

# Genjokoan: The Question of Our Lives

by Eihei Dogen zenji

translated by Anzan Hoshin roshi

and Yasuda Joshu Dainen roshi

*[excerpted from the forthcoming book Dogen: Zen Writings on the Practice of Realization]*

When all things are seen as Awakened Experience then enlightenment and delusion, practices, life and death, Awakened Ones and sentient beings can be clearly discerned. When the vast expanse of experiences are met without self then there are no enlightenment, and no delusion, no practices, no life, no death, no Awakened Ones, no sentient beings. The Way of Awake Awareness transcends nothing or something. Thus, there are delusion and enlightenment, life and death, Awakened Ones and sentient beings. However, it is like this: despite our grasping flowers wither, despite our irritation weeds flourish.

To practice by pushing ahead, meeting the numberless experiences as a self and witnessing them thus, is delusion. When the vast expanse of experiences move forward and practice and realize the self, this is Awakening.

Awakened Ones enlighten delusion, sentient beings are deluded within enlightenment. Further, there is enlightenment before enlightenment, there is delusion within delusion. When you truly see yourself as Awakened, you need not see yourself as Awakened. The realized Awakened One realizes daily life as Awake Awareness.

With the single bodymind see forms, with the single bodymind hear sounds, and they are intimately understood. This is not like reflections within a mirror or the moon in water; with these one side is in plain view, the other is hidden.

Studying the Way of Awakening is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. Forgetting the self is being awakened by the vast expanse of experiences. Being awakened by the vast expanse, one's bodymind is dropped right through and so are those of others.

No sign of enlightenment can be found and this signlessness presents itself continuously. At first, when you seek the truth, you have separated yourself from where it is. Finally, when you have received true transmission, at that instant you are the original you.

Riding in a boat and watching the shore, it looks as if it is the shore that's moving. Look directly at the boat, and you'll know that it's the boat that moves. In the same way, if you examine and discern the numberless experiences while confused about your own bodymind you will think that your mind and its nature are permanent. Be intimate with all that you do, return to the original you, and it will be clear that the numberless experiences are without self.

Firewood becomes ashes, it does not become wood again. Don't think that wood is first, ashes after. Your understanding must penetrate that although firewood is firewood, it has a before and after; that having this before, this after, it is free of these. Ashes are ashes and have a before and after. Wood doesn't become wood again after being ashes and when you die, you are dead, you do not return to life. Life does not become death; this is the true teaching of the Awakened One. Thus, life is beginningless. Death does not become life;

this is the true teaching of the Awakened One. Thus, death is endless. Life is life, death is death and are each in their own place like winter and spring. Winter does not become spring, spring does not become winter.

Waking up is like the moon reflecting upon water; the moon isn't wet, the water isn't stirred. With all of its radiance, the moon can be seen even in a puddle. Full moon, vast sky, can both be reflected in a single drop of dew hung from a blade of grass. Awakening does not obstruct you just as the moon doesn't ruffle the water. You can no more grasp at Awakening than the dew drop can restrain the full moon, the vast sky. As deep as the drop is, so high is the moon. As to how long such a reflection will last, just consider the water's depth, the moon's light.

When truth has not yet filled the bodymind, it seems you're bursting over. When bodymind is one with it, you can see what's missing.

Sailing on the ocean with no land in sight, looking in the four directions, all you can see is the round ocean. Actually, the ocean isn't round or square, it has myriad qualities like a palace, like an ornament. It only seems round as far as we can see at that brief time. View the vast expanse of experiences in this way.

Life itself is enlightenment itself and has many aspects but you can only see what your understanding of practice allows. To appreciate the vast expanse of experiences, understand that oceans and mountains may seem round or square but there are details to still be seen and that there are whole world-systems in all directions. Your immediate circles of concern are of no account. What is demonstrated itself right here beneath your feet and in a single drop of water.

No matter how far a fish swims, it doesn't come to the end of the ocean. No matter how far a bird flies, it doesn't come to the end of the sky. Since the beginning, fish and birds have always been one with their elements. When there is a great need, a great use appears. When there is a small need, a small use appears. Thus the full use of things is always as it is. Wherever something is, it covers its own ground. If a bird cut itself off from the sky it would die. If a fish cut itself off from water it would die. Also, the life of the sky is the bird itself, the life of the water is the fish. The bird is life, the fish is life. You can expand on these examples if you'd like. Practice, enlightenment, long and short life are examples.

If a bird or fish ever even tried to escape its own element it would be without its own place. Realizing your life as your life you realize the exertion of Awake Awareness. Realizing this, everything you do is actually done as the Way itself. There is no big or small, self or other, beginning, ending—and so this Way exists now. You practice and realize the Way of Awake Awareness by picking up one thing and penetrating it, by finishing with it through understanding it. The place is here, the Way everywhere. You cannot come to the limits of the truth since your study of the Way of Awareness gives rise simultaneously to your scope of vision. Do not limit realization within the limits of your own knowledge. Even after realization is manifest, it is so intimate it cannot be known as personal and so any expression of it must always leave room for more.

The monk Baoche of Magu mountain sat fanning himself when a monk came and asked, "The nature of the wind is constant and acts universally. Why do you use a fan?"

The master responded, "Although you understand the constant nature of the wind, you do not see its universal action."

"What is this universal action?", the monk asked.

The master fanned himself, the monk bowed.

This is the vital way of the transmission of the enlightening experience of Awake Awareness. If you say we do not need to use a fan because the nature of the wind is constant, that our knowledge of this constancy requires no fan, you don't know anything at all about the winds nature or of constancy. It is due to the constant nature of Awake Awareness that it can make the earth golden, and long rivers to run with ghee.

*Written in mid-autumn, 1233, and given to my lay student Yo-koshu of Kyushu.*