

The Essential Dogen

An Introduction to the Writings of the Great Zen Master

Edited by

Kazuaki Tanahashi and Peter Levitt

Shambhala: 2013

A Walk With Dogen Into Our Time

In 1954, poet Allen Ginsberg wrote a poem called "Song" that acknowledges the weight of our human circumstance and suffering in a particular and somewhat unusual way. I believe it may also provide a gateway to these writings by Zen Master Eihei Dogen, who addressed the nature of reality as he came to understand the world of people and things through his lifetime practice of Zen.

As the poem begins, Ginsberg says:

*Under the burden
of solitude,
under the burden
of dissatisfaction
the weight,
the weight we carry
is love.*

Suffering under such a weight is often accompanied by longing, as the poet well knew, and so his poem expresses the longing to return to that human possibility

known by many names, including *wholeness, oneness, unity, and Self*, though Ginsberg simply called it *love*.

Quite young when the poem was written, the poet was inspired by an intuitive certainty that the twin burdens of solitude and dissatisfaction would be relieved if the realization of wholeness or love might find full expression in the world.

Of course, Ginsberg also understood that his longing for completion was not his alone, but part of the common spiritual yearning experienced by people in every place and time, and so he acknowledges this in the final lines through the repetition of a single affirmative word, followed by other rhythmic phrasing that functions like the beating of a heart:

yes, yes,

that's what

I wanted,

I always wanted,

I always wanted,

to return

to the body

where I was born

The body of wholeness. The body of unity. What Zen monk Dogen called “the body after the final body,” and what the poet identifies as the body of love. It is for

this body he longed, and whatever words are used to point to the primordial condition of oneness acknowledged by virtually every spiritual tradition, Ginsberg importantly refers to the journey there as a “return.”

More than seven hundred years before this poem was written, Dogen crossed the sea from Japan to China, following his sincere aspiration to realize wholeness, which, interestingly, he later referred to as a “return to the source,” “return to reality” or “self returning to self,” prefiguring Ginsberg’s use of the word “return.” One of Dogen’s primary motivations for making this dangerous journey was to study with authentic teachers so that he might satisfy his spiritual quest to fully realize the “the great matter of birth-and-death.”

After two years of significant study with other teachers, Dogen was told, “The only person in Great Song China who has a dharma eye is Old Man Rujing.” Having also heard that Rujing would accept new students if they vowed to maintain the tradition of genuine, rigorous practice under his strict guidance, Dogen made his way to Rujing’s temple.

Once at the Tiantong Monastery, he wrote to Rujing as “a humble person from a remote country” and requested permission to enter Rujing’s inner chamber and receive the abbot’s personal instruction. Rujing must have found the heartfelt authenticity of this request from a monk who had traveled so far in search of dharma quite compelling for, without ever having laid eyes on Dogen, he replied, “Yes, you can come informally to ask questions any time, day or night, from now on. Do not

worry about formality; we can be like father and son.” And he signed it, “Old man at Mount Taibo.”

Rujing must also have perceived fire in the aspiration and practice of monk Dogen, whose own *Rules for Zazen* admonishes students of the way to be mindful of time’s swift passage and “engage yourself in zazen as though saving your head from fire.” At their very first meeting, when Dogen was twenty-five years old, Rujing acknowledged him and said, “The dharma gate of face-to-face transmission from buddha to buddha, ancestor to ancestor, is actualized now.”

Dogen began practice under Rujing’s unwavering eye and, not long after, Rujing confirmed that he had, indeed, “dropped away body and mind” and come to the great realization of wholeness for which the poet would also long, in a place and time that even Dogen could not imagine.

For two more years, Dogen trained below Taibo Peak, whereupon Rujing acknowledged him as his dharma successor and presented him with the traditional document of heritage. Thereafter, Dogen returned to Japan, feeling the heavy burden on his shoulders “to spread the teaching and save sentient beings.” True, his own sincere quest was satisfied, but now he pondered how he might nourish others’ aspiration with the great care that had helped him to “return to the source.”

Dogen certainly knew the profundity of one’s aspiration to realize wholeness, and so he felt the pressing need to “leave for students of the way the authentic teaching of the buddha house.” His deepest wish was to articulate both the principle

and the path as Rujing had transmitted them to him, so that others might come to full understanding as well.

The depth of Dogen's compassion for others, and his commitment to provide authentic teachings, can be seen in an extraordinary essay written in 1231. As with much of Dogen's writing, "On the Endeavor of the Way" is alternately considered insightful and compelling, or confusing and confounding by various readers, but Kazuaki Tanahashi, co-editor of this book, has noted it is "highly respected in the Soto School as Dogen's most comprehensive explanation of dharma."

In its entirety, this essay introduces primary themes Dogen would develop over his lifetime, while serving as a masterful clarification of wholehearted seated meditation (zazen), which Dogen refers to as "the authentic gate to free yourself." It also voices the burden he felt and the weight of love that the Ginsberg poem brings forward. Here is an excerpt from near the beginning:

"There may be true students who are not concerned with fame and gain, who allow their aspiration for enlightenment to guide them and earnestly desire to practice the buddha way. They may be misguided by incapable teachers and obstructed from the correct understanding; intoxicated in confusion they may sink into the realm of delusion for a long time. How can they nourish the correct seed of prajna and encounter the time of attaining the way? Since I am wandering about, which mountain or river can they call on? Because of my concern for them, I would like to record the standards of Zen monasteries that I personally saw and heard in Great Song, as well as the profound principle that has been transmitted by my master."

And so, having come to great realization under Rujing's guidance, Dogen understood fully in body and mind that from the very beginning wholeness is the fundamental reality for all beings; that, in fact, every form of life is an all-inclusive manifestation of what might be called "original wholeness," though people suffer from the ingrained pattern of dualistic thinking that prevents us from knowing our complete and original self. As a result, Dogen initiated a lifetime of teaching and writing in one of the most unique and provocative styles the world has seen, so that others might also clarify 'the great matter of birth-and-death," self might have a bridge to self, wholeness in human form might be expressed as wholeness, and sentient beings might be saved from the unforgiving rigors of delusion, anguish, and needless suffering – *the burden of dissatisfaction* – in all its forms.

During his lifetime, Dogen elucidated the principle and path of what I've called "original wholeness," a phrase I hope will join others in these notes to identify in contemporary speech what is usually referred to in more traditional Zen terminology. As the literature of Zen makes clear, it is difficult, if not impossible, for words and phrases to embody the true content and nature of realization. Brilliant and provocative as his words were, even Dogen's attempt to convey to Rujing the moment of his realization, "*I have dropped away body and mind,*" may well have fallen short of the challenge to express his realization as it was in itself.

Our attempt to authentically communicate the subjective, ineffable experience (or *nonexperience*, as Dogen might say) of realization is hindered by the limiting ability of the very words we use. It was not Dogen's, and it is not anyone else's lack that the vivid power of experience cannot be fully embodied in words. No matter how compelling or beautiful they may be, words appeal in the main to the linear, thinking mind that thinks in words. Elegant, discerning, and seemingly endless in its capacity to comprehend, ultimately, the cognitive faculty can only provide a partial understanding since it is but one of the ways human beings "know" life as it occurs. There is still the intuitive to be considered, the physical, the dream. All of these and more are authentic ways of knowing, too.

As a master of language, Dogen's use was penetrating and poetic in the extreme. Well aware of its limitations, he developed a mode of expression to convey dharma that engages more of the human capacity for understanding than the thinking mind, though certainly, as when he was at pains to meticulously describe the practice of meditation, or provide temple guidelines, his writing was prescriptive and clear. Many of the practices found in Zen communities today are performed almost exactly as Dogen described.

When it came to a nuanced expression of dharma, however, he spun words and turned phrases constantly, often creating new meanings on the spot or using the same words and phrasing to make a point in the first moment and then contradict that very point in the next. His teachings, on occasion delivered past midnight during intensive periods of practice, might even be seen as a kind of linguistic acrobatics; a compelling, clarifying and often confusing explosion of sentences that

rely on subtlety, invention, piercing insight and realized expression to embody his meaning and help students fulfill their deepest aspiration.

Filled with images, metaphor, logic and illogic, in addition to stories taken from the storehouse of the Buddha's teaching and the literature of Zen, which he would present in a manner that often overturned traditional interpretations, Dogen's teachings almost make a poetic and holographic impression in the body-mind that leaves a visceral impact while simultaneously appealing to the intellect. In so doing, he turns the body, turns the mind.

In one teaching that addresses the inherent qualities of words, Dogen's statement seems to undo everything I have been saying about the impossibility of using words to express enlightenment, as Kaz Tanahashi notes in his insightful translation of Dogen's life work, *The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*. Regarding Zen master Xiangyang's statement that "a painted rice cake does not satisfy hunger," Kaz observes:

"This is usually interpreted as "studying words and letters does not help one to realize ultimate truth." Dogen's interpretation is that words and letters as an expression of enlightenment cannot be separated from the ultimate truth. Thus, "painted rice cake" means an expression of enlightenment."

I can only laugh. Quite a few times in the ten years of working with Kaz on our various Dogen projects, (which has been a personal treasure and a source of great joy in my life) I would turn from the text and ask, "How in the world did he

come up with this?" but we could only shake our heads with appreciation for the depth of his understanding. "It's Dogen."

Dogen's use of what he called "intimate language," like the words and turning phrases of the buddha ancestors who came before him, is rooted in the nondual experience of realization. It is intended to help students yield the grip of linear, discriminative thinking and turn the mind toward an understanding of things as they truly are. Creative and virtuosic in this regard, he may be our only pre-contemporary post-modern deconstructionist elucidator of the way.

Dogen's teachings were offered to women and men, lay and monastic alike [though of course the primary recipients were his monastic students] with the expectation that they would work in conjunction with the primary activity of those who studied the buddha way: the steadfast practice of zazen. They were intended as companions of this activity, a wake-up stick whose touch and sound might resound deeply in a student's awakening field of understanding. They were never meant to replace seated meditation, or provide linguistic entertainment for students to spin in their minds while sitting idly on their cushions.

Challenging as these teachings were, Dogen's use of words to undo words, and twirling of concepts to unravel concepts helped students to embrace his instruction to study them *intimately* – his credo in all things – until the lock of discriminative thinking fell away and their practice deepened to where thinking "beyond thinking" became the activity of zazen itself.

As Dogen wrote in his essay, "The Point of Zazen":

Yaoshan, Great Master Hongdao, was sitting. A monk asked him, "In steadfast sitting, what do you think?"

Yaoshan said, "Think not-thinking."

"How do you think not-thinking."

Yaoshan replied, "Beyond thinking."

And, in "On the Endeavor of the Way," Dogen encouraged his students in the following manner:

"Sit zazen wholeheartedly, conform to the buddha form, and let go of all things. Then, leaping beyond the boundary of delusion and enlightenment, free from the paths of ordinary and sacred, unconstrained by ordinary thinking, immediately wander at ease, enriched with great enlightenment. When you practice in this way, how can those who are concerned with the traps and snares of words and letters be compared to you?"

The ability to leap beyond dualistic thinking during zazen is fundamental to Dogen Zen. It is due to the wholehearted, all-inclusive nature of the activity, but we should look at this carefully to be sure we discern his meaning. As taught by Dogen, meditation does not lead to enlightenment. In fact, there is no distance of any kind between meditation and enlightenment. There is not even a separation between one's aspiration to realize the self and that very realization. According to Dogen, from the

very first moment of establishing the meditation posture, no bridge is necessary; practice *is* full realization, and full realization *is* practice. As he says, “Between aspiration, practice, enlightenment and nirvana, there is not a moment’s gap.”

Dogen’s understanding is that at all moments we are whole, lacking nothing despite how we may feel at any given time. Therefore, zazen is not a practice that leads to realization. It is neither a means to an end in our usual goal oriented manner of thinking, nor a method for learning to concentrate, nor a technique designed to help us improve ourselves, though the practice may help to bring some of that about.

Dogen’s teaching is clear: zazen is “the dharma gate of enjoyment and ease,” an intimate expression of the oneness of all life as it manifests in human form. It is realization itself whether we are aware of it or not. It confirms what has been traditionally called “original self” or, more provocatively, “your face before your parents were born.” And, so, we do not sit in order to become enlightened; we sit as an expression of enlightenment. That is what buddhas do.

Of course, Dogen knew that students might greet this lofty teaching with doubt, as some Zen practitioners today will verify, and so he addressed the issue directly:

“Know that fundamentally you do not lack unsurpassed enlightenment; you are replete with it continuously. But you may not realize it, and may be in the habit of arousing discriminatory views, and regarding them as real.”

To clarify his teaching on the inseparability of practice and enlightenment, Dogen used the Japanese word *shushō*, the equivalent of the English term *practice-*

enlightenment, or practice-realization. He relied on teachings such as the following to bring his point across:

One time, Huineng, Old Buddha Caoxi, asked a monk, "Do you depend upon practice and enlightenment?"

The monk replied, "It's not that there is no practice and no enlightenment. It's just that it's not possible to divide them."

This being so, know that the undividedness of practice and enlightenment is itself the buddha ancestors.

But, just to sweeten the pot, here is another statement Dogen made on what he called "the thunderstorm of the buddha ancestors' samadhi." I imagine it is one his students had to swallow whole during zazen in order for it to blossom in their lives. "Enlightenment," he wrote, "actualizes buddha nature through practice."

While for Dogen all beings are "fundamentally enlightened," it is reasonable to ask, as he did during his travels in China, if this is the case and we are whole from the beginningless beginning, why do we practice? To answer, I'd like to offer a response based on Dogen's teaching: We practice because we do not yet know whom or what we are. But, as a result of many causes, including the suffering we experience and the longing engendered by that suffering, we aspire to know. That aspiration leads many people to begin the practice of zazen.

Dogen expressed this beautifully when he said, "Wisdom is seeking wisdom." Perhaps we might paraphrase and say that wholeness is seeking wholeness, self is seeking self.

Dogen's understanding of original wholeness is a radical and life-giving affirmation of all being, where the word radical means *root*. At first, it may be difficult for us to hear what he is saying. After all, most of us were raised with the idea inherited from our various religious traditions that originally we are not at one with Oneness; that from the moment of conception we live at a distance from the "Source of life." Except for the more mystical orientation within these traditions that speaks of immanence, divinity is seen as solely transcendent and, thereby, is considered "radically other" from human beings.

This belief in distance and otherness is a powerful root of the culturally pervasive view that consciously and unconsciously shapes our lives. As such, it affects how we experience whom and what we are. In addition, the fracturing pressures of contemporary life might lead many of us to agree that we not only live at a distance from the source, but from ourselves.

In saying this, I am reminded of a comment made by Franz Kafka, who wrote with such accuracy, pathos, and humor about the bizarre and dislocating minefield of modern society. When asked about his connection to others particular to his ethnic and religious community, he replied, "What do I have in common with them? I hardly have anything in common with myself!"

I don't believe Kafka is alone in feeling at odds with himself. Contemporary people trying to get through the overburdened scatter of a day could easily agree. And Dogen might well have been looking directly at us through time when he wrote, *"Your thoughts run around like a wild horse and your feelings jump about like a monkey in the forest."* Given this disposition, and the increasing pace and unpredictability of life as we edge further into the twenty-first century, it's no wonder we experience such a pervasive sense of anxiety and dislocation.

But there is more. Just as our religious traditions affect our understanding, the defining influence of secular and cultural values has a considerable effect as well. In our culture, this includes the glorification of the rugged individualist; an idea that reifies and seems to concretize the separateness of each person who, according to the mythology, must confront life and nature alone, and stand in isolated opposition to all others in order to survive. Is this not part of what creates the burden of solitude to which Ginsberg referred?

In addition, there is the societal expectation of endless acquisition whose underlying message that what we are and what we have are not enough epitomizes the burden of dissatisfaction. Though many have found ways to keep the more insatiable appetites at bay, the acquisitive sensibility keeps the mind of comparison, judgment, envy, and greed spinning. Sadly, no realm of life remains immune, including the realm of spiritual aspiration and practice.

What a far cry this is from Dogen's realization of wholeness, or even the occasional experience of feeling at one with ourselves, with life and the world. The

suffering produced by these powerful influences undermines our sense of wholeness and denies the reality of the interdependent fabric of life that brings all things into existence and makes them what they are.

Although what is now called interdependence, which Dogen understood as basic to buddha dharma, is widely accepted as an accurate description of life functioning exactly as it does, the belief in eternal separation continues to have a devastating effect on our personal lives and world. In the most extreme cases, it rationalizes the poison of aggressive actions against those we identify as “other,” promoting racism, sexism, the decimation of the natural world, and war.

Caught in the grip of such discriminative thinking, there is no room for intimacy with self or so-called other. And yet intimacy, especially as Dogen understood it, is a primary antidote to many of the causes of destruction that, in part, define our age.

The Chinese ideographs Dogen used to express “intimate” are phonetically pronounced *shinsetsu* in Japanese. For Dogen, *“Intimate means close and inseparable. There is no gap. Intimacy embraces buddha ancestors. It embraces you. It embraces the self. It embraces action. It embraces generations. It embraces merit. It embraces intimacy.”*

When speaking of an experience, for example when Dogen exhorts students to make an intimate study of the self, the ideograph carries the sense of being both all-inclusive or all encompassing, and immediate. Practicing seated meditation in a way that embodies all-inclusive immediacy is what Dogen meant by “engage yourself in zazen as though saving your head from fire.”

It is worth noting that a principal definition of the ideographs Dogen used to express wholeness, pronounced *ichinyo* in Japanese, is also “inseparable,” with the literal meaning of “one thusness” driving the sense of what inseparable means. According to Kaz Tanahashi, “one thusness” may be understood to mean “not one, not two” or “oneness,” so there is the clear implication of all-inclusiveness here as well. Nothing left out, no gap.

Intimacy, then, means *nondual*. It is another word for original wholeness. To clarify the point so that there is no confusion: the fact of oneness does not imply that we do not have personal lives, each with individual attributes. Oneness does not deny individuality in any form; it makes it possible. Without the nondual functioning of oneness, nothing could exist. And, without each thing existing and functioning exactly as it does, oneness cannot be manifested. As Dogen wrote on the subject of practice-realization, and as the teaching on form and emptiness found in the *Heart Sutra* (a central text of Mahayana Buddhism, including Zen) makes clear, “not one, not two” means, “it is not possible to divide them.”

For Dogen, intimacy is life itself. If we “study this intimately,” as he instructed his students to do, we may gain some insight into what he means when using terms like intimate realization, intimate life. Whether or not we practice daily meditation, we might take Dogen’s exemplification of intimacy in the form of *zazen* to mean that while intimacy certainly includes being or feeling close to someone, intimacy does not stop there. Dogen’s use of the word means holding nothing back while giving ourselves completely to the only moment in which we are. In this way the moment (time) and what we are doing in that moment (being) are one intimate

expression of life. Dogen calls this “time-being” in one of his most beautiful and intricate teachings.

There is the undeniable demand of thoroughness here, a quality of being best described as through-and-through, one hundred percent; a way of using ourselves fully so that we merge with our activity and, in so doing, merge intimately with all things. Dogen’s teaching that “to master one dharma [to be intimate with one thing] is to master all dharmas” points right at all-encompassing thoroughness as one of the hallmarks of intimacy.

It is true, of course, that Dogen spoke of intimacy and what I’ve called original wholeness within the strict context of Zen as it was practiced in medieval Japan, but the reach and importance of these teachings are not limited by the circumstances in which they first were given. For Dogen, the centrality of zazen cannot be separated from his great realization, and while it may be anathema to some to suggest that his teachings can be applied outside a contemporary version of that context, at this historical time there is a need for the life-giving potential these teachings provide. Therefore, it may be beneficial to look within our daily lives to find ways to embrace Dogen’s vision, understanding and whatever practices we can on behalf of ourselves, our families, society, and the world at large.

For those who do practice zazen, or who might like to establish a meditation practice, Dogen offers encouragement and guidance. In addition to the instructions he provides in “Rules for Zazen,” in the fascicle “King of Samadhis,” he writes, “Like

the sun illuminating and refreshing the world, this sitting removes obscurities from the mind and lightens the body so that exhaustion is set aside." It is a perfect prescription for the exhausting travail of our too-busy lives.

Furthermore, he says, when we "gather together all distracted thought and scattered mind within this posture," zazen "keeps your heart and mind from being stirred." It is no small thing to have a touchstone practice every day that allows "the monkey and horse to step back and reflect on themselves" so we can experience clarity and the calming of disturbing emotions. This does not mean that we do not feel deeply, or are somehow able to avoid the external or internal conditions that usually cause great upset – far from it, since Dogen taught that we should make an all-encompassing effort to meet our life as it comes to us without reservation. But it does mean that in our meditation practice, "when you are fully present, you are free of how broad or narrow it is where you are."

The ability to be fully present yet not controlled by conditions creates a stable mental and emotional foundation even in the midst of turmoil. It is a natural ability each of us has and the benefit of establishing this greater stability can be quite significant for every aspect of our lives. If we practice it, Dogen tells us, it is realized, or "made real," from the first moment we sit down until beyond the last, so the motivation to practice with consistency arises from the practice itself.

Dogen's realization of oneness as it appears in all of its diverse expressions reflects the field of life itself. It has been described as an open field, boundless, with a gateless gate through which to enter. It is the field in which compassion grows

naturally because the usual barrier between “self” and “other” is seen through and no longer blocks the way. As Kaz Tanahashi has noted, “Only when we identify ourselves with others can we genuinely act with love towards others.”

In order to effectively express the connection and compassion we feel, however, our actions must be practical and in accord with actual, everyday life. If we remain in the realm of nonduality, or if we are attached to the ephemeral realm of ideas alone, the ability to actualize wholeness will remain beyond our grasp. As Kaz wrote, “An enlightened person is someone who embodies the deep understanding of nonduality while acting in accordance with ordinary boundaries, not being bound to either realm but acting freely and harmoniously.” I find this a perfect description of the phrase “not one, not two,” which reflects the disposition of mind found in Dogen’s teaching.

It was with this orientation that we gathered and organized the excerpts for this book; to serve as possible gateways for readers so that Dogen’s wisdom might touch their lives in a way that brings them closer to themselves and all things. As we read through the material from which we chose our selections, we saw that Dogen’s teaching on wholeness offers a positive, life-loving principle and path for people in our time to engage the very same questions humans have always faced: the impermanence of life, and the great matter of birth-and-death; the fact of suffering; the undeniable chain of cause and effect, and how in the midst of life’s greatest difficulties we may meet life with a mind that is “joyful, kind, and great” so we can still “nourish the sacred body” of all things and discover how the miracle of each moment may be experienced with our whole heart and mind.

In a brief teaching titled “Undivided Activity,” which Dogen gave to an assembly of lay people in Kyoto in 1242, he underscored the importance of each person living a full and active life, reminding them that “your understanding can be manifested moment after moment.” Given what we know of Dogen’s own understanding, perhaps we can say that his hope was to encourage listeners to “fully actualize life” in every possible way.

Toward the end of his life, Dogen prepared a rough draft on an ancient Buddhist treatise called *One Hundred Eight Gates of Realizing Dharma*. The treatise emphasized the importance of using skillful means in order to realize dharma all the way through. Though Dogen’s notes are scant, here are a few examples from the treatise itself:

“Pure practice of mind is a gate of realizing dharma; it keeps the mind from the three types of poison [greed, aggression and ignorance of oneness].....Compassion is a gate of realizing dharma; it encompasses wholesome roots in all realms of birth.....Mindfulness of giving is a gate of realizing dharma; it makes you free from wanting a reward.....Right skillful means is a gate of realizing dharma; it embodies right action.

As readers will see, the gateways in the pages of this book reflect these one hundred eight gates in various ways. Some of the gateways may prove more easily entered than others, but that is a common feature of living. After reading Dogen’s

writing, and contemplating how to enter dharma gates skillfully so that life in its wholeness is actualized right where we are, we might come up with our own list and approach. Some readers may feel inspired to practice Zen or establish a meditation practice and might seek out a teacher or community where this may be done. Others may determine that they would like to increase personal awareness when in the grip of difficult or provocative emotions that reinforce the burden of solitude, and may therefore choose mindfulness practice as a gate. Since one gate opens onto another, mindfulness often leads to the gate of compassion and acceptance without a moment's gap.

Readers who are committed to addressing social or environmental issues with greater awareness and compassion, despite being up against difficult circumstances and aggressive opponents, will find many gates here. I know one man who realized that he relied on anger while working to help protect life in the ocean. From what he said, ever since childhood he intuitively followed Dogen's teaching to "look after water and grain with compassionate care, as if tending your own children," and yet his actions as an adult were so tied to rage that he contributed to the very violence he opposed. When he realized that he was actually tearing at the fabric of oneness he believed he was working to sustain, he stepped through the gate of dropping self-righteous thinking and behavior, and made a radical shift that affected every aspect of his life.

Finally, because there is no end to the need for the dharma gate of skillful means, another gate to consider is Dogen's reminder that whatever we do has an effect quite particularly attached to its causation, so that before we act we consider its

effect broadly for the near term and the far. This teaching on karma provides a gate of compassionate attention that can easily be applied to speech, livelihood, personal relationships, service, and actions of every kind.

In closing these notes, I'd like to step away from speaking about gates and offer a window into some of the text you are about to read. In the context of studying Dogen with others over the years, one thing has become clear. We cannot, of course, know with any precision what Dogen may have had in mind when writing some of the more intricate or perplexing teachings that rely on his great realization. But it is right in those moments, when we do not understand, that it may benefit us to remember that he is always trying to help us realize our own wholeness, oneness, ourselves. If in those moments of confusion we look again and remember Dogen's aspiration in teaching as he did, it may prove of some use in the end.

Kaz and I have gratefully walked with Dogen as one of life's great teachers and companions for many years. Our hope is that readers may draw close, and discover him to be a true companion as well.

Peter Levitt

Salt Spring Island, British Columbia