Zen Master DŌGEN'S EIEF AND THOUGHT

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I. Brief Sketch of His Life

Dōgen, the founder of the Sōtō Zen sect in Japan, was born in Kyōto on January 2, 1200. His father was Koga Michichika, a home minister. His mother was the daughter of Fujiwara Motofusa, the the prime minister. When Dōgen was three years old, however, he lost his father. At eight, his mother also died. Deeply sensing the world's transience, he left his home.

In the spring of his 14th year, he had his head shaved by Kōn, an abbot of the Tendai sect. On the platform at Enryakuji he received the Bodhisattva precept. In search of truth Dōgen studied hard and trained day and night. He arrived at a period of Great Doubt when he came face to face with the following problem : If man inherently has Buddha-nature, why did the Buddhas of the past seek the way and train themselves ? His doubt had its origin in the conflict of ideal and reality.

To find a solution to his Great Doubt, Dōgen went to Eisai, the founder of Rinzai Zen in Japan. Eisai, however, could not spare time for him, so Dōgen studied with Eisai's leading disciple, Myōzen.

When Dōgen was 24 years old he accompanied Myōzen to Sung China. He visited various temples there, seeking the true Way. Finally he met Jü-tsing (1164–1238), the chief abbot of Keitoku temple on Mt. Tendō, and there Dōgen became Jü-tsing's disciple.

Jü-tsing had come to Mt. Tendō when he was 62 years old, after heading six other temples. His teaching was severe and critical. Under this true Zen master, Dōgen continued his training with utmost effort. Late one night at the monastery Dōgen was deeply moved by Jü-tsing's words of encouragement to one of the trainees who was napping. It was at this moment that

Dōgen was enlightened; dualistic attachment to body and mind fell away, leaving him vital and free. Dōgen, however, kept up his training after enlightenment there for about two years. In 1227 he returned to Japan, intending to spread the true law and benefit others.

Upon his return Dōgen centered his activities on Kyōto. His extensive writing and teaching efforts helped many disciples toward enlightenment. One of his projects was the construction of his first monastery in Uji. He stayed there for 10 years and left a lasting influence.

In 1244 Dōgen was invited by Hatano Yoshishige, a samurai, to the mountains of Echizen to what is now Fukui prefecture. There he built the Eihei temple. He devoted himself to teaching eager trainees. During this time he went to Kamakura to give the Bodhisattva precept to Shogun Tokiyori. He also found time to familiarize priests and laymen with the Buddhist principle of mutual relationships (*engi no dōri*).

Dōgen's fame was such in 1250 that ex-Emperor Gosaga sent a messenger to Eiheiji with a present of a purple robe. But Dōgen rejected this token of appreciation. The messenger came with the robe three times, and Dōgen finally accepted. On the occasion he wrote the following poem:

Though the valley of Eiheiji is shallow,
The Imperial order is weighty;
The monkeys and cranes laugh at me—
An old monk in a purple robe.

Dōgen actually stored the purple robe in an attic and never wore it.

In the summer of his fifty-third year, Dōgōn suddenly became ill. His health gradually deteriorated. Several times Hatano Yoshishige urged him to return to Kyōto to recuperate. In 1253 Dōgen put his disciple Gikai in charge of Eiheiji and went to Kyōto with his leading disciple Ejō.

After returning to Kyōto his illness worsened. At midnight on August 28, 1253, in the home of Kakunen, a layman disciple, Dōgen died. He left this farewell verse:

Over these 54 years I lighted highest heaven
And sent my vital strength coursing through this vast world,

Until now—fulfilled—my body has nothing more to seek:
Living, I merge with the realm of death.

Many years later–in 1854–Emperor Kōmei gave Dōgen the posthumous title of Busshō Dentō Kokushi, the National Teacher Who Transmitted Buddha-Nature to the East. In 1879 Emperor Meiji conferred another title: Jōyō Daishi, the Great Teacher Who Received the Light of the Sun.

Among Dōgen's writings are *Shōbōgenzō* (95 fascicles), *Fukanzazengi* (one fascicle), Eiheidaishingi (two chapters), Gakudōyōjinshū (one fascicle), *Eiheikoroku* (10 chapters), *Hōkyōki* (one fascicle), and *Eiheigenzenjigoroku* (one fascicle). There are also a number of Dōgen's lectures edited by his disciples, including *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki* (six chapters) and *Sanshodōei.*

Dōgen's disciples numbered 40 or 50. Among these the ones who accurately transmitted his teaching were limited to three: Ejō, Sōkai, and Sennei. From a strict point of view, Ejōś was probably the only true transmission.

II. His Basic Ideas

Dōgen basically wanted to return to the spirit of the Buddha from a critical standpoint. Disinterested in fame or profit, he stayed away from those in power. He preferred a coarse robe to a fancy *kesa.* He secluded himsef in the mountains and tried to teach his followers how to live truly. While rejecting the unity of the three teachings (Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism), he transcended differentiations among the five schools of Zen. He even opposed the use of the name "Zen sect" and stressed the unity of Buddhism. He centered his teaching on a meditative practice that would free men from delusive attachment to body and mind. Dōgen owed much of his approach to his teacher Jü-tsing. While preserving the tradition, he expressed his own individuality.

1. Dōgen was primarily interested in transmitting an unfragmented Buddhism. Behind his rejection of the name "Zen sect" was the fear that Buddhism would become one-sided and superficial if Zen followers set up an independent system in conflict with other sects. He considered the branching of Zen into five schools as a symptom of biased interpretation. His anti-

sectarian attitude was thorough, extending to harsh words against separating Sōtō from the five schools and against separating the Buddha-mind from the Buddha-word followers. His concern was with the root of Buddhism—not its many branches.

2. Dōgen stressed the importance of the Way-seeking mind. He did not believe in downgrading Budhism to jibe with what was considered the spirit of the age. The then popular practice of dividing Buddhism into three periods—*shō* (true), *zō* (similar), and *matsu* (declining)—was considered by Dōgen as only a temporary expedient. For those who really wanted to understand the essence of Buddhism, he felt there was no substitute for hard training, especially in a declining period (*mappō*). He found profound significance in the Way-seeking—in the human effort.

3. The focal point of Dōgen's Buddhism was zazen—the practice of cross-legged sitting. He identified zazen with vital Buddha activity. His *shikan taza*(integrated sitting)was not merely a means of gaining enlightenment as in Sung China or of becoming the Buddha. Because training and enlightenment are unseparated, Dōgen said, our training enfolds enlightenment. In zazn we free ourselves from body and mind, becomeehe Right Law itself, and function as Buddhas and patriarchs.

4. The self-identity of original enlightenment and superior training in Dōsen's zazen arose from faith in inherent Buddha-nature. Enlightenment training based on Buddha-nature was the essence of his Zen. Dōgen's unique view of Buddha-nature stemmed from his own way of interpreting the following passage from the Mahāparinirvāna sūtra : "All beings have Buddhanature." He read this as : "All existences are Buddha-nature." For Dōgen Buddha-nature was the ground of all existences and of all values, and all existences were self-expressions of Buddha-nature. From this basic standpoint Dōgen extensively discussed the problems of *ubusshō* (existing Buddha-nature), *mu-busshō* (non-existing Buddha-nature), *setsubusshō* (expressing Buddha-nature), *kū-busshō* ('sūnyatā Buddha-nature), *mujō-busshō* (impermanent Buddha-nature), and *gyō-busshō* (practicing Buddha-nature).

5. True Buddhism, Dōgen said, was tranmitted by direct contact bet-

ween master and disciple. The transmissian took place through two personalities, becoming one—through one life being transferred to the other and continuing on. In this process the trunk and branches would remain essentially self-identical over the years. But there would be subtle shifts in emphasis to accord with time, place, and individuals. Dōgen insisted that the disciple must eventually transcend the master if the transmission would remain meaningful in each succeeding age.

6. Dōgen's idea of impermanent Buddha-nature led to a unique treatment of time in his essay *Jikanron*. Instead of considering time as contentless form, he saw a fused relation between time and being. Every existence in the world, he said, was itself a single time unit. Dōgen used the term *uji* to designate the specific time arising in each moment. It referred to discontinuous time—to "this time" and "that time." When *uji* was embodied in a person, it was called *kyōryaku*. Here was the continuity of time. For Dōgen then, time had two facets: one discontinuous, unrelated to past and future, and isolated in each moment; the other continuous, related to past and future, and expressing new time in each moment. The continuity of discontinuity and the going/coming of not going/not coming are in this very moment—called the absolute present or the eternal now. To live truly in the absolute present was the essence of Dōge's religion.

After two generations Dōgen's Zen was transmitted to Zen master Keizan (1268–1325). Keizan had many superior disciples, and Dōgen's ideas spread to the ordinary people. Keizan wrote about this:

> The Body of 'Sākya is still warm;
> The faint smile of Kāśyapa retains its freshness……
> To let us know the unchanging by flower gesture,
> And to teach us eternity in a smile.

These words underline the continuity of tradition as Zen passes from master to disciple vitalized by fresh insights for each new generation. Historically, the Japanese Sōtō school founded by Dōgen penetrated deeply into the daily lives of farmers and merchants. In this respect it differed from the Rinzai shool of Zen, which was linked closely with the Shogunate and the

ruling class. Rinzai flourished for a while but started to decline when the Shogunate declined. While both schools exist in Japan today, Sōtō is the larger of the two. In fact, it is the largest order in Japanese Buddhism. While relatively unknown in the West, its teachings are drawing inereasing interest outside of Japan. Some scholars in the United States and Europe, particularly a few in the flelds of pragmatism and existentialism, are finding useable insights in Dōgen's writings. From this interest may develop a synthesis of East-West thought at a level meaningful for the modern age.

III His Greatness

Dōgen's greatness is based on the depth of his thought, the thoroughness of his practice, and the nobility of his character. His life underlines the fact that religion is not a concept but a practice. He fused philosophic insights with actual practice, expressing them in daily life. Dōgen's lofty character, for which he is especilly respected today, attested to the thoroghness of his practice.

Buddhism is a teaching that shows man how to live truly for himself and to guide others to do the same. It is both a religion and a way of real living. Dogen's approach to Buddhism was broad. He taught on integrated Buddhism beyond sectarian narrowness. This stemmed from the opportunity he had to study under Jü-tsing, a great Zen master, when he went to China in his youth. Following Jü-tsing's example, Dōgen later avoid centers of power and authority and eschewed fame and profit. He lived simply and austerely. It was also Jü-tsing's imfluence that led Dōgen to oppose the prevailng trend to synthesize Buddlism, Confucianism and Taoism.

Dōgen especially stressed the importance of the Way-seeking mind. This was the vital element of religious need. Dōgen gave the Way-seeking mind a central place in his teaching.

Other ideas of Dōgen, like *honshō myōshū*, were based on respect for humman dignity. He did not discriminate by birth, rank, wealth. or sex. A concrete example of his emphasis on equality is the *Raihaitokuzui*. In this forscicle of the *Shōbogenzō* he advocated equality of the sexes long before

the Renaissance in Europe. He urged guidance and education for women and attacked the prevailing custom of setting up tabooed areas for women.

Dōgen had great philosophic depth, but his emphasis was on practice and not concept. Keizan praised him in these words; "He is the most outstanding man in 100 worlds—the model for 1,000 years."

As education and culture spread and intermingle, I believe that Dōgen's thought and practice will attract increasing interest outside Japan, and provide some old but still valid answers to many modern problems.