

## HAKUIN ZENJI COMMENTING ON DOGEN'S ENLIGHTENMENT EXPERIENCE

*Hakuin was mercilessly harsh when writing about "do-nothing" Soto teachers. However, his view of the founder of Soto Zen in Japan, Eihei Dogen, was quite different. Following is a commentary from Hakuin that dates from the "famine year" of 1747. (Excerpted from *Poison Blossoms from a Thicket of Thorns*, translated by Norman Waddell.)*

On the second day of the seventh month in the first year of the Chinese Pao-ch'ing era (1227), Zen master Eihei Dogen set out with his teacher Myozen Hoshi in a trading vessel bound for distant Sung China. At the monastery on Mount T'ien-t'ung he requested and was granted an interview with Zen master Ju-ching. He made three bows to the master and said, "Although I am but an insignificant young monk from a far-off country, I rejoice that karma from my past lives has enabled me to be admitted into your Dharma assembly. Please, master, in your great pity and compassion, teach me the true essentials of the Way."

Ju-ching lit a stick of incense, placed his palms together in gassho, and said, "Ever since our Zen school began the direct, undeviating transmission of the authentic Dharma from master to disciple, it has always had as its fundamental principle never leaving the training hall, and has had zazen alone (*shikan taza*) as the authentic way of practice. Today Zen students in temples throughout the land may sit many hours in meditation without lying down to sleep, but because they do not encounter an enlightened master, they never learn the way of entering true dhyana. Because of that, the zazen they practice differs not in the least from that espoused by the heretical teachers. Even if they continued performing such practice until the end of time they would never be able to enter the great dhyana of the Buddhas."

Dogen performed three bows, and said, "In your great pity and compassion, please teach me the correct way to enter dhyana."

Ju-ching lit incense, performed gassho, and said, "Brother Gen (Dogen), when doing zazen, you should place your mind above the palm of your left hand."

Dogen performed three bows and withdrew. Some days later he entered Ju-ching's chambers, made three bows, and said, "I placed my mind above the palm of my left hand as you instructed. Now, both my hands have totally disappeared. There is nowhere to place my mind."

Ju-ching lit incense, performed gassho, and said, "Dogen, you should make your mind fill your entire body. Make it reach each of your three hundred and sixty bones and joints, each of the eighty-four thousand pores of your skin, so that not a single place is left empty."

A few days later Dogen entered Ju-ching's chambers, made three bows, and said, "I did as you instructed, placing my mind throughout my body. Now both my mind and body have fallen away. It is like a brilliant sun illuminating the vast heavens, although its round shape cannot be seen."

This time Ju-ching lit incense, performed gassho, and said with a smile, "Brother Gen, for kalpas on end you have been revolving in the cycle of birth and death. Today you have entered

the great and true dhyana where defilements do not arise. Preserve and protect this. Never let go of it.”

Dogen performed three bows, three additional bows, then withdrew with tears in his eyes.

This is one of the secret teachings of Soto Zen. I learned about it long ago from an old priest when I was staying at the Inryo-ji in Izumi province. I have obtained many good results from practicing it, but I have not readily taught it to others. I thought I would wait until I found monks whose minds were deeply committed to the Way. Every time I heard about how earnestly you men were practicing this winter in the face of arduous difficulties, gooseflesh would rise all over my body. I only regret that the kitchen larders are empty and I am unable to provide you with the proper sustenance for the cold winter nights. This is the reason I have been so talkative tonight, unconcerned about losing my eyebrows, and emulating Tung-shan with his tray of fruit.

People might call me an old Dharma reprobate, someone who having lost his nostrils has entered a dark cave to dip water that has been lying stagnant for a thousand years, they might say that my talking about Soto Zen has caused the drowning of many of the valiant heroes of Rinzai Zen. Having no way to rebut these charges, I can only clench my left hand into a fist and gnaw on my fingertips. Why is that?

It is said that you should sell your bedding and buy a cow when the winter solstice falls at the beginning of the month, and sell your cow and buy bedding when it falls at the end of the month. But what about this year, when it falls right in the middle? What do you do then?

Hakuin gave the floor a thump with his staff and left.