

Dogen Sangha Summer Sesshin 2004
Talk on Master Dogen's Bussho
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There can never exist another world outside of this Universe. And there can never exist another me at this moment of the present.

We can see that this applies very nicely to what we've just been talking about – although we can see how things should be, we are as we are. That doesn't mean we can't change, but we are as we are, the Universe is as it is. Master Dogen denies that there's another Universe outside of this Universe, the Universe contains everything, and he denies that there's another him at the moment of the present.

At the same time, it is not possible to recognise this intellectually, because our mind is always busy interpreting reality based on our past experiences (Master Yoka Genkaku).

So our mind is always busy interpreting reality, we're always thinking what we should, could, did, do, what we must do, what happened, how it could have been improved and so on. So we always interpret reality based on our past experience. That phrase itself in the original, comes from a story about Master Yoka Genkaku. Master Dogen then comes back to this phrase from the poem by Gautama Buddha.

***"Fully manifesting existence"* does not mean existence that only comes out of random circumstances, because the whole Universe only shows itself just as it is.**

"The whole Universe shows itself just as it is", is a very well known phrase in Chinese Buddhism, and it's true everything is just as it is. To fully manifest existence isn't something that comes out of circumstances in different ways, to fully manifest existence is just to be as we are here and now. He goes on:

But this does not mean that the objective material world is existence fully manifesting itself. And on the other hand, neither do Buddhists believe that the Universe is centred around my existence.

So those two sentences are from opposite points of view. In the first sentence he says that the objective material world, that's the external world, is not fully manifesting existence, and on the other hand the personal, subjective self-centred world is not fully manifesting existence. But when we don't make any division between our own self-centred world and the external objective world, we fully manifest existence. We can say it's a balance between our internal view and the external world. This is something very simple; when we act we always throw away the division between ourselves and the external world, if only for a second, when we pick up a cup of tea the division between me and the world disappears. So the nature of action is a balance or oneness between the self-centre and the external centre.

Might we describe Zazen itself as a simple form of action?

Yes.

But what is the action in Zazen? Is it the scene?

The action.

Is it the being? Is it the looking?

We can't recognise it. And this is why Buddhism is so difficult to explain in words. Because we always try to explain the world in words it's very difficult for us to notice an experience which we can't put into words. But during Zazen we sometimes think, we sometimes notice our inner feelings, we sometimes notice the external world, but sometimes there's a balance between ourselves and the room. The nearest way I can make sense of it is to use the idea of physical balance, and say that sometimes we're aware of the external room or the pain in our legs or a draught or a bird, sometimes we're inward looking and are concentrating on our thoughts....

So is all of this the action of Zazen?

All of it is Zazen.

And for a minute instant, this is somehow the essence of it?

We can say that it's a minute instant. In order to balance anything you must wobble, you can't find a dynamic balance without some very slight movement. So in that movement there's a middle position which is instantaneous. And in that instantaneous position, we're not thinking.

So we're not conscious of it?

We're not conscious of it. And the same instantaneous state happens whenever we act, you take your glasses off, and for an instant..., pick up a cup of tea and there's an instant, but we're not aware of it so we don't notice it. What Buddhism says is although we're not aware of it, we don't notice it, we can't grasp it or properly describe it, it's the basis of our life, because these instants of action are our ground, our balance. Without it, we go off one way – thinking and thinking, or off to the other side, trapped in the material world. So the centre is the ground, the basis of our life, but we can't recognise it.

In many of the sentences it says it's not possible to recognise this intellectually because our mind is always busy interpreting reality, does that mean it's not possible to recognise it intellectually because when we're thinking intellectually our mind is busy, and what we talk about in Zazen... we're not talking intellectually, but the mind is not always busy.

The mind is always busy, when the mind is not busy, there is no mind.

Where does "intellectually" fit into it?

Maybe it's a bit superfluous, maybe that's a carry-over from Nishijima Roshi; he used this word a lot. I mean mental, thinking, some kind of image or movement in our consciousness that we usually call thought or thinking, or intellectual recognition, or something like that.

(Inaudible) we become one and recognise it at that time, but can you say that you had one of those five minutes ago?

To me, to say that is pointless.

Because it's...

Because it's gone. But that might be just my character, I don't know, it's gone whether I had it or not, the most important thing is to act now. So we can sit down and talk about last year's retreat and how everybody acted and so on, but this is this year. But we can say it I suppose. We cannot stop thinking; human beings can't live without thinking. So because we can't stop it even if we imagine we should be able to stop it, we can't, so it's better to have some kind of thought which guides us towards something realistic than to have some thought which guides us elsewhere. So to me although all these words are a kind of delusion, they tell me, "these words are a kind of delusion" or, "what use are these words". It's better than saying "there is a happy land far away". So because we think, we should have thoughts which point us towards the basis of our life. The basis of our life is outside of these thoughts, which is a real pain!

So are you getting somewhere near that idea of...bits in the balance, the idea of no mind.

Not the idea of no mind, no mind!

Because you can approach this stuff and think there's an intellectual mind and the mind that's outside intellect, but once your outside intellect.

There is no mind.

I always think there's going to be a moment when one stops reading books or listening to talks, but it never seems to come. It seems that there's a kind of hunger for what is really just confirming the same thing again and again.

Yes that's right, we need that. There's a koan story about a master who is continually telling his students that it's not in sutras, don't read sutras, you're wasting your time. Then one of his students finds the master reading a sutra, so he says " you told us not to read sutras, what are you doing?" And the master replies, "I'm just shading my eyes". We need to shade our eyes, I don't know why, we need to look in the drawer, and see it saying "no, not in here", that's to be human, that's what we are. So to have an idea that we should get rid of that and somehow be perfect is ideal, idealism. Buddhas open drawers, opening the drawer and looking in is the important thing. That's our life.

Did you say that in action, I think you said that there is no consciousness.

No mind.

These little actions we do and we're not conscious of them, we're not aware of them and that's...

I don't mean in the sense that we do things that we don't know we're doing.

But aren't you saying that, because if we're not aware of them then we can't become aware of them as moments of action, then what's the point?

There isn't a point. There isn't a point to anything; it's doing that is...it's the doing. We are doing things all of the time, all of us, when we do things, at the moment that we do them with all our effort there's no place to notice, to look at

ourselves, there's no viewpoint from which we can look at what we're doing, we just do. Then we come back to our normal busy mind and we notice what we've done and we think, "should I have done that?" But there's an instant, billions of times through our day and through our life, there's the instant of action. So it's the basis of our life.

(bell rings)

We'll stop now.

Thank you.