

Winter Sesshin 2004
Talk number 3
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Shall we carry on with the chapter?

Can we have another look at the last paragraph?

The last long one? Sure.

People do not see reality itself as being time-present – what exists at this moment – and so they feel that the state of a buddha is not time-present, but a state that they must make efforts to attain.

That's a very common view, that in order to be a buddha you have to somehow attain something in the future. And people find it difficult to understand that practicing Zazen is sitting in the state of buddha. We're all buddhas. But we don't like to accept it, because we can create an image in our mind of somebody better than ourselves, and that somebody is who we'd like to be. But the somebody we'd like to be that we create in our minds is only an image. When we practice Zazen, we sit in our state, whatever it is. And that state is buddha. And if we expect the state to be pure, calm and peaceful we may be disappointed, but the state of being disappointed in Zazen is that state of buddha. To accept ourselves as we are in Zazen is the state of buddha. And we shouldn't search for some perfect state, because the perfect state only exists in our mind.

If we're split, if we're thinking in the state of Zazen...

If we're split, we should straighten our posture, we should stop thinking.

Given a hypothetical moment when we're sitting, and we're dividing all over the place, thinking all over the place, is that still the state of buddha simply because we're practicing Zazen?

The state of buddha is not something hypothetical but something real, so there's a real person sitting in Zazen, and that real person moves in and out of the state of beyond thinking. Sometimes we're thinking, sometimes we're not thinking, sometimes we're stopping ourselves thinking, and sometimes we move beyond the state of thinking. And all of those are part of Zazen. There's no other state. We look for a perfect state. State is the wrong word really; it comes from status which means stationery, but our state in Zazen isn't stationery, it's always changing. So we should call it dyn? What could you call it, kinis? State is misleading, we don't have a state in Zazen, we wobble around. And that wobbling around is buddha. Because balance in our mind is something perfect, but balance if you stand on one leg, is wobbling, and if you don't wobble you can't balance. But we've got firmly fixed in our mind, an image of something pure and perfect.

Flow?

No, not flow, it suggests something continuous.

Inaudible

So Master Dogen says time-present.

But even the moment in which they make their efforts and reject the state of buddha because they cannot see that it is their state is also time-present – it is the time-present of a person who has not realised who they are.

Master Dogen says that if we reject the state of buddha we're somebody who hasn't realised who they are. And to realise who we are doesn't mean to realise that perfect "who" that we want to be, but to realise who we are at this moment. When we sit in Zazen and we notice we feel irritated or notice that we feel sleepy, we might feel that this isn't proper Zazen, and we should get rid of this state, but actually it's the state that we're in, so that's who we are at that moment. So it's a time-present.

Inaudible.. sitting without intention, in this balance between...

Well if we think of it in physical terms it's not so difficult. To sit straight we need to make an effort, but when we're just in the middle and all of our weight is through the centre of gravity of our body, there's no effort. But we can't keep in that exact position, so we move to one side and make an effort to come back. But in that theoretical point of balance – like the pile of bricks one on top of the other, if you get them exactly balanced there is no effort. So that's true both physically and mentally. We have to stop ourselves thinking if we notice that we're thinking, and it usually means our posture has changed too. If we're really wandering off on a train of thought, we might suddenly notice we're drooping forward for example. Coming back to the point in the middle is to lose our train of thought and to lose the effort to come back, it's a balance point.

Why do we stop thinking then?

Why?

Yes, if Buddha's state is also thinking.

Why do you usually stop thinking, when you do?

I find it quite peaceful.

Yes, we get tired of thinking don't we? So that's one reason.

But it's also very difficult.

It's not difficult, but we have a habit to think, and we live in a society which needs us to think, we can't live without thinking. If Ella hadn't thought through the breakfast this morning, we wouldn't have got it moving through so smoothly. We ate the results of her thinking. We shouldn't say thinking has no value, but there's something other than thinking which maintains us. If we only think and never stop, we go mad, we become psychotic. We have times when we stop, and Zazen is a way of stopping. And other activities; hoovering, taking out the rubbish, making a cup of tea also, but we don't normally give them the value they deserve. We think that when we're thinking we're doing something very important, when we get up and make a cup of tea, we give that a lesser value. But it's not actually, because the instances in which we act and stop thinking are

the basis of our life. The instances when we think are the basis of society, but society isn't the basis of our life in that sense.

One of the problems in Zazen is this notion I think, that a lot of people have, that you should be stopping yourself thinking. In fact the posture is kind of self-regulating isn't it. It was a great relief when you said to me that it's not necessary to intentionally stop yourself thinking.

Well you can't actually, because the intention is a thought. When we describe it, we say oh I was thinking and I stopped myself, but what actually happens is noticing that you're thinking, stopping yourself, and correcting your posture, are all the same thing. You don't notice....there's nobody to notice that I'm thinking then I stop myself at all, because I am in my thought – there's only me, and there's only my thinking, and when I stop, then I stop. But when we describe it, we split ourselves into two. There's a "me" and the other part that I do things to, I'm going to stop myself from thinking next time. That suggests that there's someone who's not thinking who stops someone from thinking, but that's not true. And that's not our experience, our experience is....."oh!".....

So Zazen is self-regulating providing we make some effort to reach the point where there's no effort, so it's a contradiction. And that means just pulling ourselves back into the middle, where our weight acts down through the centre of gravity.

It's much easier to accept and understand these things when we're talking about it, I find, but the act of doing it, is much harder.

Much harder. Yes, it's true, completely true. But the act of doing it has an effect, and talking about it doesn't have such a big effect.

I find that the longer I sit, I get moments....it seems to be just thinking all of the time, then moments of realising that I'm still, then as soon as I realise it, it goes.

It's like balancing, it's like all the sports which require balance, skiing. When you start learning to ski, there's a very fine knife-edge where you can stand up right, and it's the same if you try rowing in those scull-boats – there's a fine point in the middle. When you start you start you think how can I possibly hold myself on that knife-edge and you wobble about and fall over. But if you keep doing it, keep doing it, keep doing it, one day that knife-edge suddenly disappears and there's a plateau that you're on. It's rather strange. When you can ski you stop thinking about that knife-edge of balance, and you can keep your balance. That's the fact. That's true of Zazen too, if we practice regularly every day, we find there is a balance point, and it spreads. If we practice Zazen only now and again, we find that the balance point is just a little moment which we flash through. On with the paragraph.

It is time-present that causes the hour of twelve o'clock and the hour of 2 o'clock arranged as they are today as they rise up and drop away at their place in the Universe.

Many of his phrases are poetic, and he simply means that although we think of twelve o'clock as being there, and two o'clock as being there, four o'clock there, they all have their place. Twelve o'clock has a time-present in the Universe, and here it is. Two o'clock has a time-present in the Universe and here it is. It's a poetic image.

Two o'clock is a time-present; six o'clock is a time-present;

Then he takes it further:

living beings are time-present; buddhas are time-present.

In Master Dogen's thinking, what is here and now and time are the same thing. So the cup is time-present, the table is time-present, we are time present. He's making an identity between the real facts at the present moment and this time. An absolute identity is what he wants to make. But of course the words have already separated them – he wants to stick the words back together again. And actually, in Japanese and Chinese you can do that more successfully than in English, or other European languages. In Chinese you can stick kanji next to each other, you don't have to put "ands" and other conjunctions in there. You can join words together in a slightly more seamless way, if you want to say "body and mind" in English, we have to put an "and" in the middle, if we say bodymind it's not so acceptable though we can get used to it. But in Japanese you can just write body-mind – shinjin, and there's no "and". He wants to say buddhatime-present, persontime-present, twelveo'clocktime-present.

He even said that matter and the infinite were the same.

Yes, that's what it says in the Hannya Shingyo, in another way.

The concrete time-present of being angry makes the whole Universe real. The concrete time-present of being a buddha makes the whole Universe real.

His, Master Dogen's concept of making something real is quite interesting, and in his philosophy, making something real is to act in the present moment, or to be in the present moment. Without the present moment he says there's nothing, there's no reality. To be what we are in the present moment is creating the Universe or being the Universe. The Universe and us, the Universe and the angry person, the Universe and the buddha exist here and now as something whole, we can't have one without the other, we can't have this room without us sitting in it. We can imagine this room without us sitting in it, but at this moment we've got the room and us, we can't get rid of either, there's just roomus. And if you extend that, Master Dogen is saying that there's just angryUniverse, there's just buddhaUniverse. In our minds we can separate reality, take one part away or move it around, but in reality the situation or circumstances, and the subject or person are... we're here, we're stuck together. That's what he wants to say. And he goes on to that phrase:

The time-present in which the Universe makes itself real is called perfectly real.

And with that, he's suggesting a situation where everything is realising everything, in other words a non-subject centred view of the world. We could say that if we wander down to the lakeside and sit in a nice posture and disappear into the surroundings, then there's no surroundings and me separate. And in that moment the Universe is making itself real, and we experience that perfection just for a moment. He goes on:

The state of buddha which wants to search for the truth, practice Zazen, attain the truth, and enter the balanced state to make the state of buddha real, exists at time-present.

He's suggesting here, we are already buddha and we're looking for buddha if you like. We have the state of buddha, and it's the state of buddha which drives us to

search for the truth, practice Zazen, attain the truth and enter the balanced state to make the state of buddha real. Buddhas making buddha – he's turning things on their head a little. And that exists at time-present.

It is making perfectly real that the whole of time is the whole of existence, with nothing left over.

And Chas was talking about space-time yesterday, Einstein's idea of space-time. And in a way we can say the whole of existence is the whole of time; that has some kind of taste of a space-time continuum. But in Einstein's space-time continuum, we still have process, but in Master Dogen's space-time, or existence-time, there no continuum, there's just this, just this. In Master Dogen philosophy, we cannot escape from reality, and reality is just here now. Everything else happens in our brain. We find that very difficult to accept. Fortunately we don't have to accept it all of the time.

Weren't you saying that the past was now as well? This time-space thing...

All of the past that exists, exists now, because now is the only time that can exist. But I don't mean to suggest, I don't think that Master Dogen is suggesting that there are parallel Universes with pasts in, that somewhere present now, but simply that now is the only existence.

So all the now is put together now.

Yes. And we can't conceive of it, so he painted that landscape of nows, peaks, and we're looking out over the nows. But that's only a poetic, a very beautiful image, we can't conceive it. He says that they're not piled up on top of each other, and they're not line up in a row, and it's like looking out over mountains, but it's not even that really is it?

You say that he says we can't conceive it, is it impossible to conceive or is it just difficult to conceive?

I don't know, I haven't stopped trying yet.

What about moments of conceiving then?

Moments of conceiving it? There's only this one. I'm still trying now. We experience it. What Master Dogen is talking about is our real experience. We usually think that experience means something that happened to us which we can remember. But he means it in a much more direct sense – what's going on now is our experience. He uses the practice and experience, two kanji which he puts together – shusho, practice and experience. He glues them together. Practice – what we're doing now, or doing an experience. What we're doing and what we experience are one thing. Always he's collapsing things into themselves, he collapses his sentences into themselves, collapses his concepts into themselves.

Mike when you say that you're still trying to understand it, do you mean you're still trying to grasp it intellectually?

Yes.

Why?

I don't know, but I like it.

Because we can all experience it can't we?

Yes.

But we don't have to conceive of it.

Yes, but I can't stop it. If I could stop it, I guess I could go and do something else. My whole life has been like that, I spent nearly 20 years mountaineering, I don't know why, something drove me to it. Now I'm spending time studying Buddhism, I don't know why, something drives me to it. What do you do?

Well right now, I'm trying to understand Buddhism.

Why? Why are you doing it?

I don't know.

We have lots of reasons of course, but human beings have this kind of curiosity. In Buddhism it's called the will to the truth. Or that's our translation of it, so the will to the truth is something we have, and it manifests itself in children's kind of curiosity, a desire to eat the world. And we have it. Sometimes it's weaker, sometimes it's stronger, sometimes we can cover it up completely. In the last 5 minutes, every time I've found the next sentence to read, just as I'm about to start somebody asks another question.

It is making perfectly real that the whole of time is the whole of existence, with nothing left over.

He wants to exactly identify time and existence, or time and being, or time and being present. Nothing left over.

But since something left over is just left over,

This next sentence is making fun of our ability to intellectualise everything

even making the whole of time-present only half real is making half of time-present wholly real.

He often talks about half realising things, or half a person, and it's his way of denying that words can match reality. If we say a buddha, we immediately think of this perfect thing. So he says half a buddha, which breaks our perfection. And in some of the ancient Chinese koan stories, they talk about things like a broken wooden dipper to describe a buddha. A wooden dipper is like a bamboo handle with a cup on the end that you use to scoop water with. And the idea of a broken wooden dipper suggests something that's really existing, not something that's ideally perfect. It's broken. And Master Dogen uses half in the same way, often. We can't make something half real, something can't be half real.

Heidegger uses a similar idea, with his use of broken tools.

That's nice, that's similar. I brought his Being and Time, and I looked on my bookshelf to read before I came here but I must have lent it to someone. Is it in there?

Even the times when we seem to be blundering along heedlessly are at time-present. To leave those heedlessly blundering time-presents as they are is to see that they have their own place as time-present.

Again, he's trying to take us away from perfection, and see that in Master Dogen's sense, perfection is the present moment, not something better than what is here, but what is here is perfection. Heedlessly blundering along is just heedlessly blundering along, it time-present, it's real.

The vivid state of being in our own place in the Universe is time-present.

The vivid state of being in our own state in the Universe we experience when we're contented where we are. Often we don't want to be exactly where we are at this moment, but when we do want to be exactly where we are at this moment, our state is vivid.

The word which comes to mind is acceptance.

Yes, but not a passive acceptance, something which is beyond being passive or active, yes. There are lots of words used, to realise, realisation, acceptance, and we can't quite find the one – everyone has their own favourite word.

We should neither confuse it with not being present, not force it into being present.

He's got two opposites there, not being present and being present, and they are both concepts. He says we shouldn't go one way or the other, we should leave it as it is. To force something into being present is to say, "yes I'm present, oh I know I'm present, I can see I'm present". Then we're thinking about being present. But when we pick up a cup of tea and drink it, at the moment we drink the tea we don't need to think whether we're present or not, we're completely here.

Is it right to say that he is saying.....I mean I'm sitting here looking at you and this fantastic scenery, it's all very wonderful. Is he saying that the world is like that, and there's time too, so for me looking across there through these trees, there's those trees and there's time, and it's all there.

You mean those tree-times. It's all here.

Because we're talking about time and the Universe and it's all one thing.

It's all one thing yes, that's right. But if we just say, oh it's all one thing, it's not enough for us, so he takes all the possible ways he can look at it and all the possible concepts that were introduced into Buddhism through the centuries, of which Uji was one, and redefines them as "the one". And the one is called Dharma. So everything is Dharma, so we can go around and say that, but it's not enough is it?

What's the Sanskrit word for Uji? Did they discuss this in China and India in the sutras?

I don't know. Nagarjuna has a chapter on time, and as I said to Bryce, his chapter on time is even closer to TS Eliot's writings than is Dogen's. In Nagarjuna's chapter on time, he doesn't talk about time-present, he means it but he doesn't use the same kind of words. He uses the phrase present, future, past, but he doesn't identify time and existence in the same way, but he means the same thing.

We suppose that time just passes away, and do not understand that time never arrives.

When we try and understand time, we can think of it as a line, then someone might say no, it's not a line, it's lots of flashes, and it's almost impossible for us to see that time doesn't arrive. We think that it's twelve o'clock, so ten past twelve will arrive, ten past twelve will come, but in fact our actual experience is we're just here, we're just here, all the time. So our actual experience is that the future doesn't arrive from anywhere. The future never arrives, and the past never leaves. There's just the present, we can't find a crack where suddenly it changes from this moment to the next. It's always this moment. And he goes on:

Although our understanding itself is time-present, our understanding of time does not influence circumstances.

He means that however we understand time, it doesn't make any difference to circumstances.

People see time as coming and going, and there are few people who see it clearly as time-present here and now. Then how can it be easy for them to get the time to attain the truth?

We have an idea that attaining the truth might be something that we do in a process. Master Dogen wants to point out that it's something that happens at a moment at a time-present.

Even among those who see time as what is present now in the Universe, who can express clearly what the ineffable something is that they have already got? And even among those who have long been asserting that they have it already, none of them have stopped groping around trying to find out who they already are.

We can find in another chapter, Genjo-koan, Master Dogen says that Buddhist study is to find the self, and to find the self is to forget the self. And this has some similar kind of meaning. He says there are some people who say that they see time as what is present now in the Universe, but none of them can express clearly what it is they've already got, and even people who've been asserting that they've already got something, even among those people, they can't stop trying to find out who they are.

But leaving these people to their time-present, even attaining the truth and the balanced state are just time-presents that appear to come and go.

Time-presents that appear to come and go. In those sentences, he's talking about the difficulty we have with our own intellectual search, we look for who we are, and if we find who we are, then say that we've found who we are, we've lost who we are. And when we lose who we are, we can't express who we are. I can't express any more than that.

Now in the next paragraph he goes on to talk about our understanding that we have to get rid of things that hinder us before we can get to some special state.

In short, time-present is always made real without ridding ourselves of hindrances and delusions.

We commonly think that we have hindrances and delusions that we have to get rid of in order to make ourselves real – this was a common theme in Buddhism right through Master Dogen's time, that we need to get rid of hindrances and delusions in order to attain the truth. But Master Dogen is pointing out that time-present is always made real without ridding ourselves of hindrances and delusions. In a way it's coming back to what you were saying about acceptance, to be present is not to realise you're angry and stop being angry, it's simply to realise that you're angry. To be present is not to realise that you're sleepy and to stop being sleepy, but simply to realise you're sleepy.

The benevolent forces that appear to the right and left of us are the time-present of our whole-hearted efforts in this moment.

Benevolent forces in the original were gods and angels, and he uses phrases like "the gods of Buddhism" and so on, to suggest some kind of benevolence of the Universe. I translated it in my version as benevolent forces. So benevolent forces which appear to the left and right of us, we can think of as those times when we feel things are going our way – something is helping us. And of course we also have times when we think that things aren't going our way, everything is going against us. He's saying that these forces are the time-present of our wholehearted effort in this moment. Wholehearted efforts in this moment create some kind of benevolent forces is what he's suggesting. If we throw ourselves into what we're doing, the world goes with us.

All the living beings of the lands and oceans are also the time-present of our wholehearted efforts in this moment.

Again he's suggesting that when we make wholehearted effort in this moment, all the living beings of the Universe are with us. Or we could say that we're going with the flow, or something like that. He's suggesting that to act fully in the present moment is to be in tune with the Universe, and when we're in tune with the Universe, it's all going in our direction, we're all going together.

All the beings in this world and other worlds are also the time-present of our moment-by-moment wholehearted efforts.

In our wholehearted efforts we are helped by all the beings in the Universe. And this sounds rather poetic, and if we think about it, it sounds rather unlikely. But when we put all our effort into what we're doing at one moment, we can say that we become one with everything, and that's what he's trying to say. And when we become one with everything we stop thinking about becoming one with everything.

Our practice teaches us that without our own moment-by-moment effort in time-present, nothing could ever be made real, or continue from one moment to the next.

That sounds very unlikely. He's saying that our efforts in the moment create the world. And it sounds very unlikely. I'd like somebody to show me a moment in which they're not making an effort, and then we can all look to see if the world is here or not. Actually there isn't a moment in which we're not making an effort. We can't find a moment in which we're not making an effort.

Except for dying, killing yourself.

Well we'll have to wait and see. Killing yourself is making an effort. People who kill themselves are very sincere usually.

But there's lots of time during the day when I'm making no effort at all, when I get lost in thinking, or in imagination, I'm not there, like in a fog or a dream.

Where are you in those times?

I'm not there.

So where's the world?

It's not really there either.

Right, there you are then.

Yes it's like, no effort I just becomes a ghost, that's my experience anyway. During that time I guess the room has disappeared, my eyes are open but...

When you come back to where you are, what happens then?

Well I'm back in the room with everybody in it.

That's what he means.

Yes but I believe so, that's the suggestion, of course it's nice if you could stay in time-present without making an effort. But you were suggesting earlier that through the process of the practice, the balance point is stabilised, in terms of becoming a plateau.

But that plateau is only a knife-edge. The words we use to describe it are confusing in themselves. When we're trying to balance on a knife-edge, if we keep practicing it becomes a plateau. But it's still a knife-edge.

Yes, that's right, you can fall off your bike at any time.

I'm a bit confused, didn't you say that not making an effort is also an effort. You can't not make an effort, that's what you said isn't it?

Yes.

So when he's dreaming he's still making an effort?

Yes.

Yes, I'd prefer to accept that at some other level, inaudible.

Are we all confused now? Are we still here though? Have we gone anywhere else?

In that last paragraph, when it says wholehearted effort, it suggests some kind of whole effort, and there is a difference between whole effort and partial effort, and there's a difference between mental and physical effort together as one and just mental effort on its own. But if we say in general, we can't stop making an effort – if we stop making an effort we die. But there are different kinds of effort. If we make only mental effort then we can seemingly disappear from where we are and inhabit another area which we call the mind or the virtual world. And we can believe that we're in that virtual world, but all the time we're believing that, we actually still where we are. If we're sitting in Zazen and we go off into a long train of thought, we may believe that we're in that thought and not notice the room at all, but somebody looking at us will just see us quietly sitting where we are, we

haven't moved at all. From the point of view of the person who's sitting in Zazen who has drifted off into another place, they can say "I wasn't there", but the person who is sitting next to them can say "yes you were". Which is reality? Does reality belong to me or does it belong to you? And we can end up saying well I have mine and you have yours, then we can suggest that everybody has different realities, and there may even be lots of different realities around. And we can talk about parallel Universes or other realities in this one. But all of those hypotheses are made by people who are always in this reality. So reality seems to be that from which we cannot escape. But sometimes we can't see what it is. But although we can't see what it is we can't escape from it, whether we're confused or enlightened or angry or buddhas, we can't escape from reality. We can't escape from time-present.

Time-present is the Universe. Because we can't escape from the Universe, we're always in it. And our efforts moment by moment are in time-present, and because our efforts are in time-present, they are time-present, and because time-present is the Universe, our efforts are the Universe. Doing something makes us real. When we do something we make ourselves and the Universe real. And when we continue to do something moment by moment, we make ourselves and the Universe continue. That's what he says in that paragraph. But then in the next paragraph he says:

But we shouldn't understand that this momentary continuance is like the rain sweeping from east to west. The whole Universe is progressing from one moment to the next, not static but also not continuous process.

I'll stop just there, because he then goes on to talk about Spring. He's creating in us lots of contradictions and images, but they are all pointing to the same thing, that it's impossible to be anywhere else but in reality, and reality at this moment is just as it is.

Thank you.