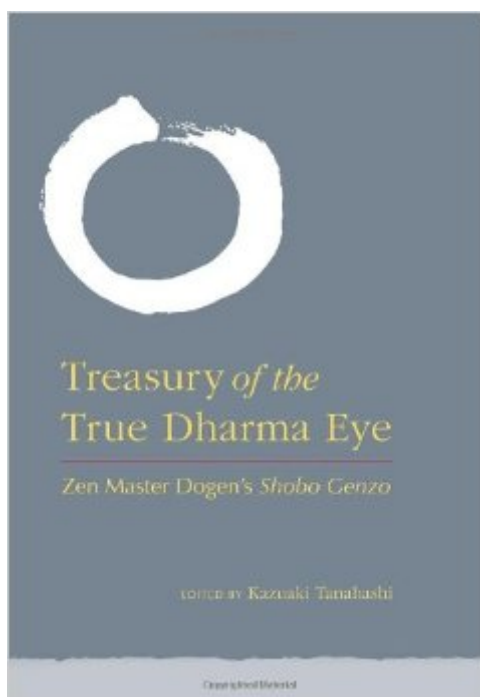


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# Treasury Of The True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Shobo Genzo



## Synopsis

This monumental work is considered to be one of the most profound expressions of Zen wisdom ever put on paper, and also the outstanding literary and philosophical work of Japan. It is a collection of essays by Eihei Dogen (1200–1253), founder of Zen's Soto school. Kazuaki Tanahashi and a team of translators that represent a Who's Who of American Zen have produced a translation of the great work that combines accuracy with a deep understanding of Dogen's voice and literary gifts. This volume includes a wealth of materials to aid understanding, including maps, lineage charts, a bibliography, and an exhaustive glossary of names and terms—and, as a bonus, the most renowned of all Dogen's essays, "Recommending Zen to All People."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

(This review discusses the first, two-volume edition of this book. The comment about the notes and glossary don't apply to this one-volume edition. See the update at the end of this review for some comments about the one-volume edition.) Dogen's Shobogenzo is the most profound and perplexing work of the Zen canon. Written in the 13th century by the founder of the Soto school of Zen, the Shobogenzo is a collection of texts written over a long period of time that examine the concepts and practices of Zen. This edition is a milestone, representing a complete English translation of the Shobogenzo, in an extremely attractive set of books. The two volumes are, while a bit expensive, very well produced. The paper is thick and opaque, the font is very readable, and the binding will

last one or more lifetimes. Volume one has introductory matter about Dogen's life and the composition of the Shobogenzo, and the first part of the texts (fascicles 1-47). (For a more thorough discussion of Dogen's life and career, as well as an analysis of his thought, see Eihei Dogen: Mystical Realist, by Hee-Jin Kim.) The second volume contains the remainder of the texts (fascicles 48-95 plus a 96th fascicle not included in the original edition of the Shobogenzo), and an extensive glossary explaining the terms used in the books. Some of the texts in this collection have been published previously, in Moon in a Dewdrop, Beyond Thinking, and Enlightenment Unfolds. In fact, many readers may find those three volumes sufficient in content, and more agreeable in overall price. (Another useful book is Realizing Genjokoan: The Key to Dogen's Shobogenzo, by Shohaku Okumura, which is a detailed, and very accessible commentary on this section of the Shobogenzo.) This glossary in volume two is essential to the reading and study of this work. Readers will need to look up terms to get a better understanding of what they really mean. Often a single word, or a short phrase, may seem obscure when reading, but the glossary goes into detail to explain it better. In addition, the glossary serves as an index, with references to where the terms are used. But the glossary is a bit problematic. At more than 200 pages, this is a big chunk of the text, and it is, of course, only available in the second volume. If you are reading the first volume, you still need to have this glossary handy, so you'll need to have both books. I wish that Shambhala had included the glossary as a separate volume - perhaps a paperback - so it could be more easily consulted. Or, if they could provide an ebook version, popping it on an iPad would make reading and consulting it more practical. This doesn't detract from the overall work, which is, I must say, an amazing feat of translation that has taken decades. The text is beautifully rendered, and, while just one interpretation, it certainly has the weight of experience both of the translators as translators and as practitioners. This set is a monument to the work of Dogen. Update: I bought a copy of the one-volume edition of this book. It's a lot more usable than the two-volume edition, which, long out of print, I'd rather try and keep in good condition. It's easier to access the glossary in the one-volume edition, and, because it uses very thin paper, the single-volume edition is about half the thickness of the two volumes together. However, this comes at a price. The paper is somewhat see-through; when reading, you see a bit of the printing of the reverse side of the page. And the font is quite light, making it a bit less comfortable to read. Shambhala should have used a slightly bolder font and a more opaque paper to make the book more readable. But none of this detracts from the content of the book, of course. With the one-volume edition, it's easier to flip around and check the glossary. Oh, and I also have the Kindle edition of the book as well. It's a great way to carry this great text around wherever I go, and, while I prefer reading on

paper, at least you can change the font size on the Kindle (or on apps on my iPhone or iPad).

This is the ultimate English translation of the most important teachings in Japanese Zen. If you're a Zen student, it is perhaps the most important text you could have (apart from the brief Heart Sutra) and will reward a lifetime of study. The Kindle edition works especially well for Shobo Genzo for two reasons: a printed version is too heavy to carry around, and a portable version allows one to dip into it and contemplate a page, a paragraph, or just a single sentence at a time. I'm making a daily practice of that. Zen Master Dogen founded Soto Zen in Japan and its most important temple, Eihei-ji, which flourishes today almost 800 years later. More importantly, he had profound realization that defined much of the Zen tradition. With regards to enlightenment, he taught that everyone is already enlightened but must realize that fact. The act of sitting Zen, he taught, is not a path to enlightenment but is itself the very manifestation of enlightenment. The Shobo Genzo collects the classic set of 95 of Dogen's essays plus a 96th discovered after the original group of 95 was established. These cover all aspects of Zen practice: some are introductory in nature, others are quite abstract, and many detail the day to day minutia of a monastery. They may be read in various ways and for various purposes. Rather than going into all of those, I'd just say this: if you practice Zen, there is much here to challenge you. It is not easy reading but worthwhile. These are texts to provoke you: "What does this mean?" "Why does this bother me?" "What on Earth is he talking about?" and "Oh, yes again, keep that non-attainment mind." This volume reissues in a single volume the contents of a very expensive two-volume set from 2011, now with the handy and readable Kindle version (although expensive for Kindle; a combo print/Kindle deal would be very nice). The translations have been in progress for 30 years by Tanahashi, the master Zen calligrapher, consulting with many others. A long list of American Zen teachers, including Robert Aitken, Chozen Bays, Joan Halifax, and John Daido Looi participated in creating and reviewing the translations. Many of the translations have been published before and used in Zen seminars over several decades. This means they are field-tested and proven in usage with Zen practitioners. Some reviewers of other versions have commented that the English translation is perhaps too seamless, insofar as there are insufficient Japanese terms to allow one to map back to Japanese. Although I speak a bit of Japanese, I don't read enough to comment on this aspect. I'm delighted with the English translation compared to other translations I've sampled. In addition to Dogen's essays, the translator's introduction presents the basics of Dogen's approach, especially the teachings on Zen meditation, with notes on how to read an admittedly difficult work. There are biographical and historical sketches, and a brief annotated summary of each essay. The annotated table of contents

makes it easy to find essays I want to read (which do not have to be read in order). Postscripts include Dogen's famous essay on "Recommending Zazen to All People", bibliographic materials, and maps. And, most helpfully of all, a massive glossary of terms and references that will help you stay oriented in the bewildering thicket's of Dogen's attempts to bridge language to Zen. In short, this is a superb reference work, a gift from a lifetime of study and work. Just to be clear, I will repeat: these essays are not easy. This is not a popular, how-to book or collection of entertaining stories. This is a 13th century Zen master trying to put some part of his realization into teaching action through language. For Dogen, Zen and life are inseparable, and this work demands exactly as much struggle to read as Zen does to practice. It is a work to study and savor. Here is an example, the first paragraph of essay 54: "Speaking dharma by means of speaking dharma actualizes the fundamental point that buddha ancestors entrust to buddha ancestors. This speaking dharma is spoken by dharma." I won't propose my own understanding of this (which I think is a profound paragraph) but call it out as an example of the kind of dense and thought provoking material that Dogen presents. It demands interaction, not an expectation that depths will be delivered easily, and certainly not an attitude that surface tautologies imply meaninglessness. (If you want a general introduction to Zen, I'd instead recommend Robert Aitken Roshi's *Taking the Path of Zen* followed by Suzuki Roshi's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*.) If you're unsure whether it's worth the significant investment, a recommended alternative place to start would be another one of Tanahashi's collection of materials from Dogen, such as *Beyond Thinking: A Guide to Zen Meditation*. *Beyond Thinking* contains some of the core essays from the *Shobogenzo* along with other materials, and is a great introduction both to Dogen's approach to Zen and to Tanahashi's style as a translator. If you find it hard to read and appreciate, then probably the *Shobogenzo* is not right for you at this time. But if you like it, then spring for the translation here, and then pass the short volume on to someone else to be inspired.

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