

The background is a solid red color. Overlaid on this are several dark red, wavy, concentric lines that originate from the left side and curve towards the right, creating a sense of movement and depth.

Mitsuo Hirai

One-Point
Lessons
From Zen
Master
Suigan
Yogo

One-Point Lessons from Zen Master Suigan Yogo

Mitsuo Hirai

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Preface

THIS BOOKLET CONTAINS EXCERPTS FROM talks given at different places and times by Zen Master Suigan Yogo (1912—1996). I have edited and, translated them into English, and condensed them into the form of one-point lessons while trying, as much as possible, to remain loyal to the spirit of the teachings.

Zen Master Suigan Yogo was one of the leading monks of the Soto School of Zen in Japan during the twentieth century. My first encounter with Master Yogo was during the summer of 1982 at a sesshin (a period of intensive Zen practice) under his leadership at Daiyuzan Saijoji Temple, near Odawara, Japan. Deeply impressed by his teachings, I remained in contact with him by way of annual sesshin, periodic discussions, and personal gatherings until his death in December, 1996.

I was profoundly influenced by Master Yogo and owe much of the development of my spiritual life to him. He was my true teacher.

Just as concentrated, one-point lessons are helpful in learning any kind of sports, the same is true, in my opinion, for learning the practice of Zen. This booklet is my attempt to distill Master Yogo's teachings from his books and my personal notes, and focus them into one-point lessons. The chapters are fairly short and intended to be read one at a time, perhaps one a day, to allow time for reflection.

It is said that learning of Zen is to be ap-proached not just by study but also by doing. No matter how many books dedicated to Zen you read, you won't be able to reach its essence without actual practice. It is my wish that this booklet will, in some small way, provide an understanding of some of the principles of Zen and also inspire you to make the practice of Zen a part of your daily life.

Lastly, I would like to thank Mr. Patrick Hallaran, a friend of mine (whom I first met during sesshin) who has supported me in publishing this

booklet and was kind enough to assist in refining the English draft. His advice and encouragement have been extremely valuable.

Mitsuo Hirai
March 10, 2013

Zen Master Suigan Yogo Biography



SUIGAN YOGO WAS BORN IN 1912, the son of a Buddhist priest of a small temple deep in the countryside of Aichi Prefecture in the central part of Japan. At the age of five, following his father's death, he moved with his mother to the town of Kuwana, near Nagoya City. There, his mother would take up work at a spinning factory to support them.

At the age of ten Suigan was sent to a Buddhist temple in a nearby town to become an apprentice monk under Zen Master Tetsugan Kuroda. Working his way through college, he graduated from the Komazawa University in Tokyo in 1936, majoring in Buddhism.

He continued his studies by becoming a monk in 1939 at Daihonzan Sojiji, one of the head temples of the Soto school of Zen. In 1969 and 1971, he toured the U.S. as a guest speaker on Zen in a series of seminars held by the Aspen Institute of Humanistic Studies.

He was elected as president of the Association of Zen Masters of Soto School in 1980. He wrote a number of introductory books on *Shobogenzo*, a collection of the writings by Zen Master Dogen (1200-1253), the founder of the Soto school, on his thought about Buddhism. Suigan Yogo was the head abbot of Daiyuzan Saijoji from 1977 until his death in 1996.

Foreword

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED THE TEACHINGS of Master Yogo, long time abbot of Daiyuzan Saijoji, in August, 2011. At the time I was attending a sesshin (period of intensive Zen practice) at Daiyuzan which is located in Japan's Kanagawa Prefecture, about eighty kilometers southwest of central Tokyo and is a major training temple in the Soto sect of Zen Buddhism.

It was Mr. Mitsuo Hirai, fellow sesshin attendee and compiler of this volume, who introduced me to the teachings of Suigan Yogo. I remember well our conversation on the train ride back to Tokyo after the sesshin ended. We talked at length about Buddhism and Zen practice, particularly as understood and taught by Suigan Yogo.

What appealed to me as Hirai-san spoke about Master Yogo was the down-to-earth and personal nature of his teachings, and how they made the sometimes difficult-to-apprehend aspects of Zen accessible to modern people.

Suigan Yogo is known in Western Zen community as one of the primary teachers of Houn Jiyu-Kennet, the first woman given authority to teach Zen in the West by the Soto School of Japan and founder of the Shasta Abbey in Mount Shasta, California.

To my knowledge, this is the first time his teachings have been made available in English. It's been my great pleasure to collaborate with Mitsuo Hirai in refining his very capable translations of the talks in this volume. His command of English is excellent, so little work was required on my part. The one-point lessons in this booklet are based on talks given by Suigan Yogo between the years 1963 and 1992.

I believe they will be a rich source of inspiration for those new to Zen as well as for more experienced mediators looking for fresh perspectives on Zen practice.

Patrick Hallaran
March 5, 2013



Daiyuzan Saijoji Temple, Odawara

CHAPTER 1. Wonder of The Ordinary

DO YOU APPRECIATE THE FACT that you can hear? Probably not, unless there is something wrong with your ears. The sense of hearing is so plain and natural that it is easily taken for granted. But don't you think it's wonderful that you can hear the sounds around you without making any effort to do so? Quite often in our daily lives, we are not aware of the real wonder of the plain things that are going on so naturally and orderly as just a matter of course.

You are now living just as you are without any conscious will to do so. Don't you think this is a kind of wonder? Effortlessly, your heart continues beating, your lungs breathing, your ears hearing, and your stomach digesting. When you are sleeping, you don't feel you are sleeping. If you do, that is a fake sleep! Nothing is more valuable than the natural order of things in the world and our lives, yet we tend to take this for granted.

Quite often we are dazzled at some extraordinary, or seemingly supernatural, or miraculous events to which we become attached and often rely on for our salvation. We tend to overlook the real wonder that things go on naturally as a matter of course. The real miracle is that there is no miracle! It is in the natural, non-supernatural, or non-extraordinary things that the true miracles lie.

When we sit zazen (Zen meditation) in the temple, we hear all the sounds around us: the streaming of water, singing of birds, wind blowing. We hear all sounds without exception, regardless of our preferences. Our bodies are formed and functioning in this way, independent of our will.

If we come to realize the true wonder of the natural order and processes of things, we would find a very restful place in our mind. This place is where the Buddha lives.

If we don't understand the truth of it, that the true peace already lies within us, then we are tempted to begin searching outside of ourselves for

a source of peace. It's like a thief trying to steal something from others; it is what I call the "thief temperament."

One of Buddha's precepts states, "Don't steal the property of others." This is a matter of common sense. You don't need to come all the way to this temple to hear that stealing is a bad thing. In essence, however, this precept refers to something much deeper. Rather than simply forbidding us to steal the property of others, it is a warning not to harbor the "thief temperament" in trying to obtain something that you already have within you.

Once you come to realize the real wonder of the natural order of things and reach the state of restful peace in your own mind, then that is it. You need nothing more, nothing less. Such is the ultimate religious peace of mind.

Realize that there is a way of living our lives plainly and naturally in the wonderful yet ordinary world where things go on plainly and naturally as a matter of course.

October, 1987



Enjoji Temple, Nara



Kotaiji Temple Kyoto

CHAPTER 2. Don't Compare

“THE PATH TO BUDDHAHOOD IS not a difficult one, provided you don’t harbor likes and dislikes.” This is the message at the beginning of a book entitled *Shinjinmei*, one of the oldest classics of Zen sect of Buddhism, written in around the seventh century by a Chinese monk named Sosan.

First, we should consider what is meant by “Buddha.” Philosophically, it has a manifold meaning, but for the sake of simplicity let’s take it here as referring to a person whose mind is controlled and at peace.

Next, what is meant by “likes and dislikes”? In our daily lives we encounter countless objects that we either like or dislike. For example, we may like sweet things and dislike sour things, or like pretty things more than ugly things. In a broader sense, not to harbor likes and dislikes means “not to make comparisons”. In this way Sosan’s message could be rephrased as “The path to the Buddha is wide open, if you don’t make comparisons.”

We live in the world of comparisons, and we usually take it as a matter of course. If we look deeper, however, we find that making comparisons is the root cause of our mental sufferings.

Competition is an example of something that happens in the world of comparisons. The winner is compared with the loser. This is obvious in sports, but is present in the business world as well.

We are rated according to the price tag of competitive ability attached to us. You may accept competition as ordinary and even take it as a challenge. That’s fine, but I suspect it may prove difficult to remain very peaceful in this way.

Just as school children are happiest when they are not rated by their test results, your mind would be most at rest were you to live in the world

as if no such price tag is attached to you.

You may find comfort in the fact that you are better off than some people. At the same time you may not be so comforted by the fact that many people are better off than you. Obviously, this way of comparison won't serve as the final solution for your sufferings. So long as you are in the world of comparisons, your mind won't be completely peaceful. Only if you live in the world of non-comparison, or non-relativity, which I call the "landscape of religion," will your mind become peaceful.

One of the old Chinese classics of Zen relays a story of a monk who became enlightened at a butcher's shop. He heard a customer saying, "I want a piece of good meat." The butcher replied, "I don't have any bad meat." Upon hearing this, the monk reached enlightenment.

How is it that the monk reached enlightenment merely by hearing such a brief dialogue? Here is my interpretation. At the butcher's shop, meats are displayed in accordance with human taste. Naturally, the better the taste, the higher the price tag. But the meat itself is intrinsically price-free. When it existed as the animal—pig, poultry, or whatever—it worked as a part of the body, be it breast or leg muscle. It performed a natural function which had nothing to do with a rating of good or bad.

It is the humans that rate the meat according to their taste and put the price tag on what is intrinsically free from price. Only in the human world the price of the meat is valid. This story suggests that the monk was inspired to look beyond the human scale of measurement and to see the landscape of religion that was previously invisible to him.

June, 1968



Hokoji Temple, Asuka, Nara

CHAPTER 3. The Human Scale of Measurement

IN OUR DAILY LIVES WE are constantly driven to work more efficiently and to achieve a greater level of significance. So, we discard anything that doesn't fit in with this agenda. We are living in the world of comparative value, always under the sway of competition. In this way, we can seldom be at rest.

I remember something that Prof. Kiyoshi Oka, a well known scholar in mathematics, once said, "If I was asked why I study mathematics, my answer would be, 'A violet flower in bloom in the valley has nothing to do with whether it is pretty or useful.'"

What he meant here, I presume, is that mathematics lies in a different dimension from the world in which the violet flower is rated as more or less pretty or useful. That must have been why he was so interested in mathematics.

When you view the violet flower as pretty or useful, you are seeing it through the lens of what I call the "human scale of measurement." The world where Prof. Oka played in studying mathematics was outside the human scale of measurement.

Only when you remove the lens of the human scale of measurement, can you see the world in the dimension where a mountain exists for its own sake irrespective of whether it is beautiful or ugly, and the violet flowers are in full bloom in their entirety despite being either pretty or useful.

Once I happened to hear a professional singer being interviewed on the radio. During the interview I remember him saying, "If the ability to sing were taken out from me, I would be worthless." He believed so, in my view, because his mind was so tarnished by the human scale of measurement that singing was the only significant thing in his life. The fact is, however, that even without the ability to sing his life would remain.

Which do you think is more important, going to work, or doing housekeeping? Is going to work more important because you must earn money? Probably. But don't you think that the housekeeping is important as well? Unless the housekeeping is done well, your work won't go very well. The housekeeping is as important as the job.

You, business people, would think, "I'll take really quick lunch as I have lots of things to prepare for the important meeting this afternoon." I think most of you would think that way.

We, monks in the temple, don't take lunch quickly. We take due time for the lunch, although the meal itself is simple. We don't think taking lunch any less important than things following the lunch. Everything we do is equal in value, whether it be the eating or other feats of practice. That is our philosophy. Perhaps you may say, "Only the monks can spend time so leisurely."

But don't you think everything in your daily life, however trivial it may seem, is important and significant? Going to bathroom is just as important as eating. In this way, isn't it possible for you to see past the concepts of comparative value?

When we talk about a highlight of our lives, we are usually referring to a certain outstanding event that marks a turning point for us. But couldn't we regard these small bits and pieces of our everyday lives--getting up in the morning, washing hands, eating breakfast and so on--as the highlights of our lives, rather than degrading them as trivial and insignificant? Wouldn't then those bits and pieces be seen as significant on their own? It is like a lion exerting his utmost power to catch even a tiny mouse.

In seeing the small events in our everyday lives as highlights, we may live in the world independent of the human scale of measurement, and feel at ease.

September, 1985



Kohfukuji Temple, Nara



Enjoji Temple, Nara

C H A P T E R 4. Getting Lost on a Clear Day

THE TITLE OF THIS CHAPTER is a quote from a poem by Zen Master Daichi who lived in Kumamoto, Japan in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. In my view, it means that, on a nice day, we can see everything so clearly that we are all the more likely to get lost. We are so dazzled at what we see in the sun that we tend to become suspicious of things possibly hiding in the shadows.

When you practice zazen, you hear sounds and smell odors around you. You cannot reject hearing what you don't want to hear, or smelling what you don't want to smell. Also, an unending flow of thoughts comes up in your mind, one after another. This is normal, because your brain is working; you cannot stop your brain from working. It's useless trying to be free from conscious thought in zazen.

You may well recollect various things in a chain of thoughts. Once a lady pub owner told me of her experience in zazen. She said, "The benefit of zazen was great, as I was able to recollect a bill of charge from three years ago." If you try to suppress the chain of thoughts, they are likely to bounce back even more persistently. This is normal. If you say, "I have become completely free from conscious thought in zazen," I would say you are not normal.

However, what you can do in zazen is to stop pursuing the chain of thoughts; let them float in and out like clouds in the sky. This is really all we do to deal with thoughts.

In light of this, you may be wondering if it's really possible to reach enlightenment by practicing zazen. Commonly, enlightenment is considered superior to the state of delusion; those who are lost in delusion may eventually attempt to find the path to enlightenment. From the religious point of view, it is not a big issue whether you are enlightened or deluded; enlightenment and delusion are both nothing more than phenomena resulting from the mental activity of likes and dislikes.

Just think of the plain fact that you hear the sounds and smell the odors around you regardless of your preference for or aversion toward

them. Your body has many functions that operate regardless of your will to control them. Your heart continues beating even when you are asleep; you can sleep soundly without having to worry about it. The troubles in your mind stem from the fact that you think you can control things that are beyond your control, and you don't see that they are. Fundamentally, this is because your thoughts are centered around the human scale of measurement.

There must be something fundamental that makes you alive as you are. Haven't you ever experienced something like the following? In the midst of the quietness deep in the wood, when you hear a shriek of a bird, the quietness seems to become even deeper after the shriek. It can be taken that the bird's shriek is an accessory of the quietness. Similarly, your life and death may be taken as accessories of something fundamental.

If you become able to look beyond the human scale of measurement to see that fundamental "something" as clearly as you would see anything in the bright sunlight and that absolutely nothing is hidden in the shadows, you will gain the freedom to view your life and death just as they really are mere accessories to what is fundamental. Then you won't get lost, even on a clear day.

October, 1987

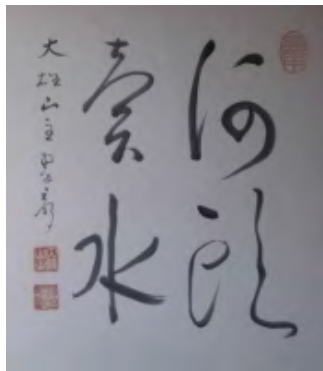


Daiyuzan Saijoji Temple, Odawara

CHAPTER 5. Zazen is Not a Tool

IF YOU PRACTICE ZAZEN WITH the objective to acquire something, such as some special or mystical ability, or supernatural power, you are not on the right track. Zazen should not be a tool to attain something, even enlightenment. Its sole purpose is to just sit without any gaining idea. That is how Dogen, the founder of the Soto school of Zen in Japan, defined zazen.

An idea to attain something in return for zazen practice is a kind of trade which is within the framework of the human scale of measurement. To sit solely in meditation is to live in the world where the value of all things as measured by the human scale—win or lose, rich or poor, pretty or ugly—are dropped off. It is the world of no relative value; the flowers in the

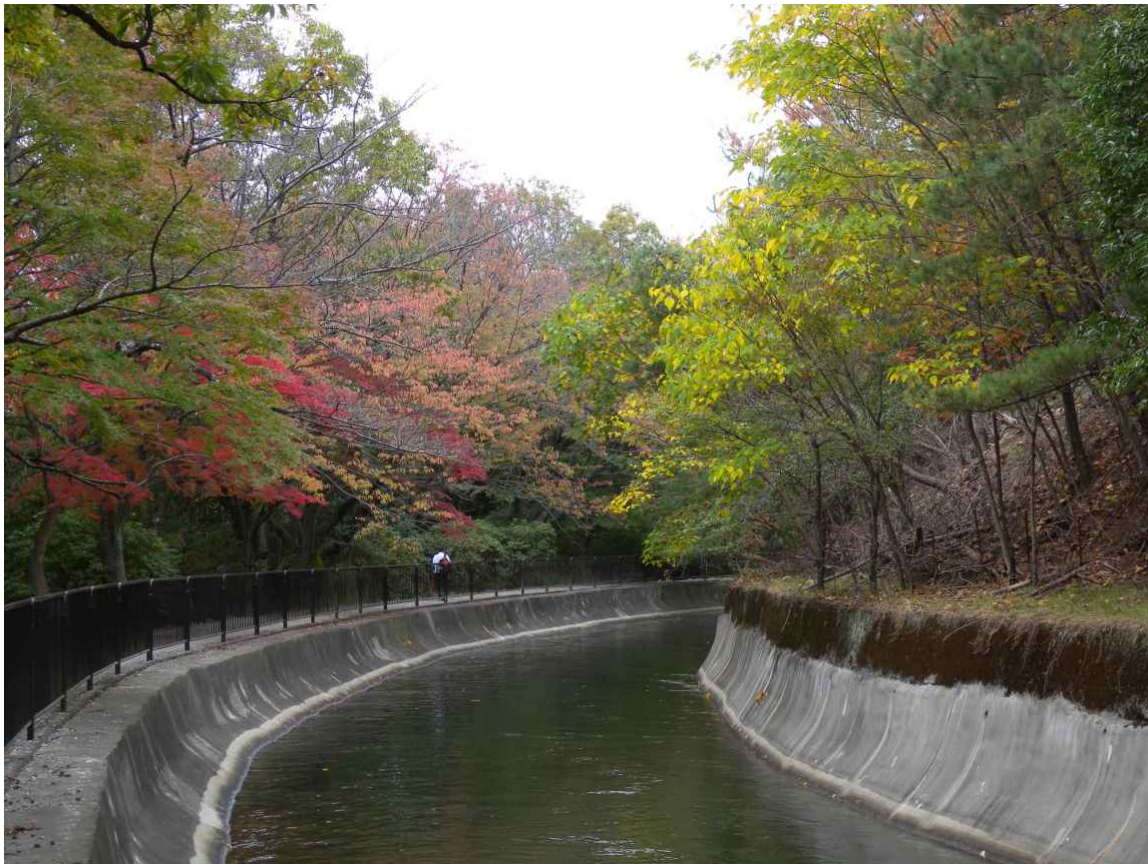


valley are in full bloom in all colors—blue, red, white, or purple--in their entirety, with no relative value attached. It is the landscape of religion in which your soul settles down in the ultimate peace. According to Dogen, zazen is the true gateway to comfort and ease.

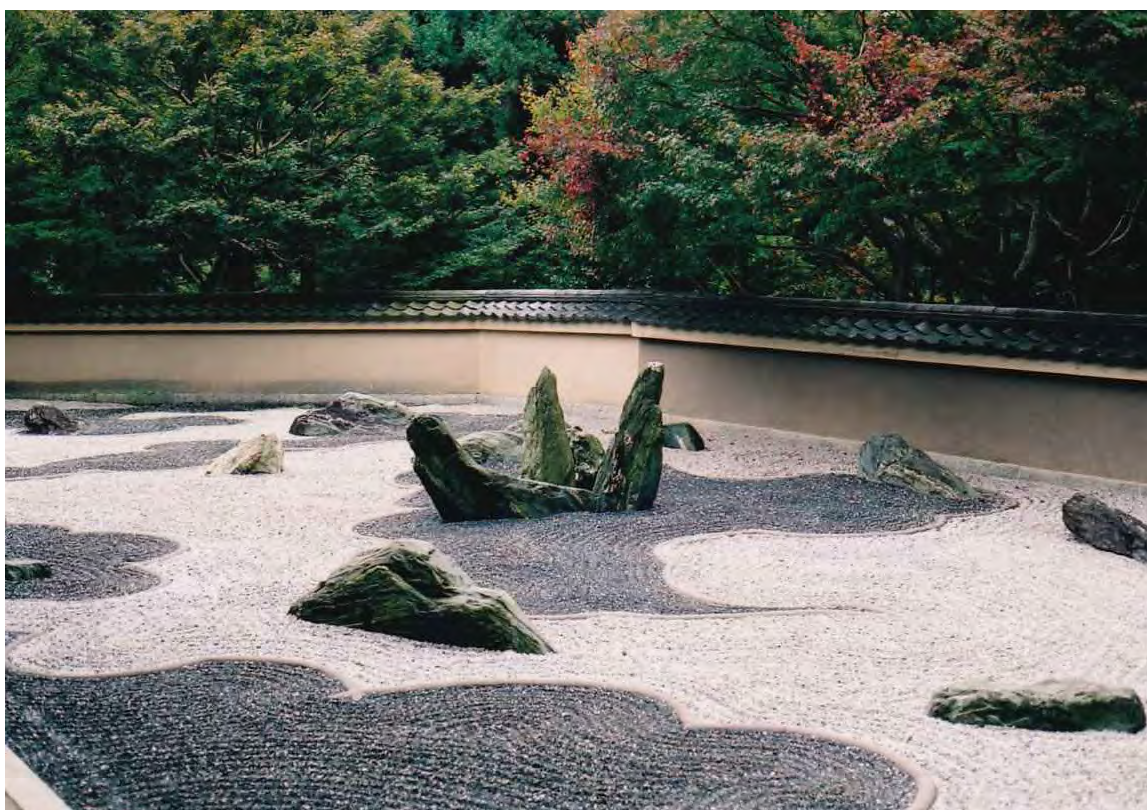
At times I enjoy writing the above calligraphy, “Selling water at the river front.” What this saying refers to is not a place that we might find these days selling nice bottles of water next to a polluted river. Rather, it's about a time long ago when the river water was clean; nobody would pay a penny for a drink of water at the river front where clean water is in abundance. Such a business would be quite futile indeed. May be what you are doing right now is just futile like this.

Paradoxically, you can accomplish something really big when you realize what you are doing is futile. In fact, a really genuine accomplishment is not made by one who seeks for something in return for his work, but by one who isn't phased by the fact that his work is futile just as selling water at the river front is futile.

January, 1988



Biwa Canal, Yamashina



Tofukuji Temple, Kyoto

CHAPTER 6. Buddha's Precepts

THERE ARE RULES OF CONDUCT in Buddhism generally known as Buddha's ten commandments, similar to the biblical Ten Commandments in Christianity. In Buddhism, however, commandments are more commonly known as "precepts." There is a ceremony where one formally become a Buddhist and pledges to uphold the precepts. In our daily lives, however, we are continually violating the precepts in many ways.

For example, the first precept says, "Do not kill." But we cannot sustain our lives without killing. Even though we may not eat any meat or fish, it does not mean we are not killing anything. Vegetables are living, and so are microorganisms used for food, such as yeast. What then, is the true meaning of the Buddha's precepts? Are the precepts in name only?

Buddha's precepts are not merely a promise made between human beings, but between human beings and the universe at large. They are not merely rules telling you what you should or shouldn't do. Rather, they have a much deeper concern with your very existence in this world.

Think about how it is that you exist right here and now. Can you explain it? Why were you born into this world? You were born from your parents, of course. But without an encounter between your parents, you wouldn't have been born at all. How did this encounter between your parents happen? How is it that your parents were born from their respective parents, and so on? It is inexplicable, isn't it? This inexplicable something that gives you life, we Buddhists call the "Life of the Universe."

Legend tells us that Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment in the morning of December 8th some twenty-five hundred years ago in Northern India, when he saw a star shining in the early dawn sky at the end of his meditation under a Bo tree, and said, "All the creatures in the universe and I are one."

This was his expression about the Life of the Universe, something inexplicable that makes all creatures on the planet exist as they do. It

includes everything in the universe—not only living things but also non-living things such as soil, rocks, and water. Thanks to the environment we are given life. Further, our very existence is dependent on the Life of the Universe.

In the midst of the Life of the Universe we live and die. Nothing stands still in the Life of the Universe; it is within this constant movement and change that we find eternal life. The Life of the Universe, we Buddhist call the “Life of Buddha,” or simply, “Buddha.”

The message of the precept “Do not kill” is nothing more than having compassion for the Life of Buddha. It is the same thing as saying, “Do not kill the Life of Buddha.”

Once you understand the spirit of it and adjust your behavior accordingly, you are meeting the precept. Buddha’s ten precepts are so constructed that once you understand and observe just one of them, you are meeting all of them.

January, 1992



Kamigamo Shrine, Kyoto



Genkoh-an Temple, Kyoto

CHAPTER 7. What Is Enlightenment?

IS ENLIGHTENMENT—ASSUMING THERE IS such a thing--only obtainable through ascetic practices? We tend to think so. We usually think that eternal truth lies somewhere remote from us, maybe way up in the sky, so it is hard to get at unless we do demanding practices.

There is an old Chinese poem depicting a man who has left his home to go on a long walk looking for anything "spring-like." All he could find was one plum blossom in his own garden at the end of his journey. Enlightenment is something like this. If we find it, it will be right in front of us, not someplace far away.

The fourth of Buddha's precepts says, "Do not tell a lie." Even a small child knows that telling a lie is no good, but isn't there any meaning deeper than that?

Concerning the precept Dogen wrote, "The wheel of law rotates on its own; nothing is deficient, nor in excess. The Life of the Universe permeates everywhere like the dew moistens gently grasses and trees." What is Dogen's meaning in this precept? Rather than warning us not to tell a lie, he urges us to realize that we exist in the world where we cannot tell a lie, that our existence in this universe is devoid of any deception.

Just as spring is expressed by the plum blossom, our every act and utterance express the Life of the Universe beyond all deception. Nobody was born with his face custom-made. We are so made that we cannot deceive the Life of the Universe.

Once you realize that you are living in the Universe where nothing is deficient, nor in excess, your mind will become peaceful. That's it. What else would you need to seek for? The very act of realizing this for yourself is the enlightenment and the true meaning of the precept. It doesn't matter if you feel enlightened or not. Your enlightenment may well be the beginning of your delusion.

Without delusion there is no enlightenment. If you ever feel deluded,
be at peace within your delusion.

January,

1992



Uji River, Uji



Jingoji Temple, Kyoto

CHAPTER 8. What are We Praying for?

WHEN WE PRAY WE USUALLY pray for something that we wish for. Typically, on New Year's day in Japan, pious men and women go to shrines and temples to pray. What do they pray for? Offering money, they pray for a good year, good health, happy family life, safety, prosperity, peace, and so on. Those wishes may not always be fulfilled, but they are making a kind of deal with God or Buddha, bargaining their wishes with their offerings. It's quite human, and I haven't much to say about it.

Manners and formalities of prayer differ from one religion to another, and you must follow them when you pray. But the purest prayer, I would say, is to pray for nothing. It is, in other words, to pray without wishing for anything whatsoever. That is zazen, the purest kind of prayer--the prayer of perfect peace.

January, 1983



Koshoji Temple, Uji

CHAPTER 9. Zazen into Activity

ZAZEN IS ONE OF THE central features of Buddhist practice in the Zen monastery. It is an expression of the ultimate static state of calmness. But the practice of zazen should not end when we get up from the cushion. Ideally, our zazen will carry on into the dynamism of our daily lives.

Shoyoroku, one of the old Chinese classics well known among Zen Buddhists, tells of an episode of a monk trying to end his own life during zazen, vowing to maintain his posture to the very end.

Amazingly, according to the story, he succeeded. Then, his master lamented his death and gently rubbed his back, commenting, "This way of dying is possible, but it is not the way I taught you."

What are the implications of this symbolic episode? Of course, you're free to interpret it in your own way, but let me tell you how I view it. First, it is a warning against extremism in religion. For the monk who died as he sat in meditation, it was a remarkable accomplishment; very few could recreate such an extraordinary feat. He was a man of special ability and may have become the focus of admiration.

In fact, even now many people admire such a person and believe that one cannot reach the spiritual awakening unless the special abilities are acquired through similar extreme practices.

Although the master didn't deny it totally, he didn't take positive view of the monk's performance. What he did deny was the extremes in religious practice, emphasizing that the overly severe practice of zazen was counter-productive. He definitely felt that extreme asceticism should be discarded in that it represented a misinterpretation of the orthodox Buddhist teaching.

Rather than be impressed by special abilities or apparent miracles, one would be better off realizing that the true miracle is that, in this world, there is no miracle. Nothing is more valuable or wonderful than the

perfectly ordinary; water flows naturally from high to low. We are often apt to overlook this.

Once you understand the relevance of this truth, hardly any effort is required to obtain true spiritual awakening. In fact, you have already obtained it. See this, and you will know the true peace. Don't pretend to be detached when you are facing death. Allow your suffering to happen.

A person of extreme religious piety and posturing is often complacent, coercive and bothersome to the people around him. Really, I think religion is like adding bit of salt to our meal. It provides a fine taste if used properly, but disastrous if used too much.

The second point of the above story is, I believe, a warning against Buddhists' propensity to renounce active life and escape from the reality of the world. What would happen, if all the monks in the monastery tried to follow the example of the monk who died in zazen? Although not as extreme an example, what if all the monks were to do absolutely nothing but practice zazen? Who would feed them? If a visitor were to come to the monastery, who would receive and welcome him? There must be someone who works actively to support the monks practicing zazen. There must be some people who work and support the monastery.

Zazen doesn't stand alone. Renouncing your self should not lead to renouncing your active life. On the contrary. The true virtue of zazen is to be expressed in the activities of daily life. So, as soon as you get up from your zazen cushion, be as positive and active as you possibly can in your daily life.

March, 1992



Uji River, Uji



Todaiji Temple, Nara

C H A P T E R 10. What Buddhism Means to You

GENERALLY, BUDDHISM IS UNDERSTOOD AS the religion taught by Gautama Buddha. Likewise, Christianity is the religion taught by Jesus Christ, and Islam by Muhammad. However, this is not entirely correct.

Any teachings, if delivered by just one person, cannot be fully trustworthy. Any religion that has become the guidepost for millions of people must have gone beyond the framework of just one person. It must be understood correctly that the sayings of the so-called founder became accepted as truths following a long process of filtering the teachings. Like the law of water flowing from higher to lower anywhere in the world and at all times, the truths thus told are universal.

In my view, the difference of these major religions doesn't seem to be too great. It is like a cylindrical timber. If it is cut perpendicular to the central axis, its cross section is a round. An eclipse, if cut on the slant. A rectangle, if cut along the axis. But the timber itself is the same as the timber. Don't be prejudiced by the difference of the cross section.

It is not correct that Buddhism is the religion taught by just Gautama Buddha. Buddhism is irrelevant whether Gautama really lived some twenty-five hundred years ago in Northern India or not. It must be understood that the philosophy developed and formulated by a few leaders, of whom Gautama was one, has been presented as originating from him.

It is immaterial whether the teachings were ever actually delivered by Gautama. What is essential is that you see the truth in them for yourself. Even if what Gautama taught were totally fictitious, if you find the truth in them for yourself, you can believe in and follow it. Then you are a Buddhist. What is important is what Buddhism means to your life, not merely gaining knowledge of it through study.

November, 1988



Kinkakuji Temple, Kyoto



Daiyuzan Saijoji Temple, Odawara

CHAPTER 11. The Truth of Buddhism

NOWADAYS, BUDDHISM IS FACING CRITICISM and some people feel that it might become extinct. It is looked down for merely being a religious form of funeral services, and its clergy being too secular or even corrupt.

I would refuse to side with this overly crisis-minded view about Buddhism. We need, most importantly, to differentiate Buddhism from the institution of Buddhists.

While the former refers to a field of philosophical and religious thought, the latter signifies temples and various organized institutions of Buddhists. Generally, people talk about Buddhism without making this distinction.

The truth of Buddhism exists in this world regardless of the rise and fall of the Buddhist institution. In other words, the truth of Buddhism will never die even though the Buddhist institution might collapse into extinction.

An example of one such truths appears in Sosan's classic, *Shinjinmei*: "The path to Buddhahood is not a difficult one, provided you don't harbor likes and dislikes." This could be rephrased as, "The path to the Buddha is wide open if you don't pick and choose." This will eventually lead you to view everything in this world with affection and compassion, without the need to discriminate. In here lies the ever-lasting truth of Buddhism.

I would like to see criticisms directed at Buddhism proceed from this understanding.

January, 1976



Nagaoka Tenjin Shrine, Nagaoka



Shirakawa River, Kyoto

CHAPTER 12. Morality vs. Religion

BY INSTINCT ANIMALS LIKE ANTS and bees keep strictly the order of their societies. It is by morality that human beings keep the order of their societies. With the sense of morality they serve to the societies to which they belong. They are, however, loyal only to their own societies, while the societies by nature are apt to pursue a selfish way to protect their own interest. This manifests the limit of morality in the world of what we call “the closed society.”

In a sense, the history of mankind is the history of war. In the course of history societies have developed from small ones to large modern states, and there have been thousands of war struggles between the societies. At the war front the killing is justified or even praised, despite it is a crime at the time of peace. This contradiction of morality cannot be avoided so long as we live in the world of the closed society. At the war each society has its own justification. But it is nothing more than the camouflaged selfishness of the society.

Religion, on the other hand, surpasses the world of the closed society. It is “the opened society,” the society absolutely opened. It is where no contradiction of morality exists. It is where love and hatred, good and evil do exist, but in a forgiven way.

In the opened society we are given life without likes and dislikes. It is the society that Gautama Buddha once said, “All the creatures in the universe and I are one.” Good and evil, beauty and ugliness, love and hatred, tears and laughter do not disappear there, but they are no more than accessories of the “oneness.” Such is the landscape of the opened society.

In the world we live today we see countless struggles and wars between the religions, and many people are killed due to the difference of religion. If the religion were to approve the killing, it would be much better

off not to have the religion. Any religion motivated by the principle of the closed society is not, never, the true religion.

June, 1968



Kimpusenji Temple, Yoshino

CHAPTER 13. Transiency is Buddha's Truth

NOTHING STANDS STILL IN THIS world. All things are transient and in a process of continual change. Flowers in full bloom are destined to dry up and fade away. In the midst of the fleeting world we tend to pursue something that exists beyond change and is not transient, so called the eternal truth somewhere remote from us. Where is it? What is it like?

"Transiency is Buddha's truth," was the words told by Eno, a Chinese Zen Master who lived during the latter half of seventh to the early eighth century. What is the meaning of this saying? The philosophy behind the words is that what is indeterminate appears only in the determinate form.

To put it in another way, the infinite is expressed only by the finite, by what is perceptible to the sense of vision or touch. The season of spring, for example, is indeterminate and abstract by itself, but is expressed and understood by the determinate and concrete form of a flower.

While the transiency means those determinate matters that are fleeting, Buddha's truth refers to something inexplicable that underlies all existence. It is infinite, indeterminate and deeply rooted in the innermost depth of the universe--what we Buddhists call the "Life of the Universe," or simply, Buddha.

What Eno is saying is that Buddha's truth is expressed through the tangible yet transient thing. In other words, each step made in the transient world is also an expression of one step in the Life of the Universe.

In the spring we can see the Life of the Universe expressed by the flowers in the valley. Each flower is in full bloom at its entirety--blue, red, or yellow--none is inherently better than any other.

Listen to the cicadas singing in the summertime. They are living fully and singing their hearts out. The Life of the Universe is shining on them in their entirety. But as soon as the summer ends, they will die. In the midst of the Life of the Universe, the cicadas are living and dying, and so are

we. Nothing stands still in the Life of the Universe. The Life of the Universe exists through transience and change and is, in that way, eternal.

By implication, what we pursue as the eternal truth is to be found in the concrete and transient world where we live our daily lives, not someplace remote from us. That is to say, each step of our life in this world is an expression of the Buddha's truth.

There are many inspiring words left for us from the Zen Buddhists of ancient China of which this is just one example.

January, 1982



Heian Shrine, Kyoto



Kinkakuji Temple, Kyoto

C H A P T E R 14. The Life of the Universe

I OFTEN SAY THAT THERE is no one who has his face order-made before his birth. Only when you reach a certain age do you come to realize how your face looks like, regardless of whether you like it or not. Also, your height doesn't increase indefinitely; you stop growing at a certain point. Furthermore, you can't live indefinitely. We all grow old, and destined to die. Your heart is beating without any effort on your part; it continues beating even while you are sleeping. You have no need to worry about it. Have you ever felt thankful to your heart? Probably not, taking it as merely a matter of course. But the real wonder lies in just this: what is a matter of course, plain and natural.

There is something inexplicable that makes us thus alive as we are and that makes all creatures on the planet exist as they do. It's not easy to describe that something, but let's call it the "Life of the Universe."

This may be the best expression we have for what is fundamental and deep rooted in the heart of the universe. It includes everything in the universe: not only living things, but non-living things like soil and water as well. As we acknowledge that we are alive thanks to the environment, our existence is dependent upon the Life of the Universe--we are living in it. There is an exquisite harmony in the rhythm of the Life of the Universe. Living in it is what we Buddhists call "Buddha."

When we refer to Buddha, you might imagine a statue of Buddha sitting in meditation. You might come to believe that you'll become Buddha when you die. Know this--you are a Buddha right now, going this way and that in our daily lives with all ups and downs: laughter and tears, winning and losing, being awakened and being deluded. Our life and death are constantly occurring within the rhythm of the Life of the Universe.

Once I was asked by a young monk in my temple, "Why do we die?" I said, "I don't know, but you'd be in a big trouble if you didn't die." How could I respond to him otherwise?

But don't worry about not dying. Be at ease knowing that you will die for certain. Living in harmony with the rhythm of the Life of the Universe,

no matter how far you may wander searching for what you want, you'll find yourself playing on a palm of the big Buddha, and never be outside of it. So, do live at ease and comfort with peace of mind even as you eventually face your own death.

October, 1987



Chion-in Temple, Kyoto

CHAPTER 15. To Learn Buddha's Way

IN HIS MASTERPIECE, *SHOBOGENZO*, DOGEN wrote, "To learn Buddha's way is to learn your self. To learn your self is to forget your self. To forget your self is that your existence is proven by the laws of the universe." What does it mean by the phrase "your existence is proven by the laws of the universe?" Again, the underlying philosophy is that what is indeterminate appears only in the determinate form. What is infinite and indeterminate is exhibited only on what is finite and determinate, what you can see or touch.

In other words, each step of your life is an expression of the Life of the Universe which makes you alive as you are. The Life of the Universe is to be understood as the infinite, indeterminate, and deep rooted heart of the universe.

Think about your existence, how you have come about to be right now. Why were you born into this world? Why does your face look like it does? Was it a custom-made? No, certainly not. You can't explain why and how it was made, can you? There is no other option than to accept it as it is, whether you like it or not. This is what is meant by the phrase, "your existence is proven by the laws of the universe."

This point of view may be regarded as fatalism or defeatism, but no, it is not. Rather, it is the intention to accept reality unconditionally in its entirety. It is the ultimate religious peace into which one's soul settles. The message Dogen is conveying here is the law of the spiritual world that is as true as the law of gravity in the world of science; the waters flow from high to low.

September, 1986



Toji-in Temple, Kyoto

CHAPTER 16. A Day of Leaving Your Self up to Buddha

I RECALL A MAN WHO took a trip to Europe recently telling me, “When I flew over the North Pole, a feeling came over me of how wonderful it is that I can live every day a life of tears and laughter.” I fully understood his feelings. Looking over the deadly frozen white world of North Pole, the inspiration must have come to him to fully and joyfully accept the day to day human world, with its tears and laughter.

The pursuit of Zen is to transcend the world as measured solely by the human scale--the worldly lives of tears and laughter--and enter the world of the “Life of the Universe” which gives us our existence on this planet. This is what we Buddhists call the “Life of Buddha.”

Once you realize the true virtue of the Life of Buddha, you may view those same tears and laughter in a very different light. In the joyful wonder of being embraced by Buddha's arms, you will have the same tears and laughter with restful peace of your mind.

We don't know when we will die; we just leave it up to Buddha. Living on a palm of the big Buddha, even the thought of dying tomorrow is not a problem for us. The very day we are living right now is a day given to us by the compassion of Buddha; it is a day of true peace of mind. It doesn't matter whether we live long or short, because it is up to Buddha and outside the world of human calculations.

Leaving your self up to Buddha is exactly what Shinran (1173-1262), the founder of the Jodo Shinshu, a school of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan, taught as the path to ultimate peace of mind. It is at this point that the teachings of Zen and Jodo Shinshu converge.

A day you leave your self up to Buddha is a blessed day; you won't get angry or be upset over anything. A day you don't leave your self up to Buddha is a pitiful day; you are filled with conflict and regret, since you are governed by human calculations.

In our daily lives we have to work to live, and are involved in various professions. No matter what occupation you may be in, the important thing is your mental attitude toward your work. If your mind is settled in the religious feeling to leave your self up to Buddha, you can't help but be kind to others. On the other hand, if you are bound to such concepts as "the customer is king," you still have a long way to go.

September, 1986



Tenryuji Temple, Kyoto

CHAPTER 17. Who Binds You?

“**A**S THE RAIN HAS EASED off and the clouds have begun to clear, the whole mountain range has come into view. They are not so high after all.”

The above quote is from a poem by Zen Master Dogen. It describes a scene that he witnessed as he was about to ascend a mountain. As visibility was hindered by heavy rain and dense cloud cover, he was unable to see the top of the mountain and became worried about how high it would be. When the sky cleared, he was relieved to discover that the mountain was not as high as he had imagined. He realized that the source of his worry was just his own self.

There is a story from the old Chinese Zen classics about a dialogue between a monk and his master. The monk asked the master, “I’m suffering. It feels as though someone is binding my mind tightly with a rope. Please undo this binding and relieve my suffering.” The master replied, “Who is it that binds you?”

The monk left, and returned to the master some time later and said, “I pondered over your question and came to realize it was myself who bound me.”

In your own life you may have feelings similar to those felt by the monk. Seemingly shackled by various restraints, you sense a lack of freedom and experience suffering. Realize that all that binds you is merely yourself, conditioned by the narrow view of the human scale of measurement. Then, just as Dogen did as he looked up at the mountain after the rain, you too will experience inner freedom.

October, 1990



Heian Shrine, Kyoto

CHAPTER 18. A Person of Freedom

IN OUR DAILY LIVES WE live as we please, more or less. In other words, our lives are mostly dictated by our desires. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing. In a sense, it is really only natural that we live life driven by the desires. So far, so good. But can living life in this way really lead to true happiness? What, if anything, is wrong with the desire itself?

What are its characteristics? First, it seems almost as if desire is born in order to vanish. Take, for example, the desire for food or sex; it disappears as soon as the desire is satisfied. We are driven by many such desires; this is what restrains us and hinders our inherent freedom. That is the reality of our lives and there seems to be no way out of the game.

Feuerbach (1804-1872), a German philosopher, said, “The religion is born from the grave.” We are all destined for death. It is this very notion that triggers us to reflect on desire and bring an end to this seemingly endless game. I think Feuerbach’s words are pointing us in this direction.

By fully reflecting on the nature and process of desire we may eventually reach a point where desire itself is able to be controlled and actually overcome. Herein lies freedom of the soul and the realm of true religion. A truly religious person is someone who has fully understood his or her desires and has ultimately overcome them to reveal the true freedom and happiness.

A person who restrains desire in an extreme way may be thought of as one who is trying to escape from the real world. On the other hand, a truly free person with controlled desire encounters the very same things as everybody else in the world of everyday affairs. He doesn’t escape from reality of the actual world. He is well aware that he can’t live in a world separate from desire and that following the right way of life is in no way hindered by desire—he lives freely and happily without restraint.

August, 1963



Heian Shrine, Kyoto



Hotoji Temple, Kyoto

CHAPTER 19. The Benefit of Zazen

ZEN MASTER DOGEN DISCUSSES THE benefit of Zazen in a question and answer format in his book, *Shobogenzo*. What follows is an excerpt from one of them translated from the modern Japanese text.

Q: “It is said that those who are unenlightened should practice zazen to get enlightenment. Is there anything to be expected, then, from practicing zazen for those who have already attained enlightenment?”

A: “Only those that don’t understand Buddha’s law could ask such a silly question. The questioner appears to regard practice and enlightenment as two separate things when they should be seen as one. The practice of zazen is itself enlightenment. The willful practice of a beginner is nothing but the whole of genuine enlightenment. He isn’t aware of being enlightened because he already has been enlightened. There is no end to either practice or enlightenment. Don’t expect enlightenment without practice. This is the teaching passed on to us from Gautama Buddha and his successors.”

In my view, what Dogen means here is that zazen should not be seen as a tool used to attain enlightenment. So long as you regard zazen merely as the means to an end your thinking will be bound by the human scale of measurement, and the true benefit of Zazen will elude you. Whether you are a newcomer or more experienced practitioner, enlightenment is there from the very beginning of zazen. Just as you don’t feel like you’re sleeping while actually asleep, you don’t feel enlightened because you are really enlightened.

This view of enlightenment can also be expressed using the analogy of a photograph. At the moment you view a photograph the subject in the photo has already changed. What you are seeing is a trace from the past. Similarly, the moment you feel enlightenment, it is already gone. Enlightenment never stands still. Practice and enlightenment continue on in a beginning-less and endless cycle. In this context Dogen says “Carry on practice in the midst of enlightenment.”

From the time he became a Buddhist monk at the age of 14, his original question was, "If, as I was told, every human being is born a Buddha, what, then, is the use of practicing?" With this question in his mind he finally travelled to China at the age of 24 and embarked on a pilgrimage for about five years.

Ultimately, what he learned there and what he passed on in his teaching is that we must repeat the cycle of practice-enlightenment day by day. As monks, we are required to shave our heads. When our hair grows back we shave it again. Thus, there is a saying among monks, "Shave head, and shave head again."

The same goes for practice and is true not just for monks but for everyone. Practice itself should not necessarily be limited to zazen and other practices in the temple, but, in a wider scope, any of your deeds in your daily life. We are given life, and we are living in the Life of the Universe where, in Dogen's words, "nothing is deficient, nor in excess." Yet, and because of this, we must do practice day by day in any aspects of our daily lives.

March, 1985



Buddhist Monks , Kyoto



Sumadera Temple, Kobe

CHAPTER 20. What Do You Live for?

WHEN KIDS PLAY, THEY PLAY just for play. That's it. They don't seek any return for what they play. Without any scenario they begin to play naturally. This is something we adults hardly can imitate. We are likely to seek some return for what we do, like how much it would be in money if we do this or that. Even when you do some simple physical exercise, you may say, "I do exercise to keep my health."

I wonder what would happen, if you are asked, "What do you live for?" Could you answer clearly? It isn't so simple, is it?. For example, you may try to answer, envisioning some targets in your job (whatever job you may be in). But they will become meaningless when you can no longer work for any reason, due to retirement, sickness, or whatever. Then, what do you live for?

There are some people who are so strongly bound by a sense of mission or calling that they believe their lives are dedicated to their purpose. But it is no more than the consequence of their own conviction. There is nothing you should do by all means in your life.

After all, the answer to the question, "What do you live for?" might well be like a hiker who is going to ascend the mountain saying, "I'm going up to the mountain because there is the mountain." Or it might be like the kids playing just for play.

I think the verb "to play" has a very significant meaning in the Buddhist thought. In one of the old Chinese sutra there is a phrase, "Sir, Kannon (one of the imaginary Buddhas), how are you playing in this world?" It doesn't say, "How are you working?" nor, "How are you behaving?"

What would happen if all what you do in your life were to play in Buddha's way, instead of to work? It would be as if you were to play all around on a palm of the big Buddha. You would be quite at ease, if you play in Buddha's way.

It doesn't mean that you should change your life style. Suppose you are working in a certain occupation. It doesn't mean to quit your job and idle your time away, nor to work halfheartedly. You will do your job just as diligently as you have done so far, but the difference is that the working itself is a part of the playing. You do various things in your daily life--wake up in the morning, go to toilet, eat breakfast, go to your office, and so on--included all what you do are the playing.

Activities of people are diverse--some earn (or lose) money in business, some draw paints for pleasure (or for money)--included all what they do are the playing.

Generally, the studying is differentiated from the playing. For example, a boy playing outside is called back by his mother, "Stop playing, and come home to study." But in Buddha's way the studying is a part of the playing, so he would play to study. Yes, play to study, but with curiosity. Incidentally, that is how mankind began to study, and the best way to study. A sense of the playing will bring a sort of freedom to your way of thinking, like the play in the hinge that allows a door to turn freely.

December, 1985



Enjoji Temple, Nara

CHAPTER 21. The Truth of Your Self

WHEN I WAS ONE OF the lecturers at a certain seminar on Buddhism, I saw the headline of a poster in front of the reception desk which reads “In search for the truth of your self....” My immediate reaction was, “Is there in the world any un-true self?” When you are in search for the truth of your self, aren’t you seeking for it somewhere outside of you, as if you assume that your self at present is the pseudo one, not the true one?

Upon his return from China in 1227, Zen Master Dogen made the first preaching to monks gathered around him at the inauguration of the temple he opened in Kyoto. He said, “I didn’t visit so many temples in China, but happened to meet Zen Master Nyojo. I wasn’t dazzled by anybody. I realized that eyes lie horizontally and a nose vertically. I returned home (to Japan) with no souvenir whatsoever. I saw no trace of Buddha. What I saw was that the sun rises in the morning from the east and the moon sets every night to the west. The whole mountain range appeared not so high, when the clouds had been cleared off after the rain. Asked what’s next, my answer is that a leap year comes after every three years, and cocks crow at dawn.”

What does he mean? In a nutshell, what he says is that the truth he sought for in his pilgrimage to China was not so sophisticated as he had expected, just as the mountains were found not so high as had been expected in the misty clouds. What he noticed were the features taking place in the universe that are natural and ordinary as a matter of course. There he saw “no trace of Buddha.”

What a daring and confident statement! What did he mean? He saw “no trace of Buddha,” because of the oneness of the universe-Buddha. Recall that Gautama Buddha once said, “All the creatures in the universe and I are one.” Dogen’s interpretation of this word, according to his book, *Shobogenzo*, is, “All the creatures in the universe are Buddha.” It means that Dogen was Buddha and so were all creatures around him. So, just as he couldn’t feel the existence of the air around him, he couldn’t see

Buddha. His comments seem to imply also that those who are in seek for whereabouts of Buddha are yet green.

Now, back to the beginning of the truth of your self. Don't try to seek for it anywhere outside of your self. Mind you, you are Buddha as you are living right now, going hither or thither in your daily life. You are living in the universe where things are going on naturally and ordinary as a matter of course as Dogen commented.

May, 1993



Rozanji Temple, Kyoto

Postscript

LEGEND TELLS US THAT ABOUT twenty-five hundred years ago, there lived a prince named Gautama in a kingdom in northern India. He led the typical life of an affluent prince, but deep down his soul was not at peace. He felt uneasy at the sight of people suffering from disease, old age, and death, and in recognition of this being the inescapable destiny of all human beings. Subsequently, he headed into the forest and applied himself to various spiritual practices, in an effort to put his soul to rest.

At about the age of thirty, after six years of deeply immersing himself in spiritual asceticism, Gautama sat down in meditation under a bo tree in the early dawn of December 8. A clear vision then came to him of the essential nature of existence. He perceived, simply, the unity of all things. Following this realization, Gautama saw that the difficult ascetic practices that he engaged in were not fruitful toward spiritual awakening. He came to the ultimate understanding that the suffering in the minds of human beings was due primarily to the greedy desire, in other words, the sway of passion. He then concluded that by understanding and controlling the passions, the suffering could be overcome.

Following his enlightenment, Gautama began attracting more and more followers and thus began teaching various ways of living a life beyond the suffering. He also proposed to those seeking the path of awakening a set of precepts, or guidelines, for living a life dedicated to ending the suffering. Eventually, he became venerated as Gautama Buddha, or simply the Buddha, or Awakened One. Such is the story of the beginnings of Buddhism.

I think the Buddhist thought as founded by Gautama Buddha is scientific, despite the fact that at his days he had no exposure to what we know of today as science, nor even to systematic letters to communicate. Just as Isac Newton proposed the law of motion of mass, Gautama Buddha proposed the law of motion of mind. His way in the anatomy of the human mind could be said scientific in that he relied on observation,

hypothesis, experimentation, and universality, four of the scientific method's key components.

He observed that the suffering of human mind comes from the greedy desire, and set up hypothesis that the suffering can be overcome by controlling the greedy desire. He proved it by actual practices to reach the ultimate peace of mind, thus verifying the reproducibility and universality by experiments. Then he began to preach his thought to the people coming to him using precepts which he contrived as the guiding principle. His thought was universally accepted as a way to lead the people's mind to the ultimate peace.

The modern biology postulates that over thirty million species of living organisms including human beings existing today evolved from the first living cell, called protocell, that appeared about four billion years ago on the earth. In a sense we may view that all organisms on the earth—from microorganisms to plants and animals including human beings—belong to the one family sharing the protocell gene in common. Further on, the sustainability of all living organisms depend on such inorganic environmental components as the light from the sun, air, water, and soil on the earth.

Interestingly, the oneness of the universe-Buddha expressed by Gautama, "All creatures in the universe and I are one," coincides with the one family concept of the biological evolution. In no way Gautama had such biological knowledge, but by intuition he must have come to the thought of oneness of all things. It seems amazing indeed. From this thought of oneness permeates the compassionate affection toward all things which is one of the characteristics of the Buddhist thought.

I think the Buddhist thought, in addition to being scientific and in harmony with the nature, is also free from preconceived ideas, and easily accessible to the contemporary people who are trained by the scientific way of thinking and tend to be skeptical of conventional theistic religions.

I think Buddhism is the religion to address essentially to the soul of the individual, not necessarily to the mass of people, as Gautama told his thought to a few fellows around him at the beginning. Zazen can be practiced individually at home or elsewhere. In the current world where

people are kept isolated by the social distancing to protect from the pandemic and must endure in solitude, Zazen could bring light quietly to the soul of the individual.

Since Buddhism started with renouncement of one's greed or selfishness, the altruism seems to be its natural outcome. It seems to me that Buddhism will become more widely and universally accepted religion, when it combines more outwardly and actively to the altruism.

In my view, Zen Master Suigan Yogo's teachings on the Buddhist thought thoroughly address these points, and provide us with many hints on how to work with our problems in our everyday lives to find the true peace of mind. We are all more or less compelled to live in the world of comparison and competition. Suigan's suggestion was not to attempt to escape from this situation, but rather to see it from a different perspective by removing the lens of the human scale of measurement. His words help us realize how we as human beings exist in the universe individually and collectively.

Suigan often told us, "You are Buddha right now as you are living in your daily life. Don't think you can become Buddha only when you die" This makes a sharp contrast to the legendary common sense of the Buddhist world that Buddha is regarded as the ideal figure like a statue sitting in meditation in perfect peace which one could become ultimately after death. Undoubtedly, Suigan's philosophy goes back to Dogen's words, "All creatures in the universe are Buddha." I think this was Dogen's antithesis against the common sense of the Buddhist world at his time about eight hundred years ago.

Suigan never tried to force his way of thinking on us. His stance was always, "I think this way, but it's up to you to agree with me or not. Think for yourself." I've long thought that his teachings would be of value to those who are interested in Zen outside of Japan. This became my primary motive for embarking on the translation into English. While I in no way consider myself an expert in Zen, I do have an inner confidence in what I've learned from Zen Master Suigan Yogo.

Mitsuo Hirai
May 25, 2020

Profile of Patrick Hallaran



PATRICK HALLARAN WAS BORN IN Cleveland, Ohio, USA. in 1965. In 1989 he graduated from the Manhattan School of Music in New York City. He moved to Tokyo in 2004, following more than 10 years living and working in New York as a professional musician. He entered the Tokyo University of the Arts in 2007, graduating two years later with a master's degree in shakuhachi performance. Hallaran now lives with his wife in the foothills of the Yatsugatake mountains in Yamanashi prefecture.

Author Biography



MITSUO HIRAI WAS BORN IN Osaka, Japan in 1932. He graduated from the Tokyo Institute of Technology in 1956 with a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering. Following graduation, he was engaged in the business of chemical industry till retirement at age 73. He met Zen Master Suigan Yogo in the summer of 1982 and remained in contact with him until Suigan's death in 1996. Mitsuo now lives with his wife in the suburbs of Yokohama.