

# Yusho Sasaki - Crosby Hall Sesshin 2019

## Does a dog have buddha-nature ?

### Summary

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### Introduction

Today I'm going to talk about one of the famous koans - it's called 'Joshu's Nothingness' or sometimes it's called 'Does a dog have a buddha-nature or not?' This is one of the first koans Zen monks are given if they use koans.

But as you know, you're not so familiar with koans, are you? Rinzai Zen often uses koans, but not often Soto Zen. One of the reasons I think is that Dogen wrote so many books, including ninety chapters of the *Shobogenzo* and on top of that you've got the *Eihei Koroku* [public record] after Dōgen moved into Eiheiji, and there are six booklets of the *Eihei Shingi* (Pure Assembly) - the rule book for Eiheiji - and so on. So most Soto Zen monks, or people who study Soto Zen, have so much material of Dōgen's to read that they really can't go beyond that.

In Rinzai Zen there is a particular kind of structured reading so they make more use of koans and other kinds of books. So this is perhaps quite a rare opportunity for you to listen to this koan.

Today I'm going to pick up one particular chapter in the *Shoyoroku* (*The Book of Serenity*) - one of the three most famous books of koans: the other two being the *Hekiganroku* (*The Blue Cliff Record*) and the *Mumonkan* (*The Gateless Gate*) (see Notes, page 10). Altogether there are said to be 1,700 koans.

### What is a *koan*?

So the next question is: 'What is a *koan*?' In Chinese *Ko* means public and *An* means announcement; so the literal meaning is 'public announcement'. So how do we understand this? Originally, it is *mondo*, between teachers and students. Or sometimes you pick up a phrase from a sutra and put it as a question. So a koan book is basically a whole list of questions to which you have to find your own answer. Even when there is an 'answer' provided, for example - the famous short koan by Ummon: 'Why did Bodhidharma come from the India to China?' and Ummon replied: 'Shao Mountain'. Or Joshu was asked, 'What is the really essential teaching of Buddhism?' and Joshu said, 'The oak tree in the garden'. So it is *their* answer.

So students ask the question and the teacher gives the answer, but there isn't anything further following that 'because... so and so' - this part is missing, so you have to find your own answer; that's what that says. So, when you read a koan - as I said there is the *Blue Cliff Record* and the *Book of Serenity*, and the *Gateless Gate* - and the *Blue Cliff Record* is thought to have been written in the 12th century - 1125 or so. Usually for each koan there is commentary and you can see there at '18 - Joshu's Dog' there is an introduction, followed by a case and there is a verse. So there are three parts - can you see? And the part called 'case' is often the koan.

It's slightly different in the *Gateless Gate*. But the others are formatted in much the same way. The *Blue Cliff Record* is written almost a hundred years before the *Book of Serenity* (which is dated 1225-6 - almost exactly the same time as Dōgen went to China). So when Dōgen was there, the *Book of Serenity* had just been finished. But of course it was written in Beijing, and Dōgen stayed in South China, so he wouldn't have known of the *Book of Serenity*. But he did know the *Blue Cliff Record*, because he found it just one day before leaving China. And of course at this time, books were very precious and the only way to have your own copy would have been to copy it yourself. So Dōgen was desperate to copy one hundred chapters, which was of course impossible in the time he had. So when he felt desperate one of the protecting gods (Hakusan) came and helped him to copy all the pages. Hakusan is a white mountain in Japan and nowadays, even after eight hundred years, every year a couple of monks run to the top of Hakusan Mountain and carry out the traditional rites because it is the protecting Buddhism.

So the *Blue Cliff Record* was written in the 12th century and is often used and studied within Rinzai Zen, because the monk who composed them belonged to the Rinzai school. Each introduction, case and verse are a group of three which are collated. One man chose a hundred koans out of the available 1,700 and he made the poem after forming an impression of each koan. Later, the author of the *Blue Cliff Record* took the poems with the koans and created each introduction and then added the commentary on each case. So three sets of people collaborated to create the one book. Essentially the same sources contributed to the *Blue Cliff Record* and the *Book of Serenity*.

## The Book of Serenity

The *Book of Serenity* is often used in Soto Zen, because the person who picked up the koan and made the poem belongs to the Rinzai group but when you hear that Wanshi Shōgaku... when you do Bodhidharma's Emptiness, when you do Dharma Battle, have you seen that anybody? In the ?Hosshin-ji? they pick up one of the chapters from the *Book of Serenity* and the *Book of Serenity* is often used by Soto Zen and these two books - the very famous *Blue Cliff Record* and the *Book of Serenity* - pick up about a third of the same koans, but using different interpretations. So even though they use the same koans they already provide different answers. And as I said, there are no true answers, you have to find your own.

So when you read koans and you try to figure it out, you may find one answer when you're in your thirties, and a totally different interpretation when you're in your sixties. So even if I say a koan is 'like this' even so I'm influenced by my own teacher - so her interpretation and my interpretation are mixed together. But as I said there isn't any 'right' answer and 'wrong' answer. Simply different answers. That's almost a favourite phrase in Zen. So you have to keep that in mind when you read a koan. And at the same time, you can be confused because different people say different things. And my view is different from someone else's when you next hear that same chapter being discussed. So be aware of that kind of thing: that kind of trickiness of koans.

The last koan book - the *Gateless Gate* - dates from later than the *Book of Serenity*. He [Mumon] belongs to the Rinzai School's specific way of interpreting koans. So even for the koan I give you, there are three different versions. One is from the *Book of Serenity* (No. 18) and the other part is from the *Mumonkan*, the *Gateless Gate*. So you see [in the *Book of Serenity* version] that a monk asked Joshu, 'Does a dog have buddha nature or not?' and Joshu said, 'Yes.' The monk then asked, 'Since it does, why then is it in this skin-bag?' Joshu said, 'Because he knows, yet deliberately transgresses.' Another monk asks Joshu, 'Does a dog have buddha nature or not?', Joshu says, 'No.' The monk said, 'All sentient beings have buddha-nature, why does the dog have none, then?' Joshu said, 'Because he still has an impulsive consciousness'.

So, this is the koan in the *Book of Serenity*. But when you see the *Gateless Gate* koan book, 'Case 1: Joshu's dog' you can see: A monk asks Joshu, 'Has a dog the buddha-nature?' and Joshu said, 'Mu (nothingness or nothing)'. And that's it! So the same koan is very different in the *Book of Serenity*, and the *Gateless Gate*. And finally, in the *Record of Joshu's Sayings*, here a monk asks Master Joshu, 'Does a dog have buddha-nature?' and Joshu replied, 'No.' The monk said, 'All beings have a buddha-nature, why doesn't the dog have it?' And Joshu said, 'It is because of his not having karmic consciousness'. So this is half of the *Book of Serenity* version.

So [the question] is how you interpret those three. It's up to you, but even if it's up to you, you need some clues to understand, otherwise there isn't anything to hang on to. So this typical *Gateless Gate* case offers no clues at all. This type of koan, Dōgen doesn't like. When you read the *Shobogenzo* occasionally you find he criticises the Chinese way at that time of using koans without offering any kind of clue to help figure out what is being said in the koan story. Because that's what Dōgen didn't like. But at the same time this is what Dōgen found when he was in China - it was very trendy.

For example, in the *Book of Serenity* & the *Blue Cliff Record* at least there is part of the introduction under the koan and there is a verse, so with this there is room to think or to analyse, to comment. That's how originally it started about koan use with a koan book, so there is introduction and koan and the verse and often they've put a long commentary on that. That is the original start of so-called koan Zen - and this type of koan use in Zen means a kind of detail and little meaning of Zen. That's I think more or less how/why Dōgen used similar patterns.

### **Reading the *Shobogenzo***

Because when you read the *Shobogenzo* (and no-one reads it completely) ... But first there's one thing that I'd better say: When you read the *Shobogenzo* there are altogether 95 chapters. If you can't read it all, the best way is just to read the first page or two of each chapter - they contain what Dōgen wants to say most of the time. Most of the time it works well. So if you don't have the patience to read the whole of the *Shobogenzo*, read the first pages - you can read 95 pages without much problem. You might not necessarily understand it, but you can say you've read the *Shobogenzo* [laughter].

For me, the *Shobogenzo* is like a koan book. He presents a theme and he just is adding commentary - so that he presents the 'koan' first and then makes comments. And then he keeps saying the same thing in different ways, again and again. That's true of the buddha-nature chapter [*Bussho*]. And for example in *Genjokoan* there are very similar patterns. So when you want to read the *Shobogenzo*, just read a couple of pages first and that's often the same ideas. And at the same time, out of the 95 chapters of the *Shobogenzo*, the three most important are: *Bendowa*, *Genjokoan* and the third one is *Bussho* (Buddha Nature). *Bussho* is quite a big chapter, and Dōgen's writing is quite similar in long chapters to other ones.

Dōgen, even though he doesn't [generally] like koans, he [especially] doesn't like the '*Gateless Gate*' - that kind of clueless koan, incomprehensible, illogical approach to a koan. Because when you see Joshu's Dog in *Gateless Gate*, 'A monk asked Joshu, does a dog have buddha-nature?' and Joshu said, 'No' or 'Nothing'. After this continues in Mumon's *Gateless Gate* he [Mumon] made a comment: When you approach this kind of koan, one must completely uproot all the normal working of one's mind. This is the way he recommended approaching koans. At the same time he says that, concentrate your whole body and mind into the question of what 'Mu' is, day and night without ceasing. So to me he tried to recommend you to have an approach that is not logical - you put your whole energy into it and think, think what? Think, 'Mu' - nothingness. What is nothingness? This is what Mumon recommended.

## The limitation of words

So rather than using words, they have a mistrust of words because words don't reflect what it is actually. Because words are just dualism, like 'good and bad' and any of the opposites. Even in 'good and bad' there are shades of good and bad. And 'tall and short'. Basically our head is given to dualism and thinking - we use words and we think that thinking defines the words, words define the thinking. So obviously in reality it's not just like 'black and white' - there are lots of shades between those - lots of shades of grey. And we can't name all those shades of grey - fifty shades of grey at least!

So, you can't explain for example 48 shades of grey with words, you can't explain 37 kinds of shades of grey - we don't have the words. So it means Zen is just between those two. Zen tries to explain something that's inexplicable, so therefore most of the time when you hear those kinds of teisho you'll be frustrated. I try to explain something I can't explain in words - and you try to understand something that is not explained by words. So it ends with boredom and frustration.

That's the weakness of that approach - so therefore *Gateless Gate* compiler or writer in that case tried to get rid of all the effort to use words. Use the intuition and with intuition you really put your whole energy into it. That's what he recommended. So eventually, if you are lucky, you reach somewhere: Voila! Eureka! that kind of level. He often recommended that, 'Your internality and externality spontaneously become one'. And for instance in dharma battles, they often used the expression: 'A small mosquito tries to bite into an ox made of steel'. So the mosquito tries to prick that steel ox - that is what you are asked to do. That is the nature of that approach.

Of course in the end intuition is quite important, but before reaching intuition you need enough knowledge to develop intuition. It's like any kind of situation - like for example mathematics. I read a book about how mathematicians are thinking of one theme all the time. Especially when you're trying to develop a formula, or theorem. That is how mathematicians think the theme for years and years and years, every waking moment. And some day it comes, and sometimes it doesn't. But often it happens like a chemist or like in the medical field. They do the research and it often ends up pure luck or there's a last minute intuition that changes the whole situation. But before that, you need knowledge to lead you to the intuition. So if you know little about it and you're given this koan: 'Mu', it doesn't mean anything at all.

## Dōgen and koans

So that's what Dōgen criticised - this kind of approach to Zen koans, which was quite popular when Dōgen went to China. That's what he criticised. But he didn't criticise, for example, the *Blue Cliff Record* because he brought that book with him [on his return from China]. And when you read his three hundred koans book [*Shinji Shōbōgenzō*] there are plenty of koans and especially after he went to Eiheiji he wrote a public record [*Eihei Kōroku* - Dōgen's Extensive Record] translated into English by Shohaku Okumura, Roshi - and that's basically whole books about koans. So even though he criticises koans, he doesn't necessarily dispense with them altogether. It's just part of koan practice that he doesn't like.

His approach is different. The *Gateless Gate* approach was called *Kanna Zen* in Dōgen's period. It means 'see-through-the-story Zen'. So compared to that kind, the other kind is called *Mokusho Zen* - silent-reflecting Zen. That is more or less the Soto Zen type, *shikantaza* type. Mokusho Zen was often practiced by the author of the *Book of Serenity* - Wanshi Shōgaku.

So even if Dōgen doesn't like this kind of see-through-the-story Zen, it doesn't necessarily mean he disliked the whole idea of koans. That's often misunderstood by monks - even by Soto monks. They often say, 'Dōgen doesn't like koans so I don't read koans, I'm not going to use koans'.

[Actually] a koan book is quite interesting - it's like a puzzle in a way. You have to find your own answers and you're not sure whether it's the right answer or not. So that's the fun part, I think. So anyway, that's how koans developed because as I said earlier there were 1700 koans in olden times. They're often quoted in conversations between teacher and student - Joshu is asked: 'What is the essence teaching of Buddhism' and he said, 'The oak tree in the garden'. That's teacher and student, question and answer. That's what a lot of koans consisted of. And those koans it consisted of are written and compiled, and there are different meanings and different interpretations and in different times.

### **Studying the *Book of Serenity***

So, I was taught by my teacher using the *Book of Serenity* and of course she's the best on the Soto Zen interpretation, so I read the *Book of Shōyōroku* and Soto Zen styles; but at the same time as I said, I studied Rinzai Zen for quite a long period. Sometimes when you read the *Book of Serenity* comments written by Soto Zen - that interpretation - sometimes I feel a little bit strange, that some of them should be interpreted in the Rinzai way. Or at least you have to compare the interpretations in Rinzai Zen and Soto Zen. That's really not particularly practiced in Japan yet, because there aren't many opportunities to listen to the whole of the *Book of Serenity*.

Fortunately, my teacher explored the whole one hundred chapters when I was in the *sodo* (see notes). I stayed in the *sodo* about five years and it took around three years to finish all one hundred chapters. And that was quite a rare opportunity for Soto Zen monks to be exposed to the *Book of Serenity*.

And so as I said, even reading or listening to koan interpretation sometimes you really do not understand well enough; but that's not a problem because you don't need to have any answer. Just [let it] stay in your mind and you have some kind of seeds in your mind, that's the most important part. Because once you have seeds - "I-don't-understand" type of seeds in your mind - that sticks in your mind and each time you read something and you're in contact with that kind ... 'Ah, this is what they are talking about' - those kinds of experiences that you have. So rather than understand... when you read something and you don't understand in a way it's much better than [if] you understand. Because once you think you understand it doesn't stay in your mind. But if you don't, it sticks to you and stays with you and you try to find the answer. That's how you develop your style of study. So that you start to learn one by one.

### **Joshu's Dog**

So let's go to that for Joshu's Dog. As I said, in Mumon's *Gateless Gate* there isn't any clue, so just leave it - I can't say anything about it. He said: 'Try not to think. Try to understand through your heart'. That's OK for practising, but it doesn't work for a talk like this. So just leave this one and let's turn to the *Record of Joshu*. A monk asked Master Joshu, "Does a dog have Buddha Nature?" Joshu replied, 'No'. The monk said, 'All beings have the buddha-nature. Why doesn't a dog have it?' Joshu said, 'It's because of his having karmic consciousness'. So when you read this you get stuck. The [difficult] part is 'what is karmic consciousness?

So, karmic consciousness is simply your whole actions, all your action of 'body, mouth and thinking'. So whatever you do, whatever you think - it leaves some trace. That is karmic consciousness; that's the original meaning. But it's gradually interpreted kind of badly - as some kind of delusions-action,

delusions-thinking. Delusions of the mind often use the words 'karmic consciousness'. So here you can imagine it's that kind of meaning. A dog doesn't have a buddha-nature because he has got a delusion-mind, a delusion-body - so therefore he doesn't have the buddha-nature. It's a literal interpretation. But the original meaning is very different from the surface of the words and sentences. Because the monk asks Joshu. 'Does a dog have a buddha-nature' and the teacher says 'No', and he says, 'Why not?' So 'Why not?' means already here the student has got a prejudiced opinion. You have to see everything without any prejudice, without your personal bias. You have for example the concept of Mahayana Buddhism - every thing has a buddha-nature - you agree that point? So the assumption is that everything has a buddha-nature, everything including a dog, a cat and humans. And he said, 'Then why doesn't the dog have a buddha-nature and his karmic consciousness?'

Here it's indicating, 'All beings have a buddha-nature, and why does a dog not?' This monk knows everything has a buddha-nature - it's a pre-agreed concept. And yet he asks the teacher. Why does he ask the question? Because a dog is 'lower' ... in that period you can imagine that a dog is not a pet - the dog is just a wild dog that's roaming around and he scavenges food, and this often causes a problem. So that kind of dog in that period - that's a very different image from nowadays. So even that mean, low-life dog has a buddha-nature is an indication of that monk's question already. So that answer is he [Joshu] said 'No', because the answer is that the dog has delusioned-mind, delusioned-action. But this is not talking about buddha-nature at all, this is talking about the monk himself. Do you follow? That Joshu said, based on conversation about buddha-nature or not, he's talking about 'How about you?' That's all that this is about.

When Joshu was asked about what the essence teaching of Buddhism is, he said it's the oak tree in the garden. It's a very similar idea. 'Look at you. Forget about the dog, I'm talking about you'. That is how Rinzai is working That's Baso's way of thinking [too]. Because all of Buddhism is about how you see things, how you think it and how you act - it is your kind of Buddhism, as manifested. Have I explained well enough? OK - let's try the other thing,

For example, Baso's is the same as Joshu's line. Baso said, 'You are perfect as you are'. You are already the manifestation of the buddha-nature, but you try to do something about it. That is wrong. You yourself are perfect. You try to interfere with what you are - that kind of problem. It's the same story as, 'The ordinary mind is the Way'. You know, you are as you are, it's OK. But you try to interfere. Even though you're in the middle of the Dharma Way, you try to find the Dharma Way somewhere else. That kind of wrong approach. You yourself are OK. You yourself are perfect as the manifestation of the buddha-nature. But you always try to look for it, you always forget what you are, you try always to get somewhere else. That is the wrong approach. That's Baso's way of thinking.

And Joshu's is very similar to that approach. So even though Joshu said the dog doesn't have a buddha-nature, but he is not talking about the dog's buddha-nature - he's talking about the monk's. You have already this delusion-mind because you are judging, using your prejudiced opinion to judge something that's right in front of you. You shouldn't do that kind of thing. That's what this is here, and Joshu tried to say it. So the buddha-nature is just a kind of tool to talk about that subject. That's the way that it is here. So because, for example, in Joshu's other books when he is asked what is the buddha-nature and when he is asked whether the dog has a buddha-nature or not he says, 'Every way leads to the big capital'.

So that is exactly the same expression as in the *Fukanzazengi*. So you are always in the middle of it. Wherever you take the road, the Dharma Way is always going there, it is connected. Once you realise you are in it, you're there. That's it. Nothing else. You don't need to walk all the way from A to B. When you are here, you are in the middle of it. That's it. That's the end of it. That's the approach of Baso and

Joshu's way. So here, 'the buddha-nature or not' is almost an irrelevant conversation. If you feel that you are already prejudiced you just correct it, you get rid of it. Your illusion-mind is a problem, get rid of that delusion and that's it. You'll be OK as you are. That's Joshu's teaching here.

OK - so this is *Joshu's Record*. In the *Book of Serenity* when you read that case: a monk asked Joshu, 'Does a dog have a buddha-nature or not?' and Joshu said, 'Yes'. And the monk said, 'Since it has, why is it in this skin-bag?' So Joshu [on different occasions] said both, 'Yes' and 'No'.

'Buddha-nature' is one of the *Shobogenzo* chapters' [*Busshō*] - it's quite a long one. This concept of buddha-nature you're quite familiar with - that everything has a buddha-nature - that's OK. And buddha-nature, of course, is Mahayana's main concept. As we learn, in Theravada they don't [have the concept] because the Enlightened One is only Shakyamuni Buddha; the maximum you can go to is Arahāt. Arahāt is the end - you can't be Buddha. But Mahayana says. 'You can be Buddha. If you want, you can be a Buddha'. That's Mahayana's very revolutionary concept, I think. That started in the earliest stage of Mahayana Buddhism, from the end of BC / beginning of AD [500 years after the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha]. And from the second and third centuries, Nagarajuna developed the Middle Way thinking - *Madhyamika* and the *Yogachara*. Any of the Mahayana theories always contains the idea of the buddha-nature. But they don't [always] use the words buddha-nature - they use the word Tathagatagarbha - it is the Dharma Body's foetus. So every body has the Dharma Body foetus.

At the same time that the Tathagatagarbha is indicated, it is often covered by delusion. But we have actually inside, the pure, beautiful Dharma Body - inside. That's the concept of Tathagata and the same idea is often used in the *Lotus Sutra* - they use the words 'Seed of Buddha'; and gradually they started using the words 'buddha-nature'. Using the meaning of something that's hidden by delusion; when delusion is dropped out, only the buddha-nature is left. So in the original idea of the Tathagata, you can understand those two schools' [*Madhyamika* and *Yogachara*] way of thinking about people and about practice.

### **Daikan Eno (the Sixth Patriarch)**

One is the Sixth Patriarch's poem and the other is Gyokusen Jinshū, his rival's, poem about the Bodhi Tree. Do you know that story? At the time of the Sixth Patriarch, Eno. Eno is illiterate and Eno is picked up by the Fifth Patriarch and he worked in the temple as a lay person. At that time, the Fifth Patriarch told everybody in the group: 'I am going to give my position to one of you, so express your view in poem form'. So one guy who is considered No. 1 [in the succession], wrote:

*Our body is like a bodhi tree  
And our mind is a mirror on that stool  
We have to keep on shining the mirror  
Trying not to accumulate dust.*

That was his way of thinking about practice because, if you don't, anything is going to be accumulated dust so that the mirror is going to become dirty. So that was his view. The Fifth Patriarch says, 'OK that's great'.

But when Eno, who is illiterate, hears the poem he says. 'I disagree with this opinion,' and asked someone to write for him:

*We are not bodhi trees  
And our mind is not a mirror  
Since we are perfect from the first*

*Why should we shine the mirror every day?*

The first poem [suggests] that Zen practice is to clean the mirror every day. That is one approach. This is quite similar to the Tathagatagarbha way of thinking. That some nice thing was covered by delusion. You have to shine it, to let it flourish.

And the other one is: 'Right from the beginning you are OK'. The only thing that you have to do is *realise* it - rather than putting wrong ideas, you just *realise* that your self is perfect. These were the two poems' ways of thinking. The one is very similar to the Tathagata idea and the other is very similar in a way to the buddha-nature of Soto Zen's way of thinking.

### **Dōgen's revolutionary view of buddha-nature**

But at the same time, this Soto Zen way of thinking is totally revolutionary. Or I should say, Dōgen's buddha-nature view is a totally different idea. You know that the first chapter of *Busshō* he quotes, 'All sentient beings have the buddha-nature' - that's actually the traditional translation. But he said, 'Every sentient being *IS* buddha-nature'. 'Has' suggests that something is tangible inside: the seed of Buddha - that's a way of thinking. But Dōgen says everything *IS* buddha-nature, everything *IS* the manifestation of buddha-nature. So his is a very revolutionary way of thinking. Soto Zen is quite different from the whole history of the way of thinking about the buddha-nature up to that time.

So in Soto Zen's point of view, when you read this kind of koan: Joshu said 'Yes' and 'No'. Either way doesn't make any difference, because Dōgen's point of view is the dog *IS* buddha-nature, buddha-nature *IS* the dog. It's not necessarily two as one, one as two - it's not completely the same. That's another confusing concept of Sekito Kisen's, that idea. But anyway... you can see, 'What is the buddha-nature?' - from Dōgen's point of view those questions themselves are meaningless, so [Joshu's] answers are quite meaningless, too.

For example, of course it's in the traditional way of thinking about this sentence, that Joshu says 'Yes'. Then we get: 'Since it has, why is it then in this skin-bag?' So already this monk has a kind of preconception - a dog is low life. Why is such a pure buddha-nature (Tathagatagarbha/pure Dharma Body) in those low animals? At this Joshu replies, 'Because he knows yet deliberately transgresses, even though he knows what the buddha-nature is'. Even though the dog is low-life. Low-life or not, that is the manifestation of the buddha-nature. So, for example, buddha-nature - of course he understands it's itself as *whatever* - so he just deliberately put himself into some kinds of dirty things. But in the pure things, people accept pure things. But it's very difficult to put himself into that dirty, low-life there. So that's what he is indicating here.

For the other situation Joshu said, 'No', and karmic consciousness because of illusions - because the dog has illusions. But having illusions or not, the the buddha-nature is there already - doesn't matter. The answer is almost irrelevant. So far, you have a concept of what this buddha-nature is. And what the buddha-nature is in your mind is more important than what it means in the sentences for *Gateless Gate* or *Joshu's Record* or the *Book of Serenity*.

### **Finding your own answer**

You really have to figure it out: What is buddha-nature? What is Buddha? As, your own answer. Because even I often think, 'What does it mean?' Because, for example, when you read the *Tenzo Kyokun*, the first sentences of the book: 'In the temple there are six managers - like Tenzo, Tsusu, etc. and all temples have six managers. All are Buddhas and all carry out the Buddha's work'. That's his first sentence. And I think these are a very important words, a very important sentence. You have to spend



a lot of time to digest this one sentence and it's meaning for you. For me, I tried to digest this one sentence for a long period. Because ... is it possible? 'Am I Buddha?' Because *you* are Buddha, means *I* am Buddha too. So am I Buddha? Am I Buddha if I call myself Buddha? 'Am I *worthy* to be called Buddha?' is the next question. That's, 'Are my actions worthy to be called Buddha's actions?' And you have to reflect to yourself all the time.

So that's why the buddha-nature is a big thing for you. Not for the concept - because a concept doesn't mean much - it's just a concept. What buddha-nature means to you is: when you read this kind of teisho it gives you food for thought. That's all that teisho does, I think - just makes you think. Because in Buddhism they never say, 'You have to believe this and that'. They always make you think, let you think and let you have your own ideas. It doesn't matter if it's right or wrong, you have your own answers. And you have to digest your answer and feel quite comfortable. That's the way you go, step by step, and that's what I like about teisho, because teisho is not necessarily giving the answer - just providing material to think.

And if you don't understand, you try to find the answer - that's human nature. So that whole process, I think, is why the teisho or the koan is important. This is for me, the way that I approach that koan. And as I said, everything is material to learn Buddhism. So even if you read koans and don't understand them yourself, it really doesn't mean much. You have to reflect, to practise... that's the point. So once you understand buddha-nature, you have to put that understanding into everyday practice, that you are understanding about buddha-nature - is similar to always getting stuck on the Tenzo Kyokun's first sentence: that they're all Buddhas and they carry out Buddha's action. The 'Buddha's action' part has a very important meaning to me - those sentences. That's the way I try to read those sentences, or study. It's not study just for study's sake, because we're not scholars, we're practitioners. When you read and when you study whatever, you always have to reflect to yourself, through yourself. Otherwise this is just reading a book. That's not the way: we are going to practise through teisho, we are going to practise through koans, and so on.

So that's more or less it - I remind myself all the time: knowing or studying, it's not a big deal. How to put into the practice what you reflect - I think that this is quite important. I'm saying everything again and again. You learn Buddhism through different things - through rituals, through bells and gongs, through teisho, and through whatever you do. That's the whole point I wanted to say. Thank you very much.

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## NOTES ON KOAN SOURCES

### The Extensive Record of Yunmen Wenyan

Originator: Yunmen Guanglu, (864–949)

### The Jingde Transmission of the Lamp: Jp. *Keitoku Dento-roku*

Extent: 1701 biographies

Published: (1004-1007)

Compiler: Shi Daoyuan

### The Blue Cliff Record: Jp. *Hekiganroku*

Main use: Rinzai Zen

Extent: 100 koans

Published: 1125

Koan Compiler: Xuedou Zhongxian (980–1052); Jp. Setcho Juken

Commentaries: Yuanwu Keqin (1063–1135) Jp. Engo Kokugon

Sources: 82 from Keitoku Dentō-roku; 18 from Yunmen Guanglu

### The Book of Serenity, or Book of Equanimity Jp. *Shōyōroku*

Main use: Soto Zen

Extent: 100 koans

Published: 1224

Koan compiler: Hongzhi Zhengjue (1091–1157) Jp. Wanshi Shōgaku

Commentaries: Wansong Xingxiu (1166–1246)

### The Gateless Gate: Jp. *Mumonkan*

Main use: Rinzai Zen

Extent: 48 koans

Published: 1228

Koan compiler: Wumen Huikai (1183–1260); Jp. Mumon Ekai

Commentaries: Mumon Ekai

Dōgen's own **Greater Shobogenzo**, compiled in 1223-27 & written in Chinese, contained some 300 koans. Titled **Shinji Shōbōgenzō** or **True Dharma Eye 300 Cases** (*Shōbōgenzō Sambyakusoku*), or **Treasury of the True Dharma Eye** (*Mana Shōbōgenzō*), it was first published in Japanese in 1766.

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## OTHER NOTES

*Sodo* - the nuns' hall in Shundo Aoyama Roshi's training centre: *Aichi Semmon Nissodo*.