

## 6.

*The Great Ocean of Meditation*

From Lectures on *Kaiin Zammai*, “The Meditative State  
that Bears the Seal of the Ocean”

“Kaiin zammai” is the Japanese name given to what I have called the Great Ocean or Waveless Sea of Meditation. “Sagara mudra samadhi” is the more technical Sanskrit Buddhist term for the meditative “substance” that comprises that Sea. But don’t quote me in calling it a “substance” or somebody will call me the biggest heretic in existence. As a matter of fact, every word I say in this lecture is going to be heretical, all right? If we get that straight from the very beginning then I’m going to be safe if anybody ever gets their hands on this tape! (laughter) I say it is “heretical” because there is no way you can say anything about this topic that is going to come out the right way up. The only way you’re going to understand what we are speaking of here is if you play, as it were, nine-dimensional chess with every word I’m saying, running from one level to the next, up, down, round, sideways, and in and out—but with your guts, not with your intellect. This is why I’ve been arguing with myself as to whether to speak about this chapter at all.

It is, to a certain extent, the Sōtō explanation of the *Avatamsaka Scripture*,<sup>†</sup> which means that it is very subtle indeed. The kaiin zammai is said to be that meditation into which the Buddha entered while preaching the *Avatamsaka*.

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But this chapter not only gives insight into the nature of this most sublime samadhi,<sup>†</sup> by extension it also tells us about the general nature of meditation and spiritual realization. It is, therefore, also about kenshō, about enlightenment, and about living within what I call “the Third Position” beyond all pairs of opposites.

Before we get into this, there is a term which Dōgen uses that requires a number of definitions, which I think we had better go into before we start. That term is “vanishing.” I’m going to give you Dōgen’s own explanation of it from this chapter, because his version is rather good. He uses the word to convey several profound meanings. First, it represents the Buddha’s

*...great, unsurpassed nirvana, which is spoken of as His ‘death’, which is described by some as ‘persisting in treating it as an eradication’, and which is described by others as ‘seeing it as a place of abiding’.*

So, when you hear of “vanishing,” you are *not* to be thinking of something that is completely and absolutely negative. The same is true when you hear the term “emptiness,” as it is applied to the sagara mudra samadhi, the Great Ocean of Meditation. You see, the ancients were stuck with words just as much as we are.

The second meaning of “vanishing” is “death,” or the passing away of life as we know it. So you’ve got to remember that it can be used in both of these ways, and in a much different one later on. And you have to apply whichever one of these is appropriate through feeling it out in your guts when you are “playing on these different chess boards,” all right?

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Third, “vanishing” is a place of abiding; that is, it is the True Refuge as taught by the Four Noble Truths: the cessation of suffering. Kohō Zenji and I felt that for this reason one should use the term “purity” rather than “emptiness” when describing It. Now, purity is something you can latch onto, whereas emptiness is something you cannot, and that is a problem. The danger of using emptiness is that you immediately put nihilism and annihilation into people’s minds. A famous Tibetan master, when discussing this with me on one occasion, said that the best way he could describe this Refuge was to use the phrase “pure energy.” Which, of course, makes him as big a heretic as I am because immediately you can grab onto energy.

What this chapter is really trying to do is tell you what the Third Position is, so that you will be able to drop the opposites quickly and easily. If you know that life and death are not really of much importance, because they are simply two positions in time, then you naturally enter into the Great Ocean of Meditation. In that Place, Buddha Nature (the Essence of Buddha, the “vanishing” that is Nirvana) will be apparent as the Third Position. Now, there are many people who would say, “Well, two birds in the hand (i.e., life and death as we know them) are better than one in the bush (i.e., a Third one of which we have no certain knowledge). And yet, everyone *has* certain knowledge of the Third Position deep within them, and one of the things this chapter tries to prove is that there *is* that certain knowledge.

This Great Ocean of Meditation can be found, according to Dōgen, when “our thoughts and things” neither “depend on each other” nor “stand against each other.” When there is no opposition, our True Nature emerges. When “the obstacles dissolve”—going on beyond the obstacles and

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blockages—“He is Nirvana,” says *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*. When there are no oppositional blocks, one can speed along at great, great speed. This is what is meant by not allowing the arising of obstructing mountains and great rivers, or by having cut the roots of the past karma which make it impossible to see across the river or around the corner. This is to unravel the endless twists and turns of the knot of string known as your life.

One of the first things they teach you in a Sōtō Zen monastery, by the way, is that you must not cut knots. I can remember being given a lot of presents when I first got to Sōjiji and noting the interest with which senior monks watched what I would do with the string. Now, I did not know that this was really a test that would decide whether I would go to a Rinzai temple or stay with Kohō Zenji; that was explained to me many years later. I looked at them and I liked the strings, they were attractive strings (I think they’d done this deliberately so as to sort of “load the gun” in my favor). Anyway, I spent a lot of time very carefully untying knots, and then I asked them if they would prefer me to cut them so as not to take so long. “Oh, no, no, no; that’s fine, you just take your time,” they said. So there I was, sitting around with this bunch of top seniors, working on the most fascinating knots, carefully undoing them all and winding up the strings. Each time I did they would grin more and more, which gave me nice feedback that it was being done the right way. Apparently if I had cut the knots they would have picked up their phone and sent me off to Myōshinji or another Rinzai temple, because the Sōtō way is to unravel the knots in the line of your life so that nothing should be left behind to damage you in the future. The Rinzai way does not unravel the knots. It relies on cutting

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directly through things, or upon getting the person so taut, so tense, that one's life acts like a spring and suddenly uncoils into one long straight line. That was how it was explained to me.

Now, with that as an introduction, let us start back at the beginning of the chapter.

*All Buddhas and all Ancestors that have ever been are invariably synonymous with the meditative state that bears the seal of the Ocean. As They swam about in this meditative state, there were times when They were giving expression to the Truth, and times when They were experiencing the Truth directly, and times when They were putting It into their daily practice. The merits of Their doing Their practice upon the surface of the Ocean included Their doing a practice that penetrated to the very bottom of the Ocean. They made Their doing of Their practice upon the surface of the Ocean Their doing of a practice that plumbed the depths of the Ocean. To wishfully seek to make one's wandering about through birth and death return to the Source was not what Their mind's activities were concerned with. Even though, from the first, the breaking through of former obstructions as if one were passing through barrier gates or piercing through the joints in a cane of bamboo has been synonymous with what each and every Buddha and Ancestor is, They are various streams that have flowed into the meditative state that bears the seal of the Ocean.*

To live within the meditative state that bears the seal of the Ocean is the ultimate end of Zen training. It is the

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ultimate goal, if you like, of Zen. I say the “ultimate end” because “goal” implies something you strive for, whereas “end” implies something that you’re bound to get. But I don’t mean that there is an end to training, okay? All Truth is at once reflected in this meditative state, just as all images are reflected in a quiet sea. It is, therefore, the highest form of insight. It is what is being described in some of those poetic Zen phrases: the Moon of Zen reflected in the sea, the green jade Moon of Zen, all these things about “moons” and “clouds,” reflecting in the sea. It is also referred to as the Dharma Cloud over the Silent Hall.

Whether, at any given moment, our practice is upon the surface of the Ocean or at Its depths, we are constantly washed in the Ocean every time we do that which is correct. So, although the bodhisattva lives in the world of samsara, he or she regards that world as a beautiful playground, or as a lovely garden. And still, the Great Ocean of Meditation is not interested in whether you get something out of It or not. It is not a matter of rewards or goals; you just do what needs to be done. And remember that, whether one goes straight into the Great Ocean or whether one decides to work for the Buddha while remaining in the world of samsara, one is still in the Great Ocean of Meditation.

Do not think that there is anything outside of the Great Ocean, and do not think that there is anything more than the Great Ocean. I have seen temples in the Far East which attempt to give a pictorial representation of this. They have every single tile on the walls and ceilings made with the image of a beautiful tiny Buddha sitting in a lotus. The floors, walls, and ceilings are all decorated as if one were in the sea. There is a sea of Buddhas seemingly everywhere: it’s not merely a sea that one sits on top of, it is also a sea

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within which one sits. And somewhere in the middle of all of this is a colossal fifteen-foot-high Buddha or Bodhisattva. The Buddha, too, doesn't seem to be necessarily sitting on top of the sea or beneath it. The attempt is to show that the sea of meditation is full, it is not just a surface thing. How do you fill the universe with meditation? It's a depiction which is exquisite to see; it doesn't completely succeed, but it's a symbol that tries.

Even though within this practice and meditation there is no wishfully seeking for the Source, as Dōgen says, this pure activity of meditation is what “each and every Buddha and Ancestor is.” Now this is a terribly important point. In other words, the Great Ocean of Meditation is the Buddha Itself. Remember I said there is no such thing as a personal God. You can experience the *kaiin zammai*, you can experience Buddha, you can experience Buddha Nature, you can know the Third Position—whatever you like to call this thing (and I give it six dozen names so that you do not turn it into a god)—or you can say that you can experience God. But the Great Ocean of Meditation is not a personal God as in the Christian sense of the term. It's very important to remember that. The original form of Buddha *is* the Great Ocean of Meditation; every Buddha act *is* the Meditation of the Great Ocean.

*The Buddha once said in verse,  
“Simply of various elements is this body of Mine  
composed.  
The time of its arising is merely an arising of elements;  
The time of its vanishing is merely a vanishing of  
elements.*

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*As these elements arise, I do not speak of the arising  
of an 'I',  
And as these elements vanish, I do not speak of the  
vanishing of an 'I'.  
Previous instants and succeeding instants are not a  
series of instants that depend on each other;  
Previous elements and succeeding elements are not  
a series of elements that stand against each other.  
To give all this a name, I call it 'the meditative  
state that bears the seal of the Ocean'."*

This poem is a description of pure meditation and an instruction in how to do it; study it well. The elements and instants which compose body and mind arise and vanish like waves on the surface of a sea, without depending upon each other and without the presence of an "I." And, within this very arising and vanishing is the stillness of the Great Ocean of Meditation. It is very important to live within this Meditative Place, otherwise one's life is perpetually ruled by insurance premiums, rent, food, clothing, and six dozen other things. In Christianity it is said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." In Buddhism, it is "I do not speak of the arising of an 'I'; I do not speak of the vanishing of an 'I.'" If you are worrying about self and things, then you have not found this Place, for such matters are not only of no importance, but they are actually unreal, being but a dream. Now, I know that some people are going to start yelling and screaming, "Oh, but we have to!" thinking that, unless they make these illusions into the reality, they are being foolish. But that is to fear the opposites; within the Meditation of the Great Ocean all things are possible without



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attachment or fear. It is terribly important to keep this in mind. When you work in the kitchen, look at the cabbage and know what it will eventually become after it has been eaten. And, unless you can see its Buddha Nature, that makes life rough. But you *can* see its Buddha Nature, for that is the real thing, the real substance. Do not get so attached, do not get so frightened.

One of the ways that they teach you how to do this in the Far East is to teach you how to say “yes” at all times. The first lesson in this came for me when I was told not to expect too much. Later on I was told not to expect *anything*. Because of our past clinging, we have been “packaged,” as it were, into what we presently look like: we are a bundle of elements that are packaged to look like me or you or the cat or the dog on the floor. And our packaging makes us tend to expect that certain things will happen. Very few people realize that clinging and expectation have a tremendous common denominator, for expectation *is* a form of clinging. So, if you expect something, you are clinging to something. If you keep expecting something, then you cannot deal with the clinging. Giving up expectations is the first step in saying “yes” to all things.

Then you can remove the “but” which usually accompanies our “yes.” At Sōjiji, any time somebody put a “but” on the end of it, you knew there was going to be trouble. “Yes, but can I do so-and-so first?” “Yes, but I don’t know how.” “Yes, but what should I do?” Any time there was a “but,” you knew there was trouble coming from the senior monks who heard it. So you learned to get the “buts” out of the way. One day I realized what they were really trying to get at: they weren’t playing silly Zen word games, they weren’t trying to get you to do the impossible, they weren’t

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trying to work you into the ground—they were trying to get you into a truly willing and unattached state.

The day I realized this was when I was working as jiisha<sup>†</sup> to the Director of Sōjiji, and he told me to take tea to the workmen who were mending the roof. Now, I'm not good on heights and the roofs of Sōjiji were very steep and high, and the workmen had pulled their ladders up onto the roof so they didn't get blown down. On that day, somehow, I just didn't fret about all that: I was perfectly willing to take tea to the men on the roof, the question was how it was going to get there. Before this, there would have been a "but" in my answer to him; on this particular morning something just clicked inside and I said, "Yes, Reverend Director; how do I do it?" He grinned and said, "Good, good. Now you've got what we're getting at." It is the *willingness* to go. And when my third kenshō hit, the thing that delighted me, and which was so incredibly valuable to me, was that frequently I was asked to do the impossible but I was willing to do it. "I am willing. How do I do this? Please show me, teach me. I will do." And immediately you *could* do, so it was not trying to get you to do the impossible. In addition, it was also trying to get you to recognize that you were not God, and not to make excuses because you thought you should be. This saying "yes" accepts *everything*, including your own humanity, and it is an essential element in the conditions which allow spiritual realization to take place.

*We need to make a diligent effort to fully explore these words of the Buddha. Attaining the Way and entering into the realization of the Truth do not necessarily depend on listening to someone else or talking with someone else. And those who have a broad knowledge*

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*based on hearsay have been known to have attained the Way upon hearing four lines of Scripture, and those who have a knowledge as extensive as the sands of the Ganges have been known to have entered a realization of the Truth through a single line of Scriptural verse. And what is more, the Buddha's present words are not about seeking one's inherent enlightenment in what lies ahead, nor are they about grasping after one's first awareness of enlightenment within some experience. In general, even though the making one's inherent enlightenment manifest is a meritorious function of a Buddha or an Ancestor, the various kinds of enlightenment—such as one's first inkling of enlightenment or one's fully experiencing one's inherent enlightenment—are not what make a Buddha or an Ancestor what They are.*

Here he is referring to the various things that cause us to reach this state, the catalysts for realization, so to speak. If I were asked to say what was the one thing that caused more people to come to realization than any other, I would say it was the teaching of preceptual truth. We hear of all the kōans and how stones hit bamboo, how somebody stubbed his toe, etc., etc. You hear all of this, but what was it that set the thing going in the first place, so that suddenly something could act as a catalyst? There is a verse in the *Shushōgi* which says, “Whenever these Precepts are truly accepted, Buddhahood is reached.... From these Precepts come forth such a wind and fire that all are driven into enlightenment.” That verse was the catalyst that projected me into the third kenshō, but what would have happened if I had not been studying the Ten Precepts themselves, in

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detail, prior to that? The verse could not have been a catalyst; it would have had no meaning. What caused me to take up this detailed studying of the precepts at that point in my life? The fact that I was up to certain things that something in me kept saying, “You shouldn’t do that.” What was it in me that kept saying, “You shouldn’t do that” other than a trickle of the Great Ocean of Meditation?

Buddha begets Buddha in more ways than one. The catalyst is only a catalyst. It’s a stone hitting a bamboo or a toe that gets stubbed. And this suddenly sort of “jolts something off the shelf,” or “lines up a bunch of poles in one line,” or whatever way you like to look at it. But it is that tiny little voice, that tiny little drop of the Great Ocean samadhi, which gets the thing going. Through all the many twists and turns that enlightenment uses to find itself within our lives, these are, each and every one, its trickles. You know how, on a muddy road out there, you sometimes see a tiny little trickle of water coming down, and just that tiny little spot is not dust or mud, and everything around it seems to dry up quickly, but yet that little trickle of water somehow still keeps running? That’s how this is; because we are honestly trying to train, a little trickle from the Great Ocean of Meditation runs throughout one’s life. By looking at it from the back end, as it were, after realization has taken place, you can see where the trickle has been. Any time there is a trickle, and you see the possibility of going deeper in your training, of taking meditation and the precepts more fully into yourself, go with it. Because this is what eventually creates the situation in which all conditions are ripe for a catalyst to do its work. It is going with the trickle that makes this happen; do not go around looking for more and better catalysts. Any catalyst will do when all conditions are ripe.

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Although, says Dōgen, the “making one’s inherent enlightenment manifest is a meritorious function of a Buddha or an Ancestor,” the various kinds of realization are not what “make a Buddha or an Ancestor what They are.” What does make Them what They are? The Great Ocean of Meditation is the Essence from which They, and we, come and go. It is the energy of which we are composed, as our Tibetan friend put it. Appearance and disappearance, arising and vanishing, are but dreams; they are but phenomena in time, as we think of it. They are nothing more than that. The real Essence has no time. The Great Ocean just *is*, which is why It is in a state of meditation, and why It does not get upset by all our twists and turns and twiddles, and why It cannot be bound by the sorts of moral codes that we put upon ourselves. We cannot conceive of a moral code so high that it can encompass the entire universe and yet tolerate the twists and turns of each and every one of us. But that is just what the Essence of the Precepts, which is the Essence of the Great Ocean of Meditation, is.

Dōgen now quotes the Buddha’s poem about the arising and vanishing of elements once again, and then he says,

*...On this occasion when the Buddha spoke about the meditative state which bears the seal of the Ocean, it was a time when there were simply various elements, which He expressed as there ‘simply being various elements’. This moment He called ‘the composing of this body of Mine’. The integrated form which is composed of the various elements He accordingly calls ‘this body of Mine’. He did not consider this body of His as a single unified form, for it was composed of*

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*various elements. Thus, He spoke of this bodily composition as 'this body of Mine'.*

When you actually experience yourself and the world in this way, you experience every element of your body in more ways than one. Once, at a time of opening up to such a Place, I could even feel the pain in the springs of the passing cars. You can feel the stresses and strains of all the elements around you because you are sharing within their essence. And when you go past that, then you bask purely in the Meditative Essence. To experience the shared essence of the elements is, as it were, the last of the physical experiences before you enter into the pure state of meditation.

If you can understand that the physical form is, in fact, the dream and not the reality, then you will be able to experience the Reality. But do not think that It is a separate reality belonging to you. It is *not your personal, separate reality*. When the “dew drop slips into the shining sea,” it is no longer a dew drop, it is part of the shining sea. Do not think that there is a separate soul within you. So long as you want a separate soul, you’re sunk. You are clinging to body and mind or, in this case, to a shadow of body and mind. And, by the way, it is the shadows of body and mind that become the past lives, for they are that which we could not transcend at the moment of death.

In the poem which starts the chapter, it speaks of elements and instants which are “previous” or “succeeding.” Do not allow that to make you think in terms of ordinary time, for, as Dōgen puts it,

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*...The time of arising is synonymous with 'these elements'; it does not refer to the twenty-four hours of a day....*

There is actually no time in pure meditation, for meditation is ever-present. Existence is time itself; existence just *is* and there is just a constant present. What else is time in its real form but a constant present? In some ways, this chapter is the forerunner of *Ūji*. People argue whether this chapter comes before *Ūji* or after it. You need to understand how to go beyond the opposites of time and space before you can enter the Great Ocean of Meditation, but you do not understand *Ūji* completely until you find that Great Ocean. You only have a relative understanding of time until then; you cannot help but think of a past and a future. This is why to dwell in the eternal present, and not to dwell in the past and not to worry about the future, is one of the biggest and most important doors into Zen training. We waste years thinking to ourselves, "Oh, how awful it was when this happened, or that happened, or what my third grade teacher did...." This is all to dwell in past time. Or we worry about what is going to happen in the future, "If I take this job what will take place?" Well, if you take the job such-and-such may take place, or it may not. You only have to live in the now. If you can learn to live in the now, and not worry about past and future, you have found one of the best gateways into Zen training, and one of the most frequently used.

*Another ancient Buddha once said, "What is this ceaseless time of arising and vanishing?"*

*Thus, in that the arising and vanishing is our experiencing the arising of an 'I' and our experiencing the*

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*vanishing of an 'I', the process is unceasing. In entrusting the matter to Him, we need to discern the real meaning of His asserting the unceasingness of this process. We continually chop up this unceasing time of arising and vanishing into what constitutes the lifeblood of an Ancestor of the Buddha. In the unceasing time of arising and vanishing, who is it that arises and vanishes? As to the who that arises and vanishes, it is the who that is on the verge of being able to realize enlightenment within this body. That is, it is the who that manifests this body, the who for whom the Dharma is expressed, the who in the past who was unable to grasp what Mind is. It is 'You have gotten what my Marrow is,' and it is 'You have gotten what my Bones are.' Because the 'you' is the who that arises and vanishes.*

To sit still within the arising and vanishing, the appearance and disappearance, you and I, the constant coming and going: this is to be within the Great Ocean of Meditation within this human life. When we are dead (as we think of it), presumably we see It in a different way; I have no way of knowing. But I do know this: It is no different in life and in death. What matters is to *be* within the Great Ocean of Meditation.

When Dōgen speaks of “the who that arises and vanishes” in this particular passage, he is not talking of the reason for coming into physical existence at birth. Instead, he is talking of the “who” who trains and of the reason for living after one has had a realization of the Truth. This “who” is the new *I* of Shakyamuni Buddha, not the old “I” of Prince Gautama. Each and every one of us possesses the



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“lifeblood of an Ancestor of the Buddha.” Even when we are the “who that was unable to grasp what Mind is,” our training is such that we are seeking the benefit of all sentient beings and are a vehicle for the flowering of the Dharma in all of the arisings and vanishings we call a life. This is the mind of the Bodhisattva. This is what the training of Ancestors of the Buddha is. All of that is implicit in what Dōgen is saying here.

Pure Buddha Nature, Bodhisattvahood, and Buddhahood are nothing other than the Essence of the Great Ocean, or what is sometimes called “non-substantial liberated Essence.” Do not think, by the way, that there is a difference between Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, *in essence*. There is a difference in appearance, because a Buddha is staying within That Place at all times and does not come out of It, whereas a Bodhisattva moves freely whilst His center is still. In essence there is no difference between them, but one must not confuse them in external appearance. Someone whose mind is stuck with the obstacles of the past, someone who has not made it to the Third Position wherein it is possible to ask, “What is my true purpose for living?” cannot grasp this meaning of being a Bodhisattva and therefore does not fully comprehend the Bodhisattva Vows.<sup>†</sup>

This is the point at which faith comes into it, the point of “entrusting the matter to Him.” It is an act of faith to remain in the Third Position and not get frightened by the arisings and the vanishings of the elements of body and mind. This is not the faith of blind belief: it is the faith of sitting still in the “meditative state that bears the seal of the Ocean.” This faith makes it possible to undertake the Bodhisattva Vows, which may seem impossible otherwise. In this place of faith, you also do not have to worry about

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whether it is possible to follow other aspects of the Bodhisattva path. In the old days people used to debate endlessly whether “one can ever become a Bodhisattva because, if one has to become fully enlightened first that means one is a Buddha and when one becomes a Buddha it is ended so there’s nothing left to be a Bodhisattva, and if you become a Bodhisattva and you’ve not yet become a Buddha, how do you know that what you’re going to do is right”—which was all a lovely muddled way of thinking about it. If you know through faith what your True Nature is, it does not matter what the appearance is, whether it is that of Buddha or Bodhisattva or Arahant.<sup>†</sup>

There is a time of being a Buddha and a time of being an Arahant and a time of being a Bodhisattva. What is seen externally is a different thing in each case, but what is seen internally is identically the same thing. This is the higher level of the teaching of looking at everyone as the possessor of Buddha Nature and not worrying about their shortcomings, their external appearance, their sex, and “whether or not men can do it and whether or not women can do it,”...and so on. These things don’t count. What matters is that you know the non-substantial liberated Essence, the Buddha Nature, in the Third Position beyond the opposites. Sometimes the Essence appears as one thing and sometimes it appears as another, and none of these things stand against each other. It is not a matter of, for example, “How can the Bodhisattva teach, since He is giving up enlightenment?” Since he or she is one with enlightenment in true spirit, how can he *not* teach?

Viewing the arising and vanishing of the elements from the place of meditation makes it possible to go onward, not only through the fears that arise from attachment, but

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also through the grief that arises in this sad world. Indeed, sometimes the world is cruel and unfair; sometimes it's downright terrible. These things are explained by the Law of Karma. Karma is cold comfort. I know, I've had to live with it. But if one stays still in meditation, gradually one sees over the years that the Essence is the supreme thing, that our little judgments and our little opinions do not really amount to so much as one hair on a dog's back.

It's very humbling to realize how great the design of the universe is, because it is not fully comprehensible by any of us. But one can have some glimpse of the colossal size of it and of how important and benevolent it actually is. Yes, all the suffering does go on, on an individual level, or so it seems, *and* so long as our faith stays true we can help that suffering by staying within the Third Position. That does not mean that we become cold-hearted, it doesn't mean that we become non-compassionate, it doesn't mean we can't grieve. The Zen master can both grieve and cry, but his grief does not overwhelm him so that he is incapable of acting, because he himself, or she, is rooted in faith and meditation. And the same can be true of every monk and lay person: if you are rooted in faith and living in the Third Position, then when the horrors of stupidity and ignorance come, you will not be overwhelmed by the suffering. Instead, you will want to renew your own efforts, both at helping and strengthening your own faith and in helping and strengthening the faith of others.

To do otherwise is to be immersed in the opposites, in ignorance of what is Real. Have you ever thought about the word "ignorance"? To ignore. We ignore what is really going on; we ignore the basic truth; we ignore the fact that the Unborn exists; we ignore that there is karma and that

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one has to pay for that which happens. What happens in spring decides what happens in autumn. If you ignore what happens in spring, you will be surprised by the crop that turns up later. That is on a very practical level, and this is true of our own lives. If your faith is rooted in This Place, in the living meditative state that bears the seal of the Ocean, then, although there will be grief, although there will be pain, it will be bearable and we will not be so caught up in the emotionalism of the moment that we do not know what to do to alleviate the pain of self and others. We will, in fact, because we are not caught up in that emotionalism, be the most effective people possible. You must accept that, whilst we remain within this body, whilst the elements coalesce together, life will be painful. What we need to know is that we can sit still beneath it. The Zen master does not offer you magic that will turn off the pain of the world. He or she does show you how you can sit still beneath that pain so that you can help the world to make itself less painful. If you wish to think of that as “magic,” you may, but it isn’t. It’s very hard work. And that’s how it’s done: by sitting still in the place of meditation and allowing the Essence to flow through you. As Dōgen points out further on in the chapter, this is our True Refuge.

*...The Ocean of one’s being is not some abode of a worldly person nor is it some place beloved by a saintly person; it is oneself alone within the Ocean of one’s being. It is simply our constantly and openly giving expression to the Dharma. This ‘within the Ocean’ does not pertain to its center, nor does it pertain to its inside or outside; it is our endlessly dwelling constantly within it as we give expression to teachings*

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*that are the flowering of the Dharma. Though we do not take up residence in the east, west, south, or north, we do return, our boat empty yet fully illumined by the moon's light. This genuine refuge is our returning to our Original Nature....*

Enlightenment is not a Place where you particularly want to be or don't want to be, it happens to be the Place where you *are*. You don't get a choice on that one. That's something that a lot of people haven't noticed. "Oh, how wonderful to be there, or how miserable not to be there." Nope: you just *are*. All these adjectives that we add to it are useless. *This is where we really are*, and Dōgen and all the great masters have told it like it is. They are not pretending with this stuff.

Next is told a famous dialogue between Great Master Sōzan (one of the monks for whom Sōto Zen is named) and a disciple:

*Sōzan Honjaku, posthumously called Great Master Genshō (C. Yüan-cheng), was once asked by a monk, "I have heard that it is said in Scriptural teachings that the Great Ocean does not give lodging to corpses. What kind of an ocean is this?" The Master responded, "It contains all that exists." The monk then asked, "Then why doesn't it give lodging to corpses?" The Master replied, "What has ceased to breathe is not connected with It." The monk asked, "Given that It contains all that exists, why is something that has ceased to breathe not connected with It?" The Master said, "The functioning of all that exists is something other than ceasing to breathe."*

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Why aren't there any corpses? "The corpse" is a code word that refers to what is an illusion. This physical body, for example, is an illusion. Remember Shakyamuni Buddha's poem at the beginning of the chapter. But, when we can see that a corpse is pure in itself as a corpse, then there is no longer any illusion and it *is* contained within the Great Ocean of Meditation. When it is known to be changeless in its Pure Essence, and when we are seen in our Pure Essence, our unborn and undying state, we realize that *we* are contained in the Great Ocean of Meditation. And when are we in this Place? When we are sitting still in the waveless sea of meditation. And a corpse is in that state when its elements are in that waveless sea. So, nothing is outside of the waveless sea of meditation, and this is the true meaning of emptiness, or non-substantial liberated essence.

At the very end of the chapter, there is a most beautifully descriptive passage:

*...The journey before us and the journey behind us, which is part and parcel with all that exists, have their own functions, and ceasing to breathe is not one of them. In other words, we are like some blind person leading a mass of blind people. The fundamental principle of someone blind leading a mass of blind people includes 'one blind person leading one blind person' and 'a mass of blind people leading a mass of blind people'. When a mass of blind people are leading a mass of blind people, all contained things contain all contained things. Further, no matter how many Great Ways there are, they are beyond 'all that exists', for we have still not fully manifested our meditative practice,*

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*which is the meditative state that bears the seal of the Ocean.*

In other words, don't try to get your brain so involved in this that you're trying to understand it. Sit still in meditation, right in the midst of the darkness of your own blindness, your own unknowing, and have faith; this thing *will* manifest. Dōgen is trying to tell you not to try to understand this intellectually. I've tried to explain it using words, as he has, but do not take it at the level of words. I'm a blind man leading blind men. Get on and do it, and then you'll know what I'm talking about.

That's really all I've got to tell you about this. It comes down again to sitting still and meditating, with bright hope which leads to faith, which leads to certainty, which leads to true liberation and the going in and out, the coming and going, arising and vanishing. Enlightenment is not escaping. It's not a two-dimensional thing; it is the Third Position. It is a permanent here-and-now thing, and those who truly understand it regard the world as a joyful place, as a place where they can do, and offer, incredible help as the pipelines of the Unborn. You cannot give that help while there is a "you" in the way and you cannot truly give it until you have found that incredibly peaceful Place of stillness.

What do you do if you want to help the world before you have found That Place? You give help anyway, with a pure heart, and you don't count the cost to yourself; you train and practice as though your hair were on fire, and one day—behold—you are in That Place. How can that be? It is because every time you sit down to meditate you are beckoning to the Great Ocean of Meditation. It is because every time you sit down to meditate the Great Ocean of Meditation

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is beckoning to you. It is because every time you sit down to meditate you are all, blindly and unknowingly, aswim within the Great Ocean of Meditation.