

Tenborin Zoom Saturday 25 April 2026

Speaking of his own awakening before the monks of his temple, Master Dogen said:

"Venerable monks, all of you, do you wish to know what happened to the ascetic Gautama when he attained awakening?"

The first answer is that realising the Way of the Buddhas corresponds to what happened to me when I heard the words of my Master Tendō Nyojō: 'Shin jin datsu raku': Cast off everything, body and mind.'

The second answer is nothing but my fist burying itself in the back of your eye."

So what happened to the monk Dogen when he heard his Master Nyojo utter *Shin jin datsu raku*? His mind, he said, returned to its source and he realised what the Eye-Treasure is, his Treasure of Light.

In the Soto School, *Shin jin datsu raku* has become the phrase that expresses the total loss of all identification with that which is illusory, conditioned, dependent on words. It is to be free from the demands, the insatiable desires of the self. This is what the *Diamond Sutra* teaches us - it's what we can put into practice in zazen:

"You must cultivate a mind free from all attachments, a mind that does not fixate on anything, that does not rely on any form, nor on any sound, any smell, any taste, nor on what is tangible, nor on any mental object. The notion of the self will no longer have any place in you, nor even the concept of being a living being, nor the concept of life, not even the concept of an individual. Like the blessed Buddhas, you will be free of all concepts."

To cultivate this free mind, we must see, in zazen, with all the attention we're capable of, through a penetrating observation, the way in which we are the prisoner of the tyrannical commands of Mara, the supreme god of the world of desire. We must see how the conditioning that manipulates us arises. See how we attach ourselves to impermanent objects through taking them to be real. Understand how the calculating mind constantly intervenes in our choices and lies to us about our intentions. We must stop thinking that we are the person who meditates, who thinks, who feels separate from Awakening.

Shin jin datsu raku, is to open one's mind completely without the calculating mind closing it again. We then discover what our Light Treasure is, and we experience peace by allowing ourselves to dissolve into this luminous presence.

The clenched fist in the disciple's Eye is the master's gesture that strikes at the disciple's ignorance and transforms it into awakening. The master confronts the disciple, in a single blow, with the fundamental question of life and death. With his fist, he delivers the impulse that leads to the ultimate answer. This blow was often, both literally and figuratively, the teaching of the Chan masters to throw the disciple off balance so that he might turn his mind towards its source.

"In other words," continues Master Dogen, *"the power of my fist over your mind must permeate your entire body in such a way that you may immediately take your seat on the diamond throne and liberate all beings. Then, all of a sudden, they will see the Morning Star shine."*

To open and let go. The one as well as the other will help you see clearly. A single punch is enough to bring you into the presence of the 23 Patriarchs (from Bodhidharma to Tendō Nyojō) ...

Do you truly wish to meet the Buddha?"

Dogen then raised his fist ... and paused. Then he spread wide the five fingers of his hand and asked them:

"How was that?"

After another pause, he continued:

"Now, right at this moment, open your Eye of the Way and see the shining star. This is exactly and simply the place where the Tathāgata, the Thus Come One, eats his rice gruel."

We can only awaken and see the light of the Morning Star if we understand the deepest meaning of this *shin jin datsu raku*, 'strip yourself of your body and your mind'."

The light of the Morning Star is the very light of the Buddha's awakening. It is precisely *what we are*.
