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# TRANSLATIONS

Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*  
*Zenki* "Total Dynamic Working"  
and  
*Shōji* "Birth and Death"

TRANSLATED WITH INTRODUCTION  
BY  
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*Clarifying birth, clarifying death, is the matter of greatest importance for a Buddhist.*

These words from *Shōbōgenzō shoakumakusa*<sup>1</sup> can be said to form the essence of Dogen's entire career, and to be the reason for his voluminous literary production as well. His main work, *Shōbōgenzō*, devotes little space to this subject directly, but all his writing may be said to spring from his concern with this question of birth and death, because for Dōgen as for all Buddhists birth and death is the basic existential problem, one that knows no sectarian boundaries. The need to resolve this problem drove him to undertake the dangerous sea voyage to China. There, in words from *Bendōwa*, he tells us: "I went to T'ai-pai peak and engaged in religious practice under the Zen master Ju-ching, until I had resolved the one great matter of Zen practice for my entire life."<sup>2</sup> Two fascicles of *Shōbōgenzō* deal specifically with birth and death—*Zenki* and *Shōji*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 諸愚妄作. *Dōgen Zenji Zenshū I* ("Complete Works of Dōgen Zenji"), ed. Ōkubo Dōshū (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1969), p.283.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.729. Also see *Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. IV No. 1, p.130.

<sup>3</sup> *Zenki*, Ōkubo, pp. 203–5. *Shōji*, *ibid*, pp. 778–9. Closely related utterances are found in the following fascicles: *Bendōwa* 辨道話, *Genjōkōan* 現成公案, *Gyōbutsuigi* 行佛威儀, *Shinjin-gakudō* 身心學道.

According to its colophon, *Zenki* 全機 was delivered the twelfth month of 1242 at the mansion of a samurai official named Hatano Yoshishige.<sup>4</sup> Dōgen was then forty-two years old. He had resided at Kōshō-ji for nine years, and would leave the very next summer for the mountains of Echizen (in present-day Fukui prefecture), where he would spend the remaining ten years of his life educating his students and devoting himself to literary production.

In *Zenki* as in *Genjōkōan* which was also intended primarily for his lay followers, Dōgen uses few technical terms. That, the subject of birth and death, and the inclusion of the parable of boat and boatman, render it highly appropriate for a lay audience.

The word *zenki*, which we have translated here as “total dynamic working,” and also “total dynamism,” lacks any truly satisfactory English equivalent, for the Japanese and Chinese is freighted with a great many subtle and diverse connotations impossible to find in one or several English words. The title derives from the initial lines of a poem of the Sung Zen master Yüan-wu: “Life is the manifestation of the total dynamic working: Death is the manifestation of the total dynamic working,” in which *zen* 全 means complete, a totality encompassing the entire universe with nothing excluded, and *ki* 機 covers such significances as motive power, spring, trigger, mechanism, opportunity. Thus for Dōgen, *zenki* indicates the total dynamic function of man and the world, in which total reality is disclosed. Life and death are the two great dynamic forces of the universe, and their *zenki* are the total realization and manifestation of the Buddha Dharma or Buddha Nature.

*Zenki*, of which no holograph now exists, has been included in all the main collected editions of *Shōbōgenzō* since Dōgen's time. We have based our translation upon the collated text found in Ōkubo's newly edited edition of *Shōbōgenzō*, which takes the Sōgo manuscript *Zenki* as its basic text.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Hatano Yoshishige 波多野義重 was a samurai official in the Kamakura (Hōjō) Shogunate. He resided at Rokuhara, an area of Kyoto east of the Kamo River, which is associated in history as the headquarters of the Taira family; in Dōgen's time it was the location of the Kyoto offices of the Kamakura Shogunate. He was also governor of Shihinosō, Echizen, an area of deep mountains and old temples, in which Dōgen was later to establish the Eihei-ji. Hatano is thought to have been instrumental in this decision.

<sup>5</sup> See *Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. IV No. 2, p.110.

The lack of colophon and date for *Shōji* 生死, and several other reasons as well, have been put forth to throw doubt on its authenticity. We will not enumerate these in detail here, but refer those interested to a series of articles by Itō Yūten in the *Aichi Gakuin Daigaku Ronsō*, which deals with the problem from various angles.<sup>6</sup> Though several of the points that have been put forth are well-founded, others have been discredited,<sup>7</sup> and there are as yet no real grounds for disproving the time-honored ascription of the work to Dōgen. For the present, most Japanese religious leaders and scholars as well tend to accept it as genuine.

Although included in the official "Honzan" edition of *Shōbōgenzō* published by the Sōtō sect, *Shōji* was not incorporated in the seventy-five fascicle version compiled by Dōgen himself before his death. This is perhaps because it is in a style<sup>8</sup> usually intended primarily for lay audiences and not the priesthood, to whom most of his *Shōbōgenzō* is directed.

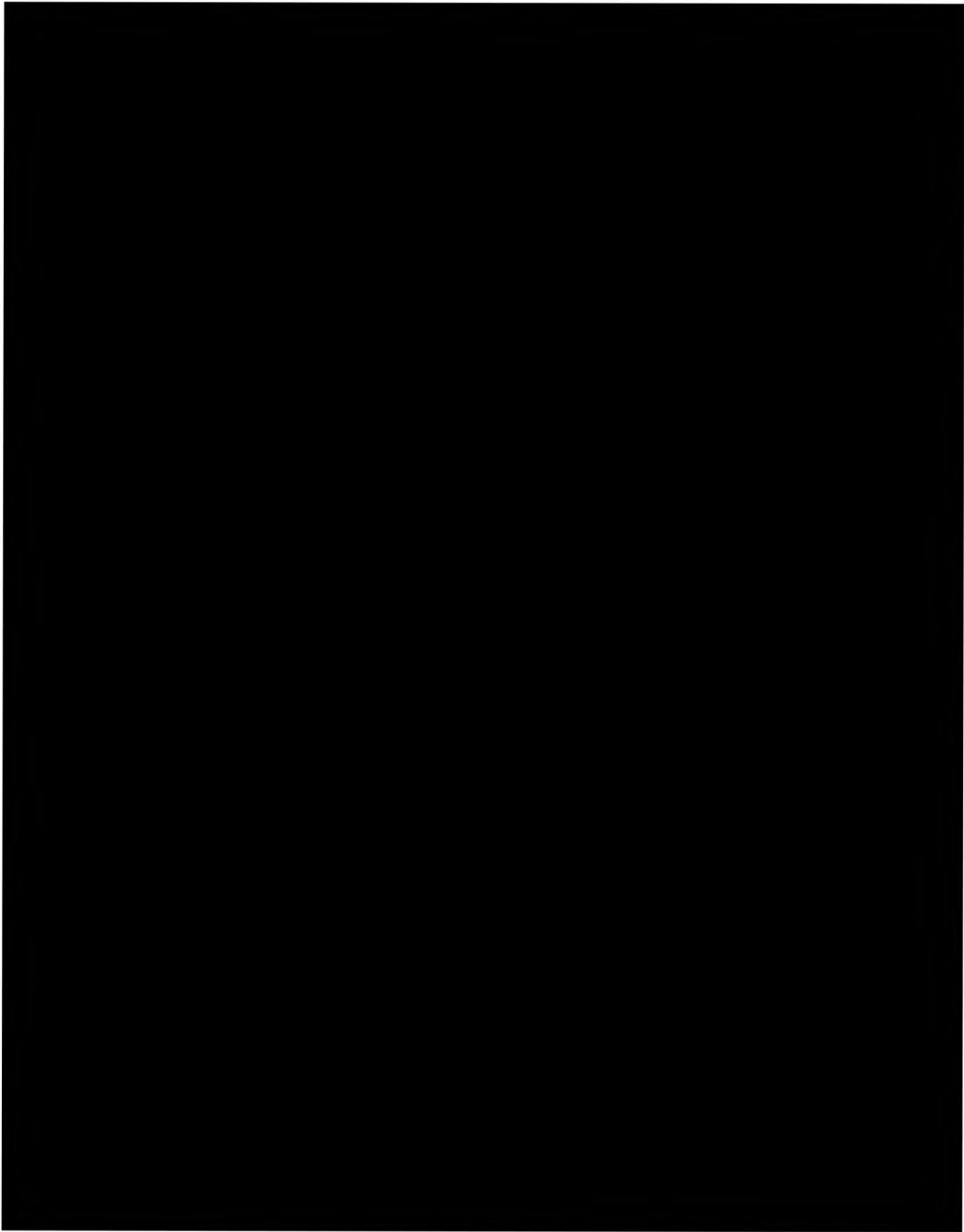
When Kōzen (d. 1693),<sup>9</sup> the thirty-fifth abbot of Eihei-ji, compiled in 1690 the ninety-five fascicle *Shōbōgenzō* that was to become the basis for the later "Honzan" printed edition, he attempted to collect all Dōgen's existing works. *Shōji* and several other fascicles from the so-called *Himitsu Shōbōgenzō* were thus incorporated into his version. This *Himitsu Shōbōgenzō*, a manuscript collection long in the possession of Eihei-ji that was probably compiled not earlier than the beginning of the Muromachi period (1338–1573), consists of twenty-eight fascicles, including several not found in earlier versions of *Shōbōgenzō*. *Shōji* is thus thought to have been unknown outside Eihei-ji circles before Kōzen's compilation. One other manuscript version exists, but we have

<sup>6</sup> 愛知學院大學論叢, Vol. 1,2,3 (1954–56). "Shōbōgenzō shōji no maki no shingi ni tsuite" ("On the Authenticity of *Shōbōgenzō shōji*").

<sup>7</sup> Kagamishima Genryū, *Dōgen Zenji no inyō kyōten goroku no kenkyū* ("A Study of Sutras and Zen Records Quoted by Dōgen Zenji") (Tokyo: Mokujisha, 1965), pp.58–9. Also, Kawamura Kōdō, "Shōbōgenzō kenkyū josetsu: Shōbōgenzō shōji no maki no kenkyū" ("An Introductory Study of *Shōbōgenzō*: *Shōbōgenzō Shōji*"), *Komazawa Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū Kiyō*, No. 23 & 24, 1965, 1966.

<sup>8</sup> I.e., *bōgo* style (法語: lit, "Dharma-talks"). Readily comprehensible works generally used by Buddhist teachers to gain a wider audience than would be possible with more difficult and technical works.

<sup>9</sup> 晃全.



From the *Teiho kenzeiki zue* 訂補建新記圖會, the illustrated edition of the *Kenzei-ki* revised by the Sōtō priest Menzan and published in 1806. The illustration is a Tokugawa artist's conception of a sermon Dōgen delivered at the mansion of Lord Hatano Yoshishige, probably *Shōbōgenzō Zenki*. The inscription reads: Preaching the Dharma at the mansion of [Lord] Hatano of Unshū.

been unable to consult it. It is said to be rougher in style and generally inferior to the *Himitsu Shōbōgenzō* text.<sup>10</sup>

Birth and death (samsara), the cycle of births and deaths that unenlightened beings repeat endlessly according to their past actions, is sometimes described as a “sea,” bottomless, limitless, and difficult to cross, which Buddhists must negotiate to reach the “other-shore” of nirvana. The vow of every Buddhist is to save all beings from the sufferings of birth and death.

But Dōgen specifically rejects an approach that would discard birth and death as evil or odious and look for the bliss of nirvana beyond this world, because birth and death is in reality “the Life of Buddha,” nirvana is unrealizable apart from samsara. Both birth and death (or, life and death) are themselves the manifestation of the Buddha Dharma (Buddha Nature), and as such each is emancipated from itself, that is, birth is no-birth, and death is no-death. To Dōgen the present life is the only life; it is absolute, without before or after: the present death is the only death; it is absolute, with no coming or going. It is an eternal life and an eternal death encompassed in this and in every instant, yet not hindering one another. This dynamism of life and death is realized not through speculative reasoning but solely in practice, in *zazen*, for he tells us in *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki* that if one practices *zazen* for a length of many years, one day he will suddenly “clarify the great matter.”<sup>11</sup>

*Zenki* and *Shōji* form part of a series of translations from *Shōbōgenzō* that began with *Bendōwa* (*Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. IV No. 1), and followed in the previous issue with *Ikka Myōju* (Vol. IV No. 2). We plan to offer annotated translations of other important fascicles in subsequent issues. These will be included with still other fascicles and published in book form in the near future.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Ōkubo Dōshū, *Dōgen Zenji Den no Kenkyū*, (“A Study of Dōgen’s Life”) rev. ed. (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1966), p. 322. Also, Kawamura, op. cit. No. 23, p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> *Dōgen Zenji Zenshū* II, p. 469.

## ZENKI

(text)

In the culmination of its quest, the great Way of all buddhas is emancipation and realization.<sup>1</sup> “Emancipation” means that life emancipates life, and that death emancipates death. For this reason, there is deliverance from birth and death, and immersion in birth and death. Both are the great Way totally culminated. There is discarding of birth and death, and there is crossing of birth and death.<sup>2</sup> Both are the great Way totally culminated. Realization is life. Life is realization.<sup>3</sup> When [the great Way] is realized, it is nothing but life’s total realization, it is nothing but death’s total realization.<sup>4</sup>

This dynamic working<sup>5</sup> readily brings about life and readily brings about death. At the very time this dynamic working is thus realized, it is not necessarily large, it is not necessarily small; it is not limitless, it is not limited; it is not long or far, short or near.<sup>6</sup> One’s present life exists within this dynamic working: this dynamic working exists within this present life.

Life is not a coming and it is not a going; it is not an existing and it is not a becoming. Nevertheless, life is the manifestation of the total dynamic

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<sup>1</sup> All dharmas (things) in the universe are the Buddha Dharma; the Buddha Dharma is manifested or realized (*genjō*; 現成) clearly in all dharmas. For Dōgen, being “confirmed” (*shō*; 證) by these dharmas, that is, “proving” the above fact in oneself in *zazen*, is the emancipation (*tōdatsu*; 透脱) from all attachments, the breakthrough that constitutes enlightenment. For all buddhas, that is, for all enlightened beings, there is *emancipation*, shedding the ego-self in practice, and *realization*, manifesting or realizing all dharmas in one’s true self, the self beyond all dualities.

<sup>2</sup> “Crossing (度) birth and death” (and the preceding “immersion. . .” 入) signifies entering birth and death in order to work for the salvation of all beings.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 1. Since all dharmas are the Buddha Dharma, there is no life apart from its manifestation, and no manifestation apart from life. Cf. the illustration of the man riding in the boat below.

<sup>4</sup> Since the great Way of buddhas is beyond all dualities, including the basic duality of birth and death, from life’s point of view each thing, including death, is life’s total realization; from death’s point of view each thing, including life, is death’s total realization.

<sup>5</sup> “Dynamic working”—*kikan*; 機関.

<sup>6</sup> I.e., this dynamic working is not something to which dualistic concepts can be applied.

working; death is the manifestation of the total dynamic working.<sup>7</sup>

You should know that within the incalculable dharmas that are in you, there is life and there is death. You must quietly reflect whether your present life and all the dharmas existing with this life share a common life or not. [In fact,] there can be nothing—not one instant of time or a single dharma—that does not share life in common. For a thing as well as for a mind, there is nothing but sharing life in common.<sup>8</sup>

Life is like a man riding a boat. Aboard the boat, he uses a sail, he takes the tiller, he poles the boat along. Yet the boat carries him, and without the boat he is not there. By riding in the boat, he makes it a boat. You must concentrate yourself to studying and penetrating this very time. At this time, all is the world of the boat. The heavens, the water, the shore—all become the boat's time, and they are not the same as time which is not the boat.<sup>9</sup> It is for this reason that life is what I make to exist, and I is what life makes me. In boarding the boat, one's body and mind and the entire surrounding environment are all the boat's dynamic working; both the entire earth and all space are the boat's dynamic working. The I that is living, the life that is I, is just like this.

<sup>7</sup> Each existence has its own respective dharma stage (法位), its own "time," and does not intrude upon any other existence. Yet that which makes each and every existence individual is also functioning equally within each and every individual. Because there is life, there is death; because there is death, there is life. Life is life and is not death, yet there cannot be life without death, and vice versa. Cf. *Shōbōgenzō genjōkōan*: "It is an established Dharma teaching, that life does not become death. Buddhism therefore speaks of no-life. It is an established teaching in the Buddha Dharma that death does not become life. Buddhism therefore speaks of non-extinction. Life is one stage of total time, and death is one stage of total time. With winter and spring, for example, we do not say that winter becomes spring, or that spring becomes summer." *Zenshū I*, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the following passage, part of which comes in the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, that is found in *Shōbōgenzō kaiin zammai* 海印三昧: "The body consists of all dharmas combined together. When it is produced, it is dharmas only that is produced. When it perishes, it is dharmas only that perish. When these dharmas are produced, we do not say an I is produced; when these dharmas perish, we do not say an I perishes..." *ibid*, p.102.

<sup>9</sup> "...boat's time." For Dōgen, every thing is dynamic, every thing is time. Each stage (位) of time contains the total dynamic working of the entire universe, so that the boat's (stage of) time encompasses heaven, water, shore, that is, everything in the universe. Cf. "...all being-time is total time, all grasses and all forms are equally time; there is all being and all the world in the time of each time." *Shōbōgenzō uji* 有時 (*ibid*, p.190).



Zen master Yüan-wu K'o-ch'in said:<sup>10</sup> "Life is the manifestation of the total dynamism: death is the manifestation of the total dynamism." You should clarify and penetrate this utterance in practice. What you must penetrate is this: although the principle of "life is the manifestation of the total dynamism" covers all the world and all space, without concern for beginnings or endings, not only does it not hinder [any] "life as the manifestation of the total dynamism," it does not even hinder [any] "death as the manifestation of the total dynamism." Although when "death is the manifestation of the total dynamism," it covers all the world and all space, not only does it not impede [any] "death as the manifestation of the total dynamism," it does not even impede [any] "life as the manifestation of the total dynamism."<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, life does not impede death; death does not impede life. All the world and all space exist equally within life and within death. This does not mean, however, that one single world, or one single space,<sup>12</sup> is totally dynamically worked within life and within death. Though this<sup>13</sup> is not oneness, it is not difference; though it is not difference, it is not sameness; though it is not sameness, this is not multifariousness. Therefore, within life there are multitudinous dharmas manifesting their total dynamic working, and within death there are multitudinous dharmas manifesting their total dynamic working. And the manifestation of their total dynamic working exists within what is

<sup>10</sup> The following quotation comes in a poem by Yüan-wu that Dōgen quotes at more length in *SBGZ shinjingakudō* 身心學道 (ibid, p.41): "Life is the manifestation of the total dynamism: /Death is the manifestation of the total dynamism. /Filling to the full the immensity of space, /The unbarred mind, always bright, clear." Yüan-wu K'o-ch'in 圓悟克勤 (J. Engo Kokugon; 1063–1135) is best known for the *Pi-yen lu* 碧巖錄 (J. *Hekiganroku*), which he compiled and partly authored. Yüan-wu gives the poem as a 'cap' to a mondo; see *Yüan-wu kuang-lu* 17 圓悟廣錄 (J. *Engo kōroku*).

<sup>11</sup> At the time of life's total manifestation, beyond the duality of birth and death, life does not hinder death's total manifestation, and vice versa. Life's total manifestation and death's total manifestation, though equally encompassing all dharmas, do not hinder each other. That is, each stage of time is total and yet does not impede on any other. Cf. the final paragraph.

<sup>12</sup> "This does not mean... one single world..." It is not one world as a single fixed whole, but, as we see two sentences later, "multitudinous dharmas manifesting their total dynamic working..."

<sup>13</sup> "This," i.e., the entire dynamic structure described above.

neither life or death. In the manifestation of the total dynamic working, there is life, and there is death.

Therefore, the total dynamic working of birth and death could be likened to the bending and extending of a young man's arm, or to a person reaching back for his pillow in the night.<sup>14</sup> It is manifested by means of the great many all-pervading powers and radiant brightnesses within it.<sup>15</sup>

When it is thus manifested, since the total dynamic working is being activated by the manifestation, it is thought that it has not been manifest prior to the present manifestation. However, prior to its present manifestation was the previous manifestation of the total dynamic working. Although there was a previous manifestation of the total dynamic working, it does not impede the present manifestation of the total dynamic working. That is the reason for competing manifestations of such thoughts.<sup>16</sup>

Delivered the 17th day of the 12th month, the 3rd year of Ninji [1242], under the patronage of the governor of Unshū,<sup>17</sup> [at his residence] adjacent to the Rokuharamitsu-ji, Yōshū. Transcribed the 19th day of the 1st month, the 4th year of Ninji [1243], by Ejō.

<sup>14</sup> The first simile derives from the Kammuryōju-kyō (Meditation Sutra): Bending and extending are both total activities of the same arm which do not hinder each other, just as birth and death, the two great movements of the universe, are each total, mutually un-hindering, activities of that universe. The second, an utterance of the Zen master Tao-wu (J. Dōgo; 769–835), is the subject of Dōgen's commentary in *SBGZ kannon* (ibid, p.169 ff.).

<sup>15</sup> "All-pervading powers" (*jinzu* 神通) and "radiant brightnesses" (*kōmyō* 光明), two terms frequently encountered in Buddhist literature, are given detailed treatment by Dōgen in separate fascicles of *Shōbōgenzō*: *Jinzū* and *Kōmyō*. Here he uses them as representatives of the individual entities (dharma) manifested within the total working of birth and the total working of death.

<sup>16</sup> "Such thoughts" refers to the above "it is thought that it has not been manifested prior to the present manifestation." This last paragraph gains from being read in light of the previous paragraph beginning, "Therefore, life does not impede death, death..."

<sup>17</sup> This is Dōgen's patron and lay follower Hatano Yoshishige.

## SHŌJI

(text)

“Since there is a buddha within birth and death, there is no birth and death.” It is also said: “Since there is no buddha within birth and death, one is not deluded by birth and death.” These ideas were uttered by two Zen masters, Chia-shan and Ting-shan.<sup>1</sup> Being the words of those who have attained the Way, they cannot have been uttered in vain. Those who would be free from birth and death must clearly realize their meaning.

For a person to seek buddha apart from birth and death would be like pointing the cart thills northward when you wished to go south to Yüeh, or like facing south to see Ursa major [in the northern skies]; the cause of birth and death would increase all the more, and he would leave completely the Way of deliverance.

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<sup>1</sup> Chia-shan Shan-hui 夾山善會 (Kassan Zen'e: 805–881); Ting-shan Shên-ying 定山神英 (Jōsan Shin'ei: 771–853). The full dialogue in which these two quotations appear is found in somewhat different wording in *Ching-tê ch'uan-têng lu* 7. “While walking together, Chia-shan and Ting-shan were talking. Ting-shan said, ‘No buddha within birth and death is in itself no birth and death.’ Chia-shan said, ‘Buddha within birth and death means no illusion about birth and death.’ They went up the mountain to see the master [Ta-me]. Chia-shan asked him, ‘We are unable to decide which of our views is closer to the truth.’ Ta-me said, ‘One is close. One is far.’ Chia-shan asked him, ‘Which is close?’ Ta-me answered, ‘You should leave and come again tomorrow.’ The next day, Chia-shan went once more and put the same question to the master. Ta-me said, ‘The one who is close does not ask. The one who asks is not close.’ (After he had become a temple master himself, Chia-shan said: ‘At that time I lacked the Eye.’)” While both Chia-shan and Ting-shan refer to the idea that samsara is nirvana, nirvana is samsara, the former speaks of liberation from birth and death, emphasizing that buddha is not apart from birth and death. The latter indicates the same liberation more clearly, emphasizing that birth and death is absolutely birth and death, without respect to buddha or anything else. In the full episode quoted above, Ta-me says that one is close and one far, but Dōgen judges them as equal, emphasizing the nonduality of samsara and nirvana, and especially to show that not hating samsara and not desiring nirvana is the attainment of buddha.

Just understand that birth and death itself is nirvana, and you will neither hate one as being birth and death, nor cherish the other as being nirvana. Only then can you be free of birth and death.

It is a mistake to think you pass from birth to death. Being one stage of total time,<sup>2</sup> birth is already possessed of before and after. For this reason, in the Buddha Dharma it is said that birth itself is no-birth. Being one stage of total time as well, cessation of life also is possessed of before and after. Thus it is said, extinction itself is non-extinction.<sup>3</sup> When one speaks of birth, there is nothing at all apart from birth. When one speaks of death, there is nothing at all apart from death.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, when birth comes, you should just give yourself to birth; when death comes you should give yourself to death. Do not hate them.<sup>5</sup> Do not desire them.

This present birth and death itself is the Life of buddha. If you attempt to reject it with distaste, you are losing thereby the Life of buddha. If you abide in it, attaching to birth and death, you also lose the Life of buddha, and leave yourself with [only] the appearance of buddha. You only attain the mind of buddha when there is no hating [of birth and death] and no desiring [of nirvana].<sup>6</sup> But do not try to gauge it with your mind or speak it with words. When you simply release and forget both your body and your mind and throw yourself into the house of buddha, and when functioning comes from the direction of buddha and you go in accord with it,<sup>7</sup> then with no strength needed and no thought expended, freed from birth and death, you become buddha. Then there can be no obstacle in any man's mind.

<sup>2</sup> "Stage of total time..." cf. *Zenki*, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 75, footnote 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 75, second paragraph (beginning "quietly reflect...").

<sup>5</sup> Here the *Himitsu Shōbōgenzō* text reads *to iu* といふ, which is difficult to account for in this context. We follow Ōkubo in emending to *itou* いふ. Also see Kawamura, *Komazawa Bukkyogaku Kiyō*, No. 23, p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> "Do not hate it" cf. *Bendōwa*, *Eastern Buddhist* Vol. IV, No. 1, p.149.

<sup>7</sup> This sentence is cited variously as evidence of Dōgen's affinity to Pure Land thought, and as grounds for disproving *Shōji's* genuineness. The Pure Land affinity may be admitted if "buddha," in the expressions "throw yourself into the house of buddha," and "when the functioning comes from the direction of buddha," should be taken to mean a *Tariki*\*

## THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

There is an extremely easy way to become buddha. Refraining from all evils, not clinging to birth and death, working in deep compassion for all sentient beings, respecting those over you and pitying those below you, without any detesting or desiring, worrying or lamentation—this is what is called buddha. Do not search beyond it.

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\*or “Other-Power” Buddha, such as Amida. However, in the context of Dōgen’s thought as a whole, it would perhaps be preferable to understand it in the sense of “Buddha Nature” or “Original Face” that is seen from the side of illusion. To account for the use here of a seemingly Pure Land style expression, one theory cites a Sōtō tradition that *Sbōji* is the record of Dōgen’s instruction intended for Pure Land Buddhists.