
*The Zen of Rags**Paula Arai*

MORNING SUNLIGHT STREAMED in through the wall of windows that overlooked the carefully tended garden while we sat in proper hierarchical formation along the low parallel tables where everyday meals were eaten in silence at the Zen nunnery in Nagoya, Japan. It was 1988, and I was three months into my field research on Japanese Zen nuns. I had become accustomed to my place at the bottom of the pecking order and the rhythm of the days at the nunnery. It was a typical day, save for a Caucasian North American Catholic nun joining us for a week to experience Zen. Although I had entered the nunnery before her, I was a laywoman. So she sat in the senior position to my left, closer to the abbess. Discretely gesturing the intricate protocol for eating Zen monastic style, I occasionally whispered English prompts into her ear.

As the meal was nearing completion, before the final bow to be cued by a clack of the wooden clappers, rags to wipe the tables were making their journey down the line of nuns. When a rag reached her part of the table, each nun bowed slightly as she mindfully picked it up and placed it along the top edge of the table. She then placed her overlapping hands on the vertically aligned thick-knap rag that was folded in half, making it approximately the width of a hand. With arms stretched forward, she moved horizontally with the grain of the wood along the top edge of the table. Upon reaching the edge of her table space, in a perfectly straight line perpendicular to the grain of the wood, she slid the rag toward herself until the top edge of the rag reached just above where the bottom edge had been. Then, again following the grain of the wood, she

moved across the surface, hands pressed evenly on top of the rag, until she reached the other side of her table space. She repeated the process one more time to completely and efficiently wipe each square inch of the table in front of her. She then unfolded the rag and refolded it to expose the opposite side, freshening it up for the next person to use. She made a slight bow as the next person reached for the rag. In this quiet and dignified manner, the rag carefully cleaned the tables as it flowed from hand to hand.

And then an unscripted motion erupted through centuries of refined table wiping. The American Catholic nun picked up the rag, wadded it in a ball, and with the zeal of a busy diner waitress, made rapid circular patterns across the table. The sun striking the surface of the table highlighted smears of spilled porridge and random traces left by the damp rag. Some sections were wiped multiple times and others were not touched at all. In a gesture of cultural respectfulness, the Catholic nun offered a bow as she placed the heaped rag for the next person. Shocked silence darted through the room. As I picked up the rag—trying not to draw attention to my ministrations of straightening out the rag—it hit me. “There are so many levels of meaning and metaphysical principles embedded in the use of a rag!”

My three decades of observations and experiences in Japanese Sōtō Zen monasteries, temples, gardens, and homes has helped me appreciate the richness of the metaphysical, ontological, and soteriological significance of Zen material culture.¹ One exceptionally rich vein of Zen praxis centers on the use of simple cleaning cloths or rags.² Ethnographic research, including in-depth interviews with Zen monastics and laity, especially women, as well as private and public instruction, yielded fundamental and subtle insights into the significance and roles of rags in Zen culture. A view of Zen from the perspective of the rag, coupled with critical analysis of root assumptions embedded in Zen rags, informs my interpretation of Dōgen’s radical nondual wisdom recorded in the *Eihei shingi*, *Eihei kōroku*, and *Shōbōgenzō*. Following the rags throughout the day and into the spaces in which they move illuminates the metaphysical and ontological import of Zen rags. This, in turn, sheds pragmatic light on Dōgen’s soteriological teachings of Buddha-nature. I also explore how rags reveal the dynamics of enlightenment in everyday monastic and domestic spheres and highlight the dimensions of healing and beauty that shape the practices inherent in Zen material culture.

Rags in Metaphysical Context

Japanese religions scholar Joseph Kitagawa's textiles-inspired explanation of the indigenous Japanese worldview as "seamless"³ is appropriate to our discussion of rags not only for the compelling visual image it evokes but also because it is the metaphysical context in which Japanese Zen rags wipe, wring, clean, protect, and heal. The quality of "seamlessness" describes a nonbifurcated whole where ontological distinctions are not rendered. The assumptions inherent in this metaphysical orientation resonate with, and therefore undergird, Dōgen's teachings found in volume four, case 331 of the *Eihei kōroku*. "Suppose someone asked, 'Before this world existed, this nature existed. When this world is destroyed, this nature will be destroyed. What is this indestructible nature?' I [Dōgen] would say to him: Fences, walls, tiles, and pebbles."⁴ Dōgen critiques the premise of the question with his "seamless" response. "Rags" could just as easily be added to this list of items that Dōgen compiles to make his point about the nondualistic nature of reality. Dōgen's pithy response also critiques the question's implicit notion of time and its relationship to existence or being. Answering the metaphysical question with a string of common items makes sense when considering his concept of being-time (*uji*), where beings and time are not separate. Dōgen's "seamless" concept of being-time assumes the "seamlessness" of different forms of beings. Hence, rags are as important and integral to the world as pebbles, people, and Buddha-nature.

To explain the dynamics of the metaphysical context of rags in the lives of Japanese Zen women whose activities are informed by Dōgen's teachings, I have analyzed the worldview of rags according to an analytical graphic rubric I devised to unpack root assumptions embedded in worldviews. I call it a "Worldview Compass" (Fig. 8.1). "North" is the metaphysical orientation. "East" is the ontological assumption of self. "South" is the soteriological aim." And "West" is the praxis, the methods that enact the values of the tradition. The "Worldview Compass of Zen Rags" illuminates the four root assumptions about the nature of reality operative in rags in a Sōtō Zen Buddhist context. The metaphysical orientation is being-time (*uji*). The ontological assumption of the self is "All beings are Buddha-nature." The soteriological aim is to actualize Buddha-nature here and now. The praxis of Zen rags includes "Practice is enlightenment" (*shushō-ittō*), Buddha activity (*gyōbutsu*), total dynamic engagement (*zenki*), and nondual experience of present conditions (*genjōkōan*).

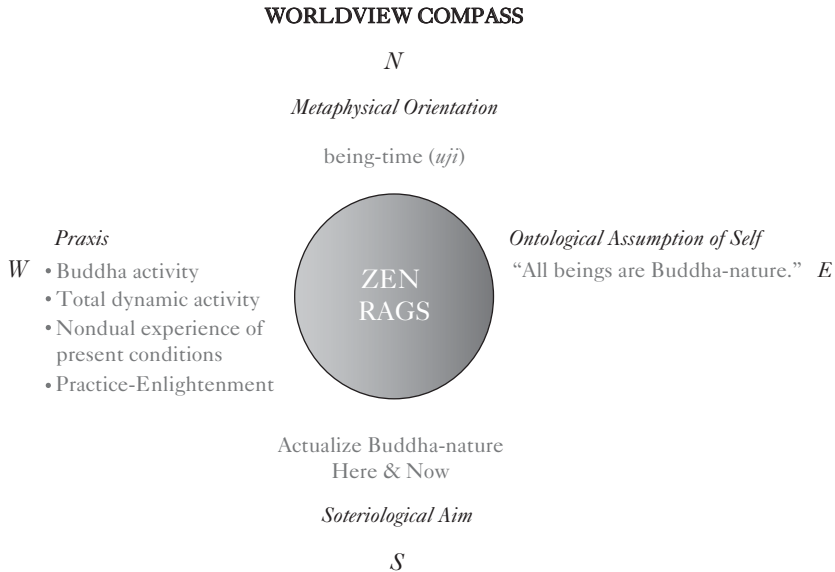


FIGURE 8.1 Worldview compass of Zen rags.

The metaphysical orientation of rags in a Sōtō Zen context is nondualistic. It does not separate ultimate, transcendent, and sacred from conventional, mundane, and profane. It also does not separate beings—including rocks, rabbits, rhubarb, and rags—from time. Dogen’s being-time has resonance with the modern physics’ mathematical model of “spacetime” that unifies dimensions of space (like length, width, height) with the dimension of time, though predates it by nearly seven hundred years. In both, time is not a separate ground across which other dimensions move. Dōgen’s concern with time, however, is not about how to measure distances or duration. His concern is how to experience reality nondualistically. To this end, he maintains that matter and time move together, not as two things in sync, but as a nonbifurcated whole. In a sense, then, nouns are verbs or things are events. That is, reality is an interdependent, ever-in-flux, dynamic event. Events can only occur in the present. Dogen’s focus on present events as being-time is an integral aspect of his method to experience reality nondualistically, or how to actualize Buddha-nature.

In keeping with basic Mahāyāna teachings, Sōtō Zen, too, asserts that ontologically everything is interdependent and empty of independent existence. Dōgen pushes this logic to assert that “All beings are Buddha-nature.” This deliberate reconfiguration of the *Nirvana Sūtra* teaching that “All sentient beings have Buddha-nature” highlights Dōgen’s more

thoroughgoing nondualistic understanding, for Dōgen’s articulation does not distinguish between sentient and nonsentient beings nor does it allow for some beings to have Buddha-nature and others not. Buddha-nature is not an object one can *have*, in the same way one cannot *have* a dog or a self, for everything is empty of independent existence. Extending this ontological assumption to Buddha-nature enables Sōtō Zen Buddhists to say rags are Buddha-nature and treat them as such. “Buddha-nature” is a ritualized term for compassionate activities that manifest the wisdom of the nondual nature of reality. Explaining “Buddha-nature” as a “ritualized term” is to underscore “Buddha-nature” as a holistic body-mind activity embedded with particular meaning. Here I am drawing on Catherine Bell’s paradigm-shifting analysis of “ritual” and “ritualization.” Bell critiques the usefulness of the concept of “ritual,” for by virtue of being a noun, it implies a reified object that does not fully account for the lived dynamics of culturally particular body-mind activities. She offers “ritualization” as a conceptual tool to facilitate understanding an activity in cultural and embodied contexts of meaning and power.⁵ In the context of being-time, then, “Buddha-nature” is not merely *not* an inert noun; it is an embodied type of activity that manifests wisdom and compassion. All beings are this activity, including rags.

To actualize one’s Buddha-nature in each moment is the soteriological aim. Because one *is* Buddha-nature, one does not need to practice in order to attain it. When one practices, one is actualizing one’s Buddha-nature. Baizhang’s (749–814) famous dictum establishes the template: “A day of no work is a day of no food.” For Dōgen, likening “work” to “practice” and “food” to “enlightenment,” is both literal and metaphorical. A day of no practice is a day of no enlightenment. Rags cleaning floors is practice. Practice is enlightenment (*shushō ittō*). Practice is Buddha activity.

Buddha activity or *gyōbutsu* is central to Sōtō Zen praxis. Activity that is informed by nondual wisdom and fueled by compassion is Buddha activity. No act is too small to be a Buddha activity. Wiping a table, dusting a shelf, or hanging a rag to dry are all laudable Buddha activities. Buddha activity is characterized by “total dynamic engagement” or *zenki*. “Total” refers to the nonbifurcation of subject and object where one experiences an intimate oneness with all beings, even rags. “Total” also includes the fullness of the present moment, the only reality in being-time. “Dynamic engagement” refers to the workings of the embodied heart-mind. Such holistic activity of the embodied heart-mind enables a nondual experience of present conditions (*genjōkōan*). Rags are exemplars of Buddha activity

each time they remove dirt from the floor. Whether threadbare or new, rags always act with total dynamic engagement as they nonresistantly do whatever the present conditions require. Rags manifest their nondual experience of present conditions no matter if they are laid flat to efficiently wipe a table or are wadded up and miss a few spots.

The Ontology of Rags

My introduction to the ontology of rags was a serendipitous event that piqued my curiosity to see if it was more generalizable. If so, not only would it then support my insight that the use of rags embodies particular ontological assumptions, it would confirm my understanding of the dynamics of practice in terms of the ontological assumption that all beings are Buddha-nature. My time and effort spent in the Zen nunnery were rewarded. Later that fall, on another sunny day, I received an explicit ontological teaching that confirmed my ideas.

The instructions on airing the meditation cushions (*zafu*) in the sun were easy to remember: "Take all the meditation cushions and place them on the tarp laid out in the front garden." Aiming to be efficient, I stacked five cushions and carried them out of the meditation hall. I slipped into my hall slippers, walked to the front door, and slid my feet out of the slippers while stepping down a level into outside sandals, all the while taking care to keep the cushions balanced. I made it to the tarp with the cushions and stepped out of the sandals before moving onto the tarp. When I bent down to begin placing the cushions in a row, however, one rolled off the pile and was about to hit the ground. Instinctively, I used my bare foot to break the fall and push it so it would fall on the tarp instead of the ground. A sharp "ouch!" cut through the sun-drenched air, uttered by the nun supervising the sunning of the cushions.⁶ I was confused. I thought preventing the cushion from landing in dirt was surely worth a little clean-foot save. How could I have done any better? Besides, why was it so important? The expression on my face revealed that I was more perturbed than perplexed. The supervising nun spelled it out for me: "The cushion is a Buddha, so treat it with respect." I had to figure out the rest for myself. I realized that I should carry only four cushions at a time, because that was the maximum number I could balance while bending down. It dawned on me that the meditation cushion Buddhas actualized their compassion by giving their support without complaint, no matter who sat on them or for how long.⁷

The ontological assumption that all beings are Buddha-nature allows for recognition of meditation cushions as Buddhas. Hence, the same can be claimed for rags. The notion of rags as Buddha-nature was metaphysically viable in view of Dōgen's teachings and was implicit throughout all activities with rags, although it was never explicitly articulated. The ethnographic validation that the women lived Dōgen's teachings that all beings are understood to be and hence are to be treated as Buddha-nature emboldened me to search Dōgen's writings for passages that could apply to the use of rags without changing the meaning or significance of the original. In the following passages from the *Eihei shingi*, *Eihei kōroku*, and the *Shōbōgenzō*, I have replaced the original text with italicized wording appropriate for rags, *mutatis mutandis*. The original wording is cited in full in the endnotes.

Replacing "water" with "rag," a passage from "Washing," the "Senjō" fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō*, reads: "*Rags* are not originally pure or originally impure. . . . All dharmas are also like this. *Rags* are never sentient or non-sentient . . . and all dharmas are also like this."⁸ Applying these assertions to an analysis of the ontological status of rags, in terms of the qualities of purity and sentience, rags are like all other things. Because ontologically everything is the same, Dōgen seems to be teaching that assessing how pure or impure something is, or ascertaining if something is sentient or not, is outside the way. It is not a Buddha activity. The Buddha activity of rags, water, tables, and people is to engage the present moment with total dynamic engagement and experience the nondual nature of the current conditions.

A further indication of the ontological status of rags is implicit in the *Eihei kōroku* Dharma Hall Discourse number 294 in which Dōgen assumes the ontological status of dust and stones as Buddha-nature. "Seeing Buddha in every bit of dust does not denigrate Buddha; hearing the sutras in every bit of earth we are not apart from the sutras. Do you want to attain intimate prediction on Vulture Peak? Large and small stones nod their heads and come."⁹ Dōgen is confident his teachings are not denigrating. His image of stones nodding with anticipation of intimacy with the dharma is a delightful illustration of his effort to help people not tarry over unhelpful dichotomizing of the nondual nature of reality by conceptually breaking things into sentient and nonsentient, or even Buddha and non-Buddha.

In his more philosophical text on Buddha-nature, the "Busshō" fascicle of *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen offers more pointed statements that inform those

who do not apprehend the ontological status of things. He asserts that those who do not accept the Buddha-nature of that which does not move or have consciousness are not on the path:

Those who hold contrary views, that the Buddha-nature may or may not exist depending upon movement and non-movement, may or may not have mysterious powers depending upon consciousness and non-consciousness, and may or may not be the natural function depending on knowing and not knowing, are outside the way.¹⁰

Dōgen consistently resists expressions that bifurcate reality into separate ontological categories, for these efforts assume not all are Buddha-nature. In an effort to offer his teachings in a more visceral manner, rather than a conceptual explanation, Dōgen elaborates on a more common object, a boat. By transposing language about boats into language about rags in a passage from “Total Dynamic Engagement,” the “Zenki” fascicle of *Shōbōgenzō*, reads:

Life can be likened to a time when a person is *cleaning with a rag*. *I clean with this rag. I wet it with water, I wring it out, I fold it, and I wipe tables and floors with it.* At the same time, the *rag* is *moving* me, and there is no “I” beyond the *rag*. Through my *cleaning with the rag*, this *rag* is being caused to be a *rag*—let us consider, and learn in practice, just this moment of the present. At this very moment, there is nothing other than the world of the *rag*: the bucket, the water, the *floor* have all become the moment of the *rag*, which is utterly different from moments not *cleaning with a rag*. So life is what I am making it, and I am what life is making me.¹¹

Following the activity as it plays out in practice makes Dōgen’s ontologically nondual view of life rather straightforward and tangible. Buddha-nature is not some mysteriously complex reality that requires lifetimes of arduous ascetic practice to experience. The nondual ontology of Buddha-nature can be experienced when cleaning with a rag, for rags, water, buckets, floors, and people are all Buddha-nature. There is no transcendent reality to strive for beyond the present conditions.

Indeed, from Dōgen’s nondual perspective of reality—where rags and rocks are Buddha-nature—the dharma, too, can only manifest in present

conditions. When hungry, dharma manifests as food. When cleaning the dishes, dharma manifests as rags. In the following passage from Dōgen's "The Model for Engaging the Way" ("Bendōhō") essay in the *Eihei shingi* written in 1244, I replace language about food with language about rags to show how Dōgen's teachings can be applied:

The suchness of the ultimate identity from beginning to end is the genuine form of all dharmas, which only a buddha together with a buddha can exhaustively penetrate. Therefore, *a rag* is the dharma of all dharmas, which only a buddha together with a buddha can exhaustively penetrate. Just at such a time, there are the genuine marks, nature, substance, power, function, causes, and conditions. For this reason, dharma is itself *a rag*, *a rag* is itself dharma. This dharma is what is received and used by all buddhas in the past and future. This *rag* is the fulfillment that is the joy of dharma and the delight of meditation.¹²

Through this text I see more clearly why the women I worked with, both monastic and lay, treated rags with such respect and care. A rag "itself is dharma" and "the fulfillment that is the joy of dharma and the delight of meditation."

In an explication of ways to practice enlightenment at Eiheiiji monastery, Dōgen wrote an essay on "The Dharma for Taking Food" ("Fushukuhampō"). It was written two years later than the "Bendōhō," and it offers an implicit elaboration of those earlier teachings on the nature of the dharma. In this *Eihei shingi* essay, I replace "food" with "rags":

Just let dharma be the same as *a rag*, and let *a rag* be the same as dharma. For this reason, if dharmas are the dharma nature, then *a rag* also is the dharma nature. If the dharma is suchness, *a rag* also is suchness. If the dharma is the single mind, *a rag* also is the single mind. If the dharma is Bodhi, *a rag* also is Bodhi.¹³

Dōgen asserts common things like rags and food are nothing less than Bodhi, the root of enlightenment.

In sum, the ontological nature of rags is not always originally pure or originally impure, never sentient or nonsentient. Rags are life—"the fulfillment that is the joy of dharma and the delight of meditation"—suchness, the dharma, and Bodhi.

Rags as Rōshi

In analyzing rags in a Zen context, I have come to appreciate how exemplary they are at actualizing Buddha-nature. They always abide in the present moment. They do not stray from here and now. They nondualistically accept their function and never complain. They never resist touching the “dirtiest” things. They work to the full extent of their capacity, no matter how long they are scrubbing floors, wiping tables, and dusting surfaces. The humans wielding the rags will surely tire before the rags do. Even if rags are worn with holes, they still do as much as they can. One would do well to study and practice under the tutelage of a rag.

Transposing Dōgen’s “Instructions to the Cook” (Tenzo kyōkun) to “Instructions from a Rag” gives an indication of how cleaning with rags is practiced among contemporary Zen women in Japan:

When you take care of things, do not see with your common eyes, do not think with your common sentiments. Pick a single blade of grass and erect a sanctuary for the jewel king; enter a single atom and turn the great wheel of the teaching. So even when you *are cleaning the floor of the bathroom*, do not arouse an attitude of distaste or dismissal. Even when you are *dusting refined Buddha carvings on the main altar*, do not arouse an attitude of rapture or dancing for joy. If you already have no attachments, how could you have any disgust? Therefore, although you may encounter *stubborn stains*, do not be at all negligent; although you may come *across smooth wood surfaces to dust*, be all the more diligent. Never alter your state of mind based on materials. People who change their mind according to *the objects they are cleaning*, or adjust their speech [to the status of whomever they are talking to], are not people of the Way.¹⁴

While doing field research in Aichi Senmon Nisōdō, I had an opportunity to see how concretely such teachings are observed. Every morning I was responsible for cleaning the wood floor on the second story of the nunnery. I learned to wring rags extremely tightly, so no drips of water would inadvertently drop on the floor. Several reprimands later, I also learned to scour the floor with my eyes to see if a drop had errantly fallen and, if so, to wipe it up before I finished. I also learned precisely where to place my hands on the rag to maximize the rag’s ability to clean the floor and maintain my balance while running “downward-dog” fashion across the floor.

There was a small fire extinguisher in an out-of-the-way corner that you had to move aside to get to the floor under and behind it. I wondered why it was necessary to clean it everyday. Nobody would see that square inch of floor, unless there was a fire. I figured odds were low of that happening.

Moreover, not long after having arrived in late August, I was already scheming how to launch a personal campaign to protest unfair treatment. Each day I gave the second-floor flower arrangements fresh water (one large vase used two buckets), but, according to Zen monastic tradition, I could only bathe on days with a 4 or 9 in them (i.e., 4th, 9th, 14th, 19th, etc.). Rag in hand, I fantasized how wonderful it would be to have just one-quarter of a bucket each night to wipe off the sweat that arose from running through the hot, humid, and still air along the monastery floors. One day I figured out how to rebel against the perceived unfairness of my situation. I decided to deliberately *not* clean behind the fire extinguisher everyday. It would be my private protest. Surely no one would notice that square inch obscured from view by the fire extinguisher. I could continue appearing to cooperate with the demands of monastic training, do my field research, and feel my demands for justice were at least known by the couple of particles of dust that I neglected every other morning. I never mustered the courage to clean it less frequently. After a few weeks, a nun approached me. She quietly said, "Please also clean behind the fire extinguisher. I noticed it is sometimes done, but it needs to be done everyday." I can hear her voice like it happened yesterday. I was stunned as I bowed, uttering a humbled "*Wakarimashita*," or "I understand" [which in this case in Japanese means I agree to do as you say].

In the homes and scholarly halls I had lived in prior to this, no one would have noticed or cared. A comma being out of place would be worthy of some red ink, but a few specks of dust would not draw attention. I could not help but reflect on the two pivotal Zen poems by Shenxiu (607–706) and Huineng (638–713) that turn on the understanding of dust, perhaps the original poetry slam. They are the polemical poems that were competing to render one person the master's successor in the lineage, and the other a humbled disciple. Though the historical accuracy of the events recounted in *The Platform Sūtra* are suspect, philosophically Huineng's poem won:

*There is no Bodhi-tree,
Nor stand of a mirror bright.
Fundamentally there is not a single thing,
From where can dust arise?*¹⁵

Still more in my head than in my body, I felt this justified me in having not tended to the dust. The dust was ultimately empty anyway. Yet the Zen nun's attention to such minute details was compelling and penetrated me in a visceral way. She had been observing me over time and had decided the moment was ripe for teaching. She was not harsh, but she was accurate. After she walked away, it was just me and the rag again. Of course, the rag was not to blame for the inconsistent cleaning. The rag would have done it. It was all on me and my mind. The nun's observations gave me a needed wake-up call. It was the rag, though, that was there for all of it. As I kept my agreement to the nun and mindfully attended to the dust behind the fire extinguisher each morning, I began to deeply resonate with Shenxiu's poem:

*Our body is the Bodhi-tree,
And our mind a mirror bright.
Carefully we wipe them hour by hour,
And let no dust alight.¹⁶*

I was determined not to let dust alight behind that fire extinguisher for the duration of my tenure at the nunnery. I was self-consciously deliberate about it. I was not reprimanded, at least for that, again. I started seeing the activity of my own mind played out in how I used my rag. The rag never lied, nor did the rag judge me. The rag helped me hone my ability to focus on the present moment without resistance to the present conditions. The rag kept me honest and trained me to see reality more clearly. Over the months, I noticed I no longer resisted cleaning the little patch of floor behind the fire extinguisher. It was morning and that is what needed to be done. I started experiencing what Huineng's poem was pointing to. It was not just philosophically superior due to its more thoroughgoing nondualistic articulation of reality; it was an expression of what it is like when you relax into the wholeness of present conditions. I realized that each day I still had to dust, but there was no separate me, rag, floor, or nun to resist, fear, or please. Or in Dōgen's more eloquent words delivered in Dharma Hall Discourse 253, "The single dynamic activity is revealed in the samādhi that enters each and every thing."¹⁷ Indeed, rags taught me the meaning of Dōgen's words from the "Tenzo kyōkun." "When you take care of things, do not see with your common eyes, do not think with your common sentiments. . . . Never alter your state of mind based on materials."¹⁸

Or, in my words, correcting errant commas is as important as wiping up particles of dust behind fire extinguishers.

These lessons and experiences enabled me to see how rags instruct by example. Their demonstration of Dōgen's teachings on *jijuyū sanmai* are exemplary. Taigen Leighton offers a succinct explication of this term in his "Introduction" to an English translation of *Eihei shingi*:

The samadhi [concentrated awareness] of self-fulfillment or self-joyousness. . . . The *ji* of *jijuyū* means self. The compound *juyū* means joyful or fulfilled, but separately the two characters mean to receive or accept one's function. So . . . self-fulfillment is, also by definition here the samadhi of the self accepting its function, or its job or position.¹⁹

I never saw a rag complain, no matter how long it worked or how dirty it got. All rags seem to have mastered *jijuyū sanmai* and fully engage in doing their jobs. I learned that if I, too, am not resisting my job, I see "rags are ceaselessly emitting a radiant light and preaching the deep and mysterious dharma."²⁰

"Because rags practice and experience rags, there is the investigation in practice of rags speaking rags."²¹ If you listen, perhaps you can even hear "Large and small rags discuss *prajñā*."²² Indeed, Dōgen encourages listening to all beings, for they all expound the dharma. "Rags, atoms, living beings, and the mountains, rivers, and great earth, from ancient to present, all expound it [the dharma] at the same time without ceasing."²³ Perhaps you can hear them teach the key to their wisdom: "On all occasions when engaged in working . . . maintain joyful mind, nurturing mind, and magnanimous mind."²⁴ Rags manifest joyful mind each moment they have things to clean. Rags manifest nurturing mind, for everything they touch is an act of care. Rags manifest magnanimous mind in the way they equanimously plunge into dirty buckets and soak up gooey messes.

Rags demonstrate their worthiness of the role of *Rōshi* for they have mastered the aim of actualizing their Buddha-nature in each moment. They abide in the samadhi of nondual joy in doing their jobs. They do not discriminate, make false distinctions, or generate divisions. They do not strive for status or vie for power. They do not play politics or have favorites. They are true masters that "practice so that there is no Zen in the world of Zen."²⁵

Soteriological Aim: How a Rag Practices Enlightenment

The soteriological aim of rags is the same as all beings. The aim is not to become a Zen Buddhist, a good Buddhist, or even a Buddha. The aim is to practice enlightenment. Dōgen defines enlightenment as practice, for he asserts enlightenment is a quality of activity, not a state of being. A state of being does not make sense in the metaphysical context of being-time, where the present moment is all there is. And the present moment is an event, not a separate thing or an isolated place. Hence, enlightenment requires practicing each moment. The implications of this are enormous. It means all beings, rags and rocks included, can be enlightened at any time. It does not require lifetimes of aspiring. Indeed, it is only possible now. It is possible to activate enlightenment now, because ontologically all beings are Buddha-nature. This means that all beings are constituted of the qualities required to act wisely and compassionately. Practices, though infinite in expression, are by definition compassionate and non-dual-wisdom activities. Buddha-nature is the term Dōgen uses to articulate this capacity to act compassionately, which depends on nondual wisdom to navigate the course of action.

Shushō-ittō is Dōgen's pithy way to say practice is enlightenment. Or, you are enlightened when you practice. Or, enlightenment is actualizing your Buddha-nature in your actions. Because you can only act in the present moment, Dōgen stresses practice. You need to actualize your Buddha-nature qualities of nondual wisdom and compassion in each moment. Rags seem to be quite consistent in their actualization of Buddha-nature, perhaps because, as Dōgen explains by way of quoting no less than Nāgārjuna, "Buddha-nature exists as a 'body manifesting itself.'"²⁶ Rags are excellent at being rags.

To place the Buddha-nature of rags in a larger context, "Buddha-nature is always total existence, for total existence is Buddha-nature."²⁷ Although there is nothing special about rags in terms of Buddha-nature, focusing on rags presents a view of soteriological opportunities replete through daily life. Dōgen was driven by a concern of how to stop suffering, and his insights into being-time and the ontological nature of common items like food, rocks, water, and rags enabled him to find "soteriological deliverance"²⁸ in spaces for all manner of necessary activities, including cooking, eating, washing clothes, bathing, eliminating, storing, sleeping, sitting, walking, painting, arranging flowers, writing, and reading. There is nary

a place a rag does not tend; for dust, at least conventionally, settles in a nondiscriminatory fashion. Cleaning each space can be approached as an opportunity for a rag to actualize Buddha-nature.²⁹ Dōgen scholar Steven Heine stresses how “Dōgen challenges what he considers the limitations of the heretical tendencies in the anthropocentric conception of Buddha-nature as a substantive human possession.”³⁰ Not only are rags exemplary beings that actualize their Buddha-nature in each moment; they are often integral to humans actualizing Buddha-nature.

Life is hardly imaginable without some type of rag; even in the wilderness blades of grass or leaves can be employed as rags. Transposing Heine’s point about the “*Sansuikyō*” (“Mountains and Water Sūtra”) to rags, “Dōgen insists that an understanding of the movement of *rags* is not separate from—but is essential for—an insight into the innate and unceasing dynamism of human activity.”³¹ Indeed, to be one with a rag is to experience the self nondualistically, to experience *muga* or no-self. It is only when you assert a self that a rag appears not to be Buddha. When you do not experience a rag as Buddha, then you cannot experience yourself as Buddha. Yet, when you experience a nondual relationship with a rag while wiping a table, you actualize your Buddha-nature where distinctions of “rag” and “self” dissolve. In a way this type of experience is what Dōgen was pointing to in his most famous teaching in the “*Genjōkōan*”:

To study the buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things [including rags]. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of all others drops away. No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.³²

Heine describes it as the “absolute simultaneity of Buddha-nature and self-realization, which involves the identity of theory and practice, ontology and existence.”³³ Moving deep within the present moment, liberation occurs. This liberation is not freedom from cleaning; it is, rather, as Dōgen explains in Dharma Hall Discourse 286 in the *Eihei kōroku*: “Negating all dualities, our feet are on the ground [and our hands are on the rags].”³⁴ Heine explains the reason for this. “Ontological truth (the presence of being-time) and existential effort . . . are coterminously realized here-and-now without expectation, hesitation or deliberation. The occasion of the truth of being-time lies precisely in this very present moment of

exertion.”³⁵ Hence, Dōgen can claim, “[Mahāprajñāpāramitā, the Great Perfection of Wisdom] is carrying water and *cleaning with rags*.”³⁶

Dōgen makes this teaching explicit by recounting a story of a novice asking one of Śākyamuṇi Buddha’s most illustrious disciples, Mahākāśyapa, why he is working, making mud for walls, no less. “The Venerable One said, ‘If I do not do this, who else would do it for me?’” Dōgen explains. “The mind is like a fan in December, the body is like a cloud above the cold valley. If we can see that we act by ourselves, then we can see that someone’s doing the work. If we can see that someone is doing the work, then we see that we ourselves are doing it.”³⁷ To be sure his disciples got the point, in a subsequent Dharma Hall discourse, referencing Yuanwu’s commentary to case 77 of the *Hekiganroku*, Dōgen expounds: “For living beings on the great earth, the more mud the bigger the Buddha.”³⁸

Dōgen elaborates on his understanding of the nature of Buddhas in his foundational and profound philosophical fascicle, “Genjōkōan”: “When Buddhas are really Buddhas, they do not recognize themselves as Buddhas.”³⁹ Casting off notions of good and bad, higher and lower, this and that—untethering oneself from a dualistically limiting perception of reality—wisdom into the Buddha-nature of all beings is obvious. Rags cleaning/cleaning with rags, then, is a supreme act of wisdom and compassion. In a radically practical, nondual way, when the table is being wiped and the floor is being cleaned, Buddha-nature is manifest. There is nothing more transcendent than that.

Rags in Daily Life

Bathing, eating, and cleaning are necessary in daily life; hence, these activities are ripe for actualizing Buddha-nature. Indeed, the details of method (*sahō*) are the focus of instruction at training monasteries. Rarely is any word for “enlightenment” uttered. Dōgen devotes careful attention to how rags and cloths are used in daily life. Indeed, Dōgen purports in the “Kajō” (“Everyday Activity”) fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō*, “The everyday life of a Buddhist master is nothing other than *wiping tables and wringing rags*.”⁴⁰ Whether in monasteries, temples, homes, or huts, rags are present. They are part of numerous activities throughout the day. Often more intense use is in the morning when many surfaces are freshly cleaned. Dishes and bodies are washed and wiped dry on a regular basis. Hands are dried numerous times a day. Heads are covered with cloths while working.

Sweat is wiped off during hard work. It is hard to imagine a day without using some sort of rag.

There are numerous types of rags, and the range of practices involving rags extends into multiple areas. *Kesa*, monastic surplice, are traditionally made from discarded rags, earning the designation as *funzō'e*: robe from garbage or excrement. *Zagu* are cloths used for bowing. *Shukin* are long pieces of cotton or linen (about 15" x 4") used to tie up one's sleeves while working or cleaning. They are also used to dry hands and face. The *oryoki* set of bowls for eating, which also includes a wiping cloth and lap cloth, is also wrapped and tied together in a cloth. *Tenugui* (about 36" x 13" of cotton cloth) are used for many purposes. Wearing one on one's head helps protect the head from direct sun, shields dust, absorbs sweat, and identifies one as a hard worker. Cloths are also used in more delicate tasks, including covering important objects like food and dishes. Lacquer dishes receive a lot of attention from rags, for they need to be wiped by two different cloths to ensure dryness. A *zōkin* rag (about 11" x 7" of terrycloth) is the preferred rag for rougher and dirtier items, like floors and large messes.

Rags help create the nature of space-time by providing an organizing structure to operate efficiently and move with mindfulness. Concerns for order are evident in the elaborate rag typologies that help define space-time as refined-slow, rough-fast, and everything in between. Moreover, rag protocol is particularly significant for harmonious community living. To agree which rags are for what purpose and to handle them in a systematized fashion (where to hang, how to fold, storage location, organizational system) is important for clarity, efficiency, and even emotional equilibrium. When everyone knows what is where and does not need to hunt for a particular rag or ask someone about its whereabouts, being-time is efficient and frustration is spared. Lack of a system in a community, even a community of two, can be the source of tension, irritation, and complaints. Although these can be opportunities to watch one's mind, in the end the logical and respectful response would be to systematize the use and organization of rags.

While in the women's training monastery, the instructions on rags were very specific:

- Use the thin tightly woven cotton cloth to clean the altar.
- Use the larger thin cloths to clean all other raised surfaces.
- Use the thick terrycloth rags (*zōkin*) only on the floor (Fig. 8.2).



FIGURE 8.2 *Zōkin*: thick cleaning rag.

Photograph by the author.

- When washing rags in the bucket, wash the cleaning cloths for the altar first.
- Always wash the rags used on the floor last.
- When finished, gently pour the water on the moss garden. (No detergents or solvents are used.)

Treating the cleaning cloths so mindfully, I began to feel intimate with the rags that I wrung out every morning and afternoon while living in the monastery. They manifested compassion by making the temple clean. Gradually I saw these rags were actualizing Buddha-nature in each moment.⁴¹ Central to actualizing Buddha-nature in daily life is the Zen praxis of *zenki*. *Zenki* is to engage the totality of body, mind, and spirit in an activity. Doing so harmonizes one with the present conditions of the cosmos, the only place and time Buddha-nature can be actualized. In volume ten of the *Eihei kōroku*, Dōgen brushes a verse that underscores the metaphysical reason for this: “People and things thoroughly merge, not separate as two.”⁴²

The “*Senjō*” fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō* details how to practice enlightenment while washing with a hand towel. Dōgen begins with a reference to a Chinese *vinaya*-based text⁴³ that he characterizes as teaching:

There are five points to observe in using the hand towel: 1) Use the top and bottom ends for wiping. 2) Use one end for wiping the

hands and the other end for wiping the face. 3) Do not wipe the nose with it. 4) Wash [the hand towel] at once after it has been used to wipe grease or dirt. 5) Do not use it to wipe the body; when taking a bath, each person should have their own towel.

Dōgen's elaborations on these five forms indicate the precision of care necessary to transform monastic practices into enlightenment practices:

When carrying the hand towel, hold it as follows: Fold the hand towel in two and hang it over the left forearm near the elbow. Half the hand towel is for wiping the face and half for wiping the hands. Not to wipe the nose means not to wipe the inside of the nose or nasal mucus. Do not use the hand towel to wipe the armpits, the back, the belly, the navel, the thighs, or the lower legs. When it becomes soiled with dirt and grease, wash it. When it becomes wet or damp, dry it by a fire or in the sun. Do not use the hand towel when taking a bath.⁴⁴

Like delineating the type and purpose for rags used for cleaning, the type and purpose of rags and towels used for bathing are thoughtfully delineated according to their effectiveness for each specific body part. Each body part has its own conditions and concerns. To specify which cloth is to be used for the nose and which is for hands helps minimize contamination of germs (as we describe it now). Using another cloth for other body parts is part of this concern for personal and communal hygiene.⁴⁵ To tend to these needs is actualizing Buddha-nature.

The "Bendōhō" chapter of the *Eihei shingi* mentioned previously is also filled with exacting instructions on how to actualize Buddha-nature when doing specific activities, including eating:

The manner of setting the bowls is: first *gasshō* and untie the knot on the wrapping cloths around the bowls. Take the bowl wiping cloth and fold it up, once horizontally and into three layers vertically. Then place it horizontally behind the eating bowls [between the bowls and yourself], along with the utensil bag. The wiping cloth is about 1.2 feet long (one standard cloth width). Place the utensil bag above the wiping cloth over your knees. Next open up the wrapping cloth, with the corner that was toward you hanging out over the edge of the platform, and the corner that was facing out opened

toward you and folded partly under itself [with the tip still showing]. Then the corners to the left and right should be folded under as far in as the bowl [with the corner tips still showing].⁴⁶

The two cloths involved while eating are the wrapping cloth and bowl wiping cloth. They are different sizes, each size suitable to its specific function. The manner in which they are used is not for pretentious effect; rather, each prescribed fold ensures efficient use of space and time as it respects the nature of the material and task it performs. As with the rag used to wipe the eating surface after a meal, the metaphysical assumption that all are Buddha-nature is also exhibited in the manner of cloths used when eating in formal Zen style.

Transposing a “Tenzo kyōkun” passage, one can see how Dōgen might teach about the attitude of mind when one handles these beings of Buddha-nature cloth. Recontextualizing the passage on preparing food to cleaning, it is apparent that the quality of mind with which one cleans can transform the act of cleaning into an enlightenment activity. “As for the attitude while *cleaning with rags*, the essential point is deeply to arouse genuine mind and respectful mind without making judgments about *the rags’* fineness or coarseness [implying also the type of objects to be cleaned].”⁴⁷ Being non-judgmental and arousing genuine mind and respectful mind is how one experiences the Buddha-nature of all beings, ragged towels and dirty rags included. To keep his teachings grounded in the everyday realm of here and now, Dōgen offers in one of his Dharma Hall discourses the cautionary advice: “Without seeking to become sages be people who are capable of your duties.”⁴⁸

A byproduct of this praxis with rags is the minimalist aesthetic for which Zen has become known. Rags are critical to this pristine aesthetic. This aesthetic quality is what living without the poison of greedy acquisitiveness and wisdom of a sustainable lifestyle looks like. Indeed, rags are the secret agents and unsung heroes of Zen’s minimalist aesthetic. As with other contemplative Zen art practices like calligraphy and tea ceremony, cleaning practice with rags helps generate one-pointed concentration in the here and now where the quality of one’s mind is revealed in real time. The methods of folding, wringing, and wiping are so exacting that a practitioner must polish his or her inner world to effectively clean the external environment. This is what I came to realize when I was asked to clean behind the fire extinguisher. In so doing, the practitioner sees there is no “inside” and “outside.” They are “not two.” Dōgen explicitly teaches this in the “Senmen” (Face Washing”) fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō*. “When inside-and-outside is

totally clean, object-and-subject is pure and clean.”⁴⁹ To experience this is to actualize Buddha-nature. To place this in the context of being-time and to be clear he is not speaking metaphorically, Dōgen adds: “to bathe the body-mind . . . and to get rid of dust and dirt, are buddhadharma of the highest priority.”⁵⁰ To place this in the fuller context of daily conduct, Dōgen teaches in a Dharma Hall discourse: “When hungry, we eat; when thirsty, we drink; when healthy, we sit; when tired, we sleep.”⁵¹ If this list were expanded, it would surely include “When dirty, we clean.”⁵²

Rags as Healers

In addition to the cleaning power of rags, rags are also capable of connecting people’s hearts and, in a rare case I discovered during my field research in Japan, healing a person’s body. Investigating rags also gives us a view of the highly ritualized nature of social etiquette in Japanese culture, which is particularly refined in Zen circles. Frequent gift exchanges are required to maintain connections and express gratitude. *Tenugui* rags are favored gifts for their practicality. Those imprinted with calligraphy and/or Buddhist images are especially treasured. The *Heart Sūtra* is commonly printed on cleaning cloths that are offered as gifts of appreciation and respect, as shown in Figure 8.3.

One particular *tenugui* rag served as an efficacious healing talisman for a Zen Buddhist woman with a terminal cancer diagnosis:

Doctors told Kimura-san,⁵³ a humble and devout Zen Buddhist woman in her late sixties, that her cancer was beyond their treatments. Her petite elderly frame and gentle humility belied her inner

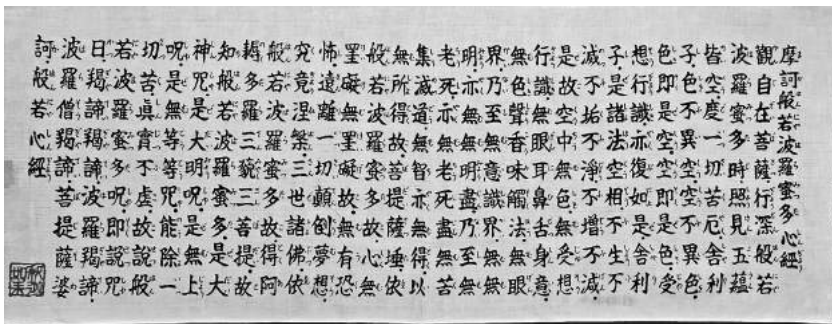


FIGURE 8.3 *Heart Sūtra* on *tenugui* cleaning cloth.

Photograph by the author.

strength. She fully believed that the *tenugui* traditional cleaning cloth given to her by the Zen abbess would heal her. To Kimura-san, this was no common *tenugui* cleaning cloth. Unlike the hundreds she had used over her near seven decades of life, this one had the calligraphy of the abbess and the image of a figure with hands held in prayer (Gasshō Dōji) commissioned by the abbess printed on it. It is important to know that the exchange of *tenugui* cloths is ubiquitous in the gift-giving culture of Japan.

Everyone must give and receive gifts so often that practical gifts are preferred, food and cleaning supplies like soap and towels among the most common. The abbess had these traditional cleaning cloths made so she would have something useful to give to people. She thought that many might not actually clean with it, but might use it for special occasions handling special dishes. She did not imagine that they would be used for healing. Kimura-san, though, believed that the *tenugui* cloth had the power to heal her body. She laid in bed with one cloth on her pillow and one on her legs, the location of the cancer. More than ten years later she was still farming her organic garden and mixing medicinal herbs for everyone's ailments from mosquito bites to arthritis. Doctors could find no traces of cancer in her body.⁵⁴ She had a twinkle in her eyes as she leaned over and touched me on the arm saying, "It's true Paula-san. That cloth healed me."

The *tenugui* cloth Kimura-san claims healed her of cancer is the usual oblong shape (Fig. 8.4). It is made of rather thin white cotton fabric, with brushwork printed in black and gray. Abbess Aoyama Shundō commissioned a highly regarded Buddhist artist, Sakuma Ken'ichi, to paint two of his famous Gasshō Dōji (Child with Hands in Prayer) facing each other. One sits on a lotus and the other is resting on clouds. Above the images, Aoyama Rōshi did calligraphy, renowned for its beauty and power. Above one side she brushed "*Wagen*" "Expression of Harmony." She wrote "*Aigo*" "Kindness and Protection" over the image of the lotus on the other side. Together the images and calligraphy encapsulate the approach to life and its vicissitudes the Abbess both teaches and manifests.⁵⁵

Another quieter, though compelling, healing I observed while doing my ethnographic research was of an upper-middle-aged woman who was working to support her family, grieving the loss of several family members,



FIGURE 8.4 *Tenugui* cleaning cloth with which Kimura-san was healed.
Photograph by the author.

lamenting the perfunctory quality of her marriage, and worrying about the future of her adult child who stayed entrenched in the bedroom all day and night. Familiar with the praxis of rags and the dynamics of Zen ritual, she created a ritual use of rags not found in the whole of Dōgen's prodigious writings. Finally understanding that she, too, was Buddha-nature, in an act of self-compassion, she deliberately did *not* dust the altar where her family was memorialized. She knew they would receive her need to *amaeru*,⁵⁶ to lean on someone with complete trust of being accepted nonjudgmentally. For her, not dusting with a rag was not an act of neglect, laziness, or rebellion. Without forsaking any responsibilities that would negatively affect others, not cleaning her family's altar was her creative and insightful way to heal from her loneliness and feel connected with unconditional love. She made not dusting a practice of Buddha Activity. This method of healing only works, however, because practice with cleaning rags is an integral dimension of Zen soteriology. By acting with *zenki* (total dynamic engagement) to not dust, she manifests the *genjōkōan*: holistic activity of the embodied heart-mind fostering a nondual experience of present conditions.

Though such healings are rare, these examples indicate they are possible. They augment the extent to which the mundane power of rags generates healing and beauty in daily life.

Conclusion

My quest to explore the meaning and metaphysics of Zen rags began with a serendipitous event of cultural and religious contrast. Having investigated Dōgen's texts and analyzed the teachings, hopefully it is more fully understandable why the Japanese Zen nuns responded with silent yet unequivocal surprise at the American Catholic nun's handling of the rag while wiping the table. For Zen nuns, rags *are* Buddha-nature. This study reveals rags embody the teachings and model the way. My analysis of rags draws out the fundamental metaphysical underpinnings that ground Zen practice and highlight the healing power of Zen aesthetics.

Indeed, rags are ubiquitous in Zen. Whether in a monastery, temple, or home, rags are never far from hand. The rhythm of daily life is punctuated with rag use and care. Whether used in pristine monasteries or cramped apartment quarters, while tending sick bedsides or wiping up spilled porridge, rags are integral to a range of practices that are designed to actualize enlightenment in a Sōtō Zen paradigm.

The heretofore lack of scholarly attention to rags is part of a larger context in which this particular volume is poised to expand, namely, heightened scrutiny of material culture in the context of Zen. The analysis of metaphysical orientation, ontological assumptions, soteriological aims, and praxis advanced in reference to rags can perhaps be applied to other examples of material events to explore the dynamics involving their functions and reveal the depths of their worth.

Notes

1. My primary source of ethnographic material on monastic Zen is from Aichi Senmon Nisōdō in Nagoya, Japan. I also did some ethnographic research at two other Sōtō Zen nunneries (Toyama Senmon Nisōdō and Niigata Senmon Nisōdō) and, for illuminating contrast, one Jōdo nunnery in Kyoto known as Yoshimizu Gakuen. I also visited the two main Sōtō male monasteries, Eiheiiji and Sōjiji. My research on Zen as practiced in temples was conducted in the greater Nagoya and Tokyo regions. For more information, see my volume *Women Living Zen: Japanese Sōtō Buddhist Nuns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). My primary research on Zen in the home was conducted in the greater Nagoya area. For more information, see my volume *Bringing Zen Home: The Heart of Japanese Women's Healing Rituals* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011). I began ethnographic research at these sites in 1988, and collectively I have spent more than five years of this period in the field.

2. Examining rags also sets in high relief the concrete ways in which Japanese Zen transposed the indigenous Shintō concern for purity into vigilant attention to cleanliness. It also showcases the practical way in which the Confucian concern for order and ritualized activities is transformed from activities done to be in harmony with the Dao to activities that actualize Buddha-nature.
3. Joseph Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 12–13.
4. Dōgen, *Dōgen's Extensive Record: A Translation of the Eihei kōroku*, trans. Taigen Daniel Leighton and Shohaku Okumura. Edited and introduced by Taigen Daniel Leighton (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2010), 302.
5. For further discussion on this, see Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), especially the chapter on “The Power of Ritualization,” 197–223.
6. For clarification, the expression of “ouch!” when I dropped the meditation cushion was due to the disrespect with which *I* treated it. It was not an expression of the meditation cushion resisting what was necessary in the present moment. The significance of this point reverberates into ethical concerns, for being Buddha-nature in a seamless whole does not mean that all activities manifest Buddha-nature. Activities that are not practice (i.e., acts of wisdom and compassion) do cause suffering. Hence, enlightenment only occurs when one is practicing. When one is not practicing (acting with wisdom and compassion), one generates suffering. I was not practicing when I dropped the cushion, and the cushion helped me see that with its expression of pain.
7. This was originally published in an article I wrote. Paula Arai, “Seeing Buddha in Our Midst,” *Dharma World* 40 (2013): 16.
8. “Water is not always originally pure or originally impure. . . . All dharmas are also like this. Water is never sentient or nonsentient . . . and all dharmas are also like this.” BDK 1:76.
9. Dōgen, *Dōgen's Extensive Record*, 276.
10. Much of the English translation is from Dōgen, “Busshō,” in *Shōbōgenzō*, BDK 2:30. However, I modified it according to the critical edition and annotations of Mizuno Yaoko in Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1990), 1:125.
11. Original quote from “Zenki”: “Life can be likened to a time when a person is sailing in a boat. On this boat, I am operating the sail, I have taken the rudder, I am pushing the pole; at the same time, the boat is carrying me, and there is no ‘I’ beyond the boat. Through my sailing of the boat, this boat is being caused to be a boat—let us consider, and learn in practice, just this moment of the present. At this very moment, there is nothing other than the world of the boat: the sky, the water, the shore have all become the moment of the boat, which is utterly different from moments not on the boat. So life is what I am making it, and I am what life is making me.” BDK 2:356.
12. Original quote from “Bendōhō”: “The suchness of the ultimate identity from beginning to end is the genuine form of all dharmas, which only a

- buddha together with a buddha can exhaustively penetrate. Therefore, food is the dharma of all dharmas, which only a buddha together with a buddha can exhaustively penetrate. Just at such a time, there are the genuine marks, nature, substance, power, function, causes, and conditions. For this reason, dharma is itself food, food is itself dharma. This dharma is what is received and used by all buddhas in the past and future. This food is the fulfillment that is the joy of dharma and the delight of meditation.” Dōgen, *Dōgen’s Pure Standards for the Zen Community: A Translation of the Eihei shingi*, trans. Shohaku Okumura and Taigen Daniel Leighton (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 84.
13. Original quote from “The Dharma for Taking Food.” “Just let dharma be the same as food, and let food be the same as dharma. For this reason, if dharmas are the dharma nature, then food also is the dharma nature. If the dharma is suchness, food also is suchness. If the dharma is the single mind, food also is the single mind. If the dharma is Bodhi, food also is Bodhi.” Dōgen, *Dōgen’s Pure Standards*, 83.
 14. Original quote from “Tenzo kyōkun”: “When you take care of things, do not see with your common eyes, do not think you’re your common sentiments. Pick a single blade of grass and erect a sanctuary for the jewel king; enter a single atom and turn the great wheel of the teaching. So even when you are making a broth of coarse greens, do not arouse an attitude of distaste or dismissal. Even when you are making a cream soup, do not arouse an attitude of rapture or dancing for joy. If you already have no attachments, how could you have any disgust? Therefore, although you may encounter inferior ingredients, do not be at all negligent; although you may come across delicacies, be all the more diligent. Never alter your state of mind based on materials. People who change their mind according to ingredients, or adjust their speech to [the status of] whoever they are talking to, are not people of the Way.” Dōgen, *Dōgen’s Pure Standards*, 37.
 15. *The Diamond Sūtra and the Sūtra of Huineng*, trans. A. F. Price and Won Mou-Lam (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1985), 18. Based upon my interpretation of the Chinese, I revised the English translation of lines three and four.
 16. *The Diamond Sūtra*, trans. A.F. Price and Won Mou-Lam, 15.
 17. Dōgen, *Dōgen’s Extensive Record*, 247.
 18. Dōgen, *Dōgen’s Pure Standards*, 37.
 19. Dōgen, *Dōgen’s Pure Standards*, 16.
 20. “Rags” replaces “trees and land” in this “Bendōwa” passage from the *Shōbōgenzō*. I use Heine’s translation of the two-volume edition of the *Shōbōgenzō* by Terada Toru and Mizuno Yaoko (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1970), 14. Cited in Steven Heine, *Existential and Ontological Dimensions of Time in Heidegger and Dōgen* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985), 58.
 21. “Rags” replaces “water.” Dōgen, “Sansuikyō,” in *Shōbōgenzō*, BDK 1:221.

22. “Rags” replaces “rocks.” Dōgen, “Dharma Hall discourse 261,” in *Dōgen’s Extensive Record*, 256.
23. “Rags” replaces “the lands.” Dōgen, “Dharma Hall discourse 500,” in *Dōgen’s Extensive Record*, 447–448.
24. Dōgen, “Tenzo kyōkun,” in *Dōgen’s Pure Standards*, 47.
25. Dōgen, “Dharma Hall Discourse 301,” in *Dōgen’s Extensive Record*, 281.
26. Dōgen, “Busshō,” in *Shōbōgenzō*, BDK 2: 18. Most scholars of Nāgārjuna would surmise this is an apocryphal attribution.
27. Dōgen, “Busshō,” in *Shōbōgenzō*, BDK 2:6.
28. Heine, *Existential and Ontological Dimensions*, 87.
29. This is written from the perspective of the rag, but perhaps the Buddha-nature of dust is to provide opportunities for people cleaning to see their mind on a daily basis.
30. Heine, *Existential and Ontological Dimensions*, 67.
31. Heine, *Existential and Ontological Dimensions*, 67.
32. Dōgen, “Genjōkōan,” in *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen*, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), 70.
33. Heine, *Existential and Ontological Dimensions*, 26.
34. Dōgen, *Dōgen’s Extensive Record*, 271.
35. Heine, *Existential and Ontological Dimensions*, 66.
36. “Cleaning with rags” replaces “gathering firewood” in Dōgen, “Dharma Hall Discourse 209,” in *Dōgen’s Extensive Record*, 221.
37. Dōgen, “Dharma Hall Discourse 27,” in *Dōgen’s Extensive Record*, 96.
38. Dōgen, “Dharma Hall Discourse 102,” in *Dōgen’s Extensive Record*, 139.
39. Dōgen, “Genjōkōan,” in *Shōbōgenzō*, BDK 1:41.
40. “Wiping tables and wringing rags” replaces “drinking tea and eating meals.” BDK 3:297.
41. A modified form of this was originally published in an article I wrote: Paula Arai, “Seeing Buddha in Our Midst,” *Dharma World* 40 (2013): 16.
42. Dōgen, *Dōgen’s Extensive Record*, 617.
43. *The Sūtra of Three Thousand Dignified Forms* is a source Dōgen seems to have turned to for these teachings, but he does not cite specifics about the exact version of the text he consulted.
44. BDK 3:193. Although rags are distinguished by type and function, they are not existentially judged as better or worse.
45. The Buddha-nature of viruses and cancerous cell activity are matters that are outside the purview of this article, but they warrant further exploration as science helps us understand phenomena at a microscopic level. Today we can observe that acting in ways to cease the suffering of a person might involve injuring microorganisms. Is there a crack in Dōgen’s nondualistic teachings at the microscopic level? Are microorganisms Buddha-nature, too?
46. Dōgen, *Dōgen’s Pure Standards*, 87–88.

47. Original quote: “As for the attitude while preparing food, the essential point is deeply to arouse genuine mind and respectful mind without making judgments about the ingredients’ fineness or coarseness.” Dōgen, “Tenzo kyōkun,” in *Dōgen’s Pure Standards*, 44.
48. Dōgen, “Dharma Hall Discourse 139,” in *Dōgen’s Extensive Record*, 139.
49. Dōgen, “Senmen,” in *Shōbōgenzō*, BDK 3:189.
50. Dōgen, “Senmen,” in *Shōbōgenzō*, BDK 3:189.
51. Dōgen, “Dharma Hall Discourse 220,” in *Dōgen’s Extensive Record*, 226.
52. To clean when something is dirty is a practical concern. For example, cleaning dishes soon after use is more efficient, for food cannot get encrusted on the dishes, requiring more time and effort that might even damage the dishes. In general, cleaning promptly is often a matter of hygiene or respect, especially when living with others. This is not to say clean is “good” and dirty is “bad.” To assign value judgments is an abstraction that removes one from the fullness of the here and now. This does not render Zen praxis ethically compromised, however. It supports an ethics that turns on suffering and not-suffering, rather than on some abstract concept that engages power struggles in defining what is good and bad.
53. This is a pseudonym.
54. Research on cancer patients who engage in mindfulness-based interventions have shown noteworthy increase in immunological and physiological function. See L. E. Carlson, M. Speca, K. D. Patel, and E. Goodey, “Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in Relation to Quality of Life, Mood, Symptoms of Stress and Levels of Cortisol, Dehydroepiandrosterone Sulfate (DHEAS) and Melatonin in Breast and Prostate Cancer Out-Patients,” *Psychoneuroendocrinology* (2004) 29: 448–474.
55. Kimura-san’s story and the paragraph describing the *tenugui* cloth was originally published in my volume, Arai, *Bringing Zen Home*, 156. The interview with Kimura-san took place on July 7, 1998.
56. For further discussion of the Japanese psychological dynamics of “*amae*,” see: 土居健郎、『「甘え」の構造』東京：古文堂，1971 [Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence: The Key Analysis of Japanese Behavior* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1981)].