

ON BECOMING A BUDDHIST

WHEN YOU BECOME A BUDDHIST you receive the blood lineage chart. What is the most important implication of the blood lineage? The blood lineage is the lineage of Buddha, the Awakened One. Of course the lineage has been handed down from the patriarchs to us, and for this reason the teacher is crucially important. At the same time, all of you are as equal in importance as the teacher. We should not forget this.

This blood lineage, or the life of the Buddha, stems from Shakyamuni Buddha. Shakyamuni Buddha is not only a historical figure who lived some twenty-five hundred years ago, but also all the buddhas of the past, present, and future. All became Shakyamuni Buddha upon his attainment of Buddhahood. This Shakyamuni Buddha is called the eternal Shakyamuni Buddha.

Dogen Zenji writes that all the buddhas become Shakyamuni Buddha and that Shakyamuni Buddha becomes *this very mind is the Buddha*. This refers to the famous Case 30 of the *Gateless Gate*. A monk asks Master Baso, "What is Buddha?" Master Baso replies, "This very mind is Buddha." Penetrate this well. What is it? Who is it? Needless to say, all of you are that! This very mind is the Buddha; this very body is the Buddha!

When you realize Buddhahood, you yourself are identified with Shakyamuni Buddha. Then your life literally is the same as that of the whole universe. This is the insight of awakening. This is what Shakyamuni himself found out and declared: "I and the great earth, all beings, simultaneously attain the Way." This is Shakyamuni Buddha's prediction, his guarantee that all of us will eventually realize Buddhahood.

Upon his awakening Shakyamuni further declared, “How miraculous it is that all sentient beings have the same wisdom and virtue of Tathagata Buddha.” To receive the precepts is to have the conviction that your life is simply the wisdom and virtue of Tathagata Buddha. Take care of yourself in this way. The ninth precaution in Dogen Zenji’s *Ten Precautions on Learning the Way* (*Gakudo Yojin-Shu*) states that in order to truly take care of yourself, you should have faith that from the beginning, your life is one with the Way. This is a fact. There is no delusion and no confusion, no upside-down views, no increase and no decrease, and no mistakes. Dogen Zenji says raise this faith, clarify it, then practice in this way.

Our life as the Way itself is what gives value to our lineage. We are not just blindly believing in something; we raise such faith in the Way and make it work as our life. What is handed down to us? What is most precious? What is the vital, warm blood that runs through ourselves and through the lives of the buddhas and ancestors? What *is* the living essence of the lineage? Please take care of this most important matter.

When you become a Buddhist you go through the ceremony of receiving *jukai*. By Bodhidharma’s definition, *jukai* means to become awakened to your own Buddha nature. *Ju* is “receiving,” or “to transmit,” and the implication of *kai* is “to awaken.” So *jukai*, or receiving the *kai*, means to become awakened to your Buddha nature. We can say *jukai* literally means to receive the lineage, for the content of the lineage is your awakening to your own nature. Your own nature is called by different names, such as self nature, true nature, Buddha nature, no-nature, empty nature, mu. When you awaken to your own nature, right here is the liberation. Right here is the sphere in which the buddhas and ancestors reside, which is no other than the life of each of us. This is one way to describe the lineage.

On the lineage chart, the red bloodline goes in one continuous circle from your name back to Shakyamuni Buddha’s name. The lineage is simply this one circle. When you receive *jukai*, your bloodline goes up into Shakyamuni Buddha. It is complete. At the conclusion of the *jukai* ceremony, we say: “When all beings receive the Buddha’s *kai*, they all enter into the sphere of the Buddha.” This

sphere of the Buddha is the same as great enlightenment. “Indeed, we are the sons, daughters, children of the buddhas.” The last verse of the ceremony verifies this one circle.

In one sense, receiving jukai is the ceremony of becoming a Buddhist, or at least becoming one who has faith in the Buddha Way. Who is the Buddha? Shakyamuni himself was Hindu. Being Hindu, he awakened and was called the Awakened One, or Buddha. So the word *buddha* means “awakened one” and was used even before Shakyamuni’s enlightenment. In this sense, Buddhism is a general term. So we could say that being Christian or Jewish, you could also be Buddha. In this context, there is no contradiction in having another religious background, regardless of your commitment to practice the Buddha Way.

I appreciate many of you from different religious backgrounds, mostly Judeo-Christian, who are interested in practicing the Buddha Way. I have trouble finding the words to express my appreciation for your involvement. For example, being from Japan and growing up in a strong Buddhist environment, I would need lots of courage and determination to explore other religious practices. I express my appreciation and even admiration for all of you who have a commitment to Buddhism, to awakening.

From this angle we can also say it does not matter if you are Japanese, Chinese, black, brown, or white. Even the time does not matter. Anyone, anytime, can commit to accomplishing the awakened life. We do not need to label ourselves Buddhist. Just follow the enlightened Way, or the awakened Way. This is enough. In this sense, there is no conflict. You might even become a better Christian or Jew. So generally, Buddha’s teaching is universal: one must truly be oneself as a human being, a man, a woman, whatever. This may be an extreme view, but basically Shakyamuni awakened, and as Buddha, the Awakened One, his concern was how to live this life in the best way possible.