

**Dogen Sangha Winter Sesshin 2007**  
**Talks on Master Dogen's Kuge**  
**By Eido Mike Luetchford**  
**Talk number 1**

I wanted to talk about a chapter from the *Shobogenzo*, called "Kuge," today. In our four-volume translation of the *Shobogenzo* each chapter has an introduction, and the introduction to "Kuge" says this:

'**Ku** means "the sky," or "space," and **ge** means "flowers." What are flowers in space? Master Dogen uses the words "flowers in space" to express all phenomena in this world. According to ideas of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, we cannot be sure whether things really exist in this world, but we can be sure that there are phenomena which we can perceive with our senses. Therefore, for him, phenomena are not necessarily identified with reality although they do actually appear in this world. He refused to discuss the metaphysical problem of "real existence" and based his philosophy on human reason. The same idea was present in ancient Buddhism. Master Dogen thought that this sceptical attitude was important in considering the meaning of our life, and so in this chapter he explains the meaning of "flowers in space," which in Buddhism expresses real phenomena.'

Kant's quite difficult to read. I had a go once. Maybe somebody might be a Kantian expert here; if so, please keep quiet!

(Laughter)

No, please speak up. But I have a very simple book on philosophy, just at my level, called *The Story of Philosophy*. There's lots of pictures in it and it's really good. So I'm just going to read you the bit from here about Kant and his philosophy, because in Nishijima Roshi's introduction he doesn't say so much about it. I'll skip the explanation of who Kant was, but he lived in the eighteenth century, 1724–1804, and 'he was the most outstanding figure to have emerged since the ancient Greeks.' He never went outside his native province in the whole of his life. He was born in Konigsberg, and never went outside that area, and he was very, very regular in his habits, so people could set their watches by him. And he wrote this amazing series of books on philosophy. So, here we go – this is what Kant believed:

'Before Kant, many, if not most, thinkers, including scientists, took it for granted that the ultimately significant limit imposed on what human beings can know is set by what there is, and we can in principle go on finding out more and more until in the end there is nothing left to find out. Kant, developing a line of thought inaugurated by Locke [an earlier philosopher], insisted that, in addition to this, our knowledge is also subject to another limitation of an entirely different sort. Everything we apprehend in any way at all - whether it is a perception, a feeling, a memory, a thought, whatever it may be - is apprehended by us through our bodily apparatus, namely our five senses, our brains, and our central nervous systems. Therefore, anything that this apparatus can deal with is capable of being experienced for us; but, anything it cannot deal with can never be experienced for us, for we have no way of apprehending it. The point here is that all apparatus, our own or any other, is good for some purposes but not for others, so its own nature sets limitations to what it can do. So if you do not have the means of detecting something, the existence of that something will remain unknown to you.'

And he talks about, for instance, gases that we can't see but might kill us.

'If there is something that is neither audible nor visible – let us say a motionless body of colourless gas – it can be neither photographed nor sound recorded... But this is not to say that the gas does not exist, on the contrary, it does, and its existence may be crucially important to you – it may even kill you...

'All these considerations, Kant says, apply to our bodily apparatus: our eyes do very important things, but not anything else; our ears can do quite other things which the eyes cannot; our taste buds can register things which the eyes and ears can't detect; our brains can do innumerable different sorts of things from any of these; and so on. The sum total of what all our faculties are able to deal with is the sum total of what we can apprehend. This is not to say that nothing else can exist. As far as our knowledge goes, anything else may exist. But, if anything else exists, whatever it may be, we have no way of apprehending it.

'So there are two different sorts of limitations on what we can know, and not just one. The first is, what actually exists, the sum of everything there is - whether or not it includes a god, or immortal souls, or anything else, all that makes up a total reality. But we human beings can know only such of it, or such aspects of it, as our bodily apparatus is able to deal with. So, on the one hand, there is what exists independently of us, and our capacity for experience; and, on the other hand, there is what we have the means of experiencing. The former, everything that exists, is almost certainly wider than the latter. These considerations apply to human experience, says Kant. What is delivered to our consciousness is a product of our bodily apparatus, and takes the form that it does because of the nature of that apparatus.'

And so on.

'This means that what things *are*, independently of our modes of perception and thought, is something of which we cannot form any conception. On the one side, we have the world of things as they appear to us, which Kant calls the world of phenomena, the phenomenal world. This is the world of all possible knowledge for us. But all the forms this knowledge takes are subject-dependent. On the other side, there is a world of things as they are in themselves, which Kant calls the noumenal world. Its mode of existence has nothing to do with the particular ways in which we register things.'

Right, that's Kant. I don't know if anybody wants to read a bit more? So, what he says is, there's a real world that we can't touch, and there's the world we can touch. The world we can touch – touch means experience in all the different ways that humans can experience – is called the phenomenal world; and the world including all the things we can't experience is called the noumenal world. Can anybody add anything to that?

*Is the phenomenal world augmented by instruments? For example, a gas which we can't see here, but if we have an instrument ...*

Yes, to measure it, so we extend our perception. Yes, that's what science does, isn't it?

*Do things move from the noumenal world into the phenomenal world, when we...?*

When we discover them?

Yes.

It would seem so, wouldn't it?

*So does Zazen work in the same way? In the same way that a scientist with a microscope can see things that he wouldn't normally be able to see, does Zazen help us to open up and experience things that we might miss if we didn't do Zazen?*

I don't know. Do you think so?

*In Zazen (inaudible).*

Yes, I think so. I notice things in myself which, when I'm rushing around in the world, I don't give myself the chance to notice, like 'Oh, I'm irritated today,' or, 'I think I might have a cold coming.' But I think this is a bit more fundamental than that. It's talking about things which we have no opportunity to apprehend. He's talking as if there's a real world, and then a limited part of that world we can somehow experience and know to exist, but then maybe all these other areas that we don't know exist. And because we don't know that they exist, they don't exist, until, as Stuart says, we might detect them, science might detect them, and then they become known.

*(Inaudible) they're still phenomenal. What Kant's saying is that there's always a difference between what you can experience and a realm which must always be, for us, something unknown. (Inaudible) So, the emphasis is not really that there's things out there that are there unknown but then you might find out about them and they become known. When things 'become' known, as known they are phenomenal. As unknown they are noumenal. But it's not that things can 'become' phenomenal from within the noumenal – the noumenal is noumenal, the phenomenal is the phenomenal. That doesn't mean that you can't discover things...*

Science does.

*... but that discovery always occurs within the realm of the phenomenal.*

OK. That's good.

And science might feel that it's uncovering things we didn't know about. Or we might feel there are spirits in the room and if we have an apparatus we might detect them.

*In my thinking, I would imagine it would be two distinct states. Maybe there's a blur between the two states ...*

This is what David's saying.

*Well, the noumenal is not really a state, it's a hypothetical...*

*Well, two separate entities. Well, I think it might actually be a fuzzy...*

What we need to do is to find out some of this noumenal stuff! Then we can decide!

*Is it an idea to replace the spiritual?*

*What about the sense where you think of someone who you know, maybe the day before, and then you get a letter from them, but you don't know if it's...?*

Ah, yes, I think that's a completely different thing. That's about human intuition...

*David's point is that the phenomenal is like the known unknown. The other stuff that we're unaware of entirely is just, like, unknown unknown.*

*If you talk about the sciences in a scientific way then, you know, the eye, for example, is something which perceives visual, you know, has visual apparatus. But, we know from our own experience that you can look someone in the eye – it doesn't just see, it can also, in a funny way, it can transmit as well, can't it? So, you can look at someone and you can communicate with someone without actually saying anything. So I don't think it's as clear cut as these two states.*

You think Kant's wrong?

*I think maybe over-simplistic.*

OK, right.

*Simplistic?*

(Laughter)

I think David's right - Kant's basically saying, 'No, not this process, which science does, of uncovering things with extending our senses' - we extend our senses through apparatus to discover things. 'Not that; but the undiscoverable.' So, there is an undiscoverable. Because when we discover things we name them, and when we name them we create them in our brains. So, for example, I say 'microphone' and create an object in my consciousness.

*Can I just ask, Mike, is it the supposition based on human logic that this noumenal exists? And, if so ...*

It's Kant's hypothesis.

*Yes, but is that in a sense self-contradictory? Because you're using your own mental apparatus to conceive of something else which is beyond your own mental apparatus, so it's really a supposition.*

A supposition, yes, that's right.

*Yes. So the only evidence for the supposition is human logic, am I right?*

Yes.

*So, in other words, it is a product of the very thing that it's saying you can't perceive. It's actually conceiving of it. So that is a kind of... you know, that our limited human apparatus has conceived of this realm which we can have no perception of. So we've already made some progress in conceiving of it, have we?*

*Do you mean, how can he know about the stuff he doesn't know about?*

*Well, what I'm saying is that, if we, as human beings, have produced in our evolution a human being who has conceived of this realm which we can't conceive or think about or even see or contemplate in any shape or form, that means that some progress has happened since we came into this realm, in the form that we've come into it in, since we first arrived in it, that we can now conceive of something beyond all our senses. Am I...?*

*For Kant, yes, it is a hypothetical supposition; but, the context in which Kant introduces that is to say, 'Well, is it worth getting involved in a convoluted discussion based on such a supposition? What is the point of that?' That supposition supposes that everything that we have access to might be different from an inaccessible reality. And there's a tradition of argument, which Kant refuses to discuss, about how what we perceive with our senses is different from actual reality. Then you've got two different realms, and there's a whole tradition of philosophy called epistemology, the theory of knowledge, which tries to work out what the relationship is between what Kant calls the phenomenal and an external reality. But then he comes along and says, 'Well, that may be there, reality as such may well be there, different from what we can experience; but this "reality as such," we can't have any access to that.' So basically... he says, 'Well, I'm not going to concern myself with that. Philosophy - proper, rigorous philosophy - shouldn't be about that question of epistemology, since that question rests on a supposition that there's a difference between what I know and reality. All I'm going to do is look at what is experienced...'*

*So, in other words, God's out the picture, we're not going there?*

*Well, God is in the picture because, in this sense, God is in our experience, in our knowledge, in our concept of the world, which involves all sorts of different things.*

This is obviously a very complicated area.

(Laughter)

And Schopenhauer went on after Kant to refine, and in some ways improve on, Kant's theories, and it's worth reading them. And there's quite a few books of simple explanations of philosophy around, and they're quite easy to read. They are trying to explain what the truth is. The 'truth' is a very common word in Buddhist texts, so what is the truth? We immediately think of the truth as something abstract, usually, something we can *know*. So there are parallels between that Buddhist problem, if you like, and the problem that David explained so clearly there. 'The Buddhist truth – if you know the Buddhist truth you become enlightened. So, what is this truth? And, if you know it, is it knowledge? So how do we get knowledge? Can we *know* the truth?' And all these problems are discussed by Dogen. But, of course, he discusses them in the paradigm of the thirteenth century, so it's quite a long way from us. And he discusses them using images and ways of expressing himself which are quite foreign to us, but which often ring bells, the images ring bells with us. And in this chapter, "Kuge," which is what I want to talk about, he talks about "flowers in the sky," or "flowers in space." And you can see as we get to the chapter that his way of discussing it is very, very broad, it's broader than Kantian philosophy, and yet it's something to do with the way that we know. We know things that we can perceive, ... and these phenomena, in some way, we create in ourselves. And therefore they have some ephemeral quality about them, in a way, and these may be what he calls

"flowers in the sky." But we should leave it to him, and try and see if we can work out what he's talking about, by going through the chapter slowly.

The chapter, in some ways, is based on a poem or a quotation from Gautama Buddha. I can't find exactly where that quotation is from, but the poem – it's quoted in the chapter - says:

*"A person who has clouded eyes,  
Sees flowers in space;  
If the sickness of clouded eyes is cured,  
The flowers vanish in space"*

That poem seems to suggest that, you know, it is as if we get a cataract. The poem seems to suggest that flowers in space are delusions. But Master Dogen discusses it in quite an unusual way. I've only done the first four and a bit pages of this chapter, so we can't get through it all, so it's going to be a partial look at the chapter. And I hope that I leave you hanging over the edge of a cliff, and going out and thinking, 'Oh, what was all that about?'

(Laughter)

But I may not be successful! The text that you have starts with another poem, this time by Bodhidharma.

**Bodhidharma wrote:**

***I originally came to this land of China to pass on the teachings of reality,  
And to liberate people from their delusions.  
Five petals opening – a single flower;  
Fruit ripens by itself.***

It's not very poetic because I've explained bits of it in simple English. There's a more poetic version of it; but, of course, it wasn't written in English originally. "I originally came to this land of China" refers to Bodhidharma, who was an Indian Buddhist master, coming from India to China. And most of you, I'm sure, know about the legends about Bodhidharma arriving in China and going to see the emperor and being asked to evaluate how wonderful the emperor's works on behalf of Buddhism were. And Bodhidharma disappoints the emperor and then goes off up into the mountains to a little temple called Shaolin, and invents kung fu!

(Laughter)

Well, actually, no, he sat practicing Zazen and nobody knew what he was doing so they called him the Zazen monk. And then, from that beginning, the whole of our ancestry develops. And this is his poem. He came to China to teach what Buddhism teaches. And Buddhism doesn't teach Buddhism. Scholars think that Buddhism teaches Buddhism, but I disagree. Buddhism teaches what reality is. And what reality is has nothing to do with Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, whatever. It's to do with real reality which really exists. "And to liberate people from their delusions" – in China in that time there were many deluded beliefs, and there still are in the world. Unfortunately, we can't know clearly what they are. So how can we decide whether beliefs are deluded or not? Christians say that there is a God who's watching us all the time and guiding us through life. Is that deluded or not? Some schools of Buddhism believe that if you practice certain kinds of practices you can become an enlightened being, and then once you

become an enlightened being that's it, you've graduated, and you're off. Is that deluded or not?

The second part of this poem expresses something very important, poetically.  
*"Five petals opening – a single flower;  
Fruit ripens by itself."*

What kind of image do you get from those two lines?

*If you keep practicing, something happens, whether you intend it or not. It's beyond your comprehension, it happens of itself, like a fruit isn't responsible for its own ripening - just by falling into the sun, or by sort of being exposed to the sun, it ripens by itself, of itself, it doesn't have to do any kind of hard work to ripen.*

*Duality and (inaudible).*

What's the duality?

*Five petals opening? It's an image.*

There are lots of images in those two words. Can anybody find one word?

*Unfolding.*

*Natural.*

Unfolding, natural. Yes, that's the picture it gives me, too. Something unfolding naturally. 'I've been trying to learn German now for three weeks, and I'm getting nowhere!' You know that feeling? You know, 'I've just started this new course and I'm making so much effort and I don't seem to be getting anywhere!' And then, another three weeks down the line, something's changed and you think, 'Well, I'm doing alright here! I've only been doing this six weeks!' And, somewhere in the middle of that human tendency to be very disappointed at our efforts and then to be very proud of our efforts, something has unfolded. Actually, what we're doing has its own result, doesn't it? It's not the result we expect, it might be the result we don't expect.

Right. Let's go on.

**We should learn through our practice the time when the flower opens, and look at its brightness, colour and shape. A flower is made up of five petals; five petals opening *is* the flower. Coming to the land of China to pass on the teachings and to liberate people from their emotional delusions *is* Bodhidharma's clear realisation of this flower.**

In those two sentences there's two identities. And by 'identities' I mean, not something causing something else, but something *being* something else. We usually think, 'Flower. Five petals.' Two different concepts in our brains. But, in that sentence, "A flower is made up of five petals;" but, "the five petals opening *is* the flower." So a real flower is five petals opening. Although in our mind we can think of a flower – 'now it's closed; now it's a bud,' and so on – in reality, a real flower is five petals opening. ... referring back to Master Bodhidharma coming to China, that his coming to China is "clear realisation of this flower." And you can see in these sentences the reason why, in other parts of the *Shobogenzo*, and also in the book of koan stories, there are stories involving a question, 'Why did Bodhidharma come from India to China?' It was a very common question in

medieval China, which monks asked to their master. And the meaning of that question, 'Why did Bodhidharma come to China?' has something to do with 'What is it to be natural? What is it to unfold naturally?' And Bodhidharma's poem here, and the two sentences following, suggest very strongly that Bodhidharma came to China naturally. We're not quite sure what 'naturally' is, but it's a nice word to use.

I got onto the internet and booked my flight and I end up being here. So the reason I'm here is the result of all those little things I did. I suppose that might be 'naturally'.

*I think it's got something to do with movement, (inaudible).*

Yes, I agree. There are lots of things here, aren't there.

*Also, for me, when it says the flower opening is a flower, for me it raises the question – we have this idea that, sort of, 'I'm me,' and then 'I do' - 'I do Zazen,' or whatever the action is. And this 'I do,' then that creates a separation. Whereas this is saying me doing Zazen is me, me doing each other thing is me, in that moment. So Bodhidharma's coming from India was Bodhidharma.*

Yes, right. Can we stop this division between what we think about things and our actual action?

*That is actual action, isn't it, when you don't make a distinction?*

Is it?

*I don't know.*

No, nor do I. Let's go on, it's a puzzle.

*May I ask, why five petals?*

Why five? I think just... Maybe they were talking ... a lotus flower is a very common symbol in Buddhism.

*What about the five senses with which you perceive the world at this moment? You see, hear, smell, touch, and taste.*

Yes, there's a sixth sense you're missing, but...

*I suppose there's the five aggregates, as well.*

Five aggregates, yes. We can look for lots of similarities; but I think just the flower that was at the centre of the poem ... that comes in later in the chapter, is a lotus flower, which has five petals. But, yes, I mean, who knows whether they were referring to something more? We can put lots of flowers into this. It suggests something beyond the image, with the verb, as Margaret suggested. So there's a suggestion there, but it's only a suggestion. We're still talking about flowers in our heads, or flowers in space. What are we talking about?

**In learning this through our practice, we should look for this state of brightness and colour.**



OK, here's a clue. He says "in learning this through our practice," we have to look for something – "the state of brightness and colour." What does "the state of brightness and colour" suggest?

*Aliveness.*

Aliveness. You know when you're practicing Zazen and you're drifting off, thinking about next week or yesterday, do you ever get the feeling that what's in front of you is kind of glazed over, or disappeared? I do. And then, sometimes, everything around me appears naturally and is very clear. And at those times I'm actually where I am. So we could take "the state of brightness and colour" as suggesting some kind of real state when we're where we are, or a real flower where it is. So "we should look for this state of brightness and colour."

### **This "ripens by itself"**

- the last line of the poem -

### **is what is meant by the phrase "Let the result be just as it is."**

Now, this is Master Dogen referring to another story that everybody was familiar with, and the story is in *Shinji-Shobogenzo*. The story is about, as usual, a monk and the monk's master. And it's about, in this case, the monk wants to get promotion, take some exams. I didn't bring the *Shinji-Shobogenzo* so I don't have the whole story. But the line in that koan, the master says to the monk, 'I will leave your shiny shoes as they are' - 'shiny shoes' means 'your brilliance,' you know, with your shiny shoes you're going to present yourself as an excellent person – 'and I will let the result of your efforts be as it is.' And Master Dogen's referring to that to explain the meaning of "ripens by itself." So, "ripens by itself" is natural.

*(Inaudible) not to make a value judgment between enlightenment and everything else that may happen when you're sitting, it's all part of the practice. The real benefit is something that you won't necessarily become aware of in the same way that you're aware of someone slapping your face, for example.*

Yes, that's what happens when we practice Zazen. Initially, we practice Zazen and the first time we practice we might feel great, we think, 'Oh, this is for me!' And then the next time we practice we might feel horrible, we think, 'Oh, I don't know if I can carry on with this!' And each time we practice we feel different, and then we tend to evaluate that as 'I didn't have very good Zazen today, and yesterday my Zazen was fantastic.' But, practicing Zazen itself produces a ripening. And, "we can leave that ripening as it is" suggests to accept the situation as it is, or accept what's going on. So, yes I agree, not to judge; but, on the other hand, it's almost impossible not to, isn't it?

*It would be easy to delude yourself and use it as an excuse for not trying, to sit properly I mean. I mean, sitting any old way, I don't think it's saying sit any old way. It's saying, you know, the discipline and the practice lead to the results alone.*

Ah, he's not talking necessarily about Zazen here, but it includes Zazen, of course. But, he's talking about the state of natural ripening. So, just to leave the results just as they are. So it's quite clear.

**Something ripening by itself is producing a cause and being affected by the effect.**

Well, that's quite straightforward.

**In the Universe, there are causes and there are effects. We produce the causes that are this Universe and we are affected by the effects that are the Universe.**

That doesn't suggest that we produce the Universe, does it? No? That's good then.

*(Inaudible question)*

No, it doesn't, does it? It does it with all the other things in the Universe, it's true. So there's no such thing as a fruit by itself, is there? Oh dear!

(Laughter)

We can imagine a fruit by itself in our head, but actually there's no such thing as a fruit by itself. And, by extension, we can imagine a person, like me, by myself, but there's no such thing as me by myself.

*(Inaudible) it's a complete thing, it's a baby, but it didn't just kind of appear by itself either.*

No. Something happened!

(Laughter)

So the 'self' is very important. This is why Master Dogen discusses it in the next sentence.

**The "self" of "itself"**

- that's in the last line, "*Fruit ripens by itself*" -

**means you, made of the same basic materials that make up the Universe. Master Rinzai**

- another famous Buddhist master -

**used "the true person without position," to express this kind of self, because it is not an "I" or a "someone."**

That sentence sounds a bit strange, and one of the reasons is that what Master Dogen actually wrote in Japanese is a play on Chinese characters. And when he plays with Chinese characters it's very difficult to render it into English. But this is one rendering, and what it suggests is that what we think of as self, alone, me, baby, fruit, doesn't actually exist on its own. So, I think of me, but all that really exists is me sitting on this cushion in this room with everybody around me. And the same is true for all of us. So our concept of a separate self is actually just a concept. I'm definitely a person, and so are you; but, the self doesn't exist separately from everything else, fruit doesn't exist separately from everything else. "Master Rinzai used 'the true person without position'" – this is, again, a reference to some sayings of another master. "A true person," a natural human being, "doesn't have any position," suggests not evaluating, not ranking, not judging, not comparing. So it suggests something that's not differentiated, a person who's not differentiated from what's going on. And when we act naturally,

we don't differentiate ourselves from what's around us. But when we act as social animals, we often differentiate ourselves from what's around us. We say, 'Oh, how did I do?', or we look at the person next to us and compare ourselves. ... And Master Dogen's suggesting that that's the kind of self which is meant by "*Fruit ripens by itself.*" So it doesn't mean a fruit - itself; and a separate thing - ripens. But, fruit ripens. Am I making any sense? (Laughs) I'd better stop then!

*A fruit is part of the Universe, so (inaudible). We cannot escape the Universe, or we cannot escape the laws of the Universe, (inaudible). Everything happens naturally according to the laws.*

Yes, so we better find out what the laws are. And this is one of the remits of science, to discover all the laws that govern all things. There may be other laws outside the laws of science. Buddhism says there's one law, and it calls it Dharma. And Dharma is the way everything works.

*Flowers are the law of the Universe.*

Right, yes. Anyway, let's stop there. It's a nice edge of a cliff.

(Laughter)

Let's continue tomorrow. Thank you.