

**Soto Zen Text Project**

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正法眼藏佛道

Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma  
Book 44

**The Way of the Buddha**  
*Butsudō*

Translated by  
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*INTRODUCTION*

This chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō* was composed in 1243, soon after Dōgen moved from the capital to Echizen (modern Fukui). It occurs as number 44 in the seventy-five chapter redaction of the *Shōbōgenzō*. This text is not to be confused with another chapter of the same title (sometimes known as *Dōshin*, or “Mind of the Way”) found in the twenty-eight chapter “secret” *Shōbōgenzō* preserved at Eihei-ji.

The central theme of “The Way of the Buddha” concerns what we might call the institutional character or identity of Dōgen’s tradition. The title reflects the claim, made at the very outset of the text, that the lineage of the ancestral masters of the tradition is continuous with the ancient line of the Seven Buddhas leading up to Śākyamuni; it is thus the lineage of the buddhas, not merely a Buddhist school. From this, Dōgen goes on to criticize sharply the common practice of referring to this lineage as the “Zen” (Sanskrit *dhyāna*, or “meditation”) school.

The text then moves to the question of the “five houses” into which the Zen historians in the Song dynasty often divided the tradition. Quoting the dismissal of distinctions among the houses by his teacher, Tiantong Rujing, Dōgen attributes the notion of distinct houses to the decline of the tradition in China. He then takes up each of the five houses in turn, arguing that none of the ostensible founders of these houses ever spoke of them as distinct schools. Near the end of this section, he singles out for criticism the twelfth-century work, *Rentian yanmu* (“The Eye of Humans and Gods”), which provides a summary account of Zen based on the history and teachings of the five schools.

Finally, the text returns to the broader issue of school identity, pointing out that the true transmission of the Buddha’s wisdom is not a school, and that the establishment of a Buddhist school is a violation of the Buddha’s own practice.

This translation is based on the Japanese edition in Kawamura Kōdō, *Shōbōgenzō*, vol. 1 (1991), pp. 471-488. The present online text reflects the version appearing in *Dharma Eye* 19 (Spring 2007); a more fully annotated text will be available in due course. Other English translations of this chapter can be found in Nishiyama, *Shōbōgenzō*, vol. 3 (1983); Yokoi, *The Shobo-genzo* (1986); and Nishijima and Cross, *Master Dogen’s Shobogenzo*, Book 3 (1997).