

Eight Truths of a Great Person
Talk given at Padma Farm (Czech Republic)
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Today I want to talk about the last chapter in Master Dogen's writings, in the *Shobogenzo*. He wrote 95 essays, or chapters, and he used them for his lectures. He died in 1253, and this chapter was written in 1253. The chapter is called "Hachi-Dainingaku". *Hachi* means 'eight', *Dainin* means 'a great person', and *gaku* means 'the truth' or 'intuitive reflection' - so the chapter contains eight intuitive reflections of a great person. I'm not going to read it, I'm going to interpret it into easier English.

Buddhas are great persons. The truth that great persons realise is the reason that they enter the serene and peaceful state. It was the last talk that Sakyamuni Buddha gave, on the night that he died.

It was also the last talk that Master Dogen wrote. But it's not my last talk! So here are eight truths that Master Dogen writes about. When he says a great person is a buddha, he also says buddhas are people who practice Zazen. So if you practice Zazen in your life, you are a buddha and a great person.

1) Small desire. (Not to have strong desire; not to chase after things that you can't get.)

Gautama Buddha said, 'If you chase after things that you can't get, you have a lot of suffering. If you don't have such a strong desire, you don't have to chase after things that you can't get, and so you don't suffer. You should practice this and learn how to have small desire. If you have small desire you can have many virtues, many advantages: for example, people who have small desire never have to try and get favours from people, and they never have to change themselves in order to get what they want. They are not pulled around by their senses. They have a balanced mind; they don't worry and they're not afraid; when they come into a situation they're not so rigid; because they don't want to get something, they can be flexible and they don't feel dissatisfied. So people who have small desire have a serene and peaceful state.'

That's the first one. But we shouldn't think it means 'don't have any desire'. If we try to stop having desire we can manage it for some time - but it's like a cork floating on water: if we push it down, it's fine; but if we stop pushing it down, it jumps out of the water. So we shouldn't try to make our desire zero. Our desire is natural. But if we very much want things that we can't get easily, then it can make us suffer. But, obviously, if we don't try to do things we can never achieve anything. So he's talking about extreme. And we all experience extreme desire. We can see, for instance, a small child - 'I want an ice-cream! Mummy, mummy, can I have an ice-cream? Mummy, CAN I HAVE AN ICE-CREAM!?!' Smack! And then when we get larger, we want larger ice-creams.

(Laughter)

2) To know satisfaction. (To be satisfied with what we have.)

The Buddha said, 'If you get rid of all kinds of things that make you suffer, then you can feel satisfied. And feeling satisfied is where you find joy and peace. People who feel satisfied, even when they're lying on the ground, they can feel comfortable. But those people who don't feel

satisfied, even if they're living in a beautiful palace, are still not happy. People who are not satisfied, even if they have a lot of money, they're still poor. People who are satisfied, even if they have no money, they are rich. People who are not satisfied are constantly pulled by their desire; so people who feel satisfied can look at them and pity them.'

3) To enjoy tranquillity. (To move away from all kinds of noise and live alone in an empty space.)

The Buddha said, 'If you want to get tranquillity and unintentional peace and joy, to allow peace and joy to come to you, you should move away from noise and live alone in seclusion. People who like quiet places are revered by the gods. This is why you should abandon your group and other groups, and live alone in an empty space; then you can find what is causing your suffering. People who love being in groups have many problems - they're like a big flock of birds who gather together on a big tree, and then they're worrying that the branches will break. People who are attached strongly to society have many kinds of suffering like this - like an old elephant who is in mud and struggling but can't get out by itself.'

So it sounds as if the Buddha says 'leave all groups and live on your own, away from everybody'. And we can imagine finding a small log house in the mountains and living there peacefully. But, actually, I think it's not like that. So we shouldn't think that he means to leave, physically leave, all other people. We can be alone in the group if we retain our own independence. Of course, we have to cooperate with each other, and we're doing that this weekend, so we have a group. But if in our group we all try to follow each other, or we are all trying to do the same as everybody else, then that's a kind of problem. I lived in Japan for twenty or so years, and Japan is a group society. So the main factor in everything everybody does is to follow their group. If they are in a small group of friends, standing in a train together, they ignore everybody else and they stand in a circle talking to each other and looking at each other all the time, and the other people they ignore completely - so, I felt, very, very rude behaviour! (Laughs) And if you go to cross the road, waiting for the traffic lights to go from red to green, everybody is waiting to cross - if one person steps out, even if the colour is red, everybody does!

(Laughter)

This is true. So Japanese society suffers from exactly this problem. Maybe we suffer from the opposite problem - we're very individual in Western societies. But anyway, this truth about tranquillity suggests that we don't get caught by groups. Our group this weekend is very nice because we came together unexpectedly and then we all disappear - very natural. I wonder where so many great people came from?

4) To practice diligence. (To keep doing things all the time, on and on and on.)

The Buddha said, 'If you practice diligence, nothing is difficult. So just keep diligent - and like a small stream of water, constantly flowing onto a piece of rock, it can make a hole in the rock. But if we get tired and give up, it's like making a fire with a stick but, before the fire comes, we say 'Oh, I'm tired!' - so we can never get fire.'

Sometimes, when we're making efforts, we don't know why we're making an effort, so we think, 'Oh, I'll stop! I deserve a rest!' Or sometimes we have an aim, and we start to work towards that aim, and then we become tired or frightened or for many reasons we stop. If we stop doing something, we can never get to our aim. A very simple example, practicing Zazen – if we stop practicing Zazen we will never learn to practice Zazen regularly. Of course, in my case, I practiced for many years and many times I thought, 'Oh, why am I doing this? Doesn't seem to get anywhere! Maybe I'm wasting my life.' But somehow, intuitively, I kept doing it. And our life works like this. Of course, sometimes we keep doing something which is stupid. And then, if we keep pursuing it, eventually we realise we have to stop. But in order to achieve something, and to get the results of our efforts, we need to keep going, step by step. This is called diligence.

5) Not to lose mindfulness.

The Buddha said, 'If you have the ability not to lose mindfulness, then problems keep away from you. For this reason, you should constantly control yourself and not allow yourself to wander in many different directions. If you lose mindfulness you lose all your good points. If your power of mindfulness is strong, then even if you go into situations where there are very strong desires, they won't harm you and you have nothing to fear.'

Mindfulness, in English, is a very difficult word, because it has the word 'mind'. But, in Japanese, the word doesn't mean 'mind', it means 'to concentrate completely on what you're doing'. So we could say 'mindempty' instead of 'mindful'. If we're doing one thing and thinking about another thing, it is not mindful. Many people try to think about what they're doing while they're doing it, and watch themselves. But in Master Dogen's teaching, mindfulness doesn't mean that. It means throwing away the person who is watching and completely concentrating on what we're doing. In Chinese Buddhism there is a metaphor – if we are not mindful it's like having two moons; and when we are mindful there is only one moon. So in the old koan stories, sometimes the monks say to each other, 'Have you got two moons?' 'No, I have one moon.' In modern society, we are very excellent at thinking about things while we're doing other things – multitasking. For instance, in England, where I live, sometimes if I go to the bank to get some money, while the person in the bank is counting the money they want to talk to me about something else. 'One... two... are you going on holiday tomorrow?'

(Laughter)

In the supermarket, at the checkout, the same thing happens. And we can become very skilful. But to have that skill, we pay a price. In some way, modern society wants us to be multi-tasking, but we don't notice the price that we pay. We become scattered in different directions. So sometimes it's good to be concentrating on one thing, attentive. And this is the meaning of mindfulness. So I like 'mindemptiness'. In Czech, does the word have the same problem?

I think the closest translation of mindfulness is "bdělost" which means 'to be awake', which I think works pretty well.

Oh really! Ah, that's much better! I'm going to use that word in my talks in England!

(Laughter)

In English it's a big problem. People think mindfulness means 'I have to think what I'm doing.' And we have a teaching in society, 'Think what you're doing!'

The word "bdělost" has a different connotation – it means 'not to be asleep'.

Great! It's the same as the Japanese meaning. Oh, I'm so pleased to hear that!

6) To practice the balanced state of dhyana.

If you remember, *dhyana* is Sanskrit, and it's the same as *jana* in Pali, *ch'an* in Chinese, *zen* in Japanese.

The Buddha said, 'If you regulate yourself, then you will exist in the balanced state. Sitting in the balanced state, you will know how the world comes and goes. This is why you should be diligent in practicing all kinds of balance. When you get the balanced state it doesn't disappear, it stays with you. We should practice the balanced state of dhyana to prevent our balance leaking away. Like water, if we have a leak in a pipe our house, we need to repair the water pipe to prevent the water leaking away.'

There is a metaphor that Zazen is ringing a bell. Bonnnng! When we ring a big bell, the sound continues and slowly dies away. So with Zazen, we need to practice. Bonnnng! And then when it dies away practice again. Bonnnng! We can keep the big bell resonating.

7) To practice wisdom.

The Buddha said, 'If you have wisdom, then you don't become greedy and want many things. If you keep looking at yourself, you can prevent yourself from becoming lost. Then you will be free. Wisdom is a strong ship, and you can sail across the ocean of getting old, becoming ill, and dying. For this reason you should practice wisdom and develop it. If we are wise, we have clear eyes.'

Wisdom, in Buddhism, is often called *prajna*, a Sanskrit word. *Pra* means 'before'. In Latin we have *pre*. And *jna* means 'thinking', 'to think'. *Jna* is the same as the Greek verb *gnos*, so it means 'thought'. So *prajna* means 'before thought'. So, in Buddhism, wisdom is something intuitive before we think. When we practice Zazen we become people with *prajna*. We develop some kind of intuition. But sometimes we can't see it. It's not necessary to see our intuition, but we act following our intuition. I don't mean in a very grand way, for instance, 'Ah, I have intuition, I'm going to go to Iceland!' But a very simple way – we're walking down the road and we cross over. No reason, just we cross over. Or we go to the theatre on Thursday, not Wednesday. So, all these small intuitions, we don't know what's happening, but those small intuitions create our life. 'I think I'll buy this book.' 'I think I'll ring up this friend.' I'm using the word 'think', but actually it's more straightforward than that. At a very simple level, we go this way, not that way. And this simple intuitive decision, at every moment, makes the path of our life.

8) Not to engage in idle chat.

(Laughter)

It would be completely silent!

The Buddha said, 'If you engage in all kinds of idle chatting your mind will be disturbed. Although you are away from your family life, still you can't become free. So just immediately throw away disturbing idle chatting. Stop yourself from chatting uselessly and then you can become serene.'

I don't think he means we can't talk to each other! But some people talk *all* the time and they can't stop talking. And it doesn't worry them what they're talking about, just they need to talk. So we don't need to do it. But we all have our characters, some people are very quiet, some people are very chatty. So that's natural.

So, that's the eight truths. And Master Dogen said:

Each of those eight truths might contain another eight truths, so there might be sixty-four of them. And if we look at each one we can find more, so there are countless truths.

Fractal.

Yes, fractal, exactly. So he understood that our knowledge is fractal. And his four views, which I talked about yesterday – looking at something from four views – is also fractal. So we can always look more closely at everything and find more, smaller divisions. Anyway, the rest of the chapter I'm not going to read, but you can read it if you want to. He says that these eight truths are the teaching of the Buddha just before he died. And Master Dogen taught these eight truths a few months before he died. So we can suppose they are the result of his life experience. They're very nice to understand, and they can give us some guidelines. That's the end of my talk.

Is learning less desire and learning wisdom different from practicing Zazen?

No, same thing. Master Dogen is saying that these are truths of a person who practices Zazen. So we might say, 'Oh, I'd like more desire so I'll stop.' We can do that. Or, for instance, we might practice Zazen and have a nice peaceful state, but we feel something too peaceful, so we can go to the pub and drink and then we feel, 'Ah, that's better! I feel more normal again!' And then after some time we get bored with normal talking and working and drinking and so on, so then we think, 'Oh, I want to practice some Zazen again.' And then we feel peaceful again, and then we feel, 'Ah, too peaceful.' So, we get a peaceful state from Zazen, but many times we want to break the peaceful state, and then we come back again. So this teaching is not about something perfect. In our mind we can form some perfect image, a great human being who practices Zazen - 'not me!' That's just an image in our brain. But if we practice Zazen on and on and on and on - slowly, instead of doing this (with forearm balanced upright on elbow, indicates excessive wobbling from side to side), we do this (indicates slight wobbling from side to side). And I suppose, maybe, when we become very old, if we practice Zazen every day, every day, we might become almost like this (indicates no wobbling; forearm perfectly balanced in the middle). But I don't know yet. So we get these qualities from practicing Zazen. We don't need to try to be like that. Just we need to stop being something else. So if we stop disturbing ourselves we can have a peaceful state. And there is a metaphor, a glass which is filled with water and ash - when we stir the water, we can't see clearly; when we stop stirring, the water settles. But we like stirring! Stirring is our life. But sometimes we need to stop stirring. And then when we just look away, we start stirring again. So, if we have an image of perfectly clear water, it's just a dream. Good health! (Drinks glass of water)

(Laughter)

Thank you very much for listening to my talks. When I give talks, I'm teaching myself. So thank you for letting me teach myself. Thank you.