

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION /

No name shines with greater luster in the history of modern Japanese Zen Buddhism than that of a twenty-five-year-old girl, Yaeko Iwasaki, who became enlightened after some five years of zazen, largely from a sickbed, and then, in the succeeding five days, deepened this spiritual realization to a degree rare in present-day Japan. A week later, fulfilling her own premonitions, she was dead. In India she would undoubtedly have been heralded as a saint and worshiped by thousands. In Japan the story of her intrepid life and its crowning achievement is scarcely known outside Zen circles.

These are the letters she wrote, in December, 1935, to her preceptor, Zen Master Sogaku Harada, then sixty-five years old, relating what she perceived, felt, and thought during those five epic days, together with his cogent comments. Not many personal documents in religious literature, we believe, are as poignant or as eloquently revealing of the profoundly enlightened mind as these letters. Though few in number and relatively brief, they convey the very essence of living Buddhism. They abound in paradox and overflow with gratitude, qualities which unfailingly mark off deep spiritual experience from the shallower levels of insight. And woven through them is a thread of singular purity, an ardent yearning to achieve full enlightenment not for her own sake but that her fellow men might attain Self-fulfillment and lasting inner peace through her efforts to make known the Buddha's Way. Her "untimely" death - untimely only as men ordinarily calculate a life span - has not ended her karmic destiny to make known the Dharma. If anything, it bids fair to give it new impetus, for in Harada-roshi's words: "Her courageous life is so inspiring and its influence so far-reaching that it is certain to promote the spread of Buddhism and benefit mankind."

As a scion of the founder of the wealthy Mitsubishi industrial combine, Yaeko Iwasaki had everything money could buy except health. At the age of two she was so seriously ill she almost died, and the resultant impairment of her heart valves left her with a frail body for the rest of her brief life. Unable to withstand the demands of daily attendance at school, she was tutored at home until she was almost eleven, at which time, having become somewhat stronger, she was enrolled in the equivalent of junior high school. Despite her inability to participate in a number of school activities, she completed junior as well as senior high school with a host of friends and an excellent scholastic record. Her keen, lively mind, her joyous, sunny disposition, and her generous spirit earned for her the admiration and love of her classmates.

Upon graduation she commenced the study of flower arrangement and tea ceremony, the traditional Japanese arts through which serenity and gentleness of spirit are cultivated, and then began to learn cooking and to study the piano, all as preparation for eventual marriage and motherhood.

But her karma was to lead her abruptly in another direction. About the age of twenty she began to cough blood, and tuberculosis was diagnosed. Her doctor sent her to bed and ordered complete rest for two to three years. Very likely this prolonged inactivity, in its effect on her physical and psychic organism, developed within her a sensitivity which was crucial to her rich spiritual flowering.

More immediately, what propelled her toward Zen was a sudden development involving her father, whom she deeply loved. He was told that he had a heart condition which could prove fatal at any time, and becoming gripped by the fear of sudden death, he attended a lecture by Harada-roshi on this most fundamental human anxiety and how it could be dissolved through zazen and, ultimately, enlightenment. So convinced was Yaeko's father by what he heard that he became a disciple of Harada-roshi and in his own home began to practice zazen. Since his heart condition precluded regular attendance at sesshin, he prevailed upon Harada-roshi to come to his home once a month, on the roshi's regular trip to Tokyo, to give a lecture and private instructions (dokusan) to his family and friends.

With a zeal born of his overwhelming fear of death, Yaeko's father devoted himself to zazen and in less than a year attained kensho. This experience banished all his fears and brought him such an upsurge of vitality and self-confidence that he once more took up his duties as the head of his family's large industrial enterprise, but with an unwise vigor. The strain proved too much for him, and one day without warning he died of a heart attack.

The appalling suddenness of her father's death brought home with dramatic force to the still-bedridden Yaeko the evanescence of life and the stark reality of death, precipitating her into the most searching reflections on the meaning of human existence. Up to her father's enlightenment she had been hearing Harada-roshi's monthly lecture

at her home, but as yet with no desire to receive private instructions or to attempt zazen herself. This event, however, had so fired the imaginations of herself, her mother, and her two sisters that they all began to devote themselves regularly to zazen. **The roshi had assigned Yaeko the koan Mu**, instructing her to absorb herself in it continuously even while lying in bed. With her father's death and the soul-searching it provoked, her zazen and overall concern with Buddhism took on a fresh and profound sense of urgency. Harada-roshi's lengthy commentary on Dogen's Shobogenzo she read seventeen times, devouring every word, and while yet far from strong she undertook zazen sitting in the traditional Japanese position, alternating it with the lotus posture. By now the worst stages of her tuberculosis had passed and she was no longer required to remain in bed. However, the disease had left its marks on her already delicate constitution and she was urged by her doctor to convalesce in sunny Kamakura, where her family maintained a villa.

In this new seclusion she was able to lose herself more and more in zazen, turning her back forever on the interests which had once been meaningful to her. So eager was she in her pursuit of the Buddha's Way that she begged Harada-roshi to come to Kamakura to continue his lectures and private instructions. Seeing in her uncommon ardor and devotion a rare spirit, he made the trip regularly each month specially to guide her, as did from time to time Yasutani-roshi and Taji-roshi, two of Harada-roshi's most respected disciples.

Some five years elapsed from the time she began zazen in bed until her first enlightenment, on December 22, 1935. In the succeeding days, as these letters vividly reveal, her Mind's eye opened fully in a flood of light and Understanding, Her ensuing rapture, her discovery that even perfect enlightenment adds nothing one does not already have, and that therefore this ecstasy is a kind of "madness" - this together with Harada-roshi's joyous recognition of her Bodhisattvic spirit and his gentle reproach for her "smell" of enlightenment afford an intimate insight, as rare as it is illuminating, into the complex and seemingly contradictory enlightenment process.

To die as Yaeko did, with a presentiment of death a week before, with no pain, and with utter serenity is, as Harada-roshi points out, an aim of all Buddhists, albeit one to which few attain. That Yaeko could achieve it is the measure of the extraordinarily high level of consciousness to which she had risen, and to the pureness of her faith, the courage, and the perseverance which made it possible. Who can read Harada-roshi's poignant account of his last hours with her and not be moved by her dauntless spirit and utter selflessness?

The physician who witnessed her death, which technically he attributed to pneumonia, recalled: "Never have I seen anyone die so beautifully." But perhaps the greatest tribute to her memory was that paid at Hosshin-ji at the first sesshin which fell after her death. Toward the end of it Harada-roshi, in tears, recounted to the ninety or so participants the incidents of Yaeko's heroic struggle for Self-fulfillment and its magnificent consummation. Such was its effect that by the end of the sesshin more than twenty persons, an unprecedented number, had gained enlightenment.

These letters first appeared in a Buddhist magazine soon after the death of Yaeko Iwasaki in an article by **Harada-roshi**. His remarks (**here printed throughout in italics**) were jotted down by him on the letters as he received them, but the general comments and the titles were added by him specifically for the article, to instruct the reader in Buddhism as much as to clarify the letters themselves. Yaeko, of course, had no opportunity to see these comments before her passing.

About a year later this same material was included in a book called *Yaezakura* (Double Cherry Blossoms), which is a brief account of Yaeko's life printed privately by the Iwasaki family as a memorial to her in December, 1937. It is from this book that the present translation was made.

All bracketed matter within both the letters and Harada-roshi's comments is the translators'.

A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON HARADA-ROSHI /

Sogaku Harada, to whom Yaeko Iwasaki's letters are addressed and whose comments accompany them, died December 12, 1961, at the age of ninety-one. At his funeral service, next to his photograph, hung a piece of calligraphy written by him several years earlier:

For forty years I've been selling water

By the bank of a river.

Ho, ho!

My labors have been wholly without merit.

These typically Zen lines are a fitting epitaph, for no Japanese Zen master in modern times strove more arduously to teach his students that there is nothing to learn than Harada-roshi. His fourteen Dharma successors (roshi) and innumerable enlightened disciples and followers throughout Japan bear witness that his efforts, if "without merit," have by no means been in vain.

Nominally of the Soto sect, he welded together the best of Soto and Rinzai and the resulting amalgam was a vibrant Buddhism which has become one of the great teaching lines in Japan today. Probably more than anyone else in his time he revitalized, through his profound spiritual insight, the teachings of Dogen-zenji, which had been steadily drained of their vigor through the shallow understanding of priests and scholars of the Soto sect in whose hands their exposition had hitherto rested. His commentary on Shushogi, a codification of Dogen's Shobogenzo, is recognized as one of the most penetrating of its kind.

Hosshin-ji, Harada-roshi's monastery on the Japan Sea, drenched by incessant rains, blanketed by frequent snowstorms, and buffeted by periodic typhoons from without and "rocked" by unprecedentedly severe discipline from within, came to be known as the harshest Zen monastery in all Japan and Harada-roshi himself as the most exacting of Zen taskmasters. More than once he refused invitations to head monasteries in balmy districts of Japan, contending that this rigorous climate helped to drive men's minds into the pit of their bellies, where ultimately they would find the secret of the universe. Men and women by the hundreds flocked to Hosshin-ji in its heyday, drawn by the roshi's extraordinary power to inspire and lead them to Self-awakening.

Like all masters of high spiritual development, he was the keenest judge of character. He was as quick to expose pretense and sham as he was to detect it. Exceptional students he drove mercilessly, exacting from them the best of which they were capable. From all he demanded as a sine qua non sincerity and absolute adherence to his teaching, brooking not the slightest deviation. Casual observers often found him rigid and narrow, but disciples and students who were faithful to his teachings knew him to be wise and compassionate.

For all his sternness Harada-roshi had his gentle side, and though he never married but remained a monk in the true sense of the word, he loved to romp with children and was exceedingly fond of animals, particularly dogs.

Thoroughly grounded in both the Soto and the Rinzai doctrines and disciplines, Harada-roshi was eminently fitted to teach an integral Zen. At the age of seven he had entered Soto temple life as a novice monk and had continued his Soto training in several temples throughout his primary and high school years. At twenty, in the face of his Soto adviser's persistent opposition, he became a monk at Shogen-ji, in its time a great Rinzai monastery, as he had been unable to find a deeply enlightened master in the Soto sect. After two and a half years of strenuous training there, he attained kensho, but his enlightenment still fell short of total liberation.

At twenty-seven, by his father's insistence that he obtain more formal education, he quit Shogen-ji and enrolled in the Soto-sponsored Komazawa University, continuing for a further six years after his graduation to do research in Buddhism under well-known scholars. But while his knowledge of Buddhism grew, it did not bring him the emancipation he longed for. He decided therefore to go to Kyoto for the purpose of meeting Dokutan-roshi, abbot of Nanzen-ji and reputed to be the best Zen master then living.

He was accepted by Dokutan as a disciple, and for the next two years came daily for koan practice and private instructions while living with a friend in Kyoto whom he assisted with the affairs of his temple. At the end of two years Dokutan-roshi, impressed with his disciple's uncommon intelligence, ardor, and thirst for Truth, offered to make him his personal attendant. Though now almost forty, Sogaku Harada accepted this signal honor with alacrity and went to live at Nanzen-ji. There he applied himself intensively to zazen and completed all the koans, at last opening his Mind's eye fully and receiving inka from Dokutan-roshi.

At this time Komazawa University recalled him to teach, in accordance with the provisions of an agreement he had made. This led to twelve years of teaching Buddhism at Komazawa, part of which time he spent as a full professor.

Harada-roshi - he now merited the title roshi - was a rare phenomenon in the Buddhist academic world: a professor during the academic year and a Zen master during his summer vacation, conducting sesshin at various temples. Within a short time he gained the reputation of a strict disciplinarian.

His dissatisfaction with the narrowness of academic life and its inevitable accent on theory, coupled with the limited opportunity it afforded him to train people through sesshin in the direct experience of the Dharma, was brought to a head by repeated requests that he assume the abbotship of Hosshin-ji. He finally accepted, and for the next forty

years lived as master of this monastery, which was to be known as one of the outstanding centers of Zen training in Japan.

Until he was almost ninety Harada-roshi conducted a week of intensive sesshin at Hosshin-ji six times a year, in April, May, June, October, November, and December, and between times held sesshin in other parts of Japan. Five days before he drew his last breath he toppled over in a faint, and without pain gradually became weaker and weaker, passing from a partial coma to complete unconsciousness.

The time of his death coincided exactly with low tide. Harada-roshi had literally ebbed away with the waters.

THE LETTERS AND COMMENTS /

1 / EVIDENCE OF KENSHO /

December 23 /

Dear Harada-roshi:

I am so grateful that you came to see me the day before yesterday, busy though you were. Do take care of your cold. At dokusan yesterday morning you told me: "What you have perceived is still hazy," so I felt I must search more deeply. When I awoke suddenly last midnight, it had become far clearer,

The Ox! has come a hundred miles nearer!

and all I could do was raise my hands palms together out of joy, sheer joy.

Truly I see that there are degrees of depth in enlightenment.

Yes, but few know this significant fact.

Even you, my roshi, no longer count for anything in my eyes. My gratitude and delight are impossible to describe. I can now affirm that so long as we are conscious of enlightenment it is not true enlightenment.

How can I express to you my gratitude for enabling me to requite, to even this small extent,² the incalculable debt I owe all Buddhas? My gratitude cannot be put into words - there is nothing I can write or say. I write you now only because I think you alone can understand my happiness, and will be pleased with me.

Now that my Mind's eye is opened, the vow to save every living being arises within me spontaneously, I am so beholden to you and to all Buddhas, I am ashamed (of my defects), and will make every effort to discipline my character.

You have seen the Ox clearly, but the point of grasping it is ten thousand miles away. Your experience is still tinged with conceptual thinking,

I am also determined to cleanse my mind of its long-standing delusions. You are the only person I can confide in. Everyone else, I am afraid, will misunderstand and think me boastful if I should suddenly speak of all this.

I am pleased with your restraint.

Believe me, never in this lifetime did I expect to be thus favored (in coming to enlightenment). I owe you so much. I gassho in heartfelt gratitude.

Guard yourself well against the cold. I look forward joyfully to seeing you on the twenty-first of next month.

Yaeko

GENERAL COMMENT: I confirm that she has truly seen the Ox, for there is in her experience deep self-affirmation, the desire to save all sentient beings, and the determination to discipline herself spiritually in her daily life. Only such an exalted state of mind can be called the mind of true children of the Buddha. But as yet there remains a subject who is seeing. Her Mind's home is still far distant. She must search more intensely!

2 / EVIDENCE OF GREAT ENLIGHTENMENT /

December 25 /

Dear Harada-roshi:

Today for the first time I have attained great enlightenment. I am so overjoyed that all of me is dancing in spite of myself. No one but you can possibly understand such ecstasy.

I have reached the point of actually grasping the Ox, and there is absolutely no delusion.

Now for the first time you have found the Way - fully realized your Mind. You have been delivered from delusion, which has no abiding root. Wonderful! Wonderful!

There is neither Ox nor man. I ought to come at once to thank you personally, but as I must watch my health I am unable to, so I am expressing by letter my deep gratitude. From the bottom of my heart I thank you and raise my hands in gassho to you.

Buddhas and Patriarchs haven't deceived me!³ I have seen my Face before my parents were born clearer than a diamond in the palm of my hand. The absolute truth of every word of the Patriarchs and the sutras has appeared before my eyes with crystal clarity. No longer have I need for dokusan, and all the koans are now like useless furniture to me. Even though I would save them, there are no sentient beings to save. Those who have only kensho do not know this state of unlimited freedom and profound peace of mind. Indeed, it cannot be known until one comes to full enlightenment. If after reading this letter you still talk nonsense⁴ to me, I will not hesitate to say your own realization is lacking.

Good! Good! This is called the stage of standing on the summit of a lone mountain, or coming back to one's own Home. Yet I have to talk "nonsense" to you. You will understand why some day.

I owe you so much. When I reflect that I have actually fulfilled the Great Vow made by me through numberless past lives and can now hold dokusan, I am infinitely grateful.

It is too early yet. Still, how many today among those called enlightened have established such inner assurance? I am delighted to see it revealed through your own words.

My Mind's eye is absolutely identical with yours - neither Buddha nor devils can unnerve me.⁵ This state defies description. I have forgotten everything and returned to my real Home empty-handed.

Has the Patriarch Dogen come again?⁶ This is the immaculate Dharma-kaya, i.e., the Buddha Birushana.

My world has been revolutionized. How vain and needless my anxious strivings of the past! By following your wise instructions and patient counsel, I wouldn't allow myself to rest satisfied with the little peace⁷ which my still-deluded mind believed adequate. I can't tell you how joyous I am and how thankful for my present state. This is all the outcome of persistent zazen, of a determination never to stop with a small success but to go on no matter how many lifetimes elapse.

Your intense devotion - and you a lay devotee! - is nothing short of astonishing.

Now I can commence the unending task of rescuing every living being. This makes me so happy I can scarcely contain myself.

All is radiance, pure radiance I can now forever progress toward perfection in natural harmony with my daily life.

You do comprehend. That is exactly how it is. How many so-called Zen men these days have come to such profound realization?

I have been resurrected, as have you and everything else, for all eternity. When you read this letter you too, I believe, will shed tears of thanksgiving.

I am so thankful to have a disciple like you that I can now die happily.

You alone can understand my mind. Yet there is neither you nor me. My body and mind in fact have completely dropped away.

I will try to improve my health, cultivate virtue, and be alert for the opportunity to teach Buddhism. I am in the center of the Great Way where everything is natural, without strain, neither hurried nor halting; where there are no Buddhas, no you, nothing; and where I see without my eyes and hear without my ears. Not a trace remains of what I have written. There is neither pen nor paper nor words - nothing at all.

Since it is impossible to talk of all this except with one who has actually experienced it himself, I had to write you. I imagine you must be happy to have such a disciple as I who have drunk so deeply from the fountain of your wisdom. I prostrate myself nine times⁸ to express my heartfelt gratitude.

Yaeko

GENERAL COMMENT: This degree of realization is termed "grasping the Ox" - in other words, the true attainment of the Way. It is the return to one's own Home, or the acquisition of fundamental wisdom. To advance one more step is to realize even profounder wisdom. This "Ox" has immeasurable solemnity and radiance.

3 / EVIDENCE OF DEEPENED ENLIGHTENMENT /

December 26 /

Dear Harada-roshi:

I am filled with remorse and shame. My letter to you of the twenty-fifth must have led you to think I had gone mad.

You need not rebuke yourself. This delirium of joy is the initial reaction of all who have had a deep awakening.

I had reached such a peak of ecstasy that I didn't know what I was doing and couldn't contain myself. When I recovered my senses and began to reflect, I burst into laughter at the thought of how topsy-turvy my emotions had become. I was then able to appreciate the story of Enyadatta,⁹ who had gone mad believing she had lost her head, and the great to-do she made when she "discovered" it, though of course she had never been without it. But I am once more myself, so there is no need to worry about me.

I have always had feelings of anxiety arising on the one hand from the fear that my aspiration toward Buddhahood might weaken because of my insignificance and powerlessness, and on the other by the fear that if I should die without actually experiencing the truth of the Dharma I might not again be able to realize it for many lifetimes.¹⁰

Yes, it must be terribly painful for one having absolute faith in the Dharma to die without experiencing it. Only by feeling that way can one practice as devotedly as you have.

But now that I have penetrated deeply and have acquired an unshakable aspiration to Buddhahood, it is clear to me that I can continue my spiritual discipline forever and in this way perfect my personality to its fullest, impelled by the Vow, which rises naturally within me, to save all sentient beings.

I am overcome by tears!

I know of no words to express my joy and gratitude.

Far from neglecting zazen, I have every intention of strengthening even further my powers of concentration.

Yes, yes, you really do understand!

I am profoundly aware of the need for diligent self-cultivation and thoroughly understand the value of dokusan. I swear never again to write anything so pretentious as I did yesterday, saying that I had become fully enlightened and therefore could instruct others in dokusan.

You have truly awakened!

Please forgive me, I was so beside myself that I simply lost all sense of proportion. After more sober reflection I see that this was rather comical, yet what a precious memory to have tasted such dazzling joy even briefly!

Buddhas and Patriarchs have all experienced this great joy at least once.

I am choked with tears of gratitude, for I can now truly understand good and evil, and can proceed steadily and without delusion to carry on my spiritual practices in and through my everyday life. From the bottom of my heart I thank you.

Do watch your health. I so look forward to your next visit.

Yaeko

GENERAL COMMENT: At this stage one acquires what is termed "the wisdom of subtle and immaculate perception," or "subsequently attained wisdom." Her degree can be gauged according to the Five Degrees established by the Patriarch Tozan. The depth of perception revealed in her second letter corresponds to the third degree, shochurai (where awareness of the One is paramount and consciousness of differentiation has subsided), and that of this letter to the fourth degree, henchushi (wherein one lives in all things with no self-conscious trace of enlightenment). Now it is possible to perform the benevolent and virtuous acts attributed to Fugen or Kannon. In Zen this is the fulfillment of the vow of a Bodhisattva, this is living in the Pure Land.

Though it takes from five to ten years after kensho for most devotees to come to this stage, she has reached it in less than a week. It is doubtless due to her deep and pure faith in Buddhism, to her vast and boundless Vow (made through countless lives and embracing all sentient beings), and to her having listened with a believing heart to every word of authentic Buddhism spoken to her. Her accomplishment is rare in modern times. The remarkable story of her determination and zeal ought to be engraved in six-foot letters as an immortal inspiration for all Zen devotees.

4 / EVIDENCE OF DIRECT EXPERIENCE OF THE GREAT WAY OF BUDDHISM /

December 26 /

Dear Harada-roshi:

Forgive me for writing you so often. I have attained the level of realization which is the last possible while yet a disciple.

Indeed you have.

I used to think: "How grand must one become upon enlightenment!" and "How admirable is he who devotes himself so fully to Buddhist activities that he no longer thinks of himself!" But I was so mistaken! From now on I will cultivate more virtue and never cease my practice.

Before enlightenment I was so anxious for it and often thought: "How noble he who returns Home with peace and contentment." But having come to full enlightenment,

Your experience points up the difference between buji¹¹ Zen and authentic Zen.

I now say to myself: "Why were you so excited about it?" For I have a distinct aversion to being called "enlightened."¹²

I am delighted to hear you say this. Yet it is only with full enlightenment that it is possible to put your Zen into practice in daily life.¹³

I have utterly forgotten the moment of my enlightenment and what happened immediately after, yet I can say I have acquired the true eye of enlightenment, so to speak. It tickles me to say to myself: "So this is full enlightenment!"

I can't tell you how thankful I am to be forever one with the true Dharma, utterly and naturally. At the same time I feel so foolish for having been carried away by my delirious joy. This should make you smile: My "delusions" about everything have positively vanished. But let us not speak to anyone else of this, as the Dharma must be respected.¹⁴

If I am careful how I speak to others about your experience, it may help, not harm, them, so don't be concerned.

I simply can't understand why I always made such a to-do about respecting Buddhism¹⁵ or anyone who had attained full enlightenment. Have I been dreaming?

Yaeko

GENERAL COMMENT: Dreaming? Certainly. Yet as dreams go in this world it is not the commonplace dream of most but a dream of tremendous and lasting significance, of intense absorption in the Buddha's Dharma.

This stage can be equated with the fifth or most advanced degree, called kenchuto (a condition of absolute naturalness¹⁶ where the mutual interpenetration of the world of discrimination and the world of equality is so thorough that one is consciously aware of neither).

I marvel that she has reached this point so quickly. That she could have done so can be attributed only to her intense faith in the Buddha's teachings and to her strong Bodhisattvic spirit. One who has attained to this degree has completed what Zen practice can be carried out under a teacher and embarked upon the path of true self-practice.

Are there even a handful today who understand all this? Katsu!

5 / EVIDENCE OF ATTAINING THE NON-REGRESSING MIND OF FUGEN /

December 27 /

Dear Harada-roshi:

Thanks to you, I have clearly perceived that Buddha is none other than Mind.¹⁷ My gratitude knows no bounds. This is as much due to your benevolent guidance as to my intense longing and striving for Buddhahood that I may save all living beings.

I had not thought of you as one with such an unusually strong aspiration toward Buddhahood. How undiscerning of me! It is evident you are the incarnation of a great Bodhisattva.

How can I ever thank you enough?

Now I see that, in terms of the Dharma, I must respect myself.¹⁸ Please point out to me what I still need to do. How thankful I am to have been able to purge myself of every iota of delusive thinking and feeling.

You have not yet entirely rooted out your delusive feelings,¹⁹ but one who has perceived as profoundly as you have is nevertheless able to live a pure life.

But in spite of this, I wish to be guided by you in all respects lest I mislead others in their practice or understanding of Buddhism.

My mind-state is quite different now from what it was at the time of kensho.

Kensho is the stage of merely seeing the Ox.

Indeed, the farther I advance on the Supreme Way, the more exalted it becomes. Now that I have experienced that tada²⁰ is itself perfection, I can at last repay your countless benefactions, and I am overjoyed. Having reached a deep

and critical stage, I do need to see you soon.

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I wish I could fly to you to advise you further. But since this is the end of the year²¹ I am extremely busy with the affairs of the monastery and therefore unable to leave at present.

Forgive me for making this request by letter, but my illness prevents me from coming to see you.

You must be extremely happy that I have truly graduated. Never did I dream that in my lifetime would I witness the transmission of Buddhism from a Buddha incarnate to the Bodhisattva Miroku.²²

I promise myself over and over to act with the utmost care in every detail of my life.

I pray that you stay well.

Yaeko

GENERAL COMMENT: The essence of living Buddhism can be summed up in the word tada. Who is Shakyamuni Buddha? Who is Miroku? They are no different from you. Look! Look!

She has reached this stage of tada. It is natural therefore that she should feel this deep joy as well as heavy responsibility as respects the profound Dharma. The actions flowing from such a Mind are those of Fugen or Miroku incarnate.

6 / EVIDENCE OF THE JOY AND PEACE OF BEING AT ONE WITH THE DHARMA /

December 27 /

Dear Harada-roshi:

Rejoice with me! At last I have discerned my Face before my parents were born with a clarity that penetrates from heaven to the very bottom of the earth. And yet I have never regarded myself as a desperate seeker.

You and I have cherished a profound illusion: that it is exalting to vow to rescue all deluded creatures no matter how many aeons it takes.

But one so deluded is called a Bodhisattva. To realize that there is no one to save is (real) saving.

Oh, how funny! Nonetheless, my respect for you as a roshi knows no bounds. Indeed no one but you can understand the import of my enlightenment.

I feel it would be unwise for you to tell others that I, who have no dignity or stature, have become fully enlightened, as it may cause them to think lightly of Buddhism.²³

That may be true from one point of view. On the other hand, many will be inspired to a greater effort, so there is no need to be concerned.

Only the exceptional few would not doubt my experience. What an immense relief to discover that just as I am I lack nothing! What a joy knowing you and I will be together everlastingly!

Buddhism is useless for those free of delusion. I chuckle knowing I have always been fundamentally a Buddha - I haven't the slightest doubt of this - yet I can tell it only to those whose enlightenment is equal to mine. To people of lesser realization I will have to preach differently.

With a heart full of gratitude I raise my hands to you palm to palm. How supremely exalted is the true Law, how consistently reasonable from first to last - I feel this so keenly!

With a peaceful heart I look forward to the New Year.

Do take care of yourself.

Yaeko

(P. S.) I can now appreciate how dangerously one-sided a weak kensho can be.²⁴

You are right. The enlightenment of most Zen teachers these days is of this kind, but a one-sided realization remains a one-sided realization regardless of how many koans one has passed. What these people fail to realize is that their enlightenment is capable of endless enlargement.

GENERAL COMMENT: To live one's life as tada is to walk the supremely glorious Path trodden by all Buddhas. When one no longer is aware of the need for Buddhism, true Buddhism is manifesting itself. Should one, however, cherish even this conception, his life will become clouded with delusion. Devotedly wipe away (the haze of) such attachment and your life will be perpetually suffused with the warm sunshine of spring.

7 / FURTHER EVIDENCE OF THE JOY AND PEACE OF BEING AT ONE WITH THE DHARMA /

December 27 /

Dear Harada-roshi:

Do let me write you often.

At last I have recovered my composure. With the realization that Buddha is myself,

I am Buddha. I am I. I am selfless I.

I have come to understand clearly the single-minded love and respect I feel toward you.²⁵

Already I have rid myself of the smell of enlightenment,

Not quite. You are even now emitting the awful smell of enlightenment.

and my gratitude to you and the Dharma is all the deeper. I feel grateful in my own mind for the realization that clinging either to the deluded or the enlightened state gives rise, in spite of oneself, to an increasingly ardent longing to pursue the Dharma with greater intensity (so as to attain supreme peace of mind).²⁶

One who never tires of performing virtuous deeds is called a Buddha. Attachment to the Dharma, however, is not a virtue, nor is this attachment easy to dissolve.

Delusion and enlightenment are equally offensive.

You can appreciate how enormously satisfying it is for me to discover at last, through full realization, that just as I am I lack nothing.

I know how you feel. Even the honored Shakyamuni clung to the (delicious) taste of his enlightenment for a period of three weeks. Unless you rid yourself of this self-satisfaction, however, you cannot know true Buddhism.

The knowledge that my karmic relation to you is profound has made me more self-respecting and prudent.

I have now had one great enlightenment and five small ones. I had forgotten who and where I was and what I was doing until today.

Going not knowing one goes, sitting not knowing one sits - this is true samadhi in Zen. Unless the ego is banished to this extent there cannot be total regeneration. You have done well. Confucius forgot about eating for three days, so absorbed did he become in just his music.

I had swept away my "delusions" so thoroughly and penetrated so deeply that I could not return to my usual state.

Let it be as it is.

I asked to have dokusan with Taji-roshi, and at that time he pointed out that this was due to the effect of my profound concentration.

Yes, due to the force generated by deep mind concentration.²⁷

I thought it might be necessary to ask you to come to give me further instructions, but then a deep insight came to me and I prayed before the Buddha, after which I lost myself in shikan-taza for what must have been three hours,

There is no need for prayer.

At last I was able to return to my normal condition.

The Zen I practiced (after enlightenment) fancying there was some residue that had to be swept away was actually desperate. It is clear to me that I can never dispense with zazen. I am grateful, so grateful for the realization that to be just as I am lifetime after lifetime is in itself perfection.

In the whole universe I am supreme, and it is perfectly natural.

Among the innumerable phenomena in the universe One only is immaculately manifesting itself. What is it if not you!

I am astonished

(Astonished) from the viewpoint of the delusive feelings.

that I am that One. How wonderful, how marvelous!

I am in good spirits, so please don't worry about me.

I look forward with the greatest pleasure to seeing you again.

Yaeko

P. S. Tears of gratitude and joy well up in me when I think that I have accomplished the practice of Zen from first to last without strain, and that I can receive your eternal guidance.²⁸

GENERAL COMMENT: An ancient Zen saying has it that to become attached to one's own enlightenment is as much a sickness as to exhibit a maddeningly active ego. Indeed, the profounder the enlightenment, the worse the illness. In her case I think it would have taken two or three months for the most obvious symptoms to disappear, two or three years for the less obvious, and seven or eight for the most insidious. Such symptoms are less pronounced in one as gentle as she, but in same they are positively nauseating. Those who practice Zen must guard against them. My own sickness lasted almost ten years. Ha!

8 / PRESENTIMENT OF DEATH /

December 28 /

Dear Harada-roshi:

I simply must see you before this year is out, come what may.

Let me tell you a disturbing thing. I feel strongly that the time of my parting from you is near, so I beg you to come to see me at any cost - for the sake of the Dharma. I ask this after serious reflection, I assure you it is not a hallucination.

Yaeko

CONCLUDING COMMENT: In this her last letter it is clear that Yaeko has a foreboding of death. In view of the radiant tenor of the preceding seven letters, I was shocked and saddened by the ominous tone of this one. I had hoped that somehow her death would not come so soon. What a terrible pity!

One of the sutras says that the ideal way to die is with an intimation of death a week beforehand, with little pain or affliction, and with a mind serenely unshaken, free from all attachment to the body. This is the ideal cherished by all Buddhists, but its realization is far from easy.

The Patriarch Chuho once solemnly declared: "I want to die with a premonition of death the week before, with my mind serenely unshaken and free from attachment to my body, thence to be reborn into the realm of the Buddhas so as to ultimately gain supreme enlightenment through them and receive their sanction the better that I may be able to save all sentient beings throughout the innumerable worlds."

Yaeko's death was in this spirit. Prior to this letter I had received a telegram urgently asking me to come to see her. I hastened to her bedside at Kamakura on the twenty-ninth of December (1935). Upon seeing and speaking with her, I confirmed the opening of her Mind's eye.

She was in tears. So was I. I cried from joy and sorrow. For herself she was not the least bit afraid of dying,²⁹ but thinking only of the Dharma and the enlightenment of others, she was deeply apprehensive that her friends and acquaintances might mistakenly believe her practice of Zen or her experience of enlightenment had caused her death. Such an erroneous belief, she feared, might lead those not yet having true faith in Buddhism to repudiate the Dharma. If this came to pass, she would have committed a grave offense karmically not only against the Dharma but against those very persons. Moreover, she would be guilty, she felt, of unfaithfulness and irresponsibility toward Buddhas and all humanity.

These thoughts weighed heavily upon her. Though she was willing to suffer rebirth in hell as a consequence of such a transgression, the thought that she might be instrumental in leading other people in the wrong direction was intolerable. During the course of the whole day and night that I remained with her she discussed these concerns with me. I assured her that she had no reason to worry, as I would set right any such misconceptions.

I had often cautioned her against overstraining herself, pointing out that it was contrary to the true Law, and further, that those who have the will to do it can carry on Zen practice without straining themselves. It is not impossible, of course, that she could have unwittingly ignored my warnings, and considering her delicate health,

sapped her strength by an overexertion which hastened her death. Her greatest fear was that the cause of her death might be misunderstood by people (who, laying the blame upon the Dharma in its excessive demands upon her) would come to despise it³⁰.

Be that as it may, the virtue of her life lies in its sterling example of how it is entirely feasible to practice Zen properly, and even experience perfect enlightenment, right in one's own home and partly from a sickbed. If there be strong determination, one can always practice zazen even with a frail constitution and without being able to attend sesshin. This it is which exalts her remarkable experience and must be recorded in the modern history of Zen.

Yaeko is dead now - a truly great loss. Her courageous life, however, is so inspiring and its influence so far-reaching that it is certain to promote the spread of Buddhism and benefit mankind.

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Footnotes:

1 "Ox" refers to the enlightened Mind. See Oxherding Pictures in section VIII.

2 That is, through her enlightenment.

3 This is a traditional way of saying that the enlightenment taught by the Buddhas and Patriarchs is now an actual fact of one's own experience.

4 What is implied here is that to the truly enlightened all talk of enlightenment is meaningless.

5 That is to say, she can stand unflinchingly before the penetrating gaze of a Buddha no less than the menacing aspect of a devil. This implies utter self-assurance and absolute fearlessness.

6 Here Harada-roshi is likening Yaeko's statement, "I have forgotten everything and returned to my real Home empty-handed," to that made by Dogen upon his return from China, viz., "I have returned Home with empty hands. I retain no trace of Buddhism. I can say only this: my eyes are horizontal, my nose is vertical."

7 "Peace" here connotes the certainty and calmness arising from her initial kensho.

8 The number of times one formally makes obeisance to a Buddha.

9 See p. 54.

10 See footnote 2, p. 164.

11 Buji Zen is a Zen without substance, a Zen which denies the validity of the enlightenment experience. Its adherents maintain that to speak of becoming enlightened is a contradiction in terms since we are all innately enlightened. See p. 46.

12 Since enlightenment brought her nothing she did not already have, to accept praise for being enlightened would be like accepting praise for having, say, two feet.

13 What Harada-roshi is saying is that the fullest development of all the potentialities of personality and character can take place only after full enlightenment.

14 This probably means that speaking of her enlightenment indiscriminately may lead to a distortion of the Dharma by those unable or unwilling to believe her experience possible.

My own sickness lasted almost ten years. Ha!

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