

**Dogen Sangha Winter Sesshin 2007**  
**Talks on Master Dogen's Kuge**  
**By Eido Mike Luetchford**  
**Talk number 3**

On page two, we got half-way through the second paragraph, so I'll read through to that part from the beginning of the paragraph.

**Only those in the line of the Buddha's truth know that a flower opening is the world manifesting itself. And a flower opening is each of the many and varied real phenomena. The Universe is a complete collection of these individual phenomena gathered together to form something bright. Having understood this concept, we can look at spring and autumn. It is not only in spring and autumn that there are flowers and fruit; time-present is always flowering and fruiting. Flowers and fruit are always sustaining and being sustained by their own time-presents, and each time-present is always sustaining and being sustained by flowers and fruit.**

Master Dogen's creating images of the whole Universe being flowers opening and then fruit ripening. We can say that "a flower opening" is a phenomenon, something happening, and then "a fruit ripens" we can say is the effect from the cause. So, whenever something occurs that's a cause, and then whatever happens there is an effect of it, so the effect is the fruit. So he's painting a picture that, instead of the Universe being some great, big, fully formed entity, as being a collection of these immediate flowerings.

We usually hold in our minds an image of our life, or the Universe, or the world, or Scotland. We have all these imaginary spaces in our heads. And, for instance, I can travel around my space. If I think of Tokyo in my head, I can travel round it in my head, going from that place to that place, catch that train and then go along ... So we have a map in our minds of the places that we experience in habit; and also we have a kind of vaguer map in our minds of the country we live in; and then a bit more vaguer map of the world, especially now that the world is made smaller by communication; and then we also have a kind of map of the Universe, you know, 'the Milky Way's up there, those black holes that Stephen Hawking found are over there, and', you know, 'the sun's here.' We've all got it; it's been formed in our consciousness by our education and knowledge. And we say, 'What's the Universe?'; 'Well, it's all that, you know.'

But, Master Dogen here is creating a different image, and that is - something occurs, a flower opens, that's the whole world; and another flower opens, that's the whole world; and another flower opens, that's the whole world. And what we put together in our minds as an image of where we are, where we live, the country we're in, the world, the Universe, is actually a collection of all these that we put together and make into something whole. But nobody's ever actually seen the whole, because all we ever see is what's in front us here and now. We can only experience now what's around us, here in this room. If someone has a mobile phone and the phone rings, then they can experience listening to the voice of somebody on the other end; but they can't see that person, so they imagine, 'Alright, so the person's in Dumfries.' That's somewhere we all know, Dumfries. Some of us are not quite sure, our picture's a bit vague, but we have this picture and it's all built up there, and we all believe it, 'so it must be true.' And as we've explored space, so our picture's become clearer. We see pictures from the space shuttle, astronauts walking about in big white suits, and we can imagine one of them looking back down on the planet; but he doesn't see what we see. He can see the blue planet from outer space, but he can't be sure whether the world he

left is still down there, because he's not there anymore. But we don't doubt it. I can't be sure whether my wife, Yoko, is really existing in Tokyo, but I don't doubt it. So the image that Master Dogen's forming here is of the world being lots of immediate phenomena, flowering, in the present, in the present, in the present. And then you put that all together slowly and make some big collective image. And he's suggesting that each flower and the time that it happens are the same, "they sustain each other." This present moment, when I move my hand, my hand is sustaining this moment, and this moment is sustaining my hand. And I'm sustaining you, and you're sustaining me. In other words, we're all in it together. This moment is all of us in it together, doing what we're doing, not doing what we're not doing.

*Is "sustaining" a correct translation here?*

Well, in the original it says "maintained and relied upon." You see, I make these interpretations according to what makes sense to me, so it might make more sense to somebody to say "every flower maintains and relies up this instant of time," but those words don't speak to me, so I changed them. Master Dogen's words, in the book, are translated as "maintains and relies upon". So, "to rely upon" is the other side of "maintaining".

*Yes, it's just that "sustains" ... It's sort of self-evident, really, normally - a space and time are spontaneously complete, they're separated only (inaudible). But the notion that they're sustaining or maintaining each other is just a different expression (inaudible).*

Yes, but it's also his way of turning things around - he wants us to see things from two sides at the same time. And in Chinese and Japanese you can do that with words. In English we have to say, "maintained *and* relied upon," or "sustained *and* sustaining." But in Japanese or Chinese you can just say, ... I can't remember the original kanji, but, for instance, another example is 'body and mind' - in Chinese you can say 'bodymind', *shinjin*. Nobody ever puts an 'and' between the characters. The kanji is a picture, so you've got two pictures next to each other, so it's more connected; whereas we've got two separate concepts with a little joining word.

*(Inaudible question)*

I don't know what 'symbiotic' means. What's 'symbiosis', anybody know?

*Mutually maintaining.*

Oh well, yes.

*Like a parasite on a shark.*

*(Inaudible)*

Yes, that's the image. The difficulty we have, especially in English, is our language takes us away from it. Because, for instance, I'm sitting on this cushion. And 'I'm sitting on the cushion' is: me, centre of the world; cushion, object. But, actually, the cushion is supporting me. So the real situation is not just 'I'm sitting on the cushion', it's 'I'm sitting on the cushion which is supporting me,' put together.

*Which is in turn being supported by the house, which is supported by et cetera, et cetera.*

Yes, yes. What can we say?

*The totality.*

The totality. What Dogen wants to do is put that into words. And in Chinese or Japanese you can do it more easily than you can in English, which is a discriminative language.

*This kind of confronts our notion of time being a container, like events happen 'in time' (inaudible).*

*(Inaudible comments)*

*The point he's making is that there's no abstract spring into which all the flowers fit. Each flower is equally as much spring as any other flower flowering.*

Ah, I think he's saying "this flower flowering." So, although it sounds general, he's trying to show us the nature of reality is what flowers at *this* place. All the 'what flowerings at this place' make up our imagined world. But what actually exists is only the flowering of this place, the flowering of this place, the flowering of this place. And that's very difficult for us.

*(Inaudible)*

That's true, every moment is all there is in every moment; but, our powerful minds carry us on and carry us over. There's nothing wrong with that, it's fact; but, to realise that fact allows us to see this moment is all. And if we see this moment is all, we can concentrate on what we're doing now, and break what we've just done. For instance, we were doing rakasu workshop this morning, and David was measuring up cloth and, because I'm watching him, I can notice things – when we watch somebody else we can notice things. And David's measuring, and then he's drawn the dots on the cloth, and he wants to join those dots up in a line – so, having very, very carefully measured the dots, he puts the ruler along the line, and he's going to draw the line. Then he's worried about the dots, again. 'Are the dots in the right place?' This is true of me, this is why I can see what David was doing. So, I said to David, and said to myself, 'No, you've done the dots. Now it's time to do the line. Whether your dots are accurate or not is a result of your past efforts. So, you make your effort and then you move on.' But this is a continual effort for all human beings, because we think.

*I read a book by Thich Nath Hanh, about mindfulness, and one of the traps I fell into was that, being aware of the momentary nature of reality is one thing, but if you get the idea of 'mindfulness', if you're not careful you can take yourself out of the present moment ...*

Into an idea of 'mindfulness'.

Yes.

Ah yes, that's true. That's why I don't like the word. But if the word means 'doing what we're doing now,' then it's OK. But I don't like the word. I think there's a tendency for us to think, 'OK, I must watch myself, make sure I'm being mindful,' which is not really where it's at. (Inaudible) ... just do. And it's a constant effort. It's our life.

*(Inaudible) ... are you suggesting that we should, or is it enough just to be aware?*

Well, it's enough to be aware, and then on top of that we want to know that we are aware. You know, we have these funny sixth senses that come, but I've got no way to know. So, I might believe that Yoko's in Tokyo, but I don't really know what she's doing.

*When we let go of that, nothing is a problem. Is that implied in the writing, you know, that when we do actually allow flowers to flower and fruit to ripen, there's no problem?*

Yes. Just as it is.

*Just as it is? Well, I remember one instance where I just let go of everything, outside of a station in (inaudible), and I knew that I just had to remain in the moment at that moment. And a friend of mine, who I hadn't seen in fifteen years, suddenly walked out of the tube station, and there was no problem, you know, there was no problem. Do you see what I'm saying? Whereas, if I'd gone searching for him I could have ended up in Tokyo or something.*

Well, little things like that are going on with us all the time. Sometimes we can reflect and notice what we did, sometimes we don't even notice what we're doing. We stay in a place and something happens which wouldn't have happened if we'd moved – we're doing it all the time, every moment. What we do changes the world. Every action we make changes the whole Universe. But we don't think of it like that.

*It's to do with our controlling nature that we've got to get rid of. Stop running the Universe.*

Right, OK. I'll try.

(Laughter)

**Thus every phenomenon has its flowers and fruit. Every tree has its flowers and fruit. Material phenomena all have their flowers and fruit. The constituents of those phenomena all have their flowers and fruit. There is flowering of human beings, and there is flowering of human flowers; there is even flowering of old and emaciated people.**

So, he's creating, again, an image of flowers appearing as a symbol for things happening, things unfolding, or reality unfolding.

**All this being so, there are the flowers in space spoken of by the Buddha.**

Now, "the flowers in space spoken of by the Buddha" are in a poem, two thirds of the way down the next page, which he comes on to later. But we can presume the audience sometimes knew the context which he was talking about - they would have known that poem, for example. So he starts talking about the poem before he tells us what it is.

**People of narrow knowledge and limited insight do not know that flowers in space have colour, brightness, leaves and petals; they have scarcely heard of the phrase "flowers in space."**

We can say this phrase, "People of narrow knowledge don't know that flowers in space have colour, brightness, leaves and petals," is comparing people who are living in their minds, for example, living in the world of anxiety, or expectation, or living their dreams - they don't notice the beauty of the moment, the brightness of the moment, the colour of the moment, and so on.

**Remember, people following the Buddha's way speak about flowers in space, but they are not known about, let alone understood, by non-Buddhists. Only buddhas and their descendents know how flowers in space and flowers on the ground blossom and fall; only they know how flowers in the world blossom and fall; only they know that these flowers in space, on the ground, in the world, are teachings of the truth. They are the accepted way to learn what the buddhist state is. Because flowers in space are the vehicle in which buddhas and their descendents travel, all the Buddha's teachings and the world of buddhas are simply these flowers in space.**

He says, first of all, "Only buddhas and their descendents know how flowers in space and flowers on the ground blossom and fall; only they know how flowers in the world blossom and fall; only they know that these flowers in space, on the ground, in the world, are teachings of the truth". So, he's suggesting, again with his imagery of flowers, that "following the Buddha's way" - that means to practice Zazen; that means to practice seeing what's in front of us - teaches us. What's in front of us teaches us, if we don't pass over it. And "flowers blossoming and falling" we can think of in many different ways. That image is very, very wide. In the "Genjo Koan" chapter of the *Shobogenzo*, which is the third chapter in our book, Master Dogen talks about "reality is flowers falling and weeds growing." So, an image of, not only events happening and then disappearing, but something to do with some disappointment, or sadness - for example, of something that's happened and is now gone; or something that is happening and will now go; or even, if we see "flowers" not only as real events but also as our imaginings, then "the falling of a flower" can suggest our imagination disappearing. So, for instance, 'I'm going to go to a retreat at Rowardennan this weekend, and it's going to be wonderful' - and I build up a kind of flowery picture in my mind, and then I arrive, and I'm too early, the doors are locked, it's pouring with rain, and everybody else has met down the hotel down the road, and they're all sitting there, so I drop into a deep depression. So we could say that we create flowers and then they fall, in a metaphorical sense. So there's lots of different images he creates here, and he doesn't define exactly what they are. So you have to ask yourself, do you know what "flowers blossoming and falling" are? And do you know that they are teachings of the truth? And do you know that they are the accepted way to learn what the buddhist state is? ... Answers on a postcard.

(Laughter)

So, Master Dogen feels that particularly Buddhism, that is the way of pursuing the nature of what it's all about by practicing Zazen, allows us to understand what flowers are when they bloom and when they fall, and so on.

**But when ignorant common people...**

There's none of those here!

(Laughter)

**...hear the Buddha's words that clouded eyes see flowers in space**

Now this “clouded eyes see flowers in space” is already quoting a line from the poem which he hasn’t quoted yet, so let’s just quickly go down the page to see what the Buddha said:

“Sakyamuni Buddha said:  
*It is as if a person who has clouded eyes  
Sees flowers in empty air/space;  
After the sickness in their clouded eyes is cured  
The flowers in empty air/space vanish.”*

This is a quotation from the Buddha, and I don’t know where it comes from. Somebody, I’m sure, does. And it’s obviously a comment about a situation that he’s talked about, and I don’t know what that situation was. So, something, “It” – “It is as if a person who has clouded eyes / Sees flowers in empty space; / After the sickness in their clouded eyes is cured / The flowers in empty space vanish.” In that poem, it would seem that the Buddha is saying that if you’re deluded you’ll see some imaginary things, and then when you stop being deluded your imaginary things will disappear. That seems to make sense. However, Master Dogen’s interpretation says something different. Going back to the top of the page: “But when ignorant common people hear the Buddha’s words that clouded eyes see flowers in space,”

**they imagine that *clouded eyes* refers to the clouding of the eyes that affects ordinary people. They imagine that those people have diseased eyes and that’s why they see non-existent flowers floating in empty air.**

So, he’s commenting on the simple, straightforward interpretation of the poem, that if we’ve got some clouds in our perception then we see things that don’t exist, and when our eyes become clear they disappear. And he goes on to comment that these people who he’s talking about, from that, conclude that the concepts that Buddhism talks about don’t really exist:

**Because these ignorant people are attached to this explanation, they conclude that the three worlds, the six realms, having buddha-nature and not having buddha-nature are all delusions and don’t really exist.**

The concepts that Buddhism talks about are: “the three worlds” – the three worlds are the mental or the spiritual world, the physical world, and the real world. “The six realms” – which are the realms or the worlds of hell, hungry ghosts, animals, demons, human beings, and gods. This was a way in Buddhism of describing the cyclic way that human beings go through a kind of cycle of mental states: we start off as a human being; and then we get very proud or pleased and we think we’re like a god; and then something happens and knocks us out of heaven and we fall into hell; slowly we come back to being an animal; and then a demon; and then a human being. So it’s describing that cycle when we feel really, ‘Ah, my life’s just how I want it, perfect, damn good!’ And then the next day something happens and we feel completely the opposite, and then we slowly come back. And that cycle repeats itself. That’s called “the six realms” in Buddhism. And “having buddha-nature and not-having buddha-nature” form the subject of the story that we discussed in the chapter called “Bussho”. Was that last time we were here?

*The second last time.*

Oh, right. So, “the three worlds” is an explanation, “the six realms” is an explanation, “having buddha-nature and not having buddha-nature” are explanations. And he seems to be criticising ordinary people for saying that these

explanations, or these concepts, don't exist. He seems to be saying that they do exist.

*(Inaudible) saying that "they imagine that 'clouded eyes' refers to the clouding of eyes that affects ordinary people". Is he saying that?*

He could be suggesting that people think that actually your eyes are cloudy, physically, and you can't see properly. Or he may be using it a bit more metaphorically. I'm not really sure.

**They get excited about the possibility of curing the disease that has caused their clouded eyes, after which they would not see any flowers in space, saying that this is meaning of the phrase "space is originally without flowers." People like this who do not know when the flowers in space of which the Buddha speaks exist, when they appear, and when they disappear, are pitiful.**

Now, the phrase "space is originally without flowers" is a quotation from some buddhist master; but, again, I don't know who. Would anybody like to say what they think this paragraph is talking about?

*It's a complete contradiction! First he's telling us there are flowers in space, and now he's telling us there aren't!*

Is he telling us there aren't?

*He's making a distinction between "flowers in empty space" and "flowers in space". The "flowers in space" at the beginning of the chapter are real; "flowers in empty space" are (inaudible).*

*(Inaudible) I think that the people who see them who are deluded are not any different to us. We're all the same, you know, we're all prone to seeing flowers in space, it's not just people with cataracts or diseased people, it's all of us. And if we make a differentiation, a value judgment about it, then we get into a kind of cycle of duality from which we can never escape. And I was going through it last night, and I keep going through it, you know, this thing of ...*

Cycle of duality?

*Yes, you know - two seconds ago I seemed to be OK and I'm in the moment and I'm not making judgments and I'm not chasing anything; and then the next second I'm chasing that moment that I've just left because it was a good moment, you know. And it's something we're all prone to. What you were saying last night to me was quite a relief, you know, that I'm not the only one doing that. That's what I was trying to stop the cycle of, but you can't stop it by value-judgments, you can't stop it by ...*

Would you say that when Dogen says "they get excited about the possibility of curing the disease that has caused their clouded eyes, after which they would not see any flowers in space," it's suggesting that you can never escape from your cycle?

*... A sort of judgmental enlightenment that ends all enlightenment kind of idea, you know, this kind of idea that we were talking about yesterday, this idea that you have a moment and all that practice that can't do anything about it.*

*Doesn't Dogen contradict himself? On page two he says, "Only buddhas and their descendents know how flowers in space et cetera ...; only they know that these flowers in space are teachings of the truth. ... All the Buddha's teachings and the world of buddhas are simply these flowers in space." And, without pause, he then says, "ignorant common people" imagine they see flowers in space!*

*(Inaudible) Is it like saying, 'If I can just clear these flowers in space so that I have clear, empty space', then all we've done is create another ... you know, 'empty space' is just another concept.*

*Is it part of his four-phased approach, which I've never got spot-on, you know, his spiritual-come-theoretical explanation of something material or practical? Is that what he's just done here? I think it's one of these contradictions that happens in Dogen (inaudible).*

*(Inaudible comments)*

*Is it saying just do what we do – instead of standing back thinking, we should just do what we should be doing?*

Any more flowers?

*(Laughter)*

*He's exploiting the ambiguity of the word 'ku'. So, it's 'space', but also it's 'empty'. (Inaudible)*

Well, yes, there is that thing in Japanese. In Chinese and Japanese they use the kanji character *ku*, and *ku* is used in normal language to mean 'air' or 'sky'. So, for instance, 'airport' in Japanese is *kuko*. So *ku* means 'air'. But it was also used, in Buddhism, to mean the emptiness or nothingness of *sunyata*. And it also means the void, as in space. So the word itself is a bit ambiguous in Japanese, which is why I put "air/space" in that poem.

*(Inaudible) So, in other words, the use of language is almost like a trap for the intellect, where you're stumbling through and you realise something that, if it was written in a kind of clear-cut language, or a kind of, you know, like a textbook-like language, would be trite by comparison. So the very way that it's sort of structured encourages the kind of thinking that his discipline is a product of. You know, by talking like we are now, our minds are beginning to realise the similarity of illusion and reality in our minds, because he's using the same phrase to describe both - "flowers in space" being delusional, "flowers in space" being pure reality. You know, this is the problem, isn't it? Half the time you think you're in touch with reality and you discover it's a delusion, because you've been projecting your preconceived ideas on things which don't get helped by that.*

We could say that's one kind of flower, which falls.

*You can't have space without flowers, though. It's all one - one whole, undivided reality. So, if ordinary people (inaudible).*

*(Inaudible) imagine things, things we create in our minds. And that he's saying that ordinary people create that because they have some kind of disease of their sight. So, the tendency is to want to cure the disease of your sight so you can see things clearly, without any imaginary trappings. That's what the poem seems to say, doesn't it. But, Master Dogen seems to be saying, 'No, that's only common*



people think like that.' Now, why's he saying 'only common people think like that?' 'Only common people think that you can get rid of your delusions.'

*(Inaudible comments)*

(Inaudible) notice the difference. We've talked, so far, about the poem's suggestion that we should get rid of something, Dogen's insistence that that's only 'the view of common people,' and that maybe it's not anything to do with 'getting rid of' or 'getting cured,' but it's noticing the fact, or noticing the difference. It may be that. Noticing how we are, itself, is not what we think it is. When we start practicing Zazen, and somebody says, 'Practicing Zazen is finding out who you are,' we expect to find this beautiful Buddha-like person. But what we find on the zafu ain't nothing like a Buddha. In our minds it's an irritated, sleepy, grumpy, excitable, you know, human being that we'd rather keep away from. It's us. (Laughs)

*And we're in the cycle of judgment, judgmentalism.*

Are you?

*Well, you know, if you're looking at that person that you've found is an imperfect (inaudible) ... faults, isn't it? That's what this is all about ...*

Is it?

*... and it's so easy to miss it. Yeah, I think it is. You know, it's just the idea of carrots that are dangled and then you chase the carrot and you catch it ...*

*(Inaudible comments)*

Let's see what he says in the next paragraph.

(Bell rings)

(Laughter)

I didn't hear that.

(Laughter)

**The truth about the clouded eyes and flowers in space of which the Buddha speaks cannot be perceived by ordinary people or non-buddhists. But by practicing this flower of emptiness, ...**

- this flower of space -

**...buddhas and tathagatas receive the robe, the position of teacher and a place to teach, and realise what reality is and receive the benefit. The Buddha indicating reality by picking up a flower and winking at Mahakasyapa was clouded eyes seeing flowers in space. The essence of Buddhism and the serene and clear mind that are passed on to the present without interruption embody clouded eyes seeing flowers in space. Awakening to reality, being in the serene and peaceful state, embodying reality, returning to our original nature, are just a flower in space opening some of its petals.**

(End of talk)