

FULL MOON SESSHIN, First Night Dharma Talk
Olympia Zen Center, July 21 to 25, 2010
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Dogen's SHOBOGENZO, chapter on **Tsuki** (On the Moon as One's Excellent Nature)

Space

This is the first talk for the Full Moon Sesshin and each year I try to choose something related to the moon. In past years I've spoken about poems of Ryokan-san, and Dogen Zenji's poems and Morten Marcus' poems, for instance. Every year I think I'll run out and won't be able to find anything else about the moon. However, something always arrives because the moon is an important symbol and metaphor in Zen practice and is used frequently in the texts.

This year I found Dogen Zenji's chapter called "Tsuki" which briefly means "The Moon." Translated in the Shasta version the title is "On the Moon as One's Excellent Nature." The interpretation of the Moon then, in this translation is that the Moon represents our Buddha Nature. In this chapter I think Dogen Zenji makes three particular points about Buddha Nature. Tonight I shall speak on one point and tomorrow and the next night on the second and third points.

As always Dogen Zenji is not easy to interpret, and this particular chapter is not so simple. He starts out with a little poem by the Buddha:

*The true Dharma Body of the Buddha
is unbounded like empty space.
It reveals It's form by conforming to an object
like water reflecting the moon.*

So, Dogen goes on to make his point clear in this, that the real Dharma Body of the Buddha is just like unbounded space.

Space.

The Moon and Space.

That's all the text I will use tonight. As you know I do better when I speak directly from Zazen rather than trying to explicate a text. I take a piece of a text and branch out from there speaking about what Dogen might be pointing toward.

So, Space! I think Space is my favorite exploration in Dogen Zenji, perhaps a lifelong exploration, space, and what space is. And as I've mentioned to you many times, one of the qualities of Buddha is spaciousness. Wherever the Buddha went, he created a sense of spaciousness around him, and the same of my first teacher Kobun Roshi, always a sense of space, unbounded space. You could be with him and feel that you didn't know especially where you were, you were just in a fantastic openness. This is a deep quality of the Buddha, spaciousness, and something that I think we come to as we continue in practice. We begin to work with and in space as a quality of being, a way in which we can be with everything at the same time, and that we can allow the world to be, and allow things to be as it is. Dogen says, it is just Space, it is all Space! He says:

Because this unbounded space is the Real Dharma Body of the Buddha, the whole earth, the whole of all realms, all thoughts and things, that is all things that manifest, are in themselves unbounded space.

I recall a couple of years ago, talking about a Koan from Dogen's chapter called Space:

Zen Master Shakyō Ezo of Bushu asks Zen Master Seido Chizō,
“Do you understand how to grasp space?”
-Seido says “I understand how to grasp it!”
-The Master says “How do you grasp it.”
-Seido clutches at space with his hand.
-The Master says, “You do not understand how to grasp space!”
-Seido says, “Well, how do you grasp it, brother?”
-The Master grabs Seido’s nostrils and he pulls on them.
-Seido is groaning with pain and he says, “It’s very brutal to yank a person’s nostrils! But I have directly been able to get free.”
-The Master says, “Directly grabbing hold like this, you should have got it from the beginning!”

We ourselves are unbounded space. This is not so easy a thing to comprehend, we can imagine it, but to truly allow it to be, allow ourselves to be unbounded space, to really recognize that what we think is something here, is just space. Just space dwelling in space. We simply are a bundle of floating space. We are insubstantial, but we are Buddha Nature, so that doesn’t make us nothing. We are insubstantial, we have no central continuing self, we have no unchanging self, we are continuously changing and all of existence is continuously changing and we are floating in this Realm of Existence in form, in physical form as space, yet we are visible.

This is the first quality of the moon. The moon is the Dharma Body, and the brilliance of the moon and the brightness of the moon, is simply Buddha Nature shining forth, through all of existence. What an incredible gift, to have the moon which is so mysterious, has been so beautiful, and serves such mystery, even though men have walked on the moon, it still is a brilliant, beautiful mystery for us and still serves as a brilliant light in the sky. The moon gets dark, the moon shines, the moon becomes full, and all of these are things that Dogen talks about in this chapter; about swallowing the moon and then vomiting it out. That drum that we used this morning by the way, is raven swallowing the sun which is the source of moonlight. Completely digesting, comprehending and understanding the realization of what it is to swallow.

In that sense if we can swallow the moon, we can comprehend and fully understand the nature of space and ourselves as Buddha Nature. And we can understand All of Existence, and we can understand the root of phenomena, the root of the phenomenal world.

I also want to speak a little bit about working with space as I’m always looking for ways in which this practice can be practical and useful. I do believe that Shakyāmini Buddha and Dogen Zenji were very practical people, in that they gave us a practice that we could use, it’s not just something that hangs out there, but rather all of the Teachings are things that we can pick up and swallow and use. This matter of space, really practicing with it for a while, just that practice, just walking through one’s life, on a daily basis for a while, as long as you can and saying, “Oh, there is space” looking at each person and saying, “That person is space.” This is a wonderful practical, actually very joyful way to relieve ourselves of participating in junk that doesn’t belong to us. Maybe a little bit like Joko Beck’s “empty boat,” in which she says if you yourself were in a boat and you saw another boat that was empty and suddenly coming down the river, headed toward your boat, you wouldn’t get upset or angry, you would just say, “Oh oh, there is that empty boat, let’s move that out of the way.” But of course with our cars we are not like that, there is always somebody in a car cutting us off when we get upset in traffic, or something like that. Joko Beck says treat everything as an “empty boat,” and I’m saying treat everything as space. Treat everything and everyone as a deliberate practice for some

time, as “Oh there is space, space dwelling in space.” Don't forget that Koan, grabbing the nose, to grab space, grasping space.

We don't have to take things quite so, personally. We can allow the world around us to be as it is and then we can see it, just as it is, and gain some insight about how to assist, or how to help a particular situation. Because, we are space within space. This is Buddha Nature, this is the Moon, this is to be the moon itself. This is to be the light of the moon, shining forth in all the aspects of our lives. *It reveals It's form by conforming to an object.* It's most interesting isn't it, like water reflecting the moon. *It reveals It's form, by conforming to an object.* Does Dogen mean, and does Shakyamuni Buddha mean that we reveal our Buddha Nature by conforming to the shape of this body, like water reflecting the moon? Like taking this form in order to reflect Buddha Nature. If we didn't have this form, there would be no Buddha Nature. The only way we can express Buddha Nature is to be in form, if not we're not in Existence. At the same time we are unbounded space, in this existence. What else would we be, what else could we be?

Sometimes, our own form seems comical almost. I think “whoowh, well if I really am Buddha Nature, why do I look so comical to myself sometimes? Strange forms that we are and strange forms that we look at around us! However, we really should not look at ourselves in that way. Godo Roshi, my Training Master said, “never care how you look.” He did tell us to take care of ourselves mind you, but once you take care of that, do not be concerned about how you look. You are Buddha Nature, you are just Buddha Nature shining forth. We should see that in others, and not worry how we look to others. This practice of Godo Roshi to not care how you look is a lot about dwelling in space then, letting the body fall away, and moving through space naturally. Isn't it amazing the way we move through the room, the way we go about and move all over the earth. Isn't it amazing! We can just go wherever we choose, we can move in space in the mind, we can be wherever we want to be. But mostly Dogen says, please be here, please be where you are, because that's where Buddha Nature is. That where the expression takes place.

At times Dogen uses the moon, as a metaphor but he says “the moon that you can think of, is also the real moon” and the metaphor is the Reality! So the moon reflected in water, is the same as looking at the moon. You are reflected in someone's eyes, is the same as looking at the Moon. And that is our meeting place, we look at another and we see the Moon, we see Buddha Nature. Buddha Nature reflects Buddha Nature. So we come together and we reflect Buddha Nature, that's all that's there.

So purposely practicing this matter of Space, it's very fantastic, it's incredibly liberating, to relieve ourselves of ills in the body, to simply say, I'm space, it relieves some of the burden of the pressure on the body since everything is infinite space.

I became very interested in deep space science too, I mentioned some of it recently. We think about our own galaxy and we know that there are other galaxies, but the Hubble spacecraft took week long pictures of a dark point in the sky that is about a size of a pinhead. The scientists wanted to know what's out there, and they didn't expect anything to come back. They expected darkness. They often try to identify dark matter so they thought they might be wasting their time by photographing that little tiny speck for one week. And it's astounding, the light of billions of galaxies, not just stars out there, but whole galaxies, there are billions of galaxies! It's just infinite! It's so astounding, we think we're so important. So let's get real. It's terribly important what we do, there is no doubt about that, we could really screw up this solar system, but there are billions of galaxies! Just space, space and more space, endless space, infinite space.

If we can comprehend that space, if we can get a glimpse of it in the mind, that is not different from what we are. The Buddha says, "What we think of, we are." If I close my eyes, and I think of the Golden Gate Bridge, the bridge that I think of is the reality of the Golden Gate Bridge. We look into deep space and if we can just imagine all of that, that is who we are, that is us, limitless.

Well, I myself, can only comprehend as much as I can comprehend and I have only swallowed as much as I could swallow and vomited back as much as I could vomit back. Vomiting back, is manifesting. But there is no end to the Realization of Buddha Nature, maybe we get a little glimpse at this point, we keep going, and we keep walking, we keep questioning, looking into our lives, holding the sacred, and we get more and more glimpses, more and more openings, more and more facets of the Light of the Moon, endlessly.

So, the moon has it's faces, which we'll talk about tomorrow night. Sometimes the moon is bright, sometimes we can't see the moon at all. Sometimes Buddha Nature is so clear to us, sometimes we look at somebody, and it's shining forth out of them, and we are just overcome with compassion and opening and joy to see such a wonderful, joyful, free human being...or we see an animal and we're so thrilled. I saw a deer go by this morning. So exciting in the middle of Zazen. We get that moment and it's just thrilling to us. Sometimes. Sometimes, nothing. We're just here and it seems pretty mundane. And that of course that too, is Buddha Nature we just don't celebrate it or think it's anything special.

And truly Buddha Nature, is nothing special, it's very very ordinary. Sometimes we look at that brilliant moon and think big deal, there is another full moon and we go about our business. Everything, quite ordinary. In our deep practice in truly reflecting Buddha Nature, we practice being ordinary. If we try to be extraordinary, we miss the point, we miss that shining light of Buddha Nature as we're trying to be something, that we don't have to try for. We already are Buddha Nature. When we try to be something, that is a different thing being expressed, and we miss the simplicity of the point of the Buddha and the point of the very subtle delicacy of Zen practice. There is nothing more fragile than Zen practice. When we practice the ordinary, we practice not being special, to allow that which is unbounded within us to take It's expression without us overriding it, which is easy to have happen.

So we are very lucky to have this practice to have this incredible opportunity to glimpse a deer running by the window.

During a sesshin with Kobun Roshi, 35 years ago, somebody asked him "Roshi what is life?" He thought for a brief second and he said, "Life is an ant walking across a page!" We Americans laughed for fifteen minutes, it was the funniest thing we had ever heard. He hadn't the vaguest idea what we were laughing at. So utterly ordinary. Out of all the possibilities he said something so simple. So incredibly ordinary, as an ant walking across a page, and that's life, that's Buddha Nature.



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