

Zenki: Complete Activity 完全

by Eihei Dogen zenji

translated by Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi and Yasuda Joshu Dainen roshi

To sum it up, the Vast Path of all the Awakened Ones is liberation [fn] Todatsu. This term is quite interesting. It is a short form for totai-datsuraku: totai is “penetrating to the matter” or “clear right through” along with datsuraku which means “shaken away” or “dropped through.” [fn] and realization. “Liberation” means that life liberates life and that death liberates death. Thus there is being free of birth and death and being soaked in birth and death. Both are the Vast Path’s fruit. There is shedding birth and death and there is crossing birth and death. Both are the Vast Path’s fruit. Realization is life. Life is realization. When this is realized, this is just life wholly [fn] Zen. This term is translated as “complete” elsewhere. [fn] realizing itself, just death wholly realizing itself.

This complete activity [fn] Kikan 完全. “Interlocking devices,” “skillful means,” or even “machine.” [fn] naturally brings forth life and brings forth death. At the moment of realizing this complete activity it isn’t large, isn’t small. It is not limitless, it is not limited. It is not long or far, not short or near. This present life arises within this complete activity. Complete activity arises within this present life.

Life is not a “coming” and not a “going”. It is not “being” or “becoming”. Life is the presentation of this complete activity, [fn] Zenki. [fn] death is the presentation of this complete activity.

Know that in all of the numberless elements that emerge as you, there is life and there is death. You should look into whether your present life and all the experiences arising as this life share one life or not. Nothing, not one moment and not one thing, is apart from this one life. For each thing and for each mind there is nothing but this one life.

Life is like a person in a boat. Aboard the boat, one uses a sail, holds a tiller, poles the boat along. Yet the boat carries you and without the boat you are not there. Riding the boat is what makes it a boat. You must study and penetrate this very moment. In this moment, the whole world is this boat. Thus “life” is what I live and “I” is life living me. Getting aboard the boat, this bodymind and all that is around are all the complete activity [fn] Kikan 完全. [fn] of the boat. Both the whole world and the vast sky are the boat’s complete activity. This I that lives and the life that is I is just like this.

Zen Master Yuanwu Keqin [fn] Yuanwu Keqin (Yuan-wu K’o-ch’in, Engo Kokugon) 圓悟克勤, 1063-1135. Compiled the Blue Cliff Records from Xuedou’s collection and capping verses. [fn] said,

*“Life is the presentation of complete activity,
death is the presentation of complete activity.” [fn] In Yuanwu Fuguo Chanshi yulu (Engo Bukkozenji goroku), 17. See also Shinjin-gakudo: Study of the Way Through the Bodymind and Kuge .* [fn]

You should clarify and penetrate these words through practice. What you must penetrate is that, although the teaching that “life is the presentation of complete activity” fills the whole world and all of space and is not concerned with beginnings or endings, it doesn’t obstruct “death is the presentation of complete activity.” Although “death is the presentation of complete activity” covers the whole world and all space, it

doesn't obstruct "death is the presentation of complete activity," it also doesn't obstruct "life is the presentation of complete activity."

Thus, life does not obstruct death. Death does not obstruct life. The total universe[fn]Jindaichi.[/fn] and vast space all exist within life and within death. This does not mean that one single world or one single space is the completed activity within life and within death. This is not oneness but it is also not difference. Though it is not different, everything is not the same. Though it is not sameness, it is not myriad. Thus, within life there are myriad experiences[fn]Dharmas.[/fn] presenting their complete activity, and within death there are myriad experiences presenting their complete activity. The presentation of their whole complete activity arises within what is not life and not death. In the presentation of this complete activity, there is life and there is death.

Thus, this complete activity is like a young person bending and stretching out an arm, or someone reaching for a pillow in the night.[fn]Dogen comments at length on this phrase in the essay Kannon. The phrase is a quotation from Daowu Yuanjie's teaching to Yunju Daoying.[/fn] It presents itself through its all-pervading activity[fn]Jinzu.[/fn] and radiance.[fn]Komyo.[/fn]

When it displays itself, since this complete activity is active as this display, it can seem as if it was not manifest before its display. However, before this present manifestation there was the way in which complete activity had already displayed itself. Although there was a previous presentation of complete activity, this does not obstruct the display of complete activity as the present. Thus this thought displays itself.

Given on December 17th, 1242, to the governor of Unshu,[fn]Yoshishige Hatano, a strong patron of Dogen's.[/fn]

at this dwelling near the Rokuharamitsu-ji, Yoshu.

Copied January 19th, 1243, by Ejo.