



In the lecture “Dogen: The Founder of Soto Zen in Japan”, delivered November 6, 2021, Diamond Approach founder and spiritual teacher A. H. Almaas investigated some of the realizations Dogen introduced that are not commonly known or understood by most of the spiritual community in the west.

In 1228 CE, the Japanese monk Dogen returned to his homeland from China, where he had lived for four years and received Dharma transmission from the Buddhist master Rujing. Dogen went on to introduce the practice of zazen in Japan and founded the school of Soto Zen, which, 800 years later, flourishes worldwide.

Dogen’s teachings diverged starkly from the Tendai Buddhist training he had received before going to China. That school promoted the doctrine of original enlightenment, which claimed that because humans are enlightened by nature, we cannot achieve enlightenment through practice. Dogen disagreed. As he wrote, “Practice is realization and realization is practice.”

Dogen’s writings about realization and awakening were revelatory and they remain so, not being easily understood even by teachers of Zen.

APA CITATION

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Point 1. Intent of this lecture

Hameed Ali discussed some of the teachings of Dogen that he knew or understood from direct experience; he gave his understanding of these teachings, for when it comes to Dogen there is no one common understanding of Dogen. Hameed did not teach Zen, but gave his understanding of some of Dogen's teachings.

Point 2. Uji: Time Being

“For the time being here means time itself is being, and all being is time...The way the self arrays itself is the form of the entire world. See each thing in this entire world as a moment of time. Things do not hinder each other, just as moments do not hinder one another...Know that in this way there are myriads of forms and hundreds of grasses throughout the entire earth, and yet each grass and each form itself is the entire earth. ...Since there is nothing but just this moment, the time-being is all the time there is. Grass-being, form-being are both time... Each moment is all being, is the entire world. Reflect now whether any being or any world is left out of the present moment.

Source: *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, edited and translated by Kasuaki Tanahashi, et al., p. 76-77

“If you wish to know Buddha-nature, you should know that it is precisely temporal conditions themselves.”

Source: *Shobogenzo Buddha-nature*, translated by Norman Waddell and Masao Abe, p.2, p. 104

“It is not the case that there is some universal ‘thing,’ form or substance called ‘time’ of which all sentient beings and buddhas are individuations.... Everything, including ourselves, is just its moment of taking place or presencing.

Source: *Impermanence is Buddha-nature: Dogen’s Understanding of Temporality* by Joan Stambaugh, p. 51.

Point 3. The Bright Pearl

“Some years after attaining the way, Xuansha instructed his students, saying: ‘The entire world of the ten directions is just one bright pearl.’ ... Xuansha first spoke the words the entire world in the ten directions is just one bright pearl. The meaning is that the entire world in the ten directions is neither vast nor minute, neither square nor round. It is neutral, not active, and not obvious.”

Source: *Beyond Thinking: A Guide to Zen Meditation, Dogen*, edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi, p. 55

“One bright pearl is not yet a name but an expression of understanding. Although there have been people who thought it was only a name, one bright pearl directly experiences ten thousand years. While the entire past has not yet departed, the entire present is just now arriving. Here is the now of the body and here is the now of the mind. This is the bright pearl; it is not limited to grass and trees here and there, or even to mountains and rivers in the universe.

Source: *Beyond Thinking: A Guide to Zen Meditation, Dogen*, edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi, p. 56

Point 4. Genjo Koan: Actualizing the Fundamental Point

“Firewood becomes ash, and it does not become firewood again. Yet, do not suppose that the ash is future and firewood past. You should understand that firewood abides in the phenomenal expression of firewood, which fully includes past and future and is independent of past and future. Ash abides in the phenomenal expression of ash, which fully includes future and past. Just as firewood does not become firewood again after it is ash, you do not return to birth after death.

Source: *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, edited and translated by Kasuaki Tanahashi, et al., p. 70

“This is being so, it is an established way in the buddha-dharma to deny that birth turns into death. Accordingly, birth is understood as no-birth. ...Birth is an expression complete this moment. Death is an expression complete at this moment. They are like winter and spring. You do not call winter the beginning of spring, nor summer the end of spring.”

Source: *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, edited and translated by Kasuaki Tanahashi, et al., p. 71

Point 5. Realization

“To carry yourself forward and experience the myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come forth and experience themselves is awakening.”

Source: *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, edited and translated by Kasuaki Tanahashi, et al., p. 69

“To study the Buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and mind of others drop away. No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.”

Source: *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, edited and translated by Kasuaki Tanahashi, et al., p. 70

Point 6. Particularity

"The total experience of a single thing does not deprive a thing of its own unique particularity. It places a thing neither against others nor against none. To place a thing against none is another form of dualistic obstruction. When total experience is realized unobstructedly, the total experience of a single thing is the same as the total experience of all things. A single total experience is a single thing in its totality. The total experience of a single thing is one with that of all things."

Source: *Eihei Dogen: Mystical Realist* by Hee-Jin Kim, p. 66

“To penetrate one thing does not take away its inherent characteristics. Just as penetration does not limit one thing, it does not make one thing unlimited. To try to make it unlimited is a hindrance. When you allow penetration to be unhindered by penetration, one penetration is myriad penetrations. One penetration is one thing. Penetrating one thing is penetrating myriad things.”

Source: *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, edited and translated by Kasuaki Tanahashi, et al., p. 134

“In Dogen’s view, the samadhi of self-fulfilling activity in its absolute purity was such that our daily activities are undefiled by and unattached to the dualistic categories, events, and things that our perceptions and intellect create, all the while living with and using those dualities. The dualistic world remains real, not dissolved. Therefore, the unity in question does not replace dualities but is unobstructed by them.”

Source: *Eihei Dogen: Mystical Realist* by Hee-Jin Kim, p. 64

By naming specific individuals and events, Dogen indicates passage through the independent aspect of dharmas. Time is not separate from being; time and being are two sides of one event. Dharmas are both a being-time and all being-time, as embodied in each being-time. A person is empty of a fixed identity and universal, yet simultaneously functions as a particular being-time. The problem arises when we try to fix these states as sequential and separate. Passage is life as process, not a life fixed and explicated.”

Source: “Being Time.” Shinshu Roberts, an article in *Insight Journal*, Retrieved from: <https://www.buddhistinquiry.org/article/being-time/>

Point 7. Impermanence is Buddha-nature

“In the Shobogenzo, Dogen writes that "whole-being is the Buddha-nature" and that even inanimate things (grass, trees, etc.) are an expression of Buddha-nature. He rejected any view that saw Buddha-nature as a permanent, substantial inner self or ground. Dogen held that Buddha-nature was "vast emptiness", "the world of becoming" and that "impermanence is in itself Buddha-nature".

Source: *Taigen Dan Leighton. The Wholehearted Way: A Translation of Eihei Dogen's Bendowa*, by Okumura Shohaku, p. 30

“According to Dogen: Therefore, the very impermanency of grass and tree, thicket and forest is the Buddha nature. The very impermanency of men and things, body and mind, is the Buddha nature. Nature and lands, mountains and rivers, are impermanent because they are the Buddha nature. Supreme and complete enlightenment, because it is impermanent, is the Buddha nature.”

Source: *Zen Enlightenment: Origins and Meaning*, by Heinrich Dumoulin, p. 82, p. 86

“Dogen tells us that Buddha-nature is neither something that we always possess, nor something that first appears upon enlightenment. It is not that sentient beings are from the first endowed with Buddha-nature. Here, the essential point is: even though you seek the Buddha-nature hoping to endue yourself with it, Buddha-nature is not something to appear now for the first time”

Source: *Impermanence is Buddha-Nature: Dogen's Understanding of Temporality*, by Joan Stambaugh, p. 21

“The Buddha-nature is not the kind of thing that we can possess at all. Viewed temporally, this means that Buddha-nature is not something that admits of being possessed in the mode of durational persistence. It does not persist; it has no duration..... As Dogen repeatedly emphasizes, the Buddha-nature is not something potential that can be actualized, akin to the growth in time of a seed”

Source: *Impermanence is Buddha-Nature: Dogen's Understanding of Temporality*, by Joan Stambaugh, p. 21

“As for the truth of the Buddha-nature: the Buddha-nature is not incorporated prior to Buddhahood; it is incorporated upon the attainment of Buddhahood. The Buddha-nature is always manifested simultaneously with the attainment of Buddhahood.”

Source: *Impermanence is Buddha-Nature: Dogen's Understanding of Temporality*, by Joan Stambaugh, p. 52

“The Great Ultimate is the tiniest particle and the tiniest particle is the Great Ultimate.”

Source: Quoting from the Dignified Activities of Practicing Buddha, Gyobutsu Ligi from the Shobogenzo, p. 98

Point 8. Non-thinking

In the fascicle The Point of Zazen, Dogen writes: “Yaoshan said, ‘Beyond thinking.’ The need for nonthinking is crystal clear. In order to think not thinking, nonthinking is always used. In nonthinking, there is somebody that sustains you.”

Source: *Beyond Thinking: A Guide to Zen Meditation, Dogen*, edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi, p. 37

Norman Fischer, from his Introduction to *Beyond Thinking*: “Usually our thought is either dull and dim, or it is agitated... in both cases, thought is being pushed by anxiety or desire... when we do Zazen, we let go of all this, letting thinking simply rise and fall by returning to awareness of breathing and posture. Thinking may be going on, but there is no more pushing... This kind of thinking is what Dogen means by non-thinking, meaning thinking beyond thinking.”

Source: *Beyond Thinking: A Guide to Zen Meditation, Dogen*, edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi, introduction by Norman Fischer

Point 9. Delusion and enlightenment

In the Great Enlightenment fascicle of Daigo, Dogen writes: “What happens when a greatly enlightened person become deluded? This is indeed a question to be asked. ...Is a greatly enlightened person who becomes deluded the same as an unenlightened person? When a greatly enlightened person becomes deluded, does the person use great enlightenment to create delusion?”

Source: *Beyond Thinking: A Guide to Zen Meditation, Dogen*, edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi, p. 66

In another translation, Kim quotes from the fascicle Daigo: “Is a greatly enlightened person who is nevertheless deluded the same as an unenlightened person? When being nevertheless deluded, does a greatly enlightened person create delusion by exerting that enlightenment?”

Source: *Dogen on Meditation and Thinking*, by Hee-Jin Kim, p. 3

“Regarding ‘a greatly enlightened person is nevertheless deluded,’ you should also investigate whether the ‘nevertheless deluded’ means fetching another ‘piece of great enlightenment’.... In any event, you should know that to understand ‘a greatly enlightened person is nevertheless deluded’ is the quintessence of practice.”

Source: *Dogen on Meditation and Thinking*, by Hee-Jin Kim, p. 3

“Or, is it that a greatly enlightened person becomes deluded means delusion brings forth another great enlightenment? You should study thoroughly in this way..... To inquire how a greatly enlightened person can become deluded should be the ultimate point of study.”

Source: *Beyond Thinking: A Guide to Zen Meditation, Dogen*, edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi, p. 66