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# Leaving Home (*shukke* 出家) as Metanoia in the Writings of Eihei Dōgen 永平道元

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# Leaving Home (*shukke* 出家) as Metanoia in the Writings of Eihei Dōgen 永平道元

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## Abstract

This article shows the results of an interpretative inquiry into discourses on home leaving (*shukke*) written by 13<sup>th</sup> century CE Sōto zen master Eihei Dōgen. The inquiry is especially focused on his magnum opus *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏, though many other works have also been reviewed. The main thesis of this research states that, conceptually speaking, *shukke* constitutes a *metanoia*, a complete mental and spiritual transformation that, ultimately, can be realized and expressed either in monastic or secular ways of life.

## Introduction

Meeks explained that the *shukke* or “home leaver” status often remained ambiguous, especially in Japan, in contrast to China, where government control over the ordination process allowed for standardization, and only those who had received ordination certificates were recognized as *shukke*:

In Japan, however, many laypeople declared themselves *shukke* simply by shaving their hair (or, in the case of women, cropping their hair) and donning monastic robes. Although the Japanese state also made attempts to control the *shukke* process by implementing an ordination certificate system based on Chinese models, its control of the process had grown lax by the middle years of the Heian period, when many aristocrats began to style themselves as *shukke*, often without official ordination certificates.<sup>1</sup>

The ambiguities in the definition of *shukke* are closely related to the proliferation of different systems of precepts and vows in Chan/Zen Buddhism. The intricacies of those systems fall beyond the scope of my work. Here I will concentrate on the analysis of Dōgen’s own words in his main written works. Most scholars seem to agree that Dōgen’s view on the difference between laypersons and monks in terms of practice and enlightenment is changeable and ambiguous. Thus, Cleary said that the question of whether a secular Zen is feasible constitutes “one of the points on which Dōgen made contradictory claims,”<sup>2</sup> but cautioned that the meaning of these must be understood “in the light of historical circumstances

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<sup>1</sup> Lori Meeks, “Vows for the masses. Eison and the popular expansion of precept-conferal ceremonies in premodern Japan,” in *Buddhist Monasticism in East Asia. Places of practice*, eds. James A. Benn, Lori Meeks, and James Robson (London: Routledge, 2010), 148.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Cleary, *Rational Zen: The Mind of Dōgen Zenji* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 33.

and a symbolic representation, rather than as an abstract truth in itself.”<sup>3</sup> Kim pointed out that the difference between laypersons and monks constitutes “one of the thorniest problems” in studies on Dōgen. I agree with Kim in his claim that Dōgen held from the beginning to end that “‘homelessness’ was the ideal possibility or model of rightly transmitted Buddhism and transcended both the monastic’s and the layperson’s lives in their ordinary senses.”<sup>4</sup>

My inquiry revolves around a main thesis: Dōgen’s *shukke* constitutes a *metanoia*, a complete mental and spiritual transformation that, ultimately, can be realized and expressed either in monastic or secular ways of life. *Metanoia* comes from the Greek *metanoiein* [μετανοῖεν], which means to repent and to change one’s mind. In LaMothe’s words:

The term is traditionally associated with a religious or spiritual transformation of one’s heart and mind, leading to changes in behavior. Typically, metanoia connotes a radical change from previous cognitions, perceptions, emotions, and behaviors, which are usually preceded by remorse regarding one’s previous perceptions and behaviors.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of metanoia that I suggest here to capture the deepest meaning of *shukke* goes well beyond the literal but narrow sense of “repentance,” reaching a complete and irreversible transformation of the self.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In his analysis of the alleged contradictions that some authors find in Dōgen’s statements, Tanaka exonerates Dōgen of this accusation. Koji Tanaka, “Contradictions in Dōgen,” *Philosophy East & West* 63, no. 3 (2013): 322–334.

<sup>4</sup> Hee-Jin Kim, *Eihei Dōgen, Mystical Realist* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 43.

<sup>5</sup> Ryan LaMothe, “Eco-Remorse, Eco-Metanoia, and the Anthropocene,” *Pastoral Psychology* (2024), 9. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-024-01151-w>

<sup>6</sup> Myers said that “although the elements of repentance, regret, reflection, and transformation are always present in the concept of metanoia to some degree, the experience

Barron explain this great difference by invoking Jesus's understanding of the term:

The English word "repent" has a moralizing overtone, suggesting a change in behavior or action, whereas Jesus' term seems to be hinting at a change at a far more fundamental level of one's being. Jesus urges his listeners to change their way of knowing, their way of perceiving and grasping reality, their perspective, their mode of seeing. What Jesus implies is this: the new state of affairs has arrived, the divine and human have met, but the way you customarily see is going to blind you to this novelty. . . Minds, eyes, ears, senses, perceptions—all have to be opened up, turned around, revitalized. Metanoia, soul transformation, is Jesus's first recommendation.<sup>7</sup>

In understanding *shukke* as metanoia I am aware that any interpretation of Dōgen's words is a risky exercise. Tanaka admitted that "translating Dōgen's writings is notoriously difficult" and that "his writings are sometimes ambiguous because of the poetic nature of his writings and sometimes difficult to understand because of his frequent engagement in word-play."<sup>8</sup> To such an intrinsic difficulty we must add the fact that the interpreter of Dōgen, as Putney said, "is faced with the problem of inconsistencies in Dōgen's writings over the progress of his career and with the paradoxical nature of Dōgen's method."<sup>9</sup>

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can range in scale from the transformation of the soul to the rephrasing of a statement." Kelly A. Myers, "Metanoia and the Transformation of Opportunity," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 41, no.1(2011): 1–18.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Barron, *And Now I See: A Theology of Transformation* (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2021), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Tanaka, "Contradictions in Dōgen," 323.

<sup>9</sup> David Putney, "Some Problems in Interpretation: The Early and Late Writings of Dōgen," *Philosophy East and West* 46, no.4 (1996): 513.

Putney echoed words from Sugio Gen'yu: "Ejō [Dōgen's foremost disciple] and his contemporaries and successors were never able to match Dōgen's attainment."<sup>10</sup> For Sugio Gen'yu, Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* constitutes a sort of testament written by his author for later generations, "in part precisely because Ejō and the other disciples could not live up to Dōgen's expectations." In pondering this speculative thesis by Sugio Gen'yu, Putney saw two implications in it. The first one is that only someone of an attainment equivalent to that of Dōgen himself would be able to comprehend Dōgen's intention. The second one is that, such a person, like Dōgen, would likely be more concerned with teaching the Dharma to present generations than with the historical interpretation of a previous master's writings.

I completely agree with the first implication in the sense that those who have not experienced an awakening as deep as Dōgen's cannot fully understand Dōgen's intention. But this does not prevent us from improving our understanding of Dōgen's teachings, assuming that most likely our understanding will never be complete. As to the second implication, I disagree. Dōgen divided his energy, so to speak, between teaching the Dharma to his generation and interpreting the writings of ancient masters, or rather, he tried to combine both efforts in a single mission, a truly herculean task that literally exhausted him. Regardless of our distance from Dōgen's level of spiritual attainment, all sincere practitioners of the Way should strive for a more profound understanding of the teachings. And not only that, we should radiate the Dharma, either by talking in *teishos*—those who legitimately can do it as certified masters—or simply by embodying the teaching in daily behaviours in the world, allowing their actions to speak for themselves.

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<sup>10</sup> Putney, "Some Problems," 504.

Had scholars of Dogen's work rooted their interpretative effort in the soil of the practice of zazen, most of those inconsistencies and paradoxes mentioned by Putney would tend to vanish. This does not mean that researchers who are not zen practitioners cannot produce excellent academic work on Dōgen's teachings; what I am saying is that a serious practice of zazen over the years can be of great help for any researcher interested in the academic approach Dōgen's teachings. However, even the most experienced zazen practitioner-researcher would find a very serious hindrance in her/his mother tongue not being Japanese.<sup>11</sup>

A quick review of the titles of the fascicles in *Shōbōgenzō* (in Tanahashi's edition of 96 fascicles) would suggest that Dōgen's views on *shukke* are concentrated in two of them, namely, Leaving the Household (*Shukke*, #83), and Virtue of Home Leaving (*Shukke kudoku*, #87). However, other fascicles like Thirty-seven Wings of Enlightenment (*Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo*, #73), offer a very rich material, as we will see later, and provide us with some key elements to understand Dōgen's discourse on *shukke*. I will concentrate my analysis on those three fascicles, but six

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<sup>11</sup> I cannot provide the reader with my direct interpretation of Dōgen's words because I lack knowledge of medieval Japanese, which makes me dependent on translations from Japanese to English or to Spanish. To alleviate as much as possible this inherent deficiency of my inquiry, while writing this article I compared up to five different translations of Dogen's *Shōbōgenzō* (four in English and one in Spanish) with the hope that this comparative work could help me to grasp the many subtleties that proliferate in Dogen's discourse. Following the suggestion made by the reviewers of my article and CJBS editors, I will use only one translation of the *Shōbōgenzō*. Specifically, I will use the translation edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi and collaborators, so all fragments from Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* cited in this paper are drawn from this translation (Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 2010). The reasons for my choice are threefold: a) it was the most recent of the five versions that I had consulted; b) the number of people involved in this translation project (a team of 32 translators, all of them with a solid academic and/or zen practitioner background), and c) Tanahashi's edition has been publicly applauded by world class specialist in Dōgen Steven Heine, whose work deserves my academic admiration.



other fascicles have also been consulted in this inquiry, as well as some of Dōgen's other major writings.<sup>12</sup>

I hope to demonstrate that, in its core elements, Dōgen's vision of *shukke* remained essentially unchanged, though the literary expression showed variations and even apparent contradictions that, in any case, dissolve themselves as one takes into consideration more ingredients of Dōgen's thought in the analysis. That is, the more comprehensive and profound the approach to the meaning of *shukke* in the light of Dōgen's work, the more connections we see between *shukke* and other notions and principles of Dōgen's Zen, and fewer changes or contradictions are appreciated in the treatment of *shukke* throughout his work.

### Dōgen's early view of *shukke*

In his *On The Endeavor of the Way* (*Bendōwa*, #1), Dōgen's earliest dated work (1231) included as the opening fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō*, he sees no difference at all between laypersons and home leavers in terms of adequacy for enlightenment. Someone asked: "Should zazen be practiced by lay men and women, or should it be practiced solely by home leavers?" Dōgen answered by stating that an ancestral master had been heard to say that, "in understanding buddha dharma, men and women, nobles and commoners, are not distinguished."<sup>13</sup> To the question "How can a busy

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<sup>12</sup> The six *Shōbōgenzō* fascicles reviewed are (as numbered in Tanahashi's edited translation): "On the endeavour of the Way" (*Bendōwa* 辨道話, #1), "Receiving the Marrow by Bowing" (*Raihai Tokuzui* 禮拜得髓, #9); "Transmitting the Robe" (*Den'e* 伝衣, #14), "Continuous Practice, Part I & II" (*Gyoji* 行持, #31a,b), "Body-and-Mind Study of the Way" (*Shinjin Gakudo* 身心学道, #38); and "Receiving the Precepts" (*Jukai* 受戒, #95). Other Dōgen's writings included in this inquiry are *The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Record of Things Heard* (*Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki* 正法眼藏隨聞記) and *Dōgen's Extensive Record* (*Eihei Kōroku* 永平広録).

<sup>13</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 16.

layperson devotedly do training and be at one with the unintentional state of Buddhist truth?” Dōgen answered by indicating that in China laypersons of various occupations aspire to and sometimes achieve enlightenment. He tells the story of a high-ranking Chinese official who practiced zazen when his official duties allowed it and managed to clear his mind, writing:

This just depends on whether or not you have the willingness. It does not matter whether you are a layperson or a home leaver. Those who can discern excellence invariably come to trust in this practice. Those who regard worldly affairs as a hindrance to buddha dharma think only that there is no buddha dharma in the secular world; they do not understand that there is no secular world in buddha dharma.<sup>14</sup>

By 1231, Dōgen would deny that worldly activities make enlightenment impossible. He explained that enlightenment has nothing to do with being ordained as a monk or not, but with having the appropriate willpower. Worldly affairs constitutes an obstacle to enlightenment, but they do not make enlightenment impossible to attain. Zen master Okumura roshi explains that, when Dōgen was young in Kyoto, around the time he wrote *On the Endeavor of the Way (Bendowa, #1)* and *Actualizing the Fundamental Point (Genjokoan, #3)*, he said in one of the *hogo* that there are two ways of practice in Buddhism, namely, “one is staying on a mountain or in a forest, and another is to live in the city. Within this *hogo*, he expressed that he didn’t want to leave the city.” Okumura refers to the following *hogo* in *Eihei Koroku*:

However, I do not yearn for mountains and forests, and do not depart from the neighborhoods of people. . . . Why should I necessarily stay in lofty halls or great temples, and be bound up in the

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<sup>14</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 17.

snare and nets of right and wrong? It is better to play within the streets and marketplace, and go beyond the threshold of names and forms. . . . Don't you see that the morning marketplace and the battlefield are the original place of awakening for complete penetration of freedom? Why aren't taverns and houses of prostitution the classrooms of naturally real tathagatas?<sup>15</sup>

Some years later, Dōgen changed his mind about the preference for playing "within streets and markets", perhaps due to "having observed the Japanese scene and the boom of Zen among the ruling class," or for other reasons that we do not know.<sup>16</sup> However, around 1240 Dōgen still supports a certain equality between monks and laymen, as shown in the fascicle *Receiving the Marrow by Bowing* (*Raihai Tokuzui*, #9) proclaimed the same year, where he says:

Also, those who are called laity in Song China are people who have not left their households. Some of them are married and have their abodes. Others are celibate but may still have much worldly concern. However, monks with cloud robes and mist sleeves visit laypeople who have clarified dharma, bow to them, and inquire about the way, just as they do to masters who have left their households. They should also do so to accomplished women and even to animals.<sup>17</sup>

Dōgen's position in the fascicle *On the Endeavor of the Way* (*Bendōwa*, #1) concerning differences between laypersons and monastics remains unaltered in the following years, as can be seen in some paragraphs from the *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*, written between 1236 and 1239. In section 3.2, we find this interesting comment made by a nun: "Even lay women practice

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<sup>15</sup> *Dōgen's Extensive Record: A Translation of the Eihei Koroku*, trans. Taigen Daniel Leighton and Shohaku Okumura (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010), 498-499.

<sup>16</sup> Cleary, *Rational Zen*, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 77.

and study the buddha-dharma. As for nuns, even though we have some faults, I feel there is no reason to say that we go against the buddha-dharma. What do you think?" Dōgen's response removes any doubt as to whether he considered significant any difference between laypersons and monastics:

That is not a correct view. Lay women might attain the Way as a result of practicing the buddha-dharma as they are. However, no monk or nun attains it unless he or she has the mind of one who has left home. This is not because the buddha-dharma discriminates between one person and another, but rather because the person doesn't enter the dharma...I don't think that the names provisionally used to distinguish monks and nuns from lay people are at all important.<sup>18</sup>

### **The fascicle *Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo***

In the fascicle Continuous Practice (*Gyoji*, #31a,b), written in 1242 and one of the most extensive and dense of the *Shōbōgenzō*, we can appreciate some clear signs of a remarkable discursive change in Dōgen's position on *shukke*, in comparison with his earlier ideas in the *Bendōwa* fascicle or in *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*:

[In *Gyoji*-a:] If you have a home, leave your home. If you have beloved ones, leave them. If you have fame, abandon it. If you have gain, escape from it. If you have fields, get rid of them. If you have relatives, separate from them. If you don't have name and gain, stay away from them. Why should you not remain free from them,

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<sup>18</sup> Dogen's *Shobogenzo Zuimonki*, trans. Shohaku Okumura (Sommerville: Wisdom, 2022), 111.

while those who already have name and gain need to give them up? This is the single track of continuous practice.<sup>19</sup>

For Dōgen, becoming a monk means becoming free from clinging and attachment (*shui dan* 執爲斷), an idea he emphasized again and again:

[In *Gyoji-b*:] Do not look back on your bodily life. Do not cling to worldly obligations and love that put you lower than birds and beasts. Even if you cling to that love, you cannot maintain it forever. Do not hold on to the house of the family that is like trash. Even if you retreat to that place, it cannot be your ultimate abode. The wise buddha ancestors in olden times let go of the seven types of treasure and a thousand servants, leaving behind jewelled palaces and vermilion towers. They saw these luxuries as drool and manure.<sup>20</sup>

This derogatory language becomes more aggressive in *Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo*, where Dōgen explains the meaning of the thirty-seven aids to awakening, a teaching typically associated with the so called “Hinayana vehicle” that Dōgen taught precisely to demonstrate that there is only one Buddhism, and that the practice of zazen dissolves any differences between vehicles. To reach this goal, Dōgen performs one of his reinterpretative maneuvers and does not speak of thirty-seven aids, but of thirty-seven elements or methods of enlightenment. This reinterpretation is coherent with the oneness or non-duality of practice and enlightenment (*shusho itto* 修証一等), advocated by Dōgen.

The first element that catches our attention is the relatively long length that Dōgen dedicated to one of the branches of the eightfold path: right action. However, what really surprise us is that Dōgen started this section with the following axiomatic sentence: “The right action path

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<sup>19</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 346.

<sup>20</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 361.

limb is leaving the household and practicing the way, entering a mountain and attaining realization”<sup>21</sup>. This comparison between Buddhist *samma kammanta* (right action) and *shukke* was a discursive *coup de effect* with deep doctrinal implications with which Dōgen tried to settle the matter bluntly: from the point of view of the Buddhist path, the right action is to become a monk.

This is an astonishing interpretation, to say the least. In the Buddhist orthodoxy, right action joins right speech and right livelihood to make up the first of the three divisions of the eightfold path, namely, the division of moral discipline (*silakkhandha*). Apparently, by equating it with the decision to become a *sannyasi*, Dōgen has stripped *samma kammanta* of ethical or moral meaning. But he will explain later—in *Shukke Kudoku* (#87)—that “the self nature of a home leaver. . .

is having a tender heart toward all sentient beings as if they were babies. This is ‘not arouse an unwholesome mind.’ This is ‘your action and speech should be in accord with each other.’ When you take the form of a home leaver, you have such virtue as this.”<sup>22</sup>

These words preserve the overall moral dimension inherent to right action.

In *Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo* (#37) we can find some of the most aggressive and harshest words written by Dōgen throughout his extensive work. “How can people who are unable to abandon family life attain the position of a buddha?” asked Dōgen. He responded to this rhetorical question by alluding to what was happening in China:

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<sup>21</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 682.

<sup>22</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 808.

How can those who cannot bear to leave the household succeed in the rank of buddhas? Nevertheless, many of those who call themselves Zen monks in Great Song China have said for a couple of hundred years that the study of the way by the laity and the study of the way by home leavers are the same. Those who say such things are dogs who take in the urine and excrement [property] of laypeople. . . . Monks who make such statements are Devadattas. In order to eat the saliva and mucus of kings and ministers, they utter such childish, crazy words. How deplorable! They are not family members of the Seven Original Buddhas, but are beasts and demons. They are like this because they don't know the body-mind study of the way, don't study, and don't have the body-mind of leaving the household.<sup>23</sup>

We do not know to what extent Dōgen wrote *Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo* as a reply to Eisai's plan regarding the precepts, as suggested by Walsh.<sup>24</sup> We cannot but speculate about Dōgen's true intention with such a change and radicalization of his discourse. Bielefeldt says that Dōgen attacks in this passage "Sang Buddhism, dominated by heretics whom [Dōgen] identifies with the Hindu view that truth lies in silence and stillness (*jakumoku gyo-nen*), not in speech and action."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 683.

<sup>24</sup> According to Walsh there is evidence to suggest that *Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo* was written as a direct response to some of Eisai's claims concerning the precepts: "Specifically, Dōgen and Eisai disagree concerning two fundamental issues: the authority of the *Four-Part Vinaya*, and the idea of the precepts as the basis of practice. Dōgen rejects outright the idea that the *Four-Part Vinaya* should be practiced by Mahāyāna monks; rather, he presents his own precept ordination ceremony which is devoid of all reference to Indian vinaya texts." Dermott Walsh, "Myōan Eisai and Conceptions of Zen Morality: The Role of Eisai's Chinese Sources in the Formation of Japanese Zen Precept Discourse," PhD diss., (UCLA, 2018), 161.

<sup>25</sup> Carl Bielefeldt, *Dōgen's Manuals of Zen Meditation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 136.

In the section on right action of the *Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo*, Dōgen accused the householder Vimalakīrti of “leaving much Dharma unexpressed” and said that “there was not a little learning that he did not reach.” “Do you not see—Dōgen said to his monks—that if Old Man Vimalakīrti had left family life, we would be able to meet with one more excellent than Vimalakīrti: that is, Vimalakīrti Bhikṣu.”<sup>26</sup> Dōgen argued against Vimalakīrti’s lack of certain virtues and qualities, caused by the fact that he was not ordained as a monk. In my view, what Dōgen said about Vimalakīrti should not surprise us, since he was aware that Vimalakīrti was probably the layman with the highest prestige in all *Prajñāpāramitā* literature.

If Dōgen’s discursive purpose was to demonstrate that only complete monastic ordination opens the door that leads to enlightenment, then understandably it was appropriate to take Vimalakīrti down from that pedestal. In any case, the enigma remains as to why Dōgen did not instrumentalise Vimalakīrti’s own words for the benefit of his argumentation. Let us explain. When Vimalakīrti finished his teaching to Bodhisattva Rahula on the meaning of leaving home, he addressed the young people there in this way:

‘Young men, renounce the world in the light of this clear teaching! The appearance of the Buddha is extremely rare. Human life endowed with leisure and opportunity is very hard to obtain. To be a human being is very precious.’ The young men complained, ‘But, householder, we have heard the Tathāgata declare that one should not renounce the world without the permission of one’s parents.’ Vimalakīrti answered, ‘Young men, you should cultivate your-

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<sup>26</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 687.



selves intensively to conceive the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. That in itself will be your renunciation and high ordination!’<sup>27</sup>

It is clear that Vimalakīrti not only did not put the path of householders on an equal footing with the path of monks, but he clearly defended the superiority of leaving home. On the one hand, Dōgen did not specify what Dharma Vimalakīrti failed to express nor what learning this sublimely accomplished layman did not reach.<sup>28</sup> Had he have specified those alleged weaknesses in Vimalakīrti, Dōgen's arguments would have been strengthened. On the other hand, it is quite understandable that Dōgen did not take advantage of Vimalakīrti's words. Had he have done it, his criticism against Vimalakīrti would have been self-contradictory.

To sum up, Dōgen categorically affirms in *Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo* that right action, as a branch of the noble eightfold path, equals to

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<sup>27</sup> *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahayana Scripture*, trans. Robert A.F. Thurman (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 32.

<sup>28</sup> Dōgen would have agreed with Vimalakīrti's description of *shukke* in his address to Rāhula: “Renunciation is itself the very absence of virtues and benefits. Reverend Rāhula, one may speak of benefits and virtues in regard to compounded things, but renunciation is un compounded, and there can be no question of benefits and virtues in regard to the un compounded. Reverend Rāhula, renunciation is not material but is free of matter. It is free of the extreme views of beginning and end. It is the path of liberation. It is praised by the wise, embraced by the noble ones, and causes the defeat of all māras. It liberates from the five states of existence, purifies the five eyes, cultivates the five powers, and supports the five spiritual faculties. Renunciation is totally harmless to others and is not adulterated with evil things. It disciplines the outsiders, transcending all denominations. It is the bridge over the swamp of desire, without grasping, and free of the habits of ‘I’ and ‘mine.’ It is without attachment and without disturbance, eliminating all commotion. It disciplines one's own mind and protects the minds of others. It favors mental quiescence and stimulates transcendental analysis. It is irreproachable in all respects and so is called renunciation. Those who leave the mundane in this way are called ‘truly renunciant.’” Thurman, *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, 31-32.

*shukke*. Without *shukke*, enlightenment is not possible, and not even Vimalakīrti is an exception to this axiom. We can see Dōgen's absolutistic position in statements like the following ones:

- Among the writings of the more than five thousand scrolls, we find neither evidence nor any principle that the lay mind and the mind that leaves family life are the same. There is no such trace in more than two thousand years.<sup>29</sup>
- During the whole life of the teaching, no-one at all has attained the truth as a lay person. This is because lay life has never been a good place for learning the Buddha's truth, and because the obstacles it presents are many.<sup>30</sup>
- So remember, salvation means leaving family life. Those who have not left family life are in a depressed state.<sup>31</sup>
- Once the Buddha-Dharma has reached a person's eyes and ears, they urgently endeavour to leave family life.<sup>32</sup>

The latter statement simply echoed Dōgen's previous words "at the time of mastering the way, people invariably leave the household."<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, Nishiyama translated these words as "in order to master the Way, it is absolutely necessary to renounce the world and become a monk,"<sup>34</sup> an alternative interpretation that raises some doubts about the

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<sup>29</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 684.

<sup>30</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 684.

<sup>31</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 686.

<sup>32</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 686.

<sup>33</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 683.

<sup>34</sup> *Dogen Zenji's Shobogenzo (The Eye and Treasury of the True Law)*, trans. Kōsen Nishiyama (Tokyo, Nakayama Shobō, 1975), 195.

causal sequence: is *shukke* a consequence of mastering the way or a prerequisite for it? I would suggest that, for Dōgen, they are simultaneous events, if not the same one.

This leads us to the key point: for Dōgen, abandonment of family life is a natural, irremediable and automatic consequence of having been reached by the Dharma. This view is consistent with Heine's characterization of the concept of *datsuraku* "in terms of the convergence of own-power and other-power highlights the inseparability of independent effort and the interdependence of determinative factors at the moment of activity."<sup>35</sup> Heine's examination of the how and when of *datsuraku* discloses "an impermanent process deliberately chosen yet spontaneously realized through activity at once independent of and interdependent with the exertions of all phenomena."<sup>36</sup> In the same way, *shukke* as a process is also deliberately chosen (as the result of a conscious decision) yet spontaneously realized (after having been reached by Dharma). However, it could be the case that someone becomes a monk without having been reached by the Dharma, like those Chinese Zen priests that Dōgen denigrated in this fascicle, *Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo*, by comparing them with "demons and animals."

It is my contention that, since his awakening in China, Dōgen remained well aware that the whole issue of *shukke* was inherently related to body and mind. At the first stage, *shukke* as "right action" requires leaving home with body and mind. At the ultimate stage, the deepest *shukke* would be crowned by the *metanoia* caused by the dropping off or abandon-

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<sup>35</sup> Steven Heine, "Dōgen casts off 'What': An analysis of 'Shinjin Datsuraku,'" *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 9, no. 1 (1986), 57.

<sup>36</sup> Heine, "Dōgen casts off 'What,'" 60.

ment of body and mind (*shinjin datsuraku* 身心脱落). Cleary's interpretation seems to be compatible both with mine—and with Nearman's introductory comment to his translation of the fascicle *Shukke*.<sup>37</sup> Cleary wrote:

While the apparent complete turn that Dōgen made on this issue was undoubtedly related to his experiences and perceptions of the mentality and trend of the time, it is also useful to consider the symbolic value of 'home' as 'attachment' in the contrast between the adjectives secular ("at home") and monastic ("one who leaves home"). Beyond the specific issues of his time, Dōgen was also addressing the perennial need of the seeker of enlightenment, namely, to rise above conventional attachments and to experience consciousness without the limitations of personal subjective bias.<sup>38</sup>

If we stick to the conventional definition of *shukke*—leaving family life and becoming a monk—it seems logical to conclude that Dōgen's position in “Thirty-seven Elements of Bodhi” is extremist, radical and excluding. But if we assume that the concept of *shukke* that Dōgen had in mind by 1244 could have a much deeper meaning—connected to both *shinjin datsuraku* and “thinking beyond thinking” (*hishiryo* 非思量)—then Dōgen's position is simply the only one that can be defended by those who truly seek purity in the practice of the Way. Before I present the arguments of my thesis, let us review the other two main fascicles where *shukke* is the core topic in the *Shōbōgenzō*.

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<sup>37</sup> *Shobogenzo. The Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching. A Trainee's Translation of Great Master Dogen's Spiritual Masterpiece* (Mount Shasta, Shasta Abbey Press 2007), 898.

<sup>38</sup> Cleary, *Rational Zen*, 35.

### The fascicle *Shukke*

According to Nearman, some of Dōgen's readers have taken the fascicle *Shukke* as evidence that he had completely rejected the idea of lay discipleship. But if that were the case, Nearman argues, it is difficult to explain why he would be giving this talk to his assembly of monastic disciples rather than to the relatively few lay disciples who were present at Eihei-ji:

It seems more likely that some of his monks were having difficulties with the harshness of monastic training in such an isolated locale, and Dōgen was trying to get some starch into their backbones by insisting that only through sticking with their commitment to leave home life behind, in both senses of the term, and to live in accord with the Precepts could they realize 'That' which they had come there to find.<sup>39</sup>

By "both senses of the term [*shukke*]" Nearman refers to a) the literal one of entering a monastery to become a monk and b) "figuratively to letting go worldly values."<sup>40</sup> It is very important to keep in mind this double meaning—and other deeper meanings—when considering the concept of *shukke*. According to Nearman:

Which meaning Dōgen intends seems to shift back and forth, and context does not always make clear whether he is referring to the literal or figurative meaning, or both simultaneously. And there is a third aspect to leaving home life behind which Dōgen brings up later in relation to a quotation from Rinzai.<sup>41</sup>

The radical tone and harsh language of the *Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo* (1244) disappears two years later in the fascicle *Shukke* (year 1246, #83),

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<sup>39</sup> Nearman, *Shobogenzo*, 924.

<sup>40</sup> Nearman, *Shobogenzo*, 898.

<sup>41</sup> Nearman, *Shobogenzo*, 930.

which is relatively small in length and has a quite simple rhetorical structure. Instead of launching criticisms against those whom he considered pseudo-Zen masters from China, now Dōgen chooses a more serene strategy, based on authoritative sources and arguments, by using only five points of support for his statements about home leaving.

The fascicle begins directly with a quote from *Pure criteria for Zen Monasteries* (*Zen'nen shingi* 禅苑清規) for which Dōgen had a special predilection, since he repeats it in two more fascicles.<sup>42</sup> The quote begins with these words: “It is taught that all buddhas of the past, present, and future leave the household and attain the way.”<sup>43</sup> In view of the subsequent content, it is evident that the concept “leaving home” is located within a context of fulfilment of monastic discipline. If we take into account how Dōgen highlighted the patriarch’s strictness with the *vinaya* code, and his statement that “precepts are primary for practicing Zen in pursuit of the way,” it seems very clear that here the action *shukke* is equated with taking of precepts. Dōgen explains the meaning of the quote with these words:

Clearly know that the attainment of the way by all buddhas and ancestors is only accomplished by leaving the household and receiving the precepts. The life vein of all buddhas and ancestors is not other than leaving the household and receiving the precepts.<sup>44</sup>

*Leaving* (home, world or family) and *taking* (precepts and vows) are the main elements of buddhas and patriarchs because, without such a leaving and taking, no one has ever become a patriarch. Let us remember that Dōgen had asked previously in *Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo* (#73), “How can those who cannot bear to leave the household succeed in the rank of Bud-

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<sup>42</sup> Those fascicles are *Shukke kudoku* (#87) and *Jukai* (#95).

<sup>43</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 766.

<sup>44</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 767.

dhas?” Another statement for this first argumentative support of the fascicle is very revealing: “To meet a buddha and to meet an ancestor is to leave the household and to receive the precepts.”<sup>45</sup> To see the Buddhas means to arrive at the truth, or to be reached by the Dharma of the Buddha, a mere rephrasing of Dōgen's words in *Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo*: “At the time of mastering the way, people invariably leave the household.”<sup>46</sup>

Dōgen's second argumentative support in this fascicle evokes Mahākāśyapa as an “excellent example of abandoning family life and receiving the precepts.”<sup>47</sup> In fact, there may not be a more radical example, as Mahākāśyapa's motivation to “leave home and be free from all things” ran so deep that he was immediately welcomed by Śākyamuni Buddha: “The World-Honored said, ‘Come, monk.’ Then Mahakashyapa's hair dropped all by itself and a *kaṣhaya* wrapped around his body.”<sup>48</sup>

For his third argumentative support Dōgen uses words from the *Mahaprajñāpāramita Sutra*, where Śākyamuni Buddha speaks of a *bodhi-sattva-mahāsattva* who plans to abandon family life. Playing on the words of this quote from the sutra, Dōgen characterizes leaving home as follows:

a) The door that leads to the supreme state of enlightenment or *bodhi*, by stating that “unsurpassable enlightenment is fulfilled at the moment you leave the household and receive the precepts. It is not fulfilled other than on this day.”<sup>49</sup>

b) “To turn cartwheels on the day of leaving the household is to turn the wondrous wheel of Dharma.”

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<sup>45</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 767.

<sup>46</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 683.

<sup>47</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 767.

<sup>48</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 767.

<sup>49</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 768.

c) “Know that the day of leaving the household goes beyond one or many.”

Dōgen’s brief mention of the state of *anuttara samyaksambodhi* and phrases such as “the day of leaving the household goes beyond the day of leaving the household” make this third argumentative support probably the most cryptic in the entire fascicle.

With a smooth discursive turn, Dōgen opts in the fourth support for a more direct and concrete reflection, based on the famous story of the drunken Brahmin who went to the Buddha wanting to become a monk, extracted from the *Mahaprajñā Paramitopadesa Sutra*. Dōgen’s teaching from this story is clear: “Breaking the precepts as a home leaver is better than keeping them as a layperson. You cannot experience emancipation by keeping the precepts as a layperson”<sup>50</sup>. This last statement seems to exclude any possibility for a householder to attain enlightenment, which clearly contradicts Dōgen’s position in *Bendowa* (written in 1227), nearly twenty years before *Shukke* (1246).

For the fifth and last argumentative support in this fascicle Dōgen uses Buddha Sakyamuni’s words: “I left the household when I was young and I attained unsurpassable, complete enlightenment. Truly I have been a buddha for a long time.”<sup>51</sup> In his interpretation of those words, Dōgen seems to dispense with the copulative conjunction “and,” which could imply that enlightenment is a consequence of leaving home or, in any case, something that happens after leaving home, and settles the matter firmly with this identity: “‘Unsurpassable, complete enlightenment’ is ‘I left the household when I was young.’”

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<sup>50</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 769.

<sup>51</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 769-770.



True to the vision offered in *Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo* it seems obvious that, for Dōgen, *shukke* and enlightenment are not two. After offering a range of diverse examples, from the Buddha and Mahākāśyapa, to the *bodhisattva-mahasattvas*, through the case of the drunken brahmin and the words from the *Zen en shingi*, Dōgen concludes his discussion of the importance of *shukke* with an emphatic comparison that leaves no room for doubt: “Even though this is so, ask, ‘How much is the merit of leaving the household?’ If someone asks in this way, say, ‘To the top of the head!’”<sup>52</sup>

### The fascicle *Shukke Kudoku*

*Shukke Kodoku* (#87) appeared in 1255, two years after Dōgen's death. Scholars seem to agree that Dōgen wanted to develop the argumentation showed in *Shukke* (#83) in his last years, but he left the new fascicle unfinished.<sup>53</sup> His main disciple, Koun Ejō 孤雲懷奘, finally completed the edition of the text after the master's death. In agreement with other authors, Heine holds that, when moving from Uji, south of Kyoto, to the province of Echizen, Dōgen recognized the need to address the concerns of three types of disciples.<sup>54</sup> Firstly, those who still needed some persuasion to make the decision to leave home. Secondly, those who, already in monastic life, needed to refine and develop their monastic training. Finally, those that were approaching the final stages of realization. Putney pointed out that *Shukke Kudoku* shifts the emphasis of its earlier version, “moving from taking precepts to enter the monastic order to the merits

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<sup>52</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 770.

<sup>53</sup> For example, Steven Heine, “‘Critical Buddhism’ (Hihan Bukkyō) and the Debate Concerning the 75-Fascicle and 12-Fascicle Shōbōgenzō Texts,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 21, no.1 (1994): 37–72.

<sup>54</sup> Steven Heine, “Critical Buddhism.”

(*kudoku*) of entering it as part of the bodhisattva vow to save all living beings before oneself.”<sup>55</sup>

This fascicle is a much longer and argumentatively deeper version of *Shukke*. Whereas in *Shukke* there are only four specific exhortations from Dōgen to his disciples, like “you must remember” or “you must know,” in *Shukke Kudoku* there are more than a dozen. Whereas in *Shukke* there were only five sources used as argumentative supports, there are over twenty in *Shukke Kudoku*, including the five of *Shukke*, which appear here again but in some cases with greater depth in their interpretation. In other words, Dōgen used all his dialectical weapons when rewriting this fascicle, usually translated as *Virtue of Leaving Home*. In my analysis of *Shukke Kudoku* I appreciate a six-sections structure. Let us look briefly at each of them and the reasons indicated by Dōgen to demonstrate the virtues and merits of leaving home.

The first section begins and ends with *Nāgārjuna*. Dōgen opens the fascicle quoting the famous Indian philosopher, from whom he borrows the question “What, then, is the use of receiving the precepts for home leavers?”<sup>56</sup> In his answer, Dōgen offers the first two reasons of many that he will spread throughout the text:

1. Those who receive both types of precepts become awakened. But one type is difficult and the other is easy. Laypeople engage in various works. If they wish to concentrate on the dharma of the way, their business declines. If they are focused on their business, their activity of the way declines. Without choosing one and abandoning the other, laypeople need to practice dharma. This is difficult.

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<sup>55</sup> Putney, “Some Problems in Interpretation,” 501.

<sup>56</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 797.

Those who have left the household can be free from worldly affairs, distant from confusion, and practice the way wholeheartedly. So, this is easy.

2. Further, laypeople are noisy and confused while being occupied in many things. The roots of their driving forces are the center of all unwholesome actions. That is why lay practice is difficult. Leaving the household is similar to going out into an empty field where there are no people. They can keep their minds unified and free from thinking.<sup>57</sup>

The words of this argument help us to appreciate how “no mind” and “rid of inner thoughts” became central elements in Dōgen's deepest conception of *shukke*, merging it with the concepts of “thinking beyond—or without—thinking” (*hishiryō* 非思量) and “dropping off body and mind” (*shin-jin datsuraku*). Other reasons are offered:

3. Also, if you leave the household and maintain the precepts, you attain immeasurable wholesome merit, which is fulfilled. For this reason, laypeople should leave the household and receive all of the [home leaver's] precepts.<sup>58</sup>

4. On the other hand, leaving the household is difficult from the beginning. Once Brahmans of the Jambudvīpa World asked Śāriputra, “What is most difficult in the buddha dharma?” Śāriputra said, “Leaving the household is most difficult.” They asked, “What is difficult about being a home leaver?” Śāriputra said, “Enjoying the life of a home leaver is difficult.” They asked, “What is difficult in enjoying the life of a home leaver?” Śāriputra said, “Practicing

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<sup>57</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 797.

<sup>58</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 798.

all types of wholesome deeds is difficult. That is why it is good to leave the household.”<sup>59</sup>

5. Now, when someone leaves the household, the Demon King says in lamentation, “This person wants to reduce the urge of desire, will certainly attain nirvana, and will join a group of the sangha treasure.”

Dōgen ends this first section by underlining the authoritative source of his arguments, noting that “[a]lthough there are a great number of bodhi-sattvas and ancestors, whether they are householders or home leavers in India and China, none of them come close to Ancestor Nagarjuna. He particularly took up the stories of the drunken Brahman and the courtesan to encourage sentient beings to leave the household and receive the precepts.”<sup>60</sup>

The second section, based on Buddha Śākyamuni’s words, is the longest of the fascicle. Except for two quotes taken from the *Abhidharma-mahavibhasa-sastra*, this second part is made up solely of words spoken by the Śākyamuni Buddha. Dōgen carefully interprets these words by making continuous exhortations of the type “know that,” and by offering a second series of reasons underpinning the virtue of *shukke*:

6. Yet, if you turn around, leave the household, and receive the precepts, you realize unsurpassable, complete enlightenment, realized by buddhas of the past, present, and future, which is the indestructible diamond Buddha fruit. Who among the wise would not joyously seek this?<sup>61</sup>

7. Know that when great sages emerge it is an authentic custom for them to leave the household. No one can say that they do so out of

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<sup>59</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 798.

<sup>60</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 802.

<sup>61</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 803.

ignorance. If you learn that they leave the household out of their wisdom, you should wish to do the same.<sup>62</sup>

8. From the Five Monks to Subhadra [the Buddha's first disciples to the last], those who took refuge in the Buddha all left the household. Know that the virtue is immeasurable.<sup>63</sup>

9. As we have the fortune of encountering the time of home leaving and precept receiving, which are the wondrous dharma of all buddhas, how could we wastefully miss the opportunity to leave home and receive precepts? It would be difficult to understand the hindrance to doing so.<sup>64</sup>

This second section contains one of the most important quotes in the fascicle as a whole. Dōgen's emphasizes Śākyamuni Buddha's words: "I abandoned my parents, siblings, family members, relatives, and teachers to leave the household and practice the way."<sup>65</sup> The echo of these words will accompany us as a background sound while we read the rest of the fascicle. Dōgen's interpretation here is exquisitely profound:

Wholesome awakening is to have a tender heart toward all sentient beings as if they were babies. Unwholesome awakening is not like this. Thus, the self nature of a home leaver is having a tender heart toward all sentient beings as if they were babies. This is *not* arouse an unwholesome mind. This is *your action and speech should be in accord with each other*. When you take the form of a home leaver, you have such virtue as this.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 804.

<sup>63</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 804.

<sup>64</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 804.

<sup>65</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 808.

<sup>66</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 808.

These words by Dōgen and the immediately preceding ones from Śākyamuni Buddha fit in perfectly with those proclaimed in *Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo*, when he equated *samma kammanta* (right action) and *shukke*: “‘Right action as a branch of the path’ is to abandon family life and practice the truth.” This should make us infer that while writing *Shukke Kudoku*, Dōgen had in mind not only the contents of the *Shukke* fascicle, but also those of *Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo*. The last paragraphs of the second section address the experience of Śākyamuni Buddha in relation to his home leaving, and include the entire content of the fifth argumentative support that I indicated in *Shukke*.

In the third section there are certain elements that invite us to consider the intimate bond between the concepts of *shukke* and *shinjin datsuraku*. Dōgen uses three Indian patriarchs as argumentative sources: Upagupta (4th patriarch), *Dhītika* (5th) and *Samghānandi* (17th). Upagupta and *Dhītika* kept a dialogue about the meaning of *shukke* which highlights the key issue of our topic. *Dhītika*, the son of a wealthy man, went to see Venerable Upagupta, the Fourth Ancestor, and expressed his wish to leave the household:

Upagupta said, “Do you want to leave the household for the benefit of your body or mind?”

*Dhītika* said, “I want to leave the household, but not for my body or mind.” Upagupta said, “Who leaves the household if not for the benefit of body or mind?”

*Dhītika* said, “A home leaver does not have a self or self-possession. Because of having no self or self-possession, the mind is not born and does not perish. Not to have the mind that is born or perishes: this is an unchanging dharma. All buddhas practice this way. Neither their minds nor their bodies have marks.”

Upagupta said, “You are greatly enlightened and your mind has been illuminated. You should take refuge in the buddha, dharma, sangha and nurture the sacred seed [of buddhahood].”

Thus, Upagupta allowed Dhītika to leave the household and receive the precepts.<sup>67</sup>

And then Dōgen explains:

Now, to encounter the dharma of all buddhas and leave the household is the supreme result. The dharma is not for the self or self-possession. It is not for body or mind. It is not that you leave the household for the benefit of body or mind. This is the meaning of *leaving the household is not for body or mind*. Because it is not for the self or self-possession, it is the dharma of all buddhas. This is the way of all buddhas.<sup>68</sup>

That is, “I” and “mine,” our ego structure, is the home that we must leave behind, the body and mind that has to be dropped off. In *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*, Dōgen had issued the warning that “first you must depart from your ego as well as from [desire for] fame and profit.”<sup>69</sup> In my view, this is the true meaning of *shukke* at the initial stage. In *Denkōroku*, Keizan Jōkin said that Dhītika's reply was: “Whoever leaves home to become a monk is a self without self, a Self that possesses nothing,” and he explained that this selfless self cannot be defined in terms of body or mind.<sup>70</sup> This keeping

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<sup>67</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 810.

<sup>68</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 810-811.

<sup>69</sup> *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*, trans. Shohaku Okumura (Tokyo, Shotoshu Shomuchō, 2004), 191.

<sup>70</sup> *The Record of Transmitting the Light. Zen Master Keizan's Denkoroku*, trans. Francis Dojun Cook (Somerville, Wisdom Publications, 2021), 72.

away of body and mind clearly resonate with the practice of *shinjin datsuraku*.<sup>71</sup>

In their deepest spiritual sense, there is some kind of experiential proximity between *shukke* and *shinjin datsuraku*. This can be intuited in Heine's masterful analysis of the term *datsuraku*, when he said that, in Dōgen's main works, "*datsuraku* appears in the sense of renunciation (*suteru*) and detachment (*shukke*)."<sup>72</sup> In this sense we must also emphasize how Cook noticed that there are numerous passages in *Shōbōgenzō* that equate realization or enlightenment with events or states of mind as "arousing an aspiration for enlightenment (*hotsu bodaishin*), and home departure (*shukke*)."<sup>73</sup> It is significant that Dōgen claims that all are equivalent to realization and Buddhahood. According to Cook, the reason can be found in Dōgen's teachings concerning Buddha-nature. Cook explains:

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<sup>71</sup> Here we must mention the first section of *Shobogenzo Zuimonki*, which ends with a strong exhortation that leaves us with some hints of the close linkage between *shukke* and *shinjin datsuraku*: "Students of the Way, you must be very careful on several levels in giving up wordly sentiment. Give up the world, give up your family, and give up your body and mind. Consider this well. Even among those who retreat from the world and live secluded in the mountains or forests, there are some who fear that their family, which has continued for many generations, will cease to exist, and who become anxious for their family members or their relatives. Although some people depart from home and give up family or property, they have not yet given their bodies if they think that they should not do anything physically painful and avoid practicing anything which may cause sickness, even though they know it to be the Buddha-Way. Further, even if they carry out hard and painful practices without clinging to their bodies, if their minds have not yet entered the Buddha-Way and if they resolve not to act against their own will even if such actions are the Buddha-Way, they have not yet given up their minds." *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*, trans. by Okumura, 64-65.

<sup>72</sup> Heine, "Critical Buddhism," 54.

<sup>73</sup> Francis Cook, "Enlightenment in Dōgen's Zen," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 6, no.1 (1983): 19.



All events or states of mind, such as assurance, home departure, and the like, are concrete manifestations of an utter self-transcendence that Dōgen refers to as *shinjin datsuraku*, “casting off mind and body,” and this self-transcendence is the actualization of Buddha-nature or realization.<sup>74</sup>

Upagupta asked Dhītika the same question that Śāṇavāsin (3rd patriarch) had previously asked him: “Will you give up family life with the body or with the mind?”<sup>75</sup> The implications of this bifurcated nature of home leaving are far reaching, as showed by Keizan Jōkin's words in *Denkōroku*. In his *teisho* on Upagupta, Keizan Jōkin explains in detail the meaning of *shukke* in the light of the dialogue between Śāṇavāsin and Upagupta, describing the difference between “bodily going forth from household life,” and “mentally going forth from household life.”<sup>76</sup>

Dōgen used the case of the patriarch Saṃghānandi to illustrate how the authentic *shukke* requires a physical displacement, a departure from the place where conventional life takes place. The boy Saṃghānandi, son of King Ratnālamkāra, wanted to be a monk at just seven years of age and his parents, making an undoubtedly difficult decision, allowed him to do so on the condition that he remained living in the palace under the supervision of his tutor, Zenrita. Dōgen explains that “[Saṃghānandi's] parents insistently discouraged him. So, the prince refused to eat. Finally, his parents allowed him to leave the household while staying in the palace. They named him Sanghanandi and asked monk Dhyanārtha to be his teacher. For nineteen years Sanghanandi didn't tire of his practice. He said to himself daily, “While living at home, how can I be a home leaver?”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Cook, “Enlightenment in Dōgen's Zen,” 19.

<sup>75</sup> *The Record of Transmitting the Light*, trans. Francis Dojun Cook, 66.

<sup>76</sup> *The Record of Transmitting the Light*, trans. Francis Dojun Cook, 68-69.

<sup>77</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 811.

“This is the first time—Dōgen explains—that becoming a home leaver while being at home [*zaike shukke* 在家出家] has been heard of. However, with the help of his wholesome action in the past, [Saṃghānandi] found a straight way in the heavenly light. Then, he left his palace and got to the grotto.”<sup>78</sup>

Dōgen considered this story an excellent precedent, because “one who detests worldly pleasure and is cautious about common dust is a sage,” whereas “one who loves the five desires and does not reject them is an ordinary fool.”<sup>79</sup> Clearly this implies some kind of discernment, which seems to be a *sine qua non conditio* for metanoia. As Kittel et al. said, “by a penitent alteration of judgment, by reconsideration, e.g., by the correction of a mistaken view, the fool becomes a wise man.”<sup>80</sup>

The idea that leaving home must be accomplished not only with the body, but also with the mind, must be understood in the context of Dōgen’s global thought, and in that way, we can appreciate its deepest meaning. Firstly, and foremost, the oneness of body and mind (*shinjin ichinyo* 身心一如) must be taken into account, for it makes no sense to raise the possibility that a partial *shukke* can be performed, either bodily home leaving or mental home leaving. As Dōgen said in *Bendōwa*:

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<sup>78</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 812.

<sup>79</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 812.

<sup>80</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1967), 980. These authors are quoted by Kelly Myers, “Metanoia and the Transformation of Opportunity,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 41, no.1 (2011): 8. Myers explains that, for Kittel et al., metanoia “is seldom a function of the intellect alone.” And he added: “Importantly, in the Liddell and Scott lexicon metanoia is described as a ‘change of mind and heart.’ Acknowledging the presence of the ‘heart’ in metanoia highlights the mind-body partnership at work in the concept. In metanoia, mind and body, feeling and intellect, collaborate in creating new knowledge and perspective.”

In buddha dharma it is always taught that body and mind are not separate, and that essence and characteristics are not two. This has been known throughout India and China, so there is no room for mistake.<sup>81</sup>

Referring to the Chinese monks for whom “the study of the way by the laity and the study of the way by home leavers are the same,” Dōgen said that they are like “[beasts and demons] because they “[a] don’t know the body-mind study of the way, [b] don’t study, and [c] don’t have the body-mind of leaving the household.”<sup>82</sup>

It is also necessary to consider the non-duality of meditation/precepts (*zazenkai ichinyo* 禅戒一如), for it makes no sense to raise the possibility of a correct meditative practice detached from taking precepts. In addition to these concepts, Bender suggests that, in order to understand *shukke*, we also need to consider existence-time (*uji* 有時) and the non-duality of practice and (*shusho itto* 修証一等).<sup>83</sup> This being the case, it is reasonable to conclude that *shukke* constitutes a sort of conceptual vortex attracting many other core concepts of Dōgen's spiritual philosophy around it.<sup>84</sup>

This third section of the fascicle ends with several examples of people who wanted to stay at both spaces (family home and monastery), and of others who made the right decision. By pointing out the difference

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<sup>81</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 15.

<sup>82</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 683.

<sup>83</sup> Jacob Bender, “Dōgen's ‘Leaving home life’ (Shukke): A study of aesthetic experience and growth in John Dewey and Dōgen,” *Philosophy East and West* 70, no.1 (2020): 57.

<sup>84</sup> In Bender's words: “As such, ‘leaving home life’ is dynamically interrelated to all things but is especially expressive of the dynamic interrelatedness, continuity, and development of the Buddhist teachings.” Bender, “Dōgen's ‘Leaving home life’ (Shukke),” 57.

between one and the other, we find another argument in support of the central thesis that Dōgen defends with this fascicle:

10. Those who are clear leave the household. Those who are ignorant stay in the household, which becomes the cause and condition of dark [unwholesome] actions.<sup>85</sup>

Right here we can appreciate another articulation with the fascicle *Sanjushichi bon bodai bunpo*, as Dōgen said there that leaving home is the natural, irremediable and automatic consequence of having been reached by the Dharma and, consequently, not leaving home would prove without a doubt that one has not really been reached by it. Therefore, a wish to occupy both spaces at the same time is a symptom of confusion or lack of clarity of mind.

The fourth section of the fascicle contains the words of three Chan masters: Nanyue Huairang (Nangaku Ejo 南嶽懷讓), Panshan Baoji (Banzan Hoshaku 盤山寶積) and Linji Yixuan (Rinzai Gigen 臨濟義玄). It is not a surprise that Dōgen, being a great connoisseur of the Chan texts, turned to them in search of solid argumentative supports, since he knew that he would find abundant material there. In relation to the difference between “true leavers” and “false leavers” of family life, Dōgen echoed Linji Yixuan’s (Rinzai Gigen) words:

Linji Yixuan of Zhen Region, said, “Home leavers should discern what is right in everyday views, buddha from demon, and what is genuine, false, ordinary, or sacred. Those who discern in this way are called true home leavers. Those who cannot distinguish a buddha from a demon are like those who leave one home only to enter another home. They are called sentient beings who create karma, and cannot be called true home leavers.”

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<sup>85</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 812.

Discernment or the ability to discriminate between the real and the unreal, the eternal from the impermanent, but also the wholesome from the unwholesome, corresponds to the Sanskrit term *viveka* in Hindu traditions, most notably in Advaita Vedānta.<sup>86</sup> To have *viveka* is the first requirement for the spiritual seeker in those traditions. For Dōgen, this *viveka* is the sign of an authentic home leaver, whereas false leavers are those who fail to know these distinctions:

Linji Yixuan of Zhen Region, said, “Home leavers should discern what is right in everyday views, buddha from demon, and what is genuine, false, ordinary, or sacred. Those who discern in this way are called true home leavers. Those who cannot distinguish a buddha from a demon are like those who leave one home only to enter another home. They are called sentient beings who create karma, and cannot be called true home leavers.”<sup>87</sup>

In relation to these “false leavers,” Dōgen had already issued some warning in *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*:

Nowadays, some people seem to have abandoned the world and left their homes. Nevertheless, when examining their actions, they still haven't truly left home or renounced the world.<sup>88</sup>

It is worth noting that Dōgen's writings often include two apparently contradictory teachings on the same topic, delivered to the same cohort of monks. The first one is an admonition to the monks to act as the scriptures dictate (for example, to leave home), and the second one is an admonition to them that such an act is not the point at all. In relation to our topic, Dōgen warns the monks that they should not think that by leaving home

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<sup>86</sup> See, for example, Arvind Sharma, *Advaita Vedānta: An introduction* (Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2007).

<sup>87</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 813.

<sup>88</sup> *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*, trans. Shohaku Okumura, 191.

they've got it all under control. He tells them they must be home-leavers (which, of course, they already are), and then in *Shukke* we saw him telling them that they'd be making a serious mistake if they thought that just leaving house and family is what it means to be a home-leaver. Just because you are home-leaving monks—Dōgen seems to say—does not mean you are doing the right things! In more Dōgen-like terms: just because you're home-leavers, that doesn't mean you're (true) home-leavers.<sup>89</sup>

In the fifth section, by the end of the fascicle, Dōgen's arguments are supported by the words of the Śākyamuni Buddha. The last conversation between the World Honored One and Mahakashyapa about how Sunakṣatra became a *bhikṣu* allows Dōgen to introduce elements such as compassion, benevolence or the convenience of finding good friends, all in relation to leaving home. The fascicle ends with a final exhortation that introduces another element of great value to gauging the depth of *shukke*:

Know clearly that home leaving is most precious. While you need to leave the household quickly, how can you wait for tomorrow, leading a life that is not close to the lives of these princes? Your exhalation will not wait for your inhalation. It is wise to leave the household as soon as possible. Also know that the benefaction of your teacher at the time of your home leaving and receiving the precepts equals that of your father and mother.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> I would like to thank one of the reviewers of this article for his insightful and very appropriate comment on the use of apparent contradictions as part of Dogen's style. This discursive movement or technique is a skillful means of encouraging monks to go beyond words, to understand and internalize the deep meaning they contain.

<sup>90</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 817.

## Conclusion

Home leavers begin a new life in a new “home,” a monastery, which is simply a context designed and organized to facilitate an ever deepening of the *shukke-habit* during the initial stages, when it is more difficult to internalize it. It is true that for Dōgen monastic Buddhism was always the model of Buddhism to practice, but as Kim wrote:

Sadly, Dogen must have realized the impracticability of his ideal of universal monasticism in the mundane world. Perhaps a bit pessimistically, he was increasingly attracted to the community of a select few in order to achieve his utopian vision.<sup>91</sup>

This shift in emphasis, although not in principle, contrasted significantly with his earlier position, namely the widest possible dissemination and popularization of zazen in Japan. Nevertheless, his new stress on elitism, rather than universalism, did not imply in the slightest the abandonment of his mission to change the world as much as the self. We must not minimize the social significance of monastic ascetism in this respect.

No one should be surprised about variation, contradiction or evolution in discourses on *shukke*, either in Dōgen's work as a whole or throughout the history of the Sōtō Zen sect. Like all schools of Zen Buddhism, the Sōtō sect “is not a monolithic religion. . . [and it is] still being made.”<sup>92</sup> Western zen practitioners need to know that the renunciation implicit in the concept *shukke* does not mean turning our backs on the world, but on the conditions that cause suffering—such as greed, anger and ignorance—and that it means rediscovering our natural confidence through sitting meditation.

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<sup>91</sup> Kim, *Eihei Dōgen*, 47.

<sup>92</sup> Kim, *Eihei Dōgen*, 9.

*Shukke*, to leave family life behind us in order to become a monk or a nun is, above all, an internal spiritual transformation, a true *metanoia*, a radical change in the vital attitude of a human being who, after leaving home behind, sheds his/her mind.<sup>93</sup> That is what Dōgen refers to in the fascicle Body-and-Mind Study of the Way (*Shinjin Gakudo*, #38) with these words: “Shaving the head and wearing the robe is itself turning the mind and illuminating the mind. Leaving the castle and entering the mountains is leaving one mind and entering one mind.”<sup>94</sup>

In my humble view, the key implication, not only for Zen Buddhism but also for other religions, lies in that this change does not have to be necessarily linked to a move or displacement by which we physically leave behind us the family home and mundane things like work, leisure, and social relationships. Conceived as a *metanoia* or mental/spiritual transformation, leaving family life (*shukke*) is a necessary condition for dropping off body and mind (*shinjin datsuraku*). But ultimately, body and mind are really the “homes” we must leave, the abodes where our egos have been born and raised. *Shukke* only makes sense to the extent that it facilitates the practice of *zazen*, that is, the conditions for *hishiryo* and *shinjin datsuraku*. In the fascicle Body-and-Mind Study of the Way, Dōgen said: “To directly enter the mountains is to think not-thinking. To leave the world behind is beyond thinking.”<sup>95</sup>

Understood as the abandonment of mundane life in order to give life to Dharma, *shukke* is to give life to *zazen*, which is the same as giving *zazen* to life. In that sense, the monk is like a prodigal son returning to his true home. However, if we do not feel the world as a real home as well, we feed a harmful duality.

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<sup>93</sup> Let us remember that this “shedding” is one of the meanings of *datsuraku*. Heine, “Dōgen casts off ‘What,’” 57.

<sup>94</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 423.

<sup>95</sup> Tanahashi, *Treasure of the True Dharma Eye*, 423.



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