

Dogen Sangha 2002 Summer Sesshin

Talks on Master Dogen's Shobogenzo

By Eido Mike Luetchford.

Chapter 3 – Genjo-koan

Session 4

We're on paragraph six.

A person getting realisation is like the moon being reflected in water: the moon does not get wet, and the water is not broken.

So if we think of a picture of the moon being reflected in water, it seems to represent to us two things; the moon and the reflection of the moon. But in Master Dogen's time, the simile of the moon being reflected in water was used to represent something whole, or the great inside the small. And it's quite difficult to grasp how they might have felt about that simile, because when we put it into English it divides itself into two sides. The simile is meant to represent wholeness, but at the same time he's using it also with the two sides. In a strange way, this suggests something which is almost impossible to grasp, and that is, that when we're in the truth, when we're in the Universe, whole, then we don't disturb the Universe and the Universe doesn't disturb us. So..... I can't think of a way to describe it, but we experience it. I suppose if you think of a balloon filled with water, the water inside the membrane and the air outside of it are different, if the membrane were to burst, the water would rush out. But if you immerse this balloon in water, then there's water inside and outside, so it's an image of an interface between two things, where there's no difference between the two sides. I can't do any better than that. So for instance, when we sit in Zazen, and in the state of wholeness, nothing changes in us, and nothing changes outside, we melt into where we are. So Master Dogen uses the simile of the moon and water: the moon doesn't get wet, and the water is not broken by the moon. And he goes further with this simile to say:

Though the light [of the moon] is wide and great, it is reflected in a foot or an inch of water. The whole moon and the whole sky are reflected in a dew-drop on a blade of grass and are reflected in a single drop of water.

So this represents the infinite in the infinitely small. And Wordsworth wrote something like this....

Q: *It was Blake.*

Oh yes right, Blake, Wordsworth Blake. It's better if Blake said it, I'm happier. Can anybody quote it?

Q: To see a world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a wild flower, Hold infinity in the palm of your hand and eternity in an hour.

Thank you. So that's exactly it. And Master Dogen's poetry is in front of us:

The whole moon and the whole sky are reflected in a dew-drop on a blade of grass and are reflected in a single drop of water.

It was necessary, and is necessary, to describe, to try to describe the state of realisation, or the state of wholeness or oneness, even though it's impossible to describe it, because people have said that the state of realisation, or the state of enlightenment is some kind of special spiritual state. And it's so far from a special spiritual state as to be laughable. So it's necessary to try and describe it, but the descriptions can't catch the state where the moon is in the puddle.

Realisation does not break the individual, just as the moon does not pierce the water.

So there's something... as I'm an engineer I keep thinking of equal pressure on both sides, that kind of thing. That's why I thought of the balloon filled with water underwater. So something equal on both sides, the interface disappears. So when we sit in Zazen, we sit, we wobble in the interface between ourselves and the world. But just in that moment, when we enter the interface, the interface itself disappears, and:

The individual does not obstruct the state of realisation, just as a dew-drop does not hinder the sky and moon.

So nothing changes, because everything is equal on both sides. Then he goes on to try and say more about realisation, about the depth of realisation, its profundity. So he wants to say something about the profound nature of just being here, completely. And he says it may be as deep as the moon is high, because the height of the moon in the 13th century was just incalculable, unknowable. So he means that realisation is incalculably deep.

The depth [of realisation] may be as the concrete height [of the moon].

And how long does it last?

The longness and shortness of its moment should be investigated in large [bodies of] water and small [bodies of] water, and observed in the width and narrowness of the sky and moon.

So he says we should test it concretely, how long does it last? And that's what we were discussing at the end of the last talk, when somebody said that they felt they could almost just catch it. Master Dogen says we should go out and look in small bodies of water and large bodies of water. So we should go and experience.

Q: Why does he say realisation does not break the individual?

He's using the word break, out of the simile of the moon and the water – breaking the surface, but bringing the individual. So he's mixing his metaphors, splitting them up. I think it's more effective in the Japanese. So the moon does not break the surface of the water, realisation does not break the individual. So the whole Universe is reflected in us, but in being reflected in us it doesn't disturb one molecule of it. So because this paragraph is written about realisation, it's not an analytical paragraph, it's more trying to catch something which is fleeting. So people say that somebody who gets the truth, or somebody who gets enlightenment, somebody who is a master, or you know, they have some special state which we don't have, but we want it. So we want to follow them to get it. But what Master Dogen says is that the state is equality, balance between inside and outside. So we just look normal, so it's nothing special. Of course, in being normal we're special. But it's not specialness in terms of, oh that bloke can levitate himself, or he has special secret knowledge that other people have. So we may think we're a little group that is special, but we're just members of a group of little insects living on the surface of a large round ball. Mildew on the surface of a ball, who said that?

Yoko: Master Kodo Sawaki.

Or scum.

(laughter)

Q: *I don't quite get the last sentence.*

Oh good. Well, "the longness and shortness of its moment" means how long it lasts for. And of course we don't know how long it lasts. So he's saying that in order to find out how long or short realisation lasts for, in terms of time, go out and look, and he's using his simile of water and the moon, he says go out and look at water and the moon. In other words, go out and live. But he's mixing his metaphors from the concrete and poetic description. And that's because we can't answer how long or short it is. There's lots of question like that which we can't answer. He often ends a paragraph rather like that, saying we should study and investigate in experience. He says in Bendowa somewhere, or is it Uji, something like "is there any piece of time which has slipped away from the present moment? We should go out and investigate this in great detail". All those not here, raise their hands! In paragraph seven he continues talking about realisation, but rather than in a poetic or philosophical way, he talks more concretely.

When the Dharma has not yet satisfied the body-and-mind we feel already replete with Dharma. When the Dharma fills the body-and-mind we feel one side to be lacking.

So what he's saying there is, if we think we've got it, we're a long way from it, if we think we haven't got it we may be there. Or when we've got it, it feels like there's something missing. And because we feel something missing, we make our effort in daily life. So even when we're in the state of balance, we make an effort to get the state of balance. So human beings are always making their effort,. So this suggests that rather than a kind of intellectual self-satisfaction, "ah, I understand it all now", making us feel high, somebody who is very sincere but a little puzzled, and trying to make sense of everything, may be closer to the state of the Dharma satisfying the body-and-mind. Or in terms of science, the diligent enquiring scientist who spends his whole life peering at things to understand them, is closer than somebody who

publishes his results and says, "look what I've found, I've discovered this". So to look itself, looking itself, is the Buddhist state. And there's a koan story quoted in one chapter about a child of fire coming looking for fire. A monk asks his master "what is the truth?" And his master says, "a child of fire comes looking for fire". The monk understands that to mean that he's looking for something he's already got, and he understands it intellectually, so for some years after that, he feels he's got it. Then he goes off to study with another master, and for some years he doesn't say anything, then the master says "you've been here three years now and you don't ask me any questions, why is that?" And the monk replies, "well actually, to be honest with you, when I was with my previous master, I got the truth". So the master says, "tell me, how did you get it?" The monk says, "it was when my master told me 'a child of fire comes looking for fire', and I understood that to be myself." So the master replies, "now that you've said that, I can see that you're very far from understanding Buddhism". So the monk gets a bit annoyed, turns around and walks off, but as he's walking off he thinks that this man is a great master so he might have something after all. He thinks he should swallow his pride and go back. So he turns around, and as he turns around he changes his attitude, and as he goes back, his attitude changes from one of "I know", to one of, "what is it?" So he says to the master, "what is the truth?" And the master says exactly the same words that his first master had said, "the child of fire comes looking for fire". But on hearing it this time, he understood that his simple sincere attitude to come and ask was the truth itself. So it says he had a realisation. That's a very nice little koan story. So it illustrates that sentence rather well. Then he gives an example of "when the Dharma fills the body-and-mind, we feel one side to be lacking".

For example, sailing out beyond the mountains and into the ocean, when we look around in the four directions, [the ocean] appears only to be round; it does not appear to have any other form at all. Nevertheless, this great ocean is not round, and it is not square.

He had sailed to China, with his master Myozen, to search for true Buddhism, and to sail from Japan to China in the 13th century must have been quite an undertaking, they would have been far enough out at sea to lose sight of land. So I suppose his example comes from his experience, that when you're right out at sea, the horizon is a circle, but he says that really it's not – it's not a circle and it's not a square. So what he seems to be saying is that because reality is formless, when we experience reality, the formlessness, we see it as something missing, because we like to have something defined. So when we have something clear and defined we think we've got it. But when we can't see clearly what shape reality is, although we may be in it, we feel... a "what is it? Where is it?" kind of feeling.

Other qualities of the ocean are inexhaustibly many: [to fishes] it is like a palace, and [to gods] it is like a string of pearls.

So these two quotes about the ocean seeming to be to fish, a palace, and to gods, a string of pearls, come from a traditional Buddhist teaching, I don't know exactly from where, maybe from an old sutra somewhere. It describes different beings viewing the ocean in different ways. So the perception of different beings is different – we can't live in the ocean but fish can't live out of the ocean. So he's saying that the ocean seems to us to be round, and we see the ocean as something full of water, and if we get in the water we get wet, but its true nature is different from that. Only its nature relative to us, we see it as the ocean, and we see it as round from horizon to horizon. So he's making the point that the ocean itself as it is doesn't have only

the qualities that we see, and so lack of definition makes us feel that something is missing, and it's the same with reality.

But as far as our eyes can see, it just seems to be round. As it is for [the ocean], so it is for the myriad dharmas. In dust and out of the frame, [the myriad dharmas] encompass numerous situations, but we see and understand only as far as our eyes of learning in practice are able to reach.

"Myriad dharmas" just means all things and phenomena in the Universe. "In dust" suggests the secular world, and "out of the frame" suggests the world of action. In English we say "out of the frame of reference".

Q: *Thinking out of the box.*

Not thinking out of the box but jumping out of the box, or leaping out. So "we see and understand only as far as our eyes of learning and practice are able to reach", so we understand as much as we experience, but there's more in the world, in the Universe, that we experience.

If we wish to hear how the myriad dharmas naturally are, we should remember that besides their appearance of squareness or roundness, the qualities of the oceans and qualities of the mountains are numerous and endless; and that there are worlds in the four directions.

So he wants to say that we see the world from our own viewpoint. If we want to see the world of outside our viewpoint, we can't, but being one with the Universe we experience everything. So when we're acting, when we practice Zazen, we experience everything as it is, but when we look out at the Universe we see things as we're used to interpreting them, and as we've experienced them. So if we want to see the Universe naturally as it is, we have to remember that besides all the qualities and characteristics we give to things, there are millions and millions of other qualities which we don't give to things, but which fish might, or gods might or animals might.

Not only the periphery is like this: remember, the immediate present, and a single drop [of water] are also like this.

So the periphery suggests his metaphor of looking round the edge of the Universe, the edge of the ocean. But not only the edge, but here and now, and a single drop of water are also like this. So we say "a single drop of water", which means we know what is a drop, what is water, and what single means, we see this and interpret it in our understanding and through our experience, but the actual drop of water itself, what it is, beyond our interpretations, is impossible for us to grasp. But although it's impossible for us to grasp, it's there, as it is, and when we sit in Zazen, or when we act, everything is here as it is. And in being here as it is, there is something which is beyond our categorisations and interpretations. To be experienced by the myriad dharmas. So it's very difficult to put it into words, but he did it. So a lot of this is very puzzling, and the reason it's puzzling is because we're used to looking at the world in a certain way, and even when we try to be unusual, or we come up with a different way of looking, we're still usually within the range of socially accepted points of view. But occasionally someone comes up with a new way of looking at the world, or something. And often their new way of looking is so far-fetched that people don't accept it, for a few years, or hundreds of years. We can see that perhaps in great scientific discoveries – often in their time they sounded so strange that they

were not accepted. So the way Master Dogen talks about things seemed in his time and now, very strange. To talk about the Universe having lots of qualities that we don't see, sounds like he's talking about something spiritual, but he's not. And in paragraph eight and nine, he goes on to talk about action itself – action in the moment. This is very strange because nobody talks about action, we do it, but we don't try and talk about it. If we do, we talk about it as a process stretching over time.

Q: *May I ask, what is action in your use of the word?*

When we act, in the present moment, there is a state where we and the world become something which is one. And we can see this in some situations, for instance in sport, and in situations where something happens to us suddenly, in emergencies, where we actually act, but we notice afterwards that we weren't conscious of what we were doing, and yet what we were doing worked. What's crucial is the fact that, at that moment, we stopped being aware of ourselves as a person.

Q: (Inaudible)

No that's when we're distracted, when we're daydreaming.

Q: (Inaudible discussion)

So the difficulty is, that we give examples, and the examples we give are kind of extremes; but we're acting all of the time. So whenever we act, we stop thinking, but people can't believe that. So there's nothing wrong with our action, however, in the modern world, we tend to think too much, so when we think about what we're doing, our action is incomplete, or partial. So if we learn that action itself is complete, then we can stop worrying about acting and just act, or we can give value to any action. We tend always to be thinking about what we're doing, and giving different values to it; "I don't need to clean the windows, they're not dirty", or "I'll leave the washing up til later because I've got more important things to do". But all actions have equal value. So wiping round the bowl of the toilet, or transferring funds from one account to another, are the same action; we press the computer key or we wipe the bowl. And in stressing that action itself is valuable for itself, Buddhism tries to tell us to just keep acting. But what we try to do is to order our actions and give them value. Of course we have to do that to live in society, we can't go in to the office and clean the toilets because it's as important.... But we ourselves can notice that when we pour a cup of tea, we can take the same whole-hearted action as when we do something we consider important. So it's just a teaching of a kind of fullness of action.

Q: (Inaudible)

Yes, it's the opposite to that. So every action is valuable to itself, every action is sacred and ordinary at the same time. So because we're thinking human beings and we're living in a sophisticated society, we need to have something to remind of that intellectually – what I'm doing now is important, what I'm doing now is important. We also need a practice to bring us back to that. So Buddhism gives us a way of reminding ourselves intellectually via the teachings, and a way of grounding ourselves in what we're doing now, which is Zazen. That's the only thing that it gives us; it doesn't give us a life, or a job, Buddhism gives us those two things – practice

and study. And the practice and the study both teach us that this moment, this act is the most important.

Yoko: (Inaudible)

So I can't do that, so I like to keep studying Buddhism, to remind myself, I can't do it, so I keep trying every day.

Q: (Inaudible)

That is realisation, yes. So when we focus on the present and act in the present, that is the meaning of realisation, or awake, or buddha. Buddha is the participle of the verb bud – to awaken. So to be awake, which suggests not being in our minds, and not in our senses, but just being simply awake. And we are, for split seconds. All that Buddhism says is, notice the value of coming back to this moment, and when we notice it, it expands. Buddhism points us in the right direction, it confuses us. I've spent a long time puzzling over the word action, for years, and I have the same question – what is action. But slowly I began to, actually for me, I did lots of rock climbing, I was a very intellectual young man, I mean very – my brain was very busy. The I started rock climbing when I was about sixteen, I didn't notice consciously but what this did was stop me thinking, when I was hanging on a rope, I had to act, otherwise I'd fall. So I forced myself into the present moment again and again, I felt ever so happy, but I didn't notice that this was what was making me happy. Then I met Nishijima Roshi who talked about action, and I puzzled and puzzled, then I realised "ah that's action, it did make me happy, and it does make me happy". But it took me a long time to catch what he was talking about, for me, my experiences in rock climbing of forcing myself to act were very valuable. But you don't have to be a rock climber. It's just moving forward in the present, no thinking or intention, just raw brute moving, moving. And that very simple thing which we all do, all of the time, when we just reach out and pick up the teapot is very important, but because it's so ordinary and almost hidden by our thoughts, we give it no value at all. Everything is action, but we have a brain which abstracts us from what we're doing. So we have this peculiar way of taking ourselves out of where we are, although we don't move from it, we take ourselves out from it, which is really strange, but that's our human condition.

Q: (Inaudible)

It's very difficult, and the chapter is very difficult, and what it's saying is very difficult, and we puzzle over it and puzzle over it. And it says some very strange things. For instance, when we were doing kinhin there, for some reason I was...not thinking but Master Nagarjuna's chapter Two of his book came into my mind suddenly, and I walked from there, round to here, and in my mind there's this picture of a kind of ghostly me, right? And I guess we all think, oh yes I walked from there to here. So somewhere in our consciousness we have this kind of feeling that there is a "me", a trace of me going from there to here. And that's so natural to us that we call it movement. But it's a complete illusion, it's not real at all, but it's so deeply imbedded in us that we can't see what the real situation is. So Buddhism says some very bizarre things.

Q: (Inaudible)

Well I don't understand it either.

Q: *Like when you kick a football.*

Yes, the arc, we say it went through the air, so there's somewhere in our consciousness this trace of a football going through the air, but it only exists in our consciousness. There's an experiment now where you stimulate the arm here, here, and here, and the person experiences something running up their arm, and yet there's nothing running up their arm. So the exciting thing is that modern investigation of perception and intelligence and so on, is realising that some of these bizarre things that masters Dogen and Nagarjuna say, are valid pictures of reality. So we become clearer that we interpret; we have an interpreted picture of reality which is not exactly the same as the way things are. Our whole society is founded on this picture. It's nothing to do with throwing away current society, or casting away our watches, or anything like that, just that Buddhism wants to see how things are, simply how they are. And then we can give value to things that we thought were not so important.

Q: *I still don't understand the football.*

Well there's not a football here. What Mark said about flashing lights seeming to be movement.

Inaudible discussion.

Yes, it definitely moves, but what we call movement, is not what movement is. And so Master Dogen says almost exactly that in a chapter in the Shobogenzo; what we call movement is not what movement really is, that's all. But yes of course we move, you're moving now. So it's time to stop. Thank you.

End of talk.

-