

Genjokoan (Actualizing the Fundamental Point)

Genjokoan means that the subjective realm and the objective realm, the self and all things in the Universe, are nothing but the true buddha-dharma itself. However, this is only an explanation of the word. Pay attention to the fact that it is not the living genjokoan itself (Yasutani, 1996, p. 7).

Genjokoan means that what is manifest (genjo) is itself absolute reality (Yasutani, 1996, p. 8).

Everything is your original self that is perfectly without lack and is completely fulfilled in itself. Don't be surprised. That's genjokoan (Yasutani, 1996, p. 9).

When Dogen wrote the Genjokoan, he was giving directions to that which has no form yet appears (Low, 2014, p. 14).

In sum, Genjokoan could be the anguish of being caught between impermanence and eternity (Brazier, 2019, p. 57).

To "genjokoan", as a verb, is to fully express our hearts, to be present in all aspects of our life, to bring our life to life, to allow ourselves to express the world, to allow the world to express ourselves. We need to "genjokoan" both delusion and enlightenment (Leighton, 2011, p. 69).

1

As all things are buddha-dharma, there is delusion and realization, practice, birth and death, and there are buddhas and sentient beings.

All beings are from the very beginning buddhas. / It is like water and ice. / Apart from water, no ice. / Outside sentient beings, no buddhas. (Hakuin, Song of Zazen)

As the myriad things are without an abiding self, there is no delusion, no realization, no buddha, no sentient being, and no birth and death.

O Shariputra, form does not differ from emptiness, emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness, emptiness itself form. (Heart Sutra)

In the midst of winning and losing, rising and falling, we should try to keep in mind concepts of "no-winning", "no-losing", "no-rising", and "no-falling" (Wincoff, 2015, p. 15).

The mirror fills because it is empty (Brazier, 2019, p. 215).

The buddha way is, basically, leaping clear of the many and the one; thus there are birth and death, delusion and realization, sentient beings and buddhas.

Seeing reality according to the perspective of the first sentence is like looking at the ocean and seeing the waves. We are aware the ocean is there, but our attention is on the waves, the various phenomena that make up our lives. In the next sentence, the emphasis is on the water, the ground of being, emptiness, the absolute. And in

the last sentence, we go beyond the duality of waves and water entirely and see them both together as one indivisible reality. All along, of course, we are looking at the same ocean; only our perspective is changing (Maezumi & Glassman, 2002, p. 140-141).

Yet in attachment flowers fall, and in aversion weeds spread.

[T]he two phrases “flowers fall...” and “weeds spring up...” are Dogen Zenji’s live words. If you take them up in the dokusan room, they make a wonderful koan. If you start to lecture even a little bit, you’ll be chased out of the dokusan room by the master’s bell. Simply, flowers fall amid our longing and weeds spring up amid our antipathy! It’s just the way it reads... If you add on a discourse or make an explanation, then the living genjokoan dies right off (Yasutani, 1996, p. 19-20).

Everyone hates to see petals fall and weeds grow. The nature of life is that it is constantly changing. Gray clouds eventually pass and harsh winds cease. This is my sitting every morning quietly facing the wall (Wincoff, 2015, p. 19).

All commentators, ancient and modern, agree that the theme of Genjokoan – that which is manifesting right before one’s eyes (genjo) is the absolute reality (koan) – is announced in these [four] lines (Cook, 1989, p. 47).

2

To carry yourself forward and experience myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come forth and experience themselves is awakening.

Enlightenment ... is said to be nothing more than that form of experience when the experienced event is not judged as external, as “other”, or as something that can only be made sense of from the perspective of the self (Cook, 1989, p. 51).

Those who have great realization of delusion are buddhas; those who are greatly deluded about realization are sentient beings. Further, there are those who continue realizing beyond realization, who are in delusion throughout delusion.

To see delusion and enlightenment is easy. That can happen any time. But then to actually bring this fully into our life is the endless practice of studying ourselves, just being there as ourselves. Buddhas are greatly enlightened and awakened to their delusions. This is our practice (Leighton, 2011, p. 69).

If one fails to realize both the I and the with, it is like seeing with only one eye, because if you cannot understand that the with [i.e., that all is different], is also the whole of Buddhahood, you are not going to see the Buddha in the bum who walks through the door. If you are stuck with the “small I”, you are just going to see a bum, and what you will say is, “How can a bum be a buddha?” If you are stuck with the whole, all that you can see is a Buddha and, because you refuse to discern the aspects of how they are being a bum, then you cannot help them. If you see a buddha who happens to be a bum, then all things can teach and enlighten you (Jiyu-Kennett, 2005, p. 66).

When buddhas are truly buddhas, they do not necessarily notice that they are buddhas. However, they are actualized buddhas, who go on actualizing buddhas.

At some level we each partake in the overall experiences of the whole Universe ... And even when we think we're not experiencing the experience of the whole Universe, we still are. We just don't know it. And our not knowing is an indispensable part of that overall universal experience. Gosh (Warner, 2007, p. 23).

3

When you see forms or hear sounds fully engaging body-and-mind, you grasp things directly. Unlike things and their reflections in the mirror, and unlike the moon and its reflection in the water, when one side is illuminated, the other side is dark.

The water is clear to the bottom, a fish is swimming slowly / The sky is infinitely vast, a bird is flying far away. (Dogen, Zazenshin, trans. Okamura, 2010)

A monk asked Tung Shan, "When cold and heat come, how can we avoid them?" Tung Shan said, "Why don't you go to the place where there is no cold or heat?" The monk said, "What is the place where there is no cold or heat?" Tung Shan said, "When it's cold, the cold kills you; when it's hot, the heat kills you." (Blue Cliff Record, Case #43, Cleary & Cleary, 1977, p. 258)

Please don't get the idea that "seeing forms with the whole body-and-mind" is something that only Zen masters experience, something exotic and very hard to attain. On the contrary. Whatever practice you are involved in, whatever work you are doing – even reading these words right now – absorb yourself in it totally, with whole body and mind. Just continue in this way, and when the time comes, you will see that your very life is the life of the enlightened one (Maezumi & Glassman, 2002, p. 144).

*Subhuti: This perfection [of wisdom] is like a reflected image.
Buddha: Because mirror and image cannot be apprehended.
Subhuti: This perfection is like a mirage.
Buddha: Because no mass of water can be apprehended.
(Conze, 1975, p. 313)*

4

To study the buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.

We should accept everything as the contents of our "self". We should meet everything as a part of ourselves. "To study the self" means to awaken to such a self (Kosho Uchiyama in Weitsman, Wegner, & Okamura, 2011, p. 182).

I would like to bring up the example of driving a car. Driving is not done by thinking. It is awkward and dangerous if we drive thinking about what we should do each moment. When we actually drive, the scenery, which is constantly changing, is the content of ourselves. We forget ourselves and operate various devices with our hands and feet in response to the changing scenery. Our life-driving is the same. This is “to forget the self is to be verified by all things.” Like car-driving, we act as one with the scenery, which is always changing (Kosho Uchiyama, in Weitsman, Wegner, & Okamura, 2011, p. 183).

“Yes, I know so-and-so has the Buddha Nature, but it’s hard for me to see it now and then.” That is quite a normal state to be in, but it occurs because you have not yet been able to fully “forget about the self”; you are holding on to your evaluations and opinions about others (Jiyu-Kennett, 2005, p. 42).

This study is like a baby bird studying or learning how to fly with its parents. By nature, a baby bird has the ability to fly, but a baby bird does not know how to fly. So the baby watches its parents and learns how to fly. It tries again and again, and finally it can fly like its parents. This is the original meaning of “to study” here. This is not simply intellectual study (Okamura, 2002, p. 105-106).

Non-self is about seeing through the constructed self, not getting rid of the self (Leighton, 2015, p. 180).

5

When you first seek dharma, you imagine you are far away from its environs. But dharma is already correctly transmitted; you are immediately your original self.

To position oneself as a beginner far from the Dharma’s edge is the correct course. It is humility, without which one will get nowhere (Brazier, 2019, p. 174).

One cannot maintain oneself by oneself. Only when one gives up the idea of “I”, will one naturally become the self which is connected with the Universe (Kodo Sawaki, in Uchiyama, 1990, p. 76).

6

When you ride in a boat and watch the shore, you might assume that the shore is moving. But when you keep your eyes closely on the boat, you can see that the boat moves. Similarly, if you examine [the] myriad things with a confused body and mind, you might suppose that your mind and nature are permanent. When you practice intimately and return to where you are, it will be clear that nothing at all has unchanging self.

The ancient and persistent strategy of Buddhism, here asserted again by Dogen, has been to overcome the belief in, and longing for, permanence by acquiring a clear understanding that the world, including oneself, is fundamentally and radically impermanent. This means that there is no self to possess anything and that there are no things in reality to be possessed (Cook, 1989, p. 56-57).

Notice he [Dogen] says “come back” [i.e., return] – as if we had somehow left the concrete place where we are right now. How can we ever leave where we are? But we do it all the time. In fact, most of us are sunk so deeply into our own mental images that we can barely even recognize where we are anymore. We need to learn to come back to a place we have never left. It’s absurd. But that’s the way it is (Warner, 2007, p. 26).

7

Firewood becomes ash, and it does not become firewood again. Yet, do not suppose that the ash is future and the firewood past. You should understand that firewood abides in the phenomenal expression of firewood, which fully includes past and future and is independent of past and future. Ash abides in the phenomenal expression of ash, which fully includes future and past. Just as firewood does not become firewood again after it is ash, you do not return to birth after death.

This section explains the problem of life and death more minutely, more clearly, and it examines the central point that all dharmas are without self in terms of time. It thoroughly demolishes the deluded, ordinary views of the unenlightened person for us (Yasutani, 1996, p. 61).

The Buddha Nature of time and season, causes and conditions, / is perfectly complete in past and future, and in each moment. / Despite differences between merits gathered, or layers of virtue, / milk and cheese completely earn their names in their own times. (Leighton & Okamura, 2004, p. 423)

Ash and firewood are perfect, because they are whole, independent beings, or independent realities. This kind of understanding is beyond our thinking. You can explain it with logic, but the explanation will not be perfect (Shunryu Suzuki, in Weitsman, Wegner, & Okamura, 2011, p 114).

This being so, it is an established way in buddha-dharma to deny that birth turns into death. Accordingly, birth is understood as no-birth. It is an unshakeable teaching in Buddha’s discourse that death does not turn into birth. Accordingly, death is understood as no-death.

If things had or were selves, which are unchanging substances underlying surface characteristics, then at one time the self would be alive and later the self would be dead. In this way, “I” would be alive, then dead, with the implication that the self that remains the same in life and death would perhaps again find itself in a new state of life after death. Dogen rejects this possibility because he rejects the notion of a substantial self. There are only a series of states that follow one after another, each state enjoying a brief career as what it is (abiding in its own dharma state), ceasing to be, and then being followed by a successor with the same career, and so on (Cook, 1989, p. 56).

The living do not die. Living things absolutely do not die. Only dying things die. It’s not a joke. It’s true. As long as you’re alive, you won’t die, so don’t worry. When you die, you won’t be alive, so don’t worry about that, either. Even when you hear it said like this, can you still not find peace of mind (Yasutani, 1996, p. 60).

Birth is an expression complete this moment. Death is an expression complete this moment. They are like winter and spring. You do not call winter the beginning of spring, nor summer the end of spring.

Scholastics think it's good enough if you understand it, but as I've said time and time again, there is a big difference between having understood it and having grasped the reality of it. Without having grasped the reality of life and death each being its own time, you cannot have true peace of mind (Yasutani, 1996, p. 63).

8

Enlightenment is like the Moon reflected on the water. The Moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken. Although its light is wide and great, the Moon is reflected even in a puddle an inch wide. The whole Moon and the entire sky are reflected in dewdrops on grass, or even in one drop of water.

When a pond become still, it becomes a mirror. When the surface is broken, the reflections are more difficult to discern. In the stillness and silence of zazen, one becomes a mirror. One displays the dharma in the world. This is not because one is trying to do so, nor is it because of any particular excellence in oneself. One is just sitting. However, just as the Buddha statue is both a supremely holy object and also merely a lump of rock, so the meditator, while still being nothing more than an ordinary human being is, just by sitting there, exemplifying the eternal wisdom of Buddhism (Brazier, 2019, p. 159).

You will not be broken. You are just as you are. And when you are just as you are, through and through, there is enlightenment (Shunryu Suzuki, in Weitsman, Wegner, and Okamura, 2011, p. 112).

What we should do, when seeing the Moon pointed to or reflected, is to be content and to share the Moon (Jiyu-Kennett, 2005, p. 41).

Enlightenment does not divide you, just as the Moon does not break the water. You cannot hinder enlightenment, just as a drop of water does not hinder the Moon in the sky.

The unenlightened person is not destroyed by satori and replaced by a new improved model. Rather, the person's attitude to him- or herself and everything else changes (Brazier, 2019, p. 214).

Even though we are deeply deluded human beings, there is no reason we cannot be enlightened. Even in a dirty pool of water, the heavenly moon is reflected (Kosho Uchiyama, in Weitsman, Wegner, & Okamura, 2011, p. 200).

This being the case, intelligence or lack of it does not matter; between the dull and the sharp witted there is no distinction. If you concentrate your effort single-mindedly, that in itself is negotiating the Way. (Dogen, Fukanzazengi)

The depth of the drop is the height of the Moon. Each reflection, however long or short its duration, manifests the vastness of the dewdrop, and realizes the limitlessness of the moonlight in the sky.

It does not matter whether one is dull or bright, successful or unsuccessful, rich or poor: awakening is awakening (Low, 2014, p. 41).

Though we are tiny, impermanent, and ego-centered as individuals, our lives are immeasurably deep and boundless (Okamura, 2010, p. 142).

The more we practice, the more deeply we realize the nature of our lives (Maezumi & Glassman, 2002, p. 156).

9

When dharma does not fill your whole body and mind, you think it is already sufficient. When dharma fills your body and mind, you understand that something is missing.

This passage expresses Dogen's rejection of the ideas of those who say that practice is unnecessary because it is sufficient just to know that the Dharma is already perfect (Brazier, 2019, p. 214).

The Dharma may be far away, like the Moon in the sky, but its light comes to us already. While we try to grasp it, it eludes us. When we stand in awe before it, it bathes us in silver light (Brazier, 2019, p. 175).

When we are filled with the universal "Life of Buddha", we can see how small, foolish and ignorant we are. This is great wisdom (Kosho Uchiyama, in Weitsman, Wegner, & Okamura, 2011, p. 204).

For example, when you sail out in a boat to the middle of the ocean where no land is in sight and view the four directions, the ocean looks circular, and does not look any other way. But the ocean is neither round nor square; its features are infinite in variety. It is like a palace. It is like a jewel. It only looks circular as far as you can see at that time. All things are like this.

Since we are finite, limited human beings, we cannot see the entirety of reality as it truly is. We are born, live, and die in this reality so we can only see it from the inside. Because we must take a position in reality, we cannot see the parts of it that are hidden by our own individual existence (Okumura, 2010, p. 147).

Though there are many features in the dusty world and the world beyond conditions, you see and understand only what your eye of practice can reach. In order to learn the nature of the myriad things, you must know that although they may look round or square, the other features of oceans and mountains are infinite in variety; whole worlds are there. It is so not only around you, but also directly beneath your feet, or in a drop of water.

A fish swims in the ocean, and no matter how far it swims, there is no end to the water. A bird flies in the sky, and no matter how far it flies, there is no end to the sky. However, the fish and the bird have never left their elements. When their activity is large, their field is large. When their need is small, their field is small. Thus, each of them totally covers its full range, and each of them totally experiences its realm. If the bird leaves the air, it will die at once. If the fish leaves the water, it will die at once.

Even though a goldfish is swimming in a small goldfish bowl, the goldfish is penetrating the whole Universe (Kosho Uchiyama, in Weitsman, Wegner, & Okamura, 2011, p. 208).

Know that water is life and air is life. The bird is life and the fish is life. Life must be the bird and life must be the fish.

It is like the dragon entering the water, the tiger entering the mountain. (Dogen, Fukanzazengi)

We cannot live separately from the world. For us, this world is our life. Since we are one with the world and are supported by all things as a part of the network of interdependent origination, we must take care of this world that includes both self and others (Okamura, 2010, p. 170).

It is possible to illustrate this with more examples. Practice, enlightenment, and people are like this.

All that stuff about birds and fishes and sky and water is just saying that you can't step outside the Universe – which is identical to your “self” – and view it objectively. As [singer-songwriter] Robyn Hitchcock says, “your head keeps blocking it off” (Warner, 2016, p. 58).

Now if a bird or a fish tries to reach the end of its element before moving in it, this bird or this fish will not find its way or its place. When you find your place where you are, practice occurs, actualizing the fundamental point. When you find your way at this moment, practice occurs, actualizing the fundamental point. For the place, the way, is neither large nor small, neither yours nor others'. The place, the way, has not carried over from the past, and it is not merely arising now.

Throughout the day, as you prepare the meals, do not pass the time in vain. If your preparations are true, then your movements and activities will naturally become the deeds of nurturing the womb of the sage. The way to put the great assembly at ease is to step back and transform yourself. (Dogen, Instructions for the Cook (Tenzo Kyokun), trans. Foulk, in Warner, Okamura, McRae, & Leighton, 2001)

Accordingly, in the practice-enlightenment of the buddha way, meeting one thing is mastering it; doing one practice is practicing completely.

From the beginningless past, your life has been interpenetrated and interwoven with the lives of many beings. As Dogen put it, in penetrating one thing, you penetrate all things. This means, if you see one person's life, take care of it – not as one person, but as all beings. So one thing is not one thing. One thing is all things, manifested as one thing (Katagiri, 1998, p. 49).

12

Here is the place; here the way unfolds. The boundary of realization is not distinct, for the realization comes forth simultaneously with the mastery of buddha-dharma.

Do not suppose that what you realize becomes your knowledge and is grasped by your consciousness. Although actualized immediately, the inconceivable may not be apparent. Its appearance is beyond your knowledge.

The Buddha may be enlightened, but “being enlightened” is not what he is aware of. He just does that which has to be done (Jiyu-Kennet, 2005, p. 51).

The way of Zen cannot be found by our ordinary, dualistic knowledge. Not only that, but all the knowledge and thoughts which are products of our ordinary consciousness are to be completely cast away. When this is done, there is the fact of actual experience (Shibayama, 1970, p. 49).

Naturally real yet inconceivable / it is not within the province of delusion or enlightenment. (Song of the Jewel Mirror Awareness)

13

Zen Master Baoche of Mt. Mayu was fanning himself. A monk approached and asked, “Master, the nature of wind is permanent and there is no place it does not reach. Why, then, do you fan yourself?”

The Way is basically perfect and all pervading. How could it be contingent upon practice and realization? (Dogen, Fukanzazengi)

“Although you understand that the nature of the wind is permanent,” Baoche replied, “you do not understand the meaning of its reaching everywhere.”

And yet, if there is the slightest discrepancy, the Way is as distant as heaven from Earth. (Dogen, Fukanzazengi)

“What is the meaning of its reaching everywhere?” asked the monk. The master just kept fanning himself. The monk bowed deeply.

Just because we are everything doesn't mean we can just sit back and it'll all be groovy. We have to do something. We have to practice. We have to take action. This very action is how we activate our realization (Warner, 2016, p. 58).

Please, honored followers of Zen, long accustomed to groping for the elephant, do not be suspicious of the true dragon. (Dogen, Fukanzazengi)

The actualization of the buddha-dharma, the vital path of its correct transmission, is like this. If you say that you do not need to fan yourself because the nature of wind is permanent and that you can have wind without fanning, you will understand neither permanence nor the nature of wind. The nature of wind is permanent; because of that, the wind of the buddha's house brings forth the gold of the earth and makes fragrant the cream of the long river.

“The wind of the Buddha's family” [i.e., wind of the Buddha's house] is the product of our ceaseless practice of vow and repentance, which is firmly rooted in shikantaza, or just sitting. This ceaseless practice makes our lives as precious as gold and our lives as rich as cream (Okamura, 2010, p. 200).

To practice for the long run, you must have a profound aspiration to live your life in peace and harmony with all sentient beings ... [This] is called living in vow, aspiring to live in each moment. To live in vow is to take care of the little details of life, like getting up in the morning. When it is time to get up, just get up. This is the way to enter the doors of a golden, peaceful world ... Getting up is only a tiny activity. It is not unusual; everyone does it. Although there is nothing outstanding about it, the goldenness of the Earth is found in just such activities in everyday life (Katagiri, 1998, p. 15).

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