

Dogen Sangha Summer Sesshin 2005
Talk on Master Dogen's Bussho
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Before I start the talk, it's normal on the first day of a retreat...we all want to get on but actually we don't sometimes. So if we feel little conflicts coming and going it's a kind of settling down process. I've been to lots of retreats, maybe more than 70, it's always the same. On the first day we sometimes feel quite irritated with other people, it's strange to go on a retreat and feel irritated. Some don't and some do. I think it's a process of settling down to being in a group together again. If you don't feel irritated but calm and peaceful put up your hand, oh good lots of people.

As I was saying last year, what we endeavour to do in Dogen Sangha is to have a real sesshin, not some kind of manufactured retreat where we impose some kind of manufactured state on ourselves, but to discover our real states at this moment and to practice Zazen. When we practice Zazen we discover our real state whatever that is. Being together practicing Zazen for 3 days, we can settle into our real states. Any questions?

I'm going to talk again about Bussho, we seem to have been doing it for ages! It's a long and difficult chapter and we are slowly getting through it As usual, we diverge, but that's nice, it's nice to have Bussho as a basis for discussing other things. Bussho if you remember is about buddha-nature. The buddha-nature was a much discussed concept and has been since the very beginnings of Buddhism. Master Dogen discussed it in this chapter in great detail and in rather an unusual way. At the Winter Retreat earlier this year we had just finished the story about Master Nagarjuna sitting in Zazen giving a talk, manifesting the round moon. And Master Dogen was irritated that wherever he went in China he would see paintings of Master Nagarjuna manifesting the round moon as a circle drawn above a cushion. He asked the people living in those temples what it meant and nobody could tell him. So when he discovered for himself what buddha-nature is, he realised that lots of people in temples were doing things but didn't really understand what it was they were doing. They were painting pictures but they didn't understand what the pictures represented. They were talking about Master Nagarjuna as the round moon without really understanding what it was. So he's pretty heavy on those people. On page 14, this is where we got to, he finishes up by saying:

These monks are like animals! How have these bands of demons managed to infiltrate and defile the truth of the Buddha's teachings? Does the Buddha's truth consist of listening to theory? Does it consist of practicing something called "Zen"? We should be clear that there has never been a Buddhism that consists of listening to theory or consists of practicing "Zen".

So he was pretty heavy on this because he saw for himself what Buddhism was. Then he went round and visited lots of temples and met monks who didn't know; they were pretending. It's quite easy to pretend, but he didn't approve of that. At the bottom of the page we start a new paragraph and a new story about National Master Enkan Sai-an from Kosho. You often see the title National Master in the Shobogenzo. In Sung Dynasty China, because Buddhism was the national religion

they appointed a National Master. So something like the Archbishop of Canterbury. This man was the National Master.

National Master Enkan Sai-an from Koshu was a revered patriarch in the lineage of Master Baso's.

That's Master Baso Do-itsu whose stories and teachings are sprinkled throughout the Shobogenzo. They include a story about Master Baso practicing Zazen trying to become buddha, and his master saying "can you become buddha by trying?" It's the story about polishing a tile. He's a very famous ancestor.

One day he preached to the assembly "All beings *have* buddha-nature." We should immediately look at the meaning of the words "all beings." The diversity of beings all have different behaviours, different thoughts, different characters, and different circumstances, and they all experience the Universe from completely different perspectives. For example, the perspective of an ordinary person, a non-Buddhist, an idealistic Buddhist, a materialistic Buddhist, a realistic Buddhist, a normal human being, and a god are all different.

The fact that Master Dogen puts the viewpoint of a god on the end isn't proof that he believes in gods. He often mentions gods and we can interpret that to mean that a god represents the ultimate idealistic person. So if we try to be idealistic and put ourselves above everybody else we can say we're trying to be a god. There were no concepts such as the unconscious or ego or id or anything like that in 13th century Japan, so Master Dogen used the symbolism of his time. He says that the perspectives of different people are different.

But from the Buddhist point of view, since being and mind are one, we say that all beings *have* minds. At the same time, even if we say that beings don't *have* minds, still being *is* mind.

In this paragraph Master Dogen is playing with language. The quotation from Master Enkan Sai-an was "all beings *have* buddha-nature". That suggests to us that for example I am a being and I have something, so there's something separate which I have in me. I have a cold – we think that there is me and a cold which comes into me. He's talking about that way we have of looking at ourselves. "At the same time, even if we say that beings don't *have* minds, still being *is* mind". Here he's going further than saying we have something, he's saying we are something. And this identity in Master Dogen's writing is very strong, he often identifies things rather than the normal way of looking at things, for example saying that we have something, he would say "I *am* a cold" not "I *have* a cold".

So mind *is* all of being, and being *is* all of buddha-nature. Grass, trees, and land *are* mind, and because they *are* mind, they *are* being.

What is he saying here? Well "grass trees and land", or sometimes "fences tiles and pebbles" were the kind of things that you would see in the countryside in Japan. So he means the things in the ordinary world, things that we see around us. He is saying then that the things we see around us are mind. That sounds like it's suggesting that it's all in the mind, we make up the whole world, that the world doesn't really exist, it's all in the mind. And this is the way that these kinds of sayings were interpreted by many people. But Master Dogen doesn't mean that. As I've said before, mind in Japanese is the character "shin", and unfortunately shin doesn't mean exactly mind. Although it's been translated as such, it means something nearer to "conscious awareness", the combination of

our thinking mind, our emotional awareness, and our normal awareness. So not the mind with which we analyse the world, but the mind with which we are in the world. I think that's nearer to the meaning of consciousness. There's a very famous saying in Buddhism, "mind here and now is buddha". The meaning of that phrase is that to be fully consciously aware of what we are and where we are at this moment is to be buddha, or to be fully awake if you like. In this sentence, "grass, trees and land *are* mind" he doesn't mean that the grass, trees and land around us are all in our mind, he means when we are consciously and fully aware of everything around us there is no division in us between our conscious awareness and those things. We experience this in Zazen and we also experience this sometimes sitting in nature, if we feel at peace in nature there is no separation between us and nature. So there is no me thinking about nature, nature *is* me thinking, there is just one thing. This is what he means by "grass, trees and land *are* mind". It's another way of saying that there is something whole.

And because they *are* being, we say they *have* buddha-nature. The sun, moon, and stars *are* mind, and because they *are* mind, they *are* being. And because they *are* being, we say they *have* buddha-nature.

He is trying to tease out what Master Enkan means when he says that all beings have buddha-nature. Lots of people interpreted Master Enkan's quotation to mean that all beings have a quality called "buddha-nature". But Master Dogen interprets it to say something more like all beings are buddhas by nature. So he's a reductionist, he's deconstructing our way of looking at things.

This is what Master Enkan meant by "*have* buddha-nature."

So not the normal sense of "have"; to "have" a headache, the headache is floating round and now it's come into the head, but "I *am* a headache".

If it doesn't mean that, then it is not the buddha-nature that Buddhism expounds.

The buddha-nature that people talked about and misinterpreted was some kind of special quality that one could get by various efforts and keep inside oneself. But Master Dogen doesn't agree.

The point that Master Enkan was making is just that all beings *have* buddha-nature. And anything that is not "all beings" may not be able to *have* buddha-nature. Then this is what I want to ask Master Enkan: Do all buddhas *have* buddha-nature?

I think there's a smile on his face when he says that.

We should ask him and then examine his answer carefully. We should look carefully at the fact that he said "All beings *have* buddha-nature"; he didn't say "All beings *are* buddha-nature." He needs to drop off the *have* in "*have* buddha-nature."

So he's trying to say to us that Master Enkan doesn't mean that we get something special. There is a little problem here, in translation too. In Chinese and Japanese "have" is "U", and U is not exactly "have" and not exactly "are", but can be somewhere between the two. So the original Japanese has a vagueness which we can't really put into English but which is quite helpful. By "he needs to drop off the *have* in buddha-nature", Master Dogen is suggesting throwing away this idea of having something.

Dropping off is a characteristic of the Universe, and the way to transcend the intellect.

That's nice. We can drop off body and mind in Zazen Master Dogen says. It's a characteristic of the Universe, but a characteristic of the human intellect is to put on. We put things on to ourselves, we have things, we get things, we want things, and we layer ourselves over with all these things. But Master Dogen suggests that we can drop them all off.

We can then go on to say that "all buddha-natures have *being*."

This is Master Dogen turning things around as usual, just to get us to look at it the other way round.

This method explains both being and buddha-nature perfectly. Master Enkan did not realise this while he was explaining reality, but that is not to say that he would not have realised it at a later time. And the method I used here is not as illogical as it seems.

Turning it around and saying the same thing backwards.

We do not always understand the truth that we possess here and now; it is a product of our physical and mental state at the moment of the present.

He means that we can't express our understanding of what we are. We are something but we can't express our understanding of it because we don't understand what we are here and now.

Sometimes our whole life seems to be devoted to expressing the truth, and sometimes we simply express the truth moment by moment.

In that sentence he's suggesting a kind of linear view of life, the whole of our life seems to be taken up trying to explain what life is about. Then "we simply express the truth moment by moment" – we express what life is about at every moment but we can't understand it sometimes. Sometimes our actions speak more than our words. We can worry about a decision, and not know what to decide but our actions solve the problem for us. In Buddhism we say that our action creates our life, it's not the result of our intellectual thinking. That doesn't mean that intellectual thinking has no role in life, but that it's what we do that actually determines our life.

That's the end of that story, any questions?

Could you just say a little bit more about the concept here of being, is it being as in Uji?

Yes.

It's the first time he mentions it in this story.

In Uji is it ARU, is it the same thing?

Yes.

It's just existence.

Well the thing is, if you trace through the Shobogenzo, through Master Dogen's explanations, everything is the same as everything else in the end. He doesn't mean that everything is the same as everything else in the end in a simplistic way. So for instance, in Uji he says that being is the same as time. So alright, now we've got buddha-nature is the same as being is the same as time, we can go on. It seems like he's saying, you know, samadhi is the same as being is the same as time is the same as buddha-nature is the same as Zazen is the same as... So what's it all about? He's not saying it in the sense that no concepts have any meaning, but in the sense that what we are in the present moment is not differentiated into concepts. And all Buddhist concepts point to that undifferentiated state, so in that sense they all mean the same thing, in that sense. So yes, being is the same as Uji, and he says that being is not separated from time, and we can say time is not separated from space and so on. It's a strange point of view really. We're using our differentiating mind to explain something which is outside of our differentiating mind, to point towards reality. Is that all right? Right, next story, all change.

Master Isan Reiyu from Mount Isan one day preached to the assembly, "All beings are without buddha-nature." Out of all the beings, both human and divine, who hear this, the exceptional amongst them will be happy to hear it. But there will also be many who will be surprised to hear it, and will doubt the truth of it. Gautama Buddha taught that "all beings *manifest/have* (U) buddha-nature," but Master Isan teaches us that "all beings *are without/don't have* (MU) buddha-nature."

In Japanese and Chinese the two characters are U and MU, and they have much vaguer meanings than "have" or "be with" or "be without" and so on. But nevertheless there seems to be a contradiction between these two teachings.

The meaning of *have* and the meaning of *don't have* are opposite, leading some to wonder which of the two expressions is true.

When we think about something, we either have it or we don't have it, can't be both. And in our mind it can't be both, it's true. But fortunately reality can transcend our thinking, and in reality it can be both.

But I think that the phrase "all living beings *don't have* buddha-nature" is the more profound of the two. Master Enkan's words

...that's the previous story

that we *have* buddha-nature seem to support Gautama Buddha's words, as if the two men are supporting the truth between them on a pole.

That's Gautama Buddha and Master Enkan, they are carrying the truth between them on a pole.

But Master Isan's expression is different. Here, both men have been swallowed up by the pole.

The first image is a differentiated image – Gautama Buddha said this, Master Enkan said this, this is being carried by them both, the second image collapses into nothing.

It seems they've consumed the concept of buddha-nature.

Yes, that's right, and that's what this little expression "all beings don't have buddha-nature" means. It means we have it but we don't have it, we have buddha-nature, but we don't have "buddha-nature", yes. So it's swallowed up by the pole.

Master Enkan was a direct disciple of Master Baso, together with Master Hyakujo.

Master Hyakujo was Master Baso's student. Baso was the monk who sat in front of Master Nangaku practicing Zazen. Master Nangaku started polishing a tile. Baso asked him why he was polishing the tile, and Master Nangaku replied that he wanted to make a mirror. Baso said "you can't do that", and Master Nangaku said "no and you can't *become* a buddha by practicing Zazen either".

But Isan was Hyakujo disciple, and thus Enkan's junior.

So he's sorting out the lineage here.

Nevertheless, Isan was more deeply versed in the truth than Enkan, his senior. Isan expresses here his conclusion, that all living beings are without buddha-nature. His conclusion is an accurate description; a real Buddhist teaching of the state that he himself is receiving and maintaining through the practice of Zazen.

So Master Dogen thinks that Master Isan's description is better than Master Enkan's, more profound, despite the fact that Enkan was the senior of the two. And as usual he relates the meaning of the state of buddha-nature to the practice of Zazen. The only way we can get any meaning is to relate something to our own experience. If we only relate the concepts we study in Buddhism to other conceptual understanding, we can become very clever scholars but we can never understand Buddhism.

So by "all beings are without buddha-nature" you mean that all beings are without the concept of buddha-nature? I don't understand.

That's the problem. So people become confused – one master says that all beings have it and another says all beings don't have it. That's the problem to be solved. Gautama Buddha is said to have said that all beings have buddha-nature. He wanted to express the fact that all beings are by nature a buddha. But in that case why do we need to make any effort to become buddhas for example? Master Isan says that no, we don't have buddha-nature, why does he say that? So we have to find answers to those questions. Are there any answers?

Things which are made up of various constituents, the aggregates, one of which is consciousness, I think that's different to the consciousness...the thinking, the intellectual consciousness. So for something to exist it has to have consciousness, whether it's a pebble or a human being, and somehow it's all linked.

Does it have consciousness?

That's one of its constituent parts.

So Master Isan might say that it doesn't have consciousness, and someone else might say yes a stone does have consciousness.

Manifestly it's got to be in there somewhere.

So maybe the whole difficulty here is how we think.

Use of language?

Yes.

Only taking one side of the picture?

Yes. A stone *has* consciousness. I *have* something. Human beings *have* buddha-nature. There's a problem there isn't there? It creates something called buddha-nature which must exist separate from me, I come along and I get it, then I have it. It's that way of thinking that Master Dogen, well that Buddhism wants to get round. The way that Master Isan gets round the problem is by saying roughly that no, we don't have it. He doesn't mean we don't have it, he means we don't *have* it.

The best phrase was your translation, "being without". The state of buddha is the state of being without.

The state of buddha is the state of being without.

So sitting here, no matter what you have, you also have the state of being without. So you can say all beings have buddha-nature, they have the state of being without, and all beings don't have buddha-nature because buddha-nature is the state of being without it.

Right. It's difficult though isn't it? I agree. Another difficulty is that we imagine that we learn things by taking things in and somehow we expand ourselves. But Master Dogen says dropping off is the characteristic of the Universe, that's the opposite. So to Master Dogen, learning things is throwing things away, becoming better is throwing away the desire to become better, becoming buddha is throwing away the desire to become a buddha, finding buddha-nature is throwing off the idea that we have buddha-nature, Zazen is throwing away our body and throwing away our mind. The whole basis of Buddhism is that in order to become normal, natural, we have to throw away all the things that we build up in order to become members of a sophisticated society. We have to drop them off or throw them away. That's behind all this, but we can't think like that. Even though I say it now I don't think like that when I go and do a piece of work for someone, I want the work, I want to have something. But at root, Buddhism is about dropping off, and what is it that we have to drop off?

Because of use of language he's constantly telling us not to listen too much to the language, listen to...

Yes, so if we drop off the language how can we communicate?

That's why it uses language.

What does?

Buddhism, it uses language but in a contradictory way.

Well it's contradictory because we study and we get so fed up with all this stuff, then we go and practice Zazen and drop it all off.

This sense of self having something, it's funny. I am often puzzled by people having sentiments like "I must be kind to myself".

Yes. I must be kind to myself. Well which "me" is being kind to myself, and if that "me" can be kind to myself, it must be kind already. So then why do I need to be kind to myself? Master Nagarjuna uses this kind of argument in his book.

It seems so kind of unexamined.

Unexamined yes. But if you examine it people think it's some kind of philosophical rubbish. But it's actually true isn't it?

I have a body.

I have a body yes.

What's the "I"?

That's right yes, what's the "I"?

Lakoff in his book Metaphors We Live By, deals with this problem.

Whose book?

Lakoff. He says that "to have" is actually a metaphor. So "I have a cold", but you can't think of a cold unless you create it as an object. He also talks about, if I can remember correctly, "primary body experience", so "up" and "down" etc.

I don't agree that the primary experience is up and down. Up and down are metaphors.

Well the body is our primary experience.

I wonder what our primary experience is. If there is a "me" observing my body then I can feel a sense of my own proprioception. But I wonder... before I have a sense of my body, before my body and I became separate, whether the primary experience is body.

He does talk about bodymind not being separate.

Oh good.

Primary is a metaphor isn't it.

Oh yes! It is, what's before primary? Drop it all off you see, this is where we get to.

But mind is embodied.

Body is em-minded. I went to a conference on consciousness in Oxford recently. I was really, really invigorated by all these people examining this in such great detail. However, one thing I notice is that although people are talking about body and mind being one, what they mean is, there is a body and there is a mind and those two things are one. But that's different from the Buddhist view. Buddhism says there is only one thing, and we separate it sometimes into body and sometimes into mind.

They also deal with abstract concepts, they will talk about it then they will go away and think about it.

Yes, go away and think about it. That's great. We're getting nearer to Buddhism.

If U and MU are vaguer than have or have not, where in English you make the distinction between 'have' and 'is', what's the other word? There's another word that you are saying is...

This is why I chose to introduce the word "manifest". I don't know, what's the solution?

So then you compromise and you say 'has', for U, so where you say 'is', there's another word.

It depends on the sentence. It's not quite as simple as that, not every 'is' in every sentence here is U, and not every 'have' in every sentence is U.

But here it's constantly going to and fro between 'have' and 'is'. So presumably he's using another word.

The other difficulty is that the original quotation is in Chinese, Master Dogen writes in Japanese. What you are looking for is a correspondence between the two words but unfortunately I can't give you an answer. The original quotation is written in Chinese characters but Master Dogen's comments are in Japanese, and in Japanese you don't have a separate word in a sentence for 'is', in a normal sentence. John is probably more qualified to talk about this problem. It is a difficult one.

It would very much depend on a particular sentence.

It's very difficult to render what he means, because he's taking a Chinese quotation and commenting in Japanese, and Chinese and Japanese grammar are completely different. But this is my interpretation, and what I mean by this is that I've put down what I think he's said, what makes sense to me. So what I've picked out is the difference between having something and being something. And that's the best I can do so far.

Is that, the difference between having and being, is that symptomatic do you think of a way of thinking about things, or is it just a quirk of the language?

Both. Language is the way we think to large extent isn't it?

Yes but, specifically in (inaudible)

Yes but you wouldn't say I have a table, you'd say I have a table in my house, yes.

In Japanese would it be "there exists a table at my house"?

It could do. But you can say that in English "there is a table in my house".

We should probe on further.

Well we did, that was where we stopped. So we did what he asked.

How can all beings *be* buddha-nature? How can they *have* buddha-nature? Any being who *has* buddha-nature must be some kind of demon! People want to spread this infernal layer that they call "buddha-nature"

over all beings! But buddha-nature is just buddha-nature, and beings are just beings. It is not true to say that beings *have* buddha-nature, as if it is something that comes to beings who don't have it and then becomes their possession. We should be clear and logical about this. The kind of "being" that we imagine *has* buddha-nature is not a real being. And the state that a real being exists in can never be called *buddha-nature*.

That makes sense doesn't it?

This is why Hyakujo, who was Master Baso's direct successor, said "To preach that all beings have buddha-nature is to insult Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and to preach that all beings are without buddha-nature is also to insult Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha." It is an insult both to say "have buddha-nature" and "be without buddha-nature." However, it is impossible to discuss buddha-nature without discussing these phrases. I would like to ask both Isan and Hyakujo, "Have you managed to explain buddha-nature despite the fact that both ways of explaining are clearly an insult?" If they have explained buddha-nature properly, their explanation should be appear as concrete and real. And to explain it properly is to explain it to ourselves and to hear and fully understand our own explanation.

That's true isn't it? If we explain something and we hit the point, we feel that we've explained it to ourselves. Anybody who has taught, that's a very common experience in teaching I think. You want to explain something and afterwards you understand it more clearly, you've explained it to yourself. So we can say that teachers teach themselves. Students allow teachers to teach themselves.

I would also like to say the following to Isan: "Although you said that all beings are without buddha-nature, you didn't say that all of buddha-nature is without any beings, or that all of buddha-nature is without any buddha-nature. More than that, you have never even dreamt that all buddhas are without buddha-nature! I'd like to see you try again!"

Bit of humour there. He's trying to deconstruct our conceptual thinking whilst using language to do it. So it sounds bizarre at times but we can sense that he's pointing to something. And what he's pointing to us vague and unformed. But if we read it and then practice Zazen we can get some kind of sense as to what buddha-nature is.

He's pointing at nothing, he's pointing at the negation of every attempt to conceptualise.

He's pointing away rather than to something. He's pointing away from all the concepts.

Where is away from all the concepts? I feel that there's a focus in what he says. A focus must be towards. So he's pointing away from all the concepts but he's pointing towards something at the same time. What is he pointing towards? We have to leave that for next time.

Duality is a word that keeps coming into my mind.

It comes into my mind too.

Everything that he talks about is duality, the whole conceptualising process exists in the world of duality. It's like we can't really help it.

No we can't help it. That's right.

And buddha-nature is getting back to...maybe the original state before duality or...beyond duality.

Yes. That's right, something, that may be the best description we can get.

I think that's absolutely right, it is duality. This paragraph is saying, being this unique thing that is manifesting, call it "me", also being a part of something which is completely whole. They are the same thing, but they are different, and we can't quite make it fit. Then we start talking about having and not having and we get into a materialistic thing, then it all falls apart...

Yes, then we hear the word duality and it fits well. So we think we've got it, it's all about duality. It's not all about duality, it's all about the state in which there is no duality. And where is the state in which there is no duality?

That's the difficulty of studying Buddhism. The moment you think you've grasped a truth, it's an illusory and problematic thing because a sense of wrongness is more useful than a sense of rightness.

Yes, and even science says so. And even the great scientists said so. But we mere mortals we forget it don't we? "Ah yes I've got it! I understand it now!" I felt that when I was writing this. Beyond duality, but yes it is duality.

That's what I was saying, the sentence without the verb, you got the start of duality, human being and reality.

Yes, body and mind; up and down; left and right; strong and weak; subject and object; me and you; salt and pepper, we live in duality.

Isn't that a wonderful thing that in our everyday life we live like that? That's how we have to live isn't it?

Yes.

There is no other way.

No.

We only live in dualities when a sense of self it is, Kodo Sawaki said as soon as the concept of self arises the universe is split in two.

That's right. And self creates other; good creates bad; up creates down; I create you; you create me; love creates hate; cold creates hot, and so on. We live in that world and that world is called Samsara. But there is the same world called Nirvana and it's not a different world, it's the same world, and that's a duality.

So how can we get away from it all? Well we can stop thinking about it.

Thank you very much.