

The Realization of Ultimate Reality

a translation of Dogen Zenji's *Genjokoan*

1 **W**HEN ALL DHARMAS ARE BUDDHA-DHARMA, there is delusion, enlightenment,
2 practice, birth, death, buddhas, sentient beings. When the ten thousand things are without
3 self, there is no delusion, no enlightenment, no buddhas, no sentient beings, no generation,
4 no extinction. Since the Buddha Way is originally beyond abundance and lack, there is
5 generation and extinction, delusion and enlightenment, sentient beings and buddhas. Even
6 so, flowers fall amid our longing, weeds flourish in our loathing.

7 To practice and confirm the ten thousand things by conveying one's self to them is
8 delusion. For all dharmas to advance and confirm the self is enlightenment. Those who
9 realize delusion are buddhas; those who are deluded about realization are sentient beings.
10 There are also those enlightened beyond enlightenment, as well as those deluded in the
11 midst of delusion.

12 When buddhas are truly buddhas, it is not necessary that they see themselves as bud-
13 dhas. Nevertheless, they are realized buddhas, and they continue to realize buddha.

14 Seeing form and hearing sound with the whole body-mind, though one intimately per-
15 ceives, it is not like reflections in a mirror, or like the moon on the water—when one side is
16 illuminated, the other side is dark.

17 To study the Buddha Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self.
18 To forget the self is to be verified by all things. To be verified by all things is to let one's
19 body and mind, and the bodies and minds of others drop off. All traces of enlightenment
20 come to rest, and this rest carries on without end.

21 When people begin to seek Dharma, they become [as if] far removed from its boundary.
22 When Dharma is rightly conveyed within oneself, one is immediately an original person.

23 A person riding in a boat, looking back at the shore, may mistakenly think the shore is
24 moving. By looking carefully at the boat, however, one can see it is the boat that is moving.
25 In like manner, when we conceive our body and mind in a confused way, grasping the ten
26 thousand things with a discriminating mind, we mistakenly think our own mind and nature
27 are permanent. Yet if we become intimate with our actions, and return to this moment,
28 that things are without self will be clear.

29 Once firewood turns to ash, the ash cannot turn back to firewood. We should not,
30 however, see ash as “after” and firewood as “before.” Know that firewood is at the dharma-
31 stage of firewood and has its own before and after—though firewood is beyond before and
32 after. Ash, at the dharma-stage of ash, has its own before and after. Just as firewood does
33 not revert to firewood once it has burned to ash, so a person does not return to life after
34 death. In light of this, not saying that life becomes death is an established custom within
35 Buddhadharma—therefore *this* is called unborn. That death does not become life is an
36 established teaching of the Buddha—therefore *this* is called inextinguishable. Like winter and
37 spring, life is a stage of time and death is a stage of time. Yet we do not suppose that winter
38 becomes spring, or say that spring becomes summer.

39 People attaining enlightenment is like the moon reflected in water. The moon does
40 not get wet, the water is not broken. For all the breadth and vastness of its light, it rests
41 upon a small patch of water. Both the whole moon and the sky in its entirety come to rest
42 in a single dewdrop upon the grass, in a mere drop of water. Enlightenment does not
43 destroy people any more than the moon breaks a hole in the water. People do not obstruct
44 enlightenment any more than a drop of dew obstructs the moon in the sky. The depth of

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one is the measure of the other's height. As for the length or brevity of time, examine the water's breadth or narrowness, and clearly discern the vastness or narrowness of the moon in the sky.

12 When Dharma has not yet fully penetrated our body and mind, we think we're filled with Dharma. When Dharma is fully realized in our body and mind, we know some insufficiency. For example, when we sail out upon the mountainless sea, we see no other aspect but the circle of the sea. Yet the great ocean is neither circular nor square. It has other inexhaustible qualities besides. It is like a palace [to a fish], or a jeweled necklace [to a bird]. Yet as far as our eyes can see, it only appears round. It is the same with all things—the dusty world and the inconceivable world beyond it assume many aspects, but we can see and understand only to the extent our eye is cultivated through *seeing*. To realize the nature of all things we must know the qualities of seas and mountains, beyond seeming square or round, are without end, and we should realize there are many worlds in all directions. This is not only so in worlds around us, it is so right under our feet, even within a single drop of water.

13 When a fish swims through water, it finds no limit of water no matter how far it swims. When a bird flies the sky, it finds no boundary of sky however high it flies. Therefore, no fish or bird has ever left the water or the sky. When they need great space, they use great space; when their need is small, their use is small. In this way each fish and bird exhausts all space, and freely acts in each place. Yet if a bird leaves the sky, it immediately perishes; if a fish leaves the water, it dies at once. We should understand that water is life and that sky is life—that bird is life and that fish is life. Life is fish and life is bird. Beyond this there are still more implications. There is enlightenment, and the realization that our little lives are limitless in this way. If, however, a fish or bird wants to swim or fly only after thoroughly investigating water and sky, they would find neither a path nor a place [to live].

If one finds this path, if one finds this place, one's daily life accordingly manifests ultimate reality. This path, this place, is neither big nor small, neither self nor other, neither preexistent, nor presently appearing—therefore is it thus.

Thus, if one cultivates and realizes the Buddha Way, when one attains one thing, one penetrates that one thing; when one takes one action, one cultivates that one action. Here is the place and the way is all-pervading. The boundary of the known is not clear because what is known is born and manifested simultaneously with the complete permeation of the Buddhadharma.

14 Do not think that attaining this place will ever become your view or that it can become known to you by means of intellection. Though complete enlightenment is immediately actualized, its intimate nature is such that it does not necessarily form as a view. Viewing is not something fixed.

As Zen master Pao-ch'e of Ma-ku shan was fanning himself, a monk approached and asked: "The nature of wind is permanent and all-pervading. Why must you use a fan?" Pao-ch'e answered, "You only understand the nature of wind as permanence, but you do not yet understand the meaning of it reaching everywhere." The monk said: "What is the meaning?" The master just continued to fan himself. The monk bowed deeply.

The verification of the Buddhadharma [i.e., enlightenment]—the vital Path's authentic transmission—is like this. To say one should not use a fan because the nature of wind is permanent, that there will be a breeze even when we do not use a fan, is to know neither permanence nor the nature of wind. It is because the nature of wind is permanent that the wind of Buddhadharma makes manifest the gold of the great earth, and ripens the sweet milk of the long rivers.

—Eihei Dogen
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