



SOTO ZEN JOURNAL

DHARMA EYE

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Greetings

Rev. Daiken Kurayama

Director of the Department of
Education and Dissemination
Sotoshu Headquarters

I would like to offer a brief greeting at the beginning of issue 55 of *Dharma Eye*.

My name is Daiken Kurayama. I was appointed as the Director of the Department of Education and Dissemination of the Soto School of Zen in October 2024. I am keenly aware of the heavy responsibility entrusted to me, as I take on the role of guiding the propagation of the teachings that form the foundation of Soto Zen. With a strong sense of duty, I am committed to doing my utmost to fulfill this responsibility. I humbly ask for your guidance and the continued support of the Dharma. I also hope this message finds all of you who read *Dharma Eye*, the Soto Zen International Center's newsletter, in good health and high spirits. I pray that your daily practice and life continue to grow richer and more fulfilling.

Last year, in April, the Soto Zen International Center hosted the "Soto Zen World Fellowship." I am sure many of you, readers of *Dharma Eye*, participated in this event. I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude for your understanding and cooperation in the international propagation of our teachings. Thanks to your support, we were able to hold this important gathering. I believe that the exchange of ideas and sharing of Zen teachings

among all participants has been deeply meaningful to the development of our Soto School.

The history of Soto Zen's international propagation began in 1903, when it was introduced to Japanese immigrants in Hawaii and Peru. From that time on, the teachings of Zen began to take root overseas and gradually spread to North America, Europe, and other parts of Asia. Despite facing numerous challenges, our predecessors devoted themselves passionately to the propagation of Zen abroad, deeply embedding its teachings in local communities. As a result, as of December 1, 2024, there are 134 international teachers active around the world, and 67 overseas Soto Zen temples have been registered.

In the future, our school will continue to expand globally. Through collaboration with overseas clergy and lay practitioners, I hope that the teachings of Zen will reach even more people, offering peace and guidance in their daily lives. Our school is committed to overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers, ensuring that the universal teachings of Zen are spread to people worldwide. This is not only about transmitting our teachings but also deepening our understanding of different cultures and values and walking together on this path.

Additionally, in 2025, the 10th U.S. Soto Conference is scheduled to be held. This event will be deeply connected to the history of Japanese immigrants who came to North America and Hawaii, embraced the Soto Zen teachings, and contributed to their communities. It will be a valuable opportunity to reflect on how Japanese immigrants came to practice Soto Zen and how these teachings became rooted in their local

communities. I believe this will be highly meaningful to us, as we honor the efforts and growth of the immigrants while opening new perspectives for the future.

We will once again look back on this history, and together with our international Dharma teachers and clergy, we will continue to spread the teachings of Soto Zen. This event will serve as a catalyst to ensure that the teachings of Soto Zen become an integral part of the lives of many people.

The development of international propagation depends on each and every one of us. I sincerely pray that the teachings of Soto Zen will continue to spread deeply around the world and achieve further growth. For this, I humbly ask for your continued cooperation. Our activities rely on your faith and support. Please continue to guide and encourage us.

Though this message may be humble, I offer it as my greeting. I look forward to your continued guidance and support in the future.

Gassho.



Reflections and Vision as the New Sokan of Hawaii Soto Mission

Rev. Shuji Komagata

Director of the Soto Zen Buddhism Hawaii Office

Aloha Dharma friends,

I am honored to introduce myself as the new Sokan, or Director, of the Hawaii Soto Mission. As I assume this role, I reflect deeply on the legacy of my family in service to Soto Zen Buddhism in Hawaii. I follow in the footsteps of my great-grandfather, Bishop Zenkyo Komagata, my grandfather, Bishop Zenshu Komagata, and my father, Bishop Shugen Komagata. I am the eighth bishop of the Hawaii Soto Mission, and this is a profound responsibility that I accept with humility and gratitude.

On April 30, 2024, my father, Bishop Shugen Komagata, retired after 16 years of dedicated service to our mission. Sadly, just over a month later, he passed away on June 7, 2024. His leadership, compassion, and guidance will forever remain in my heart. It is a bittersweet moment, as I step into his shoes, both grieving and feeling immense gratitude for everything he taught me. His legacy has shaped not only my own path but also the path of our entire temple community in Hawaii.

I was officially installed as the new bishop on October 12, 2024, a day before my father's funeral on October 13. In addition to my duties as bishop, I have also been appointed as the chief priest of the Soto Mission of Hawaii

Shoboji Betsuin and will continue to serve as the resident minister of the Soto Mission of Aiea, a position I have held since 2005.

The Road Ahead: Balancing Responsibility and Legacy

Taking on this new chapter comes with a mixture of excitement and responsibility. There are many challenges ahead—especially managing multiple roles within our growing temple community and overseeing the many ongoing projects. As the Soto Mission of Aiea embarks on a multi-million-dollar construction project for the new Soto Mission of Aiea Activity Center, I am focused on ensuring the continuity and growth of both the physical and spiritual aspects of the temple. This project, slated for completion in 2025, will house a new zazen hall, an adult day care center, and meeting spaces for our community.

This project is made possible by the Taiheiji Legacy-Endowment Bond—a 20-year investment plan that is helping fund significant capital improvements, including the renovation of aging structures and the development of new facilities. Through this bond, we raised \$1 million to support the long-term sustainability of our mission. This investment, while offering 3% annual interest, will also play a crucial role in the future of our community.

Preserving and Strengthening the Hawaii Soto Mission

At the Soto Mission of Hawaii, we inherit a rich history of over 110 years of service. As I step into my new role, I recognize the importance of ensuring that this legacy continues for genera-

tions to come. While we minister to our current members, it is equally vital to look ahead and plan for the long-term sustainability of the temple.

One of my priorities is to address the aging infrastructure. After recent heavy rains, we reroofed both the main temple and Komagata Hall, ensuring that the temple remains a safe and welcoming space for generations of practitioners. Looking forward, I am working on a master plan for the revitalization of the temple, which includes:

- Renovating the temple hall
- Opening an adult day care facility
- Reopening the martial arts dojo
- Renovating the social hall and tea ceremony rooms
- Opening a restaurant and café to serve visitors
- Creating a new temple library
- Building new residences for ministers and deacons
- Constructing a new Activity Center for zazen and the arts

These initiatives will take several years to complete, but I am excited about the possibilities they hold for our community and the future of Soto Zen in Hawaii.

Fostering a Strong Soto Zen Community in Hawaii

Beyond these physical projects, I am committed to nurturing the spiritual and communal life of our temples across Hawaii. The strength of our Sangha lies in our ministers and their dedication to the teachings of the Buddha. I plan to visit each temple regularly and maintain open

communication with our ministers, offering support and guidance where needed.

The 10th U.S. Soto Conference, which will be held on October 23-26, 2025 at the Soto Mission of Hawaii, is a significant event I am looking forward to coordinating. This conference will bring together Soto Zen practitioners from around the country and the world. Unlike previous conferences, we will offer a variety of over 30 classes and activities, allowing participants to choose the ones that resonate most with them. We will also share the beauty and culture of Hawaii with attendees, including visits to local Soto temples and historical sites, such as the Hawaii Plantation Village.

Deepening Practice and Dharma

Amidst all these exciting developments, I must emphasize that our ultimate goal is to deepen our practice of Soto Zen Buddhism. In 2028, I am planning to hold a Jukai-e at the Soto Mission of Hawaii, where we will reaffirm our commitment to the Buddhist path. Between now and then, we will focus on deepening our understanding of the teachings, especially through zazen (seated meditation) and the practice of the Four Actions of a Bodhisattva (Shishobo):

1. *Fuse* (Generosity)
2. *Rigyō* (Beneficial Deeds)
3. *Aigo* (Loving Words)
4. *Dogyō* (Cooperation)

These are not just ideals but actions we can all take to help one another along the way.

A Call for Support

As we embark on these exciting projects and deepen our practice, I humbly ask for your sup-

port. Whether through active participation in our initiatives, donations to our Legacy Endowment, or simply by sharing your practice with others, your involvement will help ensure that the Hawaii Soto Mission continues to flourish for generations to come.

Thank you for your ongoing support, and I look forward to walking this path together with you all.





Walking on the Path of the Ancients in 2024

Onshin Landry
Great Vow Zen Monastery,
Daiganzenji

The story of the 700th anniversary of Daihonzan Sojiji's Founder Keizan Jokin Zenji Tour begins not with a gathering at the large dinosaur skeleton at Fukui station, not when the pilgrims on the tour first set foot on their airplanes to take them to Japan in April 2024, nor when the preparatory ceremonies for the 700th anniversary were conducted at Zenshuji in 2022 in Los Angeles. Not even when Keizan zenji himself passed away from his earthly body. The story is definitely about all of those moments, but it starts with every and any moment that a human being turns their heart toward honoring ancestors and honoring the great mystery. How amazing it is to celebrate an awakened teacher day after day, year after year, and century after century. This heart of honoring, of wishing to offer respect and reverence to Awake Nature itself is what draws so many people to come together for the ceremony on April 23rd 2024 at Sojiji.

For my life, the story begins with honoring the part of my heart that is at one with the Great Mystery, with Buddha Nature. These moments of honoring occur in childhood, watching the raindrops streak down the car windows in beautiful, unpredictable patterns, and my honoring sounds like "Wow!" Honoring occurs in adolescence, when consciousness wakes up to the gravity of living a human life. Living as a human

being is unspeakably amazing. The vast connection to the whole universe is intuited and, in the beginning years of my Zen practice, I knew (and know!) that what I do with my life and its particularities truly matters. How can I wake up to actualizing the potential of this human heart flourishing? How can I live the Truth? And how can the Truth be shared? Such questions led me into adulthood and into shaping my life around Zen Buddhist practice. And now my honoring looks like priest robes and prostrations in ceremony halls. The activity of honoring is good and natural in the context of the 700th anniversary ceremony for Keizan zenji because Keizan zenji is one of the people who brought these questions of flourishing and living and sharing the Truth to fruition.



Women of the Way

The major, direct cause for me being able to participate in the Keizan Zenji Tour is that my teacher, Rev. Chozen Bays, was invited to be one of the four officiants at the services on the morning of April 23rd. She was invited to represent all the practitioners from North America who were present at Sojiji that day, as well as all North American practitioners who have benefitted

from Keizan zenji's life of offering.

Chozen Roshi was eager to offer her presence and sincerity at the ceremony as a way to celebrate her teacher, Taizan Maezumi Roshi, who trained at Sojiji as a young person before spreading Dharma in the United States. He arrived in Los Angeles in the 1950s with a vow to plant the seeds of Dharma on this continent so firmly such that the Dharma will never die. Those vow-seeds have bloomed into many great teachers whose streams of lineage have inspired many people to practice Dharma.

Rev. Chozen was also keen on representing all North American women practitioners and all women worldwide as one of the few (if not the first) Western women to preside over a ceremony at Daihonzan Sojiji. It was wonderful for me to see my dear teacher have her own spot for a time in the sacred place that is Sojiji. Her presence was a clear expression of the Bodhisattva heart that all beings may receive the conditions for the awakened mind to flourish.

As I reflect on the flavor and quality of the short tour of Eiheiiji, Sojiji, and Soto Zen headquarters in Tokyo, the primary sense that I have is a quality of magic and wonder. The dreamlike nature of being guided through the halls and courtyards of Eiheiiji, where such revered practitioners have cultivated and expressed their beautiful hearts for centuries, left a mark of happiness on my being. The process of departing Eiheiiji, walking back to the bus after a few hours of being there, was a happy departure. It was a lovely teaching about endings. Enjoying an experience fully and simply letting it go—how applicable is that to so many aspects of our lives!



90 Days in a Senmon Sodo

Coupled with supporting and being supported by my teachers, Rev. Chozen Bays and Rev. Hogen Bays, with a few others from my local community, I was in Japan in the Spring of 2024 to undergo training for three months at Toshoji monastery in Okayama prefecture. One principle and practice that has been growing in me is that which is called “repaying gratitude to the ancestors.” I received so much support from many different people and beings (and, in the end, the whole universe) to be able to spend a few months in Japan, and my heart’s response to that recognition was to open up clarity and kindness as best I could.

A calling that inspired the thought to enter a monastery training environment in Japan was to broaden my vision and felt experience of what Zen practice is and has been. I have been living and training at my monastery in Oregon for the last ten years. This has been beautiful and rich, and yet even the wide-reaching vision of my teachers and those who shape the practice container can only offer a limited palette of colors. Intuiting the possibility of more fully stepping into my lineage inheritance, I sought to swim in the more ancient waters of monasticism in Japan.

Celebrating Life, Moment after Moment

For me, the hallmark of training for a brief time at Toshoji had to do with how the sangha body moved and worked together as one, with each person not just contributing to the whole, but expressing the essence of Zen practice in their own unique way. In other words: it's about people! I was just so happy to receive guidance from many seniors on how things are conducted at Toshoji, and even if the flavor of those sharings were not always obviously friendly in the enthusiastic American style, they were certainly always generous. Step by step, my ignorance of the local temple style was brightened into familiarity, confidence, and deeper and deeper appreciation of the practice flavor in this small corner of the world. And more and more, the direction of my energy became guided by the inquiry, "How can I (and we) make a beautiful life together for this short time that we have?"

The spirit of imbuing daily tasks with the heart of reverence, respect, and care is something that I have consistently found nourishing in my Zen life thus far. The forms that make space for that imbuing were fully activated at Toshoji. Reciting the bath verse and offering three prostrations before taking a shower each day. Having a fellow monk partner to shave and be shaved by for *johatsu* every five days. Arriving early to the *sodo* in the morning to tidy up all the *zafu*. Quickly and carefully pouring 30 cups of *sencha* that I just made for the assembly's morning meeting of tea. All such activities express facets of the jewel of practicing together in a monastery. This life of being a human is already beautiful. How do we reveal, highlight, celebrate this truth? By sharing tea, rice, zazen, chanting, head-shaving, showers, changing

clothes, and cleaning the temple.

The spirit of reverence and celebration is ongoing in a zen monastery, even when one's individual small beliefs contract into the various shapes of aversion, greed, and ignorance. The monastery carries everyone who is on board, not just across the ocean to the other shore, but through the placid waters and stormy waves of this beautiful, always-falling-apart world.

Living together in harmony and vow-energy is not just an example for the rest of the human world; it is the actualization of a world of harmony and vow-energy. And actualizing harmony becomes real for anyone who enacts that noble intention, however one's life is shaped, whether there is a structure surrounding the person that we call a "monastery" or not.



Sharing Our School's Affair All Over the World

One nourishing element of Toshoji life was that so many practitioners made a pilgrimage to enter the sacred womb of training from all over

the world. I appreciated fostering connections with newly-made friends from all over Europe, from South America, from other parts of the United States, and other corners of the world. The nature of our assembly illuminated for me how dharma practice is relevant and vital for all human beings, even those who come from a mix of cultures that superficially seems pretty different from my own mix. It is my feeling that the commitment to making dharma accessible broadly that is expressed by Toshoji leadership is a direct fruit of the vast mind of Keizan zenji, the one who propagated the spread of Soto Zen teachings and practices. So, entering the monastery as a newcomer, mixing with those already present in the temple, and mixing with subsequent newcomers, are all fresh and firm footsteps in the path taken by Keizan Jokin zenji.



The Life and Achievements of Keizan Zenji (Part 4)

Rev. Ryuken Yokoyama
Komazawa University

IV. Establishment of Temple Inheritance System

Due to the standardization of the Dharma transmission ceremony, the Keizan lineage enabled stable reproduction of successors. Concurrently, Keizan zenji also established a system where monks of his lineage exclusively inherited temples. As previously introduced in the second installment of this series, on December 8, 1319, in Gen'ō 1 (1319), Keizan zenji created the “Document for Future Relations” at Yokoji, outlining the relationship between donors and monks as follows:

1. Even after the abbot's succession, maintain a positive relationship between Yokoji monks and temple supporters.
2. The abbot of Yokoji Temple shall be selected from among Keizan zenji's Dharma successors, and temple supporters shall not interject objections against the newly appointed abbot.

These regulations set by Keizan zenji aimed to resolve issues prevalent among Soto Zen temples of that time. The objective of the first point was to ensure that temple supporters continued their financial support even after a change in abbots. This system was established because during the medieval period, temple supporters often supported individual monks rather than the temples themselves. If a temple supporter supported an individual monk and that

monk relocated or left due to various reasons such as accepting a new abbot position or undergoing a monastic transfer, support for the temple could be terminated, potentially jeopardizing its existence. Therefore, preemptively preventing a reduction or cessation of support due to a change in abbots was a crucial task.

The establishment of regulations like the first point mentioned above was likely based on the economic conditions of Eiheiiji Temple. From Bun'ei 8 (1271) to Koan 4 (1281), Keizan zenji lived a monastic life at Eiheiiji Temple. During that time, the aristocratic society members from Kyoto who had supported the temple during the lifetime of Dogen zenji had ceased to visit¹. While those individuals might have provided economic support when they visited Eiheiiji Temple, they primarily supported Dogen zenji personally, not the institution of Eiheiiji Temple itself. Therefore, after Dogen zenji's passing, visits to Eiheiiji Temple ceased, and financial support naturally dwindled. It is believed that the only donors who continued to support Eiheiiji Temple even after Dogen zenji's passing was the Hata family, who had invited Dogen zenji to Echizen. Consequently, when Keizan zenji arrived at Eiheiiji Temple, it was in a state of decline compared to when Dogen zenji had been abbot, and it was unable to find a way to revival Eiheiiji. It can be considered that one reason Gikai zenji left Eiheiiji Temple for Daijōji Temple in Kaga in 1293 was his judgment that further support from the Hata family was not feasible².

Witnessing the decline of Eiheiiji Temple, young Keizan zenji keenly felt the importance of temple supporters continuing their support even

after a change in abbot when inheriting temples. The regulation in the first point mentioned above was precisely based on reflections from Eiheiiji Temple.

The second point mentioned above denied temple supporters the right to appoint an abbot and recognized that only monks had the authority to select an abbot. Since temple supporters are originally economic supporters of temples, they should rightfully have considerable influence over monastic appointments. The reason the *Document for Future Relations* ("Jinji Mirai-kisai Okibumi") completely denied temple supporters the right to appoint or speak out about the appointment of abbots may reflect the bitter experiences of Keizan zenji himself regarding Daijōji Temple.

When Keizan zenji relocated from Daijōji Temple to Yokoji Temple, he nominated Kyo-o Unryo (1267-1341), a Rinzai monk, as his successor. Although Kyo-o was a Rinzai sect monk, Keizan zenji had his disciples Meiho Sotetsu (1277-1350) and Gasan Joseki (1276-1366) study under Kyo-o³, and when Kyo-o became the abbot of Daijōji Temple, he stated, "If anyone desires to consult with me (Keizan zenji), consult with Shuso (Kyo-o)"⁴, indicating a strong bond of trust between them. When Keizan zenji departed from Daijōji Temple, he nominated Kyo-o as his successor not only because he trusted him but also because among his disciples, there was no one else with the qualifications to serve as abbot.

Keizan zenji expected Kyo-o, the new abbot of Daijōji Temple, to continue to uphold the Zen

style established by Gikai zenji and Keizan zenji, but Kyo-o's actions betrayed that expectation. Specifically, upon becoming the abbot of Daijoji Temple, Kyo-o initiated its conversion to the Rinzai sect.⁵

Observing Daijoji Temple converting to the Rinzai sect, Keizan zenji appears to have requested a change in the abbot to the temple supporters of Daijoji Temple, the Togashi family, but this request was not accepted.⁶ Witnessing Daijoji Temple's conversion to the Rinzai sect, Keizan zenji keenly realized the ephemeral nature of traditions he had upheld and the importance of monks from the same sect inheriting temples for maintaining stability. Therefore, he established the regulation of the second point mentioned above.

By establishing these two points mentioned in the "Document for Future Relations," Keizan zenji enabled Yokoji Temple to have only monks of the Soto sect as its abbots. Even if there was a change in abbot, the temple could receive continued economic support from temple supporters. In other words, Yokoji Temple acquired a much more stable temple inheritance system compared to Eiheiiji Temple or Daijoji Temple.

In contemporary Japan, when an abbot changes, the sect usually remains the same, and temple supporters continue their support unchanged. Although the modern temple supporter's system is directly influenced by the religious policies of the Edo Period, for the Soto sect, its origins can also be traced back to Keizan zenji of the Kamakura Period.

V. Nurturing the Spirit of Maintaining the Honzan (Main Temple)

The early life of Keizan zenji was spent in days of visiting various teachers. He studied under the guidance of Ejo Zenji and Gikai zenji of Eiheiiji Temple, and Jakuen zenji of Hokyoji Temple, among others. Later, even after becoming the abbot of Jomanji Temple in Awa Province, he continued his studies under Gikai zenji at Daijoji Temple. After exerting himself in practice in his local area, he inherited the teachings of Gikai zenji. In his later years, he established his base in Kaga and Noto, where he expanded his religious activities.

In Kaga and Noto, Keizan zenji founded a total of seven temples. With the inclusion of Daijoji Temple, these eight temples were designated by Keizan zenji as his "main places of spiritual heritage."⁷ Of particular interest is the hierarchical structure and division of roles among these eight temples.

At the pinnacle of the hierarchy is Yokoji Temple, where only Keizan zenji's Dharma successors could become the head abbot. While other temples could have abbots who were not his Dharma successors, only those from the Keizan branch of Zen Buddhism are eligible to become abbots. Regarding their functional roles, Hoyoji Temple in Kaga and Sojiji Temple in Noto, for example, are designated as "training centers," focused solely on spiritual practice. Additionally, temples such as Hoyoji Temple were designated as convents, while Kokoji Temple served as a solitary residence, highlighting the diverse functions expected of each temple.

Establishing this division of roles and dispersing the temples served three purposes:

1. Expanding the influence of the Keizan lineage branch (Soto Zen).
2. Minimizing damage in the case of unforeseen events such as natural disasters, epidemics, or conflicts.
3. Allowing practitioners to cultivate their skills under various leaders in the eight temples.

Among these three points, the third point was likely particularly attractive to disciples in this lineage. It enabled them to receive guidance from various priests, ensuring that if opportunities were missed under one lineage, there remained the possibility of gaining insights under another lineage within the Keizan branch. Furthermore, through rigorous training and recognition as Dharma successors within the Keizan lineage, disciples could potentially aspire to become abbots of Yokoji Temple in the future. Yokoji Temple, as the central temple, always remained in the forefront of disciples' aspirations, fostering a consciousness of protecting the main temple.

Moreover, if vacancies arose among the abbots of these temples, Keizan zenji's temples adopted a network system to replenish them from within the Keizan lineage, further strengthening the cohesion of the branch.

Additionally, while Yokoji Temple stipulates that abbots must serve in accordance with the succession order from Keizan zenji's lineage,⁸ this later evolved into a system of rotational abbacy, where monks from the Keizan lineage would take turns serving as abbots.

In today's Soto Zen, Eiheiji and Sojiji serve as the two head temples under a dual-head system. Both Eiheiji and Sojiji have established preservation committees to make efforts towards their maintenance and continuity. It was also Keizan zenji who nurtured the spirit of preserving the head temples in Soto Zen.

VI. Establishment of the Soto Zen Doctrine

Keizan zenji is often regarded as the "founder of the Soto sect," which tends to overshadow his philosophical contributions. However, understanding his philosophy is equally crucial.

As noted by earlier scholars, the most critical point in understanding Keizan zenji's philosophy is that he "complemented the teachings of Dogen zenji."⁹ As mentioned earlier, this attitude is consistent throughout Keizan zenji's writings. Here, we will focus on the *Denkoroku*, particularly how Keizan zenji sought to complement Dogen zenji's teachings, as indicated.

Dogen zenji's *Shobogenzo and Dogen Zenji's Extensive Record* ("Eihei Koroku") are writings that expound on "the state of enlightenment" and "how to practice within it." Borrowing Dogen zenji's words, the central theme revolves around "verification of the stage of enlightenment."¹⁰

On the other hand, Keizan zenji, in the *Denkoroku*, sought to illustrate the path to receiving the enlightenment expounded in the *Shobogenzo*, that is, the "path to enlightenment."¹¹ Therefore, Keizan zenji actively discusses not only the "experience of enlightenment" as provisionally shown by Dogen zenji but also the

“state of enlightenment”¹² glimpsed upon obtaining that experience. For example, let’s cite the following passage from the *Denkoroku* in Chapter 20, Ven. Jayata):

“Gentlemen, if you wish to gain sight of the original mind, cast off your myriad affairs, put all karmic involvements to rest, do not think of good or evil, focus your eyes on the tip of your nose for a while, and observe your original mind. At the moment when your entire mind is tranquil, with all its characteristics exhausted If one can achieve this, then all beings will be equal to the Buddha.”¹³

In this passage, Keizan zenji discusses how to attain the experience of enlightenment and describes the nature of enlightenment. The term “original mind” refers to the inherent Buddha-nature, suggesting that to understand one’s Buddha-nature, one must transcend all thoughts and objects, including distinctions such as “good” and “evil.” To practice this, one must practice sitting in meditation (*zazen*), focusing one’s gaze on the tip of the nose. He says that through the practice of *shikantaza*, one can see one’s Buddha-nature and have the experience of enlightenment.

Furthermore, rather than solely discussing the experience of enlightenment, Keizan zenji in *Denkoroku* elaborates with meticulous care on the nature of enlightenment that manifests when one attains the experience of enlightenment, described as “at the moment when your entire mind is tranquil, with all its characteristics exhausted.” The term “one mind” refers to the absolute truth that cannot be reduced to any relative existence (which is also one’s own

Buddha-nature), where one realizes the non-duality of self and truth and experiences the serene tranquility of a state where all distinctions and delusions have ceased. Keizan zenji repeatedly explains in *Denkoroku* that enlightenment’s nature is glimpsed through this experience, where discrimination ceases and tranquility prevails, as quoted.

The phrase “at the moment of one mind’s tranquility, all phenomena are exhausted” that describes the nature of enlightenment is attributed to Master Hongzhi Zhengjue (Wanshi Shogaku) (1091-1157)¹⁴, who achieved remarkable success in the Silent Illumination (*Shikantaza*) practice within the Song Dynasty Caodong School. However, Keizan zenji extensively employs the term “Hongzhi” (宏智) in explaining the nature of enlightenment, not just in this passage. This use of “Hongzhi” in the *Denkoroku* has not been widely noted before, so it is worth paying attention to this aspect.

Looking at it this way, the distinctive feature of the lectures in *Denkoroku* lies in Keizan zenji’s elucidation of the path to enlightenment (the stages of practice leading to realization) that Dogen zenji did not extensively detail, and his explanation of the nature of enlightenment using the words of the eminent predecessors of the Soto Zen tradition such as Hongzhi Zhengjue.

Of course, discussing the path to enlightenment and the nature of enlightenment is not uncommon in Zen Buddhism in general. However, it holds significant importance that Keizan zenji expounded upon the fundamental principles of Zen Buddhism. This is because Dogen

zenji did not explicitly outline the foundational principles of Zen; instead, he developed his own interpretations based on thorough study and understanding of Song Dynasty Zen thought during his studies in Southern Song China. While Dogen zenji's philosophical charm undoubtedly lies in his originality, Keizan zenji understood that Dogen zenji's ability to present unique insights was grounded in his thorough learning of Song Dynasty Zen thought. Therefore, it can be inferred that Keizan zenji aimed to articulate the fundamentals of Zen in *Denkoroku*.

Therefore, the fact that Keizan zenji expounded upon the fundamental principles of Zen based on the teachings of Hongzhi Zhengjue's Caodong Zen (Silent Illumination Zen) signifies not only the opening of the path to enlightenment but also the opening of a gateway to understanding Dogen zenji.

Before Keizan zenji gave the lectures in *Denkoroku*, it seems that the Soto Zen school lacked a unified interpretation of Dogen zenji and a doctrinal foundation for interpreting his teachings. With Keizan zenji's introduction of the basic principles of Silent Illumination Zen, the Keizan lineage acquired a philosophical foundation for its teachings.

Moreover, it is important not to overlook that *Denkoroku* is filled with words of encouragement for practitioners. For instance, one may encounter the following words:

“Even in the present day, if one continuously pursues the way and thoroughly understands it in detail, then Sākyamuni will immediately appear in the world.” (Chapter 1 Mahakashapa)¹⁵

“Long ago, you planted good karmic roots in abundance and connected deeply with the good karma of prajna. As a result of that, you have gathered together in this community of followers of Daijo, where truly it is as if you are lined up shoulder to shoulder with Kashapa and meeting knee to knee with Ananda. Therefore, although we are guest and host for one day, you will spend your whole lives as buddhas and ancestors.” (Chapter 3 Sanavasin)¹⁶

“Therefore, every single person, without exception, is the way. Every single phenomenon is nothing other than mind.” (Chapter 9 Buddhmitra)¹⁷

“Truly, if one strives as if with a beginner's mind, who will not become a person of the way?” (Chapter 14 Nagarjuna)¹⁸

In the lectures of *Denkoroku*, while expounding upon the fundamental principles of Zen, Keizan zenji continually encouraged practitioners that if they diligently practiced like the buddha and ancestors,¹⁹ the day would surely come when they would understand. This encouragement led to a succession of individuals within his disciples achieving enlightenment. For example, Gasan Joseki attained enlightenment in the year following the Dharma talks in *Denkoroku* (1301), and Meiho Sotetsu attained enlightenment two years thereafter (1302).

From this perspective, the introduction of *Denkoroku* enabled the Keizan lineage to achieve “regeneration of enlightenment.” Those who attained enlightenment and embodied Zen teachings naturally became candidates for succession within the lineage. The increase in

the number of potential successors who had realized enlightenment played a significant role in the institutionalization of the Soto Zen school within the wider Buddhist community.

In discussing “the establishment of a mechanism for stable reproduction of successors” (Point III), it was mentioned that Keizan zenji instituted the transmission ceremonies. This development can be attributed to the increase in the number of disciples who attained enlightenment under Keizan zenji’s guidance, as seen in *Denkoroku*.

To institutionalize the Soto Zen school, merely organizing administrative structures is insufficient. True institutionalization, or “denomination,” is achieved by solidifying both organizational structures and the doctrinal and ideological principles that form the core beliefs of the denomination.

Having outlined Keizan zenji’s philosophy thus far, it would also be beneficial to provide an overview of the ideological developments in the Soto Zen school after Keizan zenji. Under Keizan zenji’s guidance, disciples such as Meiho Sotetsu and Gasan Joseki emerged, rapidly expanding the Soto Zen school’s doctrinal influence. The foundational texts relied upon by his disciples were *Denkoroku* and “Wanshi Roku” (*Record of Hongzhi*). Furthermore, the interests of his followers shifted from the path to enlightenment (“satori no michi”) to the moment of enlightenment (“satori no shunkan”), marking a clear objective of achieving enlightenment. This shift in focus reflected a broader trend in medieval Japan from the Northern and Southern

Courts Period (1392) to the early Edo Period, known as “Koan Zen” (distinct from the Koan Zen of Song Dynasty China).²⁰ After the establishment of Koan Zen, *Denkoroku* gradually lost prominence, and Chinese Zen texts such as “The Record of Hongzhi and “Zenrin Ruiju” became highly valued instead.

In summary, understanding the intellectual history of medieval Soto Zen involves considering two major trends: 1) from Dogen zenji to Keizan zenji, and 2) from Keizan zenji to Koan Zen. These shifts provide a framework for effective analysis of the development of Soto Zen thought during this period.

To summarize, Keizan zenji not only paved the way for understanding Dogen zen but also marked the beginning of the flourishing of “Koan Zen” after him. In this sense, the considerable influence Keizan zenji had on the intellectual history of the Soto Zen school deserves to be reassessed.

Conclusion

In the above article, I have outlined six key contributions that Keizan zenji made to the Soto Zen sect. He innovatively addressed various challenges faced by Dogen zenji’s disciples, established a foundation in both ideology and rituals, and organized the institutional structure of the sect, thereby achieving the institutionalization of the Soto Zen sect. At the heart of these achievements was undoubtedly a spirit of gratitude to Dogen zenji’s teachings, ensuring the perpetuation of his legacy. Without Keizan zenji’s contributions, it is doubtful that the Soto Zen school would have survived to the present day.

In contemporary Japan, with its declining population, Soto Zen temples are at a significant crossroads. While reforms are necessary to overcome current challenges and progress further, there is much to learn from Keizan zenji's bold approach and exemplary direction.

Moreover, Zen Buddhism (ZEN) has spread to various countries worldwide in modern times, each adapting to its unique contemporary context. It is hoped that the insights from Keizan zenji's teachings introduced in this essay can provide valuable guidance in these diverse global settings.

¹ Ishikawa Rikizan, "Reconsidering the Three Generations Debate: Focus on the Socio-Economic Background of Dogen Zenji's Monastic Community," published in "Shūgaku Kenkyū" (Studies in Buddhist Studies), issue 31, in 1989, on page 172.

² Support for Eihei Temple received a new boost when Giun Zenji, the fifth abbot and former head priest of Hokyoji, took residence there in the year Shōwa 3 (1314). He awaited the commencement of assistance from the Ijira family (supporters of Hokyoji Temple) who were newly emerging local landowners.

³ Sato Shuko, "Biographical Materials of Kyo-o Unryo: Commentary on 'The Record of Zen Master Butsurin Keinichi's Life' and 'The Stele Inscription of Zen Master Butsurin Keinichi'" published in the "Annual Report of the Komazawa University Zen Research Institute," Issue 12, in 2001, on page 89.

⁴ Footnote (23): Dissertation, p. 107, original Chinese text.

⁵ Footnote (23): Dissertation, p. 92.

⁶ Please refer to "Sanzo's Testament: Document for Leaving Behind Traces at Temples" (Reference (19): Book, pp. 12-13).

⁷ Please refer to Footnote (26). As pointed out by Mr. Tamura Koya, in "Founding of the First Dojo: The Establishment of Shikoku's Jomanji," published in the "Buddhist Times" on June 6, 2024, the initial temple where Keizan Zenji served as the first abbot, Jomanji, is not included among the temples associated with Keizan Zenji remains. The subsequent history of Jomanji after Keizan Zenji moved to Daijoji remains unclear, posing many unanswered questions for future research.

⁸ Please refer to the "Document for Future Relations" (from "Collected Writings of Keizan Zenji," published by Sojiji Temple, 1974, Section 9).

⁹ Ikeda Rosan, "From Tendai Teaching to Dogen and Keizan Studies" (in "Journal of the Faculty of Buddhist Studies, Komazawa University," issue 43, 2012).

¹⁰ "Dogen Zenji Complete Works," Volume 2, "Shōbōgenzō: Ango" (Shunshusha, 1993), p. 236.

¹¹ My article "A New Interpretation of the Biography of Keizan Zenji (Part 25)" can be found in "Chōryū," vol. 75-7, published in 2023, on page 42.

¹² Dogen Zenji discusses aspects of "enlightenment experience" and "the boundaries of enlightenment" in a skillful manner in "Gakudō-yōjinshū" (Volume 5 of Dogen Zenji Complete Works, published by Shunshusha in 1989, p. 36) and "Bendōwa" (Reference (30): Book, p. 474), but he does not actively expound upon them.

¹³ Footnote (3): Book, pp. 126-127.

¹⁴ "Wanshi Zenji Koroku," Volume 6, "Myoshū Tendō Kaku Osho's Dharma Words" (Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō, Volume 48, p. 76).

¹⁵ Footnote (3): Book, p. 23.

¹⁶ Footnote (3): Book, p. 35.

¹⁷ Footnote (3): Book, p. 67.

¹⁸ Footnote (3): Book, p. 103.

¹⁹ Encouragement to practitioners can also be found in Dogen Zenji's "Shobogenzo Zuimonki."

²⁰ Please refer to my article mentioned in Footnote 31.



My Footnotes on Zazen (28) Viewing Zazen Through the Lens of the Alexander Technique (3)

Rev. Issho Fujita

In English, there is an *expression Taking root to fly*. This means that in order to *fly* upwards, one must first root downwards. Meredith helped me experience this by gently touching my feet, shins, and thighs while suggesting it with words. Through this, she guided me to feel grounded. In the practice and instruction of zazen, we tend to focus on the upper body and fixate on the external form of that part. However, it is necessary to pay more attention to the quality with which we place our lower body—how we position it on the cushion or mat before anything else. We need to develop ways of speaking and touching that assist in deepening our grounding. Only when the upper body is supported by a well-grounded lower body can we relax deeply, maintaining balance while reaching upwards.

Next, Meredith introduced the fundamental lesson of the Alexander Technique: balancing the head at the top of the cervical spine (the highest part of the neck). First, in a standing position, she placed her hands on my head, forehead, back, and chest, suggesting that the head should be balanced on top of the neck. She said, "Most people think of the head and neck as a single unit, but for good movement, it's better to think of them separately. The head is roughly at the height of the earlobes, balanced on the neck. It's much higher than you may have thought.



Try moving your head slowly forward and backward. Pay attention to whether you're only moving the head and neck joints (atlanto-occipital joint) and not bending your neck. It should be a very subtle movement.”

The center of gravity of the head is located in front of the pivot point of the skull at the top of the cervical spine. Therefore, without correction, the head tends to lean forward (this is why people tend to nod off, with their head tilting forward). To balance the forward movement caused by the weight of the head, we must pull the back of the head downward. The deep muscles at the back of the skull, called the suboccipital muscles, are responsible for this. In the Alexander Technique, it is very important to maintain this delicate balance in movement. When the head is balanced through the fine movements of the suboccipital muscles, the muscles in the neck and back lengthen, the torso relaxes, and the ribs become free, activating the mechanism of breathing.

In “Bendoho” (*The Model for Engaging the Way*) in *Dogen Zenji's Pure Standards for the Zen Community*, Dogen Zenji emphasizes the importance of the posture in zazen, stating things like “the top of the head should be steady” and “your neck should not bend forward from your back,” which are based on these principles. To sit properly, we must meet these conditions, but often, we tend to unconsciously contract the surface muscles in the upper part of the suboccipital muscles, pulling the head unnecessarily backward and down. Therefore, it is necessary to prevent these bad habits from developing.

Alexander Technique teachers often place their hands on the back of the head to prevent the unconscious movements of pulling the head backward and downward, offering feedback on the state of the head. They help guide us to find new ways of moving—standing, sitting, walking—while keeping the neck free and the head moving forward and upwards.

After working with the standing posture, Meredith asked me to walk around the room while keeping the same feeling in my head. She lightly placed her hands on the back of my head and gently pushed me forward as I walked. After letting go, she encouraged me to walk freely in different directions, asking, “How does it feel?” I responded, “It feels like I’ve become a little taller... and my feet are moving in sync with my head.”

She then asked, “Can you show me how you sit during zazen?” When I sat on the zafu in the zazen posture, Meredith immediately placed her hand on the back of my head and gave the instruction: “Keep your neck relaxed, lengthen your back, and allow your hips and knees to separate.” The process of sitting on the zafu must be treated as the beginning of zazen itself, with mindfulness and care. The transition between standing and zazen, or between zazen and standing, should be done in a way appropriate to zazen posture.

While sitting in the half-lotus posture, Meredith gently touched my head, neck, ribcage, back, waist, and pelvis as she listened with her hands, as if examining the balance of my body. “The body should rise balanced on the tripod

made by the sit bones and knees. That's good, you're not pushing the lumbar spine forward and arching the back too much, like many people do. But you're tightening your chest a bit too much. Try not to lift the lower ribs so much and let your front body rest. You'll notice the middle of your back moves slightly backward." She pressed on different parts of my chest, sides, and back. "Relax and gently accept this pressure. You can feel how much softer and freer your ribs are, moving in all directions—front, back, sides, and up and down, right? Not just the ribs, but in zazen, the whole body should be free to move without being stiff. It's not about staying still by force, but by allowing yourself to be still without holding on."

The last part of her instruction was: *be movable without moving, be still without holding*. I found this to be very meaningful.

She then showed me a skeletal model and explained, "If you look at the spine, you can see that the body's weight is designed to be supported in the front of the thick vertebrae, not the back." When I imagined this, I felt a slight loosening and stretching in the back.

Looking at me sitting in the zazen posture, she said, "Ask yourself: *What unnecessary tension or tightness can I let go of?...* As the balance becomes more refined, your sitting will become easier, your breath will become freer, and your life will become more vibrant. Being free in relation to the environment means being in a state where you're 'not prepared for anything, but ready for everything'... Do you understand what I mean?"

The original English for this phrase was *you are prepared for nothing and ready for anything*. Though both "prepared" and "ready" are close in meaning, the phrase is quite paradoxical and Zen-like. I interpreted it to mean that if you brace yourself for a specific thing, you won't be able to respond quickly when something different happens. I then recalled a phrase from Michizo Noguchi, the founder of Noguchi Gymnastics, who often said, "The muscles that will work in the next moment are the ones that are resting now." I interpreted Meredith's words in this context. In martial arts, there is a posture called "natural posture," which refers to being able to respond instantly to any movement of an opponent, with no bias or gaps and a high degree of freedom. I found that this concept aligns with what Meredith said.

Upon hearing this, I focused on noticing where I held unnecessary tension or tightness in my body during zazen. I gently tried to let go of these feelings of constriction and resistance. I adjusted the position of my hands and feet, shifted my center of gravity slightly, and moved my body slowly to find a more relaxed sitting posture. Another method I often use to release tightness is to visualize breathing into those areas where I want to loosen up, inhaling and exhaling in those places.

Regarding zazen, I now believe that instead of trying to conform to an objectively ideal posture or external model, we should approach it by finding the right posture for ourselves, moment by moment, in each session, in consultation with our own bodily sensations. Instead of mentally deciding on the "ideal" posture from the

start, we should listen to our body and search carefully. Therefore, it might be fine to take the entire forty minutes of a zazen period just to explore and search for this posture. The practice of "sitting correctly with bones and muscles," as described by the late Rev. Kosho Uchiyama, is not about achieving a "perfect" model posture and maintaining it rigidly whenever we sit in zazen. It is about sincerely and freshly exploring the pos-

ture that is "correct" at that moment, listening to the body and patiently pursuing this process of discovery. This process is akin to tuning a musical instrument, adjusting it toward the right note while listening intently. In such practice, we must avoid rushing or being impatient, as doing so will prevent us from sensing the delicate and subtle sensations that arise from the body.

NEWS

October 4~6, 2024

Europe Zen Workshop was held at Zendonien in Blois, France.

October 11, 2024

Hawaii Soto Zen Conference was held at Shoboji in Hawaii, U.S.A.

October 23, 2024

Association of Soto Zen North America Conference was held at Zenshuji, in Los Angeles, U.S.A

October 23.24, 2023

North America Zen Workshop was held at Zenshuji, in Los Angeles, U.S.A

November 6, 2024. January 10. March 11, 2025

South America Zen Workshop was held at Zoom

November 29, 2024

Europe Soto Zen Conference was held at Zoom

February 14~22, 2025

Baika classes by Sotoshu Specially Dispatched Baika Teacher were held at 5 places in Hawaii.

February 23, 2025

Hawaii Soto Zen Conference was held at Shoboji in Hawaii, U.S.A.

March 6, 2025

Europe Soto Zen Conference was held at Zoom

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Please address all inquiries or comments to: Soto Zen Buddhism International Center
1691 Laguna Street, San Francisco, CA 94115 Phone: 415-567-7686 Fax: 415-567-0200