

Three Philosophies and One Reality

A collection of talks by
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Introduction

This small booklet is an edited collection of seven talks given on Buddhism by the Reverend Gudo Wafu Nishijima to the weekly seminar he has held in Tokyo for the last fifteen years. Reverend Nishijima bases his explanations of Buddhist theory on the *Shobogenzo*, the central work of the Buddhist priest and philosopher known as Master Dogen. Though a brilliant and original thinker adept with words and the complexities of Buddhist logic, Master Dogen never lost sight of the gulf that separates ideas and reality. He found the true foundation of Buddhist life not in theories but in the simple sitting practice called zazen. His thought is thus entirely practical and realistic, and his insight remains as fresh and pertinent today as it was seven hundred years ago.

It was from his lifelong study of the *Shobogenzo* that Reverend Nishijima found the basis of the theory which he calls *The Four Philosophies* or *The Four Views*. In these seven lectures, he explains each of the four stages in terms of modern philosophical thought. Reverend Nishijima believes that Buddhist theory, the theory which Master Dogen recorded in the *Shobogenzo*, is always logical and understandable. But without understanding the four-phased structure which Master Dogen uses, the poetic images, complex structure, and seemingly contradictory statements about reality contained in the *Shobogenzo* become virtually incomprehensible to the modern reader.

Words and their meanings present problems to the reader and translator alike; each language has its own unique characteristics which reflect the culture of that society. Sanskrit is an elegant, complex and highly inflected language. Japanese is a rather feeling-oriented language which lacks the rigid logical structure of English. The Chinese characters which were chosen by the early translators of Buddhist literature to express the Sanskrit words *catvāry aryasatyani* are pronounced *Shi Sho Tai* in Japanese. *Shi* means four, *Sho* means sacred or noble, and *Tai* means truth or philosophy. Often, however, they are referred to as *Shi Tai Ron*, where *Ron* means theory. Thus the phrase *The Theory of Four Philosophies* is quite a close English translation from the Japanese. The word *satya* in Sanskrit has arrived in Japanese as *Tai*. Both *satya* and *tai* can be interpreted in several ways; although the prime meaning of both is undoubtedly *truth*, *philosophy* is also an accurate rendering from the Japanese.

The Reverend Nishijima has used a variety of translations for the words *Shi Tai Ron* over the years, in an attempt to find the most suitable and accurate phrase in English to transmit the system of thought which he has found in Master Dogen's work. Because the structure of the *Shobogenzo* is a theoretical structure, a philosophical system, Reverend Nishijima has chosen to use the words *philosophy* or *view* rather than *truth*. And of the *Four Philosophies* or *Four Views*, the fourth view points, not to an abstract philosophy, but to reality itself. Thus the title of this booklet - *Three Philosophies and One Reality*.

Through continuing discussion and open exchange of opinion between priests, laypersons and scholars we hope that a realistic solution can be found to the problem of which words, which phrase, best describe each facet of Buddhist thought. For we cannot avoid interpreting what we read according to our own beliefs and experiences. Words sometimes mean very different things to different people. And yet the reality which Buddhist theory is attempting to describe is only one; we can hope that everyone will reach the same understanding, a common understanding, of the reality in which we live. This was Master Dogen's hope. We too hope that these essays will stimulate this exchange, and as such, contribute to a true understanding of Master Dogen's Buddhist thought.

The Reverend Nishijima has come to believe that the *Four Philosophies*, or more correctly, *Three Philosophies and One Reality*, may be the true interpretation of the Four Noble Truths. In the first talk, he introduces this discovery, and some of the reasons why he feels that the original Sanskrit words *catvāry aryasatyani* refer to the same *Four Philosophies* which Master Dogen uses in the *Shobogenzo*. He hopes that discussion on the best choice of words to explain Buddhist concepts will continue, and he welcomes the help and advice of all who are committed to studying and spreading Buddhism.

The Theory of Four Views

[This essay was originally written in preparation for a series of talks given by Rev.G.Nishijima in San Francisco in the Fall of 1986]

The Central Theory of Buddhism

Buddhist theory is a vast philosophical system. For this reason it is impossible to give a complete overview of the many theories in only a single lecture. However, I would like to start by explaining the most important of these theories, and one which is central to all Buddhist thought. This is the *Theory of Four Views*; my interpretation of the Sanskrit words *catvary aryasatyani*. This phrase is usually translated as the *Four Noble Truths*.

The Four Noble Truths

Buddhist Scriptures tell us that after Gautama Buddha attained the truth, he wanted to teach others what he had learned. But he also had some doubt as to whether people would be able to understand his theory, because of its complexity. Tradition says that a god from heaven gave him great encouragement to give his first sermon, and so he went ahead. His first sermon was preached to his five former companions with whom he studied asceticism. We are told that in this first sermon he preached the *Four Noble Truths*, or in my translation, the *Theory of Four Views*, and the *Middle Way*. This is why we think of these two teachings as the central theories of Buddhism. To understand these theories is to understand the core of the Buddhist philosophical system. Unfortunately, people studying Buddhism in the present age have not had the chance to do so, especially in western countries.

The Traditional Interpretation

Traditionally, *catvary aryasatyani*, or the *Four Noble Truths* are:

Duhkha-satya - The Truth of Suffering

Samudaya-satya -The Truth of Aggregates
(The Origin of Suffering)

Nirodha-satya - The Truth of Enclosure or Subjection
(The Destruction of Suffering)

Marga-satya - The Truth of the Right Way

When I was a teenager, I read about the *Four Noble Truths* in Buddhist books, but I could not understand what they were referring to at all. So these four truths, which were said to be the core of Buddhism itself, became a hindrance, or stumbling block in my efforts to study Buddhism. If we look in old scriptures, the Theravada Buddhist Scriptures for example, we can find traditional explanations of the meaning of these *Four Noble Truths*. They explain that the *Truth of Suffering* means that all things and events in this world are suffering; that the *Truth of Aggregates* means that all suffering derives from human desire; that the *Truth of Enclosure or Subjection* means that we must destroy our desire; and the *Truth of the Right Way* means that, having destroyed our desire, we can find the right way.

But I can find no real meaning in these explanations, no matter how hard I try. If all things and events in this world are suffering, then Buddhism can be at best a dogmatic and pessimistic religion. If all suffering results from human desire, then Buddhism can be no more than asceticism. If the idea of destroying all our desires was a Buddhist idea, than Buddhism must be a religion which advocates what is impossible; for it is utterly impossible for us to destroy our desires. Desire is the basis of our human existence itself.

The *Truth of the Right Way* is further explained as the *Eightfold Noble Path*; right view, right thinking, right speech, right behavior, right livelihood, right effort, right state of body, and right state of mind. But I cannot find any relationship between this fourth truth and the first three.

The *Shobogenzo* and The Four Views

When I was eighteen, I found a book called the *Shobogenzo*. It was written in the thirteenth century by the founder of the sect of Buddhism in Japan which is based on the practice of Zazen. His name is Master Dogen. I found the *Shobogenzo* almost impossible to read at that time, and I was amazed that there could be a book written in Japanese which I was unable to understand at all. But although I could not understand it, I had the feeling that the book might contain important and valuable things. This was the start of what was to become forty years of study. And when at last I could understand the meaning of the *Shobogenzo*, it also became clear to me why I had found it so difficult for so long. The book itself is composed of many contradictory statements, and this made it appear illogical. But after reading and re-reading many times, I found that the *Shobogenzo* is in fact constructed in a very special way; using a unique pattern of expression.

Master Dogen expresses his ideas in the *Shobogenzo* based on a pattern of four phases. First, he explains a problem from the idealistic point of view; that is, as an idea using abstract concepts. Then, immediately after this first phase, he explains the same problem, but this time from the objective, or material point of view. In other words, he gives concrete examples and facts. Then, in the next phase, he explains the problem yet a third time as a real problem; that is, realistically thinking. Of course, he cannot explain the reality surrounding the problem with words in a book, but he does so by bringing together the subjective viewpoint which he presents first, and the second objective viewpoint. He synthesizes the two viewpoints into a realistic appraisal of the problem; a synthesis of the self and the external world. And in the final phase, he tries to suggest the subtle ineffable nature of reality itself by using symbolic, poetic, or figurative forms of speech.

The *Shobogenzo* is full of these four-phased explanations. The chapters themselves fall into four groups: theoretical, objective, realistic, and symbolic, figurative or poetic. The contents of the chapters are also divided in the same way, and even the content of individual paragraphs follows the same pattern. In general, a theoretical or subjective explanation and a materialistic or objective explanation of the same problem will always be contradictory. Again, a realistic explanation will seemingly be in contradiction to both the subjective and objective points of view. And the real situation itself is different again from the realistic explanation given. So when we first read the *Shobogenzo*, we are astounded by what appear to be gross contradictions in logic. This is one of the reasons why the book is so difficult to understand. It appears full of opposing ideas.

However, after I had read and re-read Master Dogen's book, I got used to this unique way of thinking about things. He discusses all problems from three points of view, subjective and theoretical, objective and material, and realistic. He then insists on the difference between his three viewpoints and the real situation itself. Using this method, he is able to explain the reality of a situation very clearly and logically. He believes that the most important thing is to see what the reality itself is; and at the same time, he realizes how impossible this is using the medium of the written word.

So this unique pattern or logical system is Master Dogen's way of suggesting what reality is. And I believe that Master Dogen's method is in fact a very realistic way of explaining reality. I found that Master Dogen's ideas were very realistic, and I found too that Buddhism is a religion of reality.

Then I remembered the *Four Noble Truths* which had defeated me so completely. I could not but help seeing a link between the four-phased pattern in Master Dogen's works and the *Four Noble Truths*. Then I started to think that possibly the biggest contradiction which Gautama Buddha must have faced in his thinking would have been between the subjective, idealistic thought of traditional Indian religion and the objective, materialist philosophies of the six great philosophers who were popular in India at that time.

I thought that Gautama Buddha's solution to this contradiction was his discovery that we are in fact living in reality; not, as idealists tend to think, in the world of ideas, or as materialists tend to think, in a world of objective matter alone. Gautama Buddha established his own philosophy based on the fact that we live in the vivid world of momentary existence, in the real world itself. But to express this real world in words is impossible. So he used a method which brought together the two fundamental philosophical viewpoints into a synthesized whole. And the philosophical system he constructed in this way is the Buddhist philosophical system. But at the same time, he realized that philosophy is not reality; it is only discussion of the nature of reality. He needed some method with which people could see directly what the nature of reality is. This method is Zazen, a practice which was already traditional in India from ancient times. Gautama Buddha found that when we sit in this traditional posture in quietness, we can see directly what reality is. So he recommended his disciples to practice Zazen every day.

This is the way in which I found my new interpretation of the *Four Noble Truths*. I thought that *duhkha-satya*, or the *Truth of Suffering*, was the ancient Indian way of expressing idealistic philosophy. When we are full of ideals and anxious to realize those ideals, we invariably suffer from being unable to realize them.

I thought that *samudaya-satya* or the *Truth of Aggregates* might in fact refer to aggregates of *paramanu*, the Sanskrit word for the smallest particle of matter in existence - the modern atom. The *Truth of Aggregates* would thus refer to a primitive science of matter, to the philosophy of materialism as it existed at that time.

Then I interpreted *nirodha-satya*, the *Truth of Enclosure*, to mean a dialectic synthesis; a negation of idealism and materialism.

In the ultimate stage, philosophies can never be reality itself. Gautama Buddha found this fact. And so *marga-satya*, the *Truth of the Right Way* is his recommendation to practice Zazen.

So my new interpretation gave four truths: idealism, materialism, realism and reality itself. This fundamental four-fold structure is of great importance in understanding Buddhist theory. Gautama Buddha thought that idealism is human thought in its first stage, based on a subjective viewpoint. But as a reaction to this first stage, materialistic thought arises naturally. These two viewpoints are always in conflict; a fact which can be seen in every country in the civilized world. Gautama Buddha established the religion of Buddhism to transcend both idealistic and materialistic thought. Buddhism synthesizes the idealist's point of view with the materialist's point of view to give a realistic viewpoint. To achieve this synthesis and to realize Buddhism, he recommended us to practice Zazen.

I believe that this series of philosophical viewpoints; that is, idealism, materialism, realism and reality represents Buddhism's most important theory, a theory which can be used by people everywhere as a way to look at and regulate their life and their role in society.

A concrete example of an idealist is a person who is always suffering from the frustration of being unable to reach his ideals. A materialist suffers from being unable to find any meaning in his life beyond the pleasures of the senses. We can say that the idealist would do well to study the world around him through his senses, and the materialist would benefit from becoming a little idealistic. In this way, both of them can find a synthesis between the two states, and this is the Buddhist state. When people find the realistic attitude to living which Buddhism advocates, they can think, feel, act and live in a realistic way themselves. This will make their lives more satisfying than the life of an idealist or a materialist.

In the area of science, Buddhism believes in harmony between science and religion. Until the end of the Middle Ages, spiritual religions had a very powerful hold. But in modern times, belief in spiritual religions has become weaker and weaker, defeated by the discoveries of modern science. This is not a stable situation. Of course, scientific knowledge is vital to our lives. But it should not lead us to deny what has yet to be discovered by science. Most people do not appreciate this fact; they think that it is not consistent to believe in both science and religion.

Buddhism gives us a very good solution to this problem: in the Buddhist *Theory of Four Views*, spiritual religion is the first step in the progress of human thought, and science is the second step. In the area of intellectual thought, these two stages are fundamentally contradictory. But Buddhism says that these two stages are only different faces of one and the same reality. There is no fundamental reason why a scientist cannot believe in a religion too. The Buddhist viewpoint is that people should search for a new religion which is not contradictory to the beliefs of science. Considered realistically, it is possible to find a belief which synthesizes spiritual religion and scientific truth. This belief is a new religion. To establish this new religion, we practice Zazen.

In our everyday life, the *Four Views* can be of great help in solving real problems. For example, supposing as a businessman we want to build a new factory. If we first study the project on a theoretical basis, from other people's reports and reference books, we will get an image, an ideal image of our factory as we want it to be. If we were to go straight ahead and build our factory based only on our idea, we would very probably fail. This is because our ideal image of what we want does not fit the real situation.

We should move on to a more objective and practical consideration of the problems involved. How much will the land cost? What about water and electricity supplies? What is the labor situation in the area? What is the average wage in the area? How can sufficient capital be raised? The answers to these practical questions will give us a more realistic picture of our project.

With our image we can now move on to make a realistic plan of action; a synthesis of our original idea and our concrete research. Our action plan may be far from our original idea. But it is probably the most practical plan which has a chance of working in practice. At the same time, it is only a plan; it is not the factory itself.

In the end, we have to make a move; we have to step forward and start to build our factory. When we do this, we find that the real day-by-day work is completely different from our plans, and presents many unforeseen problems. This is because even our carefully researched plan still belongs to the area of thinking. The factory we are building belongs to the real world. In the real world we have to go through many trials and troubles. And it is through these trials and errors that the real factory is slowly constructed. The series of phases in the project; the idealistic phase, the objective phase, the planning phase, and the practical phase itself always exist in our daily living.

When we have recognized the necessity of this series of stages in our thinking, we can usually be successful. Without being aware of this progression through the four stages, those who are very idealistic will sometimes fail because of their strong and often brave ideals. And those who are too objective with no ideals will also fail because their objective analysis of all possible pitfalls will make them too cautious. They may hesitate through fear of failure. Some people then, are too brave, too idealistic. And others are too cautious, too objective. To avoid being too brave or too cautious we practice Zazen.

In the *Shobogenzo* Master Dogen says, "*To practice Zazen is the whole of Buddhism, and Buddhism is just the practice of Zazen.*" So from the ultimate viewpoint, practicing Zazen is the aim of our lives. Zazen is not just a way of finding success in our life, it is enlightenment itself. To practice Zazen is our salvation. Zazen is our resting place. It is life. It is the Truth itself. The practice of Zazen allows us to bring our ideals, objectives and realistic plans together into one synthesized whole.

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Spirit in Buddhism I

Buddhists believe in the Universe. The Universe is, according to philosophers who base their beliefs on idealism, a place of the spirit. Other philosophers whose beliefs are based on a materialistic view, say that the Universe is composed of the matter we see in front of our eyes. Buddhist philosophy takes a view which is neither idealistic nor materialistic; Buddhists do not believe that the Universe is composed of only matter. They believe that there is something else other than matter. But there is a difficulty here; if we use a concept like *spirit* to describe that *something else other than matter*, people are prone to interpret Buddhism as some form of spiritualistic religion and think that Buddhists must therefore believe in the actual existence of spirit. So it becomes very important to understand the Buddhist view of the concept *spirit*.

I am careful to refer to spirit as a concept here because in fact Buddhism does not believe in the actual existence of spirit. So what is this *something else other than matter* which exists in this Universe? If we think that there is a *something* which actually exists other than matter, our understanding will not be correct; nothing physical exists outside of matter.

Buddhists believe in the existence of the Universe. Some people explain the Universe as a universe based on matter. But there also exists something which we call *value* or *meaning*. A Universe consisting only of matter leaves no room for value or meaning in civilizations and cultures. Matter alone has no value. We can say that the Universe is constructed with matter, but we must also say that matter works for some purpose.

So in our understanding of the Universe we should recognize the existence of something other than matter. We can call that something *spirit*, but if we do we should remember that in Buddhism, the word *spirit* is a figurative expression for value or meaning. We do not say that spirit exists in reality; we use the concept only figuratively.

Are there any questions?

Are value and meaning the same?

Yes. I use them to express almost the same meaning. *Spirit* is used as a figurative expression for value or meaning. Idealistic philosophies support a belief in the existence of spirit. Buddhist philosophy examines the Universe from two sides; the idealistic side and the materialistic side. So the two concepts of spirit and matter are convenient concepts to use when explaining the Universe from these two viewpoints. The word *spirit* is used to mean value or meaning.

How is spirit manifested in Buddhism?

The straight answer is that Buddhism does not believe in the existence of spirit. The Universe is usually thought of as being composed of matter. But it is not only matter; there is also the value in our civilizations and cultures which arises from matter. Matter is one concept to explain what the Universe consists of. But Buddhists consider that the Universe is ultimately ineffable; that is, beyond description.

What do you mean by the value of matter?

Matter has physical or economic value, but this is not the ultimate value that matter has. The ultimate value of matter is its value to human beings. For humans, eating is very important. But it can never become the ultimate aim of living; we cannot live just for the purpose of eating. Although we eat every day, we are not satisfied with just eating. Our life depends on another value which is not economic or physical in nature. Although economic or physical value is the basis of all civilizations and cultures, matter gives rise to another value besides its physical value.

You mean human beings cannot be satisfied with just physical value every day, so there must be some other value?

A rather nice way to explore the meaning of *value* is to look at the history of human civilizations. For thousands of years, human beings have made their efforts to build something. It is extremely difficult for us to describe clearly what that something which we have been striving to create is. But looking back at the history of the last few thousand years, we can see that the something which we have made can be called *value*.

You say that Buddhists don't believe in spirit as something different from matter. But what is the difference between what you call 'something' and what someone else calls 'spirit'?

My *something* is included in the Universe. When we look at the Universe from one side, we see its spiritual face. When we look at it from the other side we find its material face. So it is not possible to prove that spirit really exists or that matter really exists. And those who insist that the Universe is only matter lose one face of the Universe. Idealists who say that the Universe is spirit do too. Both these ideas are incomplete. And in that respect they are wrong. In Buddhist philosophy we believe in something other than matter; matter is only one face of the Universe. We have another side with no name. This is the situation. The existence of this other, nameless, face of the Universe can never be denied.

Is the reason that we do not call it 'spirit' or the spiritual face of the Universe because that belongs to the realm of metaphysics?

It is because the Universe is a unity. If we insist that spirit exists separate from matter, we easily fall into a wrong understanding of the Universe. So we avoid adopting that way of thinking. Buddhist philosophy says that the Universe is ultimately ineffable. Of course, we use the concepts of *matter* and *spirit* in our explanations. But they are only a means of explaining. They are not the ultimate nature of the Universe. Buddhism says we can believe in the existence of the Universe itself. This is fundamental to Buddhist thought.

Dogen uses the word 'mind' in the sense of spirit, doesn't he? Don't you think that mind is almost identical with spirit?

Well, mind is another concept used in explaining; Master Dogen said in the *Shobogenzo* that mind is one eye with which to view the Universe, so he used the word in his explanations. But mind does not exist as a separate entity in itself. So Master Dogen said: "*The mind of eternal Buddhas is just fences, walls, tiles and pebbles.*" This is a very important concept, and the words themselves are very well known. He did not affirm the existence of mind in itself. Mind only exists when placed against the external world. Mind and the external world can never exist as separate entities. This is the fundamental stance of Buddhist philosophy. So we can find the word mind used in the *Shobogenzo* as an explanatory concept.

Fundamentally, Buddhism believes in the unity of body and mind. When our body dies, we can find no trace of the mind. This idea is quite different from the Brahmanist ideas which were flourishing in India before Gautama Buddha. Many people find it difficult to distinguish between Brahmanism and Buddhism.

There is so much in the Universe that we cannot understand at the moment. But we will understand one day if we are able to change our way of thinking. This seems to me to be the basic problem...

I agree with you. We all have our own beliefs and our own religions. But religious ideas can never be absolute, because our ideas progress and change over thousands of years. But we can believe in some truth - we can believe in our own truth.

But isn't it possible that ideas in Buddhism will also change? As a religion gets older, it must change...

Well, I think that there are three kinds of religious beliefs; spiritual, material, and ultimately Buddhist. This is what I believe. I believe in this idea, and that is why I lecture on Buddhist philosophy. Everyone has the freedom to believe in their own religion. At the same time, however, we can find in history an evolutionary stream of religious development. In the early ages and in medieval

times, people believed in spiritual religions. In modern times, we have come to believe in materialistic religions and science. But in the middle of the nineteenth century the history of religion entered a new phase. I think we are now looking for a third religion; one that is neither idealistic nor materialistic; a religion in the middle way; a religion of reality itself.

We are free to choose which religion we believe in from these three kinds. I selected Buddhism. I have no way of proving its absolute truth or otherwise, but I believe it is the ultimate truth. So I explain my beliefs to you. The situation relies upon belief. And the problem of belief is beyond the scope of discussion: I believe this - you believe this - another person believes that. This is the situation. If you say that you cannot believe my ideas, I cannot insist that you do. You have a right to your own opinion. Religious beliefs are bound by these factors. But I believe in Master Dogen's ideas.

But that was seven centuries ago! That's a long time...

Yes. But think of the light that we see from the stars: the light itself left the star billions of years ago. Compared to that scale of time, the difference in time between Master Dogen and ourselves is not so very long.

Yes, but sometimes the light we see is from a star that no longer exists...

So time is indeed very relative. But Master Dogen's ideas are very modern ideas. When I read the *Shobogenzo* for the first time, when I was a still a boy, I was astonished to find that it contained ideas which were almost too modern. After reading more, I began to believe in his ideas. And I have now studied those ideas continuously for more than forty years. And now I have no doubts about his ideas at all. So I think that the truth can overcome differences in time. The truth deserves to be studied.

If we believe in the Ineffable, can you explain why it is necessary to study the intellectual and material face of reality?

In the history of philosophy, two systems of thought have emerged; idealism and materialism. Idealists base their thoughts on the existence of spirit, and materialists base their thoughts on matter. To explain the third system of thought that Buddhism uses, we can make use of these two existing systems. So we study these two faces of reality.

Is it a process which must continue? For example, if someone believes in Buddhism, they read the words of Buddhism and decide that they will become a Buddhist. Is it then necessary for them to study the spiritual and material faces of the Universe?

Yes. It is a method of explanation. It is not essential to be able to explain, but the two philosophical systems allow us to understand and explain Buddhist theory. So we use the two systems as phases in our Theory of Four Views.

Did Master Dogen write the Shobogenzo in order to convert people to Buddhism, or for Buddhists who already believe in the Ineffable to read? Was he preaching to Buddhists or to convert people to Buddhism?

Master Dogen said that Buddhism is belief in the Universe, and that the Universe or Dharma includes all. Therefore Buddhism embraces the whole Universe. Thus Master Dogen believed that no one can deny the truth of Buddhist philosophy. This was his belief. He did not try hard to convert other people to Buddhism. He believed that, because Buddhism is belief in the Universe, belief in everything, it is natural for us to believe in Buddhism, to believe in reality. This is the situation.

When I started to study Buddhism, I read a book by Shunryu Suzuki, a Soto priest. He seemed to be saying that the important thing to do was just to practice Zazen, and that to study idealism and materialism was not important. When I said this to you, you said that you disagreed with his opinion. I still don't understand why.

The reason we get involved in idealistic and materialistic thoughts about the world is because human beings like thinking. For thousands of years we have made great efforts to find the truth

through intellectual thought. This is fact. Human history has produced many philosophical systems. When we look at a problem, our tendency is to think about it. So the best way is to make use of our tendency to think in studying Buddhism. The use of philosophical ideas is only a means.

It isn't necessary, then?

No, it isn't necessary. That's true. If we practice Zazen every day, we need no philosophies; we need no theories. When we attain the truth, we can find how to live. Then we can find the aim of our own life, and make our efforts to reach that aim. So finding the fundamental basis of life is the most important task we have. That is why I urge you to practice Zazen and attain the truth.

But I think that we tend to think about the problem first, before finding that Zazen can help us.....

Well, I'll explain the situation in this way: Thinking, feeling and practicing Zazen all exist inside the Universe. And when we are practicing Zazen, we are experiencing the Universe from inside it. In comparison, intellectual thought looks at the Universe from outside it, as if distanced from it. And feeling is perceiving or receiving stimuli from the world outside us. So we have these three modes or attitudes in which we experience something which we call the Universe. But in fact it is impossible to say *the mind exists here*; it is even impossible to say *I am here* with any final certainty. *Something* is in existence, and so people say *this is my mind* or *this is me*. But these are only ways of explaining the existence of.....*something*. We can never prove these ideas true or false. This is the real situation. In order to discover this fact, we practice Zazen. During Zazen, we are unable to find *mind* or *body*. We are just sitting - or rather, *something* is just sitting. In Buddhism situations of this type are called ineffable. So we say that the *something* is the Ineffable. We can say that practicing Zazen is looking for the Ineffable. It is certainly a very strange state of affairs, but it is the real situation in our life.

In Buddhism there is no self, so of course there is no mind. But you said that the Universe includes something which is not matter. At the moment of death, does that something also cease to exist?

No, I think that after my death the Universe continues its existence. I do not believe that after my death the Universe will end.

What about life before birth?

Buddhism affirms the situation in the present moment. According to Buddhist philosophy, it is impossible to discover the origins of this world. This is the fundamental attitude of Buddhism. So when Gautama Buddha was asked by his disciples whether there was a beginning to this world, he did not answer. He just smiled. This was his attitude, because he knew that such problems are beyond the intellectual ability of humans. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant also confirmed the same fact. He concluded that such metaphysical questions are beyond the ability of the intellect. Gautama Buddha knew this fact, and this was why he did not answer these questions. It is a very interesting attitude.

Do you think that Master Dogen was also very intellectual?

Yes, he was. But at the same time, he recognized the existence of another world than that of the intellect. The value of Buddhism is in the fact that it discovered a world separate from the world of the intellect. People in modern times are very intelligent. They usually think that they live in the world in which their thoughts exist. But Buddhism suggests that another world exists beside the world of our thoughts. This is a very important point. So Master Dogen was very clever, very intellectual. But he had found another world. I think it may have been that because he was so intellectual he had to find another world in order to survive. In the same way, modern man is very intellectual. And so he needs to find the existence of a world beside the world of the intellect. This is the situation in today's world, I think.

If we don't practice Zazen, it's so difficult for us to find a standard isn't it?

Yes. Zazen teaches us everything. This is the situation. So to understand Buddhist theory is not the most important thing; to taste Buddhism is the important thing. Would you like to have a Zafu?

There are different kinds of people; some are calm, and some are nervous. Would you suggest different things; for example, different lengths of time to practice for these different people?

The unfortunate fact is that only people who believe in Buddhism practice Zazen. This is the real situation. I urge you to practice Zazen, but you are free to decide whether you will or not. I sincerely recommend that you do.

Thank you.

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Spirit in Buddhism II

In my last lecture, I explained the Buddhist idea of *spirit*. I feel there was some ambiguity in my explanation and so I would like to explain the concept again. I think that the ambiguity arose from two points; one was that I said that Buddhists did not believe in the existence of spirit itself, but at the same time, I used the word *spirit* frequently. The second is that I did not make use of the Buddhist system of the four philosophies in my explanation. I think that it is impossible to fully explain Buddhist theory without making use of the logic of the four philosophies. So today I would like to explain the problem of the concept *spirit* using the four philosophies.

From the idealistic viewpoint, people believe that mind really exists. This is basic to idealistic philosophies. Idealists also tend to believe that spirit exists as an entity in itself. We can say that the concept *spirit* forms the center of idealistic philosophies. In Buddhism, the concept *mind* is used in explanations without any belief in the existence of mind, or spirit, as a separate entity. The concepts are used purely as a means of explaining the philosophical problems of this world. People who believe in the existence of spirit are not Buddhists. In the first stage of the logic of the four philosophies, the idealistic approach, Buddhism employs concepts like *mind* and *spirit* for the purpose of explanation, but denies the existence of spirit as a real entity.

From the materialistic point of view, people believe in the existence of matter. Materialistic philosophies are based on matter. But in Buddhism, matter is used as a concept to explain the world; Buddhists do not believe in the existence of matter as a separate entity in itself. Materialists explain *mind* as part of the physical world. But they do not support the existence of spirit. In the second, materialistic step of the logic of the four philosophies, Buddhists, too, do not believe that spirit exists.

From the third point of view, we consider the problem on the basis of real action and experience. Here, action is explained as contact between mind and the external world. Action cannot be divided into mind and matter. When we are acting, there is no time for us to consider whether action is divided into mind and matter or not. Thus in the third phase, there is no room for belief in the existence of spirit.

The ultimate viewpoint transcends all philosophies. We are living in the reality, and we rely on the practice of Zazen to keep us aware of this fact. By practicing Zazen, we experience the state in reality itself. And this experience of what reality is forms the basis of Buddhist belief. So in the ultimate phase, we believe in reality in this Universe. We can never prove that what we experience is reality; no words can explain the experience. Our only attitude to the existence of reality is simple belief. From this ultimate viewpoint, Buddhism is a kind of metaphysics, a kind of religion. To have this belief in the reality of the Universe is to be a Buddhist. We believe in the existence of reality, but we do not divide it into two parts; mind and matter, or spirit and form. Thus, in the ultimate phase, Buddhists cannot believe in the existence of spirit; we deny the existence of spirit.

Are there any questions?

The reality that forms the basis of your belief; does that reality form the basis of your belief after you experience it in Zazen, or is there belief before that?

The belief comes from Zazen, from the reality as experienced in Zazen. So practicing Zazen is the origin of the Buddhist's belief in reality.

Can you explain what psychologically or spiritually draws someone towards Zazen?

Yes. The original motivation for someone to start practicing Zazen is often a feeling that there is nothing of value in their life; nothing that can be relied upon. Such a mood in someone's life is one of the reasons why they may start to believe in Buddhism and start to practice Zazen. From that point, the experience of Zazen itself begins to provide the motivation.

I usually use the theory of the autonomic nervous system to explain the action of Zazen on our body and mind. The autonomic nervous system has two sub-systems; the sympathetic system and the

parasympathetic system. These two systems are constructed to work in opposition. When there is a balance between the two systems, we feel peaceful. That is our natural state. But we usually live with some level of tension as the result of an imbalance in favor of the sympathetic nervous system. When we are working, we are usually in a state of tension. But that tension is not our natural state. If we want to live naturally, we should come back to our natural state. Practicing Zazen does this; it allows the two systems to balance, and so we return to our natural state. When we are sitting in this natural state, we can feel the whole Universe or reality with our whole body and mind. This is the meaning of Zazen.

Is the reality that one person perceives through practicing Zazen the same reality that another person perceives?

Yes. We can say that reality is universal. So we can call reality the Universe.

Then it is not relative to the human spirit?

I sometimes use the word mind to explain our experience, but, as I said, I don't like using the word spirit because it suggests that I believe in the existence of spirit itself. In Buddhist philosophy, mind is used to explain; some people use spirit with a similar meaning to mind, but I think the word mind is better in discussions of Buddhist philosophy.

Can you tell us something about the meaning of mind in Buddhism?

Mind is a kind of mirror which reflects the external world. In the third phase of Buddhist philosophy, the *philosophy of action*, mind is seen as identical with the external world itself. In other words, mind and the external world are one inseparable unity. But in the first phase of Buddhist philosophy, where we consider the problem from the subjective viewpoint, the concept of mind is used as a means to explain this world from the side of the subject. Sometimes mind refers to our consciousness, too. This is the Buddhist view.

Would you tell us about your experiences in Zazen?

Oh, do you want to know about so-called enlightenment?

Well, can you share your experience of Zazen with us?

OK. I will tell you what happens in my own case when I practice Zazen. At the beginning, I am usually thinking without being consciously aware that I am doing so. Then, after several minutes, I recognize that I have been thinking about something, ruminating if you like. I then start to make my efforts to stop my thinking. In this state, I am sometimes thinking, and sometimes not. These two states interchange again and again. Then, usually after about thirty minutes, I enter another state; in this state I do not need to make any effort to stop thinking. I am just sitting. It is a very comfortable, peaceful and natural state.

So first I am unconsciously thinking. Then I recognize that I am thinking. Then I start making an effort to stop thinking. Then, finally, I enter a state where I need not make any effort to stop thinking. These are the four usual states in my Zazen.

When you enter the final state, do you have any desire to return to the ordinary state?

The ultimate state is a very ordinary state. Coming back to this natural state is the aim of Zazen. The state we are in when we are thinking about something is not always our natural state. The fact is, the state in which we are acting is our natural state. This is the fundamental basis of Buddhist philosophy. We revere action itself.

In our daily life, our action saves us; when we are worrying about something, our state is not peaceful; when we are receiving stimuli from the world around us, we are not always happy. But when we are immersed in our action we are happy and at peace. This is a basic fact of life. So Buddhist philosophy says we should devote ourselves to action; it is the basis of Buddhism.

How does one translate one's experience in Zazen into one's daily life?

Do you mean, how can we enter the natural state when we are not practicing Zazen?

Well, if someone is very conscientious about practicing Zazen, both at home and at a temple, if we want to translate that experience as much as possible to times when we are not practicing.....

Yes. In practicing Zazen, the most important thing is regular daily practice. To practice Zazen every day, even for a short time, is the best way to make real the beliefs of Buddhism. Even when we are very busy, we should find some brief period when we can practice Zazen. It is the fundamental starting point of Buddhist life.

But when we practice every day, is there anything we can do when we are not practicing Zazen to.....

Let me illustrate the situation with an example. When we practice Zazen first thing in the morning, our body and mind enter the natural state. So we eat our breakfast in the natural state. We work in the office in the natural state. We study and read in the natural state. After practicing Zazen, we can do everything in the natural state; it is the effect of practicing Zazen. So I urge you to practice Zazen regularly, every day.

You described your own experience in Zazen, and talked about realizing that you are thinking and starting to make efforts to stop. I think that, for someone new to Zazen, that effort sounds a bit mysterious. We don't know how to make efforts to stop thinking. How do we do it?

Do you need to make efforts to stop thinking in your Zazen?

I think so, but the technique.... we usually think that there must be some way to do it. When you say "make an effort", we don't know exactly what kind of effort you mean. How do we not think?

During Zazen, I usually have some images in my mind, and these are a kind of thinking. So when I recognize that there are images in my mind, I make efforts to get rid of them. Do you have images when practicing Zazen?

Yes I do. But it's not the images which are the problem, it's that sometimes we don't understand how to get rid of them. Is there some particular method to get rid of them?

Well, I think that your state during Zazen is very natural and peaceful. You have the natural state from the beginning of your practice.

But when you speak of making efforts to stop thinking, usually, if I make efforts to stop thinking, I think of something else. I think about making an effort, or my mind just flits from one thought to another. And actually I don't stop thinking at all. I just get involved in a different kind of thinking.

Well, in that case, I usually focus my consciousness on keeping my lower spine straight and vertical. I concentrate my mind on making my spine straight. This efforts stops my thoughts.

So, in a sense, this is your method, your technique?

Yes, that's right.

I find that, if I don't remain conscious of the position of my body all the time, I become conscious later that my body has moved into the wrong position. So is it possible, after many years of practice, to no longer have to think about your body?

After practicing Zazen for many years, our muscles become more perfect. So we don't need to concentrate continually on keeping our posture right. But usually we need to focus our consciousness into keeping our spine straight vertically.

At the beginning, are we intentionally making an effort not to think? Is it possible to make an effort not to think at the same time as keeping your body in the right posture?

I think that concentrating on keeping our spine straight and vertical is the best way to get rid of our thoughts. This is my method.

I often hear people recommend us to concentrate on our breathing. If I concentrate on my back, my back starts to hurt. If I concentrate on my breathing, the body becomes more controlled.

Yes, some people recommend us to concentrate on our breathing; to watch closely how we are breathing. But none of my experience shows me that I need to regulate my breathing. My breathing is fortunately always smooth during Zazen, so I have no need to regulate my breathing. I do not know what the basis of the theory about regulating breathing is.

Some people recommend, in the same way that you say you are conscious of your spine, to be conscious of breathing. So it's not to regulate breathing, but just to focus the mind on breathing.

I do not recommend the method where you count your breaths. This is a kind of thinking, and such thoughts disturb our practice of Zazen. When I need a deep breath during my practice, I take a deep breath. Once or twice is enough.

I do not understand what the third phase, the philosophy of action is.

The *philosophy of action* is unique to Buddhism. It cannot be found anywhere else in the history of philosophy. European philosophies embrace many splendid ideas on materialistic and idealistic bases, but there is no *philosophy of action*.

Gautama Buddha found that we are living in reality. Reality is not only the mental side of life, but also the material side. So he considered that to think about the basis of the world from only one side, whether it be the idealistic side or the materialistic side, was not sufficient. He found another viewpoint, another philosophical position; the *philosophy of action*. Action is contact between the mind and the external world. Using the concepts *mind* and *external world* we can explain the world, or reality. But reality is not only how it seems from the inside, and not only how it seems from the outside. To explain the real situation we need a third point of view, a third philosophical standpoint.

This third point of view is Buddhism's secret; it is the valuable thing about Buddhism. To find this third point of view, we need to study Buddhism, But the third point of view is still not the reality itself; it is still a philosophy. So at the final, or fourth phase, we have reality itself. Not theory, but fact. It is, for example the practice of Zazen.

The third stage is explainable but the fourth stage is inexplicable then?

Yes. It is the nature of reality itself. Reality is ineffable. Recognition of the ineffability of reality is an important wisdom in Buddhism. People usually think that all things can be understood with the brain, but this is not true. Reality can never be explained in words. This is the fact and this is the wisdom of Gautama Buddha's teachings; to recognize that there is something which can never be explained in words. To understand this is to put philosophy in its true perspective. Philosophy and fact are different. Recognition of the difference is of great importance.

When we are struggling with our thoughts during Zazen, as we relax, we get different thoughts, different insights than when we keep struggling intensively. Do you get different insights into the things that you have been teaching about the previous day?

No. In Zazen we have no understanding. We experience the reality. We feel something through our whole body and mind. It is not thinking; it is not understanding. It is a kind of feeling. It is experience itself. We are always conscious during Zazen, but that consciousness is not thinking, not perception. This is the ultimate state in Zazen. The state of mind during Zazen is difficult to describe; it is not consciousness, neither is it unconsciousness. It is the state of pure action. We cannot be sure if we are conscious or unconscious. This is the fact.

So let's practice Zazen again now. Thank you very much.

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Matter in Buddhism

Today I would like to talk about the Buddhist view of matter. I explained the Buddhist view of spirit in my last lecture, and so I would like to move on to the second phase and explain matter from the Buddhist standpoint.

It is said that modern philosophy was founded by the French philosopher, Descartes. At the beginning of his studies, he took the position of doubting all theories and propositions. But in that position, he found one simple fact; he found that he was thinking. His philosophy starts from that one simple fact. His famous words, quoted in Latin, *'Cogito ergo sum'*, say *'I think, therefore I am'*. So according to Descartes' theory, thinking forms the basis of our lives. But at the same time, he believed in the existence of matter. His philosophy is based on mind or thinking but he also believed in the existence of matter. Thus his philosophy is known as *dualism*. And these tendencies in Descartes' philosophical thought have continued through to modern idealistic philosophies. For example, the efforts of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who is known for his work - Critique of Pure Reason, were concentrated on investigating the basis of reason or mind. He was an idealist. He posited the existence of matter, which he called *ding an sich* - or things in themselves, but concluded that it is impossible for human beings to prove the existence of matter. Therefore his philosophy was also a kind of dualism, although he is commonly called an idealist.

We can find another stream in modern Western philosophical thought; that is, English empiricism. Empiricists believe only in what they perceive with the senses, which they call *matter*. The idea was taken up by the German philosopher Feuerbach, who went on to assert that the world consists only of matter, and that nothing other than matter exists. For this, he is called a materialist. After him came perhaps the most famous of all the materialists, Karl Marx. He explained all problems and events on the basis of materialistic philosophy.

I think a very nice method of looking at the Buddhist view of matter is to compare it with matter as seen by the materialists, and then to compare the two views. Materialists believe that the world consists of matter alone. But Buddhists believe in the Universe. If the Universe consisted of matter alone, then the materialists' theory would be right. But Buddhists do not believe that the Universe contains only matter; they believe that it has another face. For example, the many people we can find in this world are involved in the activity called work. And human beings normally work for an aim. To work for an aim is a human value. The value is not purely materialistic; it is also cultural. It is a particularly human value. So in addition to matter, the Universe also contains human value, or cultural value. Materialists, however, deny this fact, and insist that the world consists only of matter and material value. This belief is very misleading when we come to consider the meaning of our lives. So Buddhists insist that the world is not only matter; it contains something other than matter - human value.

In the book *Shobogenzo*, Master Dogen says that nature is Gautama Buddha speaking, and that the mountains are his body. He says that the sounds of water in the valleys are Gautama Buddha's voice. What he is saying here is that nature is not only matter; it also has some human value. This is the Buddhist viewpoint. Buddhists believe that matter is only one face of the Universe. Matter is one method we use to explain the Universe. So Buddhism insists that to say that the world consists only of matter is wrong.

Are there any questions?

Do I understand correctly then, that Buddhists believe that there is a positive value to human life?

Yes. Buddhists believe that there is value as distinct from matter. Buddhists say, for instance, that what sort of food we eat is not of the ultimate importance; rather our interest in eating is our effort to create something of value. Considering what sort of food to eat is not the aim of our life. To work for something is the aim of human life.

Then materialists are perhaps confusing the method with the goal?

Materialists base their thinking about the problems of life on logical analysis of matter. But their ideas limit all things within their concept of matter. Their analyses are very clear and rational, but from the Buddhist point of view, they have forgotten something very important in our lives.

When you say human value, when we start thinking of the opposite of matter, we think of cultural value like listening to beautiful music and things like that. What is the difference between that sort of cultural value and what you mean by human value?

I use human value and cultural value with the same meaning. I don't know which is the more suitable to describe the expression of value. I intend both phrases to have the same meaning.

What about intellectual value?

Intellectual value is one small part of cultural or human value.

My question is very similar to the first one. But I still can't understand what you meant in your reply. I cannot understand why Buddhism is different from materialism just because human beings have value or values. Is it because those values are associated with something spiritual?

No, I don't mean that. I mean that value is a result of some sort of mental effort. But I do not think that it is spiritual. Buddhism believes in the existence of the Universe, and materialists look at that Universe from one side only. They look at only one face of the Universe, and they call that face matter. They then conclude that the Universe must consist only of matter. But Buddhists believe that matter is only one face of the Universe. It is impossible to describe the whole of the content of the Universe with words, so in Buddhist philosophy we express the Universe with the word *ineffable*. Materialists make the mistake of limiting the Universe within the boundaries of matter. But matter is only one of the faces of the Universe. The mistake that materialists make is to take part of the Universe and mistake it for the whole.

What is the other side?

According to Buddhist theory, the other side cannot be put into words. This is why we practice Zazen. While we are practicing Zazen, we can feel something. And that something is the other part of the Universe. So the Universe is sometimes simply called reality. And reality includes impossibly many facets. So we are unable to explain this other face of the Universe with words. This is the Buddhist view of the situation.

The word *immo*, from the Chinese, is used to express the ineffable. This word has a very ambiguous meaning, because reality is very difficult to put into words. In Buddhist theory it is said to be impossible to explain the Universe itself in words. But by practicing Zazen we can experience this Universe. And this real experience is the only way we have of recognizing what the Universe is. We can explain it in philosophical terms, and in scientific terms, but these explanations are always one-sided. So if we want to grasp the Universe totally, we need to experience it with our action. This is why we practice Zazen.

Do materialists deny the possibility of any kind of human value, or do they just evaluate that value on the basis of materialism?

Materialists believe in material value. That is; energy, power, calories, and so on. But these are only material values. We cannot say that to get these kinds of value can be our life's aim. We make use of that which we perceive to be matter in our everyday life, but we make use of it in order to get some value which is not material. This is the fact. If we believe that getting material values like money, power in society and so on, are the aims of life, then we will lose the ability to see the real aim of life. This is the Buddhist standpoint. For example, take those people who put all their effort into getting rich, who love eating, and so forth. Even if they live in a gorgeous house and are surrounded by everything they want materially, they will find that sometimes they feel unsatisfied. This is simply because the things which they made the aim of their life - money, food, sensual pleasures - can never provide an ultimate aim for living. This is life's secret. And so Buddhism insists that although we need material things as a means to attain our ultimate aim, those things in themselves can never become that

aim. Materialistic philosophies recognize only material values. They say that to make our societies better we need political power and to get political power we need revolution. This is their theory of society. But the Materialist's view of value and the Buddhist's view of value are different.

I get a little confused because you talk of materialists, but those materialists are being idealistic, and if the materialist has a philosophy, then that philosophy itself is an idea.

Yes. We can say that philosophy is ideas. But materialistic philosophies are based on matter - they analyze societies from a basis in matter. Their conclusion is that in order to govern a society it is imperative to control the means of production. So they strive to wrestle power over the means of production from the ruling classes, the bourgeois. Of course, their theories are ideas, but those ideas are rooted in matter.

Then, when a materialist is looking at the world, in reality, that person must experience human value, even though they may not realize it. When they do something, they must get some human value from their action.

Materialists do not generally believe that human societies can improve gradually. They believe that the situation is always controlled by the class with the greater power. They think that in order to improve society, we must defeat the ruling class. They insist on the absolute necessity of revolution. But Buddhist philosophy says that situations are changing at every moment, and so to live our best at the moment of the present is actually the best way to improve our societies. Buddhists believe that living our lives sincerely each day is gradual revolution. We do not need drastic revolution, because when we live our lives sincerely at every moment, our societies must be improving at every moment. This is the theory of Buddhism, and it is different from the insinuations of materialists.

Generally materialists believe that the Universe is predictable, and Buddhists believe that the Universe is unpredictable. Can you explain what Buddhists believe causes this unpredictability?

In the second phase, Buddhism affirms materialistic ideas, and so Buddhists also believe in the rule of cause and effect. So we also believe that the future is predictable. But at the same time, Buddhists believe that life is instantaneous - that time between present and future is discontinuous. So even though Buddhists believe that the future is predictable, we also believe that these predictions are only predictions, not fact. So Buddhists believe that the future is knowable, but they do not rely on this knowledge as absolute fact.

I can never understand how, if you believe in cause and effect, you can at the same time believe in human freedom.

To solve that problem, you need to understand the Buddhist view of time. In Buddhist philosophy we think about time in two ways. In one way, we say that time forms a continuous line from past to future. But at the same time, Buddhism is a very practical philosophy, which is based on action - action which takes place at the moment of the present. So even though we can imagine a long line of time from past to future, we believe that real time is just the moment of the present. This is the fundamental Buddhist theory about time. Buddhists believe in the rule of cause and effect; when we think of time as a long line, we can find the rule of cause and effect operating.

But if we believe solely in the rule of cause and effect, we must become determinists; we can never believe that human beings can be free. Buddhism also believes that the only real time is the present moment. This moment has no length; and in the present moment with its zero length, we can find our freedom. A rather good simile is a pea balanced on a razor blade: because the blade is very thin, the pea has an equal chance of falling either side of the blade. Human freedom has the same basic character. Because our action is at the infinitely short moment of the present, it sometimes goes one way, sometimes the other.

This is the Buddhist view of human freedom. And this theory allows us to reconcile the rule of cause and effect with belief in human freedom. In western philosophical thought, belief in the rule of cause and effect does not allow for simultaneous belief in human freedom, and vice versa. This is a well-known and unresolved contradiction in western philosophy. No-one has found a solution to this

problem through the thousands of years of philosophical development. But Buddhism has a theory which can reconcile these two: belief in cause and effect and belief in free-will. So the Buddhist theory of time is very important; we call it *The Instantaneousness of the Universe*. Buddhist theory states that the Universe appears and disappears at every moment; time is fragmented or discontinuous. Only the moment of the present really exists. And it is this theory of time which allows the contradiction between free-will and cause and effect to be resolved.

If we believe in the instantaneousness of the present moment, and we are acting sincerely, why is it necessary for us to believe in a rule of cause and effect?

It is because we have the ability to think about our predicament with our intellect. When we consider problems on the intellectual level, we must acknowledge that there is a law governing our actions, the rule of cause and effect. This rule enables us to understand and make sense of the real situations in our lives. But at the same time, this rule can never explain the whole story; we need to look at life from another point of view besides the deterministic viewpoint of causality. Buddhism encourages us to look at life and the way the Universe works in many different ways. The rule of cause and effect is one of these ways; one way to explain the Universe.

I think that Zen is not definite about the validity of causal law; there is a part of the Shobogenzo where a priest asks which is correct, causal law or freedom.....

To fully understand the relationship between human freedom and the rule of cause and effect, we should use the *Theory of Four Views*. From the first viewpoint, we can believe that human beings have complete freedom, because this viewpoint looks at reality with the mind's powers. The second view is that the Universe is governed by cause and effect, because this view looks at reality from the external, objective, and material point of view. These two viewpoints - freedom and causality - are contradictory. To solve the contradiction, Buddhism has a third viewpoint - the *philosophy of action*. This is the philosophy of the present moment. The Buddhist theory of time states that the Universe is instantaneous. This theory enables us to say both that we are free at the moment of the present and that we are bound by cause and effect. To realize these three viewpoints, we practice Zazen, because during Zazen we can experience what reality is actually like by sitting quietly. So to realize the validity of the *Theory of Four Views*, we need to act, to experience something real. And practicing Zazen gives us this experience in a very simple and straightforward way. So now its time to practice Zazen once again. Thank-you.

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Action in Buddhism I

Today I would like to talk about the *philosophy of action*. I imagine that when people hear this phrase, they must wonder what it means!

In previous lectures, I have explained the meaning of mind and matter in Buddhism, and the Buddhist attitude towards idealistic and materialistic philosophies. When we hear about idealism and materialism, we can understand what they are quite readily because we can find so many examples of idealistic and materialistic philosophies in Western thought. In ancient Greece, we can find the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, who are said to belong to the idealist school of thought. At the same time, we can find the philosopher Democritus, who was a typical materialist.

In medieval times, we can find theologies of Christian origin dividing into two distinct streams; realism and nominalism. In modern terms, nominalism belongs to the materialist school, and realism belongs to idealism.

In the recent history of Western thought, we can find many examples of both idealist and materialist philosophers; the idealists, Kant and Hegel, for example. Or Feuerbach and Marx, who are materialists. When we think about why these two philosophical schools dominated all else in Western thought, we must reach the conclusion that, when we consider the human condition with the intellect alone, we have to be either an idealist or a materialist; there is no other choice. We can say that human beings are able to think about philosophical problems only from one of these two viewpoints. This seems a natural conclusion when we remember that we normally think about a problem in our minds first, as a mental proposition, before examining it in relation to the external world of matter. The human tendency to give value to the intellect usually means that we consider problems first idealistically, then materially.

When we experience an area outside of the area of thought or intellect, a whole new world appears. This is the external world, or the world of matter. So we can classify two distinct worlds; the world of the mind, and the world of matter. This is the way we tend to view the world from our mind; we feel that there is a mental world inside our heads, and a physical world outside. Western civilizations are highly intellectual and there have emerged two distinct and excellent philosophical systems based on these two views; idealism, and materialism.

But at the same time, these two philosophical systems are doomed to always be in conflict with one another. And the human race has been searching for an answer to this conflict for thousands of years. But it has proven impossible for philosophers to find a way separate from either idealism or materialism which would enable them to consider the problems of our lives from another non-conflicting point of view. So the human race has been suffering the effects of the conflict between idealism and materialism and has been unable to find a solution.

This very same conflict existed in ancient India. The idealistic religion of Brahmanism and the materialistic teachings of the Six Non-Buddhist Teachers were at war constantly. This situation became clear to Gautama Buddha, and he worried. He worried how human beings could ever find a solution to the constant conflict - how they could ever find a peaceful state in which to live their lives. The fundamental problem is that inside our heads, we can be convinced that our ideas are the truth - or conversely, that our perceptions are the truth. It is impossible to prove which of these two positions is true; whether our ideas are always right, or whether our perceptions of the world are the reality.

Gautama Buddha found the solution to this age-old problem. He found the *philosophy of action*. The only clear explanation of the *philosophy of action* is to be found in a book written by the 13th century Buddhist priest, Master Dogen. I started to study the *Shobogenzo* as a young man, and at first could understand practically nothing. But after many years, having come to understand the *Shobogenzo* completely, I have also found out why it appears so difficult to understand - it is written about the *philosophy of action*. The *philosophy of action* cannot be understood following our usual habits of thought, and so seems impossibly difficult. But if we understand what the *philosophy of*

action is, we can solve the conflict between idealism and materialism. So today I would like to outline the *philosophy of action* for you.

In Western thought, we can find a specific method of reasoning known as dialectic. The Greek philosopher Plato used the method in many of his books by having a discussion between two people on the problem he wanted to expound. He found this method - this dialectic - very useful in presenting complex philosophical problems, as have many others right up to the modern philosopher Hegel. Hegel's use of dialectic is known as dialectic idealism. Karl Marx also used dialectic to explain materialism. His philosophical method is known as dialectic materialism.

Thus, dialectic reasoning has been employed to buttress the conclusions of both idealistic and materialistic philosophers. But I found in reading the *Shobogenzo* that dialectic can also be used to point to a solution to the idealism-materialism conflict. In the *Shobogenzo*, Master Dogen puts great emphasis and value on our actions - on what our real conduct is. Both idealistic and materialistic philosophies belong to the area of the intellect; they exist in our brains. But life itself does not exist as intellectual thought - it is very real. So to truly find what the meaning of our life is, we must leave the intellectual area. This is the secret of Buddhist philosophy. If we want to study Buddhism, we must leave intellectual thought behind.

To consider what our actions themselves really are, to consider practice and conduct, is very important in solving this conflict between idealism and materialism. This is the philosophy which Master Dogen lays out in the *Shobogenzo*. It is a philosophy based on our actions. Action is the meeting between mind and the external world. So in this sense, action is both subjective and objective at the same time. Idealism is the philosophy of the subject, materialism is the philosophy of the object and the *philosophy of action* is the philosophy of both subject and object. Action is the contact between mental world and physical world and so it exists instantaneously, always in the present moment.

We have a mental image of time as a line extending from past through present to future. But when we study what action is, we are always dealing in the present moment. So the time of action is *now* and its location is simply the place where we are at this moment - *here*. In the *Shobogenzo* Master Dogen uses the Chinese word *shali* to suggest this place, and the Japanese word *nikon* to express the present moment. He constructs his *philosophy of action* on the basis of the here and now. He explains that our life is not only a mental experience, not only a physical experience, but something real in itself.

When we examine philosophical problems from an intellectual point of view, we find it impossible to find any solution to the conflict existing between the idealistic or spiritual point of view and the materialistic or scientific point of view. But Master Dogen uses dialectic method to synthesize these two differing viewpoints. Without using both of these opposing viewpoints, it becomes impossible to explain the *philosophy of action*; we need both idealism and materialism. We also need dialectic method.

In short, if we look at problems from both the idealist's and the materialist's point of view, and then use dialectic method to synthesize the two opposing views, we can find the *philosophy of action*. Then we can understand the true meaning of our life. So if we want to understand the *philosophy of action*, and if we want to realize the Buddhist state, studying idealism and materialism in Western thought becomes of central importance. To understand the real meaning of life, we need the *philosophy of action*. To find what this philosophy is, we need to use dialectic method to unite the opposing views of the idealist and the materialist. This is the reason we study the *Shobogenzo*; to study what the *philosophy of action* is, and to use it to solve the problems of our lives as Buddhists.

The *philosophy of action* seems a strange concept to people in the modern world, but understanding it can help us to understand the true meaning of our lives.

Are there any questions?

What do you mean by the method of dialectic?

Some idealists believe that *spirit* really exists; that if our spiritual being is cared for, we will always be happy. But in the real world, although we may take care of our spiritual side, if we do not have food to eat, we will not be happy. Others find that they cannot believe in the supremacy of the spirit; they take a materialistic view of reality; they believe that *matter* is the basis of the real world. So some believe in the supremacy of the spirit, and others believe that matter is the root of everything. These two viewpoints can never meet. There is no compromise between the two.

But if we think about the problem from the realist's point of view, if we have nothing to eat, we cannot continue to live. But when we eat something to satisfy our hunger, we feel better, and we may then feel something which people call *spirit*. So considered purely from the academic point of view, there is no answer, but considered realistically we find that the dilemma is resolved in the course of our day-to-day lives. We have to work to eat. At the same time, eating of itself cannot become the aim of living. We look for value in what we are doing. Eating will not give us that value, that aim. But unless we eat, we can never arrive at our aim of achieving something of value. Reality is not wholly spiritual, neither is it wholly material. In living, the most important thing is neither spiritual in nature nor material. The most important thing is the reality in which we live itself.

The supposition that there is something called *spirit* is a thesis. The denial of the thesis that there is something called *spirit* is antithesis. A realistic viewpoint is the synthesis of these two viewpoints. We can make a similar supposition, denial, and synthesis about the existence of *matter*. The triangular relationship between thesis, antithesis, and synthesis is dialectic. In western philosophy, Plato, Hegel and Marx all used dialectic method. The method is very useful in looking at philosophical problems.

For example, everyone has a conflict over morals in their life; what is good and what is bad. Morals are at the thesis stage. They are ideals which we should try to attain to make life good. But morality alone cannot make societies good. In real societies, people are not always good. The conduct of many people is bad, and so societies make laws. People who break the laws are punished. Laws are the antithesis to morals; they bind us with no freedom. But if societies are governed too rigidly by laws, we lose our human dignity; we have no freedom in which to follow our moral code. The policy of a society synthesizes morals and laws. Individuals are free to select their own representatives, and those representatives make the laws. So social policy allows people freedom while at the same time allowing society to be maintained in a peaceful manner.

We can use this triangular dialectic method to look at all philosophical problems. And using it allows us to solve the conflict between the opposing views of idealists and materialists. Idealism constructs the thesis. Materialism puts the antithesis. And the *philosophy of action* explains how to synthesize the two sides. This is the relationship between the three viewpoints, and the meaning of dialectic method.

How do we find that third viewpoint? Why can't I put another philosophy in the third place?

In order to get rid of intellectual thinking, we need to act, to experience something. Buddhism tells us to practice, to experience. This is why Buddhism recommends the practice of Zazen. With practice and experience, we can find another area besides the intellectual area. This is the secret that Buddhism holds. This is why we practice Zazen.

You say that dialectic method is a triangular method of thinking. But it is difficult for me to understand where the third point emerges. Is dialectic method the process to arrive at the third point, or....?

We need four viewpoints. We can illustrate this with a diagram. First we have idealistic philosophies. And existing on the same level we have materialistic philosophies. We use the dialectic method to reach the third philosophy, *the philosophy of action*. But all three of these philosophies belong to the intellectual area. We need idealism and materialism to arrive at the *philosophy of action*. This is because the *philosophy of action* comes out of the conflict between idealism and materialism, using dialectic method.

But reality itself exists outside of the area of the intellect, in a different area from any of these three philosophies. But using the three viewpoints, the three philosophies, we can suggest the existence of the world itself which is outside of the intellectual area. This is why Buddhism uses the four viewpoints to explain reality. So, in summary, we can use the two fundamental philosophies of idealism and materialism to enter into the *philosophy of action* with the help of dialectic method. Then using these three viewpoints, we can reflect something which is different from any of those three viewpoints; that is, reality itself. We can never with our intellects, capture reality completely. But we can suggest reality with the three viewpoints.

However, that suggestion is still not reality itself. This is why we need to practice Zazen. When we are practicing Zazen, we are sitting in reality itself. This experience is very important in realizing the meaning of our life. This is the relationship between the four viewpoints.

In your explanation you say we move to the third stage by action, or more completely, by Zazen. You also called it reality. So haven't you moved to the fourth stage?

Yes. Zazen belongs to the fourth stage. The *philosophy of action* is an explanation of Zazen; it is not Zazen itself. Zazen belongs to reality itself. This is the relationship between the *philosophy of action* and reality.

I still cannot understand, because you said that we reach the third stage by action.

I said that the *philosophy of action* can be explained with dialectic thinking using the two fundamental philosophies. But this explanation still belongs to the area of the intellect; even the *philosophy of action* is only a philosophy - it is not reality. But it can suggest the existence of reality and so, by studying the *philosophy of action* we can find the will to practice Zazen.

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Action in Buddhism II

Today I would like once more to give my talk on the *philosophy of action* and its relationship with the two fundamental philosophies of idealism and materialism. I explained the relationship between the three philosophies with dialectic method in my last lecture, but as the theory of dialectic is rather difficult to understand, and some of you could not understand my explanations, I would like to explain the *philosophy of action* again today.

The method of dialectic is indispensable in explaining the *philosophy of action*, so let me first give a more detailed explanation of what dialectic method actually is. The word *dialectic* comes from the Greek words *dia* meaning two and *lect* meaning discussion or argument. So *dialectic* originally meant a discussion between two people. It suggests that the result of a discussion between two people gives a conclusion which is neither wholly the opinion of one of the participants, nor wholly the opinion of the other. Because of this simple fact, philosophers think that discussion allows the participants to reach new ideas which were not previously held by either party.

Dialectic method existed in Greek philosophy. The most famous of the Greek philosophers using dialectic method was Plato. He wrote many books containing discussions of philosophical problems. Plato used discussion as a way of presenting his own ideas. In this he was the first philosopher to use dialectic method. Then in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the famous German philosopher, Freiderich Hegel, used dialectic method very powerfully in explaining his theories. His philosophy is sometimes called dialectic idealism or dialectic spiritualism, because his ideas were based on mind or spirit. We can say he was an idealist.

Karl Marx, the famous materialistic philosopher also used dialectic method. His philosophy is known as dialectic materialism.

I would like to use the example of a discussion between two people to illustrate dialectic method for you. One party in the discussion is an idealist and the other is a materialist; let's call them Mr. I and Mr. M. When Mr. I and Mr. M discuss something, their opinions are always contradictory. For example, when they discuss the problem of morality, Mr. I explains morals on the basis of the conscience. This is the normal position of idealists. They say that if we listen to our conscience, our conduct will be right, and so they say that the existence of our conscience determines our morality or lack of it.

Mr. M on the other hand, does not agree that morals are a matter of conscience; he explains morals on the basis of circumstances and history. Materialists usually think that our conduct is determined by historical circumstance.

When we listen to the discussion between the two, we sometimes feel that Mr. I is right, and sometimes we think that Mr. M's opinion is the true one. In order to look at the discussion between the two people we really need a third person present. This third person will be able to reach a conclusion which is different from either of the two opinions being offered by Mr. I or Mr. M. This is how we reach the realistic viewpoint of Buddhism.

When Buddhists consider the problem of morals, they see the problem on the basis of our actions. Our actions are often led by our conscience, but at the same time, our actions are ruled to some extent by historical circumstance. So from the Buddhist point of view, the problem of morals is always a problem of how to act. Mr. I's opinion is partly true, but at the same time, Mr. M's standpoint is also true too because action contains two factors; one is our conscience or our intention, and the other is the circumstances. Action is always a synthesis of conscience and circumstance.

Buddhists give value to both these factors, because the way we act in reality is determined by both factors. For a Buddhist, morals are our actions themselves. The way that we act determines our morality or lack of it; not the way that we think alone, nor the external circumstances alone.

The method used in this short discussion above is dialectic method - a method which synthesizes opposing viewpoints to reach a third point of view. The *philosophy of action* is constructed based on this method of thinking. It is a method which relies on two opposing opinions to form a synthesis of the two as a third and radically new viewpoint.

In ancient India, there was a typical idealistic philosophy called Brahmanism, and existing in opposition to it there was also a materialistic school of thought based on the teachings of six non-Buddhist teachers. Gautama Buddha was able to synthesize these two opposing philosophical systems into the *philosophy of action*. And so the *philosophy of action* became the center of Buddhist philosophy; to understand Buddhism it is necessary to understand the *philosophy of action*. I would like to discuss with you the *philosophy of action* and its explanation on the basis of dialectic method.

Are there any questions?

If we understand the philosophy of action, does that change our actions?

Yes. It can change our actions because when we understand the *philosophy of action* we can transcend idealistic and materialistic philosophies and follow the *philosophy of action* in our everyday lives. Understanding the *philosophy of action* has the power to change our conduct. At the same time, we should be clearly aware of the difference between ideas about action and action itself. The *philosophy of action* is an idea, and although we may understand the idea, sometimes our physical body is unable to move following the *philosophy of action* because we fail to realize that the *philosophy of action* is not action itself. So we can say that it is important for us to understand the *philosophy of action* in living a daily life based on Buddhism, but at the same time, we also need the practical ability to act following the *philosophy of action*. To get this ability to act, we practice Zazen. By practicing Zazen, we can get the ability to act following the *philosophy of action*. This is the relationship between our conduct in daily life and the *philosophy of action*.

If we don't study the philosophy of action, but simply practice Zazen, is our action different?

In practicing Zazen, we can experience action itself. So although our ideas are not formulated into a philosophy as such, we also experience the *philosophy of action*. With our modern life based on intellectual analysis, it is important to also have some systematic process by which to explain our experiences. But even though we may have no formal understanding of the *philosophy of action*, we can lead a Buddhist life. At the same time, when we also understand the *philosophy of action*, it is easier for us to follow the theoretical teachings of Buddhism.

The discussion between Mr. I and Mr. M is very familiar; the situation in which we sometimes feel Mr. I is right and sometimes Mr. M is right, such a feeling of uncertainty is familiar to me. But I rarely go beyond such a feeling of uncertainty and I can't find the point of synthesis in my own thinking. So I wonder, in our usual life, when we come to such situations, do you have any advice?

Yes. We should recognize that these two ideas belong to the intellect and that action is real. We are usually disturbed by the conflict between the two ideas, but in our real life, when we act, we throw away the disturbance. We can transcend the contradiction between the two ideas in real life by acting. This is the secret of our lives, and this is the secret of Buddhism itself. So acting saves us. This is Gautama Buddha's wisdom. When we transcend intellectual conflict by acting, we enter into a different world from the area of the intellect. In this situation, we can find a philosophy which is different from idealism and materialism. Synthesizing two intellectual philosophies means acting; that is, entering another world than that of the intellect. We can transcend the intellectual world by acting.

I said that the *philosophy of action* is the center of Buddhism; of course the real center of Buddhism is the practice of Zazen itself, because Zazen is the standard form of action. But the center of Buddhist philosophy is the *philosophy of action*. So Gautama Buddha told us to act. Action can save us. This is Gautama Buddha's teaching.

Can we understand that action is reached, not by rational thinking but by Zazen? How did Buddhists reach the third stage, action? By reasoning?

No. Practicing Zazen teaches us what action is. Practicing Zazen is studying action itself. The true meaning of action does not come from our rational thinking process; the experience of action can come only from acting.

In that case, there is no difference between the fourth phase and action?

We can say that the *philosophy of action* comes in the third of the four phases, and action itself belongs to the fourth phase.

I find that the word action is very difficult to think about. I tend to think that action means a certain type of action. Does action means just doing something? Could you explain it again?

Yes. It's a difficult problem so I don't mind explaining it again and again. We can describe the structure of the four philosophies as a triangular pyramid. First we can consider the starting point of our thinking to represent one point on the base of the pyramid. That is mind. With our mind, we enter the area of idealism. We usually think about philosophical problems intellectually.

But we can find that we are not only mind; we also have a physical body - we eat, we look at the world, we see colors, images; we hear the world. This area of perception - the realm of our physical body - can be represented by a second point on the base of the pyramid, giving us a line. The usual situation of our thought process finds us moving to and fro along this line as we consider problems from the contradictory viewpoints of idealism and materialism.

This line, and the two viewpoints which occur on it belong to the area of the intellect. Our civilization is based on the human intellect. This is the reality of the modern world. Human beings progress and regress along this line between the two viewpoints. And in the same way, our civilizations also move to and fro; from idealism to materialism and back. These movements have created our civilizations. So the existence of these two contradictory points is very important. But for human beings, contradictory situations give rise to great suffering. This is because we have not been able to find a satisfactory solution to the contradiction. We have developed wonderful civilizations, but at the same time, the great suffering of the human race arises directly from these contradictory situations.

Sometimes, however, in our day-to-day life, we transcend this mental conflict by acting. For example, we may be reflecting on the misery of human life. But if we act - have a bath, eat something, go for a walk - we can rid ourselves of those painful thoughts. Acting enables us to transcend the contradictions in our minds. Action can help us. This is a very simple and obvious fact.

Gautama Buddha recommended us to practice a form of action; that is, Zazen. Because Zazen is a form of action, we can say that, just as Buddhism is based on the practice of Zazen, so Buddhist theory is based on the *philosophy of action*. Using the *philosophy of action* to think about a problem is to take our philosophical analysis out of the line on which the idealism - materialism conflict exists, and to add a third point to form a two-dimensional plane; one on which we consider realistic solutions. But even a realistic philosophy cannot save us, because in the end it is only the movement of electrical currents in our cerebral tissue!

Philosophy can never be action. To realize what action is we have to transcend these three philosophies. And to do this we practice Zazen. The practice of Zazen enables us to find a solid, three-dimensional world. The three philosophies exist on a flat plane; Zazen, which is the standard of action itself makes our plane into a pyramid. To study real life, to study real action, we practice Zazen.

If we take someone like Hegel, did his philosophical position and his real life fit together?

Hegel started his philosophical exposition from sensory perception, which he explained from the point of view of the human mind. So his philosophical standpoint starts with the mind, travels to sensory perception and back again. His point of view oscillates along this line. He thought that he was using dialectic method, but in fact he was only moving to and fro between the opposing points. This means that his philosophical thoughts and conclusions always remained in the intellectual area; he was unable to synthesize his views into a third realistic viewpoint. But people do not think it strange that

his conclusions are in the area of the intellect. They think that it is perfectly natural for the conclusions to our thoughts to be thoughts themselves.

On the other hand, Marx starts his philosophical analysis from a materialistic standpoint. He explains the human mind on the basis of matter. This is diametrically opposite to Hegel, but nevertheless, Marx is also merely moving to and fro on the line between mind and matter. He also thought that he was using dialectic method. Because Marx's conclusions were scientific and objective; based on the world of matter which we all perceive in front of our eyes, people feel that Marx's conclusions have a practicality which Hegel's conclusions lack - that Marx is objective. But in fact both Hegel and Marx left their philosophical conclusions in the intellectual area. Their conclusions were worked out theoretically, intellectually.

Gautama Buddha found a solid area; he found that action itself is the solution to the conflict. And the *philosophy of action* is the theoretical basis which suggests to us that the solution is out of the area of the intellect. So Gautama Buddha's ideas differ from Marx's and Hegel's; Gautama Buddha constructed a solid where Marx and Hegel had built only a line on a plane. Using the four philosophies, we can create this solid construction for ourselves, and transcend the intellectual area in finding real solutions. To transcend the intellect is fundamentally important in Buddhism; without this transcendence, we will always remain caught in the solutions in our minds, even if we use dialectic method. We stay on the two-dimensional plane.

But we are in reality living in a three-dimensional solid area. This is a very simple fact which is very important to realize. We are living in the real world, which is not the same as the world of either our subjective or objective thoughts. To recognize this fact, we practice Zazen.

The theory I have discussed here is the *philosophy of action*. It is rather difficult to grasp, but it is the center of Buddhism. So to understand Buddhism, we must understand this fundamental theory. We should transcend the area of the intellect and enter the world of action.

We should act.

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Reality

In the last few lectures, I have talked about the three philosophical systems; idealism, materialism, and the elusive *philosophy of action*. Today I would like to go on to talk about the ultimate phase of Buddhism. Of course there is a link between the three philosophies so far discussed, and the ultimate phase, and it is this link that I would like to explain first.

I have explained that idealism is the first viewpoint in Buddhism, and that materialism is the second. I then went on to explain how these two opposing viewpoints can be synthesized into a third viewpoint, a realistic viewpoint. The *philosophy of action* deals with this synthesis. These three basic philosophical standpoints include all the philosophical systems in existence; any philosophical system can fit into one or other of those three basic categories.

Gautama Buddha was the first person to insist on a very simple but very important fact; that we do not live according to philosophical systems; we live in the real world itself. Although this is a very simple and apparently self-evident conclusion, many people in fact believe that the real world in which we live is the same world as that world which we build up in our heads, or that world which we perceive directly with our senses. The vast majority of people living on the face of the earth take either one or the other of these two positions; that is, they either believe in idealism, or they believe in materialism. This situation is actually rather strange, but it is the fact.

The same situation exactly existed in ancient India. Gautama Buddha saw that this was the case, and he was able to recognize one simple fact clearly; that all people are actually living in the *real* world. He saw that people are prone to mistake the representation of the world that they build up in their brains for the *real* world itself, or they think that the world that they perceive with their senses is the only world that exists. Although this may seem obvious, people do actually believe that the philosophical systems they use to view the world are the world itself. Materialists believe that the world of matter which we perceive around us is the only world; idealists believe that the world is governed by ideas.

Gautama Buddha urged us to see the *real* world in which we are living; he said it was very important for us to realize this, and he dedicated his life to teaching people this simple truth. He said that to recognize that we are living in reality, it is necessary for us to transcend intellectual thought, whether it is based on pure ideas or on scientific theory, because both in fact belong to the intellect. Even the *philosophy of action* belongs to the area of the intellect.

Gautama Buddha used the Sanskrit word *Dharma* to describe the reality in which we all live. But he said that this reality is in the end impossible to put into words completely. We can give a good explanation of idealism or materialism in words, and we can even explain the *philosophy of action*. But reality itself defies description. This presents quite a problem. Gautama Buddha recognized this fact. He gave us the practice of *Zazen*, saying that when we are practicing *Zazen*, we can recognize the reality that we are sitting in with our whole body and mind. He said that people who believe that the word of their thoughts is the real world are deluded. To free ourselves from those delusions is the aim of Buddhist practice.

When I show you how to practice *Zazen*, I usually say that there is no need to think about anything, and no need to feel any particular sensation during *Zazen*. When we are sitting in reality without thinking or feeling, we can recognize that very simple, primitive fact. And it is this experience that forms the basis of Buddhist philosophy. So to study Buddhism means to study reality; to practice *Zazen* is to study reality directly.

Such a direct and simple philosophy is very hard to find in this world. Usually, we try to solve the problems of life with our intellect alone. Almost all modern-day civilizations are based on the supremacy of the intellect. People are trying to live in the world of their ideas or the world of their senses. Buddhism teaches us the *philosophy of action*, which is itself a construction of the intellect. So to really know and experience the reality of this world, we need to practice *Zazen*. This is why Master

Dogen said, “*Just practice Zazen. Practicing Zazen is Buddhism; Buddhism is practicing Zazen.*” This is his teaching, and the center of Buddhism itself. When we recognize the nature of the real world, we can be Buddhas. To become Buddha means to recognize reality. This is the ultimate phase of Buddhism.

I would like to hear your questions, now. Are there any questions?

You said that materialism is also intellectual thinking. How is that?

Many people think that materialism is a realistic philosophy. But I do not agree. Materialism is a philosophy - and it is based on the concept *matter*. Materialists analyze all their problems from the basis of the concept *matter*. Although materialists think that matter is reality itself, it is only a concept invented by the intellect to explain that *something* we see out there. So their thoughts about the world spring from an intellectual conception of the world. That intellectual conception is not the real world itself.

When you say that most people think that the world of their thoughts, or the world of matter, is the real world, it sounds a long way from everyday life. The word ‘philosophy’ suggests a very grand and special sort of thinking. Can you give us a practical example? When we think that the world of our senses is the real world, what might we be doing?

The center of idealism is the mind. The center of materialism is matter. Matter is a concept which comes from the negation of mind. When we think about philosophical problems, we usually think about them either from a viewpoint based on mind, or one based on matter. People who consider themselves materialists have the concept of the real existence of matter as the basis to their thoughts. They are always conscious of the physical world around them. That’s what I mean when I say that a materialist is living in the world of matter. But the idea that the world we are living in is composed only of matter as we perceive it directly with our senses is a kind of illusion; it is just an idea in our brain.

But when you say that someone thinks that they are living in a material world, as for instance, if I want to go and buy a new car or a new suit, what kind of thought is that?

In fact, we are all living in reality. But when we use our intellectual powers to make sense of our life, we usually become either an idealist or a materialist in our point of view. We all live in the same reality, but people tend to think about the meaning of their life. We usually find that our consciousness is attuned to one of two worlds; the world of our thoughts, or the world of our perceptions. The world which we perceive with our senses is not reality itself; it is a world viewed through a kind of conceptual framework. And in that way, it is a kind of illusion. This is true equally of the world of our thoughts.

I understand your explanation on idealism and materialism. Plato was an idealistic philosopher. He stated that behind every building there must be the thought that produced the building first, in the architect’s mind, for instance. This is not of matter. It is outside time and space and therefore holds a different reality to the materialistic world. My mind is fundamentally dualistic. I cannot conceive of unity with my mind. We think of something as black or white. That’s one thing. The second thing is that my mind is conditioned by my past experiences. As reality must lie outside both time and space, and as my mind cannot conceive of anything outside time or space, I can only think of things in terms of past, present and future. Next, the conditioning. I, as a conditioned person, think with a conditioned mind. How can I be free from my conditioned mind? How can my conditioned mind understand reality? How will I get beyond my mind?

I would like to answer your first question. It concerns the dualistic nature of our understanding. Our dualistic understanding is a product of our intellectual processes; the intellectual faculty always divides and discriminates. This is its fundamental function. Without this fundamental capacity for discrimination, we are unable to think. So in considering philosophical problems, it is natural to divide; to discriminate. Our thoughts are always dualistic by nature. It is the fundamental nature of thinking. This is the first problem.

Your second question is about cause and effect. We need to understand the Buddhist theory of *Four Philosophies*. Gautama Buddha taught us that we are living in reality, and he said that in order to recognize this fact, we need to be free from the world of the intellect. To do this, Gautama Buddha said we should act. He said that we should act right. And to act right, he told us to practice Zazen. So his teachings are about morals or ethics; not moral or ethical problems as philosophy, but as problems of how to act, how to live practically. He said that to practice Zazen is the best way to be free from the world of our intellect and to act right.

By practicing Zazen, do you get an intuitive understanding of reality, rather than an intellectual one?

Yes. When we begin to practice, we enter reality itself at once. This is the situation. So Buddhist practice is a very easy way.

As a Catholic, I believe that the world was created by God. But at the same time, I believe in the existence of matter. I think that Buddhism is a kind of religion and a kind of philosophy too. But without a god. I think that the intellect is very important in Buddhism, not only in the sense of idealistic or materialistic thought. The intellect provides us with a kind of food; we must think, study and learn. Because we cannot realize reality without the intellect too. We cannot do it only by practicing Zazen. If you were to teach a little child only to practice Zazen without teaching it to do other things, the child would not grow. I think the practice of Zazen gives us one thing. We learn something new every day of our lives in this reality. But practicing Zazen is a kind of - how shall I say - our brain is a kind of computer which receives a lot of information every day. We are not able to use all the information in our computer without practicing Zazen. Without this practice, our computer does not work very well. It seems as if someone or something puts all the information in our brain's computer into the right place. And then, at the moment when we must act, we know how to act without thinking. It doesn't mean that we don't think; we think unconsciously. The practice of Zazen and enlightenment give us this possibility of realizing reality in the right way, without conscious thought.

In answer to what you have said, I would like to say something about the relationship between God and the Universe. As I have said, Buddhism realizes the imperfect nature of the intellect. Many people believe that the intellect is absolute. But Gautama Buddha criticized this idea. He said that intellectual ability is not absolute. He urged us to recognize that we are living in reality. In Christianity, God governs the Universe. In Marxism, there is no god. Buddhists say that the Universe is God. This is a situation that we cannot recognize with our intellect. We experience this truth in our right action. Buddhists practice Zazen to experience that the Universe is God himself; God is the Universe. Buddhists do not believe that God exists outside the Universe. Furthermore, Buddhists deny the materialistic idea that there is no God. This is the relationship between the three religions of the world today; Christianity, Marxism, and Buddhism. Which of these three religions we should select is an important problem for people today. But why must this be so?

Human beings have an inherent tendency to want to sacrifice their lives fighting for their beliefs. So idealists feel that it is worthwhile to lose their lives fighting against materialists. Materialists feel that to lose their lives fighting against idealists is worthwhile, too. This is the real situation in the world today. This tendency is inherent in the human psyche. It is a somewhat sad, but true, fact.

You said that our intellect is dualistic in nature. So why don't you include dualism along with idealism and materialism?

When we look at problems intellectually, our conclusion may sometimes be idealistic and sometimes materialistic. This is the unavoidable consequence of intellectual analysis. The intellect divides all things into black or white, good or bad, right or wrong. It is the way that our brain discriminates. So our thinking is inherently dualistic. But the Buddhist *philosophy of action* is able to synthesize these two sides, these two philosophical viewpoints. This philosophy of synthesis, however, is only itself a system of thought. Gautama Buddha told us to practice Zazen so that we could recognize the reality in which we live every moment. So in the area of the intellect, we are always dualistic. This is why there is no need to include dualism. The philosophy of dualism says that reality

consists of two parts: mind and matter. But this suggests that both mind and matter really exist. The Buddhist viewpoint is that both mind and matter are concepts which exist in our brain; that reality is undivided. People who believe that mind and matter both exist as real entities are, from the Buddhist standpoint, deluded. Buddhists recognize the existence of a single undivided reality, a belief which comes directly from the experience of Zazen.

However, we need the idealistic and materialistic viewpoints in order to construct a philosophical system. Without both a right leg and a left leg, Buddhist theory cannot stand. Idealism and materialism are the legs of Buddhist theory. Reality itself cannot be explained in words, but because we human beings have the capacity and inclination to think about our lives and the reality around us, we need a philosophical system. The Buddhist philosophical system allows idealistic thought and materialistic thought to co-exist. But it does not believe that mind and matter are two real entities.

You said that the fundamental difference between Christianity and Buddhism is that in Christianity, we have one God who is outside the Universe, and in Buddhism, the creator and the created are one. So since God is everything, he is also you and me.....

I said that God and the Universe are united, but this itself is only a method of explanation. Buddhists do not therefore feel it necessary to believe in the existence of some definite spirit or essence as an object. In Buddhist theory, we say that there is something which cannot be explained with words: the *Ineffable*. Some call it the Universe, others call it God, still others call it matter, spirit or soul. But in Buddhism, we say that the something which exists cannot be explained with words.

So what you mean is that we cannot know what the truth is because knowing is of the mind. We can only be the truth?

Yes. And we can experience it; we can act. We can practice Zazen.

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