

DO IT OVER AND
OVER AND OVER

HOW DO YOU ANSWER when someone asks you, “Why do you practice?”

In the *Genjo Koan*, Dogen Zenji says:

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 enlightened by the ten thousand dharmas.

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

The word *narau*, or “study,” is more like “to repeat something over and over and over.” We could also say “to learn,” but not necessarily to learn something new. Perhaps an even better word would be *practice*. To practice the Buddha Way is to practice oneself, or just live life. This seemingly repetitive process is nothing but one's own life.

Our practice is much more than acquiring some kind of knowledge; instead, the implication of practice is doing over and over and over and over. In a way that is what we do in *zazen*. Of course, our *zazen* is not just learning something over and over; rather, as Dogen Zenji says, it is realization itself. In other words, do not separate practice and realization. We do not practice for the sake of realization; realization is already here. Each of us has some realization, one person more, one person less. When you do *zazen* day after day, time after time, moment after moment, you are manifesting yourself as that realization. Repeat what you know by merging your life into what you know, or what you have studied, and do this over and over and over again.

Dogen Zenji says, “To study the Buddha Way is to study oneself.” How do we study ourselves? How do we practice ourselves? I say “we,” but it is always singular. My life! Your life! The Buddha dharma, the One Body, is completely my life, completely your life. Shakyamuni Buddha himself found this out. That is why he said: “How wonderful! I and everyone in the universe are enlightened.” Not just *I*, but everyone. That is what *I* means; *I* means everyone. But knowing this is not enough. That is why the words *learn* or *study* are not quite sufficient. They do not convey this sense of over and over and over. In other words, minute after minute, how do we live our life as the One Body, or the One Body as our life? No more, no less.

Dogen Zenji said, “To study the self is to forget the self.” When the

* Eihei Dogen, “Shobogenzo Genjo Koan,” trans. by Hakuyu Taizan Maezumi and Francis Cook, in *The Way of Everyday Life: Zen Master Dogen's Genjokoan with Commentary by Hakuyu Taizan Maezumi*, Los Angeles, Center Publications, 1978.

Buddha dharma and my life are separate, when I do not see that my life is the One Body, that is a delusion. When I see that they are together, that is the so-called enlightened life, or the *genjo koan*. *Genjo Koan* is the name of one of the writings of Dogen Zenji. We translate it as Manifesting Absolute Reality. In other words, absolute reality manifests as one's own life. How do we work with this koan? By realizing and living our life as the Buddha dharma, as the enlightened life. By not talking about enlightenment as if it is something outside our own life. Even talking about delusion or enlightenment is already a kind of delusion. The same can be said for studying koans or for doing shikantaza. When we set anything up as the object, as something outside ourselves, right there we are conditioned by it. It does not matter how fine the object is, the result is the same. It is a deluded view, a kind of ego trip because in one way or another the ego is involved. It is very easy to be trapped there.

How can you forget the self? Dogen Zenji says, "To forget the self is to be enlightened by the ten thousand dharmas." To be enlightened, to be confirmed, or to be verified by the ten thousand dharmas simply means to be verified by anything and everything, or more straightforwardly, by all of life itself. Life is verified by itself. It has to be! When we forget the self, all we are is the ten thousand dharmas, all we are is life itself. This is how we must live, over and over again.

"To be enlightened by ten thousand dharmas is to free one's body and mind and those of others." In other words, there is no division between oneself and others. The Buddha realized this when he saw the morning star. Seeing into his own nature, he saw the universality of his life, the freedom of his life. Life is absolutely free from the beginning. It is not at all restricted. The Buddha found this out, and we should appreciate our life in this way. When you are truly unconditionally open, you are forgetting the self at that moment. If you are hanging on to something, you have the self and you are not completely open. When we truly forget the self, there is no division between inside and outside, no division between yourself and externals. In such a way, we can appreciate life in its fullness.

I think openness is a wonderful characteristic of the American temperament. How can we be unconditionally open? What kind of openness

are we talking about? Thorough openness itself is the best wisdom. When you are open, you are able to be one with another person. It does not matter if the person is a close friend or a stranger.

Some of you ask, "How do I apply this to the workaday world? I have stress-filled workdays. How can I forget the self in the midst of trying to meet deadlines?" Simply put yourself completely into your work and just do whatever needs to be done. Deadline after deadline? There is no deadline! Each moment is a beginning as well as an end, not a goal or a deadline set up by someone else.

So when you practice shikantaza, just sit. This is the condition of openness. Then, being totally open, you are nothing other than all space and time. Dogen Zenji says, "On this body, put the Buddha seal." The Buddha seal is this openness, where there is no conditioning, no division between yourself and the object, no division between yourself and your life. When you close this gap, Dogen Zenji says, you become "the Buddha seal itself; the whole space becomes subtly itself." If we are open this much, is there anything else that we need?

For the most part, we are not just sitting; we are nursing delusions one after another. There is often this feeling that *I am doing shikantaza*. When we have this feeling, then shikantaza is not at all shikantaza. Instead, there is some kind of maneuvering, some kind of action of one's self. Do not be fooled by words and ideas. When you practice with a koan, take the koan as your life. Koans are not something to study or evaluate apart from yourself. Make your life itself *genjo koan*, the realization of koan. This is what your life already *is*. Such a life is totally open and full, and one is not conscious of oneself.

So imprint the Buddha seal, not the human seal, upon your body and mind and penetrate this openness. Just do this over and over and over.