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A Discourse on Doing One's Utmost in Practicing the Way of the Buddhas

(*Bendōwa*)

Translator's Introduction: *Bendōwa*, the earliest dated work in the *Shōbōgenzō*, begins with a long introductory section which places seated meditation (*zazen*) within the context of what has been transmitted through the ages as the practice of Buddhism, as well as giving Dōgen's reasons for writing the present discourse. This is followed by an imaginary dialogue between a disciple and Dōgen as Master, which forms the core of the discourse. While this discourse superficially resembles a catechism in that the disciple asks questions to which Dōgen supplies answers, the nature of the questions and the attitude of the questioner imply that more is transpiring. Essentially, the imaginary disciple, filled with mistrust, raises various objections to the method of serene reflection meditation which Dōgen was engaged in introducing into Japan, and presents concerns that Dōgen's actual disciples were probably encountering from others or might even be holding in their own minds. The obvious expressions of doubt which the questions voice are bypassed by Dōgen, who replies from the mind of meditation, and thereby keeps to the task of clarifying the misunderstanding that lies at the heart of the questioner's doubt. Although Dōgen's writing style in this work, particularly in his introductory section, is clearly literary, he often intersperses this more formal manner of communication with conversational expressions and colorful figures of speech, which lend a compassionate warmth and gentle humor to his discussion.

All Buddhas, without exception, confirm Their having realized the state of enlightenment by demonstrating Their ability to directly Transmit the wondrous Dharma.¹ As embodiments of the Truth, They have employed an unsurpassed, inconceivably marvelous method which functions effortlessly. It is simply this method that Buddhas impart to Buddhas, without deviation or distortion, and Their meditative state of delight in the Truth is its standard and measure. As They take pleasure wherever They go to spiritually aid others while in such a state, They treat this method of Theirs—namely, the practice of seated meditation—as the proper and most straightforward Gate for entering the Way.

People are already abundantly endowed with the Dharma in every part of their being, but until they do the training, It will not emerge. And unless they

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1. A reference to the direct, Face-to-Face Transmission between Master and disciple, in contrast to the transmission of Dharma through lectures or Scriptural writings.

personally confirm It for themselves, there is no way for them to realize what It is. But when they give It out to others, It keeps filling their hands to overflowing for, indeed, It makes no distinction between 'for the one' and 'for the many'. When they give voice to It, It flows forth from their mouths like a tide, limitless in Its breadth and depth. All Buddhas continually dwell within this state, with None holding onto any of Their thoughts or perceptions, regardless of whatever may arise, whereas the great mass of sentient beings perpetually make use of what is within this state, but without their being fully awake to any situation.

As I would now explain it, diligently practicing the Way means letting all things be what they are in their Self-nature, as you put your essential oneness into operation by following the road away from discriminatory and dualistic thinking. When you have abandoned that type of thinking and have thus passed beyond its barriers, you will cease to be affected by its explanations, which, like the nodes in bamboo, block free passage, or by its theories, which are as convoluted as the knots in a piece of pine wood.

In my own case, shortly after I gave rise to the intention to seek for the Dharma, I went searching everywhere throughout our country for a knowledgeable spiritual teacher until I chanced to meet Master Myōzen of Kennin-ji Temple. The autumn frosts and the spring blossoms quickly passed each other for nine cycles, as I absorbed from him a bit about the Rinzai tradition. As chief disciple of the Ancestral Master Eisai, Master Myōzen alone was correctly Transmitting the unsurpassed Dharma of the Buddha: among his Japanese contemporaries there was definitely no one who was his equal. I next turned towards the land of the great Sung dynasty to seek out spiritual teachers on both sides of the Ts'ien-t'an River in Chekiang Province and to learn about our tradition as propounded through its Five Gates.² Ultimately I encountered Meditation Master Nyojō on Mount Tendō, and the Great Matter* which I had spent my life seeking to understand was resolved with him.

After that, at the beginning of the Chinese Sho-ting era (1228), I returned to my native land with the intention of spreading the Dharma and rescuing sentient beings. It seemed as if I were shouldering a heavy load, so I decided to bide my time until I could vigorously promote the spread of 'letting go of the discriminatory mind'. As a result, I drifted the while like a cloud, finding lodging

2. An allusion to the five Chinese Zen Buddhist traditions in existence at the time. Dōgen will identify them later in this discourse.

* See *Glossary*.

as a floating reed does, ready to learn from the customs and habits of those Clear-minded Ones of the past.

However, it occurred to me that there might be some who, by their very nature, were genuinely seeking to study the Way with no regard for fame and gain, as they tried to treat mindfulness as their prime goal, but perhaps they were unfortunately being led astray by some false teacher so that the correct understanding of the Truth was needlessly being kept from them. As a result, they may have fruitlessly let themselves become stupefied with self-satisfaction, having been too long immersed in the realms of self-delusion. And so, I wondered how the true seed of spiritual wisdom could sprout and grow in them so that they would have the chance to realize the Truth. Though I was still such a poor monk in the Way, since I was now devoted to letting myself drift like a cloud and float like a reed, on what mountain or by what river could they seek me out? Because of my feelings of pity for these persons, I have undertaken here to write down what I saw and learned of the customs and practices in Chinese Zen monasteries, as well as to preserve the Transmission of what my spiritual teacher understood to be the most profound Purpose, and thereby to propagate the true Dharma of Buddhism. I trust that what follows is the genuine inner meaning of this.

As my Master put it, the honored Great Master Shakyamuni, whilst with His assembly on India's Divine Vulture Peak, imparted to Makakashō this Dharma, which Ancestor after Ancestor then correctly Transmitted down to the Venerable Bodhidharma. This Venerable One proceeded on his own to China where he imparted the Dharma to Great Master Eka. This was the first time that the Transmission of the Buddha Dharma had come to the Eastern lands. It ultimately reached the Sixth Chinese Ancestor, Meditation Master Daikan Enō, by being directly Transmitted in this manner. The genuine Dharma of the Buddha then flowed out through the land of the Han, its main purpose being revealed without entanglement in sectarian or scholastic concerns. In time, the Sixth Ancestor had two spiritual followers: Nangaku Ejō and Seigen Gyōshi. Since they both had the Buddha seal* Transmitted to them, they were, alike, spiritual leaders for human and celestial beings. With the spreading out of those two branches, the Five Instructional Gates opened up. These are, namely, the Hōgen, Igyō, Sōtō, Ummon, and Rinzai traditions. In present-day Sung China, only the Rinzai tradition is widespread throughout the country. Even though these five monastic families differ, they are still the One Seal of the Buddha Mind.

Also, ever since the latter part of the Han dynasty (ca. 3rd century C.E.), all sorts of instructional books were leaving their mark in China; although they pervaded the whole country, which ones were preferable had not yet been

established. After the Ancestral Master Bodhidharma came from the West, he immediately cut off at their roots those tangled vines of verbalized confusion and let the genuine, pure Buddha Dharma spread abroad. I earnestly pray that the same may happen in our country.

As my Master also said, all the Buddhas, as well as all the Ancestors, have kept to the Buddha Dharma as Their dwelling place. One and All have not only sat upright in Their meditative state of delight in the Truth, but They have also put the Precepts into practice, and thus They have taken this combination as the precise and certain way for awakening to the Truth. Those in India and China who have experienced an awakening have likewise conformed to this approach. This is based on Master directly passing on to disciple, in private, this wondrous method, and the latter preserving its genuine inner meaning.

When we speak of the correct Transmission in our tradition, the straightforward Buddha Teaching of direct Transmission is 'the best of the best'. From the very moment when a disciple comes to meet face-to-face with the one who is to be his spiritual friend and knowing teacher, there is no need to have the disciple offer incense, make prostrations, chant the names of the Buddhas, do ascetic practices and penances, or recite Scriptures: the Master just has the disciple do pure meditation until he lets his body and mind drop off.

Even though it may be merely for a moment, when someone, whilst sitting upright in meditation, puts the mark of the Buddha seal upon his three types of volitional actions—namely, those of body, speech and thought—the whole physical universe and everything in it becomes and is the Buddha seal; all of space, throughout, becomes and is enlightenment. As a result, all Buddhas, as embodiments of Truth, experience a compounding of Their delight in the Dharma of Their own Original Nature, and the awesome splendor of Their realization of the Way is refreshed for Them. In addition, all sentient beings everywhere throughout the physical universe—and in whichever of the six worlds* of existence they may be, including the three lower ones—are, in that instant, bright and pure in body and mind, as they confirm the Foundation of their great liberation and reveal their Original Face. At that moment, all things realize what confirmation of the Truth really is. Everything, all together, employs its body as a Buddha does, quickly leaping in one bound beyond the limits of any 'correct' understanding to sit erect like the Lord Buddha beneath His Bodhi tree. In an instant, everything turns the unparalleled Great Wheel of the Dharma as It opens up and gives expression to the profound Wisdom that is of the Ultimate, of the Uncreated.

Moreover, these equally fully-enlightened Ones turn back to the six worlds of existence in order to personally travel the path of giving help in unseen ways.

Consequently, those who sit in meditation will, beyond doubt, drop off body and mind, and cut themselves free from their previous confused and defiling thoughts and opinions in order to personally realize what the innate Dharma of the Buddha is. That is, in each training ground of every Buddha as the embodiment of Truth, the work of Buddhas finds expression and is put into practice down to the smallest detail, as They create for others far and wide the circumstances that help them go beyond the notion of 'being a Buddha', through Their vigorous promotion of the Teaching that one goes on, always becoming Buddha. At this very moment, the lands of the earth with their trees and grasses, as well as the walls and fences with their tiles and stones, are all seen to be performing the work of Buddhas. As a consequence, all who make profitable spiritual use of whatever storms and floods may arise will be receiving guidance and assistance in unseen ways from the profound and inscrutable instructions of Buddhas, and they will give expression to their innate Understanding, which is ever intimate with the Truth.³ Because persons who accept and make profitable spiritual use of such floods and firestorms all gladly receive from the Buddhas instruction and guidance on their innate Understanding, those who reside with such persons and are spiritually conversant with them, in turn, mutually provide each other with the unbounded, endless virtues of Buddhas and cause the unceasing, wondrous, immeasurable Dharma of Buddhas to roll forth far and wide until It spreads throughout the whole universe, both within and without. However, these persons of whom I speak are not kept in the dark by being wedded to their senses, for they straightaway realize the Truth by not fabricating anything within the hush of their meditation. If, as ordinary people believe, spiritual practice and personal realization are two different sorts of things, then each could be seen and recognized separately from the other. Should someone become all involved with his sensory perceptions and intellectual understanding, he will not be in 'the realm of enlightenment' because the realm of enlightenment is beyond the reach of delusory, discriminatory thinking.

Furthermore, even though, amidst the stillness of meditation, someone experiences—not only subjectively within heart and mind, but also objectively within outer conditions—an 'entering into realization' and a 'going beyond awakening to Truth', because he is in the realm of delight in the Truth, he does not disturb a single dust mote or shatter the aspect of 'oneness with all things'. Simultaneously, the far-reaching works of a Buddha create a Buddha's profound

3. 'Storms and floods' refer to whatever befalls us physically, psychologically, or spiritually which threatens to 'blow us over' or overwhelm us. Yet, as Dōgen comments, even these seemingly negative and destructive occurrences can have spiritual benefits when examined from the mind of meditation.

and wondrous instructions and guidance. At no time does the vegetation or the earth from which it springs—which are the very places that this instructional path reaches—cease to send forth great luminosity as they give expression to the profoundly subtle Dharma. Both ‘vegetation’ and ‘walls’ clearly and effectively let the Dharma be known in the world for the sake of all forms of sentient beings, be they of ordinary minds or of awakened ones.⁴ All forms of sentient beings, awakened or not, are ever giving expression to It for the sake of ‘vegetation’ and ‘walls’. In the realm where one’s own awakening awakens others, from the very moment that you are provided with personal certainty, there is no hanging onto it, and, once your personal certainty begins to function, you must see to it that it never ceases.⁵

This is why even the meditating of just one person at one time harmonizes with, and is at one with, all forms of being, as it tranquilly permeates all times. Thus, within the inexhaustible phenomenal world, across past, present, and future, the meditator does the unending work of instructing and guiding others in the Way of Buddhas. It is the same practice, in no way different for all, just as it is the same realization and personal certifying by all. Not only is it the practice of simply sitting: it is ‘striking unbounded space and hearing It reverberate’, which is Its continuous, wonderful voice before and after the mallet has struck the bell. But do not limit the matter to this! Everyone has his own Original Face, as well as his own training and practice to do, all of which are beyond the fathoming of human speculations. You must realize that even if all the Buddhas, who are as immeasurable as the sands of the Ganges, were to exercise Their spiritual strengths and attempt to gauge the meditation of a single person by means of Their awakened Buddha Wisdom, They would be unable to reach its boundaries, try as They might to fathom them.



You have now heard just how great and vast the virtues and spiritual merits of this seated meditation are. However, someone who is befuddled by doubts may

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4. Here, ‘vegetation’ refers to all things (physical or non-physical) that are organic or growing, and ‘walls’ to all things that are inorganic or fabricated.
 5. The ‘personal certainty’ of which Dōgen speaks should not be confused with any rigid and intractable ‘certitude’ that may arise from intellectual speculation, insistence on ‘logical necessity’, religious dogma, personal delusion, etc. Unlike Dōgen’s personal certainty, which arises from direct, honest, and self-less spiritual experience, such rigid ‘certitude’ is the hallmark of the realm where one’s deluded thinking attempts to coerce others into accepting that which is deluded.

ask, “Since there are many gates into the Buddha’s Teachings, why bother to do just seated meditation?”

I would point out in response, “Because it is the proper and most straightforward entryway into what the Buddha taught.”

He may then ask, “Why is this the one and only proper and straightforward entryway?”

I would then point out, “Undoubtedly, the Venerable Great Master Shakyamuni Transmitted it directly as the most excellent method for realizing the Way, and Those who embody the Truth in the three temporal worlds, alike, have realized, do realize, and will realize the Way by doing seated meditation. Therefore, They pass it on generation after generation as the proper and most straightforward gate to the Dharma. Not only that, the Indian and Chinese Ancestors all realized the Way by doing seated meditation, which is why I have now indicated it to be the proper gate for those in both human and celestial worlds.”

He may then ask, “Since this depends on someone’s receiving the correct Transmission, or on his inquiring into the evidence left by the Ancestors, truly these are beyond the reach of ordinary people like me. However, reading Scriptures and reciting the names of the Buddhas, by themselves, can certainly be the cause for one’s spiritually awakening. I fail to see the point in merely sitting idly and doing nothing, so how can such a method be relied on for achieving a spiritual awakening?”

I would point out, “That you should now regard the deep meditative state of all the Buddhas and the peerless Great Dharma to be a pointless ‘sitting idly and doing nothing’ makes you one who is slandering the Greater Course.* Your delusion is as profound as one who says, ‘There is no water,’ whilst he is sinking down in a vast sea. Thankfully, all the Buddhas are already sitting sedately in the meditative state that is the consummate delight in the Truth. Is this not creating vast spiritual merits? Alas, your Eye is not yet open and your mind is still in a stupor, as though you were drunk.

“True, the realm of Buddhas is marvelous and beyond the power of the intellect to comprehend, to say nothing of what one who is lacking in faith and scant in spiritual understanding can grasp! Only the one whose readiness for genuine faith is great is able to easily enter the Way. He whose faith is nil, even though he is given teaching, finds it hard to accept. On the Divine Vulture Peak, there were those whom Shakyamuni said might depart if they so wished whilst He was giving voice to the Dharma. Broadly speaking, if genuine faith arises in your heart, you will need to train and practice, as well as seek out a Master to study

with. Otherwise, this faith of yours will fade away before long and, sad to say, the Dharma from the past will cease to enrich you.

“Furthermore, I am not certain whether you really know what the virtue is in performing such services as reciting Scriptures and chanting the names of the Buddhas. Merely to move your tongue about and let your voice roll forth, thinking that this will have the merit and virtue of the work of a Buddha, is utterly pitiful. Compared to a Buddha's Dharma, it is far afield and will take you ever farther in the wrong direction.

“In addition, ‘to open a Scriptural text’ means that you clarify for yourself what the Buddha taught as the principles for training and practice in both the ‘sudden approach’ and the ‘gradual approach’.⁶ When you do your training and practice as He taught, without doubt it will help you realize spiritual certainty. Compared with the merit of actually realizing enlightenment now, expending mental effort in pondering upon matters is nothing. Foolishly using your mouth to repeatedly chant something thousands upon thousands of times in an attempt to arrive at the Way of Buddhas is like believing you can reach the south by driving your cart northward. It is also like someone trying to put a square peg in a round hole. Someone who reads passages in religious works while remaining in the dark about the path of spiritual training is someone who would pay a visit to a doctor and leave behind what the doctor has prescribed. What is to be gained from that? Keeping sound flowing incessantly from the mouth is like the springtime day-and-night croaking of a frog in a rice paddy: ultimately, this too produces no benefit. How much more does this apply to those who are deeply committed to their delusions and go wandering off after fame and gain. Such things are difficult to abandon since the inclination of such persons towards success and greed goes deep indeed! Since people of this sort existed in the past, it is certainly likely that they exist in the world today, so very sad to say!

“What you must grasp is that when a trainee who has committed both heart and mind to personally confirming the Truth is in accord with a Master in our tradition—that is, with one who has realized the Way and is clear-minded—on how to practice, and has received Transmission of the wonderful Dharma of the Seven Buddhas,* the true meaning and purpose of this Dharma comes forth and will be preserved. This is beyond what Scriptural scholars who study only the words know

6. The sudden and gradual ‘approaches’ are not the same as sudden versus gradual enlightenment. The ‘sudden approach’ is the awakening to Truth through the practice of serene reflection meditation, which is the letting go of everything and sitting in pure faith and trust in the Eternal. With the ‘gradual approach’, the trainee works to cleanse his karma and clarify matters by application of the Precepts to all his actions.

about. So, quit your doubts and delusions, and do your utmost to practice the Way by doing seated meditation in accordance with a genuine Master's instructions, so that you may realize for yourself the meditative state of all the Buddhas, which is Their delight in the Truth.”

He may then ask, “Both the Tendai tradition, which is based on the *Lotus Scripture*, and the Kegon tradition, which is based on the *Avatamsaka Scripture*, as they have been transmitted to our country, are considered to be the fundamental traditions in Mahayana* Buddhism, to say nothing of traditions such as that of Shingon, which was personally transmitted to Kongosatta by the Tathagata Vairochana* and has been passed generation after generation from Master to disciple in an orderly manner. The main thrust of what these traditions talk about is that ‘Our very mind is Buddha’ and that ‘This mind of ours creates Buddhahood’, and they set forth the correct perception of the Five Dhyāni Buddhas,⁷ which is realized in a single sitting without spending many eons in training. Surely, these should be considered the most sublime of the Buddha's Teachings. So, what is so superior about the training and practice which you are going on about, that you disregard those Teachings in pursuit of your own method alone?”

I would point out, “You should understand that within the Buddha's family there is no arguing over ‘superior’ or ‘inferior’ Teachings, and no singling out of some Dharma as being more shallow or profound. You should simply try to recognize the genuine from the false in training and practice. Some, attracted by a natural setting of mountains and water with its plants and flowers, have flowed from there into the Way of Buddhas. Others, whilst gathering up in their hands the soil with its sand and pebbles, have preserved the Buddha seal. How much more are the myriad images which fill the universe surpassed by the far-reaching words of a Buddha—which are all the more rich!—and the turning of the Great Wheel of the Dharma is contained within each single dust mote. This is why a phrase like ‘Your very mind is Buddha Itself’ is as the moon within water, and why the import of ‘Sitting in meditation is itself becoming Buddha’ is as a reflection in a mirror. Do not get tangled up or taken in by a clever use of words. In order that you may now push on in your training to realize enlightenment in an instant, I show you the marvelous path which the Buddhas and Ancestors have directly Transmitted, and I do this that you may become a genuine follower of the Way.

7. The ‘Five Dhyāni Buddhas’ are the five Great Buddhas of Wisdom, each of whom represents a particular aspect of the Cosmic Buddha. These Buddhas are: Vairochana, the Eternal Buddha; Akshobya, the Immovable Buddha; Ratnasambhava, the Jewel-Born Buddha; Amitabha, the Buddha of Immeasurable Light; and Amoghasiddhi, the Fearless Buddha.

“Furthermore, the Transmitting of the Buddha Dharma must be done by a Master of our tradition whose personal awakening has been certified. Scholars who go about counting up words are not adequate to serve as teachers and guides: they would be like the blind trying to lead the blind. All who are now within our tradition's Gate, where the proper Transmission of the Buddhas and Ancestors is done, esteem and revere the expert guide whose realization of the Way has been attested to, and place their trust in him as an upholder of the Buddha Dharma. Because of this, when non-human beings—both visible and invisible—come to him to take refuge, or when arhats,* though already enjoying the fruits of realizing enlightenment, come to ask him about the Dharma, this Master never fails to give them a helping hand in clarifying what lies at the bottom of their hearts. As this is something unheard of in the gateways offered by other religions, disciples of the Buddha should just study the Buddha Dharma.

“Also, you should keep in mind that even though, from the first, we are in no way lacking in unsurpassed enlightenment and ever have it available to us for our delight and use, we cannot believe this, and so we become habituated to needlessly giving rise to discriminatory thoughts and personal opinions, chasing after these as if they were something real and, stumbling, we sadly fall off the Great Path. By our relying on these thoughts and opinions, many and varied are the illusory ‘flowers in the sky’ that we create. Do not immerse yourself in or get stuck on pondering over the twelfefold stages of Dependent Origination or the twenty-five types of existence within the worlds of desire, form, and beyond form, or speculating on the Three Vehicles or the Five Vehicles, or on whether Buddha has existence or not. By following thoughts and opinions like these, you will be unable to consider the correct pathway for training in and practicing the Buddha Dharma. Even so, when, at this very moment, in compliance with the Buddha seal, you let go of everything and earnestly sit in meditation, you will go beyond the boundaries set by any concern that you may have had over being deluded or enlightened. Uninvolved with whether the path is mundane or sanctified, you will at once be strolling about in realms beyond ordinary thinking, as you delight in the Great Enlightenment. How can those who are caught in the nets and snares of words possibly be equal to such a one as this?”

He may then ask, “Among the three traditional ways of spiritual learning, there is the study of meditative concentration, and among the six bodhisattvic practices, there is the perfecting of meditation. Because both of these have been studied by all bodhisattvas* from the moment their hearts first opened to a desire to realize enlightenment, they have been part of training and practice for everyone, bright or dull, without exception. This seated meditation that you are now talking

about can possibly be included as one form of them, but what leads you to contend that all the genuine Teachings of the Tathagata are brought together within it?”

I would point out, “This question of yours has come about because this peerless Great Teaching of the Tathagata, which is the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching on the One Great Matter for which we train, has been given the name of ‘the Zen School’.⁸ However, you must realize that this name first arose in China and then spread eastwards; it was unknown in India. It began while Great Master Bodhidharma was spending nine years ‘facing the wall’ at Shōrin-ji Temple on Mount Sūzan. Neither monks nor laity had yet learned of the Buddha’s True Dharma, so they called him the Brahman who makes seated meditation (*zazen*) his main focus. Later, all his descendants over the generations continually devoted themselves to seated meditation. Lay people, baffled when they saw this, did not understand what was actually going on, and spoke of it in general as ‘the Zazen (Seated Meditation) School’. Nowadays, the *za* is dropped, and it is referred to simply as ‘the Zen School’. But its heart and spirit is made clear through the vast sayings of the Ancestors. It is not something to be compared or grouped with the contemplative concentration or the meditation alluded to in the Six Bodhisattva Practices or the Three Ways of Learning.

“That this Buddha Dharma has been authentically Transmitted from Master to disciple has not been a secret to any generation. Long ago, at the assembly on the Divine Vulture Peak, it was only to the Venerable Makakashō that the Tathagata entrusted this Dharma—which is the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching and the Wondrous Heart of Nirvana—as His peerless Great Teaching. As this ceremony was personally witnessed by the host of celestial beings who are at present residing in heavenly worlds, it is not something that one need mistrust. Since Buddha Dharma, in general, is something that the host of celestial beings ever and ever looks after and protects, the merit of their actions has still not died away. Beyond doubt, you should recognize that this practice is the complete and whole Way of the Buddha Dharma: there is nothing to compare it to.”

8. *Zenshū*, rendered here as ‘the Zen School’, has a significance in Dōgen’s text that is not apparent in translation. Rendering *shū* as ‘school’ may be somewhat misleading if it suggests to the reader something academic or philosophical. On the other hand, to use the term ‘sect’ might invite associations with Christian sectarianism. In some other places, I have used the word ‘tradition’ in order to avoid either misunderstanding. However, Dōgen specifically reveals a few sentences further along that he understands the word to be synonymous with *mune*, ‘the main point or focus’; that is, *zenshū* refers to those who make *zen* (meditation) the focus of their training, just as those of the *Kegonshū* make the *Kegon Sutra* (*Avatamsaka Scripture*) the focus of their training.

He may then ask, “Of the four manners of bodily carriage in the Buddha’s family—namely, standing, walking, sitting, and reclining—why is it that you lay the full burden of practice merely on sitting, and talk of attaining certainty and entering Buddhahood by promoting meditative contemplation?”

I would point out, “The ways in which all the Buddhas from the ages past, one after the other, trained and practiced, and by which They arrived at certainty and entered Buddhahood, are impossible to know in full detail. If you are asking what the authority for this is, you should understand that what Those in the family of Buddhas made use of is the authority. You need not seek for an authority beyond this. To put it simply, in praise of the practice, Ancestors and Masters have said that seated meditation is the gateway to ease and joy. From this we can surmise that, among the four manners of bodily carriage, it is the easiest and most joyful. And even further, it has not been the way of practice for just one or two Buddhas: this has been the way for all Buddhas and all Ancestors.”

He may then ask, “Granted that someone who has not yet clearly understood what Buddha Dharma is may possibly secure certainty by diligently doing seated meditation. But what about those who are already clear as to what the Buddha’s True Teaching is? What could they possibly expect from doing seated meditation?”

I would point out, “Since it is said that we should not discuss our dreams in front of those who are befuddled, or uselessly put oars into the hands of a woodcutter,⁹ I am disinclined to answer your question directly. Still there is some teaching that I can give you.

“Now then, to think that practice and realization are separate from each other is a non-Buddhist view, or a misunderstanding of the Way. In Buddhism, practice and realization are completely one and the same. Because it is a practice based on being spiritually awake at this very moment, the diligent training which springs forth from our initial resolve to seek the Way is, in itself, the whole of one’s innate certainty. For this reason, we teach that you should not hold in mind any

9. Dōgen’s first analogy derives from the Chinese saying, “Do not share your dreams with a fool,” but has been modified to refer here to discussing experiences which are as yet beyond the questioner’s present level of direct understanding. The second analogy makes this more explicit: one does not discuss such matters because it is like giving tools to someone who cannot make use of them. Further, a ‘woodcutter’ is a Zen term applied to a monk who has not yet had a kenshō (that is, the experiencing of his own Buddha Nature) and is still working on cutting his karmic tendencies off at the roots, whereas ‘oars’ is an allusion to the tools needed by one who has awakened to his True Nature to help him ferry others to the Other Shore.

expectation of being enlightened as something outside of, or apart from, practice, since this practice directly points you towards your own original, innate certainty.

“Since this certainty is a spiritually awakened one that already exists within the practice, your certainty will know no limits: since the practice already exists within spiritually awakened certainty, your practice will know no beginning. This is why the Tathagata Shakyamuni and the Venerable Makakashō were both governed by Their practice, which was based on being spiritually awake. Great Master Bodhidharma and the exalted Ancestor Daikan Enō, likewise, were ‘hauled and tumbled about’ by their practice based on being spiritually awake. Such are the signs of one who resides in, and keeps to, the Buddha Dharma.

“A practice that is not separate from being spiritually awake already exists. It is our good fortune to have had this wondrous practice Transmitted to us individually, and to diligently pursue it with the attitude of mind which first awakened in us the desire to seek the Truth is, in itself, to arrive at that original, spiritually awakened state which is our innate, ‘uncreated’ Foundation. Be aware that the Buddhas and Ancestors repeatedly taught that we must not be slack in our training and practice, so that we do not stain or tarnish our innate enlightenment, which is inseparable from our practice. If you let go of any thought of ‘I am doing a marvelous practice,’ your innate enlightenment will fill your hands to overflowing. If you purge yourself of any thought of ‘being enlightened’, this wondrous practice will operate throughout your whole being.

“Further, when I was in the land of the great Sung dynasty, what I saw with my own eyes, in all the Zen monasteries everywhere, was a Meditation Hall with anywhere from five or six hundred to one or two thousand monks peacefully continuing to do seated meditation day and night. When I asked those Masters of our tradition—namely, those who had had the Buddha Mind seal Transmitted to them and were serving as Abbots of these monasteries—what Buddhism is in sum and substance, I was instructed that it was the principle that ‘Training and being spiritually awake are not two separate things.’ Therefore, not only for the sake of those trainees within the gates of our temple, but also for those who, distinguished by their seeking for the Dharma, yearn for the Truth within the Buddha’s Teachings, I have followed the path of the skillful teachers of our tradition. And in accordance with what these Buddhas and Ancestors have taught, I have put forth that one must diligently practice the Way by doing seated meditation. I have done so without distinguishing between those with the attitudes of a novice or of a senior, and without concerning myself with whether those being instructed are ordinary people or saintly ones.

“Surely you have heard what Masters have said: ‘It is not that practice and enlightenment do not exist. It is just that they cannot be taken hold of and defiled,’ and ‘The one who clearly sees what the Way is, is the one who practices the Way.’ Understand that you must do your training and practice amidst the realizing of the Way.”

He may then ask, “What about those Japanese teachers of earlier generations who spread Scriptural teachings throughout our country? At the time when they crossed over to China during the T’ang dynasty and brought the Dharma back with them, why did they ignore this principle of seated meditation and just pass on Scriptural teachings?”

I would point out, “The reason why those human teachers of the past did not pass on this Teaching was that the time was not yet ripe for It.”

He may then ask, “Did the teachers of those earlier times understand this Dharma?”

I would point out, “Had they understood It, they would have communicated It.”

He may then respond, “There are some who say:

Do not grieve over birth and death, since there is an extremely quick method for freeing yourself from them, namely, by understanding the principle that it is the innate nature of one’s mind to be ever-abiding, to persist without change. This means that, because this physical body has been born, it will inevitably come to perish, but even so, this innate nature of the mind will never perish. When someone fully comprehends that the innate nature of his mind—which is never swept away by birth and death—is in his body, he sees it to be his true and genuine nature. Thus, his body is but a temporary form, being born here and dying there, ever subject to change, whilst his mind is ever-abiding, so there is no reason to expect it to vary over past, present, and future. To understand the matter in this way is what is meant by being free from birth and death. For the one who understands this principle, his future births and deaths will come to an end, so that when his body expires, he will enter the ocean of real existence. When he flows into this ocean of being, he will undoubtedly possess wonderful virtues, just as all the Buddhas and Tathagatas have done. Even though he may realize this in his present life, he will not be exactly the same as those Holy Ones, since he has a bodily existence which was brought about through deluded actions in past lives. The person who does not yet understand this principle will

be ever spun about through successive births and deaths. Therefore, we should just make haste and fully comprehend the principle of the innate nature of the mind being ever-abiding and persisting without change. To pass one's life just sitting around idly, what can be gained by that?

Such a statement as this truly corresponds to the Way of all the Buddhas and all the Ancestors, don't you think?"

I would point out, "The view that you have just expressed is in no way Buddhism, but rather the non-Buddhist view of the Shrenikans.¹⁰ This erroneous view of theirs may be stated as follows:

In our bodies there is a soul-like intelligence. When this intelligence, or intellect, encounters conditions, it makes distinctions between good and bad as well as discriminating right from wrong. It is conscious of what is painful or itches from desire, and is awake to what is hard to bear or easy. All such responses are within the capacity of this intelligence. However, when this body of ours perishes, this soul-like nature sloughs it off and is reborn somewhere else. As a result, even though it appears to perish in the here and now, it will have its rebirth in another place, never perishing, but always abiding unchanged.

"So this erroneous view goes. Be that as it may, your modeling yourself upon this view and regarding it as the Buddha's Teaching is more foolish than clutching onto a roof tile or a pebble in the belief that it is gold or some precious jewel. The shamefulness of such befuddled ignorance and delusion beggars comparison. National Teacher Echū in Great Sung China has strongly warned us about such a view. For you to now equate the wondrous Dharma of all the Buddhas with the mistaken notion that your mind will abide whilst your physical features perish, and to imagine that the very thing which gives rise to the cause of birth and death has freed you from birth and death—is this not being foolish? And how deeply pitiable! Be aware that this is the mistaken view of one who is outside the Way, and do not lend an ear to it.

"Because I now feel even greater pity for you, I cannot leave the matter here, but will try to rescue you from your erroneous view. You should understand that, in

10. The Shrenikans were a group of non-Buddhists who are thought to have followed the teachings of Shrenika, a contemporary of Shakyamuni Buddha. On occasion, they used terms similar to those in Buddhism, but with different meanings.

Buddhism, we have always spoken not only of body and mind as being inseparable, but also of the nature of something and the form it takes as not being two different things. As this Teaching was likewise well known in both India and China, we dare not deviate from It. Even more, in Buddhist instruction that speaks of what is persistent, all things are said to have persistence without their ever being separated into categories of 'body' and 'mind'.¹¹ In instruction that talks about cessation, all things are said to be subject to cessation without differentiating whether they are of some particular nature or have some particular form. So why do you risk contradicting the correct principle by saying that the body ceases whilst the mind permanently abides? Not only that, you must fully understand that 'birth and death' is nirvana: there has never been any talk of a nirvana outside of birth and death. Moreover, even though you may erroneously reckon that there is a Buddha Wisdom that is separate from birth and death because you have worked it out that the mind permanently abides apart from the body, this 'mind' of yours—which understands, and works matters out, and perceives things, and knows what they are—is still something that arises and disappears, and is in no way 'ever-abiding'. Surely, this 'mind' of yours is something completely transitory!

"You will see, if you give it a taste, that the principle of the oneness of body and mind is something constantly being talked about in Buddhism. So, how does the mind, on its own, apart from the body, keep from arising and disappearing as this body of yours arises and perishes? Furthermore, were they inseparable at one time and not inseparable at another, then what the Buddha said would, naturally, be false and deceiving.

"In addition, should you suddenly get the notion that eradicating birth and death is what the Dharma is really about, it would lead you to sully the Precept against despising the Buddha Dharma. Do watch out for this!

"You must also understand that what is spoken of in the Buddha's Teachings as 'the Gate to the Teaching on the vast characteristics common to the nature of all minds' takes in the whole universe, without dividing it into innate natures and their forms or ever referring to things as 'coming into existence' or 'perishing'. Nothing, up to and including realizing enlightenment and nirvana, is excluded from the innate nature of your mind. Each and every thing throughout the whole of the universe is simply 'the One Mind' from which nothing whatsoever is excluded. All

11. Dōgen makes a distinction between the Buddhist concept of persistence and the Shrenikan concept of abiding. With the former, all phenomena, physical and non-physical, arise and continue on ('persist') for an unspecified period before disintegrating and disappearing, whereas with the latter, the mind is thought to remain ('abide') unchanged and unchanging forever.

Gates to the Teaching are equally of this One Mind. To assert that there are no differences whatsoever is the way the Buddhist family understands the nature of Mind. So, within this one all-inclusive Dharma, how can you separate body from mind or split 'birth and death' off from 'nirvana'? You are already a disciple of the Buddha, so do not give ear to the clatter of a lunatic's tongue as he utters views that are off the True Track."

He may then ask, "Do those who devotedly do seated meditation have to stringently observe the Precepts and monastic rules?"

I would point out, "Keeping to the Precepts and leading a pure life are standard customs in the Zen tradition and are the habitual conduct of the Buddhas and Ancestors. However, for those who have not yet formally taken the Precepts, or who have broken them, we cannot say that their seated meditation is without value or merit."

He may then ask, "Surely, someone who is endeavoring to do seated meditation can also do practices like the Shingon mantra chanting or like the Tendai form of introspection, wherein you try to stop thinking evil thoughts and contemplate what Truth is. Right?"

I would point out, "When I was in China, I asked Masters of our tradition about the genuine keys to successful training. None of them said that they had heard of any of our Ancestors to whom the Buddha seal had been properly Transmitted—either in India and China, now or in the past—ever having done practices such as those two. Truly, if you do not make the One Matter for which you train the thing that you focus on, you will never make it to the Unique Wisdom."

He may then ask, "Can this practice be done by men and women in lay life, or is it only suitable for monks?"

I would point out, "The Ancestors have said in their Teaching, 'When it comes to realizing the Buddha Dharma, make no distinction between male and female, or between the exalted and the lowly.'"

He may then ask, "By leaving home life behind, monks are quickly separated from all their various ties so that they have no impediments to diligently practicing seated meditation. But how can those of us involved in the daily pressures of lay life turn to doing training and practice so that we may realize the Way of the Buddhas, which is unconcerned with worldly affairs?"

I would point out, "The Buddhas and Ancestors, out of Their overflowing sympathy, have opened the great, wide Gates of Their compassion. They have done this so that They might help all sentient beings realize the Truth and enter the Way. Who amongst those in the worlds of either the mundane or the saintly could

possibly be excluded from entering? Because of this, should you seek examples from the past up to the present, authenticated instances of it are many indeed.

“For instance, the T’ang Chinese emperors T’ai-tsung and Shun-tsung were deeply involved with myriad matters of state, yet by diligently practicing seated meditation, they succeeded in traversing the Great Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors. The ministers Li and Fang, while councilors, served as right-hand men to their emperor, yet by diligently doing their seated meditation, they also realized the Truth and entered the Great Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors. It simply depends on whether you have the determination or not: it has nothing to do with being a householder or a monk. In addition, those who can deeply discern the difference between what is excellent and what is mediocre will naturally give rise to faith and trust. How much more evident it is that those who regard worldly affairs as an impediment to the Buddha Dharma are only inferring that Buddha Dharma does not exist within the mundane world, and they do so because they have not yet recognized that, within Buddha Dharma, there are no ‘worldly ways’.

“More recently, there was a minister in Great Sung China named Councilor Feng. He was a high official who was extremely mature in the Way of the Ancestors. Later, he composed a poem about himself:

*When free from official duties,
I am fond of doing my meditation.
Rarely do I ever lie down
or go sleep in my bed.
Though I bear the semblance
of a minister of state,
‘The old Buddhist monk’ is what they call me
from sea to sea.*

This poem is saying that, even though he had a position that left him little free time from his duties, his determination towards the path of the Buddhas was so deep that he realized the Way. With him in mind, we should reflect upon ourselves and see how our present condition looks in the mirror of his former times. In Great Sung China, I never heard it said that present-day rulers and their ministers, gentry and commoners, men and women, had not fixed their hearts on the Way of the Ancestors. Both those in the military and those in civil service were intent on seeking training in meditation and studying the Way. Among those who were intent, many undoubtedly illumined That which is the Foundation of their hearts and minds. This should let you know that worldly duties do not, in and of themselves, impede the Buddha Dharma.

“If the authentic Buddha Dharma spreads throughout a country, all the Buddhas and all the celestial beings will continually offer Their protection and, as a result, the ruler will transform his nation into a peaceful one. Since it is the wise and saintly who bring about peacefulness, the Buddha Dharma becomes ever stronger.

“Furthermore, when the Venerable Shakyamuni was in the world, even those who were perverse in their actions or twisted in their views found the Way. In the assemblies of Ancestors and Masters, both the ‘young hunters’ and the ‘old woodcutters’ alike experienced a spiritual awakening.¹² So it is certainly possible for people other than these! Simply seek out the instructive path of a genuine Master.”

He may then ask, “If I decide to do this practice, can I realize the Truth even in this present-day world, which is in the final, degenerate stage of the Buddha’s Teachings?”

I would point out, “Although those who devote themselves to the study of Scriptures make a big thing out of various terms and aspects, in the genuine Teachings of the Greater Course no distinction is made about a true, a superficial, or a final period of the Dharma, and it is said that everyone will realize the Way if they do the training. Not only that, with this Genuine Dharma that is directly Transmitted, once you have entered the practice and left your ‘self’ behind, you will likewise enjoy making use of the wondrous treasures within yourself. Whether or not someone has personally realized the Truth is something that those who have done the training will naturally know, just as those who drink water discern whether it is cool or warm.”

He may then ask, “There are some who say that, according to the Buddha Dharma, if I fully comprehend the import of ‘Our very mind is Buddha,’ then, even though I do not chant the Scriptures or physically put the Buddha’s Way into practice, I do not lack for Buddha Dharma. Simply knowing that the Buddha Dharma has always existed within me is what the whole of realizing the Way comes down to. Apart from this, there is no need to turn to others to seek anything. So why should I become all involved in diligently practicing seated meditation?”

I would point out, “This statement of yours is hopelessly unreliable. If the

12. The ‘young hunters’ is an allusion to those new to training who, having given rise to the intention of realizing Buddhahood, are eagerly seeking it. The ‘old woodcutters’ are those who have been long in training, but who remain preoccupied with cutting the roots of their past karmic tendencies. These two types are hindering themselves from awakening, the former by overzealousness, and the latter by clinging to a notion of “I still have so very far to go in training.”

matter were as you have put it, then anyone with a conscious mind could explain the principle of the Buddha Dharma without having to realize anything.

“You must understand that Buddha Dharma is to be investigated without holding onto any notion of ‘self’ or ‘other’. If knowing that ‘You yourself are Buddha’ were what realization of the Way is, the Venerable Shakyamuni, in the long past, would not have gone to all the trouble He did to try and help others realize the Way.

“Let me take a moment to substantiate this with a wonderful case concerning an ancient one of great virtue:

Long ago, there was a monk in Meditation Master Hōgen’s monastic community named Gensoku who was a subordinate under the Temple’s administrative director. Master Hōgen asked him, “Director Gensoku, how long have you been in our community?”

Gensoku replied, “Why, I’ve been in the community for three years now.”

The Master asked, “As you are still a junior monk, why have you never asked me about the Buddha Dharma?”

Gensoku replied, “I will not lie to Your Reverence. Previously, when I was with Meditation Master Seihō, I fully reached the place of joyful ease in the Buddha Dharma.”

The Master said, “And what was said that gained you entry to this place?”

Gensoku said, “I once asked Seihō what the True Self of a novice is, and Seihō replied, ‘Here comes the Hearth God looking for fire.’”¹³

Hōgen responded, “Nicely put. But I’m afraid you may not have understood it.”

Gensoku said, “A Hearth God is associated with fire, so I understand it to mean that, just as fire is being used to seek for fire, so the True Self is what is used to seek for the True Self.”

The Master said, “Just as I suspected! You have not understood. If this is what the Buddha Dharma was like, it is unlikely that It would have continued on, being Transmitted down to the present day.”

13. The Hearth God was a nickname for the temple boy who attended to lighting the lamps. Temple boys, who ranged in age from seven to fifteen, had not yet taken the Precepts and were not monks. The relevance of this reference is discussed in the Translator’s General Introduction.

Gensoku was so distressed at this that he left the monastery. While on the road, he thought to himself, “In this country, the Master is known as a fine and learned monastic teacher and as a great spiritual leader and guide for five hundred monks. Since he has chided me for having gone wrong, he must undoubtedly have a point.” So, he returned to his Master, respectfully bowed in apology, and said, “What is the True Self of a novice?”

The Master replied, “Here comes the Hearth God looking for The Fire.” Upon hearing these words, Gensoku awoke fully to the Buddha Dharma.

“It is quite clear from this that an intellectual understanding of ‘One’s very Self is Buddha’ is insufficient grounds for saying that you have understood the Buddha Dharma. If an intellectual understanding of ‘One’s very Self is Buddha’ were what Buddha Dharma is, the Master, based on what had previously been said, would not have had to offer guidance or admonish his disciple in the manner that he did. From the moment you meet a good spiritual friend, undoubtedly you should straightaway inquire into the procedures and principles of training and practice, as well as unswervingly do your utmost to practice seated meditation and keep to the Way, without ever letting your mind be content with any partial understanding. The wonderful technique of the Buddha Dharma will then not prove fruitless.”

He may then ask, “I have heard that in India and China in the present day, as well as in the past, there have been those who have awakened to the Way by hearing the sound of bamboo being struck, and others who, upon seeing the color of a flower, have clarified what their mind is, to say nothing of Great Master Shakyamuni who realized the Way upon seeing the morning star, or the Venerable Ananda who, upon the occasion of the debater’s flagpole toppling, became clear as to what Dharma is. In addition, from the time of the Sixth Chinese Ancestor on, there have been many within the five families of our tradition who have clarified what the foundation of mind is through encountering a single word or half a verse of Scripture. Surely, not all these were people who were always diligently practicing the Way by just doing seated meditation, were they?”

I would point out, “What you need to know is that neither of those particular persons—the one who, upon seeing a color, clarified what Mind is and the one who was awakened to the Way by a resonating sound—spent time in speculation and critical assessment whilst diligently practicing the Way, nor did they create a second ‘person’—be it a ‘self’ or an ‘other’—while they were directly engaged in that practice.”

He may then ask, “People in India and China have always been basically honest and straightforward. Because both countries have been centers of culture, their people, once instructed in the Buddha Dharma, have succeeded in entering the Way ever so quickly. Our country, from ancient times, has been extremely short on benevolence and wise discernment, so that it has been hard for us to accumulate genuine spiritual seeds. Because we have been a land of savage barbarians, such seeds are, alas, not to be seen. Furthermore, the monks in our country are inferior even to the householders in those great nations. Our people are foolish, narrow-minded, and petty. They cling tightly to transitory successes and delight in surface virtues. Will such a people, even if they do sit in meditation, succeed in quickly realizing the Buddha Dharma?”

I would point out, “As you say, people in our country are not yet universally benevolent and wise in their discernings, and are also given to laziness and prejudice. Were they given the Dharma straight on, Its Sweet Dew would turn sour and become a poison to them. A taste for fame and gain comes easily, whilst delusion and grasping are hard to let go of. Even so, it does not necessarily require the worldly wisdom of either the mundane or the saintly for people to recognize and enter the Buddha Dharma so that they may serve as a ferry to carry others beyond the mundane. While the Buddha was in the world, a certain man came to experience all four fruits leading to arhathood when he was hit in the head with a handball. And a certain woman came to understand what the Great Way is due to her playfully dressing up in a monk's kesa* in a previous life. These frivolous and dense persons were both like foolish and confused animals. Nevertheless, when their genuine faith and trust rescued them, they were provided with a path which led them out of their delusions. Also, upon seeing an ignorant old monk dumbly sitting, a faithful lay woman who had brought him food opened up and was awakened. Her experience did not depend on ‘enlightened wisdom’ or on Scripture, nor did she rely on words or explanations: she was rescued simply by her genuine faith and trust.

“Also, Shakyamuni's instructions have been spreading through the three thousand worlds for something like two thousand years. The countries within these worlds are of all kinds and are not necessarily lands of benevolence and wisdom, nor are their people necessarily always astute or intellectually brilliant! Even so, the true Dharma of the Tathagata has always possessed a marvelous, unimaginably great, meritorious strength so that, when the time is ripe, It spreads throughout those lands. When people duly train and practice with genuine faith and trust—be they bright or dull—all alike will realize the Way. Do not give way to thoughts that our country is not a land of benevolence and wise discernment, and that its people

are too foolish or stupid to be able to understand what Buddha Dharma is. Moreover, the people are all well endowed with the genuine seed of spiritual Wisdom. Simply, it is rare for them to be in exact harmony with It, and, as a result, they do not yet completely accept and enjoy It.”



The preceding exchange of questions and responses may prove confusing due to my shifting back and forth between the perspectives of guest and host.¹⁴ To some extent, I may have made illusory flowers appear in an empty sky. Be that as it may, since our tradition's principle of diligent practice of the Way by doing seated meditation has not yet been brought into this country, how sad for those with spiritual intentions! It is for this reason that I have brought together a bit of what I saw and heard whilst in China, contenting myself with setting down the genuine keys of clear-eyed Masters, so that those desirous of training in the practice can learn about them. Apart from this, I do not have sufficient time, at present, to set down the rules and regulations of Zen monasteries, or the rankings, standards, and ceremonies for temples. Besides, such a task must not be done in haste.

Even though our country lies east of the Dragon Sea separating it from China, which lies far beyond the clouds and mist, around the time of the Japanese emperors Kimmei and Yōmei in the sixth century, the Buddha's Teachings from the western lands gradually moved eastwards, to the good fortune of our people. However, Their terms and subtleties, as well as the ritual formalities associated with Them, have often become entangled, so that doubts of how to do the practice have weighed heavily. But now, if you make your tattered robe and your patched-up alms bowl your lifetime career, setting up a thatched hut near to where the white rock protrudes from the moss-covered cliffs, whilst sitting upright and polishing your training, in a twinkling you will be one who 'goes beyond being Buddha', and you will quickly bring to a conclusion the Great Matter for which you have trained and studied your whole life.¹⁵ These are precisely the friendly admonitions of

14. That is, between the attitude of a questioning disciple and of a responding Master.

15. In this sentence, the description of a trainee is not simply an idyllic portrait of a hermit-monk but also gives a concise metaphoric description of how someone is to train, employing traditional Chinese Zen Buddhist imagery. The robe, or *kesa*, is associated here with the Precepts; its tatters arise from one's breakage of those Precepts, and its repair results from one's true resolve to do better. The alms bowl suggests one's willingness to train by being all-accepting; its patches are the signs of one's attempt to repair 'leaks' in that willingness. Despite the less than 'perfect' condition of these two aspects of training, the trainee is still willing to continue on, while recognizing that there are still things he needs to do and that he

Master Kodon of Dragon's Fang Mountain and the legacy in how to train bequeathed by Makakashō on Cock's Foot Mountain. As to the procedures for doing seated meditation, you should follow what is in my *Rules for Meditation*,¹⁶ which I compiled during the recent Kanroku period (1225-1227).

Although one should have a ruler's permission before spreading Buddhism throughout a country, if we think once again of the legacy from the Divine Vulture Peak, then all the rulers, lords, ministers, and generals who have appeared in the hundreds of thousands of millions of lands are persons who had graciously accepted the Buddha's decrees, and now, due to their past lives, live on without losing sight of their cherished desire to protect the Buddha Dharma. Those regions in which spiritual help is spread, wherever they may be, need not be strictly Buddhist countries. Therefore, in letting the Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors flow forth, you need not necessarily wait for all conditions to be perfect. Just think of today as the day to begin!

Thus, I leave what I have assembled here for those who are concentrating upon their desire for the Buddha's Teachings, as well as for any within the genuine stream of students who, in search of the Way, drift as a cloud and lodge as a floating reed.

Written down on the mid-autumn day in the third year of the Kanki era (September 12, 1231) by me, the mendicant monk Dōgen, who went to Sung China that I might receive and bring back the Transmission of the Dharma.

need not be 'perfect' in order to keep going onwards. The hut often refers to one's 'place of training'—namely, one's body and mind—which is kept 'thatched' so that the trainee protects himself from the karmic and emotional storms that may assail him either physically 'outside himself' or mentally 'within himself'. While his seat is within the mundane world with all its surrounding growth, he chooses to sit before the white rock, Bodhidharma's 'wall', which is not only a physical place of meditation, but a mental one as well. If he then sits upright—doing his meditation, acknowledging the tatters he has made of the Precepts and the leaks from his lapses in being all-accepting, and attempting to repair them—he will quickly be able to let go of any thoughts of arriving at Buddhahood and will resolve his spiritual question.

16. *Fukan Zazengi*. A translation of this work by Rev. Master P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett appears in *Serene Reflection Meditation*, 6th ed. revised (Mount Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1996), pp. 1-3.