

STUDIA ORIENTALIA SLOVACA

ročník · volume 17
číslo · number 2

2018



Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave
Katedra východoázijských štúdií

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Vedecké štúdie v *Studia Orientalia Slovaca* sú indexované v database SCOPUS. · Research articles in *Studia Orientalia Slovaca* are abstracted and indexed in SCOPUS.

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EV 4938/14

ISSN 1336-3786

Studia Orientalia Slovaca

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Believe It or Not: Dōgen on the Question of Faith

Zuzana Kubovčáková

Abstract The founder of the Sōtō School of Japanese Zen Buddhism, Dōgen (1200-1253) was a fervent advocate of silent meditation, as well as a prolific writer. He authored a great number of essays and treatises, instructions and commentaries, poems and kōan interpretations. History remembers him, however, mostly as an ardent proponent of sitting meditation, the famed *shikan taza* of the Sōtō School. Yet despite his undeniable support to meditation practices, he was also a Buddhist monk and teacher, who transmitted to his disciples a more coherent notion of Zen Buddhism including aspects of faith and devotion. By means of surveying Dōgen's own texts in the *Shōbō genzō*, Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, the aim of this paper is to shed light on Dōgen's view on both sitting meditation, *zazen*, and the importance of devotional practices noted therein.

Key words Dōgen 道元 (1200-1253) · *Shōbō genzō* · *zazen*, *shikan taza* · meditation · Buddhist practice · faith · devotion · *Bendōwa*

Introduction

The present paper aims to concentrate on the question of faith in Japanese Zen Buddhism, viewed particularly by the figure of Dōgen, founder of the Sōtō Zen School.¹ Dōgen 道元 (1200-1253) is usually regarded as an ardent proponent of *zazen*, seated meditation. Meditation of the Sōtō School of Japanese Zen

1 For Sōtō roots in China see e.g., Jana Benická, »Speculative/symbolical Elaborations of the Relationship between the Noumenal and Phenomenal Aspects of Reality according to the Chinese Chan Caodong School«, *Orientalia Pragensia* XVI, *Acta Universitatis Caroliniae, Philologica* 3 (2007), 103-114.

Buddhism is referred to as *shikan taza* 只管打坐, meaning »just sitting« or »simply/e sitting«. Dōgen and his newly established Sōtō school are customarily described with the pair of words of *zazen* and just sitting. However, I understand Dōgen to be a more universal teacher, one emphasizing various methods of Zen practice and encompassing a spectrum of monastic practices. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to offer a portrayal of Dōgen as a teacher advocating not only seated meditation, but one who embraced a number of aspects of Buddhist teaching, presented it to his students accordingly and with identical emphasis. After a brief introduction on Dōgen's life, I proceed to concisely examine the trajectory of his life and the circumstances that led him to develop his ideas of the content of Zen thought and practice. The paper continues by shedding light on Dōgen's view on Zen meditation and concentrates on the issue of faith and belief in Dōgen's legacy. For this purpose, I explore several chapters of the *Shōbō genzō* 正法眼藏, Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, Dōgen's lifetime work. By comparing his own ideas on both seated meditation and devotional practices, I attempt to propose a picture of Dōgen as a Zen master who was as much a devotee of meditation, as he was a proponent of balance within the teaching and practice of Zen Buddhism.

1 *Dōgen the Seeker*

Dōgen, the founder of the Sōtō school of Japanese Zen, counts among a group of Japanese thinkers of the medieval Kamakura period (1185–1333) generally regarded as innovators and reformers of Japanese Buddhism.² He is second in line of Japanese Zen masters whose name went down in history as that of the founder of separate Zen schools. Dōgen's contemporary, Eisai 栄西 (1141–1215), was the first Japanese monk of the Tendai tradition that had been firmly rooted in the capital who in an attempt to study the original teachings of the school ventured to mainland China. Even though embassies between the Japanese and Chinese

2 See, for instance Kazuo Ōsumi, »Buddhism in the Kamakura Period«, in *Cambridge History of Japan: Volume 3, Medieval Japan*, ed. by Kozo Yamamura (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 573.

Buddhist establishments have been quite frequent in the previous centuries, more than a hundred years had passed since the last Japanese contacts with China. After two voyages undertaken within the period of two decades—the first in 1168 and the next between 1187 and 1191—Eisai returned from China with a novel teaching of the Lin-chi lineage of the emerging Ch’an school of Buddhism. Upon his return, Eisai was fortunate enough to establish a temple in Kyōto that was separate from the Tendai School and bears the claim to be the first Zen temple in the capital.³ Ken’ninji 建仁寺, as the temple is called, was indeed founded as a Zen temple, yet it is necessary to distinguish between the style of Zen that this temple proselytized. Established by Eisai in 1202, Ken’ninji served as a training centre in the new tradition focusing on the practice of seated meditation *zazen* 座禪. For this purpose, a separate meditation hall, *sōdō* 僧堂, was constructed at Ken’ninji. However, it also housed ritual halls for traditional esoteric practices customary for both Tendai and Shingon schools. Due to pressure exerted by the established schools in the capital, Eisai merely inserted seated meditation into the largely esoteric daily routine of Ken’ninji.⁴ Indeed, we know of two forms of Zen that spread in Japan in this early period: one of them being the combinatory *kenshūzen* 兼修禪, with training involving the doctrines and practice of Tendai, esoteric *mikkyō* 密教 teachings and Zen, and the other one being the pure Zen of *junsuizen* 純粹禪, claiming to lay emphasis solely on meditation practice, *sans* the ingredients of other schools of Japanese Buddhism.⁵ Therefore, it would be better to describe Ken’ninji as a combinatory »Tendai-esoteric-Zen temple«, since its daily routine resembled that of Enryakuji temple, head temple of the Tendai School at Mt. Hiei, with the exception of inserting daily practice of meditation into the monastic training. However, this approach was still an innovation and soon the temple distinguished itself among the religious milieu of the Kyōto capital, attracting monks and students interested in the new doctrine.

3 »The Oldest Zen Temple in Kyoto Kenninji«, <<http://www.kenninji.jp/english/>> (last retrieval January 18, 2018).

4 *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master’s Dogen Shobo genzo*, ed. by Kazuaki Tanahashi (Boulder: Shambhala, 2013), 40; or Nara Yasuaki and Okimoto Katsumi, *Zen no sekai* 禪の世界 [The World of Zen], (Tokyo: Tokyo shoseki, 2007), 242.

5 Nara, Okimoto, *Zen no sekai*, 233.

Similarly to Eisai, Dōgen too embarked on a voyage to China. His reasons for the journey, however, were different from Eisai's. Dōgen grew dissatisfied with the Tendai teaching and so he left Enryakuji in a pursuit of Buddhism which would answer his internal questions about the authentic intention of Buddhist teaching and practice, doubtful questions that seemed to take off Dōgen's mind from concentrating solely on his training. According to tradition, he was advised to seek out the help of Myōzen 明全 (1184–1225), a disciple of Eisai at Ken'ninji, who was considered an insightful teacher trained within the novel Chinese-style Buddhism, which deemed him capable of answering Dōgen's questioning of the path. After three years of studying with Myōzen at Ken'ninji, Dōgen was chosen to accompany his teacher on a voyage to China, on which they embarked in spring 1223. Following the footsteps of Eisai, they arrived at Zhejiang province 浙江省 in eastern China in the fourth lunar month of 1223. Thence they entered Tiantong monastery 天童寺, counted as the third among the Five Great Ch'an Temples, the so-called Five Mountains 五山. After practicing at Tiantong temple for a year, Dōgen started a pilgrimage to other monasteries within the province, from which he returned in spring 1225. Three weeks later, his old teacher Myōzen passed away and Dōgen entered the Tiantong temple to study with master Rujing (Tendō Nyōjō 天童如淨 in Japanese, 1163–1228), whom he now considered his Dharma teacher. It is from Dōgen that we learn about Rujing as a distinguished Ch'an master, as he was not a particularly prominent figure in the contemporary Ch'an establishment.⁶ Also, the Tiantong monastery is presently more revered due to its reference to Dōgen than in connection to Rujing himself.⁷ However, even though Dōgen received a document of lineage heritage, *inka shōsho* 印可証書 from both Myōzen and Rujing, it was only from his Chinese master that Dōgen obtained the full Dharma transmission in 1227. Soon thereafter, Dōgen left Tiantong temple and returned to Japan, where he became a fervent advocate of the practice of seated meditation.

6 Steven Heine and Dale Wright, *Zen Masters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 129.

7 *Ibid.*, 140.

2 *Back from China*

Upon his return from China, Dōgen joined the Ken'ninji community for another three years. From there he moved to Fukakusa area south of the capital, where he found Kōshōji temple 興聖寺 in 1233. Kōshōji, together with Ken'ninji and Tōfukuji, count among the first Japanese Zen temples that imitated the style of Sung-period Ch'an monasteries by erecting a monks' hall—sōdō 僧堂—dedicated solely to Zen monastic practice within their precincts. The temple was to remain the home for Dōgen's first monastic community, which was also joined by monks of the controversial Daruma School. In winter 1243, however, Dōgen moved the entire community to Echizen province north of Kyōto, for reasons that still remain obscure. The temple built there in 1244, Daibutsuji 大佛寺, was later renamed Eiheiiji 永平寺, Dōgen's legacy and the present seat of the Sōtō school.

In the years directly following Dōgen's return from China, he devoted his energies into spreading the knowledge that he encountered while traveling in mainland. Soon after his arrival, Dōgen started writing texts that dealt with Zen, both its teaching and practice, so that he could properly introduce the meditative tradition in his home country. As a matter of fact, the practice of seated meditation had been a fundamental part of the Buddhist training itself and an age-long part of the training of the Tendai School, where it was referred to as cultivation of »calming and insight« *shikan* 止觀. However, the contemporary reality differed, as the meditation practice had been largely disregarded by the late Heian period.⁸ In an attempt to revive seated meditation, Dōgen took to spreading the teaching of the Ch'an school in both action and writing. The first text Dōgen has written after his return from China in 1227, On General Recommendation of Silent Meditation, *Fukan zazengi* 普勸坐禪儀, is a brief treatise written in formal Chinese. It is an explanation and advocacy of seated meditation, which Dōgen considered the ultimate practice throughout his entire life. Also, it was an attempt to explain the benefits and importance of zazen to everyone, as well as to disseminate the teaching of Chinese Ch'an schools in Japan.

The *Fukan zazengi* (T2580, 82) begins with Dōgen's original doubt that he struggled with before leaving Japan. As a disciple of the Tendai school that teaches

8 Griffith Foulk, »Ritual in Japanese Zen Buddhism«, in *Zen Ritual: Studies of Zen Buddhist Theory in Practice*, ed. by Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 42.

the doctrine of original enlightenment *hongaku* 本覺 of all beings being innately enlightened, Dōgen deeply pondered why monastic training and practice were necessary if one was already enlightened. It seems that during his voyage to China Dōgen succeeded in finding the answer to this urging question, and it seems Fukanzazengi was his attempt to share this experience immediately after his return to Japan. Fukanzazengi therefore starts with a declaration of all-pervasiveness and universal availability of Buddha's teaching and follows with bringing forward the example of Shākyamuni Buddha and Bōdhidharma, who both practiced silent meditation for a number of years, as Dōgen reminds the reader—under the bodhi tree and against the wall, respectively—even though, as is generally understood, they were already enlightened. If the masters were already enlightened and still practiced silent meditation nonetheless, Dōgen asks, who does not need to do so nowadays?

Next, Dōgen continues with explaining the essentials about meditation practice: what to wear, how to ready oneself, where to sit, how to prepare one's environment, how to place one's feet, arms and hands, how to settle on the cushion, adjust the spine and position one's teeth, tongue and eyes. He follows with commenting on the practice of zazen with a caution not to be conditioned by one's pre-conceived ideas. He speaks about how to end zazen and how to raise from the cushion, while at the same time explaining and describing the importance of seated meditation and its circumstances—beginning with teachers and ancestors in India and China and concluding with oneself. The text is at the same time direct and practical, as well as figurative and symbolic, changing in style fluidly from one paragraph to another. It is the first of Dōgen's texts written in Japan and it can already serve as a clear example of the style and content of his future writing.

3 *Dōgen the Writer*

Steven Heine calls Dōgen a »sermonizer, essayist, and poet«⁹, while Kazuo Ōsumi refers to him as the producer of »Japan’s most sublime religious philosophies«.¹⁰ Dōgen was, to say the least, a truly prolific writer and an assiduous teacher. Since setting foot back in Japan, he has authored a great number of texts dealing mostly with instructions to his community of monks and lay people, both formal and informal dharma talks, monastic guidelines and rules for conduct in a Zen monastery.

A great number of these amounted to his own lectures and writings, especially from an earlier period of his teaching during the years spent at Kōshōji, collected in the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, *Shōbō genzō*, different editions of which count as many as 28, 60, 75, 84 or even 95 chapters.¹¹ At the same time, his disciples Senne, Ejō and Gien compiled the Extensive Record of Eihei Dōgen, *Eihei kōroku* 永平公録, a truly ample collection of ten volumes that includes Dōgen’s formal talks from later period, as well as less formal instructions to his community at Eiheiji, commentaries on traditional Ch’an kōans and a number of Dōgen’s own Chinese and Japanese poems. Thus, the Eihei kōroku imitates the original texts of Ch’an recorded sayings and was primarily intended for more laicized patrons and members of the Eiheiji community. Yet another part of his writing is the *Shōbō genzō zuimonki* 正法眼藏隨聞記, also dubbed the Kana Shōbō genzō, a six volume collection of 120 texts containing Dōgen’s oral discourses written in vernacular Japanese that originated in an earlier period before his move to Echizen.

Dōgen’s style of writing was novel, for the Japanese Buddhist setting in particular, and eclectic in general. Throughout these collections, he used kōans and encounter dialogues from the golden age of Ch’an in the Sung period, which were employed to shed light on ancient masters, their distinct teaching methods and the efficacy of these. Dōgen frequently referred to a variety of Chinese sources and used cases from the past as examples to illustrate the teaching. He used references to Ch’an patriarchs, as well as to the earliest Buddhist teachers like

9 Steven Heine, *Did Dogen Go to China? What He Wrote and When He Wrote It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 50.

10 Ōsumi, »Buddhism in the Kamakura Period«, 555.

11 For more on the various editions of Shōbō genzō, see Heine, *Did Dogen Go to China?*, 51–63.

Shākyamuni and Kaśyapa themselves. Besides citing these sources, however, Dōgen commented and expanded the source materials, often interpreting them or offering critique of an approach or utterance of a patriarch, thereby succeeding in establishing a unique discourse for the emerging Japanese Zen establishment.¹²

In addition to the aforementioned collections of sermons, Dōgen also authored a treatise called *Eihei shingi* 永平清規, regulations for his monastic community dealing with precepts and temple rules. Adherence to moral precepts was one method that Dōgen considered necessary for the revival of Japanese Buddhism, as the virtue of morality had been, alongside with concentration and wisdom, among the three fundamental approaches to Buddhist thought. The rules and precepts have proved to be essential for the organization and upkeep of a Zen monastery, especially because its principal emphasis was on Zen meditation and the achievement of the ultimate goal of Buddhism, enlightenment. Due to the highly individualistic, generally elusive and hard-to-describe experience of enlightenment that seated meditation aimed to invoke, the organization of Zen monasteries necessitated a strict hierarchical structure and earnest adherence to rules. The written records of previous Ch'an patriarchs were intended to explain the subtle experience of enlightenment, while the strictly hierarchical organization of the temple, its adherence to precepts and regulations, was aimed at stimulating it. The intention of this was to help induce the experience of enlightenment for practitioners by illustrating the example of previous patriarchs of Ch'an schools and by the monks' subsequent own endeavours in the meditation hall. By combining the two types of monastic background, doctrinal and regulatory, Zen temples were establishing an analogy to the age-old example of one's arriving at enlightenment by means of the combination of the two wings of wisdom and compassion.¹³ Only in this case, the two wings were not specifically wisdom and compassion, like in early Buddhist thought, but examples of ancient Ch'an masters put down in kōan and recorded sayings' compilations, combined with everyday adherence to rigorous monastic discipline.

12 *Ibid.*, 28.

13 Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 30.

Based on the number and volume of Dōgen's works, one can clearly perceive the effort with which he was endeavouring to root meditation practice firmly within the contemporary Japanese monastic environment. At the same time, also based on the scope of his writing, one can imagine his striving for a proper doctrinal instruction of his followers in the teaching of Ch'an/Zen school by means illustrating examples of ancient patriarchs and masters, combined with the practice of noting down his lectures to be revised and studied. It seems hard to imagine what was his primal intention—imposition of a regular *zazen* routine within Japanese Buddhist temples or doctrinal instruction of his monastic community. Heine tells us that »Dōgen's central concern [...] was to establish a full-scale community effectively guided by a highly-ritualized approach to meditation practice and doctrinal teachings«.14 Undoubtedly, by the sheer breadth of topics that he covered in his writings, Dōgen was laying foundations for a school that lay equal emphasis on both study and practice.

4 *Dōgen on Zazen*

Dōgen was an ardent proponent of *zazen* and it is again from Heine that we learn, put in a nutshell, that »an emphasis on the necessity of practicing *zazen* meditation is seen throughout all stages of Dōgen's career«.15 As I have stated previously, *zazen* is one of the various topics of Dōgen's writings in general and the *Shōbō genzō* in particular. However, I resolved to determine whether he really mentions the practice of sitting meditation ceaselessly. Within the *Shōbō genzō*16, there is a number of chapters dealing with seated meditation *per se*, the most representative being of course *The Point of Zazen*, *Zazenshin* 坐禅箴, and *Meditation That is the King of Meditation*, *Sanmai Ōzanmai* 三昧王三昧. Exploring the various chapters in greater detail, however, one does find that Dōgen is less than preoccupied with the concept of 'just sitting' of *shikan taza* as such, or at least with referring to it specifically by name. He makes innumerable

14 Heine, *Did Dogen Go to China?*, 86.

15 *Ibid.*, 82.

16 Kawamura Kōdō 河村孝道, *Dōgen zenji zenshū* 道元禅師全集 [Complete Works of Zen Master Dōgen], 6 vols. (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1995).

references to *zazen* as the principal practice of the meditative schools in multiple chapters of the *Shōbō genzō*, quite understandably, the word *zazen* being mentioned a total of 183 times in 16 different chapters of the manuscript. Alternately too, Dōgen refers to sitting meditation by the term *kekka fuza* 結跏趺坐 or *fuza* 跏坐, meaning full-lotus sitting posture or sitting posture, respectively.¹⁷ Yet another synonym for seated meditation would be *samādhi*, *sanmai* or *zanmai* in Japanese 三昧, a deep meditative practice, which Dōgen also refers to on a number of occasions.¹⁸

However, when concentrating upon the generally-held and long-emphasized view of Dōgen's advocacy of still sitting of *shikan taza*, one finds that out of the 96 chapters compiled in this edition of *Shōbō genzō*, only 11 specifically use the word *taza*.¹⁹ Moreover, in majority of these chapters it truly is a mere mention, stating the word once or twice throughout the entire text. Two chapters within the *Shōbō genzō* stand out as an exception, that being the previously mentioned The Point of Zazen, noting the word *taza* five times, and Meditation that is the King of Meditation, which refers to *taza* an astonishing 15 times. All in all, the 15 times »still sitting« is mentioned in the Meditation That is the King of Meditation is almost a half of all the references of *shikan taza* in the entire *Shōbō genzō*, which counts for a total of 33 times. Subsequently, judging by the number of *Shōbō genzō* chapters dealing with seated meditation, Dōgen certainly is a passionate proponent of sitting, albeit under various terms of *zazen*, *fuza* and *zanmai*, yet not singularly referring to it under the term of *shikan taza* as such.

A good example for illustrating Dōgen's views on not only *zazen*, but on Zen thought and practice in general would be *Bendōwa*, A Talk on Endeavour on the Way 辨道話.²⁰ Written in 1231, it is Dōgen's second text after *Fukan zazengi*, it is

17 Dōgen refers to *fuza* 33 times in only 5 chapters, discussing it primarily in chapter Meditation that is the King of Meditation, *Sanmai Ōzanmai*, with a total of 26 times.

18 *Sanmai* is mentioned as many as 80 times in 21 chapters.

19 These being: On Endeavour of the Way, The Point of Zazen, Continuous Practice, pt. two, Old Mirror, Arhat, Buddha Sūtras, All-inclusive Study, Eyeball, Thirty-seven Layers of Enlightenment, Udumbara Flower, and Meditation that is the King of Meditation.

20 Kawamura, *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, 2: 536–556.

one that Kazuaki Tanahashi describes as »Dōgen's most comprehensive explanation of dharma«. ²¹ This essay, however, Dōgen decided to write not in Chinese, as would be the usual practice for an educated monk, but in Japanese, since it was directed at a general audience and not at a monastic community of monks accustomed to reading literary Chinese. It explains Dōgen's own understanding of the teaching of Ch'an schools, of meditation, its practice and the possibilities of spreading the Ch'an tradition in the land of Japan, his views on the issue of Buddhist teachings, precepts, enlightenment, and one's endeavour on the path to it. *Bendōwa*, a rather lengthy exposition compared to the majority of Dōgen's other texts, begins with an extensive introduction on *zazen*, placing it within a tradition that begins with Buddha Shākyamuni, Mahākaśyapa and Bōdhidharma, and continues with masters and patriarchs both from India and China. Also, Dōgen states his own reasons for resolving to writing the text: his intention is to convey what he has learned in Sung monasteries, out of pity and for the benefit of anyone in Japan who would seek the true path of the Dharma just as he had, and to propagate it. ²² He portrays himself as someone whose struggles brought him to pursue Buddhism directly, a decision that has led him to important encounters that have been valuable in providing him with answers about the objective of the teaching versus practice. As such, his experience, Dōgen states on a number of occasions, can serve as an example to anyone who too would feel left in a vacuum.

After this introduction, *Bendōwa* continues with an imaginary dialogue between an inexperienced Japanese novice-monk and Dōgen as the master, the disciple posing doubtful questions or offering critical objections, to which Dōgen always offers a reply based alternately on his direct experience from China or on the age-old teaching of Buddhas and ancestors. Dōgen thus repeatedly drives on the uninterrupted continuity of Ch'an school as a tradition based in historicity and authenticity. Thereby, he emphasizes the legitimacy of the lineage, as well as supports his argument by a personal account. He serves as a living proof of the validity of actual experience that—in Zen—is considered essential for practice as well as enlightenment; enlightenment, which is also alluded to on a number of occasions in *Bendōwa*. Here, Dōgen describes his own experience of

²¹ Tanahashi, *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, 1: liii.

²² Kawamura, *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, 2: 537.

enlightenment under the guidance of his master Rujing, the famed dropping off body and mind, *shinjin datsuraku* 身心脱落, only to follow with a further elucidation of what it is and how it feels to be enlightened, and how enlightenment transmitted within the lineage of patriarchs unfolds within the phenomenal world. Bendōwa thus serves as an explanation of reasons for those in doubt, and an advocacy of paths and methods leading to enlightenment, the ultimate goal of Buddhism.

Already in this second essay that he composes, Dōgen shares his key concept about the non-duality of zazen and enlightenment. He delivers the idea quite soon after the introduction, and afterwards alludes to it on several occasions throughout the text, claiming that while in meditation, one follows the path of the Buddha-ancestors directly and that by the simple means of engaging in zazen one becomes a buddha himself.

When someone, even for one moment, expressing the Buddha seal in the three means of conduct [of body, speech, and mind], sits upright in meditation, the phenomenal worlds everywhere become the Buddha seal and together with the entire vast space become enlightened. Hence, all buddhas and tathāgatas celebrate the dharma bliss of their original nature and renew the splendour of the path to enlightenment. Also, the bodies and minds of beings within the ten phenomenal worlds as well as of those in the three lower realms of existence become bright and pure. As they realize a state of great emancipation and reveal their original face, numberless phenomena actualize complete enlightenment and together with the myriad things assume a buddha body. In a flash, they transcend the environs revealed to them and sitting upright as Lord Buddha under the bōdhi tree, they begin to turn the unparalleled great Wheel of the Dharma as the unconditioned profound wisdom springs forth.²³

This excerpt serves as a simple illustration of the content and main message of Bendōwa. It is the general direction of Dōgen's thought, however, that becomes rather apparent throughout the text. Besides making the inevitable assertion of the importance of zazen, he elevates it to a necessity—it is an essential practice because it is the practice of Buddhas and tathāgatas that has the powers to purify the samsāric worlds and enables the turning of the Dharma Wheel. For Dōgen,

23 Kawamura, *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, 2: 538.

we observe, sitting in concentrated meditation is not a vehicle to enlightenment, not a means to an end, it is the end in itself. Very early on in his writings, Dōgen does not hesitate to state firmly his conviction about the not only personal, but universal benefits of *zazen*. We find that the practice is not about one's own enlightenment but about a method uniting the practitioners with the unbroken line of Buddhas and patriarchs. It may be by means of ordination that Zen disciples become direct descendants of Shākyamuni and Bōdhidharma, but it is by virtue of their practice of meditation that they become one with Buddhas and *tathāgatas*.

When one sits in meditation, Dōgen writes, one's surrounding becomes the Buddha's seal—the source of Buddha's wisdom—while the surrounding world—the entire great earth and the entire vast sky—awakens. When one sits in meditation, Dōgen continues, Buddhas and *tathāgatas* celebrate and delight in knowing that yet another being has embarked on the path of wisdom available to all. The excerpt also tells us that meditation has the power to brighten and purify all beings, even those in the lower three realms of existence; beings, who by discriminatory thinking are considered evil and impure. Further, it is these beings within the lower realms of the six worlds that reveal their original Buddha nature and embody the example of Buddha Shākyamuni sitting upright under the *bōdhi* tree, which causes yet another turning of the Wheel of Dharma. As a matter of fact, Dōgen tells us that anyone sitting in meditation has the power to actualize not only their own enlightenment, but that of the surrounding worlds as well. In *zazen*, one not only becomes *a Buddha*, one becomes *the Buddha* who is able to put the Dharma Wheel in motion. One is diverted from one's individual world of practice, from the phenomenal world, to the absolute world of Buddhas and *tathāgatas*.

Reading this short segment of *Bendōwa*, we find that Dōgen strongly emphasizes the example of Buddhas and patriarchs. He not only encourages his disciples to practice sitting meditation as such, he is also saying that he firmly believes in the positive karmic effects of *zazen*, claiming meditation penetrates the absolute world, claiming it has the power to purify the six worlds and unite any ordinary practitioner with buddhas. Dōgen is therefore not merely an advocate of seated meditation—*shikan taza* and nothing else—he is an advocate of seated meditation as a practice that unites practitioners with Buddhas, a practice that unites the phenomenal with the absolute, because he believes in non-duality

of these worlds, a non-duality that can be reached during meditation. Suddenly we find that it is not the stripped-bare »easy practice« of sitting that Dōgen promotes in order to attain one's personal enlightenment, but it is a passionate advocacy of meditation as a vehicle for becoming one with the Buddhas. In other words, Dōgen firmly believes in the powers that meditation transmits onto the absolute worlds and their beings, and he also believes in both the power and existence of the absolute worlds and their beings, the Buddhas and tathāgatas. By reading his writings attentively, we find that Dōgen writes about the effects and benefits of sitting meditation in terms that reveal a deeply-grounded faith in both the absolute and an indisputable awe in its powers. Put differently, for Dōgen there is no distinction between meditation and/or faith; meditation is a declaration of one's faith in buddhas and the absolute.

5 *Dōgen on Faith*

Based on a broad survey of the Shōbō genzō chapters, we have observed that Dōgen was not entirely absorbed in writing specifically about *zazen*. Also, despite the Sōtō Zen practice being generally almost equated with *shikan taza*²⁴, we have found that Dōgen uses this term among other expressions that describe meditation, other expressions that feature just as prominently in his writings. However, judging from a more general notion on Zen and meditation that Dōgen conveys also in the excerpt quoted above, I became interested whether he writes about faith and whether the mention of faith and/or belief feature prominently in the Shōbō genzō.

By means of a similar survey aimed at the issue of faith within Dōgen's Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, I found that the word for faith itself (*shinkō* 信仰) is only mentioned within the entire Shōbō genzō a mere two times, in chapters Self-fulfilling Samādhi, *Jishō zanmai* 自証三昧, and Deep Faith in Cause and Effect, *Shinjin inga* 深信因果. However, looking into the matter more deeply, I came to realize that when discussing the matter of faith, Dōgen uses not the word itself

24 Foulk, »Ritual in Japanese Zen Buddhism«, 14.

but—just like in case of seated meditation—he resorts to a number of synonyms to refer to various aspects of Buddha’s teaching and practice. The character for belief *shin* 信 was mentioned an astonishing 185 times in as many as 48 chapters. Therefore, we find that a reference to belief features in the entire Shōbō genzō just as often as a mention of *zazen*. Naturally, Dōgen uses this word in the negative sense too: not to believe 信ぜん、信ぜず、不信. On the other hand, however, he more often than not employs the character for faith in other combinations, such as »pure faith« *jōshin* 淨信, »true faith« *shōshin* 正信, »wondrous faith« *myōshin* 妙信, ‘embrace the faith’ *shinju* 信受, or ‘believe, then understand’ *shinge* 信解. Clearly, all these words describe a reliance upon the other-worldly, a sense of belief and devotion, which in fact is yet another word also used by Dōgen, *shōjin* 精進. Consequently, based solely on references to certain words within the Shōbō genzō, we ultimately find that Dōgen is just as concerned with the issue of faith, as he is with *zazen*.

Admittedly, a numerical reckoning of certain expressions within the Shōbō genzō can be regarded as superficial and insufficient, especially in the context of Zen and Zen writings. I have therefore consulted the works of other scholars regarding their opinion about the issue of faith within Zen. Griffith Foulk, for instance, is convinced that faith within the monastic establishment is declared by practices such as incense offerings, prostrations, sutra reading, devotional worship, upholding the moral precepts, recitations of Buddha’s name or penance.²⁵ Since these activities represent the axiomatic part-and-parcel of any monastic training, one could assume they belong more into the *vinaya* basket of Buddhism. Nonetheless, just how close adherence to monastic rules and faith is within the context of Zen temples, explains Kazuo Ōsumi by saying Zen »conveyed the absolute through symbolic acts of ritual and discipline«.²⁶ Both the observance of monastic regulations as well as performance of rituals within the Zen monastic setting can therefore be understood as an interpretation of the absolute world of the Buddhas and a direct participation in it. It is clear that these statements do both affirm the performance of ritual behaviour and worship of Buddhist deities lying at the core of such practices. Nevertheless, they do not bring us any closer to the overall matter of faith in Zen Buddhism, unfortunately. The question of

25 Foulk, »Ritual in Japanese Zen Buddhism«, 32.

26 Ōsumi, »Buddhism in the Kamakura period«, 553.

faith in Zen seems generally disregarded, as meditative schools are usually described as iconoclastic or unorthodox.²⁷ Indeed, the pioneer of Zen Buddhism in the West, D. T. Suzuki seems to confirm just that when he says that »Zen monks were not always engaged in offering prayers, practicing penance, or performing so-called deeds of piety, nor in reading or reciting the canonical books.«²⁸ As a matter of fact, one can also come across reports claiming that »Dōgen is said to have rejected ritual and stressed the exclusive practice of *zazen*«.²⁹

In order for this issue to be clarified, it seems best to yet again turn our attention to Dōgen's writings themselves. There we find that he did attach a certain degree of importance to repentance rituals performed in front of Buddhas, merit-gaining and purification activities, as well as to confession and general sincerity of one's heart and mind. These are practices that can be labelled as ritualist behaviour rooted in faith and devotion, at least by Dōgen's rendering. Regarding his views on penance, for example, one can look at the chapter Valley Sounds, Mountains Colours, *Keisei sanshoku* 溪声山色, where Dōgen writes the following:

Also, if you are lazy in both spirit and body, if you've even lost faith, you should rediscover the sincerity of you heart-mind and repent to Buddhas of the past. In such moment, the power of merits of the Buddhas of the past will save and purify us. These merits give birth to pure faith and devotion that is free from any obstacles. [...] If you repent in this way, you will surely receive invisible help of Buddha ancestors. You should openly worship the Buddhas with prayers of mind and rituals of body, and the

27 Bernard Faure, *Visions of Power: Imagining Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 267.

28 Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 4.

29 Foulk, »Ritual in Japanese Zen Buddhism«, 31.

power of such devotion will eradicate the roots of evil. This is the single notion³⁰ of true practice, of true heart of faith and true body of faith.³¹

Clearly, Dōgen does not hesitate to describe Zen Buddhist practice—or its struggles, rather—with the help of such terms as faith, devotion, repentance, prayer and merits of the Buddhas. He claims that by relying on merits (*kudoku* 功德) of past Buddhas, one can be saved and purified, relieved from burdens or lack of faith. Obstacles are to be challenged by looking sincerely into one's heart-mind (*seishin* 誠心), where one should try to search for the original intention for following Buddha's path. By refreshing the initial purpose, one gives rise to pure faith (*jōshin* 淨信) and devotion (*shōjin* 精進). This, to Dōgen, is at the heart of the practice of repentance (*sange* 懺悔). In that moment, Dōgen claims, the merits of Buddhas and ancestors will come to one's rescue as invisible help (*myōjo* 冥助). It is the performance of concentration of mind (*shin'nen* 信念) combined with rituals of body (*shingi* 身儀) that has the power to root out evil (*zaikon* 罪根). Dōgen says—unrelentingly—that these rituals and this manner of devoted worship is the true practice (*shōshūgyō* 正修行). And he continues by stating that devotional rituals also are the true heart of faith (*shōshinjin* 正信心) and true body of faith (*shōshinjin* 正信身). Dōgen tries to encourage his disciples by explaining that the lack of faith they can feel throughout their practice may, with the invisible help of those of the absolute, lead to true practice of both body and mind. Also, to receive the invisible help of Buddha ancestors, one needs no more than to reach out with faith, devotion, and a sincere heart capable of repentance. Essentially, there can be no doubt that he is talking about modesty and humility that the faithful practitioner shows before the face of buddha-ancestors.

In yet another essay, Dōgen shares more on the issue of repentance, in connection to the topic of good and bad—or wholesome and unwholesome—karma. We can read this at the very end of a fascicle named Karma of the Three Periods, *Sanjigō* 三時業.

30 Instead of »single notion«, Dōgen writes »one colour« (一色) in the original, creating thus a direct connection to the title of the essay Mountain Sounds, Valley Colours. A literal, albeit correct translation, however, would not make sense in such a short excerpt and I have therefore resolved to an alternative iteration here, one that I found more relevant for the present purposes.

31 Kawamura, *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, 1: 283–284.

As the World-Honored One has shared on various occasions, the effects of good and bad deeds spread and even during hundred, thousand, or ten thousand kalpas they multiply and don't vanish. If one meets with favourable causes and conditions, they will certainly undergo profound realization. If, however, one repents his bad deeds, these will be destroyed and heavy wrongdoings will become light. As for good deeds, these cause joy and delight, and one can even rise as a priest.³² It is said that good deeds never vanish. Their effects are without end.³³

I tend to interpret this piece of writing as a validation of Dōgen's deeply-rooted belief in the functioning of karma, his firm belief in the workings of the universe. The previous examples established Dōgen's view on how the worlds of buddhas and tathāgatas affect the human world—or the phenomenal world, as Dōgen sees it—and his devoted reliance on the other-worldly. Yet this passage shows how the entire universe, ruled by the law of karma of the three periods – the past, present, and future—operates. Simply stated, traces of both good and bad karma, wholesome and unwholesome actions, beneficial or harmful, persist and spread further, like ripples on water surface, only to give rise to consequences in both the phenomenal and the absolute worlds. He explains the basic Buddhist doctrine on the law of karma, which has the power to penetrate and move freely between the absolute and phenomenal, and which therefore has the ability to influence one's actions within the three periods of past, present, and future that one usually perceives as separate. Good deeds, positive karma, not only never fade but also create effects that grow and multiply. On the other hand, however, while the traces of bad karma and harmful actions also never leave this world, they can be extinguished by means of one's true penance. Once again, Dōgen concludes with an allusion to one's devotion, repentance, and sincere conscience being an essential portion for the practice of Zen.

32 Becoming a member of the sangha, joining the priesthood in the present life, was regarded as a reward for good karma accumulated in past lives. In this sentence, however, Dōgen takes yet another step further when he says that good deeds can even amount to one's *rising* as a priest within the sangha hierarchy (*sōchō* 僧長). Such, to Dōgen, are the effects of positive karma.

33 Kawamura, *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, 2: 412.

6 *Faith or Zazen, Zazen or Faith*

Since I have included a piece of Bendōwa in this paper, it seems only fair to also admit that it is precisely this essay which is often cited as evidence for Dōgen's single-minded and unwavering advocacy of zazen as an exclusive practice.³⁴ The reason for this is the following paragraph, in which Dōgen writes:

Among the authentically transmitted dharma schools, the Buddha dharma of this simple tradition of direct transmission is the supreme among the supreme. From when you first meet with a learned master, make no use of burning of incense, making prostrations, repeating the Buddha name, making repentance or reading sūtras, simply devote yourself exclusively to zazen and embrace dropping off body and mind.³⁵

Surely, this is a very straightforward recommendation to engage in seated meditation at the expense of all other practices, which customarily form a part of everyday monastic training even in a Zen monastery, however iconoclastic or unorthodox its organization. Also, it is the practices that Griffith Foulk described as devotional and ritualistic, as stated previously. Nevertheless, it is necessary to add, whoever chose to cite this passage of Bendōwa as a proof of Dōgen's exclusive praise of zazen, also made the deliberate decision to pay little attention to the essay in its entirety. To be more exact, there can be no doubt about Dōgen emphasizing zazen, but he does not discredit any other activities of the monastic training. In this particular passage, zazen is supported, yet within the entire Bendōwa it is not promoted as an exclusive practice, certainly not at the expense of burning incense, repetitions of buddha's name or reading of sūtras. What is more, it is also in Bendōwa that we read a general description of the effects of zazen:

Even a short zazen of one person causes harmony of all phenomena and creates a subtle balance among all things. Thus, within inexhaustible dharma worlds, in the past, present and future, it brings matters toward the righteous path of Buddhist transformation. With each and every person sitting, this is the utmost practice of togetherness, realization of togetherness. It is not about the practice of mere sitting, because it reverberates through the sky and weaves a wondrous sound even before and after the initial strike. But it is not just about this. All the myriad beings reveal their

³⁴ Foulk, »Ritual in Japanese Zen Buddhism«, 31.

³⁵ Kawamura, *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, 2: 538.

original face and engage in their original practice, yet there is no way measuring it. You should know that because of the endless wisdom and combined efforts of all buddhas of the Ten Directions, who are innumerable like the sands of the Ganges, it is impossible to fathom the merits of even one person's zazen, as well as it is difficult to partake on their enthusiasm.³⁶

In line with the previously cited passage from Bendōwa, Dōgen shows his unrelenting belief in the power of zazen, in the powers that zazen in the phenomenal world effects in the absolute. In the phenomenal world, it is the practice of togetherness (*dōshū* 同修) and the realization of togetherness (*dōshō* 同証). In the absolute world, Dōgen is convinced—and he is trying to convince his imaginary dialogue partner in Bendōwa—that even one session of zazen reverberates through the sky and incites the combined efforts of numberless buddhas. As stated above, any zazen of even a single person unites them with Buddhas and creates right circumstances for a Buddhist transformation (*bukka* 佛化). By the same token, zazen is not only a path to enlightenment—it is not just about this—it is enlightenment itself, for myriad beings at the same time.

Further in the same paragraph, Dōgen continues with a clear-cut exposition on his understanding of the traces that zazen creates:

The merits of this zazen will resound far and wide, without end. Speak to anyone [and you will learn that] there are many gates to Buddha dharma. Whichever one you choose, I urge you to earnestly sit in meditation. What I am trying to tell you is that this is the true gate to Buddha dharma.³⁷

Previously, Dōgen said zazen of past Buddhas and ancestors created numberless merits. Here he claims that even zazen of one person has the same results, the merits of their zazen resounding far and wide, that even ordinary practitioners approach dharma gates when sitting zazen. In Dōgen's view, zazen *is* the single practice to enlightenment. But it is not the single practice because it leads to buddhahood, but because it unites the practitioners with the world of buddhas. Dōgen states it is the only path worth pursuing, within the practices of any school of Buddhism.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2: 540.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Dōgen does not hesitate to share his views directly and straightforwardly. However, by mentioning *zazen*, the original face of the myriad beings, and merits of both ordinary practitioners and those of past buddha ancestors within the same essay—and repeatedly, as we have seen—he makes no distinction between the language of a practical this-worldly monk fascinated with *zazen* only, and the language of someone who believes in the meritorious effects of devotional activities in a monastery. I regard this to be a sign of his non-dual approach to Buddhist thought and practice. However, to refrain from the Zen terminology of non-duality, I believe Dōgen's stance is simply an all-encompassing one. In my understanding of his words, Dōgen presents himself as a universal teacher concerned with a comprehensive transmission of Buddha's thought—indeed, a Zen master—who does not distinguish between any type of Buddhist practice. For Dōgen, *zazen* is the ultimate that we have seen being stressed on a number of occasions, but that does not make it soar above other approaches. There is one intention in any of these practices and that is true practice (*shōshūgyō* 正修行) performed with a true heart of faith (*shōshinjin* 正信心).

By saying that *zazen* unites those who engage in this practice with the world of Buddhas, I understand that Dōgen does not create any kind of opposition between the practical monastic training centred solely on *zazen* on the one hand, and everyday rituals directed at prostrations, penance, incense offerings, reciting of buddha's name or reading of sūtras on the other hand. For Dōgen, it is not a question of whether to sit or to engage in activities regarded as devotional, because for him there exists no distinction and no preference between them. There are many gates to Buddha dharma, says he, the gate of *zazen* and the gate of ritual practices counting among them.

7 Conclusion

When Dōgen was still a student of Buddhism, he left for China with a quest; he had a question in his mind and he was desperate to find a truly authentic answer to it. One can imagine him being an ambitious and hard-working seeker, passionate about his mission, who must have felt a sense of both fulfilment and burden after finding the answer to his perennial question: why do we need to meditate if we are already enlightened? As a matter of fact, the answer to this

query is similar as the explanation on the matter whether Dōgen was more concerned with sitting meditation or with devotional practices: meditation is already equal to enlightenment, since just as Buddhahood is inherent in everyone, enlightenment is inherent in meditation. In like manner, zazen is the practice expressing one's deep devotion to the absolute and reliance on the powers of enlightened beings. There is no first or second and one is not superior to the other because there is no hierarchy between them; they are inherently identical. Meditation encompasses devotion to Buddhas, faith in the absolute is expressed via the medium of meditation.

Dōgen teaches that every single step on the path of Buddhism is a true step, in his writings he reiterates that every practice—whether it is the practice of one's body or mind—is equally relevant, equally important and equally valuable. Be it the practice of connecting with the earth in this phenomenal world by means of sitting meditation, or the practice of uniting this with the absolute world of buddhas, tathāgatas, or ancestors, to Dōgen these are alike.

When reading his writings, one can make no mistake that Dōgen—staying true to the non-dual aspect of Zen—does not place a greater value on one aspect of Buddhism above another. Even though there is a great variety of topics to be explored within the *Shōbō genzō*, the intention of this paper was a comparison of Dōgen's view on the issues of zazen and faith. Zazen on the one hand, as *the* advocated method of the Sōtō school, versus the aspect of faith and devotion within the Buddhist practice that is only rarely connected to Zen schools on the other hand. The topic pursued in this paper was how much is Dōgen, the founding master of the allegedly iconoclastic and unorthodox Sōtō Zen School, concerned with the ritual and devotional side of Zen practice. Needless to say, the originally intended comparison has turned out to be a correlation; the single practice of sitting in meditation is closely related to a strong devotional worship of Buddhas, as is clear from the passages of various chapters of the *Shōbō genzō* cited above. The truth is, as these examples mean to illustrate, Dōgen indeed does claim that not only is zazen equal to enlightenment and that the practice of zazen already corresponds to the state of *samādhi*, but in the same breath he also states a non-discrimination between zazen and faith, worship of buddhas and ancestors, and an individual repentance. The passages quoted above aim to illustrate Dōgen's own belief in Buddhas and tathāgatas, in the power of merit transcending the

relative and absolute worlds, as well as in the reality of karma of the past, present, and future, and its functioning within all of these worlds. Dōgen frequently writes about past Buddhas and ancestors, and the performance of repentance rituals in front of them, he makes numerous mentions of the importance of a sincere heart, a deep and honest devotion, as well as places emphasis on the enactment of rituals with one's sincere mind and body of faith. To Dōgen, there is no distinction between any of these practices, as they equally lead to buddhahood.

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