The Other Shore

from the teachings of Zen Master Hogen

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Introduction

The idea for this book arose out of a desire to collect together various items which Zen Master Hogen Daido Yamahata has written over the past years, together with some of his oral teachings. In particular I wanted to extract brief fragments, so that people who had never met Hogen-san, and those who knew nothing about Zen, might have a general introduction to him and his practice. Of course, I also hope that this collection will find a place with those who are already Hogen-San's followers.

Although it is possible to read every page of this book in one sitting, I would like to suggest an alternative approach. Consider these fragments rather like poetry, to be read and digested slowly, no more than a few at a time. Or find the quotation which strikes you the most deeply, and go back to it more than once. Hogen-san's statements can be deceptively simple: one must always bear in mind that his comments come not from any intellectual conclusion: instead they are an attempt to relate his direct experience of the truth.

This single encounter

I think that just being here and doing nothing is the most important, the wisest, the greatest work in this world for a human being.

It seems to be of little importance whether we live longer or healthier lives, since this is a transient abode. The only question we are given is how we experience this limitless, real life.

The realization of life is nothing more than the realization of death. Doing something with all your heart and forgetting yourself in it is the ultimate truth.

The truth of life is not a goal to be attained in some particular time or place in the future, but the reality of the step you take at this very moment.

Zazen, running, conversation, reading, considering (and taking responsibility for) the problems of the world, having dinner or taking a bath... whatever you are doing now - that is the daily reality for you: do not try to escape it.

Each thing we are doing or facing now is our true reality, our true encounter. This is exactly the point. Whatever you are doing now, do it. Just do it. Don't avoid it. If you escape from this, you are always escaping towards some future, from the cradle to the grave.

I maintain that your present imperfect state is much much better and more full of grace than the perfect state you intend to achieve in the future. Our lives, as we are practising now, are better than anything we will gain in the future. Therefore, you should switch the centre of your being and your whole attention from your dreams of the future, and instead have your awareness on Here Now.

This morning, I happened to look at a leaf of a tree. In that leaf I discovered the detailed reality of our existence. I had never before truly seen the miraculous nature of our life. I looked at the leaf in deep silence, with eyes full of tears. Thus I sat, in the depth of a special serenity and peace.

The life of true emptiness takes the form of whatever is here now.

We often say, "See you again soon", or, "I practise zazen twice a day". But is it the same zazen? Can we repeat anything a second time? Will you be the same "You" tomorrow or next year? Unconsciously we believe that our lives are full of repetitions, but in fact nothing is ever the same: it is impossible to repeat anything. Each time, out of necessity, our practice is utterly new and different.

When you have lunch, you should just have lunch. Otherwise you are not living in this world.

"How am I doing it?" Examine this only.

We cannot and do not need to cut ourselves off from material possessions and physical pleasure. When we are naturally facing just this one encounter, that is quite enough. We don't need to cut out anything: it happens by itself.

What is our real problem?

In fact, it has nothing to do with whether or not the earth and everyone on it are destroyed. Instead, we must ask: am I truly meeting and receiving this miraculous encounter? This is our only problem.

You can confirm what I have told you in your daily life. You are living and seeing the daily experiment of Here and Now always, naturally. If you are not blind, you will not need any further proof. See it for yourself. That is quite enough. There is no other way.

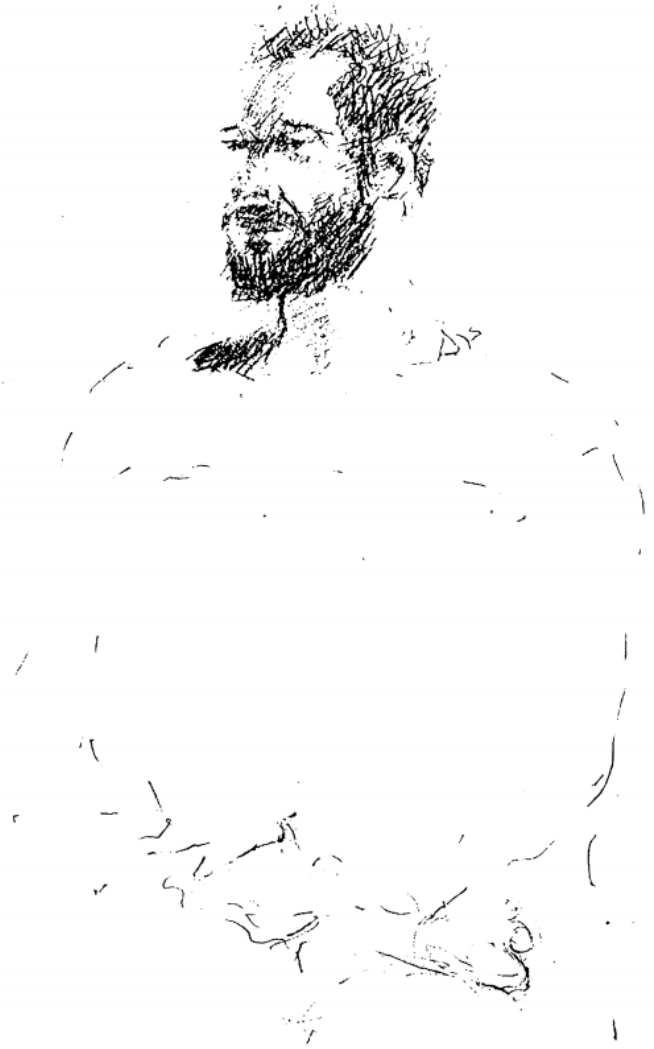
The fixed state is one where there is no new death, no new birth, in other words, just "habit". As long as one is alive, one should be continually dying and being born in every encounter, so that the enlightened life flows forever. Every sitting is the realization of a new world which one is seeing for the very first time.

They say that once you are contented with what you are, you will have no growth, no progress. This, I think, is a superficial understanding. Real growth, true progress, begins when you get at the truth of what you are; when you can say, "it is absolutely all right," even though it may be very poor and miserable.

So, please observe your unsatisfactory situation more and more, and take better care of it as it is. Then you may see the door open to the next world.

It was on the fifth night of the intensive training session in December, when I was 25 years old, that I sat in a graveyard behind the temple, uttering "Muh, Muh, Muh," in a very loud voice. As I was engaged in the whole-hearted utterance of "Muh", I discovered that heaven and earth became "Muh" altogether. When I uttered "Muh" I discovered that the whole universe became "Muh". When I uttered "Uhh", the whole universe became "Uhh". All things became settled in that experience. As you are, so is the universe. The whole universe responds to your act. When you go to the bathroom, you have the universe of the bathroom. You have no other universe than this. There is no origin and no occasion for the creation of a new universe other than this place and this occasion. Between heaven and earth there is only this event. We stand at the origin of the creation of the universe. There is nothing less and nothing more than this.

Our daily life is, thus, nothing but miracles.



Acceptance

I wonder why we are always avoiding and running away from the real purpose of life. I think is because of our anticipatory nature, a dream of something else, something better, than what one already is. This dream arises from our attachment to the ego. So we continue to roam about, motivated by our unconscious fixed idea that we dislike ourselves as we are.

Rain or shine, good or bad, hopeful or hopeless, satisfying or unsatisfying; we must give up such poor judgements of ourselves. Please, just sit and sit and sit. Do not have any satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Just do it without any consideration for the effect.

We are born anew only when we accept this actual world which is so miserable, imperfect, and rotten as the most perfect, irreplaceable, and infinite one.

I find infinite meaning in hunger and thirst, the shedding of blood and tears, sorrow and joy, birth and death, disease and old age. A world without any problems or suffering or contradictions is as dead as a world made of vinyl and plastics which neither change their forms nor decompose in the ground.

As the inevitable product of our ego, we now have wars, tragedies, precision instruments, political strategies, pollutions, multi-national corporations, and so on. This is the human world as it is.

In such a world we shed our blood and tears, often against our will. In such a world our life is unfolding itself perfectly. Thus we practice the Great Way.

I am sure that falling down into the karmic way is also meaningful for our lives. In order to wake up to our ultimate reality, we need first to lose our awareness of it. In order to find our true home, we must first travel the world. If we had continued to live in paradise forever, we would never have recognized the miracle of our life.

If you lament over your misfortunes, it is because you are looking at things from one point of view only. Misfortune and misery can actually bring about a different kind of happiness. Every experience should be welcomed because it is a chance for growth and self-realization, no matter how hard it may be. After you have endured many hardships, after you have made many mistakes, then you may say that you have actually lived.

You attempt to be better. In fact, there is no such thing as "better".

By doing yoga and zazen, we can begin to appreciate the real state of our body and mind, both of which are stiff and unpeaceful. We should not hate them. Please, let them be as they are. Taste their special, bitter taste

Your zazen may be painful. However, when you accept your suffering one hundred per cent, the suffering disappears. It is no longer suffering. The problem is in refusing to accept your reality, that is, the pain.

When we are awakened to the fact that this actual world is the perfect Life itself, we will discover a different way of wrestling with the pain and the difficulties. We will have a definite solution as to where to settle our minds and where to root ourselves in the world. Right at this point, I believe, there exists the foundation for a social revolution in which all human beings attain the Way.

As long as you do not refuse to accept a thing, or do not impose your own thinking out of convenience or because of some arbitrary judgement, the task you will have to do will be given to you before you ask for it. As long as you are ready to come and go as the occasion arises, you will no longer have a choice between what is planned and what is not planned. You should remain free from the practice of choosing, so as to keep yourself entirely open to accept whatever comes your way.

When we love someone, we are blind to his faults. When we hate someone, everything he does seems to be wrong. We see people according to our mental pictures, not as they really are.

Our acceptance or rejection of people and situations is unnecessary. It is something extra, like putting legs on a snake. Instead, accept things as they come and let them go as they go. In emptying our minds, we meet people as if we were meeting them for the first time in our lives. Here lies wisdom and true meeting.

Just live, accepting this given moment of true light. Here God is born, the Way is attained, love is received, eternity is opened. It is natural. When at last we have nothing, then everything is given. What lives now, that is Life.

Intention and effort

Why are we living in this world? What is the purpose of our lives? What are we seeking throughout the whole of our existence?

We are seeking real happiness. This is the fact. All of us are. And have we really achieved it? From morning till night, from the cradle to the grave, we are making plans and all sorts of efforts. For example, earning money, giving education to our children, trying to keep our bodies healthy... by every conceivable means, we are doing all that we can to achieve our final happiness. So, have you achieved it? Not yet? When?

In fact, we are not achieving it. All of the effort we make throughout the whole of our lives is in vain. Isn't it? If you could get it by your effort or will or planning, you should already have found your final happiness. But you haven't yet. Why?

From our earliest youth we have, unconsciously, always been forced to do things with intense effort in order to attain some specific purpose or position. Our parents and school teachers, all of them, encouraged us to become cleverer, stronger, bigger, and always more 'moral'. And again at our workplace everybody is competing to be better than the rest. In such manner we are swept forward into our graves. It is a completely senseless and stupid way to live.

Even when we do nothing, we are doing something. This is inevitable for all of us as long as we live. But the critical point is that we should try nothing. That is to say, we should do everything we need to do in our daily lives, intentionlessly. Having such an experience, I am aware that I am still living in the final peace, as I am here with you. After this realization we come to a very simple conclusion: we do not need to create any reason for living.

It is one's intention, one's mind, that obstructs the limitless light and freedom, though originally there is nothing but light and freedom.

You ask me how to get rid of expectations and intentions. In response to your question, I can sincerely say that there is no method, and that it is not a question of how to abandon them. It is your sitting itself that should be completely one with "It". Your daily actions must become one with It. You cannot depend on anyone to lead you. From here on, you must just sit until you fall from the cliff of the self. I cannot say any more than that, and you cannot know any more than that.

Each time I sit in zazen I am answering you. Can you feel that a thousand miles is one wind?

In my temple we have our own daily schedule of Zen and yoga, but no rules (and no money). It can be dissolved at any time: our life is always being changed by the ideas and experiences of our new members, because we have no fixed intentions or organized politics.

Without practice and effort, we cannot reach a peaceful state. We should realize that a peaceful state to be reached at the end is totally different from the state of laziness which may exist before setting out on a long journey of practice.

You have a burden in your mind as to whether you are making progress, or whether you are merely going round and round in circles. This is because you have expectations of going somewhere, getting somewhere, becoming something better. But what is progress anyway?

I do not mean to say that it is all right for you to stay as you are now. You must take each step anew, burning out your old life completely.

As long as we practise sitting in order to gain something special or to satisfy our own intentions or purposes, zazen is never deepened, nor is it possible to enter a state of samadhi.

The harder we try to clarify muddy water, the muddier it becomes. It is best to leave it alone.

When we do and finish the one thing that we are confronting now, without intention, we will surely find the next step naturally.

Ask for nothing, hope for nothing, be caught by nothing.

Ego and transcendence

Whether it is the "Infinite Light Supreme" or the "No Ego, No-Mind Nature" or the "Eco-cosmic Symphony in Harmony with the Wholistic Love of God"; whatever you may call it, it can become the domain of the ego. Once it becomes as such, it proves to have been nothing more than the structure of the ego from the very beginning. Whatever name it has, whatever faith, creed, or system of philosophy it may be, it is still within the realm of the ego. So long as one remains in this realm, one can never arrive at true emptiness.

Whatever I may do - such as Zen, yoga, or living my daily life - I do whole-heartedly, by throwing myself away and letting life take its natural course completely. But if my manner becomes habitual or self-righteous, then anything I do will be wrong. It will be good for nothing.

This advice is helpful to remind us always to make a fresh start, no matter how many years we have been practising. This is one of the fundamental admonitions we should keep in mind each day, whether we are at the top of the mountain or the bottom of the sea.

We human beings accept and lead our lives, completely unaware that we are the realization of some hundred million years, and that our lives are beyond the realm of possibility for water-dwelling creatures.

Out of the water and onto the land, we are now living lives that at one time seemed utterly impossible. How, then, can anyone conclude that we are incapable of actualizing somewhere which, from our present standpoint, also appears impossible? If we assume that a spiritual being will never emerge or enjoy living in some higher dimension beyond this materialistic earthly plane, such an assumption comes from the limitation of ourselves as earth-bound creatures. It is as if we deny the possibility of birds that fly, simply because we are fishes.

We act out of conviction, and therefore create strong, unfathomable sin. It is in this sense that our very conviction is the womb of our sin. Religions are not at all the exception to this case: rather, they are the greatest example.

Whether it is our faith or our philosophy, because of our firm convictions, we human beings create karma or sin. We must deeply observe this fact. After all, one's own conviction has trapped oneself more and more firmly into the darkness. Wars are the caused because of this and, ultimately, the destruction of the world.

Looking at the problems of the world, it is natural to feel great pain and sorrow, and to wonder what should be done to help. However, any action that does not come from your own original stillness will only increase those problems *ad infinitum*.

If you really wish to help others, you must be free from your emotional attachments to them. Such attachment is merely the product of your ego. Thus the best way to help others is to sit in emptiness; in no-mind meditation; in your own original peace. When you are in the depth of no-mind, you can see things as they are, without emotional distortions. Then you can truly be of service.

Our ideas may not always be the best; there may be sometimes better or more important ideas than our own. Therefore, we should be flexible, open to new encounters and new realizations. We should be able to give up our own ideas at any time. But when we keep strong attachments in our mind because of our earnest intention, it is extremely difficult for us to give them up. This is our common problem, isn't it? You have your ideas and another person has his ideas; therefore, we really need to see both sides clearly, like an empty mirror.

Even if we continue our discussion with another person for one thousand years, we may not reach any final agreement. But we should not try to get rid of our differences because they are the very things which teach us and enrich our lives.

We think that we are alive by doing whatever we like to do, with infinite freedom and unlimited creativity inherent in each of us. But actually we are confined and limited by a particular life-style, which arises because of our tastes and ideas, our habits and our self-centred tendencies. We bite at only a certain aspect of life, and cling to it like an insect.

As long as we hold onto our childish ego and are insistent on satisfying ourselves, the world will stay in as much of an uproar (on the human level) as ever. It only becomes worse and worse under human efforts. As things are invented through our worldly intentions and desires, everything remains in the endless circle of accumulating karma. This way of existence does not belong to Buddha nature, but to the infant one.

We are always thinking, "I am seeking the real Truth," but in fact aren't we merely asking for our own intellectual satisfaction?

How do we judge things? How do we distinguish between right and wrong? Our childhood experiences are always at work subconsciously, determining our vision of the world. In the very beginning we are as pure white paper: with age the paper becomes stained with this colour or that. Superficially we may accept new colours later on, but underneath we remain the colour of our childhood.

Thus, we must recognise deeply that there is nothing more doubtful than our own judgement. Our normal values, our ideas of good and evil - there is nothing more unreliable than these.

When we have thoroughly examined every aspect of our motivations and our values, then we may return to that original pure white paper. Such purity, such emptiness, is our innermost self, which existed before the birth of our parents. When all the stains and colourings have thus been stripped away, we are born anew, every moment.

We do not need to acquire or attain anything, because originally through our existence itself we are already whole. In the same way, the stars are enough in themselves; the stones on the beach are already perfect.

In order to understand this, try to remember who you were before you were born. Did you have property then, thoughts, ideas, plans, or philosophies? Of course not; you did not need such nonsense.

In this Way of life we have no other ideal than this matter and this occasion. We hold neither complaints nor demands. We do not say, "I wish things to be this way," or "I believe things should be that way," or "I need this or that."

When we are conscious of having grasped something and have a clear idea about it, we become the most rigid and the roughest at heart. We become trapped in the world of self-consciousness and self-satisfaction.

The call of God arises in the depth of our despair; when we are desperately ashamed of our existence, and feel miserable to have lost all that is firm within us...when we are at a total loss about what to do. At this moment the "self" can be ripped away.

To fail is to be born again.

To be free from ourselves is the true meaning of our practice. But if we try to do so through our own will, the effect will not be to free ourselves at all; rather, we become enslaved.

Therefore, you must consider this question: what is the deepest prayer which penetrates the whole of your life? Of course you do not need to be conscious of it, but in the undercurrent of your life, what prayer is always there? What is your life ultimately about? What is the real essence of your life? Please, look into yourself.

When worldly phenomena and passions lose the power to shake one fundamentally, one's determination and conviction can quietly dissolve. Then with no ego, no-mind, there awakens the great nature of Buddha; one's innermost essence, which is shared with all living beings.

There is no separation

As long as we adhere to the common outlook on existence, which is borne out of a sense of separation, the competition and cruel wars will continue. If we believe that we are separate, and if we are determined to survive, we will have no choice but to fight against one another.

Therefore, it is essential that we come to the radical understanding that we are all one and the same body, one and the same existence. This is the main reason for doing zazen and yoga meditation.

Every living creature is unique and meaningful, an indispensable link in the universal circle. When I observe closely a dry leaf, a blade of grass, an earthworm, I am struck by the deep wonder of the sacred universe. These small things may seem to be useless, but in truth nothing is useless. We are all descendents of the beginning of the universe.

Life can exist only in the indivisible flow between inner and outer, between self and other.

The whole universe can exist only in you, only in me, only in this encounter.

I am always being supported by you, by air, by water, by the sunlight, by people who live all over the world, by clothes, by soil, by the earth, stars, time, and space. In the end, the whole cosmos is allowing me to exist. You are also being supported by everything else in the universe. Therefore, we cannot consider ourselves to be separate; we cannot exist independently of any other thing.

Not even a single living creature can exist without the sacrifice of other creatures. In consequence, nobody can live in a happy-go-lucky fashion, and living itself becomes very fragile and doubtful.

The violence you speak of is not anywhere else but in our minds, in which we separate ourselves from others and from the world. When we discover the truth that we are the one same existence with everything in the cosmos, we no longer create problems in our minds about violence. This insight is the solution of the problem of violence at its deepest root.

Compassion does not arise from our human emotional level. From that level we have human love, anger, and hatred, which in turn cause conflicts and wars; all because we believe that we are separate individuals. Only when we are free of the human emotional level, and in the depth of emptiness, can our true compassionate nature, which is the deepest layer of our existence, begin to awaken. Otherwise we are, in fact, always full of desire. And we cannot have both compassion and desire, can we? It is impossible.

When we are engaged by our superficial consciousness, and busy with our ordinary life, we act as individuals and perceive everyone as being separate.

But sometimes, on special occasions, our ordinary consciousness lets go of us for a moment. Then we become aware of our deeper self, which is normally unconscious. Here, in the depth of our being, there is no time, no space, no separation: then we are one with everything.

This is the deepest essence of our being, and the source of all compassion. We call it Buddha nature.

Each of us is the whole cosmos.

If you really see the limitation of individual existence, then you can also truly understand the limitless life contained in your existence.

If you are really yourself, you are you and the whole cosmos. The whole limitless cosmos is within you.

Listen to the birds singing outside. But they are not outside. There is no border between them and us: no separation. Everything, all living creatures, and the whole cosmos are the same body. We are not individuals.

Look at my hands. They appear to be separate, but in reality they are not. Both are part of the same body.

When I sit, I am the tip of the iceberg. All of my ancestors are actualizing here within me. Everything is actualizing here. So, when you experience a deep transformation, the whole cosmos is also changed: because truly there is no separation.

Zazen

Zazen is an unknown, original vast field which no-one has ever explored. This is new, virgin soil. We know nothing about zazen. I am not your teacher, but as one of your friends I will try to tell you of my way of daily practice.

You may have many ideas in your mind. First of all, it is necessary to be free of them. Zazen is not a way to gain great knowledge: rather, it is a way to become humble.

Zen is something to be practised in our daily life as air is breathed by anyone at any time. Zen is nothing but the total living of this encounter at each moment by throwing away our preconceived ideas and our plans. In other words, the ego disappears and one is enlivened here, doing totally only one thing at this very moment, with no relation to the self-consciousness of the mind. This can be done and is done by anyone who is willing to do it unconditionally. This is the deepest root and foundation of human life: it has nothing to do with following a religious sect.

Zazen is not a way to get a peaceful state of mind, and we should not indulge in it as such.

Zazen is just the open way to be here now, simply, without making any effort.

Zazen is a primal, fundamental practice, based on the trinity of body, breathing, and mind. The true zazen won't open to us until our sitting posture and breathing are properly adjusted, and the mind is let go of.

You speak of a breathing method and say, "It might be useful," but what is useful? The concept of usefulness can only exist in a world of techniques, and Zen is not a technique. It is the practice of the Buddha, the realization of the Way. When you are aiming for a goal, you consider the question of usefulness. In zazen, however, we do not need to progress efficiently towards any goal. Therefore, there is no method in Zen. Only sitting exists and it is everything.

How can we attain the Buddha's Way? Do you have some special method to attain it? Is that why we do zazen, yoga, chanting, running? No, these are not ways to attain it. They are, each of them, Buddha's life itself. They are the ultimate attainment in themselves, not ways or means to reach some other goal.

"Concentration" implies that the mind is focused, like a lens. We do not seek that quality in meditation: instead, it is better to be as an empty mirror. When you try to concentrate, you need to make a special effort, but when you are like a mirror you do not need any effort.

What is it to be alert? True alertness is the state of selflessness in which one is instantly and directly able to respond. This is the way things are reflected in a mirror, just exactly as they are. If one has something in one's mind, the outside world will not be reflected perfectly, nor will it be possible to respond at once. The practice of zazen is a way of realizing this truth: that the real acceptance of and response to the world has nothing to do with one's own judgement.

There is no special way to realize the truth. We are already arriving at the final truth now, step by step, each one of us. There is nothing extra, and no technique, to reach Here Now. This is zazen.

Even if we sit quietly, we can by no means be thoroughly free from all ideas and thoughts. A stream of thoughts flows through our mind, one following the other, and we repeat the ups and downs, unable to extricate ourselves from the tyrannical hold of joy, sorrow, and desires.

However long we may sit in such a state of mind, it is nothing but a waste of life.

When you sit, do not think at all about becoming enlightened, becoming No-Mind, becoming Buddha, or about what one should do in order to become a certain way. This is all unnecessary. One does not seek anything. Leave alone all rambling thoughts and noise. One neither notices them nor allows them to become a nuisance. One lets them flow away and vanish, just as clouds are blown away in the open sky. If you do not mind about them, they are not a problem. One deals with none of them.

Just devote yourself to sitting. No matter what ideas or thoughts may come and go in your mind, give no heed and resign yourself to sitting. In due course your sitting will get spontaneously adapted to sitting itself. Once your sitting is settled in Za (sitting), your-mind becomes free from all ideas and thoughts and you are wholly absorbed in sitting.

As long as we think or say "No-Mind", we are not in the true state of no-mind. If we are one with it, there is no distinction between mind and no-mind. What remains is pure action.

To expect or wish for some change can be a big hindrance in your practice. To practice zazen is to abandon the self who is pleased or disappointed at the progress or change through zazen. It is a total new birth in each sitting.

There is a break between God and man when man, by his own intention, acts in a self-centred way. If a sitting, or whatever it may be, is done out of your own ego, it can never be called zazen. To sit, only to sit, without paying any attention to oneself, is the real sitting.

When you do zazen, just do zazen. That's all. When you read a book, just read the book. That's all. This is the only way to end your deluding passions. Can you live any other way?

Even if you have practised zazen for some ten years, you may still fall into the trap of your ego and be crushed at the last moment. Actually, you have been practising zazen up until that moment only as an appendage (Zen plastic surgery, Zen make-up, decorative Zen). You have been doing nothing but playing snugly and comfortably for the past ten years. If you do not investigate the living Zen of life's actual struggle day and night, and if this living Zen doesn't always die and come into being anew, then it is a false belief. All you have practised is of no use.

There are many professional priests who specialize in being deeply asleep; who are stuck in traditional ways of practice. Among those practising zazen, there are quite a number of people who sit merely out of habit; who are, in other words, asleep. Once we become aware of this fact, we are inclined to rebel against the tradition and its discipline. However, in the resulting "free" practice of zazen, we tend to stray from the path - we end up living in self-drunkenness and dying in dreams.

Instead, try to find a way to go more deeply into the heart of the formal discipline of zazen, thus becoming more and more aware of yourself. This is what is called practice. Practice is not for falling asleep or cultivating some habitual routine: practice is for entering the Infinite Way, for harmonizing ourselves with the flow of life. It is a way of letting go of our discriminative judgement, a way of forgetting ourselves. On this path there is neither complaining nor reasoning.

The formal disciplines (of sitting, posture, daily practice) are not ultimately disciplines at all. They are the fruits of human wisdom; the abyss, the infinite, the void.

It is impossible for any one person to understand or tackle all of the important problems in the world. You must decide what is the most important, the most urgent, for you. For me, zazen is the most fundamental task in response to the heavy problems in our modern world.

We do not need a particular time in order to have space in our hearts for calling back the real human wisdom. It is enough if we sit in calmness for a short time each day. Being busy is different from having no room in our hearts. Therefore, if you do sit, you will find that you can sit. However busy one may be, one eats and sleeps - you can sit during those times.

You can perform zazen correctly only through an honest daily life. If you nurture zazen in a special way separate from daily life, its base will be disorderly and unsound. It's a lie if zazen is not exactly life.

No matter how hard we try to improve our sitting, we fail if, in our everyday life, which is the mother's body, we are pointless and loose.

Try to combine your breathing with the rhythm of the universe. It will cause you to awaken to the truth that there is nothing but the breath of the cosmos within you, coming from an immaculate origin.

A true Zen practitioner is a person who sees reality, who is deeply related to the world - to people, animals, plants, rocks, the sea - and through this connection is reborn with each encounter.

In real sitting, Life is flowing calmly and deeply and all in one direction. This the moment when man has the most beautiful face.

We do not try to gain enlightenment. We just leave our body and mind in the void, and sit and sit wholeheartedly and are Buddha ourselves right here now. We need nothing other than this.

When we sit firmly and unconditionally for a while, we realize our original simplicity. At this moment we can see clearly that we need very little in our ordinary life. Seeing this, we become purified.

Please, be free from your zazen!

When you are really free from your zazen, you can do sitting and daily moving zazen accordingly.

Carried by the current of deep life, we are naturally led to sit. Here is the opening of a new encounter in sitting. This sitting is no longer your own.

The form of your zazen should be like a mountain.

Zazen begins only at the point where you cast off everything.

Through my brief experience, I am aware that this way of sitting is the essence of human wisdom.

If you continue your zazen practice for one thousand years, you will lose your special idea or specific direction and, after all, you will get nothing.

The Master

There is nothing more obstinate, narrower, and smaller than seeking the Way in one's own way. There is nothing more miserable than that. Has my "self" been completely battered down from the depth of my existence? Or do I remain the monarch of all I survey, living in the safety zone where I preserve what I have sensed through my consciousness? This reflection on myself, this most important examination, comes not from myself, but from Buddha. Everything depends on this turning point.

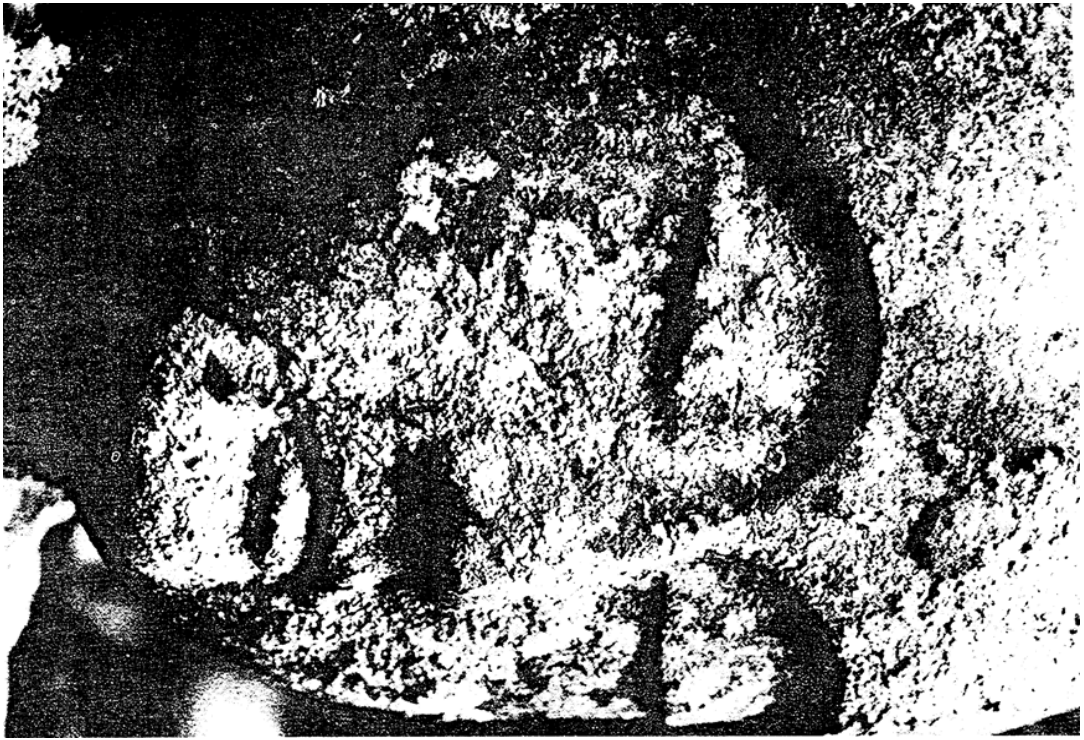
Why are we here together, myself with my brothers and sisters? We are praying for the ultimate divine Light and responding to the quiet voice calling from the abyss: thus are we here.

It is not I who gives the light. I am nothing more than a midwife or a guide. Now I will guide, together with you, along the road to the spring at the top of the mountain.

It is you who must walk the path. There are no maps, and you cannot progress unless you are willing to walk by yourself: unless you take that one step further by yourself, you cannot get there.

This kind of journey does not take us to a different place: this is the inner journey for us to get home.

You let go of your ego and look at yourself. There you will find grace, an open road, and somebody who is looking for the same answer.



Because all that I say has already become nothing but impure principles or doctrines, I fall into a deadlock and cannot help but give up everything and just sit motionless in zazen.

About Hogen Daido Yamahata

Hogen Yamahata (generally known as Hogen-san) is a Zen Master in the tradition of the Soto sect of Zen Buddhism in Japan. He began practising zazen (sitting meditation) while still in high school. He had, even as a teenager, a very deep question about the nature of life and death; and therefore sought out religious figures in an effort to find an answer.

Hogen-san's quest took him all over Japan. He went on foot from monastery to monastery, carrying a begging bowl, searching for his answer. Eventually he encountered a Zen monk who impressed him most deeply. As Hogen later explained, it seemed that the monk had a soft light around him. Hogen stepped forward and asked his question. In reply, the monk took Hogen by the shoulders, shook him fiercely, and shouted, "This is it!!". Hogen had found the man who was to become his Master.

Even then, Hogen-san's Zen training was not a straight path. In 1962, he spent one year alone in an abandoned monastery in the mountains, with nothing but zazen and begging for support. Thereafter he entered a Rinzai

temple in Kyoto, and undertook severe training as a complete beginner in Zen.

Finally, some 15 years ago, Hogen-San found a small empty monastery called Chogen-ji, near Mt. Fuji. He has lived there ever since, maintaining his daily practise of zazen, yoga, mantra-running, chanting, and manual labour.

Living with him in the temple are his disciples, as well as his wife and their four children.

In recent years Hogen-san has begun to travel extensively throughout the world in order to lead meditation retreats (sesshins). His yearly schedule includes visits to England, Ireland, Norway, Holland, France, Portugal, Spain, Greece, Australia, the United States, and Israel.

Hogen calls himself a "crazy monk". Indeed, one's first encounter with him is a shock. He has a youthful build, and looks little more than half his true age. Instead of a "Great Master", one is confronted with a truly unassuming individual who is quick to laugh and make jokes. And instead of a holy ascetic, there is someone who loves lobster madras and a pint of guinness. In fact,

in the midst of all the light-heartedness, it is easy to forget the immense power which Hogen-san possesses.

His power has nothing to do with manipulation or domination; in fact, he himself seems unaware of his enormous influence. Still, it is true to say that the lives which are touched by Hogen-san are transformed. In the moment of his total attention, and moreover of his complete and unconditional acceptance of each individual just as he or she is, anything seems suddenly possible.

Cover: Details of Zen circle calligraphy by Hogen Yamahata.

Photograph of Hogen-san, p. 135, by Jesus Martinez.

Photograph of Japanese stone Buddha, p.133, supplied by Hogen-san.

The Heart Sutra is chanted as part of Zen practice. It conveys the experience of the meditational insight, the Heart of (Zen) life. It concludes with the following mantra:

GYA TEI GYA TEI HA RA GYA TEI

HA RA SO GYA TEI BO JI SO WA KA

This means, *"Gone, gone, gone to the Other Shore, landed at the Other Shore"*.

This is the Other Shore. This is the moment of our final destination, the ultimate goal of all creation, the conclusion of all history and all life. In your kitchen, at your work, wherever you are, you have arrived at your final goal. Intellectually you may think of some future, but in truth this moment is the only reality. You are the true life and have nothing more to seek.

- Hogen-San