

Shoaku makusa: Not Doing Wrong Action

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The primordial Buddhas are saying,

“Not doing wrong action, Shoaku-makusa.”

Sincerely doing every kind of good, Shuzen-bugyo. “Sincerely doing every kind of good.” naturally clarifies this mind, Jijo-go-i.

This is the Teaching of all the Buddhas. Ze-shobutsu-kyo.

This is the universal precept of the Seven Buddhas, our Founding Ancestors, and is truly transmitted by earlier Buddhas to later Buddhas and is received by later Buddhas from earlier Buddhas. It is not only the Teaching of the Seven Buddhas but of all the Buddhas. This principle must be investigated and mastered through practice. This instruction of the Dharma of the Seven Buddhas is the Dharma as taught by the Seven Buddhas. Intimately transmitting, intimately receiving, it is penetrating the true situation. It is already the Teaching of all Buddhas; it is the Teaching, practice, and realization of hundreds, of thousands, of ten thousand Buddhas.

In the quotation, the term “wrong action” refers among the moral categories of good, wrong, and neutral to morally wrong. Its nature, however, is unborn. The natures of morally good and morally neutral are also unborn. They are unstained, “Without leaks.” the true form, which is to say that these three categories of moral nature include manifold varieties of dharmas. “Wrong action” includes similarities and dissimilarities among wrong actions of this world and wrong actions of other worlds, similarities and dissimilarities among wrong actions of former times and wrong actions of latter times, as well as similarities and dissimilarities among wrong actions in heavenly realms and wrong actions in human realms. Even greater still is the difference between what is called wrong action, called good, and called morally neutral in the Awakened Way and the secular realm.

Right and wrong are temporal, but time is neither right nor wrong. Right and wrong are the Dharma, but the Dharma is neither right nor wrong. In the balance of the Dharma, wrong is balanced. In the balance of the Dharma, right is balanced.

And so, in learning of complete and utter Awakening, in hearing the Teachings, doing the training, and realizing the effect, this is profound, vast, and wonderful. Some hear of unsurpassed Awakening from good friends, and some hear of it from the sutras. What one hears first is, “Not doing wrong action.” If one does not hear “not doing wrong action,” one is not hearing the Buddhas’ true Dharma but demonic talk. Know that hearing “not doing wrong action” is hearing the Buddhas’ true Dharma. This phrase “not doing wrong action” is not like what usual people do and follow.

Hearing this Teaching as Awakened speech hears it as it is. Hearing it as it is means as words expressing unsurpassed Awakening. Because it is already Awakened speech,[fn] Bodai-go.[/fn] it speaks Awakening. As unsurpassed Awakening's speaking turns into its hearing, one moves from the aspiration for "not doing wrong action" toward enacting "not-doing wrong action." As wrong action becomes something one cannot do, the power of one's practice immediately manifests. This fully manifests in the measure of the whole earth, the whole universe, the whole of time, and the whole Dharma. Its measure is the measure of "not-doing."

At that very moment[fn] Shoto-inmo-ji.[/fn] that very person,[fn]Shoto-inmo-nin.[/fn] whether living in or traveling in places where wrong actions are done or becoming involved in circumstances for doing wrong actions or becoming mixed up with friends who do wrong actions, nonetheless will be unable to do wrong actions.[fn]Wrong action will not arise.[/fn] The power of "not-doing" manifests, and so wrong actions themselves do not express wrong action because wrong actions are not a "something". This is the principle of "holding one is releasing one":[fn] Ichinen-ippo.[/fn] at that very moment one knows that "wrong action" is not something that can attack people and clarifies the truth that people cannot harm wrong action.

When you straighten up the whole mind through practice and straighten up the whole body through practice then, before the first move, eight or nine[fn]Hakkujo. Refers to the following concerning Caoshan Benji (Sôzan Honjaku, 840-901) from Sanbyakusoku 125.

Caoshan questioned Acarya De,

*"The Buddha's true Dharma-body
is like empty space;
responding to beings it manifests form
like the moon reflected in water."*

Now, how do you explain this principle of responsiveness?"

De replied, "It is like the donkey looks into the well."

Caoshan said, "Your statement is a great statement, but it is only eight or nine [parts] complete."

De said, "Master, how would you say it?"

Caoshan replied, "It is like the well looks at the donkey."

["Donkey" is actually a copyist's error for the word "pulley". The pulley for drawing water up from the well points down into the well, the well reflects the pulley back.][fn] are completed, and "not-doing" lies behind your brain.[fn]Nogo. Behind the brain.[/fn] When you bring your own body and mind to practise or anyone's[fn]Tare(Japanese). "Who."[/fn] body and mind is brought to practise, the power of practising with the four great elements and five aggregates suddenly manifests, and the "self" of the four great elements and five aggregates is not defiled.[fn]Zenna.[/fn] Today's four great elements and five aggregates practise, and the power of each moment's practice by the four great elements and five aggregates causes those four great elements and five aggregates to practise. When the mountains and rivers and earth, the sun and stars and planets are also brought to practise, then the mountains and rivers and earth, the sun and stars and planets bring us to practise in turn. This is not glimpsed just once; it is a living vision, again and again. Since

this living vision is all moments, it brings the Buddhas and Ancestors to practise, to hear the Teachings, and to realize fruition. Since not one of the Buddhas and Ancestors has ever dishonoured the Teachings, practices, and realizations, the Teachings, practices, and realizations have never hindered the Buddhas and Ancestors. When the Buddhas and Ancestors are brought to practise, no Buddhas or Ancestors, whether in the past, present, or future, both before and after the first move, have ever avoided it. In walking, sitting, standing, and lying down through the hours of the day[fn] Juni-ji. Literally the “twelve hours” of the day.[/fn] we should know that when living beings are becoming Buddhas and becoming Ancestors, we are becoming Buddhas and Ancestors without this obstructing our already being Buddhas and Ancestors. In the practice of becoming Buddhas and Ancestors, our humanity is not violated, is not stolen, is not lost; and yet it drops away.

We practise through good and wrong actions, causes and effects. This does not mean pushing causes and effects, or creating them. Causes and effects sometimes bring us to practice. This is because the Original Face of causes and effects can be clearly seen: it is “not-doing,”[fn] Makusa.[/fn] it is unborn,[fn]Musho.[/fn] it is impermanent,[fn]Mujo.[/fn] it is not obscuring, it is not falling,[fn]A reference to Shoyoroku 8 and Mumonkan 2:

Whenever Baizhang taught in the Dharma Hall, there always appeared an old man at the back of the gathering who listened but then always vanished when the crowd began to break up to go home. One day however he stayed behind.

Baizhang asked, “Who is it standing there?”

The old man said, “Long ago, in the age of Kashyapa, the past Buddha, I lived here in a mountain temple. Once a student asked me, ‘Does an awakened person still fall into cause and effect or not?’ I answered her, ‘She doesn’t fall into cause and effect.’ As a result I fell into the body of a wild fox for five hundred lives. Now I ask you master to turn a word for my sake.”

Baizhang said, “She is not blind to cause and effect.”

The old man woke up at these words.

Dogen zenji’s entire essay Shobogenzo 82: Jinshin Inga (Deep Trust in Cause and Effect) is a commentary on this koan. See also Sanbyakusoku 102, Ikka Myoju, Raihai Tokuzui, Daishugyo, Arakan; Shobogenzo Zuimonki 2, Eihei Koroku 1, 5, -9 (77)

Whenever Baizhang presented a discourse an old man attended them to hear the Dharma along with the monks. At the end when the monks left the Dharma Hall so did he. But one day he remained after they had gone. Baizhang asked him: “Who are you?”

The old man replied, “I am a really a non-human being, but I was a human being. Long ago when Kasyapa Buddha taught in this world I was the abbot of a temple right here. At that time one of my students asked me whether a person of vast practice is subject to cause and effect. I answered him, ‘A person of vast practice does not fall into cause and effect.’ For this answer evidencing a clinging to absoluteness I became a fox for five hundred rebirths, and I am still a fox. Will you save me from this condition with your Zen words and release me from a fox’s body? Now may I ask you: Is a person of vast practice subject to cause and effect?”

The Master said, "A person of vast practice does not obscure cause and effect."

At these words the old man experienced great awakening. "I am liberated," he said, paying homage with a deep bow. "I am no more a fox, but I have to leave my fox body lying behind the gates of the monastery. Master, please perform my funeral as a monk." Then he disappeared.

The next day the Master instructed the head monk to strike the clappers and announce to the community to attend the funeral of a monk following the mid-day meal.

"Who could this be? We are all healthy and no one was sick in the infirmary," wondered the monks.

After the mid-day meal Baizhang led the monks out behind the monastery gates and with his staff he poked out the corpse of an old fox from under a large rock. He then performed the ceremony of cremation.

That evening in the Dharma Hall Baizhang spoke to the monks and told this story about cause and effect.

Huangbo, upon hearing this story, asked Baizhang: "The old man became a fox for five hundred lifetimes because he used a wrong turning word. But what if he had answered correctly, what would have become of him?"

The Master said, "You come up here near me and I will explain it."

After a moment Huangbo went up to Baizhang and slapped the Master's face.

The Master clapped his hands and laughed and said, "I thought only the barbarian had a red beard but here is another red bearded barbarian."[/fn] it is dropped through. Through studying it this way, the fact that "wrong actions" have always been "not-done" is realized. This realization penetrates through seeing right through[/fn]Kentokutetsu. Seeing that penetrates right through.[/fn] the "not-doing" of "wrong actions" and eradicates them by decisively sitting through them.[/fn]Zatokudan. "Zadan" means to "sit through"; this phrase adds "decisive". (The wordplay on "through" in the translation picks through this throughout the sentence.)[/fn]

At that very moment, in the beginning and middle and end, as "not doing wrong action" is actualized, wrong actions are not produced through casual conditions, for there is only "not-doing." Wrong actions are not extinguished through causes and conditions, for there is only "not-doing." If wrong actions are equalized, then all dharmas are equalized. Those people who only understand wrong actions to be produced by causes and conditions but who fail to see that those causes and conditions themselves are "not-doing" are to be pitied. Since "the seeds of Awakening sprout in accordance with conditions," then "conditions sprout in accordance with the seeds of Awakening."

It is not that wrong actions do not exist, but that there is only "not-doing." It is not that wrong actions do exist, but that there is only "not-doing." Wrong actions are not emptiness; they are "not-doing." Wrong actions are not form; they are "not-doing." Wrong actions are not "not-to-be-done," for there is only "not-doing." For example, spring pines are neither non-existent nor existent; they just are "not-done". Autumn chrysanthemums are neither existent nor are they non-existent; they just are "not-done". The Buddhas are neither existent nor non-existent; they are "not-doing." Pillars, lamps, candles, whisks, staffs and so on, are neither existent nor non-existent; they are "not-doing." One's self is neither existent nor non-existent; it is "not-doing."

Studying this through practice actualizes the koan and is the realization of the koan when it is considered from the perspective of host and considered from the perspective of guest. Since things are already so, regrets of having done what was not to be done are not other than the energy of doing not-doing. As this is so, acting on the idea that “if it is all ‘not-doing,’ then I will deliberately do wrong” would be just like walking north and expecting to arrive in the south.[fn]Etsu, Vietnam.[/fn] “Not-doing wrong action” is not merely “wells looking at donkeys” but also wells looking at wells, donkeys looking at donkeys, people looking at people, and mountains looking at mountains. From [Caoshan Benji’s] “explain this principle of responsiveness,” comes “wrong action does not arise.”

*“The Buddha’s true Dharma-body[fn]Hoshin.[/fn]
is like empty space;
responding to beings it manifests form
like the moon reflected in water.”*

Because there is the “not-doing” of “responding to beings,” there is the “not-doing” of “manifesting form.” “Is like empty space” is clapping to the left and clapping on the right. “Like the moon reflected in water” is “the water holding the moon.” These “not-doings” are the undeniable actualization of reality.

“Sincerely doing every kind of good.” The term “every kind of good” refers to the morally good among those three categories of moral nature. Within the category of morally good there exists every kind of good, but this does not mean that every kind of good is manifest beforehand just waiting for someone to do them. At the very moment of doing good, every kind of good arrives. The myriad kinds of good may have no fixed form, but they gather where good is done faster than a magnet attracts iron, their strength greater than a vairambhaka tornado. All the karmic forces generated in the vast earth, the mountains and rivers, in all the lands of the universe cannot obstruct this accumulation of good.

And so, while there is the principle that in each world system what is perceived as being good will differ, what is recognized as good is “like the manner in which all Buddhas of the three times Teach the Dharma.”[fn]From the Lotus sutra’s chapter two on Hoben or Skillful Means: “like the manner in which all Buddhas of the three times Teach the Dharma, so now I also Teach the Dharma which is indivisible.”[/fn] It is the same even though the Dharma they Taught was in accord with the specific situations of the world; the lifespan and measure of their bodies also accorded with each situation, yet they Teach the “indivisible Dharma.”[fn]Reference to the same passage in the Lotus sutra.[/fn]

Since this is so, therefore, the good of a devotional practice based upon faith[fn]Shingyo. For example Pure Land.[/fn] and the good of Dharma practice[fn]Hogyo.[/fn] will be widely different but not be different things. It is just like how a sravaka’s observance of the precepts would correspond to a bodhisattva’s violation of the precepts.

Every kind of good is neither produced through casual conditions nor extinguished through casual conditions. Even though every kind of good all consist of dharmas, all dharmas do not consist of every kind of good. Causes and conditions, arising and vanishing, every kind of good are all alike in that, if the head is correct then the tail is correct. Every kind of good is “sincerely practising,”[fn] Bugyo.[/fn] but is neither one’s self nor knowable by a self; it is neither other nor knowable by an other. Since what is known and seen by self and other consists of knowing self and other and seeing self and other, the living awakened view is to

be found in suns and moons.[fn]Suns and moons are different from each other though both are bright. Differences are grounded within what is common between seeing and knowing.[/fn] This is “sincerely practising.” Although at the very moment of “sincerely practising” the koan is fully actualized, the koan neither arises newly now nor does the koan dwell eternally. Can “original practice”[fn]Hongyo. Original practice or the practice done in the past, including in previous lives. The koan, the presentation of reality, does not begin or is not created at any particular moment and it also is not existent as an abstraction.[/fn] even be talked about?

Doing “every kind of good” is “sincerely practising,” but it cannot be measured. This “sincerely practising” is a living awakened vision, but it does not calculate. It does not manifest in order to count the Dharma. The measure of living awakened vision is not the same as measuring other dharmas.

“Every kind of good” is not existent, not non-existent, not form, is not emptiness, nor anything else; it is just “sincerely practising.” Wherever it manifests, whenever it manifests, it must be “sincerely practising.” This “sincerely practising,” certainly manifests “every kind of good”. The full manifestation of “sincerely practising” is itself the koan, but it does not arise or vanish, it is not causally conditioned. The same is true of the coming, staying, and leaving of “sincerely practising.” “Sincerely practising” even a single good among the every kind of goods causes the whole Dharma, the whole body,[fn]Zenshin.[/fn] and reality itself to “sincerely practice” together. The causality of this “good” is the fully actualized koan “sincerely practising.” It is not a matter of causes being prior and results following after, but one of causes being fully perfected and effects being fully perfected. The sameness of causes is the sameness of dharmas; the sameness of results is the sameness of dharmas. Although causes bring about results, it is not a case of before and after because of the principle of the sameness of before and after.

“Naturally clarifies this mind” means not-doing is “natural,”[fn]Ji.[/fn] not-doing is “clarifying,”[fn]Jo.[/fn] not-doing is “this,”[fn]Go.[/fn] and not-doing is “mind.”[fn]I.[/fn] It means sincerely practising is “mind,” sincerely practising is “this,” sincerely practising is “natural”, and sincerely practising is “clarifying.” Thus it is said that “this is the Teaching of all the Buddhas.”

“All the Buddhas” might refer to such as the shining beings of freedom[fn]Jizaiten.[/fn] but, while there are similarities and dissimilarities amongst the shining beings of freedom, every shining being of freedom is not a Buddha. Or, “all the Buddhas” could refer to those like a World Ruler[fn]Ten-rin-sho-o. Cakravartin.[/fn] but every World Ruler is not a Buddha. These kinds of points should be studied through practice. Unless you study what “all the Buddhas” are, you not only will be suffering pointlessly but you will be a suffering human who is not even practising the Awakened Way. “Not-doing’s” “sincerely practising” is “when the donkey’s business is not yet finished, the horse’s business already arrives.”[fn]Sanbyakusoku Shobogenzo Case 156: Changqing’s Clarification

Changqing Huiling was studying with Lingyun and asked, “What is the essence of the Buddha’s Dharma?”

Lingyun said, “When the donkey’s business is not yet finished, the horse’s business already arrives.”

Later Changqing went back and forth between Xuefeng and Xuansha for twenty years but did not clarify the matter until one day he had a great awakening when he was rolling up a screen. He wrote a verse to express it:

“Wonderful, wonderful.

Rolling up a screen, I see the world.
If someone were to ask what I understand
I would hit him in the mouth with my whisk.”

Xuefeng asked Xuansha, “Has this person seen through?”

Xuansha said, “This could just be usual mind. He needs further testing.”

That night when the assembly gathered to bow to Master Xuefeng he said to Changqing, “Xuansha has not approved you yet. If you have an authentic understanding express it now to the assembly.”

Changqing spoke a verse:

“The single body amidst the many forms.
In affirming it, there is only intimacy.
In the past I pursued my mistakes.
Now I see it’s like ice in fire.”

Xuefeng turned to Xuansha and said, “This can’t be called usual mind.”

(In the Wudeng Huiyan the ending is different:

Xuefeng turned to Xuansha and said, “I don’t accept this. It could have been said with just usual mind.”

Changqing then asked Xuefeng, “Please, Master, present what has been passed down through all the Ancestors.”

Xuefeng remained silent.

Changqing then bowed and left the hall.

Xuefeng smiled.

When Changqing went to Xuefeng’s quarters for an interview, Xuefeng asked him, “What is it?”

Changqing said, “The weather is clear. It’s a good day for community care-taking.”

Xuansha said, “Your answer is not separate from the great mystery.”[/fn]

Bai Juyi[/fn] Bai Juyi (Haku Kyo; a.k.a. Bai Luoten, Haku Rakuten), 772-846 was the lay disciple of Zen Master Fokuang Ruman (Bukko Nyoman) who was a Dharma-heir of Zen Master Jiangxi Daji [a.k.a. Mazu Daoyi; Baso Dōitsu.[/fn] of the Tang dynasty was a lay disciple of Zen Master Fokuang Ruman. He was the grandchild of Zen Master Jiangxi Daji (709-788). While serving as governor of Hangzhou, he visited Zen teacher Bird’s Nest Niao-ko Daolin.[/fn] Niao-ko Daolin (Niao-ko Tao-lin, Choka Dorin), 741-824. Known as “Bird’s Nest” he was a Dharma-heir of Jingshan Guoyi (Ching-shan Kuo-i, Kinzan Koku-itsu) in the Niutou (Ox-head) Lineage that derived from the Fourth Ancestor. [/fn]

Then Juyi asked, “What is the great meaning of the Buddha Dharma?”

Daolin replied, “Not doing wrong actions, sincerely practising every kind of good.”

Juyi said, "If that's so, even a three-year-old child could express it."

Daolin replied, "Perhaps a three-year-old child could say it, but even an elder in their eighties cannot practice it."

That being said, Juyi bowed and departed.

Although Juyi was a descendant of General Bai,^[fn]Bai Qi. In Japanese Haku Ki. A general of the Jin dynasty, around 250 BCE.^[/fn] he was truly a wizard of poetry such as rarely lives. It is said that he had been an author for twenty-four lives and he was spoken of as like Manjusri or Maitreya. No one has not heard of his poetic style and attitude and none have been untouched by his ocean of poetry. Despite this, in the Buddha Way he was a beginner; he was a late comer. Concerning "wrong action does not arise, sincerely practising every kind of good" and its meaning, he could not even dream of it.

Juyi thought that Daolin was only speaking of having a conscious intention that one must not do wrong action and that one must sincerely practice good. As for the Buddha Way's thousands of ages old, tens of thousands of ages old^[fn]Senko-banko.^[/fn] "wrong action does not arise, sincerely practising every kind of good," this principle which transcends past and present, Juyi did not know it and did not hear it. He had not set foot on the Buddha Way and lacked the energy of the Buddha Dharma and so spoke like this. Even an admonishment to not commit wrong action and even the counsel to do good are the manifestation of "not-doing."

The whole Buddha Dharma, from what one first hears from a good friend to the ultimate realization, is constant. This is called "head is correct and tail is correct" or "wonderful causes, wonderful results," or "awakening causes, awakened results." Cause and effect in the Buddha Way are beyond discussions about differing maturations or equal streaming,^[fn]Ijuku means maturation of effects due to moral or immoral behaviour as cause while toru or equal streaming means that causes and effects just flow.^[/fn] since without awakening causes there cannot be awakened results. Daolin's expression of this truth is the Buddha Dharma.

Even if wrong actions completely filled countless worlds or completely swallowed however many dharmas, there is liberation through not-doing. Because every kind of good is already "good in the beginning, middle, and end,"^[fn]Shochugo-zen. A famous phrase from the opening chapter of the Lotus sutra, "The Dharma which they should teach is good in the beginning, middle, and end."^[/fn] the nature, the aspect, the embodiment, the power and so forth of sincerely practising are "such."^[fn]These are some of the ten features of Suchness in the second chapter of the Lotus sutra.^[/fn] Juyi has never followed these tracks, and so said that "even a three-year-old child could express it." He spoke like this because he lacked the power to properly express an expression.

Pathetic Juyi. What are you talking about? Since you have not yet heard the winds of the Buddha, can you ever really know a three-year-old child? Can you really ever know the truth a child is endowed with at birth? In knowing a three-year-old child, you must know the Buddhas of the three times. Only through knowing the Buddhas of the three times, can you know a three-year-old child. Don't think that meeting them is knowing them. Don't think that not meeting them is not knowing them. Knowing a single particle of dust is knowing the entirety of realms. Penetrating^[fn]Toku.^[/fn] a single dharma penetrates numberless dharmas. Not penetrating the myriad dharmas is not penetrating a single dharma. When you fully penetrate the study of penetration, because you see numberless dharmas and you see a single dharma, the study of a single speck of dust is the complete study of the totality of realms.

It is utterly stupid to think that a three-year-old child could not express the Buddha Dharma or that whatever a three-year-old child expresses must be easy. For this reason, to clarify birth, to clarify death, is the circumstances of the one great matter of the Buddha's family.

An ancient sage said: "Right at the time of your birth you have a share of the lion's roar." [fn]The quote is from the Mahaprajnaparamita sastra or Daichido-ron, attributed to Nagarjuna. [fn] A share of the lion's roar is the virtue of the Thus Come Ones turning Dharma wheels; it is Dharma wheels turning themselves.

Another ancient sage [fn]Yuanwu Keqin. [fn] said: "Birth, death, going, coming are the true human body." [fn]Dogen also uses this phrase in Shoho-Jisso: The True Form of All Things. [fn]

As this is so, clarifying the true body and having the virtue of the lion's roar are certainly the one great matter and is not "easy". Therefore, to clarify the circumstances and conduct of a three-year-old child is an even greater matter in its similarities and dissimilarities with the conduct and circumstances of the Buddhas of the three times.

Juyi foolishly had never listened to anything a three-year-old child could say since he never even suspected that there could be something to it and so spoke like this. He didn't hear Daolin's voice, which was obvious like thunder. He said, "Even a three-year-old child could express it" to say that [Daolin] could not express it. He does not hear the lion's roar of a child and completely misses the Zen Teacher's turning of the wheel of Reality.

The Zen Teacher, unable to restrain his compassion, went on to say, "Perhaps a three-year-old child could say it, but even an elder in their eighties cannot practice it."

What this says is that there are words that can be spoken by a three-year-old child, and you should carefully investigate them. An elder in his eighties says, "I cannot practice it," and you should carefully consider this. What a child can say is wholly entrusted to you even if it is not wholly entrusted to the child. What an elder cannot practice is wholly entrusted to you even if it is not wholly entrusted to the elder.

The Buddha Dharma finds truth in discerning, expressing, and getting to the meaning in this way.

Presented to the assembly on the night of the harvest moon at Kannondori-in Kosho-Horin-ji in the second year of E'no (1240). [fn] [Postscript (from Tôunji manuscript)]: En'o era, senior metal year of the rat (1240), night of the harvest moon, presented to the assembly at the Kannon-dori Kosho-Horin-ji in Uji district, Yôshû province [a.k.a. Yamashiro]. Kangen first year, junior water year of the rabbit, seventh day of the final third [i.e., 27th day] of the third moon, copied in the attendant's quarters by Ejo (1198-1280). [fn]