

Great master Kokaku of Mount Ungan was the rightful heir of Tozan. He was the thirty-ninth dharma descendent of Shakyamuni Buddha and the rightful ancestor in the Tozan tradition. One, day he addressed the assembly, saying: If one wants to attain the essence of thusness, one must become a person of thusness. But one is already a person of thusness, so why should one be anxious about the essence of thusness!¹

—*Eihei Dogen*,
SHOBOGENZO IMMO

“**T**HE ESSENCE OF THUSNESS” is enlightenment. Dogen Zenji says, “It is said that to think of attaining the essence of thusness is already to be a person of thusness. But one is already a person of thusness, so why should one be anxious about the essence of thusness.” Which is to say that the as-it-is-ness is supreme enlightenment, and that is what we call thusness.

Thusness is no other than this very body and mind. How do you appreciate this? Dogen Zenji first expresses thusness in Chinese and then in Japanese. When we examine this line in Chinese, it means to want or to wish for enlightenment: “If one wants to attain the essence of thusness, one must become a person of thusness.” But Dogen Zenji rephrases it in Japanese in the following way: “To think of attaining the essence of thusness is already to be the person of thusness.” Dogen Zenji says you are already thusness.

The *Nirvana Sutra* says that all beings have Tathagata Buddha's wisdom and virtue. How do we manifest or reveal ourselves as having the same wisdom as Tathagata Buddha, or reveal ourselves as the person of thusness? This is always the key to our practice. Whether your practice is shikantaza, koans, breathing, or something else, how do you understand this poem? Having the life we are living, we are already the person of thusness, the unsurpassable Way. Are we truly living as such a person?

The nature of this supreme enlightenment is such that even the universe in all the ten directions is but a small portion of the supreme enlightenment. And the supreme enlightenment is still further beyond the entire universe. We are also various furnishings in the universe in all the ten directions. How do we know such is the case? The answer is, we know that such is the case because our bodies and minds manifest themselves in the entire universe and they are all selfless.²

"They are all selfless." In other words, with / and without /, including both relative and absolute. These ten directions, the entire world, are nothing but the body and mind of the person of thusness. The entire universe is nothing but each and every one of us. And at the same time, such a person is selfless. And being selfless, the person is able to manifest body and mind as the ten directions, as the entire universe.

There is the expression, the world in the ten directions is nothing but the illumination of one's self. So how to be this selfless person? We are already this person. What is preventing us from realizing it?

Our bodies are not really ours. Life passes with time, never stopping for a moment. Where did our ruddy faces disappear to? Although we look for them, their traces are nowhere. As we observe carefully, there are many things of the past we can no longer find. Neither do our sincere minds ever stand still; they go and come at every turn. Even though we have the mind of sincerity, it is not something sluggish surrounding the self. Within this context, there are people who arouse the mind all of

a sudden; once the mind is aroused, they discard things they have hitherto indulged in; they desire to hear what they have not yet heard and seek to verify what they have not yet verified. All this has nothing to do with their personal efforts. We must know that this is so because they are persons of thusness. How do we know they are persons of thusness? We know they are persons of thusness because they think of attaining the essence of thusness.³

Dogen Zenji is talking about all of us. This passage makes me appreciate so very much all of you who are practicing. You know there is something that you must clarify, and yet your effort is not your effort. Whose effort is it? It is the effort of the person of thusness. Who is this person? Dogen Zenji says that even the hardship, anxiety, or whatever such a person experiences is also the essence of thusness. This is very true.

We say the true dharma eye looks for the true dharma eye. The true dharma eye comes to do zazen to *be* the true dharma eye, or manifest as such a person. In other words, you yourself as the true dharma eye manifests wherever you are as the true dharma eye.

We intrinsically have the countenance of the person of thusness, and so need not be anxious about the essence of thusness. Because anxiety is itself the essence of thusness, it is not anxiety. Moreover, we need not be startled by the essence of thusness being this way. Even if thusness appears startling and suspicious, it is thusness all the same: there is that thusness by which you ought to be startled. It can't be measured by the measure of the Buddha, or the measure of the mind, any more than it can be measured by the measure of the dharma world, or the measure of the entire world. It is simply that "one is already a person of thusness; so why should one be anxious about the essence of thusness?"⁴

Isn't this wonderful? Your life cannot be measured by any restricted ruler. This reminds me of the koan by the Sixth Patriarch and Nangaku Ejo, which I have already referred to. "Who comes

here as thus?” Nangaku spent eight years struggling with this koan. “Who am I?” is a fundamental inquiry. You know the answer intellectually. I am the whole world! I am this obvious fact: the person of thusness, the essence of thusness. This is my life, your life!

Nangaku said, “If you try to explain it, it doesn’t hit the mark.” What is the mark? Where is it? You yourself are the mark, and you yourself are the bow and arrow. You yourself are everything; that is the target. How can the target be hit? Is there any kind of special bow and arrow? This wisdom that Buddha manifests is innate in all of us. It is the life of each of us. How do each of you appreciate this thusness—the unsurpassable Way—as your life, as the life of the Buddha, as the wisdom of the Tathagata? It does not matter what you call it.

How do you take care of your anxiety, your frustration over this matter? “If one wants to attain the essence of thusness, one must become a person of thusness. But one is already a person of thusness, so why should one be anxious about the essence of thusness?”

[1.](#) Hee Jin Kim, trans., “Flowers of Emptiness: Selections from Dogen’s Shobogenzo,” in *Studies in Asian Thought and Religion*, vol. 2. (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 201.

[2.](#) Ibid, 201.

[3.](#) Ibid, 201–202.

[4.](#) Ibid, 202.