

Dogen's Shobogenzo is his most revered work. It consists of 95 fascicles or chapters.

This page combines a number of resources on the Shobogenzo. The first line gives the index of the the chapter in two different editions of the Shobogenzo: the 75-chapter edition of Kohun Ejo (Dogen's disciple) and the 95-chapter edition of Kozen (1648-1693).

The second ordering is similar to that used in the Windbell English translations (vols [1](#),

[2](#)

,
[3](#)

and

[4](#)

).

The chapter title appears after the chapter numbers. These are web links to a Japanese original online at [Shomonji](#) temple. The second line gives the Romanisation of the Japanese name.

The third line gives the English names for the chapter, and this is followed by a summary of the chapter. Both of these are taken from the Cross & Nishijima translation with the kind permission of Windbell Publications.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=01/3 genjo-koan - The Realized Universe}

01/3

genjo-koan

The Realized Universe

Genjo means "realized," and koan is an abbreviation of kofu-no-antoku, which was a notice board on which a new law was announced to the public in ancient China. So koan expresses a law, or a universal principle. In Shobogenzo, genjo koan means the realized law of the Universe, that is Dharma, or the real Universe itself. The fundamental basis of Buddhism is belief in this real Universe, and in Genjo Koan Master Dogen preaches to us the realized Dharma, or the real Universe itself. When the seventy-five chapter edition of Shobogenzo was compiled, this chapter was placed first, and from this fact we can recognize its importance

{jospagebreak_scroll title=02/2 - maka-hannya-haramitsu - Maha-prajna-paramita}

02/2

maka-hannya-haramitsu

Maha-prajna-paramita

Maka is a phonetic rendering of the Sanskrit word *maha*, which means "great." Hannya is a phonetic rendering of the Sanskrit word

prajna

which can be translated as "real wisdom" or "intuitive reflection." Haramitsu is a phonetic

rendering of the Sanskrit word

paramita

which literally means "to have arrived at the opposite shore," that is, to have accomplished the truth. So

maka-hannya-haramitsu

means the accomplishment which is great real wisdom. In this chapter, Master Dogen wrote his interpretation of the Maha-prajna-paramita-hrdaya-sutra. Hrdaya means heart. This short sutra, usually called "the Heart Sutra," represents the heart of the six hundred volumes of the *Maha-prajna-paramita-sutra*

. Even though it is very short, the Heart Sutra contains the most fundamental principle of Buddhism. What is the most fundamental principle?

Prajna

. What is

prajna

?

Prajna

, or real wisdom, is a kind of intuitive ability that occurs in our body and mind, when our body and mind are in the state of balance and harmony. We normally think that wisdom is something based on the intellect, but Buddhists believe that wisdom, on which our decisions are based, is not intellectual but intuitive. The right decision comes from the right state of body and mind, and the right state of body and mind comes when our body and mind are balanced and harmonized.

So

maha-prajna-paramita

is wisdom that we have when our body and mind are balanced and harmonized. And Zazen is the practice by which our body and mind enter the state of balance and harmony.

Maha-prajna-paramita

, then, is the essence of Zazen.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=03/22 bussho - The Buddha-nature}

03/22

bussho

The Buddha-nature

Butsu means Buddha and sho means nature, so bussho means Buddha-nature. The Chinese characters read in Japanese as bussho represent the meaning of the Sanskrit word *buddhata*, or Buddha-nature; this was usually understood as the potential we have to attain the truth, or as something which we have inherently and which grows naturally day by day. But Master Dogen was not satisfied by such interpretations. In his view, the Buddha-nature is neither a potential nor a natural attribute, but a state or condition of body and mind at a present moment. Therefore, he saw the Buddha-nature neither as something that we might realize in the future, nor as something that we have inherently in our body and mind. From this standpoint, Master Dogen affirmed and at the same time denied the proposition "We all have the Buddha-nature." He also affirmed and at the same time denied the proposition "We all don't have the Buddha-nature." At first sight, these views appear contradictory, but through his dialectic explanation of the Buddha-nature in this chapter, Master Dogen succeeded in interpreting the concept of the Buddha-nature from the standpoint of action or reality.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=04/37 - shinjin-gakudo - Learning the Truth with Body and Mind}

04/37

shinjin-gakudo

Learning the Truth with Body and Mind

Shinjin means "body and mind," and gakudo means "learning the truth," so shinjin-gakudo means "Learning the Truth with Body and Mind." Generally speaking, people usually think that they can arrive at the truth through intellectual reasoning. In Buddhism, however, it is taught that the truth can be attained not by the intellect alone, but through action. Therefore learning the truth in Buddhism includes both physical pursuit of the truth and mental pursuit of the truth. This is why Master Dogen called the Buddhist pursuit of the truth "learning the truth with body and mind." In this chapter he explained learning the truth with body and learning the truth with mind, and at the same time, he explained that the two ways of pursuing the truth are always combined in the oneness of action. So we can say that the division of learning the truth into two ways is only a method of explaining the Buddhist pursuit of the truth through action.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=05/6 - soku-shin-ze-butsu - Mind Here and Now Is Buddha}

05/6

soku-shin-ze-butsu

Mind Here and Now Is Buddha

Soku means "here and now." Shin means "mind." Ze means "is." Butsu means "buddha." The principle of soku-shin-ze-butsu, or "mind here and now is buddha" is very famous in Buddhism, but many people have interpreted the principle to support the beliefs of naturalism. They say if our mind here and now is just buddha, our conduct must always be right, and in that case, we need not make any effort to understand or to realize Buddhism. However, this interpretation is a serious mistake. The principle soku-shin-ze-butsu, "mind here and now is buddha," must be understood not from the standpoint of the intellect, but from the standpoint of practice. In other words, the principle does not mean belief in something spiritual called "mind" but it affirms the time "now" and the place "here" as reality itself. This time and place must always be absolute and right, and so we can call them the truth or "buddha." In this chapter, Master Dogen explained this meaning of soku-shin-ze-butsu, or "mind here and now is buddha."

{jospagebreak_scroll title=06/23 - gyobutsu-yuigi - The Dignified Behavior of Acting Buddha}

06/23

gyobutsu-yuigi

The Dignified Behavior of Acting Buddha

Gyo means to practice or to act, butsu means buddha, yui means dignity or dignified, and gi means ceremony, formal attitude, or behavior. Therefore Gyobutsu-yuigi means the dignified behavior of acting buddha. Buddhism can be called a religion of action. Buddhism esteems action very highly, because action is our existence itself, and without acting we have no

existence. Gautama Buddha's historical mission was to find the truth of action, by which he could synthesize idealistic Brahmanism and the materialistic theories of the six non-Buddhist teachers. In this chapter Master Dogen explained the dignity that usually accompanies buddhas in action.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=07/4 - ikka-no-myoku - One Bright Pearl}

07/4

ikka-no-myoku

One Bright Pearl

Ikka means "one," myo means "bright" or "clear," and ju means "pearl." So ikka no myoku means one bright pearl. This chapter is a commentary on Master Gensa Shibi's words that the whole Universe in all directions is as splendid as a bright pearl. Master Dogen loved these words, so he wrote about them in this chapter.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=08/18 - shin-fukatoku - Mind Cannot Be Grasped [The former]}

08/18

shin-fukatoku

Mind Cannot Be Grasped [The former]

Shin means "mind," fu expresses negation, ka expresses possibility, and toku means "to grasp." Shin-fukatoku, or "mind cannot be grasped," is a quotation from the Diamond Sutra. On the basis of our common sense, we usually think that our mind can be grasped by our intellect, and we are prone to think that our mind must exist somewhere substantially. This belief also extends into the sphere of philosophy; Rene Descartes, for example, started his philosophical thinking with the premise "Cogito ergo sum" or "I think therefore I am." The German idealists, for example, Kant, Fichte, von Schnelling, and Hegel, also based their philosophies on the existence of mind. But in Buddhism we do not have confidence in the existence of mind. Buddhism is a philosophy of action, or a philosophy of the here and now; in that philosophy, mind cannot exist independently of the external world. In other words, Buddhism says that all existence is the instantaneous contact between mind and the external world. Therefore it is difficult for us to grasp our mind independently of the external world. In short, Buddhist theory cannot support belief in the independent existence of mind. In this chapter, Master Dogen preached that mind cannot be grasped, explaining a famous Buddhist story about a conversation between Master Tokuzan Senkan and an old woman selling rice cakes.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=09/44 - kobusshin - The Mind of Eternal Buddhas}

09/44

kobusshin

The Mind of Eternal Buddhas

Ko means "old" or "eternal," butsu means "buddha" and shin means "mind." So kobusshin means "the mind of eternal buddhas." In this chapter, Master Dogen cites examples of the mind of eternal Buddhas, quoting Master Tendo Nyojo, Master Engo Kokugon, Master Sozan Konin, and Master Seppo Gison. Then he explains a story about National Master Daisho (Master Nan-yo Echu) and his disciple that suggests the oneness of the mind of eternal Buddhas and miscellaneous concrete things. At the end of the chapter he quotes Master Zengen Chuko's words on the matter.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=10/26 - daigo - Great Realization}

10/26

daigo

Great Realization

Dai means great and go means realization, so daigo means great realization. Many Buddhist scholars, for example Dr. Daisetsu Suzuki, have translated go as "enlightenment." But the meaning of the word "enlightenment" is ambiguous and the word has for many years been a stumbling block to the understanding of Buddhism. So it may be better to translate go as realization. The meaning of realization in Master Dogen's theory is also difficult to understand. Anyway, it is clear that realization is not only intellectual understanding, but a more concrete realization of facts in reality. So we can say that realization in Master Dogen's theory is realization in real life. We can study his thoughts on realization in this chapter.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=11/58 - zazengi - The Standard Method of Zazen}

11/58

zazengi

The Standard Method of Zazen

Gi means a form, or a standard of behavior. Therefore Zazengi means the standard method of Zazen. Master Dogen wrote several treatises about Zazen. First he wrote Fukan-zazengi, (The Universal Guide to the Standard Method of Zazen), in 1227, just after coming back from China. In Shobogenzo he wrote Bendowa (A Talk about Pursuing the Truth), Zazenshin (A Needle for Zazen), Zanmai-o-zanmai (The Samadhi That Is King of Samadhis), and this chapter, Zazengi. Fukan-zazengi was the first text Master Dogen wrote, and thus it was the first proclamation of his belief in Zazen. Bendowa was an introduction to Zazen written in an easy style and format to

help us understand the fundamental theories of Zazen. Zazenshin contains a guiding poem on Zazen, and Master Dogen's interpretation of it. The reason Master Dogen used poetry to interpret the meaning of Zazen is that it is difficult to interpret the philosophical meaning of Zazen in prose, because the ultimate meaning of Zazen is something that cannot be explained with words. Master Dogen felt that it was appropriate to suggest the ultimate philosophical meaning of Zazen in poetry. But in this chapter, Zazengi, Master Dogen explained only the formal method of practicing Zazen. The existence of this chapter indicates how highly Master Dogen revered the formal standard of Zazen.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=12/27 - zazenshin - A Needle for Zazen}

12/27

zazenshin

A Needle for Zazen

Shin means a bamboo needle that was used for acupuncture in ancient China. So shin means a method of healing body and mind, and the word came to be used for a maxim that has the power to cure a human being of physical and mental discomfort. Subsequently, the word shin was used to describe short verses useful in teaching the important points of a method of training. In this chapter Master Dogen first explained the true meaning of Zazen, quoting and commenting on a famous exchange between Master Nangaku and Master Baso. Then he praised a Zazenshin by Master Wanshi Shokaku, and finally, he wrote his own Zazenshin.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=13/31 - kai-in-zanmai - Samadhi, State Like the Sea}

13/31

kai-in-zanmai

Samadhi, State Like the Sea

Kai means "sea" and in (a translation of the Sanskrit word *mudra*) means "seal" or "stamp." Zanmai (a phonetic representation of the Sanskrit word *samadhi*

) means the state in Zazen. So kai-in-zanmai means "sea-stamp samadhi" or "samadhi as a state like the sea." These words appear frequently in the Garland Sutra. Master Dogen explains that the words describe the state in Zazen, or the mutual interrelation between subject and object here and now. In this chapter Master Dogen expounds on samadhi as a state like the sea, quoting from the Vimalakirti Sutra, the Lotus Sutra, and from a conversation between Master Sozan Honjaku and his disciple.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=14/43 - kuge - Flowers in Space}

14/43

kuge

Flowers in Space

Ku means "the sky," or "space," and ge means "flowers." What are flowers in space? Master Dogen uses the words "flowers in space" to express all phenomena in this world. According to the ideas of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, we cannot be sure whether things really exist in this world, but we can be sure that there are phenomena which we can perceive with our senses. Therefore, for him, phenomena are not necessarily identified with reality although they do actually appear in this world. He refused to discuss the metaphysical problem of "real existence" and based his philosophy on human reason. The same idea was present in ancient Buddhism. Master Dogen thought that this skeptical attitude was important in considering the meaning of our life, and so in this chapter he explains the meaning of "flowers in space," which in Buddhism expresses real phenomena.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=15/36 - komyo - Brightness}

15/36

komyo

Brightness

Komyo means luminosity, light, or brightness. Such light has been revered in Buddhism since ancient times, and has both a physical and a mental or spiritual side. Generally speaking, idealistic people believe in spiritual light whereas materialistic people only believe in physical light, but according to Buddhist theory, brightness has both a physical side and a mental side. In this chapter Master Dogen explained this brightness. He explained that the Universe is our own brightness, that the Universe is just brightness, that our behavior in the Universe is brightness, and that there is nothing other than brightness.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=16/30 - gyoji - [Pure] Conduct and Observance [of Precepts] - Parts 1 & 2 }

16/30

gyoji

[Pure] Conduct and Observance [of Precepts] - Parts 1 & 2

Gyo means deeds, actions, or conduct; and ji means observance of precepts. So gyoji means "Pure Conduct and Observance of Precepts." In short, we can say that Buddhism is a religion of action. Gautama Buddha recognized the importance of action in our life, and he established an ultimate philosophy dependent on action. In sum, the solution to all problems relies upon the philosophy of action and therefore Master Dogen esteemed action highly. In this chapter he quoted many examples of pure conduct and observance of precepts by Buddhas and patriarchs. The contents of this chapter are thus very concrete, and encourage us in practicing

our Buddhist life and observing the Buddhist precepts.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=17/29 - inmo - It}

17/29

inmo

It

Inmo is a colloquial word in Chinese, and it means "it," "that," or "what." We usually use the words "it," "that," or "what" to indicate something that we do not need to explain. Therefore Buddhist philosophers in China used the word inmo to suggest something ineffable. At the same time, one of the aims of studying Buddhism is to realize reality, and according to Buddhist philosophy, reality is something ineffable. So the word inmo was used to indicate the truth, or reality, which in Buddhist philosophy is originally ineffable. In this chapter Master Dogen explained the meaning of inmo, quoting the words of Master Ungo Doyo, Master Samghanandi, Master Daikan Eno, Master Sekito Kisen, and others.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=18/33 - kannon - Avalokitesvara}

18/33

kannon

Avalokitesvara

Kannon is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese name of the Bodhisattva called *Avalokitesvara* in Sanskrit. Avalokitesvara is described in the Lotus Sutra as someone who always comes to this world to save a man or woman who cries for help. Kannon literally means "Regarder of Sounds," and this expresses the character of Avalokitesvara who always responds to the cries for help of living beings in this world. Thus, Avalokitesvara is usually thought of as a symbol of compassion. But Master Dogen understood Avalokitesvara as a symbol of a life force that is more fundamental to living beings than compassion. So in this chapter he explained the true meaning of Avalokitesvara, quoting a famous conversation about Avalokitesvara between Master Ungan Donjo and Master Dogo Enchi.

{jospagebreak_scroll title=19/20 - kokyo - The Eternal Mirror}

19/20

kokyo

The Eternal Mirror

Ko means "ancient" or "eternal" and kyo means "mirror," so kokyo means "the eternal mirror." And what "the eternal mirror" means is the question. In this chapter Master Dogen quoted Master Seppo Gison's words "When a foreigner comes in front of the mirror, the mirror reflects the foreigner." From these words we can understand the eternal mirror as a symbol of some human mental faculty. The eternal mirror suggests the importance of reflection, so we can suppose that the eternal mirror is a symbol of the intuitional faculty. In Buddhist philosophy, the intuition is called *prajna*, or real wisdom. Real wisdom in Buddhism means our human intuitional faculty on which all our decisions are based. Buddhism esteems this real wisdom more than reason or sense-perception. Our real wisdom is the basis for our decisions, and our decisions decide our life, so we can say that our real wisdom decides the course of our life. For this reason, it is very natural for Master Dogen to explain the eternal mirror. At the same time, we must find another meaning of the eternal mirror, because Master Dogen also quoted other words of Master Seppo Gison, "Every monkey has the eternal mirror on its back." Therefore we can think that the eternal mirror means not only human real wisdom, but also some intuitional faculty of animals. So we must widen the meaning of the eternal mirror, and understand it as a symbol of the intuitional faculty which both human beings and animals have. Furthermore Master Seppo Gison said, "When the world is ten feet wide, the eternal mirror is ten feet wide."

When the world is one foot wide, the eternal mirror is one foot wide." These words suggest the eternal mirror is the world itself. So we can say that the eternal mirror is not only a symbol of an individual faculty but is also something universal. From ancient times Buddhists have discussed the eternal mirror. In this chapter Master Dogen explains the meaning of the eternal mirror in Buddhism, quoting the words of ancient Buddhist masters.