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On Learning the Buddhist Way of Holy Poverty

Kazuyoshi Nakayama

In Greek tradition self is a reality. In Buddhism, on the contrary, it is a non-reality. For the Greek the world is, so to speak, a book to self and self is a reader of the world. For Buddhists self is both a book and a reader. Buddhists find out the objective world in their own selves. There one who sees is the same with what is seen. Dōgen writes in 'Genjō Kōan': "To study the way of the Buddha is to study your own self. To study your own self is to forget yourself."

Buddha lived such a life as a beggar who has no shelter, no food in preparation, and nothing but a few clothes and one bowl. This is the way of life of a man who studies and forgets himself. Poverty means freedom from all the weights on his mind. His holy poverty is the model of Buddhists who should imitate it.

Dōgen tells his disciples over again how to learn the way of poverty in the dialogue, 'Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki'.