

FIRST DOGEN BOOK

SELECTED ESSAYS FROM DOGEN ZENJI'S
SHOBOGENZO

TRANSLATED BY BOB MYERS

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Selected essays from Dogen Zenji's *Shobogenzo*

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First Edition

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To Sakiko

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Dialog on the Way of Commitment.....	5
Truth Unfolding	43
A Particular Hour.....	49
Why the First Patriarch Came From the West.....	59
Truth Unfolding: Notes.....	65
A Particular Hour: Notes	99
Why the First Patriarch Came From the West: Notes.....	129
Bibliography	152
Index	155

INTRODUCTION

This book presents annotated English translations of four essays by Dogen. Dogen was the 13th century Japanese Zen master who launched the Soto school of Zen Buddhism in Japan and penned *Shobogenzo*, a collection of nearly a hundred essays renowned for their power, clarity and poetic beauty.

The intent is to provide an accessible introduction to Dogen's writings for the English reader. This objective governed the selection of essays, the translation policy, and the nature of the commentary.

The essays were chosen to span the range from introductory to advanced, from practical to philosophical. "Dialog on the Way of Commitment," or *Ben-dowa*, is an introductory essay directed towards the newcomer to Zen Buddhism. "Truth Unfolding," or *Genjo Koan*, is a definitive, elegant exposition of the importance of practice, one of Dogen's primary themes. "A Particular Hour," or *Uji*, is a compelling testament to the urgency of attending to the moment. Finally, "Why the First Patriarch Came from the West," or *Soshi Seirai I*, is a Zen meditation on the human condition. Together, they represent the essence, albeit highly distilled, of Dogen's writings and teachings.

The translation approach taken was to emphasize accessibility and readability, while maintaining the greatest possible fidelity to the original. Dogen presents formidable challenges to the translator. He wrote in a medieval Japanese with unfamiliar syntax and vocabulary. His writings are sprinkled with innovative stylistic devices he used to drive home his message. And the concepts he is conveying can at times seem very opaque.

Soto Zen has taken firm root in the West over the last three decades. This has been accompanied by half a dozen or more English translations of all or part of

Shobogenzo. These translations are the fruits of the labor of esteemed Zen masters and scholars. Still, there is ample room for new translations with new insights. The density and interrelatedness of Dogen's writings means that each hour or day or week or month spent pondering a phrase or sentence or paragraph can add value to the enterprise of rendering Dogen into an English which accurately conveys his meaning and style. These translations are yet another such effort.

The concept of fidelity operates at many levels. One such level is vocabulary, which is mapped precisely here, even in cases where this requires the use of unfamiliar words or Buddhist technical terms, which are then explained in the notes. Examples include both Chinese Buddhist terms which are mapped back to their Sanskrit equivalents, such as *dharma*, as well as native Japanese words such as *satori*. A second level is style, which is mirrored in these translations to the absolute extent possible. For instance, repetitions which might not usually be found in English are carried though. Where Dogen omits a word it is omitted in the English as well. Furthermore, if Dogen is in a lyrical or poetic mode, that should be mirrored in the translation.

One level which is here not mapped religiously, on the other hand, is that of Japanese syntax, the mechanical mimicking of which simply yields wooden, awkward English. Japanese is Japanese and English is English. Assuming that the original Japanese was accessible and readable, which in the case of Dogen it certainly was, an "accurate" translation should replicate that accessibility and readability in English.

The most important question in terms of fidelity is meaning. Ideally, if the words and syntax and style are carried through to English, the meaning will follow. Even if the original is ambiguous, or even if it has multiple meanings as is sometimes the case in Dogen, a skillful translation can reproduce that same ambiguity or multiplicity of meanings. There are times, however, when circumstances force the translator into a particular interpretation. In that case, it's important to take full advantage of every available clue, including syntactic details, character usage, and, notably, the relationship to preceding and succeeding sections—in other words, the flow. What should not factor into the interpretation is the translator's preconceived notions of what Dogen "must have been talking about."

Another major source of insight in interpreting Dogen is the extensive body of translations available both in Japanese and English, as well as commentaries,

mostly in Japanese. There are, however, limits to their usefulness. Some translators have laudably taken it upon themselves to translate large volumes of Dogen's writings, such as *Shobogenzo* in its entirety, which reduces the amount of time they can spend on any given essay. In other cases, apparent mistakes in interpretation are propagated from one commentator or translator to another. In any case, in addition to referring extensively to preceding translations and commentaries, this book often presents those alternative translations to the reader (in the form of footnotes to avoid disrupting the flow of the notes), not so much to criticize potentially misleading translations as to give the reader the opportunity to draw her own conclusions. Given that objective, attributions to specific translators are often omitted, since the intent is not a scholarly review of previous translations.

Some would say that in translation of works such as these the dimension of beauty rivals that of meaning in importance. And there is no question that Dogen wrote beautiful prose. Part of that beauty lies in the careful prosodic structures he chose, something which can to some extent be brought across in English. Another part lies in his choice of vocabulary, for which the same holds. But it is beyond question that there remain additional elements of beauty in Dogen that defy reproduction.

To make Dogen more accessible to those getting to know him for the first time, the decision was made to accompany the translations with extensive translator's notes. The annotations are not in general meant to elucidate the essay's deeper meaning. Dogen can speak for himself if only given the voice to do so. Rather, the focus is on pointing out interesting or challenging aspects of Dogen's prose and possible alternatives for interpreting or translating it. This opportunity to clarify aspects of Dogen's writings in the notes makes it possible for the translation itself to adhere more closely to the original. The annotations also present historical and cultural background to enhance the reader's understanding. In each section, the translated essays are first given by themselves, to avoid distracting the reader with the annotations. In a second subsection, the translations are repeated, this time interspersed with translator's notes. Perhaps the reader will find it useful to read the stand-alone version, then the annotated version, and finally return to the stand-alone version to experience something akin to what readers and listeners in the 13th century did.

Some may find the translator's notes overly detailed, pedantic, or even distracting. My intent was to leave an unmistakable trail of the decisions made

during the translation process, admittedly in some part as a pre-emptive defense against the all-too-common criticism of new Dogen translations that they're bad simply because they're different, or did not involve someone in a purple robe.

For ease of readability, diacritics have been omitted in body text, and all Japanese characters placed in footnotes or endnotes.

Dogen's life has been documented in detail elsewhere; for example, see Kim, 2004. Some aspects of his biography can be found in his writings, including those translated here, such as *Dialog on the Way of Commitment*. Briefly, Dogen was born into a noble family in 1200 and entered the priesthood at an early age. The dominant event in his life was his trip to China between 1224 and 1227, where he met his teacher Nyojo and "solved the riddle of existence," in his own words. He returned to Japan and taught and wrote near Kyoto, where he wrote the essays here, before founding Eiheiiji in the mountains of current-day Fukui Prefecture. He continued to teach there until his death in 1253. Eiheiiji remains the head temple of the dominant Japanese Soto school of Zen Buddhism more than 750 years later.

DIALOG ON THE WAY OF COMMITMENT

Bendowa

This essay, written by Dogen in 1231 soon after his return from China, is as accessible and readable today as it was eight centuries ago. It is a presentation of the basics of Dogen's Zen. The original Japanese title is *Bendōwa*. *Bendō* is a two-character combination that literally means “exert-way”—the way of commitment, or committing yourself to the way. *Wa* means dialog (or story, or discussion); the essay is mostly structured as a question-and answer question.¹

Note that the word *bendō* also occurs upwards of a dozen times through the document. We need a translation which works well when Dogen uses it to refer to his particular path, and for this “way of commitment” seems to do the job.

¹ [Uc] has “The Wholehearted Way,” omitting the “talk” element, while [Ta] “On the Endeavor of the Path”; but “wa/話/talk” seems more informal to me than “On the...”, which would be how *ron/論/theory* would typically be translated when occurring in a title like this. I’ve chosen “dialog” since it’s closer to the nuance in “wa/talk” and since much of the content occurs in a Q&A format.

Note also that in some texts the *ben* is written with an alternate character containing “*katana/sword*”² as its middle radical, still pronounced *ben*. That character would mean to cut, or by extension to distinguish, so the meaning of the title becomes “talk on distinguishing the way.” However, that would not seem to match well the way *bendōwa* is used within the text. [Wa] uses this character and translates the title of the essay as “Negotiating the Way.”

Due to the length of this essay and the relatively low density of notes, I’ve chosen not to present the translation and notes separately as with the other essays, instead endnoting directly from within the translation.

² 刀.

The enlightened ones¹ bring us a simple message² about a precious truth:³ the sublime, unique, natural⁴ technique for reaching ultimate awareness.⁵ Offered to each seeker⁶ in turn, its unadulterated essence is the self-fulfilling meditative state called *samadhi*.⁷

The most immediate way⁸ to start enjoying this state is to sit, erect, in the form of meditation known as *zazen*. This practice is the only way to bring out the intrinsic truth⁹ overflowing in all of us, to validate that truth and thus make it our own.¹⁰ This is the uncountable truth that fills our hands when we release it, the unbounded¹¹ truth that fills our mouths when we speak it. Here the masses¹² insist on using every intellectual device, finding direction in none. Here the buddhas¹³ dwell in every direction, clinging to intellectual device in none.

Devoting yourself to this path I'm teaching will bring everything forth in enlightenment, leading to a place of absolute unity.¹⁴ But these will be mere fancy words of no concern to you when the time comes that you jump across and let go.¹⁵

Hungry for the truth,¹⁶ I myself, after crisscrossing Japan visiting teachers, finally encountered Myozen,¹⁷ at Kenninji Temple,¹⁸ I began following him, and before I knew it nine springs and autumns¹⁹ had passed. It was during that period that I learned something of the "Rinzai" style of Zen. Lead disciple of Eisai,²⁰ the founder, Myozen was unsurpassed as a teacher²¹ of the *buddhadharma*, head and shoulders above the other disciples.

Next I headed to the China of the Song Dynasty where I continued my search on both banks of the Zhejiang,²² learning the teachings of the five schools. At last, I attached myself to Zen master Nyojo²³ of Mt. Tendo, and that was where I finally solved the riddle of existence. I

came back to Japan at the beginning of the era they called Shaoding,²⁴ burdened with the responsibility of passing on to others what I had learned.

While waiting for the right time to begin preaching, however, I decided to spend my time wandering about like²⁵ the wise men of old, floating like a cloud and drifting like a leaf. But then my thoughts turned to those who were unselfishly looking for the truth but, led astray by charlatans, might accidentally hide the right answers from themselves, become lost in empty self satisfaction, and sink into an extended state of confusion. How would they find the chance to foster the true seeds of *prajna*, real wisdom, and gain the way? With no fixed abode, they would have no way to know where to find me, which mountain my cloud was floating over or which river my leaf was drifting down. Distraught at this prospect, I resolved to gather and record the essential approaches used in the monasteries in China as I experienced them personally, as well as the profound essence of the truth that I received from the my teachers, so that those studying the way²⁶ might know the true dharma of the buddhas.²⁷ This would seem to be truly essential.²⁸

The historical Buddha, according to legend, gathered his disciples at a place called Vulture Peak in India, where he passed on his truth to Mahakashyapa. The truth was passed down faithfully from master to master, eventually to Bodhidharma, who took Buddhism to China,²⁹ and there passed on the teachings to a great master known as Eka,³⁰ That was the beginning of our religion's spread throughout eastern Asia.

Six generations later, the simple message³¹ wended its way to renowned master Eno,³² This was when the true *buddhadharma* really

began flourishing throughout China and it became clear that Buddhism was not about fancy words.³³ Eno's two outstanding disciples, Ejo³⁴ and Gyoshi,³⁵ both bore the Buddha's imprint and taught widely. Their teachings spread and gave birth to five schools: Jogen, Iggyo, Soto, Unmon, and Rinzai (although at present in China only the Rinzai school remains popular); five different schools, but still just one mark of the Buddha mind.

Of course as far back as the later Han period,³⁶ there had also been plenty of holy writings available in China, but no clear idea which were worth studying and which not. It was Bodhidharma's arrival in China that severed the creeping vines of confusion at their root, allowing a single, pure doctrine to spread. We can only pray that the same scenario unfolds here in Japan as well.

These patriarchs and buddhas who made the *buddhadharma* their own all held that there is just one true way to become enlightened: sitting upright in a deep meditative state. To the east and to the west, those attaining enlightenment have followed this approach, thanks to teachers who passed on the miraculous technique accurately to them in private.

The authentic tradition holds that this simple, straightforward message takes absolute precedence. From the time you meet a teacher and learn the teachings, neither bow, nor chant, nor read sutras, nor engage in rituals, nor burn incense; simply sit and leave behind distinctions of body and mind.

Sitting in *samadhi*, even briefly, the mark of the Buddha you imprint onto body, mouth, and mind extends throughout the earth, the skies filling with enlightenment. Thus the sages rejoice, and renew the

splendor of the path to *satori*.³⁷ Beings throughout earth, heaven, and hell are purified and cleansed, affirm their absolute liberation, and show their original visage. All things attest to and engage the Buddha's true insight. Finally you transcend the realm of perception to become the king at the foot of the bodhi tree in seated meditation, instantly turning the incomparable wheel of being and unfolding the ultimate wisdom.

This enlightened world circles back to directly but imperceptibly sustain the people of *zazen*,³⁸ that they might completely leave behind the body/mind distinction, disconnect from random, impure perceptions and thoughts, affirm and enter into the intrinsic truth of Buddhism,³⁹ raise up the teachings at countless places of practice, share⁴⁰ the chance for transcendence⁴¹ widely, and proclaim its law. As they do, soil and earth and grass and trees, fences and walls and tiles and pebbles throughout this world exude holiness.⁴² Blessed by the wind and water at the wellsprings of this outpouring, and graced⁴³ by the incomparably subtle and inconceivable teaching, they soon arrive at enlightenment.⁴⁴ Those taking up⁴⁵ this water and fire endow themselves and everyone with whom they live and speak with endless virtue⁴⁶ by spreading the teaching of original awakening, their efforts imbuing the entire universe, within and without, with inexhaustible, indestructible, inconceivable, and immeasurable⁴⁷ truth.

But yet we don't perceive these things while sitting—because in the stillness, stripped of artifice,⁴⁸ we experience direct affirmation. If, as many believe, practice is one step and realization⁴⁹ a second; this would imply that the two are perceived separately. Yet if perception is involved, it cannot be realization. A mental muddle⁵⁰ cannot bring us to realization.

You will join your surroundings⁵¹ in stillness. As your mind and surroundings sit together in stillness, awakening⁵² flows in, affirmation⁵³ flows out. As you approach the boundary of self-rapture, you embody boundless truth and the profound and subtle teaching. Not a particle is moved nor aspect of reality disturbed.⁵⁴ Wherever nature⁵⁵ is touched by this teaching, a great light emanates, forever illuminating⁵⁶ the profundity and strangeness⁵⁷ of its truth. Earthly objects⁵⁸ hold forth on behalf of sages and fools, and in return the sages and fools raise their voices on behalf of the earthly objects.

Intrinsic to the world⁵⁹ of realization of self and others is that we are fully endowed with an enlightened nature;⁶⁰ we unfailingly carry ourselves according to enlightened law.⁶¹ So *zazen*—even that of a single person, sitting a single time—joins with all things in contemplation and calmly connects with all moments of time, thus embodying the eternal divine teaching throughout time and space.⁶² Each experience of *zazen*⁶³ is identically practice, identically realization.⁶⁴ Practice is not just sitting on your cushion. It is the echo of emptiness being struck,⁶⁵ the strange, sonorous, silken⁶⁶ subtones before and after the mallet meets the metal of the bell.⁶⁷ And true practice, unjudged and unjudgeable,⁶⁸ is intrinsic in your true face no matter who you are.

Not even the collective power and wisdom of gods as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore could begin to comprehend the virtue in the *zazen* of one man.

Q1. You've made the case for *zazen* being highly effective. But what if someone ignorantly inquired why you recommend it as the be-all and end-all, since there are many ways to approach the truth?

A1. I'd say it's just the right way to approach it.

Q2. And why would seated meditation alone be the right approach?

A2. Because it is precisely what the historical Buddha passed down to us as the wondrous approach to finding truth. This is the way all enlightened ones⁶⁹ did find, are now finding, and will in the future find the truth. That is why *zazen* was passed down as the right approach. What's more, the Indian and Chinese patriarchs all attained the way through *zazen*. That is why I am now teaching this as the right approach for all.

Q3. Let's say that your wondrous meditation technique has in fact been passed down correctly and was practiced by the ancient fathers, even though that seems far-fetched. But reading the sutras and chanting⁷⁰ can also get you enlightened, right? How can just sitting by yourself doing nothing get you any closer to truth?

A3. Calling this "sitting by yourself doing nothing" is a major insult to our entire religion.⁷¹ You could hardly be more confused if you were in the middle of the ocean claiming there was no water. If you practiced *zazen* you could already be sitting in the carefree self-rapture of the buddhas. Wouldn't that be far better? It's heartbreaking that that you remain so blind and hypnotized.

Thought cannot penetrate the realm of the buddhas. Consciousness cannot approach it. How unlikely then that it could be known by the skeptical or the naïve! Only those of pure and great faith can enter it. Those who doubt will have difficulty receiving the teaching no matter how much they are taught. Even on Vulture Peak there were some of whom the Buddha said, "It may be best for them to depart." So when faith arises in your mind then practice and study. If it does not

then do not, bewailing the fact that after all this time truth has still not bestowed its blessings on you.

Do you really imagine that you understand what doing things like reciting sutras or chanting the name of Buddha is supposed to achieve? The notion that merely wagging your tongue or raising your voice could bring Buddha's blessings is incoherent. Time will show clearly how far these practices are from Buddhism. The sutras serve only to document Buddha's teachings about the practice⁷² that we need to follow in order to accomplish our goal. Do not strain your intellect in the vain hope that you might thereby be able to attain wisdom. You have no more chance finding the truth by flapping your gums blindly reciting ten million chants than you would trying to get south by driving north. It's like trying to put a square peg in a round hole. Reading sutras without understanding how to practice is like reading a prescription but forgetting to take the medicine—it accomplishes nothing. Neither do sounds issuing incessantly from your mouth, like toads croaking day and night in the spring rice paddies. If, like many others past and present, you find it especially difficult to discard these practices, it may be because you're fixated on the material world. It's heartbreaking.

Let me be clear about one thing. The great truth of the Buddha and his predecessors must be passed along from teacher to student, the teacher having attained the way and clarified his mind, the student realizing his nature and affirming his being. That is how this truth is revealed and maintained. It is not something that can be grasped by our brothers who base their study on the written word. Given that, cast aside your doubts; follow the teachings of a true teacher; devote

yourselves to the way of *zazen*; and prove to yourself the power of the self-fulfilling *samadhi* of the buddhas.⁷³

Q4. Religions such as Tendai⁷⁴ and Kegon, the ultimate expressions of Mahayana Buddhism, already exist in Japan. Not to mention Shingon,⁷⁵ which Birushana⁷⁶ transmitted directly to Kongosatta⁷⁷ and has since been passed down undisturbed. What a sublime expression of *buddhadharma* it is, teaching that “Mind is Buddha, Mind Creates Buddha,” and that you can realize the true essence of the Five Buddhas⁷⁸ in a single sitting, with no need for lengthy practice. What is so good about your type of practice that you recommend it to the exclusion of all these other teachings?

A4. The key point when talking about religions is not whether one religion is better or worse than another, some belief deeper or shallower than some other one, but rather whether the practice is genuine or not. For you, it may be plants and flowers and mountains and rivers that bring you closer to the way of the Buddha. Someone else may find the mark of the Buddha⁷⁹ in earth, stones, sand, or pebbles. But all these natural phenomena can be swamped by magnificent words; the wheel of dharma can turn within a speck of dust. Saying “Mind is Buddha”⁸⁰ is simply the moon reflecting in the water, just as “Sitting Becomes Buddha” is a reflection in a mirror. Do not be caught up in eloquent words. I’m recommending the practice here where you experience enlightenment⁸¹ directly, showing you the simple message of the sublime truth of our Buddha ancestors that you may become a traveler in the truth.

And a religious teacher centered in the truth⁸² is absolutely indispensable for the truth to be taught and learned. Academics with their nose buried in the sutras cannot shepherd our *sangha*;⁸³ that would be

the blind leading the blind. One of the bulwarks of our religion is that all those following the teachings handed down by the patriarchs respect the master who has attained the way and is aligned with the truth. He holds out his hand to everyone that they might open and illuminate their mind's state, whether unbelievers⁸⁴ who come seeking refuge, or students of other faiths⁸⁵ who come questioning the truth. This is unheard of in other sects. Students of the Buddha, however, should simply study⁸⁶ the *buddhadharma*.

Intrinsically, we are all completely and perfectly sane.⁸⁷ We are enveloped and imbued⁸⁸ by this sanity. But we fail to acknowledge this, instead hatching a hodgepodge of beliefs which we embrace and then chase as if they were real, diverting us from the quest for the truth. These beliefs embroider the entire sky with their flowery efflorescence. Otherwise, people would not have dreamt up the twelve-fold chain of causation or the twenty five realms of existence or the doctrines of three vehicles and five vehicles or Buddha's existence or non-existence. Do not confuse learning these doctrines with real practice of the truth.

When you now release everything⁸⁹ and sit single-mindedly in meditation, leaving behind confusion, clarity, emotion, and intellect⁹⁰, and leaving aside paths sacred or profane, instantly you find yourself enveloped by and imbued with sanity, cavorting freely outside of the framework,⁹¹ fulfilled in awareness. Those entrapped⁹² in the snare of words have nothing to compare with this.

Q5. Zen is already included in the Three Learnings, namely Precepts, Meditation, and Wisdom⁹³, since the "jō (meditation)" part of the Japanese term "kai-jō-e" is short for "zenjō." And it's already included in the Six Paramitas,⁹⁴ since one of them is *dhyana paramita*,

the perfection of meditation, where *dhyana* is the Sanskrit precursor of the Chinese term *chan* and the Japanese *zen*.⁹⁵ All Buddhas-to-be,⁹⁶ gifted or otherwise, learn both of these as beginners and practice them. So your “zazen” would seem to be just one of these. On what basis are you claiming it brings together the true dharma of the enlightened ones?

A5. This question may arise from confusion caused by the fact that the term “Zen School” has come to be applied to the supreme truth of the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, the great question of the enlightened ones.

The term “zen” arose in China; it was never used in India. During the great master Bodhidharma’s nine years of wall-gazing at Shaolin Temple on Mt. Song, neither monks nor laypeople understood the Buddha’s true teaching as yet, so they simply referred to him as “that Indian monk who makes a religion of zazen.” The following generations of patriarchs all focused exclusively on zazen, as evidenced by the fact that common folk, unaware of the reality, dubbed them the “Zazen Church.” In today’s world people have come to drop the “za” and now simply use “Zen” to refer to the sect or religion. But the pronouncements of our forebears make it clear where the roots⁹⁷ of this word lie,⁹⁸ *Zazen* must not be considered in the same sense as the “zen” concentration or meditation in the Three Learnings or the Six Paramitas.⁹⁹

The legitimacy of the passing down of this law of the Buddha has never been in question. The heavenly hosts bear incontrovertible witness to the ceremony on Vulture Peak where Shakyamuni conveyed to Mahakashyapa the treasury of the true dharma vision, the wondrous mind of nirvana, the great truth. Those same multitudes of angels

will hold and protect the *buddhadharma* into eternity, with effort unflagging.

Let me be perfectly clear. This is the way of *buddhadharma* in its entirety. It brooks no comparison.

Q6. Why should we meditate in a sitting posture?

A6. Ancient teachers probably practiced in different postures, I don't know. If you need a reason for seated meditation, think of the reason as being that that is what is used in the Buddhist tradition. And that is reason enough. But another reason for you is that one patriarch described *zazen* approvingly as "approaching the truth in joyful repose," and you can deduce for yourself that sitting is the posture that best fits that bill. I would also emphasize that this is the path of all buddhas that have preceded us, not just one or two.

Q7. This seated meditation may be something that people can devote themselves to in order to get an internal affirmation¹⁰⁰ of the truth if they have not already achieved on. But what does it offer to those who have already attained understanding?

A7. At the risk of casting pearls before swine,¹⁰¹ I would advise you that thinking of meditation and realization as two separate things is just wrong.¹⁰² We teach that meditation and realization are identical.¹⁰³ Because realization is practice, a beginner's way of devotion is the entirety of intrinsic enlightenment.¹⁰⁴ Why do we recommend not having any expectation of enlightenment in your approach to practice? Because meditation is already the intrinsic realization that points directly¹⁰⁵ to your true self. Realization is practice, so it has no end; practice is realization, so it has no beginning. Shakyamuni and Maha-

kashyapa were both filled and enriched¹⁰⁶ with practice within realization, and practice within realization also drove¹⁰⁷ Bodhidharma and Eno. After embracing Buddha's truth, it is like this for everyone.¹⁰⁸

Practice has never been separate from realization. With each slice of that unique practice which you gratefully learned one-on-one, of your beginner's mind devoting itself to the way, comes a slice of intrinsic realization in its natural habitat.¹⁰⁹ The patriarchs admonished us to maintain a robust practice in order to avoid defiling the realization from which it is inseparable. As your hands release ineffable practice, intrinsic realization will fill them; as intrinsic realization passes from your body, ineffable practice will course through it.

I saw for myself that temples everywhere in China have meditation halls accommodating five hundred, six hundred, a thousand or two thousand monks, encouraged to meditate day and night. When I asked the head monks¹¹⁰ about the true meaning of the *buddhadharma*, those pious men informed me that it lay in how meditation and realization are one.

That is why I call on not just those studying here,¹¹¹ but all worthy seekers of truth, all who long for the reality within the *buddhadharma*, be they new or old, saint or sinner, to follow the path of the masters and devote themselves to the way of meditation as the sages before us have taught.

I'm sure you've heard of the old master¹¹² who said "Practice and realization are never absent, so there's no point in denigrating them."

Or as another said, "Those who see the way practice it."¹¹⁴ The implication is clear: you must practice within attainment of the way.

Q8. Past teachers of Buddhist doctrines in Japan all visited China during the dynasty¹¹⁵ and heard the true message there. Why did they bring back only the doctrinal teachings and not the framework¹¹⁶ you are speaking of?

A8. These ancient teachers of men did not bring back the *dharma* because the time had not yet arrived for them to do so.

Q9. Do you think those teachers of old grasped the *dharma*?

A9. If they had understood it, it would have spread.

Q10. It has been said:

"Bemoan not mortality;¹¹⁷ the path to escape it is at hand, and it is to realize the eternal nature of spirit. The body shall die just as surely as it is born, but not so the spirit. Realize that the immortal spirit exists within, and that therein lies thy essential nature, the body a mere temporary abode, ephemeral, dying here, reborn there. Mind endures unchanging, throughout past, present, and future. To understand this is to be liberated from mortality. Those who do so put an end to the living and dying of the past and, when they cast off their mortal form, enter the ocean of nature. As they do so verily they are endowed with the same sacred virtue as the angels. Those who have not yet learned this principle are damned to repeat their experience of mortality forever."

This can only mean that what's really important is to realize that we all have an immortal soul. What on earth is to be gained by wasting

your time sitting on a cushion? Is this line of thinking in accord with the way of the buddhas and the patriarchs?

A10. Not in the least. It's the heresy of Senika.¹¹⁸ The heresy claims that lurking in your body is a sort of ghostly intelligence,¹¹⁹ which can tell good from bad, right from wrong. The ability to feel pain and pleasure, suffering and delight is due to this ghostly intelligence. And what's more, this ghost-like nature can slip out of a dying body and be reborn somewhere else. Just when you think it's dying, it manages to get itself reborn somewhere else and thus hangs on through all eternity.

That's what the heresy says.

Believing such nonsense and calling it *buddhadharma* is more foolish than grasping tiles and pebbles and imagining that they are golden jewels. It's so stupid I'm at a loss for another analogy. Echu,¹²⁰ the master who taught a Tang Dynasty emperor, strongly criticized this fallacy. How laughable—raising to the level of the Buddha's subtle truth the belief that the soul endures and the body perishes. You are promoting the basic cause of the very mortality that you are trying to escape. It's pitiful. Know that this is pure heresy, and pay it no heed.

Let me add that to see past this heresy you need to know that we teach that in the *buddhadharma* body and mind are intrinsically unified, nature and aspect are indivisible—an unshakable principle known throughout China and India. If a religion teaches things are permanent then everything is permanent, making it impossible to separate body and mind. If a religion teaches things are evanescent then everything is evanescent, making it impossible to separate nature and aspect.¹²¹ In either case, it cannot possibly be true that the body pe-

ishes while the spirit lives on. Let it also sink in that mortality is nirvana. Nirvana has never been discussed outside the context of mortality. Think about it: that mind of yours which is trying to arrive at a supposed Buddhistic wisdom but shuns mortality, hoping instead that the enduring soul is separate from the body, is itself an understanding and perceiving mind which is itself subject to mortality, thus violating the premise of eternity. Who can deny this?

Look closely, and you'll see that true religions have always taught that body and soul are unified. So why on earth should the soul take off and detach itself from the body and survive when the body dies? That would imply that body and soul are unified sometimes but not other times, turning all these religions into big lies. Those who think the idea is to eliminate mortality are guilty of hating Buddhism. We must tread carefully here.

You should know the Buddhist school of thought called Universal Aspect of the Nature of Mind,¹²² which states that, throughout the entire *dharma* realm in all its vastness, it is impossible to separate nature and aspect or distinguish life and death. Nothing, not even awareness and nirvana, is outside the nature of mind. Each and every thing and phenomenon shares this mind, nothing excluded, nothing unrelated. There are many such schools of thought in Buddhism, but all of them hold that mind is uniformly singular. Buddhist teachings are known for their insistence on saying that distinctions of mind do not exist.

To nevertheless try to distinguish body and mind, or separate life from nirvana, is impossible. We are born children of the Buddha, and must not lend our ears to the jumbled mumblings of the non-Buddhist philosophers.

Q11. If I pursue this meditation practice do I also have to obey the precepts?¹²³

A11. Following the precepts and leading a good life¹²⁴ is indeed basic to our religious traditions, but even those who have not yet learned the precepts, or who have broken them, may still benefit from meditation.

Q12. Is there any reason I can't combine this meditation practice with my current faith?¹²⁵

A12. Every single one of the masters that I met during my trip to China¹²⁶ and asked about the essentials¹²⁷ told me that of all the patriarchs, past and present, East and West, who bore the true mark of the buddha, they had never heard of one who combined practices as you propose. Attaining a singular wisdom requires taking a singular approach.

Q13. Do I have to enter a monastic life to follow your practice? Can normal people do it too?

A13. The patriarchs teach that there are no distinctions of gender or status as to who can grasp¹²⁸ the *buddhadharma*.

Q14. But monks can leave behind all the cares of daily life and devote themselves completely to the *zazen* path of devotion. How can those pursuing the affairs of the material world dedicate themselves to practice and fulfill the natural¹²⁹ Buddha way?

A14. The patriarchs have in their great benevolence opened to us the vast gate of compassion, that each and every living being might achieve realization.¹³⁰ Absolutely anyone may enter. This has been

amply proven both in the past and the present. For example, emperors and statesmen,¹³¹ however preoccupied, have nevertheless devoted themselves to the way of *zazen* and penetrated¹³² the great path of the patriarchs. So it simply depends on your commitment, not on whether or not you have left the world behind to become a monk. Anyone possessed of a keen ability to discern excellence will be drawn to believe. Imagining that your daily activities could interfere with the *buddhadharma*, you're really saying you think that the Buddha's law doesn't exist within the world, but that's backwards. It's the world's law that doesn't exist within the Buddha.¹³³

Recently in China there was a Minister of State named Hyo, a high-ranking official experienced in the way of the patriarchs. He wrote the following poem to express himself:

When duties permit, I delight in *zazen*,
Rarely lying down even to sleep.
Although a minister,
My fame as a long-time practitioner crosses the four seas.

This man was constantly occupied with his official duties, but nevertheless able to attain the way thanks to his deep commitment. Apply such lessons from others to yourself. Apply such lessons from the past to the present.

Recently in Song Dynasty China, the Emperor, his ministers, aristocrats and commoners, men and women are all focused on the way of the ancestors. Warriors and scholars alike are committed to joining in and studying the way. Many of those so committed will undoubtedly illuminate the ground of their mind. From this you can see yourself that daily affairs do not interfere with the *buddhadharma*.

When true *buddhadharma* spreads throughout a nation, the buddhas and angels vigilantly protect it, and the reign of the emperor proceeds in peace. With this peace of the holy, the *buddhadharma* then gains in strength.

And when Shakyamuni was alive, criminals¹³⁴ and heretics found the way. In the congregations of the ancient fathers, *satori* opened to hunters¹³⁵ and woodcutters.¹³⁶ So there is no reason this is impossible for anyone. All that is necessary is to seek the guidance of a true teacher.

Q15. Frankly, our society today is in its final days. I doubt that your meditation practice can really help us reach perfection when things are in such a mess.

A15. It is the doctrinaires, who specialize in naming and classifying things, who have invented concepts such as “final days.”¹³⁷ Actual Mahayana teachings divide time into no such phases. They simply say that anyone who practices will find the way. In fact, whether you are at the beginning or the end of your journey,¹³⁸ the simple message of the truth is just to gather the same rare family treasures and fill yourself¹³⁹ with them. The person practicing knows himself whether or not he is enlightened—in the same way that a person drinking water can himself tell whether it is tepid or cool.

Q16. It has been said:

“In Buddhism, nothing is required except to fully grasp the principle of ‘Mind is Buddha’; no sutras need pass your lips, no trappings of Buddhism adorn your body.¹⁴⁰ Knowing that *buddhadharma* is intrinsi-

cally within you—this completes the circle of attaining the way. Nothing remains to be sought from others.”

Why, then, must we go to all the trouble of following the *zazen* path of devotion?

A16. This statement lacks all rhyme and reason. If what you said were even remotely true, then anyone with mental function could obtain knowledge simply by being taught this idea.

You need to let go of other people’s beliefs and your own¹⁴¹ in order to study Buddhism. If you could attain the way just by understanding “Mind is Buddha” then the great religious leaders would not have bothered to give us their teachings.

Let me illustrate this with an excellent example from an old master.

Long ago, there was a director monk named Gensoku¹⁴² in the congregation of Zen Master Hogen.¹⁴³ who asked him, “Gensoku, when was it again that you came to this temple?”

Gensoku replied, “Three years have passed since I arrived.”

The Zen Master said, “You’re fairly new here then. Why haven’t you ever asked me about Buddhism?”

Gensoku replied, “I cannot lie to you, Master. Actually while I was studying with Zen Master Seiho,¹⁴⁴ I already reached the state of joyful repose in Buddhism.”

The Zen Master asked, “And through what words was it that you were able to obtain that entrance?”

Gensoku answered, "I asked Seiho, 'What is the nature of the self of this student?' And he replied, 'Fili Vulcani veniunt ignem petentes. (The children of Vulcan come seeking fire.)'" ¹⁴⁵

Hogen responded, "Fine-sounding words. But perhaps you didn't really understand them."

Gensoku said, "But Vulcan is the Roman god of fire. I understood that searching for fire with fire was similar to searching for the self with the self."

The Zen Master replied, "Now I see that you in fact don't get it. If that was all there was to Buddhism then there is no way it would have been passed all the way down to us today."

Devastated, Gensoku stomped out of the meeting. But halfway back to his quarters he thought, "The Zen Master is famed as a top teachers, and the spiritual leader of 500 souls. There must be something to his criticism." He returned to the Zen Master, apologizing for his rudeness, and asked him, "What is the nature of the self of this student?"

The Zen Master replied, "Fili Vulcani veniunt ignem petentes."

Upon hearing this, Gensoku had an immense satori experience.

It's clear, then, that you cannot claim to have understood *buddhadharma* by virtue of superficially comprehending a formula like "Self is Buddha." If it were, our Zen Master above would have given neither the guidance nor the admonition that he did. From the first time you meet your teacher, just learn the rules of practice and single-mindedly follow the *zazen* path of devotion, avoiding letting fragments of know-

ledge and half-baked concepts¹⁴⁶ stick in your mind. Then Buddhism's wonderful technique will not be in vain.

Q17. We hear stories from ancient India or China where people realized the way on hearing the sound of bamboo being struck,¹⁴⁷ or cleared the mind on seeing the colors of a flower,¹⁴⁸ and Shakyamuni affirmed the way upon seeing the morning star, while the venerable Ananda¹⁴⁹ attained clarity in truth when told to take down the banner pole;¹⁵⁰ during the period of the five Zen schools following the sixth patriarch Enō, for many a single word or half a phrase was enough to illuminate the foundation of the mind,¹⁵¹ yet not all of these people had been practicing the *zazen* way of devotion, had they?

A17. You must realize that now or in the past, all those who seeing colors found mental clarity, or hearing sounds realized the truth, were exactly those who did not doubt, debate, or deconstruct¹⁵² the way of devotion¹⁵³ and were at one with themselves in the moment.¹⁵⁴

Q18. People from India and China are sincere by nature. Living in the center of civilization as they do, they are more receptive to Buddhism when it is taught. In Japan, people have always lacked virtue and wisdom, making it difficult for the seeds of truth to grow. It is deplorable that we are such barbarians. Our monks don't measure up even to the laypeople in India and China. Our world is obtuse and small-minded. We spend all our time trying to make ourselves look good and adore superficiality. I doubt if even *zazen* can help people like this grasp the *buddhadharma*.

A18. You're right. The people in our country are twisted, and still lack virtue and wisdom. Teach them the honest truth and they manage to turn its heavenly nectar into poison. They are quick to go

running after fame and fortune, and slow to dissolve their confusion and attachments. However, worldly knowledge is not the vessel in which we make the voyage to entering and affirming the Buddha's truth. When the Buddha was alive, someone attained the fourth stage¹⁵⁵ by being struck by a ball; while someone else illuminated the great way when she put on a monk's robe as a joke,¹⁵⁶ even though both were hardly better than animals. True belief was what helped them leave confusion behind. There was the lay woman who experienced *satori* when she offered a meal to a senile old priest that just sat there saying nothing; this was not based on knowledge, not based on learning, not relying on words, not relying on stories, just sustained by true faith.

Shakyamuni's teachings have now been spreading throughout the world¹⁵⁷ for around two thousand years. The many lands they have reached include some where virtue and wisdom do not prevail and some where the people are not necessarily sages. But the miraculous great power of good intrinsic to the true law of the enlightened ones will allow it to spread in each land when the right time arrives. People of true faith and diligent practice will find the way, regardless of their level of intelligence. Do not think that our people should not encounter Buddhism because they are stupid or our country is short on virtue and wisdom. The seeds of true wisdom are abundant in all of us. It's just that we rarely acknowledge that they are¹⁵⁸ and have not yet taken them up and made them our own.

Perhaps this question-and-answer approach, with me asking the questions and then turning around and answering them, has proven somewhat confusing. Have I been creating flowers in the flowerless sky?¹⁵⁹ But it is sad for those possessing the will to know the real mean-

ing of the path of devotion that it has still not been brought into our country. That is why I decided to answer the wishes of aspiring practitioners by gathering the things I saw and heard in a foreign land, and recording the truths of the clear-eyed masters. Other rules of practice and regulations need to be written down as well, but that deserves more time than I have now.

Although our country lies east of the Dragon Ocean,¹⁶⁰ far beyond the clouds and mist, its people were indeed blessed by Buddhism being brought from West to East around the time of the Emperors Kimmiei and Yomei.¹⁶¹ But the correlative focus on names, appearances, and rituals has relegated practice to a position of unimportance. Choose instead, now, to don a torn robe and eat from a patched bowl for the rest of your life,¹⁶² build a straw hut by the mossy crags and white cliffs, and practice sitting upright, whereupon going beyond Buddha¹⁶³ will be immediately revealed and the great task of your life of study instantly accomplished. This is exactly the teaching of the dragon's tusk¹⁶⁴ and the legacy of the chicken's foot.¹⁶⁵ The rules of *zazen* which you should follow can be found in *Fukanzazengi*, which I compiled several years ago.¹⁶⁶

Normally we would await the emperor's edict to spread Buddhism throughout our country, but it is the edict¹⁶⁷ that the Buddha left on Vulture's Peak that should be graciously received by emperors, ministers, nobles, and generals of one hundred billion lands, who have not forgotten how in their past lives they protected and maintained Buddhism. Everywhere the teachings spread¹⁶⁸ becomes Buddha-land.¹⁶⁹ So spreading the word of Buddhism does not necessarily require choosing the right place or waiting for the right circumstances. Why don't we just start today?¹⁷⁰

Thus I gather these thoughts and leave them for distinguished seekers after truth as well as those who wander, like drifting clouds or floating weeds, in search of the Way.

¹ *shobutsu nyorai*. In Zenki, [Ta] translates as “various Buddhas and Tāthagatas”. Here he translates it as all buddha tāthagatas.

² *tanden*/単伝, lit. “simple/single-transmit/message”.

³ *myōhō*/妙法/wonderful-law.

⁴ *mui*/無為; some translators have “unconstructed.”

⁵ Orig. “anokubodai wo shō-suru” 阿のく菩提を証する. [Ta]: “actualize supreme, perfect enlightenment.” Skt. “anuttara samyak sambodhi.”

⁶ *hotoke*/ほとけ. Some translators have translated this as buddha, but that ignores that distinction that Dogen made between shobutsu and hotoke. Hotoke is a more colloquial term which does mean buddha, but can often be translated equally well as “souls”.

⁷ *jijuyū zanmai*/自受用三昧. Lit. “self-receive-employ samadhi”. Self-fulfilled samadhi. Self-joyous meditation.

⁸ Orig. *shōmon*/正門, “main gate”. Some translators have “true gate”, but I think the common usage dominates. Other gates are not “false gates”, they are just not the main gate. “Front gate” has the connotation of the most direct way into the temple compound.

⁹ *hō*/法/dharma/law.

¹⁰ *shō*/証/affirm-authenticate-prove.

¹¹ or, “is neither horizontal nor vertical.”

¹² *shujō*/衆生/sentient beings

¹³ *shobutsu*/諸仏

¹⁴ *ichinyō*/一如. I’ve omitted *shutsuro*/出路/exit-road at the beginning of this phrase since I don’t know how to translate it. Other translators differ on how they handle this.

¹⁵ This sentence is very hard to understand. [Ta] has “passing through the barrier and dropping off limitations, how could you be hindered by nodes in bamboo or knots in wood?”. However, this ends up not being compatible with a later use of *sechimoku* in this document, where Dogen is discussing how the arrival of true Buddhism in China helped people move away from dry scriptural formulations. [Mi]’s translation at least tries to connect to the previous sentence, paraphrasing as

“when you overcome the barrier separating the enlightenment and [path of escape], and drop off body and mind, these divisions (*setsumoku*) will become of no concern.” [Sa] as usual has a very abstract commentary, but seems to be saying that it is the associations which are being dropped off, or something. [Ze] has “And when you thoroughly understand, why cling to such trifles as these?” [Lu] goes with “At that moment of clearing barriers and getting free, how could this paragraph be relevant?”

I think this sentence has to be put in context. Dogen is talking about very simple ideas like the primacy of sitting practice. It’s unlikely that he would suddenly toss in a “dropping off body and mind” type of concept. Remember, he’s talking to newcomers and skeptics. I therefore think he’s referring to the barrier between potential practitioner’s current lives and their future zazen life, and jumping over that barrier; and “dropping off” their current life style to practice zazen.

¹⁶ *hosshin*/発心.

¹⁷ Butsujubō Myōzen, 1184-1225.

¹⁸ In present-day Kyoto.

¹⁹ seasons of frost and flowers.

²⁰ Myōan Eisai, 1141-1215.

²¹ *shōden*/正伝/true-transmit. But I prefer to avoid mechanically translating anything involving the character *den*/伝/transmit as “transmit/transmission.” I understand that this has a particular meaning in the context of Buddhism, which should not be diluted by randomly paraphrasing it, but I think “message” is often a better way to express this.

²² A river running through the modern-day province of the same name, lying south of Shanghai; the modern name of the river is .Qiantang.

²³ Tendō Nyojō; C. Tiantong Rujing, Ju-tsing.

²⁴ 1228-1233.

²⁵ Orig. 先哲の風をきこえむ, lit. “hearing the wind of former philosophers”. [Ta] has “studying the wind of the ancient sages”, [Mi] “teach what the predecessors did”. I don’t think anyone knows what studying “wind” means. At the same point, “drifting and floating” seems to contradict the idea of “teaching” in [Mi].

²⁶ Orig. *sangaku-kandō* 参学閑道, lit. “participate-study-calm/easy-path”. [Ta] has “students of the way”. [Mi] glosses the 閑 character as meaning “study” in this case. [Lu] tries “people who learn in practice and are easy in the truth”. [Ok] has “practitioners of the way of serenity.”

²⁷ Orig. *bukke* 仏家, lit. “Buddha-house”. Some translators have “Buddha’s lineage”.

²⁸ Orig. *shinketsu* 真訣, lit. “truth-parting” or “truth-point”. [Ta] has “This is indeed the essence”. But what is Dogen trying to say here? Why would he be saying here, as [Mi] has it, “This indeed is the mystery of the truth.”, reading the word 秘訣 *hiketsu* into Dogen just from the presence of the 訣 character? What is true? What he wrote here? From the standpoint of continuity, I believe he is saying writing down what he learned is essential.

²⁹ 神丹国 (J. “*shindankoku*”).

³⁰ Hui-k’o (487-593) (J. Teisho Eka, Jinko), 2nd Chinese Zen patriarch accepted as a disciple by Bodhidharma at Shaolin Monastery, China [acc to Japanese tradition]. Also Huike.

³¹ *tanden*/単伝, lit. “single/simple-transmit/convey”.

³² Taikan Enō” or “Yenō” (638 - 713); C. Dajian Huineng.

³³ *sechimoku*/節目.

³⁴ Nangaku Ejō; C. Nanyue Huairang.

³⁵ Seigen Gyōshi; C. Qingyuan Xingsi.

³⁶ 25-221 AD.

³⁷ [Lu] “renews the splendor of their realization of the truth”. [Le] “and renew the adornment of the way of awakening.”

³⁸ *zazenjin* 座禪人; “zazen people”.

³⁹ *shō-kai* 証会.

⁴⁰ *kauburashimeru*: translated as “extend” in Tanahashi’s “Sansuikyō” (extend virtue).

⁴¹ *bukkōjō* 仏向上: going beyond buddha, ongoing buddhahood, buddha going beyond

⁴² *butsuji* 仏事をなす

⁴³ *myōshi* 冥資. [Mi] translates this religiously as “aided” (*tasukerareru*). 冥 means dark, meditative, Buddhist, while 資 means finance or contribute.

⁴⁴ Why should *chikaki*/ちかき mean “intimate” ([Mi] & [Ta]), and not “near” or “soon”?

⁴⁵ *jyū*/受用. Glosses directly as “receive and use”. Same as last two characters of “*jijyū*” in “*jijyū zanmai*”. [Ta] has “receive the benefit of”.

⁴⁶ *buttoku* 仏徳. Buddha merit

⁴⁷ immeasurable: [Ta] has “unnameable”, but original is *fukashōryō*, which glosses directly “amount cannot be named”; [Mi] has “cannot be measured”.

⁴⁸ *muzōsa*/無雜作. [Ta] has “unconstructedness.” Note that the second character in this case is not that for “construct”, but rather that for “random”.

⁴⁹ perfection, in last two sentences: *shōsoku*, which [Ta] translates as just “realization”, while [Mi] has “*shinjitsu no jishō no gensoku*”, or “principle of true realization”.

⁵⁰ mental muddle: *meijō* 迷情; [Ta] has “delusion”, of course. [Mi] paraphrases, referring to distinction and judgment.

⁵¹ *shinkyō* 心境; [Mi] has a complicated discussion involving “*rokkyō*”.

⁵² perfection: *shō* 証

⁵³ *satori*. [Ta] has “enlightenment”.

⁵⁴ *issō wo yaburazu*: [Ta] has “disturbing its quality”; [Mi] has “*genjitsu..no issō*”. I’ve added “reality” for clarity and readability.

⁵⁵ nature: Dogen has *sōmoku-doji*, lit. “grass-trees-earth-soil”. [Ta] has “grass, trees, and lands”. I intuit Dogen is trying to refer to nature in general here rather than referring specifically to grass, trees, earth, and soil.

⁵⁶ illuminating: original is “*toku* とく”. This is the word typically used for teaching or preaching. It also has a more general meaning of solving (such as a puzzle), or even melting. [Ta] translates this literally as “expound”. The image of nature expounding something is intriguing but my guess is that this is not really what Dogen meant, other than in a very abstract way. I think “illuminate” is true to Dogen’s intent and also works well with the great light.

⁵⁷ strangeness: *myō* 妙. [Ta] has “inconceivable”.

⁵⁸ earthly objects: *sōmoku-shōheki*, lit. “grass-tree-fence-wall”. My interpretation here as well is that Dogen is referring to natural and man-made objects around us, rather than trying to make some specific point about grass or trees or fences.

⁵⁹ *kyōkai*: In modern Japanese, this is quite clearly “boundary”. [Mi] leaves it as is, resulting in a sentence that doesn’t make sense—how can a boundary have intrinsic realization? If it’s a boundary, is it the boundary between *jikaku-kakuta* and something else, or the boundary between *jikaku* and *kakuta*? [Ta] goes for “realm”.

⁶⁰ 証相. [Mi] gives “*shō no sugata*”. [Ta] has “mark of realization”. The dictionary entry for this character shows meanings such as “mutual, aspect/phase/countenance, affinity”.

⁶¹ *shōsoku*/証則 is “enlightenment-principle”; [Ta] has just realization, whereas [Mi] gives “principles of true realization.” In any case, it seems clear to me that Dogen is contrasting *shōsō* here with *shōsoku* in the next phrase. *shōsō* is something that someone (we?) are intrinsically fully endowed with, whereas *shōsoku* is some-

thing that is unfailingly occurring. It remains to be seen if my interpretation is correct, involving “enlightened nature” and “enlightened law,” and that the subject is “we”.

⁶² The original enumerates “past, future, and present”, and “the limitless dharma world”.

⁶³ Original *hihi* 彼彼. Meaning unclear. I’ve followed [Ta] who has “each moment of zazen”, whereas [Mi] has the opaque “*sorera no doremodoremo*”.

⁶⁴ Or, according to [Lu], “For everyone it is the same practice and and same experience”.

⁶⁵ Is this what the sentence is saying? That practice is like striking emptiness? [Ta] avoids the issue with its usual “word soup” approach. [Mi]’s modern J translation glosses as “not just the *TIME* of zazen practice, but...” In general, I don’t understand how this sentence connects to the previous, or the next.

⁶⁶ Original *menmentaru* 綿々たる. [Ta] renders this as “everywhere” “ [Mi] has “continues without dying out”. I’ve translated it literally.

⁶⁷ このきはのみにかざらむや. [Ta] has “Why should it be limited to this moment?”, while [Mi] has the この程度ではない (it is not just this). I’ve omitted it.

⁶⁸ *What cannot be judged or measured? True practice, or true visage?

⁶⁹ 如来 *nyorai*; *tathāgatas*

⁷⁰ 念仏 *nenbutsu*, chanting the name of Buddha

⁷¹ 大乘 Great Vehicle

⁷² Orig. *tonzen-shugyō* 頓漸修行. I have omitted the *tonzen* part. Many translators have “sudden and gradual practice”. [Mi] elaborates as “practice suited for those of sudden enlightenment and those of gradual enlightenment.”

⁷³ *shobutsu*/諸仏.

⁷⁴ Japanese school of Buddhism which was a descendant of the Chinese Tiantai school, initially brought to Japan in the middle of the 8th century. Mt. Hiei (比叡山), where Dōgen studied at the beginning of his career, became a center for the study and practice of Tendai in the 9th century. The Tendai sect enjoyed the patronage of the emperors and aristocrats.

⁷⁵ Referred to as “Hokke” 法華 by Dogen. A major school of Japanese Buddhism, also known as Mantra; brought to Japan from China by the monk Kukai in the Heian period (794-1185). Centered on the cosmic Buddha Vairocana. Shingon holds that enlightenment is possible within this life, with the help of a genuine teacher and through properly training the body, speech, and mind.

⁷⁶ In Sanskrit, Vairochana. A Buddha who was the central figure of many early schools of Buddhism in Japan.

⁷⁷ In Sanskrit, Vajrasattva. The first patriarch in the lineage of transmission of Shingon.

⁷⁸ Referring to a teaching of the Shingon school. According to Uchiyama, these are the buddha of the wisdom of action, buddha of the wisdom of well observing, buddha of the wisdom of equality, buddha of the wisdom of the great mirror, and buddha of the wisdom of the dharma universe.

⁷⁹ Most translators appear to be missing the connection between this and the following sentence and the paragraph as a whole. I don't grasp it entirely either, but I suspect that the 象 of 万象 below (natural phenomena) is referring to the plants-trees-mountains-waters-earth-stones-sand-pebbles here

⁸⁰ Here and in the following Dōgen is making obvious fun of the Shingon sect's slogans such as "instantly mind becoming Buddha". He clearly does not intend these to be some statement of his version of truth, as some translators would appear to think, but rather as nonsense formulas.

⁸¹ *jiki-shō-bodai* 直証菩提, lit. direct-validate-bodhi. Several translators have "immediate," but this would seem to be misleading at best.

⁸² *shōkei* 得道証契. I see no consensus on how to translate this. 証 is of course "validation" or "affirmation", often translated as "enlightenment" or "realization", but what about 契? In modern Japanese it's commonly used in the term 契約 or contract; modern Japanese dictionaries give as other senses "understanding (as in agreement)", promise, opportunity. Some translators have "merge", others "accord".

⁸³ Orig. 導師, "guiding teacher", used as I understand it to refer to a head monk kind of role.

⁸⁴ *myōyō no shintō* 冥陽の神道. [Ta] has "spirit beings of the visible and invisible realms". [Mi]'s modern Japanese translation gives "non-human gods of the visible and invisible worlds", Following this [Uc] has "deities from seen and unseen realms." I would question, though, why Dogen would here, in the middle of a rather concrete discussion of what kind of teacher you should have and the problems with an overly academic orientation, suddenly start talking about spirit beings. Here and below I follow [Lu], who believes that Dogen is categorizing various kinds of people who might be looking for the truth.

⁸⁵ *Shōka no rakan* 証課の羅漢. Arhats who have "attained the fruits of realization" ([Ta]); "people who have actualized the rank of arhat" ([Uc]). Dogen is probably using arhat here in the negative sense sometimes encountered in Mahayana

literature of those engaged in practices that are self-centered and incomplete, with a view toward practice and enlightenment which will not permit them to reach the level of Buddhahood.

⁸⁶ *narau*/ならう.

⁸⁷ *bodhi*/菩提.

⁸⁸ Our old friend *juyū* 受用, lit. “receive-use.”

⁸⁹ Orig. has *butsuin ni yorite*, “by virtue of the buddha seal.”

⁹⁰ [Uc] has “sentimental judgements about delusion and enlightenment”

⁹¹ *kaku-gai ni sō-ō*/格外. [Ta] has wander freely outside ordinary thinking”. [Lu] “roam outside the intellectual frame”, [Uc] “stroll beyond classification”.

⁹² *sentei ni kakaharu*. [Mi] gives a lengthy gloss involving “cages for catching rabbits and nets for catching fish”.

⁹³ Skt. shila, samadhi, and prajna.

⁹⁴ Six perfections, including generosity, skillful conduct, forbearance, diligence, meditation, and wisdom (Skt. dana, shila, kshanti, virya, dhyana, and prajna).

⁹⁵ Dogen’s answer—that the question is based on confusion caused by the name “Zen” applied to his sect—makes sense only if the question is picked apart into its component Sanskrit and Japanese parts.

⁹⁶ *bodhisattva*

⁹⁷ *kokoro*, heart

⁹⁸ In other words, in the word “zazen”.

⁹⁹ Original given by [Mi] has *narabete*, that by [Na] has *naratte*.

¹⁰⁰ *shōkai* 証会

¹⁰¹ In the original, “talking about your dreams to a fool.”

¹⁰² *gaidō*/外道, lit. “off-path”. Meaning is apparently “non-Buddhist philosopher”.

Some translators have “heretical”, which seems heavy-handed to me.

¹⁰³ *ittō*/一等. One and the same; the same; inseparable; completely the same.

¹⁰⁴ One of the trickier sentences in Bendōwa. [Ta] has “Because practice of the present moment is practice-realization, the practice of beginner’s mind is itself the entire original realization.” Part of the problem here is the translation of the first phrase in the original, namely “ima mo (even now)”. [Ta] has tried to make that into the “present” of “present moment”, but the Japanese doesn’t parse that way. Remember Dōgen is speaking to experienced Buddhists. So I think this “even now” has the implication of “even now, after all the practice you have done”; and then the sentence proceeds to interpret itself quite nicely; he is not merely discussing beginner’s mind but rather encouraging his listeners to return to it.

¹⁰⁵ *jikishi*/直指, lit. “direct-point”. For some reason [Ta] condenses this down to just “immediate”. [Uc] has “directly indicated.” My translation requires adding a direct object of “true self.”

¹⁰⁶ *juyū*/受用, “receive-use”

¹⁰⁷ *inten*/引転, lit. “pull-rotate.” Various translators have “turned”, “pulled and turned”, “pulled and driven”, “moved”. I have an image of the pulling motion that might start a prayer wheel in motion. Or pulling a dance partner to spin her. But I have no idea what it really means or how to translate it.

¹⁰⁸ Orig. is *buppō ōji no ato*, which [Uc] turns into “the traces of dwelling in and maintaining buddha-dharma”; and then assumes the *mina* indicates *all* traces. [Ta] has “tradition of abiding in buddha-dharma”, but then has nowhere to go with the *mina* so leaves it out. [Lu] has “examples of all those who...”, but I can’t see where “examples” comes from. I think this sentence is more straightforward than it might look, and means what it says.

¹⁰⁹ *mui no chi ni* 無為の地に, lit. “no-intention-ground”. Others have “on unfabricated/unconstructed/non-intentional ground.”

¹¹⁰ Did Dōgen ask the head monk at a particular temple, many, or all?

¹¹¹ Presumably at the temple where Dōgen is holding this dialog.

¹¹² Nangaku Ejō.

¹¹³ In Chinese, 修証不無、染汚即不得. Other translations include “It is not that there is no practice and enlightenment, but only that it cannot be defiled,” and “it is not that there is no practice and no realization, it is just that they cannot be defiled.” I find these translations both incomprehensible and wrong.

¹¹⁴ Shikū Honjō (C. Sikong Benjing), 667-761. Disciple of Eka.

¹¹⁵ 608–917.

¹¹⁶ *mune* 胸; could also be “principle”. [Ta] has “practice” but that seems limiting to me.

¹¹⁷ *seishi*, lit. “life-death”. Has a variety of nuances depending on the context, but here the focus is on actual birth and death.

¹¹⁸ Senika was an Indian philosopher living around the time of Gautama.

¹¹⁹ *rei-chi*

¹²⁰ Nanyo Echu, d.775. C. Nanyang Huizhong or Hui-chung Hui-cheng (683-769 according to Waddell and Abe).

¹²¹ [Uc] has “in the gate of speaking of permanence”, “in the gate of speaking of impermanence”, but I think it is clear here that the “gate” refers to “school” or “sect”. [Ta] has “the teaching about permanence”, “the teaching about impermanence”. Both

make it appear as if both teachings are valid and have reasonable consequences. Instead, I believe Dogen is saying that teaching either permanence or evanescence is limited and limiting and ultimately self-contradictory.

¹²² “dharma gate of the vast total aspect of mind essence”, J. 心性大總相の法門, quotation from Daijō Kishin Ron 大乘起心論 (Awakening of faith of Mahayana).

¹²³ *kairitsu*/戒律. Precepts (skt. shila) and regulations (skt. vinaya).

¹²⁴ *bongyō*/梵行.

¹²⁵ In the original, Shingon and Shikan.

¹²⁶ Tang 唐.

¹²⁷ *shinketsu* 真訣; same word as used early in essay.

¹²⁸ *kaitoku* 会得 (meet/acquire)

¹²⁹ *mui* 無為 lit. “no-intent”, sometimes “unconstructed”, “unintentional”

¹³⁰ *shōnyū* 証入. Does this mean “entering enlightenment”, or “becoming enlightened and entering the way”, as [Mi] would have it?

¹³¹ Tang emperors Daisō (Dai Zong), 762-779 and Junso (Shun Zong), 805; and Ministers Lee and Bo.

¹³² *kaitsū* 会通, lit. “meet-penetrate”

¹³³ A typical Dōgen construction. *Buppō* 仏法 “Buddha-dharma” and *sechuu* 世中 “in this world” are normal constructions, but Dōgen inverts them to get *Sehō* 世法 “world-dharma” and 仏中 “in the Buddha”. Hopefully the translation captures this word play.

¹³⁴ Believed to refer to King Ajatasatru, who killed his own father, King Bimbisara.

¹³⁵ Sekkyō Ezō (Shigong Huican), a disciple of Baso Doitsu (Mazu Daoyi).

¹³⁶ The Sixth Ancestor, Enō, of course.

¹³⁷ 正像末法. Refers to a theory that Buddhism will unfold in stages, starting with a 500-year phase where it is practiced correctly (*shōhō*), followed by another 500-year phase where just the forms remain (*zōhō*), and a final 500- or 1000-year phase where it dies (*mappō*). Dogen’s era was supposed to be *mappō*.

¹³⁸ 入法出身, lit. “enter-law-leave-body.” [Ta] has “entering dharma and leaving bondage behind”; [Lu] has “entering the dharma and getting the body out”; [Uc] tries “entering dharma and...embodying it freely. Since the next phrase begins with *ona-jiku* (identically) whatever two phenomena Dogen is trying to refer to here they both need to be something that can involve receiving and using the rare treasure of your own house, a point [Ta] seems to miss. [Mi] has the most inventive translation,

glossing as “entering the dharma and transcending it.” [Na] concurs. [Sa] claims that this refers to a distinction between people starting and completing the path; I’ve adopted his interpretation.

¹³⁹ *juyū*, again; lit. “receive-use”.

¹⁴⁰ *mi ni butsudou wo gyō-zuru*. [Na] has “practice the Buddha way with mind and body”, which is almost certainly wrong.

¹⁴¹ Some translators have something along the lines of “giving up the view of self and other”, but in context, it seems clear that Dogen is saying practitioners need to give up views held by themselves and others (like the one just proposed by the questioner).

¹⁴² Hōon Gensoku (C. Baoen Xuanze).

¹⁴³ Hogen Buneki, 885–958. C. Fayen Wenyi. One of the great masters of Tang Dynasty Zen and the head of one of the five Schools of Zen.

¹⁴⁴ C. Qingfeng (Baizhao Zhiyuan).

¹⁴⁵ Orig. *heitei-dōji-rai-kyū-ka* 丙丁童子来求火, lit. “*heitei-dōji* come looking for fire.” [Uc] says that *heitei-dōji* refers to the novice in the monastery who carries around a flame to light the lamps. *Heitei* refers to fire in its role in Chinese cosmology. Other translators give constructions such as [Ta] “The fire god is here to look for fire.” Please pardon my transporting China to ancient Rome, the Chinese language to Latin, and Chinese cosmology to Roman mythology.

¹⁴⁶ *ichi-chi-han-ge*, lit. “one-know-half-comprehend”.

¹⁴⁷ Zen Master Kyōgen Chikan (C. Hsiang-yen Chih-hsien, Xiangyan Zhixian, d. 898, 經源), who was enlightened while living as a hermit on Mount Buto when his broom whisked a piece of tile against a nearby bamboo tree.

¹⁴⁸ Reiun Shigon, C. Lingyun Zhiqin, 9th century Zen Master who was enlightened when he saw a flowering peach tree.

¹⁴⁹ First cousin of Shakyamuni, his personal attendant, and one of closest disciples.

¹⁵⁰ Some translators have “a banner-pole fell down”, or “the banner pole toppled”. “a stick falling”, “a temple flagpole fell”. The story is that in his old age, long after the Buddha’s death, Mahakashyapa one day told Ananda that it was time to lower the banner. The banner is hoisted in the monastery every time somebody is teaching. By saying that he should lower the banner Kashyapa suggested that it was due time for Ānanda to let go of his learning, abandon all the proud ambitions about theoretical mastery. Then finally he was awakened, it is told.

¹⁵¹ *shinchi* 心地, lit. “mind-ground.”

¹⁵² Orig. 擬議量, lit. “doubt-discuss-measure”. [Ta] has “intellectual thinking,” [Uc] “vacillating deliberation,” [Lu] “without intellectual doubt”. [Ze] has “zazen without zazen.” I’ve assumed that each of the three characters should be interpreted separately.

¹⁵³ Of zazen.

¹⁵⁴ 直下に第二人なき. *Chokka* could possibly mean either “directly below” or “right now.” The phrase could mean “right away they had no secondary person ([Uc]),” “immediately became unexcelled ([Ze]),” “any self besides their original self ([Ta]) (who omits *chokka*).”

¹⁵⁵ of arhathood.

¹⁵⁶ A woman who in a past life had been a prostitute.

¹⁵⁷ *san-zen-kai* 三千界, lit. “three-thousand-worlds.” Trichiliocosm.

¹⁵⁸ 承当. [Sa] says this means the same as 承知, or understand. [Lu] has “experience (the state directly),” [Ta] hit the mark”, [Uc] “accept.”

¹⁵⁹ See §29.

¹⁶⁰ The Sea of Japan.

¹⁶¹ Japanese emperors who reigned from 540–571 and 586–588, respectively.

¹⁶² Or “make a torn robe and patched-together bowl the rest of your life.”

¹⁶³ 仏向上, *butuskōjō*

¹⁶⁴ Zen Master Ryūge Koton 龍牙古遁 (C. Longya Juden), lit. “dragon-tusk”, 835-923, famous for his ascetic practices. Ryūge is also reported to be the name of a mountain where he practiced.

¹⁶⁵ kukkutupada (J. *keisoku* 鶏足, lit. “chicken foot”). Mountain in central India where Mahakashyapa died.

¹⁶⁶ In the original, “in the Karoku era (1225-1227).”

¹⁶⁷ I search in vain for other translations that have picked up on the obvious parallelism that Dōgen intends between the emperor’s edict and that of the buddha. Dōgen is making a not-too-subtle claim that the authority of the Buddha takes precedence over that of secular authorities, which he hopes to get on the good side of by pointing out their supposed virtue in past lives.

¹⁶⁸ Some translators have “everywhere the emperors etc. control.”

¹⁶⁹ 仏国土. A neologism of Dogen’s.

¹⁷⁰ [Ta] has “Just think that today is the beginning,” and [Mi] concurs, while [Uc] has “Only do not think that today is the beginning.”, and [Ze] has “do not think that today is the beginning,” [Wa] “And you must never think that you are starting new from today.” The negative interpretation seems suspect in the light of the fact that the

entire thrust of this fascicle is to start introducing Dogen's Buddhism in Japan. I agree with [Lu] who believes this is a question.

TRUTH UNFOLDING

Genjo Koan

Viewing various things as Buddhistic things, then we have wisdom and we have practice, we have life and we have death, we have buddhas and we have sentient beings. Stripping all things of their essence, we have no delusion and no satori, we have no buddhas and no sentient beings, we have no beginnings and no endings. The way of the buddha inherently soars above such extravagance and austerity, uniting beginning and ending, uniting delusion and satori, uniting sentient being and buddha. It is falling blossoms uniting love and sorrow, spreading weeds uniting indifference and dislike, nothing more.

If delusion is betaking oneself to practice and realize everything, enlightenment is everything moving ahead to practice and realize oneself. Buddhas are greatly enlightened about such delusion. Sentient beings are greatly deluded about such enlightenment. Some gain enlightenment atop enlightenment; some compound delusion

amid delusion. Buddhas who are truly buddhas do not necessarily realize that they are buddhas. The fact remains, though, that they are illuminated buddhas and go on illuminating buddhanness.

While you may get closer to understanding by exerting body and soul to take in sights, or exerting body and soul to take in sounds, such is not the harboring of a reflection in a mirror, such is not water and moon. When one thing is illuminated others will be dark.

Learning this way of the buddha means learning oneself. Learning oneself means forgetting oneself. Forgetting oneself means being illuminated by all things. Being illuminated by all things means dropping the veil from the body and mind of oneself and the body and mind of others. There may be pauses along this trail of enlightenment, stretching out its emergence.

People who start off by going out and looking for the dharma will only distance themselves from where it lies. Receive the truth innate in yourself, and you will instantly assume the measure of the real person.

Sailing along on a boat, scanning the shore, you may mistake the land as sliding by. You need to focus closely on the boat to see that it's what's moving along. In the same way, surveying all things with body and mind in disarray, you may mistake your own mind and own nature as enduring. Focusing closely on your life and turning back within will clear up the notion that all things are without self.

Firewood turns to ash, which does not turn back again to firewood. But do not view the ASH as coming next after the FIREWOOD that comes first. FIREWOOD occupies the status of FIREWOOD in the world, coming first before coming next. It is disassociated from anything you may say

precedes or follows it. ASH has the status of ASH in the world, coming next after coming first.

Life too is an ephemeral status; death too is an ephemeral status. Consider the example of winter and spring. We do not think of winter turning to spring, or speak of spring turning to summer.

A person gaining satori is like the moon nestling in water. The moon remains dry, the water unbroken. A broad, intense glow nestles in inches of water; the entirety of the orb and arching sky both nestle even in the dew on a reed, nestle even in a single drop of water. Just as the moon does not pierce the water, satori does not rend the person. Just as the dewdrop does not obstruct the moon, the person does not obstruct satori. [One is] deep to the extent [the other] is high. The longer you probe the shallows and depths, the broader the moon you should discern in the heavens.

If you think that the truth you know already suffices, then that truth has not yet permeated your body and mind. Not until truth suffuses your body and mind will you find that part of it is insufficient.

Imagine, for example, looking out from a boat in the middle of the sea, no land in sight, nothing but the curving horizon. But we know the ocean is not really curved, nor straight. It has a boundless number of additional aspects. It could be a palace or a jeweled necklace. It is simply our eyes which at this moment cannot go beyond seeing it as curved. The same holds for everything. Whether amidst the grit or beyond the ordinary, of all the many aspects you see and understand only those that you have developed the ability to. You must realize things are not merely curved or straight; the features of land and sea are countless, constituting entire worlds. You must realize this holds not

only for yourself, but for things beneath your feet as well, or even a drop of water.

Swim as they may, fish find no end to the sea; fly as they may, birds find no end to the sky. Yet fish and bird still remain in the sea and sky as they have for ages. They simply make greater use of it when needs are great. They make lesser use of it when demands are less. There may be no creatures that do not thus fully explore their contour and no places where they do not rove, but birds would perish instantly if they left the sky, fish would perish instantly if they left the sea. You know the sea sustains life; you know the sky sustains life. I say the bird sustains life; I say the fish sustains life. Thus must life sustain the fish; thus must life sustain the bird.

Beyond this there is an inevitable further progression. Such is the nature of practice/realization.

Yet were bird or fish to attempt to completely understand sea or completely understand sky before trying to move through sea or sky, they would not be able to attain their way or attain their place, in either sea or sky. This place, if attained, unfolds truth in accord with life there. This way, if attained, is truth unfolding in accord with life along it. This way and this place are neither great nor small, neither within nor without, neither already there nor yet to appear

In similar fashion, to seek and find the way of the buddha, learn a single thing and apply a single thing; engage a single deed and master a single deed. Here lies the place and here passes the way, blurry at first because they emerge and evolve as one exhausts Buddhist teachings. Do not assume that the goal is necessarily a lesson knowa-

ble by one's own intellect. Ultimate answers may unfold instantly but not always unfold mysteries; how then can this be called unfolding?

Hotetsu Zenji of Mt. Mayoku was fanning himself. A monk approached and asked, "They say 'WIND'S NATURE ETERNALLY ABIDES, NO PLACE NOT VISITED.' So why does the Master use a fan too?" The teacher replied, "You understand only that the breeze is by its nature constant, but not the notion that there is nowhere it has never reached." The monk said, "What do you mean, then, what is this notion of NO PLACE NOT VISITED? At this point the master simply fanned himself. The monk clasped his hands in veneration.

Such is the experience that validates Buddhist doctrine, its true message come alive. "I don't need to use a fan, since even if I don't I'll be able to feel the breeze if it's really constant." Saying this misses the meaning both of constancy and of the nature of the breeze. It is this natural, constant breeze through the buddha's mansion that unfolds the gilding of the earth and transfigures the milky waters of the Great River.

Shobogenzo Genjo Koan Fascicle One

This was written around mid-autumn, the first year of Tempuku and
given to lay student Koshu Yo of Chinzei.

[Revised in] the Mizunoe-ne year of Kencho.

A PARTICULAR HOUR

Uji

The old buddha said:

STANDING ON HIGH, HIGH MOUNTAIN PEAKS AT A PARTICULAR HOUR; MOVING
ALONG DEEP, DEEP OCEAN BOTTOMS AT A PARTICULAR HOUR.

THREE HEADS AND EIGHT ARMS AT A PARTICULAR HOUR; SIXTEEN-FOOT AND EIGHT-
FOOT AT A PARTICULAR HOUR.

THE STAFF AND WHISK AT A PARTICULAR HOUR; WOODEN PILLARS AND STONE LAN-
TERNS AT A PARTICULAR HOUR.

THE THIRD SON OF CHANG AND FOURTH SON OF LEE AT A PARTICULAR HOUR; THE
GREAT EARTH AND VACANT SKY AT A PARTICULAR HOUR.

“A particular hour” tells us that an hour is inherently particular; the
particular is invariably an hour.

The gilded sixteen-foot figure has its hour, which thus glows in
splendor. It must be considered within the twelve hours of the now.
The three heads and eight arms have their hour, which thus must be
part and parcel of the twelve hours of the now.

We cannot really judge how long or short these “hours” we speak
of actually are, but their passage leaves traces too clear to doubt.

Mere lack of doubt, however, does not imply understanding. People do not invariably have doubts about every single thing or every single object they fail to understand, and the doubts they do have may not be justified by what led up to them. But in any case the hour for these doubts will soon arrive.

You must realize that we self-blanket the universe, with an individual hour for every individual head and object in that blanketed universe.

And just as no individual hour defines another, neither does any individual thing.

Thus, in a single hour many minds arise; in a single mind many hours arise.

This also applies to practice in attainment of the way, where the self looks at its self-arraying. We thus find the principle that the self is a matter of the hour.

This principle of how things are just so should drive us to explore how the earth is overflowing with countless elephants and grasses, each of those individual grasses and elephants finding itself within that overflowing earth.

It is this dynamic that launches us on our practice.

Reaching the state of being just so is, itself, one of those grasses or elephants. This holds whether or not you engage that elephant, whether or not you engage that grass.

The hour is always exactly and uniquely just so, which is why any particular hour is an hour of overflowing; a particular grass and a par-

ticular elephant both have their hour. The overflowing existence of the overflowing world suffuses every single one of those scattered hours. Stop and ponder whether or not the overflowing world could overflow with existence outside the hour of the now.

But the reaction of normal people who haven't studied Buddhism when they hear the phrase "a particular hour" is to think "Well, at a particular hour there were the three heads and eight arms and then at a particular hour there was the gilded sixteen-foot [image of the buddha]"—as if these hours were hills or streams in some landscape they had passed through. They say to themselves: "The landscape may still be back there but I've come through it and now dwell in the vermilion tower of the jade palace; I'm here, the scenery is back there, the heavens are up there, and the earth is down here."

But this is just one way of looking at the situation. If you say there was an "I" at the hour of climbing some hill or crossing some stream, then surely that "I" must have incorporated that hour. The hour could not have just taken off leaving the "I" behind. With no past or future aspect, the hour of climbing the hill was the absolute, eternal now of a particular hour. Even if the hour did retain a past and future aspect, the "I" would have embodied the absolute, eternal now in a particular hour. Does not the hour of crossing hill and dale gulp down the hour to come in the vermilion tower, and does it not then spit it out again?

Yesterday there was an hour for the three heads and eight arms; today there is an hour for the sixteen-foot and eight-foot [buddha figures].

But the concept of past and present does not lie in going into the wilderness to look out over a vista of thousands of peaks or tens of thousands of peaks, fading away [into the distance].

We experience the three heads and eight arms singularly within our particular hour; they may seem far away but are actually in the absolute, eternal now. We experience the sixteen-foot and eight-foot singularly within our particular hour; they may seem to be elsewhere but are actually in the absolute, eternal now.

Which means there is also an hour for the pine; there is also an hour for the bamboo.

Do not fixate on the hour flying away; do not focus on flying away being what it does. If the hour simply flew away it would inevitably leave an opening. Blame the preconception that hours slip away for your failure to listen to the truth of this particular hour.

The crux of the matter is that the all-encompassing existences filling the all-encompassing universe link themselves to form each and every individual hour. Each is a particular hour, making it an hour particular to me.

The interesting thing about particular hours is how they stepflow. They stepflow from today, as we call it, to tomorrow; they stepflow from today to yesterday; they stepflow from yesterday to today. They stepflow from today to today; they stepflow from tomorrow to tomorrow.

Because of how hours stepflow, past and present neither fall on top of each other nor overlap, while Seigen also has his hour, Obaku also has his hour, and Baso and Sekito also have their hours.

Because self and other are inherently a matter of hours, practice and enlightenment are a matter of a variety of hours.

There is an hour for plunging into the mud and diving into the water as well.

This is missing from the average person's reality, no matter how hard that average person looks at things from his average person perspective on the now with its web of connections and dependencies. That reality has the effect before long of ensnaring our average person in that very web of connections and dependencies.

Believing this hour, this existence to be outside reality, he perceives the gilded sixteen-foot figure to be outside himself. Attempts to run away from the absence of his gilded sixteen-foot figure are themselves scattered fragments of a particular hour, scattered glimpses on the part of one who has not yet witnessed the truth.

What paints the horse [at noontime] and ram [in the early afternoon] onto our world now? It is also the ascending and descending and rising and falling that brings things to be the way they are supposed to be. There is also the hour of the rat [at midnight] and also the hour of the tiger [before dawn], also the hour of man and also the hour of buddhas.

Each hour bears witness to the world in its fullness in the form of the three heads and eight arms; it bears witness to the world in its fullness in the form of the gilded sixteen-foot figure.

We can take this fullness to the extreme by world-filling the full world with the full world. Or doing the gilded buddha on the gilded buddha,

unfolding the truth-seeking mind, practice, enlightenment, and nirvana, which are all particular, are hours.

The fullness of the hour invariably takes fullness to the extreme with the fullness of existence, leaving nothing behind. Since leaving nothing behind means leaving nothing behind, even a semi-extreme way of bringing a particular hour to its fullness is an extreme way of bringing a semi-particular hour to its.

Even a seeming misstep is a particular matter. Looking more closely, before and after the misstep unfolds is where the particular hour dwells. At a particular hour we assume with vigor our dwelling place in the truth. Neither go out of your way to see it as not particular, nor force yourself to see it as being so.

Your fixation on the inevitable passage of the hour prevents you from understanding that it is still here.

Understanding this is a matter of the hour and comes from nothing else.

No skinbag who perceives hours as coming or going can fathom where the particular hour dwells, much less find the hour of breakthrough.

Even if they accept where the hour resides, many do not sustain the embodiment of its intrinsic just-so nature. Even if they have long embodied its just-so nature, they cannot avoid groping for its appearance in front of them. The ordinary person's version of this particular hour would limit awakening and nirvana just to the coming and going aspects of the particular hour.

This particular hour, however, unfolds uncaged. Heavenly monarchs and their subjects, now unfolding to the left, unfolding to the right, are, even as you read this at a particular hour, brimming with our energy. On land and sea unfolds a particular hour for these masses, now filled with strength. Light or dark, man or beast, we form this particular hour into the present with every drop of our power, we step it through the flow with every fiber of our being. Were it otherwise, know that not a single phenomenon or object would unfold or stepflow whatsoever.

Do not think of stepflowing as being like a storm moving east to west. The world is bursting with change, with ebbing and flowing, with stepflowing. Take spring as an example of stepflowing. There are multitudes of springscapes, each a stepflow. Stepflowing requires no external assistance. Spring, for instance, always stepflows by simply stepflowing across itself. Stepflowing is not something spring has, but rather something it is. Stepflowing comes to fruition in each spring hour of the now. Roll this back and forth in your mind until you've grasped it in full. Think when you hear the word "stepflowing" that the world is outside of your head and that things that can stepflow continue slogging toward the east past world after world, eon after eon, and you will simply be distracted from your studies.

Yakusan visited the Zen master Baso to ask him a question, as it happens at the suggestion of Sekito. "I've come close to understanding the three vehicles and twelve divisions. But why did Bodhidharma come from the West?"

To this query, Baso replied, "Have him arch his eyebrow and wink his eye at a particular hour; have him not do so at a particular hour.

Having him arch his eyebrow and wink his eye is the thing to do at a particular hour; at a particular hour it is not..."

Hearing this, Yakusan had a great realization, and told Baso, "Back when I was studying with Sekito I felt like a mosquito up on an iron ox."

Baso has a unique way of looking at things. Think of the eyebrow as a mountain and the eye as an ocean, for a mountain can be an eyebrow just as surely as an ocean can be an eye. Think of "having him arch" a mountain; think of "having him wink" an ocean. "Being the thing to do" becomes familiar to "him"; "having" leads "him" along. Not being the thing to do does not imply not having him do it; not having him do something does not imply its not being the thing to do. Either is a particular hour.

There is an hour for the mountain, and an hour for the ocean. Neither the mountain nor the ocean could exist outside of the hour, and the hour could not fail to exist within the immediate now of the mountain and the ocean. If the hour could shatter, the mountain and the ocean could shatter as well. Since the hour cannot shatter, neither can the mountain or the ocean.

In the light of this truth we see the morning star rising over the awakened one in the iris of whose eye is reflected the flower raised in his hand. Were that not an hour it could not have been just so.

Zen master Sekken was of the lineage of Rinzai, the anointed successor to Shuzan. Once he pronounced to the assembly: "Particular hours bring meaning but not words. Particular hours bring words but not meaning. Particular hours bring both meaning and words; particular hours bring neither meaning nor words."

There is a particular hour for both meaning and words; particular hours bring them and particular hours do not. If the hour that brings them is yet to arrive, that [simply] means that the current hour has not yet brought them. If meaning is a wild ass, words are a horse. Make a horse of words and you will have a wild ass of meaning. "Bring" does not indicate already there; "not bring" does not indicate yet to come. This is the nature of this particular hour.

It is what [the hour] brings, not what it does not, that defines what is being brought; it is what [the hour] does not bring, not what it does, that defines what is not being brought.

As for meaning, you see the meaning when you touch the meaning. As for words, you see the words when you touch the words. As for defining, you see the defining when you touch the defining.

Defining defines definition; that is the hour. Other things may benefit from definition, but never have been defined by defining.

I meet someone; someone meets someone. I meet myself; the emergent meets the emergent. These things could not be just so without the benefit of the hour.

The hour of meaning is when the truth unfolds, the hour of words when logic rises. In the hour that brings them we cast off the shell; in the hour that doesn't, one stays and one leaves. Confirm this for yourself.

You must be this particular hour.

Both of these revered teachers may have been saying the same thing, but isn't there something to add? Particular hours semi-bring us meaning and words; particular hours semi-don't.

Consider these things deeply.

Having him arch his eyebrow and wink his eye is a semi-particular hour; having him arch his eyebrow and wink his eye is a jumbled particular hour; not having him arch his eyebrow and wink his eye is a jumbled hour of jumbled particularity.

Study these things coming and going, study them arriving and leaving; this is the hour of the particular hour.

Written this first day of winter, the first year of Ninji at Kosho Horinji.

Copied by Ejo during the summer retreat in the first year of Kangen
(1243).

WHY THE FIRST PATRIARCH CAME FROM THE WEST

Soshi Seirai I

GREAT MASTER SHUTO OF KYOGEN-JI (SUCCESSOR OF DAI-I AND WHOSE MONK'S NAME WAS CHIKAN) PREACHED TO THE ASSEMBLY, SAYING: "YOU'RE LIKE A PERSON WHO HAS CLIMBED UP A TREE IN A THOUSAND-FOOT GORGE, WITH YOUR MOUTH AROUND A LIMB; YOUR FEET ARE UNABLE TO STEP UP ON THE TREE, YOUR HANDS ARE UNABLE TO PULL UP ON THE BRANCH. THEN A PERSON UNEXPECTEDLY APPEARS BENEATH THE TREE AND ASKS WHY THE FIRST PATRIARCH CAME FROM THE WEST. IN THIS SITUATION, IF YOU RESPOND TO HIM AND OPEN YOUR MOUTH YOU WILL FORFEIT YOUR LIFE, BODY LOST. IF YOU DON'T RESPOND YOU FAIL HIS QUESTION. QUICK, WHAT WOULD YOU DO AT THAT POINT?"

AT THAT POINT PRACTICE LEADER KOTO SHO STEPPED OUT OF THE ASSEMBLY SAYING, INSTEAD OF ASKING US WHAT WE WOULD DO IF WE HAD CLIMBED THE TREE, PLEASE, MASTER, TELL US WHAT WE SHOULD DO IF WE HAVEN'T CLIMBED IT YET? HO-HO, THE MASTER LAUGHED LOUDLY.

Rare are the nuggets of insight in the many analyses and commentaries on this story. All will likely leave you scratching your head, as it were.

Leaving that aside, by pondering this while conjuring forth imponderability, conjuring forth unponderingliness, before you know it you will in effect join old Kyogen on his cushion. Once you've joined old Kyogen sitting ramrod straight on his cushion, examine the story in detail without waiting further for Kyogen to open his mouth. Do not just peer at it borrowing old Kyogen's eye; peer into it conjuring up Shakyamuni Buddha's storehouse of eyes on the true law.

You're like a person who has climbed up a tree in a thousand-foot gorge. Scrutinize these words calmly. What does person mean? [Someone who] is no more a post than he is a pillar.

Even if the truth of the buddhas, truth of the old masters cracks his face, he should not mishandle this encounter between himself and the other.

The place where the person has climbed up a tree is neither the boundless earth, nor the top of a hundred-foot pole, but a thousand-foot gorge. Even if he were to fall off, it would be inside the thousand-foot gorge.

There are times you fall down and there are times you climb up. The story is saying to you're like a person who has climbed up a tree inside a thousand-foot gorge. This obviously means there are times you climb up. In this case, it is a thousand feet to the top, a thousand feet to the bottom. It is a thousand feet on the left, a thousand feet on the right. It is a thousand feet over here, a thousand feet over there. It is a thou-

sand feet for such a person and a thousand feet up the tree. Traditionally a thousand feet has been like this.

But we must also ask how great the measure of a thousand feet is. We are told it is as the measure of the ancient mirror, as the measure of a brazier, as the measure of a tombstone of which we are told.

WITH YOUR MOUTH AROUND A LIMB. What kind of mouth is this? You may claim not to know the mouth's overall width or overall aperture, but you should know its location from the time spent going down the limb searching for branches and plucking leave. It is the time spent gripping the limb that forms the mouth.

Thus the whole mouth is the branch; the whole branch is the mouth. The mouth courses through the body; the coursing mouth is the body.

YOUR FEET ARE UNABLE TO STEP UP ON THE TREE because the tree itself steps up on the tree. It's as if the feet themselves step up on the feet. YOUR HANDS ARE UNABLE TO PULL UP ON THE BRANCH because the branch itself pulls up on the branch. It's as if the hands themselves pull up on the hands. Even so, your feet still move back and forth, your hands still open and close. You are not alone in initially thinking [you] are hanging in the void. But does not hanging in the void pale in comparison to having your mouth around a limb?

A PERSON UNEXPECTEDLY APPEARING BENEATH THE TREE ASKS WHY THE FIRST PATRIARCH CAME FROM THE WEST. This A PERSON UNEXPECTEDLY APPEARING BENEATH THE TREE means something like a person appearing within the tree, as if the person were the tree. It's a person unexpectedly appearing beneath a person. That gives us tree asking tree, person asking person.

The totality of the tree is the totality of the question; the totality of why [the first patriarch] came from the west is the question of why he came from the west.

The questioner also has his mouth around a limb when asking the question. If he did not have his mouth around a limb he would not be able to ask the question. Mouth full, he is voiceless; full of words, he is mouthless. When asking why [the first patriarch] came from the west, his mouth is around why he came from the west.

IF YOU RESPOND TO HIM BY OPENING YOUR MOUTH, YOU'LL FORFEIT YOUR LIFE, BODY LOST. Now scrutinize closely the words IF YOU RESPOND TO HIM BY OPENING YOUR MOUTH. It sounds as if you could respond to him without opening your mouth. In that case you would not forfeit your life and lose your body.

Whether you open your mouth or do not open your mouth does not prevent you from having your mouth around the branch. Opening and closing are not necessarily all there is to the mouth, although a mouth can open and close. That means that the mouth can always remain around the limb without that preventing it from opening and closing.

Respond to him by opening your mouth means responding to him by opening the branch, or responding to him by opening why [the first patriarch] came from the west.

Any response to him without opening why [the first patriarch] came from the west is not a response to why he came from the west. This is inherently not responding to him, and that would be preserving your life, body whole, not forfeiting your life, body lost.

Once you've forfeited your life, body lost, you cannot respond to him. Having said that, in his heart Kyogen is not unwilling to respond to him. But this would probably result simply in forfeiting life, body lost. Obviously until you respond to him you'll be preserving your life, body protected. The moment you respond to him you'll invigorate your life, body freed.

Having your mouth full is the way for everyone, one might deduce. You should respond to him, you should respond to yourself. You should question yourself, you should question him. This is having your mouth around the truth. Having your mouth around the limb means having your mouth around the truth.

When you respond to him you're opening another one on top of your mouth. If you do not respond to him, even though you may fail his question, you do not fail your own question.

Thus we see that without exception the buddhas and old masters responding to why [the first patriarch] came from the west have all given their response having encountered a time of having climbed up a tree with their mouth around a limb.

Master Juken of Seccho said, "It's easy to say something up in a tree. It's hard to say something at the bottom of a tree. [This] old monk is up in the tree, so bring on your questions.

BRING ON YOUR QUESTIONS—no matter how hard you try, the question will be too late, the question being brought after the answer. I ask old awls everywhere, past and present, is Kyogen's loud laugh of ho-ho SAYING SOMETHING UP IN A TREE, OR SAYING SOMETHING AT THE BOTTOM OF A TREE? Is

it responding to why [the first patriarch] came from the west, or not responding to why he came from the west? Try saying something.

Shobogenzo Soshi Seirai I Fascicle Sixty Two

Preached to the assembly within the remote mountains of Etsuu on the 4th day of the 2nd month in the 2nd year of Kangen (kinoetatsu)

Transcribed on the 22nd day of the sixth month in the 2nd year of Kōan (tsuchinotou) at Eihei-ji, Kichijō-san

TRUTH UNFOLDING: NOTES

This essay is one of Dogen's most important. He took pains to revise it before his death and placed it prominently at the beginning of *Shobogenzo*.¹ Given the title *Genjo Koan*, a newcomer to Dogen or Zen might think it was about koans, those Zen riddles such as "the sound of one hand clapping." People with some familiarity with Zen will have a more sophisticated understanding of koans, knowing them as stories or sayings traditionally used in study and practice. But whether they are riddles or didactic devices, why would Dogen write an entire essay about koans?

The answer is that Dogen is using *koan* in its original, broader sense of "unerring truth or principle." Originally it referred to a public notice, issued by the central government or other public authority; a public record, such as of a court case; or a magistrate's table. It thus gained the connotation of something of great authority or veracity, an immutable decree. In this translation we use the translation "truth."²

¹ In the case of the 75-fascicle version. *Genjo Koan* comes third in the later 95-fascicle version, in which *Dialog on the Way of Commitment* comes first.

² Ideas from other translators include "universe" (Nishijima/Cross), "issue" (Cleary), "fundamental point" (Tanahashi), "suchness" (Waddell/Abe), and "absolute reality" (Cook). Augusto Alcade claims that "ko" means the absolute and "an" means the relative.

What precisely is this truth? Everyone reading this essay will have their own answer. Some will see Dogen describing enlightenment. Some will see him describing the process of getting there. A deeper understanding would synthesize the two, viewing the essay as providing us with Dogen's answer to the basic problem of practice and enlightenment: why, if we are all inherently perfect, do we need to work at being so? This paradox consumed Dogen from his early years, and was the existential question that motivated him to make his ambitious crossing to China at the age of 24.

In the essay, Dogen starts by describing the way of the buddha as a synthesis of prevailing worldviews; presents the steps in the progression toward it; examines the relationship between before and after, comparing them to fire and ash; describes enlightenment as something reflected in us like moon in water; ponders the interrelatedness of ourselves and our environment, birds and fish serving as metaphor; and concludes with a story about a stubborn old Zen master who insists on pushing air around with his fan even though a breeze is blowing all around him.

Woven throughout the essay is an important subtext: we cannot attain the way with our own efforts or faculties; we cannot assume we are the center of the universe; we cannot necessarily trust our perceptions, and we cannot succeed in intellectualizing our way to truth.

These, says Dogen, are the truths that “unfold.” “Unfold” is the first half of the essay's Japanese title, *genjo*, commonly translated as “manifest” or “realize.” It is constructed from two individual Sino-Japanese ideographs.

The first character, pronounced *gen*, originally evoked the luster of a gem, the radical (component) for which can be found at its left.³ This character's meanings include “appear,” “current,” “actual,” “present,” and even “reality.”

The second character, *jo*, depicts a semi-circular cutting instrument. From this comes the meaning of a repeated shaving motion, giving rise to senses including “take form,” “become,” “complete,” “make,” “develop,” “achieve,” “accomplish,” and “bear fruit.” (This wide range of meanings is typical of Chinese characters.)

(Both the *gen* and the *jo* of *genjo* can refer to either the process or the resulting state. Thus *gen* can be either the appearance or the state of having appeared;

³ The right side is the character for “sight,” but in this case is providing only the phonetic value.

jo can be either the becoming or the state of having become. To the Eastern mind the two overlap, are two sides of the same coin.)

The combined word *genjo* does not exist in contemporary Japanese.⁴ Its two component characters could combine in different ways: “appears and then takes form”; “the apparent takes form,” or “the forming appears.” Among commonly seen translations, “manifest” overemphasizes the “appearing,” while “realize” and “actualize” focus too heavily on the “taking form.” This translation uses “unfold” as the most succinct, balanced expression that encompasses both appearing and taking form.⁵

The final task is to combine *genjo* and *koan* into an English translation for the essay’s title. (The result should ideally be able to function as either a noun or a verb, since Dogen uses it in both ways within the essay.) After selecting “truth” for *koan* and “unfold” for *genjo*, it is a quick step to “Truth Unfolding.” (“Unfolding Truth” or “Truth of Unfolding”⁶ would be additional possibilities.)

We now move on to the essay itself.

Viewing various things as Buddhistic things then we have wisdom and we have practice, we have life and we have death, we have buddhas and we have sentient beings.

Dogen begins by discussing a particular worldview called Buddhism, which, like any worldview, calls out certain things, identifies them, and assigns them names. By “Buddhistic” Dogen is referring not to the way of the buddha which he will go on to describe in the essay, but to the doctrines of Buddhism with a capital “B,” the prevailing religion of the time. He is saying, in other words, that the application of Buddhistic doctrines to the various things in the world gives rise to and promotes a variety of concepts. Dogen is not criticizing this view per se, but is preparing to say that it represents only one side of the coin.

This translation takes more liberties with this sentence than perhaps any other in the essay, at least outside of this paragraph. The reason is that unlike most of Dogen, a “direct” translation of this sentence, no matter how carefully constructed, fails to convey the point and would have the unfortunate effect of

⁴ In modern Chinese it has the unrelated meaning “ready-made.”

⁵ Yasutani, however, claims that *genjo* simply means phenomena.

⁶ Alternative views include Nishiari, in *Shobogenzo Keiteki*, who says that *genjo koan* means “everything in the world as it actually is.” He emphasizes the “public notice” etymology of *koan* and interprets it as “immutable decree from above.” Kim believes that *genjo koan* refers to a *koan* realized in everyday life, as opposed to *kosoku koan*, a *koan* for study.

starting the essay off on a jarring, puzzling note. Such a direct translation would be something along the lines of, “When various things are/become Buddhist things, there is wisdom and there is practice, there is life and there is death, there are buddhas and there are sentient beings.” The key problem lies in the initial clause and the term *naru* it uses to tie together “various things” and “Buddhistic things.” This term, although extremely common, nevertheless encompasses a series of meanings ranging from “to be” to “to become,” including nuances such as “to be formed into.”⁷

Even as translated, of course, the sentence retains a Buddhist perspective, but it can easily be recast to give it a contemporary, Western tilt: “When you look at various things in religious terms, you see divine knowledge and prayer, life and death, and saints and sinners.”

“Things,” occurring twice in the sentence, is the Sino-Japanese character commonly rendered as *dharma*. By itself, *dharma* has a complex range of connotations, including phenomenon, law, truth, and doctrine. In conjunction with “various,” it simply refers to “various things.” In conjunction with “buddha,” it forms the word *buddhadharma*, which most commonly refers to Buddhist teachings or doctrine. This translation somewhat unconventionally renders this as “Buddhist things,” to tie together “various things” and “Buddhist things” in the same way that the appearance of the word *dharma* in both does in the original.⁸

⁷ Thus the great majority of translators simply go with “to be,” resulting in formulations like “when all dharmas/things are buddhadharma.” In a mere five words, corresponding to nine Japanese characters in the original, they have already dug themselves into a deep hole. Most basically, no reader can understand it, which would seem to be a fatal flaw in a translation.

Once you’ve made the mistake of imagining that this sentence refers, not to the Buddhist world view, but rather some sort of sacred buddhadharmization of the world, it seems odd in the extreme that this holy state might pertain, as the sentence implies, at some points in time but not at others. Tanahashi solves this problem in one bold stroke by simply rewriting Dogen’s words, from “when” to “as”, in this sentence and the next.

⁸ *Buddhadharma* can also have the connotation of the “truth of the buddha” or “the law of the buddha.” Taking that interpretation would give rise to translations such as “when various things are the law of the buddha.” But this gives rise to two problems. First, how can things be the law of the buddha sometimes but not others? Second, shouldn’t all things be the law of the buddha, not just some “various” things? The first problem has led at least one popular English translation (Tanahashi) to try to dodge the inconsistency by switching from “when” to “as,” but that finds scant support in the original, commentaries, modern Japanese translations, or the following context. The second problem has led some translators to arbitrarily translate “various things” as “all things” (even though Dogen explicitly uses a different word in the very next sentence where he does actually mean “all things”).

The specific Buddhist concepts are presented as three contrasting pairs: wisdom vs. practice, life vs. death, and buddhas vs. sentient beings. Dogen is emphasizing how Buddhist theology *distinguishes* between the elements of these pairs.⁹ The original is emblematic of Dogen's precise structure: A *ari* B *ari*, C *ari* D *ari*, E *ari* F *ari*.¹⁰

"Wisdom" is, in the original, a Sino-Japanese compound composed of two characters indicating delusion and enlightenment. The emphasis is not on the individual components or the dichotomy between them, but rather the concept bracketed by the two extremes—in other words, "wisdom."

The lower-case "buddha" simply refers to awakened people. "Sentient beings" is used in the informal sense of non-buddhas, or ordinary people. The characters used to write this word could be literally transcribed as "hosts of the living."

Dogen now proceeds to present a second, alternative worldview.

Stripping all things of their essence, we have no delusion and no satori, we have no Buddhas and no sentient beings, we have no beginnings and no endings.

This sentence paints a nihilistic, content-less philosophy that deprives the world of recognizable concepts. The "essence" or "self" that things are stripped of is the bundle of concepts and expectations that we possess regarding them—in other words, their identities.¹¹ Dogen makes frequent reference to things' selves in his writings.

"All things" here is literally "ten thousand *dharma*s," where "ten thousand," often translated as "myriad," is used in the sense of "a great many." (Compare

⁹ Yasuda translates this passage as "can be clearly discerned" to emphasize the point about distinctions. (Kimura 2005) uses "complementarity of selfsame A and B."

¹⁰ Tanahashi bollixes up this regular structure with his "there is delusion and realization, practice, and birth and death, and there are buddhas and sentient beings." This leaves out the "and" tying together the elements of the first pair and the "there is" on the middle pair,

¹¹ Tanahashi uses "myriad things without an abiding self." Cleary misreads the syntax as "when myriad things are all not self." Waddell/Abe have "when all things are without self." Nishijima/Cross have the garbled "when the myriad *dharma*s are each not of the self." Masunaga gets a special prize for creativity with "when all things belong to the not-self." A few translators assume that the *ware* or self must refer to the reader, leading to odd results along the lines of "when we have no self with all things."

this to “various things” in the preceding sentence, literally “various/many/several *dharmas*.”¹²)

The structure of the series of concepts in this sentence is, like the first, highly symmetrical, with three similarly contrasting pairs: NO confusion NO *satori*, NO buddhas NO sentient beings, NO growth NO decay. While in the first sentence Dogen paired wisdom (delusion/enlightenment) with practice, here he is pairing confusion and *satori*, using native Japanese words for both.¹³ While in the first sentence he paired life and death, here he pairs beginnings with endings.¹⁴ Actually, the character for life and beginning is the same. This versatile character has a wide range of meanings also including “birth” and “arising.”

The way of the buddha inherently soars above such extravagance and austerity, uniting beginning and ending, uniting delusion and satori, uniting sentient being and buddha.

Dogen now describes the true way—*butsudo*, the “path of the *buddha*.” It “soars beyond” the “extravagance” of Buddhist doctrine and the “austerity” of nihilism.¹⁵ It is a synthesis of the two prevailing, yet flawed, worldviews.

What the synthesis yields is presented as yet another triplet of pairs, but with a key difference: each is a single, two-character Chinese compound. For example, in contrast to the first sentence where we had “life and death,” or the second

¹² Some translators (Tanahashi, Cleary, Nishijima/Cross) do distinguish, although incompletely, between the two, using “all things” (or “all *dharmas*”) in the first sentence and “myriad things” (or “myriad *dharmas*”) in the second. In *Understanding Shobogenzo* Nishijima translates the first as “all things and phenomena” and the second as “millions of things and phenomena.”

Mizuno claims that “various things” refers to the four elements, five skandhas, and eighteen worlds. Nishiari and Yasutani both claim that “all things” is equivalent to “various things.”

¹³ A distinction which is lost if the two different sets of words are mechanically translated identically as “delusion” and “realization” as most translators do.

¹⁴ These two characters are the same as those used, in negative form, in the firewood section to come, where they are translated “without beginning” and “without end.”

¹⁵ The “extravagance and austerity”—a single Sino-Japanese compound—has confused an entire generation of translators, who fail to link it to the excess of concepts in the first sentence and the poverty thereof in the second. At least two modern Japanese translations (Nakamura and Mizuno) simply take this as a general metaphor for opposites. Cleary thinks that the *buddha* way “sprang forth from abundance and paucity”, although this would seem to be a misreading. Tanahashi thinks that “the *buddha* way is...leaping clear of the many and the one,” while Waddell has “beyond any fullness and lack.” Bennett thinks this means “transcends unity and duality,” while Nishiyama/Stevens somehow believe that the *buddha* way transcends “*itself* and any idea of abundance or lack”; another translator thinks it transcends the relative and the absolute. Yasuda has “transcends nothing or something.”

where we found “beginnings and endings,” in this sentence we encounter a compound which might best be rendered in English with a slash as “beginning/ending.” Dogen’s intent is to show that these are an indivisible, united pair. In the absence of a comparable lexical device in English, the translation conveys this explicitly by introducing the word “uniting.”

The specific concepts introduced in these first three paragraphs were by no means chosen lightly. In fact, they are precisely the topics Dogen will be addressing throughout the rest of the essay. And they are also closely related to each other. In fact, the three pairs can be viewed as alternative perspectives on the same basic issue. Practice, life, and sentient beings can be grouped together on one side, and wisdom, death and buddhas on the other.

These first three sentences have been the subject of extensive analysis and commentary since first written more than seven hundred and fifty years ago.¹⁶

It is falling blossoms uniting love and sorrow, spreading weeds uniting indifference and dislike, nothing more.

This synthesis, Dogen now says, applies not just to abstract concepts such as life and death, but to our everyday experiences—including a single pink cherry blossom drifting down to the ground. The marriage of love and sorrow in the scattering of the blossoms is itself the way of the buddha. There is no need here to cast about for analogies of flowers to enlightenment or weeds to delusion.

This seems like a fitting, even obvious, conclusion to the paragraph. Yet this sentence has tormented translators and commentators throughout the years. Superficially, it might appear that Dogen is abruptly switching gears from

¹⁶ One commentator, a revered if opinionated Japanese Zen master, comments on the first sentence as follows. “This is the ‘gate of setting up differences.’ It’s the relative position. But it’s not the simple relative position that the unenlightened person sees. It’s the relative position that has the absolute position as its ground. In other words it’s the relative in the midst of the absolute. If we reduce this ‘relative in the midst of the absolute’ to ‘affirmation with negation as its ground,’ conceptually it seems easy to grasp, but that’s a delusion.

“It’s the absolute position. The absolute position definitely cannot be pictured in the mind of the unenlightened person. This, also, is not the simple absolute position; it’s the absolute position with the relative position as its ground. In other words it’s the absolute in the midst of the relative. If you express this ‘absolute in the midst of the relative’ conceptually as ‘negation with affirmation as its ground,’ it seems to give you the feeling of understanding, but that also, after all, is a delusion.”

This would seem to be seriously overcomplicating the matter; it sounds like a graduate seminar on Eastern Philosophy. The reader is probably better off appreciating Dogen’s clearly presented, compelling insights directly.

philosophy to an admittedly pretty metaphor about flowers and weeds (or grasses). The only transition is one of Dogen's verbal tics that literally means something like "and even if it can be said that it is like the above". Many translations shorten this to "but" or "yet," giving the misleading impression that the flowers falling and weeds spreading somehow contrast with what was said in the previous sentence about the way of the buddha.

Compounding the mystery is Dogen's use of two unfamiliar compounds with reference to the flowers falling and weeds spreading. The first combines love with sorrow (or regret), the second abandonment (or resignation or indifference) with dislike. Failing to find any additional clues to work from, and in some cases misled by Japanese commentators, translators have interpreted the first as "attachment" and the second as "aversion."¹⁷

But why would Dogen suddenly segue into a critique of attachment here, following his succinct description of the "way of the buddha"? The key to understanding the sentence is to realize that the two unfamiliar adverbial compounds in the original, the ones describing flowers falling and weeds spreading, serve to pair opposites (love/sorrow, indifference/dislike) in exactly the same way as the compounds in the previous sentence (beginning/ending). Dogen has adopted (or more likely invented) unfamiliar words precisely for this reason. The sentence, then, far from being a disconnected aside about attachment, is in fact an integral part of, a natural conclusion to, the entire paragraph.

If delusion is betaking oneself to practice and realize everything, enlightenment is everything moving ahead to practice and realize oneself. Buddhas are greatly enlightened about such delusion. Sentient beings are greatly deluded about such enlightenment. Some gain enlightenment atop enlightenment; some compound delusion amid delusion.

Dogen now turns immediately to the first of the pairs of concepts mentioned in the initial paragraph, to show us how his concept of synthesizing worldviews applies to delusion and enlightenment. He defines delusion and enlightenment, then explains how enlightenment is not separate from delusion but rather is about

¹⁷ Yielding translations such as "flowers fall in attachment," "flowers fall amid our longing," or "flowers, while loved, fall" (although in all three cases, it almost certainly should be "blossoms," not "flowers"). Nishiyama/Stevens simply give with "people hate to see flowers fall and do not like weeds to grow." Some scholars believe that it is the attachment which *causes* the flowers to fall, the aversion which *causes* the weeds to spread. This interpretation may stem from an incorrect parsing of the Japanese *nomi* ("only/merely/simply/solely"), as indicating that blossoms scatter *only* when we are attached to them. Some translators, including Tanahashi, omit this "simply".

delusion; delusion is not separate from enlightenment but rather is about enlightenment. This paragraph again boasts the extremely clean structure typical of Dogen, one that is not only esthetically pleasing but also helps to convey the message more clearly.

The slightly awkward “betaking” translates a Japanese word referring to carrying a relatively heavy object for some distance. “Practice and realize” translates the troublesome Japanese word *shusho*, the first part of which undeniably refers to practice or training, while the second, translated “realize” here, literally means proof or evidence (or, as a verb, prove, validate, or demonstrate).

Dogen is saying, in other words, that enlightenment is self-reinforcing, confusion self-perpetuating. In this he is echoing Jesus, who preached: “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.”¹⁸

Buddhas who are truly buddhas do not necessarily realize that they are buddhas. The fact remains, though, that they are illuminated buddhas and go on illuminating buddhaness.

“Illuminated buddhas” and “illuminating buddhaness” both use the *sho* word meaning witness, prove, enlighten, realize, or actualize. Translators have handled this in a number of ways.¹⁹

While you may get closer to understanding by exerting body and soul to take in sights, or exerting body and soul to take in sounds, such is not the harboring of a reflection in a mirror, such is not water and moon. When one thing is illuminated others will be dark.

Elaborating on his counsel not to “betake” ourselves to practice and realize everything, Dogen now cautions against overdependence on our visual and auditory faculties. The mirror does not set out to find things to reflect, he says; water

¹⁸ Matthew 13:12.

¹⁹ Tanahashi gives “They are actualized buddhas, who go on actualizing buddhas.” Other translations include Waddell: “Yet they are realized, fully confirmed Buddhas—and they go on realizing Buddhahood continuously.” Nishijima/Cross: “They are buddhas in the state of experience, and they go on experiencing the state of buddha.” Cleary: “nevertheless it is realizing buddhahood—Buddhas go on realizing.” Nishiyama/Stevens: “However, they are still enlightened buddhas and continually realize Buddha.” Luetchford: “We are still buddhas, and we go on experiencing the state of buddha.” Bennett: “A truly enlightened Buddha expresses his Buddhahood in his daily life.”

does not set out to find the moon. Self-initiated efforts will invariably end up focusing on one thing to the detriment of others.²⁰

This interpretation, however, is one with which very few commentators and translators concur. Some believe that Dogen is telling us about how the buddhas from the previous paragraph perceive things. That, however, would seem to be excluded by the final sentence, the one about illumination and darkness; the unlikely implication would be that buddhas illuminate some things but are in the dark about others.

Other commentators—most, actually—believe that Dogen was telling us how we *should* perceive things, rather than how *not* to. But there is ample evidence to contradict this view. First, note that the well-known image of the moon in the water, which Dogen says our visual and auditory attempts at perception do *not* resemble, nearly always has positive associations.²¹ Second, the Japanese word used to refer to “exerting” body and mind can be construed as having a negative tone, as in “straining” or “struggling,” rather than the upbeat “unified” that many translators adopt.²² Third, it would seem to be hard to interpret the final phrase/sentence about illuminating some things and leaving others in the dark as being positive.²³ Fourth, there are syntactic clues in the sentence, including a *but* (rendered as the initial “while” in the translation) in “...understand more closely,

²⁰ Indeed, scientists have recently found that sustained attention on an object impairs one’s perception of it [Ling, Carrasco].

²¹ Although opinions vary on this point, such as that of Nishiari Bokusan.

²² The repetition of “exerting body and soul,” found in the original and replicated in the translation, also hints at straining. However, instead of “exerting” the Japanese could also be “raising (or engaging or mustering) body/mind”, as well as, arguably, “uniting body and mind,” “body and mind as one,” “whole body and mind,” “all our body and mind.”

²³ Although that does not prevent many translators from doing so. Mizuno believes this refers to subject vs. object, giving an elaborate rendition: “If there is one side of seeing and hearing, it is not necessary to speak of being seen or being heard; when speaking of being seen or being heard, there is no need to speak of the subject seeing or hearing.” Murakami agrees, saying “subject and object are one, so attempts to know just one will result in the other disappearing.” Most English translators give more literal translations. Tanahashi thinks this phrase is connected to the previous and gives “Unlike things and their reflections in the mirror, and unlike the moon and its reflection in the water, when one side is illumined, the other side is dark.” Others include Waddell and Abe, who think we’re still talking about buddhas: “When they [buddhas] realize one side, the other side is in darkness”; also, “When one side is realized the other side is dark,” “When we affirm one side, we are blind to the other side”; “when one side is enlightened, the other side is dark”; “when you witness one side, one side is obscure”; “if you look at only one side, the other is dark”; “when we understand one side, the other side remains in darkness”; and “when we are experiencing one side, we are blind to the other side.”

but such is not the harboring..." Finally, recall the earlier part of the essay where Dogen clearly cautioned us against "betaking oneself to practice and realize" things.

In conclusion, it seems indisputable that Dogen is in fact making a cautionary statement about unilateral attempts to understand the world via our visual and auditory organs of perception, as if reality was something "out there" that we could reach towards with light beams coming out of our eyes. Jesus taught something similar: "By hearing you will hear, and will in no way understand; seeing you will see, and will in no way perceive."²⁴

"Sights" in the original is literally "colors"; "sounds" is "voices."

Learning this way of the buddha means learning oneself. Learning oneself means forgetting oneself. Forgetting oneself means being illuminated by all things. Being illuminated by all things means dropping the veil from the body and mind of oneself and the body and mind of others.

If reaching this state of synthesis—the way of the buddha—is not possible by means of watching and listening with our eyes and ears, then what is the right approach? Dogen lays out a simple roadmap. This passage has come to be perhaps the most widely quoted of any in Dogen's writings, thanks to the unmatched economy and clarity with which it encapsulates the path of Buddhist spiritual development.

One common translation of the first sentence is "to study the buddha way is to study yourself," differing both in sentence structure and in the choice of "study" instead of "learn." With regard to the structure, "X means Y," the approach taken here, seems closer to the meaning of the original, which literally is "saying X is Y." With regard to studying vs. learning, the original Japanese word²⁵ has a broad range of meanings, including "following" and "mastering." "Learn" conveys this better than "study," and also works better in opposition to "forget," which comes up in the following sentence.

Some translations use "the self" rather than "oneself." The original word,²⁶ however, is best thought of as having the everyday meaning of "oneself," rather than referring to some specific Buddhist concept of "self."²⁷

²⁴ Matthew 13:14.

²⁵ *Narau.*

²⁶ *Jiko.*

²⁷ Which would usually be *ware*.

“Let all things illuminate you” involves the same *sho* character used in the statements about illuminated buddhas continuing to illuminate and about illuminating one thing while others are dark. It might also be “let all things bear witness to you.”

We now encounter Dogen’s renowned formulation “dropping the veil from body and mind.” It is said that Dogen achieved enlightenment at Mt. Tendo in China, where he was studying, when he heard his master Nyojo say to a fellow meditator who was nodding off, “Zazen is dropping the veil from body and mind,” perhaps slapping him at the same time with his slipper as was said to be his habit.²⁸

The phrase in question, *shinjin datsuraku* in Japanese, has, for the entire decades-long history of English-language Dogen scholarship, been translated consistently as “casting off body and mind,” with only minor variations such as “drop off,” “drop away,” “slough off,” “fall away,” or “shed.” But whatever the specific English words chosen, the phrase remains impenetrable. Is it really possible to lay aside our body, any more than we can drop off our mind (or spirit, soul, heart, or essence, which are other possible renderings of the Sino-Japanese character)? Is this a statement of Zen philosophy so profound that only advanced practitioners can understand it?²⁹

That would seem unlikely. For instance, in *Dialog on the Way of Commitment*, an introduction to Zen explicitly addressing beginners, Dogen counsels us to “neither bow, nor chant, nor read sutras, nor engage in rituals, nor burn in-

²⁸ One theory is that Nyojo actually said “dropping the dust from mind,” and that this was either misheard by Dogen or inspired him to come up with his own formulation. That seems less than likely, however, since the two phrases are not homophonous in Chinese (although they are in Japanese).

²⁹ Consider, for example, the following explanation by a respected Zen teacher (private communication). ‘*Shinjin* used in *shinjin datsuraku* signifies the locus of the illusory phenomenal experience or the *nirmanakaya* in forgetfulness of *sambhogakaya* and *dharmakaya*. It is the world of experience that arises through the superimposition of false predications or false thoughts upon the whole field of *nirmanakaya* that is ontologically grounded in *dharmakaya* and constitutes a whole with *dharmakaya* and *sambhogakaya*. Therefore, in the context of Zen and Dogen’s teaching, “body-mind” or “bodymind” is not an incorrect translation. If one wants to be precise, the “body” (*kaya*) is the gestalt of physical geometrization, while the “mind” is the gestalt of thought/mentation arising from a complex of false predications which is superimposed on the whole process of geometrization [...] In the experience of spiritual awakening or enlightenment, this whole process of superimposition drops out or is cast off, and the triune constitution of wholeness, that is *nirmanakaya-sambhogakaya-dharmakaya*, in its wholeness shines forth.’ Note that *nirmanakaya*, *sambhogakaya*, and *dharmakaya* are elements of a Hinayana doctrine known as *Trikaya*, which holds that Buddha has three aspects or “bodies.”

cense; simply sit and *shinjin datsuraku*.” In the current essay as well, he is introducing the concept in the context of an eminently straightforward series of steps of personal development.

To solve the mystery of what this phrase could mean, let us deconstruct it. First, we break it into the two words *shinjin* and *datsuraku*. Then we break each of those words into their individual constituent characters, analyze them, and put them back together to see what ensues. Finally, we examine possible meanings resulting from recombining the two words.

Shinjin is the easier of the two component words. It is made up of the characters for body and for mind, essence, heart, or soul. Combined, the meaning could be “body and mind,” “body/mind,” or possibly “body vs. mind.”

The *datsu* of *datsuraku*³⁰ can mean take off, strip off, peel off, or remove (including clothing); escape, break out, release, or extricate; get rid of; or be left out. The character is said to derive from the image of removing a piece of meat from the enclosing hide. The “escape” meaning (which is related to the other meanings in that it is you yourself being extricated, from a situation) seems implausible here; what would it mean to “escape and fall”? More likely are the meanings of undress, remove, or get rid of; think of pulling off one’s shirt and dropping it on the floor. *Raku* is straightforward: it simply means fall, drop, tumble, slide, sink, land, or decline (although it can also mean fall behind or leave behind.) We can therefore tentatively gloss *datsuraku* as “removing and dropping.”

Together *shinjin datsuraku* thus indicates that the body and mind, or body/mind is involved somehow in something being removed and dropped. The common wisdom is that it is body/mind itself which is being removed and dropped, that it is, in grammatical terms, the direct object of the removing and dropping. This is what yields the traditional translation of “cast off body and mind.”

There are clues, however, that this popular interpretation might be wrong. Dogen celebrated body and mind. For example, just a few sentences later in this very essay, he refers to “truth permeating the body and mind.” Are we to cast off that which truth permeates? Moreover, he described the layout of Eihei-ji by referring to the *sodo* (monks’ hall, where they meditated, ate, and slept) on the

³⁰ *Datsuraku* exists in contemporary Japanese, but means to miss the cut (for a sports team), fall out of contention (in a political race), or be left out (as a page from a book), meanings that are not very helpful here.

left as providing nutrition for the mind, the *kuin* (kitchen) on the right as providing nutrition for the body. Is he counseling us to cast off the very body and mind for which the monastery was architected to provide nutrition? Finally, Dogen devoted an entire fascicle of *Shobogenzo*, called *Shinjin Gakudo*, to a discussion of the path of body/mind-based learning. How does one learn with body and mind if they are cast off?

To resolve these kinds of inconsistencies, commentators have adopted a variety of tortured interpretations. One commentator puts words in Dogen's mouth, ending up with the formulation "letting go of the body/mind *that is not your own*." Another imagines, essentially, that Dogen omitted the equivalent of the word "bad" before body/mind, that he was really just talking about casting off some bad, pre-enlightened body and mind, and that after enlightenment you'll get a new, shiny, improved one. Yet another holds that Dogen was talking about casting off the body and mind of the self, rather than some other body and mind—one presumably not of the self.

To find the solution requires exploring possibilities for what Dogen is saying other than to cast off body and mind themselves. Alternatives include casting off something else *with* body and mind; casting something off *in a way* which is bodyminded; or casting something *away from* body and mind.

There are two final clues in this particular case. The first is that here Dogen adds "of oneself" and "of others' selves" as qualifiers to body/mind. This only deepens reservations about the "casting off body and mind" formulation; I may be able to cast off my own body and mind, but how could I possibly cast off somebody else's? Again, commentators have developed elaborate, but ultimately unconvincing explanations to resolve this inconsistency. For instance, some say that Dogen is talking about eliminating or conflating the physical and mental aspects of objects around us. But if someone else's body and mind are involved, not only does the hypothesis of body and mind as direct object ("cast off body and mind") not make sense, but neither does that of body and mind as instrument ("cast off something *with* body and mind"), since I cannot cast something off or do anything else with someone else's body and mind; nor that of body and mind as modality ("cast off in body/mind fashion"), since I cannot cast off something in the fashion of someone else's body and mind. We are left with the final alternative: casting something away from body and mind. This makes perfect sense in the context of Dogen's self/other distinction. We can indeed remove whatever it is from both our own body/mind and that of others.

Second, whereas elsewhere in his writings Dogen typically uses the four-character compound form *shinjin datsuraku*, leaving us no explicit clues as to the relationship between *shinjin* and *datsuraku*, here he uses the two words within a sentence, providing us with some additional syntactic hints about their relationship. It is noteworthy that he avoided the obvious, direct syntax he could have chosen had he wanted to say the equivalent of “cast off body and mind.” Instead, he chooses a more roundabout syntax which can be rendered literally as “with regard to your own body and mind and that of others.”

It appears clear, then, that the intent is to strip off or remove something covering body and mind. But what? The answer is implicit: it’s whatever is doing the covering—the cover, or veil. We thus arrive at the translation “dropping the veil from body and mind.” Far from being a loose, interpretative translation, this corresponds almost perfectly, literally, character-for-character to the original: *body-mind-unveil-drop*.

Future scholarship, of course, could well “unveil” other, more compelling meanings.

There may be pauses along this trail of enlightenment, stretching out its emergence.

Along this path, however, there may be detours, Dogen says, and the overall process is thus one that may take time.

However, once again commentators’ opinions on the meaning of this sentence diverge. The original for “trail” in “trail of enlightenment” is a word which could just as easily mean “trace,” “mark,” “impression,” “remnant,” or “vestige.” The original for “pause” is a word which could also mean “cease.” “Stretch out its emergence” is an unfamiliar word, which character by character means “long-long-emerge,” interpreted by some as “eternal” or “never-ending.” Combining these alternatives can yield completely different translations such as Yasutani’s “the traces of enlightenment come to an end, and this traceless enlightenment is continued endlessly.”³¹

³¹ Other translations include “No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly” (Tanahashi); “All trace of enlightenment disappears, and this traceless enlightenment continues on without end” (Waddell/Abe), unfortunately not matching the original, which says what is continuing is the trace, not traceless enlightenment, and does not contain the word “all”; “When you have reached this stage you will be detached even from enlightenment but will practice it continually without thinking about it” (Nishiyama/Stevens), which is completely made up; “There is ceasing the traces of enlightenment, which causes one to forever leave the traces of enlightenment which is cessation” (Cleary); “There is [also] remaining content with the traces of enlightenment, and one must eternally emerge from this resting”

Note, however, that the entire paragraph so far has been a clear progression, each sentence sharing a common structure and delineating one step in the sequence. That this sentence completely departs from that structure suggests that it is not describing another step, but rather commenting on the entire progression to date, which would support an interpretation of trail rather than trace. Second, the sentence in question involves syntax which does not mean just “there *are* [pauses]”, but rather “there *may be*” or “there *sometimes are*.” In other words, it is discussing something that happens only in some cases. These are the factors behind the translation presented here.

People who start off by going out and looking for the dharma will only distance themselves from where it lies. Receive the truth innate in yourself, and you will instantly assume the measure of the real person.

Dogen now repeats, for the third time, that truth (*dharma*) is not something to be found through ego-directed search.

Many translators imagine Dogen is saying that beginning seekers are far from the truth.³² But the original is clear, if read carefully: the distancing from the truth is not, of course, something inherent in beginners, but rather is the fault of starting off with ego-driven pursuit of the truth. As the eighth-century Buddhist scholar Shantideva wrote: “Those seeking to escape from suffering hasten right toward their own misery.”³³

Sailing along on a boat, scanning the shore, you may mistake the land as sliding by. You need to focus closely on the boat to see that it's what's moving along.

(Cook); “There is a state in which the traces of realization are forgotten, and it manifests the traces of forgotten realization for a long, long time” (Nishijima/Cross); “[Then] we can forget the [mental] trace of realization, and show the [real] signs of forgotten realization continually, moment by moment” (Nishijima); and the creative “It means wiping out even attachment to Satori. Wiping out attachment to Satori, we must enter actual society” (Masunaga). Mizuno, in her modern Japanese translation, gives the equivalent of “the traces of enlightenment go into a state of complete rest, and those completely resting traces of enlightenment continue as is forever.” Nakamura tries “There are not even any traces of enlightenment. That continues to be the case forever.”

³² The problem is the word *hajimete*, which can mean “first time” and which many translators therefore assume refers to beginners, but can also mean “at first,” referring to how you start your quest to find the dharma, as confirmed by modern Japanese translations. Incorrect English translations include Cleary, with “when people first seek the Teaching, they are far from the bounds of the Teaching.” Tanahashi tries to wiggle his way out by adding the word “imagine” (“you imagine you’re far away”) which is unfortunately not found in the original.

³³ A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life, I:28.

Dogen now invites us out for a sail. Perhaps he was recalling the initial leg of his trip to China in 1224, along the Inland Sea of Japan from Kyoto to Hakata, where the shore would likely have been in constant view to the right. In this compelling real-world analogy, he likens our tendency to self-centric views of the world to the common illusion that a moving vessel you're riding in constitutes a fixed point of reference.

An anecdote attributed to Ludwig Wittgenstein, the great twentieth century philosopher who has been compared to Dogen, comes to mind. "I've always wondered why," he once asked a friend, "people have always thought that sun rotated around the Earth." His friend replied, "Well, obviously that's because it *looks* that way." Wittgenstein's response: "But what would it have looked like if the Earth was rotating around the sun?"

In the same way, surveying all things with body and mind in disarray, you may mistake your own mind and own nature as enduring. Focusing closely on your life and turning back within will clear up the notion that all things are without self.

"Clear up the notion that all things are without self" is the opposite of what most translations say. Most give something equivalent to "clarify the idea that all things are without self."³⁴

The sentence in question is clearly discussing everything being without self; that is beyond dispute. The issue is whether it's a "notion" that needs to be "cleared up," as translated here, or a "truth" that "becomes evident." Let's marshal the evidence pro and con. Lexical clues are sparse. The word translated here as "clear up" can indeed also have the nuance of "clarify" or "reveal." And the word translated as the somewhat pejorative "notion" can in fact also mean "idea" or "concept" (and can also, depending on the context, be "assertion" or "teaching"). However, it sometimes comes with a slight negative tinge, as in "preconception," "abstraction," or "supposition."

Looking at the context, however, we first note that this formulation is very similar—nearly identical, actually—to that in the second paragraph of the essay (p. 69). There, recall, viewing things as without self was something Dogen was holding up as a nihilistically flawed, or at best one-sided, approach to the world, one of two aspects to be synthesized into the way of the buddha. It is therefore

³⁴ For instance, one popular translation has "it will be clear that nothing at all has unchanging self," which omits "principle/idea/notion" and adds "unchanging." Other attempts include "all things have no selfhood," "myriad dharmas are not self," "things are not self," and "things have no permanent self."

highly implausible that he would be presenting that here as something we need to see clearly.

Second, remember that the analogy is to a boat which superficially seems to hold constant position, but on closer examination proves to be moving. Corresponding to the moving boat, Dogen says, is our mind and nature. The shore being “scanned,” which initially appears to move but then is seen to be fixed, corresponds in the analogy to the “all things” being “surveyed.” The conclusion is that the “all things” are in fact fixed like the shore. This corresponds to all things having, rather than not having, a “self” or “identity”. The notion that they do not, in other words, is what is cleared up by focusing closely on your life and turning back within, thus discovering that it is your mind and nature which are in flux.

What is translated here as “focusing closely on your life and turning back within” uses two unfamiliar words: literally, it reads “become close to *anri* (practice, [daily] life, or deeds) and [thus?] return to your *kori* (origin/right here/where you are/within you).”

Firewood turns to ash, which does not turn back again to firewood.

Dogen now directs his focus to the second of the pairs of concepts he introduced in the initial paragraph—life and death, beginnings and endings. He presents a metaphor involving that most mundane of daily necessities in thirteenth century Japan, the firewood essential to cooking and heating, and how it burns down to ash.

But do not view the ASH as coming next after the FIREWOOD that comes first. FIREWOOD occupies the status of FIREWOOD in the world, coming first before coming next. It is dissociated from anything you may say precedes or follows it. ASH has the status of ASH in the world, coming next after coming first.

ASH and FIREWOOD are capitalized here to show how in the original they are written using *kanji* characters, in contrast to the first sentence, where they are written in native Japanese.³⁵ It’s somewhat of a mystery what Dogen intended to accomplish with this device. Perhaps he was just trying to introduce stylistic variation in the text. Perhaps he was trying to distinguish between the native Japanese *takigi* for firewood, which may refer more to small branches and twigs gathered from the forest, and *maki*, one reading of the Chinese character, which tends to refer to prepared firewood. (Most texts give the *takigi* pronunciation in

³⁵ This point seems to have been overlooked by virtually all translators.

small letters (*furigana*) next to the Chinese character, but that may have been added by a later copyist.) Perhaps he was using the Chinese character to evoke associations with the firewood found in various Chinese Buddhist writings, where it is a common analogy for life; firewood running out can be a metaphor for death, or enlightenment. Perhaps he was using native Japanese to refer to the firewood itself and the Chinese character to refer to the concept of firewood.

“Firewood occupies the status of firewood in the world” is literally, “firewood resides in the dharma position (or ‘phenomenal expression’) of firewood;” the same for “ash” later in the paragraph.³⁶

Just as firewood, having turned completely to ash, cannot return to firewood again, a person, having died, cannot return to life.

Dogen now returns to using native Japanese for firewood and ash, and we therefore return to lower case.

It is up to the reader to decide whether Dogen here is talking about life and death itself, or is using it as a metaphor. Although in general we need to resist the temptation to over-interpret what Dogen is saying, here he may well be talking about practice. That would make sense, considering that this section directly follows one talking about “focusing closely on your life” and “turning back within.” Specifically, Dogen may be comparing firewood (life) to one’s pre-focused self, fire to practice, and ash (death) to the results of the process. After practicing, one never “returns” to one’s pre-practice self. Yet the pre-practice self and post-practice self are both there all along.

Yet it is established dogma in Buddhist theology that life is not held to turn to death; thus they refer to “without beginning.” It is an established Buddhist teaching that death does not turn to life; thus they refer to “without end.”

Nishiari comments that this section is extremely difficult, that it has been the subject of spirited commentary over the years, and that he himself failed to understand it for many years, imagining that Dogen must have gotten “without beginning” and “without end” backwards. Another commentator declares that he is sure that without beginning and without end are in fact reversed, but that it

³⁶ (Kimura 2005) uses “dimensionality.”

“Existing before and existing after,” translated here as “from beginning to end,” is amenable to an alternative parsing of “a beginning exists and an end exists,” which is adopted by many translators, but seems unlikely to have been what Dogen was trying to say.

doesn't really matter since this is describing such a state of consciousness so advanced that it's all the same anyway.

The difficulty is most likely due to a failure to realize that Dogen is criticizing the official Buddhist stance. It might seem implausible that Dogen would actually criticize Buddhist teachings (*buddhadharma*, as in the very first line of the essay). But actually his writings are filled with such criticisms, including an implicit one in the very first line of this essay. Here, he is calling illogical the official Buddhist stance that life does not turn to death; of course it does. The doctrine is illogical that death does not turn to life; of course it does. As Mark Twain famously said, "I was dead for billions of years before I was born, and it caused me no great inconvenience." The application of terms such as "without beginning" to life (or perhaps to death; the translation preserves the ambiguity), or "without end" to death (or perhaps to life), he seems to be saying, are not helpful. In other words, Dogen says, it is not surprising if you (like Nishiari) have a hard time understanding such theological concepts.

("Without beginning" and "without end" use the same characters found in the initial paragraph of this essay, but with the negative prefix *fu*.³⁷ The resulting terms can both be found in the Chinese version of the Heart Sutra. "Beginning" is the character for life, arising, growth, emergence, the same used earlier in the paragraph, where it was translated as "life" in the context of a human being. "End" is the character for death, extinction, or destruction.)

"Buddhist teaching" is literally "Buddhist turning of the dharma wheel," a common expression referring to the preaching and propagation of Buddhism.

Life too is an ephemeral status; death too is an ephemeral status. Consider the example of winter and spring. We do not think of winter turning to spring, or speak of spring turning to summer.

Life, like firewood—the "too" is explicably omitted from several popular translations—is evanescent.³⁸ So is death, like ash.

³⁷ Translators take a variety of approaches to the negative *fu* prefix, including "not," "un," and "non." Japanese and Chinese have a number of such negative prefixes, including *mu*, *hi*, and *mi*, and distinguishing among them is no easy task. Generally speaking, *mu* emphasizes lack of existence, *hi* focuses on difference, and *mi* on lack so far. *Fu* can be said to emphasize the lack of an attribute—in this case, beginning or ending.

³⁸ "An expression complete this moment" according to one translation, or "an instantaneous situation" according to another. However, the Japanese *ichiji*, lit. one-time, has more of a nuance of "temporary" or "provisional" than "instantaneous" or "this moment."

The English expression “turn to” found throughout this section is the translation of the Japanese term *naru* used consistently by Dogen to characterize the relationship between firewood and ash, life and death, and the seasons. The dictionary tells us that this word means “become.” But *naru* has a range of subtle nuances which the English “become” fails to adequately convey. When we say “A becomes B,” we usually think of A assuming the *nature* of B. With *naru*, on the other hand, the flavor is that A retains its essence while assuming the *form* of B. There is also a touch of destiny and finality inherent in *naru*. This can best be seen in the reference to the seasons, where some translations have Dogen stating that “we do not think of winter as *becoming* spring.” But in English that is precisely what we think! What we do not think of is spring retaining its essence as it assumes the form of summer, or summer being the purpose of spring. In this translation, *naru* has consistently been translated as “turn to” in an attempt to more effectively convey these nuances.³⁹

A person gaining satori is like the moon nestling in water. The moon remains dry, the water unbroken. A broad, intense glow nestles in inches of water; the entirety of the orb and arching sky both nestle even in the dew on a reed, nestle even in a single drop of water. Just as the moon does not pierce the water, satori does not rend the person. Just as the dewdrop does not obstruct the moon, the person does not obstruct satori.

This meticulously constructed paragraph may be one of the most succinct, compelling and poetic ruminations on *satori* found anywhere in Buddhist literature.

The moon in the water is a powerful, recurring motif in Buddhist literature. In the eighth century, Zen Master Hsuan Chuen of Yung Chia, a student of Daikan Eno, wrote in *The Ode to Enlightenment*: “It is easy to recognize images in a mirror, but who can grasp the Moon from the Water? The One Nature perfectly pervades all others. The One Dharma enfolds all other dharmas. The One Moon is reflected by all waters,” while Dogen himself, of course, devoted an entire fascicle (*Tsuki*) in *Shobogenzo* to the moon. James Austin, an eminent student of the neurobiology of Zen, believes, based in part on personal experience, that the image of the moon describes a specific visual aspect of the experience of *sato-*

³⁹ Other translators use a variety of constructions for this, such as, in addition to “become,” “turn into,” “pass into,” or “change into,” and for the reverse process (here “end up again”) “return,” “revert,” and “go back to being.”

ri.⁴⁰ Outside of the Zen tradition, haiku poets such as Buson have also celebrated the moon's reflection in water: "Escaped the nets/Escaped the ropes/moon on water." The moon would have been full the evenings of the mid-autumn days when Dogen dipped brush in ink to write this essay.

One existing translation simply has "enlightenment is like the moon reflected on the water." Unfortunately, nothing in this translation but the moon and the water matches the original. First, the original explicitly refers to a *person* and to his or her *gaining* of *satori*, elements which certainly should be preserved in translation. Second, the target of the analogy—what the gaining of *satori* is being compared to—is not the moon, reflected or otherwise, but rather the *fact* of the moon's nestling in the water, the nestling itself. Third, the original clearly has the moon "nestling" (or "resting," "being harbored," or "being cradled"; less poetically, "being housed" or "being stationed") rather than "reflected." One does wish translators would take more care with such important passages.

[One is] deep to the extent [the other] is high.

This sentence is difficult, and translations diverge. The original makes no explicit mention of the moon, water, *satori*, or person, leaving the reader to make those connections. This translation mirrors the original in omitting these concrete references.⁴¹

The longer you probe the shallows and depths, the broader the moon you should discern in the heavens.

Virtually every element of this sentence is subject to multiple interpretations, which has yielded a bewildering variety of translations (one translator simply omitted it, perhaps wisely).⁴² The original says literally "long-short of time

⁴⁰ [Aus 2006], p. 406.

⁴¹ A number of translations attempt to provide unwanted help by inserting words not present in the original. Examples include "the depth of the drop is the height of the moon"; "the deeper the moonlight reflected in the water, the higher the moon itself"; and "depths of the dewdrop cannot contain the heights of the moon and the sky" (although that translation seems to reverse the meaning). One contemporary Japanese translation inserts words from the *satori*/person side of the analogy with "the depth of your self-knowledge is invariably the magnitude of the height [of the dharma]."

⁴² One popular translation imagines that instead of probing bodies of water of various sizes, or determining the width of the moon, what is involved here is "manifesting" the "vastness" of the dewdrop and "realizing" the "limitlessness" of the "moonlight in the sky." One is at a loss where to start in analyzing this fanciful translation. The original does not refer to a dewdrop, but simply bodies of waters large and small; contains nothing that could be construed as "ma-

(subj.), study big-water small-water, should/must determine moon's width-narrowness."

Interpretations of the reference to time in this sentence range from the duration of the reflection, to the speed of the arrival of enlightenment or the length of time it persists. This translation assumes that it refers to the inspection or probing process—in other words, the length of practice.

If you think that the truth you know already suffices, then that truth has not yet permeated your body and mind. Not until truth suffuses your body and mind will you find that part of it is insufficient.

The words "suffice" and "suffuse" in the translation here are an attempt to reproduce a stylistic feature of the original where the Japanese for the two words⁴³ share a character component.

Imagine, for example, looking out from a boat in the middle of the sea, no land in sight, nothing but the curving horizon. But we know the ocean is not really curved, nor straight. It has a boundless number of additional aspects. It could be a palace or a jeweled necklace. It is simply our eyes which at this moment cannot go beyond seeing it as curved. The same holds for everything. Whether amidst the grit or beyond the ordinary, of all the many aspects you see and understand only those that you have developed the ability to. You must realize things are not merely curved or straight; the features of land and sea are countless, constituting entire worlds. You must realize this holds not only for yourself, but for things beneath your feet as well, or even a drop of water.

Dogen now takes us on another boat ride, this one in the middle of the ocean. Here he may be recalling his open-ocean crossing of the East China Sea in 1224, where he would have been out of sight of land for nearly the entire three-week voyage. His point is to emphasize the subjective and partial nature of our vision, in particular with regard to the topic just discussed—our knowledge of our own level of the truth.

The reference to palace and jeweled necklace is an allusion to a passage in Buddhist literature.⁴⁴ A fish—swimming through the water—would see it as a palace, an angel—floating above it—would see it as a jeweled necklace; and, although not mentioned here, a devil would see it as pus and blood.

nifesting" them or their "vastness"; fails to refer to "realizing"; and talks about the moon, not moonlight.

⁴³ *tareri* and *juusoku*.

⁴⁴ Asvabhava's commentary on Asanga's *Treatise on Emerging Mahayana*.

“Amidst the grit or beyond the ordinary” is a four-character Chinese compound. Translations vary.⁴⁵

Swim as they may, fish find no end to the sea; fly as they may, birds find no end to the sky. Yet fish and bird still remain in the sea and sky as they have for ages. They simply make greater use of it when needs are great. They make lesser use of it when demands are less.

Dogen now introduces a double analogy involving fish and birds and sea and sky, as a vehicle for discussing ourselves and our environment.

Is some distinction between fish and bird implied? The fish, in Buddhism, signifies fearlessness and happiness, swimming as it does freely and spontaneously through the ocean of suffering, suspended effortlessly, eyes always open. There is also the *mokugyo*, or wooden fish, a roundish, hollow percussion instrument used in Mahayana Buddhism as an accompaniment to group chanting, or as a signal to start and end meditation sessions. Another type of wooden fish may be hung either in front of the *kuin* (dining hall), where it is struck to call monks to a meal, or in the *sodo* (monks’ residence hall), as at Eihei-ji, where the fish in question measures a massive twelve feet in length.

Birds have been favored topics of analogies by spiritual leaders, poets, and writers throughout the ages. Jesus said, “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns.”⁴⁶ The historical Buddha reportedly compared monks to birds: “Just as a bird takes its wings with it wherever it flies, so the monk takes his robes and bowl with him wherever he goes.” William Blake explicitly associated flight with detachment: “He who Binds Himself to a Joy/Does the winged life destroy/He who kisses the joy as it flies/Lives in Eternity’s sunrise.” Perhaps Dogen was associating a bird’s two wings with the two worldviews he presented in the initial lines of the essay. Perhaps the ocean represents suffering and the sky liberation. But this is all mere speculation.

⁴⁵ (Kimura 2005) has “in the realms of samsara and nirvana.” Tanahashi has “dusty world and world beyond conditions.” Nishijima/Cross: “in dust and out of the frame,” which is literal if slightly infelicitous, commenting that this refers to the secular world vs. the world experienced in the Buddhist state.

⁴⁶ Matthew 6:26.

What are the “needs” and “demands” referred to here? Two contemporary Japanese translators think it means the need to move around. Others take different approaches.⁴⁷ This translation treats the original fairly literally.

There may be no creatures that do not thus fully explore their contour and no places where they do not rove, but birds would perish instantly if they left the sky, fish would perish instantly if they left the sea.

The “contours” in question could be either those of the creatures or of the space in which they find themselves, an ambiguity preserved in the translation. However, other translators have different ideas about this sentence.⁴⁸ In any case, this all seems rather understandable by Dogen standards. But just when we’re ready for some kind of insight or conclusion, Dogen launches into a seemingly opaque series of Chinese anagrams.

You know the sea sustains life; you know the sky sustains life. I say the bird sustains life; I say the fish sustains life. Thus must life sustain the fish; thus must life sustain the bird.

This paragraph bears the hallmarks of Dogen’s obsessively elegant prosodic structure. To make the point here that bird, fish, sky,⁴⁹ sea, and life stand in an

⁴⁷ Tanahashi has “When their activity is large their field is large. When their need is small their field is small,” but the first “activity” seems questionable, it’s hard to see where “field” comes from, and the “simply” in the original is missing. Masunaga has “When their need is great, there is great activity. When their need is small, there is small activity,” conflating the two words used in the Japanese into the single English word “need” and also forgetting “simply.” Cook sticks closely to the original, with “It is just that when there is a great need, the use is great, and when there is a small need, the use is small,” finally picking up the “only” in the original Japanese that other translators inexplicably skipped over. For “use,” another translator has “function.” Nishijima has an interesting twist: “The more [water or sky] they use, the more useful it is; the less [water or sky] they need, the less useful it is.” This is similar to Nishiari’s commentary.

⁴⁸ Tanahashi gives “each of them totally covers its full range, and each of them totally experiences its realm, eliminating Dogen’s double negative, substituting “range” for “contour” (which also could be “edge” or “boundary”), repeating “totally” in the second phrase even though the original contains no such word, and replacing “rove” (an obscure two-character compound meaning literally “step-fly” with “experience.” (Kimura 2005): has “they always reach the furthest bound of the moment, and explore the whole distance of the moment,” introducing the concept of moment. Nishijima/Cross also depart substantially from the original, with “none fails to realize its limitations at every moment, and none fails to somersault freely at every place,” successfully if awkwardly preserving the double negative, but getting most of the rest of the sentence wrong. Neither translation manages to connect to the following phrase about fish and birds dying if they leave their environs.

⁴⁹ Should it be sky or air, and sea or water? In the preceding part Dogen spells out *sora* (sky) in hiragana, so the corresponding character in the section being addressed here can legitimate-

intimate interrelationship, he repeats, six times, the same compact four-character Chinese construction.⁵⁰ To better see the exceedingly precise and symmetrical structure, let's line it up like this:

以水為命	しりぬべし、
以空為命	しりぬべし。
以鳥為命	あり、
以魚為命	あり。
以命為鳥	なるべし、
以命為魚	なるべし。

The repeated construction on the left is a common one in Chinese, used in set phrases such as “the sea as one's breadbasket” or “from the sea one's daily bread.”⁵¹ The first character basically indicates something instrumental, the third “for (the benefit of).” The entire phrase has an almost perfect English translation in the form of “A sustains B.”⁵² The sea sustains life.⁵³

Let us now move on to the three modifiers following each pair of phrases. The first is *shirinubeshi*, indicating simply that this is something everybody knows.⁵⁴ After all, when translated correctly as “the sea sustains life,” it is indeed something everyone knows.

ly be translated as sky, rather than air. The Sino-Japanese character for “water” is used throughout, but by analogy with “sky” we prefer “sea.”

⁵⁰ 以○為○.

⁵¹ 以海為田

⁵² Taking a bit of poetic license, we might also consider substituting “nourish,” or even “nurture,” for “sustain.” A perfectionist might be inclined to find a translation which mapped the four-element lexical structure more precisely, such as “from sea comes life.”

⁵³ Nishijima translates this as: “So we can conclude that water is life and the sky is life; at the same time, birds are life, and fish are life; it may be that life is birds and life is fish.” And Tanahashi has: “Know that water is life and air is life. The bird is life and the fish is life. Life must be the bird and life must be the fish.” Unfortunately, the only correct things about either of these translations are the nouns life, bird, fish, water and air. Both translators have missed the meaning of the central construct 以 A 為 B, translating it flaccidly as “A is B”. The alternatives are hardly better; Waddell/Abe has “A means B,” Genku Kimura “A constitutes B.” Jaffe comes a bit closer with “because of A there is B.” Presumably the Japanese are getting confused by the old kanbun habit of reading Chinese as Japanese, which in this case ends up as “A wo motte B wo nasu”.

⁵⁴ And not Nishijima's “So we can conclude” nor Tanahashi's “Know that.”

The modifier on the next two phrases is *ari*.⁵⁵ This word indicates a declaration by Dogen; he is telling us something he believes we don't know, actually quite startling: that we can switch gears and think of birds and fish as being sustainers of life as well.

The final modifier is *narubeshi*, which quite clearly means "it must follow."⁵⁶

This whole paragraph, then, is not some muddle of random Zen-like equivocating of birds, fish, sea, sky, and life, but a carefully constructed syllogism, building upon what came before. First, there's something we all know: that the sea and sky sustain life. Then, there's something new Dogen is telling us: that the birds and fish also sustain life. Finally, there's the insightful conclusion: that life sustains birds, and life sustains fish, and, by extension, life sustains, in the context of the overall analogy here, our very selves.⁵⁷

Beyond this there is an inevitable further progression.

The progression mentioned here may refer to an extension of the analogy, or to the progress of the student (or creature), or both. Most translators assume the first.⁵⁸ The translation presented here is quite faithful to the original, preserving whatever ambiguity it contained.

Such is the nature of practice/realization.

There are two fundamentally differing interpretations of the overall thrust of this essay. One holds that Dogen is conveying the way he sees reality, the other that he is conveying the way he sees spiritual development. Obviously the two are intertwined. But in many regards the second interpretation would seem a better fit. Here Dogen explains why he has introduced the analogy of birds and

⁵⁵ This one Tanahashi simply ignores, while Nishijima invents "at the same time."

⁵⁶ One can't imagine where Nishijima gets "may be" from this.

⁵⁷ But a nagging doubt remains. Is it possible there was a transcription error that was never caught, and that the second pair of phrases should refer to bird and fish nourishing sky and sea, rather than life? In certain ways, this would make more sense. What nurtures life? The sea. What nurtures the sea? The fish. What nurtures the fish? Life.

⁵⁸ Sample translations include Tanahashi: "it is possible to illustrate this with more analogies." Masunaga: "You probably will be able to find other variations of this idea among men." Nishiyama/Stevens: "Many more conclusions can be drawn like this." Cleary: "There must be progress beyond this." Cook: "Besides these [ideas], you can probably think of others." Nishijima: "There may be other expressions that go even further." Jaffe: "Besides this we could proceed further." Waddell/Abe: "We could continue in this way even further." Nishiyari, however, interprets the "progress" as our own progress towards buddhahood.

fish: it can be applied, he says, to our own practice. Dogen is equating the movements of the bird and fish with practice and the sky and sea with enlightenment. He is saying that no matter how vast the sky or ocean, the bird must still flap its wings, the fish wiggle its fins. There is, however, another potential interpretation: that the nature of practice/realization lies in the progression itself.

A phrase that follows “practice/realization” in the original has been omitted in the translation here due to its obscure nature. It is a four-letter Chinese compound, and thus probably a reference to something in Buddhist literature, possibly one of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras. It’s composed of two pairs of ideograms, “longevity/happiness+person/thing” and “life+person/thing,” where the character used for “life” has connotations of limited duration as well as destiny and fate, but also can mean “decree.” Some translators conflate the two to their ostensibly shared meaning of “life.” Others imagine a contrast being drawn between long life and short life. Perhaps Dogen is referring to the relatively short, one- or two-year lifespan of birds compared to that of fish, some specimens of which have been known to live for a hundred years or more. However, it’s unclear why Dogen would emphasize lifespan in this particular context.⁵⁹

Yet were bird or fish to attempt to completely understand sea or completely understand sky before trying to move through sea or sky, they would not be able to attain their way or attain their place, in either sea or sky.

The creatures, however, do not have the luxury of trying to figure out everything about their surroundings before they set out, and in the same way humans can ill afford to wait until they’ve got everything figured out before starting practice.

For “completely understand” the original uses a term which literally means “take to the limit,” but often has the meaning of understanding in depth, as it does here.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Some translators focus on the “person” meaning of the second character in each pair. Tanahashi has simply “people,” Waddell “all that is possessed of life,” Jaffe “lives of people,” Cook “long and short lives,” Cleary “the existence of the living one.” Murakami renders this as the equivalent of “lives transcending long and short are realized.” Mizuno has “lifespan” (*jumyō*).

⁶⁰ Other translators interpret this more literally. Tanahashi has “Now if a bird or a fish tries to reach the end of its element before moving in it”; Nishijima/Cross have “a bird or fish that aimed to move through the water or the sky [only] after getting to the bottom of water or utterly penetrating the sky, could never find its way or find its place in the water or in the sky.”

For “attain (their way and place),” many translations use “find.” But this carries the potentially unfortunate connotation of there being a path or place “out there” somewhere that one’s self sets out to find—something Dogen has recommended against more than once in the essay so far. The original Japanese is the same as used earlier in the passage “a person gaining *satori*,” and can mean obtain, get, earn, acquire, receive, or benefit from, as well as learn (as in obtaining knowledge). “Gain,” however, does not work very well with the English “place” and “way.” For these reasons this translation uses “attain.”

Japanese has no plural forms. Therefore, it conceivably could be, and perhaps should be, “ways” and “places.”

A minor point: the phrase “completely understand sea or completely understand sky” seems repetitive and awkward, with “sea and sky” repeated yet another time at the end of the paragraph. But Dogen, for whatever reason, made the stylistic choice to make this repetition in the original, and the translation reflects this choice.

This place, if attained, unfolds truth in accord with life there. This way, if attained, is truth unfolding in accord with life along it. This way and this place are neither great nor small, neither within nor without, neither already there nor yet to appear, thus is it so.

The way and the place—it doesn’t really matter, in some sense, whether Dogen is still talking about birds and fishes here, or is addressing the reader⁶¹—are where truth unfolds and is unfolding. “Truth unfolds” is a verbal form of *genjo koan*. “Truth unfolding,” of course, is precisely *genjo koan*.

“Life” here is *anri*, the same word encountered in the first boat ride, where Dogen counseled us to focus closely on our life. As mentioned in the notes on that passage, its somewhat obscure meanings can include practice, daily life, and deeds.

⁶¹ Other translations switch to talking about “you” and “us” here. Tanahashi gives “When you find your place where you are, practice occurs, actualizing the fundamental point.” However, the original has no “where you are,” and even assuming “practice” is a valid translation for *anri* it is unclear why this would be “practice occurs” rather than “in accordance with practice.” He continues “When you find your way at this moment, practice occurs, actualizing the fundamental point;”, but again “at this moment” is nowhere in the original, and he has completely ignored Dogen’s elegant stylistic device of using *genjo koan* in both verbal and nominal forms. Nishijima/Cross attempt to use “action” for *anri*, forcing them to interpret the finding as the action in question, with spotty results: “When we find this place, this action is inevitably realized as the Universe. When we find this way, this action is inevitably the realized Universe [itself].”

“Not yet to appear” is interpreted by many⁶² as “not now appearing,” but this is clearly wrong.

In similar fashion, to seek and find the way of the buddha, learn a single thing and apply a single thing; engage a single deed and master a single deed.

The fish and bird, navigating their way through their element, are models for us as we “seek and find” (*shusho*, or practice/realization) the way of the buddha. The process is incremental: we learn things and apply them as we do so, we engage in acts and master them as we do so. The original takes the form of pair of six-character Chinese phrases, insinuating that Dogen is quoting from Chinese literature, but in this case we do not know the source and face the usual difficulties in interpretation. “Learn” is the term often used in contexts such as gaining enlightenment; “thing” is *dharma*, which, as we have seen, has a plethora of meanings;⁶³ “apply” is sometimes translated “penetrate” and can have the meaning of delving into or understanding deeply, but also indicate doing something thoroughly—in other words, applying it.⁶⁴

Any or all of the occurrences of “single,” the translation used here for the character “one” in the original, might refer to a unique, unitary thing or deed rather than individual things or deeds. For instance, the two occurrences of “single” in the first phrase could be describing a unitary *dharma*, those in the second a series of individual deeds.⁶⁵ The English translation is designed to preserve this ambiguity.

Here lies the place and here passes the way, blurry at first because they emerge and evolve as one exhausts Buddhist teachings. Do not assume that the goal is necessarily a lesson knowable by one’s own intellect. Ultimate answers may unfold instantly but not always unfold mysteries; how then can this be called unfolding?

⁶² For example, Tanahashi’s “not merely arising now” (although the original has no “merely”), or Nishijima/Cross’s “do not appear in the present.”

⁶³ One dictionary lists senses including custom, practice, code of behavior; obligation or mission; social order or system; good, or good behavior; truth or incontrovertible meaning; basis of the universe; religious obligation; method of realizing truth; teaching; true nature or characteristic; and tenet. And those are just the meanings not specific to Buddhism; there may be a score or more additional senses of the word in Buddhist theology.

⁶⁴ One translator has “Meeting one thing is mastering it—doing one practice is practicing completely.” (Kimura 2005): “learning one principle, mastering that principle; meeting one practice, realizing that practice.”

⁶⁵ One commentator thinks it has the first meaning in the earlier part of the initial phrase and the second in the later part: “gain the unitary *dharma*, penetrate each individual *dharma*.”

Dogen again refers to the official Buddhist teachings of the day (*buddhadharma*) he mentioned in the first sentence of the essay, and the need to move beyond, or exhaust, them. Most translators, however, fail to capture Dogen's distinction between the official Buddhist line and the way of the buddha he teaches. Instead of "exhaust Buddhist teachings" one translator thinks that we need to "master" them; another that we need to "perfectly realize" them. In fact, Dogen lived in a time when Buddhism was, in the form of many sects, a widely popular religion and he preached against its rigid doctrines, much as Martin Luther taught against Catholicism three centuries later.

In the last sentence of the paragraph, Dogen denigrates so-called ultimate answers, the intellectual lessons he referred to in the previous sentence, which one can jump to quickly but leave real questions unanswered.⁶⁶ The final "unfold" in the sentence uses an alternative character for *gen*, "see" instead of "appear." It is unclear what Dogen was trying to accomplish by using that character; perhaps this is merely a copying error. In any case, the same character is used to write *genjo koan* in the colophon.

Hotetsu Zenji of Mt. Mayoku was fanning himself. A monk approached and asked, "They say 'WIND'S NATURE ETERNALLY ABIDES, NO PLACE NOT VISITED.' So why does the Master use a fan too?" The teacher replied, "You understand only that the breeze is by its nature constant, but not the notion that there is nowhere it has never reached." The monk said, "What do you mean, then, what is this notion of NO PLACE NOT VISITED?" At this point the master simply fanned himself. The monk clasped his hands in veneration.

The essay now comes full circle with this compelling analogy⁶⁷ involving Hotetsu,⁶⁸ an eighth century Chinese master and student of Baso. The analogy concerns enlightenment vs. practice, the very same pair of concepts Dogen highlighted in the first line, and promised, implicitly, to show us how his way of the buddha synthesizes and integrates. Roughly speaking, the breeze corresponds to enlightenment, the fanning to practice. The master is saying that although the wind blows constantly it is still necessary to fan. Actually, the breeze and the fanning are interdependent: the breeze is the concerted effect of the master and

⁶⁶ Most translators miss this, one imagining that "ultimate answers" is "experience of the ultimate state" which is "realized at once."

⁶⁷ From Shinji Shobogenzo, pt. 2, no. 23.

⁶⁸ Magu Baoche in Chinese.

countless others fanning themselves, while at the same time, the breeze is what moves their fans.

According to Christian scripture, “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?” “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”⁶⁹

The monk presents his question in Chinese, indicated here by capital letters. The Chinese given as “eternally abides,” in reference to the wind, is a technical Buddhist term, literally “always resident,” often translated into English as “never-changing,” “permanent,” or “ever-present.”

Dogen employs an intriguing stylistic device here to highlight the distinction between formalistic and personal understanding. In the monk’s first question, the use of Chinese, here translated character-for-character, evokes a scripturalist nuance. When Hotetsu responds, however, at least in Dogen’s retelling of the story, he uses the native Japanese constructions “constant” and “nowhere it has never reached,” using direct, everyday language to convey a direct, everyday experience. In the monk’s follow-up question, he once again uses the Chinese formulation NO PLACE NOT VISITED, indicating that he is still stuck at the formalistic level of understanding.⁷⁰ The master helps him break through his fixation by simply continuing to fan himself silently. The monk’s response was to clasp his hands in veneration, but the term in the original could also be interpreted as doing prostrations or bowing deeply.

Such is the experience that validates Buddhist doctrine, its true message come alive. “I don’t need to use a fan, since even if I don’t I’ll be able to feel the breeze if it’s really constant.” Saying this misses the meaning both of constancy and of the nature of the breeze. It is this natural, constant breeze through the buddha’s mansion that unfolds the gilding of the earth and transfigures the milky waters of the Great River.

In a final reference to Buddhist doctrine, Dogen makes the point that its real essence is this interplay between practice and enlightenment. He connects to popular conceptions of Buddhism with the mention of the gilded earth, which refers to the Amida Sutra, where Gautama taught: “Also, Shariputra, in Amitabha (Amida) Buddha’s land of Ultimate Bliss, there is always heavenly music playing. Moreover, the ground is made of gold, and flower petals float down from the skies six times every day.” Dogen was appealing to his readers’ fami-

⁶⁹ James 2:14 and 2:26.

⁷⁰ No existing English translations succeed in bringing across this nuance.

liarity with Pure Land Buddhism, newly popular in his day, for which this is one of the key scriptures. In other words, we can read Dogen's words as saying: "Here is the real way to get to that gilded earth your holy writings talk about." The transfiguring of the milky waters is also a scriptural reference, to the Flower Garland Sutra that served as the chief text of the Kegon School, a dominant form of Buddhism in Japan at the time, where it is written, "The light of this great jewel solar matrix, when it shines on seawater, turns it to milk; the light of the great jewel removing moisture, when it shines on the milk, turns it to cream; the light of the great jewel flame light, when it shines on the cream, turns it to butter; the light of the great jewel thorough exhaustion, when it shines on the butter, turns it to ghee, blazing like fire, consuming it without remainder."⁷¹

"Milky waters" in our translation corresponds to "milk" in the translation just quoted. The original is an obscure word said to refer to some liquid of a milky nature, which is then "transfigured"—"ripen" would also be possible—but Dogen does not specify into what, most likely assuming his readers know the reference to cream.⁷²

"Great River" may refer to the Yangtze (Chang Jiang) River, which flows symbolically from Tibet across China, emptying into the East China Sea near where Dogen studied. It could equally well refer to all the great rivers of the world.

Shobogenzo Genjo Koan Fascicle One

This was written around mid-autumn, the first year of Tempuku and given to lay student Koshu Yo of Chinzei.

[Revised in] the Mizunoe-ne year of Kencho.

⁷¹ Cleary, p. 1000.

⁷² Many translators have made their own guesses. Nishijima/Cross have "ripen into curds and whey," claiming the substance in question was a "kind of edible dairy product, like yogurt or cheese," but whatever it is the original syntax would indicate it is the pre-ripened, not post-ripened state. Waddell/Abe have "ripens the sweet milk," Cleary "develop into butter," Tanahashi "make fragrant the cream," Jaffe "turn into sweet cream," Nishijima (from "Understanding the Shobogenzo") "ripens into delicious cheese," Nishiyama/Stevens "causes to flow with sweet, fermented milk," Masunaga "ripens the rivers to ghee." The translators using "ghee" or "butter" or "curds" apparently assume that that must be what a milky substance can ripen into, but the process of making butter is not one of "ripening." Mizuno says that this sentence means "ripening the milky substance (into reality)." Our translation follows Nishiyama's commentary, which emphasizes that the rivers are already filled with some kind of milky substance, which practice etc. (the breeze) then gives a superior taste.

Mid-autumn would have been the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month, corresponding to mid to late September in our modern calendar; the year this essay was written, this day would have fallen on or near September 20. The first year (and only) year of the Tempuku era was 1233. Chinzei is current-day Kyushu, the southernmost of the four major islands constituting the Japanese archipelago. Kencho is a Japanese era which began in 1249. *Mizunoe-ne* refers to the 49th year in a 60-year cycle used in the Orient to count years; in this case, it corresponds to 1252, the year before Dogen's death.

A PARTICULAR HOUR: NOTES

The title of this essay, “Uji,” is composed of two Sino-Japanese characters. The first indicates *possession, being or existence*, the second *time or hour*. Together, they form a common word meaning *sometimes*.¹ Lurking within this pair of ideograms, however, lies a second meaning: *time and its existence*.

The title of the essay, then, is a word that we use every day without thinking (“sometimes”), but which also has a deeper, alternative meaning (“the existence of time”). As such, it’s a perfect linguistic analogue to time itself: something that we experience every day without thinking, but which also has a deeper, alternative meaning. The mission Dogen sets himself in this essay is to call forth that meaning for the reader.

But how can these dual meanings be expressed in English translation? What is needed is something which is both an everyday English word, meaning something close to “sometimes,” while simultaneously invoking nuances of time and its existence. (It also needs to be capable of functioning as a noun, a verb, and an adverb to accommodate the ways it is used throughout the essay.) Perhaps looking more closely at each character will prove useful in this endeavor.


¹ In Japanese, *aru toki*.



The character pronounced “u”² is shown here. Its original sense is possession; its shape derives from a human hand (the upper part) holding a piece of meat (the lower part). The possession meaning could imply that the title of the essay is talking about the time we have, or which is available to us.

The character also indicates existence, of the world and things in it (as opposed to one’s own existence, or that of other people). The relationship with the first meaning is obvious: if we possess something, then it exists. From this perspective, the title of the essay may allude either to *a time things exist*, or equally well *a time that exists*.

Yet another facet of this character is to indicate one certain or particular thing out of many. This is the meaning behind the common “sometimes” meaning of “uji.”



The second character, “ji,” is built from two components: “sun” on the left, providing the semantics of the sun progressing across the sky, and “temple” on the right, providing the phonetic value.³ It shares three meanings with the English word “time”: (i) time as a stream; (ii) a season or period of time; and (iii) a point in time. It also boasts an additional meaning: “hour.”⁴

We now know the meanings of the individual characters, but how are those meanings combined? We will encounter this problem repeatedly throughout these notes: what does a compound AB mean in terms of the meaning of its individual components A and B? One obvious but

² The pronunciation of “u” for this character is rare; it is a so-called “go-on,” (“Wu reading”), mimicking 5–6th century pronunciation in the Wu region around current-day Shanghai. Students of Japanese will be more familiar with the common Sino-Japanese (“on”) reading: “yū.”

³ The majority of Sino-Japanese ideographs are this kind of so-called semasio-phonetic, or phonetic-ideographic, characters, combinations of semantic and phonetic elements.

⁴ For instance, “eight o’clock” in Japanese would be hachi-ji, where the ji is the character in question.

actually less frequent case is “A and B.” Applying this to *uji* yields something like “Being and Time.”

This corresponds to the popular wisdom in the West about this fascicle: that it discusses the relationship between time and being, or even asserts that the two are equivalent, in some kind of Einsteinian four-dimensional space-time theory. This view is both reflected in, and may stem from, the fact that existing translations use titles such as “Being Time” or “Time Being” or “Existence-Time,” and render some frequently occurring structures in the essay as “something or other is time”. It is somewhat odd that Zen masters and other erudite commentators have latched so firmly onto this interpretation.

Because there is a second possibility for the semantics of character pairs, that if anything is more common: the first modifies the second, giving “the A-type of B.” This would yield English translations such as “A Certain Moment,” “Hour of Existence,” “Time of Being,” “The Present Moment,” or “The Hours We Have.”

Ideally, the translator takes a conservative approach to his craft, devoting himself to creating a target language text which mirrors the ambiguities and possibilities found in the original. Sometimes, however, he or she is forced to take a stance, when the choice is between two diametrically opposed interpretations or vastly differing nuances, such as “Being and Time” and “The Present Moment.”

In this case, resolving the conflict requires coming to an admittedly subjective conclusion about what the true topic of the essay is. “Being” is an abstraction of the sort Dogen evinces little interest in, and one searches in vain for places elsewhere in his writings where he addresses it. In fact, “time” is also an abstraction, and this essay actually argues against that concept, against time as something that comes and goes, as a series of mountain peaks. One can only conclude that it is unlikely that Dogen, whether in the title or the essay itself, would be equating time, a concept that he insists does not exist, with being, one that he rarely addresses. Instead the point of the essay, for which it makes compelling arguments at every turn, is that there is a specific time, the one right now.

Even after deciding that the essay discusses a specific time—now—and that the translation of its title should reflect that, choices remain for how to translate the individual words. The English word “time” tends to invoke time in the abstract, so given the emphasis in the essay on the granular nature of the here and now in preference to the notion of time as a continuum, *hour* or *moment* is a

better choice here than *time*. The final choice of *hour* makes explicit the association of the Chinese character with hours of the day. Note that neither Japanese nor Chinese has a specific marker for the plural, so either *hour* or *hours* would be possible. In this essay, however, with Dogen's focus on a very particular hour rather than hours in general, the singular *hour* therefore seems preferable. For "u," any of "certain," "specific," or "particular" would work. Choosing the latter results in the title used here, "A Particular Hour." It conveys the sense of the now, while also functioning, as does *uji*, as the everyday word "sometimes," as well as lending itself to adverbial use in the form "at a particular hour." Like all translations, of course, it is still somewhat of a compromise.

We now proceed to the body of the essay. It leads off with a poem by the 8–9th century Chinese master Yakusan Igen.⁵ Dogen certainly felt a special affinity for Yakusan, who came fourteen generations before Dogen in a direct line of students and teachers.

The old buddha said:

Dogen uses his in-depth knowledge of the Chinese Buddhist literature to sprinkle Chinese stories, sayings, and poems throughout his writings. He often employs such quotations as a launching pad for his own, creative twist on a subject, as he does here. Although in most of his writings, including the voluminous collection of essays entitled *Shobogenzo* of which this essay is the twentieth, Dogen chooses to express himself in his native tongue, this poem is given in the original Chinese, eight compact lines of six characters each (seven in the first two lines, which add characters for "standing" and "moving"). Dogen assumes his readers and listeners know Chinese; sometimes he helps out the reader with a Japanese paraphrase, other times, as here, he does not.

⁵ Yaoshan Weiyan in Chinese.

The name Yakusan Igen, like that of many Zen masters, has two parts. Most commonly, the first refers to the name of the temple or monastery the master is associated with, while the second is the master's practice name. For instance, in the name "Eihei Dogen," Eihei refers to Eihei-ji, the monastery Dogen founded. Some masters, such as Yakusan, are more commonly referred to by the temple name, others by their practice name, and still others by a separate, posthumous name (in Dogen's case, Koso Joyo; references to Joyo Daishi, lit. Great Teacher Joyo, are also seen).

These translations and notes give names of Chinese masters in the Japanese pronunciation that Dogen would have used.

Standing on high, high mountain peaks at a particular hour; moving along deep, deep ocean bottoms at a particular hour.

Like a throbbing drumbeat, each line of Yakusan's poem leads off (or ends, in the English translation) with the title of the essay itself: *uji*—"a particular hour." In these first two lines Yakusan emphasizes height and depth with a parallel, rapid-fire repetition of the Chinese ideograms for "high" and "deep."

("Moving" could conceivably be "descending to.")

Three heads and eight arms at a particular hour; sixteen-foot and eight-foot at a particular hour.

What are the three heads and eight arms? Multi-armed denizens of the Buddhist pantheon include the so-called Wisdom Kings, known as *vidyaraaja* in Sanskrit or *myo-o* in Japanese (one is Ragaraja, or Aizen Myo-o, the god of sexual passion and the transformation of that passion into spiritual awakening). However, these deities, whose wrath is directed at obstacles and craving, usually have three eyes, not three heads (along with a lion in their hair and possibly more than one set of legs.) A well-known multi-headed figure is Avalokitesvara, the Goddess of Mercy (Kannon in Japanese), who can also have four, or eight, or a thousand arms, but her heads are actually small faces (often eleven) arranged around her main head. A third alternative is *asuras*, fierce, wrathful, proud, jealous, envious, competitive deities, which are, however, usually depicted with six arms, not eight. All these potential interpretations have all been adopted by various commentators and translators. One that has not, but for which there is precedent elsewhere, is that the multi-armed, multi-headed figure represents the complexity of Buddhist doctrine and practice. This interpretation rings true. Zen is far more focused on debunking an overly scripturalist approach to Buddhism than supporting a Manichean caricature of evil.

"Sixteen-foot and eight-foot" is said to refer to the height of standing vs. sitting figures of the Buddha. Of course, feet were not actually used in ancient China, but the *shaku* (Japanese pronunciation), a basic unit of length, was almost exactly equivalent to our foot, at 11.93 inches. The poem, in the original, refers to "one-jo-six and eight-shaku," where *jo* is another unit of length equivalent to ten *shaku*.

There are thus two possible ways to interpret this line. The asura vs. buddha version has Yakusan pointing us to hours when we encounter, or which bring us, good and evil. The other contrasts the simplicity of direct truth with the undue

complexity of doctrine, as represented by the figure of the buddha and the gargoyle figure. Unfortunately, the rest of the essay contains no obvious hints as to which interpretation might be closer to the mark. To avoid pre-judging the issue, this translation simply uses “three heads and eight arms” throughout.

The staff and whisk at a particular hour; wooden pillars and stone lanterns at a particular hour.

The staff and whisk are ceremonial objects carried by the Zen teacher, which by extension represent Zen teaching. The pillars are most likely the circular variety embedded in the walls of monastery buildings, probably the Buddha Hall, in such a way as to be visible from both inside and outside, while stone lanterns typically dot the grounds of a monastery.

As a whole, then, the couplet recalls experience both inside and outside the monastery halls. One imagines adepts, motionless in formal sitting posture, listening to their master preach in the lecture hall, then later, during their daily *samu* work period, sweeping around the columns and stone lanterns on the monastery grounds.

The third son of Chang and fourth son of Lee at a particular hour; the great earth and vacant sky at a particular hour.

“The third son of Chang and fourth son of Lee” in contemporary American English would be “every Tom, Dick and Harry.” Yakusan is counterpoising the small-scale (people around us in everyday life) and the large-scale (earth and sky), the human with the natural.

In fact, the entire poem is a series of such contrasting pairs: high vs. low, stillness vs. motion, and differentiation vs. uniformity in the first couplet; good vs. evil (or simplicity vs. complexity) in the second; and inside vs. outside, or permanent vs. transient, in the third. Note also the symmetry, preserved from the original, that each member of each pair is itself composed of two elements: heads *and* arms, sixteen-foot *and* eight-foot, staff *and* whisk, pillars *and* lanterns, third son *and* fourth son, earth *and* sky.

In eight brief lines, Yakusan has connected a wide range of human experience with time: experiences each occur at a particular hour, and that particular hour brings us that experience.

The poem concluded, we now hear Dogen’s voice for the first time.

“A particular hour” tells us that an hour is inherently particular; the particular is invariably an hour.

Dogen begins his essay with a vintage, elegant, symmetrical formulation, not merely equating the hour and the particular, but forcing us to rethink what both really mean in terms of the other.

The gilded sixteen-foot figure has its hour, which thus glows in splendor. It must be considered within the twelve hours of the now. The three heads and eight arms have their hour, which thus must be part and parcel of the twelve hours of the now.

“Twelve hours” here refers to our 24-hour day, which traditionally in East Asia was divided into twelve hourly periods identified by the name of a creature from the zodiac. This system remained in use in Japan approximately through the end of the Edo Period. (The character for “hour,” as mentioned above, is the same as that for “time” (the second character of *uji*).

The second sentence could also be interpreted as “study [this hour (or the glowing)] *with* the twelve hours of the now.” The precise parallel structure of the original (“within the twelve hours,” “part and parcel of the twelve hours”), however, suggests the reading given in the translation, and most Japanese commentators agree.

We cannot really judge how long or short these “hours” we speak of actually are, but their passage leaves traces too clear to doubt. Mere lack of doubt, however, does not imply understanding. People do not invariably have doubts about every single thing or every single object they fail to understand, and the doubts they do have may not be justified by what led up to them. But in any case the hour for these doubts will soon arrive.

The twelve hours of the traditional Japanese timekeeping system were divided into six daylight hours and six night-time hours, meaning the hours changed in length as the year progressed. For instance, the noon “hour” in Edo in the summer could be as long as two hours and forty minutes, while the midnight hour shrunk to half that length. Perhaps that is what Dogen is referring to when he writes “how long or short” these hours are, or perhaps he is talking about the inconstancies in our temporal perception.

This passage is not central to Dogen’s message in this essay, and as such one might think it not worthwhile to belabor translation issues. But every translated sentence is read by thousands of people, and many of them, perversely, pick up

on precisely the wrongly translated ones, perhaps because they seem more exotic or “Zen-like.” For instance, Issan Dorsey, the twentieth-century gay Zen master based in San Francisco, reportedly had a special fondness for this essay, and would sometimes just yell out the word, or make up sentences like “Got that Uji thing going.” An article about Dorsey⁶ quotes him as especially liking passages such as the one here, which in the Tanahashi translation is “when sentient beings doubt what they do not understand, their doubt is not firmly fixed. Because of that, their past doubts do not necessarily coincide with the present doubt. Yet doubt itself is nothing but time.” Unfortunately, each of the quoted sentences is translated incorrectly. It is not that “doubts are not firmly fixed” but rather that they do not inevitably exist. It is not their “past doubts” not coinciding with their present doubts, but rather the present doubts not being justified based on what preceded them. And so on.

You must realize that we self-blanket the universe, with an individual hour for every individual head and object in that blanketed universe.

The first phrase is a great challenge to translate. The original, which might be translated literally as “array self, make entire world,” provides neither the subject nor information about whether self is singular or plural. Both are common omissions in Japanese.

“Self” could either be your own self,⁷ or the selves of all the phenomena and concepts and objects in our world. (Dogen regularly refers to the “self” of things; for instance, see the second sentence of *The Truth Unfolds*.) The translation attempts to dodge the issue with “self-blanket.”

The original here contains the distinctive repetitive neologisms “hour-hour” and “head-head-object-object.” Repetition is a common lexical device in Japanese, often used to indicate plurality, individuality, or emphasis. The word “individual” in the translation is intended to capture the parallel repetitions in the original.

“Head” might be taken, at first glance, to represent living entities, and “object” non-living ones.⁸ Or, Dogen could be using “head” as a metaphor for the dominant aspect of the “object.”

6

⁷ One translator has “the way the self arrays itself is the form of the entire world.”

⁸ One translator treats “head and object” as “individual and object;” while another lumps them both together into “things.” Yet another thinks “head” refers to “points.”

In this paragraph we encounter for the first time one of the key concepts Dogen will be weaving, like a fugal motif in a Bach organ composition, throughout the essay. The ideogram in question, shown above, is pronounced *jin* or *tsukusu*, meaning complete, entire, devoted, or full, with additional nuances of exhaust, run out of, use up, and deplete. Here Dogen combines it with the character for “world,” yielding *jinkai*, or “every last bit of the world” Later, we will see it paired with “existence” and “moments,” as well as with the “elephants” and “grasses” soon to be encountered. Above, we have combined it with “array” to obtain “blanket.”

It’s possible to translate this ideogram as “entire,” which in the combination with “world” would give “entire world.” And that is in fact the approach taken by many translations. But this fails to do justice to the immense power of this character, capture the vibrancy of the neologisms, or reflect the importance Dogen is assigning to the concept both here and in other compounds. “Omniverse,” which is closer to the original intent, is a tempting alternative, but the “omni” prefix does not work well with the other concepts Dogen combines it with (“omnimoment”?). This translation thus uses a variety of glosses for this character, including “fill” or “full,” “bursting,” “overflowing,” and “totality,” depending on which works best in the context.

And just as no individual hour defines another, neither does any individual thing.

“Define” here is literally “hinder,” a recurrent theme in Dogen’s writings, found also, for example, in *Drawing Donuts* and *Unfolding Truth*. The term is sometimes also translated as “block,” “deter,” “obstruct,” “interfere,” “restrict,” “impede,” or “limit.” The interpretation here and later is that one hour does not prevent other hours from being what they are—in other words, does not *define* them.

Thus, in a single hour many minds arise; in a single mind many hours arise.

The original text here is an eight-character Chinese aphorism, one of the pithy, compact formulations of which Dogen was inordinately fond. The first phrase is composed of four characters, “same time arise mind,” forming two normal-looking Japanese words of two characters each, at first glance reading “at the same time, the [way-seeking] mind arises.” But then in the second four-character group Dogen jarringly permutes the order of “time” and “mind” to

yield “same mind arise time,” forcing the reader to go back and reinterpret the first phrase as shown in the translation.

This also applies to practice in attainment of the way, where the self looks at its self-arraying. We thus find the principle that the self is a matter of the hour.

In the original, the two phrases of the first sentence are presented as separate sentences (one manuscript actually places a paragraph break between them), which could be rendered literally as “Practice/attain-way also like this. Array self, self see this.” Dogen’s original audience presumably could have seen the connection between these two sentences, but in the translation it has been made explicit: the self looking at it arraying itself is part of, or the essence of, practice.

This principle of how things are just so should drive us to explore how the earth is overflowing with countless elephants and grasses, each of those individual grasses and elephants finding itself within that overflowing earth.

This sentence provides a brilliant example of the clarity, power and balance in Dogen’s prose. The first phrase focuses on the earth and how it overflows with the “elephants and grasses;” the second reverses direction and focuses on the grasses and elephants (Dogen switches the order) and how they lie within the earth.⁹

“Just so” here is *inmo*, a word which can have the everyday meaning of “like that,” “thus,” or even just “this,” but also mean “the way things are,” in which case it is sometimes rendered as “suchness.”

The elephants and grasses are a recurring motif in the essay. Dogen’s precise intent here may never be known. It would appear that he is singling out two key aspects of reality to focus on, symbolized by an animal/vegetable distinction. Possibly the reference is to the elephants found in India and the grass said to have been given to Gautama before his period of meditation under the bodhi tree. In addition, “grass” is a conventional term for things or forms, while “elephant” shares the same character with “phenomenon,” so the intended meaning could

⁹ Other translators fail to fully capture the taut dynamic of this paragraph. One has “each thing...and grass...is in no way separate from the whole earth,” (failing to reverse the order of “thing” and “grass” as it is in the original, although that may have been no more than a stylistic affectation by Dogen). Another goes overboard with “...each grass and each form itself is the entire earth.” Yet another tries “each of the grasses and each of the forms exists as the entire earth.” Dogen’s original Japanese, however, does not support such interpretations. A fourth translator has “...each single blade of grass, each single form, is on the whole earth,” which is closer to the original, but misses Dogen’s vigorous juxtaposition of filling vs. forming.

well have been along the lines of “things and happenings.” Perhaps there is an analogy of “grass” for words or writings, which is one of its associations. Commentators do not agree: for “phenomena,” for example, they variously use “form,” “thing” or “appearance.”

It is this dynamic that launches us on our practice.

In other words, the dynamic—the Japanese could also be “back and forth”—between the world that is filled with things and the things that fill it.

Reaching the state of being just so is, itself, one of those grasses or elephants. This holds whether or not you engage that elephant, whether or not you engage that grass.

“Engage that elephant, engage that grass,” is presented in the form of another compact Chinese proverb, literally translatable as “meet-elephant, not-meet-elephant; meet-grass, not-meet grass” (where “meet” could also be “grasp” or “understand”).¹⁰ Reaching the just-so state, Dogen is saying, is in itself just another of the happenings in the world—although we may be prone to not looking at it that way.

The hour is always exactly and uniquely just so, which is why any particular hour is an hour of overflowing; a particular grass and a particular elephant both have their hour. The overflowing existence of the overflowing world suffuses every single one of those scattered hours. Stop and ponder whether or not the overflowing world could overflow with existence outside the hour of the now.

Dogen now rains down on us a shower of neologisms, combining all the characters he is highlighting in this essay in a variety of evocative permutations. He replaces a character in the essay’s title, “A particular hour,” to get “a particular grass” and then “a particular elephant,” and transforms “overflowing earth” into

¹⁰ Some translators attempt to interpret this phrase in isolation, imagining that it says that understanding and not-understanding co-exist (“the forms are understood and not understood,” or “there is understanding of form and no-understanding of form”); that they don’t co-exist (“sometimes that which appears is recognized and again not always,” “we sometimes meet the appearance and sometimes not”), or even that one leads to, or “is” the other. Such interpretations would seem less compelling than that taken by the translation, where the reaching of the state itself is considered to be an elephant or grass that can be engaged or not.

Returning to the first part of the sentence, the phrases “one [of those] blade[s] of grass” and “one [of those] elephant[s]” in the original lead many translators to interpretations such as “all things and happenings becoming one.” But neither the syntax of this sentence nor the context supports such a superficial Zen-like interpretation.

“overflowing existence. Then he goes himself one better with an exuberant four-character neologism, “overflowing existence of the overflowing world.”

“Every single one of those scattered hours” is another Dogenism, literally “hour of hour-hours.”

But the reaction of normal people who haven't studied Buddhism when they hear the phrase “a particular hour” is to think “Well, at a particular hour there were the three heads and eight arms and then at a particular hour there was the gilded sixteen-foot [image of the buddha]”—as if these hours were hills or streams in some landscape they had passed through. They say to themselves: “The landscape may still be back there but I've come through it and now dwell in the vermilion tower of the jade palace; I'm here, the scenery is back there, the heavens are up there, and the earth is down here.”

What is this vermilion tower?¹¹ Remember, the context is the thinking of a person who did *not* understand “a particular hour.” The vermilion tower thus likely intended to indicate an imaginary, unattainable location that “normal people” are fixated on trying to reach. A contemporary translation might render this as “the penthouse suite at the Bellagio.”

The final sentence is a good example of how cryptic Dogen can be and the resulting difficulties for the translator. Literally, it just says “mountain-river and self, and heavens and earth.” So it could be interpreted as some other translators have: “I'm as far away from the scenery as the heavens are from the earth.”

But this is just one way of looking at the situation. If you say there was an “I” at the hour of climbing some hill or crossing some stream, then surely that “I” must have incorporated that hour. The hour could not have just taken off leaving the “I” behind. With no past or future aspect, the hour of climbing the hill was the absolute, eternal now of a particular hour. Even if the hour did retain a past and future aspect, the “I” would have embodied the absolute, eternal now in a particular hour. Does not the hour of crossing hill and dale gulp down the hour to come in the vermilion tower, and does it not then spit it out again?

What does it mean to gulp down or spit out time or an hour, and who or what precisely is doing the gulping and spitting?¹² The intent is, in all likelihood, the

¹¹ It has been variously translated as “lordly mansion,” “jeweled palace with crimson towers,” “stately palace,” “jeweled palace and vermilion tower” (where the “and” would seem to be in error), “vermilion palace,” or just “palace.” Some translators eagerly assume this palace must refer to enlightenment.

¹² One translator has “Does this time-being not swallow up the moment when you climbed the mountains and the moment when you resided in the jeweled palace and vermilion tower? Does it not spit them out?” Unfortunately, the original offers scant support for such an interpretation. It says quite clearly, in its medieval syntax, that it is the hour of mountain climbing (and

present hour of the stroll in the woods gulping down the fantasy hour in the magic castle in desire and expectation, but then spitting it out in disgust.

Yesterday there was an hour for the three heads and eight arms; today there is an hour for the sixteen-foot and eight-foot [buddha figures].

Japanese is notorious for omitting things from sentences and letting the reader fill in the gaps. The first phrase here is a good example. Literally, it simply says “three-heads eight-arms, time of yesterday.” But a literal interpretation such as “Three heads and eight arms are yesterday’s time” seems dubious.

But the concept of past and present does not lie in going into the wilderness to look out over a vista of thousands of peaks or tens of thousands of peaks, fading away [into the distance].

The mountain vista presents another challenge for the translator, thanks to ambiguities in Dogen’s archaic syntax. Does Dogen want us to think that the sweep of time is, or is not, like looking out over a mountain range? The problem is a troublesome “not” at the beginning of the sentence (actually at the end, since in Japanese word order is essentially reversed), which clearly applies to the “receding” (of hours, or more likely mountains), but may or not apply to the part about looking at the mountains. If it doesn’t, then time *does* resemble a postcard picture of a mountain range and *does not* pass away/recede/fade. This interpretation is possible syntactically, but seems unlikely in context. Much more plausible is that the “not” in the original extends to and thus negates the view of time as a linear series of mountain peaks.

This is somewhat disconcerting. Typically different interpretations might yield a shift in nuance or emphasis. But here they are diametrically opposed. And impeccably credentialed Zen masters and eminent scholars all assure us that Dogen is in fact exhorting us here to rush out into the wilderness and gaze on mountain ranges as an excellent analogy for how time works. It’s true that the sentence does include some disarming false clues. For instance, “thousands of peaks or tens of thousands of peaks” does indeed have a tone of grandeur. But actually it could just as easily mean “a ridiculously large number of peaks.”

What is a student to do? Differences in translation are unavoidable, given the immense gulfs of time, culture, and geography that separate us from Dogen.

stream crossing, which the translator inexplicably omits), not the “time-being,” which is doing the gulping down and spitting out of the hours in the tower.

Translation cannot be a one-to-one conversion, transforming marks in one language to marks in another which “mean” the “same” thing! That’s why in general it’s impossible to say which translation is “right” and which is “wrong.” Each brings its own insight. Simply understand the potential issue and follow the interpretation that makes sense to you.

We experience the three heads and eight arms singularly within our particular hour; they may seem far away but are actually in the absolute, eternal now. We experience the sixteen-foot and eight-foot singularly within our particular hour; they may seem to be elsewhere but are actually in the absolute, eternal now.

In these two sentences, Dogen once again indulges his penchant for neologisms, suffixing a word meaning “one experience” with the hiragana *su* particle which transforms it into a verb. The translation interprets the “one” here literally as indicating a single, or singular, experience.¹³

Which means there is also an hour for the pine; there is also an hour for the bamboo.

The original Japanese here for the first phrase is brief: “And if so, pine also time is.” As we’ve seen, Japanese syntax often fails to provide the “glue” needed to really figure out how the pieces fit together. A classic example is the Japanese sentence *watakushi wa sakana desu*, which appears to say “I am a fish,” but really means “I [would like to have] fish [for dinner].” Translating this as “I am a fish” is not a matter of being overly literal, or maintaining a bit too much fidelity to the original—it’s just wrong. It’s easy to fall into that trap here, translating this as “a pine tree is time.” Although a pine tree “being time” certainly has a distinct Zen-like flavor, and may also be an attractive mental puzzle, it suffers from utter semantic vacuity. I think there can be little doubt that Dogen’s intent here was not that pine trees *are* time, but that they *have* their time—hours when we experience them.

It is unlikely that Dogen’s choice of these two botanical varieties was arbitrary. Both are favorites of artists and poets throughout the history of Asian culture. Knowing typical monastery landscaping, Dogen probably needed only to lay down his brush and look out his window to see excellent specimens of both. At Eihei-ji, the monastery he later founded in the mountains of current-day Fukui

¹³ One translator thinks it means the experience passes “instantly”; others simply ignore it and translate this term as “transpire,” “pass on,” “move forward,” “pass,” or “make a passage.”

Prefecture, he would plant pine trees some of which, after more than seven and a half centuries, still tower hundreds of feet over the entrance gates.

The implication could also be that at certain hours we share the characteristics of the pine and bamboo. Pine and bamboo have many aspects in common (both are evergreen, hardy, and long-lived), and many where they differ (unlike pine, bamboo is empty inside, grows quickly, and bends flexibly when necessary).

Do not fixate on the hour flying away; do not focus on flying away being what it does. If the hour simply flew away it would inevitably leave an opening. Blame the preconception that hours slip away for your failure to listen to the truth of this particular hour.

What is the “opening” that would appear if the hour flew away? Is it an opening before the next hour, or between us and the hour (as some commentators hold)? The translation leaves the ambiguity intact, letting the reader decide which of these or other interpretations he or she prefers.

“Truth” is *do*, or “path.” “Listen to” could also be “experience and hear,” or “understand.”

The crux of the matter is that the all-encompassing existences filling the all-encompassing universe link themselves to form each and every individual hour. Each is a particular hour, making it an hour particular to me.

In the last sentence, Dogen continues his verbal gymnastics, personalizing *uji* with the prefix “me” to yield the three-character compound “me-particular-hour.”¹⁴

The interesting thing about particular hours is how they stepflow. They stepflow from today, as we call it, to tomorrow; they stepflow from today to yesterday; they stepflow from yesterday to today. They stepflow from today to today; they stepflow from tomorrow to tomorrow.

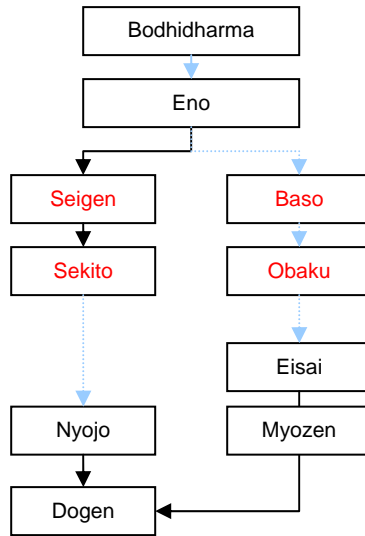
Dogen now presents his unique conception of the nature of the flow of time, which we might characterize as a “wave/particle” or “quantum” theory. He synthesizes a new term *kyoryaku*, most likely a neologism in his day (in modern Japanese, as *keireki*, it is a common word with the largely unrelated meaning of “resume.”) He builds his new word from two characters, the first indicating flow

¹⁴ Other translators here have adopted approaches such as “my existence time” or “my being time” or “your being time.”

or passage of time, the second a series of stages. In other words, it combines *flowing* and *stepping*. This presents a real challenge for the translator. The approach taken here is to coin the new word “stepflow” (although “flowstep” would be truer to the original order of characters).¹⁵

Because of how hours stepflow, past and present neither fall on top of each other nor overlap, while Seigen also has his hour, Obaku also has his hour, and Baso and Sekito also have their hours.

The possibly unfamiliar names Dogen gives here are of noted 7th and 8th century Chinese Zen masters. They are carefully selected to represent two major flavors of Zen; Dogen had a personal connection with both. Dogen’s ecumenical point is that there is an hour for each.



Note:

Dotted blue lines indicate multiple generations.

Red names are those mentioned in text.

¹⁵ Some translators have glossed over the startling juxtaposition of opposites inherent in Dogen’s new term, rendering it simply as “continuity” or “passage.” Other translators come closer with formulations such as “passing in a series of moments,” or “momentary passing.” One uses “seriatim passage,” accurate but awkward. A Dogen scholar tried the term “discontinuous continuity.” These attempts basically hit the mark, but fail to convey the freshness and originality of Dogen’s terminology, which is the verbal equivalent of him waving his arms wildly and screaming at the top of his lungs across the centuries to us: “Look at my radical new idea about time!”

Seigen Gyoshi,¹⁶ born in 660, was a leading student of the legendary master Eno,¹⁷ known as the Sixth Patriarch, or sixth teacher in the lineage starting with Bodhidharma, who originally brought Buddhism from India to China.

Obaku Kiun¹⁸ was the teacher of Rinzai Gigen,¹⁹ the great master who gave his name to the Rinzai school of Zen. He died in 850.

Baso Doitsu²⁰ was the teacher of the teacher of this Obaku, and was himself the successor to Nangaku Ejo,²¹ another student of Eno's along with Seigen. He lived from 709–788.

The final name Dogen cites is Sekito Kisen,²² a follower of Seigen's who was born in 700 and ran a practice center in Hunan Province until his death at the age of 90. The name "Sekito" literally means "stone head," referring to the huge rock near where Sekito is said to have meditated in isolation for fifteen years. He is credited with laying the early groundwork for what is now the Soto school of Zen Buddhism. He is also the teacher of Yakusan, the master whose poem, the reader will recall, Dogen chose to lead off this essay.

We thus have Seigen (a direct successor to Eno) and his student Sekito, these two leading towards the Soto lineage; and Baso (a second-generation student of Eno) and his disciple's disciple Obaku, these two leading towards the Rinzai lineage.

Myozen, under whom Dogen studied prior to visiting China, as mentioned near the beginning of *Dialog on the Way of Commitment*, was a sixteenth-generation dharma heir of Obaku.

Because self and other are inherently a matter of hours, practice and enlightenment are a matter of a variety of hours.

The first phrase is syntactically an exact copy of the first phrase in the entire essay, "an hour is inherently particular."

¹⁶ Qingyuan Xinsi in Chinese.

¹⁷ Huineng in Chinese.

¹⁸ Huangbo Xiyun in Chinese.

¹⁹ Linji in Chinese.

²⁰ Mazu Daoyi in Chinese.

²¹ Nanyue Huairang in Chinese.

²² Shitou Xiqian in Chinese.

“Self and other” here is a two-character compound. The problem with such compounds is that the relationship between the first character and the second, if not already known, can be very hard to divine. For instance, in a compound A/B, the meaning could, of course, be A *and* B, but it could also be A *vs.* B, A *united with* B, the A-type of B, the B *which* A’s, the A/B *problem*, and so on. In this case the nuance might be something like “the issue of self *vs.* other.” The confusion deepens further if the individual characters in question have multiple meanings. Here, for instance, these two characters are sometimes used to indicate subject and object. Following the principle that simpler is better, the translation simply goes with “self and other.”

There is an hour for plunging into the mud and diving into the water as well.

Plunging into mud and diving into water is an energetic metaphor for throwing oneself into daily life, but also alludes to a Zen saying concerning the willingness of those enlightened to go anywhere to save those who are not.

This is missing from the average person’s reality, no matter how hard that average person looks at things from his average person perspective on the now with its web of connections and dependencies. That reality has the effect before long of ensnaring our average person in that very web of connections and dependencies.

“Reality” in the original is *dharma*.

The word translated as “connections and dependencies” is a technical Buddhist term referring to causes and conditions, and often associated with karma. One dictionary describes this word as referring to the internal and external causes for something, or for it being born or dying, and by extension to the being born and dying itself. Another defines it as the circumstances which bring any single entity into existence. In any case, here Dogen offers us two interrelated perspectives on these connections and dependencies: that our perspective is rife with them, and that therefore we then fall subject to them.

Believing this hour, this existence to be outside reality, he perceives the gilded sixteen-foot figure to be outside himself. Attempts to run away from the absence of his gilded sixteen-foot figure are themselves scattered fragments of a particular hour, scattered glimpses on the part of one who has not yet witnessed the truth.

The image of people imagining time is external to reality (again, *ho*, or *dharma*), and running to escape from their missing internal buddha, is immense-

ly compelling.²³ The word “scattered” is intended to replicate the effect of Dogen’s use of the doubled characters “fragment-fragment” and “glance-glance.”

What paints the horse [at noontime] and ram [in the early afternoon] onto our world now? It is also the ascending and descending and rising and falling that brings things to be the way they are supposed to be. There is also the hour of the rat [at midnight] and also the hour of the tiger [before dawn], also the hour of man and also the hour of buddhas.

The horse and ram refer to hours of the old Japanese daily schedule described earlier, “horse” running from 11am to 1pm and “ram” from 1pm to 3pm. The rat and tiger also represent periods of the day, rat being around midnight and tiger being the last period before dawn. For “ascending and descending,” Dogen employs a muscular four-character compound, literally “rise-fall-up-down.” The “way they are supposed to be” is, in the original, a technical Buddhist term often translated as “dharma position.”

Each hour bears witness to the world in its fullness in the form of the three heads and eight arms; it bears witness to the world in its fullness in the form of the gilded sixteen-foot figure.

“Bear witness” here is *sho*, one of the most challenging terms to translate in all of Dogen. As a verb, it literally means to prove or validate; as a noun, proof, validation, witness, evidence, or certificate. Some scholars assign it a meaning of “experience,” with the nuance of “experience for yourself”—which is related to the meaning of “prove,” if you think about it, since experiencing something yourself can be thought of as proving it to yourself. As part of the compound *shusho*, it is commonly translated as “practice and enlightenment” (as it is later in this paragraph).²⁴

²³ Although some eminent commentators interpret this as us trying to run away (from the issue) by *saying* the buddha is absent. One leading translation has “attempts to escape from *being* the sixteen-foot golden body,” but this is just a simple misreading; it must be “...from *not being*...”

²⁴ Translators have also used “enlighten” when this character stands by itself, as it does here—“enlighten the entire world”—but although “enlighten” may be a viable choice when the subject is a person, it works less well when applied to hours, as is the case here. One translator, sensing this problem, adds a human subject absent in the original: “you enlighten the entire world.” The difference is by no means negligible. Instead of “hours bearing witness to the world,” we have “people enlightening the world at this time.” Issues like this appear in translations more frequently than you might think.

We can take this fullness to the extreme by world-filling the full world with the full world. Or doing the gilded buddha on the gilded buddha, unfolding the truth-seeking mind, practice, enlightenment, and nirvana, which are all particular, are hours.

Dogen now unleashes a fusillade of neologisms and unique syntactical combinations. He takes the “full world” he’s been talking about, reverses the characters and verbifies it—rendered here as “world-filling.” He makes the gilded buddha into an action performed on itself.²⁵

The fullness of the hour invariably takes fullness to the extreme with the fullness of existence, leaving nothing behind. Since leaving nothing behind means leaving nothing behind, even a semi-extreme way of bringing a particular hour to its fullness is an extreme way of bringing a semi-particular hour to its.

“Extremeness” is the final of the key concepts Dogen discusses in this essay, following hours, existence, elephants, grasses, and fullness.

Even a seeming misstep is a particular matter. Looking more closely, before and after the misstep unfolds is where the particular hour dwells. At a particular hour we assume with vigor our dwelling place in the truth. Neither go out of your way to see it as not particular, nor force yourself to see it as being so.

“Not particular” is the obvious antonym to “particular,” since the Japanese *mu* is the precise antonym to *yu*, the first character in the title of the essay.

Your fixation on the inevitable passage of the hour prevents you from understanding that it is still here.

The key to this passage is how to interpret the word for what Dogen is counseling us to understand: the two-character compound *mito*, composed of one character usually translated as “not (yet)” and a second usually translated as “arrive.” Superficially, this would seem to yield “not (yet) arrived.”²⁶

²⁵ One popular translation simply ignores Dogen’s verbal gymnastics, translating the sentence as “to fully actualize the golden body.” That’s too bad, since Dogen’s intent here is precisely to use words as a *kyosaku* stick whapping us on the shoulder—not all that gently—rather than to make some logical point or convey some philosophical insight.

²⁶ Thus we see other translations that think the thing we are failing to understand, rather than “the moment still being here,” is “time never arriving,” or “time not yet having arrived,” or “what is yet to come.” Yet throughout the essay Dogen has consistently been focusing on the present (whose moment, remember, “gulps down” and “spits out” that of the future, in the vermilion tower.) It seems counterintuitive that now he would now suddenly shift gears and tell us that we should be understanding that time/moments have yet to arrive, or, even more unlikely, will never arrive.

However, both characters have alternative interpretations which lead to a completely different meaning. The first, in addition to “not (yet)” can also mean “still”—the conflation of “yet” and “still” is common to many Asian languages; the second, in addition to “arrive,” can also mean “proceed” or “attain.” Combining these alternatives gives us “still proceeding” or “still attaining”—quite a different matter from “yet to arrive.”

Confirmation is offered by Nishiari Bokusan, the early 20th century abbot of Eihei-ji, the very monastery that Dogen founded in the mountains near the Sea of Japan. A noted Dogen scholar, Nishiari penned a three-volume commentary on *Shobogenzo* entitled *Shobogenzo Keiteki*. Rather than paraphrasing such an eminent teacher, let us quote him directly:

“This [section] again warns against the view that holds that hours come and go. *Mito* refers to residing in dharma position—everything in its natural place. [...] The average person just thinks that hours pass by like wind blowing. He only sees the coming and going aspects: I turned 30, I turned 40, it turned spring, oh no, it’s already fall. [...] What is being warned against is not understanding that each hour resides in its dharma position, one realized hour.”

Nishiari uses the technical Buddhist term “residing in dharma position,” but helps us out with the everyday explanation that this means “in its natural place.”

Another source of insight can be found in contemporary Japanese renditions of Dogen. These popular versions attempt to address the difficulty that contemporary Japanese readers have reading original Dogen. Medieval Japanese is roughly as far apart from modern Japanese as Shakespeare’s English is from modern English. Overall there is a high degree of recognizability, but there are differences in syntax, unfamiliar vocabulary, and words whose meanings have shifted.

Some of the popular versions barely go beyond reorganizing Dogen’s words based on modern Japanese syntax, leaving intact technical terminology and neologisms, such as “stepflow,” for readers to figure out on their own. Other translations interpret, restate and paraphrase. Both approaches provide valuable input for deciphering some of Dogen’s more enigmatic passages, not least because they often reflect careful study of centuries of Dogen scholarship and commentary.

These contemporary Japanese translations also support the interpretation in this case of the hours’ being “still here” rather than “yet to arrive.” One of the

more interpretative, albeit uninspired, versions gives the following. “Therefore we must not have fixed ideas about hours existing. People think only that hours pass away, and don’t notice the aspect that they don’t pass away.”

Understanding this is a matter of the hour and comes from nothing else.

Dogen’s argument comes full circle: he is saying there is an hour²⁷ when we understand that the hour is now. The hour is both when the understanding is occurring and what the understanding is about.

As for the second phrase, one could scarcely imagine a better exemplar of the opacity of Dogen’s prose and the range of interpretations to which this has led translators. An utterly literal translation of the original would be “no circumstance/karma/relationship [of the understanding] drawn (or affected or induced) by other.”²⁸

No skinbag who perceives hours as coming or going can fathom where the particular hour dwells, much less find the hour of breakthrough.

“Skinbag” is an affectionate moniker Dogen often applies to teachers and others.

“Breakthrough” is “penetrating the gate.” This is not a temple gate, however, but rather a particular kind of gate perhaps unfamiliar to Westerners: passport checkpoints or customs inspection stations in use through the end of the Edo period to control travel between individual regions of Japan. Such checkpoints both separate and connect. Passing through them could be either a mere formality, if your party’s papers were in order, or a matter of life and death, in the case of an unaccompanied female for example.

A well known historical checkpoint is the Hakone Sekisho, in the shadow of Mt. Fuji on the shores of Lake Ashi, on the Tokaido route that linked Edo (present-day Tokyo) and Kyoto. Perhaps Dogen passed through this checkpoint

²⁷ The first phrase easily falls prey to the “I am a fish” problem, since the original Japanese superficially appears to say “understanding is time.”

²⁸ Other translations include “[understanding] has no relation drawn by another” and “no circumstances are ever influenced by it,” or, the unlikely, “it does not depend on its own arrival” (another mistranslation said not merely to have influenced Issan Dorsey,” but been a “difficult, but truer-than-true teaching” that “could have been the motto for [his] whole life of practice”). When you encounter translations like this which seem to make no sense, it is far safer to presume the translator was having a bad day than to imagine Dogen is saying something of such unfathomable profundity that it’s beyond your powers of comprehension. Two translators, one into English and one into modern Japanese, simply omit this phrase, an act of discretion which in this case may be the better part of valor.

on his 1247 trip from Eiheiiji to Kamakura to visit Hojo Tokiyori, regent of the Kamakura shogunate.

Even if they accept where the hour resides, many do not sustain the embodiment of its intrinsic just-so nature. Even if they have long embodied its just-so nature, they cannot avoid groping for its appearance in front of them. The ordinary person's version of this particular hour would limit awakening and nirvana just to the coming and going aspects of the particular hour.

Dogen now refines his discussion of exactly how the “skinbags” fail to understand the hour, clarifying that mere acceptance of the hour as it is—neither coming and going—is not sufficient; he also wants us to “embody”²⁹ its intrinsic just-so nature. He further counsels us to stop groping around for the appearance of the hour.³⁰

This particular hour, however, unfolds uncaged. Heavenly monarchs and their subjects, now unfolding to the left, unfolding to the right, are, even as you read this at a particular hour, brimming with our energy. On land and sea unfolds a particular hour for these masses, now filled with strength. Light or dark, man or beast, we form this particular hour into the present with every drop of our power, we step it through the flow with every fiber of our being. Were it otherwise, know that not a single phenomenon or object would unfold or stepflow whatsoever.

Here Dogen unleashes one of the brilliant, lyrical flights of fancy that delight us throughout his writings. “Uncaged,” in the original, is “not held back by trap, net, or cage.” The “unfold” appearing throughout the paragraph is the Japanese *genjo*, well known as part of the name of the famed *Truth Unfolding* essay leading off *Shobogenzo*. It can also legitimately be translated as manifest or realize.

In “particular hour for the masses,” Dogen has created another new word, reminiscent of his earlier “particular hour for me,” which has been translated it in a parallel way.

²⁹ For “embody,” Dogen uses a term commonly translated as “express,” with one commentator noting that this means to express not only in words, but also in actions.

³⁰ This difficult section has been interpreted differently by many translators and commentators. For example, some think it is not the moment or its just-so nature being expressed or embodied, but the understanding, or the state (of having already attained just-so nature yourself, or “already being such,” etc.).

Do not think of stepflowing as being like a storm moving east to west. The world is bursting with change, with ebbing and flowing, with stepflowing. Take spring as an example of stepflowing. There are multitudes of springscapes, each a step-flow. Stepflowing requires no external assistance. Spring, for instance, always stepflows by simply stepflowing across itself. Stepflowing is not something spring has, but rather something it is. Stepflowing comes to fruition in each spring hour of the now. Roll this back and forth in your mind until you've grasped it in full. Think when you hear the word "stepflowing" that the world is outside of your head and that things that can stepflow continue slogging toward the east past world after world, eon after eon, and you will simply be distracted from your studies.

One commentator a bit overexuberantly interprets Dogen's use of spring here as a metaphor for the flowering of the soul.

Springscapes: this sentence is a bit of a riddle. Literally, "Spring has many aspects, and this/it/they are called stepflowing."

Yakusan visited the Zen master Baso to ask him a question, as it happens at the suggestion of Sekito. "I've come close to understanding the three vehicles and twelve divisions. But why did Bodhidharma come from the West?"

Recall that Yakusan is the author of the poem Dogen quotes to lead off the essay, Sekito being his teacher. "Three vehicles and twelve divisions" refer to two classifications of Buddhist teachings, one according to whom the teachings target and the other by how they were given; by extension, the reference is to the entirety of Buddhist doctrine.

To this query, Baso replied, "Have him arch his eyebrow and wink his eye at a particular hour; have him not do so at a particular hour. Having him arch his eyebrow and wink his eye is the thing to do at a particular hour; at a particular hour it is not..."

Baso's reply is given in Chinese. The person doing the winking is held by some to be the historical Buddha, who once winked as he held up a flower to a disciple, but the legend is not known to mention him also arching his eyebrow. Another commentator thinks it is Baso, referring to himself in the third person, who is doing the arching and winking. But a more convincing reading, given that Baso was answering a question about Bodhidharma, is that he was referring to the first ancestor himself, arching one of his well-known bushy eyebrows (or rather, having the student imagine him doing so). If Bodhidharma arches his eyebrow or winks, it is because you are having him do so; therein, in this interpretation, lies the reason he came from the West: so you could imagine him arching his eyebrow and winking.

Hearing this, Yakusan had a great realization, and told Baso, “Back when I was studying with Sekito I felt like a mosquito up on an iron ox.”

Baso has a unique way of looking at things. Think of the eyebrow as a mountain and the eye as an ocean, for a mountain can be an eyebrow just as surely as an ocean can be an eye. Think of “having him arch” a mountain; think of “having him wink” an ocean. “Being the thing to do” becomes familiar to “him”; “having” leads “him” along. Not being the thing to do does not imply not having him do it; not having him do something does not imply its not being the thing to do. Either is a particular hour.

There is an hour for the mountain, and an hour for the ocean. Neither the mountain nor the ocean could exist outside of the hour, and the hour could not fail to exist within the immediate now of the mountain and the ocean. If the hour could shatter, the mountain and the ocean could shatter as well. Since the hour cannot shatter, neither can the mountain or the ocean.

In the light of this truth we see the morning star rising over the awakened one in the iris of whose eye is reflected the flower raised in his hand. Were that not an hour it could not have been just so.

Some liberties have been taken with this sentence, which in its original reads “the morning star appears, the *tathagata* appears, the iris appears, [and] the flower appears.”

Zen master Sekken was of the lineage of Rinzai, the anointed successor to Shuzan. Once he pronounced to the assembly: “Particular hours bring meaning but not words. Particular hours bring words but not meaning. Particular hours bring both meaning and words; particular hours bring neither meaning nor words.”

Sekken Kisei³¹ was a 10th century Chinese master coming five generations after Rinzai; his teacher was Shuzan Shonen.³² In this paragraph, Dogen introduces a cryptic quote from Sekken in preparation for a discussion of the dichotomy between the non-verbal and the verbal and its relationship to time. Of course, this quote is in the original Chinese. The first two characters of each line are our old friends *uji*—“a particular hour.”

The character translated as “meaning” here has a slightly broader sense in the Sino-Japanese realm: it could also connote intent, will, or thought (which is how one contemporary Japanese Dogen scholar interprets it), or even mind (used by

³¹ Shexian Guixing in Chinese. Name is sometimes given as Shoken Kisho.

³² Shoushan Shengnian in Chinese.

one popular English translation). Considering that “meaning” and “words” are meant as a pair, however, and that Dogen had much better words at his disposal if he intended “mind,” in this context “meaning” seems to be the right choice.

What is translated here as “bring”—as in “particular hours bring”—is, in the original, literally “arrive.”³³

There is a particular hour for both meaning and words; particular hours bring them and particular hours do not. If the hour that brings them is yet to arrive, that [simply] means that the current hour has not yet brought them. If meaning is a wild ass, words are a horse. Make a horse of words and you will have a wild ass of meaning. “Bring” does not indicate already there; “not bring” does not indicate yet to come. This is the nature of this particular hour.

Dogen now offers a twist of his own on Sekken’s quotation, the seemingly incongruous analogy of ideas and words to wild asses and horses.³⁴ Here Dogen is likely referring to a passage from the Chinese Zen literature where Master Chokei asks Master Reiu Shigon, “What is the great intention of the Buddhadharma?”, and Reiu replies “Donkey business being unfinished, but horse business coming in.” One possible paraphrase is “before you’ve got to the meaning, words come in.”

Dogen uses the horse/ass analogy to highlight both the differences between meaning and words (unlike wild asses, horses can be tamed, trained, and controlled for the benefit of humans) and the similarities (wild asses and horses are zoologically similar, coexisting in their equine nature).

Ideas are the wild ass to the horse of words.

It is what [the hour] brings, not what it does not, that defines what is being brought; it is what [the hour] does not bring, not what it does, that defines what is not being brought.

This sentence, symmetric and elegant in the original, may forever remain a mystery. A pidgin-style translation of the first phrase would be “bring[ing] (subj.) impeded by bring[ing], not impeded by not bringing,” involving both the word we have been translating as “bring,” as well the previously encountered

³³ Some translators use “arrive,” others “reach.” But arriving where, or reaching what? How can “words” “reach” something, or “arrive” somewhere? One contemporary Japanese translation thinks this means “reach another person,” interpreting the paragraph in interpersonal terms, but this seems unconvincing. Another translator interprets “arriving” as “present” and “not arriving” as “absent,” which rings a bit truer.

³⁴ One translator imagines that meaning is stubborn like a donkey, while words jump and gallop about like a horse.

“impede.” This is the compound which, prefixed by *mu* (not), is used in the Chinese version of the Heart Sutra—that brief, profound statement of Buddhist philosophy perhaps best known for propounding that “form is emptiness and emptiness is form”—to indicate mind or spirit being unobscured or unobstructed. Here it has again been translated as “define.”³⁵

As for meaning, you see the meaning when you touch the meaning. As for words, you see the words when you touch the words. As for defining, you see the defining when you touch the defining.

We touch *in order to see*. We see *when we touch*.³⁶

³⁵ Assuming we follow some translators in using the word “arrive” where we are using “bring,” this actually can be turned into the quite Zen-flavored “Arriving is impeded by arriving, not by non-arriving.” The only problem with that translation is that it is impossible to figure out what it means.

One commentator (Waddell) opines here that “impeding is analogous to self-affirmation, the manifesting of true subjectivity. Hence, impeding, which as itself (being-time) is the entire world and all time, signifies the affirming and maintaining of individuality or ‘selfness,’ without which there would be a one-sided fall into undifferentiated oneness.” Such a fall does indeed sound nasty, and this explanation sounds very scholarly, but what does it mean? Why would Dogen have been saying something that requires a Ph.D. in Eastern Religions to understand? Other impenetrable commentaries include one informing us that “presence restricted by itself means real presence as it is, i.e. presence that is not restricted by worrying about absence,” and later “restriction means being as it is. It is the state which real things already have.”

³⁶ For the first sentence, one translator instead gives, “mind overwhelms mind and sees mind.” How could two translators end up so far apart, without even a single word in common, translating ten brief characters: *I ha i wo sae, i wo miru*? In addition to the mind vs. meaning issue discussed above, three differences in interpretation are at work.

(1) Assuming that the topic of the sentence (marked by the Japanese particle *wa*) is the agent or actor, unjustifiably anthropomorphizing what is in reality merely the topic—in this case, mind/meaning.

(2) Interpreting the Japanese word *saeru* as block/interrupt/stop rather than touch. In theory it could be either, but common sense tells us that it makes more sense to see meaning by touching it than by blocking it. (Of course, there may be less of a gap between the two interpretations than meets the eye. Touching is related to blocking. For instance, when we place our hand in a river, we are touching the water--but also blocking it.)

(3) Assuming that the parallel verbal construction “touch...see” indicates simple concurrency: “touches and sees.” But this structure more often indicates a causal relationship or instrumentality: the touching causes, or allows, or is the means for, the seeing.

Defining defines definition; that is the hour. Other things may benefit from definition, but never have been defined by defining.

I meet someone; someone meets someone. I meet myself; the emergent meets the emergent. These things could not be just so without the benefit of the hour.

The hour of meaning is when the truth unfolds, the hour of words when logic rises. In the hour that brings them we cast off the shell; in the hour that doesn't, one stays and one leaves. Confirm this for yourself.

“Truth unfolds” is *genjo koan*.

“Logic rises” is a riddle.³⁷ The first two-character word of this four-character compound straightforwardly mean “rise” or “ascend”; with lower likelihood it could be construed as the more exalted “transcendence.” The second, obscure word apparently can refer to a screw or spring, or a mechanism which is powered by a spring, or by extension the motive force behind something. (Taken individually, the first character means “gate,” but also “related to,” while the second, rare character can refer to the act of screwing in, or a mechanical device of some sort. This is the word that translators have rendered as “pivot” or “key” (or “unlocking”).)

At this point for additional clues we need to consider what Dogen might actually have been saying in the context. It seems clear that he is trying to draw a *distinction* between meaning and words, as between horse and wild ass, between mind and brain as it were. From that perspective, it is unlikely he would be praising both by describing their respective hours as unfoldings and transcendings. Instead, he is saying that in the “hours of the brain” its logical, mechanistic properties are ascendant.

“Cast off the shell” is literally “shedding/leaving the body.”³⁸

As for “one stays and one leaves,” existing translators and commentators also vary wildly on what Dogen is likely to have meant.³⁹ “The succession of linguistic riddles continues.

³⁷ 向上關樞 (kōjō kanrei). Translations include “supreme key to truth” (Abe), “going beyond, unlocking the barrier” (Tanahashi), “pivot which is the ascendant state” (Nishijima/Cross, who note that “ascendant” means the state which is more real than thinking and feeling), and “key of transcendence” (Cleary). According to Mizuno, refers to the time when words open the gate transcending *satori*

³⁸ Tanahashi has “casting off the body”; Nishijima/Cross “laying bare the substance”; Cleary “whole body.”

You must be this particular hour.

Dogen engages in some of his trademark wordplay, making the word *uji* into an imperative verb form.

Both of these revered teachers may have been saying the same thing, but isn't there something to add? Particular hours semi-bring us meaning and words; particular hours semi-don't.

Consider these things deeply.

Having him arch his eyebrow and wink his eye is a semi-particular hour; having him arch his eyebrow and wink his eye is a jumbled particular hour; not having him arch his eyebrow and wink his eye is a jumbled hour of jumbled particularity.

Study these things coming and going, study them arriving and leaving; this is the hour of the particular hour.

Or, “this is the hour of *uji*.”

Written this first day of winter, the first year of Ninji at Kosho Horinji.

Ninji is the name of one of the eras that were—and still are, to some extent—used in Japan to count years, based mainly on the reigns of emperors. In Dogen's time, eras were often as short as one year and rarely longer than five. Ninji ran from 1240 through 1243. The first day of winter might have been October 1.

Kosho Horinji is the temple Dogen founded in 1236, after his return from China and subsequent stay at Kenninji. It lies halfway between Kyoto and Nara in current-day Uji City (no relation to the name of the essay). Today it's a quick 20-minute train ride on the Nara line from Kyoto.

Copied by Ejo during the summer retreat in the first year of Kangen (1243).

Koun Ejo, 1198–1280, was Dogen's right-hand man and successor as abbot of Eihei-ji until his retirement in 1267. Ejo is perhaps best known for *Shobogenzo Zuimonki*, a series of personal notes he made based on Dogen's lectures, which were later discovered and disseminated. He gave transmission to Tetsu Gikai, the third abbot, who in turn was the teacher of Keizan, revered as the co-founder of Soto Zen in Japan and the master who established Sojiji, the second of the Soto school's two major temples.

³⁹ For example, “being one with just this, while being free from just this” (Tanahashi); “sticking to this and parting from this” (Nishijima); “one with this, detached from this” (Cleary); and “contact with this and separation with this” (Abe),

WHY THE FIRST PATRIARCH CAME FROM THE WEST: NOTES

This essay is fascicle 62 of the *Shobogenzo* (in the 75-fascicle version). Bi-elefeldt reports that it was probably “composed at Kippōji,¹ the monastery in the province of Echizen (modern Fukui prefecture) where Dōgen was residing at the time.” In it, Dogen takes up a parable, from a ninth-century Zen Master named Kyogen, about a person being quizzed, while hanging from a tree by his mouth over a thousand-foot gorge, about why the first patriarch came from the west.

Why the first patriarch came from the west is a classic Zen koan, or thought exercise. It asks: if everything is already perfect just as it is, or already has Buddha nature, then why bother to practice or do anything else, and in particular, what would be the point in anyone making an arduous, years-long journey from India to China?

The first patriarch who made that journey, referred to in the title of the essay as “soshi” (ancestral master), is Bodhidharma, the legendary sixth-century Buddhist monk who came from India (or perhaps Persia) to China. He is counted as number 28 in the line of succession from Gautama Buddha.

¹吉峰寺

In the title, instead of “why,” other translators use “intention.” The character in question, “i”,² has a range of nuances which do indeed include “intent/intention” (as well as “wish/desire”). But that would seem to imply some specific motivation on the part of Bodhidharma. Another meaning of this character is “meaning,” which seems to be more appropriate in this context and can be translated simply as “why,” the option taken here.

As in the notes on other essays in the book, the majority of comments on other translations have been relegated to the footnotes, especially if they are criticisms primarily technical in nature. For brevity, for this essay I’ve limited myself to reviewing the translations of Bielefeldt (under the aegis of the Stanford Soto Zen Text Project), Nishijima/Cross (abbreviated as “N/C”), and Nearman.

Dogen is dismissive of past commentary from other masters on the episode and recommends that we attempt to come to our own understanding of it through *zazen* meditation. He guides us through a detailed, phrase-by-phrase analysis of the story, restating and explicating it line by line. He takes up the meaning of words such as “person” and “thousand-foot gorge.” He conflates, overlays and equates the components of the story such as hanging from the branch, being asked the question, and opening or not opening your mouth. By the end of the essay, we come to understand that why the first patriarch came from the west is not some question posed externally, but rather intrinsic to the situation itself, and that that far from there being a contradiction between hanging on the branch and answering the question, they are two sides of the same coin.

GREAT MASTER SHUTO OF KYOGEN-JI (SUCCESSOR OF DAI-I AND WHOSE MONK’S NAME WAS CHIKAN) PREACHED TO THE ASSEMBLY, SAYING: “YOU’RE LIKE A PERSON WHO HAS CLIMBED UP A TREE IN A THOUSAND-FOOT GORGE, WITH HIS MOUTH AROUND A LIMB; YOUR FEET ARE UNABLE TO STEP UP ON THE TREE, YOUR HANDS ARE UNABLE TO PULL UP ON THE BRANCH. THEN A PERSON UNEXPECTEDLY APPEARS BENEATH THE TREE AND ASKS WHY THE FIRST PATRIARCH CAME FROM THE WEST. IN THIS SITUATION, IF YOU RESPOND TO HIM AND OPEN YOUR MOUTH YOU WILL FORFEIT YOUR LIFE, BODY LOST. IF YOU DON’T RESPOND YOU FAIL HIS QUESTION. QUICK, WHAT WOULD YOU DO AT THAT POINT?”

This oft-quoted story appears in several sources, such as the 13th-century Record of the Transmission of the Lamp,³ as well as case 243 in Dogen’s own *Shinji Shobogenzo* (not to be confused with the Shobogenzo of which this essay

² 意.

³ 景德傳燈錄 (J: Keitoku Dentoroku, C. Jungde chuandeng lu).

is a part). Although the essay is mainly written in Japanese, as is the entire *Shobogenzo*, the initial parable is quoted in Chinese. To make the distinction clear, this translation shows this and other Chinese portions in small caps as above.

The master in question⁴ is identified by the name of his temple (Kyogen-ji), his posthumous name (Shuto), his monk's name (Chikan), and his teacher Dai-i.⁵

Moving on to the parable itself, the first phrase about being up in a tree is deceptively ambiguous. First, is the emphasis on the person climbing the tree, having climbed it, or simply being up in it? Given the later contrast Dogen draws between climbing and falling, this translation uses "has climbed."⁶

Second, is the tree really on a cliff (or precipice), as nearly all translators claim? If it were, how exactly could it be positioned so as to put someone who falls from it in mortal danger? Could the tree be growing on top of the cliff but leaning out over the edge? Could it be sticking out from the side of the cliff? Or is the tree perhaps even hanging in space?⁷

The correct interpretation is certainly that the geological feature in question is a gorge, with overhangs on either side, rather than a cliff or precipice.⁸ The horizontal orientation of a tree lying across the gorge is also consistent with the person being unable to gain a foothold on the tree—something that would be unlikely if the tree were vertically positioned. There are two additional clues later in the essay that suggest we are dealing with a gorge rather than a one-sided cliff. First, Dogen makes the point that someone falling off the tree would fall *into* the gorge—which makes no sense if it's a cliff, since you can't fall "into" a cliff, unless you're in Zen funnyland. Second, in the discussion of dimensions which follows Dogen refers to the gorge/cliff/precipice as being "a thousand feet

⁴ 香巖智閑 (C. Xiangyan Zhixian), d. 898.

⁵ 大瀧 (C. Dagu), referring to his temple. Also known as 瀧山靈祐 (J. Isan Reiyū, C. Guishan Lingyou) (771-853).

⁶ Nearman's interpretation is that the person is actually climbing up the tree ("Imagine someone climbing up a tree. He believes that '[c]limbing a tree' is a metaphor for doing one's training and practice." In his contemporary Japanese translation Nakamura also has the person climbing up the tree. Nishijima has "A person has gone up a tree", Bielefeldt "a person is up a tree."

⁷ Nearman has the tree growing out of the top of the cliff but leaning over the edge, which he implements by introducing the new word "edge" as in "at the *edge* of a thousand-foot-high cliff.". Bielefeldt has the tree "above" the precipice, leaving unclear where the tree might be rooted, if at all.

⁸ Which would probably be 斷崖 in Chinese, rather than the 懸崖 of the original.

on/to the right and a thousand feet on/to the left.” Although one could imagine that he was saying the width of the cliff from left to right was coincidentally exactly the same as its height from top to bottom, or perhaps was referring to the height of the cliff when viewed from the left or the right, it makes much more sense we are dealing with a gorge a thousand feet high on both left and right sides.

The word translated here as “foot” is actually *shaku*, a traditional measurement used in carpentry, and said to derive from the distance between nodes on bamboo. It is nearly exactly 12” in length.

The phrase “mouth around a limb” is the most natural way in English to express the Chinese construction here relating to biting or having something in your mouth⁹ (we might also say “between his teeth,” but the structure of the essay requires that we stick with “mouth”).

“Step up on” translates a character which refers to putting your foot on something, “pull up on” a character which refers to pulling yourself up or climbing with your hands and could be used to describe clambering up, or scaling, a cliff. Other translators awkwardly render these as “step on,” “stand on,” or “hang on.”¹⁰ One criterion for the translations of these phrases about hands and feet is that they need to work in the context of Dogen’s later play of ideas, employing precisely parallel syntax, concerning how “feet themselves step up on the feet” and “hands themselves pull up on the hands.”

Now another person suddenly appears beneath the tree and throws out the question about why the first patriarch came from the west, presenting the first person with the dilemma of whether to ignore the question or open his mouth to answer and fall to his death.¹¹

⁹ Other translators have adopted formulations such as “biting a branch of the tree” (N/C) or “his mouth bites the tree branch” (Bielefeldt). Nearman has “grabs hold of a branch with his mouth”.

¹⁰ The characters in question are 踏 and 攀, respectively. Bielefeldt has “His feet don’t stand on the tree; his hands don’t hang on a branch.” The translation of the first phrase could be charitably attributed to following a literal translation style, which is certainly the translator’s choice, but that of the second seems wrong. N/C comes close with “her hands will not pull her onto the branch,” as does Nearman with “he is unable to pull himself up with his hands” (omitting the “branch” in the original). (Nearman also says the man grabs hold of the branch in his mouth “since he cannot get a hold.” However, the original text does not support this.)

¹¹ Nearman thinks that by not answering a spiritual question, the person would be acting contrary to the Bodhisattva vow to spiritually help all sentient beings.

“Forfeit his life, body lost”¹² is the first instance of a four-character pattern of the form X-body-Y-life, used repeatedly throughout the essay. Here, X is “lost” and Y is “forfeit.” The original order is actually reversed: “lose body [and/thereby] forfeit life.” In any case, spelling out” the four characters allows us to replicate the effect, as best we can, of this device.¹³

AT THAT POINT PRACTICE LEADER KOTO SHO STEPPED OUT OF THE ASSEMBLY SAYING, INSTEAD OF ASKING US WHAT WE WOULD DO IF WE HAD CLIMBED THE TREE, PLEASE, MASTER, TELL US WHAT WE SHOULD DO IF WE HAVEN’T CLIMBED IT YET? HO-HO, THE MASTER LAUGHED LOUDLY.

“Practice Leader”¹⁴ has several meanings. In India, depending on the sect, it can refer to monks of a particular age, degree of seniority, or level of advancement. In Chinese Zen, which is the case here, it refers to the monk appointed to keep the practicing monks organized,¹⁵ and/or the person on the head or first mat. It can also indicate teachers or scholars of superior ability. In present day Japanese Zen of the Soto variety, the term applies to the lowest category of monk who has taken *tokudo* and been registered as a monk, a usage also seen in Chinese Zen.

Most translators have Koto Sho saying “I do not ask”¹⁶ about when the man is up in the tree, but given that Kyogen has just posed the question himself to the assembly, it seems more likely that Koto is saying to his teacher “do not ask” or “instead of asking.”

Rare are the nuggets of insight in the many analyses and commentaries on this story. All will likely leave you scratching your head, as it were.

Having finished quoting the parable, Dogen now launches into his explication of it, but not before making a typical acerbic comment on past masters.

¹² 喪身失命.

¹³ N/C lose the pattern by conflating the two verbs into a single “lose”, yielding “lose body and life.” For some reason, Nearman chooses “lose his grip” instead of “lose his body.”

¹⁴ 上座/*jōza*. Nearman has “novice monk,” N/C “Acarya,” and Bielefeldt “senior monk.” See: <http://wiki.livedoor.jp/turatura/d/%BE%E5%BA%C2>.

¹⁵ 僧房上座.

¹⁶ This is the N/C rendering. Bielefeldt has “I’m not asking”; Nearman “I have no question.”

“Insight” translates a word that could also be “saying,” “words,” or “truth,”¹⁷ while “nuggets” corresponds to the Chinese counter following it, ignored by most translators.

Bielefeldt translates “analyses and commentaries”¹⁸ as “discussions and comments,” adding in his notes that “The former term translates *shōryō*, a common expression for ‘discussion’ or ‘consultation’ among several parties, but often used in Chan texts for literary ‘discussions’ of a topic; the latter term is a loose translation of *nenko* (literally, ‘taking up the old [cases]’), the genre of Chan writing that comments on *kōan*, or the ‘old cases’ (*kosoku*) of previous masters.”

Leaving that aside, by pondering this while conjuring forth imponderability, conjuring forth unponderingliness, before you know it you will in effect join old Kyogen on his cushion. Once you’ve joined old Kyogen sitting ramrod straight on his cushion, examine the story in detail without waiting further for Kyogen to open his mouth. Do not just peer at it borrowing old Kyogen’s eye; peer into it conjuring up Shakyamuni Buddha’s storehouse of eyes on the true law.

What is translated here as “ponder” is the compound *shiryō*,¹⁹ combining the character for thought and that for magnitude or quantity, and usually translated as “thought” or “thinking.” Compared to other words relating to thought, *shiryō* has a more active nuance, as if rapidly turning over various ideas in one’s head. The reference to “imponderability” and “unponderingliness,” of course, comes from the famous story involving Yakusan,²⁰ found in the *Zazenshin* fascicle of Shobogenzo and elsewhere (my translation):

Monk: What are you pondering sitting up ramrod straight?”

Yakusan: Pondering imponderability.

Monk: How do you ponder imponderability?

Yakusan: Unponderingly.

“Imponderability” is *fu-shiryō*, where *fu* is the Chinese particle for not doing or being able to do something, whereas the “unponderingly”²¹ is *hi-shiryō*,

¹⁷ 道德. Translated variously as “express its essence” (Nearman), “can tell us something” (Bielefeldt), or “express its truth” (N/C).

¹⁸ 商量拈古. N/C has “commentaries and discussions of the ancients”, Nearman “discussions and commentaries.”

¹⁹ 思量.

²⁰ 藥山惟儼 (J. Yakusan Igen, C. Yaoshan Weiyan), 745-828

²¹ Or as N/C would have it, “It is different from thinking.”

where *hi* is the Chinese particle for, roughly, not being something. These terms are commonly translated as “not thinking” and “non-thinking.”²²

Are imponderability and unponderingliness the same thing? Are they two different but parallel states, both of which we should “conjure forth” while pondering?²³ Or does the imponderable give rise to unpondering, which is one possible reading of the way Dogen strings them together here? My translation here merely attempts to reproduce this ambiguity in English.

The verb translated here as “conjuring forth,” applied to imponderability and unponderingliness—what you’re supposed to do with them—is *nenrai*.²⁴ Its first character has finger-related nuances such as plucking, holding and/or twisting, and in fact this character is used for the Buddha’s act of holding up and twirling a flower at Vulture Peak. (It can also have nuances of thinking deeply, searching for a solution, or laboring to come up with an idea.) The second character means “come.” The resulting image is of finding and grasping the not thinking or non-thinking in your fingers and twirling it gently as you bring it closer to yourself.

Several translators adopt the limp translation “use” or “utilize.” However, we must also keep in mind that the first character *nen* is also used as part of the word *nenshutsu* later in the paragraph describing what to do with Shakyamuni Buddha’s storehouse of eyes on the true law. Bielefeldt makes a laudable attempt to capture the connection, using “take on” for *nenrai* and “take out” for *nenshutsu*. This translation adopts “conjure forth” and “conjure up.”

The promised effect of the pondering is characterized by the adverb *onozukara*, translated here as “before you know it,” but rendered by most English translators as “naturally.” That is within the broad scope of the word’s meaning, as well as being the definition appearing in many Japanese-English dictionaries, and as such cannot be called incorrect, but given this context we want to consider some alternatives. The original meaning of *onozukara* is said to be “under something or someone’s own power, without help from the outside.” In that sense, it could be translated as “spontaneously” (or even “automatically”), or “all by itself/oneself.” It can also have the sense of “just maybe,” as well as “before you know it.” Finally, it can also mean “coincidentally” or “accidentally,” but

²² Nearman has “not deliberately thinking about it” and “not deliberately thinking about anything.”

²³ As Nearman would have it.

²⁴ 拈来.

those senses would not seem to be relevant in this context. Since this sentence stands in contrast to the preceding one where Dogen describes relying on the commentaries of other masters as not too useful, and starts with his exhortation to the reader concerning imponderability and unponderingliness, here the “before you know it” translation seems most cogent, although the simple “yourself” could also work.

The “in effect” in “you will in effect join old Kyogen on his cushion” is a translation of *kōfu*,²⁵ an obscure word (actually, today it means *kung fu*). Most translators imagine it has to do with “effort,” but are then left with the problem of how effort on the cushion fits in with the flow of the discourse.²⁶ If one is convinced that the meaning is effort rather than effect, then a translation such as “you can make an effort to join old Kyogen on his cushion” is possible. “Sitting ramrod straight” translates *gotsuza*,²⁷ whose first character can indicate towering, fixedly, or according to N/C “mountain-still state.” “Without waiting further for Kyogen to open his mouth” obviously refers back to the lead-in story, but more generally to the need to explore things on our own without waiting for “masters” to explain them to us.

Dogen once again indulges in his penchant for character play with the words translated here as “peer at” and “peer into,” both sharing a first character²⁸ meaning to watch for, look at, or spy on. For “peer at” the second character is that for “see”; for “peer into” the second character is “break/tear.”²⁹

²⁵ 功夫.

²⁶ For instance, N/C have the clumsy “effort on one round cushion with Old [Master] Kyogen will naturally be present,” while Bielefeldt goes with “we will naturally have concentrated effort on the same cushion as old Xiangyan,” and Nearman tries “your efforts on your meditation cushion will naturally be like those of our dear old friend Kyōgen.”

²⁷ 兀坐.

²⁸ 覷.

²⁹ N/C obscure this relationship by translating the first as “glimpse” and the second as “instantly to see through it” (although the “instantly” is nowhere to be found in the original.) Nearman does little better, going with “look upon” vs. “break through and see.” Bielefeldt once again successfully picks up the character play and skillfully reproduces it in English with “look at” and “look through.” I think “peer” is closer to the right nuance than the alternative “look,” and “look through” has the unfortunate hint of looking through a phone book rather than seeing through or into something as if it were transparent, which is the intent here.

“Storehouse of eyes on the true law,” of course, is *Shobogenzo*. Dogen is connecting and contrasting the (single) pair of eyes borrowed from Kyogen with the Buddha’s entire storehouse of eyes.

Now Dogen starts the process of walking us through the story step by step, analyzing each word and phrase, restating, explicating. He is showing us not only how to read this particular story, but more generally how to look at any story and its words.

YOU’RE LIKE A PERSON WHO HAS CLIMBED UP A TREE IN A THOUSAND-FOOT GORGE. Scrutinize these words calmly. What does PERSON mean? [Someone who] is no more a post than he is a pillar.

The word “scrutinize” translates *sankyū*,³⁰ which could also be study, explore, investigate, or work through. The first character can be thought of as a kind of abbreviation for *sanzen*, sitting zazen, the process of which is taken to the degree of the second character, meaning “reaching the limit” (of understanding of something important). In a related sense, the second character might be thought of characterizing the study process, thus “study without reservation.” “Calmly”³¹ could also be “quietly.”

Dogen first invites us to contemplate the meaning of the word “person” as used to refer to the person up in the tree. He is not trying to define “person” in its generic sense, but rather characterize the person in the story, the one that has gotten himself into the relatively exalted, if awkward, position of being up in the tree.

The literal syntax of the sentence concerning the post and the pillar is “if [he/it] is not a pillar, [he/it] should not be called a wooden stake.” Most translators approach this mechanically, resulting in tortured English which then requires further tortured explanations to make sense of.³² In fact, this is just a syntactic device to express “neither pillar nor post.”

Syntax aside, what are the pillar and post referring to here? As he does throughout this essay and indeed the *Shobogenzo* in its entirety, Dogen is making

³⁰ 参究.

³¹ しづかに (shizuka-ni). Quietly, tranquilly, serenely, soundlessly, silently, pensively.

³² For instance, N/C indicate in a footnote that the post “here represents a general category. All wooden things are real entities, and so we should not always group them under a concept such as ‘wooden thing’ or ‘piece of timber’,” proceeding to use the latter formulation in their actual translation. Good thing we have these masters to elucidate such complexities for us. Nearman has the similar “piece of lumber.”

reference to other works by himself and other masters. In fact, this whole essay can be viewed in some sense as a “mash-up,” a clever, thought-provoking combination of overt and covert references to the entire Zen literature. In that sense, here one can sense an almost post-modernist flavor, where Dogen is making meta-comments on the nature of the Zen literature.

In this particular case, the post and pillar are objects or symbols both of which occur in the literature being asked a question, like the person in the story. The post,³³ which could be variously translated as peg, nail, paddle, pin, stake, or picket, is actually asked why the first patriarch came from the west in a question-and-answer from Sekito Kisen in *Transmission of the Lamp*:

A monk asked: What is the meaning of the First Patriarch’s coming from the West?

Master: Ask that post over there.

Monk: I do not understand you.

Master: I do not either, any more than you.

We have no record of the pillar being asked why the first patriarch came from the west, but we are counseled to ask it about buddha nature (and have it ask us as well) in the Bussho fascicle of Shobogenzo.

The pillar (rochū) is a large round column used in temple construction which is half inside and half outside a hall such as the hattō or butsuden. It is often used, along with tiles or lanterns, to refer to the physical surroundings at a monastery, or to symbolize lifelessness or non-sentience. Dogen discusses such non-sentient beings preaching the Dharma in the *Mujō Seppō* fascicle of Shobogenzo. But pillar may also refer to a master or monk, in the sense that they serve as the fundamental support for their temple or monastery. The pillar is mentioned, with either or both nuances, in the Yakusan Igen poem leading off the *A Particular Hour* fascicle of Shobogenzo: “The staff and whisk at a particular hour; wooden pillars and stone lanterns at a particular hour” (where the lantern can also refer to a Zen master, in this case to his ability to illuminate).

The phrase about posts and pillars, then, might be paraphrased as “the man hanging from the tree is neither a post, who could not possibly respond to the question of why the first patriarch came from the west, nor a pillar, whether of the inanimate kind or in its symbolic meaning of Zen master, who could not or

³³ 木概.

would not answer the question either.” The person is going to answer the question, albeit in his own way.

Dogen may also be characterizing the level of spiritual development of the subject of the story, saying the person in question is not necessarily a fully realized master, but that that doesn’t mean he is a mere novice monk (who presumably would not be up in the tree yet anyway, or might even still be trying to figure out where the tree was). Under this interpretation, the point of the parable is to discuss the plight in which a student at a moderately advanced level might find himself or herself.

Parenthetically, the character for “post” is also the “stick” of “[dried] shit-stick,”³⁴ a branch-like object used in India to wipe the rear, and famously referred to in Unmon’s answer to the question, “What is Buddha?”.

Even if the truth of the buddhas, truth of the old masters cracks his face, he should not mishandle this encounter between himself and the other.

This sentence has been subject to many interpretations, most wrong.

The original for the first phrase can be transliterated as “even/also it-is face-breaking of buddha-visage ancestor-visage.” It turns out that “face breaking” is a part of the common four-character compound “face-breaking-subtle- smile,”³⁵ sometimes translated as “face breaking into a smile,” and thus a potential shorthand for smiling or grinning. Most translators adopt that interpretation; some go further and see an allusion to the story mentioned above where the Buddha held up a flower on Vulture Peak, in response to which his disciple Mahakasyapa smiled,³⁶ but the plausibility of this reading is reduced by the fact that in that story it is only Mahakasyapa who smiled.

In addition, the character translated as “visage” in the rough transliteration above is also commonly encountered as a sort of abbreviation for *menboku*,³⁷ which also means “face” but in the sense of “losing face,” and can be translated as honor or dignity. In a Zen context *menboku* is used to mean, truth, marrow, or underlying meaning.

³⁴ 乾屎橛.

³⁵ 破顏微笑 (*hagan bishō*).

³⁶ Nearman actually puts this explicitly in his translation, which would seem to be exceeding his writ as a translator by a fair margin.

³⁷ 面目.

In terms of who is smiling or cracking their face, we have to remember that just two sentences ago Dogen was promising to explain to us something about the “person” in the story, the same person who you’ll recall has a giant branch stuffed in his mouth, which would easily crack his face, but make it almost impossible to smile. So it’s almost certainly that person who is doing the smiling or facial cracking or whatever it is.

So there is more here than meets the eye. Superficial translations such as “a buddha’s face and a patriarch’s face breaking into a smile” almost certainly do not capture the writer’s intent.

This interpretation is supported by the presence of the contrastive “even if.” It would hardly make sense that we or the guy or whoever it is would be being advised to not mishandle, or misunderstand, the self/other encounter in the next phrase *in spite of* the buddhas and ancestors smiling, or he himself smiling. On the other hand, it would make eminent sense that the tree climber is being so advised *even if* the result were to crack his face.

All in all, then, it would seem advisable to take Dogen at face value and translate this as “face cracking” on the part of the climber.

Then again, this entire line of interpretation could be wrong and the buddhas and old masters, or climber, might indeed be smiling after all. Very few sentences in Dogen have English translations that can legitimately claim a 100% probability of being correct, and for the majority the percentage drops below 50%, as is the case here. The best the translator can do is find a translation which reproduces ambiguities and multiple interpretations in the English; failing that, find the translation that works best from a syntactic, stylistic, semantic, and contextual standpoint; and finally point out the issues in notes, as I’m doing here.

The second phrase of the sentence can be literally translated as “self-other (poss.) encounter should-not-mistake.” “Self-other” could refer to our own self vs. the other within; ourselves vs. other people; the smiling buddha vs. the smiling ancestor; or the person in the tree vs. the person below asking the question. “Encounter” translates the Japanese word *shoken*,³⁸ literally “mutual seeing,” which is commonly used to indicate a meeting between teacher and student in the Zen context, but could also be translated as “meeting” or, as one translation tries, “mutual recognition.” “Mistake” (*ayamaru*) could mean either to misun-

³⁸ 相見.

derstand or confuse (other translators have used “lose sight of” and “overlook”), but also “handle incorrectly.”

So how are self/other, the encounter, and the misunderstanding or mishandling related to each other? Is it us, the readers, that are being counseled to avoid the mistake, as some translators believe, or the person in the tree, or self and other? Are the parties to the encounter the self and the other, or could it possibly be between the grinning buddha(s) and patriarch(s)? Such are the kinds of puzzles that a translator finds in most every line of Dogen, if only he takes the trouble to look for them.

Again, the one thing we can be relatively sure of is that the sentence relates to the definition of “person,” since after all that’s what Dogen is talking about here. In other words, we can reasonably exclude faux-Zen constructions out of left field.³⁹ We can start by trying to identify the predicate of which “person” is the subject. There are contextual and syntactic hints that the person in the tree is the one being advised to not make a mistake. Self and other would then quite naturally refer to the person in the tree and the other person in the story (the one asking the question), and their encounter is not some quasi-philosophical “recognition” or “understanding” but rather the actual encounter just described in the story itself.

The thrust of this little 26-character passage which we have just spent nearly three pages analyzing, then, is as follows. Not being a post or a pillar, the climber should ensure that he does not sacrifice the opportunity presented by the encounter with the questioner, even at the risk of his mouth cracking open with the resulting truth.

The place where the PERSON HAS CLIMBED UP A TREE is neither the BOUNDLESS EARTH, nor THE TOP OF A HUNDRED-FOOT POLE, but A THOUSAND-FOOT GORGE. Even if he were to fall off, it would be INSIDE THE THOUSAND-FOOT GORGE.

The reference to the boundless earth is somewhat opaque. The hundred-foot pole,⁴⁰ according to Bielefeldt, “is a common expression in Zen literature for the

³⁹ Such as that of N/C, who seem to believe that the smiles are themselves the meeting of self and other, whatever that might mean. Bielefeldt stays close to the original syntax, ending up with “Though it be the face of a buddha and the face of an ancestor breaking into a smile, we should not be mistaken about the meeting of self and other,” mostly leaving the riddle to the readers, but not before making the decision on their behalf that it’s them that should not be confused, rather than the person in the story.

⁴⁰ 百尺竿頭 (*hyakushaku kantō*). N/C explicitly introduce “beyond” into the English, although it’s not there in the original, while Bielefeldt omits the “top.”

extreme limit of religious practice, as in the saying ‘proceed one step beyond the hundred foot pole.’”

The “inside” of the gorge is indicated in the original by placing the character for inside, within, or interior⁴¹ after “thousand-foot gorge.” Some commentators believe the boundless earth represents infiniteness and the hundred-foot pole finiteness.

If, as mentioned above, we mistakenly believe we’re dealing with a cliff or precipice rather than a gorge, we have the thorny problem of how to fall “into” or “inside” a cliff. Various translators have dealt with this in a variety of creative ways.⁴²

There are times you fall down and there are times you climb up. The story is saying to YOU’RE LIKE A PERSON WHO HAS CLIMBED UP A TREE INSIDE A THOUSAND-FOOT GORGE. This obviously means there are times you climb up. In this case, it is a thousand feet to the top, a thousand feet to the bottom. It is a thousand feet on the left, a thousand feet on the right. It is a thousand feet over here, a thousand feet over there. It is a thousand feet for such a person and a thousand feet up the tree. Traditionally a thousand feet has been like this.

What is translated here as “traditionally” is *kyorai*, a compound of the characters for “head towards” and “come,” meaning “up to now.”⁴³

But we must also ask how great the measure of a thousand feet is. We are told it is as the measure of the ancient mirror, as the measure of a brazier, as the measure of a tombstone of which we are told.

We take the notion of a thousand feet for granted, thinking of it in the physical terms of up/down/right/left, yet in fact upon further examination we find that its measure (or magnitude) can be viewed from a number of perspectives, including that of mind, body, and life/death, represented here by the mirror, brazier, and tombstone. These objects also call forth associations to koans found elsewhere in Zen literature. (Another possible, albeit less likely, reading is that the

⁴¹ 裏.

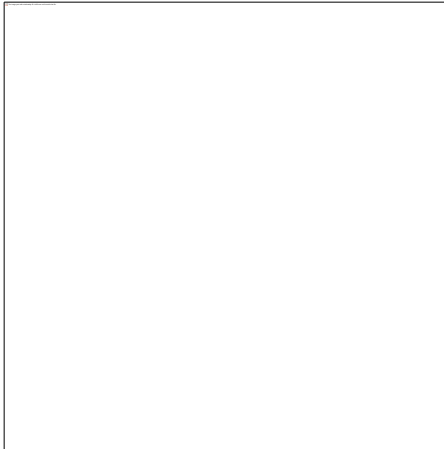
⁴² The confusion extends to both modern-day Japanese commentators and English translators. Nakamura glosses this as 千尺懸崖のうち, or “**part of** (or **within**) the thousand-foot cliff.” N&C have “**within the concrete reality** of a thousand foot precipice”. Nearman gives “**within the context of** a thousand-foot-high cliff.” Bielefeldt is more conservative with “he is **within** ‘a thousand foot precipice’.” But as described in the notes, such over-readings are hardly necessary.

⁴³ However, N/C and Nearman interpret this as “up to now in this essay,” translating it as “foregoing.” Bielefeldt has “so far.”

number of feet in a thousand feet is the same as the number of mirrors, braziers, or tombstones.)

Commentators say that the ancient (or old, or eternal) mirror represents the mind and how it reflects reality. The mirror and brazier reference a dialog between Seppo Gison⁴⁴ and Gensa Shibi,⁴⁵ given in the *Kokyo* fascicle of Shobogenzo and elsewhere, comparing the measure (or breadth⁴⁶) of the world to that of the mirror and or the brazier. Nearman believes that the implication is that the fireplace is immeasurable because “when the fires of karmic consequence arise, the size of the fireplace is irrelevant in the fact of the pain experienced,” but he may have the wrong religion. N/C think the reference is to an object with “a conspicuous physical presence.”

The tombstone⁴⁷, or “seamless stupa (or pagoda, or tower),” shown in the accompanying picture,⁴⁸ is seamless by virtue of being carved from a single block of stone, and refers to an oblong memorial to a deceased monk. N/C note that it is a “concrete object with an eternal meaning.” It is referred to in another dialog between Seppo and Gensa in the *Juki* fascicle of Shobogenzo.



Taking the three analogies together, many commentators believe that the implication is that the thousand feet is immeasurable. It's equally plausible, however, that Dogen is saying the meaning of a thousand feet varies depending on your perspective.

⁴⁴ 雪峰義在 (C. Xuefeng Yicun), 822-908.

⁴⁵ 玄沙師備 (C. Xuansha Shibei), 835-908.

⁴⁶ 闊.

⁴⁷ 無縫塔 (*muhōtō*), lit. “seamless tower,” an egg-shaped tombstone so named because it is carved from a single piece of rock.

⁴⁸ Picture is of tombstones at Anyōin, a temple in Kamakura.

WITH YOUR MOUTH AROUND A LIMB. What kind of mouth is this? You may claim not to know the mouth's overall width or overall aperture, but you should know its location from the time spent going down the limb searching for branches and plucking leave. It is the time spent gripping the limb that forms the mouth.

Dogen continues dissecting the individual terms that lie at the center of the story, now moving on from consideration of “person” and “thousand feet” to “mouth.”

The “aperture” here in “mouth’s overall width or overall aperture” is actually itself the character for mouth, which however also can have the related meaning of “opening” or “overture.” It’s understandable that in the context many translators believe it refers to the mouth, but this would yield an odd translation such as “the whole mouth of the mouth.”⁴⁹

Most translators assume that Dogen is advising us to search for branches and pluck leaves⁵⁰ in order to learn the location of the mouth. But actually this is a literary reference meaning to get bogged down in the details. The allusion is to the old poem “Ode to Enlightenment”⁵¹ by Yongjia Xuanjue,⁵² a disciple of the sixth patriarch Eno (Huineng), consisting of 64 verses, including one translated by D T Suzuki in his *Manual of Zen Buddhism* as “If you go on gathering leaves and branches, there is no help for you.” Another translator has “No point searching for branches or plucking leaves.”⁵³ The branch searching and leaf plucking is contrasted to “going directly to the root.”

So it would seem unlikely this is something Dogen is recommending. And he’s not. He’s telling us we *already know* the location of the mouth from our historical preoccupation with the small stuff. The confusion stems from the Japanese *shirubeshi*, literally “must/should know,” which many translators handle as if it were a kind of imperative—“you should do this or that,” in line with their

⁴⁹ Various translators attempts include “the whole mouth, the whole vastness of the mouth” (Bielefeldt), “the total extent of the mouth or the whole of the mouth itself” (N/C), or “just ‘the expanse of the whole Mouth itself’ (Nearman), but none of these tracks the syntax of the original.

⁵⁰ 尋枝摘葉.

⁵¹ 證道歌 (J. Shōdōka, C. Zhengdao ge).

⁵² 永嘉玄覺 (J. Yoka Genkaku), 665-713. Yongjia refers to his birthplace in present-day Chekiang Province; his monk’s name was Myodo (明道, C. Mingdao).

⁵³ Aitken’s “I can’t respond to any concerns about leaves and branches” and Bielefeldt’s “Plucking at the leaves and searching the branches—this I cannot do” are less convincing.

preconception that Dogen's writings are a kind of list of directions for doing Zen and being Zen-like. A common mistaken translation is the imperative "Know that." Actually, here and elsewhere, the meaning is simply that you should (already) know. Dogen often uses this phrase *shirubeshi* as a kind of prefix to sentences, as in one occurring earlier in the present essay about there being times to climb up. There as well the thrust is "You should [already] know." In many cases the English "obviously" or "clearly" will be appropriate translations.

The "time spent" in the translation above corresponds to the word *shibaraku* in the original. This word, depending on the context, can refer to either a short period of time or a long period of time.⁵⁴

Thus the whole mouth is the branch; the whole branch is the mouth. The mouth courses through the body; the coursing mouth is the body.

"Coursing" translates the character *tsu*⁵⁵ preceding body and mouth, meaning "through."⁵⁶ Another possible reading, more in line with Dogen's penchant for symmetric and mirror-image verbal constructions, would be "every of fiber of his body the mouth, every fiber of his mouth is the body." That would be more possible if Chinese equivalent of "is"⁵⁷ were not omitted in the first subphrase, whether intentionally or due to a transcription error. Yet a third variation would be "the mouth pervades the body; the body is what pervades the mouth."

A Japanese commentator provides the following insight. "The meaning of mouth here is not limited to the mouth as organ, but refers to the nature of the Dharma. Inevitably, all existence is the mouth and it is preaching the word at the same time. To refer to the fact that the preaching does not stop with the voice Soto Zen uses the term *mujo seppo*, a favorite of many an old master. This kind of back-and-forth is a notable characteristic of this fascicle."

⁵⁴ N/C render this as "for the present" and Nearman as "just for the present," but neither is a good translation of the original not to mention not fitting into the flow of the narrative.

⁵⁵ 通.

⁵⁶ N/C translate this as "thoroughly realized," a bit of editorializing we probably could have done without. Bielefeldt goes with "It is the mouth throughout the body; throughout the mouth is the body." Nearman has His whole body, through and through, is his Mouth: his whole Mouth, through and through, is his body."

⁵⁷ 是.

YOUR FEET ARE UNABLE TO STEP UP ON THE TREE because the tree itself steps up on the tree. It's as if the feet themselves step up on the feet. YOUR HANDS ARE UNABLE TO PULL UP ON THE BRANCH because the branch itself pulls up on the branch. It's as if the hands themselves pull up on the hands. Even so, your feet still move back and forth, your hands still open and close. You are not alone in initially thinking [you] are hanging in the void. But does not hanging in the void pale in comparison to having your mouth around a limb?

The “feet” which are moving back and forth might better be “heels”; the “hands which are opening and closing might better be “fists.”

The phrase “you are not alone in initially thinking” can be literally transliterated as “self-other people period-of-time think.”⁵⁸ I’ve taken the interpretation that the self-other refers to the listener/reader and other people.

A PERSON UNEXPECTEDLY APPEARING BENEATH THE TREE ASKS WHY THE FIRST PATRIARCH CAME FROM THE WEST. This A PERSON UNEXPECTEDLY APPEARING BENEATH THE TREE means something like A PERSON APPEARING WITHIN THE TREE, as if the person were the tree. It's A PERSON UNEXPECTEDLY APPEARING BENEATH A PERSON. That gives us tree asking tree, person asking person.

The “as if the person were the tree” is literally “person-tree-be/become.” Nearly all commentators have imagined person-tree to be a compound noun Dogen has creatively invented, and given it translations such as “man-tree,” “human tree,” or “person tree.” If this seems odd, it’s probably because it is. It’s more likely that the correct interpretation is simply “person-be/become/tree.”⁵⁹

The totality of the tree is the totality of the question; the totality of why [the first patriarch] came from the west is the question of why he came from the west.

The word “totality” appearing in this paragraph translates the Chinese character *kyo*,⁶⁰ which has a wide variety of meanings, including lift, raise, hold up, cite, choose, recommend (as in raising someone for consideration), or even just “do,” with a nuance of in unison. However the meaning we are looking for, absent in

⁵⁸ 自他 (*jita*), lit. “self-other.” N/C translates this as “I and others,” yielding a rendering “Now people—I and others—are prone to think...” (leaving out the しばらく (*shibaraku*) and inserting the “prone.”). Nakamura believes the *jita* here refers to dualists.

⁵⁹ 樹拳問なり. N/C have “the whole tree is asking a question,” but it’s impossible to see how they got from here to there, since the original is actually quite clear, with “whole” nowhere in sight in the original.

⁶⁰ 挙.

Japanese and therefore possibly overlooked by some Japan-centric scholars, is “all,” “entire,” or “whole.”⁶¹ Here I’ve used “totality.”

Translating this as “raise” doesn’t make any sense.⁶² What does it mean to “raise a tree?” And “raising a question” sounds like English, but that’s just an accident; the character in question does not have the meaning in Chinese of posing a question.

Even after we have found the correct translation for the character in question, it remains to parse the structure of the Chinese sentence. Again applying our technique of literal transliteration to this sentence we obtain, for the first phrase, “[it] is all tree all question.” This poses the same sorts of questions of interpretation we have encountered before: does it mean “the whole tree is the whole question,” or “it is the whole tree and the whole question”?⁶³ But if the latter, what would be the “it”?⁶⁴

The second phrase of the sentence is structurally similar. It goes, “[it] is all-(coming-from-east-reason) ask (coming-from-east-reason).” Again, this could either be “all of why he came from the west *is to ask* why he came from the west,” “all of why he came from the west *asks* why he came from the west,” or “all of why he came from the west *and* asking why he came from the west.” But in both cases the context and syntax suggests the first, “A is B” interpretation.

This translation places “the first patriarch” in brackets to show that it is absent from the original, where the abbreviated form *seirai i* is used. Normally such brackets should be considered major red flags; they are the last refuge of a translator who cannot make something fit together either syntactically and semantically and thus must invent things to stick in the translation. Here, however, we are simply reinserting the known subject in order to make the English flow

⁶¹ Nearman correctly uses “whole,” as in “‘the whole tree itself asking the whole question’ and ‘the whole intent behind Bodhidharma coming from the West’ asking ‘why he came from the West’,” but the original syntax does not support his interpretation that the tree is asking the question.

⁶² This is Bielefeldt’s approach: “They raise the tree and raise the question; they raise ‘the intention of coming from the west’ and question ‘the intention of coming from the west.’”

⁶³ N/C’s “the whole tree is asking a question” can hardly be correct, since they’ve omitted the second 举 in 举樹举問 and the syntax doesn’t line up anyway. But by now this is far from surprising.

⁶⁴ Bielefeldt neatly sidesteps the question by having it be “they” who are doing the raising, leaving it up to the reader to decide if it’s supposed to be the tree that was asking (some other) tree, the person that was asking some other person, both the asker and askee, or something else altogether.

properly. We could try something like “the totality of the reason for (or intent of) coming from the west,” but that would sacrifice the consistency of translating *soshi seirai i* using “why,” as in “why the first patriarch came from the west.”

The questioner also has his mouth around a limb when asking the question. If he did not have his mouth around a limb he would not be able to ask the question. Mouth full, he is voiceless; full of words, he is mouthless. When asking why [the first patriarch] came from the west, his mouth is around why he came from the west.

With the sentence beginning “mouth full,” Dogen once again bequeaths to us one of the highly distilled, symmetric word experiences for which he is deservedly famous. The word-for-word transliteration is “full-mouth no sound, full-words no mouth.” The challenge in reproducing this structure in English is that the Japanese *man* (“fill/full”) in the original is used in distinct ways in the two subphrases: “to be full [with something]” in the first and “to fill [someone or something]” in the second. One is tempted to reproduce the structure with something like “Mouth too full to speak, words too full to mouth,” but that may be taking translator’s license a bit too far. Other translators try things like “no voice that fills the mouth,” “he would have no sound filling his mouth,” or “nor any voice to fill the mouth,” but these miss the mark in the sense that the fullness of the mouth in the first phrase is almost certainly referring to the limb stuffed in the poor guy’s mouth.

IF YOU RESPOND TO HIM BY OPENING YOUR MOUTH, YOU’LL FORFEIT YOUR LIFE, BODY LOST. Now scrutinize closely the words IF YOU RESPOND TO HIM BY OPENING YOUR MOUTH. It sounds as if you could respond to him without opening your mouth. In that case you would not forfeit your life and lose your body.

Whether you open your mouth or do not open your mouth does not prevent you from having your mouth around the branch. Opening and closing are not necessarily all there is to the mouth, although a mouth can open and close. That means that the mouth can always remain around the limb without that preventing it from opening and closing.

The second sentence of the above uses the same term *zenkō* (whole mouth) as found earlier both in the reference to the whole mouth being the branch, and that to the mouth’s aperture. Nearman attempts to assign some special meaning to this by rendering it as the capitalized Mouth, or whole Mouth.

“The mouth can always remain around the limb” uses the term *kajō*, or “normal state.”

RESPOND TO HIM BY OPENING YOUR MOUTH means responding to him by opening the branch, or responding to him by opening why [the first patriarch] came from the west.

Dogen equates, or relates, opening your mouth, opening the branch, and opening the reason or Bodhidharma's voyage from the west.⁶⁵

Any response to him without opening why [the first patriarch] came from the west is not a response to why he came from the west. This is inherently not responding to him, and that would be preserving your life, body whole, not forfeiting your life, body lost.

Translators differ on what this might actually mean.⁶⁶

Once you've forfeited your life, body lost, you cannot respond to him. Having said that, in his heart Kyogen is not unwilling to respond to him. But this would probably result simply in forfeiting life, body lost. Obviously until you respond to him you'll be preserving your life, body protected. The moment you respond to him you'll invigorate your life, body freed.

Having your mouth full is the way for everyone, one might deduce.

"One might deduce" translates the Japanese *hakarishirinu*, which other translators have translated as "thus," "clearly," and "in conclusion." This seems important because it is tying together and restating what went before. The modern-day Japanese word *hakarishiru* means to guess or conjecture, which is why I've adopted "deduce" here. Overall, in the original the sentence is in Chinese form and reads "person-person full-mouth is way/truth/words." It's unclear whether the subject of the sentence, and thus what is being equated with the way or the truth, is the people with full mouths, or the full mouths that people have, or the state of their mouths being full.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Nearman neatly manages to conceal the consistent use of "open" for mouth, branch, and reason by using different translations for each; he has "Is **'opening'** one's mouth to answer another" the same as **'disgorging'** the tree branch to answer another" or the same as **'disclosing'** the intent behind Bodhidharma's coming from the West to answer another?"

⁶⁶ N/C: "Not to have answered others is to be holding onto life with the whole body; it cannot be called losing body and life." Which they claim is used here as an ironic expression of attaining realization (i.e. getting into the activity of the moment and forgetting oneself). Bielefeldt: "And, since it is not answering him, this is "his whole body protecting his life"; we cannot say that "he forfeits his body and loses his life." Nearman: "Not to have answered another is to grasp hold of life with one's whole being; it cannot be called 'losing one's grip and forfeiting one's life'" (with footnote: "that is, it cannot be called dropping off body and mind.").

⁶⁷ N/C: "the mouth of each person being full is the state of truth." B: "Thus, we know that each person with a mouth full is saying it." N: "Clearly, what fills the mouth of each and every

You should respond to him, you should respond to yourself. You should question yourself, you should question him. This is HAVING YOUR MOUTH AROUND THE TRUTH. HAVING YOUR MOUTH AROUND THE LIMB means HAVING YOUR MOUTH AROUND THE TRUTH.

When you respond to him you're OPENING ANOTHER ONE ON TOP OF YOUR MOUTH. If you do not respond to him, even though you may fail his question, you do not fail your own question.

The discussion of opening another mouth on top of your own is in Chinese style and is likely to be a reference to some old Zen story which unfortunately no one has tracked down.⁶⁸

Thus we see that without exception the buddhas and old masters responding to why [the first patriarch] came from the west have all given their response having encountered a time of having climbed up a tree with their mouth around a limb.

MASTER JUKEN OF SECCHO SAID, "IT'S EASY TO SAY SOMETHING UP IN A TREE. IT'S HARD TO SAY SOMETHING AT THE BOTTOM OF A TREE. [THIS] OLD MONK IS UP IN THE TREE, SO BRING ON YOUR QUESTIONS.

Seccho⁶⁹ is known for compiling the cases and providing the capping verses which became the basis for the Blue Cliff Record.

Concerning this story, N/C comment, "It is easy to express peculiar ideas, but difficult to manifest the everyday state," but one struggles to find where they find "peculiar ideas" or "everyday state" here,

person is the Truth." In his contemporary Japanese translation Nakamura claims this means "the entire mouth of people is the *satori* of the buddha way."

⁶⁸ N/C: "over the mouth it further opens a mouth." B: "he opens a mouth on top of his mouth." N: "You open the Mouth within your mouth." Nakamura: 開口がさらに開口するといわなければならない。

⁶⁹ 雪竇重顯 (C. Xuedou Chongxian), 980-1052. Known posthumously as Myōkaku .

BRING ON YOUR QUESTIONS—no matter how hard you try, the question will be too late, the question being brought after the answer. I ask old awls everywhere, past and present, is Kyogen's loud laugh of ho-ho SAYING SOMETHING UP IN A TREE, or SAYING SOMETHING AT THE BOTTOM OF A TREE? Is it responding to why [the first patriarch] came from the west, or not responding to why he came from the west? Try saying something.

Shobogenzo Soshi Seirai I Fascicle Sixty Two

Preached to the assembly within the remote mountains of Etsuu on the 4th day of the 2nd month in the 2nd year of Kangen (kinoetatsu)

Etsuu refers to the Echizen region in western Japan, current-day Fukui Prefecture. Kangen ran from 1243 to 1247. Kinoetatsu is an alternative method of referring to years, involving a sixty-year cycle (the next such year is scheduled to occur in 2024).

Transcribed on the 22nd day of the sixth month in the 2nd year of Koan (tsuchinotou) at Eiheiji, Kichijō-san

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INDEX

A

A Particular Hour fascicle of Shobogenzo, 138
Aizen Myo-o. god of sexual passion, 103
Ajatasatru, 38
Amida Sutra, 96
Ananda, 27, 39
angels, 24
anri, 82, 93
arhat, 35
ash, 44, 66, 82, 83, 84, 85
asura, 103
Austin, James, 85
Avalokitesvara, 103

B

Bach, Johann Sebastian, 107
bamboo, 27, 30, 39, 52, 112, 113, 132
banner pole, 27, 39
Baoen Xuanze. *See* Hoon Gensoku
Baso Doitsu, 55, 95, 115
Bimbisara, 38
bird, 46, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 94
Birushana, 14
Blake, William, 88
Blue Cliff Record, 150
boat, 44, 45, 80, 82, 87, 93
Bodhidharma, 8, 9, 16, 18, 32, 55, 115, 122, 129, 130, 147, 149
body, 2, 4, 9, 10, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 31, 34, 38, 39, 44, 45, 59, 61, 62, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 81, 87, 96, 117, 118, 126, 130, 133, 142, 145, 148, 149
brazier, 61, 142, 143

buddhadharma, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 68, 84, 95
buddhas, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 17, 20, 24, 43, 44, 53, 60, 63, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 74, 76, 117, 139, 140, 150
Buddhism, 1, 4, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 34, 35, 38, 41, 51, 67, 84, 88, 94, 95, 96, 103, 110, 115, 144
Buson, 86
butsudo, 70

C

casting off body and mind, 76
chanting, 12
chicken's foot, 29
China, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 27, 30, 32, 34, 39, 66, 76, 81, 87, 97, 103, 115, 127, 129
Chinese dynasties
 Song, 23
 Tang, 19
Chinzei, 98

D

Dai-i. *See* Isan Reiyu
Daikan Eno, 85
datsuraku, 77
death, 4, 21, 37, 39, 43, 45, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 82, 83, 84, 85, 98, 120, 132, 142
delusion, 33, 36, 43, 69, 70, 71, 72
dharma, 2, 8, 14, 16, 19, 21, 30, 34, 35, 37, 38, 44, 68, 80, 83, 84, 86, 94, 115, 116, 117, 119, 124
dharma position, 83, 117, 119
dhyana, 16

dhyana paramita, perfection of
 meditation, 15
 Dorsey, Issan, 106
 dragon's tusk, 29

E

earth, 9, 10, 14, 19, 21, 33, 35, 47, 49, 50,
 51, 60, 96, 97, 104, 108, 109, 110, 141,
 142
 gilded, 96
 East China Sea, 87, 97
 Echizen province of Japan, 129
 Echu. *See* Nanyo Echu
 Eihei-ji, 4, 64, 77, 88, 112
 Einstein, Albert, 101
 elephant, 50, 51, 108, 109
 enlightenment, 7, 9, 10, 14, 17, 30, 31,
 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 43, 44, 53, 54,
 66, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 76, 78, 79, 83,
 86, 87, 92, 94, 95, 96, 110, 115, 117,
 118

F

Fayan Wen-yi. *See* Hogen Buneki
 final days, 24
 fire, 10, 26, 39, 66, 83, 97, 103
 firewood, 44, 70, 82, 83, 84, 85
 fish, 36, 46, 66, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 94,
 112, 120
 Five Buddhas, 14
 flower, 27, 56, 71, 135
 creating in the flowerless sky, 28
 Flower Garland Sutra, 97
Fukanzazengi, 29

G

gate, 22, 30, 37, 38, 71, 120, 126

genjo, 66
 Gensa Shibi, 143
 gilded earth, 96
 Goddess of Mercy, 103
 grass, 10, 33, 50, 108, 109
 Guishan Lingyou. *See* Isan Reiyu

H

Heart Sutra, 84
 Hinayana, 76
 Hogen Buneki, 25, 39
 Hokke, 34
 Hoon Gensoku, 39
 horse, 53, 57, 117, 124, 126
 Hotetsu. *See* Mayoku Hotetsu
 Huangbo Xiyun. *See* Obaku Kiun
 hundred-foot pole, 60, 141, 142

I

Igyo school, 9
 imponderability, 134
 incense, 9, 77
 India, 8, 16, 20, 27, 40, 108, 115, 129,
 133, 139
 Inland Sea, 81
inmo, 108
 intelligence, 20, 28
 Isan Reiyū, 131

J

Jesus, 73, 75, 88
 jeweled necklace, 87
 Jogen school, 9
Juki fascicle of Shobogenzo, 143

K

Kannon, 103
 Keron religion, 14, 97
 Keizan, cofounder of Japanese Soto Zen, 127
 Kencho (Japanese era), 98
 Kenninji, 7, 127
 Kimmei, Japanese emperor, 29
 Kippoji, 129
 koan, 65
Kokyo fascicle of Shobogenzo, 143
 Kongosatta, 14
 Kosho Horinji, 127
 Koun Ejo, second abbot of Eiheiiji, 127
kuin (kitchen), 78
 Kukai, 34
 Kyogen Chikan, 39, 130
 Kyoto, 4, 31, 81, 120, 127
 Kyushu, 98

L

lantern, 104, 138
 life, 4, 21, 22, 29, 31, 34, 37, 40, 43, 44, 46, 59, 62, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 104, 116, 120, 130, 133, 142, 148, 149
 Lingyun Zhiqin. *See* Reiun Shigon
 Longya Juden. *See* Ryuge Koton
 Luther, Martin, 95

M

Magu Baoche. *See* Mayoku Hotetsu
 Mahakashyapa, 8, 16, 18, 39, 40
 Mayoku Hotetsu, 95
 Mazu Daoyi. *See* Baso Doitsu
 meditation, 1, 7, 10, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 24, 30, 36, 88, 108, 130, 136

mind, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 20, 21, 23, 27, 31, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 44, 45, 50, 54, 55, 67, 71, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 81, 82, 87, 107, 118, 122, 123, 125, 126, 142, 143, 149
 mirror, 14, 35, 44, 61, 73, 74, 85, 142, 143, 145
mokugyo, 88
 moon, 44, 45, 66, 73, 74, 85, 86, 87
 in the water, 86
 in the water, 14, 74, 85
 morning star, 27, 56, 123
 mortality, 19
 mountain, 8, 49, 56, 101, 103, 110, 111, 123, 136
 mouth, 9, 13, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 129, 130, 132, 134, 136, 140, 141, 144, 145, 146, 148, 149, 150
 Mt. Buto, 39
 Mt. Hiei, 34
 Mt. Tendo, 7, 76
 mud, 53, 116
 muhōtō (gravestone), 143
Mujō Seppō fascicle of Shobogenzo, 138
 Mykaku. *See* Seccho Juken
 Myoan Eisai, 31
 Myozen, 7

N

Nangaku Ejo, 32, 37
 Nanyang Huizhong. *See* Nanyo Echu
 Nanyo Echu, 20, 37
 Nanyue Huairang. *See* Nangaku Ejo, *See* Nangaku Ejo
naru, 68, 85
narubeshi, 91
 Ninji, 127
 nirvana, 16, 21, 54, 88, 118, 121
 Nishiari Bokusan, 67, 74, 83, 97, 119

non-thinking, 135

O

Obaku Kiun, 115

ocean, 12, 19, 45, 49, 56, 87, 88, 92, 103,
123

Ode to *Enlightenment*, 85, 144

P

palace, 45, 51, 87, 110

patriarchs, 9, 12, 15, 16, 18, 20, 22, 23

peace, 24

Perfection of Wisdom Sutras, 92

pillar, 60, 104, 137, 138, 141

pine, 52, 112, 113

plucking leaves and searching for
branches, 144

ponder, 51, 109, 134

practice, 1, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16,
17, 18, 19, 22, 24, 26, 28, 29, 31, 34,
36, 37, 39, 43, 46, 50, 53, 54, 65, 66,
67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 75, 79, 82,
83, 87, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 102,
108, 109, 115, 117, 118, 120, 129, 131,
142

practice leader, 133

precepts, 22

Pure Land Buddhism, 97

Q

Qingyuan Xingsi. *See* Seigen Gyoshi

Qingyuan Xinsi. *See* Seigen Gyoshi

R

ram, 53, 117

rat, 53

realization, 10, 11, 17, 18, 22, 32, 33, 35,
36, 37, 46, 56, 69, 70, 79, 91, 92, 94,
123, 149

Record of the Transmission of the Lamp,
130

Reiun Shigon, 39, 124

Rinzai Kigen, 56

Rinzai school, 9

rituals, 9, 29, 76

Ryuge Koton, 40

S

samadhi, 7, 9, 14, 30, 36

Sansuikyo fascicle of Shobogenzo, 32

satori, 2, 10, 24, 26, 28, 33, 43, 45, 69, 70,
85, 86, 93, 126, 150

sea, 45, 46, 55, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93,
121

Seccho Juken, 63, 150

Seigen Gyoshi, 32, 115

Sekito Kisen, 55, 115, 138

Sekken Kisei, 56

Sekkyo Ezo, 38

self, 7, 8, 11, 12, 17, 26, 30, 36, 37, 38,
39, 40, 44, 50, 53, 69, 73, 75, 78, 81,
82, 83, 86, 93, 106, 108, 110, 115, 116,
125, 140, 141, 146

Senika, 20, 37

sentient beings, 30, 43, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71,
72, 106, 132, 138

Seppo Gison, 143

Shakespeare, William, 119

shaku, 103, 132

Shakyamuni, 16, 17, 24, 27, 28, 39, 135

Shantideva, 80

Shaoding era, 8

Shaolin Temple, 16

Shigong Huican. *See* Sekkyo Ezo

Shiku Honjo, disciple of Eka, 37

Shingon, 34
 Shingon, 14
 Shinji Shobogenzo, 130
shinjin datsuraku, 76, 79
Shinjin Gakudo fascicle of Shobogenzo, 78
shirinubeshi, 90
shiru beshi, 144
 Shitou Xiqian. *See* Sekito Kisen
 shit-stick, 139
Shobogenzo Zuimonki, 127
shusho, 73, 94, 117
 SHUTO. *See* Kyogen Chikan
 Shuzan Shonen, 56, 123
 Sikong Benjing. *See* Shiku Honjo
 Six Paramitas, 15
 skinbag, 54, 120, 121
 sky, 15, 46, 49, 85, 86, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 100, 104
sodo (monks' hall), 77
 Sojiji, 127
 Song dynasty, 7, 23
 Soto, 1, 4, 9, 115, 127, 130, 133, 145
 sounds, 13, 27, 44, 71, 73, 75, 125, 147, 148
 spring, 55
 staff, 49, 104, 138
 stepflowing, 55, 122
 Suzuki, D T, 144

T

Taikan Eno, 32
 Tang dynasty, 19, 20, 39
tathagata, 123
 Tempuku (Japanese era), 98
 Tendai, 14
 Tendo Nyojo, 4, 31, 76
 Tettsu Gikai,
 third abbot of Eihei-ji, 127

thought, 21, 76, 81, 117, 123, 129, 134, 137, 138
 three heads and eight arms, 49, 51, 52, 53, 103, 104, 105, 110, 111, 112, 117
 Three Learnings, 15
 Tiantai. *See* Tendai
 Tiantong Rujing. *See* Tendo Nyojo
 tiger, 53
 tombstone, 142
 tower, 51, 110, 111, 113, 143
 translation philosophy, 2, 140
Transmission of the Lamp, 138
 tree, 33
 trichiliocosm, 40
 truth, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 24, 27, 30, 31, 32, 35, 44, 45, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 60, 63, 65, 66, 67, 68, 77, 80, 81, 87, 93, 94, 103, 113, 116, 118, 123, 126, 134, 139, 141, 149, 150
Tsuki fascicle of *Shobogenzo*, 85
 Twain, Mark, 84

U

Universal Aspect of the Nature of Mind doctrine, 21
 Unmon, 139
 Unmon school, 9

V

Vairocana, 34
 Vajrasattva, 35
 vermilion tower, 51, 110, 118
 Vulture Peak, 8, 16, 29, 135

W

water, 10, 12, 14, 24, 44, 45, 46, 66, 73,
 74, 85, 86, 87, 89, 90, 92, 116, 125
 diving into, 53
 whisk, 49, 104, 138
 wild ass, 57, 124, 126
 wind, 10, 31, 95, 96, 119
 wisdom, 8, 10, 11, 13, 21, 22, 27, 28, 35,
 36, 43, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 77
 Wisdom Kings, 103
 Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 81
 wooden fish, 88

X

Xiangyan Zhixian. *See* Kyogen Chikan
 Xuansha Shibei, 143

Xuedou Chongxian. *See* Seccho Juken
 Xuefeng Yicun, 143

Y

Yakusan Igen, 55, 102, 134
 Yangtze (Chang Jiang) River, 97
 Yoka Genkaku, 144
 Yomei, Japanese emperor, 29
 Yongjia Xuanjue, 144

Z

zazen, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 22, 23, 25,
 26, 27, 29, 31, 32, 34, 36, 40, 130, 137
Zazenshin fascicle of Shobogenzo, 134
Zenki fascicle of Shobogenzo, 30