

On Learning the Way Through Body and Mind

(*Shinjin Gakudō*)

Translator's Introduction: In this discourse, the Japanese word *shin* is most often rendered as 'mind'. However, there are places where the reference is clearly to 'heart' or to 'intention' (what one has in mind), and it has been translated accordingly.

You cannot realize the Buddha's Way if you do not aim to practice the Way, and It will be ever more distant from you if you do not aim to study It. Meditation Master Nangaku Ejō once said, "It is not that your training and enlightenment are absent, but they must not be tainted with anything." If we do not study the Buddha's Way, then we will lapse into the ways of non-Buddhists or those who are immoral. This is why former Buddhas and later Buddhas all invariably trained in, and practiced, the Buddha's Way.

There are provisionally two ways to learn what the Buddha's Way is: namely, to learn by means of our mind and to learn by means of our body. To learn by means of the mind is to learn by all sorts of minds. Those minds include the discriminative mind, the mind of feelings and emotions, and the mind that sees the oneness of all things, among others. Also, after we have established a spiritual rapport with a Master and have given rise to the mind that would realize full enlightenment, we take refuge in the Great Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors and explore the daily functioning of the mind that seeks full enlightenment. Even if we have not yet given rise to the mind that truly aspires to realize full enlightenment, we should imitate the methods of the Buddhas and Ancestors of the past who gave rise to the mind that seeks enlightenment. This mind is the mind that has resolved to realize enlightenment; it is the manifestation of a sincere heart moment by moment, the mind of previous Buddhas, our everyday mind, and the three worlds of desire, form, and beyond form. All of these are the products of our mind alone.

Sometimes we learn the Way by casting aside these various minds, and sometimes we learn the Way by taking them up. Thus, we learn the Way by thinking about these minds, and we learn the Way by not thinking about them. Sometimes a kesa* of gold brocade is forthwith Transmitted and duly accepted.¹

* See *Glossary*.

Sometimes there is Bodhidharma's saying, "You have gotten what my marrow is," followed by standing in place after making three full prostrations.² There is learning Mind by means of mind, which is the Transmitting of a kesa to the one who pounded rice.³ To shave one's head and dye one's robes is nothing other than to turn one's heart around and illumine one's mind. To scale the castle walls and enter the mountains is to leave one frame of mind behind and enter another.⁴ That a mountain monastery is being entered means that whatever one is thinking about is based on not deliberately thinking about some particular thing.⁵ That the worldly life is being abandoned means that what one is specifically thinking about is not the point. To fix one's gaze upon these thoughts is comparable to two or three rounded heaps: to play around with these thoughts in spiritual ignorance is comparable to myriad thousands of sharp edges. When we learn in this manner what the Way is, appreciation will naturally come from our making efforts, but efforts do not necessarily proceed from already having appreciation. Even so, to borrow unseen the Nostrils of an Ancestor of the Buddha and let them expel one's Breath, and to use the hooves of a donkey or a horse and let them stamp the seal* of one's awakening, these have been signposts of the Way for tens of thousands in the past.⁶

In short, the great earth with its mountains and rivers, along with the sun, moon, and stars, are the very stuff of our mind. So, right at this very moment, what sort of thing is appearing before our very eyes? When we speak of the great earth

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1. This is an allusion to a Zen Buddhist traditional account that Shakyamuni, when dying, gave His gold brocade kesa to Makakashō as proof of Transmission.
 2. This is a reference to the Mind-to-Mind Transmission from Bodhidharma to his disciple Taiso Eka.
 3. A reference to the Mind-to-Mind Transmission from Daiman Kōnin to Daikan Enō, which was accompanied by passing on the kesa that Bodhidharma had originally brought with him to China.
 4. An allusion to Prince Siddhārtha's leaving his life in his father's palace behind and entering the mountains to seek the Way.
 5. An allusion to a kōan story concerning Meditation Master Yakusan, recounted by Dōgen in Discourse 26: On Wanshi's 'Kindly Advice for Doing Seated Meditation' (*Zazen Shin*), pp. 335–338.
 6. 'Nostrils' refers to one's Buddha Nature, which is as plain as the nose on one's face. 'The hooves of a donkey' refers to one's commitment to plodding on, doing one's daily training to clean up one's karma. 'The hooves of a horse' refers to one's commitment to galloping on, going wherever necessary to help all sentient beings realize the Truth.

with its mountains and rivers, the mountains and rivers, for instance, will refer to some mountain and some flowing water: but ‘the great earth’ is not limited to just this place where we are now.

Mountains are also of many types. There are great Mount Sumerus and there are small Mount Sumerus. There are those that lie horizontally and there are those that rise vertically. There are those within three thousand worlds and there are those in innumerable countries. There are those that depend on their form and there are those that depend on empty space.

Rivers likewise are of many types. There are celestial rivers and there are earthly rivers. There are the four great rivers and there is Lake Anavatapta from which they flow. There are the four Anavatapta lakes in the northern continent of Uttarakuru, and there are oceans, and there are ponds.⁷

‘The earth’ does not necessarily refer to land, and land does not necessarily refer to ‘the earth’. The earth can refer to the land, and it can refer to the ground of our mind, and it can refer to earth that is treasured, such as a monastery. Though we say that earth is what all things are, this will not negate the concept of ‘earth’, for there may be worlds in which space is viewed as ‘earth’.

There are differences in the way that the sun, moon, and stars are viewed by humans and celestial beings, since all their various viewpoints are not the same. Because this is the way things are, the perspectives of our whole mind function as one. These perspectives are already what our mind is. So, should we treat the great earth with its mountains and rivers, the sun, the moon and the stars as being within us or outside us, as arising or as departing? When we are born, is one speck of something added to us? At death, does one mote of something depart from us? Where are we to find this birth-and-death, along with our views about it? Up to the present, they have been just one moment of the mind and then a second moment of the mind. One moment of the mind and then a second moment of the mind is one great earth with its mountains and rivers and then a second great earth with its mountains and rivers. Since such things as the great earth with its mountains and rivers are beyond a matter of existing or not existing, they are beyond being large or small, beyond being acquirable or not acquirable, beyond being directly knowable or not being directly knowable, beyond being penetrable or not being penetrable, and they do not change in accordance with our having awakened or not.

You should definitely accept as true that what we call ‘learning the Way through mind’ is the mind, as it has just been described, accustoming itself to

7. Lake Anavatapta is traditionally said to be in Tibet, and is considered the source of the four major rivers of India. In Indian cosmology, there are four continents surrounding Mount Sumeru, which is considered the center of the universe. Uttarakuru is the northern continent.

learning the Way. This truth goes beyond anything's 'being large or small' or 'existing or not existing'. Our learning of the Way is described in one Scripture as, "Knowing that a home is not our Home, we abandon our home, leaving home life behind in order to become a monk." This is beyond any measure of size, beyond any measure of proximity. It is beyond all the Ancestors from first to last, and it is even beyond a Master who has gone beyond Buddhahood by helping others to realize Buddhahood. There is verbally expounding upon the Matter* as being 'seven feet or eight feet'.⁸ And there is actually embarking for the Other Shore, which is done for the sake of both oneself and others. This is what learning the Way is. Because learning the Way is as this, the tiles* and stones of our walls and fences constitute our very mind. Further, our learning the Way is beyond such sayings as "The three worlds of desire, form, and beyond form, and these alone, are what constitute the mind," or "The whole universe, and this alone, is what constitutes the mind. It is the tiles and stones of our walls and fences." What was nurtured in the years before the Chinese Hsien-tung era (860-873) broke down in the years after the Chinese Hsien-tung era.⁹ To learn the Way is our 'slogging through the mud and being drenched in the water'¹⁰ and our 'binding ourselves without a rope'.¹¹ It is our having the ability to draw forth the Pearl and the skill to enter the Water for It. There will be the day when this Pearl dissolves, and there will be times when It is smashed to pieces, and there will be times when It is crushed to bits. We do not consider ourselves as being equal with those who are the pillars* of the temple, nor do consider ourselves to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with those who are as stone lanterns.* Because things are as they are, we learn the Way by running barefoot and we learn the Way by doing somersaults.¹² And who among you will fix your eyes upon It and look? For each and every one of us, there is our going forth in accordance with whatever circumstances arise. At such a time,

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8. That is, after having awakened to the Truth, one employs skillful means, which are adjusted to whatever situation arises, without becoming fixed to only one way of responding.
 9. An allusion to a remark made by the tenth-century Meditation Master Sōzan Honjaku who, along with his Master Tōzan Ryōkai, is credited with founding the Sōtō Zen lineage. The remark refers to his level of understanding early in his training as being superficial and to his understanding later as having gone beyond understanding.
 10. A common Zen Buddhist phrase describing a monk's willingness to help others no matter what he or she may need to go through.
 11. An allusion to keeping to the Precepts without feeling bound up by them.
 12. This sentence describes how we learn, namely, by being willing to stumble on, stepping on all manner of things, and by being willing to be tossed head over heels, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

because our walls are falling down, this helps us to learn that the ten directions are open to us, and because there are no gates, this helps us to learn that we are not kept from going anywhere.

As to the phrase, ‘the mind that has resolved to realize enlightenment’, this mind sometimes arises in a life-and-death situation, sometimes in the serenity of nirvana, and sometimes under other conditions. It does not depend on any place, and it is not obstructed by any place where it arises. The intention to seek enlightenment does not arise from any particular set of conditions and it does not arise from the intellect. It arises from the intention to seek enlightenment. In fact, it is the intention that seeks enlightenment. The intention that gives rise to seeking enlightenment is beyond existing or not existing, beyond the judgmental realm of ‘good or evil’, and beyond moral indifference. It is not something that arises as an effect from some previous life, nor is it something that beings in lofty worlds can always realize. It is simply the arising of the intention to realize enlightenment at that moment in time. Because it is not concerned with external circumstances, at the very moment when this intention to seek enlightenment arises, the whole universe, through and through, also gives rise to the intention to seek enlightenment. Though it is said that this arising seems to turn external circumstances around, the intention to seek enlightenment is something that these circumstances do not recognize. The arising of this intention is like both self and other stretching out their hands to each other. And we ourselves stretch out our hands as go forth amidst beings who are alien to us. We give rise to the intention to realize enlightenment even within the worlds of the hells, the hungry ghosts,* the animals, and the asuras.*

As to the phrase, ‘the manifestation of a sincere heart moment by moment’, at all moments we manifest a sincere heart. And we do it not for one or two moments, but moment by moment.

*The leaves of a lotus are round in their roundness
And their roundness resembles a mirror:
The spines of a water chestnut are sharp in their
sharpness
And their sharpness resembles an awl.*

We speak of the leaves resembling a mirror, but they are so just moment by moment; we speak of the spines resembling an awl, but they are so just moment by moment.

As to the phrase ‘the mind of previous Buddhas’:

A monk of long ago once asked National Teacher Echū, “Just what is the mind of previous Buddhas?”

The National Teacher responded, “The tiles and stones of our walls and fences.”

Since this is so, you need to realize that the mind of previous Buddhas is beyond the tiles and stones of Their walls and fences, and ‘the tiles and stones of Their walls and fences’ goes beyond what is called ‘the mind of previous Buddhas’. This is how we learn what the mind of previous Buddhas is.

When we want to understand what ‘mind’ is, be it in this world or some other world, it is simply our everyday mind. Yesterday departs from this place and today comes from this place. When yesterday departs, the whole of the heavens departs, and when today comes, every bit of the earth comes: this is our everyday mind. Our everyday mind opens and closes within these confines. Because a thousand gates and ten thousand doors open or close at any one time, they are what ‘everyday’ is.

Now, ‘the whole of the heavens’ and ‘every bit of the earth’ are like forgotten phrases, like some voice gushing up out of the ground. The phrases are equal, the minds are equal, and the Teachings are equal. Our living and our dying die out in every moment, but we are ever ignorant of what preceded this latest body of ours. Though we are ignorant, if we give rise to the intention to seek enlightenment, we are undoubtedly advancing along the road to enlightenment. Already we have established this place, and there is no doubt about it. And we already have doubts about it, which is what being ‘everyday’ is.



The phrase, ‘learning the Way through the body’, means that we learn the Way by means of the body, that we learn the Way by means of our living flesh. Our Body comes from our learning the Way, and what has come from our learning the Way is our body along with our Body. The whole universe in all ten quarters is synonymous with our one real physical body, and the coming and going of birth and death is also synonymous with our real physical body. We train with this body when we part company with the ten evils, hold to the eight Precepts, take refuge in the Three Treasures, and give up our homes, leaving home life behind to become a monk—this is to truly learn the Way. Thus we speak of this as ‘our true human body’. By all means, those of us learning in these later times must not hold to the same opinions as those non-Buddhists who deny causality.

Meditation Master Hyakujō Daichi once said, “If you hold to the opinion that we are Buddhas by nature and are already in the Way of Meditation because we are innately immaculate and innately enlightened, then you belong among those non-Buddhists who deny causality.” Unlike broken tools in a vacant house, these words of his are the product of his merits and virtues accumulated through his learning the Way. Having leapt beyond the opposites, he is brilliantly clear in all aspects; having let everything drop away, he is like wisteria that no longer depends on a tree for its support.

Sometimes those who learn the Way manifest in their own bodily form in order to help rescue others by giving voice to the Dharma, and sometimes they manifest in another bodily form in order to help rescue others by giving voice to the Dharma, and sometimes they do not manifest in their own bodily form in order to help rescue others by giving voice to the Dharma, and sometimes they do not manifest in another bodily form in order to help rescue others by giving voice to the Dharma, and so on, going so far as to not give voice to the Dharma in order to help rescue others. At the same time, when someone gives up their body and then raises their voice to proclaim the Dharma, there is something that silences all other voices. And by putting one’s life on the line, there is something that will get to the Marrow when one opens one’s hara.¹³ Even if you had taken your first steps in learning the Way before the time of the Lords of Awe-inspiring Voices in the ever so distant past, you would have developed even further if you had been Hyakujō’s own children and grandchildren.

‘The whole universe in all ten quarters’ means that each of the ten quarters is the whole universe. East, west, north, south, plus northeast, southeast, northwest, and southwest, along with the zenith and the nadir, are what we call the ten quarters. We need to consider the occasions when their front and back, length and width, are thoroughly whole.¹⁴ What we call ‘considering’ means clearly seeing and determining that, even though it is said that our human body is restricted by ‘self and other’, nevertheless it is the whole of the ten quarters. We hear in this

13. ‘Opening the hara to get to the Marrow’ refers to a certain spiritual experience that may occur when someone’s meditative mind is focused on the hara, which is the area just above the navel. This is sometimes represented by a picture of a monk—or an arhat—pulling open the hara to reveal within Something that is variously described as a Golden Buddha, the Child of the Lord, or the Embryo of Buddha (Skt. *Tathāgatagarbha*).

14. In other words, front and back, and length and width are not separate from each other, nor are they separate from the whole universe. Just as you cannot have a front without a back, so you cannot have anything that is somehow independent of the whole universe.

expression something that has not been heard before, due to its implications that the ten quarters are equal to each other and that the universe is equal to itself.

A human body is composed of four elements* and five skandhas.* Its four elements and its six sense organs, all together, are not something thoroughly understood by ordinary, worldly people, but they are something that saintly people have thoroughly explored through their training. Further, we need to clearly see the ten quarters within a single dust mote, and it is not that the ten quarters are all packed up in one sack.¹⁵ Sometimes, the Monks' Hall and the Buddha Hall are erected within a single mote of dust, and sometimes the whole universe is erected in the Monks' Hall and the Buddha Hall, for it is from these Halls that the universe has been built. The principle of this is that the universe in all ten quarters is our real Body. Do not follow erroneous views that deny causality. Since the universe is beyond measure, it is beyond being wide or narrow. The universe in all ten quarters is the eighty-four thousand skandhas that give expression to the Dharma, the eighty-four thousand meditative states, and the eighty-four thousand invocations. The eighty-four thousand skandhas that give expression to the Dharma are the turning of the Wheel of the Dharma, and the place where the Wheel of the Dharma turns spans the whole universe and spans all time. It is not a place without directions or boundaries: it is our real Body. You and I, right now, are human beings who are the real Body of the whole universe in all ten quarters. We learn the Way without ever making a mistake about such things. We go on, discarding one body and receiving another, for three great asamkhyeya eons, or thirteen great asamkhyeya eons, or immeasurable asamkhyeya eons,¹⁶ during which time, without fail, we learn the Way. We learn the Way by now stepping forward, now stepping back. Our respectfully bowing, with hands in *gasshō*,* is our everyday behavior of walking and standing still. In our painting a picture of a withered tree, or in our polishing a tile made of dead ashes, there is not the slightest break. Though our days, as they say, are short and swift in their passing, our learning the Way is profound and far-reaching. So, even though the demeanor of those who have abandoned their homes and left home life behind to become monks may seem bleak, do not confuse them with woodcutters. And even though their lives may seem a struggle, they are not the same as farmers working in rice fields. So, do not compare them by discussing whether they are deluded or enlightened, or good or bad; do not pursue such questions as “Are they false or true?” or “Are they genuine or fake?”

15. That is, there is no inside or outside of them.

16. ‘Asamkhyeya’ is a Sanskrit term of measurement for something that is experienced as being interminably long, but which simply takes as long as it takes.

When people speak of living and dying, coming and going, as being what the real human body is, they use the words ‘living and dying’ to describe the wandering of ordinary, worldly people lost in samsara as well as to describe what the great saintly ones have escaped from. But this does not mean that going beyond the ordinary and transcending the holy are simply to be considered as ‘our real Body’, for life and death come in two kinds and in seven kinds.¹⁷ At the same time, because each and every one of these kinds, when thoroughly understood, is totally life-and-death, there is nothing that we need fear. And the reason why we need not fear life and death is that even before we have abandoned this life, we are already encountering death in the present. And even before we have abandoned death, we are already encountering life in the present. Life is not something that stands in the way of death, and death is not something that stands in the way of life. Neither life nor death are understood by ordinary, worldly people. Life may be likened to an oak tree in its growing; death may be likened to an iron man in its immobility. Though oak trees are restricted to being oak trees, life is never restricted by death, which is why we take up learning the Way. Life is not one sort of thing, and death is not another, second sort of thing. Never does death stand against life: never does life stand against death.



Meditation Master Engo once said:

*Life fully manifests its function
And death fully manifests its function as well,
All within the limits of Great Unbounded Space,
For they are both the moment-by-moment manifestations
of a sincere heart.*

We need to do our utmost to tranquilly consider these words of his. Although Meditation Master Engo spoke these words, he still had not recognized that life and death are beyond the scope of their functions. When exploring ‘coming and going’ through our training, there is life-and-death in going, and there is life-and-death in coming. There is coming-and-going in life, and there is coming-and-going in death. With the whole universe in all ten directions as its two or three wings, coming-and-going flies off and flies back, and with the whole universe in all ten directions as its three or five feet, coming-and-going steps forward and steps back. With life-and-death as Its head and tail, the real Body, which is the whole universe in all ten

17. There are various listings of the two and seven kinds of life and death, all of which describe different perspectives on how life and death function.

directions, can reverse Itself and turn Its head around.¹⁸ In reversing Itself and turning Its head around, It may look the size of a penny, or It may resemble the inside of a tiny mote of dust. The flat level ground is a precipitous cliff rising a thousand feet high. And the precipitous cliff rising a thousand feet high is the flat level ground. This is why there is the look of the southern continent and the look of the northern continent; by examining these, we learn the Way.¹⁹ There is the Bones and Marrow of ‘being beyond deliberately trying to think about something and being beyond deliberately trying not to think about anything’. Only by our resisting the tendency to deliberately manipulate our thinking do we learn the Way.

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Ejō

18. That is, just as our physical body can turn itself around and go a different way, so our minds can also turn away from delusion and toward enlightenment.

19. The southern continent of Jambudvīpa is associated with the world of human beings who are capable of learning because they are aware of their suffering, whereas the northern continent of Uttarakuru is associated with the world of celestial beings who see no need to train because they are, at the moment, enjoying a constantly easy and blissful existence.