



Asking Dōgen's Question

At the age of fourteen, the young Dōgen entered monastic life under the Tendai system of Mt. Hiei. By the time he was fifteen he had become disenchanted with the hollow formalism of the Tendai monastic order and had begun to struggle with his great question. One of the major understandings of Tendai Buddhism is derived from the following passage in the *Mahāparinirvāna sūtra*: “Shakyamuni Buddha said: All sentient beings everywhere possess the Buddha-nature; the Tathāgata exists eternally and is without change.”

Sounds encouraging, doesn't it, at least in contrast to the idea that we are all fundamentally ignorant. How comforting to think that an unchanging and eternal Buddha-nature nestles within our being, even though that being may be subject to change. But it raised a question for Dōgen: “If all sentient beings originally possess Buddha-nature, why do we still develop the mind for enlightenment and engage

in ascetic pursuit of it?” This is a stunningly logical question. If I have something, why must I seek it? And what does it mean to say that I possess something unchanging, while I myself am subject to change? If I find this diamond, can I hold on to it?

In 1223, Dōgen journeyed to China to find an answer to his question. During the time of his study with Ru-jing (Jap. Tendō Nyōjō) he “dropped off body and mind” and found the answer.

So what happened? When I first read this account I was disappointed because nowhere in it does Dōgen make mention of finding the answer to his question. I wanted him to shout “Eureka! Got it!” as he stepped once more onto the shore of Japan in 1227.

Of course in truth he had found it, and his new understanding threads throughout his writings in *Shōbōgenzō*. In *Genjōkōan* (1233), Dōgen deliberately alters the usual translation of the phrase from the *Mahāparinirvāna sūtra*, to

state that all sentient beings ARE the Buddha-nature. In *Busshō* (1241) he tackles the matter directly and interprets the phrase “All sentient beings everywhere” as meaning “entire being”, that is to say, all things, and says, “In other words, ‘entire being’ is Buddha-nature.”¹ Moreover, Buddha-nature is beyond either existence or non-existence; it embraces them both.

As *Genjōkōan* reminds us: “To study the Buddha Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the body and minds of others drop away. No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.”² With body and mind dropped away, the Buddha activity of all things is actualized. There is not even the barrier of the dualistic “knowing” of realization.

And in 1242, with *Zenki*, Dōgen shows us how we exist in undivided activity that enfolds all

things. He likens our being to riding in a boat and says, “You raise the sails and row with the oar. Although you row, the boat gives you a ride and without the boat no one could ride. But you ride in the boat and your riding makes the boat what it is... At just such a moment, there is nothing but the world of the boat... When you ride in a boat, your body and mind and the environs are the undivided activity of the boat.”²

So now we can begin to see what he found as an answer to his question: We do not possess a hidden Buddha-nature that we must struggle to bring forth. Buddha-nature is not a thing separate from our self. It is the activity of dependent origination in which all things function in mutual dependence. Things come into existence and go out of existence, but Buddha-nature neither comes nor goes, for it is the coming and going. To paraphrase the *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra*: “Change exists eternally and is without change.”

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Milwaukee Zen Center – Schedule

March

- 7 Introduction to Zen, 6:30 p.m.
- 17 All-day sitting,
6:15 a.m. – 8:50 p.m.
Dharma Talk, 10:20 a.m.
- 18 All-day sitting,
6:15 a.m. – 4:40 p.m.
- 24 Annual Meeting, 9:30 a.m.
(no study class)

April

- 4 Introduction to Zen, 6:30 p.m.
- 7 Buddha's Birthday
Service + bathing the
baby Buddha
- 21 All-day sitting,
6:15 a.m. – 8:50 p.m.
Dharma Talk, 10:20 a.m.
- 22 All-day sitting,
6:15 a.m. – 4:40 p.m.

May

- 2 Introduction to Zen, 6:30 p.m.
- 19 All-day sitting,
6:15 a.m. – 8:50 p.m.
Dharma Talk, 10:20 a.m.
- 20 All-day sitting,
6:15 a.m. – 4:40 p.m.

To see the entire 2007 Schedule and more information on Two-day sitting, visit our web site at www.milwaukeezencenter.org

3rd Annual Great Sky Sesshin August 11-18, 2007 Hokyoji Zen Monastery

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registration forms, go to
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or write or call the Zen Center.

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Everything I do is the functioning of Buddha-nature, but though Buddha-nature is beyond good and evil, I am not. I may function in interdependence with all things, but I have choice. Therefore, in order not to be a loose cannon on the deck of the ship of interdependence, I must enter into wholehearted engagement so that my ego-self drops away to reveal the self of “entire being”. So that, as Dôgen says, “There is no second self.” Only undivided activity.

Dôgen also said, “Practice is enlightenment, enlightenment is practice.” What does this mean?

As a teenager, I was painfully shy and pretty much a wallflower at high school dances. I'd distance myself from the dance floor and stand along the wall, watching. Once in awhile a boy would approach but because I was afraid I wasn't a good dancer, I'd mostly say, “No, that's o.k. I'd rather watch.” And then one night I said “Yes” and was led out onto the dance floor. It was lovely to be in the midst of the music and

lights and color even though I suppose my dancing was less than superb. But we danced.

I think this is what Dôgen meant. Our ego, our dualistic thinking, and our sense of separation keep us standing by the wall. When we let go of the conceptual thinking that holds us back, we step onto the dance floor with the rest of “entire being.” Dôgen emphasized zazen, *shikantaza*, as the most complete form of letting go of conceptual thinking. To wholeheartedly practice zazen is to actualize the undivided activity of all being, of Buddha-nature.

Knowing that we are Buddha-nature is both thrilling and daunting. Like Dôgen, we realize that there is no second self. Just THIS. Snow falls outside the window.

-Tonen O'Connor

¹ The Heart of Dôgen's *Shôbôgenzô*, translated by Norman Waddell and Masao Abe

² *Moon in a Dewdrop*, edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi

Happenings

On February 10, Lisa Marr received ordination from Tônen as a priest-in-training, receiving the Dharma name of Tômon and the Way name of Myôkô. Tôjun Cobb acted as Tômon's Jisha for the ceremony and Zuiko Redding, Resident Teacher at the Cedar Rapids Zen Center, was present as Honored Guest. Friends and sangha members gathered for a pot luck lunch following the ceremony. We welcome Tômon to her new role and wish her well on her path.

Tônen made a number of presentations during the past month: two talks at University High School, at Ferne Caulker's UWM class on Ritual, and as part of a panel presentation at the Sacred Texts exhibition at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design.

Tôjun spent the last two weeks of January at Hôkyoji Zen Monastery in Minnesota, participating in a winter practice period with Dôkai Georgeson and two other practitioners.

Tônen was pleased to be able to attend a ceremony on Feb. 11 at the Great Lake Zen Center in which Susi Childress received the sixteen Bodhisattva precepts of a Senior Dharma Teacher in the Kwan Um Order. Our congratulations and best wishes to her.

On February 18, the second day of the February two-day sitting, Anne Hanson of the UWM faculty gave a talk on the use of stories as underpinnings for ethical teachings within Theravadin Buddhism. We greatly appreciate her generosity in sharing her knowledge with us.

Tônen was in San Francisco Feb. 23- 26, to attend the Mountain Seat ceremony for the installation of Myôgen Stucky as a new co-abbot of San Francisco Zen Center and to attend a Board meeting of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association. March 5 she attended a meeting of the Department of Corrections Religious Practices Advisory Committee in Madison and was in Los Angeles March 9-11 for a gathering of kokusai fukyoshi and dendokyoshi organized by the Soto Zen Buddhism North America office.



Kimyo—Returning to Life

*Divisions, feelings, opinions—all are the secretions of the brain
Transcending the division between life and death,
Returning now to the reality of the Life of the present,
This is called 'kimyo'—Returning to Life
Presently returning to Life, Holding precious this very moment
Just holding precious—the life that fills the universe*

By Kosho Uchiyama Roshi

Translated by Tom Wright

milwaukee zen center

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Wed., Thurs., Fri.

6:15 am Zazen
(Zen sitting)
6:55 am Kinhin
(Zen walking)
7:05 am Zazen
7:45 am Service
8:00 end of practice

6:30 pm Zazen
7:10 pm Kinhin
7:20 pm Zazen

Saturday

6:15 am Zazen
6:55 am Kinhin
7:05 am Zazen
7:45 am Service
8:00 breakfast, oryoki
8:25 work period
9:15 break, coffee & tea
9:30 study class*
10:30 end of practice
**except on all-day sitting days*

Introduction to Zen

An informal presentation on Buddhism and Zen, followed by instruction in zen sitting, tea and discussion.
6:30-8:30 p.m.—first Wednesday each month.

Zen sitting instruction and private interview available by appointment. Call 963-0526.

MZC Contact Information

For messages: **Phone:** (414) 963-0526
Fax: (414) 963-0517 **E-mail:** kokyō-an@earthlink.net
For information and schedules: www.milwaukeezencenter.org

Useful Websites:

Soto Zen Buddhism: <http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/>
Soto Zen in America: <http://www.szba.org>

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