Shoaku Makusa –Wrong and Not Doing

Ancient Buddhas said:

> *Not doing wrong*
> *Practicing the many kinds of right*
> *Naturally purifies the mind*
> *This is the teaching of the buddhas*

This was the common precept of the Seven Legendary Buddhas, and has been passed on from past buddhas to present buddhas; and so present buddhas have received it from past buddhas. It was not only taught by the Seven Buddhas; it is taught by all buddhas. We need to reflect on this teaching, and make sure that we can practice it. And this teaching of the Seven Buddhas is always recognizable as the teaching of the Seven Buddhas. For what has been passed on by them and received by us is just our real behaviour here and now. The teaching of the buddhas is here already; it is the teaching, practice, and experience of hundreds, thousands, and tens of thousands of buddhas.

What we are discussing here is what we consider to be wrong, right, and neither-right-nor-wrong, and wrongness is just one of these properties. But the property of "wrongness" is a concept, and has no real substance. And the same is true of what we think of as right and neither-right-nor-wrong. In essence, these concepts are used to describe events that themselves are something real in the present.

But if we consider actual events that have really happened, we do find innumerable concrete occurrences that we can describe with these three properties.

There are similarities and differences between acts that are considered morally wrong in this society/culture and acts that are considered morally wrong in other societies/cultures. There are similarities and differences between acts that are considered morally wrong at different periods in human history. There are similarities and differences between acts that would be considered morally wrong in ideal societies, and acts that are considered morally wrong in human societies. And the difference in the meanings of wrong, right, and neither-right-nor-wrong between the Buddhist and the secular worlds is even greater than in those instances.

Right and wrong occur at a time, but the time of occurrence itself is not right or wrong. Right and wrong are real events, but reality itself is not right or wrong. When all things are balanced, then our view of wrongness is balanced. When all things are balanced, then our view of rightness is balanced. Because this is so, learning the supreme state of pre-conceptual wisdom, hearing Buddhism explained, training ourselves with Zazen, and experiencing the effects bring us a state that is profound, all-embracing, and happy.

We hear about the state of supreme pre-conceptual wisdom sometimes from a teacher, and sometimes from the scriptures. From the first we hear it telling us "Don't *do* wrong!" Any teaching that does *not* sound like it is telling us "Don't *do* wrong!" is not the teaching of the Buddha, and may be some other misleading teaching. Just remember that if it sounds like it is telling us "Don't *do* wrong," it is the Buddha's authentic teaching.

It is not like the usual rules of society, which are intentionally laid down and maintained; it is our pre-conceptual wisdom that is telling us this. It is simply our supreme pre-conceptual wisdom speaking to us. The admonition

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itself is produced pre-conceptually, and so it speaks to us from out of our pre-conceptual wisdom. When we hear pre-conceptual wisdom speaking, hearing it changes us; then we don't want to do wrong, we manifest the state where there is no doing of wrong, and wrong continues not to be done. Just at this time we realise the power of practicing Zazen. And our realisation is as wide as the whole earth, the whole world, through the whole of time, and the whole of reality. This is how wide the *not doing* of *wrong* is.

No wrong can be done by a person who is fully at this time and in this place, even if that person lives in a place where they could do wrong, faces circumstances in which they could do wrong, and associates with friends who do wrong. The power of *not doing* is put into action, no concrete wrong is done, and so the qualities that characterise a wrong action do not appear. It is just the fact of whether we do or whether we don't do. Just at that moment, we realise the truth that wrong is not something that invades us, or that we have to destroy. When we act fully, uniting body and mind, then we see the situation clearly just before the moment of action, and we notice the fact that we have not done wrong in the back of our mind afterwards. When the ineffable person who is I acts, fully uniting body and mind, the power of all the mental and the physical aspects of reality appears at once.

But there is no separation between these mental and physical aspects of reality and our action. When all these mental and physical aspects of reality combine in action at the present moment, their power in that moment is the fullness of action itself. When we act in oneness with the mountains, rivers and the earth, the sun, moon and the stars, then the mountains, rivers and the earth, the sun, moon and the stars also act in oneness with us. This is not just a single momentary occurrence; it occurs at every moment. So being in the moment, in which we are awake to reality, is the cause of buddhas of all times acting with body-and-mind undivided, being taught by reality, and experiencing the effect of that. But none of the buddhas have ever seen the teaching they receive and the effect they experience as separate from themselves, and neither act, teaching nor experience have ever separated from them. So when act, teaching, and experience make buddhas act with body-and-mind undivided, none of the buddhas try to resist, before, during, or after the moment.

During the hours of the day and night, as we are sitting, standing, walking and lying down, we need to reflect on the fact that when ordinary people become buddhas, they do not disrupt the state of buddha that has always belonged to them. And when ordinary people become buddhas, they do not destroy their characters as ordinary people. They do not take anything away from it or add anything to it. But they have transcended the state of an ordinary person.

We accept that there are right-and-wrong, cause-and-effect in what we are doing. But we do not try to change the effect we are causing, or try to cause a particular effect. And sometimes it is cause-and-effect that makes us act. This state, in which we can see the cause and its effect clearly, is the state called *not doing*; it neither appears in this moment, nor is it a constant state. And in this state we are neither denying that effect inescapably follows cause, nor are we trapped in a deterministic view. It is the state in which the division between body and mind falls away.

If we study in this way, we realise that *wrong* is simply a matter of *not doing.* And helped by this realisation, we can see clearly that the word *wrong* always means *not doing!* We confirm this absolutely in the practice of Zazen.

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In realising that *wrong* is always just a matter of *not doing,* just at the moment of the present, there are no causes or conditions that produce *wrong,* or that cause *wrong* to disappear; it is just a matter of *not doing.* If our view of *wrong* is balanced, all things are balanced. People who understand that *wrong* arises out of causes and circumstances, but do not see that the circumstances, the causes and they themselves are all in the momentary state of *not doing* are to be pitied! It is said that the nature of buddhahood arises from the circumstances, but equally the circumstances arise from the nature of buddhahood.

It is not true to say that wrong does not exist; it is just a matter of *not doing*. It is not true to say that wrong exists; it is just a matter of *not doing*. Wrong is not only an abstract concept; it is just a matter of *not doing*. Wrong is not only a concrete event; it is just a matter of *not doing*. And this doesn't mean the idea of "*not doing*"; it means really *not doing*!

An example is the pine tree in the spring; neither staying the same nor constantly changing, it is just in the momentary state called *not doing*. Another example is chrysanthemums in the autumn; neither staying the same nor constantly changing, they are just in the momentary state called *not doing.* Buddhas also are neither staying the same nor constantly changing, they are just in the momentary state called *not doing.* Things like those pillars outside, that stone lantern over there, this whisk I am holding, that staff you are holding, are neither staying the same nor constantly changing, the are all just in the momentary state called *not doing.* I am neither staying the same nor constantly changing, I am just in the momentary state called *not doing.*

Studying practically in this way from both the subjective and the objective viewpoints is the Universe made real, and it is also Universal realisation. When we are already in the state of *not doing*, no wrong can be done, and even regretting that we have done something that we should not have done is just a source for energy to promote our effort not to do wrong. But if anyone thinks that since the state of *not doing* is like this, then we can do no wrong even if we try, then they are walking north and expecting to arrive at the south coast.

The relationship I want to express between *wrong* and *not doing* is not one-sided. Although when a donkey looks into a well, the well also looks up at the donkey, the well is also looking at the well itself, and the donkey is looking at the donkey itself; the person is looking at the person themselves, the mountains are looking at the mountains themselves. It is because Buddhism teaches this principle of full manifestation in the present that *wrong* is just a matter of *not doing*.

Real form in the Buddha's world
Is just like space;
Each thing causes it to manifest its form differently,
Like different surfaces of water reflecting the image of the moon.

Not doing is a thing manifesting itself in the present, and so it is made real with each actual form. Just like space, it manifests its form in each separate present. It is like the images of the moon reflected in many surfaces of water, and at the same time, the many surfaces being made real by the images of the moon they reflect. We should not doubt that this state of *not doing* is made real at every moment.

Practicing the many kinds of right. Rightness is one of the three conceptual properties: wrong, right, and neither-right-nor-wrong. The concept of rightness covers many concrete right actions, but this does not mean that

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the right action already exists somewhere waiting for someone to come and do it. However, the very moment when someone *does* right embraces all the many concepts of rightness. All the many forms of rightness that we can think of are pulled into the place where right is being done as if by a magnet. Nothing on Earth can stop this merging of the many forms of rightness and right action itself.

On the other hand, as with wrong, what we recognise as right varies between different societies and cultures. Just as buddhas of the past, present and future teach the truth in the form that they see it, what we see as right we call right. But although the buddhas teach the truth of their own times in the world as they see it, since their existence too is momentary, they all teach the truth that is beyond intellectual discrimination. So even though there is only one kind of right, the "right" of a person who pursues the truth through intellectual study and belief, and the "right" of a person who pursues the truth through action are very different.

For example, the way that intellectual buddhists observe the precepts breaks the precepts as they are observed by buddhists who pursue the truth in their everyday lives. Concrete right actions do not arise out of causes and circumstances, neither are they made to vanish by causes and circumstances. Concrete right actions are real events, but not all real events are concrete right action. One similarity between causes and circumstances arising and vanishing and concrete right actions is that if they start right, they end right.

Concrete right action is what is meant by *doing right*. But it is not done by the self, and cannot be recognised by the self; neither is it done by or recognised by the world. In intellectual views that are based on self and the world being separate, perception is also based on separation of self and the world. But the unclouded perception of Buddhists is like looking at the sun or the moon; that is *doing* right. At the moment when right is done, we make rightness real. But this real rightness does not arise in that moment for the first time, neither does it continue on in the doer. So we should not think of it as our original conduct. Right action is *doing right*, but we should not understand it intellectually. *Doing right* in the present is unclouded perception, but we should not understand it intellectually. Our unclouded perception does not appear so that we can think about it intellectually. Thinking based on unclouded perception is not the same as other kinds of thinking.

It is not a matter of whether concrete right action exists or does not exist, or whether it originates from the physical or mental side; it is just *doing right*. Right action is – in all places and at all times without exception – real. *Doing right* is always a concrete action. Action makes things real, and the arising and vanishing of causes and circumstances are unrelated to it. Action is like this through-and-through. When we do one real right action from among the many conceived "right actions," this real state makes everything real.

The cause and the effect of this *doing right* are also real right action. We shouldn't always think that cause comes first and the effect follows from that; they are both independent right actions. Cause is balanced in being as it is; effect is balanced in being as it is. Although we know that effect follows cause, the relationship between cause and effect is not just that one comes first and the other follows; the truth is also present that the moment before and the moment after are balanced as they are.

Naturally purifies the mind. This means that *naturally purifies the mind* is identical to *not doing*. There is not a process of not doing wrong that leads to the mind becoming pure; it is an identity, not a process. This is why ancient

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Buddhas said, *This is the teaching of the buddhas.* The many buddhas may include Siva for example [the Hindu god of destruction and renovation], but there are many different kinds of gods and not all of them are buddhas. There is the example of Chakravarti-raja, but not all people like him are buddhas. We need to study this carefully. If we do not learn what buddhas are, then even though it may look as if we are making a great effort, we are only the same as ordinary people accepting their suffering; we are not pursuing the Buddha's truth. *Not doing* and *doing right* form the real events of our everyday lives.

Haku Kyo-I of Tang Dynasty China was a lay disciple of Master Bukko Nyoman, and a second-generation disciple of Master Baso Do-itsu. When he was the governor of the Koshu district, he studied Buddhism in the order of Master Choka Dorin. One day he asked his master, *"What is the essential point of Buddhism?"* Dorin said, *"Not doing wrong, doing right."* Kyo-I replied, *"Can that be true? Why, even a three-year-old child can give such an answer!"* Then Master Dorin replied, *"Yes, even a child of three can give such an answer, but even an old man of eighty cannot practice what the child says."* On hearing this, Kyo-I prostrated himself before his master to show his gratitude, and left.

Although Kyo-I was the son of a general, he has for many years been considered a great poet. He is said to be one of the 24 literary giants of China. Some people even said that he was an incarnation of Manjusri, the realised form of Gautama Buddha's wisdom. Others said that he was an incarnation of Maitreya, the form in which Gautama Buddha would return to the world after his death. Everyone loved his poetry, and there was no-one in the literary world who had not studied his work. But in Buddhism, it seems that he was just a beginner, a late developer! It seems that he had never understood the point of *not doing wrong, doing right*, even in his dreams! Kyo-I thought that Dorin was only telling him "Don't do wrong, do right" as an intentional aim to hold in his mind. He never recognised and had never heard that the principle of *not doing wrong, doing right* has been in Buddhism from the eternal past to the eternal present.

Kyo-I said what he did because he had not experienced the Buddhist state and so did not have the power of that state. Even though Master Dorin's words do caution us not to do wrong and urge us to do right, he is talking about *actually not doing wrong*. This truth that Buddhism teaches is always the same when we hear it from our teacher for the first time, and when we experience it in practicing Zazen. We can describe it with phrases like *"right beginning, right ending", "wonderful cause, wonderful effect", "buddhist cause, buddhist effect".* It is not a matter of discussing whether the cause and the effect are identical or different. For buddhas too, what we do always has an effect.

The truth that Master Dorin speaks shows that he has grasped Buddhism. Even if wrong pervades the Universe, enfolding it and swallowing it over and over again, still we find salvation and liberation in the state of *not doing wrong*. And *doing right*, action which is right through-and-through, makes the essence of *right* real in form, substance and power.

But Kyo-I had never trodden in these tracks, and so he replied *"...even a three-year-old child can give such an easy answer"!* In saying this, he is not actually able to express the truth of the situation. What a pitiful person you are, Kyo-i! Just what are you saying? You do not know the state of a buddha, so how can you know the state of a child of three? Do you know the state in which a three-year-old child lives? If you know the state of a three-year-old

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child, you must also know the state of the buddhas. How can anyone who doesn't know the state of the buddhas of the past, present and future know the state of a child of three?

We shouldn't think that we know someone just because we have met them, or that we do not know someone just because we haven't met them. To know a single molecule is to know the whole Universe. To know the essence of one thing is to know the essence of all things. Someone who does not know the essence of all things cannot know even the essence of one thing. A person who studies and attains the perfect state through Zazen can know the essence of all things, and the essence of one thing. Studying one thing is in fact studying the whole Universe. It is really stupid to think that a child of three cannot teach Buddhism, or to think that a child can only talk about simple things. Clarifying what life is and clarifying what death is are the most important task in Buddhism.

One master of the past said, *"When you come into this world, even your first cries proclaim the Buddhist truth!"* And the baby's ability to proclaim the truth is exactly the same as Gautama Buddha's ability to proclaim the truth; what the baby teaches is what the Buddha taught. Another master of the past said, *"The everyday activities of our lives make us real persons."* So to make the "real me" clear, and to proclaim the truth of Buddhism is never easy, and is the one great task of our life. This is why it is important to be clear about the motives and actions of a three-year-old child. But because the conduct of a three-year-old child is the same as the buddhas of the past, present and future in some respects, and different in others, Kyo-I would never be able to hear a three-year-old child teaching Buddhism. He is too stupid to suspect that a three-year-old child might be able to teach Buddhism, and that's why he said what he did. He didn't hear what Dorin was really saying, even though it was a loud as thunder, and so he said *"...even a three-year-old child can give such an answer,"* implying that Master Dorin had not expressed the truth in his words.

But Kyo-I's words show that he was not capable of hearing a three-year-old child teaching the truth of Buddhism, and that the time he had spent with Master Dorin had been in vain. But Master Dorin in his benevolence could not help adding, *"Yes, even a child of three can give such an answer, but even an old man of eighty cannot practice what the child says."* What he was saying was "A child of three has words that express the truth, and you should study this fact very carefully." It is also true that not even an old man of eighty can practice them, and we should study this diligently too.

You are free to have an opinion on whether or not a child of three can express the truth, but your opinion is irrelevant to the child's actual expression. You are free to decide whether or not an old man of eighty can practice them or not, but your decision is irrelevant to the old man's actual conduct. These are the principles of Buddhism that we should follow, teach, and revere.

Shobogenzo Shoaku Makusa

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PALI VERSION:

Not doing any wrong,	*Sabba pāpassa akaraṇam*
Enacting/undertaking good,	*Kusalassa upasampadā*
Cleanses your own heart/mind.	*Sa citta pariyodapanam*
That is the teaching of the buddhas.	*Etaṃ buddhāna(ṃ) sāsanam*

CHINESE VERSION

Not doing wrong	*SHOAKU MAKUSA*
Doing the many kinds of right	*SHUZEN BUGYO*
Naturally purifies the mind.	*JIJO GO-I*
This is the teaching of the buddhas.	*ZE SHOBUTSU KYO*

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