

Class 1: Sleeves Tied Back

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This week we are going to begin taking a look at a text by Dogen zenji called “Tenzo kyokun” or “Instructions to the Chief Cook”. It will probably take us several classes to work with this text and even so we are just going to go through it in a fairly introductory manner because this is a text which was composed separately from the 95 chapters of the “Shobogenzo”. It is one of the texts contained within the “Eihei Shingi”, or “Monastic Rules” which Dogen zenji composed for his monks at Eihei-ji and so a lot of the content of the text is intended directly for monks and priests and so on and so forth and their particular lifestyle and their particular way of doing things. But nonetheless this text has turned out to be one of the more “popular” of Dogen zenji’s texts, shall we say, in the west, along with Genjokoan, Fukanzazengi and Uji. Several translations of “Tenzo kyokun” have come out and so obviously people seem to find something in the text; and what is in the text are instructions on how to cook as practice, how to take care of oneself and others and of what one is doing as practice.

Practice is concerned with realizing Buddha Nature, realizing that we have Buddha Nature, and completely Waking Up to Buddha Nature, completely manifesting Buddha Nature, leaving no gaps in our practice. So often we feel that only sitting is practice or perhaps kinhin is practice, or perhaps chanting is practice. But we breathe in and we breathe out and we move. If we live a life of practice, then this is practice.

Within the Jewel Net of Indra, within the luminous interdependence of all that is, all of this coming and going, nothing is separate from anything else and yet, everything is distinct and vibrant and clear. Because it is distinct and vibrant and clear it shows its Face^[fn]Roshi is referring to “honrai memmuku”, the Original Face of Awareness.^[/fn] clearly. And by looking into the Face of what this moment shows us we recognize this Face to be our own face and any task that we do brings this Face before us. In the practice of this Way there is nothing which can be left out and there is nothing which can be left undone. And so a lot of this text is concerned with very precise ways of doing things and it is also concerned with telling the tenzo, or the chief cook, how important it is to plan out just precisely how much food will be needed for the monks, how many monks there are in the Zendo; if there is anyone in the sick room; are there any visiting monks, and so on and so forth so that there will be enough food with no wastage.

This can contradict some of the more popular notions of what Zen practice is about. Zen practice is about being spontaneous and just doing whatever comes up in the moment – knocking over tables and laughing madly and so on and so forth. And these romantic notions can be quite attractive, especially when we are trying to escape our own responsibilities. We would like to validate this escape by pretending that it is Zen, following the Dao, the Way of Zen. The Way of the Dao, the Way of this moment is to complete this moment. If you breathe in, you have to breathe out. If you take one step, you take another step. And so you don’t leave things undone; you don’t leave things that others will have to take responsibility for because within this Jewel Net of Indra you are not alone.

This reminds me of something I was reading just recently about certain actions that occurred around 1945. Some scientists had fashioned an object named “Trinity”. Trinity was the first atomic bomb. The scientists had had quite a good time working on Trinity. There were all sorts of sweet technical details to work out, simply fascinating work. When they were finished they weren’t sure whether this thing was going to work or

not. So as the test date drew near, there were all kinds of speculations as to what might happen. Perhaps it wouldn't go off. There seemed to be an outside chance that an atomic explosion would cause the atmosphere to catch on fire and the entire planet would burn. But they thought they'd take that risk because they wanted to see if it would work. One scientist was taking side bets as to whether the State of New Mexico would be vaporized.

Perhaps it is me, but this seems to be a little short-sighted. But how often do we do this, do we do something regardless of the effect that it will have on others or on ourselves? How often do we do things which, later on, we are ashamed of? Why would we do something that would embarrass us? But we do these things.

The law of karma, the law of cause and effect holds. (Although if one looks closer at the law of cause and effect, if one looks completely at this whole moment, one recognizes completely the Great Mirror Wisdom and sees that even cause and effect doesn't hold because actually nothing has ever happened. There is just simply this seamless web.) Yet still cause and effect hold. A moment of ignorance makes room for more moments of ignorance. The more dreams you allow yourself, the more that you dream; the more that you steal, the easier that you make it for yourself to steal. Why would you do such a thing? Why would we limit ourselves in these ways? And yet we do, forgetting that if we breathe in, we have to breathe out, we have to complete everything that we do.

So, in practice, we even have formal ways of taking meals known as "oryoki", in which there are no bowls or chopsticks or spoons that a practitioner leaves behind for someone else who has to clean up after them. When we finish sitting we fluff up the zafu and rest it against the wall. When we see someone, we look into their eyes.

So with this introduction we can begin to look at this text:

From ancient times communities of the practice of the Way of Awake Awareness have had six office holders who, as disciples of the Buddha, guide the activities of Awakening the community. Amongst these, the tenzo bears the responsibility of caring for the community's meals. The Zen Monastic Standards states, "The tenzo functions as the one who makes offerings with reverence to the monks."

Since ancient times this office has been held by realized monks who have the mind of the Way or by senior disciples who have roused the Way-seeking mind. This work requires exerting the Way. Those entrusted with this work but who lack the Way-seeking mind will only cause and endure hardship despite all their efforts. The Zen Monastic Standards states, "Putting the mind of the Way to work, serve carefully varied meals appropriate to each occasion and thus offer everyone to practice without hindrance."

In times past such great masters as Guishan Lingyu, Dongshan Shouchu, and others have served in this post. Although this is a matter of preparing and serving meals, the tenzo is not just "the cook."

So first of all, a large monastery has six officers, six people put in charge of various functions. Besides the teacher there is the administrator or director and his assistant, a treasurer, a practice supervisor, a cook and a work leader. None of these are simply people working on jobs. These are people fulfilling Buddha activity, the activity of Buddha, the activities of the monastery, except that these positions were held by accomplished monks who have Way-seeking mind. We have had classes on this Way-seeking mind of bodaishin. Bodaishin, this Way-seeking mind, is the beginning point of practice, when we have some glimpse, some possibility of

recognizing some innate dignity, wisdom, compassion, and all-embracing humour within ourselves. This is actually the starting point of our practice. We might be quite confused; we might have a great deal of suffering that we hope practice will take care of, that practice will help us to clarify it, and this possibility of clarification is the beginning point of practice: The recognition that there is something wrong and that it can somehow be righted is the Way-seeking mind. But the Way-seeking mind does not seek the Way elsewhere; it seeks the Way within this moment, within this action. Each action is the Way-seeking mind. The full realization of this Way-seeking mind is Ocean Seal Samadhi,[fn]Kai-in Zanmai.[/fn] is entering into the whole moment. It is complete kensho. And yet it doesn't end, this complete kensho doesn't end. The Way-seeking mind does not end. Although it does not look for the Way elsewhere, it does not blind itself to the fact that the Way continues endlessly. So the Way continually seeks the Way. Kensho is seeing into our own nature. Waking Up to this inherent Buddha Nature is Waking Up to the possibility of Waking Up and Waking Up again and again and again, moment after moment, action after action, completely seeing Complete Nature moment after moment. Not stopping with feeling better, not stopping with clarity, not stopping with compassion or all-embracing skillful means but continuing: continually penetrating the ten directions and the three times, seeing this coming and going, recognizing time and space and selves to be merely the compilation of intelligence, the deportment of this bodymind, that this bodymind is the Way itself. Each action is the Way itself. Each action is the Way-seeking mind. To truly fulfill the function of tenzo, one must have such a mind.

When I was in Song China, during spare moments I enquired of many elder monks who had served in the various offices about their experience. Their words to me were from the bone and marrow of the Awakened Ancestors who, having attained the Way, have passed it through the ages. We should carefully study the Zen Monastic Standards to understand the responsibility of the tenzo and also carefully consider the words of these senior monks. The cycle of one day and night begins following the noon meal. At this time the tenzo should go to the administrator and assistant administrator and procure the rice, vegetables, and other ingredients for the next day's morning and noon meals. Having received these things, you must care for them as you would the pupils of your own eyes. Thus Zen master Baoning Renyong said, "Care for the monastery's materials as if they were your eyes." The tenzo handles all food with respect, as if it were for the emperor; both cooked and uncooked food should be cared for in this way.

Following this all of the officers gather in the kitchen building in order to carefully consider the next days meals with regard to flavourings, vegetables to be used, and the kind of rice-gruel. The Zen Monastic Standards states, "In deciding the morning and noon meals, the amount of food and number of dishes, the tenzo should consult the other officers. The six officers are the administrator, assistant administrator, treasurer, disciplinarian, tenzo, and head caretaker. After the menu is decided post it on boards by the abbot's residence and the study hall." Following this the morning gruel may be prepared.

Do not just leave washing the rice or preparing the vegetables to others but use your own hands, your own eyes, your own sincerity. Do not fragment your attention but see what each moment calls for; if you take care of just one thing then you will be careless of the other. Do not miss the opportunity of offering even a single drop into the ocean of merit or a grain atop the mountain of the roots of beneficial activity.

The Zen Monastic Standards states, "If the six flavours are not in harmony and three virtues are lacking, then the tenzo is not truly serving the community."

It says do not give away your opportunity. Each task that is presented to us is an opportunity to complete this task, to complete this moment, to realize this Buddha nature. So if we are given something to do this is not a burden, it is an opportunity. If someone yells at us this is an opportunity for us to see how we are at that moment and to recognize their mind as our own mind and somehow to evoke the dignity of Buddha nature within that moment. This is an opportunity, not an attack. When someone is hungry, to feed them is an opportunity, an opportunity to extend ourselves past our usual limits to enter completely into the real world.

Be careful of sand when you wash the rice, be careful of the rice when you throw out the sand. Take continuous care and the three virtues will be naturally complete and the six flavours harmonious.

The six tastes are sweet, salty, sour, so on and so forth.[fn]Bitter, sour, sweet, hot, mild, salty.[/fn] The three virtues are mildness, purity and dignity. So the food that you present to the monks is not slop. You treat each vegetable, each grain of rice completely, using it as an offering, an offering of your own practice to those in the Zendo who are practising. When we chant our brief form of the Meal Chant we go through the five reflections:

*This meal arises from the labour of all beings,
May we remember this offering.
Greed arises from self-cherishing,
May we be free in moderation.
This offering sustains us, gives us strength
May we be grateful.
We use this strength
And attain the Way,
Prajnaparamita!*

And so there is this sense of responsibility even in eating, in even being able to take a breath. Because all sentient beings throughout all times and all directions are sustaining and feeding and nursing and in turn, you feed and nourish and nurse them.

Wash the sand when you examine the rice. Wash the rice when you throw away the sand. Be careful.

There is the story of Huineng and Hongren. When Huineng, the Sixth Ancestor was studying at Hongren's monastery, his main work there was to mill the rice. And after he'd shown some promise Hongren approached him and asked him what he was doing and he said, "I am sifting the rice. I am sifting the chaff from the rice."

And Hongren said, "Is it complete?"

Huineng said, "I am still sifting the rice".

He was still completing his practice with each grain of rice, still clarifying his mind moment to moment to moment. Although he'd shown great promise he did not take this promise as a credential, he continued his practice through the work of sifting grains of rice.

Xuefeng once practiced as tenzo under Zen master Dongshan. Once when he was washing rice, Dongshan said, "Do you wash the sand away from the rice, or the rice away from the sand?"

Xuefeng said, "I wash them both away together?"

Dongshan said, "Then what will the community eat?"

Xuefeng overturned the washing bowl.

Dongshan said, "You should go and study with someone else. Soon."

Senior students, from ancient times, always practiced with the mind which finds the Way and so how can we of later generations not do the same? Those of old tell us, "For the tenzo, the mind which finds the Way actualizes itself through working with rolled up sleeves."

Working with the sleeves tied back. – A monk's koromo, the formal robes, have very, very long sleeves which tend to get in your way, knocking over incense burners and so on and so forth, truly helping one to be quite mindful. But in order to do any task, even to write a letter and certainly to work in the kitchen, you draw the sleeves back, you tie them behind your back so that they stay. So this is truly rolling up your sleeves and getting to work.

You yourself should examine the rice and sand so that rice is not thrown out with sand. The Zen Monastic Standards states, "In preparing the food, the tenzo is responsible for examining it to ensure that it is clean." Do not waste grains of rice when draining off the rinsing water. In olden times a cloth bag was used as a filter when draining the rinse water. When the rice is placed in the iron cooking pot, take care of it so that rats do not fall into it or idlers just hang around poking at it.

After cooking the vegetables for the morning meal and before preparing rice and soup for the noon meal bring together the rice pots and other utensils and make sure that everything is well-ordered and clean. Put whatever goes to a high place in a high place and whatever goes to a low place in a low place so that, high and low, everything settles in the place appropriate for it.

There is no "high" or "low", one just puts things where they go. No vegetable is better than another vegetable. No person is better than another person. No moment is better than another moment because it is always this moment and whoever you meet, you meet this person.

Chopsticks for vegetables, ladles, and all other tools should be chosen with great care, cleaned thoroughly, and placed well.

After this, begin work on the coming day's meals. Remove any weevils, lentils, husks, sand, and pebbles carefully. While you are selecting the rice and vegetables, the tenzo's assistants should chant the sutras to the shining being of the hearth. When preparing the vegetables or ingredients for the soup which have been received from the office do not disparage the quantity or quality but instead handle everything with great care. Do not despair or complain about the quantity of the materials. Throughout the day and night, practice the coming and going of things as arising in the mind, the mind turning and displaying itself as things.

Sincerity. Sincerity is the root of our practice. It is how we practice, body, breath, sincere with the breath, working with the koan, questioning sincerely and completely and whole-heartedly. This one word: "sincerity".

Put together the ingredients for the morning meal before midnight and begin cooking after midnight. After the morning meal, clean the rice cooking pots and soup pots for the noon meal. The tenzo should always be present at the sink when the rice is being soaked and the water measured. Watching with clear eyes, ensure that not a single grain is wasted. Washing it well, place it in the pots, make a fire, and boil it. An old teacher said, "Regard the cooking pot as your own head, the water your own life-blood." Place the cooked rice in bamboo baskets in summer and wooden serving buckets in winter and set these out on trays. While the rice is boiling, cook the soup and vegetables.

The tenzo supervises this personally. This is true whether the tenzo works alone or has assistants to tend the fire or prepare the utensils. Recently, Zen monasteries have developed positions such as rice-cook and soup-cook who work under the tenzo. The tenzo is always responsible for whatever is done. In olden times the tenzo did everything without any assistance.

In preparing food never view it from the perspective of usual mind or on the basis of feeling-tones. Taking up a blade of grass erect magnificent monasteries, turn the Wheel of Reality within a grain of dust. If you only have wild grasses with which to make a broth, do not disdain them. If you have ingredients for a creamy soup do not be delighted. Where there is no attachment, there can be no aversion. Do not be careless with poor ingredients and do not depend on fine ingredients to do your work for you but work with everything with the same sincerity. If you do not do so then it is like changing your behaviour according to the status of the person you meet; this is not how a student of the Way is.

Strengthen your resolve and work whole-heartedly to surpass the monks of old and be even more thorough than those who have come before you. Do this by trying to make as fine a soup for a few cents as the ancients could make a coarse broth for the same amount.

The difficulty is that present and the past are separated by a gulf as great as between sky and earth and no one now can be compared to those of ancient times. However, through complete practice of seeing the nature of things you will be able to find a way. If this isn't clear to you it is because your thoughts speed about like a wild horse and feeling-tones careen about like a monkey in the trees. Let the monkey and horse step back and be seen clearly and the gap is closed naturally. In this way, turn things while being turned by them.

When you are practising there is the wild horse and there is the monkey, galloping and climbing throughout the bodymind. You don't whip them, you don't beat them. You simply ask them to look at themselves, to recognize themselves and through this comes sincerity; through this comes clarity; through this comes whole-heartedness.

Clarify and harmonize your life without losing the single Eye which sees the context or the two eyes which recognize the details.

The single Eye is the eye which sees oneness. The two eyes see multiplicity – see the difference between a

grain of rice and a lentil.

Taking up a vegetable leaf manifests the Buddha's sixteen-foot golden body; take up the sixteen-foot golden body and display it as a vegetable leaf. This is the power of functioning freely as the awakening activity which benefits all beings.

Having prepared the food, put everything where it belongs. Do not miss any detail. When the drum sounds or the bells are struck, follow the assembly for morning zazen and in the evening go to the master's quarters to receive teachings.

And so the tenzo has an awful lot to do and yet does not neglect his own practice.

When you return to the kitchen, count the number of monks present in the Monks' Hall; try closing your eyes. Don't forget about the senior monks and retired elders in their own quarters or those who are sick. Take into account any new arrivals in the entry hall or anyone who is on leave. Don't forget anyone. If you have any questions consult the officers, the heads of the various halls, or the head monk.

When this is done, calculate just how much food to prepare: for each grain of rice needed, supply one grain. One portion can be divided into two halves, or into thirds or fourths. If two people tend to each want a half-serving, then count this as the quantity for a single full serving. You must know the difference that adding or subtracting one serving would make to the whole.

If the assembly eats one grain of rice from Luling, the tenzo is the monk Guishan. In serving a grain of that rice, the tenzo sees the assembly become the ox. The ox swallows Guishan. Guishan herds the ox.

There are references to two koan here. Rice from Luling is a very expansive and wonderful, tasty kind of rice and in answer to the question, "What is the meaning of Buddha Dharma?" one Zen master says, "What is the price of rice from Luling?"

The other koan involves Guishan who told his monks that in his next lifetime he would come back as a water buffalo. On one side of the buffalo's chest would be written, "I am the monk Guishan". So at that moment, is it Guishan or is it a water buffalo? The water buffalo looks at Guishan; Guishan looks at the water buffalo. There is complete mutuality when the tenzo brings in the rice, serves the monks, he sees the water buffalo, he sees Guishan. When the monks look at the tenzo they see the water buffalo and they see Guishan. The monks see the monk. Mutuality sees mutuality in the rice.

Are your measurements right or are they off? Have those you consulted been correct in their counting? Review this as best as you can and then direct the kitchen accordingly. This practice of effort after effort, day after day, should not be forgotten.

When a patron visits the monastery and makes a donation for the noon meal, discuss this with the other officers. This is the tradition of Zen monasteries. Other offerings to be distributed should also be discussed with the other officers. In this way, the responsibilities of others are not disrupted nor your own neglected.

And so I believe we will leave the text at this point, but there is still quite a bit to go. Are there any questions or any comments that anyone would like to make about this text or any related matter?

I did not think there would be.

Sometimes this kind of text can seem not quite as exciting as Uji or Genjokoan, and yet in many ways, simple and straightforward instructions like these are the most precious because they are the ones so difficult to complete. He is saying sit there and feel your breath. It sounds very simple but it involves the entire bodymind. Every action involves your entire bodymind. We can hear about various koan and so on and so forth, but perhaps the most precious instruction we might receive from our teacher is how to walk during kinhin, how to bow. Completely bowing, completely walking, completely sitting, completely cooking, completely eating. This is the completion of the Buddha Way which never ends and always completes itself.

And so we will end with gassho.