

Article

# Just Sitting and Just Saying: The Hermeneutics of Dōgen's Realization-Based View of Language

Steven Heine

Department of Religions Studies, Florida International University, Miami, FL 33199, USA; heines@fiu.edu

**Abstract:** This paper explicates the complex relationship between contemplative practice and enlightened activity conducted both on and off the meditative cushion as demonstrated in the approach of the Sōtō Zen Buddhist founder Dōgen (1200–1253). I examine Dōgen's intricate views regarding how language, or what I refer to as just saying, can and should be used in creative yet often puzzling and perplexing ways to express the experience of self-realization by reflecting the state of non-thinking that is attained through unremitting seated meditation or just sitting (*shikan taza*). In light of the sometimes-forbidding obscurity of his writing, as well as his occasional admonitions against a pre-occupation with literary pursuits, I show based on a close reading of primary sources that Dōgen's basic hermeneutic standpoint seeks to overcome conventional sets of binary oppositions involving uses of language. These polarities typically separate the respective roles of teacher and learner by distinguishing sharply between delusion and insight, truth and untruth, right and wrong, or speech and silence, and thereby reinforce a hierarchical, instrumental, and finite view of discourse. Instead, Dōgen inventively develops expressions that emphasize the non-hierarchical, realization-based, and eminently flexible functions of self-extricating rhetoric such that, according to his paradoxical teaching, "entangled vines are disentangled by using nothing other than entwined creepers," or as a deceptively straightforward example, "the eyes are horizontal, and the nose is vertical."

**Keywords:** Dōgen; Sōtō Zen; *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*; *zazen*; non-thinking; *kōan*; *waka*; hermeneutics; Zen pivot; realizational model



**Citation:** Heine, Steven. 2021. Just Sitting and Just Saying: The Hermeneutics of Dōgen's Realization-Based View of Language. *Religions* 12: 81. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020081>

Academic Editor: George Wrisley

Received: 20 December 2020

Accepted: 24 January 2021

Published: 28 January 2021

**Publisher's Note:** MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



**Copyright:** © 2021 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

As founder of the Sōtō Zen sect in medieval Japan, whose rigorous form of contemplative practice continues to thrive at several dozen specialized training monasteries (*senmon dōjō*) in addition to numerous temples and centers located throughout the world, Dōgen (道元, 1200–1253) is especially well known for his distinctive approach to attaining enlightenment based on the sustained practice of "just sitting" (*shikan taza* 只管打坐). This technique refers to a purposeless, yet continuing method of seated meditation (*zazen*) enacted to foster the awakening of non-thinking (*hishiryō* 非思量), which is a reflective state of understanding beyond conventional calculation that can be applied to all activities associated with cloistral discipline as part of the daily monastic round of ceremonies and chores (Uchiyama 2014; see also Akiyama 1935).<sup>1</sup> An emphasis on the realization of meditative awareness, or non-thinking, is proclaimed in various writings beginning with the *Universal Recommendation for Zazen Practice (Fukanzazengi)*, a proclamation that was composed in 1227 when Dōgen first returned from a four-year trip to China, where he attained enlightenment. The text was revised six years later in an impressive example of Dōgen's formal calligraphy that is today prized as a National Treasure of Japan (Eubanks 2016).<sup>2</sup> According to this essay, which alludes to a prominent Zen dialogue that Dōgen

<sup>1</sup> Uchiyama's book is based on the life and thought of Sawaki Kōdō, the eminent twentieth century Sōtō monk who constantly traveled to various temple all over Japan promoting the practice of *shikan taza* for both monastics and lay followers.

<sup>2</sup> The original text was revised a third time in 1243 for inclusion in his *Extensive Record*.

interprets extensively in the essay, “The Lancet of Zazen” (*Zazenshin*), by parsing two key terms featuring a negative prefix (either *fu* or *hi*) with varying implications: “One must learn to think (*shiryō* 思量) of not thinking (*fushiryō* 不思議). What kind of thinking is not thinking? It is non-thinking (*hishiryō*), which is the essential virtuosity of seated meditation. This constitutes complete consciousness here and now that is unattainable so long as one remains caught up in conceptual traps and mental hindrances” (*Dōgen* 5.6).<sup>3</sup> Dōgen further explains that non-thinking reflects neither a contrast to nor a synthesis of thinking vis-à-vis not thinking because it is “always already underlying and permeating those mental activities” (*Dōgen* 1.104), even when this is not perceived or recognized by the practitioner.

The aim of this article is to show, based on a close reading of primary sources by Dōgen and related Zen texts, that Dōgen’s focus on maintaining dedicated and determined meditation on the cushion, which serves as the main gateway to liberation from ignorance and attachments occurring off the introspective seat, stands on a par with the equally valuable function of what I refer to as the practice of “just saying.” Dōgen thereby recognizes and advocates the vital role of language in the enactment and expression of awakening. This experience is based on carrying out a Zen “pivot” (機, Ch. *ji*, Jp. *ki*), or the process of self-realization attained through adopting a thoroughly flexible outlook whereby a teacher becomes aware that whatever is spoken needs to be constantly adjusted to the needs of shifting pedagogical conditions (Zhou 1999; see also Zhu 2011). From the standpoint of the pivot, also referred to in Daoist thought as the “hinge of the Way,” a teacher clarifies his thoughts and expressions to address whether a disciple or rival is, for example, acting either overly positive and affirmative or excessively negative and nihilistic, even if this process often involves giving contradictory responses. The adverb, as for the phrase just sitting, implies “exactly or only” using that one method. However, this does not represent an exclusive sense disregarding or repudiating related activities. Rather, it conveys the notion of unimpeded single-minded concentration that encompasses exterior functions as emblematic of inner realization. That outlook reflects the creative and skillful use of language, i.e., phrasing that is deliberately open-ended and ambiguous in order to meet the needs of various learners by helping them realize their own awakening (He 2001; see also Girard 2000).

As suggested by Hee-Jin Kim, who wrote the first comprehensive scholarly analysis in English of Dōgen’s thought, “The single most original and seminal aspect of Dōgen’s Zen is his treatment of the role of language in Zen soteriology” (Kim 2004, p. 59; see also Kim 1975). In examining how expressiveness at once contributes to and reflects the attainment of enlightenment (*satori*) by liberating the mind from conventional entanglements, Kim emphasizes that the “reason of the Way” (*dōri*) is the basis of Dōgen’s approach in that, “for all his admonitions against play with words, he was deeply poetic, and, as a medieval Japanese, he could not have been otherwise. To Dōgen, to philosophize was not only to think but also to feel, not only to rationalize but also to poeticize” (Kim 2004).

The method of expression endorsed emphatically in Dōgen’s various works evokes creative forms of speaking or, to coin another term, “non-speaking” (*higogen* 非語言), so as to disclose the multivalent layers of meaning of the Zen pivot through using inventive rhetorical devices. These techniques include chiasmic sentences, displaying and remarking on nonverbal symbols of authenticity like the master’s walking staff or flywhisk, inversions of conventional meaning, paradoxical passages, philosophical puns, stunning images, seemingly absurd or contrariwise repetitive and self-evident utterances, tautological wording, and more. Dōgen’s goal is to establish and develop the underlying realization-based interconnectedness of just sitting and just saying as conveyed in his many essays, homilies, letters, sermons, speeches, and related forms of discourse, including prose as well as poetry (Heine 1997). No matter what speaking or writing technique is used, he adamantly

<sup>3</sup> All citations from the collected writings are from *Dōgen’s Collected Works* (Dōgen Zenji zenshū). 1989–1993. Edited by Kawamura Kōdō, et al., 7 vols. Tokyo: Shunjūsha, abbreviated as *Dōgen*.

supports the efficacy and necessity of mobilizing expressions for the sake of disclosing his understanding of the Zen pivot in relation to the levels of understanding of his followers.

## 2. On Overcoming Dualities

Hee-Jin Kim's analysis is clearly demonstrated by a key passage in the essay on "Discerning the Way" (*Bendōwa*), which in many editions is the opening fascicle of his masterwork, the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye (Shōbōgenzō)* (Dōgen vols 1–2; see also [Sōtōshu Zensho 1970–1973](#), vols 1–2; *Taishō*, volume 82;<sup>4</sup> and [Mizuno 1990–1993](#)). Here Dōgen deals with the inexhaustibility of language as a way of conveying the role of meditation in disclosing the [Buddha] Way (*dōtoku*). Dōgen argues, "Although the possibility of enlightenment is allotted amply to everyone, if we have not practiced *zazen* properly it does not appear, and when we do not realize awakening it is not attained. Let it go and it fills the hand: how could it ever be limited by one versus many? Speak of enlightenment and it fills the mouth: vertically and horizontally, it is without any boundary" (*Dōgen* 2.460). Dōgen concludes the passage by suggesting that the experience of awakening does not suffer restrictions delimiting the capacity to resourcefully offer innovative expressions in various teaching activities ([Kurebayashi 1970](#)).

A central goal of Dōgen's use of innovative expressions is to challenge the status of entrenched dualities. For example, in another detailed study Kim examines more than half a dozen types of Dōgen's imaginative rhetorical techniques, including the transposition of lexical elements. A key example occurs when Dōgen's responds to the famous adage of master Mazu, "Mind itself is Buddha," in the fascicle by that name (*Sokushin zebutsu*). Here, Dōgen switches the order of the characters and says we must investigate, as four of twenty-four possible variations according to later commentators, that "mind itself Buddha is" (*shinsoku butsuze*), "Buddha itself is mind" (*butsusoku ze shin*), "itself mind Buddha is" (*sokushin butsuze*), and "is Buddha mind itself" (*zebutsu shinsoku*) (*Dōgen* 1.57). The last of these utterances blurs the illusory line between a declarative statement and an inquiry in a linguistic move typical of Dōgen's novel interpretations of Zen sayings that will be examined in a later section of this paper. This technique helps overcome the typical view that there are winners and losers based on right versus wrong answers in traditional exchanges.

A similar example of rhetorical innovation occurs in the essay on "Spring and Autumn" (*Shunjū*), in which Dōgen examines a set of commentaries on a dialogue attributed to the Chinese Sōtō master Dongshan concerning whether it is possible to avoid suffering extreme cold or heat. In this context, Dōgen mentions a saying by another predecessor that compares the source exchange involving Dongshan to playing a game of chess (*go*) by indicating that an opponent who fails to respond effectively to their rival's initial board move will easily be deceived and lose the advantage (*Dōgen* 2.411). Instead of elaborating on this meaning of the analogy, Dōgen radically shifts the focus from the matter of gaining advantage versus disadvantage by remarking that if he would allow an opponent an eight-move handicap, which was a typical gesture at the time, this would mean "there is no longer any contest" (*Dōgen* 2.412) because the chess players are now of equal status. The two participants, he says, are thereby mutually engaged in a process of illuminating self and other by working through "mistake after mistake" (*shōshaku jushaku*) together until the "right mistake" is eventually made for their mutual benefit ([Morimoto 1989](#); see also [Odagiri 2016](#)). He compares this interactive situation to that of mud wrapped in mud, suggesting the working through of delusion, or a pearl hidden within another pearl, symbolizing the role of gaining insight. Whether engaged with deception or illumination, according to Dōgen's view, the participants in a dialogue are working in synch to eventually enlighten one another.

Dōgen's interpretative standpoint thus eliminates competition resulting in the defeat of one player for the sake of common support that leads to the awakening of both players

<sup>4</sup> *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (Taishō Tripitaka). 1962. Edited by Takakusu Junjirō and Watanabe Kaigyoku, 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō shinshū daizōkyō kankōkai, abbreviated as *Taishō*. First published 1924.

(Ishii 2012). This approach can be compared to the analysis of human interactions offered by James Carse, who argues there are two types of games that are typically played (Carse 1986). One type is the finite game, which is played for the purpose of winning a competition that is carried out from beginning to end in linear fashion until victory is declared. The other kind of game, according to Carse, is the infinite game, in which the players continue to take part in the ongoing contest without any ulterior interest in reaching a set conclusion. This view represents a way of understanding how, for Dōgen, the limitless possibilities of language unfold in a non-instrumental fashion leading to the self-realization of all parties (Hori 2003; see also Lopez 2020).

As Dōgen suggests in an essay about what he learned while studying in China, “nothing is concealed in the entire universe” (*henkai fuzōzō*) (*Dōgen* 6.14). This saying, which also appears in case 99 of the *Blue Cliff Record* (Ch. *Biyānlū*, Jp. *Hekiganroku*) *kōan* collection, suggests that full disclosure is possible through creatively using words because, “In the fundamental design of manifesting the world, gold and jade play together, and in the realm of strategic actions, two savvy masters are like arrowheads meeting in midair. The entire universe is disclosed, which means that far and near are equally revealed and past and present are vividly integrated” (Cleary 1998, p. 494 modified). This case is also included as number 58 in Dōgen’s *300 Koan Case Collection* (*Shōbōgenzō sanbyakusoku*) (*Dōgen* 5.156-58).

Dōgen is aware, however, that authentic Zen language is so intricate and complicated that it is like “entangled vines [of discourse] that are being continuously disentangled by nothing other than entwined creepers” (*Dōgen* 1.420). This can be somewhat disconcerting or even off-putting for some readers, who may not be able to grasp the obscure citations and ambivalent allusions embedded in his work or to comprehend the ways he crosses back and forth between using Chinese lexis that are interfused with Japanese syntax and pronunciations. For example, Dōgen’s innovative wordplay transforms the word for sometimes (*uji*) into the philosophical implication of “all beings (u) are all times (ji).” Realizing that the complexity of his rhetoric was likely to be at least partially misconstrued, Dōgen offers a poetic comment featuring natural imagery on the prominent motto that Zen constitutes “a special transmission outside the scriptures” (*kyōge betsuden*):

<i>Araiso no</i>	The Dharma, like an oyster,
<i>Nami mo eyosenu</i>	Washed atop a high cliff.
<i>Takayowa ni</i>	Even waves crashing against,
<i>Kaki mo tsukubeki</i>	The reef-like coast, like words,
<i>Nori naraba koso</i>	May reach but cannot wash it away ( <i>Dōgen</i> 7.153).

In this verse, the symbolism of the oyster and waves presents an analogy depicting the relationship between the Dharma, or truth, and its relative manifestations exemplified by the vicissitude of waves. The oyster has been cast out of its setting by the flux of a particular surge of water but must inevitably return to its source for sustenance. Thus, the Dharma is not seen as a remote entity since it finds its place beyond the water precisely because of the perpetual motion of the breakers. The doctrines, sūtras, or proverbs expressed by Buddhist ancestors come to reside on a lofty peak, like the mollusk, and may seem separated from the motions of everyday life. This causes a chasm between the two realms, which struggle to join together again. Therefore, for Dōgen, the truly special aspect of Zen transmission reconnects the oyster and water by situating authentic spirituality within concrete existence and evoking this as the experiential basis for Zen discourse.

Dōgen creatively reads texts and bends language to enact and express his enlightenment as a model for disciples to at once follow and try to surpass. Nevertheless, because of concern for the appearance of convolution, on some occasions Dōgen endorses an apparently opposite perspective by enunciating deliberately direct, albeit cryptic, pronouncements. A prominent example is an eloquent passage from a sermon included in the *Extensive Record* (*Eihei kōroku*) collection that he first delivered in the main hall of Kōshōji temple when it was opened in 1236. Here, Dōgen suggests that, because his Chinese mentor Rujing taught him that, “one’s eyes are horizontal (aligned with the navel), and one’s nose is vertical (aligned with the ears)” (*Dōgen* 4.22), he returned to Japan “empty-handed (*kushū*

*genkyō*)" (Dōgen 3.34). With "no specific teaching to proclaim," he announces, "Each dawn the sun rises in the east, / And every dusk the moon sets in the west. / Clouds lift and valleys are still, / Then rain drenches the nooks and crannies in the highlands." Moreover, "Every few years brings a lunar leap month, while roosters crow every day at the break of dawn" (Dōgen 3.34). In a similar instance he suggests, "In the early morning I eat gruel, and at noon I eat rice. Feeling strong I practice *zazen*, and when tired I go to sleep" (Dōgen 3.130). These common-sense statements complement the paradoxical musings Dōgen often uses and, in their own ways, they are just as perplexing yet inspiring for learners seeking to develop their own self-understanding.

### 3. Situating Dōgen's Standpoint in Theoretical and Historical Contexts

In section 5, I unpack some of the basic hermeneutic principles enunciated by Dōgen in his multifaceted elucidations that bring to light the intimate linkages connecting meditation and language as part of his distinctive method of training followers to develop non-thinking and non-speaking. Before doing this, I probe further where his view stands in relation to the celebrated motto that refers to Zen as a special transmission. On the one hand, Dōgen does occasionally devalue or criticize concern with rhetoric, as pointed out by numerous traditional commentators who are wary of overemphasizing Dōgen's literary achievements based on just saying because this focus may be seen to eclipse an emphasis on just sitting. These interpreters point out that in an evening sermon in the *Treasury of Miscellaneous Talks* (*Shōbōgenzō zuimonki*) Dōgen argues, "Zen monks are fond of studying literature these days, finding it an aid to writing verses and treatises. This is a mistake. Reading classics is a waste of time and should be abandoned" (Dōgen 7.90). However, that passage is accompanied in the same sermon by the contrary notion that encourages impromptu forms of expression since Dōgen also remarks, "Even if you cannot compose formal verse, just say what is in your heart."

The key to answer the question of whether he approves of the Zen motto about special transmission is to recognize that Dōgen's approach to just saying is never one-sidedly bound to either an affirmation or a rejection of the catchphrase that had become a central element of Zen sloganeering since the eleventh century. This unbounded outlook is a central aspect of the overall challenge to the many entrenched dualisms Dōgen seeks to overcome. Also, the motto's emergence was always somewhat disingenuous because it occurred at the same time that dozens of voluminous collections of aphorisms and commentaries by hundreds of masters were being published by Zen leaders in China over the course of several centuries. This was part of an effort to propagate Zen teachings among the elite class of scholar-officials who were intellectual leaders in the Song dynasty. They were intrigued by meditative discipline but most of all considered eloquent writing a necessary avenue for accessing the subtleties of non-thinking. Dōgen's position is deliberately ambivalent and flexible in navigating the unlimited capacities, along with confronting the severe drawbacks, embedded in all forms of verbal and non-verbal communication (Matsunami 2011). He promotes an astute level of insight that is continually cultivated by means of contemplative engagement with creative reflections on the significance of the Zen pivot that is disclosed in dialogues. Dōgen's view of just saying, or expressing enlightened awareness through exceptional uses of discourse, is compatible with the way just sitting suggests neither the passivity of mind nor an activity strictly of the body.

In order to clarify the connections between just sitting based on non-thinking and just saying related to non-speaking as the twin pillars of Dōgen's view of Zen practice in the appropriate historical and conceptual contexts, let us consider briefly his distinctive view of interpreting *kōan* cases. *Kōans* are pithy encounter dialogues usually involving an apparently illumined master who engages with a deficient disciple or rival teacher in order to demonstrate his distinctive understanding and realization of the Zen pivot.

The main example of *kōan* commentary literature is the multilayered compilation, the *Blue Cliff Record*, which was composed in 1138. Despite a rather controversial history, since it was kept out of circulation for many years, this text was apparently brought by Dōgen

to Japan, where it soon became a mainstay of both the Sōtō and Rinzai Zen monastery curricula. The compilation includes prose and poetic comments on 100 cases in which the commentary persistently challenges previous views about the encounter dialogues without necessarily positing a fixed standpoint but, instead, leaving it up to readers to make their own judgment about the true meaning of the sources.

Let us note that in many ways, the approaches embodied by *zazen* practice and *kōan* comments may seem at odds or even nearly opposite. The method of *zazen* involves cultivating a supreme sense of steadfastness, or a fixed and lofty standpoint that is highlighted by the character 兀 (*gotsu*), often used in the reduplicative term 兀兀. This Sino-Japanese glyph, which resembles the character for mountain (山, *san* or *yama*) written upside down, indicates something “massive and immovable” or “towering,” thereby suggesting a motionless and unchanging state. In contrast to this steadiness, the aim of *kōan* commentary according to the *Blue Cliff Record* is for a master to use language creatively in order to “startle his audience.” This is accomplished according to case 97 when, “There is thunder pealing and lightning flying, clouds moving and rain rushing, lakes overturned and cliffs toppled, like a pitcher pouring or a bowl emptying, but you have still not told even half of the story. You must be like someone who can tilt the polar star and shift the axis of the earth” (Cleary 1998, p. 424 modified). Other examples refer to the overturning of great oceans, leaping beyond the mythical cosmic peak of Mount Sumeru, scattering the white clouds, and breaking up empty space in that, immediately, with just one rhetorical device used to examine a single object the teacher’s words surpass the tongues of everyone on earth.

Because of the apparent gap between the stillness and quietude attained via ongoing *zazen* training or just sitting and the unpredictable and destabilizing effects of *kōan* discourse as exemplary of just saying, many Zen monk-poets like Dōgen questioned the role of language and were uncertain of the merits of writing poetry. We find this doubt expressed, intriguingly enough, in some of their most compelling poems. This sense of concern was conveyed by the eleventh century master Baoxian who wrote, “Deep within the temple, no one speaks, / All I hear is the sound of tall pines dripping with rain. / Poetry comes to me when I fall out of meditation, / And anxiety interferes with my peaceful repose” (In Protass 2016, p. 90 modified). In a similar vein, the Chinese Sōtō master Touzi Yiqing writes, “Though in the business of explicating emptiness, / I cannot avoid being enslaved by my talents. / I have been studying and practicing Zen meditation, / Yet, somehow remain preoccupied with literary pursuits” (In Pan 2007, p. 27 modified). According to Dōgen’s verse that evokes the same concerns as his Chinese predecessors:

Living for so long in this world without attachments,  
 Since giving up using paper and pen.  
 I see flowers and hear birds without feeling much,  
 While dwelling on this mountain let others judge my meager efforts (*Dōgen* 4.290).  
 (久舎人間無愛惜/文章筆硯既拋來/見花聞鳥風情少/乍在山猶愧不才)

A profound sense of doubt about the efficacy of language is further indicated in a *waka* by Dōgen that conveys the feeling of being overwhelmingly compelled to press ahead with the task of expressing the Dharma based on a combined sense of accountability and exhilaration, while knowing that his creative writings will likely fall on deaf ears:

*Haru kaze ni* Will their gaze fall upon  
*Waga koto no ha no* The petals of words I utter,  
*Chirikeru wo* Shaken loose and blown free by the spring breeze,  
*Hana no uta to ya* As if only the notes  
*Hito no nagamen* Of a flower’s song? (*Dōgen* 7.165).

Despite such concerns, Dōgen knows he must utilize just saying, which actualizes the non-dual practice of enacting his enlightenment linked to compassionate concern for instructing disciples. In order to fulfill the role of just saying, Dōgen frequently twists the typical meaning of words and phrases while insisting that resourceful expressions can and

must be used. In the *Treasury* fascicle on “Mountains and Rivers Sutras” (*Sansuikyō*) he severely criticizes those Zen teachers whose “point is that any speech that involves thinking is not genuine Zen talk because only irrational words are the speech of Buddhas and ancestors.” Dōgen complains that these misguided teachers try to cut off entanglements instead of recognizing “that thoughts are understood through words, and that words liberate our thoughts” (念慮の語句なることをしらず、語句の念慮を透脱することをしらず) (*Dōgen* 1.320).

#### 4. Prominent Interpreters Engaging the Complexity of Dōgen Discourse

Many knowledgeable followers have found themselves perplexed by Dōgen’s writings and felt incapable of understanding his bewildering words without relying on reference works written by a handful of specialists fully immersed in the Sōtō Zen literary tradition. According to the *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism’s* comment on the challenge of reading Dōgen’s masterwork, the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* (*Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏), “Part of the difficulty arises from the fact that Dōgen quotes freely from Buddhist sutras and Chinese [Zen] masters, but interprets these passages quite ingeniously” in that, for example, he “invented a number of Buddhist neologisms that were largely unique to him, including creative ‘mis’-readings of original Chinese passages” (*Buswell and Lopez* 2013, pp. 1940–41).

For many interpreters, the best way to grasp the full significance of just saying is to incorporate the meaning of Dōgen’s texts into one’s daily practice conducted on and off the cushion. For example, the nineteenth century Sōtō monk Ryōkan’s verse entitled, “On Reading Dōgen’s *Extensive Record*” (*Eihei kōroku o yomu*), highlights the significance of evoking a holistic outlook that understands words and ideas in relation to meditation based on the function of non-thinking (In *Leighton and Okumura* 2010, pp. 69–71 modified; see also *Sawaki* 2010). The poem opens by indicating that one lonely and sleepless night, “long after midnight, while listening to pouring rain pelting the bamboo trees in the garden,” Ryōkan reached over to a bookshelf and happened to pick out an unused copy of the *Extensive Record*. Then, “Beneath the open window sitting at my desk, I burned incense, lit a candle, and peacefully read the whole book. / Inspired by its righteous teachings, my body-mind were cast off. / In every single word, the jewel of a dragon is displayed. and with each phrase, a tiger is captured in a cave. / Old master Dōgen fully conveys the transmission of Buddhism from India to Japan” (*Sawaki* 2010).

Ryōkan comments that Dōgen’s wonderful nuggets of wisdom were essentially the same truths he carried out in his own Zen practice. This inspired a profound sense of inner peace, yet Ryōkan was also aware that he felt out of place in relation to the rest of early modern Japanese society that long ignored Dōgen’s teachings. He tearfully laments that none of his contemporaries, nor indeed anyone since Dōgen’s time, deeply understands these texts and he wonders wistfully at such neglect: “Since nobody is able to distinguish between a gem and an ordinary stone. / for over five hundred years the *Extensive Record* has been buried in dust. / Because people are not able to read it with the Dharma eye, / Who benefits from its outpouring of words disclosing truth in every phrase?” (*Sawaki* 2010).

The verse concludes with Ryōkan remarking that he was absorbed in reading while “pining for the long-forgotten past, so my tears not ceasing, drenched the copy of master Dōgen’s book.” Sure enough, the next morning a neighbor came by and, immediately noticing this, asked why the book was damp. Ryōkan responded with irony and poignancy: “I wanted to tell him but, because it was embarrassing, I did not know how. / Feeling distraught that I could not come up with an explanation, I bowed my head for a few moments until I found these words, / ‘Last night’s heavy rain must have leaked in and soaked the bookshelf’” (*Sawaki* 2010).

A fascinating modern account of a practitioner similarly trying to grapple with and gaining illumination from the intricacies of Dōgen’s writing is offered by Kazumitsu Wako Kato, a Sōtō monk born in 1927 who spent much of his later life in California leading *zazen* centers and teaching at universities (*Kato* 2019). Kato tells the story of how, after being

trained in sectarian rites and procedures as a young man in Japan, he found that he only really understood meditation once he started reading carefully Dōgen's *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*. A few years following the end of the second world war, Kato was given by his mother a rare manuscript that was scribed by a former abbot of his temple who had contributed to the first major woodblock publication of Dōgen's masterwork in the early 1800s. Although he cherished this frail text, Kato found it nearly impossible to understand the *Treasury* at first and was told that his mentor never managed to finish studying it. He then decided to recite it aloud slowly to take in the tone of Dōgen's language, without worrying about the meaning of particular words, or to skim quickly in order to feel the mastery of rhetoric as if by osmosis before perusing the work again carefully.

This eventually led to a profound and sustained experience of spiritual release. Once he learned how to read the *Treasury* "with both eyes," according to a phrase used by the eminent commentator, Kishizawa Ian, Kato saw the whole world as unified because every phrase has a hypnotic influence creating unspeakable delight and reassurance through its clear and incisive critique of calculative thinking based on Dōgen's standpoint of creative ambiguity. Kato acknowledged, however, that there were periods when he felt overly attached to this work. It also took him a long time to apply its practical significance in terms of how it fosters a reflective light that gives strength in each situation, especially during turning points in one's personal journey, by disclosing Dōgen's distinctive ways of living and thinking or sitting and saying.

For instance, when he first moved to San Francisco from a small village in Japan, Kato felt that Dōgen's writing previewed and offered insight into the urbane cosmopolitanism of the modern world by saying in the *Treasury* fascicle on "This Mind is Buddha," "Mind is just mountains, rivers, the great earth, it is the sun, moon, and stars, and the fences, walls, tiles, and pebbles" (*Dōgen* 1.57). The merit of that holistic view, Kato suggests, applies equally for men or women and for home-leavers or householders, whether they are just sitting, just standing, just walking, or just reclining in the fourfold notion of *gyōjū zaga*. Dōgen's view of Zen, Kato finds, is a gift of true transmission that can and must be given back and forth to others as part of ongoing mystical resonance.

### 5. Dōgen's Hermeneutic Standpoint

There are several main aspects of Dōgen's hermeneutics of just saying that seek to break down distinctions between speech and silence, affirmation and negation, or inquiry and declaration in Zen encounter dialogues and related sayings. His interpretations are carried out without diminishing the role of particular diversified perspectives that allow for the conventional polarities to continue to function provisionally, as appropriate or necessary for specific pedagogical circumstances. Dōgen's approach radically shifts the focus of language involved in commenting on exchanges away from a template that is hierarchical, in that wise teachers invariably initiate unenlightened disciples or obstructed adversaries, although in some table-turning instances the reverse transpires. He also challenges instrumentalism, which suggests that words are used primarily as a skillful means in order to refute any misunderstanding, as well as a linear approach, which maintains that interactions lead in a straight line from the hopeless ignorance of one of the participants to the attainment of knowledge. In addition, Dōgen criticizes the apparent inflexibility of the conventional view that the process of using language reaches a conclusion and then no longer needs to be continued.

Instead, Dōgen inventively develops means of expression that reflect an emphasis highlighting that there is:

(a) a non-hierarchical ranking of participants in that all those engaged in the dialogue, whether of higher or lower status in an institutional setting, are viewed as standing on a comparable conceptual level without a sense of superiority or inferiority in terms of social standing or degree of insight;

(b) a realization-based motif because the exchange members do not, according to Dōgen's interpretation, seek to contradict or defeat one another, but instead are able to



lead themselves together to a higher level of awareness whereby so-called delusion and knowledge are intertwined;

(c) the use of roundabout tactics, since discussions of dialogues are perpetuated without a fixed standard or set goal, and therefore beginning and end or original wording and elaborations are recognized as reciprocally related in a meandering pathway leading toward truth;

(d) an eminently flexible view that, like the practice of just sitting, is unceasing because dialogical exchanges continue to use entanglements, obstructions, or mistakes as creative means to help extricate participants from self-deceptions but without ever expecting these to fully disappear.

An important feature of Dōgen's hermeneutic standpoint is that verbal discourse in a non-hierarchical exchange plays a crucial role in conveying the experience of the Zen pivot. This view is derived in part from the saying in Dongshan's famous verse, *Song of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi* (Ch. *Baojing sanmei ge*, Jp. *Hōkyō zanmai ka*), "Meaning does not abide in words themselves, but it arises at pivotal moments of activity whenever thoughts are expressed" (Powell 1986, p. 64 modified). This practical admonition was expanded by a later Zen master to suggest that, if one has not yet experienced enlightenment, they look for meaning but do not pay attention to specific words; but once one has experienced awakening and is now teaching others, they look for appropriate words but do think much about their meaning since it is ultimately relative and ambiguous. In that vein, Dōgen was perpetually involved in the process of discerning the appropriate phrasing needed to shed light for his followers on the level of meaning relevant to their particular situations.

Because a true teacher realizes that the significance of any expression is related to the learner's capacity for apprehension, there is never only one connotation indicated by a set of words. Dōgen remains purposefully open-ended, knowing that his teaching was somewhat like scattering sand in the eyes of the beholder. Out of the experience of doubt that the uncertainty underlying all forms of expression induces, the impact of a Zen pivot is to probe further and investigate sayings and dialogues more deeply because, from this challenging existential context, the truth mixed with untruth becomes clear as an epiphany during an opportune occasion.

Dōgen is not necessarily averse to positing a thesis that can be absorbed, but more important than this is the goal of instigating self-reflection, which functions as a *kōan* by scrutinizing all premises, assumptions, and prejudices in a dialectic elaboration that leads to the gradual weeding out of mental defects. Doubting suppositions and stereotypes fosters a more profound level of awareness. This occurs not only through illumination, but also by casting shadows and tracing forms in darkness or in silhouette relief so that one comes to know their true meaning only by inference or by realizing what they are not. Since the twinkling of momentary insight passes quickly, understanding must be cultivated through exploring all available discursive options.

The teaching method of Dōgen suggests that, while maintaining a constancy of effort in all endeavors based on just sitting, one must also stay acclimated to making the most of spontaneous opportunities for enacting release from conventional thinking through just saying. This transpires when an adept demonstrates that being confronted by difficult questions or perplexing banter is exactly the time best suited to demonstrating flexibility, confidence, and versatility. According to an ironic comment in *The Blue Cliff Record*, that ability represents the Zen pivot of the eminent master Zhaozhou, who replied, "there is a cypress tree in the courtyard," to a question about the meaning of the Buddha. The text's comment reads, "Just when Zhaozhou gets to the ultimate point where he seems stuck and unable to make a move, it is then that he advantageously turns things around" (Cleary 1998, p. 225).

As an example of a *kōan* narrative that Dōgen cites in his *Monastic Rules* (*Eihei shingi*) but without offering his own remark, master Jiashan, who early in his career was serving as a monastic cook, answers the query of his teacher Guishan, "What are we going to eat today in the refectory?" Jiashan replies, "Every year, spring is the same." When Guishan

seems to approve of this indirect response, though perhaps without much enthusiasm, Jiashan counters, “A dragon resides in the phoenix nest” (*Dōgen* 6.114). Although the two mythical animals are often linked because of shared auspicious qualities, this image is usually reversed in that the phoenix flies far to be close to the protective power of the dragon that does not budge from its lair. The point of Jiashan’s perplexing utterance is that disciple and master must be able to challenge and learn from one another as equals, rather than staying trapped in a hierarchical relationship.

Many passages in Dōgen’s collected writings reveal his facility to enact such a turnaround through discursive savvy and rhetorical sleights-of-hand. One instance involves his interpretation in sermon 5.355 in the *Extensive Record* of a poem by the master Longya, who was a disciple of Dongshan. Longya is also cited in case 196 of the *300 Koan Collection* for responding to a monk’s query, “When do teachers of old get stuck?” by saying, “When the thief slips into an empty room” (*Dōgen* 5.224). In his homily, Dōgen first cites Longya’s verse about the master-disciple relationship, “Studying the way is like rubbing sticks together to make fire, / When smoke arises don’t stop. / Just wait until the golden star appears. / Returning home is arriving at your destination.” After praising his predecessor Dōgen says, “I respectfully offer another verse using Longya’s rhyme”:

Study the way as if rubbing sticks to make fire.

Seeing smoke does not mean you should stop.

Right then and there the golden star appears.

This very world itself is the supreme destination (*Dōgen* 3.228).

The first two lines of Dōgen’s poetic comment are quite similar to Longya’s verse, while subtly altering the focus of the instructions regarding continuity. But in a deceptively simple alteration in the last two lines Dōgen changes from emphasizing that the goal will be reached someday in the future to a realization at this very moment that is renewable and sustainable. His rewriting of the source thereby fulfills the Zen literary method of providing a relevant alternate (*daigo*) or substitute (*betsugo*) expression for the original utterance by evoking the outlook of, “While other teachers said it their way, I speak in my own fashion.” This also implies that the learner should not accept the point of view of their mentor and must continue to explore the implications of the saying for themselves. There are several examples in which Dōgen defies what was said by his predecessors, including his Chinese master Rujing, yet concludes by demanding of the audience, “What do you think?”

Another Zen saying that Dōgen cites on numerous occasions in both the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* and the *Extensive Record* involves the eccentric, trickster-like practitioner Puhua. According to the *Record of Linji* (Ch. *Linji lu*, Jp. *Rinzai roku*), Puhua frequently went around the streets of the local town ringing a small bell and calling out to those who would listen, “When encountering brightness, I strike brightness; / When encountering darkness, I strike darkness; / When encountering four quarters and eight directions, I act as a whirlwind; / When encountering empty space, I flail my whip” (明頭來明頭打, 暗頭來暗頭打, 四方八面來旋風打, 虛空來連架打. 師令侍者去) (*Dōgen* 1.125).

The comments of Linji, who was known to be eclectic and spontaneous in his teaching methods but also tried to maintain monastic decorum in the institutional settings, express in consummate double-edged fashion, “I’ve always had my doubts about this fellow” (我從來疑著這漢). The term for doubt (疑) also implies a sense of wonderment at Puhua’s capacity for displaying discernment at the Zen pivot between allowing oneself to feel ensnared and extricating from all entrapments (*Taishō* volume 47: 503b;<sup>1</sup> see also [Sasaki 2009](#), p. 296). In the “Ocean Seal Samadhi” (*Kaiin Zanmai*) fascicle of the *Treasury* Dōgen remarks on this story, “When it is said, ‘I’ve always had my doubts about this fellow,’ it just means he had an encounter with ‘this guy I’ve always had my doubts about.’” Dōgen further

<sup>1</sup> Uchiyama’s book is based on the life and thought of Sawaki Kōdō, the eminent twentieth century Sōtō monk who constantly traveled to various temple all over Japan promoting the practice of *shikan taza* for both monastics and lay followers.

comments that, during the exchange, there is no judgment to be made about supposedly mistaken or non-mistaken questions or answers stemming from either person since every utterance reflects, “That is what you’re thinking!” (是什麼心行 なるべし) (*Dōgen* 1.126). This comment represents the technique of equalizing inquiry and declaration based on the what-ness or quiddity of the hermeneutic situation that drives Dōgen’s imaginative interpretation of the source.

In another intriguing example of reappropriating and revising a Zen encounter dialogue in “The Ungraspable Mind” (*Shinfukatoku*), Dōgen cites the case in which master Deshan, who is proud of his profound knowledge of the *Diamond Sūtra*, appears to be outsmarted by the repartee of an elderly woman selling refreshments by the side of the road. When Deshan asks for a biscuit, the woman makes an ingenious wordplay on the word for refreshment, *tenshin* (點心, Ch. *dianxin*; also pronounced *dimsum* in Cantonese), which literally means “pointing (*ten*) to the mind (*shin*)” (*Dōgen* 1.83). She says that the mind is ungraspable, according to the *sūtra*, and then challenges Deshan by asking which refreshment can be pointed out. Deshan is left speechless, but Dōgen’s extended commentary insists that we should not simply consider the lady a wise winner and the master a stunned loser in this game. Instead, he recommends that both parties should have continued the exchange with additional questions and answers in order to lead each other to a more thoroughgoing understanding. According to the Zen narratives, it was later in his travels that Deshan was able to attain awakening.

## 6. Thinking, Not Thinking, and Non-Thinking

One of the main examples displaying various aspects of Dōgen’s hermeneutic approach is included in the “The Lancet of *Zazen*.” This is perhaps the primary *Treasury* fascicle that articulates a theoretical framework in support of the dynamics of meditative practice in relation to inventive expressions. Here Dōgen maintains that the state of non-thinking transcends the ordinary dichotomy of rationality and irrationality through continual *zazen* practice applied to each aspect of everyday life. Non-thinking does not indicate a deficiency of thought but is a way of keeping free from the grasping that tends to accompany conventional cogitation, while staying fully involved in creative modes of discourse (Heine 2020).

In “The Lancet of *Zazen*” Dōgen analyzes the brief yet highly suggestive encounter dialogue regarding the value of contemplation. According to the case, which is also mentioned in the *Universal Recommendation for Zazen Practice* and the fascicle on “The Principles of *Zazen*” (*Zazengi*) but without commentary, a novice asks the master Yaoshan who is deep in meditation, “What do you think about while sitting upright and steadfast (兀兀地, *gotsugotsuchi*)?” The master replies, “I think about not thinking.” When the monk probes further, “How do you think about not thinking?” Yaoshan answers enigmatically, “By non-thinking,” a phrase that can also be rendered as “without, or beyond, thinking” (*Dōgen* 1.103). How do the connections play out involving thinking, not thinking, and non-thinking? Or, as expressed by the Edo-period commentator on Dōgen, Katsudō Honkō, what is the state of thinking-non-thinking (*shiryō-hishiryō* 思量非思量) (Okumura 1988), whereby there is no need to deliberate on the meaning of deliberation in that the vicious cycle of ordinary cogitation is cut off or cast away?

Most commentators focus on how this dialogue highlights the progression of stages moving from (a) thought as thesis to (b) the antithesis of no thought and, finally, to (c) a synthesis that is beyond thought (Kasulis 1981, p. 71). Therefore, the typical explanation of the Yaoshan dialogue emphasizes that the master has cleverly outsmarted the inquirer by leading him on a progression from ordinary thinking (*shiryō*) to the stoppage of conceptualization (*fushiryō*) and, ultimately, to a transcendent state involving absolute negation (*hishiryō*) that lies outside the ordinary boundaries of thought and thoughtlessness. At that point, the monk is struck speechless in conclusion based on a kind of finite game that occurs in numerous Zen dialogues.

Dōgen points out that the Yaoshan exchange demarcates a subtle but crucial distinction between two terms indicating negation, “not” (*fu* 不) and “non” (*hi* 非), which are used as modifiers for the noun “thinking.” Since these prefixes can appear in other contexts to be almost interchangeable in meaning in a way that is different than the function of this dialogue, it is important to clarify Dōgen’s view by keeping in mind his complex discussions in “Buddha-nature” (*Busshō*) and other fascicles of the significance of nullification involving several *kōans* that evoke another word for negation, “no” (*mu* 無). This term indicates various aspects of “nothingness” or non-substantiality that surpass the ordinary sense of absence, loss, lack or vacuity, which can also apply to the meaning of *fu* and *hi*, especially when the word “what” is understood as quiddity rather than indicating a simple query.

Dōgen’s extended commentary disputes the conventional interpretative position in several ways that are typical of his flexible, non-hierarchical and realization-based approach to hermeneutics. According to his view, the monk’s query about not thinking does not suggest a naïve sense of doubt but constitutes a remark that contributes to the master’s ability to utter a more constructive expression of the meaning of reflexivity than he ordinarily musters. Dōgen asserts that both parties in the exchange, the supposedly superior master and the uninformed monk, are speaking from the standpoint of enlightenment and are working together to bring each other to an enhanced understanding without the usual sense of competition involving a clear triumphant winner and regretful loser.

Dōgen’s approach thus contradicts conventional interpretations indicating the one-sided defeat of a benighted disciple by an enlightened master. The monk’s final silence suggests understanding rather than a state of being dumbstruck. For Dōgen, the goal is not necessarily to reach illumination as a one-time breakthrough experience, but to realize the ongoing process of self-reflection and self-reliance based on the power of non-thinking through just saying. His reversal of the typical view of the exchange as a three-stage progression is based on his creative (mis)reading of the interrogatory sentences to represent declarative statements. He argues that not thinking is a form of thinking that incorporates non-thinking, “Although not thinking [in the sense of an absence] may represent a long-held view, in probing this sentence further the phrasing suggests, ‘Not thinking is how you do think.’ It is not the case that there is no thinking whatsoever while sitting upright and steadfast, or that thinking somehow lies outside the activity of sitting upright and steadfast” (*Dōgen* 1.103-4).

By extending the implications of the founder’s approach, various leaders of the Sōtō sect’s extensive tradition of commentaries on the *Treasury* have shown that the whole case can be read not as a set of questions and answers, but as a series of statements with each remark in the dialogue conveying, instead of concealing, some aspect of the overall profundity of the notion that just sitting equals non-thinking. This interpretation understands the dialogue to mean that the monks intends to say, “Thinking while sitting upright and steadfast is ‘what.’” (兀兀地思量什麼). Yaoshan responds, “[Such] thinking is not (*fu*) thinking.” (思量箇不思量底). The monk remarks, “Not thinking is how you do think.” (不思量底如何思量). Yaoshan says, “It is thinking of no-particular-thing (*hi*).” (非思量). The ensuing silence indicates nothing more needs to be said, rather than a failure to speak.

A key aspect of Dōgen’s view is to suggest that there is no advancement of consciousness toward a culminative state of transcendence because three different standpoints referred to in the dialogue—thinking, not thinking, and non-thinking—actually represent a single mode of awareness, that is, several possible ways of considering its differentiable but underlying unified significance. Therefore, for Dōgen, non-thinking is not separable from the realm of thought, but is fully embedded within it while enabling the interactions of thinking and not thinking:

Regarding Yaoshan’s answer, “Non-thinking,” although this term may seem crystal clear, when we are thinking of not thinking we are always already in the process of non-thinking . . . Although sitting upright and steadfast functions as sitting upright and

steadfast, how could sitting upright and steadfast not be engaged in thinking about sitting upright and steadfast? (*Dōgen* 1.104).

A traditional Sōtō Zen commentary on the *Treasury* suggests, “The moment of *zazen* is thinking-not-thinking,” and also points out that, “*Zazen* is total sitting, for which there is no measure” (Bolokan 2016, p. 170). This emphasis on the unlimited resourcefulness of non-thinking can be taken to indicate the unity of just sitting and just saying.

### 7. Dōgen’s Creative Interpretation of “Two Moons” *Kōan*

The next example shows it is important to point out that Dōgen’s basic interpretative standpoint is not a formulaic method to be mechanically applied to every dialogue or saying. Rather, it represents an open-ended and unlimited outlook for which the continual playing of realization-based interpretations is based on appreciating and appropriating the reverberating effect of a vast network of citations and allusions evoked in his diversified discursive techniques. An especially interesting example occurs in his verse comment on a *kōan* cited as case 9.12 in the *Extensive Record* case (*Dōgen* 4.190). According to the source narrative, the master Yunyan, who was the teacher of Dongshan, is sweeping the temple grounds as part of his contemplative training when another monk, Guishan, says, “Aren’t you the busy one?” Yunyan responds, “I’m not really that busy,” and Guishan says, “Then, there must be a second moon!” [which usually refers to something illusory or deceptive]. Yunyan holds up the broom and says, “Which moon is this?” In most versions, the interlocutor is stunned into silence, much like Deshan’s exchange with the old woman and the impact on the monk of Yaoshan’s utterance.

The word for “busy,” as used in the reduplicative term (驅驅) that features the character for horse as the lex’s radical, usually indicates spurring a steed, enjoining a disciple, or the driving away of impurities. This implies, to use a contemporary idiom, that Yunyan must be an “eager beaver” in the twofold sense that Guishan’s remark is a putdown of apparent overattentiveness or feigned interest, yet also indicates praise for the concerted effort to get rid of defilements, even if this ultimately proves a futile task. As a comment in case 84 of the *Blue Cliff Record* says sarcastically of a misguided use of silence, “This is like a broom sweeping away dust; the traces left by the broom still remain” (*Taishō* volume 48.209c). Similarly, case 31 suggests, “A capable Zen teacher . . . should not just hold to one side but must sweep to the left but turn to the right and sweep to the right but turn to the left”; here, the act of sweeping (撥) is not the literal function of using a broom but instead implies removing impurities (*Taishō* volume 48.171b).

In the version of Yunyan dialogue that appears as case 21 in the *kōan* collection published in 1224, the *Record of Serenity* (Ch. *Congronglu*, Jp. *Shōyōroku*), the second monk is not Guishan, a disciple of master Baizhang under whose tutelage Yunyan also spent some time, but instead it is Yunyan’s Dharma-brother Daowu. Known for being artistic and impulsive whereas Yunyan is pensive and reserved, Daowu is speechless at the conclusion of this account. The case was originally included in the *Jingde Transmission of the Lamp Record* (Ch. *Jingde chuandeng lu*, Jp. *Keitoku dentōroku*) from 1004, except that Guishan was the other monk, and it also appears as case 83 in Dōgen’s *300 Case Collection* (*Shōbōgenzō sanbyakusoku*) but with Daowu as the exchange partner (*Dōgen* 5.166). In the *Record of Serenity*’s version, the main dialogue is followed by Xuansha’s cryptic comment on holding up the broom, “That is the second moon!”, and also by Yunmen’s more general remark, “When the butler sees the maid, he pays attention” (*Taishō* volume 48.240c). There are countless other additional comments in various Zen collections of prose and poetic remarks from the thirteenth century through the present.

Dōgen also alludes to the Yunyan dialogue in a couple of his formal sermons included in the *Extensive Record* marking the occasion of the harvest moon. In sermon 4.344 from 1249 Dōgen says, “Why has our ancestor Yunyan’s remark, ‘Which moon is this?’ suddenly turned into a sitting cushion?” (*Dōgen* 3.222). In this instance Dōgen uses a rhetorical structure that recalls the perennial Zen query, “Why did the first patriarch come from the west?” to emphasize the role of just sitting. Also, in sermon 7.521 for the same occasion

in 1252 Dōgen comments, “The ‘second moon’ of Xuansha is about to set, and Yunyan’s ‘Which moon is this?’ is waning. Although this is so, everyone in our lineage makes use of the sayings of Buddhas and ancestors.” (*Dōgen* 4.100). Moreover, in the *Treasury* fascicle on “The Moon” (*Tsuki*), Dōgen further emphasizes a realization-based interpretation in an indirect reference to the Yunyan case, “You should realize that the passage of the moon, even if it seems to be racing along, is not a matter of beginning, middle, and end. Therefore, there is the ‘first moon’ and ‘second moon.’ But, whether first or second, they are the same ‘moon.’” (*Dōgen* 1.266). Other *Treasury* fascicles in which Yunyan-Daowu dialogues are discussed at length include “Bodhisattva Kannon” (*Kannon*), “Eyeball” (*Ganzei*), “Insentient Beings Disclosing the Dharma” (*Mujō seppō*), and “The Thirty-seven Factors of Bodhi” (*Sanjūshichihon bodaibunpō*).

The poetic commentary posited by Dōgen on the Yunyan exchange reorients the main topic from a preoccupation with determining the victor of a Dharma contest based on distinguishing the real from the false moon that is symbolic of true versus false activity. Instead, Dōgen emphasizes the multiplicity of perspectives represented by unlimited number of lunar objects circulating everywhere as perceived by awakened perceptivity:

Whoever sweeps the ground finds the moon reflected there,

The broom circulates the moonlight into vast empty space.

This moon abides among hundreds of thousands of moons.

So, how can there be any difference between second and first? (*Dōgen* 4.190).

(誰人掃地更看月/禿帚放光透大虛/千萬月中重此月/縱云第二又何初).

Therefore, when taking into account all the comments proffered by Dōgen and other interpreters, instead of there being a strict method formulaically prescribed to readers, we are invited into playing a kind of infinite game in which creative expression is a mark of ongoing realization. This experience continues to unfold through engagement with previous and current as well as anticipated or potential participants in dialogical exchanges since, in this instance, the meaning of “hundreds of thousands of moons,” rather than the question of one moon versus two, or winner in contrast to loser, is to be continually pondered. This takes place by virtue of turning the hermeneutic situation upside-down and topsy-turvy by enacting the Zen pivot based on the thoroughgoing productive integration of just sitting that reveals non-thinking with just saying expressed through non-speaking.

## 8. Conclusions

In light of the difficulties that were experienced by figures like Ryōkan and Kato before they could truly comprehend Dōgen’s method of just saying, many modern non-clerical readers in Japan and the West have wondered if the daily monastic round of waking, sitting, chanting, wiping, eating, sweeping, and sleeping that Dōgen depicts in great detail in many of his writings can also be applied to everyday activities undertaken in a secular setting. Do the same principles work when one is reading, writing, figuring, working, or playing, regardless of whether or not *zazen* is actually practiced? After all, according to Dōgen, regulating one’s body-mind in a way that circulates the meaning of awakening so as to resonate with all beings is an experience without boundary that can be recommended universally. This could be carried out effectively in collaborative artistic expressions such as the kind of dialogue that implicitly happens in the playing of a string quartet or jazz ensemble, or among members of a dance troupe or during a theatrical performance. One way of overcoming the darkness of deceptions that are apparent in the ordinary life of both clerics and non-clerics is to look closely at the meaning of expressions based on just saying that disclose profound philosophical truths.

No matter how or what is expressed, according to Dōgen, or whether it is seemingly trivial or high-minded, the act of just saying can lead to an awareness that true reality is not demarcated by conventional separations of speaker, voice, and listener. Rather, he maintains, there is holistically “the ringing of the ringing of a bell” or the “clicking-clacking of a pearl rolling in the bowl while being turned by its container” (*Dōgen* 1.217, from

“Suchness” (*Inmo*) fascicle; *Dōgen* 1.412, from “Spring and Autumn” (*Shunjū*) fascicle). In that way a Zen adept is able to relinquish and release ordinary thoughts, which are seen as ideations that come and go like ripples after a pebble has been tossed in a pond. Through the ability to examine insightfully yet forget constructively any burdensome thoughts, a standpoint that is refreshed and agile is attained and applied to expressiveness.

This rejuvenated outlook helps resolve what one *Dōgen* interpreter has called the “Metabolic Syndrome of the Mind,” which means that an overexposure to an excessive influx of information and directives in modern society typically leads to stress and anxiety for which the remedy of relaxation and liberation remains elusive. As a recent self-help book based on practicing the method of just sitting indicates, “Begin the day with purity! End the day in harmony!” ([Hirai 2017](#)). In between, there must be advanced levels of concentration that engage single-mindedly with just saying and related activities on and off the cushion in order to form and maintain constructive habits that synchronize one heart-mind with external circumstances throughout the day.

Exploring and expressing this outlook occurs whether or not one sits upright. However, those who seek to heighten their sustained attention toward a particular object or concept must be cautious about overreacting to a superficial understanding in that *Dōgen* indicates, “When one side is illumined, the other side is dark” (*Dōgen* 1.3; see also [Yoshizu 1993](#)). In other words, too much focus on any detail is detrimental to the overall perception of one’s surroundings because of the innate partiality and insufficiency of human awareness, a condition has been confirmed in modern neurological science ([Ling and Carrasco 2006](#); [Himmelberg et al. 2020](#)). The sense of deficiency, for *Dōgen*, is overcome once the attainment of the Zen pivot is realized in a way that is devoid of limitation by encompassing without attachment multiple perspectives. Therefore, the expansive functions of just saying contribute to an enhancement of self-realization that continually reexamines and creatively discloses diverse views without settling on any particular stance. Indeed, the function of just saying is to disrupt or overturn those attitudes that represent fixation with a specific position and thus fail to enact the non-hierarchical flexibility of ongoing resourceful uses of language.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## References

- Akiyama, Hanji. 1935. *Studies of Dōgen (Dōgen no kenkyū)*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Bolokan, Eitan. 2016. Dimensions of Nonduality in *Dōgen’s Zen*. Ph.D. thesis, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel.
- Buswell, Robert E., and Donald S. Lopez Jr., eds. 2013. *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Carse, James P. 1986. *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Thomas Cleary, trans. 1998. *The Blue Cliff Record*. Berkeley: Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai.
- Eubanks, Charlotte. 2016. Performing Mind, Writing Meditation: *Dōgen’s Fukan-zazengi* as Zen Calligraphy. *Ars Orientalia* 46: 173–97.
- Girard, Frédéric. 2000. “Le bouddhisme médiéval japonais en question.” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 87: 645–76. [[CrossRef](#)]
- He, Yansheng. 2001. *Dōgen and Chinese Chan Thought (Dōgen to Chūgoku Zen no shisō)*. Kyoto: Hōzōkan.
- Heine, Steven. 1997. *The Zen Poetry of Dōgen: Poems from the Mountain of Eternal Peace*. Boston: Tuttle.
- Heine, Steven. 2020. *Readings in Dōgen’s Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Himmelberg, Marc M., Jonathan Winawer, and Marisa Carrasco. 2020. Stimulus-dependent contrast sensitivity asymmetries around the visual field. *Journal of Vision* 20: 1–19. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
- Hirai, Masao. 2017. *Learning the Heart of Monks by Developing Habits Morning, Noon, and Night (Obosan ni narau kokoro ga totono—Asa, hiru, yoru—No shūkan)*. Tokyo: Discover Twenty-One.
- Hori, Victor Sogen. 2003. *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Koan Practice*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Ishii, Seijun. 2012. New Trends in *Dōgen* Studies in Japan. In *Dōgen: Textual and Historical Studies*. Edited by Steven Heine. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 223–36.
- Kasulis, Thomas P. 1981. *Zen Action, Zen Person*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Kato, Kazumitsu Wako. 2019. *Sky Flower on the Day Before: My life guided by Zen Buddhism*. (self-published).
- Kim, Hee-Jin. 1975. *Dōgen Kigen: Mystical Realist*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Kim, Hee-Jin. 2004. *Dōgen on Meditation and Thinking: A Reflection on his View of Zen*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Kurebayashi, Kōdō. 1970. *Mainstream of Dōgen Zen (Dōgen zen no honryū)*. Tokyo: Daihōrinkan.
- Taigen Dan Leighton, and Shohaku Okumura, trans. 2010, *Dōgen's Extensive Record*. Boston: Wisdom.
- Ling, Sam, and Marisa Carrasco. 2006. When sustained attention impairs perception. *Nature Neuroscience* 9: 1243–45. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
- Lopez, Donald S., Jr. 2020. *Buddha Takes the Mound: Enlightenment in 9 Innings*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Matsunami, Naohiro. 2011. *Studies of the Intellectual History of the Zen School in the Kamakura Era (Kamakura ki Zenshū shisōshi no kenkyū)*. Tokyo: Pelikan.
- Mizuno, Yaoko, ed. 1990–1993. *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye (Shōbōgenzō)*. Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko, vol. 4.
- Morimoto, Kazuo. 1989. *From Derrida to Dōgen: Deconstruction and Dropping Off Body-Mind (Derrida kara Dōgen e: datsu-kochiku to shinjin datsuraku)*. Tokyo: Fukutake Books.
- Odagiri, Takushi. 2016. Dōgen's Fallibilism: Three Fascicles of Shōbōgenzō. *The Journal of Religion* 96: 467–87. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Shohaku Okumura, trans. 1988, *The Heart of Zen: Practice without Gaining-Mind*. Tokyo: Soto-Shu Shumuchō.
- Pan, An-yi. 2007. *Painting Faith: Li Gonglin and Northern Song Buddhist Culture*. Leiden: Brill.
- William F. Powell, trans. 1986, *The Record of Tung-Shan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Protass, Jason. 2016. *Buddhist Monks and Chinese Poems: Song Dynasty Monastic Literary Culture*. Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, USA.
- Sasaki, Ruth Fuller. 2009. *The Record of Linji: Translation and Commentary*. Edited by Thomas Yūhō Kirchner. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Sawaki, Kōdō. 2010. *On Reading the Eihei kōroku (Eihei kōroku o yomu)*. Tokyo: Daihōrinkan.
- Sōtōshū zensho* (Sōtō Sect Collection). 1970–1973, Sōtōshū Zensho, jōkankōkai, ed. Tokyo: Sōtōshū shūmūchō, 18 vols, abbreviated as SZ.
- Uchiyama, Kosho. 2014. *The Zen Teaching of Homeless Kodo*. Boston: Wisdom.
- Yoshizu, Yoshihide. 1993. Comments on the phrase, "When one side is illumined, the other side is dark" ("Ippō wo shōsuru toki wa ippō wa kurashi' no ikku no kaishaku nitsuite"). *Shūgaku kenkyū* 35: 12–17.
- Zhou, Yukai. 1999. *The Language of Chan Buddhism (Chanzong Yuyan)*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang People's Press.
- Zhu, Caifang. 2011. The Hermeneutics of Chan Buddhism: Reading Koans from *The Blue Cliff Record*. *Asian Philosophy* 21: 373–93. [[CrossRef](#)]