

Tenborin Zoom - 05 September 2026

Koun Ejo quotes Master Seppo Gison, just as his own Master Dōgen had done.

Master Seppō Gison was the abbot of a monastery so poor that the fire in the kitchen would sometimes go out for lack of fuel. The monks lived on nothing but rice and a few beans. Despite this, the community never numbered fewer than one thousand five hundred monks. Dōgen says that this way of life should be the standard against which practitioners should measure themselves. Not because hardship is virtuous in itself, but because it shows what these monks really valued. They gathered around Seppō not for comfort but to follow his teachings and realise awakening. The meagre food and difficult conditions were simply not the issue.

Master Dōgen often says that prosperity and comfort corrupt the minds of monks and practitioners. This is a pattern that isn't unique to the monastic or spiritual life. When circumstances become comfortable, we tend to take things for granted, without questioning anything. And so we end up practising zazen out of habit, without appreciating either its grandeur or its ever-new freshness. We become attached to what we possess, to our conditioned patterns and to our fanciful dreams. We protect our ignorant comfort rather than prioritising the search for truth and the practice of the Way.

Koun Ejo continues:

"Instead of wasting their time trying to wash away dirt with mud, Zen practitioners must first understand the words they use when they talk about a subject. If it is [about] the silent light that shines upon countless worlds, why should these words be those of a famous poet? Why should they be the words of a buddha? Or of anyone else?"

Listen carefully: The silent light that shines on innumerable worlds is the monks' hall, the dojo, the Buddha's altar, the kitchens, the great gate of the temple."

This final recommendation comes from Master Unmon, speaking to his monks about the light that dwells within us all. It illuminates all the places where monks live. And the same is true of the place where we ourselves live and practise. The place where our lives unfold must be regarded as a palace of light, even if it is cramped, modest, and maybe even a little shabby.

Dōgen tells us, in a way that may seem almost startling: even in the absence of any aspiration for awakening, practice carried out with a mindful heart will eventually give rise of its own accord to that impetus. For the practitioner who fears that their motivation or their sincerity is not yet sufficient, Master Dōgen's advice is not to wait for it to come first, but to practise without questioning it. The aspiration for awakening arises from the practice, and not the other way round. We do not wait to become the person of awakening before we practise; it is practising itself that makes us that person of awakening.

In being awakened, as we move about, eat, work, we recollect that we *are* light. A flame burns within our heart. Our body is nothing but a fire of light emanating from that flame. Let us keep this image present in our minds, and little by little it will become alive, vibrant, illuminating the whole of our day.

Master Dogen tells us:

"Listen and hold within yourself [the realisation] that beings of the present, past and future inhabit this light. This is what hundreds and thousands of Unmons celebrate together.

The silent light that shines on countless worlds is the monks' hall, the dojo, the Buddha's altar, the kitchen, the great gate of the temple."
