

# Emancipation - The Quest for the Self in Buddhism

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I will trace the thought of Self-inquiry in Buddhism from the early Buddhism to Mahayana Buddhism, and then in Japanese Buddhism. The goal of Self-inquiry is to return to what transcends the self, and to unite the self and the universe. Religious truth is nothing other than the awareness of the self that is kept alive by such truth. This essay explores the essence of religion through Buddhism.

## **Self-Inquiry**

Religion starts from the awareness of the powerlessness of human existence. The problems of death and suffering are the problems of human beings themselves, but they are beyond human power. They are our own problems, but they are problems beyond our power. For example, death is inescapable, no matter how hard we try. Against death, man is powerless. Suffering is also an inescapable burden of human life. We try to escape suffering, but it keeps coming back to us. Human beings are helpless against suffering life.

Moreover, human beings realize for themselves that they are powerless to deal with so many problems. And when they do, they realize the meaninglessness of their own existences. There is always a breakdown in life. The problems of death and suffering appear through the collapse of this life, exposing the meaninglessness of human existence.

But also, by becoming aware of this as a problem of the self, man transcends the human. And man knows what is beyond man. Religion is a feeling of return to what transcends the human. Only by being grounded in what transcends the man can the human beings find a new meaning to their meaningless existences. Human beings are helpless, but by becoming aware of their helplessness, they are able to find something beyond them, and to place the basis of themselves in that. Thus, we are awoken to the true nature of ourselves.

In this sense, religion is a search for the self. It is a question of where the self is, and a question of the source from which the self is formed. When human beings are confronted with their own contradictions through the issues of death and suffering, their existence becomes a big question mark. When this great question is somehow cleared up, this is called emancipation or enlightenment.

At that time, one realizes that one is alive in a larger world. At the same time, the primordial world that animates this self comes to the fore. This is a world that we did not realize when we were just buried in the mundane life without facing the problems of death and suffering. It was in the process of becoming aware of the more fundamental world that one's own existence was severely challenged when one's daily life was broken by the problems of death and suffering. The search for the self is also a search for the world.

But there must be negativity in this process. Only when the everyday self is denied, when the self in the face of contradictions is denied, can we realize that the root of the self and the root of the world are one. Through self-denial, the true self and the true world are discovered. There, the everyday self is denied, and the original self is found underneath. Emancipation is the awakening of the everyday self to its true self through self-denial.

From the perspective of this original self, daily life is a loss of self, a forgetting of the original self, and an escape from it. The Buddhist expression, "lost in life and death," expresses well the state of daily life in which the original self is lost. Whether we are aware of it or not, our life is a life of anguish, plagued by anxiety over death, anger, hatred, greed, and stupidity. Our life is a life in which we are lost in life and death. There is no true self, and the self remains lost in this life.

Religion is the demand of life to recover the original life from such a non-essential life. To leave the meaninglessness of life, to awaken to one's true life, and to be reborn as a true life, that is religion. Only then can one transcend life and death, attain eternal life, and truly live.

Human beings are lost in the world of life and death, but by becoming aware of this, they hope to transcend life and death. While buried in the sea of suffering, they wish to

escape from it by becoming aware of it. Religions are born from human beings who have these two contradictory sides at the same time. It is a wish for emancipation from suffering and a desire for something greater than oneself.

The Buddhist concept of bodhicitta is to be aware of the meaninglessness of the everyday self, to seek the original self, and to attain something greater than the self. Without this mind, religion would not be possible. In this sense, the opportunity for spiritual awakening can be found at any time and place, at any stage of life. When the inevitable stumbling blocks in life cause us to become aware of the self that is on the verge of death or the self that is facing suffering, and when we realize the meaninglessness of human existence, the desire to seek the true self arises. The reason why Buddhism repeatedly taught the impermanence of life was to emphasize the importance of being aware of the emptiness of human existence and finding one's true self. Life is impermanent and swift, and nothing in it is permanent or eternal. When we realize this at the various stages of life, we develop a desire to find our true self, a desire for enlightenment and emancipation. Religion is the fundamental fact of the self that opens up to this kind of seeking mind. The pursuit of the true life, that is religion.

However, when a person becomes aware of the emptiness of the everyday self and has the desire to discover the true self, it can be said that the true world has already appeared to him without his being aware of it. As the Avatamsaka Sutra (The Chapter of the Newly Aspired Bodhisattvas' Merits) says, "When you first begin to seek the path, you will attain true enlightenment." When you first begin to seek the path, the world of enlightenment is already open to you. In the Lotus Sutra (The Chapter of Skillful Means), it is said, "When you make this thought, all the Buddhas of the ten directions will appear. The workings of the mind, such as aspiration or seeking for Bodhi, are the point of contact between the non-essential self and the essential self, and the point of contact between delusion and enlightenment. In general, Mahayana Buddhism teaches that, in the human mind, unenlightened mind and enlightened mind, and delusion and awakening, exist at the same time, and that we should transform our delusive mind to awaken the inherent pure mind. In this way, it can be known that the non-essential self and the essential self were not far apart but were seen to be in close contact with each

other.

## **The Teachings of The Early Buddhism**

Originally, the process from the Buddha's renunciation to enlightenment was the process of abandoning everyday life and finding the original self. At the age of twenty-nine, feeling the impermanence of life, the Buddha left his royal family and became an ascetic, joining the group of ascetic monks in order to seek the path. However, no matter how much he practices asceticism, he could not attain the correct enlightenment, so he gave up asceticism, and under the Bodhi tree, he formed a dhyana-samadhi and attained the Great Enlightenment. He was thirty-five years old. All of the subsequent developments in Buddhism revolved around this Buddha's enlightenment.

The renunciation of the Buddha was also based on his awareness of the emptiness and burden of human existence. The process of the Buddha's quest for enlightenment also started from the awareness of the contradictions of human existence, and was nothing more than an attempt to find the ground on which the original self could be established. When the true self is found, we awaken to the fact that we are alive in the larger world. The Buddha's emancipation would have been like that.

The Buddha's teachings, or the framework of Buddhist thought, are said to be characterized by the four Dharma marks of impermanence, all-pervasive suffering, devoid of permanent self or essence, and tranquility of nirvana. All existence, including human existence, arises from many conditions and perishes as those conditions perish. All beings are subject to repeated extinction, and nothing lasts forever. Every human being, whether rich or poor, bears the burden of life, old age, sickness, death, and many other hardships from which there is no escape. Human beings are always afraid of death and cling to life, but that life is also full of suffering. Moreover, we cannot even control this painful life with our own power. There is no such thing as the permanent self. Only when we realize the emptiness of a life dominated by impermanence, suffering, and selflessness, and when we attain tranquil enlightenment away from delusion and attachment, can we return to our original world.

This basic teaching of the early Buddhism well captures the essence of human

existence and precisely indicates the direction to which it should return. It tells us that human existence is burdened with contradictions that we cannot free ourselves from by our own power. Human beings are helpless in the agony of life and in the anxiety of death. This is because our daily lives are in the constant state of losing our original selves. The original self can only be found by realizing the emptiness of the everyday self, renouncing attachment to life, and standing in a state of tranquil enlightenment. The teachings of the early Buddhism are a theory of human existence and practice based on deep human observation.

The truths taught by the early Buddhism were also expressed in the Four Noble Truths of the causes of Suffering and the path of cessation of the causes of Suffering. A person's life is a life filled with suffering. Living is suffering as it is, aging and sickness are unavoidable, and we are always in fear of death. To live is to live with sorrow, grief, misfortune and anguish. We are constantly met with hatred, we have to part from those we love, we seek but cannot obtain, and we are always tormented by fierce desires. Our life is full of things that we cannot control. Life is suffering. The suffering of life is caused by the thirst of greed and attachment. Like a thirsty person seeking water, the desire burns so fiercely that it torments us. We can only get rid of suffering by destroying this thirsty love and getting rid of attachment. In order to eliminate suffering, we must realize that everything happens according to conditions, that is, we must realize the Law of Dependent Origination, and come to the point where there is no longer any clinging. In order to do this, we must practice eight righteous paths, the Eightfold Path. This is the truth as taught by the early Buddhism.

This simple and clear teaching of the early Buddhism is also the result of keen human observation and deep thought backed up by practice. By analyzing the suffering of life from various angles, the early Buddhism often sees that human existence is essentially load-bearing. In order to find the true self and arrive at the truth of human existence, we must be deeply aware of the nature of human existence, which is full of such load, and break free from it. Religion is an awareness of the contradictions of human existence and a wish for emancipation from suffering. The teachings of the early Buddhism are also a philosophy based on a deep insight into human existence and point

to the main path of religion.

The state of enlightenment attained by the early Buddhism is called nirvana. Nirvana is a state in which greed, rage, anger, and foolishness have been destroyed. When these passions that torment our lives are eliminated, our suffering and anxiety will disappear. It is just like a burning fire that is extinguished. When the various afflictions disappear, and we reach a state of tranquility where we are free of all attachments, everything in this world will reveal itself as it is, and the truth will emerge. At the same time, we can be alive in this world of truth and find our true self.

The early Buddhism teaches that in order to attain right enlightenment and nirvana, one must fulfill the right path, destroy vexations, and leave attachments. The Eightfold Path of right view, right thought, right speech, right work, right life, right devotion, right thought, and right action is the right path to enlightenment and is the practical theory of the early Buddhism. It says that in order to reach nirvana, one must have the right view, do the right deeds, live the right way, and practice the right practices.

The word "right" in this context means, above all, to be free from delusion. When we are under the control of greed, rage, and foolishness, we cannot observe and judge anything as it is, and we fall into delusion. When we remove the shroud of this delusion and leave it behind, we can perceive everything as it is. Right is also said to be a state of being apart from reverse perception. The reverse perception is to observe and think the truth in the wrong order and wrong way. When we are caught up in greed, anger, and complaint, we mistakenly regard the impermanent as permanent, the suffering as pleasure, the impure as pure, and the selfless as the self, and if you leave this reverse perception, you will be on the right path. The right is also said to be "being free from extremes. People often go to extremes, and all the more fall into delusion, and make mistakes, but if they leave the extremes and follow the middle path, they will be on the right path. The Eight-Fold Path is thus about seeing, acting, living, and practicing without delusion, without reverse perception, and without extremes. Indeed, the path of right practice as taught by early Buddhism is the correct path to right enlightenment.

## **Self-Renunciation**

However, if this is merely a moral teaching to destroy craving, to avoid greed, rage, and foolishness, and to observe moderation, then it must be said that there is a limit as a religion. It is because people are inevitably misled by their vexations and fall into delusion that they run to extremes and take the wrong path, and thus achieving the right path is not as easy as it sounds. Human beings are always drowning in greed, antipathy, and complaining, and are always attached to things and stray. This is why life is suffering, sorrow, and confusion, but it is not so easy to cut off craving and passion, which are the causes of suffering. Most of us are ordinary unenlightened people who are ruled by vexation and strayed in a sea of suffering.

However, it is these strayed ordinary unenlightened people who must be saved. Without the salvation of such ordinary people, religion cannot be a true religion. There are not many religions that can save such strayed ordinary people. Even more so, such strayed ordinary people cannot be saved by mere morality, which recommends only right conduct. No matter how hard we try to do the right thing, the evil that nests in human existence is not something that can be easily crushed.

As described in “Connected Discourses”(4.23), Godika practiced asceticism diligently in the caves in the mountains surrounding the royal castle, and often attained a state of emancipation. However, each time he relapsed, he became a prisoner of his own vexations, and after repeating this six times, in despair, he took a sword and committed suicide.

Also, from the demon stories that appear in the āgama sutras, it seems that even the Buddha, who attained true enlightenment, had many anxieties and anguish afterwards. There, we can feel the humanity of the Buddha. Of course, the anxieties and anguish of the Buddha were more advanced anxieties and anguish related to preaching and missionary work, and may not be treated in the same way as the anxieties and anguish of the ordinary people. But even so, it is these ordinary unenlightened people's delusion that must be saved.

If the Eightfold Path taught by the early Buddhism is merely an ethical lesson, it will not be able to save us from the evil that lies deep within human existence. The root

evil cannot be redeemed by morality. This was also the reason why Mahayana Buddhism, which holds that it is ordinary unenlightened people who must be saved, had to emerge later. This is also the reason why Mahayana Buddhism has criticized Early Theravada Buddhist schools. Mahayana Buddhism criticized Early Theravada Buddhist schools, saying that their practice was an act of self-interest and not an act of altruism to save all sentient beings. They also insisted that Buddhism should be the one that saves all sentient beings. This is also the reason why Mahayana Buddhism criticizes those who try to attain emancipation by listening to the Buddha's teachings and practicing the path by oneself (Sravaka) and those who try to attain enlightenment by becoming aware of the Dependent Origination by oneself (Pratyeka-buddha). At best, they reach the state of Arhat-ship. The Mahayana side of Buddhism criticized them by saying that they are devoted only to their own emancipation and do not care for others.

In order to achieve true emancipation, that is, the total emancipation of the self, there must be total self-renunciation. We must abandon the self-imposed practice of trying to attain emancipation by cultivating the right path through one's own efforts, or the self-imposed practice of trying to attain emancipation on one's own by concentrating on one's own practice. The words "emancipation" and "enlightenment" are often taken to mean that through one's own efforts and self-reliance, one can overcome the worldly self with all its vexations and reach the other shore where all vexations disappear. However, true emancipation or enlightenment is not something like that. For true emancipation or enlightenment, there must be the abandonment of the self, and the abandonment of the self that is trying to be abandoned, and letting oneself be kept alive by the greater world.

Originally, the Buddha's enlightenment was founded on such a great renunciation. Feeling the impermanence of the world, the Buddha became a renunciant and devoted himself to severe penance in search of the path. However, correct wisdom could not be obtained for any length of time. His limbs became like stalks of reeds, the skin of his belly almost touched his spine, and his physical strength declined to the extreme. All the more his power of the mind grew fainter and fainter, and correct enlightenment never came. The Buddha realized that extreme asceticism is not the right way to attain true



enlightenment, so he abandoned his ascetic practices, and to nourish his body, he took food and thin porridge boiled in milk, and quietly practiced dhyāna meditation under the Bodhi tree. It is said that he soon attained emancipation. The details of this emancipation are still a mystery that cannot be clarified by the Buddha's later teachings. This mystery has led to various developments in Buddhism since then. At least, however, the Buddha's deeds themselves have already taught us that true emancipation requires great renunciation.

In order for the true self to be found at the base of the self, there must be self-denial. The self can gain itself through self-denial. By dying to the self, the self lives. By dying to the self, the self is made alive by something greater than the self. In religious experience, there is always an experience where the self is abandoned as nothing at all, and at the same time, the self is saved by something greater than the self. At that time, the self is denied and, on the contrary, the true nature of the self emerges. This is what is known as emancipation or reformation.

There has to be self-denial. However, that self-denial does not mean denying oneself by one's own power. Rather, it must be denied because it is denied. Self-denial must be called for, not by the self, but from the very foundation of the self. Then, for the first time, the negation of the self turns into the affirmation of the self. And with that, the deepest root, the one that gives life to the self, will appear before the self. The Buddha's experience of emancipation must have been like that.

In the early Buddhism, this is expressed by the expression "dharma" being revealed or made known. The Dharma here refers to the basis of the self, and the great life that animates the self. To be alive to such a great life and to be filled with the root of the universe is what is called emancipation or enlightenment. To be penetrated by the Dharma is enlightenment and awakening. It is emancipation to renounce all scruples, to die to oneself, and to live in the greatness. To die is to live. The self dies and is reborn. In this rebirth, not only the self, but also all other things surrounding the self and all things in the world are reborn at the same time. The self and all things outside the self becomes one and merge in the great field.

Religion is the awareness that human beings are made alive by something beyond

human beings. It is the awareness that the self is supported by that which is beyond the self. When the self abandons the self and dies to the self, the self is made alive by that which transcends the self. Moreover, this thing that transcends the self is at the same time something that dwells within the self. When the self is alive in a place that transcends the self and penetrates the self, the self, the other, and all that exists are exposed as they are, and all things are connected.

Religion started from the awareness of man's helplessness. The problems of death and suffering were meant to make us aware of this human helplessness. When one is aware of one's own powerlessness, one is faced with nothingness that cannot be grounded by anything. However, when we are thoroughly aware of our own powerlessness, when we abandon the self and become one with the nothingness of the self, the self is instead made alive. The self is the self without the self. At the base of the self, there is a primordial field in which the self dies and is born. When the self is abandoned to this primordial field, the death of the self is transformed into the life of the self, and the true self is found there.

There, life and death are one. Life is death, and death is life. Life and death are no longer opposed to each other; there is death in life and life in death. There is no opposition between life and death. Both life and death are alive in the field of the primordial life of the universe and are one and the same. Life is the manifestation of the primordial life of the universe, and death is the return to it, and in this primordial field, life and death are one. In both life and death, the self is alive to and works with this great true life. Life and death, as they are, are themselves the work of the true life of the universe. Thus, it is possible to transcend life and death while remaining impermanent. This is what Mahayana Buddhism means when it says that life and death are no other than nirvana, and when it insists on the non-duality of delusion and enlightenment.

In such a primordial field, suffering life remains suffering life, transcends this, and is kept alive in the primordial field. Vexations remain vexations, which are themselves the workings of the true life of the universe. This is what Mahayana Buddhism has been insisting on, that vexation is no other than bodhi, and the non-duality of vexation and bodhi. There, the delusional life bonded by karma consists two sides of the same coin

with the world of enlightenment being bonded by karma as it is.

## **Self-Drop-off**

Dogen's words, "Body and mind drop off, drop off of body and mind," well express the structure of this emancipation. Dogen, who had studied in the Southern Song Dynasty in search of the Way, one day, at dawn, he was sitting in Zen meditation with other monks. What is it to sleep?" He heard the sharp voice of Ru-jing scolding one monk as he sat down to sleep. As soon as he did so, Dogen was suddenly enlightened and experienced the dropping off of body and mind. So Dogen immediately went up to the Ru-jing and burned incense. To Ru-jing's question, "What happened?" Dogen replied, "My body and mind have dropped off. Ru-jing replied, "Body and mind drop off, drop off of body and mind," and then repeated, "Drop off, drop off. Thus, Dogen was given the seal of approval by Ru-jing, and fulfilled his important duty to attend school for the rest of his life.

In the Shobogenzo (The Chapter of Bendowa), he recalls the rules of the Zen tradition in the Great Song Dynasty, and explains the essence of these rules as handed down from Ru-jing, saying, "From the beginning of your knowledge of Zen meditation, do not burn incense, pray, recite buddha's, but sit down and let your body and mind drop off."

The words "body and mind drop off, and drop off of body and mind" clearly indicate that emancipation is nothing other than the revival of the self at the extreme of self-abandonment and the affirmation of the self through the thorough denial of the self. The experience of the abandonment of the self as nothingness, and at the same time, the emergence of a self that is activated by something greater than the self, is described. Moreover, the word "drop off" expresses well that this self-denial is not a self-denial by one's own power.

When Dogen attained enlightenment under Ru-jing, he must have experienced the disappearance of his own body and mind in the darkness of dawn and arrived at the root of the universe, from which his own body and mind, which had been brought to life by the root of the universe, came back to life. All of Dogen's subsequent activities started

from this point. It was nothing more than an attempt to express the self and the world as it was, as it had been opened to him.

In the Shobogenzo (The Chapter of Shou-ji), Dogen also speaks in a gentler way about the true self that emerges when the body and mind have dropped off. When you do this, you will be able to leave life and death behind and become a Buddha, without exerting yourself, without having your mind tormented. Whomever you may be, you should be mindful of where you are.

Here, too, we are told that the dropping off of body and mind and the denial of self are not the result of our own power, but rather are the result of the work of the Buddha and the origin of the universe. When one abandons all judgements and lives in the greatness, life is death, death is life, life and death are one and the same, and one can leave life and death behind.

Religion is a demand that our own life force, in its entirety, seek its source. Emancipation or enlightenment is the search for the source of one's own life through self-renunciation, and the discovery of one's self as being alive to the fundamental life of the universe. It is to be aware that the self and the source of the universe are one. In the place of the primordial life of the universe, the self dies to the small self and lives to the big self. At this time, the self becomes a point of expression of the universe and is responsible for the creative activity of the universe. The self becomes a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm. Even a drop of dew reflects the whole sky and the whole earth, and even a pore contains the ocean. The macrocosm exists within the microcosm.

In this respect, Schleiermacher's view of religion as an intuition and feeling toward the great universe and an absolute dependence on it, in a sense, strikes at the essence of religion. However, it must be criticized for its lack of self-denial and its emphasis on the direct union of the self with the universe. Moreover, the self-denial is not a denial by one's own power, but a self-renunciation, a throwing away, a dropping out, which itself must be an action from the great universe. The feeling of absolute dependence that Schleiermacher describes seems to contain such a meaning, but it is not always fully expressed.

## **The Union of Self and Universe**

Kukai's Esoteric Buddhism also aimed at the union of the self and the universe. Moreover, it is believed to be accomplished through the correspondence between the action of the great universe and the request of the self.

Kukai was born into the Saeki clan in Sanuki, and in order to become a competent official, he went to the capital and entered a government university, where he studied Confucianism, Taoism, and a wide range of other Japanese and Chinese studies. However, despite this, Kukai was not satisfied with learning to train government officials, so he abandoned the university and devoted himself to the practice of Buddhism, traveling around the southern capital and the mountains of his hometown as a Buddhist monk. The ascetic practice he practiced at that time was called the Mantra of Kokuzo-Gumonji. It was to look up at the stars in the night sky while continuously chanting a short mantra, and to try to attain union between the universe and oneself. This was in line with the ancient Indian Upanishadic philosophy of "the unity of Brahman and Atman" and had its source in the practice of yoga. The Upanishads were about the unity of Universe and Self, Brahman and Atman, and involved the practice of becoming one with the greater universe.

Kukai's esoteric Buddhism evolved from the method of Kokuzo-Gumonji, which originated in the Upanishads. It is thought that a profound correspondence between the workings of the great universe and the mind of the self that receives them is necessary. The response of the inner mind to the workings of the universe is called Kaji. Kukai, in his "The Righteousness of Sudden Attainment of Buddhahood," says, "When the shadow of the Buddha's sunshine appears in the hearts and minds of sentient beings, it is called 'K'; when the ascetic's heart and mind are well watered and he feels the Buddha's sunshine, it is called 'Ji'.

The method of Kokuzo-Gumonji, which Kukai practiced in his youth, was also an attempt to understand the correspondence between the macrocosm and microcosm and to experience communion with the true life of the universe. Moreover, even in his later years, after completing the theory and ritual system of Esoteric Buddhism, Kukai returned to nature and concentrated his mind more and more to become one with the

great life of the universe. This is well known from his hymns of praise to nature in his "Shouryoushuu" and the documents in which he expresses his intense desire to return to nature. The essence of Kukai's Esoteric Buddhism is to realize through the body that one's self is one with the universe, and that one is alive to the life of the great universe. Specifically, through the three dense practices of body, mouth, and mind, Kukai's esoteric teachings attempt to realize that one is one with the workings of the body, mouth, and mind of Mahāvairocana Buddha.

Kukai systematized the path to enlightenment in his "Jujushinron" as a process of deepening the mind in ten stages, and clarified the truth of esoteric Buddhism.

The first stage, "Ishouteiyoushin" is the mind of a man who, like a ram, is preoccupied with satisfying his every instinct and desire. It is a mind that is lost in delusion, but it is the lowest form of mind because it does not even realize that it is lost. People only look at the immediate benefits and do not even realize that they are in hell.

The second stage, "Gudoujisaisin" is the stage of the human mind where even a foolish person feels the desire to give something to someone else. It is the stage of the human mind where the moral mind has sprouted, just like a seed of grain that has been sown and sprouts because of the soil and water.

The third stage, "Eidoumuishin" is the stage when even infants are awakened to a religious mind, so that they lose their fearful minds. In this stage, people devote themselves to various teachings and gain temporary peace of mind, just as infants and calves devote themselves to their mothers. The teachings of the various different paths in India and Taoism in China are examples of this.

The fourth stage, "Yuiunmugashin" is the concept that all things apparently made up of the five skandhas; form (rupa), sensations (vedana), perceptions (samjna), mental activity or formations (sankhara), consciousness (vijñana) are insubstantial. This is the theory of Sravaka. From this stage, we enter the stage of Buddhism, but this is still considered to be the rudimentary stage of Theravada Buddhism.

In the fifth stage, "Bakkouinshuin" the seed of Avidyā (ignorance) which is the condition that causes suffering, is extracted, and even if the karma that arises from ignorance is removed, only one person can obtain the rewards and not pass them on to

others. This is the position of Pratyekabuddha (solitary buddha). Here, ignorance is eliminated, all causes of delusion are eliminated, and enlightenment without attachment can be attained, but it is still monopolized by the individual. This stage, like the Fourth Dwelling Mind, is still in the Hīnayāna Buddhism (Lesser Vehicle stage).

The sixth stage “Taendaijyoushin” is the stage of compassion for all sentient beings who are not related to oneself, and this is where Mahayana Buddhism begins. It begins from the standpoint of the theory of idealism, which holds that all things are without substance, and that only the workings of the mind are real. It is said that this is the Hosō (Yogachara) sect of the six Nanto sects (in Japan).

The seventh stage, “Kakushinfushoushin” is the stage of attaining peace of mind through the realization that all things are empty, and corresponds to the position of the Sanron school of the six Nanto sects. In Mahayana Buddhism, this is the position of Madhyamaka (middle view) school where one realizes that all phenomena are insubstantial, cuts off all delusion about the existence of all things, and attains a tranquil mind.

The eighth stage, “Ichidoumuishin” is the realization that all things are free from duality and that there is no discrimination between subjectivity and objectivity. This is the position of the Tendai sect. The core of the Lotus Sutra, the sacred text of the Tendai sect, is the belief that human nature is inherently pure, and that it is there that the Buddha with eternal life lives. When we realize this, we can see all things as they really are.

In the ninth stage, “Gokumujishoushin” is the position where one realizes that everything has no fixed nature, just as water has no fixed nature and ripples when it meets the wind. This is the position of the Kegon sect. Just as water and waves are indistinguishable, the truth and the phenomenal world are essentially one. The truth is expressed in the phenomenal world, as we see here. Here, the world of delusion and the world of enlightenment are one, and all things are reflected in the vast single mind of the Buddha, just as clear water reflects all things.

The tenth stage, “Himitsushougonsin” represents the ultimate position of Esoteric Buddhism, and is said to be the highest stage where one can open the storehouse of the

Mantra and obtain the hidden treasures. The ninth stage, Kegon, is still in the philosophical stage. In the tenth stage, the truth of the ninth stage is expressed as a mandala world, and the truth can be obtained through one's own body. By contemplating the mandala, which depicts the world of truth in the universe, one can feel the great life of the universe, and by contemplating the Sanskrit character for "A", which symbolizes Mahāvairocana Buddha, one can attain the primordial life of the universe. By attaining this highest stage of esoteric Buddhism, one can know one's own true mind and attain the highest wisdom, the wisdom of all.

Furthermore, according to the "Jujushinron," from the standpoint of esoteric enlightenment, which has reached the tenth dwelling mind, all the previous stages of manifestation from the first stage to the ninth stage can be regarded as stages of esoteric Buddhism. From the first stage, the stage dominated by desire, to the ninth stage, the stage of Kegon, all are manifestations of the mind of Mahāvairocana Buddha, and all can be included in Esoteric Buddhism. The esoteric way of thinking is that if you open the eyes of your deep mind, you will find that even the most trivial stage contains a profound truth in its own way.

Kukai's Esoteric Buddhism is based on the belief that one can attain instant Buddhahood by entering directly into the mandala world. According to Kukai's view, the body of the self is the body of the Buddha and the body of the universe. In addition, through the correspondence between the Buddha's great sorrow and sentient beings' faith, and the correspondence between the universe and the self, in other words, through blessing, the mind of the Buddha and the mind of the universe are contained in the mind of the self. Therefore, the work of the self is the work of the Buddha, and a person has already attained Buddhahood and become one with the universe while still having a body. The body of both Mahāvairocana Buddha, the great life of the universe, and human beings are composed of the six elements of earth, water, fire, wind, sky, and mind, which are expressed as a mandala world. In the mandala world, the workings of the three secreties of the human body, mouth, and mind are united with the workings of the three secreties of the Buddha's body, mouth, and mind. Furthermore, the Six Elements, the mandala, and the three secreties are fused together so that the Buddha and



sentient beings become one, and everyone attains Buddhahood. In the ode in "The Doctrine of Instant attainment of Buddhahood," the same is said as follows.

The six elements as Mahāvairocana Buddha are mutually fused with the six elements of ordinary beings, are always interconnected, the four types of mandala, never separated from each other, when one practice the three secreties, they correspond with three secreties of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas fusing and unifying each other and appear quickly, as Indra's net jewel reflect all others on it, so is on one self.

In other words it can be said as follows. The six elements of life in the universe are unobstructed, eternally connected and fused together. The four types of mandalas, each representing a true aspect, are never separated. When the three secreties of the Buddha and ourselves respond to each other through the wondrous workings of the three secreties, the world of enlightenment will quickly appear. As Indra's net jewel reflect all others on it, so is on every body.

Mahayana Buddhism was originally based on the idea that all living beings have Buddha nature. Esoteric Buddhism says that one can become immediately aware of this fact and attain Buddhahood by directly entering the mandala world, without having to go through a long and rigorous ascetic practice. Furthermore, he believes that not only human beings, but also animals, plants, minerals, and all other things in the world can attain instant Buddhahood. Kukai believed that one's own life is one with the life of the universe, and that the microcosm is one with the macrocosm.

Kukai's Esoteric Buddhism has a systematic and magnificent worldview, which is expressed in a mandala-like world image. It is an all-encompassing, cosmological, and far-reaching teaching. It is a vast philosophy of life that holds that all living beings, including human beings, are alive within the great life of the universe, and that the great life of the universe works within all living beings.

### **Self Kept Alive by Truth**

As is well known, In the Shobogenzo (The Chapter of Undistinguished Manifestation of Religious Truth), Dogen said, "To train in the Way of Buddha is to train in the self. To practice the Buddha's way is to practice the self. To destroy the self

is to be proved by all Dharma. To be proved by all Dharma is to make one's own body and mind, as well as the bodies and minds of others, drop off.

In some respects, religion is a search for the self, a search for the source of the self. But it is also a return to a place where the self is no longer the self, but one with the primordial life of the universe. There must be self-denial, but it must not be a denial done by one's own power, but by being approached by the fundamental truth of the universe. When one discovers oneself to be alive to the true life of the universe, one's own body and mind, as well as the bodies and minds of others, drop off and become one with the true life of the universe. This is the world of emancipation or enlightenment, where there must be a correspondence between self-renunciation and the action of the universe. At this point of correspondence, the self and the universe become one, and the microcosm and the macrocosm become one. Dogen's words express this truth well. In this respect, Dogen emphasizes the self-denying aspect more than Kukai.

In the Shobogenzo (The Chapter of Undistinguished Manifestation of Religious Truth), Dogen also said, "Advancing oneself through all Dharma to attain the truth is delusion. When all Dharma advance and manifest on the self, it is enlightenment." Placing the truth of the universe in a distant place beyond the self and trying to reach it by one's own power is not enlightenment, but delusion. Because it still relies on one's own power. Rather, it is only when we give up the self and drop off into the truth of the universe that the truth of the universe will willingly reveal itself to us. This is true emancipation and enlightenment. In order for one's self to be alive in the true life of the universe, it is necessary to abandon one's own power and to be illuminated by the truth of the universe. Dogen's statement in the Shobogenzo (The Chapter of Yuibutsu-Yobutsu), "Enlightenment means to be saved only by the power of enlightenment in a short time," also expresses this truth. Only through the action of the macrocosm can the microcosm be united with the macrocosm.

Thus, Dogen said that practicing Buddhism and enlightenment are one and the same. In the Shobogenzo (The Chapter of Bendouwa), he says "It is the view of the non-Buddhist that the practice and the proof are not one and the same. In Buddhism, the practice and the proof are one and the same. .... Therefore,

when you are practicing asceticism, you should not be concerned about the proofs other than the practice. .... If the proof of the practice is already in the proof, there is no beginning in the proof, and if the practice is in the proof, there is no beginning in the practice.

This is best expressed when he says, "If it is already the proof of the practice, there is no beginning to the proof. The idea that practice and enlightenment are two different things is nothing but a non-Buddhistic idea. In Buddhism, practice and enlightenment are the same thing. Therefore, even when giving the precepts of practice, we should not expect enlightenment apart from practice. Since enlightenment is already a practice without leaving practice, there is no end to enlightenment.

The reason why Dogen originally abandoned his training at Mount Hiei, came down from the mountain, and traveled all the way to Sung to study at Ru-jing was because of one simple question. In Tendai and other Mahayana Buddhism, the human mind is inherently imbued with Buddha nature, and humans are originally in the world of enlightenment. For Dogen, this was a fundamental question that involved his entire existence, and it was a question that shook his entire existence. This great question was resolved when he experienced the drop-off of body and mind under Ru-jing and obtained the view that the practice and the proof are one and the same.

For Dogen, practicing Buddhism is not a means to attaining enlightenment, and attaining enlightenment is not a matter of reaching some other world apart from practicing Buddhism. The practice itself is in the world of enlightenment and is enlightenment itself. Therefore, since both practice and enlightenment are united in the world of eternal truth, there is no end to enlightenment and no beginning to practice. For Dogen, the practice itself is already taking place in the truth of the universe. The truth of the universe is expressed in the practice itself. The truth of the universe already resides within the practicing human being. This is what Dogen meant when he said, "Shushou-ittou" (the practice and the proof are one and the same.)

Dogen's "Shikan-taza" is another expression of this "Shushou-ittou" (the practice and the proof are one and the same). For Dogen, zazen means that the true life of the universe is already expressed in the form of zazen. It is no longer a process to be

emancipated. The truth is manifested in the figure of the zazen practitioner who has abandoned the intention to be emancipated and is simply sitting. The form of zazen expressed by the body itself is nothing other than participation in the world of enlightenment. The form of the body itself is an expression of the true life of the universe. In the small body itself, the whole universe resides.

For Dogen, the self was nothing more than the expression of the entire universe. The self extends over the whole earth, and the whole earth dwells within the self. Man, and the universe are one. Not only that, but all living things are one with the universe.

To be emancipated is to realize that the self and the universe are one.

(Source: "What is Religion?", Chapter 1, in Michinori Kobayashi's "Philosophy of Life" Collection, 4, Minerva Shobo, Kyoto, 2016)