

BOOK REVIEWS

SHÖBÖGENZŌ-ZUIMONKI, 232pp. *DŌGEN ZEN*, 199pp. *SHIKANTAZA: AN INTRODUCTION TO ZAZEN*, 129pp. By Okumura Shōhaku. Kyoto Sōtō Zen Center, Sōsenji, Kyoto.

Zen master Dōgen, the thirteenth century Zen monk who transmitted Chinese Sōtō Zen to Japan, wrote several volumes soon after he returned from Sung China describing the style of practice he experienced there. Over the last six years, Okumura Shōhaku, a Sōtō Zen priest, has translated and published three books in which he has attempted to present Dōgen's teaching as seen in these early writings. His first book, *Shikantaza*, published in 1985, contains Dōgen's "*Fukanzazengi*" ("The Way of Zazen Recommended to Everyone"), "*Shōbōgenzō Zazengi*" ("The Way of Zazen"), "*Shōbōgenzō Zanmai Ozanmai*" ("The King of Samadhis") and portions of "*Shōbōgenzō Bendōwa*" ("Talk on the Practice of the Way"). In *Shikantaza*, he introduces the practice of zazen (sitting meditation) using several different approaches. The first part, called "How to do Zazen," is a 38-page photographic essay which illustrates in detail the zazen Dōgen describes in "*Fukanzazengi*." These photos, plus a few diagrams, provide simple and clear visual instructions for postures and forms used in Sōtō Zen practice. The second part, "What is Zazen," is a collection of writings about zazen practice by various Sōtō Zen teachers. This section includes the works by Dōgen mentioned above, and also translations from works which have not been published before: Koun Ejō's sole extant writing, "*Kōmyōzō-zanmai*" ("Samadhi of the Treasury of the Radiant Light"), "*Zazen Yōjinki*" ("Things We Should be Careful About Regarding Zazen") by Keizan Jōkin (Ejō's descendent), "*Juniji-hōgo*" ("On Practicing Throughout the Day") by Daichi Sokei (a disciple of Kangan Giin, Dōgen's disciple), and selections from "The Dharma-Words of Homeless Kodo" and "On Zazen" by Okumura's teacher Uchiyama Kōshō, who was a disciple of the important modern master, Sawaki Kōdō. A supplement at the end of the book, called "How to Make a Zafu," provides diagrams and explanations for making the style of cushion used in zazen practice.

Shōbōgenzō-zuimonki (1987), is a translation of Dharma talks of Dōgen recorded by his disciple, Kōun Ejō, which offer concrete examples of zazen practice extending into everyday life. In the introduction Okumura tells us, "I read *Zuimonki* for the first time when I was a student and it made a strong impression on me. . . . Since then *Zuimonki* has been a strong force in my life." He begins by introducing Ejō, telling about his life and his relationship with Dōgen. This is useful because there is little information available in English about Ejō. In several footnotes he also explains the relationships of other early teachers to Ejō, to Dōgen and to each other, which gives the reader

a sense of familiarity with these people and shows their different ways of seeking the Dharma. This is a helpful reminder that we must each pursue the Dharma according to the circumstances of our own lives. There is no one style.

I am grateful to Okumura for one particular story in his introduction. Ejō was first ordained as a Tendai monk; After studying at Mt. Hiei he began to realize the training he was receiving was only for the purpose of helping him to get a high position in the Buddhist order. He was thinking of leaving the monastery, and paid a visit to his mother. She told him: "I allowed you to become a monk not because I wanted you to rise to a high position or associate with the upper class . . . do not study or practice for fame and profit . . . practice in poverty, wear black robes, hang a bamboo hat on your back, and walk on your own feet (instead of riding in palanquins)." When he heard these words, he "changed his robes and never went back to Mt. Hiei." This story illustrates the role that feminine wisdom has played historically in the development of spiritual practice. It seems that there is very little Zen literature written by women, so it is easy to assume that men have been the sole transmitters of the Way. It is important to realize that those who do not take center stage (and this often means women) are not less valuable transmitters of the Dharma, and that both feminine and masculine aspects of spirituality are necessary to provide balance.

Okumura's third book, *Dōgen Zen* (1987), has the same quality of varied approaches as *Shikantaza*. In it he presents translations of Dōgen's "*Gakudō Yōjinshū*" ("Points to Watch in Practicing the Way"), Menzan Zuihō's "*Jijuyu Zanmai*" ("Samadhi of the Self"), and "Dogen Zen as Religion," an essay by his teacher Uchiyama. "*Gakudō Yōjinshū*," written in 1234 just after Dōgen founded Kōshōji, is addressed to the monks who were practicing there. In it Dōgen emphasizes cultivation of the mind which can see impermanence, saying it is the same as bodhi-mind. Okumura gives extensive explanations using footnotes which cite relevant portions of Dōgen's writings and segments of commentary written by Menzan Zuihō.

"*Jijuyu-zanmai*," (1737), is an explanation of Dōgen's "*Bendōwa*," and was written as a guide to zazen for lay students. In it Menzan tries to explain that the Buddha's samadhi, called by various names in the sutras, is nothing other than the zazen which we practice with our body and mind. Menzan published more than fifty books about Dōgen's writings during his lifetime. Until now, only small portions of his work have been available in translation. "Dōgen Zen as Religion," written in 1977, is a translation of the last half of Uchiyama's *Shūkyō-toshite-no Dōgen Zen (Dōgen Zen as Religion)*. In this writing, he compares what he calls the "genuine religion" of Dōgen with the "superstitious beliefs" he believes form the basis of present-day religions. Using twentieth-century thinking to explain his points, he

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reaches the same conclusion as Dōgen and Menzan: “the zazen transmitted by the Buddhas and Patriarchs is . . . genuine religion in which we settle peacefully in the practice of just sitting.”

Rev. Okumura has studied Dōgen for more than twenty years. His approach is more that of a practitioner than of a scholar. The manner in which he presents the materials gives the reader a sense of how to practice in addition to explaining the basic philosophy. Though these books are unrefined in one sense, with occasional misspellings, sometimes awkward sentence structures and inconsistent formats, the spirit of Zen practice which they convey more than outweighs these weaknesses.

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