

# BIRTH AND DEATH

## Zen Master Dogen

As a buddha is in birth and death, there is no birth and death.” It is also said, “As a buddha is not in birth and death, a buddha is not deluded by birth and death.”

These statements are the essence of the words of the two Zen masters Keqin [Jiashan] and Dingshan. Never neglect them, as they are the words of those who attained the way.

Those who want to become free from birth and death should understand the meaning of these words. If you search for a buddha outside of birth and death, it will be like trying to go to the southern country of Yue with your spear heading towards the north, or like trying to see the Big Dipper while you are facing south; you will cause yourself to remain all the more in birth and death, and miss the way of emancipation.

Just understand that birth-and-death is itself nirvana. There is nothing such as birth and death to be avoided; there is nothing such as nirvana to be sought. Only when you realize this are you free from birth and death.

It is a mistake to suppose that birth turns into death. Birth is a phase that is an entire period in itself, with its own past and future. For this reason, in buddha dharma birth is understood as beyond birth. Death is a phase that is an entire period in itself, with its own past and future. For this reason, death is understood as beyond death.

In birth there is nothing but birth, and in death there is nothing but death. Accordingly, when birth comes, face and actualize birth, and when death comes, face and actualize death. Do not avoid them or desire them.

This birth-and-death is the life of a buddha. If you try to exclude it, you will lose the life of a buddha. If you cling to it, trying to remain in it, you will also lose the life of a buddha, and what remains will be the mere form of a buddha. Only when you don't avoid birth-and-death or long for it do you enter a buddha's mind.

However, do not analyze or speak about it. Just set aside your body and mind, forget about them, and throw them into the house of the buddha; then all is done by the buddha. When you follow this, you are free from birth and death, and become a buddha without effort or scheme. Who, then, remains in the mind?

There is a simple way to become a buddha: When you refrain from unwholesome actions, are not attached to birth and death, and are compassionate toward all sentient beings, respectful to seniors and kind to juniors, not excluding or desiring anything, with no thoughts or worries, you will be called a buddha. Seek nothing else.

*This translation has been copied from 'Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, Zen Master Dogen's Shobo Genzo', edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi. Published by Shambala Publications, 2010.*