

**PART I**  
**Guidelines for Studying the Way**  
**2014 Householder Sesshin**

Today we begin the first talk on Dogen Zenji's Gakudo Yojin-shu which is translated as Guidelines for Studying the Way. Dogen is one of the most important figures in Japanese Zen and especially in the Soto tradition.

In this essay he speaks about important teachings which he brought back from China to Japan for monastics to study. He was in his 30's at the time. But these teachings are something we should know and practice with as well. They are as sound now as they were in the 1400's when Dogen was alive.

Dogen begins with a straight ahead statement: **"You should arouse the thought of Enlightenment. The thought of enlightenment has many names but they all refer to one and the same mind."** Arousing the thought of enlightenment in Sanskrit is called Bodhicitta which means Raising the Bodhi mind.

It is the moment when we say I must change my life, and so we set out on the road of a spiritual practice. But raising the mind of awakening is more than just a nice idea. It is not like taking up a hobby but closer to what happens after we hit bottom in our life. It is more like when we think I don't want to live life this way anymore. It may unfold when we lose something that is precious to us or we have a serious illness or our plans for how our life will go have gone completely out the window and as a result we make a serious vow to practice. Wanting a way of living that is more harmonious. So raising the Bodhi mind is when we make a vow to wake up and practice the Way no matter what. That is rousing the thought of enlightenment.

Then he quotes Nagajuna **"The mind that fully sees into the uncertainty of life and death is called the thought of enlightenment."**

This is about our realizing that the world is topsy turvy ...complicated and impossible to figure out...that things are constantly shifting and changing, arising and disappearing. I think we have all had this experience?

This realization is different from the self-centered notion that if I just had it together everything would be alright. That if I were more, better, or different then I could have a nice stable life. This is a delusion you see. Life is chaotic not stable. It is changeable moment to moment. The nature of things is impermanence.

And when we realize this we begin to consider "I have to change my thinking here, I need to live differently". And so we enter a practice like Zen.

Dogen then says **"thus if we maintain this mind, it can become the thought of enlightenment."**

So Dogen is encouraging us to see that this great doubt about the way we have been viewing our life about the way things are should be maintained and cultivated. Great doubt means great questioning about how we've been thinking and living.

Indeed he says **"when you understand the discontinuity, the notion of self does not come into being. Ideas of name and gain do not arise."**

When we actually look and realize that all things are of the nature to change, we stop searching for some stable experience of things staying the same or the notion of a substantive self. Upon seeing the truth of impermanence we begin to practice letting go and acceptance of change. Dogen is asking us to look closely at how we hold on and that relationship to our suffering and he tells us to do it now. Like our evening chant at the end of zazen, "time passes swiftly and opportunity is lost". He says **"practice the way as though your head was on fire"**.

This to me is about great determination to awaken...to not give up or turn away. We're not sure of what we're doing but we go into daisan anyway and offer our insight and no matter how off we are; no matter how many times we are rung out to "work with this more" we go back again until we see it. So it is about knock me down seven times ... I get up eight times.

Then he speaks of hearing a song of praise sung by a mythological god and bird. He says **"treat it as if the evening breeze was brushing against your ears"**. In other words enjoy it but don't cling to the

experience. Of course this is true for all our experiences. We should enjoy them but not grab or attach to them. They are like shadows moving across the room or the call of the chickadee. We smile and let it go. Just because all things are impermanent doesn't mean we shouldn't enjoy them.

Then he says: **“even if you read the sutras of the expedient or complete teaching without throwing away name and gain it cannot be called arousing the thought of enlightenment”.**

So, you can read all the sutras you want, study all you want but if you fall into the pit of trying to gain fame and profit you're caught and you lose the way. There is nothing wrong with reading and studying but Dogen asks that we look at our agenda here.

We hear so many people making statements about the enlightened state, what it is and isn't but Dogen says if you are holding on to some idea of gain you have missed it altogether this is not the Way but a strategy for enhancing the small self...the ego. I think regarding this each of us should look deeply at what notions and beliefs we hold onto... and see what happens when we question them.

We can experience wonderful insights about the nature of things, but first...raise the Bodhi mind...everything else will fall into place later as a result.

**“Just forget yourself for now”, he says “and practice inwardly”. We see the sixty-two views are based on a self. When the notion of a self-arises, sit quietly and just contemplate it. This is one with the thought of enlightenment. Is there a real basis inside or outside your body now? Your body with hair and skin is just inherited from your father and mother. From beginning to end a drop of blood or lymph is empty... none of these are the self. Deluded people are attached to them; enlightened people are free of them.**

**You figure there is self where there is no self. You attach to birth where there is no birth. You do not practice the Buddha Way. You do not cut off the mind road which should be cut off.”** I see this, as developing awareness of the places and ideas that we get stuck by, that we hold on to dearly to them. So, although we don't get rid of these notions, and stuck spots when we practice the Way, and realize the teaching of impermanence we find we're not interested in them so much. Instead we are more committed to seeing what is beyond our self-centered thoughts and notions and that is a big difference. So, all other possibilities for insight and freedom come out of our commitment to wake up.

The enlightened state is seen by taking away all things that obscure it, it is not an obtained special state, so, take away enhancing the ego self and all the ideas around it. Let go of grasping and trying to have things the way you want them to be and see how it feels because when you do that what is left is acceptance and love for the way things are, just as they are. And this is what we work at in both daily practice and sesshin. So, when the veils or layers of self-centered views are seen through, love is there. Often in Zen it is called Great Intimacy but in my view that is another word for love... so, go home tonight, cultivate that practice.