

## ***Shobogenzo* by Eihei Dogen**

### Chapter 6 “**Mind Here and Now is Buddha**”

Translated from the Japanese by Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Chodo Cross

**Translator’s Note (on Chapter Six):** *Soku means “here and now.” Shin means “mind.” Ze means “is.” Butsu means “buddha.” The principle of soku-shin-ze-butsu, or “mind here and now is buddha” is very famous in Buddhism, but many people have interpreted the principle to support the beliefs of naturalism. They say if our mind here and now is just buddha, our conduct must always be right, and, in that case, we need not make any effort to understand or to realize Buddhism. However, this interpretation is a serious mistake. The principle soku-shin-ze-butsu, “mind here and now is buddha,” must be understood not from the standpoint of the intellect but from the standpoint of practice. In other words, the principle does not mean belief in something spiritual called “mind” but it affirms the time “now” and the place “here” as reality itself. This time and place must always be absolute and right, and so we can call them the truth or “buddha.” In this chapter, Master Dōgen explained this meaning of soku-shin-ze-butsu, “mind here and now is buddha.”*

(Soku-shin-ze-butsu)  
“Mind Here and Now Is Buddha”

What every buddha and every patriarch has maintained and relied upon, without exception, is just “mind here and now is buddha.” Many students, however, misunderstand that “mind here and now is buddha” did not exist in India but was first heard in China. As a result, they do not recognize their mistake as a mistake. Because they do not recognize the mistake as a mistake, many fall down into non-Buddhism. When stupid people hear talk of “mind here and now is buddha,” they interpret that ordinary beings’ intellect and sense perception, which have never established the *bodhi*-mind, are just buddha. This derives from never having met a true teacher. The reason say that they become non-Buddhists is that there was a non-Buddhist in India, called Senika, whose viewpoint is expressed as follows:

The great truth exists in our own body now, so we can easily recognize its situation. In other words, [a spiritual intelligence] distinguishes between pain and pleasure, naturally senses cold and warmth, and recognizes discomfort and irritation. [The spiritual intelligence] is neither restricted by myriad things nor connected with circumstances: things come and go and circumstances arise and pass, but the spiritual intelligence always remains, unchanging. This spiritual intelligence is all around, pervading all souls—common and sacred—without distinction. In its midst, illusory flowers in space exist for the time being, but when

momentary insight has appeared, and things have vanished and circumstances have disappeared, then the spiritual intelligence, the original essence, alone is clearly recognizable, peaceful, and eternal. Though the physical form may be broken, the spiritual intelligence departs unbroken; just as, when a house burns down in a fire, the master of the house leaves. This perfectly clear and truly spiritual presence is called “the essence of perception and intelligence.” It is also described as “buddha,” and called “enlightenment.” It includes both the subject and the object, and it permeates both delusion and enlightenment. [So] let the myriad *dharma*s and all circumstances be as they are. The spiritual intelligence does not coexist with circumstances and it is not the same as things. It abides constantly through passing *kalpas*. We might also call the circumstances that exist in the present “real,” insofar as they derive from the existence of the spiritual intelligence: because they are conditions arising from the original essence, they are real things. Even so, they are not eternal as the spiritual intelligence is, for they exist and then vanish. [The spiritual intelligence] is unrelated to brightness and darkness, because it knows spiritually. We call this “the spiritual intelligence,” we also call it “the true self,” we call it “the basis of awakening,” we call it “original essence,” and we call it “original substance.” Someone who realizes this original essence is said to have returned to eternity and is called a great man who has come back to the truth. After this, he no longer wanders through the cycle of life and death; he experiences and enters the essential ocean<sup>1</sup> where there is neither appearance nor disappearance. There is no reality other than this, but as long as this essence has not emerged, the three worlds<sup>2</sup> and the six states are said to arise in competition.

This then is the view of the non-Buddhist Senika. Master Echū, National Master Daishō, of the great kingdom of Tang, asks a monk, “From which direction have you come?”

The monk says, “I have come from the south.”

The master says, “What [good] counselors are there in the south?”

The monk says, “[Good] counselors are very numerous.”

The master says, “How do they teach people?”

The monk says, “The [good] counselors of that quarter teach students directly that mind here and now is buddha. Buddha means consciousness itself. You now are fully endowed with the essence of seeing, hearing, awareness, and recognition. This essence is able to raise the eyebrows and to wink, to come and go, and to move and act. It pervades the body, so that when [something] touches the head, the head knows it, and when something touches the foot, the foot knows it. Therefore it is called ‘the true

all-pervading intelligence.’ Apart from this there is no buddha at all. This body must appear and disappear, but the mental essence has never appeared or disappeared since the limitless past. The appearance and disappearance of the body is like a dragon changing its bones, a snake shedding its skin, or a person moving out of an old house. This body is inconstant; the essence is constant. What they teach in the south is, for the most part, like this.”

The master says, “If it is so, they are no different from the non-Buddhist Senika. He said, ‘In our body there is a single spiritual essence. This essence can recognize pain and irritation. When the body decays the spirit departs; just as when a house is burning the master of the house departs. The house is inconstant; the master of the house is constant.’ When I examine people like this, they do not know the false from the true. How can they decide what is right? When I was on my travels, I often saw this kind. Recently they are very popular. They gather assemblies of three or five hundred people and, eyes gazing toward the heavens, they say ‘This is the fundamental teaching of the south.’ They take the *Platform Sutra* and change it, mixing in folk stories, and erasing its sacred meaning. They delude and disturb recent students. How could [theirs] be called the oral teaching? How painful it is, that our religion is being lost. If seeing, hearing, awareness, and recognition could be equated with the buddha-nature, Vimalakīrti would not have said, ‘The Dharma is transcendent over seeing, hearing, awareness, and recognition. When we use seeing, hearing, awareness, and recognition, it is only seeing, hearing, awareness, and recognition; it is not pursuit of the Dharma.’”

National Master Daishō is an excellent disciple of the eternal buddha of Sōkei. He is a great good counselor in heaven above and in the human world. We should clarify the fundamental teaching set forth by the National Master, and regard it as a criterion for learning in practice. Do not follow what you know to be the viewpoint of the non-Buddhist Senika. Among those of recent generations who subsist as masters of mountains in the great kingdom of Song, there may be no one like the National Master. From the ancient past, no counselors to equal the National Master have ever manifested themselves in the world. Nevertheless, people of the world mistakenly think that even Rinzai and Tokusan might equal the National Master. Only people [who think] like this are great in number. It is a pity that there are no teachers with clear eyes. This “mind here and now is buddha” that the Buddhist patriarchs maintain and rely upon is not seen by non-Buddhists and [people of] the two vehicles, even in their dreams. Buddhist patriarchs alone, together with Buddhist patriarchs, possess hearing, action, and experience that have enacted and that have perfectly realized “mind here and now

is buddha.” Buddhas have continued to pick up and to throw away hundreds of weeds, but they have never represented themselves as a sixteen-foot golden body. “The immediate” universe exists; it is not awaiting realization, and it is not avoiding destruction. “This concrete” triple world exists; it is neither receding nor appearing, and it is not just mind. “Mind” exists as fences and walls; it never gets muddy or wet, and it is never artificially constructed. We realize in practice that “mind here and now is buddha,” we realize in practice that “the mind which is buddha is this,” we realize in practice that “buddha actually is just the mind,” we realize in practice that “mind-and-buddha here and now is right,” and we realize in practice that “this buddha-mind is here and now.”

Realization in practice like this is just “mind here and now is buddha” picking itself up and authentically transmitting itself to “mind here and now is buddha.” Authentically transmitted like this, it has arrived at the present day. “The mind that has been authentically transmitted” means one mind as all *dharma*s, and all *dharma*s as one mind. For this reason, a man of old said, “When a person becomes conscious of the mind, there is not an inch of soil on the earth.” Remember, when we become conscious of the mind, the whole of heaven falls down and the whole ground is torn apart. Or in other words, when we become conscious of the mind, the earth grows three inches thicker. An ancient patriarch said, “What is fine, pure, and bright mind? It is mountains, rivers, and the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars.” Clearly, “mind” is mountains, rivers, and the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars. But what these words say is, when we are moving forward, not enough, and when we are drawing back, too much. Mind as mountains, rivers, and the earth is nothing other than mountains, rivers, and the earth. There are no additional waves or surf, no wind or smoke. Mind as the sun, the moon, and the stars is nothing other than the sun, the moon, and the stars. There is no additional fog or mist. Mind as living-and-dying, coming- and-going, is nothing other than living-and-dying, coming-and-going. There is no additional delusion or realization. Mind as fences, walls, tiles, and pebbles is nothing other than fences, walls, tiles, and pebbles. There is no additional mud or water. Mind as the four elements and five aggregates is nothing other than the four elements and five aggregates. There is no additional horse or monkey. Mind as a chair or a whisk<sup>31</sup> is nothing other than a chair or a whisk. There is no additional bamboo or wood. Because the state is like this, “mind here and now is buddha” is untainted “mind here and now is buddha.” All buddhas are untainted buddhas. This being so, “mind here and now is buddha” is the buddhas [themselves] who establish the will, undergo training, [realize] *bodhi*, and [experience] nirvana. If we have never established the will, undergone training, [realized] *bodhi*, and [experienced] nirvana, then [the state] is not “mind here and now is buddha.” If we establish the mind and do practice-and-

experience even in a single *ksana*, this is “mind here and now is buddha.” If we establish the will and do practice-and- experience in a single molecule, this is “mind here and now is buddha.” If we establish the will and do practice-and-experience in countless *kalpas*, this is “mind here and now is buddha.” If we establish the will and do practice-and-experience in one instant of consciousness, this is “mind here and now is buddha.” If we establish the will and do practice-and-experience inside half a fist, this is mind here and now is buddha. To say, on the contrary, that undergoing training to become buddha for long *kalpas* is not “mind here and now is buddha” is never to have seen, never to have known, and never to have learned “mind here and now is buddha.” It is never to have met a true teacher who proclaims “mind here and now is buddha.” The term “buddhas” means Śākyamuni Buddha. Śākyamuni Buddha is just “mind here and now is buddha.” When all the buddhas of the past, present, and future become buddha, they inevitably become Śākyamuni Buddha, that is, “mind here and now is buddha.”

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