

Dogen Sangha Summer Sesshin 2006
Talk By Eido Mike Luetchford
The Four Views

I'm going to try to put together pieces. I always feel, when I talk about a chapter in the *Shobogenzo*, Master Dogen writes in such a strange way, puts everything together, and you feel sometimes, 'Ah, yes.' But when we go out into the world, the world doesn't feel very 'Ah, yes' at all. And, certainly, if we go away from this weekend saying, 'Everything is a bright pearl!' and get into work and somebody says, 'Oh, what about that deadline? You were supposed to finish that on Friday,' and you say, 'No deadline. Lifeline, living line, yes. And everything's OK, it's perfect as it is' - it's fine for us, but nobody else really gets the point. So, Buddhism has a teaching about the immediacy of our real experience, about the perfection of the real world we live in, warts and all, about the difference between our thoughts and reality, and so on, and those teachings are very exact; but they don't seem to fit in with politics, daily life, the pressures of business, and so on. And I feel that to try and create a Buddhist world in this world is a big mistake. And, personally, I have no desire to build up any kind of buddhist community that lives in a nice peaceful, happy state, because it's a kind of dream. You can do it, you can build a centre somewhere and everybody can go and live there and do organic farming in the day and practice Zazen; but, for me, I'm more interested in how we reconcile Buddhism with normal life. And Master Dogen reconciles it with normal life - of course, normal life for him was very different - but he reconciles it by using four viewpoints, which some of you know about.

The teachings of Buddhism have a particular viewpoint about them. They make us look at the here-and-now and see who we are and what we're doing here and now. And that's very important. Because, for example, if we take the story about Gensa stubbing his toe, we can see that we could make that a kind of metaphor for society - we're all walking along this path, trying to get to the end of the path, and because we're looking hard at the end of the path and hurrying along we keep stubbing our toes; and then there's lots of people sitting on the edge of the path with bleeding feet while we're all rushing past; and a few of us notice these people and stop and try to help them; but we don't notice that what is creating that situation is how we're moving forward. So, without some kind of aim or ideal we never move forward - and human civilisation has been created by our ideals and our aspirations, and they're very important - but, as we move towards our aspirations, we stub our toes and we don't notice, and then further down the line we notice, 'Oh, all my toes are all scarred! And, oh, my foot's become infected!' This, I think, for me, is a kind of metaphor of our very busy lives in modern society. So, we shouldn't stop our busy lives in modern society, we shouldn't stop having our ideals and moving towards them, we shouldn't stop trying to help people who've stubbed their toes; but, we should learn how to look where we're stepping as we're moving towards our ideals.

I think this is the contribution that the peculiar Buddhist view can make towards modern society. Not to say, you know, 'Stop working for companies and making profits and things like that! Buddhism says "No fame and profit"!' And not to say, 'We shouldn't have armies, Buddhism is peaceful!' Because that's really, in a way, unrealistic, at least at this time. But we can say, 'As you're rushing along, just watch where you're going. Concentrate on putting one foot in front of the other, because that's what gets us to our aim.' And I learnt this as a mountaineer, because most mountaineers, when I started, we were all young people and we

were all very driven to get to the top of the mountain. And that's what we did, we drove ourselves. And those of us who didn't look to see where we were going fell down crevasses and all kinds of things. You can read heroic exploits of mountaineers, like "Touching the Void", that wonderful film, and we can say that situations like that are actually the mountaineers stubbing their toes. It might be heroic and wonderful to watch, but it hurts! You can notice it when you're walking. If you're concentrating on where you're heading to, too much, you don't watch where you're going. And in order to watch where we're going, we need to understand that this one step is moving us towards our aim. Just this one step now. So we concentrate stupidly on this one step and, magically, half an hour later we're up there, and we look back and we say, 'Oh, look where we've come from!' It's a kind of miracle. I still feel, after doing mountaineering for many years, it's a kind of miracle when we walk along and then stop and look back and we've come from somewhere to somewhere else! And what's done that is this peculiar action called walking. We go like this (moves left leg), and then we go like that (moves right leg), and we keep doing it and we move along. So we can say the Buddhist contribution says, 'Look where you're stepping now and then you can move more realistically towards the goal.'

Formally, in Buddhist philosophy, this is explained as four views. We can say that living in the world as human beings there are four fundamentals, or four views, or four ways of being.

One of those is to be aspirational, to be idealistic, to want to do something, to achieve something – we need to use our brains to think and plan and to see where we want to go.

The second fundamental, or view, or way of being, is the physical aspect – while we're moving towards our goal we need to look at ourselves as physical beings. We may be a very brilliant strategist and have lots of ideas about where we're going to take our group or our company or whatever, but unless we keep our body healthy and keep within our physical limits, we won't get there. So we can say the second fundamental is the physical. The first fundamental is the ideal, the second fundamental is the physical. We have a body. It's no good having a strong will without having a strong body.

The third fundamental, or view, we can say is the immediate. And the immediate means looking where we're putting our feet at this moment – the action of doing something now, the ability to do something now, rather than try and do something now while our mind is thinking about something else. And, again, we often have to do that, we have to multitask in our lives. But if we only multitask, and never have an opportunity just to concentrate on what we're doing now, if we're always pulled into the future or pulled into something else, we become so stressed we can't carry on. So multitasking is fine, but we need something more basic than that. So this is the Buddhist view, or the Buddhist fundamental aspect – immediacy, or doing something now, acting in the present. And we can say that this acting in the present saves us – saves us from our physical problems or our physical difficulties; saves us from our intellectual problems or our intellectual difficulties. So, for instance, if we're very wound up and we have a very busy mind, then to do something is an obvious and effective way to unwind. So when we're wound up we want to go for a walk, or go for a workout, or whatever, go for a swim.

Then the last viewpoint, or fundamental, is an all-embracing one that says our life is composed of three areas – the intellectual, idealistic area; the physical area; and the area of action in the present – and all those different kinds of modes of being are all intermixed. So we're all idealists at the same time as being materialists at the same time as acting.

But, in the West, in Western civilisation, the third fundamental, or the third viewpoint – that is, doing something now, concentrating on what we're doing at the moment – is rather weak. And the other two are highly developed: idealism – the spiritual view of the world, the philosophical view of the world – is very highly developed; and materialism – the scientific approach to the world, looking at matter and the physical side – is highly developed. But, until recently, the third view – that is, the value of action itself, of looking where we put our feet – has been not given very much importance. Our society gives value to intellectual achievement, or to physical prowess, but doesn't give that much value to sheer action. For example, we may work in a company where there's a lot of people working in an office planning and doing strategy, and they're valued very highly; and somebody's going round doing the cleaning and they're not valued highly. But Buddhism says that our actions, whether we're planning a strategy or cleaning the toilet, are all important.

So, Buddhism can make a kind of contribution to our society. Not an alternative. Many people think that we can learn about Buddhism and make ourselves an alternative life – become vegetarian, no violence, never get angry, live away from all disturbance, and so on. Well, good luck to them. But I'm more interested in how we can add this third viewpoint to our excellent civilisation, so that instead of having to stop now and again and set up charities to administer to people with bleeding toes, we can avoid stubbing our toes a bit. It's a kind of long-term, slow revolution, in a way.

What did you mean when you said "until recently" the third view hasn't had much value?

Well, with the popularity of sport and physical activity, people are realising what the value of action is. When I went to school, I don't know if it was the same for you, we had half an hour P.E., and sometimes we played football; but nobody taught me about my body, nobody showed me about my body, nobody said to me, 'This is your body, Michael, and how you use it will influence you in later years,' and things like that. Nobody said, 'As well as sitting and swotting for exams it's important to move around.' It wasn't part of the culture. When I was at school I felt the culture was, you know, 'Be as clever as you can, get as many exams as you can. If you can go to university then that's...,' you know. Attainment all the time. And the other end was no attainment and not valuable. But I feel it's changing, mainly due to our freedom to engage in physical activity. We realise its great value. So stockbrokers go jogging, and so on. When a stockbroker goes jogging, he's integrating the Buddhist third viewpoint into his or her life. It's not necessary to *call* it 'Buddhism', but the way of Buddhism is to make that clear with Buddhist philosophy, and to practice it with Zazen. Master Dogen says, 'Zazen is not the only way to have a balanced body and mind.' We can become balanced by many hundreds of thousands of different methods, and sport is one way.

That desire for action presumably explains some funny behaviour. For instance, a judge was saying to me that sometimes judges, even if the lawyers say 'You don't

need to come along,' the judges will insist on coming along and sort of shout at people a bit, because their alternative is just sitting in their room.

Waiting.

Waiting. You know, so people are sort of saying, 'What's the matter with him, coming along and shouting at me?' But he just wants a bit of...

A bit of action!

Yes.

Yes, we all want a bit of action; but our traditional values, in the West, tend to undervalue action. And Buddhism teaches the value of action. And although Zazen can be made to seem like some kind of esoteric practice done by shaven-headed monks in rooms full of wispy incense, it's, to me, the simplest sport. Practicing Zazen gives us a balance that we can get every day. You can do it by jogging every day, or playing a sport every day, but you don't know what you're getting. So Buddhism is the way of practicing action and learning about its value. And we can say that to act is to find the middle way between thinking about what we do and the physical aspects of what we do.

When you say Zazen is the simplest sport, I understand you to mean that that is one aspect of something.

One way to describe it, yes.

Because what I have in mind is a friend who does rock climbing – with rock climbing you have the same intensity of attention, it's a now that your life depends on, but that doesn't apply to all sports.

No, it doesn't, no. And also, in sport we set up the situation so that we have our goals and things, don't we? So, a competition, and then, you know, athletes concentrate on winning more than the act of participating, and then the whole caboodle starts again. So they're running and stubbing their toes again. So we can take something simple and make it very complicated with our human ability to create this ideal and rush towards it, in sport as well. But, basically, we can say moving the body or acting creates balance. That's why I say Zazen is the simplest sport – and everybody wins.

So, those of you who know about Master Dogen's four views can see that those four views, or four fundamental modes of being in the world, can be looked at themselves from many different viewpoints. So, discussing it, we've got lots of different aspects interwoven. We can apply this structure of four views, for example, to Gensa walking along the path. The first view is he's ideal – he wants to go and get something somewhere else. The second view is his physical body – he's walking along with bare feet and sandals. The third view is his actual action in the moment. And putting those together to get a total overall view, we see that, because his intention was so strong, he didn't look where he was going and he stubbed his toe, and that made him realise the situation.

So that's a quite rough attempt to put together the rather basic or fundamental view of Buddhism about being here and acting, with our hectic, goal-oriented, complicated lives. We shouldn't seek to replace the life we live with something

called 'buddhist life', because the life we live *is* the only life we've got. Buddhism doesn't say, 'Escape from your life and find perfection.' It says, 'The only happiness that exists, really, other than the one in your mind, is in the life that you have now. To look for it somewhere else is not the point.' So, to find balance or happiness in the life that we are leading – complicated or simple, it doesn't matter. I'm going to stop there, and please comment, ask questions, tell me things, or anything at all in the last fifteen minutes.

The fourth fundamental looks to me as if it's bringing the first three together. Why has he done that? Why has he added the fourth?

Because we have that ability. It's difficult to find words, I keep trying to find different ways to say it. But, for instance, it's indisputable that we think and we can't stop thinking; it's indisputable that we have a physical body, and we can't get free of it; it's indisputable that we act and the only place that we act is now, nobody's ever acted before now or after now, so the stage of our action is always now; and it's also indisputable that we have the ability to take a kind of intuitive overview of our situation - we do it, that's what we're all trying to do, really. But if we do it from only one viewpoint – if we only look from the idealistic viewpoint, it's unbalanced; if we only look at it from the physical aspect, our life, and just concentrate on what we're eating and exercise, it's unbalanced. So we have the ability to take an overall view of the human state.

So there are times when, as human beings, we need to do the first three separately, because that's what it is to be human and to live in society? There are times we need to sit down and think and plan, and times we need to be going shopping while we're thinking about something else, and times we need to be acting; so the fourth element is about the capacity, then, to...

Putting it all together.

Alright, OK, thanks.

Is that prescriptive or is it descriptive?

Both. More descriptive than prescriptive, actually, because even though we might want to be balanced, it's beyond our ability to know quite what to do. We can do it, but to know what we should do is difficult.

I think we have a hierarchy of importance and that causes problems. We think some things are more important than other things; but, actually, as you say, just putting one foot in front of another completely fulfils the essential functioning of the Universe. So it's not... it's just as important as everything else.

Yes, I agree. But, our Western society, for example, tends to be biased towards the idealistic side. Tends to be. So we tend to give value to, for instance, cleverness. I know all these statements I'm making have exceptions, but that's from our history, our very long history with Christianity and attaining the state of – what's it called in Christianity? – the state of grace, and so on.

There's just this very great pressure on us to achieve, and the message we get from when we're children is, 'You can be the best in whatever you do.' 'I can be the best poet in the world,' or something like that. But that creates an immense pressure. Whereas, in fact, it...

For some people it does. Other people relish it, because they know...

But it doesn't really matter, does it?

No, no that's right.

My father had this sort of drive to be the best anatomist in the world, but in the end he died. So we all die. So what are you going to say about it? What did you achieve?

It happens so early on as well. My students, if ever they do anything that's not on the syllabus, they really want to know, 'Do we need to know this for the exam?'

(Laughter)

You know, 'So why are you teaching it?' Because they think that education is about getting an exam. It's terrible.

That's what their taught.

Oh yeah, that's right, that's what we teach them all the time.

I think that's what I was taught, too, most of the time. And we can't say, 'We shouldn't have exams,' you know, 'Everything should be open.' It's a question of balance, always. Seeing value in what we're doing.

I'm reading your book for about the fiftieth time, "Between Heaven and Earth", and I still find it a very difficult book to read. You said that...

That's because it's not a very good book, actually.

(Laughter)

I think it's a great book. You said that when you were writing it, it was almost a bit like a carpet, you pulled it together like a carpet, and I've had this sort of image of... You've got these four views on things and, I don't know anything about weaving machines, but if the weaving action is one of the four views and you're missing something and ending up with holes in your carpet, it's almost like that's...

Yes, that's another analogy, weaving a carpet. So Buddhism says, 'Just make the one, what is it called, stitch, or whatever, that you're doing. And then you'll get the whole carpet.' Yes. But, I'm sorry it's so difficult! (Laughs) I think it's not such a good book, really.

I'm probably quite thick, I can't quite get it!

What do you think is wrong with the book?

Umm... It's impossible for me to work out exactly what Nagarjuna was saying in the second century. So it's incomplete. It's like a faint line traced in the sand. It's like, you know, like archaeology – I've uncovered this and, you know, you can

say, 'There's a bit of wall there, and something round there, so maybe there was a building there.' That's how I feel about that book.

So you think he was saying more that you can't get to?

It's lost, yes. Whether somebody else can find it or not I have no idea. But all the other translations haven't found it, so mine's no worse than theirs. But still, it's incomplete. So you have to be an archaeologist and say, 'Oh yeah, that goes with that, and you can imagine something there...'

Yoko: There's not anything completed.

Oh, thank you, Yoko!

Yoko: There aren't any things which are completed in our world. You know, it's just that you think, 'Oh, this should be done like this, and this shouldn't be done like this.' Always, you know, you have special expectations, 'I want to write more clearly,' or something; but...

Yes, that's right. I had an expectation, I had a hope, an ideal, to write this book which explained what Nagarjuna taught all very clearly, and so on. And there's somebody else got the same kind of attitude to that, too, which is our teacher. But, I uncovered the foundations and wrote what I could, and then I published it because that's what you do. So it's incomplete.

It's human limitation. Limited. So maybe somebody will do it another way. (Inaudible), one bit.

One bit more, yes, that's right. And this is what we're doing with the *Shobogenzo*. I know some of you find reading the books almost... the sentences are almost impenetrable, sometimes. But without those books we couldn't move forward to another stage, because getting from medieval Japanese and Chinese to modern English – different paradigm, different viewpoint, different metaphors, different language – is too much. So we can only do it in incomplete steps. So these modern interpretations that I'm doing are incomplete, too. I've done the best I can, and we did "Ikka-no-myōju" this weekend; but it's not complete, it's a work-in-progress.

There's another sense in which it is complete, if you've done it and published it, and then it's done.

Yes.

And it helps us when we read it.

Yes, so it is complete, but it's not the completeness I can imagine. It's real completeness, yes.

And it's done and it's finished, it's over, it's passed.

Yes. Move on.

Yoko: So if you are to write a complete MMK, you have to spend the whole of your life up to then... (laughs)

Oh, I've finished it, Yoko, it's gone!

(Laughter)

I don't even want to talk about it except I didn't want to be impolite to David! If it's wearing out I can give you another copy!

No! I really enjoy it.

What is it, or what was it, about the man Dogen and the time he lived in that you feel drawn to in terms of what inspires you, that can't be found today in contemporary life? Was there something special about that time, or...?

It can, in a way. The thread is everywhere. You know, in all philosophers, scientists, people of learning, newspapers, novels – the thread of reality is everywhere. Everybody's got little jewels. But, for some strange reason, Dogen was able, during the fifty three years of his life, to write something complete. I mean, it's not complete; but it's complete – it's got a holistic view of life, it's not one-sided. And that's why it contains so many contradictions. He takes different viewpoints – he's not just on this side or that side, he's on both sides, and in the middle too, And that, to me, is very, very unusual. And he was some kind of genius to be able to write like he did.

So he presumably really stood out in his own time? We can't assume... I mean, I would imagine that people he spoke to then maybe had a similar response that we do, then, to what he was saying, do you think? Or do you think what he was saying made...

No. What Dogen wrote was very unusual even for people in medieval Japan, wasn't it?

Yoko: Yes. So people could not understand the Shobogenzo. Therefore, they wanted to put it in a box, and ...

And pray to it! Put it in box, close the lid, and then every day go, 'The Great Master Dogen...'

Yoko: Later, somebody found it and then presented it. Of course, some people knew Dogen Zenji wrote the Shobogenzo, somewhere, but they could not find where it was.

When was it found? When was it brought out again?

It was first printed, fixed, you know, in print form, in the eighteenth century. They made wood blocks and then it became fixed and published. Before that I don't know clearly. But in the book, even though it's written in the thirteenth century, he touches on an amazing range of things. He talks about relativity. Not in the mathematical terms that Einstein does, but it's the same thing he's talking about – the fact that what we think is fixed is, in fact, relative; that time is relative; that space is relative. And he talks about whether we should look at things as a whole or as bits, which is reflected in modern physics with particle-wave duality. All these things he talks about *clearly*, which is quite staggering, really. So it's just

very interesting. But why I got tied up in it, I don't really know. Nothing else to do, I suppose!

(End of talk)