

**Winter Sesshin 2004**  
**Talk number 4**  
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Something occurred to me between this morning and now, that when Master Dogen gave his lecture, he just gave it, and it's quite short. But we're pulling it apart, and in a way that makes it more difficult; if you go and see a film you just see the film and that's it, but if you pull the film apart and discuss it, it becomes something else. It's quite difficult, and another thing is we expect to be able to understand what we read, but I couldn't understand the Shobogenzo the first time I read it, or the second or the third. And Nishijima Roshi said the same thing, he couldn't understand any of it at the beginning. And he said that he looks at it rather like a huge canvas. We normally expect to pick up a book and understand the sentences as we go from the beginning to the end, but if we think of it more as a canvas we can see a bit there or a bit there. We can understand a little bit, or it does something for us, there's some which we can't quite make out and so on. And I think he's right. Coming back to it again and again we can slowly get something, even if we can't understand some of the sentences they leave some kind of an impression, in my experience. Although I've tried to interpret it, I wonder whether my interpretation is clearer or less clear than the original in some places. But it's an interpretation.

We just got to the part on page 2, in the middle of the third paragraph. He was saying that the whole Universe is progressing from one moment to the next. And he says it's not static, but it's also not a continuous process, so that's difficult for us to understand, something that's progressing but is not a continuous process.

**An example of this momentary passing is Spring. It has many different aspects, the passing of which we call the progress of Spring. But our practice teaches us that the passing of time from moment to moment involves no external object.**

He's saying that we can look at Spring as an example of progression, which he goes on to discuss in the coming paragraph. But the passing of time doesn't involve anything external. What we feel is time passing doesn't involve anything external. The he discusses Spring in more detail now:

**For example, momentary Spring passes through a process that we call Spring. But the passing is not Spring itself; we just think of Spring as the movement of momentary Spring through the process Spring. But Spring is made real at every time-present in the process of Spring.**

We've got a process which we call Spring – "Spring is coming", "Spring is here", "it's Spring", and in that he's saying that although we think of that period as Spring, actual Spring is just now in the Spring time. So Spring, Spring, Spring, Spring, Spring. Spring is made real at every time-present in the process of Spring.

**We need to come back to this again and again.**

What he wants us to come back to is the difference between what is real here and now in this time-present and what we call Spring, or what we call a process, or what we call a person.

**In discussing the momentary passing of time, if we think that there are only individual things that change on the outside, but that there is some real unchanging entity that passes from moment to moment moving through all worlds and all times, we are becoming lax in studying Buddhism in our practice.**

He's saying in discussing the momentary passing of time, if we think that there's something that's existing through all times and all worlds that passes from moment to moment, then that's not right. There is nothing real and unchanging that passes from moment to moment called time. But we do call it time.

*How is that different from all the nows are in the past or future?*

If we think that there's something actually real passing through those called time, then he says we're becoming lax in studying Buddhism. This is a kind of parallel with what he says about the self, in earlier chapters. He says that to believe in a permanent unchanging self that goes on while we're living and after we die and so on, unchanging, then that's not right. He's saying the same about this. Although we hold in our mind a concept of time, and that concept has something real about it, because it corresponds to something real for us, it doesn't really exist. But although it doesn't really exist, it is really useful.

*Then time is the external object that doesn't exist.*

Where's the external object. Oh in the paragraph, the "passing of time from moment to moment involves no external object"? It means that you can sit without doing anything, and you can imagine time passing, it doesn't mean anything else, it doesn't mean anything external. It's the opposite.

*The externalisation of time is a necessary consequence of imagining things as persistent?*

Yes, so he's saying contradictory things all the way through.

*A clock is external isn't it but it's not time?*

No, we just keep looking at it and it's different to the last time we looked at it. And so we say it's moved, time has moved. But the sentences are contradictory, and this is the big problem with reading the Shobogenzo – he says one thing then the opposite. Making sense of that is not so easy until we notice that reality is contradictory if we try to explain it. It's not contradictory itself, but our explanations of it have to contradict each other to try and grasp it. We say today went very quickly, that's one statement, but today was exactly 24 hours, that's another statement. They contradict each other. We usually say that one is right and one is wrong, one is objective, that's right, and the other is subjective, that's wrong. But he gives them equal vale. He makes contradictory statements and gives them equal value.

*What's he contradicting there?*

That sentence at the end of the previous paragraph, "the passing of time from moment to moment involves no external object", so there's nothing external, just

time passing, then the sentence at the end of this paragraph, "if we think there is some changing entity that passes from moment to moment".

*Isn't he saying the same thing? Because doesn't no external object mean there's no object outside of time?*

Is he saying the same thing?

*He talks about, earlier in the first.....the second paragraph on page 1, "we imagine events as part of a journey". In that kind of picture wouldn't the external object be whoever is actually traversing that journey, so they are from outside time?*

If you picture it like that.

*Then that would be the external, it isn't actually necessary to have time passing....*

OK. I can't quite... In that paragraph on page 1, he's talking about time as a journey.

*So in that don't you have some kind of separation between the world where the journey is, and yourself?*

That's one way to look at it, another way is to look at it is that there's the world then there's time passing through it.

*I think we've taken that last paragraph in the previous sentence out of context anyway. It says before that, "this momentary progression in Spring".*

Can you see that it's darker now, it's been getting darker through the afternoon?

*Yes but we don't need night to know that. We don't need the concept of night to know that it's dark.*

That's right yes.

(Hubbub of general conversation)

Let's move on without any external object. There's a story that begins in the next paragraph, it's one of the koan stories, and it's a discussion between a master and his disciple, although they all have the title of Master, they were master and disciple.

**One day, at the suggestion of Master Sekito Kisen Master Yakusan Igen asked Master Baso Doitsu a question: "I have more or less understood the meaning of Buddhist theory and its classifications.**

By classifications he mean the many different classifications we can find in traditional Buddhism – The Three Worlds, The Four Levels, The Eight Consciousnesses, The Three Poisons, The Four This and the Six That. So he's learned all those.

***But I want to ask you what was Master Bodhidharma's purpose in coming from India to China?***

This was a kind of traditional question, Bodhidharma came from India to China in the 6<sup>th</sup> century and brought the practice of Zazen with him. And from that time, Buddhism as the practice of Zazen spread in China, but before that time it was largely esoteric Buddhism. This was brought home to me quite surprisingly a couple of years ago. Yoko and I went to an exhibition of Buddhist statues at the Royal Academy. They were from China, from the earliest date of Buddhism in China right through to about the 10<sup>th</sup> century. They were arranged in chronological order through four galleries. Where it started all the buddhas were very god-like with lots of ornaments and necklaces and headdresses and things, all standing with their hands in special positions. And as you went through the centuries, when you got to the 6<sup>th</sup> century suddenly all these statues changed to seated buddhas in the meditation position wearing robes. It was quite striking – “ah, that’s when Bodhidharma came”, it was almost there in the museum.

*Mike, can I just ask you something slightly off the subject but it’s to do with Bodhidharma. He also apparently brought with him a sutra, but we don’t study it at all. Why?*

You can study it if you want to.

*Is there a reason, is it more Rinzai Sect?*

I’ve no idea. Isn’t that the sutra which no-one know whether it was written in China or in India?

*I think so, it was purported to have been brought by Bodhidharma.*

Was it? I’ve not read it.

*It’s supposed to be the fundamental sutra of Zen, of Ch’an.*

Is it? I don’t know anything about it. And Nishijima Roshi never mentioned it. I mean I know its existence and I’ve heard that there’s some controversy over hundreds of years whether it was written in China or India. But other than that I don’t know. Have a look at it and see.

*I’ve got it.*

What do you think?

*Well I’m not going to read it if you say not to.*

You’ve got it but you’re not going to read it? If I say?

*It’s translated by Suzuki and with commentary.*

Right off you go then. His question was what was Master Bodhidharma’s purpose in coming from India to China? And many students asked their masters this, and it was in a way a kind of set question. It meant when somebody goes to spread Buddhism somewhere, what is it that makes them do it? What is their intention, what are they trying to do, who sends them? And:

**On hearing this question, Master Baso Doitsu replied, “At one time-present he was moved to raise his eyebrow and wink, at another time-present he was not moved to raise his eyebrow and wink. And one time-present to raise his eyebrow and wink was right, and at another time-present, to raise his eyebrow and wink was wrong”.**

Which sounds a very strange answer. But the answer that Master Baso Doitsu gave is trying to say that he just went. In other words there's something natural in his actions. Sometimes to raise your eyebrow and wink is....you do it, and it's ok to do it. Sometimes you do it and it's not ok to do it, sometimes you don't do it and it's ok to do it. He's trying to say that, so it just happened.

**When Master Yakusan heard these words, the whole of Buddhism became clear to him and he said to Master Baso, "When I studied with Master Sekito, I was just a mosquito sitting on the back of a giant ox!"**

I think in everything we do, we have a tendency to want or expect things to happen, as a result of our efforts now we expect to see a result. And if we're practicing something, I suppose when you're practicing Yoga you do the exercises and you expect to get more flexible, then if you don't you feel you must be doing something wrong. And in all kinds of training I think that's a very common human tendency. But Buddhism teaches that things unfold naturally, and I think lots of teachers realise that and say so. In other words don't hurry, do your practice and it'll happen. But we tend to be impatient. Master Yakusan had been studying Buddhist theory and classifications and thought that the more he got the more he would understand. Then he asked this question to Master Baso Doitsu, who says, "wink? Don't wink? Sometimes it's ok sometimes it's not ok?" In other words there's some kind of natural process, not the result of some kind of intention. Master Bodhidharma didn't have a strong intention such as, "I'm going to China to spread Buddhism!" Just that's what happened.

*Is it also because we expect some kind of deep meaning to the answer, rather than a straightforward and simple one? Actually I was reminded, I went to a lecture of a Zen archer who studied in Kamakura. When he went there he was expecting that he would revere all these wonderful masters, and to be mystified by the whole thing, and all he was told to do was just aim and fire. They said there's nothing to it, that's all you do.*

Just keep doing it.

*Just keep doing it yes. It was a very interesting lecture because he kind of demystified the whole thing.*

Yes, you can say Master Baso is demystifying the whole thing with that kind of down to earth answer.

*Is that a 13<sup>th</sup> century way of saying what happens happens, would that have been a current contemporary way of saying it?*

Well I don't know. But I can guess he said it in some kind of simple and direct way. And that it made sense to Master Yakusan. But I don't know how they actually spoke to each other in that time. But certainly there were very large differences in the way that people conceived things and spoke to each other. But there are also very large similarities too, because they were human beings. Some of these replies that the masters give to their disciples in the koan stories sound so strange that people think that there's some mystical secret there, but I think all of them are strange only because of the way people spoke, and also the translation is sometimes not clear enough. I always work from the point of view that they must have been saying something sensible and down to earth. Master Dogen then comments in the following paragraph, and Master Dogen's commentary is again creating image upon image:

**No-one else could have uttered these words of Master Baso's. The eyebrow Master Bodhidharma raised or the eye he winked may indicate a mountain or an ocean,**

Now we can suppose he means he's connecting the eye with the external world, so to wink an eye, raise an eyebrow, Master Dogen's creating an image of that eye looking at something, and the something could be mountains or oceans.

**because the mountains and the oceans and his eyebrows and eyes are one whole.**

When we look at something, we separate the person who is looking from the object, and we feel that it's an active process – light is going out from our eye, but it's not really like that.

*It's coming into the eye.*

Yes, for a start.

**Being moved to raise an eyebrow he sees the mountain. Being moved to wink, he rules the ocean. Being right has become part of him and pulls him in. Being wrong is not always not doing, and not doing is always wrong.**

He's taking the words in the answer of Master Baso, and commenting on each of the words. So when we say it was right for him to raise his eyebrow, he's saying that Master Bodhidharma had right as part of him. So right pulls him in. Then he says, at one time it was wrong to raise an eyebrow and wink an eye, Master Dogen comments that being wrong is not always not doing. Not winking an eyebrow and raising an eye is not always wrong, he's turned it around and said that wrong is not always not raising an eyebrow and not raising an eye. He's playing with the sentences.

**All these are time-present. The mountains are time-present and the oceans are time-present. Without time-present the mountains and the oceans would not exist. We cannot deny that time-present *is* the mountains and the oceans here and now. If time-present decays, so do the mountains and the oceans. If time does not decay, nor do the mountains and the oceans.**

Again, he's identifying time-present with the external scenery. And he goes on to say:

**It is from this truth that the bright star appeared to Gautama Buddha, the state of buddha appeared, his ability to see the truth appeared, and his acknowledgment of Mahakasyapa appeared. All *are* time-present. Without time-present nothing could be here and now.**

And in the original, the acknowledgment of Mahakasyapa is a reference to the story of Gautama Buddha holding up a flower and twirling it, and Mahakasyapa smiling. And in the old sutras, it's a kind of illustration of Mahakasyapa understanding what Gautama Buddha is transmitting, or receiving what he's transmitting.

So in that paragraph he's running round and round Master Baso Doitsu's words, to reinforce that time-present is just what's here and now. And what is here and now is not separate. That's the most I can say about that. Shall we go on to the

next one, or shall we stop and talk about something else and do the next one tomorrow? Hands up all those that agree! Hands up those that don't agree!

*I'd like to talk about, even briefly, about change. This is popping up in my mind whilst we've been talking today. I could see very clearly earlier, when we were talking about Spring, that Spring is just..... I'm tempted to say a succession, but there's just this moment Spring, this moment Spring. And the memory will eventually kick in and tell you it's a progression, but it is just this moment Spring, this moment Spring. But some moments seem to have a slight thickness, because you can see things changing, apparently. Yesterday I was thinking an alternative to talking about time-present, is that somehow there is change but no change.*

Yes.

*I can't go any further than that at the moment.*

*Sounds a bit like light, is it a particle or is it a wave. That's what I struggle with, we're told it's both.*

*I am seeing things moving, I am conscious of things moving, so it's tempting to say that this is evidence of the succession of moments, and yet of course that's always in the moment.*

I read an article which I can't remember so clearly about experiments which psychologists were carrying out with vision. And this involves some kind of complicated computer tracking system, Mark might know about this, where someone looks at a word and then they are reading a sentence, but while they're reading it, the computer changes the other parts of the sentence, and I can't remember it clearly enough to tell you about it in detail. But the outcome seems to be that what we see as a continuum is filled in by our brain or our memory, so huge parts of what we see around us are filled in by ourselves, and there are just small areas in our visual field which are actually operative at that moment.

*There's a very pernicious disease (inaudible) where your eyes if you jump back the things corrects the back bit of text.*

Fascinating.

We're all looking at each other now, but it seems that whole parts of the vista are being filled in by our minds. We don't know which parts – is it you maybe?

*I'm operating on a concept that I'm in a room, I think maybe at an unconscious or subconscious level, I've got an active concept right now that I'm in a room with people, and I don't have to look at each of you closely to see the person there. So it's like the mind on the strength of that very strong custom or concept can sketch in the bits that I do bother to notice.*

*Is it like when you see colours, so you see a very dark red right up to a very light red, and there's, right in the middle there's one missing, you know exactly what it looks like, because you see the gradation.*

*Can I ask you a question about a phrase that seems to keep repeating – "illuminating the light of time-present". Is that just a turn of phrase, or do you think that Dogen perceives some kind of relationship between light and time and the present?*

Both. Also it's a kind of poetic image. But we imagine, and our imagination is pictorial in some way, but it doesn't have the brilliance of what we actually see. If you're practicing Zazen, sometimes you're there and your eyes are half-closed, and you're not sure whether you're asleep or awake, and you sit in that state and it's quite peaceful, but it has some kind of....surreal is too strong a word....but not bright. Then sometimes you kind of wake up, and you sit there and everything around you is just there, the wall or whatever, and it's brighter. The present is brighter than anything else. And when we're not caught up in the images in or brain, the present is brightest – it's kind of illuminated. It's not only a poetic image, he's trying to describe something that's real too. When we feel fresh, fit, and in this place, everything has a kind of brightness to it, a freshness to it, a something to it. When we're tired, or when we're thinking, or when we're hungry, or when we're pulled out of where we are, things around us lose their brightness or freshness. I think he's using an image to touch on that too. But of course it also has just a poetic quality about it. But this strange situation, yes we do see movement, I'm talking, my lips are moving, and Stuart's leg is moving over there. And of course we can't deny that. We've got a problem if we want to talk about change in terms of Buddhist theory, because there's no doubt that there's some process in existence which we track with our consciousness. But there's also another view which Master Dogen has put in this chapter which is the instantaneous view, and these two views don't fit together. The assertion that reality is only here and now in this instant and the evidence that we see of change and process contradict each other in our brain. Nothing contradicts itself in front of us, there's nothing in front of me that's contradicting, you know? There's nothing that doesn't make sense in front of us but in our brain it contradicts. To resolve that contradiction, Buddhism insists that we have to get out of the area of thinking. It says "yes, think about it, you'll tie yourself up in knots, stop thinking, then the knots will disappear". And in that way, Master Dogen's writing is rather cruel, because it ties us up in knots, then we can put it under the table and go out for a walk. The point is that reality itself is not contradictory, but our ways of conceiving it have to be. Well at least they seem to have to be, maybe in 150,000 years time science will have explained the whole of existence. But this seems unlikely because science is coming across contradictions.

*Can I just make a point about....if we just saw what the eye saw, and the cones at the back of our eye saw, you would see basically a fuzzy grey, and a small bit of very sharp colour. So we're constantly building up a picture, likewise when we hear, apparently get in tune with language, and we use sounds because we don't hear sounds. In another person's language we have to re-learn the sounds. Like wise in painting, Turner was the first painter to paint lilac in the rainbow.*

That's true, poets and artists see often things that haven't been noticed, and they teach us how to see them.

*So even just on the mundane level, we're building a picture.*

Yes, so that picture we build is a kind of constructed world, this doesn't mean it's not real, but we all construct it, then we all agree on it so we can share it. Loads of our consciousness is occupied with that shared constructed world, but it's not shared by other beings that don't have our way of communicating. The plant doesn't share it, the dog doesn't share it, though the dog shares it partly. In Master Nagarjuna's writings he talks about the constructed world as that world. We learn how to fill in, I suppose, then we have how to learn how to fill in. Then we all seem to fill it in in the same way, I guess.

*So we have to try and unlearn all that?*



No, just we can notice how we are. Any other comments?

*So time is like a management tool, we create it to allow ourselves to achieve things?*

*It's a survival tool, we learn how to plant drops at a certain time of year, depending on the position of the sun.*

It's a puzzle....what is time? Hmmm. Well I haven't got anything more to say, so if nobody else has anything more to say we could finish. But if you want to say something please do.

*The Japanese character for time, is it exactly the same as our conception of time?*

Ji?

*Does it have any other connotations?*

I don't know of any other connotations. Do you?

*The character itself is made up of two components, one meaning the sun, and the other meaning a temple, so the sun beside a temple.*

Right let's finish then, thank you very much.