



SHŌBOGENZŌ
GENJŌ
KOAN

by Dogen Zenji



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*Written in mid-autumn of the first year
of the Tempuku Era (1233 A.D.) and
given to my lay student Yo-koshu
of Kyushu.*

When all dharmas are Buddha-dharma
there are enlightenment and delusion, practice, life and
death, buddhas and creatures.

When the ten thousand dharmas are without self,
there are no delusion, no enlightenment, no buddhas, no
creatures, no life and no death.

The Buddha Way transcends being and non-being;
therefore there are life and death, delusion and enlight-
enment, creatures and buddhas.

However,

flowers fall giving rise to attachment, and weeds spring up, arousing antipathy.

To carry the self forward and realize the ten thousand dharmas is delusion.

That the ten thousand dharmas advance and realize the self is enlightenment.

It is buddhas who enlighten delusion.

It is creatures who are deluded in enlightenment.

Further,

there are those who are enlightened above enlightenment;
there are those who are deluded within delusion.

When buddhas are truly buddhas, one need not be aware of being Buddha.

However, one is the realized Buddha, and further advances in realizing Buddha.

Seeing forms with the whole body and mind,
hearing sounds with the whole body and mind, one understands them intimately;

Yet, it is not like a mirror with reflections, nor like water under the moon—

When one side is realized, the other side is dark.

To study the Buddha Way is to study oneself.

To study oneself is to forget oneself.

To forget oneself is to be enlightened by the ten thousand dharmas.

To be enlightened by the ten thousand dharmas is to be freed from one's body and mind and those of others.

No trace of enlightenment remains, and this traceless enlightenment is continued forever.

When first one seeks the Dharma, one is far away from its environs.

When one has already correctly transmitted the Dharma to oneself, one is one's original self at that moment.

When riding on a boat, if one watches the shore, one may assume that the shore is moving.

But watching the boat directly, one knows that it is the boat that moves.

If one examines the ten thousand dharmas with a deluded body and mind, one will suppose that one's mind and nature are permanent.

But if one practices intimately and returns to the true self, it will be clear that the ten thousand dharmas are without self.

Firewood turns into ash, and does not turn into firewood again. But do not suppose that the ash is after and the firewood before.

We must realize that firewood is in the state of being firewood, and it has its before and after. Yet despite this past and future, its present is independent of them.

Ash is in the state of being ash, and it has its before and after. Just as firewood does not become firewood again after it is ash, so after one's death, one does not return to life again. Thus, that life does not become death is an unqualified fact of the Buddha-dharma; for this reason, life is called the non-born.

That death does not become life is the Buddha's revolving of the confirmed Dharma-wheel; therefore, death is called the non-extinguished.

Life is a period of itself.

Death is a period of itself.

For example, they are like winter and spring.

We do not think that winter becomes spring, nor do we say that spring becomes summer.

Gaining enlightenment is like the moon reflecting in the water. The moon does not get wet, nor is the water disturbed.

Although its light is extensive and great, the moon is reflected even in a puddle an inch across.

The whole moon and the whole sky are reflected in a dew-drop in the grass, in one drop of water.

Enlightenment does not disturb the person, just as the moon does not disturb the water.

A person does not hinder enlightenment, just as a dew-drop does not hinder the moon in the sky.

The depth of the drop is the height of the moon.

As for the duration of the reflection, you should examine the water's vastness or smallness,

And you should discern the brightness or dimness of the heavenly moon.

When the Dharma does not fill our body and mind, we think that we have enough.

When the Dharma fills our body and mind, we realize that something is missing.

For example, when we view the four directions from a boat on the ocean where no land is in sight, it looks circular and nothing else.

No other aspects are apparent.

However, this ocean is neither round nor square, and its qualities are infinite in variety. It is like a palace; it is like a jewel. It seems circular as far as our eyes can reach at the time.

Likewise, the ten thousand dharmas are so.

Though there are many aspects of the secular life and the religious life, we only recognize and understand what the power of our penetrating vision can reach.

In order to appreciate the ten thousand dharmas, we should know that although they may look round or square, the other qualities of oceans and mountains are infinite in variety; furthermore, other universes lie in all quarters.

It is so not only around ourselves but also directly here, even in a drop of water.

When a fish swims in the ocean, there is no limit to the water, no matter how far it swims.

When a bird flies in the sky, there is no limit to the air, no matter how far it flies.

However, no fish or bird has ever left its element since the beginning.

When the need is large, it is used largely.

When the need is small, it is used in a small way.

Thus, no creature ever comes short of its own completeness. Wherever it stands, it does not fail to cover the ground.

If a bird leaves the air, it will die at once.

If the fish leaves the water, it will die at once.

Know, then, that water is life.

Know that air is life.

The bird is life and the fish is life.

Life is the bird and life is the fish.

Beyond these, there are further implications and ramifications.

Now if a bird or a fish tries to reach the limit of its element before moving in it, this bird or this fish will not find its way or its place.