

The Question of the Self

Perhaps the clearest access to the question of the self in Dōgen lies in the fascicle of Shōbōgenzō entitled "*Genjō-kōan*." Because all issues are so intimately and inextricably interwoven in Dōgen's thought, it is difficult and even artificial to isolate one question from all the rest. Yet we must choose the most direct inroad available to us to the question of the self.

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 verified by myriad dharmas; and to be verified by myriad dharmas is to drop off the body-mind of the self as well as the body-mind of the other. There remains no trace of enlightenment, and one lets this traceless enlightenment come forth for ever and ever.¹

If one wishes to study the Buddha-way, the only place to start, the only initial access, is one's own self; one cannot search for it somewhere outside the self. When one studies the self, really studies the self, one does not encounter an enduring substantial thing called "self." What, then, does one encounter? One encounters the myriad dharmas, the ten thousand things of the world and thereby forgets the self that one did not find. These

myriad dharmas verify and confirm one's activity and this allows body-mind to drop off. When one's body-mind drops off, the notion of the body-mind of the other drops off as well. Dropping off body-mind (*Shinjin datsuraku*) allows the transparency of enlightenment to enter. Enlightenment leaves no trace, as this would imply a dualism between the dropped off body-mind and enlightenment. This traceless enlightenment, absolutely free from any kind of dualism whatsoever, is then free to come forth and continue for ever and ever.

Only when the self gives way to allow the myriad dharmas to enter, does the self become what it truly is. Its true function is to become utterly transparent to the myriad things of the world, be they other people, realities of nature, man-made things or whatever. In the words of D. T. Suzuki:

It is the Heart indeed that tells us that our own self is a self only to the extent that it disappears into all other selves, non-sentient as well as sentient.²

The self is never some kind of substantial object, something over against us that we can find. In his *Traktatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Ludwig Wittgenstein illustrated this graphically by drawing a picture of the eye and stating that this is not what we see when we look.³ The eye (or the self) is at best that with which we see; it is never *what* we see. Jean-Paul Sartre, in a totally different context, and from a totally different perspective, stated pretty much the same thing in *The Transcendence of the Ego*. What we get is always the me, the object, never the I, the subject or self.

Going back to the beginning of *Genjō-kōan*, we have three paragraphs of which Hee-jin Kim states that they "express the gist of the entire *Genjō-kōan* fascicle and, for that matter, of the whole *Shōbōgenzō*."⁴ We need to take a prolonged look at these paragraphs to see what the implications of that statement are.

When all dharmas are the Buddha-dharma, there is illusion and enlightenment, contemplation and action, birth and Death, buddhas and sentient beings.

When myriad dharmas are of the nonself, there is no illusion or enlightenment, no buddhas or sentient beings, no arising or perishing.

Because the Buddha-way intrinsically leaps out of plenitude and dearth, there is arising and perishing, illusion and enlightenment, sentient beings and buddhas. Still do flowers fall to our pity and weeds grow to our displeasure.⁵

The first paragraph states the duality and differentiation of illusion and enlightenment, meditation or contemplation and action in the world, birth and death, buddhas (enlightenment), and sentient beings (illusion). Differentiation is the case when dharmas are of the Buddha-dharma. This may be cautiously compared to a "thesis," a positive statement.

The second paragraph negates the first in that it asserts the nonduality and nondifferentiation of illusion (sentient beings) and enlightenment (buddhas) and arising and perishing. Now, nonduality is the case when dharmas are of the nonself. This can be compared to a negation of the thesis, to an antithesis. The first paragraph asserts "is"; the second paragraph asserts "is not." But the second paragraph is not the simple negation of the first. Illusion (sentient beings) and enlightenment (buddhas) are common to both paragraphs; contemplation and action are absent from the second paragraph and are thus never explicitly negated. The first paragraph speaks of birth and death, whereas the second negates, not precisely birth and death, but arising and perishing. Whereas the affinities between birth and arising and between death and perishing are obvious, it remains questionable whether they can simply be "equated." All of this is mentioned in order to point out that the second paragraph is not simply a global negation of the first.

The third paragraph is no “synthesis” of the first two. The Buddha-way “leaps out” of plentitude (form, differentiation, and duality, “is” first paragraph) and dearth (emptiness, nonduality, “is not,” second paragraph). What does Dōgen mean by “leaping out?” Instead of synthesizing the first two paragraphs, the third dynamically transcends them (neither “is” nor “is not”). Yet the final sentence of that paragraph indicates that form, duality, and emptiness (nonduality) are still present, are included as well (both “is” and “is not”). Flowers wither and die while weeds flourish. Things do not conform to what we want; they are not just the way we would like them to be. They simply are as they are (suchness).

It should finally be noted that birth and death and contemplation and action are never specifically negated as such. Thus, there is subtle differentiation within Dōgen’s “dialectic.”

We shall consider the next two paragraphs of *Genjō-kōan*, saving the remaining paragraphs for a later discussion with a somewhat broader focus.

To exert and verify myriad dharmas by carrying forth the self is illusion; to exert and verify the self while myriad dharmas come forth is enlightenment. Those who apply illusion to great enlightenment are buddhas; those who have great illusion amid enlightenment are sentient beings. Furthermore, there are persons who attain enlightenment upon enlightenment; there are persons who have more illusion within illusion.⁶

The focus of this paragraph is clearly illusion and enlightenment. Illusion consists in carrying forth the self, in asserting the self and attempting to force exertion and verification of myriad dharmas or things. This is deluded activity, the very opposite of what the Taoists called “*wu wei*,” noninterference or letting be (Meister Eckhart’s *Gelassenheit*), which is nothing passive. What should come forth is not the self, but the myriad dharmas. What

should be exerted and verified are not the dharmas, but the self. The self is to be *exerted*, not *asserted*.

Activity of the Self

We need to pause in our interpretation of the beginning of *Genjō-kōan* and consider briefly the three related terms “total exertion” (*gūjin*), “activity-unremitting,” “ceaseless practice” (*gyōji*), and “total dynamism” (*zenki*). Kim broaches the extremely subtle differentiation between total exertion (*gūjin*) and total life force/dynamism (*zenki*) as follows:

Thus, the principles of the total exertion and the total function or dynamism are two aspects of the one and same reality of subjectivity in Dōgen’s metaphysical realism. Loosely speaking, the former addresses itself primarily to the self, whereas the latter (the total dynamism) speaks to the world. Both refer to the undefiled freedom and liberation of the self and the world as the self-expression of Buddha-nature.⁷

The expression “two aspects of one and the same reality of subjectivity,” I believe, must be taken to mean that, whether the emphasis is on self or on world, the “place” where Buddha-nature expresses itself is ultimately localized in the self which is inseparable from world. Otherwise we are back in the dualism of subject and object, which cannot be Kim’s intention.

If we provisionally accept for now this “loose statement” that exertion refers more to self and dynamism more to world, where does that leave our third term, activity-unremitting? Again referring to Kim, activity-unremitting is “the universal dynamics inherent in all reality.”⁸ Thus, activity-unremitting would seem to be the most comprehensive of the three terms. Certainly the fascicle on activity-unremitting constitutes one of the longer and more substantial of the *Shōbōgenzō*, whereas the fascicle on total

dynamism is quite short and there is no separate fascicle on total exertion at all.

Having made this general statement, we want to briefly examine each of the three terms. The following cursory discussion can hardly exhaust the matter.

Total exertion (gūjin)

Although no separate fascicle is devoted to it, total exertion certainly pervades the whole of Shōbōgenzō. Exertion often seems to be roughly equivalent to self-obstruction and is inseparable from a dharma-situation (*jūhōi*). Exertion and a continuous flowing on of temporal activity preclude each other. In other words, in order for a thing to totally exert itself or to obstruct itself, it must achieve a certain *stasis*, a dwelling where it abides in its dharma-situation. For example, the act of dropping off the body-mind (*Shinjin datsuraku*) cannot take place in any kind of horizontal transition, but “dropping” definitely implies a vertical dimension where body-mind can actually be let fall. As long as I drag body-mind along with me, which is what I habitually do, body-mind cannot drop off.

Since this is for the moment to be a brief excursion into our three terms, we can say for now that what is perhaps most distinctive about exertion is its inseparability from a dharma-situation and its ultimate identity with self-obstruction and penetration, both terms that we have not yet had the opportunity to discuss.

In a brief discussion Francis Cook gives an interesting interpretation of *gūjin* in his book *How to Raise an Ox*.

Looked at from the angle of the person who experiences the situation, it means that one identifies one hundred percent with the circumstance. Looked at from the standpoint of the situation itself, the situation is totally manifested or exerted without obstruction or contamination.⁹

The person experiencing a situation totally becomes it. He is not thinking *about* it; he *is* it. When he does this, the situation is

completely revealed and manifested. This much is reasonably clear. What does it mean to say that a situation is totally exerted? Normally we associate exertion primarily with human beings, in a secondary sense with some animals. A student exerts himself cramming for an exam. A football player exerts himself running for the touchdown. A husky might exert himself pulling a dogsled with a heavy load. We would not ordinarily speak of a flower exerting itself. How can a situation which is supposedly something "inert and lifeless" or "nonliving" exert itself? We need a viable example here. Suppose a person sensitive to the beauty of nature takes a walk in the forest. Dōgen could have said that the person responding with all of his sensibilities is exerting himself. Here exerting himself does not mean straining or forcing himself, but rather opening himself up. Responding is never anything passive, but can even be quite strenuous. What about the forest? The response of the person allows the forest to become manifest. This becoming manifest does not mean simply putting in an appearance in some static manner, but entails a dynamic presencing. The forest manifests itself actively, that is, it exerts itself and presences fully.

This situation is an "example" of "the whole being of emptiness leaping out of itself" (*konshinchoshutsu*).¹⁰ The term "example," however, is, strictly speaking, inappropriate here since we are not talking about a particular situation exemplifying some universal. The particular situation *is* the whole. Totality presences in it with nothing left out.

We did not discuss the phrase "without obstruction or contamination." A discussion of "obstruction" will be saved for a later context. "No contamination" simply means that nothing extraneous leaks into the total situation.

Total Dynamism (zenki)

What seems to stand out most about total dynamism is that it is primarily related to birth and death, which certainly constitute, after all, an important part of the most basic structure of existence. Like the dropping-off of the body-mind, birth and death for

Dōgen are in no way transitions, birth being ordinarily conceived as a transition into life and death as a transition and passage out of it. Birth and death never obstruct each other, nor does one birth obstruct any other birth or one death any other death.

This dynamic working (*kikan*) makes birth and death what they truly are. . . . The present moment's birth exists in this dynamic working; dynamic working exists in the present moment's birth. Birth is neither a coming nor a going; birth is neither a manifestation nor a completion. Nonetheless, birth is the presence of total dynamism, death is the presence of total dynamism. (Kim, 242)

Although the present moment's birth exists in this dynamic working and dynamic working exists in the present moment's birth, Dōgen unambiguously asserts the priority of dynamic working over birth and death (it makes them what they truly are). He makes a similar statement in the *Gyōji* fascicle:

We should study that we see birth-and-death in the enactment of the Way; we do not enact the Way in birth-and-death. . . . (195)

Conditioned arising is activity-unremitting, because activity-unremitting is not caused by conditioned arising. (193)

Whatever else Dōgen intended with these kinds of statements, he is attempting to eliminate "humans' petty views" (245). One of the most tenacious of these views is that of a stretch of time between birth and death in which things occur. Birth and death thus constitute a static, extended framework within which various things can happen. A careful study of the *uji*-fascicle should help to undermine our traditional, hopelessly narrow views. There is no temporal duration and, consequently, no

stretch of time in which things occur, no transition from one thing or period to another. Spring is spring and summer is summer; spring does not become summer. Birth is birth and death is death; birth does not become death.

However, we do not wish to become too involved with the question of time at this point. That subject pervades everything that Dōgen wrote, and we shall return to it after investigating the activity of the self as far as we can.

Oddly enough, the meaning of moon (*tsuki*) in the *tsuki*-fascicle is nearly identical to total dynamism (*zenki*). Our metaphysically conditioned minds immediately want to construe "moon" as a symbol, a metaphor for total dynamism, or at least an example of it. But this will not do. In Kim's words,

Since its first ideographic component *tsu* or *to* means "all," "total," etc., and the second component *ki* is as in *zenki* ("total dynamism"), we may well conjecture that Dōgen is here alluding to *zenki* by way of the moon metaphor. . . . Dōgen here relates *nyo* ("like") to *ze* ("this"), evoking the familiar Zen association *nyoze* ("like this," "thusness"). He goes on to draw the implication that "like this" signifies not mere resemblance but the nondual identity of symbol and symbolized. He thus rejects any dualistic notion of metaphor or simile (*hiyu*), whereby an image points to, represents, or approximates something other than itself. Rather, for Dōgen, the symbol itself is the very presence of total dynamism, i.e., it presents. (250–51)

Total dynamism is not some kind of universal that is exemplified or symbolized by the moon. Such a universal does not exist for Dōgen. Rather, moon together with clouds scudding by or moon and the myriad forms it illuminates constitute a dharmasituation that utterly lacks a causal structure. For Dōgen, it is not the case that clouds scudding by cause us to believe that the

moon is moving. There is no hierarchy here or, for that matter, anywhere else in Dōgen's thought. Hierarchy is just another remnant of metaphysical thinking, another form of an *arche* or principle.

As in the fascicle on total dynamism, in the moon-fascicle Dōgen takes up the dharma-situation of a boat in water. It is significant that both fascicles present this situation; this attests to their cohesion. The situation of the boat in water explicitly includes the human being sailing the boat, whereas the situation of moon and scudding clouds does so less explicitly. Without explanation "moon" suddenly becomes "mind-moon." Dōgen's emphasis is always predominantly cosmological; it is never anthropocentric. When speaking of human beings, he is mostly concerned with getting his listeners to distance themselves from the narrow-minded and petty views of humans, and even of gods.

The common theme of the three activities focused on here: total exertion, total dynamism, and activity-unremitting, is the kind of "movement" involved. Words like "activity," "dynamism," and "exertion" indicate that something is "going on." "Dynamism" is too abstract to provide a concrete sense of what Dōgen is trying to convey. We can, however, bear the Greek sense of *dynamis* in mind if we extract it from the Aristotelian schema of *dynamis-energeia*, potentiality-actuality. Potentiality or potency in Dōgen is not geared to actualizing itself. Potency *is* actual. Everything is right now (*nikon*), not off in the future "somewhere."

The Tathagata's statement that "The moon moves when clouds scud, and the shore passes when a boat sails" is such that the "clouds scudding" is the "moon's moving," and the "boat's sailing" is the "shore's passing." Cloud and moon walk and move together, at the same time, on the same path, and have nothing to do with beginning or end, before or after; boat and shore walk and move together, at the same time, on the same path, and have noth-

ing to do with starting or stopping, flowing or returning.”(248–49)

We must face and grapple with the question of what potency is if it is not geared to actualization as its “not yet.” What kind of “movement” is involved in potency? We ordinarily think of movement as something that starts and stops, that begins and ends. We ordinarily think that all movement goes somewhere, makes a transition. This kind of movement presupposes a continuity and a substratum that Dōgen absolutely rejects. Thus, he can state that “‘Clouds’ scudding is not concerned with east, west, south or north” (249). We are not talking about any kind of *direction* or local motion in general. Dōgen presents another situation where our customary way of thinking movement simply cannot apply. That situation is the mountain’s walking. Anyone knows that a mountain is not about to pick itself up and trudge in some direction. The mountain’s “walking” must be of a different sort.

Those who doubt the mountain’s walking do not yet know their own walking. It is not that they do not walk but that they do not know or understand their own walking. (296)

Because we do not understand our own “walking,” we cannot conceive of what it means to say that a mountain walks. And yet we still do walk even though we do not understand this. Thus, we are speaking of some sort of “automatic” or at least non-conscious or non-deliberate activity here. Dōgen also uses the term “working” to describe what the mountain does. This seems somewhat less paradoxical, also less forceful. If for “walking” and “working” we try to substitute “presencing,” this might help to facilitate our understanding. A mountain has a definite presence, as does a person without making a conscious effort. There is a distinct kind of “power” in this presencing that links it to the

dynamis or potency we were trying to bring out. We shall return to this absolutely central issue later.

Activity-unremitting (gyōji)

Like *uji*, being-time, which takes place constantly regardless of the enlightened or unenlightened state of things and persons, total dynamism and activity-unremitting would appear to be constantly at work, whereas total exertion seems at times to be less “automatic,” seems to require some kind of concerted “effort.” Thus, whereas the word “total” in total dynamism would appear to refer to the “universality” of that dynamism, “total” in total exertion appears more to indicate the entirety and wholeness of a single dharma. This is most evident in the phrase “*ippogūjin*,” the total exertion of a single thing, a favorite expression of Dōgen’s.

This is not to say that total exertion is a matter of someone’s “will” or forcible doing; none of these three terms has anything to do with that. Rather, exertion has to do with *enactment*. Enactment is the taking place (*kyōryaku*) or, if you like, the embodiment or bodying of absolute emptiness. Any ordinary everyday position or situation of time (*uji*) takes its place as a dharmasituation through the total exertion enacting absolute emptiness (*sūnyatā*).

To return to activity-unremitting, the working of *gyōji* is the nonsubstantial “foundation” for everything: self, other, the cosmos. Yet we are not merely passive “products” and puppets of this activity; our own working works along with it. “Because of our activity-unremitting the ring of the Way is possessed of its power” (192).

If, as we have asserted, activity-unremitting is constantly active, whether we are aware of it or not, then what is its relationship to the now, to the present moment? A striking parallel can be found here between activity-unremitting and Buddha-nature in their temporal constitution.

Thus ("all existence") is not a being originally existent because it fills the past and present; not a being arising for the first time because it does not receive a single particle of dust; not a being in isolation because it appropriates all; not a being existing without a beginning because "the What presents itself as it is," not a being existing with a beginning because "One's everyday mind is the Way." (68)

All existence cannot be equated with or restricted to an origin; it has not always been there because it is open-ended without any final limit. All existence does not now originate for the first time because it already contains all that can be. All existence does not exist in isolation because it is interdependent. All existence is not without a beginning because it simply is as it is (suchness). All existence does not have a beginning since everyday mind, which is the Way, has always existed.

The present of activity-unremitting is not an original being abiding primordially in one's self nor is the present of activity-unremitting something going from or coming to, entering or leaving, one's self. What we speak of as the present does not exist prior to activity-unremitting; it is called the present in which activity-unremitting realizes itself. (193–94)

The present of activity-unremitting is not something that we inherently possess; nor is it something extraneous to us that enters the scene at some appropriate moment. It does not exist prior to activity-unremitting; it cannot be separated and isolated by itself. This presents something of a dilemma to our minds accustomed to Aristotelian logic. We would like to seize upon one of two alternatives: either something is innate in us, always with us, or we acquire it at some point as it happens to us. But the present of activity-unremitting cannot be bifurcated into a present mo-

ment and an activity-unremitting, both tenuously held together at times by a nebulous “self.” There is no present moment that lacks activity-unremitting, whether we are aware of that activity or not.

The Self as Illusion and Enlightenment

We now return to the last two sentences of our passage from *Genjō-kōan*.

Those who apply illusion to great enlightenment are buddhas; those who have great illusion amid enlightenment are sentient beings. Furthermore, there are persons who attain enlightenment upon enlightenment; there are persons who have more illusion within illusion. (51)

The phrase “those who apply illusion to great enlightenment” refers to buddhas who know how to use illusion and make it work for great enlightenment. For Dōgen, illusion is not nothing and is not useless; it has its own status in reality.

Thus, while encountering this discourse on dreams in dreams, those who try to eschew the Buddha-way think that some nonexistent phantasms are unreasonably believed to exist and that illusions are piled up on top of illusions. This is not true. Even though delusions are multiplied in the midst of delusions, you should certainly ponder upon the path of absolute freedom (*tshūshī no ro*) in which absolute freedom is apprehended as the very consummation of delusions (*madoi no ue no madoi*).¹¹

It is not the case that there are two mutually exclusive states: enlightenment and illusion. Enlightenment and illusion cannot be separated. Dōgen reinterpreted the statement in the Nirvana Sutra: “all beings have the Buddha-nature” to mean: “all beings

are the Buddha-nature." We are all fundamentally enlightened. This was Dōgen's own "personal" kōan. If we possess the Buddha-nature already, what need is there for practice? To give a somewhat limping analogy, the Buddha-nature might be compared to a great talent or gift. Suppose that Mozart had decided to become a banker and had never received any musical training or even exposure to music. Mozart undeniably had one of the greatest of musical gifts, and yet it is conceivable that he might never have had the opportunity to develop that gift. Without practice and realization the gift remains dormant. We would be left with a tragic waste.

Now, what does it mean to have great illusion amid enlightenment? It goes without saying that the reflections offered in this study at best point out one of many possible interpretations of Dōgen's rich text which can never be exhausted by some non-indigenous contemporary effort.

To have great illusion amid enlightenment could mean that someone is deluded about their supposed enlightenment, that someone is convinced that he is enlightened, whereas, in fact, he is not. Probably Zen masters' experience abounds with such examples. The expressions "Zen sickness," "the stink of Zen" confirm the fact that there has been an ample supply of such cases. The most poisonous kind of ego-pride is spiritual pride.

This might also be applicable to the last statement in our passage: There are persons who have more illusion within illusion. To have more illusion within illusion might well mean that a person has no idea that he is deluded. A person who realizes that he is deluded is no longer completely within the realm of illusion. As Socrates remarked, he knew that he knew nothing. In part this remark was ironical. Nobody ever got the best of Socrates in an argument or a discussion. But on a more profound level, Socrates meant this seriously. After all, when it comes to ultimate questions none of us ordinary mortals knows anything.

Finally, we come to the last remaining statement: there are persons who attain enlightenment upon enlightenment. The basic

sense of this would appear to be that of no attachment to enlightenment, ultimate freedom from the idea of something labeled “enlightenment.”

Attaining enlightenment beyond enlightenment is also characterized as going beyond the Buddha. In the fascicle bearing that title (*Bukkōjōji*) Dōgen writes:

This one who goes beyond the Buddha is the “non-Buddha.” When you are asked what the non-Buddha is like, just consider: We do not call him/her the non-Buddha because s/he exists before the Buddha, nor do we call him/her the non-Buddha because s/he exists after the Buddha; nor is s/he the non-Buddha because s/he out-reaches the Buddha. S/he is the non-Buddha only because s/he goes beyond the Buddha. This non-Buddha is known as such because s/he drops off the Buddha’s countenance and because s/he drops off the Buddha’s body-mind.¹²

“Going beyond” is not to be considered as any kind of transcendence in the traditional sense. The whole import of Dōgen’s key term “dropping off” is diametrically opposed to “climbing over” (*trans-cendere*) and refreshingly obviates meta-physics, trans-meta-physics, meta-meta-meta-physics and the whole business of “meta” of which it is to be fervently hoped we have truly had our philosophical fill. Kim’s footnote is helpful here.

The process of going beyond the Buddha is not a matter of temporal sequence any more than it is one of spatial juxtaposition. The “beyond” defies any static spatial or temporal analogies. This view is quite consistent with Dōgen’s notion of temporal passage (*kyōryaku*). Elsewhere in this fascicle he writes: “This process of going beyond the Buddha is to reach the Buddha while advancing to meet the Buddha anew.”¹³

Again, we postpone discussion of temporal passage (*kyōryaku*) until a later point when we shall take up the question of being-time (*uji*) pervading all of Dōgen's writings.

When you have unsurpassed wisdom, you are called buddha. When a buddha has unsurpassed wisdom, it is called unsurpassed wisdom. Not to know what it is like on this path is foolish. What it is like is to be unstained. To be unstained does not mean that you try forcefully to exclude intention or discrimination, or that you establish a state of nonintention. Being unstained cannot be intended or discriminated at all.

Being unstained is like meeting a person and not considering what he looks like. Also it is like not wishing for more color or brightness when viewing flowers or the moon.¹⁴

Being unstained is not something that can be consciously willed or brought about; any intention simply precludes it. Dōgen says that being unstained is like meeting a person and not considering what he looks like. Mostly when we meet someone, particularly for the first time, but also subsequently in a different way, we "take stock" and "keep score." What strikes us are categories and above all numbers: how old the person is, whether thin or fat, what color hair and eyes, plus ensuing informational data such as profession or job, how much his or her salary is, what kind of house he or she lives in, married or single, children *ad infinitum malum*. We should just meet a person as he is in his suchness without considering all the categories and numbers which have little or nothing to do with who that "person" is. After all, person comes from *personare*, to sound through, whence comes the idea of *persona* or mask. We want to meet "what sounds through."

Similarly, we should not wish for more color in the flowers or more brightness in the moon, This "more" is our idealized cate-

gory, and misses the flowers and the moon in their suchness, their as-it-is-ness. Overpainting the landscape ruins the painting. Or one can perhaps see this as-it-is-ness in a small child before it has become self-conscious. It just *is*, and that is its utter charm.

Spring has the tone of spring, and autumn has the tone of autumn; there is no escaping it. So when you want spring or autumn to be different from what it is, notice that it can only be as it is. Or when you want to keep spring or autumn as it is, reflect that it has no unchanging nature.¹⁵

Dōgen chooses the most volatile and transitional seasons of the year, the seasons where we are most apt to notice nature. Winter and summer seem to be more stable, even somewhat static. But if I want autumn to be spring and not autumn, I am simply deluding myself and lose the reality of what is. And if I want to hang onto spring, keep it and not let it give way to summer, I have failed to realize that nothing can have an unchanging nature. Impermanence *is* Buddha-nature.

That which is accumulated is without self, and no mental activity has self. The reason is not that one of the four great elements or the five *skandhas* can be understood as self or identified as self. Therefore, the form of the flowers or the moon in your mind should not be understood as being self, even though you think it is self. Still, when you clarify that there is nothing to be disliked or longed for, then the original face is revealed by your practice of the Way.¹⁶

Here Dōgen eliminates both the physical and mental components (the four great elements and the five *skandhas*—that which is accumulated) and also specific mental activity such as representing images of flowers or the moon as envisioned by something like the self. This is a more detailed and explicit way of describing the dropping off of body and mind. Whereas Plato had

singled out the immortal soul as what is real, as what is the self, and had denigrated the body to being “the prison of the soul” (*Phaedo* 81 e), Dōgen wants to free one from *both* body and mind. What we think of as our mind, the mental activity and representation going on more or less automatically in our heads is not what we truly are, is not the self. It, too, must be dropped off. Take, for example, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. This enormous book describes what went on in one man’s head during a period of twenty-four hours. Can we therefore say that this is what the man is?

Also learn that the entire universe is the dharma body of the self. To seek to know the self is invariably the wish of living beings. However, those who see the true self are rare. Only buddhas know the true self.

People outside the way regard what is not the self as the self. But what buddhas call the self is the entire universe. Therefore, there is never an entire universe that is not the self, with or without our knowing it. On this matter defer to the words of the ancient buddhas.¹⁷

Dōgen is keenly aware that he is writing for students of the Way, not for enlightened buddhas. He is concerned with what those students understand and do not understand, and admonishes them again and again:

Yet the ancient buddha’s word cannot be mistaken. Even if you do not understand it, you should not ignore it. So, be determined to understand it. Since this word is already expounded, you should listen to it. Listen until you understand.¹⁸

Any performing musician knows that he has to practice until he “gets it right.” How many students of philosophy and religion realize that they ought to do the same?

The self is the entire universe. Is this not an outlandish, far-fetched and trumped-up statement? Not at all. We all begin by thinking that this particular being that I myself am is the self. But the true self is formless. Thus, *it cannot be a being*. This is extremely difficult to fathom because all we know and talk about are specific beings. This was Martin Heidegger's gargantuan difficulty with regard to the question of being. He knew that being can never be a being (ontological difference), he also brought being very close to nothingness (the veil of being) on various occasions, but he was never able to follow the radicality of the Buddhist approach—to present a “positive” dimension of nothingness, admittedly a very difficult thing to do.

What is not the self is this particular being that I think I am. Even the Upanishads say that the Self is *neti, neti*, not this particular being, not that particular being, not a being at all. And, of course, the Buddha himself taught that all beings have no self (*anatman*). But this does not mean that the self is nothing, which would commit the sin of nihilism, just as the opposing statement that the self is a real, permanent being commits the sin of permanence or eternalism.

After explaining that fish always know one another's heart, unlike people who do not know one another's heart, and stating that a bird can see traces of hundreds and thousands of small birds whereas beasts have no conception of what traces in the sky are, Dōgen goes on:

Buddhas are like this. You may wonder how many lifetimes buddhas have been practicing. Buddhas large and small, although they are countless, all know their own traces. You never know a buddha's trace when you are not a buddha.

You may wonder why you do not know. The reason is that, while buddhas see these traces with a buddha's eye, those who are not buddhas do not have a buddha's eye, and just notice the buddha's attributes.

All who do not know should search out the trace of a buddha's path. If you find footprints, you should investigate whether they are the buddha's. On being investigated, the buddha's trace is known; and whether it is long or short, shallow or deep, is also known. To illuminate your trace is accomplished by studying the buddha's trace. Accomplishing this is buddha-dharma.¹⁹

In contrast to the usual meaning of "trace" as residue, something left over or behind, a kind of defilement, to know the Buddha's trace is to know his path, to know where he has gone. After all, Dōgen's examples of fish knowing where fish are going and birds knowing one another's traces do not constitute "traces" that any of us can discern.

We cannot see the Buddha's traces because we see the Buddha from the outside. All we see are attributes, not traces. This should remind us of the passage previously discussed about meeting a person and not considering what he looks like. This is to be unstained.

"Traces" may also remind us of the Oxherding pictures in which a boy first catches sight of the footprints of the ox and thus begins his quest for the true self. Before he saw the footprints he might well have not known that there was anything to look for.

The Self as Buddha-nature

Concentrating mainly on the Buddha-nature fascicle with occasional passages from elsewhere, we now want to explore to a certain extent what Dōgen says about the self as Buddha-nature. Probably the most obvious thing about Buddha-nature is the fact that it does not coincide with the individual ego-self. But the traditional Western and Hindu alternative, that is, to say that the Buddha-nature is a Universal Self will not do either. The matter is far more subtle and more difficult.

They [many students] think vainly that the Buddha-nature's enlightenment and awakening is the same as the conscious mind which is only the movement of wind and fire. But who has said that there is in the Buddha-nature enlightenment and awakening! Although enlightened ones and awakened ones are buddhas, still the Buddha-nature is neither enlightenment nor awakening in the ordinary sense.²⁰

If the student attempts to look into his mind, and this is what he is instructed to do if he is not to search for the Buddha-nature outside of himself, what he encounters is the ordinary mind's reactions to what is going on around him. In other words, in spite of his attempt to "turn within," he is still "outside." Actually, the very fact that he is representing an "outside" and an "inside" dualistically, shows that he is getting nowhere. He is trying to enter what Heidegger called "the cabinet of consciousness." However, as Heidegger showed throughout *Being and Time*, we are always already "out there" (in the world). This is the meaning of ek-sistence and ek-stasis. The cabinet of consciousness is a Cartesian construct.

It has often happened that . . . those who have been teachers to men and devas . . . have, many of them, thought that the wind and fire movement of man's conscious mind is the Buddha-nature's enlightenment. It is to be pitied, that such a blunder occurred because they have not paid sufficient heed to the study of the Way.

Advanced students and beginners in the Buddha Way must not make this mistake now. Even though you may study enlightenment, enlightenment is not the wind and fire movement of the conscious mind. Even though you study movement, it is not what you think it is. If you can understand movement in its truth, then you can also understand true enlightenment and awakening.²¹

A kind of “everyday” kōan is the question: Who am I? In Zen this is often expressed as: Where do you come from? This, of course, is not a question about geography; it is a question about the self. Even in contemporary slang when someone says: I know where you are coming from, this means basically that he knows “where” and who the person *is*.

When the Sixth Chinese Patriarch Ta-chien Ch’an-shih of Ts’ao-hsi shan first went to practice under the Fifth Patriarch of Huang-mei shan, he was asked, “Where do you come from?” He answered, “I am a man of Ling-nan.” The Fifth Patriarch said, “What have you come for?” “I’ve come to become a Buddha,” he replied. The Fifth Patriarch said, “People of Ling-nan have no Buddha-nature. How could you attain Buddhahood?”²²

Dōgen interprets this to mean, not that people from Ling-nan have no Buddha-nature, but that the Sixth Patriarch is no-Buddha-nature. This is similar to his interpretation of the Nirvana Sutra’s saying, “All sentient beings without exception have the Buddha-nature,” to mean all beings or whole being is the Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is nothing that we possess already or that we acquire through practice; the Buddha-nature is manifested at the very moment of attainment. The categories of our logical, conceptual thinking compel us to ask: either we always possess it or else we first acquire it through attainment. Many of the kōans, especially the one about polishing a tile, stress the impossibility of acquiring or becoming the Buddha-nature. It just flashes up at the moment of our seeing. Seeing and flashing up are one sudden, instantaneous “event.” We shall return to this crucial point in a discussion of form and emptiness. Emptiness is not an entity; it is manifest only in form. Similarly, the Buddha-nature is no entity whatsoever; it manifests itself only in seeing.

Another way of asking who someone is or where he comes from is to ask his name.

Then, when he [the Fifth patriarch] was seven years old, while on the way to Huang-mei mountain, he met the Fourth Patriarch Ta-i, who saw that although he was still a child, his physiognomy was excellent and unusual, different from that of ordinary children. The patriarch asked him, "What is your name?" The boy replied, "There is a name, but it is not an ordinary name." The master said, "What name is it?" "It is Buddha-nature," said the boy. The patriarch said, "You have no Buddha-nature." The boy replied, "You say no (Buddha-nature) because Buddha-nature is emptiness."²³

When asked for his name, the boy does not reply that he *has* a name, but states that *there is* a name, that is, Buddha-nature. The master flatly retorts that the boy has no Buddha-nature. But the boy, instead of being rebuked or defeated by that remark, replies that he "has" no-Buddha-nature because Buddha-nature is emptiness. Here again "no-Buddha-nature" must be understood to lie beyond the opposition of Buddha-nature versus no-Buddha nature.

Dōgen continues:

You must without fail devote yourself to the truth of "no-Buddha-nature," never remitting your efforts. No-Buddha-nature has to be traced perplexingly, yet it does have a touchstone: "What." It has a time: "You." There is entering into its dynamic functioning: "Affirmation." . . .

The Fifth Patriarch said, "You say no (Buddha-nature) because Buddha-nature is emptiness." This clearly and distinctly articulates the truth: that is, emptiness is not, "no." But in uttering "Buddhanature-emptiness," one says "no." One does not say "half a pound" or "eight ounces." One does not say emptiness, because it is emptiness. One does not say no because it is no. One says no because it is Buddhanature-emptiness.