

# Doctrine and the Concept of Truth in Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō

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p 257 Since the early twentieth century in Japan and for the past two decades in the west, the Zen master Dōgen (1200-1253), founder of the Sōtō lineage, has attracted widespread attention and acclaim both as a philosopher and as a literary master. Dōgen's primary work, the *Shōbōgenzō*, written and compiled serially during the last two decades of his life, is now regarded as one of the greatest expressions of truth in the Buddhist tradition. The title itself, *The Eye and Treasury of True Dharma*, [1] shows that the overall aim of the work is to disclose truth. The text purports to penetrate to the very essence of Buddhist experience by disclosing its truth (*bo*) properly or correctly (*sho*). Invariably dedicated to the truth of the matter at hand, Dōgen works his way through the vast spectrum of traditional Buddhist thought and practices, skillfully appropriating, criticizing, and redefining the meaning of Buddhist experience. Yet nowhere in this quest for truth does the *Shōbōgenzō* systematically address the question of the nature of truth as such. We are not told what understanding of truth supports the claim, for example, that a certain doctrine is true, or that the practice of *zazen* authenticates the truth of doctrine. The aim of this study of the *Shōbōgenzō* will be to clarify its implicit concept of truth, and to show how such clarification can shed light on the meaning of the text as a whole.

This task is complicated, however, by the fact that the *Shōbōgenzō* deals with two kinds of truth, yet never makes their difference explicit. On the other hand, true *Dharma* signifies "correct doctrine," p 257 and many chapters in the *Shōbōgenzō* take this as their primary concern. "True followers of the way" are sharply distinguished from "non-believers," and "right transmission" of Buddhism is opposed to "false doctrine." Here the *Shōbōgenzō*'s task is to clarify the difference between true and false doctrinal positions and to encourage correct belief. In this case, "truth" implies a straightforward correspondence between doctrine and the reality that it represents. According to a second understanding, however, truth is manifest beyond the distinction between correct and incorrect correspondence. This view overturns the centrality of doctrine in the sense that true *Dharma* does not contrast with false *Dharma*, but rather, includes it. Hence, truth can encompass equally the oppositions between belief and doubt, enlightened and ignorant, *samsara* and *nirvana*. This understanding of truth goes beyond truth as correspondence, yet includes subtle traces of it. True *Dharma* in these references is that in which one resides, or the essence that all beings embody, but in no instance is it a conceptual possession of certain individuals. On the contrary, all beings are possessed by it whether they realize it or not. As we shall see, both of these understandings of truth can be found throughout the *Shōbōgenzō*.

## Truth as Correct Dharma and Right Understanding

Dōgen initiates a significant change of course in the Zen tradition when, from within that tradition, he opposes the radically anti-doctrinal posture of Zen's paradigmatic figures such as Bodhidharma, Hui-neng, Lin-chi, and Ta-hui. Even today, Dōgen's writings are unique in the Zen tradition for the extent to which they take seriously such traditional matters as doctrine, language, scripture, and faith. In chapter after chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*, an adamant stand is taken: *sutras* are not just "names and forms" that must be rejected in order to attain authentic practice and enlightenment. On the contrary, to reject the *sutras* is to reject the Buddha's proclamation of *Dharma*. For Dōgen, the spoken *Dharma* is as essential as the "wordless *Dharma*" and, in fact, is inseparable from it. Similarly, for Dōgen, the practice of *zazen* is not, as some of the great Chinese Ch'an masters had been teaching, a ritualized behavior that one must leave behind in the quest for enlightened spontaneity. Failure to practice *zazen* is failure to practice

the Buddha Way. *Zazen* is not an ordinary activity; it is handed down from Buddhas and Patriarchs as the right way to practice enlightenment.

p 258 The *Shōbōgenzō* expresses immense respect for the Buddhist *sutras*, for the historical Buddha who initiated their transmission, and for the transmitted tradition as a whole, and on this basis, takes a strong stand in doctrinal matters. A master of critique, with an uncanny sense and awareness of language, Dōgen works his way through the vast repertoire of Buddhist doctrines and practices, alternately praising, criticizing, and reinterpreting them. In the process, Dōgen makes it perfectly clear: belief or disbelief is not an indifferent matter. On the contrary, correct doctrinal belief is essential to the Buddhist way. Dōgen is persistent in his efforts to expose "false views" and to present the "correct viewpoint." Ability to "discriminate the true from the false" is for Dōgen essential to enlightenment (1977:78/1972:188). [3] "Trainees should learn this: It is imperative that we can discern true from false" (1983a:109;1972:450). "Mistaken belief," "evil belief," "distorted ideas and opinions" are to be rooted out, and replaced by the "correct viewpoint," "truth without error." References to "non-believers" — those doctrinally "outside the Way" — are found throughout the *Shōbōgenzō*, and Dōgen warns of the dangers of associating with them (1983a:83;1972:75). Various versions of "distorted teaching" stand in clear opposition to the true, which should not be subjected to doubt (1983b:16;1972:345). "When you hear the true teaching believe it without any doubt" (1975:95;1970:294-5). "Do not have any doubt about it" (1977: 164; 1970:332).

Which particular doctrines and viewpoint are taken to be "correct" is not of concern here. But one example will illustrate *how* the case is made for right understanding in doctrinal matters. In the *Jinshin Inga* chapter, where Dōgen defends the principle of "causality," the text reads: "To harbor doubts regarding the law of causality as many monks do, is a clear denial of this law's very existence. Truly it is regrettable that the Way of the Buddhas and Patriarchs has declined in this way.... We should not doubt this [teaching]" (1983a:97;1972:432). Correct belief on this issue distinguishes true Buddhists from the unorthodox, those "outside the Way" (*gedo*). "A man may take ordination, he may wear a monk's robe, but if he subscribes to this mistaken view, he is not a disciple of the Buddha, for, as already stated, this is the doctrine of non-believers" p 260 (1983a:98-99;1972:450). Dōgen is adamant that unless one believes and understands correctly on this matter, there can be no progress on the Buddhist path. "It is imperative that trainees clarify the principle of causality first, otherwise they will remain susceptible to false views, their practice decline, and finally they will cease from doing good altogether. The principle of causality is straightforward; those who do wrong fall into hell; those who do good attain enlightenment" (1983a:101;1972:437). Quoting a Zen poem that says that "causality is as true and unchangeable as pure refined gold" (1983a:100;1972:436), Dōgen makes this point clearly: the principle of causality is permanent and knowable. When one understands properly and holds the correct viewpoint on this matter, then one's understanding corresponds with the way things truly are, and the consequences of such correct belief are ultimately beneficial. On the other hand, "spreading false doctrine is a most serious crime" (1983a:106;1972:447). "The principle of causality means that those who practice well realize enlightenment — it's as straightforward as that" (1983a:98;1972:433).

To justify this doctrinal claim to truth, Dōgen appeals to tradition. "It is apparent that the Patriarchs never denied the chain of causality....Do not teach that causality does not exist; this is untrue and conflicts with the Law transmitted by the Buddhas and Patriarchs. Only those ignorant of the true teaching support such views" (1983a:97;1972:432-33). Several times the appeal is made to one particular patriarch, Nagarjuna, who, ironically enough, in his "causality"

based claim that all doctrines are empty (*sunya*), initiated the historical sequence that led to the denial of causality that Dōgen so dreaded. So Dōgen invokes Nagarjuna to set things straight. "As Patriarch Nagarjuna said, "to deny, as non-Buddhists do, the principle of causality, is not only a denial of the existence of the present and future worlds, but also the existence of the three treasures, the Four Noble Truths, and the various stages of arhathood" (1983a:98; 1972:434). The authority of tradition, and of Nagarjuna in particular, is so powerful that Dōgen can simply sum up the matter by saying: "The preceding are the compassionate teachings of the Patriarch Nagarjuna, We should gratefully accept and heed these words" (1983a:98; 1972:434).

This example shows the *Shōbōgenzō*'s position on the nature and importance of correct doctrinal belief by focusing on a doctrine that is fundamental to most Buddhist thought. The same essential attitude, however, is presented on many matters of correct belief and practice, from the doctrine of *karma* to the details of monastic practice. There is a right way of belief and practice in all matters that is knowable and verifiable as true and efficacious. How can one correctly distinguish p 261 the true from the false? [4] The *Shōbōgenzō*'s answer to this question in the above example is a pattern that appears throughout the text. Tradition, "the Buddhas and Patriarchs," supplies the standard by which to judge the truth of doctrine. "Anyone who wishes to determine if a teaching is correct or not should use the standards of the Buddhas and Patriarchs. They are the true masters of the wheel of the Law whom we should consult" (1977:23;1970:392). A doctrine can be verified as correct if it can be found to be the teaching of Buddhas and Patriarchs.

Furthermore, the *Shōbōgenzō* holds that the content of correct belief and practice has been accurately transmitted from the Buddhas through centuries of tradition. [5] "I also learned (from a *sutra*) that the Patriarchs transmit the *Dharma* free of error" (1983b:100;1972:400). That the Patriarchs' transmission can be trusted Dōgen claims to have learned from a *sutra*. The tradition apparently verifies itself. Furthermore, because the transmission of doctrine is unbroken, the Buddhist *Dharma* has been able to escape the vicissitudes of history: " ... it is not difficult to authenticate a doctrine even if removed by centuries from the Buddhas and Patriarchs" (1983b:72). Dōgen is aware of at least some of the historical and hermeneutical problems that arise when the truth of historically transmitted doctrine is based upon the word or confession of that same transmission. The divergence and plurality of belief is an often mentioned and much lamented fact in the *Shōbōgenzō*. But Dōgen's response is simply that the others have received it incorrectly, and that the truth runs like a single unbroken thread down through the centuries. "Shakyamuni's Eye and Treasury of the true Law and supreme enlightenment was only rightly transmitted to Mahakasyapa, and no one else. The right transmission surely passed to Mahakasyapa" (1977:23;1970:392).

But in spite of the continuity of tradition, there are those who hold "mistaken and distorted views." "Unfortunately many masters have proclaimed the teaching based on their own limited mistaken views... They distorted the teachings to conform to their own misguided interpretation which they contested to be true Buddhism" (1983b: 16; 1972:345). Although these people think they possess the p 262 truth, they are caught in an illusory perspective that can only be exposed by showing them the correct interpretation of the teachings. "Inferior monks remain ignorant and do not know that their teaching is twisted. It is a pity that they are trapped in illusion. Such people have not experienced the *Dharma* and do not know how to think properly" (1983a:83;1972:76).

Apparently those who hold a correct viewpoint *and* those who adhere to incorrect doctrine *both* believe that their view is true, and *both* verify that view by reference to the tradition. Yet nothing in the *Shōbōgenzō* indicates how one might adjudicate the conflict of interpretations. The circularity of an appeal to tradition as a means to verify an interpretation of tradition is not raised to the status of an issue. Therefore, even the pivotal principle itself can be stated in circular terms: "This is the Buddhist teaching of right transmission — only those with right transmission can correctly calculate right transmission" (1983a:68;1972:38). As Dōgen seems to sense, the whole procedure seems to rest on one crucial belief: "belief in right transmission" (1977: 181).

But even if there is difficulty in grounding correct belief, it nevertheless remains a central theme throughout the *Shōbōgenzō* that the truth or falsity of one's doctrine and practice is a matter of great significance. In contrast to much of the Zen tradition that precedes it, the *Shōbōgenzō* is adamant that doctrine does make a difference. To bring the significance of this position into focus, one might contrast Dōgen's relentless critique of false views with Nagarjuna's famous "critique of all views." For Dōgen, not all views obstruct realization, only those "outside the way" (*gedo*). Others, sanctioned by Buddhas and Patriarchs, are to be cultivated. It is significant that the *Shōbōgenzō* commonly refers to the *Lotus Sūtra* as the highest standard for truth, because this text can clearly be seen to support Dōgen's emphasis on correctness and truth of belief. But this same *sutra* also expresses a concern for universality and all-inclusiveness. It probes toward a position that, rather than simply contradicting other positions, attempts to take them all in, including them in one universal *Dharma*. This is also Dōgen's concern, a concern which derives from a second approach to the question of truth.

### Truth as the Embodiment of Dharmata

Some sections of the *Shōbōgenzō* take a different position on the question of truth. Rather than focusing on conceptual or propositional truth, they maintain that truth is neither graspable in concepts nor expressible in propositions. Although nowhere in the *Shōbōgenzō* is a systematic theory of knowledge articulated, it is not difficult to p 263 sense, in many chapters, that the Buddhist concepts of impermanence and emptiness (as well as Dōgen's own practice) stand behind his view that truth, *dharmata*, is not graspable in conceptual knowledge. Many passages demonstrate a profound insight into the Mahayana understanding of "ungraspability," "unattainability," "incomprehensibility." Two such passages read: "When you have complete understanding then even the ideas of the wisdom of enlightenment or the status of detachment will be seen for what they are — tentative and delusive"(1975:70;1970:260). "We cannot say that there is; or is not, practice and enlightenment — it cannot be comprehended or attained. Again the great meaning is beyond attainment or comprehension. We cannot say that there are no holy truths, practice or enlightenment, nor can we say that there are holy truths, etc. Nothing can be attained, nothing can be comprehended" (1977:5;1970:307)." On this basis, it would be inappropriate to hold, with unquestioning certainty, any view. Such holding is a kind of grasping that prevents attainment of the way.

This second understanding of truth appears to stand in sharp contrast to the first which advocates "correct views" and which seeks to expose heresy (*gedo*). Some sections of the text even go so far as to proclaim the impossibility of propositional correctness and its inadequacy as the goal of praxis. Even in its most anti-heresy passages, the *Shōbōgenzō* never comes close to saying that enlightenment consists in absolute knowledge or correct understanding. Clearly,

realization does not consist in transcending human limitations; it entails instead an awareness of them and the "unattainability" of perfect knowledge. Thus the *Genjokoan* chapter maintains that, "when the *Dharma* is completely present, there is a realization of one's insufficiencies" (1975:2;1970:37). *Dharma* or truth, therefore, must include those insufficiencies along with an understanding of them. One of the *Shobogetizo's* most famous passages says, "To have great enlightenment about illusion is to be a Buddha" (1975:1;1970:35). This radical grasp of illusion characterizing a "Buddha" is contrasted with the "great illusions about enlightenment" which characterize sentient beings. One has "great illusions about enlightenment" when one takes it to be the perfect possession of knowledge rather than the humble practice of "no-mind."

One who truly practices the way, realizes the "insufficiencies" of all views and is, therefore, less inclined to engage in the self-centered struggle to have one's own view prevail. In matters of thought, it is more fruitful to seek the strength or the truth of all views. In this vein Dōgen can say, "Never take your own viewpoint to be definitive, alternative interpretations must be studied to develop unified understanding" (1983b:49;1970:130). The attitude appropriate to this kind of p 264 truth is detachment. Such truth becomes manifest only when all self-centered grasping for it is set aside and replaced by a mode of being characterized by openness. Thus the *Shōbōgenzō* occasionally interrupts meditation on an idea to remind the reader that the text's message can only be understood in a released state of mind. "If there is no detachment, there can be no attainment of this observation" (1975:20;1970:85). No matter how subtle and open a discussion is, the conceptual process inevitably tends toward abstraction, objectification and attachment. "Remember though, that real Buddha mind is detached even from these statements" (1975:20;1970:85).

On this basis Dōgen concludes that ordinary thinking is inadequate to this highest form of truth. Our rational thought processes only attain the perspectives and opinions criticized above; by their very nature they cannot grasp "the true nature of all *dharmas*" (*dharmata* / *hossho*). On the other hand, a simple negation of thinking gets one no closer to realization. Because non-thinking is a willful, active, and mediated relation to immediate experience it shares essential features with its supposed opposite, thinking. Both thinking and non-thinking express the subject's own effort to determine and "frame" experience in a particular way. Dōgen sets out to show that there is a fundamentally different kind of "thinking" (experience) which he calls "thinking without thinking." [6]

"Without thinking" (*hishiryo*) is not "non-thinking" (*fushiryo*) just as Buddhist "no-mind" is not mindlessness. Rather, it is the foundation of mind that encompasses mindfulness and mindlessness — all forms of mind — and thus actualizes mind in its entirety. Dōgen puts it this way: "After we develop the mind of practice through enlightenment, we will realize that the source of all these forms of mind is "no-mind." "No-mind" is the true Buddhist mind undivided, beyond discrimination of opposites — and contains no analysis. To comprehend the true way we need "thinking without thinking" (1975:9;1970:74-75). "Without thinking," according to Dōgen, is the fundamental state of mind; it precedes all discrimination, analysis, and subject/object separation. This prereflective "pure experience" is the basis of all positive and negative reflection. All experiential, linguistic, and conceptual structures arise out of it. This level of experience is prereflective — it precedes thought — both in the sense that it comes first and in the sense that it grounds all reflection. All conceptualized experience has a basis in and is elicited by the world that appears to us preconceptually. The one who does the thinking — the

individual subject or self — makes his/her appearance in p 265 the course of time, [7] gradually, and in different ways, but does so, according to the *Shōbōgenzō*, on the basis of a prior unity. Although forgotten or obscured, this unity is nevertheless always present; without it neither subject nor object would appear. *Dharmata* (*Hossho*), "the true nature of all *dharmas*" is not, therefore, the subject's correct experience of objective *dharmas* — it is the "presence of things as they are" (*genjokoan*) prior to the reflective separation between subject and object. Therefore, very often, when Dōgen (and others in his tradition of language practice) speak of mind (*shin*), they signify neither the subject's reflection, nor the mechanism of reflection, but the total, unbroken process whereby the world comes to manifestation through the subject. In the deepest sense, mind is the unity of experience: "This is the stage of pre-thought beyond egocentric cognition. If you reach this state of pre-thought you will realize the true luminous nature of mind — prethought must become the eye through which you view phenomena" (1975:10;1970:75).[8]

Reflective, second and third order experience, "enforms" and "enframes" this prereflective presence in particular ways. Pattern, structure, and a framework order experience in various ways that are meaningful, suggestive, and useful. But for Dōgen, this thoughtfulness loses track of its character and its basis. The forms and structures of conceptuality are taken to be "the true nature of things" — a closure that fails to see other structures and perspectives, as well as the experiential basis of all subsequent structuring. Fundamentally, mind is open and undetermined. Structural closure is a static and narrowing focus. For this reason, "without thinking" (*pre-thought*) is characterized in terms of openness and receptivity. Hence Dōgen exhorts his listeners and readers to look at things from different angles and perspectives, to pry open the rigidity of frameworks, and thus, perhaps, to work back through them to their foundation — the pre-reflective, unframed presence of things as they are.

This is the function of *zazen*, for Dōgen, the practice of things as they are and the occasion for things to be as they are. In true *zazen*, the practitioner penetrates beneath the structures and norms of conceptualization, beneath even subjectivity and objectivity, to the pure becoming present of *dharmas* — what is in truth. This truth is transcendent, unlike the truth of propositional correspondence, because it is not conceptually constructed, nor is it graspable in that form. "It completely goes beyond ideas of difference and identity, separation and unity, between this phenomenal world and *dharmata*" p 266 (1977:64). Its transcendence, however, is its depth and proximity rather than its distance from us. As what is most fundamental and deeply rooted (*hon*), the truth of *dharmata* lies so close to us and is so all-pervasive that, immersed in it, we cannot grasp it as something at hand. [9]

The fact that this truth encompasses all beings, whether they know it or not, allows Dōgen, in ecstatic language, to play with the meaning of enlightenment and the dichotomy between enlightenment and illusion. "Priests of the present day think that there are two distinct states: unenlightenment and enlightenment. They think that unenlightenment becomes enlightenment and it is attained from somewhere or someone else. But even that idea is nothing but great enlightenment. ... Consequently, everything, right now, is the eternal present in great enlightenment. This is great enlightenment, this is great enlightenment" (1975:38;1970:24).



All views, including the enlightened and unenlightened, derive from what is most primordial and, therefore, common to all beings. Great enlightenment encompasses everything; it is the "true nature of all dharmas" and is experienced in pre-reflective immediate presence. Therefore, it cannot properly be contrasted with an opposite — unenlightenment.

Thus the text says: "We should not study enlightenment as something that occurs when unenlightened people are awakened to great enlightenment. Both people in illusion and enlightened people have great enlightenment; unenlightened people and those who are not in illusion also have great enlightenment" (1977:55;1972:21).

Truth in this second sense of *dharma* does not stand in contrast to an opposite such as untruth, falsity or ignorance: "Wisdom and ignorance appear to be in opposition like the sun to the moon but ultimately they transcend this opposition" (1975:62). Rather, untruth or ignorance is simply another form that *dharma* takes. The *Shōbōgenzō* continually plays with this paradox: "Turning one's back or opposing truth is malicious. However, truth can even be found in those actions. Who can fathom the relation between maliciousness and truth?" (1975:52;1972:154). Furthermore, this level of truth is indifferent to the distinction between doubt and belief so important to the first meaning of truth discussed. "Even if we doubt it, still Buddha-nature has emerged in us" (1983b:123;1970:48). *Dharmata*, the true nature of all dharmas, is all-inclusive and inescapable. Neither illusion, doubt, nor everyday mindlessness puts one outside of its scope. Dōgen shows this conclusively in one of the p 267 *Shōbōgenzō*'s most beautifully crafted sections by appealing to the Zen master Baso: "Zen master Baso said, 'Sentient beings have never left the state of *dharmatta samadhi* throughout myriads of kalpas. They are always in a state of *dharmatta samadhi*, putting on their clothes, eating rice, greeting their visitors, and using the six sense organs. All their actions are the function of *dharmata*'" (1977:64;1972:84).

Truth in the sense of *dharmatta* is not something that anyone lacks; not is it, therefore, the legitimate goal or aim of anyone's quest. We already reside within it in an undivided and unqualified way. But what, then, is Dōgen's Zen about, if not just such a quest? What is the meaning of the Buddhist way of practice if we are already possessed by its goal? According to the traditional story of Dōgen's life, this very question set Dōgen himself out on his way (from the Buddhist establishment at Hieizan), forcing him to probe beneath the objectifications of Buddhist doctrine toward the experience that initially generated them.

For Dōgen, the question was answered and its problematic character dissolved, when, through his own practice and the guidance of his teacher, he discovered that practice is ill-conceived when it is taken, as it had been traditionally in Buddhism, to be a means to the goal of enlightenment. Dōgen's realization was that practice is the goal; the goal is to practice (that is, to undertake and perform in all one's actions and at all times) enlightenment. [10] The relationship between practice (*shu*) and realization (*sho*) is not to be conceived as a relationship between means and end where one practices in order to attain what one lacks. Rather, in practice, one authenticates the prior presence of Buddha-nature; and Buddha-nature shows its fundamental presence in any act or moment of practice. [11] Practice (exemplified in, but not limited to, *zazen*) is simply openness to the pre-reflective immediacy that is already present, although hidden beneath conceptual structures and reified ways of framing experience. On this account, practice is not abandoned when realization is attained, it is heightened and becomes more thoroughgoing as the presence of the Buddha-nature is revealed more and more



concretely. Therefore, Dōgen says: "Even after attainment of the way, they neither relax nor abandon their practice. Their essence cannot be measured; their essence is their bearing and manner, and this manner is their attainment of the Way" (1977:87). Attainment of the way of practice manifests its results, we see in this passage from Dōgen, in a transformation of one's "bearing" or "manner". This bearing or manner is described as "continuous practice and study of the Way" (1983a:2;1970:166). To practice in this way is to "reside in the truth" (Yokoi: 176) at all times including "daily action, drinking tea and eating rice" (1983a:11;1970:181).

In Dōgen's view, this all-inclusive and very subtle understanding of practice is the most adequate because it mitigates against dualistic conceptions of practice, which separate it from realization. Therefore, Dōgen calls for practice without expectation of enlightenment, because in this view, such practice is enlightenment. Thus Dōgen exhorts his followers: "Concentrate on practice. Do not expect great enlightenment; great enlightenment is daily action, drinking tea and eating rice" (1983a:11;1970:181).

Throughout this discussion, however, another more subtle distinction emerges: that between those who are engaged in authentic practice and those who are not. Yet how can this distinction be maintained against Dōgen's claim that all sentient beings are always in the enlightened state of *dharmata* and that the distinction between enlightened mind and ordinary mind is false? "All minds are mindfulness. The minds of fools and saints, grass and trees" (1977:76; 1972: 184).

The crucial distinction that remains and that Dōgen's Zen must presuppose is that while *dharmata* expresses an ontological identity (all experience has its ground in pre-reflective unity), one must still acknowledge that some beings recognize and live in accordance with that realization and some do not. Although all acts are practice and all beings are Buddha-nature, not all beings live in awareness of that fundamental identity. Therefore, in traditional Mahayana terms, while the *bodhisattva* experiences the identity and emptiness of all beings, as this experience matures in practice, it becomes more and more obvious that most other beings do not recognize the reality in which they live. This difference comes to be experienced as crucial and gives rise to the *bodhisattva*'s compassion. This important distinction can be seen throughout the *Shōbōgenzō*. In the following passage Dōgen says that doubt and belief are both forms of truth, but whether one realizes this or not makes all the difference: "Even doubts about the *dharma* are true form. Those who possess the Buddha's wisdom realize this, for they experience a peaceful existence" (1983b:114). Or as the following passage expresses it in paradoxical form, neither enlightenment nor illusion exist, yet to recognize that is enlightenment and not to do so is illusion: "We should know that neither enlightenment nor illusion exist. *Those who are aware of this* have attained enlightenment of absolute truth and are called Buddhas" (1983a:129 — my emphasis).

In the *Gyōji* chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen encourages his followers to engage in the "ceaseless practice of the present" (1983a:2;1970:166). But then, further down the page, he says something that could be taken to undercut any basis for encouragement: that all actions already are ceaseless practice (1983a:2; 1970: 166). If all actions already are ceaseless practice, why should one strive to practice ceaselessly? Dōgen's point here is clearly that one's relation to practice makes all the difference. Although everyone always practices, that is, acts out their destiny in "daily life, eating rice, and drinking tea," most human beings tend to live in a narrowly conceived world of representations that limit and determine the openness and depth

of life. To most people daily life is ordinary and dull, while the Buddha-nature they seek is exalted and otherworldly. But to Dōgen, for one who realizes it and practices it, daily life is the life of the Buddha. There is no difference between the acts of the enlightened and unenlightened: both eat rice and drink tea. The difference is manifest only in one's awareness of the activity. For the unenlightened, daily life is that with which one is occupied when one is not practicing. For the enlightened, daily life is practice, and what one practices is openness to the continual manifestation of what is present beyond the subject's own interests, concerns, and projections — indeed, beyond the self's individuated existence.

The second meaning of truth in the *Shōbōgenzō*, truth as *dharmata*, goes beyond propositional correctness and correspondence. The "truth" is simply what is — what comes to be — beyond any partial and perspectival grasp that I have on it. This truth grounds all of us, enlightened and unenlightened; we are immersed in it; we speak, think, and act out of it. Still, Dōgen exhorts his listeners/readers: "Look into *zazen* for the truth" (1977:44;1970:448). *Zazen* in this passage is the "place" where one can most readily find the truth that already resides within and around one. "Truth" refers both to *dharmata* and to the awareness of *dharmata*. The former is nondualistic; *dharmata* is all that is. But the latter is distinct from its opposite, the absence of such awareness. This distinction between awareness and unawareness of truth generates the difference in "bearing" or "manner" that distinguishes "attainment of the Way" from non-attainment. Such "enlightened bearing" is the mode of being of one whose primary activity is "ceaseless practice of the present" and whose experience, therefore, reflects the "presence of things as they are." p 270

## Doctrine and the Unity/Diversity of Truth

In "pure experience" (*junsui keikan*), a contemporary way of referring to Dōgen's pre-thinking mode of *zazen*, no reflective distinctions obtain. All that is, before thought, is the "presence of things as they are" (*genjokoan*). Nevertheless, as we have seen, the *bodhisattva*, immersed in this "emptiness", experiences an acute difference among living beings — that some are aware of pure experience and some are not. This experience gives rise to the *bodhisattva's* compassion and the call to activity. Dōgen's reflections on this aspect of the tradition, and his own' experience of it, acknowledge the tension between the open receptivity of "pure experience" and the *bodhisattva's* calling to act and to "make a difference" for other beings. In classical Mahayana language, this is the tension between the experience of emptiness and compassion. Thus Dōgen says that even though doubt is itself the truth of *dharmata*, still we should enlighten and transform all doubt: "Even though disbelief is itself true form, still we should enlighten the true lotus flower and thus clarify the eternal existence of Buddha" (1983b:116).

Although "pure experience" is empty and doctrineless, doctrine and teaching are not irrelevant to the *bodhisattva's* practice. On the contrary, Dōgen claims that teaching and thought are important aspects of the practice, and that these are inevitably doctrinal matters. Dōgen is relentless in his critique of the "wordless dharma," the view, widespread in the Zen tradition, that since ultimate truth is beyond language, any form of linguistic or doctrinal teaching is misleading or irrelevant (1977:188-9;1972:261). According to Dōgen, this position is naive about what really takes place in the tradition. "Those who think they know that words are just names and forms do not know that Shakyamuni's words are not bound by letters and forms. Those people are not liberated from ordinary mind. The Buddhas and Patriarchs who have totally cast off body and mind use words to proclaim the Dharma and turn the wheel of law and many benefit from seeing and hearing it. Those who have faith and follow the Dharma will be

influenced by both the spoken and wordless Buddhist teachings" (1977:60;1972:57). The text appears to say that doctrine is one means by which one comes to experience the emptiness of doctrine. That doctrine is empty is itself a doctrine that must be appropriated in practice. Thus Dōgen radically reinterprets the role of language and doctrine in the Zen tradition. On this basis he says that the Zen admonition to "'Abandon profound and marvelous speech' is just another form of profound and marvelous speech" (1977:53;1972: 19).

But the specific status of such "profound and marvelous speech" or doctrinal teaching is as ambiguous a matter as it is important. p 271 Several different possibilities are suggested throughout the text. There are passages that seem to imply that, although doctrine is not ultimately true itself, it can function as a means to the experience of truth. Thus the first meaning of truth as correct doctrine would stand in an instrumental relation to the second, truth as *dharmata*. In this light Dōgen can say, "Such an enlightened understanding must be developed by continuous practice and study of the Way" (1977:59;1972:56; Yokoi: 169). [12] But this view is explicitly and rigorously denied by other passages. One of the clearest themes in the *Shōbōgenzō* is that practice — including doctrinal practice, religious thinking — is not to be conceived as a means to the goal of realization. On the contrary, practice is based on enlightenment and issues from it. Practice in order to enlighten oneself is inauthentic practice, while a single instance of authentic practice actualizes enlightened "bearing." The unity of practice and realization (*shusho-ittot / shushoichinyo*) applies for thinking and doctrinal understanding in the same way that it does for *zazen*. Therefore, authentic understanding of the doctrine of *genjokoan* (the presence of things as they are), for example, is based upon the presence of things as they are, but no amount of thinking about the doctrine of *genjokoan* puts one in the presence of things as they are.

Pure pre-reflective experience, the Buddha-nature that grounds all beings, is the basis for all thought; reflection (and all activities of the subject) has its point of departure in the unity of subject and object that is pre-reflective. But, human beings differ in the extent to which "pure experience" is obscured or manifested in daily life. Thus, one's thought or doctrinal understanding reflects the state of one's practice and realization.

What one thinks and says (or does, writes, paints, etc.) corresponds to, and therefore reveals, one's mental state and depth of realization. Thought both arises out of and reveals the extent to which one practices and realizes the truth of *dharmata* in "pure experience." [13]

In the *Shōbōgenzō*, the conventional means/end relation between practice and realization is inverted: practice is based on realization. This understanding leads Dōgen beyond the view that correct belief or doctrine is a prerequisite for realization. Instead, the text typically asserts that realization — the presence of things as they are in pre-reflective experience — authenticates doctrine. Doctrine is authenticated (*sho*) in pure experience in the sense that one comes to understand it for the first time. Prior to this transformation of experience, p 272 one's understanding was superficial and grounded more in subjectivity than in the unity of the situation. In the experience, however, seeing and believing are the same activity. To experience deeply the impermanence of all things is to understand the doctrine of impermanence. To be in "the presence of things as they are" (*genjokoan*) is to know finally what *genjokoan* means, thus authenticating a doctrine that before was only superficially believed.

While this theme is crucial for understanding the relation between doctrine and realization in the *Shōbōgenzō*, it is still incomplete. Even if realization authenticates doctrine, we can still ask: How is doctrine itself significant? Authentic practice — which is realization — is the heart of the matter for Dōgen. That doctrine is authenticated in the process seems almost beside the point until we can see what significance it might have in itself. Indeed, the text's insistence that doctrine not be considered a means to the goal of realization, raises the question: Why does Dōgen bother with doctrine at all? An adequate answer to this question requires a brief clarification of the apparent opposition between Dōgen's terms "thinking" (*shiryō*) and "without-thinking" (*hishiryō*). If realization (*isho*) is truly "without thinking" (pre-reflective), and if thought does not function as a means to realization, then doctrine would seem to have no role to play in Dōgen's Zen. But realization is not a negation of thinking (*jushiryō*), and the *Shōbōgenzō* is Dōgen's finest doctrinal expression. For Dōgen, to ground oneself in pre-reflective experience (*hishiruo*) is not to abandon thought. On the contrary, such experience gives rise to thought of the purest kind, thought that reflects perfectly the "presence of things as they are." "To think without thinking" is to have so thoroughly set aside one's own will, desire, and subjectivity that one's thought reflects the occasion or situation at hand and not one's own design on it. Thought responds to the situation that evokes it by taking its bearings primarily from what is present, both here and now.

Ordinary thinking (*shiryō*) is the subject's own creation. It accords more with the subject's desire or habits than with the situation at hand. The failure of ordinary thought is that it pre-forms all experience; it simply cannot allow *what is* to be present *as it is*. "Thinking without thinking" requires that the subject let go of its own plans and devices, and attend to what is as it comes to presence. Rather than eliminating thought, this simply realigns thought with reality, beyond the subject's own will to enframe it. On some occasions, it is sufficient to be aware of the situation at hand directly, without thinking. More complex situations call for more elaborate and systematic reflection. Both extremes, however, are grounded in the situation rather than in the subject, and both call for an openness that is uncharacteristic of anything we typically regard as thinking. Pure experience then, gives rise to thought of its own accord, and Dōgen's religious thought is one form that this thinking can take.

This understanding has far reaching consequences for the status of doctrine. If the situations to which thought conforms are impermanent, always turning into new situations, then doctrine would have to change along with them. Dōgen does not shy away from this conclusion: the teachings are impermanent: "Therefore, teaching, clarifying impermanence, and practice are by their nature impermanent. Kanzeon proclaims the Dharma by manifesting himself in a form best suited to save sentient. This is Buddha-nature. Sometimes they use a long form to proclaim a long Dharma, sometimes a short form for a short Dharma. Impermanence itself is Buddha-nature" (1983b:128; 1970:54).

What this means is that there cannot be one permanent body of correct doctrine because the reality to which it would have to conform is itself variable and in transformation. As the text says clearly, "circumstances are constantly changing the form of suchness" (1975:130; 1972:252). Religious thinking that originates in pure experience does correspond to the reality of the situation, but it is also empty (*Ku*) in the sense that it originates dependent upon the particularities of the given situation. As an expression (*dotoku*) of a given occasion (*jisetsu*), it is neither permanent nor universally applicable. On this account therefore, the *Shōbōgenzō* should

be read as a series of such expressions occasioned or elicited by various and changing circumstances in Dōgen's world between 1231 and the year of his death in 1253.

If so then Dōgen's Zen would appear to be ultimately baseless, without any kind of stable and enduring foundation. Again, the text, (Immo chapter) radically confirms our reservations:

Suchness is the real form of truth as it appears throughout the world — it is fluid and differs from any static substance. Our body is not really ours. Our life is easily changed by life and circumstances and never remains static. Countless things pass and we will never see them again. Our mind is also continually changing. Some people wonder: If this is true on what can we rely? But others, who have the resolve to seek enlightenment, use this constant flux to deepen their enlightenment (1975: 58).

Dōgen's position is simply that doctrine's ultimate baselessness is nothing to fear. In fact, that baseless quality of impermanence is the Buddha-nature towards which all authentic doctrine should direct us. But once again a qualification is required. Authentic thinking is not completely baseless. There is something concretely given to which it p 274 must correspond. That is the given situation itself, which comes into being in its own unique form and structure. All thought and action must take their bearings from this situation, responding to it in accordance with the situation's own requirements. Doctrine is authentic to the extent that it is such an open response and to the extent that it includes within it some recognition of its own impermanence/emptiness.

If authentic Zen thinking is a spontaneous response to the situation arising out of "pure experience," it requires no justification in terms of function. As such, it simply belongs to the situation itself, as does the person, whose role is simply to be open to and to respond to "things as they are." Thus Dōgen can suggest (in *Mujo-seppo*) that his dharma discourse is not so much his as the dharma's own discourse, speaking through him as it does through all kinds of beings (1983a:68). But the *Shōbōgenzō* implies further that this thoughtful response to the given situation is extremely important. For Dōgen, as for the Mahayana tradition generally, doctrinal expressions correspond to the suffering and ignorance of the world. Buddhist thought suits the occasion whenever it alleviates suffering and enlightens ignorance. Since authentic doctrine expresses the "bearing" and "manner" of pure experience, it may function as an inspiration, an enabling power, or an opening toward the experience from which it derives for anyone who is in a position to appropriate it.

Doctrinal expressions also make experience explicit; they bring a pre-reflective mode of being to conscious reflection. The *Shōbōgenzō* implies in numerous places that this process of thematic understanding is not a supplement to realization. Rather, it seems to be a necessary part of the development of enlightened awareness. Thus the paradoxical phrase "thinking without thinking" appears to express a reciprocal relation between thought and "without thinking." Dōgen formulates the relation in this way: "Priest Hoen once stated: 'Practice cannot go beyond thought; thought cannot exceed practice.' This expression is important. Think about it day and night, practice it morning and evening." (1983a:10;1970:179). From this perspective, we necessarily practice what we understand, while, at the same time, understanding is based on practice. Similarly a reciprocal relation can be seen between realization (actualization of pure experience) and practice. Practice is based upon realization. As realization deepens, practice is transformed. One no longer sits *zazen* in the same way as before nor does one act and conduct daily life in the same way. But the reverse of this must also be true. As practice deepens so does realization, since in the final analyses they are one and the same.

Thus, for Dōgen, thinking should be a spontaneous response to "things as they are" in themselves. As such, it is encompassed by p 275 enlightened awareness, for its role is to bring the true situation to conscious awareness. Yet, doctrinal thought has no final status, since it is relative to a given situation. The impermanence of Buddhature requires doctrinal impermanence. Enlightened awareness takes its cue from impermanence itself and embodies a responsive relation in it. This awareness is expressed most appropriately in doctrines that show their own impermanence/emptiness.

These conclusions prompt one final question: To what extent does the *Shōbōgenzō* itself manifest this understanding of its own status as an open and thoughtful response to an impermanent situation? This is an extremely complex question to which only a preliminary response is possible here. Dōgen is well-known for his creative reinterpretations of traditional Buddhist texts and doctrines. Occasionally he ignores the standard grammar and syntax of a traditional text in order to draw a deeper meaning out of a passage. [14] Clearly, his account of truth overcomes the traditional requirement that all interpretation merely duplicate the earlier tradition.

Nevertheless, the *Shōbōgenzō* usually presents these creative reinterpretations as "correct" (*sho*) in the sense that they reproduce the original meaning. Occasionally Dōgen will say: "We should possess the same thought as Shakyamuni at that time" (1977:79-80; 1972: 190). Such passages appear to reflect a more static and a historical position that neglects the prominence of impermanence in other sections of the text. Do these passages follow traditional patterns of thought that exempt aspects of the Buddhist tradition from the emptying process of time? Or do these statements, like others, reflect the demands of the situation and occasion to which each section of the *Shōbōgenzō* was a response?

One further passage sheds light on this question: "The essence of the Dharma proclaimed by all Buddhas of the three worlds is the same, yet the actual words used depend on the time and circumstances" (1977:173-4; 1970:360). This could mean that realization is transhistorical in the sense that it is simply openness to what is as it comes to be in its various and impermanent forms. Time and circumstances transform the doctrine, but its basis — pure, pre-reflective experience — remains the same. This interpretation depends on identifying "the essence of Dharma" as "pure experience," an easily supportable identification but one obviously open to other readings. For the word "*dharma*" itself has multiple traditional meanings. Two of those meanings correspond with the *Shōbōgenzō*'s two forms of truth. *Dharma* can mean the teachings themselves (particular doctrines, concepts, and practices), or it can mean their referent, that to p 276 which the teachings themselves point (enlightened awareness). Where "*dharma*" means the teachings, *Shōbō* (correct *dharma*) can mean the correct way to interpret the traditional texts, their proper doctrinal meaning. Where "*dharma*" is that to which the teachings refer, then truth can mean "the presence of things as they are" in enlightened awareness. The *Shōbōgenzō* uses this ambiguity fruitfully, and this helps explain both the text's brilliance as a treatise guiding practice at various levels (discourse suited to the situation) and its difficulty as a systematic expression of thought. But the unity of these two kinds of truth is implied in a number of ways, converging in the act of practical application where the particularity of the situation reigns. Notice, finally, how the following passage works between the two: "There are many interpretations and explanations of this koan, but few have understood it correctly. Most

people are just groping in the dark. If we look at this koan with a pre-thinking mind we can attain the same real free samadhi as Kyogen, and if we sit zazen like Kyogen we can grasp the meaning of this koan before he even speaks" (1975:114;1972:203-4).[15] Here, to understand "correctly" is not to grasp a universal doctrine or a concept, but to be immersed in the "presence of things as they are" where one "thinks without thinking" and where thought (doctrine) is evoked and thereby authenticated.!"[16]

## Notes

1 The Shōbōgenzō is widely regarded as one of the most difficult of all Buddhist texts to translate. What that really means, of course, is that the text is simply difficult to read. The text is deeply rhetorical, resists univocal meaning, and frequently shifts in mood and style. Translation perplexities begin with the title itself. David Shaner translates the title, with equal justification, Treasury of the Correct Dharma-eye. Several other possibilities could also be suggested. What they all indicate, however, is the text's focus on the matter of truth.

2 This correspondence is complicated, however, by the role of tradition as mediator between doctrine and reality and as the standard and guarantor of truth. Section I below clarifies this relation.

3 References to the Shōbōgenzō will be made first to the Nishiyama translation, followed by the Terada version of the Japanese text. The Nishiyama translation is used here for consistency, in spite of its problems, because it is currently the only complete translation. Wherever difficulties affect passages quoted in this paper, revision will be made and noted. Readers are referred to numerous other translations of sections of the Shōbōgenzō, especially to the Abe/Waddell translations in *The Eastern Buddhist* and to Cook (1978). For a listing and review of Dōgen translations, see Kasulis (1978).

4 I have found no explicit epistemological discussion, in our modern sense of the term, in the Shōbōgenzō. Yet there are reflections concerning how the correspondence between doctrine and reality are grounded and justified. Tradition and contemplative experience that is authenticated by tradition are the two primary sources of justification.

5 Japanese scholars have noticed that the earlier sections of the Shōbōgenzō are more generous in specifying where that correct transmission can be found. Sections written after Dōgen's move to Echizen in 1243 are more sectarian and sometimes very critical of the Rinzaï tradition of Zen. Various historical factors could account for this shift in position, but one commonly suggested is that Dōgen's audience changes to become strictly monastic and removed from the pluralistic world of Kyoto.

6 For an exceptionally clear and insightful interpretation of this particular pattern of thought, see T. P. Kasulis (1981).

7 For an account of Dōgen's understanding of temporality (and its relation to Heidegger) and a translation of the Vji (Being-time) text of Dōgen, see Heine.

8 Translation revised.

9 This non-dualistic "proximity" is expressed in another way by Shaner; the truth of dharmata is phenomenologically described as "first-order bodymind awareness."

10 An excellent essay highlighting the unity of practice and enlightenment in Dōgen is Cook (1983).

11 Buddha-nature signifies for Dōgen the ever-changing presence of "things as they are." Masao Abe's essay generated a great deal of the contemporary Western interest in Dōgen, and remains the seminal work on that important topic. Hee-Jin Kim's chapter on the Buddha-nature does an excellent job of showing the relationship between this understanding of Buddha-nature and other themes in Dōgen.

12 Yokoi stipulates "correct belief" as an aspect of the way to realization.



13 For a very helpful discussion of Dōgen's understanding of "expression" see Kim, chapter 3.

14 A classic example of this hermeneutic strategy is described very well by Kōdera.

15 Translation revised

16 Earlier versions of this paper were presented to the Twenty Ninth International Congress of Orientalists in Tokyo, Japan (May 1984) and to the Western Regional Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (Los Angeles, 1985).

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