

REPRINT FROM THE WINDBELL,
DECEMBER 1962

by Shunryu Suzuki, Roshi

The more we attempt to manage religious activity, the more we lose our fundamental way. The more we study the teaching of Buddhism as if it were philosophy, the more we lose the original teaching.

The founder of Eiheiji Monastery, Dogen Zengi, respected students who sincerely practised zazen rather than intelligent or learned students. Dogen emphasized organizing everyday life as the practice of Zen. He felt that this was the proper activity for Buddhists. When he spoke of the basic teaching of Buddhism, the transiency of life, he stressed it as an actual fact and not as a teaching of the sutras.

Dogen Zengi lost his father when he was three and his mother when he was eight. His mother was a Fujiwara, the most eminent family of the time. She understood well the teaching of transiency, and she wanted Dogen to be a sincere priest. He decided to follow her will. After his mother died and he sat by her cold body, he reached a profound understanding of impermanency, watching a few lines of incense smoke drift. Dogen said, "I can walk on the edge of a white blade, I can do without food and drink, but it is not possible for me to forget my mother's last words."

In *Zuimonki** it is stated that Dogen said, "In order to have a strong way-seeking mind, it is necessary to see the transiency of life. This actual fact of life is not something conceivable in our brain or something to be dwelled on as an object of meditation. It is an actual fact. You should not wait even for Buddha's teaching."

In *Denki*** it is stated that Dogen said, "When we are not sincere enough to be Buddhists, there is a difference between the intelligent and the dull . . . If you lose your life (Buddahood can only be attained when you have human life) you cannot have your life again. This way is Buddha's true teaching. We should encourage ourselves with great holy desire and devote ourselves to Buddhism under the guidance of a true master."

And again in *Zuimonki* he says in regard to right activity, "Some people think building a temple or pagoda means that Buddhism is prospering. This attitude is a great mistake. Even a building of gold and precious stone is not the prosperity of Buddhism. The only prosperity of Buddhism is the practice of Buddhism, without wasting a single moment."

* *Zuimonki* is a book written by Dogen's main disciple, Ejo, after Dogen's death.

** *Denki* is a biography of Dogen Zengi.