

SHÔJI

Life and death – Dogen Zenji (1200-1253)

If the Buddha is within life and death, there is no life and death.

Then again, if there is no Buddha within life and death, we are not deluded by life and death.

These are the expressions of Chia-shan and Ting-shan, two Zen masters who walked the way, so their words should not be taken lightly.

Their meaning must be clearly understood by all those who would free themselves from life and death. If you seek the Buddha outside of life and death, it is like turning the cart to the North and heading for Etsu, or looking South to see the North Star.

You will gather the cause of life and death more and more - and lose the way to liberation. If you understand that life and death are themselves Nirvana, there is no need for avoiding life and death or seeking Nirvana. Then, for the first time, you will have the possibility to free yourself from life and death.

Do not fall into the error of thinking that there is a change from life to death. Life is one position of time, and it already has a before and after. So in Buddhism it is said that life itself is no-life. Death is also a position in time, and has a before and after. So it is said that death itself is no-death.

When it is called life, there is nothing but life. When it is called death, there is nothing but death. If life comes, this is life. If death comes, this is death. There is no reason to try to escape from it, and there is no reason to cling to it either.

This life and death is the life of the Buddha.

If you try to throw it away you lose the life of the Buddha. If you cling to it you also lose the life of the Buddha, and you will obstruct the activity of Buddha. When you neither deny nor seek, you are manifesting the mind of the Buddha. But don't try to measure this by your mind. Don't try to explain it by your words. When you let go of your body and mind and forget them completely and you throw yourself into the Buddha's abode, then everything is done from the side of Buddha and you just follow along without effort or anxiety - you break free from life's suffering and are Buddha yourself. How can you then have any hindrance in your mind?

There is a very easy way to be a Buddha: Do not do any evil. Do not try to cling to life and death but, with deep compassion, work for all beings. Respect your elders and sympathize with those younger. When you do neither deny things nor seek them or think and worry about them - then you are called a Buddha. Don't look for anything else.

Shôbôgenzô Shôji