I managed to get here and feel relieved. How to overcome this consciousness?" Come to think of it, this "knowing" was a big obstacle. From now on I will deploy my *bodaishin* to the maximum, and try to overcome this unnecessary knowing.

Rōshi

Those who don't know how the mind functions, believe that they grasped its essence by intellectual understanding. But those who experience "diving" into a real, genuine mind, part from distracting thoughts; it, naturally, makes them happy, and that reflects on their psychological state.

If it is purely cerebral understanding, one can easily deny it by reasoning, but if we have a case of practical experience, one gets triumphant, his or her heart jumps with happiness. One is full of joy, relief and self-confidence, and this triad bridges intelligence and the emotional part of their mind, which makes it pretty troublesome. This is what one has to dismantle and get rid of.

Emotions are something that cannot be resolved by intelligence. When we are in love, whenever the one we fancy appears, our heart goes crazy—the same is with emotions in *zazen* training: they possess a great amount of energy and that makes them a formidable enemy.

Utter Refinement

Participant B

I was going through a similar experience and have the same trouble right now.

There is one more *comrade* here who was in Shōrinkutsu for the first time, just as we were, and I would like to hear what he has to say.

Participant C

I was listening and thinking about how I agree with the previous speaker. I also visited Shōrinkutsu for the first time and was nervous the first three days. I had to learn the basic things: how to bring chopsticks to my mouth properly, how to chew, how to place chopsticks back to the table, how to walk, etc. Rōshi helped me realize how absent-minded I was before. For example, I would put food into my mouth, chew three-four times and swallow. After rōshi told me to pay attention to every bite in any given *now*, I started doing it more carefully and focused on chewing; I truly appreciate food now and take time to concentrate on what I eat. I finally started noticing the taste of food and think with gratitude of the people who prepared it.

Focusing on one thing in the *now* shows me new sides of things I thought I knew well. What I see, what I hear, what I taste—everything is new now. I experienced how silent and clear I can be if I do not think about things that are unrelated to that concrete *now*. If I could do it, everybody can. We live in uncertain times, and I think we should all control our own spirits.

One Twist, One Breath

Participant B

What else did you experience?

Participant C

As the time went by, I felt how rōshi's sermons soaked in my mind, one after another, and I have become deeper and deeper.

When you practice properly, there is nothing hard or unpleasant in it; on the contrary, as I was approaching the last day in Shōrinkutsu, I wanted to stay longer. Didn't you feel the same way?

Participant B

Yes, absolutely. Being in such a beautiful and quiet place, facing Seto Inland Sea, and polishing your spirit—can there be anything better?!

Participant C

I agree. The week I spent there was one of the happiest and the most advantageous ones. But then I went back to Tokyo and soon realized how hard it is to keep that spirit and focus on the *now* amidst this chaotic and busy city life. To be honest, I'm struggling now. One must really continue to practice on a daily basis. I *sit* for fifteen-twenty minutes, fully concentrated on “one twist, one breath.” As I “just” twist my lower back and breathe, there is no *bon-nō*, there are no redundant thoughts in my head.

Rōshi

You are doing perfectly well. With your diligence, you should just go straight, with no reasoning and quibbling.

Participant C

Of course! I wouldn't waste this wonderful *en*.

The Importance of an Observing Eye

Rōshi

This is your first time with us, isn't it? Tell us your impressions.

Participant G

It is pretty hard. Let me introduce myself. Until recently I was working in a firm, but I quit and entered one UK university as a post-grad student. I'm moving to England this April. I was always interested in the Eastern world, typically Eastern arts, such as tea ceremony, ikebana, martial arts, like karate, etc. I thought that

moving abroad was a good opportunity to learn something characteristic about our country, and this is why I came today.

After I've been sitting for a while, I can say the same thing as other participants: my head is full of distracting thoughts, I cannot get rid of unnecessary images. The harder I try to make them go away, the more they come back. I probably wasn't doing it the right way. But after listening to the "colleagues," I think I know what is important: in order to overcome bad habits, I must guard and protect the *now*. Cherishing myself means cherishing the *now*. And I think I know how to do it. Am I right?

Rōshi

You said that you cannot get rid of distracting thoughts. It is impossible to get rid of them by a conscious effort. There is a firm "rail" on which they appear in your mind. Unless you remove that "rail," they won't stop coming, and the way to remove it is to become *one with now*. Since you are dealing with psychological processes, to which you cannot apply the word "objective," you have to acquire a discerning eye and engage in concrete practice. By using your body in *zazen* training, you will get your genuine mind back. Your hands are tied by the images from your past and no matter how much you want to break free using all your mental potential, it doesn't work. And what works? Full commitment to the *now*.

Diligence and Effort

There are a few religions and many teachings. They all say good things. However, they are based on repeating mantras or believing in certain ideas, and no matter what kind of noble ideals they preach, they cannot solve the problems of our mind. Unless it is done properly, it is impossible to reconstruct our psyche. Furthermore, there is a danger of getting hooked on some other idea and making the problem even bigger.

The way to solve this problem is to “just” be in the *now*, but without proper *bodaishin* nobody trains long enough to achieve results. So, I recommend having a fellow practitioner and Buddhist texts nearby. If you continue training, your *now* will naturally become clear to you. Diligence and effort will pave the Way for you. It will reveal itself to you, I assure you. Just have *bodaishin*.

The Dōjō and the Common World

Advanced trainee

We heard the story of our fellow trainee who was in Shōrinkutsu for the first time. I would like to ask you, rōshi, to tell us a few things: Does it mean that one cannot learn important things without going to Shōrinkutsu and training under your guidance? Or can one learn while living in the common world? What is the cause for that gap that we feel after getting back from Shōrinkutsu to the common world? What can we do to avoid that gap in our everyday practice?

Rōshi

Coming to Shōrinkutsu is not the absolute requirement. All you need is to *become one* with what you are doing *now*. You may go to a very famous *dōjō* and train hard night and day, but if you are focused on the wrong thing, the fog from your soul will never lift. On the other hand, if you train regularly, focusing on every given *now*, under the guidance of a proper master, you will *get there*.

I’ll say it one more time: the most important thing is not to let your *now* go. With practice, you will naturally start to feel it. Then your everyday life will become more joyous. The gap between practice in a *dōjō* and in your usual environment will soon diminish and then disappear. Believe me and continue training.

Advanced trainee

Why is it easier to get the right direction in the *dōjō*?

Rōshi

Because you're focused on the training and free from everything else. In the common world, on the other hand, you have to think and talk. You have to respond quickly. For that, you use your intelligence, your emotions, and all information that you have gathered in the course of life. All that data and energy head outside, and you are left to endure turbulence by yourself, i.e. you're back where you started from when you went to the *dōjō*.

That is why it is important to *sit* in the morning and in the evening, to get that pure *now* back. Should you lose it completely, it would be extremely difficult to get it back while in the common world. However, if you continue to practice, every day, little by little, your feeling of *now* won't go away. It is not easy at all, but there is no success without hard work.

This is your life. Life is happening *now*; by cherishing yourself in the *now*, you acquire a rich life that is impossible to fulfill with possessions and money.

Pro forma Practice

Participant D

Rōshi, thank you very much! It is so inspiring to hear the stories of my fellow practitioners. Today we have a Zen Buddhist priest with us; it would be nice and useful to hear about the training of a professional.

Zen Buddhist priest

I became a priest when I was thirty years old. I trained for seven years in the Antai temple in Hyogo prefecture. Having a medical condition which affects both vision and hearing, I led a rather inert life, and at some point it made me sad. 'Is this all there is?' I asked myself and tried to find the answer through *zazen* practice.

In our temple, people practice more than one thousand hours

per year. There is the so-called *sesshin*, which is eight days in a month when trainees sit from four a.m. to nine p.m., fifty minutes of absolute stillness, repeated fourteen times. This is the old school way of training, known as *pro forma zazen*. There are many rules and restrictions, and I hoped I would “see” something by performing all that.

After seven and a half years my eyesight completely deteriorated, and I left the temple to receive medical treatment. What can I tell you about my practice there? My state of mind was... there was nothing certain in it, except that I was a mess. Chaotic thoughts, and A LOT of them. Doubting that “meeting with one’s genuine self,” mentioned in “Fukan zazengi,” is possible, I left the temple.

The Importance of Thoroughness

After that I, being almost blind, underwent rehabilitation and learned acupuncture and moxibustion. At that school, I was lucky to meet one woman who introduced me to Shōrinkutsu, and I went there and trained under the guidance of rōshi Kidō Inoue. In short: after one week I met my genuine *self*, and that was something utterly new, compared with my previous practice.

Of course, I was wondering what the difference was and realized one very simple truth: before, I wasn’t thorough in grasping every instant.

“Just” doing *zazen*, “just” eating... *what on earth does this “just” look like?* In order to understand that, one has to have a clear view of every given *now*. But nobody ever taught me **concretely how** to have this clear view. I had no idea what this “one breath” looked like. Getting to know that was a big breakthrough for me.

The Place Where the Mind Starts

“Just” is, in other words, a moment, a place before the mind activates. As I realized that, I felt great relief both in my pursuing the Way and in everyday life. The problem is continuity. I am doing it every day by *sitting*.

In my training I try not to bring any unrelated thoughts into anything I do, to keep my mind pure and focused on one thing, one action. That is all. There is nothing else besides that.

I believe this is the end of my searching for the right *zazen* and plan to stick to it. I will probably go to Shōrinkutsu again and look forward to seeing all of you.

Zazen Far Away from Zazen

Participant E

If you don't mind, I would like to ask you something....

Zen Buddhist priest

Sure, go ahead.

Participant E

You trained a few years under the guidance of the famous master Sawaki?

Zen Buddhist priest

No, my teacher was master Sawaki's apprentice.

Participant E

What did they teach you?

Zen Buddhist priest

To “be silent and sit.” I was often sleepy and constantly had distracting thoughts. There were moments of calmness, but by the end of *sesshin*, I would feel exhausted. My *zazen* practice was a repetition of that, for years. I thought it was the way it should be and tried to build up a stronger version of myself, the one that will endure all that. As you can see, it was miles away from *shikan-taza*.

Participant E

I have never met master Sawaki but have read a few of his books. What he preaches is correct. However, it lacks concrete recommendations on how to unmistakably *become one with*, the skill we get trained in at Shōrinkutsu. I had the impression that he knows Zen well but is not sure what must and mustn't be done. Does that have anything to do with your leaving?

Zen Buddhist priest

There were a few colleagues who afterwards went to some famous *dōjō*, some even moved to the USA, Thailand, and Myanmar, but none of us has achieved *kenshō*. I believe that the problem was in the teaching that had no clear principles. From time to time, I meet my former tutor and older colleagues and still have the impression that none of us, including me, have a clear view of the right practice. Such training continues for years and is a clear waste of time. I feel sorry for those who practice, believing that they're doing it the right way. This is the problem of the whole Zen world.

You cannot *just sit* without pinpointing a specific purpose. Sitting for the sake of sitting is pure waste of time. Well... that is something that I can say now. Back then I didn't know what to pay attention to, and that is obviously due to not having a proper tutor. I recommend to all of you to be careful when you decide whom to follow.

Denying Kenshō Is a Sin

Participant E

I'm convinced that we should believe in the essence of the Buddha's teaching that helped the Buddha himself and Bodhidharma achieve *satori*, and then also master Dōgen, who brought the teaching to Japan.

I think that we should follow in their footsteps, and we need

tutors who will tell us, “Do it this way.” But in the books of some teachers of our days there are no tutorials, and some even deny *kenshō* and *satori*. This is the same as denying the Buddha and master Dōgen. I find it strange that professionals do *zazen* without striving to solve problems of their (and our) mind.

Zen Buddhist priest

You are right. The problem is that the tutors themselves do not know the true meaning of *shikan-taza*. The simplest way is earnest repetition of “one breath, one twist.” That is all. And we have people who have never practiced true *zazen* explaining the ultimate reality of life to us —*in words!* In today’s Zen world we almost have no people who earnestly practice the way master Dōgen wrote in “Fukan zazengi.” Master Dōgen repeated several times that we shouldn’t indulge in wordplay, but, despite of it, the whole religious world is being played by weird reasoning of scholars. And where are the real practitioners? Nowhere!

Rage

Nowadays, Zen-fashion is denying *kenshō*. When I think of “Fukan zazengi” and master Dōgen’s intention in writing it, I can’t help consuming it with rage. When one sees “Fukan zazengi”, it is like a kindergarten child going to university. Since there are no real practitioners, the teaching of the Buddha and other masters is spread by these scholars and turned into religious theory. Reading their books is a waste of time.

In *zazen* there are no amateurs or professionals: you invigorate your *bodaishin* and dedicate to one thing in the *now*. After a while, you succeed in the *zazen* master Dōgen wrote about. This is something a great majority of tutors doesn’t know. And not only do they not practice diligently and properly but also look at others, who earnestly seek the Path, as a nuisance. They look down on those who twist their backs while doing *zazen*. To be honest, I was

also reluctant at first. But then I realized that it wasn't the form that matters but the content. Now I know what is important: it's *bodaishin* and practical self-improvement with an accomplished rōshi.

Advanced trainee

Thank you for your inspiring story. I have also been through something similar.

Sōtō school in Zen Buddhism is all about *shikan-taza*, but among all masters I have encountered, there was only one who really pursued it. How sad.... So, **we** have to give our best.

All of our speakers today mentioned “just” and *now*. There is nothing besides *becoming one* with every given *now*. Rōshi, could you please share your opinion?

Rōshi

You are all very thorough and absolutely correct. All there is is you in the present moment and the present moment itself. It is the *now* and the way to awaken to it that the old masters have passed on to us. We should use their method to purify ourselves. I shake with anxiety when I think about the future of the Teaching in Japan, and all over the world.

I often think about modern society. The decline in marriage, the rise of divorce, the collapse of the family as an institution, neglecting children, problems in education both at home and school, environmental problems, the situation with temples and *zazen* practice—they all have a spirit (mind) in common. The psyche of every individual influences the future of that particular individual and the human race as a whole.

We, the Zen Buddhist priests, should put more effort into solving the problem(s) of the mind. If we lose the *state of oneness*, we can neither learn nor teach the Way to salvation. I am really worried about Buddhist teaching.

Dear colleague, tell us your opinion on this, being both the one who learns and the one who teaches.

Children's Tragedy

Zen Buddhist priest

As you said, rōshi, the family is in a horrible situation. I can tell that by looking at my family and at the family of my brother.

I didn't respect my parents; the wish to avoid becoming like them has partially influenced my decision to become a priest. I asked myself, 'What does it mean to live like a proper human being?' Without knowing that for sure I couldn't go and teach others how to live.

I visit my brother once in a while. It breaks my heart to see how he and his wife treat their children—they only demand good grades in school. As if there are no other values besides school grades. On the flip side, children have no particular bond with the father, who is almost always absent, and altogether it is a rather gloomy family atmosphere.

I feel pity for the children. They are all innocent, and parents have absolute authority over them in general. Their psychological health and dreams about the future entirely depend on their home environment.

I remember my childhood with sorrow. A child is helpless. I don't want my nephews to grow up distressed.

Reflecting and Awareness

Being a priest, I often visit peoples' homes. And most of them are like my brother's. This is post-war Japan's reality, and it makes me sad and worried.

What we all need now is awareness of the way we live and philosophy of true independence. I strongly believe that we have to praise our natural rhythm more fully and arrange an environment for raising children. If we don't do that, I'm afraid

that the human race will step over the line of no return.

To prevent that, we must solve the problems of the mind, that is why I came to sit with rōshi today. Seeing all of you, who probably came for the same reason, gives me hope. True *zazen* is difficult to find; I am grateful I have found it.

Advanced trainee

Your talk gives me goosebumps. Thank you for sharing your story with us.

Most of us, gathered here today, lead a normal life. Rōshi, may I ask you to tell us more about everyday life and Zen, and what to do so that we can continue our practice while living the way we, common people, live?

Adapted Zen

Rōshi

Yes, of course.

We have heard one highly suggestive story, which left an aftertaste of deprivation. We must fight against spiritual ignorance.

In order to cast out the bad habits of our mind that come so quickly, we must examine ourselves thoroughly. Are there any distracting and redundant ideas in our thoughts and deeds?

For example, everyone who has a good upbringing will align his or her shoes after taking them off. If they haven't done it, they should go back and arrange the shoes *now*. Those who are lazy to arrange their own shoes will never do that with other people's shoes, which shows that they lack thoughtfulness and the will for heartfelt communication with others. This simple example says a lot about a person's character.

The next one is a person who arranges shoes, but the stress is now on whether he or she "just" does it. If they "just" arrange the shoes, it is evidence of the *state of oneness*, and that he or she is

on the Path to enlightenment.

Start by checking your own character throughout the day. “Just” arrange your shoes. The goal is not to do that like Pavlov’s dog, but to “just” do it in the *now* that has no before and after. At first, you have to be very attentive in checking that your mind hasn’t drifted away from what you are doing at that moment. As you continue to do that, at some point you will start to perform very smoothly.

When you go up or down the stairs, check whether you “just” make one step after the other. When you watch a TV programme, sit up straight and “just” watch, without adding your thoughts and emotions. Preparing food, eating, and cleaning after the meals are also wonderful “just doing” possibilities. Slow down a little bit and “just” do whatever you do, neatly, without any additional thoughts or feelings

While eating, pay attention to every bite. If the food is solid, chew thirty-fourty times before you swallow, and only then move your hand towards the next piece. Make sure that every phase of your meal is done neatly, focused on every moment of the process.

When you go out to meet somebody, pay attention to every breath you take. On a train or a bus, sitting or standing, guard your *now*, stay focused on inhalations and exhalations.

By doing your daily routine consciously, you will become closer, more intimate with everything you do. The space between you and everything else will become smaller and eventually there will be no room for unrelated thoughts. You will soon notice that you “just” see the signboards, without reading them, and that you “just” listen to what people tell you, without hastily expressing your views on the topic. Your driving will become more relaxed, noise around you won’t go on your nerves anymore, sadness and anxiety will weaken. Craving for material goods will lessen, so you will buy fewer things—your life will naturally become simpler. Aware of this new freedom, you will be refreshed

and open to new impressions.

As you continue to live like this, your everyday life will become the *state of oneness*. The essence of Zen will be within your reach. Examine your mind, notice your standpoint, and go back to your origin.

Master Hakuin said, “With strong *bodaishin* every moment is the *state of oneness*.” Everything you do is practice itself—there is no need for more practice. “Just” do it *now*.

Eventually, *bon-nō* will disappear. What does that mean?—It means that there is no room for non-existent ideas, that your mind doesn’t disperse, it is genuine, and the truth is obvious to you.

Advanced trainee

Thank you, rōshi, for the concrete recommendations which assure us that anyone can practice anytime and anywhere.

And as for you, my friends, I want to thank you for gathering here today. I’m looking forward to seeing you again.

ABOUT MASTER DOGEN

Master Dōgen and the Great Doubt

Before I start advocating “Fukan zazengi,” I would like to introduce master Dōgen. He is extremely famous; there are plenty of wonderful books written by many researchers, but here, we are going to engage in the most important matter, and that is: the great doubt master Dōgen had, the way he overcame it, and the sublime spirituality he had put great effort into acquiring. It all began with this significant doubt. Here is this famous sentence:

If all beings originally have buddha-nature, then why do great masters have to boost their bodaishin and train day and night? He was twenty-eight years old when he found the answer and became the fifty-first Zen master (the first one was the Buddha himself). This is the result of the fifteen years of *bodaishin* and the outcome of his truth-seeking.

Dōgen, feeling relieved, liberated and happy after the *fōg* lifted, shouted out to his teacher, “Body and mind dropped off!” That was proof that Dōgen attained *satori*.

“There is nothing more to know,” Dōgen roared like a lion. Thanks to this awe-inspiring self-confidence, master Dōgen dedicated his fifty-four-year long life, unsparingly, to teaching the way to awakening.

Upon acquiring the essence of Buddhism, Dōgen returned to Japan and started teaching Zen Buddhism. How can we ever repay him?! Only by *bodaishin*.

From Mount Hiei to Kyoto

We can learn all the important lessons for living a life that matters from master Dōgen, but now we will focus on his *bodaishin* and his kind heart. He spared no pain in his training,

and that bore fruit. We will approach the way he trained (and got results) and his method of passing on the teaching to us.

Thanks to master Dōgen's teachings, our country benefited immensely. I will now show you Dogen's spirit in his young age.

First of all, he was a genius. Until the age of nine, he mastered "Four Books and Five Classics," the authoritative books on Confucianism in China, written before 300 BC. Those books and some others would be too difficult even for university students nowadays. When he was thirteen (some sources say fourteen) he entered Hiei temple to study Buddhism.

The motive for young Dōgen's priest apprenticeship were the words of his dying mother. It is believed that his parents were from noble families, and that they passed away when he was at the age of three and eight, respectively. It is not hard to imagine how he must have been struck by life's uncertainty.

We are talking about the 13th century, the Kamakura period, the revolutionary shift from the Imperial Court to the cast of warriors as the head of the state. Dōgen's wise mother knew that her bright son would have to take part in political games and could easily become their victim, so she advised him to become a priest before she passed away. Dōgen, fourteen, entered the Hiei temple and became a priest.

His apprenticeship lasted for about two years. During that time, he read all the books that were in the temple, twice. And he came up with the famous "great doubt": *If all beings originally have buddha-nature, then why do great masters have to boost their bodaishin and train day and night?*

This question, that ceaselessly bothered the young priest, was *the Beginning of Master Dōgen*. I want you to know that without this doubt there would not have been master Dōgen. This famous Dōgen's phrase expresses the essence of the whole teaching of the Buddha.

The young and passionate truth-seeker asked this question to

the high-ranked priests in Hiei temple; confronted with such a deep and noble question, authorities were just blushing and sweating. Seeing that nobody can give him the answer, Dōgen said, “There’s nothing for me to learn in Hiei. Staying here is meaningless,” and left.

I would like to bring to your attention that he was still a teenager, not more than fifteen-sixteen years old. He went to Kyoto and visited many illustrious masters, but no one could answer why one who already has buddha-nature, needs to practice day and night to acquire that buddha-nature. Dōgen was anguished: “Why? You are renowned teachers, aren’t you? How on earth do you practice? You have no knowledge of Buddhism at all!” This is the beginning of the founder of our Sōtō Zen Buddhism.

The Meaning

I will give you a few explanations. This phrase “All beings originally have buddha-nature” belongs to the Buddha (Shakyamuni). This means that we are all born as buddhas, which means that we are all awakened, we know the truth from the beginning, we are originally free from *toraware*.

So, if this statement is true—Dōgen was reasoning—why did “the great masters have to boost their *bodaishin* and train day and night?”

Logical, isn’t it? We are supposed to be *awakened*, but what do we have in reality?—We struggle with gains and losses, society is full of problems, people may look happy and content, but let them hear something they dislike, and they rage, hate, cry, grumble all the time! A small compliment from a beautiful lady can bring enormous strength to a man... and so on... this soul that moves us is so hard to understand! And despite this reality, priests go around telling us that we are all spiritually *awakened and free*! How can one believe them?! Dōgen was young, but he knew that something was wrong, and that made him sad and frightened.

Those were the words of the great Buddha, so he had to believe in them. However, our spirits are in constant change—*where is our sacred, awakened nature then?* It was so hard to believe, and Dōgen was in a whirl of *bon-nō*, more and more each day.

But this wasn't just anybody—this was Dōgen, born with the Zen spirit. And he must have thought, “This is, without doubt, the key point of Buddhism. If I succeed in disassembling it, I will solve this problem which is giving me such pain.” Being a genius and having an enormous *bodaishin*, he noticed the problem existed, and only he could find the solution. The doubt arose from the understanding of Buddha's teachings that all living beings are originally buddhas. Those who didn't notice the problem are far from Buddhism. It would never occur to them to look for salvation.

Search

The temples of Kyoto gave Dōgen nothing. He heard that master Eisai had returned from China and brought back Zen, so he immediately knocked on Eisai's door. This is how Dōgen encountered Zen.

He instantly knew, that was *it!* He realized that the truth cannot be expressed in words but only in dropping away of body and mind.

However, in less than a year, master Eisai died. Dōgen continued training with his disciple for the next six years but then realized that this one is actually not able to teach him, so they went to China together and spent three years searching for an established teacher. Before they found one, his fellow priest from Japan became sick and died.

Day after day, Dōgen was searching for a proper Zen master. While in Hiei temple, he read all the books on Buddhism, so he perfectly knew the theory, but he needed a master who was the embodiment of our original awakened nature.

Finding the True Master

The days passed by in a vain search. Dōgen met many teachers, but none of them was a true teacher, so he started packing his humble belongings, disappointed.

One day, as he was waiting for the ship sailing to Japan, he met one old priest. A seeker recognizes a fellow seeker at first sight; Dōgen knew that he had an extraordinary man before him, so he told him everything—how he came, with great hopes, to this country which gave Zen to the world, and that now, he is going back to Japan feeling sad, since he hadn't found a master who can help him solve his doubt. He was agitated and perhaps had cried, for it was a time when one travelled great distances at the cost of his own life.

The old priest must have been happy. There were many practitioners, but this passionate young man, who traveled this far seeking the true teaching, was obviously serious. This acquaintance led to Dōgen's encounter with his teacher.

Dōgen couldn't help himself and started talking about what was bothering him, right away: the true buddha-nature of human beings. I'm sure that the old priest said something like, "These are highly important words that cannot be understood by reason. Their true meaning will become clear to you when you liberate yourself from your body and mind."

Why am I so sure that such conversation took place? —The genuine seeker will ask such things and the genuine practitioner will give such answers. Here lies the difference between a genuine and a pro-forma practitioner.

Master Dōgen must have realized that he met someone who clearly had a discerning eye and knew what he was talking about. The old priest also recognized a genuine truth-seeker and suggested taking Dōgen to his (the old priest's) teacher. Dōgen must have felt like a thirsty man who was offered water, or like a man who was lost in the dark and was offered a lantern. Feeling alive again, Dōgen asked the old priest to take him to his master.

And his master was the famous Rujing (or Nyojō in Japanese).

Master Nyojō was the fiftieth patriarch, counting from the Buddha. Dōgen finally met him after he had spent three years in this eastern Chinese province. Dōgen was twenty-six. His great *bodaishin* helped him persevere in his search and finally meet the right teacher.

Master Nyojō immediately realized that the young foreigner is a man of great capability; wanting to entrust him in preserving the teaching, he told him not to hesitate and to come anytime and ask anything. True masters love the Way, love the people on the Way. In other words, *bodaishin* takes care of *bodaishin*.

A Strange Encounter

Dōgen solved the problem of his great doubt two years after he met master Nyojō. Acquiring the Truth takes time; a trainee makes his *self* hollow, watches the master, listens to the sermons, and practices, practices, practices....

One hot summer day, Dōgen saw an old priest sun-drying mushrooms. It was none other than the old monk who had brought him to the master Nyojō. Dōgen happily greeted the man and said, out of pity for his age: “Why don’t you leave that to some young monk?” The old man answered: “Then it would be his training, not mine.” Dōgen then said: “You could, at least, wait until it gets a little cooler...” and the old man replied: “It must be done now.” To Dōgen it was a great lesson. *If not now, when will I do it?! There’s only now! Don’t you know that? And you consider yourself a practitioner of Zen?!*—to Dōgen it sounded as if the old man had said all that.

This was a very profound happening for Dōgen. He realized the essence of the essence: the *now* that has no before and after. *What was he doing all these years?!* He ran to *zendō* (a room for meditation) and sat for a long time.

The Big Death

Here we are, with young Dōgen and his keen *bodaishin*—he is making his first steps in the *state of oneness*. We almost see the *smoke*, which means that the fire is starting to burn. One should train hard with this vigor, otherwise one cannot go *all the way through*. Master Dōgen's passion was obviously real.

He spent days and nights *sitting*. It wasn't *zazen* that he had done before. It was solely *zazen*, day and night. He forgot the existence of his *Self*. He finally became *one with*, he *died*. "Dying" here means to cease one's previous existence, to stop being a man full of *bon-nō* and to be born as a new person. In Buddhism this is called "the great/glorious/noble death," or "forgetting the *Self*."

His body, mind and self-awareness were all gone, consequently—the great doubt was gone, too. However, he didn't realize it.

Dropping off Body and Mind

One day, as Dōgen was doing *zazen* in the *zendō*, a fellow practitioner fell asleep next to him. Master Nyojō did what tutors do in that situation: he tapped the shoulder of the sleepy disciple with a bamboo stick. That sound brought Dōgen back (from his *death*). It was like the experience the Buddha had when he came back from his *death* (the moment he noticed the morning star). That sound triggered Dōgen's *satori*.

Upon attaining *satori*, Dōgen realized why great masters trained day and night, even though they had buddha-nature from the beginning—to *become aware of that nature!* People practice *zazen* in order to acquire that awareness and to become the light of the world.

A mere ten days after the conversation with the old monk, Dōgen attained *satori* and roared like a lion, "Body and mind dropped off!" And his teacher, master Nyojō, acknowledged it by saying, "They dropped off, indeed."

After the ceremony of the dharma transmission, Dōgen became the fifty-first great master and said, “There is no higher truth than this one. This is the end of my training.” He was twenty-eight years old. Can you imagine his fifteen-year struggle and not shed tears?

Around this time in China, Wumen Huikai wrote “Mumonkan” (The Gateless Gate) and Wansong Xingxiu wrote “Book of Equanimity.” “The Blue Cliff Record” (the collection of *kōans*), “The Ten Oxherding Pictures,” and suchlike were circulating for some fifty-sixty years. This was the golden age of Zen in China.

Nowadays, the Buddha’s heritage has almost vanished, both in China and India. It’s been said: should the Buddha’s teaching die, the country will emerge in chaos. How true! If there’s no remorse, no pity, no shame, no striving for self-improvement—humans turn into beasts. Alas....

Returning to Japan

It is the Kamakura period, year 1227, emperor Go-Horikawa is on the throne. Dōgen is back from China, entrusted with the Buddha’s teaching. Here is what he announced upon his return:

“I returned to Japan empty-handed. There is no slightest peculiarity about Buddhism. I have only come to know that I have two eyes on both sides of my face and a nose in the middle of it. The sun rises from the East, the moon sets on the West. Cocks crow in the morning, a leap year occurs every four years.”

What he meant was: There is nothing special and sacred about Buddhism. It has just helped him lift the *fog* from his mind and see the original truth, free of errors and doubts. Real Buddhism teaches us that we have two eyes and a nose in between, from the beginning—meaning that the way we live is true from the beginning.

Knowing this fact (in our own experience) provides absolute relief and a full, rich life. Save yourself time—take away this fog of uneasiness. Find a proper teacher and walk along the Zen Path.

That was the beginning of Zen in Japan. Many Japanese masters flew abroad—to China, USA, and other countries—and spread the essence of Zen. Here in Japan, they spread it through three schools (Sōtō, Rinzai, and Ōbaku). Zen is that light that makes our country shine. We mustn't betray it and forget our gratitude.

Fukan Zazengi

Upon his return to Japan, Dōgen spent some time in the Kennin temple. It is the temple where master Eisai served and where he, Dōgen, started training Zen. Nevertheless, his stay there was only temporary. Dōgen began writing “Fukan zazengi” right away. To remind you, it was the year 1227.

Despite intense training, Dōgen couldn't reach the *state of oneness* and it took him fifteen years to get there, but only after he had met the proper master. That made him write “Fukan zazengi.” That, and also the knowing that he must show the right way to attain *satori*, otherwise the Buddha's teaching will collapse.

This work contains seven hundred and fifty-six *kanji* (characters). About a hundred years prior to Dōgen, master Chōrō Sōsaku took the essence of master Baizhang's (Jap. Hyakujō) teachings and wrote a work called “Zazengi.” Dōgen used the main contents of that work, added something and perfected it. Aside from content, which is, of course, splendid, the honorary professor of Tokyo University Mr. Jōken Katō praises Dōgen for his masterful writing style and highly precisely used *kanji*.

After this work, master Dōgen spent the remainder of his life writing “Shōbōgenzō” (Treasury of the True Dharma Eye).

Meeting Ejō

It was during Dōgen's writing of “Fukan zazengi” that Ejō (1198-1280), a monk-scholar, appeared in the Kennin temple. After just

one glimpse of him, Dōgen knew that a man of great value was standing before him. They spent a few days talking about the Teaching, and Ejō profoundly admired Dōgen. They then parted, but Ejō said he'd be there when Dōgen opens a new temple.

Six years later, hearing that Dōgen had built Kōshō temple in Uji (a city near Kyoto), he came right away and became Dōgen's disciple.

It is essential to have a proper tutor, for only then can one practice the right way. Together with passionate *bodaishin*, that enables one to reach the *state of oneness* faster. In Ejō's case these two (*bodaishin* and a proper teacher) proved to be an unbeatable combination: after a few years in Kōshō temple, Ejō achieved *satori*. I can imagine how happy master Dōgen must have been seeing that he judged Ejō correctly.

Ejō was fast in attaining *satori* because all that time (some eight, nine years since he first met Dōgen in the Kennin temple) he practiced the way master Dōgen had taught him: he knew that the teaching was non-verbal, and that he mustn't rely on words; that he must stop all thinking and imagining, and focus on the *now*, the absolute *now* that has no before and after.

Avoiding the Danger and Building the Eihei Temple

Little by little, master Dōgen became famous; many noble and high-ranked people started receiving lessons in his temple, which made him enemies in other religious groups. Among these, the monk-warriors from the Hiei temple, where he spent a few years, bore the biggest grudge against him. Knowing about the danger master may be in, his old friend Yoshishige Hatano invited Dōgen to the Echizen province (today's Fukui prefecture) and offered to build him a new temple. Master Dōgen acted quickly: he took his trainees and moved to Fukui. It was the year 1246. Having Ejō on his side helped master Dōgen a lot. That is how the temple Eihei, the center of Japan's Sōtō school, was open. If Dōgen and his

pupils had stayed in Uji, who knows what would have happened.

In our hearts there are jealousy, grudges, hatred, greed, etc., and as soon as they have an opportunity to reveal themselves, they turn us into beasts. Casting out these impurities from our hearts leads not only to the peace of our individual hearts but also enables whole countries to live in peace and to exist in the first place.

Why on earth would monks carry spears and other weapons?! Their mission is to dedicate themselves to the spiritual practice and spread the Buddha's noble idea throughout the world. Threatening other practitioners or common citizens is outrageous! However, Buddhism assures us that they were also born with buddha-nature, that they are also awakened from the beginning. Everyone who has a remorseful heart and *bodaishin* is a buddha. Those scoundrels who have not, waste their genuine Buddhahood and don't even think that their deeds are wrong. They live in hell.

One does not have to leave the worldly life and go to a monastery, but it is desirable to try to pursue the Path once, for knowing and not knowing the way—makes a big difference.

Bodaishin grows on remorse, self-discipline, and a wish to be kind and useful to others. In order to feel the desire to be a man (woman) of the Path, one has to be compassionate (there are so many people who suffer in wars and terrorist attacks), regret one's own instability, drastic disparity between social classes, misapplied equality, etc.

Life is short. Before you get old and die, you should want to live cheerfully, content with yourself and in harmony with others.

Zen Style of Master Dōgen

Master Dogen's style of teaching Zen was elegant and simple. Rather than having many pupils, he chose to teach a handful, but a handful of devoted and promising ones.

The keywords in master Dōgen's Zen are "shikan-taza" and

“shikan-katsudō”—“just sitting” and “just doing.” It is “just” intense “kneading” of the *now*, serious, careful grip on the absolute *now* that has no before and after. It is a style that prescribes perfecting the *state of oneness* by paying close attention to one’s every movement and doing that in a detached manner. Sōtō Zen was said to be the “peasants’ Zen” because it is supposed to be performed like farming work: uprooting the weeds, one by one, cultivating the field, hoeing, one stroke after another.

On the other side, Rinzai Zen is called “warriors’ Zen,” or “samurai Zen.” Well said! For it is really the focused handling of *kōans*, without noticing anything else besides that, as if preparing for a sword battle that decides whether one lives or dies.

Master Dōgen was full of benevolence, thorough in everything and he never wasted even one drop of water. He considered worldliness to be *rust* for *bodaishin*. Worldliness—that is a desire for material things, for honor, and approval. This is what a practitioner should be cautious about. He (she) should keep *bodaishin* firm, otherwise someone’s sweet words or a prospect of easy earning may destroy his (her) previous effort.

People were talking about the noble priest; rumors reached the emperor’s ears and the purple robe was sent to Dōgen. Being a humble man, the master thanked him, but didn’t accept the honor. The robe was sent one more time, he refused again, but the third time he thought it would be disrespectful, so he accepted. An exquisite example of a balanced knowledge of etiquette and one’s own freedom. However, Dōgen said, “If I wear this, even monkeys will laugh at me,” and never put it on. Which is something one could expect, for it was a man who had no problem with wearing old clothes, repaired many times.

Master Dōgen and Tokiyori

This period was marked by a shift in power from the court to *bakufu* (shogunate); the transition, of course, was pretty “bumpy,”

various clans were eager to sit at the top.

Fifty years of the shogunate reign passed. The fifth *shōgun* Tokiyori Hōjō is well known to us as a wise ruler. He knew that without force, one cannot suppress rebels, but, on the flip side, without the moral qualities, it is impossible to win people's respect, and that means that betrayal can happen anytime.

Rumors about master Dōgen reached Kamakura and the *shōgun* asked for lessons in Zen. I don't know how much master Dōgen knew about Tokiyori, but he went to Kamakura and spent six months there. Dōgen was then forty-eight years old. The *shōgun* was twenty-one; he just came to power. The Hōjō family was the political opponent of Dōgen—they ruined the family on his mother's side.

However, master Dōgen wasn't a petty man. He was bright as the moon and noble—these words describe his personality best.

Master Dōgen was telling this young regent how in the long history of China there were good rulers and tyrants, how the mission and the duty of a good ruler is to provide stability to the country and happiness to his people. He also suggested to Tokiyori that returning power to the emperor would be in the best interest for a stable country, which was, you must agree, a rather bold suggestion.

Tokiyori admired master Dōgen. Impressed by the nobility of the Buddhist doctrine, Tokiyori pleaded with Dōgen to accept him as a pupil. He even offered to build a temple and asked Dōgen to stay in Kamakura, but Dōgen wasn't fond of the idea of getting close to the political power, so he went back to temple Eihei.

Tokiyori became a very successful *shōgun*. Deeply impressed by Zen, he donated a piece of land to Dōgen, wishing for the teachings to flourish.

It was Dōgen's apprentice Genmyō who handed the document of donation to the master, his face shining with happiness. The temple Eihei was rather poor, so Genmyō thought that the master

would appreciate the present (who wouldn't have?!). However, the master tore off the robe from the disciple and not only did he evict him, he dug the soil Genmyō was standing on, saying "Even the soil he touched is dirty!" and threw it away. But why did he do that? *What happened to the master's warm heart?*—some would ask. However, they would be wrong.

I would do the same thing. Let's say a master hit a disciple thirty times. Why would he do that? To squeeze the doubt out of him, doubt about the teaching. For without profound thinking and doubting, there cannot be a breakthrough. Master Dōgen had an overall look on things and acted upon it. He was far-sighted and a truly big teacher. His act was out of love and compassion. He set a good example for the coming generations.

One of the great masters Dōgen admired the most was Zhaozhou Congshen (Jōshū Jūshin in Japanese, 778-897), for his outstanding achievements in breaking fresh ground in *zazen*. He also admired master Yōgi (992-1049), for his elegant simplicity.

Master Yōgi lived in an old barn. One day, as the floor was covered with snow, Yōgi was just sitting there, shoulders shrugging up towards his ears and lamenting into the darkness. After some time, he said, "The Buddha also used to sit on a stone under a tree, why should I complain!"

Together with these words, master Dōgen often quoted the words of master Ryūge (835-923): "In learning the Way, you must first learn to be poor. After that you get yourself out of poverty, and the Way stays within you."

The Zen-style of master Dōgen is the perfection of these two views. Passing down the Buddha's spirit was the purpose of his life. The Buddha left behind his country, his status, his family, and sat on a stone for six years. It is not only the money and material goods, but also love and affection that you mustn't harbor at all—this is what the Buddha proved not in words, but in deeds. Common people are afraid of losing wealth, whereas people of the

Path are afraid that the teaching might die.

In order to pass down the spirit of the Buddha to us, master Dōgen deliberately performed this by throwing away the soil the disciple was standing on. This is the Eihei temple-style—benevolence and nothing but benevolence. There was nothing personal in it. ‘From now on, leave your impure thoughts behind and give your best to purify yourself,’—this was the message.

When a *shōgun* donates a piece of land, it goes through authorities, the donation document is official, with required seals, and it is handed to the receiver in a gorgeous lacquered wooden box; what Genmyō brought wasn’t just a mere piece of paper. Had he “just” handed it to the master, with no personal emotions added, nothing of the kind would have happened to him. There would be no reason to scold him. His duty was to “just” hand over on the document. Master Dōgen was always emphasizing that the essence of the Buddhist practice is to perform one’s duties with no redundant ideas. Genmyō must have been in the temple for a short time and he didn’t quite understand master Dōgen’s teachings.

What can I say; a sad situation. Material goods make our soul rot. Thus is the soul of a common person.

It wasn’t something that master Dōgen gladly did, but there is this huge Truth that he had to pass down to the coming generations. As an example and a warning to others, the master evicted this young monk and even threw away the soil he was standing on. Some scholars have been investigating this episode giving it various interpretations; some were even talking nonsense about the depth of the hole, showing that they know nothing about master Dōgen. One has to stop thinking and cease all mental activities in order to achieve the *mind’s eye*. Not knowing where the borderline between one’s duties and emotions lies, makes one promote such silly ideas. Political, social and other turmoil are usually caused by such ideas. Everyone has to think and rethink

over and over again and learn from great teachers of the past.

Shōgun Tokiyori realized that it was Zen that supported him spiritually and after master Dōgen had left, he started searching for a good teacher. He found Rankei Dōryū who came from China. Tokiyori immediately built a temple (it is the famous Kenchō temple) and started training. The year is 1253. The master was forty-one, Tokiyori twenty-seven years old. Coincidentally, it was the year that ended Dōgen's fifty-four-year long life. By the way, Tokiyori remains well-known as a good ruler thanks to his *bodaishin* and his strive for self-perfection. His son, another famous *shōgun* Tokimune, was a Zen practitioner, too; he founded the Engaku temple. This episode has reached our time:

Before going to a battle, worried, afraid, he went to see the master.

"What shall I do in a 'life or death' situation?"

"Life,' 'death'—you're afraid because you've been thinking about such trifles! How silly! Do you think you'll have time to think about it once you pull your sword out and confront your enemy?!"

Tokimune roared. *Yes, it's true! There's nothing to think about! He's going to fight for Japan! No feelings, no gains and losses, no likes and dislikes, nothing; when you fight, you **fight**!* This roar showed that the decision ripened in Tokimune. The result is well known: Tokimune defeated the Chinese army and saved our country.

When Tokimune raised his voice, the master said:

"Look at you! You barked at ME!" What he meant was, 'When a lion roars, small animals tremble. That's the spirit! That's the condition for defending one's homeland.'

With this faith he repelled invaders and showed them Japan's strength. China has, by the way, tried many times to conquer Japan, and that is something that has to be told out loud. But what are our politicians doing? They just let China do whatever it wants; that is rude to Tokimune who defended us.

Some say that master Dōgen was acquainted with master Rankei Dōryū, although there is no evidence of that. But, if he knew that a proper master was coming to Kamakura, he would surely go back to his temple relieved. On the other side, Rankei Dōryū couldn't have come to Kamakura, without knowing who master Dōgen was. The two men of their caliber could not have been ignorant of each other. And Tokimune must have talked to the new teacher about master Dōgen. Rankei Dōryū respected and trusted Tokiyori, too. With Rankei's visit the Rinzai school was established and Kamakura's five famous temples were erected.

This era is worth mentioning for one more reason. The teachers from China brought precious Buddhist sutras and works of old masters and they were all printed out. The monasteries' financial power, protected by *bakufu* (shogunate), was thus furtherly amplified. It certainly was a merit that helped Zen spread throughout our country, and not only in the political and cultural class but at all levels (literally from the emperor and aristocracy to warriors, merchants, tea ceremony masters, and prostitutes), and it finally became a big part of the Japanese spirit, which is marvelous! And we mustn't forget that it was master Dōgen from whom it all started. The golden age of Zen lasted for five hundred years after Dōgen.

Passing to the Other Shore, Alive

Master Dōgen questions, "What is life and death?" This is the greatest question for everyone who believes in the Teaching. The Truth is in life and death both, so there is no need to look for something else, to stray in life and to be afraid of death. If awakened to this truth, one does not suffer in life and death, or try to escape from it and does not seek some special ease through *satori*. The moment one realizes that, he or she achieves real ease and solves the greatest problem in life."

No other teacher explained the essence of awakening in such a

comprehensible way. He also said, “When we are talking about all great masters, we are talking about the Buddha. The Buddha is our spirit, our spirit is the Buddha. All the past, present and future teachers become the Buddha by attaining *satori*. Because there are no two ways of achieving *satori*, no two truths, no two spirits. In other words, the spirit is buddha. That being said, the spirit must attain *satori* to realize it is buddha. When one awakens, one can really repay the Buddha and all the other masters.”

After master Dōgen “died” for the common life (he left the life of the ordinary man) and dedicated his entire being to the seeking of the Truth, he solved the Great Doubt, “All beings originally have buddha-nature, so why great masters have to boost their *bodaishin* and train day and night?” that had bothered him since he was fifteen.

Master Dōgen lived for the Law (which is also called the Way, the Path, etc.). He was a saint among the saints, but still a human. He knew: when his time comes, it will be the end of his life. Just like that, like every other living being. This is the law of life, and realizing that truth means *satori*.

Satori is getting that obvious fact from the bottom of your gut. This is the essence of the Buddha’s teaching, and master Dōgen lived to pass along that truth.

As the leaves turn yellow in autumn and then start falling, *autumn* came to master Dōgen, too. He sensed the change but knew it wasn’t the usual one. He knew what it meant. This is the kind of knowledge that becomes possible if you cast out your body and mind.

He then entrusted everything to Ejō and, with no regrets, worries, and agitation (which is something we achieve in the *state of oneness*, after we have wholeheartedly practiced) he headed to Kyoto, for he was advised to go there for a medical treatment. This is his farewell verse, written shortly before his death:

*Lighting dharma sky for fifty-four years,
I conquered and smashed the universe.
Hah!
There is nothing this body wants.
Alive, I pass to the other shore.*

Interestingly enough, this verse is very similar to the one, written by Dōgen's teacher, master Nyojō. Let's compare it:

*Soiling dharma sky for sixty-six years,
I leave this body of mine.
Hah!
Life and death—trifles indeed.
Alive, I pass to the other shore.*

And, if you don't mind, this one is mine:

*When my time comes, I want this—
(and you, my brothers, what will you do, huh?)
Let me tell you: I'll come back from the other shore.
Huh!
Silly things I say!
There is no this and that shore, no life, no death. Only the
freedom of coming and going!*

The Advocacy of "Fukan Zazengi"

Master Dōgen wrote "Fukan zazengi" when he was twenty-eight years old. It was after he inherited the Buddha's teaching from master Nyojō, became the fifty-first patriarch of Buddhism and returned to Japan. "Fukan zazengi" is the most important, the most concrete, and the most detailed guidebook on *zazen*, written by the man who attained awakening and felt endless compassion

for us, the common people. This work is like an umbrella on a rainy day, like food to a starving man—it is all that we need to know in our everyday practice.

I present you seven hundred and fifty-six *kanji* in my adapted translation. Prepare yourself for a rather difficult reading.

We live in a world where countries fight and family members do not bond. This all comes from unhealthy spirit. We all need to “wake up” to our original selves, take back our self-confidence, purify the world and seek the Way that would bring delight to all of us.

There are a lot of religious schools, but there is only one “Path to realization” that brings light of joy and benevolence to people. This is because all the other teachings lack concrete ways for taking off the “fog” from people’s minds. Consequently, they (those teachings) cannot prove their effectiveness. And also, there are no teachers who can examine and verify the achievements. So, one cannot experience real delight, ease, and the freedom of not being tied down by one’s mind, by the past, by material things, etc. Without that, one lives in a dream-like state and not a real life.

Buddhism, and especially Zen, is not a religion (meaning: *it is not a belief system*) but a way towards awakening to our true *self*. It is a teaching about the truth. And what is that “truth?”

Knowing that food is edible or delicious doesn’t help you taste it or give you its nutrients. You should eat it—not *think*, or *talk*, or *listen to opinions about it*.

“Fukan zazengi” gives you the best “food” the best food there is, chewed and generously served. All you need to do is focus on the *now*. Practice being in the *now*. That is all, but it requires some effort. Nothing can be achieved without effort.

About the Title

Titles are very important; they usually give you an idea about the content. In the case of “Fukan zazengi,” these five *kanji*

ideograms summarize the whole work.

普・勸・坐・禪・儀

普(**fu**) means “universal.” Something that applies to everything and everybody.

勸 (**kan**) means “recommend.” What does it recommend? Zazen (坐禪), of course. *Kenshō*. How is *kenshō* to be achieved? By performing *zazen*. And how is *zazen* to be performed? “Fukan zazengi” is about that. About the real delight, ease, and satisfaction. “Fukan zazengi” says, ‘You already possess it—go ahead and use it.’ Which is synonymic to “do *zazen*.”

儀 (**gi**) means “way, method.”

The five ideograms of “Fukan zazengi” tell us: “I recommend doing *zazen* this way to everyone. Awaken to the true Path and enjoy your life.” What a warm-hearted message! Do we deserve it...?

Alright, let’s start! I will give you “Fukan zazengi” adapted for the modern reader, and then I will comment on every fragment.

Truth is in Everything

Master Dōgen introduces us to the conclusion right at the beginning. He practically says, ‘This is the wonderful world that you are going to get.’ He arouses our excitement by showing us the right answer of a difficult calculation task. And then (in the following paragraphs) he shows us the way this difficult task is to be solved.

“Fine-tune what is important. There is truth in everything. Eyes see true colors, ears hear true sounds, the nose catches true smells. There is no need for extra effort and practice, there is no need to know about *satori*. For the same reason, there is no need to wipe something that is not dirty. In the first place, you cannot part from the truth, therefore you need not to search for it.”

He says that the truth is in everything and that there is no need for training. *All you need you already possess!* It sounds great, but.... Imagine that you give a smartphone to a man who had never seen it or even heard of such a thing. Or a man who stands in front of a vending machine he sees for the first time. Both of them would just stare, lost, at these useful machines.

Master Dōgen says, ‘do nothing.’ Meaning, ‘just sit.’ If you can “just” sit, then you understand the master correctly. But many misunderstand him. He didn’t say that you should sit still, lost in your reveries. Remember—this is the man who suffered a lot before he achieved what he achieved! This is the point many stumble upon. And why is that? It is because they lack *bodaishin*. I beg you: don’t make the poor master cry there *on the other shore*! He says, ‘Perfect what is important.’ And if you don’t know what is important, ask! And do it right away because there is no time to lose.

Another thing: get to know yourself. Find a proper teacher and knock on his door. Say “no” to hesitating, “no” to wasting time!

“All things are originally true. Eyes see true colors, ears hear true sounds, the nose catches true smells. “

Eyes see what they see, ears hear without learning how to listen. Salt is salty, honey is sweet. In the summer it is hot and we sweat, in winter it snows and we’re cold. Everything “behaves” in accordance with its nature and there is nothing more or aside from it. It is obvious. Water does what water should do, fire burns the way it’s supposed to. All things and all phenomena have their way and do what they are meant to do in every given *now*—not more, not less.

We all stand and sit, sleep and wake up. We observe, listen, just like that. With no help from others, *awakened* or not, we all do that, don’t we? All you need to do is to “just” perform the *now* earnestly. Don’t waste time complaining! Explore your *now* earnestly.

“Furthermore, there is no need to wipe something that is not dirty.”

A baby cries and laughs and poops, etc., freely, having no regard to what others think. This is a normal baby. What do the parents do? They meet the baby’s needs. Without the influence of ‘Oh, how sweet,’ ‘Oh, how dirty,’ etc. Spring, summer, autumn and winter come without fail by themselves, not because they were asked to. Who can say it is false or wrong?

In Buddhism, we call it the Truth, or the Law. It is an endless chain of cause and effect, and it is beautiful. What more is there to want?!

The world is covered with dust?

What a lie!

Look at the morning snow.

How beautiful! Those who understand it, smile, delighted; those who don’t... well, I can just say that I’m sorry. Whether you understand it or not, it is “just” like it is. Open your eyes and take a better look!

There is another famous verse:

Matsushima, ah!

Aah, Matsushima, ah!

Matsushima, ah!

Matsushima is beautiful, no matter who looks at it or when. We don’t need some supreme being to tell us how beautiful it is. It is just like it is, the way it should be. You don’t need to practice *zazen* or anything else to understand it. Do not think, add nothing to it—“just” look at it!

“In the first place, you cannot separate from the truth, therefore

you need not to search for it.”

Look around. Your eyes see things, your ears hear sounds. You should know this simple truth. As the sun rises in the east, the morning begins. It belongs to nobody. In spring, everything is green. And it is green for everybody, justly and equally. When you eat, your stomach gets full. It is nobody’s fault. You have no need and time to explore facts of the *now*. You should know this simple truth.

Not more, not less—all things and all phenomena are what they are. There is no room for doubt. Just enjoy everything with unconditioned spontaneity! It is so simple and wonderful!

The law of things is like this: fire is hot, ice is cold. No doubt, solid as a rock! Everyone knows that. However, you may know something and still not fully accept it. That is why your mind is not at ease. You can’t relax, thinking about the gains and losses (you had or you might have), somebody criticized you and you’re in a bad mood, and everything looks *dusty* and awful in every sense. Time and time again you corner yourself into self-contradiction and frustration, into worries and suffering, you find this world unfair and unjust. In such moments you may be listening to wonderful sermons that make sense, but they don’t stay in your mind, nor do they echo in your soul.

If every given *now* is true, pure, and wonderful, why can’t you experience it like that? Why don’t you understand what spiritual leaders say? This is the fundamental question. There are no lies in master Dōgen’s words. But you still do not understand or don’t accept them. And you want to understand them, but in a comprehensible way, right?

Buddhist training, i.e. *zazen* is here to solve the problem. Master Dōgen’s whole life and this concrete work, “Fukan zazengi,” has that mission. The first paragraph reveals the essence of the problem: it is in us, and we have to realize that. Master Dōgen came to that knowledge after many years of hard

thinking and training. After he found the answer to the question, why should we practice in order to achieve buddha-nature if we originally have it. And he wanted us to have our doubts, too. To think and search. Only then can we realize things. We need to look into ourselves, as the Buddha and all great teachers did.

The eyes “just” see, ears “just” hear. The mouth chews. Salt is salty, sugar is sweet. There’s neither more nor less than this. And it is the same as in the great masters’ case. There is nothing more one could ask for.

Check for yourself. Don’t waste your time on the training that will take you on a never-ending trip in circles. Beware of the *there’s no need to do something special*-part, because if you take it literally, you will end up nowhere. You already read about master Dōgen’s painful path to *satori*; without strong *bodaishin* you will go astray. There are many so-called teachers who prophesy *doing nothing*—be careful.

Now: you need to know *what is true*. First and foremost, examine yourself carefully, in detail. What is not your *now*? What is not *the fact*? I said (wrote) many times: eyes see, ears hear. When you are seated in front of the chopsticks, your hand moves on itself towards the food and takes it to your mouth. Did you ever take food to somebody else’s mouth or to your nose? I believe you didn’t. It is in our nature to do these kinds of things without thinking. Once the food is in our mouth, we start chewing it. It has its own taste. Everything happens smoothly. *En* brings things together and drives them apart, in every given *now*.

What is En?

People often stumble upon the word *en*. *What is en*? We will make a brief stop to look at it from various angles. Simply said: it is everywhere, but it doesn’t exist. Everything is *en*. Everything, including the universe, is *en* (or: is a manifestation of *en*).

For example: What is the essence of the universe? The answer

is: *en*. The Universe seems huge, endless. But seen by a person who realizes the gist of *en*, the universe is nothing special. If we put it in simple terms, the universe is people and things. Or: time and space. It is everything we see and hear *now*. It is all a manifestation of *en*. Should there be no *en*, there would be nothing. People, and grass, and the entire universe exist thanks to *en*. And they exist while there is *en*.

Changes in the universe happen when *en* changes. *En* is the word that applies to everything (big, medium, small), and the more one tries to generalize *en*, the less one understands it. “No, it cannot be. One should understand it if one thinks hard enough. If one doesn’t understand, it is because his or her brain is not working in a scientific way. It must be possible to explain it. And if one cannot explain *en*, then it is not true, and I don’t believe in it”—is what you will hear from people who put intellect on top of everything. This is already an addiction—a *generalization addiction*. One is constantly thinking, constructing philosophical systems at any cost, and making long rows of “smart” terms that average people don’t understand. *En* has no substance, it can be neither measured nor caught. It is like catching and measuring the clouds. *En* is beyond understanding. You may think until doomsday and still not grasp *en*, so stop thinking!

En is the *now* itself; it has neither a beginning nor an end. But we people need distinctions, so we label things as “positive” and “negative,” “the beginning” and “the end,” “bright” and “dark,” “us” and “others.” But this is all man-made, it has nothing to do with *en*. December 31 is the last day of the year, and the new year starts the next day (or the minute 31st expires!). It is out of necessity for convenience that we place boundaries where they do not exist. *En* has nothing to do with that.

In other words, *en*, just like *now*, has no beginning and end. And the universe is like that, too. You will realize how wonderful it is when you *become one* with *en*. This great realization is called

satori.

At the end of “going all the way through” is *becoming one* with *en*. The moment we realize the true *now*, the past really becomes the past and one gets liberated from its (past’s) restraints. This is why we practice *zazen*.

Let’s go even deeper into the topic. We get born and go through our everyday lives due to *en*. First, there is the *en* that brought our parents together. Then we appear. In order to survive, we need food and water and oxygen. Their balance (*en*) is what keeps us alive. All processes in our organism happen as a result of *en*. Our breathing is one of the *en*’s manifestations. The moment we become unable to exhale, we cannot inhale either, and we die. Death comes with the expiration of *en* that keeps us alive. We may want to die but cannot die, and it is because *en* provides conditions for living. Without *en* we cannot be born, we cannot live, and we cannot even die.

I said, “*En* is the *now* itself.” It means that *en* is the result of things that happened in the past, and also the cause of future events.

One more example: fire. Fire doesn’t exist on its own. It needs the *en* of paper, branches, matches, etc. But fire doesn’t “live” in the paper or matches—it needs rubbing or some other kind of external power to start burning.

Fire warms us up, it cooks us food, and provides us with light. It burns us when we touch it. This is all due to *en*. Fire doesn’t exist at the same time and place with water. They function in different ways.

This was an excursion into *en*. Let’s get our story back on track.

There is no such thing (substance, entity) called “now”—it is a sum, a result of various circumstances. If there was something like a *solid now*, it would pile on top of the previous ones, but since there is no such thing, every *now* dissolves without a trace and makes room for the next *now*. Isn’t it great? All you should do is

go along with this perfect, natural order of things and keep yourself (both your body and mind) together with whatever you are doing, without redundant thoughts and emotions.

This is how your everyday life (your life, in the broadest meaning!) should be. However, most people are absent-minded, therefore they do not notice that they are already doing it. This is what master Dōgen had in mind when he wrote, “Truth is in everything.”

Many years ago, I also didn’t realize the importance of that and I suffered. I beg you to bear this in mind if your life is precious to you.

Everything in your life will come to its place once you understand this. Through realizing every fact, all problems will be solved.

The obstacles on our way to awakening to this truth are the “bad habits” of our mind. In the darkness of the mind, unexplored by its “proprietor,” hide all kinds of guesses, anxieties, etc. Isn’t it awful that most people spend their entire lives like that?

In wars, millions of people lose their lives; some didn’t even hesitate to use nuclear bombs, like in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and kill hundreds of thousands of civilians. All that darkness comes from the mind (heart, soul—call it what you want). But if you start living according to the Path, you will change the world. I beg you to do that.

Go After It

In the first paragraph master Dōgen introduced the essence of the teachings to us. But there is no way one can understand it all of a sudden. Now starts the explanation. *What are our mistakes? Which course to take in order to achieve deliverance?*

Here is a free translation of what master Dōgen said: “You may know the essence, but even the slightest doubt can make you lose stability and find yourself in turmoil. You still hang around the

entrance; long is the way to realization.

Think of the Buddha who did *shikan-taza* on a rock under a tree. You probably also know Bodhidharma who brought the ‘Dharma Gate of Emancipation’ from India to China—he meditated, facing a wall, for nine years. But all that has nothing to do with the past; it is always a matter of the present moment.

You must be careful not to give too much importance to words and theories. Whenever something appears in your mind, go after it, get to know what it is and where it comes from, and then cut it away. If you continue to do that carefully, both the body and mind will fall off and the truth will reveal itself to you.

If you really want to find the Way, stop doing what you are doing right now, just sit and do *shikan-taza*.”

Effort! More effort! People of our time are pretty lazy. You mustn’t be like that. Life became convenient and that has made people believe that everything is easy, whereas big achievements require hard work.

Master Dōgen tells us to leave all worldly thoughts and activate our *bodaishin*. Leave out the words and excessive thoughts, do not try to understand, just do whatever you do with your whole heart. Sit. As you sit, various thoughts and images will appear in your mind and stir it up; take a good look at it, see where it comes from and where it is going next. Make sure it disappears without a trace. Soon, you will be able to notice (those moments of) the appearance and the disappearance of thoughts and images in a split second, i.e. you will know better what your mind is like originally, when it is free of bad habits.

When you start having a clear view of the *now* with no before and after, it means that you have reached the *state of oneness*. To achieve this state of utmost importance, I recommend you to make your life as simple as possible, to make time to sit as much as possible, and the “gate” will open up to you. Just don’t let *now* out of your sight.

There is nothing left apart from the thorough performance of what master Dōgen said, “Learning the Buddha’s Path means learning the self.” If you sincerely want to become a man/woman of the Path, don’t argue but gather all your *bodaishin* and sit, sit!

Nine Years in Front of the Wall and Master Huike (Eka)

I would like to tell you a little bit about master Bodhidharma (? ~ approx. 536) and master Huike (Eka in Japanese). The two of them were the embodiment of the Buddha’s soul. These episodes are legendary, and if this is your first encounter with Zen, you should know them, too.

Bodhidharma was the twenty-eighth patriarch of Zen Buddhism; his predecessor sent him to China to teach Zen, saying, “There are no proper teachers of Zen here in India. Go to the east and spread the teaching, otherwise it will cease to exist.”

The trip to China was long (it took three years) and full of troubles. It was in the year 546 AD, when, as the legend says, Bodhidharma was 120 years old. My deepest bow!

Hearing that a famous master of Zen had arrived to his land, the emperor Vu (464-549) came to greet him. The emperor was a famous Buddhist lover and supporter; he built many temples and even preached himself. Here is their conversation, which is widely known:

Emperor: “What is the essence of the precious teaching?”

Bodhidharma replied dryly: “Emptiness is all that exists.”

Emperor: “But you are standing before my very eyes, aren’t you?”

Bodhidharma: “I do not know.”

The emperor didn’t understand, and they say that Bodhidharma hastily left the province. He then went to Shaolin temple, where he meditated in front of a wall (the famous “Wall gazing”) for nine years.

The emperor was famous for his knowledge of Buddhism, but after that infantile question, Bodhidharma realized that the

dharma gate will not open to that man, and left. What a discerning eye and mobility!

And now comes the most famous part of his life, in the Shaolin temple. How did he pass on the Buddha's teachings? Not orally. Only by "just" sitting. His whole appearance was the embodiment of the teaching. However, nobody knew that *zazen* is *zazen*. And that *zazen* is only *zazen* and nothing more. This is something one realizes as one experiences *kenshō*.

Poor Bodhidharma! He traveled that far to spread the precious teaching, but all practitioners he had met tried to understand it rationally.

The Law can be acquired only by practice. Bodhidharma was aware that there weren't many practitioners who knew that, but he believed that some day somebody will appear, so he continued to "just" sit.

Nine years are long, but for a person who does something wholeheartedly, time has no meaning. And then, one monk heard about Bodhidharma; he came to see him. It was December 9, 520 AD.

It was Dazu Huike, called Eka in Japan. He was forty years old. Obviously very intelligent and educated, he was, naturally, far from casting out the body and mind, despite extremely strong *bodaishin*. However, Bodhidharma didn't pay attention to him. People like Eka rarely experience awakening. Eka didn't want to give up easily—determined to get a tutorial, he spent the night standing in front of *zendō*. The snow piled up to his waist. Bodhidharma saw that in the morning but still didn't accept Eka. Of course! Personal feelings have nothing to do with the Path.

"Hey, you, standing in the snow the whole night! What are you doing?"

"I have only one favor to ask you. Show your kindness to the poor straying humankind and teach it how to enter the dharma gate of emancipation." Do you notice that he is not asking a favor

for himself?

“You are saying that so lightly. Do you know how much the Buddha suffered and practiced to go through the gate of emancipation? Others masters also. Who do you think you are?!”

This was actually a test. Bodhidharma’s message was that he didn’t want to waste time with some lukewarm trainee. And what do you think Eka did to prove his determination? —He cut his arm off! Sending a message, *One arm or both arms, I couldn’t care less! If life is so full of suffering, why should I want to live?*

Bodhidharma, of course, realized that he had met a great man. He didn’t come in vain, and neither were the nine years of wall-gazing in vain.

A few years later, Eka went through the gate of emancipation and got a mind-seal from Bodhidharma. The teacher sighed with relief; the biggest fear of a man of the Path is that he will have nobody to pass on the Buddha’s wisdom to.

Some sources say that both masters were assassinated by rival Buddhist clans, jealous of their achievements. It shows how horrifying emotions can be. Wars start for this reason.

At that time, our country was in the Aska period and it started uniting on the grounds of penal law and civil code. In the year 593, when they say Eka was killed, one of the greatest figures in our history, prince Shōtoku, became the regent. The prince sent an ambassador to China to collect valuable books on politics, religion, etc., and soon came up with the Seventeen-article constitution. Although not a constitution in the contemporary meaning (it was more of a moral code), it is still regarded as one of the oldest constitutions in the world. However we call it, the fact is that it largely contributed to the progress of the country.

Some six hundred years after the twenty-ninth patriarch Eka, the Buddha’s wisdom transmitted to the fifty-first patriarch, master Dōgen. He attained *satori* and brought the teaching from China to Japan; Zen spread to all social classes, from the emperor

and aristocrats to warriors and prostitutes.

The “backbone” of our national mentality was formed in prince Shōtoku’s time. We have to thank him for bringing Buddhism to Japan.

My Advice

You may passionately want to train, but if you do it the wrong way you may achieve nothing. Cut off greed for knowledge. It sounds magnificent (the *knowledge* part), but all greed is our enemy (and the total opposition) of deliverance. However, there is one more true saying, that looks contradictory to the above-mentioned one: He who does not seek does not find. So, my advice is: *stop wanting to know and start doing*.

The wish to understand, to know more, makes you read everything you can lay your hands on; you’re not aware of getting hooked on the theory and distancing yourself from the real thing, from the source. Without a proper teacher, who could bring you back to the right path, you will endlessly stray. Master Dōgen was also wandering about for a long time; wanting to spare you from such straying, he wrote “Fukan zazengi.”

Once you become entrapped, you cannot get out of it. The reason is simple: you think that you get it—that makes you like it (and yourself together with it!)—so, naturally, you want more of it. Before you know it, you start criticizing others who don’t have your theoretical skills. You’re an expert! While in fact you became an embodiment of *jiga-gaken*. You may not notice it in yourself but you must have met such people. It is a rather widely spread phenomenon.

Our self-righteousness comes from the survival instinct. It ruins our mind and causes clashes throughout the world. One may sit and sit, and do *zazen endlessly*, but without *bodaishin* and a proper teacher, one cannot liberate oneself from this enemy within.

The essence of *zazen* training is “just” being in the *now*. But if you want to know more or to understand something better now, you must cut off that wish, for it is the greed of your mind, i.e. *bon-nō*. We do *zazen* to weed out such (and other) desires because they get in the way of seeing the proper appearance of things (and of ourselves, too).

The dharma gate of liberation is an absolute state that transcends *knowing-not knowing*, *understanding-not understanding*. Having theoretical knowledge is comforting and pleasant, but it is like a dream: as you wake up, you experience disappointment. Long story short: be awake all the time. Dreams are like clouds; once the clouds lift, you get to see what the sun really looks like.

This is what we do in *zazen*. *Zazen* takes away the *clouds*. You should look inside yourself, find the *clouds* and remove them. But, at the beginning, it is not that easy. Bad habits (excessive thinking, images, delusions, etc.) are deeply rooted in your mind and won’t go away. So, here is the skill that master Dōgen came up with to help us with this difficult task: when an idea arises, take a good look at it, and cut it off with no hesitation. This is the best way to stop an endless running of *bon-nō* and get to the “clean” bottom of your consciousness.

Master Dōgen also warned us not to stop paying attention to the present moment, not even for a second. This *now* moment is everything, so, by being in the *now* every single moment, you naturally end up in the *state of oneness*.

What we call “thoughts,” “emotions,” “*bon-nō*,” etc.—all that is a product of the past. And we need to focus on our mind *before* various ideas and thoughts take over, etc. So, even when they appear, our task is to not follow them.

When you manage to see your “plain,” “uncontaminated” mind, you will be able to notice the appearing and vanishing of the ideas. In the end, their appearance will not bother you and eventually

they will stop appearing. This is the *state of oneness*. The *mind without the mind*. Or, simply: the empty mind.

Noticing this state of mind is pretty startling. You'll scream in your heart, 'This is it!' Some think it is *satori*, and others, brazen ones, even brag that they achieved *daigo* (big *satori*). Stay away from those kinds of people.

But, let's go back to "Fukan zazengi."

When you start having a clear view of the *now* with no before and after, you will manage to cut off *bon-nō*, but this is only the tip of the iceberg. The main part is still out of your reach and will continue to cause you trouble.

However, now you know where to look and how to cut off what appears in your thoughts, so the training is much easier. If you keep on observing and keep your *self* away from words and from the past, you will manage to stay away from *bon-nō*. By now, you are able to function, giving the "steering wheel" to your five senses.

You have only peeked a little into the *state of oneness*; your *bad habits* are setting traps from all sides and now starts a very important phase of the training. You have to "knead" the *state of oneness*. As the great masters warn us, this is rather difficult. But you must give your best, with a bigger *bodaishin* than ever. As your practice advances, you will be able to forget everything and "just" be and do. Unless you get to this stage, there will be no *smoke*, so there will be no *fire* either. It requires a lot of effort, but not an effort to do something extraordinary; you just have to focus, single-mindedly, on what you are doing. In every given *now* "just" knead the *state of oneness*.

The result is a state that is hard to describe. You become as light as air, and do everything mechanically and accurately, just like a robot. You have to continue in that manner.

Keep on kneading (no thoughts, no emotions). It's getting "hot" and—oh!—here is the smoke! You're almost there! This is an advanced stage in which you can "just" do whatever you do, easily.

You are *one with the thing*; there is nothing else (that was constantly present in your mind before), so you have no sense of time and space and the whole day goes on smoothly.

What is going to happen next is your big realization. *En* will provide it to you. It will happen when you completely “forget” yourself. At the beginning it was *smoke*, and now it is a full scale *fire*. The moment of awakening, called *satori*.

If you want to obtain this, do *zazen* right away! “Just” do it, *now*. Or, if you need to walk—“just” walk. If you have to clean the house, clean it right now. Don’t hesitate, don’t search for reasons to postpone your action, don’t let your bad habits get in the way. *Zazen* training kills the bad habits of your mind. So, will you sit or not?

In the morning, get up and go straight to the bathroom to wash your face. Focus on every move you make, don’t let the *state of oneness* (*you-one-with-whatever-you’re-doing*) out of your sight. This effort is indispensable. And don’t forget your *bodaishin*—keep it burning! Keep your eye on everything you do. Like a fisherman who gazes at the float, or like an archer who focuses his gaze on the target. If you are writing, keep your eye on the tip of the brush (pen), and if you’re cutting something in the kitchen, don’t lift your eyes from the knife. Everything that exists, exists *here* and *now*. Only that *here* and *now* is the real appearance of things.

Thinking that *zazen* is something extremely difficult proves the lack of *bodaishin*. Should one have *bodaishin*, he or she will be able to “just” sit. Remember this, gather yourself together and focus on the *now*. That is all you have to do!

Stop Thinking

Little by little we get to the point, and to the detailed instructions. Here is my free translation to the contemporary Japanese language:

“You should do *zazen* in a quiet room. Should you eat too much,

you will get sleepy; on the flip side, you won't have enough energy if your stomach is empty, so find your balance.

Stop thinking. Don't attach labels "good" and "evil" to things, don't think of right and wrong, of what you like or dislike—nothing of the kind should take place. Planning to achieve *satori* also contaminates *bodaishin*, so don't set goals. 'Just' sit, forgetting not only *zazen* but your own body and mind, too."

As simple as that. You may use all available scientific and technical skills, but you won't solve your spiritual suffering. Here you need to cultivate your mind.

One way to describe *zazen* is "an intelligent person becoming dumb." You cannot become dumb while you try hard, but, on the other side, if you don't try hard, you definitely can't become dumb. One must push hard to become both smart and empty-headed. It is not easy to keep perfectly away from something or someone, and it is even harder to become completely dumb. I suppose you are wondering what on earth I am talking about, so let me give you an example: imagine a man who left a bag with his passport and wallet somewhere. While he doesn't notice it, everything is alright, but sooner or later he notices. A normal person will turn pale and run around looking for his belongings. A true dummy won't. He will say, 'Oh, boy, I lost my things,' notify the police and the people who are waiting for him. A *normal* person will become disorganized the moment he realizes what he has done, whereas the dummy will be happy he noticed before it was too late and efficiently handle the situation. The state of mind of these two is completely different. Which one would you choose?

Being aware but staying calm—this is possible if you are firmly in the *now*, you don't think of what *was* and what *will* be, you "just" do what you have to do. This is the ability of a *dummy*. Dummies abide in the state of ease. They live, not thinking that they are living, and when the dying time comes, they "just" go, not thinking that they are dying. They are so absorbed in the *now*, that they

have no time to contemplate. This is what we, Buddhists, call “being dumb.”

In order to become a *dummy*, one has to practice efficiently. Choosing a quiet place is very important. At the beginning, one should avoid all sorts of visual, audial, and other excitements. One has to make a conscious decision to practice, otherwise he or she will succumb to temptations and miss the opportunity for deliverance. *Bodaishin* plays a huge role here.

As you start *zazen*, your body and mind are already in the realm of pure spirit and you are a child of that spirit. Relax and entrust yourself to it as you would entrust yourself to your parents. The realm of pure spirit is good and positive through and through, so you don't have to discern good and evil. Also, there is no special need to strive to attain *satori*; if you “just” practice, the bad habits will fall off naturally.

As long as we are alive, our senses gather information, memories from the past and everything we have experienced, and they ceaselessly “boil” in our minds. “There is no way one can sit still without thinking”—you are saying to yourself and “robbing” yourself of the possibility to awake for real life.

Life is short and there is only *now*. You should know that and try hard to liberate yourself like the Buddha did. You need *bodaishin* right now.

Sitting Straight

Here is the most important instruction in “Fukan zazengi.”

“Prepare some cushions and make yourself comfortable. Sit straight; it is better to keep your eyes open, for if you close them, various images will emerge.

So, arrange your posture, arrange the necessary state of mind and “just” sit, tall as a mountain. At first, you will battle with the images and won't be able to relax; this is inevitable, it will take some time, but it will stop when you start understanding where to

look with your mind's eye. Whenever you feel tension in your body and mind, relax again and focus on the *now*.

'Just doing' is the essence of *zazen*; if you ignore all thoughts and images, you will naturally have a clear view of the true *now*, and the bad habits will fall off. One more time: whatever arises in your mind, just cut it off and get back to the *now*."

Sit and stop all mental processes. This is what you need to perfect. It is not easy. I have already mentioned the metaphor about starting a fire. You need to rub two sticks together for a pretty long time, but once you start the fire, you won't need the sticks anymore—it is over with the exhausting friction. It gets bright and warm; it is good for you and for everybody else.

That sheer bliss is here. The famous Jill Bolte Taylor, the author of "My Stroke of Insight," had a pseudo-*state-of-oneness*-bliss-experience. I suppose that she wants to have access to it on a daily basis, but without *zazen*, that is not possible. On the other hand, knowing *zazen* through science and technology only makes it harder to reach the *state of oneness*. It is the same as just listening to someone describe food: you can't taste it. So, to enter the *state of oneness*, you must "just" do.

The Dharma Gate of Emancipation

In this paragraph master Dōgen writes about the advanced *zazen* training. He uses difficult words and *kanji*, but what are words and letters? Dead things. Don't let go of the *now* by stopping at every word you don't understand. Just slide over the text and apprehend it as a whole—that is good enough for boosting your *bodaishin*.

Zazen is just *zazen*—nothing more, nothing less, so, don't expect anything from it and do not give it any particular meaning. On the other hand, do not sit lost in reveries, for you will never go *all the way through*.

Master Dōgen says "do not learn Zen." This means 'Do not go

around gathering information and theory,’ and ‘Do not think that endless sitting will take you to satori.’ Apparently, there were practitioners who had a false image about *zazen* back in master Dōgen’s time, too. Although, one can understand that: the proper *zazen* training was not widely spread yet.

That is the reason why master Dōgen wrote “Fukan zazengi.” And the essence of it is: relax your body and soul; if an image arises, let it go. Stay away from it. Whatever may arise, just ignore it and don’t go with it at any cost. Focus all your attention on your breathing. After a while it will be easier to deal with thoughts and images. From that stage on, *zazen* will become pleasure.

With further *kneading*, you will notice that distracting thoughts vanish immediately. It is a very pleasant realization. Delusions, false perceptions and distracting thoughts that had given you so much trouble, disappear now, although you have done practically nothing. This is the *state of oneness*.

You will reach the *state of oneness* inevitably, if you “just” sit seriously. When you sit, “just” sit. That is the present moment of *zazen*. Now is neither long nor short. It has neither before nor after. It is “just” *zazen*. When you experience the state with no excessive thoughts, worries or dilemmas, it is the ultimate “joyful ease,” which is the meaning of the “Dharma Gate of Emancipation.” But you mustn’t be too satisfied with it and/or with yourself! Many have stopped earnest practice here. You must continue because only *zazen*, only earnest practice (of becoming *one with*) can give you “joyful ease.”

The walking Zen is just another form of practice. It focuses on walking, with no thoughts about the repetitive left-right movement of your legs and feet or their walking speed, etc. No thoughts—no problem; that’s the meaning of “joyful ease.” It is the same with other activities, with everything: “just” do whatever you are doing with no excessive thoughts. If you manage to “just” do everything you engage in, 24/7 will be a “joyful ease.” This is

proof that your body and soul are one, and that they are one with what you do, which, furtherly, means that there is no space for bad habits to show themselves. If, on the other hand, they still raise their heads, it means that your way of doing *zazen* is wrong, or that you do not give your best, or both. You need to boost your *bodaishin*!

We practice *zazen* in order to realize the Truth. *Zazen* proves its own existence. It has no other purpose. When we eat, the act of eating becomes the “path” and the truth. If we become *one with eating* (if we focus on it), we can understand the true nature of eating.

Master Dōgen mentions *kōan*. What is *kōan*? The word “*kōan*” comes from a syntagm, “*kōfu no andoku*,” which means something like “government regulations.” It mainly concerned (in ancient China) homicides and death penalties, so it was something you wouldn’t underrate or ignore—that could cost you your life.

So, *kōan* is a way to prove whether or not you really understand the law of Buddhism. *You say you don’t? No matter how hard you think?* Well, it (*kōan*) is meant to be impossible to grasp by logic. I’ll say a funny thing: if you really understand the way ears and eyes function, you won’t stumble over anything when you listen or observe. But you WILL stumble if you let yourself be thrown into confusion, if you let your bad habit of thinking *this* and *that* mess with facts. Think of *kōan* as a tool that helps us dig up and expose our unsolved nasty habits of excessive thinking and deluding ourselves.

Let’s say that you’ve been questioning things like, ‘How do eyes function?’ ‘How do we see?’ This is *kōan*. It is the humans who get bewildered—eyes and ears have no such problems. We all naturally hear and see, without any special effort. It is a fact and the truth. Originally, no one stumbles while observing and listening. And, when asked, ‘What is it like to see and hear?’ people usually stumble and stammer.

Let me tell you a bit more about *kōans*. There are two types: the ancient *kōans* and the actual *kōans*. (Note that this is just one of the few classifications.) After the Buddha died, Mahakasyapa ordered Ananda to ‘Get in through the keyhole.’ This is a two-thousand-six-hundred-year old *kōan* given to the whole humankind. The characteristic of this sort of *kōan* is the open question-answer style. Those who don’t understand, just don’t, that’s all.

Other kinds are the “actual *kōans*.” *Actual* means “a certain thing, here and now.” It is a thing that actually exists in front of our eyes. The purpose of these *kōans* is to reveal whether a trainee realizes this existent thing or phenomenon.

“Who is this walking creature?” “What is it like to walk?” “How many steps did you take to come here?” “Try to walk without using your legs.” “Scratch the head of that man across the river.” “Sing karaoke without using your mouth.” “What are you doing now?” etc. If you have parted with your nasty habits, you should be able to answer without hesitation.

If you can’t answer when asked, “What is it like to walk?” you should address the act of walking. “To address walking” means that you are actually going to make one step at a time until you are sure what it is like to make each step. And then, when you become *one with* it, in the *now*, you will realize the answer. It is a practice and nothing but a practice!

So, *kōans* are delivered to trainees all the time. Should one be careless and say, ‘Oh, this tastes nice,’ he will be bombarded by questions such as, ‘What is *this*?’ ‘Show me the *taste*,’ ‘*Who* says it tastes nice?’—the teacher will squeeze nasty habits out of him. Without a proper teacher, one cannot get rid of bad habits. I think this is enough to get the impression of the place *kōans* have in Zen Buddhism.

By attaining the *state of oneness*, you become invincible. There is nothing to worry or bother you once you get there. The “just”

mind puts you at the top of the world, so to speak. Everyday is a shiny day. It is the path of the neutral mind. Great ease, great joy, great freedom—this is what you get once you get rid of your nasty habits.

This is what you need to understand: should you properly train *zazen*, the Path will reveal itself to you, your body and mind will reunite; you will be like fire—nothing will be able to approach you. Cold as ice, sharp as a sword, two-three days without sleep won't harm you. Upon entering the state of oneness, you'll stop wasting time in reveries and your mind will naturally become gathered. Having this in mind, engage in *shikan-taza* seriously—is what master Dōgen tells us all.

Everything is practice and the Law itself in each and every moment, so be polite to it. Nasty habits of our minds are so persistent that you mustn't let your guard down. Let nothing unrelated slip in, “knead” your *state of oneness*, and the “Gate of joyful ease” will open to you. Whip your *bodaishin* and waste no time. Life goes by so fast.

Dying Sitting or Standing

This paragraph is about the greatness of the old masters, who went all the way through the *state of oneness*. It says that, with an earnest practice, the *state of oneness* is attainable, regardless of the trainee's IQ. It says that the compassion the old masters felt for us, as well as the *state of oneness*, are far beyond our imagination. Freely translated it is something like this:

“Among the great Zen masters there were some who achieved what ordinary mortals considered impossible: they consciously died while doing *zazen* or even standing. The abilities one acquires with *zazen* are remarkable.

In tutoring trainees, the masters were using various, sometimes drastic, ways; their practice was not based on intellectual knowledge, it only came from *zazen*. The power of *zazen* has

nothing to do with the supernatural.

You should accept everything that appears in front of your eyes as an obvious and natural world. If you look for something beyond the obvious, for some supernatural powers—you are not doing *zazen*.”

Whatever shape or form it has, it is the genuine truth that comes before our recognition arises. Having said that, it (the genuine or the great truth) has nothing to do with your intellectual abilities and knowledge, so naturally let go of all volitional activity when practicing *zazen*. “Just” be in the *now* frankly, honestly, and completely—this is the only way to teach Zen. Should you practice this way, you will eventually see the results.”

Things are always as they are; salt is salty and sugar is sweet. There is nothing to contemplate about. Once you let things be as they are, without using your reasoning, the truth will stand clear before you and your mind will be at ease. In order to manage that, you have to get rid of your nasty habits, which is what the masters of old times have been teaching us. They may have been harsh sometimes, but it was always due to their best and warm-hearted wishes for us. You have probably read or heard about the teachers who kicked and slapped their disciples (and what about the one who cut off his pupil’s finger? I’m sure you’ve come across this famous story); it of course, does not happen every day (relax!), but the truly great teachers do anything to inspire their trainees’ passion for practice and lead them to their awakening. But, unfortunately, such teachers are rare nowadays, and it makes me want to cry when I think about the future of Zen.

I cry in front of your grave, my sobs—the autumn wind.

Matsuo Bashō

So, one may have strong *bodaishin*, but unless he or she knows

how to get rid of the nasty habits, nothing can be done. At that point, people usually start reading books about *zazen*, and I cannot blame them. But what they should be doing instead of reading is to look inside themselves, and at things their hands are touching and the ground their legs are walking on. There is only the *now*—you mustn't let go of it. Focus on the *now* wholeheartedly. Grab the truth, the facts, with your teeth and nails, and do not let go! If you continue to do so, the bad habits will naturally fall off.

The clouds are gone

Do not think the light is back

For the moon was there all the time

Priest Musō Kokushi

There is a whole world out there, the earth and sky, the people and things, etc., and we see, hear, smell, touch, and recognize them. We (and the things) interact with each other and then go our separate ways, everything changes like the weather and the four seasons. The only eternal thing is the Truth to which we need to awaken to, and *zazen* is the way to do that. By being “just” present in the *now*, the bad habits fall off and we realize the truth.

You can't miss the *now* for it is *now* all the time. Believe in that, believe in your teacher, and “just” perfect being in the *now*. There is nothing special or hard about *zazen*. Everyone can get to know what *zazen* is just by sitting with a calm mind.

So, just do it! Sit calmly, sit persistently, and your effort will pay off.

Master Dōgen said, “All there is to understand is that you have one eye on both sides of your face and a nose in the middle of it.” The minute he realized such an obvious fact, all fears and hesitations dropped off.

Do all these obvious things *now*. And the Gate will open to you, as it has been proven from all the masters' experiences.

First do real, true *zazen*. Become *one with* everything you do—really walk, really observe, really clean. There is only one truth; you will get to the realization that there are no two *now*-s.

Many Ways, One Zazen

In this paragraph master Dōgen tells us not to waste time. Translated into the language a contemporary reader can understand, he says:

“Be it a Chinese, an Indian or a Japanese person, everyone who learned Buddhism grasped the truth, thanks to *zazen*. All people are different and there are as many ways to teach *zazen* as there are people in the world, but there is only one *zazen* and it is common to all of us. *Zazen* is not something you go far away to search for. Training is not somewhere outside of you. It happens within, where you are, with your eyes directed to your inner *self*. If you miss this important point, *zazen* ceases to be *zazen*.”

The Buddha discovered the Dharma gate of emancipation (or the Gate of joyful ease, if you prefer) and it is something that has worked every time and everywhere. All the great masters taught us to knead our *now*, so you should devote yourself to what you are currently doing, in accord with *en*. If you continue in that fashion, you will attain the same *state of oneness* as they did. Give a serious thought to these golden words!

The easiest way to “get there” is *shikan-taza*. Just sit; don’t complain or make excuses why you can’t do it.

About “There are as many ways to teach *zazen* as there are people in the world, but there is only one *zazen* and it is common to all of us”: *yeah... zazen is great, but... we all have our daily lives to live, jobs to do, relationships to make work, we would rather be loved than ignored, and rather have money than be poor, etc. That’s right—so many different people, so many different lives. But that is nothing new, we all know that! The*

question is: are you going to spend your whole life focusing on those details? You might die in a car accident tomorrow, and you still worry about people liking you?! About playing golf with your business partners?! If you have time for that, sit this very moment! Life won't wait!

About “*Zazen* is not something you go far away to search for”: it seems to me that master Dōgen looked back on his own experience here. He spent many years looking for the Way in the external world, so he even traveled to China. We all tend to think that special people know special things, and we would go to the end of the world to get them. But—master Dōgen says—the problem is your own mind, in this very *now*. There is no other mind in the *now*.

If you understand him, you realize that all you have to do is deepen the understanding of the *self*, in every given *now*. And if you do not realize this, it is due to your nasty habits that are causing chaos in your mind. You need to get rid of these nasty habits, and the best way to do it is to focus on the *now*, in *shikan-taza*. Now that you know this excellent and simple way of overcoming your problems, stop reading those mountains of books and stop reasoning. That would be the external way, the way to nowhere, so stop wasting your time. This warning comes from master Dōgen's warm heart; it is based on his personal experience. We need to bear this in mind.

The Truth

We have reached the summary of “Fukan-Zazengi.” I divided it into five chapters.

In the famous “Lotus Sutra” it says that the world is full of suffering and that human beings are in an endless circle of transmigration. The great compassionate Buddha wanted to liberate us from such fate. Master Dōgen agrees with the Buddha, but says that everyone can liberate themselves from

suffering.

“We are blessed to be born as humans; we should live like humans do, in awareness, and not waste our time in vain on cheap pleasures. Life is short and fragile. If you think that you are going to live forever, and that the world is always going to be there for you, your life might end without knowing what you, as a human, should know.”

Chapter One

Short and Fragile

You must surely feel the passion in master Dōgen’s message. Idleness leads to hell. I already mentioned the episode with the old monk who was drying mushrooms in the sun. Dōgen felt sorry for the old man and said, “Why don’t you let younger brothers do that?” The old man answered, “Then it would be their practice, not mine.” But Dōgen didn’t quite understand this powerful message, so he continued: “You could at least wait until it becomes a little cooler.” Without doubt, this remark was from Dōgen’s kind heart, but from the standpoint of an awakened mind, it showed his dualistic thinking (good/ evil, should/shouldn’t, gain/loss), i.e. Dōgen was still only halfway through on the road to his awakening. The old monk’s answer struck him hard: “No, I cannot wait!”

Reminded that *now* has no before and after, young Dōgen got a hint about the true *state of oneness*. This episode helped him grasp the *state of oneness*, and ten days later, he attained his awakening.

Chapter Two

Born as Humans, Destined to be Buddhas

Should you go *all the way through*, you will become a buddha (the awakened soul).

In the beginning, the Buddha Shakyamuni and other great

teachers were all ordinary men, but they kept their *bodaishin* strong and performed everything with an absolute focus, going *all the way through* in everything they did. It is only natural that the Gate of emancipation opened to them. It will open to everybody, for we are all destined to be buddhas.

I'll emphasize this one more time: it is good to believe in master Dōgen's words and to admire him, but it is useless if you don't practice.

Spending honestly-earned money on cheap pleasures and personal grooming defames the sacredness of labor and wastes time. Nonetheless, we all need that sometimes. Knives do a wonderful job, but they need to be sharpened once in a while.

Time does not wait (for anyone). Since we were born as humans, we mustn't waste this important opportunity on trifles. Living without looking back on this precious human nature is a conduct worthy of a beast. You mustn't allow that to happen.

If you spend every day making the most out of it, you will reach the territory of Great Freedom, you will become a buddha and help save the world. I think that is a wonderful mission for everyone to fulfill.

We all want to live a secure and relaxed life. The real treasure in life is to be at ease with everything that happens to you, to have no more and no less than you need. Only then can you love both yourself and others.

Everything exists as one unique sample in itself, a *single* thing distinct from any other things. And though there are always similar ones, they are never completely the same. Straying from the Way happens when you don't see this *single* thing for what it is but as something similar to other things. But once you become *one with* it (with this single thing), the nasty habits fall off and the right Way unfolds before you. This is what our passionate teacher, master Dōgen, wanted for all of us.

Chapter Three

The False Thing, the Real Thing

We are all buddhas from the start. But we need to be reminded of that, which is precisely what the great masters have been doing for us. Let's trust them and earnestly do whatever we can to get where they are taking us, no matter how long it takes.

Do not think that you understand Zen only because you read books and listen to what people tell you about it—it is all false. Sit yourself and learn by observing those who have mastered the Law—that is the best way.

This is (a bit) off topic, but I want to tell you what I saw once in at a famous Shinto shrine. One lady was performing *ohyakudo* (a ceremony that refers to walking back and forth a hundred times before offering a prayer). I was deeply moved by her appearance: she devoted herself single-mindedly and walked and prayed, without glancing sideways, despite being surrounded by many people. I really hope she won't be awfully disappointed if her prayers don't get answered.

Imagine what would happen with the universe should every prayer that ignores basic laws of natural causality be answered! There wouldn't be water when you need it to extinguish a fire, and the summer would not come to warm us up after months of chilly winter. There is an order in the universe, it "just" is in every instant of the *now*. All other ways, inconsistent with this order, lead to nowhere. Perhaps you want to try other possibilities (and you may—go ahead!), but, at the end of the day, we all realize what is **right**. Do *zazen* and become enlightened. "Just" do what *now* requires. If you need money—work hard; if you know that doing something is bad—don't do that. And always mind your manners and be grateful.

Chapter Four

The Same Ground with the Old Masters

All the people who have walked along the Path are saints. We should honor all past, present and future men and women of the Path and boost our *bodaishin* learning from them. *Zazen* practice unites us with the old masters. In “Fukan zazengi” master Dōgen says, “Honor those who have stopped learning and training.” These are the great masters, men and women who “graduated” practice. They “just” live *now*.

Sutras and the old masters’ writings are the beacon for a practitioner. One should read a bit of them every day. “Fukan zazengi” is one of the most suitable works for that purpose—choose one paragraph and master it.

For example: “The Truth does not hide from us. Everything you see is true; before you think about the training and awakening to the Truth, know that the world itself is true.” Stand. Walk. Sit. You need no special effort to do any of that, right? “Just” do it, *now*.

Or, “Detach from your emotions! Stop all kinds of thinking, do not plan to attain *satori*.” Leave all your plans and projections and “just” do whatever you are doing single-mindedly. Right now, pay full attention to the present moment!

And, “If you practice *zazen* the way old masters taught us, you will come to their ground.” Do your best not to lose sight of the *now*. Master Dōgen encouraged us to keep our *bodaishin* strong, for that will make us one with the old masters.

We are close to the goal.

“Continue to practice this way and you will inevitably become like them.” Dōgen says “continue,” without specifying how long; it doesn’t matter: don’t think about how much time it will take you, just whip your *bodaishin*, and do your best—this is master Dōgen’s message to us.

You will be rewarded for *shikan-taza* by becoming able to stick to the *now*. It is important that you do not loosen your grip there! You will experience ease and you will have a lot of theoretical knowledge by that point; it will be an obstacle on your way to

perfection, so forget about it, don't enjoy the ease, continue to focus on the *now* wholeheartedly.

Master Dōgen guarantees that you will become the same as the great masters, should you practice this way. In other words—it all depends on your will and effort. This is why Zen is great.

Chapter Five

The Treasury at Your Disposal

Here we are, on the right Way to liberation.

“And the treasury will open itself to you, and you will have it at your disposal.”

The “treasury” here is life, vast as the universe itself, the life which doesn't discriminate between life and death, good and evil.... The great masters were all like that, without discriminatory prejudices. You already know that we all possess that quality—you just need some discipline and effort to discover it. *Bodaishin, bodaishin!*

We should all have fun in life; otherwise, there is no point in being alive. And to lead such a life, a certain preparation is needed. Embrace *bodaishin* and have a meaningful and joyous life. “Just” do whatever you are doing—earnestly, seriously, and absolutely focused on it. Allow no unrelated thoughts and emotions to disturb you. This is the way Master Dōgen and the other outstanding teachers lived. *Bodaishin, bodaishin!*

ZAZEN and KENSHO

Zen is the Path that leads to awakening to one's true self. In order to attain it, one must go *all the way through* in everything one does. Going "all the way through" means to do it wholeheartedly. When you do something wholeheartedly, 100% focused on it, excessive thoughts do not appear. And if there are no excessive thoughts, there are no *jiga/gaken*, i.e. nothing messes up your mind, and you are stable and peaceful. We were all like that when we were born. Remember this!

However, as we reach about three years of age, we start to differentiate between ourselves and others and also many other things. This is the beginning of the nasty habits we have been mentioning throughout the entire book. Here, our body and mind part ways. Therefore, our mind *flies around*, forgetting where it went and how it should come back. We practically spend our whole life with this troublesome, chaotically wandering mind. In order to get back to our genuine stable and peaceful mind, we have to get rid of these nasty habits, and *zazen* is the way to do it. Realizing one's genuine self is called *kenshō*.

In order to get your original, stable mind back, you must go *all the way through* while absolutely focusing on one thing until you forget yourself. If you do not go *all the way through*, your bad habits won't leave you alone. *Zazen* is the best way to stop your wandering mind. That is why all the teachers recommend *zazen*.

However, beware of those who pay too much attention to form. The gist of *zazen* is not in the form. Its crucial point is *going all the way through*. I will try to give you some comprehensive examples and will be happy if they help.

You know how it looks to study for an exam—you put your nose to the grindstone. It is a state of mind in which hours feel like minutes.

This is what we call to *become one with*. You transcend yourself. There are no thoughts such as, “Oh, I have to study!” “Oh, I should attain *satori*!” or “I must practice hard.”

What sounds surrealistic and impossible—“to die alive”—is actually this—*becoming one with*—and all of you have experienced it a couple of times. But you didn’t know how important it was, and it stayed in the past, which is a shame. If you only knew that it could lead you to the Gate of joyful ease, you would think, “This is it! I became *one with*! If I continue with it, I can achieve *satori*!” So, remember this for next time. You must notice that you are experiencing it, and you must continue to *knead* it in order to make use of it.

The Importance of Bedtime

The next one is even more exciting. We all experience many things throughout the day, but in the end, we put everything aside and go to sleep. Our body, mind, and our *self* play no role at this point. And that is precisely what is important. “What happened, happened—it is over. There is nothing to be done.” What has passed by will never return, so we just release all thoughts and go to sleep.

Moments before falling asleep our body and mind leave us alone—we are empty. I want you to pay attention to this. It is brief, but it definitely is the time you transcend yourself.

Being absorbed in studying is an active process, it is subjective and productive. Preparing for sleep is the opposite of that, it even has something nihilistic to it. But they have something in common: they are both cases of transcending the *self*. This is the point I want you to pay attention to.

When you’re absorbed in studying, you *become one with* a thing or with doing something (the studying) and forget about yourself. When going to sleep, there is nothing to *become one with*. If we forget something when we dive into sleep, it is not because we

become one with something but because we are absent-minded. It is a state that resembles dreams and hallucinations. And it couldn't be further away from what we, Zen practitioners, aim for! Our goal is not absent-minded wandering through life.

But this resemblance of falling asleep with the *state of oneness* (however false!) can be of some use to us. We should use it to breathe. Breathing is a fact and an undeniable "thing." When you lie in bed, you should breathe wholeheartedly focused on breathing. This bears fruit without fail.

As you become aware of natural breathing, your *bad habits* will fall off. You will soon notice that you are in a better mood and that your sleeping quality has improved. As you lie down, consciously do this (breathe) for a while. In my twenties, I practiced this a lot, and I can tell you it is worth doing. You go to bed every day—so, use this time effectively.

All you have to do is relax and entrust yourself to this natural fact of breathing. Just breathe in and out naturally. It is mindfulness par excellence and a superb way of Zen training. You should consider it seriously.

On the Kenshō Trail

If you thoroughly examine everything you come across during your day, you will conclude: it is all about *en*. *En* is the connection between a subject and an object. It is you and the "thing." When you *become one* with the "thing," you slip back into your original state—the one that doesn't know about intrusive thoughts and egoism. *En* is the gate of emancipation (deliverance, freedom—call it what you want). All we need to do is "just" perform what *en* suggests, but since we forgot how to do that, we must practice *zazen* wholeheartedly for a while.

Imagine someone called your name. This is also *en*. So, someone called you, and you naturally said, "Yes?" You didn't have to think how to react. Notice this: you mindlessly "just" answered. Focus

on this and you will know what it is like to *become one with*.

When you have to urinate, you naturally stand up and head to the bathroom. You don't ruminate over it. There is nothing to ruminate over! You "just" go to the bathroom. You don't contemplate your moves, but your hand opens the door. Ask your hand, "Who is opening the door?" Does a hand have consciousness on its own, or not? How can it move without thinking and planning? Hands are selfless, doors are selfless. So, who or what is making the action?

Billions of things function without human thinking. Eyes and ears, arms and mouth, the sensation of pain and feeling cold. You need to hurry and apprehend this fact! You must not let your mind separate from the facts of the *now*.

Constantly be very attentive to the *now*. If you slow down a bit and focus on what you are doing at the moment, you will clearly see when your mind *becomes one* with the "thing." You will realize that all actions are selfless.

When you notice this border between *bon-nō* and reality, you will know for sure what you should "knead" in your practice. Entrust yourself to the *now* and to *en*, and you will see how everything you do becomes smooth.

In our everyday lives our head is (pardon my pun!) ahead of everything. Every minute it speculates goals of our actions and plans ways to fulfil them. This is inevitable in work and in life in general, so, at the beginning of your training, do your work as slowly, thoroughly and wholeheartedly as you can. The minute you free yourself from work, switch to *zazen* (sit in a quiet place).

Remember: the more you think the further you are from the fact. As long as you're not *one with* a fact, your mind wanders and your *now* can't bear any fruit from training. It's a shame! You will not know **real** joy and peace. But if you attentively perform *now*, you will clearly see your true *self*. And here it is—the realization of how many of your worries, dissatisfactions, and other negative

emotions were groundless and how they were ruining you. No more “storms” in your heart. Only by “just” doing what you have to do in every given *now*.

The real treasure in life is living with peace of mind and contentment in everything you do. This contentment is selfless. It comes from understanding that every given *now* is real and a fact. This understanding makes life exciting and joyful.

There is a verse of master Takuan:

*Night after night the moon traverses over the water
Not thinking about it, not leaving the shadow in it.*

And another one from an anonymous author:

*The Moon in a pond—looks as if it's there, but isn't
The Moon in a pond—looks as if it's not there, but is.*

*The Neuroanatomist Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor
and the State of Oneness*

At last, we come to the precious experience of Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor. I am a Zen Buddhist, i.e. a specialist for the soul (mind, heart, if you prefer). Doctor Bolte Taylor is a renowned neuroanatomist. I've already spoken/written about Dr. Bolte Taylor's experience many times, and now I want to add some similarities and some differences between the two of us.

Dr. Bolte Taylor has suffered a brain hemorrhage, but she was lucky to fully recover. She wrote about that in her book titled "My Stroke of Insight." What is so amazing about her is that she remembers all the details from the moment her stroke started until her complete recovery, and she analyzed and described the entire process in a very descriptive way. This is a rare experience and a magnificent scientific achievement that shows us the relationship of the brain and the mind, and it continues to influence both scientific and spiritual worlds.

In a nutshell: when the stroke occurred, Jill's brain activities shut down one by one, the *threesome* of intelligence-emotions-volition ceased to function, so she couldn't process data, and she felt no fear or sorrow or any other emotion. In the end, there was nothing left to bother or tie down her mind. It resembled the *state of oneness*. Jill Bolte Taylor describes it as, 'My spirit soared free like a great whale gliding through the sea of silent euphoria.'

This means that a person who experiences it is not connected to the past, nor the knowledge, nor to any information. In terms of Zen, it is the *now*. There are only bodily sensations. That is the reason delusions, fantasies, and obstructive thoughts don't appear, i.e. the mind is experiencing complete peace.

This corresponds to master Dōgen's words, "Stop feeling, stop thinking," which we mentioned in "Fukan Zazengi." In other

words, it is the mind before thoughts arise, it is the *mind without mind, thinking without thinking*, it is “just.” This is the *state of oneness*.

Dr. Bolte Taylor even says that she didn’t want to come back from that wonderful, peaceful world. She must have realized how complicated, how stormy our brain is in its usual functioning.

Luckily, Jill Bolte Taylor has recovered. At the same time, her “bliss” was over, like a dream. She is, of course, happy she has recuperated and regained her free functioning, but she is also sorry for losing her free spirit that wasn’t tied down by anything.

The state of bliss, caused by lack of functionality resembles the *state of oneness*, indeed. This is interesting by itself, but it became even more significant for the fact that it was a neuroscientist who experienced and proved it. However, Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor is not a Buddhist and she doesn’t know about the *state of oneness*. So, she probably thinks that it is impossible to reach it by one’s effort.

The “bliss” Dr. Bolte Taylor has experienced was caused by a damaged brain, so, as she said, after the recovery she had trouble suppressing her turbulent emotions solely by reasoning and willpower.

The *state of oneness* is a realm which can be reached by effort. It is awakening to the true *now*, so one experiences bliss without going back to the previous and turbulent everyday life. Otherwise, it is not the *state of oneness*.

Furthermore, as one doesn’t know how to get there, one cannot experience it again. The biggest difference between this kind of bliss (purely individual) and the one we experience by *zazen* practice is the lack of universal peace, freedom of obstacles, relief, benevolence, and moral sense—and these are the greatest values in Buddhism. Without benevolence and the “mind’s eye,” one cannot take away another man’s pain and make him happy. In other words, this individual, illness-induced bliss cannot be the Way, leading to peace and happiness for a human race. This makes

it fundamentally different from the *state of oneness*, which is attainable by strong desire and effort. There is nothing stronger than *bodaishin*. Nonetheless, “My Stroke of Insight” is worth reading. It is a precious document, interestingly written.

If Dr. Bolte Taylor had known the true value of *zazen*, she would probably have gotten interested in it. Should she really get engaged in *zazen* and attain *kenshō*, she would come up with a program for implementing peace in the world peace. She would be the second scientist who understands spiritual conditions for peace, relief, and freedom. The first one is Naho Ichikawa from Brain, Mind and KANSEI Sciences Research Center at Hiroshima University.

If the scientists and I would join forces and make an educational program, we could raise human qualities within people around the world. Without doubt, that would make our world a better place. Jill Bolte Taylor could be an important player in the peace movement.

For this noble mission, the unprecedented scientist Dr. Bolte Taylor and I have to meet. I would really want her to come and visit me and get to know Zen as soon as possible, for I turned eighty this year (it is 2020 as I’m writing this book). I’m concerned whether we have enough time to arrange that.

The Zen Buddhist Priest's View on Coronavirus

The pandemic of coronavirus COVID-19, which burst out in Wuhan, China, and spread throughout the world, shows no signs of stagnation. It looks like a rather nasty virus. I have often talked about it with Akihiro Maeda, the researcher of microorganisms (the lecture through which you can get acquainted with his work is just below). Every country has been undertaking different measures; however, this is a “play” with no rehearsal, so the situation looks different in every country. It is becoming not only a social problem but also a threat to the whole humankind. No medical institutions have endless capacities, but the Japanese people (who think “peace and water are for free”) don’t seem to take care of themselves. Nevertheless, we have to admit that Japan does not have such a serious problem with clusters. I will write later about the reasons.

If only Mr. Maeda could obtain coronavirus, I have no doubts that he would come up with some powerful microorganisms to drive it away. At this point, there is no effective measure against it anywhere in the world. There is no vaccine to prevent it, there is no drug to cure it. So, all we can do now is keep physical distance, give our best not to catch it or infect others; that and our immune system are all we have at our disposal now.

However, the already existing *Maeda Enzyme Water* can give us a lot. Its strong enzymes boost immunity, though, it takes three days of consuming it to show its effect. It should at least be given to medical personnel in order to prevent the medical care breakdown. Alas, nobody shows interest....

And now I want to introduce Mr. Maeda. This is what he wrote about his work.

“What Is Maeda Enzyme Water?”

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that enzymes are the ones that keep us alive. I have been amazed by microorganisms my entire life, both in research and in observing nature. To my astonishment, it is possible to make full use of their vitality for us, humans, by taking in only their enzymes. Their enzymes are what they entirely are. However, I am talking about the different types of enzymes than people usually think about. The best known are the degrading enzymes, such as amino acid-degrading enzymes or carbohydrate-degrading enzymes. As opposed to them, I work with living microorganisms, with both degrading and metabolizing enzymes. Metabolizing enzymes work functionally—they attack other microorganisms, defend healthy colonies and symbiotic bacteria, guarantee security to the host, etc. As they enter the human body, they make cancer shrink, cure allergies, balance intestinal bacteria....

What excites me the most is the soundness of everything. My main interests are the human body, nature, agriculture, intestinal bacteria, cancer, stock raising..., and this list will grow as long as it is connected to microorganisms. Since soundness is my primary interest, unlike the geeks from academic circles who theoretically rave about microorganisms, I research microorganisms that coexist in our natural surroundings, as well as the products of their metabolism. This kind of approach is not only a matter of science but of *zazen* practice, too. I search for a substance that would be common to everything, and I think I have found it.

One of the microorganisms' metabolic products happens to be an enzyme, related to blood pressure and coronavirus. It is enzyme ACE 2, a receptor for coronavirus (the virus sticks to it). This enzyme developed in the course of evolution in order to fulfill the lack of natrium, as the living creatures started moving from the sea onto the land. In the human body, the renin-angiotensin

system regulates blood pressure and fluid and electrolyte balance. When angiotensin 1 changes into angiotensin 2, the blood pressure raises (this change is what medicaments target and stop), after that angiotensin 2 gets degraded by enzyme ACE 2 and becomes angiotensin 1-7, lowers blood pressure, protects kidneys and lungs, dilates blood vessels, and causes some other vitally important processes. And coronavirus “glues” to this extremely important substance.

The function of regulating blood pressure is also connected to the inflammatory effect. High blood pressure causes inflammation of blood vessels. Tobacco causes inflammation in lungs. In order to suppress inflammation, the ACE 2 enzyme increases its level in that organ. That is to say: we all have it, but its quantity varies from one individual to another, and that is why some people are more susceptible to coronavirus and have heavier symptoms.

I discovered that my enzyme water contains microbial enzymes that can substitute this ACE 2 enzyme. I have always insisted on the inseparable connection between humans and microorganisms, and the proof that we share this important enzyme affects the way we are going to deal with microorganisms in the future. It’s not an exaggeration to say that it determines the future direction of a human race, to a certain extent. But, apart from this concrete influence on human beings, microorganisms teach us that nature is perfect—it does nothing purposeless—and that there is no other way of living but based on *bodaishin*.”

And now let me continue this semi-scientific lecture, based on my multiple talks with Mr. Maeda.

As we got to know from Mr. Maeda’s lecture, ACE 2 is a substance that moderates many processes in our organism. It is an enzyme, and it increases when needed. It seems that there is an affinity between it and coronavirus; the virus sticks to it and propagates horizontally. In people with a compromised immune

system, the ACE 2 level is high, and that is why they are more susceptible to coronavirus.

There is plenty of ACE 2 in *Maeda Enzyme Water*; it works well with other enzymes and boosts our immunity. In other words, ACE 2 is a double-edged sword: it is compatible with coronavirus and helps the immune system. *Maeda Enzyme Water* is a kind of terra incognita with its abundance of substances that are yet to be analyzed; its power makes Mr. Maeda extra cautious, for it may have unpredictably powerful effects on the human organism. Mr. Maeda prescribes only safe doses of his enzyme water, so in case of some cancers it has no effect; therefore, he asks for feedback.

This new coronavirus enters through the mouth (nose and eyes also), bursts into healthy cells (mainly in the lungs), eventually causes a lack of oxygen, which, furthermore, leads to immune depression. So, immunity has a deciding role in this life or death matter.

Incubation period is one to two weeks, which says about its rather slow multiplication. This long period without symptoms makes it so widely contagious.

It seems that other animals do not fall ill with coronavirus. The question is: why? One of the possible answers is again ACE 2; coronavirus needs it to enter cells, and animals have it in smaller quantities.

There are still too many things that we don't know about this virus, but its horizontal propagation makes it as nasty as a ninja. Usually, when a virus enters our body, antibodies attack it (but as a result of that ferocious attack antibodies die, too). However, this virus has an affinity with human antibodies, so they don't consider it an enemy and don't fight against it. Thanks to that, coronavirus kills our immune cells and moves into their dead tissue, which allows it to propagate.

This is why the incubation period is long. Hiding in dead immune cells makes it invisible to the antibodies. As if

coronavirus possesses stealth technology! It's like a submarine sneaking during a sea battle. The body would send immune cells and fight it, but there are some conditions needed in order to succeed.

This is why elderly people and people with chronic diseases—who already have a weakened immune system—easily catch coronavirus. And until they test positive, they pass on the virus to many others.

“Since I don’t have coronavirus in my laboratory, I’m not 100% certain, but there is plenty of ACE 2 in my enzyme water; as a ‘rear of the armed forces’ it can support antibodies,” says Mr. Maeda. And he continues: “If it works the way we think at the moment, it means that until the human body comes up with new antibodies that would recognize the virus, we may catch it repeatedly. During that time the virus will also mutate, so it will become even trickier.” This makes it really difficult to deal with.

What we can and must do is keep our immune system alert. Sterilize, wash hands, sleep enough, and eat properly. On top of that, I would recommend taking vitamin and mineral supplements, as well as things like *Maeda Enzyme Water*, for making our defense and attack system stronger. At this point, it seems to be the best measure.

So, why does Japan have so few cases of clusters? First of all, our lifestyle is different. We don’t shake hands and hug. As we get back home, we take our shoes off. Toilets in Japan are always clean, and we wash hands after using restrooms. We bathe and change underwear and socks every day. Japanese cuisine is well balanced; we eat pickled plums *umeboshi* and a lot of fermented food, so, in general, we have healthy intestinal bacteria, which directly affects the immune system. We have four seasons, every season has its own sorts of fermentation and microorganisms; we can say that the Japanese have endemic immunity.

There are also invisible elements to it, such as spirituality and

tradition. Although, nowadays spirituality is not ranked high, which I consider a big problem. Killing vs. helping people, stealing vs. trying to preserve peace, etc. come from having/lack of spirituality. I can't stop wondering why people don't notice such a fundamental thing! This is the result of giving too much credit to intellect.

The spirituality of our nation is based on the institute of the emperor, on Buddhism, Confucianism, and suchlike. As a result, the Japanese people understand impermanence and have the sense of shame, reverence, and diligence; all these characteristics form our specific moral code. Until WW2 we had imperial reign and the "Imperial Rescript on Education"; with them in our fundament, we have achieved a lot.

Thanks to these elements, our people are less prone to losing their temper and fight with others, compared to other nations. The morality of the Japanese national spirit reveals in the following sayings: "Samurai's compassion for the weak," "Even an evil-doer has his reasons," "Even a worm will turn," "The child is father of the man," "One man's fault is another's lesson," "God sees into your heart," "Good luck and bad luck alternate like the strands of a rope," "Inscrutable are the ways of heaven," "Sometimes the best gain is to lose," "Host does his best to properly treat his guests, guests do their best to properly treat their host," "An evil act is quickly known," etc.

I would like to add one more difference—the honorific speech when addressing others and a humble way of speaking when "I" is the subject. This is out of respect for others, and it results in rich spirituality which shapes social stability and order. The awareness of personal responsibility makes people avoid clashes and makes them choose secure and calm ways of handling things. People who rarely experience frustrations have emotional stability, and that is one of the conditions for good immunity.

One more peculiarity of the Japanese culture is *matsuri*

(festivals). Every part of the country has its own festival, through which people, who worked side by side throughout the year, enjoy the collective expression of gratitude to gods. Our *matsuri* represent the continuity of tradition, warm-heartedness, style, and grace, and a relief for expressing gratitude and loyalty to the gods. Sharing these spiritual values nurtures our nation's high standard of living. *Matsuri*, through appreciation of tradition and obligations, unite people with the same goal; in other words, they are the supreme embodiment of cooperation, one element that has also formed the typical Japanese morality. Festivals in the Western world are also flamboyant and have a long tradition. However, most of them are based on individual performance and everybody has fun on his or her own. At first glance, they appear to be similar, but the content is what makes them different from the Japanese ones, which is normal, of course, since we're talking about different nations and different traditions.

What makes our culture typically Japanese is punctuality, the sense of obligation, diligence, thoughtfulness, hospitality, as well as ingenuity, etiquette even among close people, etc. All these elements are in the fundament of our aesthetic; they have formed the typical Japanese phenomena of simple elegance (*wabi* and *sabi*), without whom one cannot imagine haiku poetry.

This aesthetic, together with harmony, cooperation and the feeling of solidarity, forms the Japanese responsibility that is well known and deeply rooted in our way of living. Everyone aims to be the best in performing his or her job. Japan has big technological power thanks to the earnest and diligent work of each individual. Since it comes from the national mentality, I assume it is going to flourish in the future, too, like all the other developed countries.

This is also the answer to why there are not so many coronavirus clusters: the state doesn't have to force anybody to act responsibly. People in Japan are genuinely responsible. There are, of course, exceptions, but too few to change the big picture. Their

lower percentage, compared to other parts of the world, comes from the differences in the state's beginning and its history. Many other nations, different mentality and culture, cannot understand Japan. They find Japan's successful fusion of tradition, on one side, and modern technologies (for example, Shinkansen), on the other, highly unusual. They need time to understand us, but I'm positive that they will come to it, for we are the same human beings.

Be that as it may, it is appalling that some people were buying up all the masks and toilette paper (in the period of their shortage); some were even discriminating and bullying others. This is an evil practice that we sometimes see in Japan; it is sick and shameful. On the flip side, too much concern for others often turns into something negative. It can start rumours and lead, again, to discrimination. This is something that a Japanese, or a human being in general, mustn't do.

I don't remember the country, but I saw on TV how neighbours greeted a man who came back from the hospital after he had recovered from severe COVID 19. It was such a beautiful sight! The sight everybody should learn from.

Sending masks to all citizens—like our state has done—is fine and we should be grateful, but it would be more effective if they taught people how to make masks. They could have done it through the media, broadcasting a few times a day. It is not worth spending that much time and money on the production and the delivery of masks, no matter how necessary they are. Our taxes could have been used in a better way. In a situation like this, the state and the population should have a closer relationship and trust each other more. Japanese people are skillful and hardworking—it's a shame that the state didn't make any use of it.

It is hard to predict the future with coronavirus. Even if Japan had conquered it, unless it is extinguished on the entire planet,

we cannot sigh with relief. I am especially concerned about the coronavirus' effect on fetuses, as well as the obstacles it may cause to the development of small children. We all should give our best to end this pandemic.

As a secondary problem, I'm afraid of the possible negative influences new drugs can have on children. It is hard, or even impossible to undo what has been done, so I hope that researchers and drug-developers will come up with new medicaments and vaccines with the utmost care.

I will pray for those who tragically lost lives to the illness.

About Coronavirus, After Six Months Have Past

July 2020 is coming to its end. It's been six months since the beginning of the pandemic; we have learned a lot. According to the announcement of July 27, Tokyo had 160 new coronavirus cases. There are reports about rejecting people from Tokyo in other prefectures. As I was afraid, exaggerated reactions are becoming an obstacle to normal social life.

One cannot deny that the increase of newly infected people is disturbing. The problem with reporting is that it does not give us the actual picture, and that is: the number of recovered cases is much bigger, and the death rate, although not zero, is still less than the number of people dying from influenza. One-sided reports make people anxious and damage the economy. And still, my biggest concerns are babies, small children and elderly people.

According to researchers, coronavirus has two base sequences: the Tokyo base sequence and the Saitama one. This is interesting and also gives scientists an opportunity to predict future changes. As Mr. Maeda said, the virus increases by horizontal propagation and also by interchange with other DNA that turns it into something else. It was obviously one virus at the beginning, but there is a big enough chance that we will have a new one.

Now we witness a trend that is giving us hope: there is a

decrease in mortality rate. What has happened? What has changed in our dealing with the coronavirus?

Wearing a mask is not 100% effective. It is summer and wherever you go, fans are blowing air—the virus must be everywhere. Of course, after being some time in the air, it is not as toxic. We are breathing it in, little by little, and our organisms are producing antibodies. If it wasn't the case, I suppose we'd have a much higher death rate—which we do not have. This is what the world finds interesting in Japan's case.

You probably remember the “Diamond Princess” cruise ship that spent a few weeks in the port of Yokohama; I wonder why so many people caught the infection (there were death casualties, too), and, on the other side, why so many didn't.

At that point (February 2020) knowledge about coronavirus was practically non-existent. Even lower was the number of people who had immunity against it. It is a ship, i.e. many people closed in a tight space, breathing the same air—a paradise for an infection. Nevertheless, the number of deceased is low, which proves the effectiveness of isolating passengers from each other. Those who caught the virus and didn't develop symptoms or had mild ones won, thanks to their immune system and ACE 2. Furthermore, I find that the decision to keep the asymptomatic passengers on the ship was right. If they had left, they could have started clusters in their hometowns or passed the infection to others, on the way back to their countries.

So, here we are in Japan, six months later; I believe that the everyday contact with small quantities of the weakened virus helped us work out some kind of immunity, and that is why the death rate has fallen compared to the first months of the pandemic. We have probably already caught coronavirus (weakened by disinfection and ultraviolet rays), made antibodies to it, passed it on after its further weakening, and so on. This is the most natural building of our immunity, isn't it? I am not a

scientist, but judging from the numbers—infected people vs. deceased ones—assures me in my deduction.

Our bodies are not what they were six months ago. We have obviously strengthened our immunity system by the intake of the weakened coronavirus. I'm not saying that we have conquered it, but as we approach zero in death rates, we can start to lead a normal life again. This half of the year was a preparation for it and still is going to take some time, but these are steps we need to make in order to open up the next phase.

As I already said, my concerns are the unexpected harmful effects from the anti-corona vaccine and the drugs that medicine will use in treating COVID 19. Except in life and death situations, when their use is justified, it would be better to avoid them, both from the standpoint of health and economics. I think it is much more reasonable to continue to keep ourselves safe by disinfecting, wearing masks, and keeping physical distance; doing that will give our immune system time to become able to fight coronavirus on its own. It may well be that by the time the vaccine and new drugs are approved, coronavirus won't be a deadly threat to us anymore. In the course of evolution, human beings have experienced it many, many times.

If we postpone the normalization of our daily lives until the complete eradication of coronavirus, many people will not be able to sustain themselves and there will be a lot of suicides. Compared to that, fever, fatigue, pains, and other symptoms, however unpleasant, can be treated. Right now, it looks as if we have to choose only between these two options, and people are anxious. This is why we need true information, presented rightly, because, to my great sorrow, too many people still believe rumours and half-truths. Sadly enough, this is immanent in human nature. Thanks to the more precise tests, the numbers will show an increase in the newly infected. But if we continue to take preventive measures, I'm sure that the number of severe cases will fall and the death

rate will soon be zero.

Which numbers one looks at will decide whether one becomes encouraged or anxious. The situation is undeniably different from the one at the beginning of the year, and I beg for balanced information and cool-headed processing of it.

Come to think of it, ruling a country and being a medical worker in such a tough situation is so hard.... I want to express my deepest gratitude to all of them and pray that every one of us takes care.

July 7, 2020

Afterword

The culmination of joy is, after all, being a man (woman) of the Path and knowing yourself. Taking away the shadows from your mind brings ease and joy to everything you engage in. You feel “at home” in all your enterprises, so that even difficulties add fun into your life. The way you handle difficulties is important. You can grit your teeth and make suffering even bigger, or you can entrust yourself to *en* and “just” do what you have to do *now*.

It is a kind of treasure hunt. And there is pleasure in everything, even in being hungry or poor. First, find the Path and get to know yourself.

Here I would like to show you the last letter that the mother of master Ikkyu had written to her son before passing away. Connect it to master Dōgen, and then try to place yourself in this picture of the Law (Path, Way). Warm-heartedness of this loving mother who taught her son the splendor of the Path must touch you.

“The plum is blooming. Oh, how great it would be if you could see it! Nobody else can praise its beauty like you.

I am leading an insignificant life among ordinary people, whereas you, my son, became a wonderful monk. You are now learning how to develop a discerning eye, to find out whether we are going to hell, and whether we are walking along the Path or not. If you become bigger than the Buddha and Bodhidharma, I won’t mind living in such a vulgar world.

The Buddha has taught for forty-nine years, but in the end, he said that words couldn’t express the truth, so you must awaken to the truth inside of you. Whatever you do, do it with all your heart, and don’t let *bon-nō* disturb you.”

And there is also this letter:

“There is no age, there is no death. Those who linger only to the Buddha’s words and do not practice, are like worms in an outhouse. You may read all sutras and even understand them, but if you don’t experience *kenshō* and *satori*, you will not understand what I’m writing about in this letter.

A mother and her child are always together, but you and I are now in different worlds. Let this letter be my keepsake to you and, please, fulfill my wish.”

What a wonderful mother!

The forward to this book was written by the secretary of Kyoto Forum Mr. Katsuhiko Yazaki (Buddhist name Dōnen). More than thirty years passed since he first came to my *dōjō*. He has reached the state of oneness; still no *satori*, but he is on the way to it.

The world needs peace and security, and recovery of trust among nations. We must have self-respect and share the truth. It is extremely hard to achieve, but it gives everybody immense joy. For, it is you being yourself, and on top of that you make others happy. Reaching the *state of oneness* is so worth the effort!

Poverty can be pleasant. As the Buddha said, “The one who knows what is enough has a lot even if he has a bit; the one who doesn’t know what is enough has a bit although he has a lot.” Fortune, joy, and ease come with the *state of oneness*. Be yourself and be there for others—and you will enjoy a rich, meaningful life.

In order to manage it, you first have to take away your nasty habits. After that, you can help others open their eyes. *Zazen* is a really deep and interesting Way. What could be better than living in joy? “Just” do it *now*. *Bodaishin, bodaishin!*

Kidō Inoue

The Author's Biography and Bibliography

Kidō Inoue rōshi was born in 1940 in the town of Takehara (Hiroshima prefecture) as a second child of Kankei Inoue, the head of the temple Shōun. From the age of thirteen until graduation from the department of Oriental philosophy at Aichi University, he spent time in the Zenkyuin temple, Toyohashi (Aichi prefecture). From age twenty-four he started a twenty-two-year long practice in Shōrinkutsu seminary, under masters Gikō and Daichi Inoue (his uncle and aunt). In 1981 Inoue rōshi was appointed to be the head priest of the Kaizō temple, and in 1984 he became the fifth abbot of the Shōrinkutsu seminary. Inoue rōshi actively teaches, (gives) lectures, and writes books. Here is a list of the books translated into the English language: “Zen and Peace,” “Zazen: The Way to Awakening,” “Record of Traces and Dreams: The Heart Sutra,” “The Life of the Buddha A True and Readable Guide by a Zen Master,” “The Ten Oxherding Pictures,” “Mind and Zen: Zen Questions and Zen Answers The Way to Know Your True Self.”