

# First Sesshin Lecture on Genjo Koan

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*THE SECRET OF ALL THE TEACHINGS* of Buddhism is how to live on each moment, how to obtain absolute freedom moment after moment. Moment after moment, we exist in interdependency to past and future and all existence. In short, if you practice zazen, concentrating on your breathing moment after moment, that is keeping the precepts, helping yourself and helping others, and attaining liberation. We do not aim for or emphasize some particular state of mind or some particular teaching. Even though it is a perfect and profound teaching, we do not emphasize the teaching only. Rather we emphasize how we understand it, and how we bring the truth into practice. This practice also does not mean some particular practice only. When we say "Zen," Zen includes all the activity of our life.

Dogen-zenji said we are like water and milk when we practice. When each one of us is concentrated on Zen practice, we are not just separated beings. The oneness of all the students or monks is there. When you live in each moment, each one of you is an independent being, and at the same time, each one of you attains absolute independency. You attain the same buddhahood that Buddha attained. Living in each one's absolute freedom, we attain the same attainment. Each one of us is independent in the same realm. When this realm is understood, there are students, there are teachers, there is someone who serves tea, there is someone who drinks tea, and there are independent beings. We are practicing the practice which was started by Buddha. In this way, Buddhism is carried forth.

Though Buddha was born 2,500 years ago, Buddha is right here when we practice his practice. Buddha lives in our age with us. Buddha is Buddha, and we are a student. So you may say there is student and teacher, but we are all the same—we are all practicing the same practice the same way as our Buddha ancestors did in their time. Actually, we are practicing the same practice *with* them. Whatever we do, that is Buddha's practice, and this is how we keep the precepts.

In Buddha's day, the practitioners' way of life was Indian—in China there was the Chinese way of life, in Japan there is the Japanese way of life. Although the way of living is different, actually what we do is not different from what Buddha did because we express absolute freedom. There are not two absolute freedoms.

In China when they were too interested in Buddhist philosophy, they ignored how to live in Buddha's way. In other words, they ignored how to

keep the precepts. To keep the precepts is not to keep the Indian way of life. When you eat here, you should eat here. You cannot eat in India all the time [laughs]. Strictly speaking, if you want to keep the precepts literally, you have to go to India [laughs]. Then you can keep the precepts completely. There is an interesting story about a monk from India [laughs]. When he came to China, he could not observe Indian precepts because the customs were different. So he returned to India because he was very much afraid of breaking Indian precepts [laughs].

If you do not know how to observe the precepts, or if you emphasize just written precepts without knowing how to keep them, then Buddhism will die immediately [laughs]. If you know how to keep the precepts, Buddhism will continue and will develop as Zen developed in China. Various Mahayana schools were lost in China because they were too interested in the philosophy of Buddhism without knowing how to actualize the teaching. So eventually they ignored precepts, though they said they did not ignore them. "Zen students ignored them," they may say, because Zen students did not observe them literally. Some Mahayana schools observed them as Indian Buddhists did. They thought that this is Buddha's way. So Buddha's way eventually separated from their everyday life. Zen students understood the precepts as their way of life, so they did not mind the formal way of life. They were sure that their way of practice was how to actualize Buddha's teaching—in short, to live on each moment. That is the conclusion of Mahayana philosophy—to live in this moment, to attain enlightenment. To be Buddha is to attain perfect freedom. How to attain perfect freedom is how to live in this moment.

In China Zen Buddhists established new precepts, which are called pure rules. For other Buddhists, precepts were some rules Buddha observed, but for them precepts were their own way of life: how to live in this moment in this place. When we are not so sincere about our practice or about our way of life—about ourselves, we may say, "I am a priest, but they are layman" [laughs]. "I am a priest, and Buddhist teaching is written in some particular book." If you understand Buddhism in this way, you ignore the precepts. But if you realize that religion is for everyone, that is our way of life. Precepts which are written in some particular book cannot be actualized—cannot be brought into everyday practice. When we become sincere about our everyday life and the meaning of religion, we cannot live with old precepts which were set up for some other person. We should have our own precepts.

Thus, Hyakujo-zenji established Mahayana precepts in the eighth century. Mahayana Buddhism was introduced in China in, maybe, the fourth century. For many years, Indian precepts were observed. It is impossible for Chinese people to observe Indian precepts [laughs]. It is ridiculous. They observed it just for the priests only, ignoring the usual life of ordinary people.

Zen Buddhists were very serious about their way of life and people's way of life—they renewed the Indian precepts. In India, you know, maybe they could practice zazen all day long, because the monks were supported entirely by people. After they finished their household life, they became monks, and their boys and girls supported them. But Chinese monks, who supported themselves, could not sit all day long. Whatever they did should be Zen. So they developed the practice more to everyday life. Chinese Zen was more practical. They knew how to apply Zen in everyday life.

How to apply Zen in everyday life is not difficult. If we live on each moment, that is Zen. Whether you are sitting or working, when you live on each moment as you practice Zen, that is how to practice Zen. Zen is in our everyday life. You may say the Indian way was a rather lazy way, not active enough. Naturally Indian Zen emphasized some mysterious state of mind, but in China they emphasized having direct experience.

In this way, Buddhist philosophy was actualized in Zen practice. The oneness of zazen practice and everyday activity was brought to our society. So Zen is the source of the philosophy, and the source of art, and the source of religious life.

In "Genjo-Koan," in the first paragraph, Dogen-zenji gives us the whole pattern of the Buddhist way:

*When all things are Buddhist phenomena . . .*

—when all things are Buddhist teaching, you may say—

*. . . we have enlightenment and ignorance . . .*

—something to study or something to observe—precepts, or sutras, or a problem for philosophical discussion of life and death, or enlightened one, or ignorance.

*When all things are without self, we have no ignorance, no enlightenment, no buddhas, no people, no life, and no death.*

When all things are without self all that we do is done in the realm of selflessness, like milk and water; there is no water or no milk. When the whole textile is woven completely in various colorful threads, what you see is not pieces of thread, what you see is one whole textile. Do you understand? There is no need to say "this is water" when you drink milk. Do you say this is water and this is milk? You just drink milk, and there is no water or milk.

Dogen continues:

*When all things are without self, we have no ignorance, no enlightenment, no Buddha, no people, no life and death.*

The Buddhist way is beyond being and non-being. We know each colorful thread, and we know the whole woven textile. We observe things in two ways without any contradiction. But when we are not sincere enough, you may say, "This is Buddhism [laughs], and this is another religion. We are monks, and they are laymen, that's all." You don't understand the whole beautiful textile.

The Buddhist way is beyond a thread or a textile. Therefore we have life and death, ignorance and enlightenment. Still we see the various colors in the woven textile, and we appreciate the pattern of the textile.

He continues:

*We have life and death, ignorance and enlightenment, people and buddhas.*

—so many interesting colors on the one whole piece of cloth.

*However, flowers fall with our attachment and weeds grow with our detachment.*

Even though we are Buddhist, we live with people seeing the flower fading away day by day. We bring out the weeds day after day with our detachment.

*That we move ourselves . . .*

—he explained more about it. Here in the second paragraph, there are various ideas and various practices, not only Zen but also Pure Land school. But those are, for him, one beautiful textile. A piece of thread is not useful. When you make a beautiful cloth with it, it becomes useful—it becomes perfect religion.

Each of the schools of Buddhism and various religions finds its own meaning in big human religious life. It makes sense. It is to weave a beautiful cloth with thread. Each religion is just a piece of thread. Maybe it is colorful, maybe it is beautiful, but if you weave something with it, you can make a beautiful dress.

In this sense our way has two facets. One is as a secret of the religion: how to find the meaning—true meaning of religion. And, on the other hand, we remain as one of the schools of Buddhism—one of the many ways of practice.

I have two facets. I belong to the Soto school. I am just a piece of thread [laughs]. I know how to make myself a piece of useful material. This is the Soto way. Without knowing how to make ourselves useful, to observe some lofty activity does not make much sense.

So in the second paragraph he says:

*That we move ourselves and understand all things is ignorance.*

He gives the definition of various threads—this is red thread, this is pink, this is blue—like this. “That we move ourselves and understand all things is ignorance.” Then what is enlightenment? Enlightenment is:

*That things advance and understand themselves—that is enlightenment.  
It is buddhas who understand ignorance.*

Who is Buddha? Buddha is someone who understands ignorance. Who are people? People are ignorant of enlightenment. He says:

*It is people who are ignorant of enlightenment. Further, there are those who are enlightened about enlightenment—and those who are ignorant of ignorance—When buddhas are truly buddhas, they are not necessarily aware of themselves as buddhas. But they are enlightened ones and advance in enlightenment.*

We are not just Soto priests. We are Buddhists [laughs]. But we cannot practice all the ways of practice. Although we practice just the Soto way, we are, nevertheless, Buddhist [laughs]. That’s all.

Here you will find out how important it is to live in each moment. To live on each moment makes everything possible—makes doing the precepts possible, makes attaining enlightenment possible, makes attaining absolute freedom from sectarianism possible. This practice makes it possible to attain perfect, complete satisfaction in our life.

*Shunryu Suzuki Roshi’s grandson, Shungo Suzuki, was married to Kumi Hirano on May 11, 2002 in Japan. Shungo will eventually succeed his father, Hoitsu Suzuki Roshi, as head priest of Rinso-in, the Suzukis’ home temple in Japan.*

