

Dogen Sangha 2002 Summer Sesshin

Talks on Master Dogen's Shobogenzo

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Chapter 3 – Genjo-koan

Session 2

Those who greatly realise delusion are buddhas. Those who are greatly deluded about realisation are ordinary beings.

It doesn't say that buddhas are not deluded, it says that "those who greatly realise delusion are buddhas". So that suggests that if we think that to never be deluded is to be a buddha, then we're creating some kind of perfect picture. But if we think that a buddha notices what delusion is, then we may be nearer the real situation.

There are people who further attain realisation on the basis of realisation. There are people who increase their delusion in the midst of delusion.

So sometimes if we don't notice that we're deluded, we become more and more deluded, but if we notice and admit it, then we can move on. "There are people who further attain realisation on the basis of realisation", suggests that we can make some kind of progress in realisation. "There are people who increase their delusion in the midst of delusion", suggests that we can make some kind of progress in becoming more and more deluded.

When buddhas are really buddhas, they do not need to recognise themselves as buddhas.

This is a very nice sentence, because we're constantly looking to see how we are; not only do we want to be perfect, but we want to see ourselves as being perfect. And of course we can't, though sometimes we can catch a glimpse of ourselves, but the sentence says that to be a buddha, you don't need to know you're a buddha, you don't need to notice you're a buddha.

Q: So doesn't this sentence suggest that there is some kind of realisation to be attained?

Yes he says that there are two kinds of realisation; one is the one we have in the moment, and one is due to our efforts over the years. If we practice Zazen and study Buddhist philosophy over a number of years, we can become clear about what Buddhism is, and that's a kind of second stage of realisation. So he doesn't deny that there is progress, but he denies there is progress. So he makes a contradictory statement. So we can say that progress is in our minds, because we're only living now, but at the same time we do feel that there is something called progress.

Q: Inaudible. (*Questioner refers to a book by Jack Cornfield – After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*)

Yes, so without the ecstasy, there's no laundry to do.

Q: *Yes so I think what he's saying is that even after you've achieved realisation, this doesn't mean that...you're a buddha....(inaudible).*

Yes, and some people who think they're perfect and open a school to teach the right way, inadvertently, while doing that, in the middle of their delusion, teach themselves. So we don't need to worry about if we think we're perfect or not, we can just do it. And even if we do something as a mistake, if we do it sincerely, we can sometimes learn from it. So we might think we're the biggest thing since sliced bread, and when we find out that we're not, we can still carry on. So we always get a chance to try again, so to realise delusion means that – "now I realise I'm not what I thought I was, oh dear, now I can start again". So realising that is a constant thing, but it doesn't mean we shouldn't start, we keep realising we're deluded, and noticing that we're deluded is itself a kind of moving on.

Nevertheless, they are buddhas in the state of experience, and they go on experiencing the state of buddha.

So because the state of buddha is a state, not the result of some intentional effort, it's just doing or practice, then we don't need to recognise it, we just need to do it. So when we practice Zazen, if we try and see why we're doing this, it's difficult to find a reason. And if we look to see if we're peaceful now, it's difficult to see whether we are or not. But we can continue practicing.

Q: *Isn't it better to stop trying to be perfect all the time?*

Yes, it's better to stop trying to perfect all the time, the question is – how do we stop trying to be perfect all the time. Next paragraph. This paragraph describes the function of perception, the last paragraph which we've just done, describes really the function of intention – the intellect; that we don't need it. But paragraph three talks about perception, or the senses.

When we use the whole body-and-mind to look at forms, and when we use the whole body-and-mind to listen to sounds, even though we are sensing them directly, it is not like a mirror's reflection of an image, and not like water and the moon. While we are experiencing one side, we are blind to the other side.

So using "the whole body-and-mind to look at forms" suggests sight, and "the whole body-and-mind to listen to sounds" suggests hearing. But Master Dogen says that these senses are on-sided, so for instance, while I'm talking to you I can't listen to somebody else saying something, and while I'm looking this side, I can't see what's going on behind me. So when we focus ourselves directly into our perceptive functions we become one-sided. That's not to say that there isn't a state where we have perception that is more intuitive, and we can notice this in many different sports, where for instance a football player or tennis player can kick or hit the ball without consciously seeing it, or just at the moment that they see it they also hit it. So there's no focusing, in the sense that I might focus on the tape recorder for instance.

So our senses are one-sided, when we focus on our senses then we are blind to the other side. Paragraph four:

To learn the Buddha's truth is to learn ourselves. To learn ourselves is to forget ourselves. To forget ourselves is to be experienced by the myriad dharmas. To be experienced by the myriad dharmas is to let our own body-and-mind, and the body-and-mind of the external world, fall away. There is a state in which the traces of realisation are forgotten; and it manifests the traces of forgotten realisation for a long, long time.

It's a famous paragraph. Yet it is a contradiction – "to learn the Buddha's truth is to lean ourselves, to learn ourselves is to forget ourselves". We think that there's an enduring person called "myself"; I was reading a book by Richard Feynman the other day, and there's an example in the book about the meaning of science. He talks about a paper which describes that in the brains of rats, phosphorous, which forms a large part of the basis of the brain, decays with a half life of two weeks. That statement sounds rather scientific and undecipherable, then he goes on to say that what this means is that the phosphorous atoms in the brain of a rat, and indeed in the human brain, are not the same atoms which were there two weeks ago. So the atoms in my brain now are not the same atoms which were in my brain two weeks ago. So what is it I call "my brain"? And it's rather a nice comment – I think that I am "me", and I've been "me", the same "me" that I was two weeks ago. But according to Richard Feynman, it may be that all the atoms in my brain have disappeared and other atoms have come to take their place. So our concept of ourselves is quite strong, but whether there is an enduring something called "myself" or not is very difficult to know.

Q: Can I come back to the phrase "while we are experiencing one side, we are blind to the other"?

Yes, I think this phrase refers to the focusing characteristic of our senses. So actually it's true; when we focus on one thing, we can't see another. So for instance, if we're using a mobile phone while we're in the car, so listening and talking, we don't notice the traffic coming from the right. So when we focus on one sensual input, we're blind to the others.

Q: Sensual input?

Yes.

Q: So like the Gestalt thing?

I don't know enough about that, the inkblot thing?

Q: The image of the vase or the two faces, if you look at it one way you don't see the other.

Oh yes, that's certainly true, yes that's the kind of example, yes. I think Master Dogen here is saying something which is basically very simple. Some recent studies on sight have suggested that though we think, we feel, that all of the time we see all around us, in fact the latest experiments have suggested that we actually see, up to date, now, a very small area; the rest we fill in, or is filled in from our brain's activity, from memory.

Q: *Or made up.*

Or made up, yes, I'm making it all up. So I think it means something very simple; simply that our perceptual ability has to be focused, and when we focus it, it can only be focused on one place. So when I'm looking in front, I can't see behind.

Q: *That seems obvious.*

Yes, it's obvious, but someone wrote to me in an email, she said that some people are very quick to understand, but they need explanation many times. And I feel that's true for most of us. Yes, it's obvious, but although it's obvious, you see people with one hand on the steering wheel having a conversation whilst driving a car. And so although it's obvious that while they're having a conversation they can't concentrate on the traffic, they do it. So we need to have it repeated many times – the obvious.

Q: *Are you saying you can only see one thing at one time?*

No, I don't mean that, I mean you can only focus on... what can I say? An area?

Q: *One side.*

Q: *Direction.*

OK, one side, direction, sound.

Q: *But that doesn't say it...*

So what should we say about all of it then? We've got sound, vision etc. How about "when we see one side, we are blind to the other"? It's not bad for the 13th century is it?

Q: *Mike, what does "whole body-and-mind" mean?*

The whole body-and-mind means that we're completely focused on something. So completely concentrating. Anybody got any better examples? I think when we're completely concentrating on some kind of perceptual input, we find it difficult to notice anything else.

Yoko: So when you talk, you can't hear.

Q: *But you can see though.*

You can't read a book while you're talking very easily.

Q: *Can I think while reading?*

You'll have to answer that. But it's a very rare person who can read the newspaper while having a conversation with somebody else. So in a very simple sense what Master Dogen is saying makes sense in our real experience.

(Long, largely inaudible commentary from group member)

Well, there's room between paragraphs 3 and 4 to insert an extra paragraph. I don't think that's what Master Dogen is saying. The strange thing is, when we focus intently on one thing, we can grasp everything. So for instance, if we're in the middle of an activity, so a footballer playing for example, we can still retain an awareness of everything around us.

Q: *Around us?*

So there might be a few things missing.

Q: *But actually at that point, that is everything, a footballer about to kick a ball, that is everything...*

Yes, that's right. So there's a difference between that and perception; when we're acting, we lose our feeling of reflection and we're totally involved in what we're doing. And in that total involvement, there is also some kind of wider involvement. Talking about actual perception, such as looking at forms, and listening to sounds, when we do that, we can't do the two together. So when we listen intently, we can't look intently at something different, or when we look forward, we can't see what's behind us, or when we're intently reading a book, we can't have a conversation, or when somebody is talking to us, it's difficult for us to talk to somebody else – this kind of thing. So he says clearly that looking at forms and listening to sounds, "while we are experiencing one side, we are blind to the other side".

(Inaudible discussion among group members)

Any more comment?

(More inaudible comment)

Yes, so that's what he's saying – when we're totally involved in one perception, we can't be involved in another.

(Inaudible commentary)

Hmmm, it seems quite straightforward to me. When we intently look at something, or when we intently listen to something, our looking and listening is a direct experience; it's not as if we're reflecting on something, but it's a direct input. And in that state we can't do two things at once. So if we're intently talking, we totally involved in talking; we not thinking about talking, we're talking talking. Or if we're listening; we're not thinking about listening, we listening listening. And we can't do both at once. So I don't see any contradiction in what you say.....

(Inaudible comment)

I don't know enough about it, and certainly Master Dogen is not talking at that level, but if you read a book by Daniel Dennett, called 'Consciousness Explained', he suggests that actually when you analyse our sensory inputs in terms of time, there's not enough time for it all to work. So he suggests that our whole body processes sensory input. But this is getting rather complicated, and of course modern science can contribute far more to our understanding. However, it's not our understanding that Master Dogen is trying to increase, but rather just to point out to us something

rather simple; that when we concentrate on one thing, we can't concentrate on another.

(Inaudible discussion)

First of all "water in the moon" is a metaphor, it's used quite a lot in the Shobogenzo; people couldn't get to the moon, and yet they could see the moon in the water. When we look at things, or when we listen to sounds, it's a direct experience, and if we do it completely we're completely absorbed in it. And when we're doing that we can't do something else. So for instance, as Yoko says, if I'm talking now I can't hear other things as they are going on, and if I listen to a tape of myself later, I can hear other things which I didn't hear.

(Inaudible)

I don't understand that. What Yoko said is that if we look in a mirror, we can see things behind us and things in front of us.

Q: And also if we're looking in the mirror, I can see you in it, and at the same time you can see me in it.

Q: This is not an example of a mirror with a person looking in the mirror, the whole point is that it's a mirror which is just reflecting, the mirror just reflects.

Q: But the people can see each other at the same time.

Q: But without the people, forget the people, the mirror's just reflecting, nobody is involved.

Yoko: We are talking about human beings - us, we. So if we look at a mirror in just one side, we cannot see another. So that's our condition as a human being.

(Inaudible, confused discussion goes on for some time)

Anybody got a timetable?

(Laughter)

(More confused argument and discussion)

Q: When he's talking about the image in the water, he's talking about the individual mind reflecting totality, Buddha mind. So he's using terminology which was common currency at that time...

To do what?

Q: You used mobile phones, we all know what mobile phones are about...

What does he use it to do?

Q: He's talking about the last line in paragraph four, "there is a state in which the traces of realisation"...

I see, so we're on to a different part now.....

Q: I thought that the two paragraphs were interrelated, they clone to each other. I didn't say what you said was wrong, I think it's absolutely right.....when it talks about the hidden and the obscure.....the realisation of Buddha-nature.

No. In paragraph three, he means when we focus, with our perception, whatever perception it is, on one thing, we can't perceive another. That's what he means in the paragraph. Nothing more or less.

Q: If you stand something in front of the mirror.....

Nothing about mirrors! Just, you can't see behind you, can you?

Q: No.

No! Anybody here can see behind them, put their hands up! Can anybody...

(People talking at the same time)

Q: People can listen to music and move at the same time.

People moving and listening to music at the same time, we have a name for – dance. So dance is a whole thing, one thing. But he says that our perceptions are in a way partial, although we have them with our whole body-and-mind, our perceptions are partial. And that's what he's pointing out in that paragraph. The in the next paragraph, number four, he says that in order to find out who we are, the best way is to forget who we are. And in order to forget who we are, it's best to be experienced by the myriad dharmas. So when we forget who we are, there is no "we", so this suggests a kind of ego less state. And this state is very familiar to us, because every time we act, whether that's picking up a cup of tea, or walking down the corridor, or jumping off a cliff, at the instant of acting there is no room to reflect, and there is no room to perceive. So although we can't say there's no reflection or perception, our experience is whole. And he describes that as "to be experienced by the myriad dharmas" – to be experienced by the whole of the Universe. So to be experienced by the whole of the Universe is the opposite to "I am experiencing the Universe". So to learn the truth about ourselves he suggests, is to put ourselves in the state where we are being experienced by the world. And that suggests action – doing something. To be experienced by the world is to let our own body-and-mind and the body-and-mind of the external world fall away. And as many of you know, to let our body-and-mind fall away is a description he uses in other places in the Shobogenzo to describe the state in Zazen. And to let our body-and-mind fall away suggests a simple, whole, state where we don't discriminate on the basis of physical and mental body-and-mind. So the state he's talking about here is the state we experience in Zazen. And in Zazen we can say that we forget ourselves, and in forgetting ourselves we can say that the world experiences us, and in the world experiencing us, we can say that we have no separate consciousness of our own body-and-mind or the body-and-mind of the world. So we're sitting... something is sitting, somewhere. And of course we now get this image in our minds of this "something sitting somewhere" state, and we think, "my Zazen isn't like that", but Zazen is like that, but we pass through two fundamental states of thinking and perception in Zazen. And when we wobble between these two states, there is a state in the middle, and that state in the middle, or the interface between the two, is the

state which Master Dogen describes in this paragraph. And in this state in the middle, we forget any trace of realisation, so we don't know if we realise. And this state of traceless realisation continues endlessly. Is that right, Yoko?

Yoko: Hmmmm? I wasn't listening.

Ah, yes, she was reading so wasn't listening! That's what Master Dogen is saying!

Q: (inaudible)

Yes that's right – eternal. So when we sit in Zazen we're sitting in eternity. But we have an idea of eternity as stretching from this time into the future. But we can think of eternity in the present moment, and we can experience eternity in the present moment. But it's different from the eternity we think about.

Q: *I like what Yoko said once – that eternal experience is momentary.*

Yoko: Yes, that's what I said.

(Laughter)

End of talk.