

essays of
Sawaki Kodō





In the Spring of 2004 I was 22 years old. I lived at the San Francisco Zen Center with my teacher Kosho McCall, who at the time was receiving Dharma Transmission from Blanche Hartman. Blanche studied o-kesa sewing with Rev. Joshin Kasai, a disciple of Kōdō Sawaki Rōshi. Blanche shared her appreciation for Sawaki's teaching style with Kosho, and Kosho shared his appreciation of Sawaki with me. In 1990, Soto-Shu Shumūcho published *"The Zen Teachings of Homeless Kōdō,"* Shohaku Okamura's English translation of Kosho Uchiyama's 1975 *"Yadonashi Hokkusan."* For the next ten years, that slim volume was about all there was in English by or about Sawaki Rōshi. In the 90s, Association Zen Internationale published a magazine called *"Zen Revue."* The first half was in French, and then it would repeat itself (sans photos) in English. I was very excited when I found several issues of this magazine in the reading room at City Center. Being a recently retired punk rocker, I felt compelled to make a fanzine. I spent a glorious day in the City Center copy room amongst boxes of back issues of *"Wind Bell."* I felt nervous about being caught as I cut and pasted away while I was supposed to be working. The only person who saw me was Blanche's husband Lou who asked what I was up to. I told him I was making a Homeless Kōdō magazine for Blanche and Kosho and he said, "far out." The bits in the second portion of the zine are what was available on the Antai-ji webpage at the time. There's a lot more available now, but I've decided to keep this volume as it originally appeared when it was made. Enjoy. -Koji Dreher

Further reading:

www.antaiji.org

www.zen-road.org

Living and Dying in Zazen: Five Zen Masters of Modern Japan by Arthur Braverman

AN INTERVIEW WITH KOSHO MURAKAMI

Q. When did you meet Kodo Sawaki ?

A. In 1957; I was 20, now I'm 50. Before that I had been taught in the Rinzai school, then I studied theoretical physics and got my degree. In 1959 I was ordained a monk by Kodo, then I served as his secretary. At that time he was still in good health but I used to carry his things — very heavy because of all the books. Whenever he got somewhere he would simply say «Hello» and plunge into his books. He had a very beautiful voice. When he was angry his voice became terrifying and set everything around him shaking and quaking. Nowadays nobody in Japan follows Kodo's way, his style of living.

Q. What is your practice, your gyoji ?

A. I get up at 3 a. m., put on my kesa, eat guen mai. I eat two meals a day, never meat or fish. Then I read, and answer letters. Many people write to me asking questions about life and death and their problems. In the evening I read some more and go to bed at 9 p.m., after taking a bath. Once a month I make kesas for other people, sometimes real funzoe (kesa made of rags etc). Sometimes I give talks in town and I go for zazen once a week at Shimodo, near Izu, south of Tokyo. Once a month there is a little 3-day sesshin with people who have practised a long time. Thirteen hours of zazen every day. At these sesshins there are only 3-6 people.

I would like to go back to a traditional gyoji, like Dogen practised. That no longer exists at Eihei-ji. No true zazen. Young monks complain about their aching legs and stop zazen as soon as they return to their father's temple. In Japan when people see a temple they think of Buddhism, but inside the temple are only people who want money and who live comfortable lives. True monks are rare today. Kodo didn't like Eiheiji.

Q. What do you call «Kodo Sawaki's style» ?

A. No temple. True religion can't live in temples. Kodo had a very rough childhood, as an orphan taken in and raised by a gangster relative. That's why he could understand other people's suffering so deeply. Kodo Sawaki used to say that monks in temples were like cats in houses, but a true monk was like a tiger in the forest. People who live in temples don't live like Buddha. Kodo did not allow his disciples to follow the way of temples.

Q. How have you lived since Kodo Sawaki's death ?

A. I have not been ordained a monk or been given any shiho by any other master because I have never met any master but Kodo. I don't belong to the Soto Zen establishment. I think it's best to be independent. I'm not interested in certificates. What is important today is to follow the mind of Buddha. You have to be Buddha's disciple, directly, not through the intermediary of a shiho. The real shiho is to accept the dharma from a real master. Kodo Sawaki had many disciples but only one received the true transmission and continued his style. Uchiyama changed the style of Antaiji. I recently met Narita Roshi at Akita. He practises zazen with businessmen. He has a big temple, he's part of the Soto establishment and he does what he can in that framework.

Q. What happened after Kodo Sawaki's death ?

A. Deshimaru met Oshawa before Kodo died. He was interested in coming to France. When he decided to go, two years after Kodo's death, the son of Abe, whose father was a close friend of kodo, came with him. I thought of coming to join them myself and started learning French so I could help Deshimaru. But a little while later he wrote that he didn't need any help because he already had good disciples.

After Kodo's death I went around Japan visiting his true disciples, with my tent on my back. I met some remarkable people. They continue to hold sesshin among themselves in different parts of Japan. Others have disappeared or are dead. In particular there is Genko, at Myogenji in Nagoya; he is a true disciple of Kodo.

KODO SAWAKI

Zazen reveals the true nature of reality. Immediately one feels a great need to grasp it. But the true nature of reality is to not have reality. From a human point of view, this reality is not reality. Nowadays, people, that is intellectuals, accustomed to passing exams filling reams of paper on any subject, try to write about it. But the more they seek reality the more it escapes.

Men only look to the things of men. A fish only sees the world of a fish, a thief sees thieves every where. Someone told me that a judge often said : « For me, everyone seems to be a criminal ». He was probably speaking the truth. It was normal for him to see everyone as guilty.

An antiques collector, even if he worships Buddha, still estimates its value : « How much can I buy this for ? »

A man who has just stolen something is afraid and takes fright. The policemen who chase him look at the faces of everyone, wondering whether or not the guy in front of them is the thief. So, the hunter and the hunted move in different worlds. That is why reality is so difficult to realize. To discover the true nature of reality is to embrace in one look the whole of the universe. For that, it's enough to look over your glasses, or even better, to take them off.

To realise the universe in one glance is not a problem of quantity but of quality.

Even if one evaluates the distances of the universe in thousands of billions of light-years, beyond that there is still the unknown. In the Lotus Sutra, the age of the universe is said to be five hundred cosmic cycles. Infinitely huge, infinitely small, the world is limitless. The true problem is neither time nor space, it is the essence of the universe.

To see the reality of the universe, in just one look, all that is there and only that, everyone can actualise this during zazen.

From a biological point of view, human beings are nothing other than mushrooms. People make categories like : higher civil servant, rich man, etc. but we are nothing other than mushrooms born in a breath. We are mushrooms for a night.

Besides, mushrooms exist in the world of dreams. Nothing is real. The concepts that we make are nothing but a realm of dreams.

In ancient times, there were neither x-rays nor telescopes. Nothing of this kind existed. So we had to equip ourselves with eyes able to see without the aid of telescopes or microscopes. Then, one day, for the first time, one eye perceived the reality in its totality. This extraordinarily perceptive eye saw itself as well as the others. It penetrated happiness as well as suffering and, looking at everything in the world with its prodigious eye, it perceived for the first time a world where absolutely nothing existed.

KODO SAWAKI

When we watch what goes on in the world, we can see that people are like animals, ready to fight and destroy each other on the slightest pretext. They never think to act for each other. Their heads are filled with themselves. It is the same for one person, a group, a country ; it is what happens when people do not hear the true dharma.

When we hear the dharma it becomes clear that money does not necessarily make people happy, that power does not provide greatness, that a country's size is not a measure of its strength.

Human beings imagine they are the triumph of evolution but there are more thieves and murderers among humans than anywhere else. You seldom see a cow killing another cow. People kill people with bombs. It is in this sense that human beings are the most miserable of all animals. No other animal suffers as much as human beings. They claim to be the lords of creation but they are also the creatures that suffer most. Because of their suffering they wage unending wars, they alone can fall into hell ; and when they put their own egos first, they create hell. Yet it is those same human beings who can dare to get rid of those egos, transcend them, and when they make the decision to do that they are doing a great deed.

What is the sense of our life ? It is to solve the problem of our existence. The solution of our life is to practise the way with all living creatures, to know that although we possess the Buddha-nature we have done nothing but grope in the darkness thus far in life. This true freedom must be ours, but it cannot be achieved by oneself or by others. True freedom, I believe, is to be fettered neither by society nor by one's own ego.

True freedom means taking hold of non-fear. Nothing can frighten us any more, neither sickness nor death nor poverty. When we have this attitude there are no more disasters on earth or in heaven.

To fall into a blazing fire is a disaster and to receive a million dollars is also a disaster. It is a mistake to believe that suffering is caused by lack of money or by pain or cold or hunger. The root of suffering exists, whether there is money or not ; it is the suffering of the whole universe.

The secret of Buddhism is non-possession. Look at people ; they are all big bags of skin that want to possess. It is not easy to turn towards non-possession.

Zazen means practising the way that unites the self with God or Buddha. When we practise this way there is no more pain or shame or sadness. This way is our true ego. Satori means taking hold of the self that penetrates the whole universe. Zazen has no use ; when we practise zazen we no longer wish to escape from the life of transmigration, we no longer wish to be reborn in paradise or to escape from suffering. To accept suffering in order to help all mankind is *bodai shin*, the mind of awakening. We must live our life from one moment to the next, our faith anchored in the stopped clock. That is the way to live eternally, not knowing whether tomorrow we will still be alive, not knowing what we did yesterday. We practise the true thing today, the thing that penetrates our bones, with our feet firmly planted on the great earth.

The desiring ego is poor. I have never wanted anything, but people give me things anyway, too many things. They give me sweets I cannot eat because of my stomach ulcers. Grownups often tell their children, when they cry, «It's nothing ! Don't cry !» Those same grownups are torn apart by their prejudices and shout and complain. Zazen tells them, «It's nothing ! Don't cry ! Your world is nothing at all.» Because of their prejudices they don't see the paradise beside them. So I say to them : Sit down.

KODO SAWAKI

Kodo Sawaki Roshi used to say, «Biologically, human beings are no different from mushrooms. Arbitrarily, we all make up our own categories, e.g. colonel, rich man, poor man etc, but we are simply mushrooms sprouting overnight in a puff of wind. Also, these mushrooms exist only in the dream world, and in that world there is nothing else ; your categories are nothing other than the dream. To wake up means to hold unshakeably to the thing that is one with the universe. Because we are one with the universe we have life, and we should act in unison with the universe. Instead of that, most people play hide-and-seek, from beginning to end of their lives. There are things they prefer and things they dislike ; they agonise running after the things they prefer and are unhappy because they cannot obtain them, just as they are unhappy because they cannot escape from the things they dislike. And so they go on until they die. That is what is known as transmigration. The dharma means that people must lose, for themselves. That's what is called giving, *fuse*. It is to your own advantage to lose. Even if someone gives me something, there is no hope of that person getting something in return : if I give thanks for the present, the giver's ego swells, and if I don't give thanks the giver is sorry s/he gave. In the end, the gift is like zazen : happy, unforgettable, a whole life long. Patiently, I say nothing. To create our own thing that embraces the entire universe is the deep meaning of zazen. To practice zazen is the most precious good, the highest, the most important of all the things it is possible to do. Zazen is the life of all the sacred texts, zazen is the living expression of all the scriptures. If human beings believe they are alone, they are nothing but animals. They have appetites for food and sex, and that's all. Then they want money and a house and toys. But as they grow older their playthings, their toys become more and more complicated. At first their mother's breast is enough, then they want caramels and balloons and a camera and a bicycle and works of art and paintings, and at the last is the coffin.

Zazen is not something special. On the contrary, it is a very ordinary teaching. Why ? Because it drives out our human desires.

If you desire satori you are no better than a beggar. Not to desire money, not to desire life, not to desire fame, not to desire anything at all but simply to practise zazen : that is *hishiryo*, infinite consciousness.

When you practise zazen you transcend the three worlds. You practise zazen, but what does zazen do ? It must be true zazen. The condition of the mind is most important : it is when yourself and the environment, in zazen, are only one, that there are no more desires in your kingdom.

We must return to a world without artifice. Our world is deformed by artifices, which in turn produce other artifices that are dressed up, covered over with lacquered paper. And all in order not to look within. That is the realm of ordinary people.

What we must do is give the human animal a good slap across the nose and tell it : «Here is the Way»; and create, together with everyone else, the eternally immortal human person. That is the only thing that has any real value.»

Kodo Sawaki

"True reality is always the same and is never interrupted."

If we believe the sutras, we might say that radio existed in the most distant times. One day, Maudgalyayana, one of Shakyamuni's principal disciples, wanted to see how far Buddha's voice carried. He set out towards the east and walked straight ahead without stopping. Even though he covered a considerable distance, he still heard Buddha's voice. Using his supernatural powers, he was able to go beyond the myriad earths of Buddha and reach a land where the banner of Buddha Komyo waved. Maudgalyayana arrived in the middle of the meal. Large iron bowls were filled with rice. Splash! He fell like a drop of water on the edge of a bowl. The Buddha of this land measured 80 yujun. Now a yujun represents 42 lieues-- in other words, he was 12,800 kilometers tall. He really was a very tall Buddha. He could not even have sat on our earthly globe. He would have hung it from his belt like a pillbox. The Buddha was surrounded by his disciples. It was an arhat who resembled arhats in all points conforming to the Buddha. Their bowls too. They were so big that all of Japan would have fit in them. It was on the edge of one of these bowls that Maudgalyayana landed.

The arhat saw him and looked carefully at what seemed to him a small insect. He took him delicately between thumb and forefinger to observe him more closely. He saw that his head was shaved, that he wore a kesa and that he had every appearance of a monk. And so the arhat said, "World-Honored One, a black insect has come to visit us. What can be the causes and conditions of his coming? Would there be black insects?"

The Buddha replied, "Well, well! Beyond the myriad Buddha lands there is a world called Shaba where the World-Honored Shakyamuni resides. The man you see is a strong disciple of this Buddha. He wanted to measure the strength of Buddha's voice and that is how he arrived in our world. Yet, he has exhausted his supernatural powers but he has not exhausted the Buddha's voice."

After having heard the Buddha's teaching, Maudgalyayana came back to this earth. It is said that the World-Honored Shakyamuni was listening at the same time to Buddha Komyo through space. Exactly like the radio. The universe is one: "The nature of ultimate reality is unique and identical to itself." All forms are without form, true reality is always the same and is not interrupted. This uninterruptedness of life is you and me. How can ordinary man, whose life is limited to the contents of his wallet, be conscious of living eternity? It is only by dying that we truly understand what the continuity of life is.

If we reconsider things from the world of the dead, we see that the nature of ultimate reality is unique and identical to itself, and that it is our concepts that create disorder and confusion. At the moment of death, there is no longer good, nor evil, nor existence, nor non-existence. All this is only dreams and illusions.

Kodo Sawaki, The Chant of Awakening

KODO SAWAKI

A monk has the characteristics of a monk, a teacher has those of a teacher. A soldier has the characteristics of a soldier, a poor man has the characteristics of a poor man, a rich one has those of a rich man. Each person has her or his own characteristics. The Way begins when you abandon all the characteristics.

Causes and circumstances are the origin of the world of phenomena. If the origin of a phenomenon is a cause, then it has no nature of its own. When you accept and recognise that absence, you will reach the pure land.

Our everyday life is a life of transmigration and wandering through the world of our dreams and fantasies. It is what is known as travelling through the long night of ignorance. What are people so busy doing? Transmigrating... What they like best is playing hide-and-seek and running noisily after their desires. They try to get away from what they dislike, but is there anywhere to get away to? No. Is there anywhere to get? No.

If you want fortune or health or satori, you are nothing but a beggar. But if you can forget this ordinary human nature, there will be nothing in you that is separate from heaven and earth.

When you practise zazen you are in your coffin. When you are in your coffin you can understand that nothing belongs to you. All the things you have acquired, knowledge, money, trinkets, are just temporary loans. By practising zazen you can stand in your own life, steady and unshakeable.

When you forget about wanting to get anything for yourself, the Buddha dharma is right there. Whatever good you may do, if it is done for your own ego, is just a sad story.

People amass knowledge, but I think that the final point is to be able to hear the sound of the valley and see the colour of the mountain. In short, not to look at people but to look at the moon, the trees, to hear the sermon of the whole universe.

So create the present out of your true self. The present that keeps rising up and rising up, free and unfettered. It is called no-thought, hishiryō. If everyone on this earth wanted the way there would be no more wars or famine, no more useless lives that have no reason for existing except in competition. This earth would become a paradise. But people prefer make trouble with their personal egos.

To have no thoughts, no desires, to be hishiryō, does not mean to be an inert lump of clay. It means not to rejoice when Buddha comes and not to turn away when the devil comes.

In the kingdom of the way the ego disappears. It disappears absolutely from the whole world.

When you practise zazen there is no more sin. Zazen is the one, only precept, transmitted by Buddhas and patriarchs. And to settle yourself in zazen means to stop all the fabrications of your ego and practise what the Buddhas and patriarchs practised.

Shikantaza is the exact same zazen as that of Bodhidharma and Shakyamuni. But a zazen in which you are seeking something, however lofty the doctrine, is worth nothing. It is an empty husk of the practice. Only this zazen, practised with this lump of flesh, is Buddha. My zazen is not to get money or become famous or achieve some position. My whole lifelong I have only eaten for zazen, taken care of myself for zazen, lived for zazen; the whole strength of my life has been only for zazen.

That is when Buddha or God appears in this body and creates what is called living Buddha.

KODO SAWAKI

People always have something to do. They act as though fireworks were bursting out all over, in front, behind, left and right. They don't know which way to turn.

« I don't have time, I'm in a hurry, I've got too much to do... »
Their heads are full of contradictions and they never take time to put them in order. But the more complicated the world grows, the more we need to simplify it, unify it and recover its fundamental oneness.

Ask yourself why you eat, why you need to drink alcohol. You'll tell me, « Because I feel like eating, I feel like drinking, so I eat and drink, that's all. » Most people don't even know why they do what they do, and that's why their lives are incoherent.

« I eat because I feel like eating, I drink because I feel like drinking, » that's like the fool who laughs and cries and doesn't know why. « I did that because I felt like doing it. I have to go there because I felt like going. » That's just how a baby behaves.

« Peaceful and happy, in silence, calm and serenity, » that's why I live, that's why I eat. Clean and clear. Sawaki practises zazen and in order to make zazen stronger he shaved his head and put on a kesa. That's all. He practises zazen and gets other people to practise too. He possesses nothing that is not essential. The rest is just blahblah, even if it's talking about the Dharma year in and year out for a century. Some people study the written texts so hard they have nervous breakdowns. Then they say wonderful things of which neither I nor anybody else understands a single word. They work so hard they don't even practise zazen any more. They quit eating and fill their bellies with study. It's all useless. Our sole and supreme mission is so simple : live in silence, calm and serenity ; peacefully, far from noise and agitation.

After avenging an affront to his master, Oishi Yoshio withdrew to Sengakuji temple and said, « In any event, the purity of my intentions has never been darkened by so much as the shadow of a doubt. » There was only one way out for him — hara kiri. Knowing he would have to die, he did what he had to do with a clear conscience and a single thought, not considering what he was going to gain as a result or what might become of him. Those whose minds are filled with contradictions live in anguish, whereas when the mind is unified everything becomes simple. The main thing is oneness. When life disappears that is all that remains. That's why we have to be vigilant. Those who don't find oneness are to be pitied. We don't know why we're born as

human beings, nobody knows. Our parents put us in this world, there's nothing we can do about it, here we are. It's like the birds : the male brings food and the female sits on the eggs. When heat has done its work, cheep ! cheep ! She gives the babies food and cheep ! cheep ! they fly away. Animals are absolutely not different from us, only we're a little more elaborate. Human beings are just animals that smoke. They wouldn't worry so much if they only had this unique place in which to live « in silence and serenity ». We could call it supreme karma.

Kodo Sawaki

To pass on the lamp is to pass on the flame. Shakyamuni passed it on to Mahakashyapa, who passed it on to Ananda. It was then handed down from Shanavasin to Upagupta, then to Dhritika, to reach the twenty-eighth patriarch, Bodhidharma.

The relationship that developed between Shimokobe Choryu and his disciple Keishu Ajari illustrates the intuitive insight that existed between the two men.

Keishu wrote: "Only you know me; and rare are those, I think, who know you as well as I do." People who are on the same wavelength are indeed very rare.

It was the twenty-eighth Indian patriarch, Bodhidharma, who introduced the Law to China. It was received by the emperor, who asked:

"What is the essential principle of the awakening of the sage?"

"To be wide open and empty without there being any sage."¹

"Then what is he who is before me?"

"I do not know," replied Bodhidharma.

Bodhidharma's was the first voice to make itself heard in China. Not getting on well with the emperor, Bodhidharma crossed the river, passed to the other side of the Yang-Tse-Kiang and retired in the Shao-Lin monastery where he practised zazen for nine years facing a wall.

His disciple Eka arrived at the monastery one day and asked to be instructed on the Way, but he received no reply. He waited outside in the snow for Bodhidharma to pay attention to him. He ended up buried waist-deep, and it is even said that he cut off his arm to prove his sincerity. Finally the master relented and accepted him as a disciple. He would later say to Eka, "You took my marrow!"

The third patriarch was Sosan, the fourth was Doshin, the fifth was Konin. China was going through a time of trouble and war, and Konin had to take refuge in the Obai mountains north of the river. It was in this monastery one day that he discovered the virtues of young Eno, who worked in the kitchen.

One day, Konin said to his disciples, "I wish to transmit the Law to one of my disciples. And so, I would like each one to compose a poem expressing his understanding."

Jinshu, the brightest, composed this poem:

The body is the Bodhi tree.

The mind is like a clear mirror.

We should always do our best to clean it,

So as not to let dust settle on it.

He posted it on the wall in a place where everyone could see it. The fifth patriarch read it in passing and said, "If we practice the Way in this spirit, we will not err."

All the disciples learned it by heart; the monastery hummed like a beehive. Eno, who was busy stacking rice, asked his comrades: "Hey! What are you all mumbling?"

"It's Jinshu's poem. Everybody knows it by heart."

Eno decided that he would compose one too.

"Listen to me," he said. "Listen to my poem."

"Shut up, idiot, don't say stupid things."

No one wanted to listen to him. So he had a young monk write his poem, next to the place where Jinshu's was:

Bodai, satori, its originality

Is not a tree.

The mirror does not exist.

Originally, there is nothing.

Where could the dust settle?

All the disciples were stunned, as was the fifth patriarch. "There is nothing more ill-timed, more stupid," he said, erasing it with his sleeve. "The affair stops here."

During the night, the patriarch went down to the kitchen where he found Eno stacking rice.

"Are you finished with the white rice?" he asked.

Eno replied at once: "It is ready but it is not yet sifted."

He struck three times with the mortar.

It was midnight when the fifth patriarch recognized him as his successor in the Law.

The master gave him the order to flee. Eno jumped into a boat, Konin lent him a hand, and he disappeared. The disciples rushed in pursuit of him, swarming in all directions.

He lived as a recluse in the mountains for fifteen years, then one day made his entry into the world. He planted the banner of the Law at Temple Horin-ji, on Mount Sokei. There, Yoka Daishi and a great number of disciples found profound illumination in his presence.

Dogen wrote: "When the kesa reached Mount Sokei, the Law spread throughout the universe."

All of these illustrious patriarchs transmitted the kesa. And it is in this way that the gate of the Law was bequeathed to us

KODO SAWAKI

People only grow angry because they think of their five feet eight inches of body as a possession. Yet when the sutras talk about it, all they say is that it is a big bag of stinking skin.

When somebody in a rage shouts «Who do you take me for?» or «Who do you think you're talking to?» I think to myself, «To a big bag of sinking skin».

Human beings tear each other apart because of their opinions, politicians tear each other apart, husband and wife tear each other apart. The whole world is full of tearing. Why? Just because of the vanity of our egos. Even monks and nuns and priests tear each other apart. Is there life after death? Is the soul eternal or not? All of that is nothing but trivial jokes, ego-stories. If we stop paying attention to the ego, such nonsense as eternity or not eternity ceases to exist, for the soul.

This degenerate world is the reason why professional liars succeed today. But if we observe impermanence, there are no more lies, and where there are no more lies religion appears.

You can see your image in a mirror, but how do you see the mind that not even a mirror can reflect? It's possible, in zazen. Nothing reveals the ego like zazen. The purer the zazen, the more transparent, the better you can see the illusions of your ego.

Our corruption is that we are cut off from the universe, and our illusion is that we confuse the cut-off ego with the one that, originally, is not separate from the cosmic system. The roots of that true ego are the same as those of sky and earth, the same body and same mind as all sentient beings.

This true religion, which has no right side or wrong side, no inside or outside, is transparent from sky to earth, is the secret of Zen. Everything must become completely transparent, me and you, past and present and future. In terms of reality this means that our life today, our attitude now, gives life to the past. If our attitude is false then all those who have fed us and taught us, all those we have met and known, have acted solely in order to produce that falseness. If our attitude is right, whatever they have done they did solely in order to produce that rightness. The limits of the Self are truly beyond any imagining, and fill sky, earth, and the whole universe.

In terms of religious faith, space and time have nothing to do with it. It is only right now that we can use this ordinary human body to practise zazen with Shakyamuni, with the Buddhas of the whole universe in the ten directions, practise zazen with the mountains, rivers and trees. That's why I practise zazen.

Sitting like this is what makes the self become transparent, makes us able to see without any limits, in harmony with sky and earth, and it is what gives the self a total vision of the whole universe. That is the way of silent sitting and the principle of Shikantaza.

KODO SAWAKI

«The formless is neither empty nor non-empty,
But the true reality of the Buddha.
The bright mirror of the mind reflects everything, without making
distinctions,
Infinitely vast, clear and shining, it penetrates the universe.»

«The formless is neither empty nor non-empty». The formless includes form and form includes the formless: there is no problem for the two to coexist side by side. The same goes for liking and disliking, macrocosm and microcosm, good and bad. This is why we have to ask what is good and what is bad - they are not so very remote from one another. They are part of our human condition. When we no longer consider them as opposites, we grasp the body of the Buddha, its essence, ultimate reality: «the true reality of the Buddha». That is the satori of the Buddha.

Dogen Zenji wrote this poem: «Flowers, purple leaves of Autumn, white clouds of winter, their illusory colours enchant me.» In the landscape of satori, he admires the colours of illusion and of satori at the same time. The fact that they are fundamentally empty and formless makes him admire them all the more. It is good to see the beauties of nature and all things under their double aspect - they are so different.

«The bright mirror of the mind reflects everything, without making distinctions». The mirror of our mind does not discriminate; it neither likes nor dislikes this thing or that thing. For the mind, all is luminous right to the heart of the lowest depths - it never encounters any obstacle.

In the old days in China, there lived a monk called Gensha no Shibi. One day as he was leaving on a pilgrimage, he injured his foot by stubbing it on a rock. The pain was extreme and he asked himself, «Since my body does not exist, where does this pain come from?» At that moment he had satori. «I have understood! they are both empty and formless!» He immediately turned back and returned to the monastery. His master, Hogen, was astonished to see him returning. «Why haven't you gone to make your visits?» At that time, going on pilgrimage from monastery to monastery visiting different masters was considered part of the practice. Gensha's reply was very surprising, «Bodhidharma did not come from China and Eka, the second patriarch, did not come from India.»

«Speak, explain yourself,» said Hogen.

«The entire universe is a bright pearl», replied Gensha. He meant that the ten thousand things are like a single pearl - the pearl being the symbol of the One. Since the pearl is as bright and transparent as crystal, there is no point seeking elsewhere because there is nothing.

It is written in the *Kegon-kyo*, «Ultimate reality includes everything» and also, «One is the many, the many is the One.» And in the *Hokyo Zanmai*, «When you see yourself in the mirror, the image is exactly like you; it is not you, and yet it is nevertheless really you.» This extremely subtle statement means that happiness is sadness and wealth is poverty: the one is included in the other. You are me and I am you; together we make only One. The two coexist in unity without impinging on one another. You are me without being me, like my image in the mirror.

On the subject of mirrors, I remember this old poem: «The image the mirror silently shows me sulks when I sulk and gets angry when I am angry.» It's not only the mirror that reflects our image - other people do it also. When I get angry, the person I am angry with changes and looks angry; when I smile, I get a smile back, as though an electric current were passing between us. The life of those who don't understand this principle is constipated. But those who have grasped it acquire the mysterious gift of divining exactly what others are thinking. The world becomes as transparent as a crystal box: «Infinitely vast, clear and shining, it penetrates the universe.» What I call «me» contains the entire universe.

How could a warrior surrounded by enemies cut thirty people - fifty according to some accounts - to pieces singlehanded? What force enabled him to perform such an exploit? The reason is that he put no barrier between himself and others. He was open to the entire universe - he became infinitely vast, clear and shining - he penetrated the universe.

Seen by the Mountain

The Buddha's Law doesn't involve busting a gut to attract your lover or climb higher in society. If you have the slightest thought of profit, that's no longer the Buddha's Law. The slightest action, however small, becomes great if it is authentic, done without desire for gain or thought for self. Most of the time people only act on their own behalf, in their own interest.

Being yourself certainly doesn't mean reciting "Namu Amiba Butsu, Namu Amiba Butsu" whilst living off other people's generosity in order to get Amida's help to stop you falling into hell. Being yourself means acting without desire for profit or gain, just as a nose is a nose, eyes are eyes, a mouth is a mouth and a navel a navel.

We don't know what comes after death but if we have to go to hell once we get there we'll be OK. When your mind is in peace, no place is bad. It's because we're scared of hell that we want to go to heaven. What do we know of heaven and hell? They are creations of the human mind and have no absolute value.

If you give hoping to receive, this implies that our actions, practice or morality ought to be useful and efficient. You're keeping accounts, evaluating giving, the precepts, patience and energy. And then you do a profitability calculation. What's the most effective? I would answer that the most effective thing is not to look for profit. Shakyamuni himself came up against this problem when at the beginning of his search he practised asceticism in order to attain virtue. His efforts failed because he was trying to obtain something.

It's useful to look at yourself from the point of view of the mountain. The mountain doesn't say, "Hey, Sawaki! You're great, you know!" The mountain neither admires me nor criticises me.

What is zazen for? The eternal question to which I always reply, "Zazen is useless." Even if people never come back, it doesn't matter. Dogen says, "You should not practise the Dharma to get a miracle." We make fun of this sort of thing but right from our earliest childhood we have read stories about child prodigies and we start thinking: "Wouldn't it be great to come back to Earth again?"

One day when Prince Siddhartha was out walking, he met a hungry tigress who was too weak to feed her cubs. The Prince offered them his body to feed on. These stories are not as extraordinary as they may seem: on the Buddha's Way, even life itself is unnecessary.

Kodo Sawaki

To You

Kodo Sawaki

Excerpts from *Zen ni kike*. English version by Jesse Haasch, based on the German translation by Muho (*An Dich: Gesammelte Zen-Sprüche*, Angkor Verlag, 2002).

People only keep themselves busy to avoid boredom. Everybody complains that they're so busy they haven't got any time. But why are they so busy? It's only their illusions that keep them busy. A person who practices zazen has time. Whoever practices zazen must try to have more time than anyone else. If we aren't careful, we'll start making a big fuss just to feed ourselves. We're constantly in a hurry, but why? Just to feed ourselves. Chickens too are in a hurry when they peck for their feed. But why? Only to be eaten by humans.



A Zen monk is someone who leads a free life, at the center of which stands the Buddha-Way. True home-leaving [*shukke*] involves recognizing the true self which can never be stained. It means creating your own life so that it fills the whole universe. Tearing away all the Indian myths and all the Chinese myths and only practicing the naked content of the Buddha's teaching – that's leading a Zen life.



Life doesn't run on tracks. Birdsong knows neither major nor minor. Bodhidharma's teaching doesn't fit on manuscript paper. The Buddha-Dharma is wide and unlimited.

When you try to hold it still, you miss it. It isn't dried cod. Living fish has no fixed form.



Zazen is unsatisfying. Unsatisfying for whom? For the ordinary person [*bumpo*]. People are never satisfied.

In our school, zazen lacks excitement. Ordinary people are always looking for excitement: sport, gambling, horse races. What makes them so popular? It's the suspense between winning and losing. Isn't it self-evident? That which is measureless and unlimited won't satisfy people's greed.

How could that which fills the whole universe ever mean satisfaction within the categories of an ordinary person?



Because you try to make things your own, you wander from world to world. The Buddha-Dharma is always ungraspable [*fukatoku*]. There's nothing there to be gained [*mushotoku*]. But because you're always looking for something more, right away you go wrong.

That "illusion" or "satori" exist, that's the way the world talks – they can grasp it. Buddha-dharma cannot be grasped – it's beyond all that.

In the practice of the Buddha Way there is

neither illusion nor satori. Illusion and satori are topics for people's conversations. Distinguishing between illusion and satori is human work. But sensory perception is nothing more than sensory perception, distinguishing judgement is nothing more than distinguishing judgement – it isn't Buddha-Dharma. Buddha-Dharma doesn't mean destroying illusions to get satori. Zazen means not running after or away from things.

Buddha-Dharma is limitless. If you don't understand this limitlessness, you won't understand Buddhism. And furthermore, this understanding or not-understanding is itself far from limitlessness. That's why there is no illusion outside of satori and no satori outside of illusion.



As long as you say zazen is a good thing, something isn't quite right. Unstained [fuzenna] zazen is absolutely nothing special.

We mustn't stain our zazen by saying that we've come further, feel better or have become more confident through zazen.



Zazen isn't like a thermometer where the temperature slowly rises, "Just a little more . . . now that's it – I've got satori!"

Zazen never becomes anything special, as long as you practice. If it becomes something special, you must have a screw loose somewhere.

There are some who can even pride themselves on their zazen: they think the temperature on their Zen thermometer is already quite high. But this has got nothing to do with zazen. "Simply doing" it [*shikan*] means zazen.



KODO SAWAKI

Why are people afraid? Because they rely only on their own individuality. During the war, in China, I kept my hands in gassho wherever I went. When you do gassho whoever you meet does gassho too, automatically. If I had raised my fist or brandished a revolver it wouldn't have happened the same way. Walking in gassho means not shooting any more.

Today the news of our world is transmitted through pictures. Frenzied pictures, of the action of our bonnos and complications. And those complications are what we call civilisation, development and progress. But from the buddha's point of view it is degeneracy rather than progress.

Everybody is shouting «Civilisation, civilisation!» but in fact all we meet is a plethora of blinding phenomena. You leave the radio on and go to sleep with your mouth open, wake up, listen a bit... blindly. Green lights and red lights in the streets give us no peace. Without civilisation, we can become intimate with our natural bent, which is towards liberation.

There are the religions of primitive peoples and the religions of the civilised. It's interesting to observe how even today some people still think the primitive thoughts. These people live the lives of civilised people but their thoughts are the thoughts of primitive people.

Zazen means practising with a human body, which is not different from Buddha. When a human practises what is not different from Buddha, he or she is in harmony with the universe and one with heaven and earth.

Therefore, using our whole body for the universe itself is our holy practice. Using it only for the ego is doing what birds, dogs, cats and maggots do.

Practising zazen is being a person at one with heaven and earth, a person who does not move when they see a mountain or a river. A person who does not move when they meet a bird or an animal, a person who never envies the majesty of the swan and never laughs at the awkwardness of a goose. Then, every motion we make is a gesture that fills the universe. At every instant, we perform the great boundless work. Our breathing out is the breathing out of the whole universe. Our breathing in is the breathing in of the whole universe. Seeing is seeing the whole world, hearing is hearing the whole world. The whole world of odors, touch, taste and consciousness. That is how all worlds should be created : by sitting down for no reason. Although ordinary people wouldn't even stick out their tongues for nothing, that «nothing» is the essence of our school. To practise for nothing means not living grudgingly ; when we don't live grudgingly nothing is wasted. People who want money are useless, they say they can't live without money. But things go very well without money, everything goes very well when we don't live grudgingly.

Discover inalienable life, which is without coming and going, in origins as in destruction, and insist upon it : that is practising the Way.

Then, for the first time, you will reach right vision and your ego will no longer be a transitory self but an eternal self. As long as we don't wake up to that, it is futile to be born into this world.



KODO SAWAKI

The human race is distinguished by its intelligence and great manual dexterity that enables it to build all sorts of machines. It also likes fighting. It uses language skillfully. In short, man is endowed with all sorts of talents. Unfortunately, experience shows that individuals who use their talents well are rare. People say we should not use our talents to bad ends; I would go further and say we should do our utmost to make the best use of our talents. A crook makes bad use of his gifts. A usurer too. People with three holiday homes and several mistresses too. Each of us in our own way is an example of misused talent. Starting with myself, when I look closely I see that I have made pitifully poor use of my gifts. People who make no mistakes are rare.

Making the best of your abilities is identifying yourself with Buddha or God. I would say the first thing you have to do is to know yourself inside out. Once you have done that, you can then use the best of yourself to cut through the passions that lead us to make poor use of ourselves. Only then can we stand firm on our own mountain-top, that luminous, dazzling peak that contains the entire universe, and wield the razor-sharp blade of wisdom. Grasping the sword of wisdom means bringing human capabilities to their highest flowering.

People who reach this highest point in themselves where heaven and earth have the same root, where they are one with the entire universe, are capable of helping others.

One day a man happened to see Sariputra relieving himself in a field. The man felt very great gratitude. He put his hands together and prostrated himself. The story goes that at that moment he had a revelation of the true nature of Buddha. It appears that the sight of Sariputra going to the toilet was capable of inspiring profound respect. Let's just say that there was something about him that commanded respect. We should arouse this feeling of respect in others whether we are practising zazen, reading a sutra or performing the ordinary acts of everyday life: things like eating or going to the toilet; things we don't normally value very highly. Then every moment of our daily lives can bring forth infinite benefits like the dragons and elephants who stamp and frolic about without even needing to have the Law explained to them.

When I look back on my life I realise could have become many things. When I was little, I thought of doing all sorts of jobs. Is it just chance that I became a monk and put everything I've got into it? I could have been a navvy building the railways, for instance. I would have spent the whole day wielding my pick and shovel to move great quantities of earth; then in the evening I would have gone home and drunk lots of sake. I would have liked that life simply because it was my life. I could have become a singer, although I don't know that my voice would have been good enough. Or a storyteller. I could have become anything, somebody really OK or a complete slob. A life is like a nail; it doesn't matter where you decide to bang it in, here or over there, it has many different uses. The same is true of illusion and satori.

We think of Mount Fuji as a great mountain, but it seems tiny seen from the top of the Himalayas. They say the Pacific Ocean is immense, but it's only part of planet Earth; from outer space it looks about the size of a foot-bath. It's not even as though it was unfathomable; we know how deep it is. It is hard to imagine what a tiny animal man is. Seen through a microscope, amoebas look like submarines lurking on the sea-bed. And for an amoeba moving about on a microscope slide whose limits it cannot see,

the slide is as big as the Pacific Ocean. Saying that things are big or small is the result of a wrong view of things. Things are as they are, neither big nor small. It's up to us to see the world differently.

What really delights human beings in their little tiny world? They love to have a good time and they like getting presents. They consider a birth a happy event even though there may be great misery if the child is infirm or turns out to be a good-for-nothing. They offer their congratulations when there is a wedding even though they don't know that the bridegroom won't turn out to be a chronic drunk. Joy and suffering are purely relative concepts; they are vague and deceptive. You can never be certain which event will bring happiness and which sadness. Good contains evil and vice versa.

Consequently, "Truth is without foundation and the root of illusion is empty. By abandoning having and not having, the non-empty becomes empty." These two verses contain the entire universe: good and evil have never existed. And Shinran's famous saying becomes obvious, "You shouldn't glory in virtue or be afraid of evil." Without exception, all men are neither good nor bad.

KODO SAWAKI

Most people think that a religion is a group of people who share a system of beliefs. The truth is that each person has their own religion; religion is the peace of mind you feel when you are truly yourself. Although this personal religion shapes our day-to-day life, we cannot explain it or show it to other people. I think that religion is a kind of deep-down security that is different for each person and that enables us to keep going without other people's help.

Once you are clear that our religion is the essence of what we are, then you see that the squabbles that set members of the various schools of Zen against one another are quite ridiculous. You also realize that there is no point trying to ape Shakyamuni or any other master. Behaviour that is appropriate to one period of history is completely inappropriate if transplanted to another. Our essential task is to take hold of our own peace of mind here and now.

The lives of the patriarchs show that they all had the power of *maka hannya*; great wisdom. Take the great patriarch Kanadaiba, for example. He didn't give talks or even write textual commentaries; his way was to deepen his wisdom by living it from day to day. One day he was mortally wounded by a heretic. As he lay dying, his disciples begged him to divulge the name of his attacker. But he replied, "If I tell you his name, he will become your enemy and you will kill him." He died without telling.

We should take hold of our self, our essence, our true ego, call it what you will. We should take hold of it because, just as it is, it is our Buddha nature.

In order to grasp your true nature, you need to learn to spot where and when to stop. You don't catch something by always running after it. Stopping doesn't mean stagnating; it means finding peace within yourself. Peace of mind, peace of the soul. A young girl will find happiness in being a young girl. Once she has become a woman, her happiness will come from being a woman, a grand-mother and so on until she finally finds happiness in death.

All too often girls are in a hurry to become women and once they are women, to become mothers. The kitchen-maid gets tired of doing the cooking and wants to be head cook. But once she's head cook, she finds the work too hard. We should all learn to get the maximum pleasure out of the condition in which we find ourselves.

Once day I got a postcard from a policeman telling me that he made every effort to live his condition as police inspector to the full. I couldn't help chuckling as I read his card. That really is the point! He had fully understood my teaching. Becoming a Buddha means becoming fully yourself. When you are not yourself, life becomes a living hell.

When a jackal tries to roar like a lion, he can open his mouth and howl as much as he likes; what comes out will always be the howl of a jackal, not the roar of a lion.

The «Nirvana Sutra» says «A jackal can spend a hundred years, a thousand years, trying to roar like a lion without succeeding. But a three-year old lion cub will roar just like the rest of its family.»

The Buddha's Law teaches us to become lions. By that I mean to live automatically according to our own true nature. That way, our lives will be worth living.

Whether you roar like a lion or miaow like a cat, if that is your true nature your life will work for the good of all.

Why does the Buddha eat? He eats so that he can work for the good of all beings. He gets up early for others. At night he sleeps for others. Whether laughing or crying, everything he does is to save mankind.



Maître KODO SAWAKI.

KODO SAWAKI

Everyone wants to have a good memory in order to remember what others said or wrote, but by memorizing what has already been done, we live with - importations - and we lose our individuality and originality. On the other hand, it's very disturbing to forget everything. So, it is better to have a good or a bad memory? Is it better to forget what was said? Is it better to remember? What's the truth? I don't know.

Shakyamuni said, - One mustn't spend his life wandering about. You look for a home when you already have one. You don't need to build another one. -

Men spend their time moving. They depreciate what they already have and run after something else. One can understand this idea simply by observing a child. He is no longer interested in what belongs to him as soon as he sees something else. This is what Shakyamuni meant by - wandering about -.

We look for things which please us, but we are constantly changing our point of view. Shakyamuni told us, - You already have a home, don't build another one. - Isn't every one of us born with a face, a brain and a body? So, rest peacefully where you live and don't go looking elsewhere. Nevertheless, some of us demean what we are, we demean every moment of our lives and the place where we live, and we go searching for other things.

In the Lotus Sutra, it is written, - The treasure can be found right near you. - The ultimate place of peace is not within the limits of the earth. It's here. The truth is so close and you don't even see it. You go far away, very far, looking for Buddha and the satori, and you fall in hell. You are in a hurry, amidst your confusion and haste, so when you get to where you're going, there's nothing. The mist suddenly rises: it was only a mirage. You want to go back to where you come from, but you realize that you are now surrounded by mountains with peaks as sharp as blades and there is no way back: it's the hell of a man dying in the desert.

We want to run away from a world which we consider to be awful, but after leaving it, we miss it like a lost paradise. Men always want to go elsewhere and when they get there, they feel like rats in a sewer and when they think about where they came from, they remember it as the most wonderful place.

One must take the world for what it is. I knew a philosophy professor who had tuberculosis. He spent all of his time reading philosophy books. He told me that he fought with the truth. Actually, he died from a pulmonary hemorrhage while spitting up blood onto his journal. Maybe he died on the battlefield, but he was not fighting with truth, he was fighting with his own dreams. Truth is not a strict immobile concept. We cannot neither classify it nor store it in a box. It is not something which we can say is here or there. Truth is what it is, the way things are, with their imperfections. Truth is there, without having to look for it, without running away from something else. Truth? Illusion? These are just ephemeral words, devices, circumstances with which we delude ourselves. Men trap themselves by the terminology which accompanies our civilisation more than by the reality of circumstances.

The Chinese poet Hakurakuten wrote:

- Why should I fight with the horns of a snail?
I am a spark between two pieces of flint,
I accept fortune, I accept misfortune, moreover, I'm thrilled!

I stand there with my mouth hanging opened, without laughing, like an idiot. -

How can one fight with a snail's horns which retract each time they are touched? Truth and illusion are words which are as transient as a snail's horns. Truth cannot be found in a precisely defined vocabulary as explained in a philosophy textbook. That kind of truth is just a scholastic accessory used when taking exams.



Kodo Sawaki

Compassion and Patience

On the subject of compassion and patience, I would like to present to you a page by Fukakusa no Gensei Jonin, excerpted from his collection of poetry and prose, *Sozan-sbu*:

"Seiko, I give you the name Jinin, compassion and patience. I want to tell you what it means. When a bodhisattva shows the Way to others, that is compassion. When he practises for himself, that is patience. If you do not possess compassion, you cannot practise patience, and inversely, if you do not possess patience, you cannot practise compassion. If you have compassion, you become patient; if you are patient, you become compassionate.

The four great oaths of the bodhisattva show you the path. The first says, 'Creatures are innumerable. I swear to save them.' And the last, 'The Buddha-Way is without

equal. I swear to accomplish it.' Consequently, to accomplish the first you must be compassionate, and to realise the last you must be patient.

Compassion means looking at all other beings as we look at ourselves, and looking at ourselves as we look at other beings. The world of the Law is that of equality where there is no prejudice, no discrimination, no feeling of hate or love.

If someone seeks the Way, you must guide him immediately. If he is not seeking the Way, go and meet him on his own territory. If he is interested in worldly affairs, speak to him of worldly affairs and by this path steer him towards the Way. Speak of aestheticism to the aesthete, of magic to the magician, of literature to the literary. You must catch him with what holds his attention and lead him towards the Way to have him enter there. It is not because you talk about worldly affairs, art, magic or literature all day that you are an aesthete, a magician or a scholar. Let us say that the important thing is to act while practising non-action, every day.

Patience means not rejoicing when everything is going as you wish, and not being irritated when everything is going badly. Practising patience means not being influenced by the look on someone's face or a tone of voice, an expensive house or a title. It means being in harmony with the place and time, even if you live deep in the mountains and must withstand the hardships of cold and hunger, wearing straw and eating herbs.

When you are alone, do not let the beguiling serpent come near, and in the darkness of your room do not awaken the lecherous demon. Study in spite of the cold or heat, practise zazen day and night. The important thing is not to bat an eyelash even when the winds rage from the eight directions and to not become unhinged when the three poisons assail your mind, keeping your gaze fixed steadily on the truth and your mind concentrated on the essence of the Law.

If, in spite of your practice, you do not obtain the expected results, but your faith is deep, you will certainly perceive the truth. If the power of your patience is not strong enough, it is as though you were throwing ice into boiling water : not only will you not help others but you will also not save yourself. You will be a defeated and crushed bodhisattva.

If, on the other hand, the power of your patience is strong when you practise compassion, you will free yourself from all servitude and no ties will hinder you from helping all creatures in the universe. Your mission is to soothe humans beings in their suffering and thus bring them peace and joy. If you doubt this, look at plants : they are born in the spring, bloom in the summer, bear fruit in autumn and completely reconstitute their strength

in the cold of winter ; without ever doubting themselves, they accomplish great things.

Believe in my words, Seiko ; by putting them into practice, you will attain perfect knowledge and supreme enlightenment, you will be honoured for having helped all people. Seiko, I beseech you, apply yourself ardently."

Kodo Sawaki, The Chant of Awakening : A Zen Master's Comments on The Shodoka (Albin Michel — in French), pp. 130-132

Kodo Sawaki

The Mind of the Way

"Seize only the root without worrying about the branches, As the limpid jewel swallows the moonbeam."

This is the most important verse in the *Shodoka*. An old adage says, "When your last hour comes, do not seek the truth, seek God." Divine help is only the merit, while truth is the base, the body, the original source of all things. We like merit, we do not like the body ; we like to be paid, we do not like to work ; we like reward, we do not like effort.

However, true reality is what is essential, God's help is only an appendage. *Seize only the root without worrying about the branches*. We must search for the truth without worrying about God. Let us grasp the essence of things; the rest is secondary and without importance. When we have a panoramic and correct view of our true nature, it does not matter if others criticise you or admire you, and yet, most people only look for praise.

It is written in Dogen's *Gakudoyojin-shu*, "They discard the roots and run after the leaves...When something is in people's favour, they practise it, knowing full well that it is contrary to the Way; they refrain from practising what is neither praised nor renowned, even though they know what the true Way is. How sad !"

Further on, he explains the reason for this : "Some taught to search enlightenment outside of the mind, others to be in another land. From such doctrines come the source of error and disorder; they are responsible for false thinking. Imagine that you are given a good cure and you are not told how to use it, the illness you will contract will be worse than if you had taken poison. In our country, since ancient times, it seems that there have never been good doctors capable of giving good cures, nor anyone to control the toxic effects. It is already difficult to eliminate the suffering and sicknesses of life, and we would like to escape the pains of old age and death ! All this is the fault of the masters and not the disciples."

Only the mind of the Way is important. Whether or not the theoretical doctrine is of great depth does not enter into consideration. *Grasp only the root without worrying about the*

branches. Go directly to the mind of the Way, the rest is secondary. Without dwelling on the face of things or seeking profit, question yourself about the correctness of your own practice, and if it is perfectly exact, whether or not others criticise you or praise you is unimportant. This verse contains the essence of *Shodoka*.

KODO SAWAKI

In the eyes of the Buddhas there is no such thing as crime or happiness, loss or gain. To kill a human being is certainly a crime but war can sometimes be praiseworthy heroism... to take up to the Buddha mind is to become someone whom nothing separates from the universe.

The beginning of the Bodhidharma sutra says, « Our nature is mysteriously subtle. » That means that you are unlimited and that I find myself in you. So nothing can exist that kills. What I mean is that if I do not kill it is not because there's a law against it but because I cannot kill. And I do not steal, not because I have no right to steal but because I am unable to steal.

If there is a subject and an object there is no Buddha dharma. Myself and you are united; myself and the enemy are united. And this very way, this very dharma, this very certification and this very practice are never disturbed or destroyed. It's really good, there's nothing better.

Perhaps the atom bomb may save the side that uses it but not the enemy's side. Only zazen saves both; friends and enemies. To become Buddha is just to sit down in zazen. To understand the Way is to follow it. Practice and satori are only one, but satori is there whether practice is there or not. It's very hard to understand. When you practice in the midst of illusions, satori comes for the first time before one is even aware of it. Isn't that a wonderful practice? Just sit down, without wanting anything. People talk about eternity but eternity is practising here and now. If I can manage to make you understand that thoroughly, you won't live to the age of 50 in the dark! Otherwise, you cannot follow the Buddha way. Zazen is practising here and now. Now! Now! Now! For nothing is eternal. So, even health is nothing; even intelligence is nothing. You must catch hold of this very important thing that does away with the regret you may feel to have your head cut off now.

A dojo is a place where people are killed. As long as the person is alive in us, this world remains a world of illusions and chimeras. It's important to die in order to see the world. Looked at from the coffin it is an interesting sight. The reality of the real world is magnificent, if only we can take off our coloured glasses to look at it. But that is not something you can talk about with people. So the person has to be killed. And when the person is dead, that's good.

Religion does not mean transforming the world outside but rather transforming this eye, this ear. Religion does not mean thinking. It means practising. Religious practice is the one, unique thing. Nothing to do with the bragging truths on the package of a bottle of pills.

Through daily practice you will be born in heaven, and through losing daily practice you will be born in hell. The heaven I speak of is quiet, it is the tranquil strength of a person for whom there is no such thing as good or evil, Buddha or satori, nothing to get, nothing to complete.

Kodo

Those who talk about the Law without having experienced it for themselves are parrots. They quote what belongs to others like dictionaries. Teaching the Law means telling what we have personally experienced. Zen is not book learning, but an intuitive understanding that is transmitted directly from master to disciple. These days, we must attend lectures in order to be a candidate for an exam, even if we hate the professor. In the past, zen monks had neither the time nor the patience to listen to masters they didn't like. They would spend one night in a temple, listen to the master, ask him questions, and if they weren't satisfied, they would continue on their way until the next temple. One day, they would find their master and stay near him. This was called the pedestrian pilgrimage.

The transmission of the Law is a process which cannot be conceived of rationally. It is not an intellectual understanding that comes from oral teaching or from reading. It is the fusion of two beings. I always describe it as being on the same wavelength. For example, Kashyapa had only to meet Shakyamuni for all his problems to be solved. The two men fell in together. That is why Shakyamuni sat next to him one day when he had assembled his disciples and a terrible wind blew through the audience. They shared the same seat. The transmission is a direct and personal relationship, person to person.

The Law of Buddha develops in three successive phases: a period when the Law is correctly taught and practiced, followed by a period when it is distorted and deformed, then a final period of decline and degradation. The correct Law is the one taught by Shakyamuni during his lifetime. He unified the Law through his strong personality and was the engine of its propagation. The decline began at the moment of his death. During his lifetime, his disciples abstained from alcohol, but the moment he entered Nirvana, they began to think there wasn't really much harm in it.

Then doctrine was formed. During Shakyamuni's lifetime, a doctrine was not necessary; it was established only after his death and was based on his teachings. Doctrine is not only theoretical—although certain monks follow only the dogma.

Little by little, we have lost sight of the personality of Buddha. The disciples of disciples, from generation to generation, by cutting their whisky with water, have ended up with a liquid with no smell, no color, and no taste.

Gradually, as Shakyamuni is distanced from us, demons draw near. They are innumerable and of many types. There's the demon of melancholy, of desires, of voracity, of torpor, of doubt, of remorse, of anger, of profit, of pride. They are powerful because the Law has been falsified and distorted. The true Law has been weakened.

Sudden awakening is the teaching by which each of us, just as we are, is Buddha. Let us return to our supreme mission and regain our perspective; let us take ourselves in hand and learn to know ourselves.

Dogen said: «One should not practice for future retribution of one's accumulated virtues.» That means that over there, there is nothing. Everything is here. Everything, absolutely everything is within us.

KODO SAWAKI

A man like Ryokan was a true monk, a monk of inferior rank, and Shakyamuni was the same. They didn't need to become temple abbots and the reason why they became great is that they didn't need anything. Why?

Because they had the one thing that can't be burned by fire or drowned by water. Their minds were different from those of the people who are incessantly yelling, «out of my way, out of my way!» and scrapping like kids to push their careers. Even if they get to the top, those people are poor. A friend of mine who works in the Zen head office told me, «I get visits from some weird people, at first glance they seem very lofty and highminded but then all they do is lie on their bellies and crawl for promotion. It's disgusting.» Buddhism has become something very strange; it says, «Total life is the thought of nonthought,» but nonthought itself has become a tool for getting ahead in business. In fact, you can become anything! Today they say, «Practise, practise,» but there are all kinds of practices. There is practise to make money, and there is the Buddha Way. Among ways, there is the way of infernal beings and the way of hungry ghosts. Where we should excel is in the Buddha Way and what we should wake up to is true Zen; to wake up to the Zen of the Tathagata, we have to see the lower Zens.

All we have to do is affirm reality, but it isn't easy when people and phenomena alike are opposing it. Then everything that appears in this world is only illusion, karma and habit. A thief sneaks away and the policeman chasing him suspects everyone he sees of being the culprit. The hunter and his game move in totally different realms. True reality is hard to know. To affirm that reality is to fly over the whole universe and embrace every prospect in it with a single glance. That is waking up, in Buddhism.

The great chance of my life was to practise zazen with this body that might just as well have become the body of a rogue. It was also a chance for everybody around me and all the people I might have deceived and misled. They were all saved when, fortunately, I became a monk. My living devotion to Buddha is the zazen posture and the content of that zazen posture is the human being Sawaki. Then the crazy, complicated mind of Sawaki communicates with every sentient being and that is how zazen saves humanity. When the reality of living devotion to Buddha is affirmed in this way, when zazen and Sawaki are one, a whole life is complete.

That is the authentic transmission of the Buddhas and patriarchs: only sit.

More than any human technique, high illumination or deep introspection, it's better to practise what is to people unacceptable, what can't be added or subtracted: the deepest, the purest and most authentic zazen.

In a word, here I sit up straight, and this immense and boundless zazen fills space and time.

Kodo Sawaki

Currently, all zazen congregations or masters who transmit the law have signs indicating their presence.

A long time ago in India, large banners were put up and even now, in certain regions, flags of all colors hang and fly in the breeze; a souvenir of ancient times.

In our language nowadays, hanging flags indicating a law and establishing true doctrine, means expressing one's own experience relating to enlightenment. Those who speak of the law without ever having experienced it are like parrots. They quote words and expressions of others, just like a dictionary. Teaching the law means relating one's personal experience.

All day long, we use expressions which mean absolutely nothing like: "I'm fine, thank you", even when one is really not feeling well. These are words which reflect nothing at all. Progress? regression? Who knows what goes in the right or wrong direction? What's good and what's bad? A cure can be a poison and a poison can be a cure.

In the Gion section of Kyoto, Ikkyu Ocho had a disciple named Chigoku Taii who was a high class prostitute. When she realized that hell didn't exist and that she was Buddha, all her customers left her feeling totally enlightened and became, shortly thereafter, fervent followers of the Way.

I often hear people say that they prefer a certain yoken (sweet bean paste) as compared to another. They are imported from Kyoto to Osaka, and vice versa. Why always seek elsewhere? As far as I'm concerned, rice balls and radishes with sauerkraut satisfy me just fine.

A long time ago, I was travelling by train in the Kansai region. I remember reading an article in the local newspaper about the vast quantities of sardines caught in the sea of Is, and what was done with them. There was a photo of a beach covered with these sardines. Sardines are considered to be very ordinary fish because there are great quantities of them in our seas. If they were fished only once a year, I'm sure they would be considered as a great delicacy. Trout, on the other hand, is considered to be a luxury as it is very rare.

I once joined some fishermen in the Tamagawa river, but I didn't see one single trout hanging from a line. Sardines swim in schools and with one swipe of the net, you can catch mountains of them. They are transported by truck, salted, dried, and canned. The surplus sardines are sold to be used as fertilizer. We don't have a very high regard for these fish, but they are really rather tasty. In fact, they would certainly be considered even better than trout if they were more rare.

Good and bad are relative concepts which don't really exist. It's the same for truth and illusions. The good could not exist without the bad. It's simply man's karma which produces dualism and determines what's good and bad. What makes men happy in their tiny little world? They like to have fun and receive gifts. They consider a birth to be a happy event whereas it could be something very unfortunate if the baby is ill or becomes a hooligan. Marriage is also considered to be a reason for congratulating even if the bride might be marrying a long time drunkard.

Joy and suffering are relative notions which can change and be deceiving. Nothing allows anyone to say that they are 100 % sure that an event is a happy one and another an unhappy one. There is bad within the good and goodness within the bad. Good and bad within themselves don't really exist. For the time being, the following comment by Shinran is evident : "One must not find virtue in glory, nor feel fear of evil".

Each and every man is neither good nor bad.



Kodo Sawaki

We're told that when we die we return to the cycle of birth and rebirth. We wonder whether we will be reborn in human form but nobody can answer that question. The ego asks, «If I'm good now, will I be rewarded with a good rebirth?» whilst blind, anxious people worry whether heaven really exists.

There are basically two ways of dealing with the problem of life and death. The first is meekly to accept the power of karma; the second is to allow ourselves to be borne up by the bodhisattva vows.

A person floundering and choking in the sea may be there because they have missed their footing or they may have jumped in to save a precious object they don't want to lose. In both cases the person is in the water. In the first, you're there by mistake; in the second, you've dived in willingly. It makes all the difference. There's all the difference in the world between being at the mercy of your karma and being free to act.

The incredible energy that fills the universe - and which is, in fact, the universe itself - is like a great ocean. Depending on whether your karma or your bodhisattva vows have the upper hand, the water of this ocean can be a healing medicine or a deadly poison; it can be steam or it can be ice. Because the waves in this ocean ceaselessly arise and disappear and are each unique and different, nobody can solve the mystery of death. When one of Master Dogo's disciples asked him about death, his simple answer was, «I just don't know.»

Sometimes I say, «Look, this is more or less how things are...» But things in this life don't work on a «more or less» basis. Each day is different. Certainty doesn't come gift-wrapped. You can't reassure someone who's dying with mere words. Don't philosophers say that any explanation that resembles the thing it is explaining must be a bad explanation? Happiness, sadness and prosperity are all as unpredictable as the the horse who ruined his old master Sai by running away but who, a few months later, returned leading a magnificent thoroughbred.

Thanks to their vows, bodhisattvas experience this continuity with calm, making their excess energy available to others. People who allow their karma to dominate their lives accumulate debts and are crippled with interest payments; or they are always behaving unfairly or disloyally and harming other people. Living to help others and living in ways that harm other are poles apart. People who are always on the borrow so they can squeeze the most out of life get swept away by the current and finish up drowning. The same goes for the type of person who cries for help but then, when the lifeboat comes along to fish them out, complains that the lifeboat didn't come earlier.

The opposite approach - helping other people, making oneself useful to them, sharing their burdens and living simply - means being reborn indefinitely. That's the sort of life you can expect if you are driven by the power of the bodhisattva vows. Such people are like clouds that move across the sky without wondering what is going to become of them. They don't complain that there's nothing they can do about their lives. They drift across the sky chasing nothing and fleeing nothing. That's what it means to practise the bodhisattva vows.

In one of his poems, Shinran says, «The ferryman goes constantly back and forth from one bank to the other.» He makes the crossing and then returns. For the bodhisattva, life and death are a pleasure-garden, a playground. Bodhisattvas run away from nothing because they desire nothing; they chase after nothing because they hope for nothing; because there is nothing. Freely, naturally, they are tossed by the waves on the sea of life and death.



Kodo Sawaki

A long time ago, once when Sariputra was going to the « toilet » in a field, someone saw him. This man felt so grateful that he joined his hands together and prostrated. The story goes that at that moment, he had the revelation of the true Buddha nature. It seems that the fact that he saw Sariputra in the position of defecating naturally inspired deep respect. Let's say that something in Sariputra forced the respect. We can arouse this respect by doing zazen or by reading the sutras, as well as by all daily actions like eating or going to the toilet - actions to which we don't generally give much consideration. Thus, each moment of a daily life brings forth infinite blessings, like dragons and elephants frolicking about, without ever having to

explain the Law.

Nowadays, rational thinking is the priority. Reason is worth nothing here. You will never be able to hit a target with an arrow if you only have explanations in image form. You can't learn a posture and know what it feels like by reading a book about it. It's the same for zazen : if you don't do it, you can't understand it.

In our era, many books about Zen have been written by people who don't even practice.

One day Rishokoko visited Yakusan and he gave him this compliment :

«You have worked on your posture so well that you look like a crane. «

In truth, this is what we aspire to.

I remember one evening when I was doing zazen alone in the dojo, my posture attracted the attention of people walking by in the hallway. When they noticed me, they stopped where they were, speechless, then felt irresistibly attracted to the room. It was only their kind abbot, but apparently when I am in zazen, I'm a completely different man.

Another time, while doing zazen where I was living, someone opened the door and said, «Dinner's ready ». When he saw me, he was silent. Later on he said to me, «We are old friends and I am very comfortable with you, but when I opened the door to call you for dinner, I couldn't move...zazen filled the room, so I fell to the ground and prostrated.»

It's not only my zazen which fills space, it's the same for everyone.

Zazen, as seen from inside, is limpid and transparent. When we do zazen, we don't have a very high opinion of ourselves, but we still lift our heads up. To be honest, zazen is not the right moment to think about what is not right about oneself when have a family quarrel or when we party with geishas, or other things...we are not conscious of the goings and comings of a flea. During zazen, we don't pay attention to the flea which wants to get in our underwear. Simply because zazen becomes transparent.

A guy who is busy fighting won't feel a nail digging into his foot. Another, who is drunk, can scratch his knee, roll on the ground, and jump in mud without even realizing it because he is under the influence of alcohol. Illusions appear during zazen, but they are only illusions, they're nothing. We know that things are what they are. During zazen, in an instant, the ordinary man who wants to place himself between two Buddhas, is revealed. The dojo is called «the belvedere where all humanity is touched. «Thanks to this panoramic view of the world, the contents of zazen are extraordinarily valuable. We are in harmony with Buddha and at the same time we live like ordinary human beings. It is said that religion isn't bothered by contradictions, but none of them have the capacity to accept everyone and everything like zazen.

To you, saying that Zazen hasn't gotten you anywhere

What is zazen good for?

Good for nothing! As long as this "good for nothing" practice does not penetrate to our bones, and we really practice what is good for nothing, it won't be good for anything.

Practicing what is "good for nothing" with confidence - isn't it worth a try?

You say that you would like to try zazen in order to become "a better person". Become "a better person" by doing zazen? How stupid! How could "a person" ever become something better in the first place?

You say: "I want to become a better human being by doing zazen."

Zazen doesn't teach you how to be human.

Zazen means to stop being a human being.

You say: "Zen means to empty your mind, right?"

You will never have an empty mind as long as you don't die.

You think that things are supposed to become better because you practice zazen? No! Zazen means to forget about "better" and "worse".

You won't get any tips for practicing zazen.

"The day is long, just like a child's,
the mountain quiet, like the eternal past."

Zazen is un-satisfactory. Un-satisfactory for whom? For the ordinary person - the human being never feels satisfied.

Zazen as practiced in our school isn't thrilling. The ordinary person always wants to be thrilled. Why are gambling, sports or horseraces so popular? Because we are thrilled when it comes to "winning" or "losing".

How could that which is eternal and boundless ever satisfy our human desires!?

How could that which fills the whole universe ever fit into the frame of our human minds!?

Un-satisfactory: Just practice zazen.

Un-satisfactory: Manifest zazen with your very body.

Un-satisfactory: Become one with zazen with body and mind.

Being stared at by zazen, being scolded by zazen, being obstructed by zazen, being pulled this way and that way by zazen, living in tears - isn't that the happiest way of life imaginable?

You say: "I understand that we are buddhas when we practice zazen. Does that mean that we are ordinary beings when we don't sit in zazen?"

When a thief steals he is a thief - when he isn't stealing, does it mean that he isn't a thief anymore? And it is the same to eat your meal in order to go stealing, or to eat in order to practice zazen?

If you steal once you are a thief forever. In the same way, the zazen that you practice once is eternal zazen.

There is no funnier thing than zazen: When you sit yourself, it doesn't seem to be good zazen. But seen from the outside, nothing could be more majestic. Usually it is the opposite: Whatever we do doesn't seem

so special to the others, it is only ourselves who are convinced that we are doing pretty good.

Because Buddha-Dharma can not be attained, it fills the whole universe. If our daily practice, in the same way, is one of non-attainment, it will never make us tired.

True practice of non-attainment means to practice as the wooden man and the woman of stone.

Zazen is transparent. It has no flavor. If we give zazen a flavor, it becomes something "human".

Zazen isn't popular. Things like sport, where there is victory and defeat, are popular with ordinary people.

The reason why zazen doesn't become popular is because it is flavorless and ungraspable. Babies can find no interest in it.

The great transparent sky is different from the bonsai-trees (Japanese miniature trees) on your veranda: It is boundless. But human beings seem to prefer to attend to their bonsai-trees or play around with other toys.

Your consciousness is used to spices: that's why the transparent and flavorless Buddha-Dharma doesn't impress you.

Some say that they have a lot of deluded thoughts during zazen. The reason why you become aware of the deluded thoughts is because the waves calm down and the blood stops rushing to your head.

Some say: "When I do zazen, I start to have all these deluded thoughts."

No, it is only because of zazen that you become aware of those deluded thoughts. If you were dancing around with all those deluded thoughts, you would just be unconscious of them.

When a mosquito bites you during zazen, you think: "Shit! He got me!"

When you are dancing, you don't even realize when a flea is sucking on your balls.

A layman asked, "I have been practicing zazen for quite a while now, but still I don't know what to do about all those deluded thoughts that occur during my zazen. Once, during the air raids of the second world war, I was sitting in zazen. When the bombs dropped all around me, I experienced not a single thought: Nothing could be closer to zazen than the zazen at that time. But after that, my zazen wasn't so good anymore. Isn't there a way I can get back to the zazen that I experienced at that time?"

Sawaki Roshi answered: "Yes, Koan-Zen can do that for you. Someone gives you a koan, yells at you and pushes you into a corner. There won't be any space left for 'deluded thoughts'. After it's over, however, everything is the same as before. You just push the 'deluded thoughts' to the side for a moment.

On the other hand, the 'just sitting' (shikantaza) as taught by Dogen Zenji aims at the whole: the manifestation of your true form. You appear naked, as ugly as you are. You realize that thoughts continue to appear in your head, just like bubbles produced by a crab in the water. Actually, it is nothing but the virtue of zazen that makes us realize how full of shit we are: When we are all focused on one thing, we don't think of anything. We are not aware of the flea that sucks on us when we drink with a girl in our arm. There is not a single deluded thought! When we sit in zazen however, we can't help but be annoyed about that flea. Because then, we are aware. We stop being numb, we become transparent and clear."

Isn't it natural that we experience all kinds of psychological phenomena while we're alive?

During zazen, we tend to have all kinds of different thoughts and we ask ourselves if that is alright? The fact that we ask ourselves if it is alright only proves that zazen is pure and transparent. We are scolded by the purity and transparency of zazen. When we dance around naked and drunk, we don't ask ourselves questions.

In zazen, the Buddha and the ordinary person are one. Because of this, we will realize just how ordinary and unsatisfactory persons we are in the eyes of the Buddha - considering the fact that we are all originally Buddhas!

Only the ordinary person is deluded by "deluded thoughts".

Quick your bitching! Don't gawk around! Just sit!

"Senshi Osho practiced for 30 years with Yakuzan, just to clarify this one fact." (Shobogenzo Sanbyakusoku)

What fact? The fact that zazen alone is enough.



To you, aiming at the ultimate way of life, as taught by Zen

It has to be that way, but it can be any way possible.

Nothing has to be done in any special way, but it has to be done in the best and highest way.

Sen-no-Rikyu once told a carpenter to nail a nail into a pillar. Thinking this way and that way for quite a while, Sen-no-Rikyu finally points to the exact spot. The carpenter made a sign in that spot and took a break. After the break though, he doesn't find his sign anymore. Again Sen-no-Rikyu thinks a lot and finally points again to a spot, "here, this is the right spot." Looking at the spot closely, it turned out to be exactly the same spot that the carpenter had left his sign on before.

In the midst of pure formlessness there has to be an ultimate aim. In the same way, among the facial expression of human beings there are some which can be called ultimate expressions.

"Mystical power" means that the expression on your face isn't out of focus.

We always seem to think that we are controlled by our deluded feelings, and that we can't do anything about it. We think that there is a constant fight between the Buddha-Dharma and our deluded feelings.

But this is not the case. Buddha-Dharma teaches that there is absolutely no difference between us and Buddha. And the Dharma is manifest in all phenomena.

The Buddha-Dharma teaches us the lines in the hands of practice.

Practice means the whole-hearted inquiry, "what can I do on the Buddhaway here and now?"

Looking up and down, left and right, the important point is not to lose sight of the here and now.

The essence of the activity of Buddhas and patriarchs, the activity of the essence of patriarchs and Buddhas is what is called the "soft spot".

Good and bad exist only in this moment, but in this moment there is the eternally good and the eternally bad.

All we do has to fill the whole universe. This moment is eternal - and here we have to give ourselves to whole-hearted practice of the way.

Our effort has to circle around the question: what has to be encountered with what?

"Giving" has to have an aim too. Don't give the keys and the gun to the robber. You have to have courage as well as wisdom when you give.

To study the impermanence of all phenomena means to study each single moment without losing your aim.

"How about that in this case?" - to study impermanence means to inquire and experiment like this in each single case of daily life. Impermanence doesn't just mean that all of us will die.

Just like a burning flame, our human form is change each single moment. It's just that our bodies seem to keep more or less the same shape all the time.

All things are contained right in the midst of non-existence.

Nirvana means "unborn-undying".

The basic spirit of Buddhism is: "no individuals!"

The absence of the ego in Buddhism doesn't imply absentmindedness. Quite the opposite, the Bodhisattva practice of Mahayana Buddhism means to be aware of everything. Hinayana Buddhism is looking for idiots. Mahayana Buddhism transforms idiots through practice.

A picture that is only a picture "somehow" is useless.

The practice of the Buddhaway means to develop an attitude.

Don't run around like a rodeo horse. Walk like an ox!

The question of Mahayana Buddhism is your attitude of life.

Even with a cup of tea it makes a great difference if you just let it slip out of your hand, or if you put it back into place properly.

In all your actions, exercising them properly right to the end should be your basic attitude. If your mind is absent even for an instant, you are dead.

The point is to arrange sinews and muscles properly. You have to become a person without gaps. For this, your sinews and muscles have to be balanced with the right tension and order.

"How do I look like in the eyes of mankind?" - this is another question we have to inquire about. "How do I look like in the eyes of the rich?", "...and how in those of the poor?", "how does a westerner see me?", "how about a communist?", "how about the president?" - you need to possess something that won't peel off from whichever direction you examine it.

If you don't take care, you will become a superficial Buddhist.

What is the Buddha-Dharma about? About being pulled by Buddha in all of the aspects of daily life!

You should only go for the eternal way. "Eternal way" - that means continuous practice of that which is good for nothing.

It's not enough to hit the mark only once.

Having achieved 100% last year doesn't count anything - you have to hit the mark right now.

"Don't waste your thoughts thinking about past and future
be completely free in this single moment!"

Just eat the rice gruel. When you "just do" something, there are no people of higher or lower rank, there are no smart or stupid persons. No delusion, no satori.

"Just doing" is the essence of the Buddhaway, but it seems that it is exactly this "just doing" that no one in the world understands.

Everybody is suffering because they are wearing their life-views inside out. To save suffering beings means to let them reflect once more, on a firm, unshakeable fundament, on their view of life. To take a look on life from this firm, unshakeable fundament is what is meant by the wisdom of Buddha.

Buddhaway means to believe (i.e. clarify) what is clear right from the start. It means to think not-thinking.

To you, fighting hard to reach "satori"

We do not practice to reach "satori". Satori is pulling us. Satori is spinning our practice around.

Don't search for the Way. The Way is searching for you.

You study, you do sports, you're interested in "satori" and you want to get rid off your delusion - thus even zazen becomes a marathon competition for you, with "satori" as the goal. But because you try to get a grip on it, you go astray.

Stop playing around with it - only then your original, cosmic nature will manifest itself.

You are searching for the Way? Isn't it just you ego-desires that are "searching for the Way"?

Trying to reach satori and to get rid off delusion is just like trying to buy and sell the same product at the same time.

To try to "become a buddha" or "reach satori" by doing zazen means to chase something.

True zazen means to stop trying to "become a buddha" or "reach satori".

"Non-thinking" has nothing to do with looking for satisfaction. It means to be firmly settled in the here and now.

Buddha-Dharma can not be "attained" by human effort.

To say that we have to "see God" is - in the eyes of anyone except the members of that special group - just as strange as saying that we have to "reach satori".

Buddha-Dharma does not mean individual liberation. That is why Shakyamuni Buddha said: "I and every living thing on this earth attain the Way simultaneously - the mountains, the rivers, the grasses and trees all become buddha."

Trying to have "your own personal satori" has nothing to do with Buddha-Dharma.

People want to have even "their satori" individually...

Buddha-Dharma means NO EGO.

Each one of us has his own individual ego. But it is a mistake to try even in zazen to have "your own, individual satori". NO EGO isn't individual.

You want your own, personal satori - peace of mind only for yourself.

Do you really think that the Buddha-Dharma exists only for someone like you?

Take care, or you'll start to think that your individual identity is the most important thing in the world. And thus, you'll forget about that which fills the whole universe.

When I say "satori", you will think that I am talking about some "personal satori". So let me clarify: That what can't even be called "satori" is satori.

You want to become a buddha? You are wasting your efforts!

Just let the present moment be the present moment, just allow yourself to be yourself.

Where do you think you are going when you aren't even here, now!?

Trying to become a buddha by doing zazen reminds me of someone who is in a hurry to get back home: He is in such a hurry that he starts to run inside the train that is carrying him home.

The mundane way of thinking tells us that we practice in order to experience "satori". But look at the sutras: Nowhere you will find a buddha that reaches satori through practice. A buddha is a buddha right from the start.

We do not start to practice now to experience "satori" later.

Each one of us has been a buddha since the eternal past, with nothing lacking at all. But for some reason people seem to have forgotten that, got lost in illusion, and now make a great fuss about their suffering. When we practice, we have to practice as the buddhas that we have been since eternal times past, enlightened right from the start.

The practice of just sitting (shikantaza) that has been transmitted by buddhas and patriarchs means to do zazen without trying to make a buddha out of ourselves.

If on the otherhand you try to chase a "buddha" or "satori" outside fo zazen, that is like your ego trying to become "God". Buddhist practice is called "Buddhist practice" because we are practicing buddha. If that "buddha" would be something "over there", we were just trying to deify ourselves by practice.

"What does it mean to practice the Buddha way? It means to become a buddha!" - that is a lie.

To practice the Buddha way means: The Buddha way - put into practice.

Zazen means to sit without even thinking of "Buddha".

When you sit in zazen you attain the way without thinking at all about "attaining the way".

The Lotus-sutra is correctly called: "The sutra of the Lotus flower of the wondrous Dharma". Wondrous, unthinkable Dharma means that cause and effect are one. Practice and satori are one.

To explain this, the metaphor of the Lotus flower is used: The Lotus flower contains seeds, and if you open the seeds you will already find the next leaves rolled up in them. And one stem without branches. That is just like the way of practicing zazen in accord with the Buddha-Dharma.

We do not practice to get closer to satori step by step. The practice is in itself satori - we are putting satori into practice, we are sitting the zazen of buddhas and patriarchs.

We don't experience satori because of our practice. The "practice" itself IS satori. Each single step we make is the goal.

Eternal satori is manifested in the practice of this single instant. In the Lotus-sutra this is called: "The infant father gives birth to an age-old baby" - that means that the young and fresh practice of this instant (infant father) manifests eternal satori (the old baby).

When we give our whole existence to practice, how could we possibly ask for some cash-back called "satori"?

Most people seem to have no soul. They won't move a finger if they don't get tips for it. They only work when they get applause for it. They don't practice if you don't offer them some bait like "satori"... That's what I call "having no soul". It's a common problem, not only that of the woman in the Mumonkan (case 35) who split her soul.

Seigen Gyoshi asks the sixth patriarch: "What practice goes beyond ranks and steps?"

In the mundane world, everything is about ranks and steps: The rich and the poor, the v.i.p's and the ordinary folks... Buddhadharma goes beyond those ranks and steps.

The sixth patriarch replies: "What have you been doing all this time!?"

Seigen answers: "I didn't even practice the noble truths" - that means: "I don't even have 'satori'!"

The sixth patriarch affirmed: "When someone doesn't even practice the noble truths, what kind of rank and steps could there be?" (Keitoku Dentoroku, Chapter 5)

Inside zazen, there is no space for ranks and steps like "v.i.p's" or "ordinary folks". Only when people do zazen in order to gain "satori", they fall into ranks and steps.

An individual has his personal "satori": That is true in the world of individual persons.
What goes beyond the world of individual persons: That is zazen.

Dropping off body and mind means that our personal "practice" and "satori" disappear.

Some guys try to use the Buddha-Dharma for their own purposes: Just like some people try to use their education to appear more "important", they will practice in order to show off their "satori".

Isn't it clear from the start that there can't be no such thing like "dropping off body and mind" as long as we don't get rid off these human desires?

If you tried to ensure rebirth in paradise through your own effort, you would have to recite Amithaba Buddha's name 24 hours a day. So what will you do when you sleep? Will you fall into hell if you stop breathing while you sleep?

No, reciting Buddha's name means to do it with the faith that you are contained within the Universal Light that penetrates everywhere, without any possibility to drop out of it.

When you recite Buddha's name or do zazen, don't do it like someone who tries to fabricate some product in his workshop.

Buddha-Dharma is ungraspable. Don't grab it, let it go! Once you grab it, you fall into hell. And even though you get a grip on it - that's just like getting a grip on horse shit. But you try to make something out of it - and get lost in the labyrinth of transmigration...

Buddha-Dharma is ungraspable, without anything to gain.

You, on the other hand, are looking for something - that's why you lose your way.

"Illusion" and "satori" aren't anything more than the gossip of the world. They are graspable.
Buddha-Dharma is ungraspable - it is "not".

There is neither illusion nor satori when we practice the Buddha way. Both "illusion" and "satori" exist only in the realm of human beings. It's our human discrimination that creates "illusion" and "satori". Sensual awareness is just sensual awareness, intellectual discrimination is just intellectual discrimination - it's not the Buddha-Dharma. Buddha-Dharma does NOT mean to get rid of illusion and attain satori. Zazen means to stop chasing after this while we are running away from that.

Buddhism is boundless. Unless you understand this boundlessness, you won't understand Buddhism. By the way, when we talk about "understanding" or "not understanding" we completely miss the point of boundlessness.

That is why there can be illusion outside of satori, and no satori outside of illusion.

With a depressed expression

Sawaki Roshi:

What is the meaning of complaining with a depressed face: "I have no money, nothing to eat, only debts..."? It is because you are stingy that you think that you should have more fun and a happier life, and that is why you always complain about your misery.

You are not even hungry, still you complain that you have nothing to eat! Thus you will become really hungry. Everyone gets fooled by words. Names and words are the cause of our confusion.

Also beggars laugh, and millionaires cry. So what is all the excitement about?

Uchiyama Roshi:

Seven or eight years ago a man about 30 years old visited Antaiji one evening with a depressed expression on his face: "I have nothing to eat"

We were just having some rice soup for dinner, therefore I invited him to eat with us first and then talk afterwards. His reply struck me as strange: "I have nothing to eat, but I am not really hungry."

When I talked with him after dinner, I learned that he was living with his wife and his mother, and had a job, although the company he was working for was not too big. Still, he had an income and was certainly not starving. Therefore I told him: "Do not say that you have nothing to eat when you are not even hungry! You should rather say that your income is not enough to gratify your vanity."

He wound up staying with us for one week, but finally he returned back home, saying happily: "At home, my life is still better than your life here."

The life here in the temple must have struck him as really poor. But that is alright. Unless you really have nothing to eat, you will be happier if you live your life without a depressed expression on your face.



To you, having fallen off the ladder to success

When you think about your life once more after you have died, you'll realize that it doesn't matter at all.

"Never mind, it doesn't matter! No reason to cry so hard."

Grow up a little and open your eyes: You'll see that it's all a great fuss about nothing. All living beings make a great fuss about nothing - just like crybabies.

All the world is making a great fuss about nothing! There is just no reason for it. Nothing in this world is worth shedding all those tears.

Sometimes actors on stage will say things like: "What can I do? What can I do?" I never ask myself what I should do. In the end, it just doesn't matter.

Good luck, bad luck, right and wrong - it's not necessarily what it seems to be in our eyes. It's not what we think it is. We have to transcend good luck and bad luck, right and wrong.

The whole world is spinning in karma.

The world that human beings know is only the world which they see through the small hole of their karmic delusions.

The real world appears before our eyes once we stop staring at the world of our karmic delusions.

We have to break out of the world of delusion, rather than working our asses off in it.

You always talk about your problems, but what do your problems consist of in the first place? You remind me of someone who tries to catch his own fart in his hand and then constantly smells at it, complaining: "Oh, that stinks!"

There more leisure you have, the more time you spend with your farts. It seems that you need to face some real problem.

You suffer so hard that you want to hang yourself or drown in the water? Come on boy, wake up to reality!

You only suffer as much as you make yourself suffer. Some people suffer from designing their own "suffering".

People's minds are constantly moved by wind and waves. Writers make a living by selling those wind and waves as "literature".

Because you internalize everything, it becomes a problem for you. When you have no-mind, there is no problem.

You suffer because you don't want to follow what has to be followed.

Belief means the same as non-thinking: It means to follow. To follow what? To follow doesn't mean that the weaker gives in to the stronger.

Satori means to accept necessity without bitching. Great satori means to see necessity as necessity. Necessity is cosmic necessity.

You're afraid of dying? Don't worry, you'll die!

To you, being bothered by the eyes of the others

You can't even exchange a fart with someone. Each one of us has to live his own life. Who cares if you are better than me or not?

The eyes don't say, "our rank may be lower but we see more."

The brows don't reply, "we may not see anything, but we are higher than you!"

Living the Buddha-Dharma means activity inside not-knowing: the mountain does not think that it is high, the ocean does not think that it is deep and wide. Everything in the universe has the activity of not-knowing.

"The song of the bird and the smile of the flower manifest naturally, independent from the man in sitting in Zazen at the bottom of the cliff."

The bird does not sing to please you with its song. The flower does not bloom because you think it is beautiful. And you do not sit in Zazen to gain "Satori".

Each one of us just manifests himself by himself to be himself.

Religion means to live your own life in a completely fresh and new way, without letting anyone fool you.

Hey, what are you gawking at! Don't you realize I'm talking about you?

The asshole needs not be ashamed to be the asshole. And there is no reason for the feet to complain just because they are feet. The head is not the most important thing either. And the navel should not be to proud of himself just because he's at the center.

It's strange that people think that the president is something special.

The nose can't replace the eyes. The mouth can't replace the ears. Each has its own identity, which is unsurpassable in the whole universe.

Everything living is living out its own, unsurpassable identity. Each lives only his very own life. How comes that everyone seems to forget that?

Our society is lacking role models: what we call our "common sense", "social awareness" and our "correct policy" are all just bad examples.

During the Tokugawa era (from 1600 to 1868) the Confucianists said: "Shakyamuni was too proud of himself - he said that nothing in the whole universe surpassed his own identity!"

Totally wrong: not only Shakyamuni's identity is unsurpassable. Each one of us has an identity that is unsurpassable in the whole universe. And while we have it, we complain about it.

To practice the Buddhaway means to manifest your own identity, which is unsurpassable in the whole universe, within yourself.

Quick your bitching! You always cry and complain about yourself, trying to be like the others. How come you look so happy as soon as things seem to be coming your way?

Leading a religious life means to reflect and check yourself - reflect and check yourself!

Some make a face as if all this had nothing to do with them.

If you can't put yourself in the last place, you have neither faith nor remorse.

Lately, whenever youngsters cause problems, people blame "the social environment". But who knows which kind of social environment is good, which is bad? Is it bad to be born rich? Is it better to be born poor?

The worst environment is one in which a person can not find his own identity.

We should not try to find our worth in our parents, our family tradition or our "roots". We should not try to show off our money, our social position or our fancy clothes. We have to live ourselves, naked, without pretense.

Religion means to live your own life unstripped, completely naked.

Everyone in the world seems to try to make themselves look more important by using other people or things as their background scenery. That is like trying to give taste to some tasteless food by putting it on a special plate.

The world has lost the man himself out of sight.

In Religion, there is no "collective responsibility": everything depends only on myself.

Ordinary people always need an audience, otherwise they lose their motivation to do anything. When someone is looking on however, they will even jump into a fire.

(Note: "Ordinary people" is a technical Buddhist term, which can also be translated as "normal person" or "deluded person". When Sawaki Roshii is talking about a person, a human being or about people, he does not think about human beings or people as the "measure of all things". Quite the opposite, for Sawaki Roshii a human being is someone who makes "a smart face while groping in the dark". Each one of us is an "ordinary person", but we should never excuse ourselves with that, or even start congratulating ourselves for our just being "ordinary human beings".)

People honour themselves with certifications and the like. This leads only to hypocrisy: "Let me express my humble feelings..."

There is too much competition in the world, too many victories and defeats.

I am myself. Absolutely no comparison possible.

It starts with education in school: examinations, scores, giving ranks and numbers to people according to their achievements - how stupid!

Who is important and who is not? Is it "important" to be good in school? Is some one, who is not so good in school, not such a good person? Aren't there many idiots who are good in school?

On the other hand, some of those who end up last place in school curse their fate and live their lives feeling like victims. They say their lives are "fucked up" - it is exactly this attitude that "fucks up" their lives.

Don't be so happy about the ranks others give you. Aren't you yourself? You are happy or disappointed whenever people judge you - but you don't even understand who you are in the first place!

I never praise anyone. Because everyone knows his own good sides best. People even think they are better than they actually are.

The kids caught a mouse: now it is struggling in the trap. The kids love to watch how it is rubbing its nose bloody, almost tearing off its tail. In the end they give it to the cat to eat...

If I was sitting in that trap I would say, "fuck, you god damn humans won't make a fool out of me!" - and I would just sit in Zazen.

To become Buddha means to stop gawking around. When you stop gawking around, you will finally be able to eat your meals peacefully.

To practice the Buddhaway means to stop gawking around. It means to be one in the present. This is what is called samadhi.

We don't eat in order to shit, we don't shit to produce manure. Still, everyone seems to think that we go to school in order to enter a college, and that we go to college to get a good job.

Arousing Bodhimind means to stop gawking around.

"Should I live as a monk? Or should I rather give up the monk's life?" - just stop gawking around and commit yourself to "carrying the heavy load of the Shobogenzo (the eye store of the true Dharma) and be fully present all of the time, in any place." (Daichi Zenji's "Hotsuganmon")

This is what is called arousing Bodhimind.

To dedicate this body to the Buddhaway without gawking around means that "the great, unsurpassable force of life manifests itself completely".

Buddha means someone who is not gawking around.

Actually, there is no reason to gawk around in the first place. Still, it seems to be our habit from times unthinkable to peep to the left and peep to the right.

Grown ups have strange habits: they can make a lot of fuss about a single word.

Try to put a baby to shame - you won't be able to do it. It is only grown ups that are conscious of themselves and the others - thus they fool themselves and become ashamed or angry.

Why can't we just go straight?!

"The iron ox isn't afraid of the lion's roar."

Of course not, as he hasn't got the weakness of living beings.

"The wooden man is like a bird or a flower."

True, because he also has no self-consciousness.

Human beings are smart: when they see a ghost, they run. When they see a hallucination, they become afraid.

Everybody is talking about "reality". It seems they make a real fuss about reality, being led astray by reality.

Some guys spend their whole life without finding a way to live.

Stop groping in the dark. Walk firmly in the wide and open. "Don't walk by night. Proceed when it's bright." (Keitoku-Dentoroku 15)

This koan expresses the essence of religion.

Where ever you turn, there is only yourself. There is nothing that isn't yourself.

"Help me with my lazyness! Take this pain from me!"

That won't work.

Samadhi means to be yourself and only yourself. That is the "mind that is oure and clear by itself".

Only in Zazen you can be yourself and only yourself. Outside of Zazen you will always try to be better than the others, try to have more fun than the others.

Each one of us is born with the world and dies with the world. Because each one of us has his own world that differs from everybody else's.

**To you, for whom something is still missing in Zazen
(by Uchiyama Kosho)**

Dogen Zenji's practice of shikantaza is exactly what my late teacher Sawaki Kodo Roshi calls the "zazen of just sitting". So for me too, true zazen naturally means shikantaza - just sitting. That is to say that we do NOT practice zazen to have "kensho" experiences, "solve" a lot of koans or receive "inka-shomei". Zazen just means to sit.

On the other hand, it is a fact that even among the practitioners of the Japanese Soto-school, which traces itself back to its founder Dogen Zenji, not a few have doubts about this kind of zazen. To make their point, they will quote passages like these:

"In the hall: 'I have not visited many Zen monasteries. Having met with my master Tendo, I quietly confirmed that the eyes are horizontal and the nose vertical. Nobody can fool me anymore. I have returned back home with empty hands.' "(Eihei Koroku, 1st chapter)

"I travelled to Sung China and visited Zen masters in all parts of the country, studying the Five Houses of Zen. Finally I met my master Nyojo on Taihaku peak, and the great matter of a whole life time of study came to an end." (Shobogenzo Bendowa)

Now people will say: "Hasn't Dogen Zenji himself said that he 'confirmed that the eyes are horizontal and the nose vertical, and that the great matter of a whole life time of study came to an end'? What use is there then when an ordinary person who has not the least glimpse of enlightenment 'just sits'? Isn't that kind of zazen just stupid?"

I remember all too well having had this kind of doubts myself, and of course not only I had these doubts: Many of those who practiced under the guidance of Sawaki Roshi eventually gave up just sitting and switched to "Kensho-Zen" or "Koan-Zen". Therefore I can understand these doubts very well.

First, we should know that Sawaki Roshi was a typical Zen master just as you would imagine one, and his charisma was so great that anyone who would listen to his talks for the first time felt attracted like a piece of iron towards a magnet. Therefore, when Roshi would say that "zazen is good for nothing" (that was Sawaki Roshi's expression for the zazen that is "beyond gain and beyond satori (mushotoku-mushogo)"), everyone thought that he was just saying it, but that in reality zazen would of course get them "somewhere somehow" over time. I am sure that many practiced like that with Sawaki Roshi.

Maybe those who lived outside and came to the temple just to participate in zazen or the sesshin did not have such strong doubts. But those serious enough to throw their physical existence into the Way, become monks and join our community that practiced under the Roshi - those who really lived their lives as zazen practice would sooner or later start to have doubts about shikantaza. Because however much you may sit, you will never get "your fill" - zazen won't satisfy you. It is just like even though you eat, the food does not seem to fill your stomach. So when I say that we never get "our fill" by zazen, I mean that we do not have the feeling of "satori" filling our stomach.

Many of the young people who had dedicated their physical existence to the practice of the Way started to think: "What use is there in wasting my youth on this practice of zazen which seems to have no lasting results?" And too many finally left, saying: "And what about those 'senior students' who have practiced for years? Aren't they all still the same ordinary deluded people? After all, what we really need is SATORI!"

I myself felt as if those doubts would make me burst. Still, I continued to practice zazen with Sawaki Roshi

for 25 years - until his death. Therefore, I think that I understand the doubts pretty well, but I have also come to understand the meaning of shikantaza that Dogen Zenji and Sawaki Roshi are talking about. When I write the following, I will try to be something like an "interpreter" between the two sides.

When I say that an "interpreter" is needed, I do not only mean to say that the doubting practitioners do not understand the words of Dogen Zenji or Sawaki Roshi (that is of course the case), but also that the words of Dogen Zenji and Sawaki Roshi often do not reach down to the root of the doubts and problems of us, who try to practice shikantaza. This is not because Dogen Zenji or Sawaki Roshi would not understand our doubts, but rather because they express themselves in a way that far transcends our ordinary common sense. I therefore want to try my best at offering my own "translation" of Dogen Zenji and Sawaki Roshi's words.

For example, let's take a look at the quote from the "Eihei Koroku":

"I quietly confirmed that the eyes are horizontal and the nose vertical. Nobody can fool me anymore. I have returned back home with empty hands."

How about reading it like this:

"I confirmed that I am living my life by breathing the present breath in the present moment."

How can I make such an interpretation? The fact is that when I am reading the "Shobogenzo", I do not do it as a scholar of Buddhist studies who just tries to find some order in the labyrinth of Chinese characters. I am also not reading it as a sectarian who thinks that each single character is so holy that he wants to conserve it like canned food and then prostrate in front of it, without ever opening the can. When I read Dogen Zenji, I do it as a wayseeker. Living my completely new life, I am always looking for a brand new way to live this life. For me, this is the meaning of words like "reflecting on your own mind with the old teaching", or what is expressed as "to study the Buddha way means to study yourself".

Anyway, if we read it in the light of our completely new life, we should not interpret Dogen Zenji's words about the eyes being horizontal and the nose vertical in a flat and static manner. We should realize that "the eyes horizontal, the nose vertical" expresses the dynamic functioning of this "raw"

life we are living. It is the dynamic flow of living our life by breathing the present breath in the present moment. Read thus, we should see that Dogen Zenji isn't talking about some mystical state that one might experience during zazen once you get "satori": He is talking about the plain facts of life that everyone of us is living.

Therefore it is said at the beginning of the "Fukanazengi": "The way is complete and all-pervading, why use practice as a means to verify it? The vehicle of truth wheels freely, why do you exhaust your efforts?" And how about the following sentences? "If there is only the slightest discrimination, it will cause a separation like that between heaven and earth. If you follow or resist, your mind will be shattered and lost." It is a basic fact that each one of us lives his completely new life, fresh and raw. But when we start to think about it in our heads, in that moment we get stuck in a static concept that we "grasp". Because what we think of as "raw, fresh and alive" isn't raw, fresh and alive anymore. "Raw, fresh and alive" means to open the hand of thought: Only what we let go can be raw, fresh and alive. Zazen means this opening of the hand of thought, it is the posture of letting go.

I want to add some words here about the actual practice of shikantaza - just sitting. When we sit in zazen, it is not that there are no thoughts at all appearing in our heads. Actually, a lot of thoughts appear. But if you start to chase those thoughts, then that can't be called zazen anymore. You are just thinking in the sitting posture. It is important for you to realize then that, "I am doing zazen right now, this is not the time for

chasing thoughts!" Return to the correct posture, and open the hand of thought again. This is what is called "waking up from distraction and confusion".

Next we might become tired. Now it is time to remind ourselves, "I am doing zazen right now, this is not the time to sleep!" Let's then return to the correct posture, and wake up to zazen. This is what is called "waking up from dullness and fatigue".

Zazen means to wake up from distraction and confusion, dullness and fatigue for a billion times, and return to the wide awake posture of zazen. "Living the raw and fresh life called zazen" means to arouse the mind for a billion times in this fashion, practice and realize it for a billion times: This is what is called shikantaza - just sitting.

People say that Dogen Zenji got "satori" by dropping off body and mind, but what is this "dropping off body and mind (shinjin-datsuraku)" in the first place? Dogen Zenji writes in the "Hokyoki":

"The abbot pointed out: 'To practice Zen means to drop off body and mind. It has nothing to do with burning incense, doing prostrations, calling upon Buddha, confessing one's sins or studying the scriptures. It is just sitting.' I stepped forward and asked: 'What is dropping off body and mind?' The abbot answered: 'Dropping off body and mind is zazen. When you just sit, you are freed from the five desires and the five illusions disappear.'"

That means that the zazen in which you open the hand of thought and let go, let go a billion times, is in itself the dropping off of body and mind. Dropping off body and mind isn't some special kind of mystical experience either.

Only this kind of zazen can be called "the whole way of Buddha-Dharma, which isn't equalled by anything" (from the "Bendowa"). And it is also called the "true gate of Buddha-Dharma" (ibid).

Let's compare living our lives with driving a car: You shouldn't sleep behind the wheel, and you shouldn't drink and drive. Also, when you are driving a car, you shouldn't be tense and you shouldn't think too much - it's dangerous. The same is true when we sit behind the wheel of our own lives. The basics for driving our own life consist in waking up from dullness and fatigue, so that we don't fall asleep behind the wheel. Also, we have to wake up from distraction and confusion, that means we must not be tense or think too much while driving. Zazen means to put these basics of "driving your life" into actual practice. Thus it can be called the "whole way" and "true gate" of the Buddha-Dharma, and it is "universally recommended" by Dogen Zenji in his "Fukanzazengi".

"The body and mind of the buddha way are grasses and trees, stones and tiles, wind and rain, fire and water. To discover these things around you and realize the buddha way inside them is the meaning of arousing bodhi mind. When you grasp emptiness, you should build pagodas and Buddhas with it. Use the water from the valley to manifest Buddhas and pagodas. To do this means to arouse the mind of incomparable, complete bodhi-wisdom, it means to repeat the one arousal of mind for a billion times. Thus, you are practicing realization." (Shobogenzo Hotsumujoshin)

It would be a great mistake to interpret this "to repeat the one arousal of mind for a billion times" as a mere reminder for those who haven't yet experienced satori to not neglect their practice. To arouse the mind for a billion times means that the raw and fresh life breaths as fresh and raw life.

Those people who give up the practice of shikantaza because it doesn't give them a feeling of satisfaction, and they thus start to get bored by their practice, do so because they intellectualize these "billion times of arousing the mind" in their heads. They think: "Oh gosh! How could I possibly do this for a billion times? What I need is SATORII! If I could have only one big satori, that would take care of those billion times once and for all!"

That is just as if we were told when born as babies: "From now on you will have to breathe for your whole lifetime, each single breath, each single moment - you will breathe in, breathe out a billion times." Would we

reply: "Oh gosh! I have to try somehow to take care of that breath of my life for once and all, and take only one single big breath!"

Even if we tried to do that, we would hardly succeed. That is why the "Shobogenzo Hotsumujoshin" (quoted above) continues:

"A person who thinks that we arouse the mind once and for all, without ever arousing it again, and who says that practice is endless, but the fruit of realization only one - such a person has never heard the Buddha-Dharma, doesn't know the Buddha-Dharma, and doesn't meet the Buddha-Dharma."

Who tries to have "satori" once and for all doesn't accept the fact that we have to live our fresh and raw life just as fresh and raw as it is.

Even in the biological sense we can only live by breathing the breath of our whole life, each single breath, each single moment. To live means to breathe this breath right now, and therefore to live your "raw/fresh" life naturally doesn't mean to think about it in your head. It means to accept life as life - as "raw, fresh and alive" - and to develop an attitude of living. When you do this, that is exactly "the great matter of a life time of study coming to the end". It is also the start of true practice of shikantaza - just sitting. This is what Dogen Zenji calls "unity of practice-realization" and "practice on the ground of realization".

And that is why Sawaki Roshi always said:

"There is no beginning to satori, nor an end to practice!"



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