

FULL MOON SESSHIN, THIRD NIGHT DHARMA TALK
Olympia Zen Center, July 21 to 25, 2010
Eido Frances Carney

Dogen's SHOBOGENZO chapter on Tsuki (On the Moon as One's Excellent Nature)

“Vomiting it out”

The moon is very beautiful right now, not quite full but it comes through the trees here, it really is the kind of moon that the Japanese love in their poetry. To see the full moon in a pure sky is very rude. It's not a favorable moon, it's like showing off, because the moon does represent awakening, so it's like showing off your awakening by seeing this full moon with nothing else in the sky. When a cloud drifts across the moon, well let's say as we have here, shining through the trees, this is really very lovely, this poetic and delicate and beautiful moon, because it's not showing off. It's just letting us see different aspects of It through the trees.

We've been talking about Buddha Nature, Dogen Zenji's chapter on the Moon, and Dogen's use of the moon to point to Buddha Nature.

For those who are here tonight for the first time I can't help you by recapping, I don't even remember Dharma talks after I give them, so we go on to the third point that Dogen was speaking about in this particular chapter. The first one was essentially about Buddha Nature as Unbounded Space, and this Dharma Body as Unbounded Space, and that we are Space itself and that we exist as Space within Space. Then Dogen refers to this movement of Buddha Nature and our Realization of Buddha Nature as “swallowing” the Moon, when we understand and Realize and really grasp the Teachings.

The third part is “vomiting it out,” meaning how Buddha Nature manifests. In this third part, the question is **how does Buddha Nature manifest?**

Dogen refers to phases of the moon, sometimes it's full, sometimes it's dark, sometimes it's half full, it's all its various phases. I'll just read you the little poem that is in that particular section:

Great Master Tosu Daido of Shushu Province, was once asked by a monk

“What is the Moon like when It is not yet full?”

The Master answered “It swallows up three or four Moons.”

The monk then asked “And after It is full, what is It like?”

The Master replied “It vomits out seven or eight Moons.”

This is the poetic language of the manifestation of Realization as vomiting out seven or eight Moons, meaning that, we manifest and give away that understanding in whatever way our particular life manifests. For everyone it is a different expression, right? So the word “vomiting out” means how is Buddha Nature spiritually expressed? Another way to talk about this is in relationship to our practice. It must be practical for us to talk about, otherwise it doesn't make sense. In terms of our practice, in terms of our Zazen, there is the coming to the cushion, the recognition of practice.

There is sitting Zazen, the swallowing it up, and then there is the vomiting it out, which is getting off the cushion. The first two are not so difficult, but the third! **What do we do with our lives when**

we get off the cushion? This is the great difficulty. We cannot just hang out on the cushion forever, we cannot just sit Zazen, although some of you may feel that that's all we are doing in sesshin, but we're not really, there's a great deal of activity going on that is not just sitting Zazen. We can't reside on the cushion forever. It's a mistake to get lost in Zazen. It's very difficult to find your way back. Zazen is a profound Teaching that actually shows us how to live. But it still remains our profound Koan: How do we get off the cushion? What do we do when we get off the cushion?

Well I'm not going to answer the question for you. I continue to answer it for myself every day. It isn't something that we just do once, we actually do it every day. We sit Zazen, truly entering Space, truly being Space in the practice of Zazen, and then when we get up everything is complicated. It's like taking a flight some where: nothing complicated up there. My life feels very simple, no big deal, it's only when you come back to the ground that all that junk is around again.

So we have this problem then of landing on the floor after we get off the cushion. It's a very serious matter. It is actualizing the fundamental point. Dogen Zenji's profound central Koan of Soto Zen: Actualizing the fundamental point, Actualizing Buddha Nature. This is the most serious subject for our lives, and although we come to the cushion, again, in order to die, in the way that we do to allow and find our True Selves, it's really that other piece that is behind it for us, because we wonder what shall I do with my life? What is my life about, what should I do with it? I'm not going to answer that either. I don't know! I don't know and I would never tell anybody, I don't know what you should do with your life. I only know that that question is completely informed by the practice of Zazen, by swallowing. **There is nothing to vomit if we don't swallow!**

So the time of engaging on the cushion is precious for all that comes after, for addressing the importance of our lives and the preciousness of knowing we have this one life, when knowing maybe we are older and we are looking, and how precious this is. There is some sense, there is something we have to do in our lives.

So, there is this sense that there is something I have to do in my life. That is the vomiting it out, that comes in getting off the cushion. There is something that each of us has to give and that is the coming to really see and really address that, and really know what that is and the ways in which we can give, the ways in which we can serve in this life.

One of our Precepts is No attaching to fulfillment.

So we don't go toward the answer to that Koan by way of thinking that we want to fulfill ourselves. That's not it. But it is about the same subject that we find on the cushion in relation to one another, sitting together as Sangha on the cushion in the recognition of this human being sitting next to me, or the human beings sitting together, the recognition of suffering in the world. And the recognition that everything is changing. How do we fit into all of that? Oh, that's a mighty huge Koan in anybody's life! It takes real digging, real releasing of the attachments to the assumptions that we have about our own selves. Releasing that, so that Buddha Nature informs the way to go. Buddha Nature shows the pathway. That is a True Gem of our lives, that reveals the True Gem hiding within us, that it isn't the ego at work here, this is nothing about the ego, so that all of that stands aside and allows the beauty of what we truly are to speak in the world, to truly shine.

About this pathway, I want to share tonight the Dharma Talk with C.J. who has begun to teach in Port Angeles. They are studying a particular subject, and I invited her to give a little bit of her teaching tonight about this.

CG

Well, what's important was that the group has been reading Steven Bachelors' Buddhism Without Beliefs for quite a while now, and in the chapter on Emptiness he has a really great metaphor that he talks about, which is called a *shul* which is a Tibetan word for an impression that is left by something that is no longer there. So it's like when you see where a deer has slept in the woods, that's a *shul*. And in the same way, the Ancestors and the Teachers who came before us, have left a *shul* for us to follow. They are no longer there, but there is a path that we can follow, where their footsteps have been, and so that's a *shul*. It's an impression of something that is no longer there. Carrying the metaphor a little farther, we ourselves are also a *shul* because we are empty of permanent characteristics, there is no permanent abiding self, in this skin bag, so we are just a collection of processes and sensory input, and mental formations, and that changes from moment to moment, every single second, we are a different thing. So, we are just an impression of something that is no longer there. We mistake ourselves for a real person. But that being as that may, as we talked about this tonight, I thought a little bit about how that connected with the Sangha and for me, in asking about how do I manifest the Buddha Dharma, how do I manifest Buddha Nature, that's been a big question for me ever since I became a priest. So I have to say that, those of you who were here, the sesshin last summer, when we spent seven days preparing for Shuso ceremony, and we all put in a lot of great effort in the evenings, training for the ceremony. Eidosan putting great effort teaching us the ceremony and we all put in this great effort at learning what we needed to do. Then we did it! Then we created this *shul*. It's no longer there, we did all the actions and it's no longer there, but it provided a path for me to follow. For that I am most grateful to everyone here who made that possible. So now, I am following that path into the future and without that Shuso ceremony, I probably never would have started a group in Port Angeles. It was an important gate for me to pass through as a priest in order to manifest the Buddha Dharma. Something changed for me after that ceremony. That made it possible for me to go forward, and teach other people.

So, in each moment we are creating a *shul* that has an effect on others around us, and everyone who comes into the Zendo leaves an impression for others to follow in the future. A path forward, a way to manifest Buddha Nature.

Eidosan: It's wonderful, it's a very happy, beautiful teaching!

Maybe you have some questions.

Student

A question about the term space. I couldn't help but reflect on star stuff. How stars explode and throw out stuff and bombards the earth...and life ends up being star stuff. But we're also Space. And it made it so easy for me to connect with the Dharma talk last night, with the idea of all of us being part of space, and it's all temporary. It's how we treat this lease, but what happens to us.

Teacher

When I was an undergraduate, I took paleontology as my science. We went out on a paleontology dig and we found some fragments of an animal called a calicothere. It's a cross between a horse and a rhinoceros, and they existed in this area, where Nevada and Oregon and California come together. The teacher put the bones in my hand! I don't know how many billions of years these bones were, but you know, so are we, so is everything, that old. I mean you don't want to think of yourself as being that old, but that is what the stuff of the planet is. Nothing can be created or destroyed, everything that is here is here. We're just the same stuff of it. The same stuff of the stars.

Student

And that's being processed over and over.

Teacher

That's right and you just hope that you come through some.

Student

The reincarnation is reality.

Teacher

The reincarnation suggest that there is a same soul that goes from one being to another. And Buddha said that is not the case. Buddha did not subscribe to that kind of reincarnation in which there is an abiding soul that goes from one to the other. The stuff that we are goes forward, and the thing that truly goes forward in this notion of impressions of the Vow of our lives. It is the Vow that leaves the impression. That's what goes forward. When this personality is gone and I die, I'm done. I'm not coming back, not because I'm a saint or anything like that, it's just that there will be reappearance in a different form. I don't believe in an abiding soul. If the Vow is strong, the Vow stays, the impression, the Vow that we make here, that resides in an impression of the Ancestors and continues.

You know to look at that. Look at the life of Martin Luther King Junior. He's such a powerful force in our recent history and from the time he died he's gotten bigger and bigger and more influential. He's extremely important to our culture. So it is the Vow that he had to challenge unjust laws. It is such a great legacy. The Vow of nonviolence, so profound, so great. We didn't have anybody like that before, really. He is an example of how that Vow continues. That's a big impression.

Student

A quick comment about recycled matter. It reminded me about a cowboy poem called Reincarnation.

Teacher

It's a great poem, we'll read it tomorrow.

Student

I want to reflect on the greatness of the moon last night. It was so bright.

How does the Moon vomit?

Teacher

The Moon reflects the Sun, the Buddha, the sunlight. Just by shining it vomits. When we're looking at the moon we're actually looking at the sunlight. So how is that shining forth. The light of the moon is it's vomiting forth. That's what the moon does. The moon shines. The Moon shines. It teaches us this notion of phases that we are always moving through, always changing and not always with the brilliant light of Buddha Nature and yet Buddha Nature is always there. The moon holds the nature of Buddha Nature and sometimes it shines brilliantly and sometimes it's dark, and sometimes it's just a little shine. Always changing. And still it's completely Buddha Nature, no matter how much.

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