

ZEN NOTES



Recent visitors: members of the Institute for Zen Studies, Japan, including Rinzaï, Soto, and Obaku delegates

The Institute is located at the Rinzaï Zen College, in Kyoto. Its activities include translating and publishing materials relative to Zen; building a library of books on Zen; helping people and groups of all nationalities find the appropriate Zen practice place for their own level of experience, and holding zazen practice periods.

DOGEN REVIEW by John Storm

Dogen Eihei (1200-1253) may have lived and died in medieval Japan, but in spirit he is a true citizen of the 20th century. During his lifetime, scholars say, the founder of the Soto sect in Japan was little known and little appreciated, a nonconformist who retreated to a remote monastery and died relatively young, his main work, the "Shobogenzo," restricted for nearly 600 years to a circle of monks. Today, however, Dogen has emerged as perhaps the most celebrated of all Zen masters. His writings, expressed in a dreamy, almost surrealist language that skips tantalizingly along the boundaries of meaning, have touched a particularly sensitive contemporary nerve. Indeed, they have proved all but irresistible to specialists of every kind--scholars of Buddhism, scholars of Japanese history and scholars of philosophy, among others--as well as to a whole spectrum of Zen students with an intellectual turn of mind and a taste for a poetico-mystical reading of the Mahayana. Dogen, in short, has become an industry, and the list of new Dogen titles seems to grow by the day.

One advantage of all this scholarly attention (or disadvantage, possibly, depending on the perspective) is the process of demystification that occurs as a result. What was Dogen like as a man? In "Recarving the Dragon: History and Dogma in the Study of Dogen," one of eight essays in "Dogen Studies," a Kuroda Institute compilation edited by William R. LaFleur, Carl Bielefeldt offers a fascinating overview of recent scholarship on the subject.

Dogen underwent a marked change of view in mid-career, at about the time he abandoned Kyoto with a batch of new disciples and established a monastery in the isolated province of Echizen, according to Bielefeldt, who teaches Buddhism at Stanford University. For a decade or more after returning from his studies in China, Dogen had little to say about Ju-ching, the Soto teacher who had given him transmission, and was free with his praise of Lin-chi, whom he described as the "legitimate heir" of Huang-po. Then, rather abruptly, Dogen began to emphasize Ju-ching's teachings and to denounce as

fake those of certain Lin-chi descendants, eventually concluding that Lin-chi himself was "not of the highest caliber" and never understood Huang-po.

The motivation for this turnabout, which has had far-reaching effects relevant even today in American Zen, has been a topic of much speculation. As outlined by Bielefeldt, the various theories advanced to explain it are more or less plausible in human terms, though not especially flattering to Dogen, who is portrayed as resentful over lack of recognition or, more specifically, over losing out in political maneuvering within the Zen community. Whatever the truth may have been, such biographical realism ought to provide a useful counter to any extremes of worshipfulness that may be developing along with the enthusiasm over Dogen's writings, separating out what one might call Dogen's career tactics from his teachings proper.

It is the teachings, after all, not the polemics against other Zen masters, that make Dogen of interest today, and with translations from the "Shobogenzo" coming out regularly, getting to know him is no longer the formidable task it once was. Two new Dogen collections have become available recently, in fact, "Moon in a Dewdrop," by Kazuaki Tanahashi in collaboration with a number of individuals associated with the San Francisco Zen Center, and "Shobogenzo: Zen Essays by Dogen," by Thomas Cleary. They join the four-volume "Shobogenzo," by Kosen Nishiyama and John Stevens; "Zen Master Dogen: An Introduction With Selected Writings," by YuHo Yokoi with Daizen Victoria; "Shobogenzo Genjo Koan," by Taizan Maezumi and Francis Dojun Cook, and several chapters of the "Shobogenzo" translated by Norman Waddell and Abe Masao and published in "The Eastern Buddhist."

Like many other Zen masters, Dogen has "voice," a clearly distinguishable, irreducible something that sings through the most disparate translations. Listened to like music, without too much effort to grasp a definite meaning, Dogen isn't really all that obscure. There is a passage in the "Genjo Koan," for example, which Tanahashi renders: "To carry yourself forward and experience myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come forth and ex-

perience themselves is awakening." This is close to Maezumi's: "To carry the self forward and realize the ten thousand dharmas is delusion. That the ten thousand dharmas advance and realize the self is enlightenment." But in Nishiyama-Stevens the passage becomes: "It is an illusion to try to carry out our practice and enlightenment through ourselves, but to have practice and enlightenment, through phenomena, that is enlightenment." And in Cleary it reads: "Acting on and witnessing myriad things with the burden of oneself is 'delusion.' Acting on and witnessing oneself in the advent of myriad things is enlightenment."

Or consider the opening of "Sansui-Kyo" or the "Mountains and Waters Sutra": "Mountains and waters right now are the actualization of the ancient buddha way. Each, abiding in its phenomenal expression, realizes completeness. Because mountains and waters have been active since before the Empty Eon, they are alive at this moment. Because they have been the self since before form arose they are emancipation-realization." So it reads in Tanahashi. In Nishiyama Stevens, it becomes: "The present mountains and rivers maintain their true form and actualize their real virtue. They transcend time and therefore are active in the eternal present. Since their original self is revealed, they are detached from their manifestation. Mountains possess the virtue of being high and wide yet the movement of clouds and the blowing of the wind are free and not restrained by the mountain." And Cleary renders the passage this way: "The mountains and waters of the immediate present are the manifestation of the path of the ancient Buddhas. Together abiding in their normative state, they have consummated the qualities of thorough exhaustiveness. Because they are events prior to the empty eon, they are the liveliness of the immediate present. Because they are the self before the emergence of signs, they are the penetrating liberation of immediate actuality. By the height and breadth of the qualities of the mountains, the virtue of riding the clouds is always mastered from the mountains and the subtle work of following the wind as a rule penetrates through to liberation from the mountains."

In both instances, we know what's being said, more or less, and who's saying it, despite the rather lush variety of expression used by the translators. More problematic, however, are certain areas of definite, practical advice where the translators choose mostly the same language. In the "Zazen-gi" or "Rules for Zazen," for instance, Dogen's technical advice on what to do with the mind while sitting emerges in substantially the same form in most of the translations, and yet remains more opaque, to me, than his more poetic flights. The crucial passage, in Tanahashi, says: "Sit solidly in samadhi and think not-thinking. How do you think not-thinking? Nonthinking." In the glossary, Tanahashi explains that Dogen is using the terms "shiryo" (thinking), "fushiryo" (not-thinking) and "hishiryo" (nonthinking). Nonetheless, even if the distinction between "not-thinking" and "nonthinking" were clear, Dogen would seem to be advising us to suppress thoughts during zazen, something that Zen teachers unanimously agree is wrong, a throwback to pre-Buddhist forms of yoga.

So what might Dogen have intended? Let me suggest a different reading. Instead of assuming that "shiryo" is prescriptive, a grammatical imperative, allow it and its companion, "fushiryo," to be descriptive, a simple description of what goes on in the mind during zazen: the repeated alternation of thinking and not-thinking. What is "hishiryo," then? Yokoi adds the connotation of "beyond," rendering the word in a phrase: "Thinking beyond thinking and nonthinking." Taisen Deshimaru, the late Soto teacher in Europe, goes further: "Beyond thinking. Absolute thinking. Thinking without thinking. Thinking from the bottom of non-thinking. Thinking not thinking, hearing not hearing, smelling not smelling, looking not looking, etc. To stop the thinking process occurring in the frontal brain (as opposed to the central brain or primitive brain), and to think instead with the body." Perhaps best of all is a phrase, in a different context, of Sasaki Roshi's: "The thought that you don't need to think."

SOKEI-AN SAYS

Virtuous scholars, the physical body is an abode. This "abode" can be translated as "shrine"--the shrine of Buddha. When you close your hands on your breast and stand before Buddha, you will realize that the physical body is an abode of Buddha.

You cannot say that you take refuge in it. That is, in the physical body--this is really from the view of a common-minded one; because to the common-minded one the physical body doesn't mean anything. But to the enlightened one there is no physical body; his own body is really the Trikaya Buddha.

But if you stand before it. Here "it" means the physical body. You cannot separate from your physical body and stand before it; it is only a supposition that you can.

The Trikaya Buddha is in its own nature. That is, in your own nature. When we join our hands on our breast and look upon ourselves from the outside, this is the Trikaya Buddha within us. This state of being is permitted only to enlightened men, only to Zen students. Those who worship God from the outside cannot realize this. They cannot free themselves and stand before their body and join hands and look into the Trikaya Buddha and find themselves within it. This is only for the disciple, but it means that the Trikaya Buddha is you yourself. You realize this when you enter the first gate into Buddhism.

So really the Trikaya Buddha is the initiation into Buddhism. It is the revelation--the whole mysterious world is manifested. You have seen the sadharma pundarika (the pure white lotus)--it is realization. You will hear many terms from the lips of Christian teachers like revelation but this is revelation! God reveals himself to us. You have your own teacher and you come to the revelation and you have no realization of the value of it. But if you are in the desert with no water and eating grass, and suddenly you see that you yourself pervade heaven and earth--how wonderful!

In the ancient days it was rare for anyone to come to this realization so, with compassion, Buddha made this method and now one can come into it easily.

About one hundred-and-fifty years ago, anyone who crossed this continent from East to West crossed in covered wagons. It was a revelation. Today everyone goes by train so they cannot see the wonder of it. In those days they fought Indians and starvation. Wagons broke, horses died--it was really an adventure.

The Buddha found revelation, meditating under the tree for six years. Hermits meditating under the sun in the desert also appreciated the value of revelation. Today you can come to it in the sanzen room under the koan of "before your father and mother" or the koan of the hand. It is easy now, but it is the same revelation. If your master is broad and humble, and you are really earnest, when you prove the first koan you will appreciate revelation too.

When I passed the first koan, I felt for seven days as if I were swinging in the air...

You must cast away all notions, all convictions. In the ancient days the monks meditated three years and swept pebble stones..then HO!...and all the universe appeared to their minds. Hakuin meditated many days...it was December 8th when the midnight gong sounded that he realized the Trikaya, but his realization was still in the state of dreams. The next morning he went out to beg, still thinking of nothing but revelation. An old woman refused to give him anything saying: "Go away." He did not hear her and the old woman became impatient and, with her bamboo broom, knocked him into a rice swamp, and he came out and realized THIS IS IT and he rushed to his teacher's room and all of a sudden his teacher said, "That is right. You have passed it!"

Don't say that Reverend loses his temper when he shouts at you if you don't pass your koan in three or six months. Don't take it personally. Don't take a personal view of sanzen. There's no person about it.

Everyone in the world has this within. Because your mind is deluded, you cannot see your inner nature. Because you seek the Trikaya Buddha without, you cannot see the Trikaya Buddha within. Trikaya Buddha means Dharmakaya Buddha, Sambhogakaya Buddha and Nirmanakaya Buddha. Nirmanakaya Buddha has beginning and end, but Dharmakaya Buddha is eternal--will not be born--will not die.

gon notes

Give heed to my sermon. I shall disclose the
Tri-kaya Buddha of your own nature within you.
This Tri-kaya Buddha is born from your own nature.
You will not find it outside. How could you find
the Tri-kaya Buddha outside? It is really foolish
to kneel down and say: "Oh, God!" and cry. I am
quite sure that John Wesley, the originator of
Methodism, and other Christian masters realized
the true Tri-kaya Buddha within themselves. But
the common-minded cannot understand and so they
must make a picture of heaven and hell.

What is that which is called the pure Dharma-
kaya Buddha? A monk asked Unmon, "What is pure
Dharmakaya?" Unmon said, "A dung scraper." I can-
not give such an answer to young American ladies--
if one makes such an answer he just perishes and
disappears--no Dharmakaya in it.

The nature of man in the world is originally
pure. All Dharma is born out of his own nature.
It is not his own notion or his own idea but
his own nature, which is not ego, that is orig-
inally pure. As long as you keep your ego you
cannot see your own nature.

It seems to me to understand something that
is quite handy to use every day one must solve
one's koans. From my own experience, you must
find your answer and analyze it very carefully
then apply it to daily life.

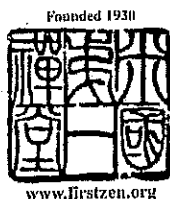
Pure Dharmakaya is a dung scraper all right.
But if I say this, you think it means, "I can do
anything that is abominable." Well, I cannot ac-
cept that as Zen teaching. It only means it is
the way someone thinks.

Dharmakaya is all--no woman, no man included
in it. It is not something to apply to daily
life--it is the foundation. You cannot root out
the root and apply it to the ceiling--it is the
root.

Don't criticize Zen teaching after a few
months of study. It takes years to realize
the value of it.

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113 East 30th St., New York, NY 10016 Editor, Mary Farkas
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