

Daikaku

(1213–1279)



By the mid-thirteenth century, so many Japanese monks had embarked for China that “longing for the Dharma, entering the land of Sung” became a stock phrase to express religious aspiration. The number and zeal of these visitors so impressed Chinese masters that more than a dozen of them, including Lan-ch’i Tao-lung, hatched the opposite dream—sailing to Japan to promote the Dharma. Lan-ch’i reached the island of Kyushu in 1246 and spent the next thirty-three years, exactly half of his life, devising ways to teach Zen across the language barrier. For his efforts, he received the posthumous title Daikaku Zenji, Zen master of Great Enlightenment.

Born in western China, Daikaku left home at thirteen and made his way east for the next two decades, visiting monasteries and studying with various Ch’an teachers, including Enni’s master, Wu-chun. He eventually settled with Wu-chun’s lesser-known Dharma cousin, Wu-ming Hui-hsing, and apparently received transmission in this branch of the Yang-ch’i school at an exceptionally early age. Though he seems to have lacked an official invitation to visit Japan and did not speak Japanese, he managed to negotiate entry and, after a brief stay in Kyushu, traveled north to Kyoto and then Kamakura. Within three years of his arrival in Japan, he was introduced to the most powerful person in the land, Hojo Tokiyori, who ruled as regent for the shogun and had long cultivated an interest in Zen.

His good karma did not stop there. Tokiyori, having already explored the Tendai-influenced Zen of Eisai’s school and having received instruction from Enni, welcomed the unexpected opportunity to study with a Chinese master and quickly ensconced the newcomer in the abbot’s quarters of a Kamakura temple. With the regent’s backing, Daikaku promptly added a monk’s hall to this temple complex and established Zen training along Chinese lines. In that same year, Tokiyori undertook to build a new monastery patterned on the great institution at Mt. Ching. Daikaku lent advice and was installed as founding abbot in 1253, when construction was completed. In Kyoto, work on Tofuku-ji had proceeded slowly, so Kamakura’s Kencho-ji opened sooner, becoming the first fully functioning Rinzai monastery in Japan.

Tokiyori had political as well as personal reasons for so embracing Daikaku and Zen as a whole. This newfound, highly impressive form of Buddhism lent

the shogunate an aura of religious and cultural authority that helped legitimate it in a world dominated by these concerns. The leading position that Ch'an held in Sung China, along with the access émigré masters provided to mainland intellectual and aesthetic trends, made Zen a viable, even attractive alternative to those Japanese institutions that had previously served as legitimators of power—and it was put to such use right away. When Kenchō-ji opened, it was dedicated, first and foremost, to “the longevity of the emperor” and “the welfare of the shogunal line,” and later, when Kublai Khan mounted an invasion threat, Daikaku and the Kenchō-ji monks were called upon to perform ceremonies for protection of the nation. The Chinese master apparently had no scruples about serving power in this way, and indeed, he preached that “faithful observance of the laws of the [secular] world does not differ from faithful observance of the laws of the religious world.”

However he catered to the shogunate's demands, Daikaku went earnestly about the business of teaching Zen, and monks lined up to train with him by the hundreds. One problem: though many had a good command of written Chinese, few could understand spoken Chinese, and very few, if any, could make sense of Daikaku's Szechwan accent. Kenchō-ji annals note instances of a laborious, three-step process by which Daikaku's verbal instructions were communicated to his monks: they were first recorded in Japanese phonetic syllables, then these were carried to another Szechwan native who rendered them into Chinese characters, and finally these were translated into Japanese. To expedite exchange, teacher and student took to “brush talk,” as later described by another Chinese master:

I express my mind
 using a brush instead of my tongue,
 and you seize my meaning
 hearing my words with your eyes.

Even this strategy failed if a student's grasp of written Chinese left something to be desired. Witness the final item in this chapter.

Under these circumstances, Daikaku and other émigré masters found it necessary to improvise new training methods. To offer koan instruction in the preferred Chinese manner would have demanded so much brush talk—and time—as to make teaching a large group impractical. Instead, the Chinese teachers came up with new koans that could be expediently given, recalled, and tested. Some of them were created impromptu, out of a situation or to suit the character and the experience of a particular student.

When one of Wu-chun's senior successors appeared on the scene in 1260, Tokiyori named him second abbot of Kenchō-ji, and Daikaku moved to Kyoto for a few years, following Enni in the abbacy of newly restored Kennin-ji. During his time in the imperial capital, he tutored the former emperor Go-Saga in Zen and succeeded in eradicating Tendai rites and other such practices from Kennin-ji, bringing monastery operations fully into line with Rinzai traditions. As he had in Kamakura, Daikaku imposed a strict, Chinese monastic code, emphasizing

four daily intervals of zazen and assiduous around-the-clock practice: “Even on bath days and holidays do not allow your practice of Zen to relax for an instant.”

Despite his loyalty to the power structure, Daikaku fell victim to a rumor that he was a Chinese spy and found himself banished to the provinces. He is said to have weathered this stunning reversal not just with equanimity but with cheer, taking the occasion to spread the Dharma in the countryside. Reinstatement came in due course, enabling him to end his career in his old post at Kencho-ji. Before his death in 1279, he and Tokiyori’s successor drew up plans for a second, large Kamakura monastery, later built and named Engaku-ji.

Daikaku left his imprint on Japanese Zen and Kamakura culture in many ways. Besides building temples and implanting the Chinese monastic regimen, he made his mark as a poet and calligrapher, helping the warriors of the shogunate develop a cultural base to rival that of the old order in Kyoto. Also, like Dōgen and Enni before him, he wrote a question-and-answer meditation manual making the rudiments of Zen practice available to anyone who could read. In the decades that followed, his twenty-four Dharma successors continued this work in Kamakura and elsewhere, doing much to expedite the naturalization of Ch’an to Japan. ☸

SAYINGS OF DAIKAKU

Zen practice is not clarifying conceptual distinctions, but throwing away one’s preconceived views and notions and the sacred texts and all the rest, and piercing through the layers of coverings over the spring of self behind them. All the holy ones have turned within and sought in the self, and by this went beyond all doubt. To turn within means all the twenty-four hours and in every situation, to pierce one by one through the layers covering the self, deeper and deeper, to a place that cannot be described. It is when thinking comes to an end and making distinctions ceases, when wrong views and ideas disappear of themselves without having to be driven forth, when without being sought the true action and true impulse appear of themselves. It is when one can know what is the truth of the heart.

The man resolute in the way must from the beginning never lose sight of it, whether in a place of calm or in a place of strife, and he must not be clinging to quiet places and shunning those where there is disturbance. If he tries to take refuge from trouble by running to some quiet place, he will fall into dark regions.

If when he is trying to throw off delusions and discover truth everything is a whirl of possibilities, he must cut off the thousand impulses and go straight forward, having no thought at all about good or bad; not hating the passions, he must simply make his heart pure.

Illusion is dark, satori is bright. When the light of wisdom shines, the darkness of passion suddenly becomes bright, and to an awakened one they are not two separate things.

This is the main point of meditation. But an ordinary beginner cannot mount to the treasure in one step. He moves from shallow to profound, progresses from slow to quick. When in the meditation sitting there is agitation of thought, then with that very agitated mind seek to find where the agitated thought came from, and who it is that is aware of it. In this way pressing scrutiny as to the location of the disturbance further and further to the ultimate point, you will find that the agitation does not have any original location, and that the one who is aware of it also is void, and this is called taking the search back.

If the press of delusive thoughts is very heavy, one of the koan phrases should be taken up, for instance seeing where it is that life comes from. Keep on inquiring into this again and again. An ancient has said that while you do not yet know life, how should you know death? And if you have known life, you also know death, and then you will not be controlled by life-and-death, but will be able to rise or set as you will.

Hearing a sound, to take it simply as sound; seeing a form, to take it simply as form; how to turn the light back and control vision, and how to turn hearing within—these are the things that none of you understand. In hearing sounds as you do all day long, find out whether it is the sound that comes to the convolutions of the ear, or the ear that goes out to the location of the sound. If it is the sound that comes to the ear, there is no track of its coming; and if it is the ear that goes to the sound, there is no track of its going. The practitioner of Zen should carefully go into this in his silent inquiry. In silent investigation, with great courage turn the hearing back till hearing comes to an end; purify awareness till awareness becomes empty. Then there will be a perception of things, which is immediate without any check to it, and after that, even in a welter of sounds and forms you will not be swept away by them, even in a state of darkness and confusion you will be able to find a way. Such is called a man of the great freedom, one who has attained.

Whether you are going or staying or sitting or lying down, the whole world is your own self. You must find out whether the mountains, rivers, grass, and forests exist in your own mind or exist outside it. Analyse the ten thousand things, dissect them minutely, and when you take this to the limit you will come to the limitless, when you search into it you come to the end of search, where thinking goes no further and distinctions vanish. When you smash the citadel of doubt, then the Buddha is simply yourself.

When you set out to look for the way of the buddhas and ancestors, at once it changes to something that is to be sought in your self. When sight becomes no-sight, you come to possess the jewel, but you have not yet fully penetrated into it. Suddenly one day everything is empty like space that has no inside or outside, no bottom or top, and you are aware of one principle (*ri*) pervading all the ten thou-

sand things. You know then that your heart is so vast that it can never be measured. Seng-chao says, "Heaven and earth and I are of one root; the thousand things and I are one body." These words are of burning import and absolutely true.

The holy men and illumined ones who have this principle clear in them, find that past, present, and future are like dream-stuff. Wealth and rank, gain and fame are all an illusion; the mined gold and heaped-up jewels, the beautiful voices and fair forms, are illusion; joy and anger and sorrow and happiness are this illusion. But in all this illusion there is something that is not illusion. When even the universes crumble, how should that crumble? When at the end of the world cycle the universal fire blazes everywhere, how should that burn? That which is not illusion is the true being of each and every man. Every day go into the calm quiet where you really belong, face the other way and turn your gaze back; if you do this over the long years, that which is not illusion will of itself reveal itself before you. After that manifestation, wherever you stand Maitreya [the future Buddha] is there, and when you turn to the left or glance to the right, it is Shākyamuni everywhere.

Realization makes every place a temple; the absolute endows all beings with the true eye. When you come to grasp it, you find it was ever before your eyes. If you can see clear what is before your very eyes, it is what fills the ten directions; when you see what fills the ten directions, you find it is only what is before your eyes.

It is not, as some ancients and the Confucians taught, that you sweep away ordinary feelings and bring into existence some holy understanding. When ordinariness and holiness exist no more, how is that? An octagonal grindstone is turning in empty space; a diamond pestle grinds to dust the iron mountain.

ANECDOTES ABOUT DAIKAKU

THE SUTRA OF ONE WORD

A man came to [Daikaku] who was a believer in repetition of mantras like the Lotus mantra and the mantra of Amida, and said, "The *Heart Sutra* which is read in the Zen tradition, is long and difficult to read, whereas Nichiren teaches the mantra of the Lotus, which is only seven syllables, and Ippen teaches the mantra of Amida, which is only six. But the *Zen Sutra* is much longer and it's difficult to recite."

The teacher listened to this and said, "What would a follower of Zen want with a long text? If you want to recite the Zen scripture, do it with *one word*. It is the six- and seven-word ones that are too long."

ONE-ROBE ZEN

A priest from the headquarters of the regent Yasutoki visited Kencho-ji and remarked to Daikaku, "Eisai and Gyōyū began the propagation of Zen here in

Kamakura, but the two greatest teachers of the way of the ancestors have been Dōgen of the Sōtō sect and [Enni Ben'en]. Both of them came to Kamakura at the invitation of regent Tokiyori to teach Zen, but both of them left before a year was out. So there are not many among the warriors here who have much understanding of Zen. In fact some are so ignorant about it that they think the character for Zen—written as they think it is by combining the characters for “garment” and “single”—means just that. They believe that Zen monks of India in the mountains practiced special austerities, and even in winter wore only one cotton robe, and that the name of the sect arose from this.”

Zen

“one-robe”

Daikaku listened to all this and laughed. “The people of Kamakura are right to say that Zen means wearing a single garment. They well understand what the sect stands for. An ordinary man is clad in layers of the three poisons and five desires, and though by repetition of the buddha-name and reading the scriptures he tries again and again to strip them off, he cannot get out of his layers of passions. Fundamentally Zen means having no layers of clothes but just one piece. Repeating the buddha-name—it is becoming just one piece with the buddha; reading the scriptures—it is ‘apart from the Law no I, and without I no Law,’ so that I and the Law are one piece. This is called ‘knocking everything into one.’ The warriors of Kamakura, when they say Zen means the sect of a single robe, have grasped its deepest essence.

“If you don’t have those layers of clothes, you will be cultivating the field . . . in the Zen way. Here and now let a man strip off the eighty thousand robes of the Treasure of the Law and experience the simplicity of the one robe. How would that be?”

The priest bowed in reverence and left.