



Eihei Dogen: Mystical Realist

By Hee-Jin Kim

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Eihei Dogen, the founder of the Japanese branch of the Soto Zen Buddhist school, is considered one of the world's most remarkable religious philosophers. *Eihei Dogen: Mystical Realist* is a comprehensive introduction to the genius of this brilliant thinker. This thirteenth-century figure has much to teach us all and the questions that drove him have always been at the heart of Buddhist practice.

At the age of seven, in 1207, Dogen lost his mother, who at her death earnestly asked him to become a monastic to seek the truth of Buddhism. We are told that in the midst of profound grief, Dogen experienced the impermanence of all things as he watched the incense smoke ascending at his mother's funeral service. This left an indelible impression upon the young Dogen; later, he would emphasize time and again the intimate relationship between the desire for enlightenment and the awareness of impermanence. His way of life would not be a sentimental flight from, but a compassionate understanding of, the intolerable reality of existence.

At age 13, Dogen received ordination at Mt. Hiei. And yet, a question arose: "As I study both the exoteric and the esoteric schools of Buddhism, they maintain that human beings are endowed with Dharma-nature by birth. If this is the case, why did the buddhas of all ages - undoubtedly in possession of enlightenment - find it necessary to seek enlightenment and engage in spiritual practice?" When it became clear that no one on Mt. Hiei could give a satisfactory answer to this spiritual problem, he sought elsewhere, eventually making the treacherous journey to China. This was the true beginning of a life of relentless questioning, practice, and teaching - an immensely inspiring contribution to the Buddhadharma.

As you might imagine, a book as ambitious as *Eihei Dogen: Mystical Realist* has to be both academically rigorous and eminently readable to succeed. Professor Hee-Jin Kim's work is indeed both.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This book is an excellent comprehensive introduction to Dogen's massive corpus of intricate writings as well as to his elegantly simple yet profound practice. It stands as the best overall general introduction to Dogen's teaching." (From the new foreword by Taigen Dan Leighton)

"This book's re-issue represents an important moment in the history of Dogen studies. Kim's work still stands out for the depth and clarity of its elucidation of Dogen as a religious thinker and practitioner." (Mark Unno, Editorial Board, *Journal of Religious Ethics*, and author of *Shingon Refractions*)

"Down through the years and through its earlier editions, it was always to Dr. Kim's book that I turned first in any matter relating to Dogen. Now from his retirement from a fine academic career, we have the fruit of his lifetime of research and meditation. I am very grateful." (Robert Aitken, author of *Taking the Path of Zen* and *The Morning Star: New and Selected Zen Writings*)

"Dogen is no easy read--fortunately Kim's book, itself a polished gem, expertly guides a reader into what is simultaneously rich and playful in Dogen's Buddhist vision." (William R. LaFleur, author of *Awesome Nightfall: The Life, Times, and Poetry of Saigyo*)

"A essential volume in any Dogen library." (Zoketsu Norman Fischer, former abbot, San Francisco Zen Center, and author of *Taking Our Places: The Buddhist Path to Truly Growing Up*)

"Kim's work remains a beacon of scholarship into the mind of one of the most remarkable spiritual giants in the history of Zen." (John Daido Loori, abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery)

"*Eihei Dogen: Mystical Realist* remains a valuable contribution to all of modern Zen commentary."
(SirReadALot.org)

About the Author

Hee-Jin Kim is Professor Emeritus at the University of Washington.

Taigen Dan Leighton, Soto Zen priest and successor in the Suzuki Roshi lineage, received Dharma Transmission in 2000 from Reb Anderson Roshi and is Dharma Teacher at Ancient Dragon Zen Gate in Chicago. After residing for years at San Francisco Zen Center and Tassajara monastery, Taigen also practiced for two years in Kyoto, Japan. Taigen is author of *Zen Questions: Zazen, Dogen, and the Spirit of Creative Inquiry*, *Faces of Compassion: Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression*, and *Visions of Awakening Space and Time: Dogen and the Lotus Sutra*. He has edited and co-translated several Zen texts including: *Dogen's Extensive Record: A Translation of Eihei Koroku*, *Cultivating the Empty Field: The Silent Illumination of Zen Master Hongzhi*, *Dogen's Pure Standards for the Zen Community*, and *The Wholehearted Way*, and has contributed to many other books and journals. Taigen teaches online at Berkeley Graduate Theological Union, from where he has a PhD. He has taught at other universities including Saint Mary's College, the California Institute of Integral Studies, and in Chicago at Meadville Lombard Theological Seminary and Loyola University Chicago. Taigen has long been active in social justice programs, including Peace and Environmental Activism.

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