

**AROUSING BODHI-MIND:  
WHAT IS THE 'EARTH' IN DŌGEN'S TEACHINGS?\***

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\*Editor's Note: This was an oral presentation given at the November 2011 Conference on Zen Master Dōgen titled, "Bringing Dōgen Down to Earth," held at Florida International University, which included Dr. William Bodiford, Dr. Griffith Foulk, Dr. Steven Heine, Rev. Taigen Dan Leighton and Rev. Shohaku Okumura as speakers. The co-organizers were Steven Heine and Shotai De La Rosa.

**Introduction**

I am very honored to be invited to this conference as a speaker. I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to all the people who supported me and who worked to organize this meaningful event to promote our understanding of Dōgen and his teachings and practice. Other speakers are all eminent Dōgen scholars. I am the only one who is not an academic. I am simply a zazen practitioner. I have been studying Dōgen only to understand the practice I have been engaging in as the most important thing in my life, and to share the teaching and practice with people in the West. I am happy if my talk can be interesting and even a little bit helpful to you.

When I heard the theme of this conference, "Bringing Dōgen Down to Earth," I thought this was a strange title. It sounds like Dōgen is up in the air, and we are on the earth, and therefore we need to ask him to come down. Perhaps I had such a question because I am not a native English speaker. But I believe Dōgen has always been sitting on the "earth" and *we* are living up in the air about five to six feet above the ground, and therefore we need to bring ourselves down to the earth on which Dōgen is sitting.

When I talked about this question at my temple, Sanshinji, one person said, "Did you see the Dōgen movie? In that movie, when Dōgen had the enlightenment experience of dropping-off-body-and-mind (*shinjin-datsuraku*), he shot up into space. Probably, Dōgen is still up there." I saw the movie once, but I did not appreciate the film so much, particularly that

part.<sup>1</sup> Today, I would like to talk about my understanding of the “Earth” on which Dōgen has been walking, staying, sitting, and lying down. He quotes an ancient saying in *Shōbōgenzō* “Inmo” (Thusness), “If we fall down because of the ground, we get up depending on the ground. If we seek to stand up apart from the ground, after all, such a thing (standing up apart from the ground) is not possible.”<sup>2</sup> What is this ground or “earth” on which we fall down and stand up? I think it is the very simple and down to earth reality of our lives, the impermanence of our body and mind and of all myriad things in the world.

### **Significance of Arousing Bodhi-Mind in Dōgen’s Teachings**

In 2011, I had two genzō-e retreats on “Bodhi-mind” (Skt. *bodhi-citta*, Jp. *bodaishin*). One was at Chapel Hill Zen Center in February, where I gave lectures on *Shōbōgenzō* “Hotsumujōshin” (Arousing Unsurpassable Mind). The other was in Sweden in July, where I gave lectures on *Shōbōgenzō* “Hotsubodaishin” (Arousing Bodhi-Mind). Originally both of these fascicles were entitled, “Hotsu-bodaishin” and according to the colophon, these two fascicles were written on the same day; the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the Second Lunar Month in 1244. But the latter is a part of a twelve-fascicle collection of *Shōbōgenzō*, therefore commonly considered to have been written later than Hotsumujōshin. As I prepared to teach these two fascicles of *Shōbōgenzō*, I studied Dōgen’s teachings on arousing bodhi-mind. I found that “Arousing Bodhi-mind” was one of his critical issues from the very beginning of his searching the Way as a teenager, through his middle years when he started to teach at his monastery at Kōshōji, until his final years at Eihei-ji. I think we can see what was the foundation of his practice and teaching for his entire life through examining what he taught about bodhi-mind.

### **Zuimonki: Seeing Impermanence and Arousing Bodhi-Mind**

Soon after he established his own monastery, Kōshōji, in Fukakusa

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<sup>1</sup> Shohaku Okumura, in *Realizing Genjokoan*, pp. 81–88. I discussed that the story of Dōgen’s dropping-off-body-and-mind in his biography is a made up story by person who lived later.

<sup>2</sup> This is from my unpublished translation. Another translation is in Nishijima & Cross, *Master Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō* Book 2 (Windbell Publications, 1996), p. 121.

in 1233, he talked to the monks, in his assembly, about various aspects of practice. His dharma heir Koun Ejō recorded those talks. Later these talks were compiled as *Shōbōgenzō* “Zuimonki.” In one of these talks, Dōgen mentioned his experiences while he was a novice monk at the Tendai monastery, Enryakuji, on Mt. Hiei. This is one of them:

I first aroused bodhi-mind because of my realization of impermanence. I visited many places both near and far [to find a true teacher] and eventually left the monastery on Mt. Hiei to practice the Way. Finally, I settled at Kenninji. During that time, since I hadn’t met a true teacher nor any good co-practitioners, I became confused and evil thoughts arose. First of all, my teachers taught me that I should study as hard as our predecessors in order to become wise and be known at the court, and famous all over the country. So when I studied the teachings I thought of becoming equal to the ancient wise people of this country or to those who received the title of *daishi* (great teacher) etc.

When I read the *Kōsōden*, *Zoku-Kōsōden* and so on, and learned about the lifestyle of eminent monks and followers of the buddha-dharma in Great China, I found they were different from what my teachers taught. I also began to understand that such a mind as I had aroused was despised and hated in all the sutras, *shastras* and biographies....Having realized this truth, I considered those in this country with titles such as “great teacher” as so much dirt or broken tiles. I completely reformed my former frame of mind. Look at the life of the Buddha. He abandoned the throne, and entered the mountains and forests. He begged for food his whole life after he had completed the Way.<sup>3</sup>

Dōgen himself said he aroused bodhi-mind because of seeing impermanence. It is said in his biography that he first aroused bodhi-mind when he saw the smoke from incense at his mother’s funeral ceremony. He was eight years old. He then became a Tendai monk when he was 13 years

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<sup>3</sup> *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki: Saying of Eihei Dōgen Zenji* (Sotoshu Shuicho, 1998), pp. 4–8, and 146.

old. At the Tendai monastery, his teachers encouraged him to study and practice hard to become an eminent and famous teacher. Perhaps, then, he might be able to become the emperor's teacher or the teacher of other noble people.

Later, he discovered that to study and practice for the purpose of pursuing such status and fame was not what the Buddha and ancestors had been recommending. That was one of the reasons he left the Tendai monastery and practiced Zen with his teacher Myōzen at Kenninji in Kyoto. Zen was a newly introduced school of Buddhism in his time. Myōzen and Dōgen went to China together to study Zen at Chinese monasteries. Myōzen died in China in the 5<sup>th</sup> month of 1225. Right before Myōzen's death, Dōgen met Rujing (Nyojō) and received dharma transmission in the Caodong (Sōtō) lineage of Zen from him and returned to Japan.

***Gakudō-yōjinshū: Seeing Impermanence and Bodhi-Mind***

In 1233, he founded his own monastery, Kōshōji. He wrote *Gakudō-yōjinshū* (Points to Watch in Studying the Way) for the monks who wanted to practice with him to show the essential point of his practice. *Gakudō-yōjinshū* is a collection of ten independent essays in which he discussed the key points the monks needed to keep in mind while they practiced with him. The very first section was about the necessity of arousing bodhi-mind. He said:

Though there are many names for bodhi-mind, they all refer to the one-mind. The Ancestral Master Nāgārjuna said that the mind that solely sees the impermanence of this world of constant appearance and disappearance is called bodhi-mind. Therefore, [for now I think it would be appropriate to talk about] bodhi-mind as the mind that sees impermanence. Truly, when you see impermanence, egocentric mind does not arise, neither does desire for fame and profit.

We hear of some in the past who had heard a little of the teaching and we see some in the present who have seen a little of the sutras. Most of them have fallen into the pitfall of fame and profit and have lost the life of the buddha-way forever. How sad and regrettable this is! You should thoroughly understand that even if you study the provisional or direct teachings, or receive instruction on

the traditional scriptures of the esoteric or exoteric teachings, unless you completely give up the desire for fame and profit you cannot arouse true bodhi-mind.<sup>4</sup>

Arousing bodhi-mind through seeing impermanence was the starting point of his own practice, and, when he started to teach at Kōshōji, that was the primary prerequisite for the monks to practice with him. Seeing impermanence enables us to be liberated from attachment to our body and mind, and the desire for fame and profit.

***Chiji-Shingi: Mind of the Way***

There are a few more aspects of bodhi-mind in his teachings besides seeing impermanence. A second aspect is the faithfulness toward the tradition of buddhas and ancestors. In the section regarding the duties and responsibilities of the Director (kannin) in *Chiji-shingi* (Pure Standards For The Temple Administrators), he refers to bodhi-mind as *dōshin*; “Mind of the Way.” “Dao” or “Way” is a translation of the Indian word *bodhi* (awakening).

What is called the mind of the Way is not to abandon or scatter about the great Way of the Buddha ancestors, but deeply to protect and esteem their great Way. Therefore having abandoned fame and gain and departed your homeland, consider gold as excrement and honor as spittle, and without obscuring the truth or obeying falsehoods, maintain the regulations of right and wrong and entrust everything to the guidelines for conduct.

After all, not to sell cheaply or debase the worth of the ordinary tea and rice of the Buddha ancestors’ house is exactly the mind of the Way. Furthermore, reflecting that inhalation does not wait for exhalation also is the mind of the Way and is diligence.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This is from my translation of *Gakudō-yōjinshu* in *Heart of Zen: Practice without Gaining-mind* (Sotoshu Shumicho, 1998), p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Taigen Leighton and Shohaku Okumura, trans., *Dōgen’s Pure Standards for the Zen Community: A Translation of Eihei Shingi* (State University of New York Press, 1996). p. 156.

Here, Dōgen says that to maintain the simple style of day-to-day practice transmitted in the lineage of ancestors without making it a commodity to be exchanged for fame and profit is the Mind of the Way. Therefore, seeing impermanence is emphasized again.

**Arousing Unsurpassable Mind: Mind of Offering**

*Shōbōgenzō* “Hotsumujōshin” (Arousing Unsurpassable Mind) was written several days before the ground-breaking ceremony in 1244 for his new monastery Daibutsuji (later renamed Eihei-ji). Dōgen says that bodhi-mind is the mind that is one with all things within the entire world and is the mind as the true reality of all things. He also places emphasis on the concrete activities of making offerings (*kuyō*) to sustain the Dharma, not only by becoming monks, practicing meditation, and studying and expounding Dharma teachings, but also through the construction of temple buildings, Buddhist statues, making any kind of donation, even simply doing *gasshō* and reciting *namu-butsu* (“I take refuge in Buddha”) in front of a Buddha statue. He states that all such practices have the virtue of the unconditioned. Here, he does not mention the relationship between arousing bodhi-mind and seeing impermanence: “The First Ancestor of Cīnasthāna said, “Each mind is like trees and rocks.”

“Mind” here is “mind is like.” It is the mind of the whole earth. Therefore, it is the mind of self and other. Each mind of the humans of the whole earth, as well as of the buddhas and ancestors, and of the devas and dragons of all the worlds of the ten directions—these are trees and rocks—there is no mind apart from them. These trees and rocks are, by their nature, not cooped up in the realm of being and nonbeing, emptiness and form. With this mind of trees and rocks, we bring forth the mind, practice and verify; for they are trees of mind, rocks of mind. Through the power of these trees and rocks of mind, the present “thinking of not thinking” is realized. Upon hearing the “sound of the wind” in the trees of mind and rocks of mind, we first transcend the followers of the alien ways; before that, it is not the way of the buddha.”<sup>6</sup>

**Hotsubodaishin: Mind of Saving All Beings**

Finally in *Shōbōgenzō* “Hotsubodaishin” (Arousing Bodhi-mind),

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<sup>6</sup> Carl Bielefeldt, trans., downloaded from <http://hcbss.stanford.edu/research/projects/sztp/translation/Shōbōgenzō/>

Dōgen wrote that we arouse bodhi-mind with thinking mind. To arouse the bodhi-mind is to take a vow that, “Before I myself cross over, I will help all living beings cross over the river between this shore of samsara and the other shore of nirvana” and strive to fulfill this vow. Here, Dōgen emphasizes the aspect of bodhi-mind working as compassion.

In this way, whether we wish in our mind or not, being pulled by our past karma, the transmigration within the cycle of life and death continues without stopping for a single *ksana*. With the body-and-mind that is transmigrating in this manner through the cycle of life and death, we should without fail arouse the bodhi-mind of ferrying others before ourselves. Even if, on the way of arousing the bodhi-mind, we hold our body-and-mind dear, it is born, grows old, becomes sick, and dies; after all, it cannot be our own personal possession.<sup>7</sup>

He goes on to say that arousing bodhi-mind depends on the instantaneous arising and perishing of all things, including the mind itself. Again Dōgen places emphasis on seeing impermanence of all things, both inside and outside of ourselves. He says:

While being within this swiftness of arising and perishing of transmigration in each *ksana*, if we arouse one single thought of ferrying others before ourselves, the eternal longevity [of the Tathagata] immediately manifests itself.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Five Aggregates are as the Mara and Avalokiteshvara**

At the end of “Hotsubodaishin,” Dōgen quotes Nāgārjuna in the *Daichidoron*<sup>9</sup> regarding the obstacles that hinder us when we try to arouse bodhi-mind. These obstacles are called demons or *Mara*. Mara is the demon that attacked Shakyamuni when he sat under the bodhi tree, to prevent him from attaining awakening. Shakyamuni conquered the Mara and attained awakening.

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<sup>7</sup> This is from my unpublished translation.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> The *Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra*, Nagarjuna’s commentary on the Prajna Paramita Sutra.

Nāgārjuna said that there are four kinds of demons: the demon of delusive desires, the five *skandha* (aggregates), death, and the celestial demon. Finally he said that all demons are actually only of one kind: the five aggregates. The Five Aggregates represent the demon that prevents us from seeing impermanence and arousing bodhi-mind. The five aggregates are the none other than our own body and mind. Our body and mind are nothing but ourselves. There is nothing else beside the five aggregates. Our body and mind are the Mara.

In “Hotsubodaishin,” Dōgen concludes that arousing bodhi-mind is seeing impermanence and that our five aggregates (our own body and mind) are the Mara that hinder us from seeing impermanence. Now I would like to compare this statement with something he wrote in *Shōbōgenzō* “Makahannyaharamitsu,” which is the very first fascicle he wrote in the *Shōbōgenzō* collection in 1233, the year he founded Kōshōji monastery. This fascicle contains Dōgen’s comments on the Heart Sutra:

The time of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva practicing profound prajna paramita is the whole body clearly seeing the emptiness of all five aggregates. The five aggregates are forms, sensations, perceptions, formations, and consciousness; this is the five-fold *prajna*. Clear seeing is itself prajna.

To unfold and manifest this essential truth, [the Heart Sutra] states that “form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” Form is nothing but form; emptiness is nothing but emptiness -- one hundred blades of grass, ten thousand things.<sup>10</sup>

In this text, Dōgen explains that the five aggregates are the five-fold prajna (wisdom) that sees emptiness. The five aggregates are both Mara (demon) and the five-fold prajna. It could be possible that Avalokiteshvara represents the five aggregates. Avalokiteshvara sees that only five aggregates exist and they are empty. There is nothing other than the five *skandhas*. Then there cannot be Avalokiteshvara outside the five aggregates. Five aggregates clearly see the emptiness of five aggregates. That is, five aggregates settle down as being simply and peacefully five

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<sup>10</sup> This is from my unpublished translation. Another translation is in *Master Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō*, Book 1. pp. 25–26.



aggregates without the separation between the subject that grasps the five aggregates themselves as “me” and the objects that are grasped by the subject as “other.”

### Conclusion

Overall, in Dōgen’s teachings, it can be inferred that the “Earth” on which Dōgen was walking, staying, sitting, and lying down is actually the impermanence of the five aggregates, our own body and mind. When we fail to see the reality of impermanence, selflessness, and emptiness of the five aggregates and cling to them as “I,” the entirety of our body and mind becomes Mara. When we are liberated from self-clinging and see the impermanence and emptiness of the five aggregates, they are five-fold prajna and Avalokiteshvara. On the ground of the impermanence of the five aggregates, when we see impermanence, no-self, and emptiness, the five aggregates are Avalokiteshvara.

When we grasp the five skandhas as “my” body and mind and attach ourselves to them, then we become self-centered and our life becomes samsara. We fall down on the ground. As Dōgen said, in *Shōbōgenzō* “Inmo,” when we fall down because of the ground (earth), the only possible way to stand up is by depending on the ground. We stand up by clearly seeing the emptiness of the five aggregates. We fall down and stand up millions of times in our practice. This is the transformation of our life from five aggregates as ignorance to five-fold prajna and from the Mara to Avalokiteshvara. As Dōgen said in *Shōbōgenzō* “Hotsumujōshin,” we should arouse bodhi-mind a hundred thousand myriad times. This transformation is not a one-time enlightenment experience. We let go of the five aggregates moment by moment.

In summary, the meaning of the expression “dropping off body and mind” (*shinjin-datsuraku*) should be very clear. It is not a particular psychological experience, such as going up into space as depicted in the Dōgen movie. Rather, it is the clear seeing of the entire body-and-mind; the five aggregates as simply five aggregates, without any grasping. All things are the five aggregates. The five aggregates simply being the five aggregates themselves without clinging is prajna, and that is our practice of zazen. Zazen enables the five aggregates (our own body and mind) to transform themselves from being the Mara to being Avalokiteshvara. This is was encompasses the very foundation of Dōgen’s teachings.



