

Shushogi

What is Truly Meant by Training and Enlightenment

Great Master Eihei Dogen (1200–1253)

Introduction (The Reason for Training)

The most important question for all Buddhists is how to understand birth and death completely, for then, should you be able to find the Buddha within birth and death, they both vanish. All you have to do is realise that birth and death, as such, should not be avoided and they will cease to exist for then, if you can understand that birth and death are Nirvana itself, there is not only no necessity to avoid them but also nothing to search for that is called Nirvana. The understanding of the above breaks the chains that bind one to birth and death therefore this problem, which is the greatest in all Buddhism, must be completely understood. It is very difficult to be born as a human being and equally difficult to find Buddhism however, because of the good karma that we have accumulated, we have received the exceptional gift of a human body and are able to hear the Truths of Buddhism: we therefore have the greatest possibility of a full life within the limits of birth and death. It would be criminal to waste such an opportunity by leaving this weak life of ours exposed to impermanence through lack of faith and commitment.

Impermanence offers no permanent succour. On what weeds by the road-side will the dew of our life fall? At this very minute this body is not my own. Life, which is controlled by time, never ceases even for an instant; youth vanishes for ever once it is gone: it is impossible to bring back the past when one suddenly comes face to face with impermanence and it is impossible to look for assistance from kings, statesmen, relatives, servants, wife or children, let alone wealth and treasure. The kingdom of death must be entered by oneself alone with nothing for company but our own good and bad karma.

Avoid the company of those who are deluded and ignorant with regard to the Truth of karmic consequence, the three states of existence and good and evil. It is obvious that the law of cause and effect is not answerable to my personal will for, without fail, evil is vanquished and good prevails; if it were not so, Buddhism would never have appeared and Bodhidharma would never have come from the west. There are three periods into which the karmic consequences of good and evil fall; one is the consequence experienced in this present world, the second is consequence experienced in the next world and the third consequence experienced in a world after the next one; one must understand this very clearly before undertaking any training in the way of the Buddhas and Ancestors, otherwise mistakes will be made by many and they will fall into heresy; in addition to this, their lives will become evil and their suffering will be prolonged.

None of us have more than one body during this lifetime, therefore it is indeed tragic to lead a life of evil as a result of heresy for it is impossible to escape from karmic consequence if we do evil on the assumption that, by not recognising an act as evil, no bad karma can accrue to us.

Freedom is Gained by the Recognition of Our Past Evil Acts and Contrition Therefor

Because of their limitless compassion the Buddhas and Ancestors have flung wide the gates of compassion to both gods and men and, although karmic consequence for evil acts is inevitable at some time during the three periods, contrition makes it easier to bear by bringing freedom and immaculacy: as this is so, let us be utterly contrite before the Buddhas.

Contrition before the Buddhas brings purification and salvation, true conviction and earnest endeavour: once aroused, true conviction changes all beings, in addition to ourselves, with benefits extending to everything including that which is animate and inanimate.

Here is the way in which to make an act of perfect contrition. “May all the Buddhas and Ancestors, who have become enlightened, have compassion upon us, free us from the obstacle of suffering which we have inherited from our past existence and lead us in such a way that we may share the merit that fills the universe for they, in the past, were as we are now, and we will be as they in the future. All the evil committed by me is caused by beginningless greed, hate and delusion: all the evil is committed by my body, in my speech and in my thoughts: I now confess everything wholeheartedly.”

By this act of recognition of our past behaviour, and our contrition therefor, we open the way for the Buddhas and Ancestors to help us naturally. Bearing this in mind, we should sit up straight in the presence of the Buddha and repeat the above act of contrition, thereby cutting the roots of our evil-doing.

Receiving the Precepts

After recognising our evil acts and being contrite therefor, we should make an act of deep respect to the Three Treasures of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha for they deserve our offerings and respect in whatever life we may be wandering. The Buddhas and Ancestors Transmitted respect for the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha from India to China.

If they who are unfortunate and lacking in virtue are unable to hear of these Three Treasures, how is it possible for them to take refuge therein? One must not go for refuge to mountain spirits and ghosts, nor must one worship in places of heresy, for such things are contrary to the Truth: one must, instead, take refuge quickly in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha for therein is to be found utter enlightenment as well as freedom from suffering.

A pure heart is necessary if one would take refuge in the *Three Treasures*. At any time, whether during the Buddha’s lifetime or after His demise, we should repeat the following with bowed heads, making gassho:

“I take refuge in the Buddha,
I take refuge in the Dharma,
I take refuge in the Sangha.”

We take refuge in the Buddha since He is our True Teacher; we take refuge in the Dharma since it is the medicine for all suffering; we take refuge in the Sangha since its members are wise and compassionate. If we would follow the Buddhist teachings, we must honour the Three Treasures; this foundation is absolutely essential before receiving the Precepts.

The merit of the Three Treasures bears fruit whenever a trainee and the Buddha are one: whoever experiences this communion will invariably take refuge in the Three Treasures, irrespective of whether he is a god, a demon or an animal. As one goes from one stage of existence to another, the above-mentioned merit increases, leading eventually to the most perfect enlightenment: the Buddha Himself gave certification to the great merit of the Three Treasures because of their extreme value and unbelievable profundity—it is essential that all living things shall take refuge therein.

The *Three Pure, Collective Precepts* must be accepted after the Three Treasures; these are:

Cease from evil,
Do only good,
Do good for others.

The following *Ten Precepts* should be accepted next:

1. Do not kill,
2. Do not steal,
3. Do not covet,
4. Do not say that which is untrue,
5. Do not sell the wine of delusion,
6. Do not speak against others,
7. Do not be proud of yourself and devalue others,
8. Do not be mean in giving either Dharma or wealth,

9. Do not be angry,
10. Do not debase the Three Treasures.

All the Buddhas have received, and carefully preserved, the above Three Treasures, the Three Pure Collective Precepts and the Ten Precepts.

If you accept these Precepts wholeheartedly the highest enlightenment will be yours and this is the undestroyable Buddhahood which was understood, is understood and will be understood in the past, present and future. Is it possible that any truly wise person would refuse the opportunity to attain to such heights? The Buddha has clearly pointed out to all living beings that, whenever these Precepts are Truly accepted, Buddhahood is reached, every person who accepts them becoming the True Child of Buddha. Within these Precepts dwell the Buddhas, enfolding all things within their unparalleled wisdom: there is no distinction between subject and object for any who dwell herein. All things, earth, trees, wooden posts, bricks, stones, become Buddhas once this refuge is taken. From these Precepts come forth such a wind and fire that all are driven into enlightenment when the flames are fanned by the Buddha's influence: this is the merit of non-action and non-seeking; the awakening to True Wisdom.

Awakening to the Mind of the Bodhisattva

When one awakens to True Wisdom it means that one is willing to save all living things before one has actually saved oneself: whether a being is a layman, priest, god or man, enjoying pleasure or suffering pain, he should awaken this desire as quickly as possible. However humble a person may appear to be, if this desire has been awakened, he is already the teacher of all mankind: a little girl of seven even may be the teacher of the four classes of Buddhists and the mother of True Compassion to all living things. One of the greatest teachings of Buddhism is its insistence upon the complete equality of the sexes.

However much one may drift in the six worlds and the four existences even they become a means for realising the desire for Buddhahood once it has been awakened: however much time we may have wasted up to now, there is still time to awaken this desire. Although our own merit for

Buddhahood may be full ripe, it is our bounden duty to use all this merit for the purpose of enlightening every living thing: at all times, there have been those who put their own Buddhahood second to the necessity of working for the good of all other living things.

The *Four Wisdoms*, charity, tenderness, benevolence and sympathy, are the means we have of helping others and represent the Bodhisattva's aspirations.

Charity is the opposite of covetousness; we make offerings although we ourselves get nothing whatsoever. There is no need to be concerned about how small the gift may be so long as it brings True results for, even if it is only a single phrase or verse of teaching, it may be a seed to bring forth good fruit both now and hereafter.

Similarly, the offering of only one coin or a blade of grass can cause the arising of good, for the teaching itself is the True Treasure and the True Treasure is the very teaching: we must never desire any reward and we must always share everything we have with others. It is an act of charity to build a ferry or a bridge and all forms of industry are charity if they benefit others.

To behold all beings with the eye of compassion, and to speak kindly to them, is the meaning of *tenderness*. If one would understand tenderness, one must speak to others whilst thinking that one loves all living things as if they were one's own children. By praising those who exhibit virtue, and feeling sorry for those who do not, our enemies become our friends and they who are our friends have their friendship strengthened: this is all through the power of tenderness. Whenever one speaks kindly to another his face brightens and his heart is warmed; if a kind word be spoken in his absence the impression will be a deep one: tenderness can have a revolutionary impact upon the mind of man.

If one creates wise ways of helping beings, whether they be in high places or lowly stations, one exhibits *benevolence*: no reward was sought by those who rescued the helpless tortoise and the sick sparrow, these acts being utterly benevolent. The stupid believe that they will lose something if

they give help to others, but this is completely untrue for benevolence helps everyone, including oneself, being a law of the universe.

If one can identify oneself with that which is not oneself, one can understand the true meaning of *sympathy*: take, for example, the fact that the Buddha appeared in the human world in the form of a human being; sympathy does not distinguish between oneself and others. There are times when the self is infinite and times when this is true of others: sympathy is as the sea in that it never refuses water from whatsoever source it may come; all waters may gather and form only one sea.

Oh you seekers of enlightenment, meditate deeply upon these teachings and do not make light of them: give respect and reverence to their merit which brings blessing to all living things; help all beings to cross over to the other shore.

Putting the Teachings into Practice and Showing Gratitude

The Buddha Nature should be thus simply awakened in all living things within this world for their desire to be born herein has been fulfilled: as this is so, why should they not be grateful to Shakyamuni Buddha?

If the Truth had not spread throughout the entire world it would have been impossible for us to have found it, even should we have been willing to give our very lives for it; we should think deeply upon this: how fortunate have we been to be born now when it is possible to see the Truth. Remember the Buddha's words, "When you meet a Zen Master who teaches the Truth do not consider his caste, his appearance, shortcomings or behaviour. Bow before him out of respect for his great wisdom and do nothing whatsoever to worry him."

Because of consideration for others on the part of the Buddhas and Ancestors, we are enabled to see the Buddha even now and hear His teachings: had the Buddhas and Ancestors not truly Transmitted the Truth it could never have been heard at this particular time: even only so much as a short phrase or section of the teaching should be deeply appreciated. What alternative have we but to be utterly grateful for the great compassion exhibited

in this highest of all teachings which is the very eye and treasury of the Truth? The sick sparrow never forgot the kindness shown to it, rewarding it with the ring belonging to the three great ministers, and the unfortunate tortoise remembered too, showing its gratitude with the seal of Yofu: if animals can show gratitude surely man can do the same?

You need no further teachings than the above in order to show gratitude, and you must show it truly, in the only real way, in your daily life; our daily life should be spent constantly in selfless activity with no waste of time whatsoever.

Time flies quicker than an arrow and life passes with greater transience than dew. However skilful you may be, how can you ever recall a single day of the past? Should you live for a hundred years just wasting your time, every day and month will be filled with sorrow; should you drift as the slave of your senses for a hundred years and yet live truly for only so much as a single day, you will, in that one day, not only live a hundred years of life but also save a hundred years of your future life.

The life of this one day, to-day, is absolutely vital life; your body is deeply significant. Both your life and your body deserve love and respect for it is by their agency that Truth is practiced and the Buddha's power exhibited: the seed of all Buddhist activity, and of all Buddhahood, is the true practice of *Preceptual Truth*.

All the Buddhas are within the one Buddha Shakyamuni and all the Buddhas of past, present and future become Shakyamuni Buddha when they reach Buddhahood. This Buddha Nature is itself the Buddha and, should you awaken to a complete understanding thereof, your gratitude to the Buddhas will know no bounds.

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