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# A Primer Of Soto Zen: A Translation Of Dogen's Shobogenzo Zuimonki (East West Center Book)



## **Synopsis**

Zen was popularized in the West largely through the writings of Dr. D.T. Suzuki, who followed the school of Rinzai Zen. Although it remains relatively unknown in the West, Soto Zen eventually attracted the greatest number of followers in Japan. With its gentle, more intellectual approach, Soto Zen relies on deep meditation (zazen) rather than the "sudden," direct method (using koan) of Rinzai Zen, in striving for enlightenment. The *Shobogenzo Zuimonki* consists largely of brief talks, hortatory remarks, and instructional and cautionary comments by the Soto Zen Master Dogen (1200-1253). Translated, shobogenzo means "the eye of the true law." Roughly translated, zuimonki means "easy for the ears to understand," or "simplified."

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"A good introductory text to main Zen themes and ideas." -- Philosophy East and West "For anyone wishing to understand how one of the greatest Zen masters actually taught his disciples...highly recommended." --The Japan Missionary Bulletin

The *Shobogenzo Zuimonki* consists largely of brief talks, hortatory remarks, and instructional and cautionary comments by the Soto Zen Master Dogen. Translated, shobogenzo means 'the eye of the true law.' Roughly translated zuimonki means 'easy for the ears to understand,' or 'simplified.'

A great book. Short, easy to read. Sadly, I don't see most people these days having the where with

all to give up family life, take up robes and bowl, and walk the Buddhadharma path as Dogen prescribes over and over in his writings.

a fine reproduction of Dogen's words. arrived on time. an inexpensive collection of Zen footsteps.

"A Primer of Soto Zen: A Translation of Dogen's Shobogenzo Zuimonki" is a very misleading title. I remember I bought this book at a Soto Zen Center bookstore the second time I visited, hoping to understand the Soto Zen tradition and learn more about who Dogen was and how to do zazen. This book does not answer any of these questions. It is rather a collection of talks given by Dogen to his students which were written down by his disciple Ejo. It is also very wrong to assume that this text was intended to be a textbook for a certain school of thought as Dogen was not interested in establishing a school but rather in practicing in the way of Sakyamuni Buddha. On the back of this book, it says that Zuimonki can be roughly translated as "easy for ears to understand" or "simplified." Shobogenzo("The Eye of the True Dharma") is of course Dogen's 92 chapter magnum opus(which I shall read one day when I have lots and lots of time on my hands) that addresses everything from enlightenment to how monks should flush a toilet when living the monastic life. So this can be looked at as a simplified version of Dogen's Shobogenzo. The tone and content of the talks suggest this as well. Dogen's greatest gift as a Zen Master was to clearly and rationally articulate the essential teachings and practices of Sakyamuni Buddha and the Zen patriarchs. Dogen is constantly putting an emphasis on the practice of zazen and to put everything else aside. He says it simply and convincingly without any extra terminology or philosophy. It reminds me of the simple sayings of Sakyamuni Buddha in the "Dhammapada" as opposed to the more complicated sutras.I do not recommend this book if: 1.This is your first introduction to Dogen(Check out Kazuaki Tanashi's "Moon in a Dewdrop") 2.You are seeking information on the basics of the practice of Soto Zen and Zazen(Check out any of Shunryu Suzuki's books.) If you are really into Dogen and can't get enough then by all means, pick up this book. It will be worth your time. I prefer his writings from Shobogenzo like "Endeavor of the Way" and "Actualizing The Fundamental Point" myself but maybe you'll have a strong connection with these talks instead. I think it's a good book to pick up every now and then and read a few pages from and remember the basics of my practice and what Dogen was trying to get at in his teachings and writings.

A PRIMER OF SOTO ZEN - A translation of Dogen's Shobogenzo Zuimonki by Reiho Masunaga. 119 pp. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1971 and reprinted. Eihei Dogen (+ 1200-1253), who

was an exceptionally gifted child, was born into an aristocratic household in Kyoto. The death of his mother when he was eight years old so impressed upon him the central Buddhist truth of impermanency, that he forsook his aristocratic privileges when he was thirteen and went to Mt. Hiei to study to become a Buddhist monk. But after intensive study, and since no-one in Japan could satisfactorily answer his questions - not surprising when you consider that he was the greatest genius Japan has ever produced - he sailed to China in 1223 in search of someone who could. There he studied under the Soto Ch'an (Zen) Master Ju-ching (+ 1163-1228), attained enlightenment, and returned to Japan to become the founder of Japanese Soto Zen. Zen first became known to the West largely through the writings of D. T. Suzuki, who was a follower of the 'Sudden' or direct koan-using Rinzai Zen. Soto Zen, in contrast, is a gentler method which places greater reliance on Zazen or deep meditation, and is the method that has gained the largest number of adherents in Japan. The present small book of just 119 pages is exactly what it says - a 'Primer of Soto Zen' - and as such, as Masunaga explains, it "does not concern itself with any great philosophical subtleties." Instead what we find is a collection, recorded by his disciple Ejo, of brief talks, remarks, comments, and exhortations, addressed by Dogen largely to Zen beginners and lay followers, which offers "an insight into the type of Buddhism Dogen sought to propagate" (page 2) - in other words, an ideal book for ordinary folks like most of us. Here, to give you a taste, are a few lines selected at random: "Nothing can be gained by extensive study and wide reading. Give them up immediately" (page 8). "Every man possesses the Buddha-nature. Do not demean yourselves" (page 19). "To enter the Buddha Way is to stop discriminating between good and evil and to cast aside the mind that says this is good and that is bad" (page 29). "To escape from the world means that one's mind is not concerned with the opinions of the world" (37). "One must be deeply aware of the impermanence of the world" (page 38). "When the Buddhas ... state that the mind is plants and trees, revise your preconceptions and understand plants and trees as mind" (page 66). My own copy of this book was purchased many years ago, and is now pretty dog-eared. It's one of those old friends I like to return to. Since it's mainly addressed to beginners it doesn't, as I've indicated, give the full scope of Dogen's thought. With the 'Zuimonki' - which means 'easy for the ears to understand' - we are rambling the plains and foothills of Dogen's thought. But any sensitive reader will find much to interest them here, and the book is an excellent introduction to Dogen the man and to his more advanced thought. To discover just how profound Dogen can be, you will have to turn to the 'Shobogenzo' proper. This has been translated, in whole or in part, a number of times, but an edition I can strongly recommend is Kazuaki Tanahashi's 'Moon in a Dewdrop - Writings of Zen Master Dogen.' Besides twenty texts from the 'Shobogenzo,' this book includes four additional texts

and a selection of Dogen's poems. It also contains a fine Introduction on Dogen's Life and Teachings, four Appendices, full Notes, a Selected Bibliography, an incredibly full and detailed bilingual Glossary of a kind one won't find elsewhere, and some interesting illustrations. Dogen's Japanese is an excruciatingly difficult Japanese, so much so that some think it should be called 'Dogen-ese' and not Japanese. Think 'Finnegans Wake' and you'll get an inkling of the problems involved in translating him. The language and thought of the 'Shobogenzo' comes to us from such a height that there can be no such thing as a definitive interpretation, and hence no such thing as a definitive translation.'Moon in a Dewdrop' is the result of a collaborative effort by a team of highly competent American Zenists, some of them very well known. It has always seemed, in my humble opinion, that, considering the difficulties, they did a very fine job. If you enjoy the 'Zuimonki,' I'm sure you'll be bowled over by 'Moon in a Dewdrop.' Dogen leaves most other thinkers behind in the dust.

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