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Enlightenment in Dōgen's Zen

by Francis H. Cook

Writing and teaching in the thirteenth century, the Japanese Zen master, Dōgen Kigen, had the advantage of looking back at eighteen centuries of the development of Buddhist thought and practice. He was particularly well informed in earlier Chinese Zen developments. His writings show that he was on intimate terms with the great teachers of the Chinese lineages, with Zen literature, and with the issues that occupied Chinese Buddhists. It is therefore particularly worthwhile to read his writings about practice, the nature of enlightenment, and the like, because we can see in them how he appropriated almost the entire tradition and remolded it with his genius. On the one hand, all his writings echo with the words of Hui-neng, Chao-chou, Yün-men, and other greats; on the other hand, we are struck with the startling depth and subtlety of his own thought as he often goes far beyond his predecessors. To read his works is to understand why he is considered to be Japan's most original thinker to date.

With this in mind, it is surprising that he did not respond directly to the ancient controversy concerning whether enlightenment is gradual or sudden. As is the case with the question of the importance of faith 信, for instance, no essay in the *Shōbōgenzō* is devoted to this issue of the suddenness or gradualness of the enlightenment experience, despite the very great importance in his writing of *satori* 悟 or *shō* 証. However, there is in *Shōbōgenzō* abundant material whose cumulative weight can supply an answer to this question, with which Dōgen never—directly at least—concerned himself in his extensive writings.

The confusion of Western orientalists concerning the issue of gradual versus sudden enlightenment is nowhere more evident than when they write about training and enlightenment in

Dōgen's Zen. In one recently published book, it is said that "The aristocratic priest Dōgen (1200–1253) who left the Tendai monastery for China and returned to establish the meditative, *gradual school* of Sōtō Zen is generally considered the second founder of Japanese Zen"¹ [my emphasis]. In another recent book, which is designed as a college textbook on world religions, we find the statement that "By contrast [to Eisai] Dogen derived his version of Zen from the Northern school [in China], with its doctrine of gradual enlightenment." The author adds, ". . . Dogen was especially opposed to sudden enlightenment or enlightenment as something apart from meditation."² Another author of a book on Buddhist philosophy says, "These two sects [Northern and Southern Chinese Zen] were probably the forerunners of the two main streams of Zen that flourished later in both China and Japan. The Tsao-tung sect, which advocated 'silent illumination' and which probably was inspired by the Northern sect and its Yogācāra ideas, came to be known as the Sōtō sect of Japanese Zen."³ These remarks are surprising, since it is generally known that the Northern school, with its so-called teaching of gradual enlightenment, died out after several generations, leaving the field to the Southern school of sudden enlightenment. *All* of the later lineages, such as the Lin-chi and Tsao-tung, are descended from Hui-neng's Southern school, and a number of lineage charts in Japanese and Western sources show clearly that Dōgen's line is traced back through Yüeh-shan Wei-yen, Shih-t'ou, and Ch'ing-yüan Hsing-ssu to Hui-neng.⁴ Thus, the question is why Western scholars categorize Dōgen's Zen as a form of the Chinese Northern school and as advocating a form of gradual enlightenment. Part of my purpose is to demonstrate that this categorization is incorrect.

It is not hard to see why some writers believe that Dōgen was a representative of a lineage that promoted gradual enlightenment, because at first glance, the Sōtō style does seem to be a gradualistic approach to enlightenment. Dōgen's insistence on a lifetime of zazen practice in contrast to the dramatic *kōan* approach of Rinzai Zen seems to point to a relaxed, leisurely approach, lacking in the strenuousness and intensity of Rinzai practice; but to see this as a gradual approach is to miss the intensity of zazen practice. Connected with this, there is the

characterization of Sōtō Zen as based on “enlightenment from the beginning” in contrast to Rinzai’s “enlightenment with a beginning,” and the assumption may be that the former stresses a gradual growth in enlightenment while the latter stresses a sudden accession to it. However, this is to overlook what is meant by “enlightenment from the beginning.” Other catch-phrases may also give a wrong impression. D.T. Suzuki’s characterization of Rinzai as “koan introspection Zen” in contrast with Sōtō “silent illumination” may play some part in the misunderstanding. The characterization of Sōtō as “farmer Zen” as opposed to Rinzai as “Genralissimo Zen” also seems to connote a leisurely, progressive approach on the part of Sōtō.

All of the above characterizations make some sense and logically lead to the assumption that Sōtō Zen is a gradual approach to enlightenment, if zazen meditation practice is conceived as a *means* which results in an eventual enlightenment. That is, the notion of meditation, as opposed to *kōan* practice, as well as the various catch-phrases used to characterize Sōtō Zen, all give the impression of a lengthy, progressive self-purification that will in theory culminate in the self-transformation called enlightenment. That, however, is where part of the problem lies in the usual interpretation of Dōgen’s tradition, because zazen meditation is not instrumental in nature, and while there are in fact gradualistic elements in his teaching, there also is an important suddenist orientation, which is explained in terms other than the emphasis on a lifetime of meditation. Also, part of the problem is due to thinking of the enlightenment experience as a temporal matter; part of my argument is that time is not a consideration as far as enlightenment in Dōgen’s Zen is concerned.

First, it needs to be noted that despite the eventual Chinese consensus to the effect that enlightenment is sudden, the principle of gradual enlightenment was held by some Buddhists, primarily in India, but also to some extent in China. The systems of the *Abhidharmakośa* and Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga* are definitely gradualist, laying out a long and strenuous program of moral development (*śīla*), meditation practices that in themselves are gradual in consisting of preliminary tranquillity exercises (*śamatha-bhavana*) followed by insight practices (*vipāśyanā-bhavana*), and culminating in *prajñā*, the latter being a

moment-by-moment, progressive insight into the validity of the four holy truths and the three marks of conditioned being. The *Kośa* points to the progressive nature of the whole *mārga* when it says that “La pensée parfumé par le *śamatha* (calme) peut obtenir par la *vipāśyanā* la *vimukti*. . . .”⁵ This means that insight is preceded by tranquillity, which is the necessary condition for the former. In the *vipāśyanā* practices, the obstacles previously anesthetized or tranquilized in *śamatha* are definitively destroyed one by one, as the meditator little by little perceives the reality of the four holy truths and the three (or four) marks of the conditioned. Consequently, the grasp of truth takes place piecemeal and progressively during the insight practices, and this insight gained in the course of insight practice, along with the corollary destruction of defilements (*kleśa*), is the content of enlightenment. Therefore, enlightenment, defined as insight into the four holy truths and the marks of the conditioned, is gradual.

The meditation practices outlined above reflect characteristic Indian attitudes towards ritual defilement. There lurks in the background as a tacit presupposition a gnostic-like view of man as essentially a pure, luminescent being trapped in the gross material world of embodied form and natural functions. Liberation is usually defined as freedom from the body and its demands, which are conceived as obstacles to liberation from which freedom is demanded. Given the corollary view that these material and psychic obstacles are numerous and tenacious, much time is required for their removal. Often, many lifetimes are necessary for the complete removal of the obstacles.

Mahāyāna Buddhism redefined the nature of the religious goal to a great extent. No longer was *viśuddhi*, purification, the object; rather the goal was *prajñā*, understood as the perception of universal emptiness. *Prajñā*-insight is understood as a *sudden* perception of the nature of existence in its universal emptiness, and this includes the nature of moral and cognitive faults (*kleśa*). In the realization of the emptiness of these faults, the necessity of their gradual, piecemeal removal was eliminated, for they all vanished at one blow with the grasp of emptiness. Now, although this perception is sudden, the Indian debaters at the Council of Lhasa argued that progress is gradual,

opposing the suddenist position of the Chinese delegate, "Mahāyāna."⁶ Why?

It appears from the documents that come down from the debate that the issue was not whether the transformative event of enlightenment *per se* is sudden and total but rather whether it is necessary to undergo a preliminary moral and cognitive purification prior to the sudden ascension to enlightenment. Kamalaśīla, for instance, argues in opposition to the Chinese suddenist position that one must be thoroughly accomplished in the ten pāramitās, which include mastery of moral, ethical, practical, and intellectual qualities, and in this he bases himself on Indian scriptural and exegetical literature. A number of Mahāyāna texts, such as the *Daśabhūmika* and *Samādhinirmocana* sūtras, dwell at great length on the six or ten stages of Bodhisattva practice, each with its corresponding pāramitā. The latter work, in fact, correlates each of the *bhūmis* with a pāramitā and with a *vipaśyanā*-insight practice, and then discusses how the insight meditation of each stage acts as an antidote to such-and-such a *kleśa*, *vikalpa* (discursive thought), etc.⁷ Gradualism is evident in this schema. Aside from the question of the nature of the culminating enlightenment, a considerable part of the debates in Tibet and China seem to focus on the necessity of this preliminary, progressive preparation for the culminating moment.

It is entirely possible that the opponents in this debate would have agreed that enlightenment itself is always and necessarily sudden, given its nature. T.R.V. Murti makes the point that

The Mādhyamika conception of Philosophy as the perfection of wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*) (non-dual, contentless intuition) precludes progress and surprise. Progress implies that the goal is reached progressively by a series of steps in order, and that it can be measured in quantitative terms. *Prajñā* is knowledge of the entire reality once for all, and it does not depend on . . . previous knowledge. A progressive realization of the Absolute is thus incompatible. . . . It is, however, possible to conceive of the progressive falling away of the hindrances that obstruct our vision of the real. But there is neither order nor addition in the content of our knowledge of the real.⁸

Murti's acknowledgement of the possible necessity for a progressive removal of *obstacles* to enlightenment reflects the dominant Indian conception of the religious path: first purification, then release. It is an essentially conservative position and in stark contrast to the Chinese radicals who, to state it simply, did not believe in the necessity of preliminary purification. Others, including Walter Liebenthal, have argued that "No school called itself 'gradual.'"⁹ The reason is that all were well-enough versed in the essentials to know that, by its nature, enlightenment had to be a sudden, once-and-for-all matter. Still, the Indians, and some Chinese, held to the necessity of a progressive removal of obstacles to the goal. Others, like Tao-sheng (5th century), put forth a novel view based on an entirely different set of assumptions.

Chinese Buddhism underwent several important developments, which eventually resulted in a distinctive approach to practice and enlightenment. One of the most important was a sort of phenomenological approach to the question of the nature of enlightenment and its relationship to those activities usually categorized as practice (as distinct from the objective of the practice), and there emerged a view of enlightenment that deviated from that of Indian Buddhists. According to the Chinese view, the meditating mind-body in its serenity, selflessness, and absence of conceptualizing and evaluating, is itself, *at that very time*, in a state that exhibits the characteristics of enlightenment. Consequently, there is no qualitative break between samādhi and prajñā, which is what the author of the *Platform Sutra* seems to mean when he says,

Good friends, how then are meditation and wisdom alike? They are like the lamp and the light it gives forth. If there is a lamp, there is light; if there is no lamp, there is no light. The lamp is the substance of the light; the light is the function of the lamp. Thus, although they have two names, *in substance* they are not two. Meditation [*ting*] and wisdom [*hui*] are also like this¹⁰ [emphasis mine].

This important passage from the *T'an ching* says in the most explicit terms that means and end, samādhi and prajñā, are in fact the same thing, and in fact not means and ends at all. Rather, with recourse to the common *t'i-yung* (substance and

function) pattern of thinking that pervades so much of Chinese thought, the argument is made that meditation, or samādhi, is not a separate thing, but, rather, the *modal* expression of the substance that is innate prajñā. Shen-hui claims that both meditation and wisdom are identical, each being an alternate expression for the crucial state of *wu-nien* 無念.¹¹ *Wu-nien*, *wu-hsin* 無心, the mind that does not dwell on dharmas, the mind that does not abide anywhere, is what is meant by Buddha-mind, and such a mind is the distinguishing characteristic of both meditation and wisdom.

The same understanding will appear later in the writings of Dōgen, albeit in a radicalized and novel form, and the language of substance and function will appear in similar form. In both the *T'an ching* and the *Shōbōgenzō*, the basic idea is the same, and is rooted in the impeccable sources of Mahāyāna: stated one way, it is a denial of plural substances or essences, because to see something as a mode of something else is to deny real, substantial differences between the two and to affirm a single reality that manifests or is expressed in various ways. In both the *T'an ching* and *Shōbōgenzō*, samādhi-meditation is the way or form that prajñā takes. Stated another way, all things are empty, absolute nonbeing, and meditation is merely one way in which emptiness negates itself in the form of time-space.

A little later than the *Platform Sutra*, Ch'an master Hui-hai remarked,

Should your mind wander away, do not follow it, whereupon your wandering mind will stop wandering of its own accord. Should your mind desire to linger somewhere, do not follow it and linger there, whereupon your mind's questing for a dwelling place will cease of its own accord. Thereby, you will come to possess a nondwelling mind, a mind which remains in the state of nondwelling. If you are fully aware in yourself of a mind dwelling on nothing, you will discover that there is just the fact of dwelling, with nothing to dwell upon or not to dwell upon. This full awareness in yourself of a mind dwelling upon nothing is known as having a clear perception of your own nature. A mind which dwells upon nothing is Buddha-mind. . . .¹²

In this passage, the author makes a significant series of correlations: the meditative state of not dwelling on dharmas is said to

be a perception of one's own nature, and that same state of nondwelling is Buddha-mind.

This understanding that the mind in samādhi is itself Buddha-mind seems to be reflected in the position taken by the monk, "Mahāyāna," in the Tibet debates, for in defending the idea of sudden enlightenment he rings a series of changes on a common theme. Buddha-nature rests at the bottom of our being and is revealed when false thoughts are no longer entertained.¹³ It suffices to separate oneself from false notions in order to be integrally furnished with the 37 components of enlightenment (*bodhi-pakṣa*).¹⁴ "When a single sense faculty returns to its source, the whole six sense faculties are liberated" (a quotation from the *Sūramgama Sūtra*).¹⁵

A second Chinese development is a corollary of the point made above, and supports it. If the goal is a certain quality of consciousness characteristic of samādhi and not a separate, transcendent state following samādhi, what counts practically is the ability to achieve significant, rapid results in meditation. In the Chinese way of seeing things, some people seem to have a natural talent for rapid progress, while others lack it. Why this is so was frequently explained by recourse to the handy doctrine of a stock of merit accumulated in previous lifetimes. The observation that talents differ is reflected in Tao-sheng's tendency to speak of sudden enlightenment as great 大 and small 小.¹⁶ It is significant that while enlightenment is *always* sudden, some people attain sudden enlightenment quickly and others take a much longer time to achieve the same sudden enlightenment. The first type of individual is large, the second is small. The main point is, though, that enlightenment is sudden for both types; there is no gradual enlightenment. Also, however, while some take much time—even lifetimes—to prepare for the sudden enlightenment, others do not need the lengthy preparation. Their abilities being great, they quickly achieve samādhi and, consequently, enlightenment. The scriptural source for this understanding of enlightenment is the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*: "One attains nirvāṇa without destroying the moral and intellectual faults" (*kleśa*) and "without destroying the conditioned." In other words, enlightenment is possible without a preliminary program of moral training and rejection of the conditioned world of birth and death. The Indian rejoins-

der to the Chinese position at the Lhasa debates indicates what troubled the Indians, with their assumptions about the necessary process of becoming purified and enlightened. The Indians insisted on an adherence to the teachings of the twelfold scriptures and on a rigorous training in the pāramitās. The Chinese keep insisting that while all that is necessary for those of slight abilities, it is not for those who are talented and capable. This distinction seems to reflect Tao-sheng's categories of great and small abilities.

There are other important developments besides the two mentioned above, such as the prominence in Chinese Buddhism of the doctrine of Buddha-nature. It is important for the way in which the Chinese translated Indian Buddhism into a native form, but it lies beyond the scope of this paper. With these basic assumptions, the belief in an immediate sudden enlightenment is possible. If Buddha-mind—the Absolute—is the absolute, it can have no gradations or parts, and must be acquired or actualized totally and at once. "Those who believe in Instantaneous Illumination declare that *li* is indivisible and that *wu* 悟 expresses that experience (in which *li* appears) in one final vision. As *li* is indivisible, there cannot be two acts in which it appears."¹⁷ Moreover, Buddha mind (or *li*) is defined as nondelusive, nondiscriminative consciousness. To achieve this state in samādhi in which the mind, like a bright mirror that reflects images clearly and without distortion, does not discriminate or evaluate, is to actualize or "see" one's Buddha-nature. Finally, some may do this very quickly and others may take a very long time, but the resultant enlightenment is always sudden and total.

By the end of the eighth century, a number of Buddhist writings reflected the understanding of the nature of enlightenment described above, and they put forth the idea, in sharp contrast to the orthodox Indian view, that enlightenment is achieved at the very commencement of Buddhist practice. Thus, for instance, Shen-hui says, in the ninth century,

If in the first stage of one's spiritual progress which consists of the ten assurances 信, in one's initial resolve to seek perfect wisdom, an instant of thought corresponds with the truth, one will immediately achieve Buddhahood. . . . This clarifies the mystery of sudden enlightenment.¹⁸

Thus, enlightenment does not occur at the end of the 52 stages (in the system of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*). Instead, it is achieved during the stages of assurance, which are the first ten of the 52 stages, when one first resolves to seek enlightenment (*bodhicit-toṭpāda*). Somewhat earlier, Fa-tsang, the third patriarch of the philosophical Hua-yen school, claimed exactly the same, basing his arguments on the Hua-yen doctrine of the identity of cause and effect. Quoting the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, he says, "The Bodhisattva who arouses the thought of enlightenment for the first time is a Buddha" (*Taishō* vol. 9, p. 452). Why?

Because of the wonderful principle of dependent origination prior and subsequent are all the same. If the prior is obtained, the subsequent is obtained. When the end is finished, then one penetrates to the bottom of the beginning.

Also quoting the sūtra, he says,

The Bodhisattva who puts forth the thought of enlightenment for the first time is identical with the Buddha, equal to all the *tathāgatas* of the three time periods, . . . he acquires the one body or ten bodies of the *tathāgatas* and the uniform wisdom of the Buddhas of the three time periods. (*Taishō* 9.425)¹⁹

The above remarks concerning the Chinese view of sudden enlightenment serve only as a preamble to the central concern of this paper, which is the nature of enlightenment in the Zen master Dōgen's writings. They are necessitated because of the requirement to put his teachings in a proper perspective, since he was not only an innovator but also an inheritor of the continental tradition. His own contributions to teaching concerning enlightenment, therefore, can only be properly appreciated against the background of his predecessors and their remarks on the subject. The keystone of his teaching on the subject is the doctrine of intrinsic, universal Buddhahood, and with this as a basis, he develops his unique teaching concerning practice and enlightenment. This is expressed in several key terms in his writing: *genjō-kōan* (the presencing of things as they are 現成公案) *zenki* (total dynamic functioning 全機), and *gū-jin* (total penetration 究盡). These are only understandable in

the light of the fundamental concept of intrinsic Buddha-nature.

However, the term that best expresses Dōgen's approach to the religious life is *shushō ittō* 修証一等, which translates as the "oneness of practice and enlightenment," and which is very similar to the concept of the oneness of *ting* and *hui* in the *Platform Sūtra*. Its *locus classicus* is the seventh question-and-answer exchange in the *Bendōwa*. In reply to the question, "As for the practice of *zazen*, those who have not yet realized the Buddha Dharma achieve it by negotiating it by means of *zazen*. What is the use of *zazen* for someone who has already achieved the Buddha Dharma?" Dōgen replies,

To think that practice and enlightenment are not identical [不一] is a non-Buddhist view. In the Buddha Dharma, practice and realization are one [一等]. Because your practice right now is practice based on realization 証上の修, the training of the beginner is the totality of intrinsic realization. Therefore, even though you are instructed to practice, do not think that there is any attainment outside of practice itself, because practice must be considered to point directly to intrinsic realization. Because realization is already realization based on practice 修上の証, the realization is boundless; if practice is practice based on realization, practice has no beginning. In this way, Sākyamuni and Mahākāśyapa both practiced the practice of realization daily, and Bodhidharma and Hui-neng were likewise drawn to practice based on enlightenment. All the examples of the patriarchs are similar. Since there is no practice apart from attainment, we are fortunate in directly transmitting a portion of wonderful practice, and therefore even the beginner's negotiation of the Way is the acquisition of one portion of intrinsic enlightenment.²⁰

The term *shushō ittō*, or *shushō ichi-nyo*, seems to occur only in *Bendōwa*, but there are many passages throughout *Shōbōgenzō*, addressing the question of the relationship between practice and realization, which reflect the approach of the *Bendōwa* passage and clarify it. In *Fukan zazengi*, Dōgen's first piece of writing, where universal (*fukan*) recommendations for practice are presented, the author says,

That which we call zazen is not a way of developing concentration. It is simply the way of peace and wellbeing. It is practice which measures your *satori* to the fullest and in fact is *satori* itself. It is the presencing of things just as they are [*genjō-kōan*] and in it you will no longer be trapped as in a basket or cage. . . . Know that the Dharma is itself present and that confusion and distraction are eliminated right from the beginning.²¹

This passage clearly expresses the relationship between practice and attainment as Dōgen understood it: practice is not a means to enlightenment or attainment, but is that which measures, or actualizes, one's *already existent enlightenment*. In fact, says Dōgen, zazen practice is enlightenment. The preceding passage from *Bendōwa* expresses the same relationship, speaking in terms of identity, nondualism, etc. In both passages, it is said that practice is an expression of intrinsic realization (again echoing the modal language of the *Platform Sūtra*), and actual realization is an expression of practice. Practice—specifically zazen—is merely the way in which intrinsic realization manifests itself in time and space. Realization, on the other hand, takes the form of objectivity, dispassion, clarity, and a sense of being totally “here now” in the activity of zazen. Consequently, though a distinction is made between practice and realization, when one is present, the other is also present. In terms of the traditional distinction between intrinsic enlightenment and acquired enlightenment, in which the latter has been seen as a means whereby the former is nourished and developed, in Dōgen's view, intrinsic enlightenment is acquired enlightenment, and vice-versa.

A further clarification occurs in an important passage from the *Sesshin sesshō* chapter of *Shōbōgenzō*:

As for the Buddha Way, when one first arouses the thought [of enlightenment], it is enlightenment; when one achieves perfect enlightenment, it is enlightenment. First, last, and in between are all enlightenment. . . . The foolish think that at the time one is studying the Way one does not attain enlightenment, but that only when one has acquired *satori* is it enlightenment. They do not understand that, when one musters one's entire mind and body and practices the Buddha Way, this is the entirety of the Buddha Way.²²

Here, it is expressly denied that enlightenment occurs as a distinct event at the end of the whole eons-long career of the Bodhisattva. Enlightenment is a fact even in the person who first directs his thought to attaining the Way. In fact, it is present even in the individual who has not started practice. There are numerous passages in *Shōbōgenzō* that equate realization or enlightenment with such events or states of mind as assurance (or “faith” 信), arousing an aspiration for enlightenment (*hotsu bodai shin*), and home-departure (*shukke*). All of these are traditionally conceived as being very early stages in the religious career of the aspirant, and it is significant that Dōgen claims that all are equivalent to realization and Buddhahood. The reason can be found in his teachings concerning Buddha-nature. All events or states of mind, such as assurance, home-departure, and the like, are concrete manifestations of an utter self-transcendence that Dōgen refers to as *shinjin datsuraku*, “casting off mind and body,” and this self-transcendence is the actualization of Buddha-nature or realization.

The whole question of practice and realization, and their relationship, is inseparable from the doctrine of Buddha-nature.²³ In various chapters of *Shōbōgenzō*, and particularly in the *Busshō* chapter, the continental Chinese doctrine that holds that all beings possess Buddha-nature is completely transformed and radicalized in conformity with Dōgen’s attempt absolutely to overcome all dualisms, such as those of acquired and intrinsic enlightenment, Buddha and ordinary beings, practice and enlightenment, and the like. Dōgen’s point, and it is one of the hallmarks of his brand of Buddhism, is that all beings *are* Buddha, and by “beings” Dōgen means both sentient and insentient—everything without exception. On one level, distinctions remain and are significant; however, on another level, all distinctions are united and resolved, insofar as all things are merely the presencing of things as they are, or the presencing of reality (*genjō-kōan*).²⁴ In Dōgen’s well-known reading of the passage from the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* that says that all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature, the meaning comes to be “All are sentient beings and the total being is Buddha-nature.”²⁵ This means that the total being *just as it is* is Buddha, and that is the meaning of *genjōkōan*. The duality of Buddhas and other beings is abolished in a refutation of the so-called

“Senika heresy,” which postulates the existence in beings of some kind of spiritual principle that is distinguishable from the body and that, moreover, survives biological death. Dōgen totally rejects such a dualism, and instead speaks of a single reality, the totality of existence, which manifests dynamically in exactly the forms that constitute our experience, whatever those forms may be. In this way, even the traditional distinctions, such as true and false, or real and illusory, are abandoned. In *Shōbōgenzō Gabyō*, for instance, the painted picture of rice cakes is claimed to be just as real, just as ultimate, as “real” cakes. True, one cannot eat the painted cakes, but that is beside the point. The point is that each thing—a rice cake, a picture of rice cakes, a thought or feeling, the family dog, delusion—as it discloses itself in that particular form is, as *genjō-kōan*, Buddha, and there is no Buddha apart from these things. Therefore the beginner in the Buddha Way is no less Buddha than one at a later stage of training, and realization as Buddha is consequently present at the very inception of religious training.

This being the case, zazen-practice for Dōgen is no longer thought of as discontinuous with its result or as an activity that nurtures some latent, undeveloped, inner spiritual entity. Our true nature, says Dōgen—rejecting earlier Indo-Chinese metaphors and their implied dualism—is not like a seed. Zazen is, rather, an activity through which we testify to, actualize or realize (in the sense of “making real”) that which we really are, totally, at all times. Dōgen is particularly fond of the term *shō* 証, which carries with it these meanings, as well as those of “proving” and “authenticating” (and other cognates). To be enlightened, therefore, is not a matter of transforming oneself gradually, or even suddenly, into something one was not before, but, rather, a matter of self-authentication. “Self-authentication” means “being the authentic self that is Buddha,” and zazen is, in all its dimensions, the way one actualizes the authentic self. Whether understood as the formal, cultic activity of the meditation hall or as the more extended zazen that ideally pervades all activities, it is that activity in which one truly appropriates and savors what one actually is.

Dōgen uses a number of synonyms for zazen, such as *kaiin zammai* 海印三昧 and *jishō zammai* 自証三昧, each of which adds another dimension to the basic concept of zazen. An im-

portant synonym is *jijuyū zammai* 自受用三昧, the samādhi that has the function of allowing the individual to enjoy his enlightened nature.²⁶ The model for this samādhi is the post-enlightenment meditation of the historical Buddha, who, according to scriptural statements, is said to have continued to sit in samādhi for seven (or, alternately, twenty-one) days after becoming enlightened. At that time, he was not engaged in samādhi in order to attain enlightenment, for the enlightenment had already occurred. The meditation was, instead, a free, sportive activity through which the Buddha enjoyed the present fact of his enlightened nature. This is why Dōgen, in *Fukan zazengi*, says, “Do not sit in meditation in order to become a Buddha, for being a Buddha has nothing to do with sitting or lying down.” With the basic assumption of an enlightened nature that is anterior to practice, Dōgen then proceeds to use this model for zazen practice as he understands it; that is, as an activity that actualizes an already-existent enlightenment and applies it to the concrete affairs of everyday life. Consequently, to be in *jijuyū zammai* is to actualize the Buddha-nature that one is.

If this sounds like some of the statements of the *Platform Sūtra*, it is not surprising, for Dōgen had read that work, and was critical of it, but still reflected its fundamental insights in his own writing, despite his own innovations. The following passage from the Chinese work parallels Dōgen’s thinking in several important ways:

Good friends, my teaching of the Dharma takes meditation (*ting*) and wisdom (*hui*) as its basis. Never under any circumstances say mistakenly that meditation and wisdom are different. They are a unity, not two things. Meditation itself is the substance of wisdom, wisdom itself is the function of meditation. At the very moment when there is wisdom, then meditation exists in wisdom; at the very moment when there is meditation, then wisdom exists in meditation. Good friends, this means that meditation and wisdom are alike. Students, be careful not to say that meditation gives rise to wisdom or that wisdom gives rise to meditation, or that meditation and wisdom are different from each other.²⁷

Like the passage cited earlier, this passage reflects the *ti-yung*

pattern of thinking about the relationship between practice and attainment. It denies any difference in substance or essence between them, explicitly affirms their identity, and conceives of zazen activities as being the manner in which wisdom (or Buddha-mind) is actualized in concrete affairs.

Dōgen suspected the *Platform Sutra* of being a forgery,²⁸ and part of the reason for this is that its teaching of *kenshō* 見性 seemed to be at variance with what Dōgen saw as the true situation. The idea of *kenshō*, “seeing one’s nature,” implies a very fundamental dualism, in that there is a “nature” which is Buddha, and something else that “sees.” Consequently, there is a fundamental dualism of Buddha and not-Buddha. However, Dōgen’s *point d’appui* for everything he had to say about the Buddha Way was the understanding that there is only Buddha, and therefore the assertion of something or someone seeing Buddha contradicted his understanding. He undoubtedly believed that no one as eminent as the Sixth Patriarch could have used this kind of language. Part of Dōgen’s radicalization of the continental tradition consisted in the overcoming of any hint of dualism implied in the idea of *kenshō* by taking most seriously the idea that “All are sentient beings and all are Buddha-nature.”

If this is the case—that there is only Buddha—then what can “seeing” mean? On the one hand, it must mean that it is Buddha who sees, and furthermore, the situation must be one in which Buddha sees Buddha. But even this is too literal an understanding of the nature of the event or process called *kenshō*, for there is no Buddha that can be seen or even conceptualized. “Seeing,” in the final analysis, means “being,” and to see one’s true nature means to be one’s true nature. *Zazen*, or *jijuyū zammai*, is the actualization and concrete application of one’s true nature.

The teaching of the oneness of practice and realization was for Dōgen a logical and religious consequence of his radicalization of the doctrine of Buddha-nature, and it is an important part of the demystification and demythologization of enlightenment that characterizes Japanese Buddhism. This process has continued down to the twentieth century in the Sōtō tradition, and it has taken the form of a general reluctance to consider enlightenment as in any way divorced from the world of

life and death. On the one hand, it is a prime example of the way in which Far Eastern Buddhists applied the seminal teachings of Nāgārjuna and the sūtras that preach emptiness. On the other hand, it is a noteworthy example of the more general Buddhological work of unpacking the primitive symbols of Buddha, enlightenment, and the like, exploring them, and drawing out their potential. I have already discussed Chinese Buddhological thinking with regard to enlightenment, and need not repeat my discussion here. Much more Chinese philosophical work played an important part in the process of bringing enlightenment and nirvāṇa down to earth. The debates and writings of the Northern Wei, Sui, and early T'ang concerning whether the absolute is only pure or a mixture of pure and impure, and the consensus as it is reflected in the *Ta-ch'eng ch'i hsin lun*, is one part of this work. The work of the Hua-yen thinkers, such as Chih-yen and Fa-tsang, consisted in part in creating a philosophical rationale for the teaching of the identity of absolute and relative (i.e. *li* 理 and *shih* 事 or *k'ung* 空 and *yü* 有). Basing himself on certain well-known scriptural passages such as the one that says that "The *tathāgata-garbha* transmigrating in the six realms of existence is called 'sentient beings,'" Fa-tsang was able to demonstrate that the totality of being is the cosmic Dharmakāya.²⁸ The effect of this kind of work was far-ranging for the Sino-Japanese Buddhist tradition, but one effect was that of removing the other-worldly, utterly transcendent connotations that had hitherto clung to enlightenment and nirvāṇa.

The Chinese and Japanese Buddhist came increasingly to think of the enlightened individual not as someone who had attained a realm apart from and transcendent to the world, but, rather, as someone who remained completely in the world and totally involved in history. He had not transcended the world, because the world itself is nirvāṇa; he had instead transcended the self, or, in Dōgen's words, "dropped off mind and body." Compare Indian artistic representatives of enlightenment with typical Chinese ones. Indian Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are royalty dressed in jewels and crowns; or, sitting in meditation, they exude aloofness and withdrawal. The Chinese figures of Putai, Hanshan, and Shih-te are shown strolling nonchalantly among butchers and wine drinkers, laughing, at ease, their feet

covered with the dust of the streets. They exemplify in the most graphic way the Chinese appropriation of the teaching of the identity of nirvāṇa and saṃsāra, for enlightenment has been brought down out of the clouds, demystified, and humanized. As the above remarks have attempted to show, enlightenment is not some ineffable, unimaginable, transhuman event that lies at the culmination of Herculean efforts. It is realized here and now, in the world, in the act of self-forgetting called "meditation."

Though enlightenment has lost its other-worldly odor, this does not mean that Dōgen did not believe that enlightenment is important. However, in his writings it is presented in the terms of everydayness, with no hint of its being a separate order of being, "mysticism," or an "altered state of consciousness." When he returned from China and was asked what he had learned under Ch'an master Ju-ching, he replied, "I learned that my eyes are horizontal and my nose is vertical." He is very fond of speaking of enlightenment in the homeliest of terms: "The everyday life of the [enlightened] patriarchs is nothing but drinking green tea and eating plain, boiled rice."³⁰ To be enlightened means to live a rather ordinary life of such activities as eating and drinking, but such events are lived in total attentiveness, with mind and body cast off, so that the food and the act of eating are totally totally realized or penetrated (*gū-jin* 究盡). Consequently, they are known not as less worthy or holy than some other aspect of life or a more spiritual life beyond the world, nor as defiled, nor as mere "things," but, rather, as complete and perfect just as they are, which is Buddha. Enlightenment consequently is stripped of the mystical-transcendental, the supernatural, the extraordinary. However, it is necessary; Dōgen's career as a Zen teacher, his journey to China, and the resolution of his own existential dilemma began when he solved the question that plagued him as a young man: If all beings are Buddha from the beginning, then why did all the Buddhas and patriarchs practice so hard all their lives? The answer is that realization or actualization makes all the difference in the way we experience our lives.

Enlightenment, as Dōgen understood it, is nothing more than a profound at-oneness with the event at hand, in total openness to its wonder and perfection as manifesting absolute

reality, and this at-one-ness in total openness is what is meant by samādhi. This process (for I believe that it is a process and not a one-time spectacular event) is, according to Dōgen, timeless. The processive nature of the realization consists in the fact that the at-one-ness or immediate experience must be repeated over and over as each new event occurs, and consequently there can never be an end to practice as a conscious commitment to realization. In this way, there is something of the gradualistic approach in Dōgen's Zen. However, according to him, the actual realization is timeless each time it occurs. From the point of view of the realization itself, it has neither antecedent nor consequent, for the realized event—sipping the tea, for instance—engulfs all other events and swallows up past and future. Dōgen calls this timelessness of realization *nikon* 而今, or “Now.” “Now” is not an abstract, razor-thin quantum of time forever moving forward and separating past from future. In fact, it does not even exist apart from the concrete realization moment-by-moment of each event, and may be synonymous with the realized event. As an absolute “Now,” it therefore crystallizes and focuses within itself all time and being, and there is, in that “Now,” nothing else. “When one side is realized,” says Dōgen, “the other side is obscured.” (*ippō o shō suru toki wa, ippō wa kurashi*)³¹ In *Shōbōgenzō Gyōji* he says, “The time when continuous practice (*gyōji*) is manifested is what we call ‘Now.’”³² Thus, while there is a gradualistic tinge to realization, the absolute nowness of realization seems to preclude categorizing it as either gradual or sudden.

How might enlightenment in Dōgen's writings be assimilated to the traditional categories of sudden and gradual, with their several variations? If it has to be categorized, it has to be said to be sudden, because it is simultaneous with, and in fact identical with, practice. That is, prior to practice, there is no realization, and one's intrinsic Buddhahood is not actualized. When one begins to practice, even a little, realization becomes a lived fact. One may perform certain activities that enhance the possibility of realization, but these activities are not realization; realization is actualized in the form of practice, which is none other than active Buddha (*gyōbutsu* 行佛). However, as I have remarked above, realization has to occur over and over, endlessly, as each event is experienced in selfless openness, and

thus there is a gradual element in the practice in the sense that the individual progresses little-by-little in skill in actualizing Buddha-nature.

“Intrinsic enlightenment,” says Dōgen, “is wonderful practice,” because intrinsic enlightenment is both the ground of practice and is expressed in the form of practice. As was remarked earlier, practice, in its own turn, is always practice of enlightenment 証上の修 . The enlightenment or Buddha-nature that is the ground of practice is thus the *point d'appui* of the religious life, but, as I have shown elsewhere,³³ the overwhelming emphasis in Dōgen's teaching is on practice rather than attainment or realization, and, indeed, it is what characterizes his brand of Buddhism. It is expressed throughout his writings in his concern for the smallest details of ritual or liturgical activity, formal zazen, manual labor, eating, bathing, and dressing, using the library, and the like. Preeminent, of course, is the constant emphasis on regular, intensive zazen as the heart of the religious life and the “way of all the Buddhas and patriarchs.” It is this emphasis on zazen—specifically in the form of *shikan taza*—that gives his Zen its peculiar flavor. Here, zazen is totally stripped of its older, traditional, instrumental function and comes to be elevated to the very essence of the religious life, as the be-all and end-all of the Buddha Way. If realization is identical with the samādhi of *jijuyū zammai*, then to be enlightened means constantly to develop the power of samādhi, and this development has no end as far as Dōgen is concerned. It is this emphasis on constantly developing samādhi that may have led various Western commentators to characterize enlightenment in this form of Zen as gradual. However, if by “gradual” is meant either that realization is necessarily preceded by preliminary moral purification, scriptural study, and some sort of *vipāśyanā*-like study of certain Buddhist truths, or that enlightenment itself may be acquired progressively and piecemeal (which are the two possible meanings of “gradual”), then there is no way that enlightenment can be gradual in Dōgen's Zen. For want of a better term, let us call Dōgen's view of enlightenment one of “suddenly-suddenly-suddenly,” or perhaps “suddenly time after time.” It is unique to Dōgen.

One final point needs clarification, and that is the term “enlightenment” itself. I have used that term throughout this

paper, along with alternate expressions that I believe convey better the nature of the experience that has been the subject of the paper. These expressions are “realization” and “actualization” as related to intrinsic Buddha-nature. Dōgen uses the terms *shō* 証, *satori* 悟, and, to give the Sanskrit form, *anuttara samyak sambodhi*, the “highest, perfect enlightenment.” The latter is the final and perfect enlightenment that comes at the culmination of the Bodhisattva’s ages-long career, and it is generally felt in Buddhism in general that no one achieves it in the present life-time. It is always in the future, and Dōgen, like all Buddhists in the Sino-Japanese tradition, retained the concept out of piety, but was not really concerned about it. However, at times, perhaps in rhetorical imprecision, he speaks of present attainment as *anuttara samyak sambodhi*, and, indeed, he may have believed that there is only one enlightenment, by whatever term it was given. However, his favorite term is *shō*, “realization,” “authentication,” “proof,” “evidence,” etc. He also uses the term *satori*, and sometimes it seems to refer to a more definitive transformation than is denoted by *shō*. Again, however, he seems to use the two terms interchangeably. It may be possible to see a hierarchy of enlightenment experiences in the use of the three terms, ranging from *shō*, as the recurrent actualization of Buddha nature, to *satori*, which may denote a major, rather dramatic transformation, to the final, complete enlightenment ages hence, which remains only theoretical and ideal. But, as I have remarked, and as is clear from some of the passages quoted above, Dōgen seems to have believed that with either *shō* or *satori* the individual attains the only enlightenment there is, and this may be part of his demythologizing work. The point, though, is this: neither *satori* as separate from *shō* nor *anuttara samyak sambodhi* seems to have assumed the importance of *shō* in the form of Buddhism he taught and wrote about. Perfect, complete enlightenment is almost inconceivable and, what is more, is terribly remote from today’s concerns. *Satori*, in the sense in which it is used in the Rinzai tradition, and as distinct from *shō*, may be a wonderful experience and may deepen the experience attained in *shō*, but what is finally important, and that which characterizes Dōgen’s teaching, is the constant, recurring actualization of Buddha-nature in *samādhi*, which is the realization called *shō*. Hence, the character-

ization of this approach to practice as “enlightenment from the beginning,” in contrast to the “enlightenment with a beginning” of Rinzai Zen.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the venerable teaching of sudden enlightenment in the form reconceptualized and deepened by Dōgen served very well his mission of creating a universal, practicable religion suited to the needs of the masses. His central teaching of universal Buddhahood, the oneness of practice and realization, and the conduct of the ordinary affairs of life as a means of expressing intrinsic enlightenment accomplished several important things. First, it made enlightenment a real possibility for common people, by eliminating its older associations of remoteness, improbability, and extraordinariness, and showing that, on the contrary, it was available to ordinary folk, that it was related to ordinary problems, and that it could be pursued within the context of ordinary life. The similarity between Dōgen’s teaching and those of Suzuki Shosan and Ikkyū, for instance, lies in the idea that enlightenment is merely a certain manner of taking care of one’s rather ordinary life, not something mysterious and out of reach to plain people. Thus, such a humanization and demystification of enlightenment also tended to eliminate the doubt or anxiety over the ordinary man’s ability to achieve the genuine, full goals of the religious life. The ignorant, stupid, and unwashed are no less Buddhas than Monju or Fugen, and have the means of actualizing that Buddhahood while planting rice or cutting wood. Finally, religion becomes possible for the average person in that, ultimately, the only requirement is a steadfast assurance or faith that one is already that than which nothing is more supreme or wonderful, that one has an innate dignity and perfection, and that these can really be actualized through the selfless attention to the mundane structures and demands of daily life. In this way, Dōgen’s way is strikingly similar to those of Shinran and Nichiren, and constitutes an important part of the religious revolution of the Kamakura period.

NOTES

1. Thomas Hoover, *Zen Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 53.

2. John A. Hutchinson, *Paths of Faith* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), pp. 52 and 254.
3. David Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii), 1976, p. 174.
4. For instance, Philip Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, Miura and Saski, *Zen Dust*, and some of D. T. Suzuki's writings. Japanese sources, such as the *Zen Shū Jiten*, also contain extensive lineage charts.
5. Louis de LaVallée Poussin, tr., *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1923–1931), ch. 6, p. 301.
6. Paul Demiéville, *Le Concile de Lhasa* (Paris, 1952).
7. Étienne Lamotte, ed. and tr., *Samdhinirmocana, L'Explication des mystères* (Louvain: Bureau du Muséon, 1935). Cf., for instance, p. 236 for a correlation of the 10 stages with the four purifications (*viśuddhi*).
8. T.R.V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955), p. 220.
9. Walter Liebenthal, "A Biography of Chu Tao-sheng," *Monumenta Nipponica*, 11 (October, 1955), p. 90.
10. Yampolsky, *Platform Sutra*, p. 137.
11. Jacques Gernet, *Entretiens du Maître de Dhyana Chenhouei du Ho-tso* (Hanoi, 1949), p. 50.
12. John Blofeld, *The Zen Teachings of Hui-hai on Sudden Illumination* (London: Rider and Company), 1962, p. 56.
13. Demiéville, *Concile*, p. 95.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
16. Walter Liebenthal, "The World Conception of Chu Tao-sheng," *Monumenta Nipponica*, 12–13 (1956–58), pp. 257–258.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
18. Wing-tsit Chan, ed. and comp., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 440.
19. Francis H. Cook, "Fa-tsang's Treatise on the Five Doctrines" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1970), pp. 500, 504. Original in *Taishō* no. 1866, p. 505. b–c.
20. My translation, based on that of Norman Waddell and Masao Abe in the *Eastern Buddhist*.
21. Francis Dōjun Cook, *How to Raise an Ox* (Los Angeles: Center Publications, 1978), p. 97.
22. *Shōbōgenzō sesshin sesshō*, in Nakamura Sōichi, *Zenyaku Shōbōgenzō*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Seishin Shobo, 1972), p. 262.
23. Dōgen's remarks concerning Buddha-nature and its relationship to phenomenal existence is discussed in many places. See, for instance, Masunaga Reiho, *The Sōtō Approach to Zen*, Hee-jin Kim, *Dogen Kigen: Mystical Realist*, and Takashi James Kodera, "The Buddha-Nature in Dogen's Shōbōgenzō," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 4, no. 4 (December, 1977), pp. 267–292.
24. This translation of the term *genjō-kōan* was suggested by T.P. Kasulis,

in "The Zen Philosopher: A Review Article on Dōgen Scholarship in English," *Philosophy East and West*, 28, no. 3 (July, 1978), p. 368.

25. See the translation of *Busshō* by Norman Waddell and Masao Abe in *The Eastern Buddhist*, 8, no. 2, pp. 94–112.; 9, no. 1; pp. 87–105; and 9, no. 2, pp. 71–87.

26. Dōgen refers to this samādhi in *Bendōwa*. See the translation by Waddell and Abe in the *Eastern Buddhist*, 4, no. 1 (May, 1971).

27. Yampolsky, *Platform Sutra*, p. 135.

28. Hee-jin Kim, *Dōgen Kigen: Mystical Realist* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975), p. 68–69.

29. Francis H. Cook, *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), ch. 7.

30. *Shōbōgenzō genjō-kōan*. Hakuyu Taizan Maezumi, *The Way of Everyday Life* (Los Angeles: Center Publications, 1978). A recent translation.

31. Cook, *How to Raise an Ox*, p. 176.

32. Cook, *How to Raise an Ox*, is a translation of 10 practice-oriented chapters from *Shōbōgenzō*, with the translator's own interpretive comments added.