



Bishop's Office Newsletter

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Fourth Quarter, 2020

Issue No. 34

Bishop's Message: Bishop Shugen Komagata

Aloha from the Bishop's Office,

Recently, Hawaii has seen a drastic uptick in new infections and deaths caused by the Novel Coronavirus. I hope you have been doing well throughout these very turbulent times. I pray for a quick resolution to this problem, and for the recovery of those infected by the virus.

In the Soto Zen tradition, October is the month when we honor Bodhidharma, also known in Japanese as Daruma. Daruma is the Indian monk who traveled to China and spread the Buddhist spirit through seated meditation, or zazen.

As we find ourselves having spent majority of 2020 dealing with the global pandemic, perhaps now is the opportune time to reflect upon the teaching Daruma. The saying, "nanakorobi yaoki," translated to mean "seven times down, eight times up," comes from the physical and mental perseverance of Daruma. For so many people around the world, 2020 has been a year full of "nanakorobi" (seven times down)—roadblocks, setbacks, and misfortune—for a multitude of reasons.

It is important that we direct our focus on "yaoki," or "eight times up." We must do our best to overcome adversity and be happy. During the recent shutdown and stay-at-home order, sometimes we can find happiness and peace in the small things. Offer senko in front of your butsudan. Take the time to chat with a friend or loved one on the phone. Clean out that storage shed that has accumulated so much over the years. Exercise. Let us take a moment to reflect upon the positive impact Bodhidharma can have in our lives, whether it is through zazen or simply to stay positive and never give up.

Please take care of yourself and your loved ones.

In Gassho,

Bishop Shugen Komagata



Shushogi, Chapter 5: Verses 30-32

By Rev. Daitsu Tom Wright
Alaneo Zendō



Being Grateful

As we all know, each sentence or couple of sentences in *Shushōgi* have been taken from various fascicles of Dōgen Zenji’s *Shōbōgenzō*. For example, our opening sentences were taken from different sections of *Shōbōgenzō: Gyōji (jō)—Continuous Practice, (Part I)*. **“Time passes faster than an arrow. This living body is even more transient than the dew. No matter how skillful one may be, it is impossible to bring back even a single day that has already passed. To have lived aimlessly to a hundred years is to taste the bitterness of time, to become nothing more than a sad carcass. Even though you have allowed yourself to be a slave to your senses for a hundred years, if you give yourself over to practice for even a day, you will gain a hundred years of life in this world as well as in the next. Each day of your life should be considered to be precious; you should have deep regard for this mere shell of a body. It is through our own practice that the practice of the various buddhas appears and their great way reaches us. Through our *continuing and maintaining practice*, the *continuing and maintaining practice* of all the buddhas manifests. The Great Way of all the buddhas permeates everywhere. Therefore, each day of our practice is the seed of all the buddhas, the seed of the *continuous practice* of the buddhas.”**

Dōgen Zenji is not the first person who has said that time passes swiftly and our life is transient, but his interpretation of this ancient saying carries a different message. Whereas, some people think that since our life is very short, we should live a fun life and try to get as much as we can; that we should try to make as much money as possible and hold on to as much power as we can grab. Dōgen, however, interprets this quick passing of time and of our life to mean that because our life is short, we should devote it to practicing the Buddha Way. He is telling us that to pile up money or material possessions or power is pointless. And, it is through our day-to-day studying and practice of the Buddha’s teaching that is most important. That is, we have to continue to practice day by day, hour by hour, encounter by encounter. Then, surely the *seeds* of our practice will bear the fruit of all the buddhas.

Our text continues; **“All the various *buddhas* are none other than the Buddha Shakyamuni himself. The Buddha Shakyamuni is nothing other than ‘this very mind is *buddha*’. When the *buddhas* of the past, present, and future become *buddhas*, they surely become the Buddha Shakyamuni. That is ‘this very mind is *buddha*.”**

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This passage was taken from the fascicle *Sokushin Zebutsu—This Very Mind is Buddha*. Our next sentence, “**Study this question in careful detail: Who is *this mind itself is buddha*?**” comes from *Ōsaku Sendaba—The King Requests Sendaba*. And, our final sentence, “**For it is in this way that we can express our gratitude to the Buddha,**” can be found in the fascicle *Raihai Tokuzui—Revering Attainment of the Marrow*.

Now, let us explore the meaning of these passages.

All the various *buddhas* are none other than the Buddha Shakyamuni himself. The Buddha Shakyamuni is nothing other than ‘this very mind is the Buddha’. When the *buddhas* of the past, present, and future become *buddhas*, they surely become the Buddha Shakyamuni. The implication that all *buddhas* are, in fact, the Buddha Shakyamuni, is that all *buddhas*, past, present and future *buddhas*, have discovered or attained the same enlightenment that the Buddha Shakyamuni attained. What a *buddha* does, any *buddha*, is carry out *buddha actions*, i.e., acts as a *buddha*. That means when we take up the posture of zazen, we are taking up the same posture as the Buddha Shakyamuni. We are carrying out *buddha actions*. Yokoyama Sodō Rōshi calligraphed the expression 坐相降臨 *zasō kōrin*—the posture of zazen has come down from the heavens. In other words, that very form we are able to take when we sit zazen is a gift from the heavens. And, I think the longer we sit, the deeper we are able to realize that truth.

In the fascicle, *Ōsaku Sendaba*, leading up to this line, ‘**We must deliberate carefully on who ‘this very mind itself is *buddha*’ is referring to**’, we can read the following: “Do not be remiss in your study and, by all means, carry on that life vein of our Buddha ancestors. For example, when someone asks, ‘What is *buddha*?’ and the reply is ‘this very mind is *buddha*’, what does that truly mean? Is this not *the king requesting sendaba*? We must deliberate carefully on who ‘this very mind is *buddha*’ is referring to.”

Here, *this mind* refers to the very life force which we have been given. In this passage, *mind* or *shin*—心, is not referring merely to our psychological mind. Here, *shin*, refers to our very life force, which is, at the same time, *buddha*.

“**For it is in this way that we can express our gratitude to the Buddha,**” How can we not feel grateful for being able to carry out the actions of a *buddha*. The opportunity to return to the true and full reality of our life through sitting zazen is something that we must always feel grateful for, because returning to the full reality of our life means to give full measure to who we truly are. This is expressed in our founder, Dōgen Zenji’s, 只管打坐 *shikan taza*—just concentrate on sitting, and in his 尽一切自己 *jin-issai jiko*—all inclusive and comprehensive self. Sawaki Kōdō Rōshi expressed through his enigmatic expression 自己が自己を自己する *jiko ga jiko wo jiko suru*—self selfs the self. His disciple, Uchiyama Kōshō Rōshi expressed this as 自己ぎりの自己 *jiko giri no jiko*—self that is only self. In other words, who we truly are, who our true self is, is a self that is connected to and comprises the whole universe. This is embodied in the Buddhist understanding of interdependence of all things.

How wonderful it is that each of us, in our own way, can practice *this mind itself is buddha*, in our sitting life, and then carry that over into our day-to-day actions, through kind and compassionate actions.

