

FULL MOON SESSHIN, Second 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)

Swallowing

This is the second evening Teisho of our Full Moon Sesshin in 2010. The sky has cleared and it looks like we'll see the moon tonight. It should be clear for the rest of the time and getting a bit warmer even tomorrow. It was a beautiful day, we are not used to it now, we were so cold and now suddenly we're not used to the hot weather. It's a great pleasure to be out in the garden on such a beautiful day, with gratitude for your earnest hard work in the projects that we take up. Thank you for that.

So, we are talking about Dogen Zenji, about his teaching on Tsuki, the Moon, the Moon as Buddha Nature. I said last night that, I thought there were three points that Dogen Zenji was making in this particular chapter of Shobogenzo and this next point is about swallowing. Swallowing it up. I said that there was Buddha Nature and then there was swallowing It up, and then there was vomiting It out. And the swallowing it up was the point of understanding and comprehending, completely comprehending in the same way that when we understand something, we talk about really digesting something, fully engaging with it and bringing it wholly into the body and mind, and being intimate with it. So this is swallowing it up. It really means being intimate with Buddha Nature.

So the text continues

*The Moon of our heart and mind is solitary and at the full,
Its light swallows up all forms that arise.
Its light is not something that illumines concrete objects,
And concrete objects in turn are not things that truly exist,
When Its light and object both vanish from sight,
There is still That which is the What.*

Of course when he says that they are not things that truly exist, he means there is not permanent inherent unchanging self. That is simply what he means, when we talk about “the phenomena don't exist,” it means things are forever changing.

So the text goes on

What is now being expressed is that without fail the Ancestors of the Buddha as disciples of the Buddha possess the Moon of their heart and mind, because they treat their Moon as their heart and mind.

So they possess Buddha Nature of the heart and mind and they treat Buddha Nature as their heart and mind.

If it were not the Moon, It would not be their heart and mind. And without a heart and mind there is no Moon, there is no Buddha Nature. Solitary and at the full means that it lacks for nothing.

Well the text goes on from there but I'm going to attempt to speak to this question of swallowing it up, of comprehending of really coming to understand that It lacks of nothing. I was thinking today

about this swallowing it up and all of our life-situations, how to speak about this not in an esoteric matter but in a very real way of life.

Many come to practice, we throw ourselves into practice and we know that there is some tremendous yearning in us that brings us to practice in the first place. We feel like there is perhaps something absent in our lives, maybe we are suffering, maybe we come to practice with this sense that if we don't make it here, we're not going to get it. And many times, this practice is called the End Practice, the final practice, because we feel so much that our very lives are at stake.

We know that there is something that we need to answer, something that we have to do, and we can't exactly identify it, we can't be certain of what it is. Maybe we feel lost. So we come to practice saying, "I'm going to find it, and if I don't find it here, I'm over, I'm finished!" That was me. I felt very strongly, if I didn't get the answer, I was going to die on the cushion. I was really quite willing to die. I know that when I went into training, I was prepared to die. I went into training thinking that I really might not survive it, knowing how hard training was and reading all of the history of people who went into training and died. People work very hard, they lose weight, there is no protein, you get sick, and you work eighteen hours a day, you're on your feet working so hard. You fall into bed and then before you know it, the bell rings and you're up again. Yet, even that physical aspect of it can't compare to the sense of urgency about completing oneself and knowing it has to be done before one dies and pushing to the edge because you might die and also that one can't live without finding the answer.

So there was that sense, for me, quite honestly I really thought I was going to die many times, and I was prepared to, and I was prepared to stay, even to that point. But aside from that, the physical commitment, there was also an emotional piece, and this is what I'm talking about with us, this emotional piece, that we want to answer something in our lives and where are we going to go to address that? Thus we come to Zazen, because Zazen is a space, dwelling in space that accepts every aspect of us. There is nothing that we can hide in Zazen, and there is nothing to hide in Zazen. We come quite naked in heart and mind to the practice of Zazen and address serious life-issues. That's also what I mean, partly, what I think is "swallowing it whole."

We will never, ever completely comprehend Zazen or the entirety of the meaning of Space. Very few people understand space. Dogen says that in his chapter on Space. He says very, very few people get what space is. He says, even that guy who grabbed the other monk's nose and twisted it, he didn't exactly get it either, because if he really had gotten it, he would have twisted his own nose. We don't have to think we will comprehend everything, because it's endless. That is one of the aspects of Zen that attracted me: that I could never finish exploring. It probably wouldn't happen that I would study a body of doctrine and then say well, that's nice, but I can't fit into it. I cannot try to squish myself down and stuff myself into a whole body of doctrinal and theological teachings!

Zazen admits everybody and there is no end to it. We can't think that we would completely swallow it and comprehend the entirety of it. But there is still that yearning to at least address our own lives in swallowing it whole; in swallowing it and being able to comprehend perhaps the intention of our own lives and to once and for all meet even a glimpse of the Original Self, a glimpse that allows us to settle into our lives, to be able to understand what our right path is, how we can make our way along that path, knowing we've had a glimpse of real Buddha Nature. Kobun Roshi says about this "We don't come to practice in order to make ourselves a better person. We come to be who we truly are." Meaning we come to have a glimpse of Buddha Nature. To see who we truly are.

So this swallowing It, is wonderful, wonderful, wonderful in just that notion, that we would be able to swallow the Teachings, digest them and hold them in this Dharma Body, those Dharma Bodies. To hold the Teachings in this Dharma Body as best we can. So wonderful to think that!

Dangers of course are that we become discouraged, or we think that we didn't get something, or maybe we didn't have a kensho, or we didn't have some particular experience and therefore it's not for us. This is tricky business. If we came with a feeling and a sense that "this is the right way for me, we may disappoint ourselves gravely, if we walk away, before we've had a chance to blossom. Just a tiny glimpse of Buddha Nature. We can just see it in someone else, even if we can't believe in ourselves, to see it in someone else, is actually to see it in yourself even though we don't realize that.

So this swallowing It and being able to comprehend what we can, and use it on behalf of our lives, this is remarkable and essential. We only get this one life, in this way. Life after life after life. I just see that there is life in consciousness and there is just the manifestation of Buddha Nature, so there are just people born and blossoming going on, and this continual appearance of dandelions, billions and billions of dandelions occurring, all of this just going on and on and on. And there is always the appearance of people in consciousness, but this particular appearance, the life you have now, is only one time.

This appearance is incredibly lucky to be born at all. Then the question is how will we swallow, and what will we swallow? There is so much today to think is important to swallow. I'm the first to raise my hand, to be a news-junky, no doubt about it. But you know it's dangerous to play too much in that. I raise my hand again, knowing sometimes the precipice I dance on, around that. At the same time, I care terribly about the way our world is going.

But what do we swallow? Our lives require tremendous care and as I said last night, those moments in which we might be given an insight, just a delicate tiny moment, that might open us, is so fragile and takes so much effort, so much commitment to practice on the cushion, to work for that fragile moment. I know, you've had things in your life, problems in your life that you had to solve, and if you think on how those problems worried you, and how much thought you gave to them - sometimes all day, sometimes in the midst of your other work, the worry comes up- this might go on for years over certain problems in your life. So our effort to get a glimpse of our Buddha Nature somehow, we have to remain interested, truly remain interested in this over the long term, give effort to it for years.

We also have a fear about Buddha Nature. "Oh, what if I discover my Buddha Nature! Oh, no, I'll have to become a monk, or I'll stop driving a car just living in a hut somewhere, give up my house, be homeless, and Oh, what about my family..." All this kind of thought comes into the mind when we imagine what it would be like to see Buddha Nature. As Dogen Zenji points out, in Genjo-Koan, remember, "when the moonlight falls into the water, the moonlight does not disturb the water at all." It doesn't rattle it, it doesn't shift it, it doesn't change it. Seeing our Buddha Nature is like that. We don't throw away our responsibilities because of that. Maybe that insight leads us to see that we live in a perfect situation, maybe it leads us to love this awful job that we are doing. Maybe we're unhappy in our job, and opening Buddha Nature leads us to see something useful and important in that. I don't know, there's no absolute answer, it's just that our fears are unfounded. It's the most natural thing in the world, because Buddha Nature is the most natural way to be. Completely natural, like truly, truly coming home.

Swallowing It is also scary because of the notion of commitment, an awful big word, maybe that word is more terrifying to people than Buddha Nature. Commitment! We've whole generations of people who are unable to commit to anything, because they were born into a particular generation that met the world in a certain way, can't commit, can't do it. Yet something runs after us. When we can't commit to something, something keeps running behind us, and we think "I won't commit here, I won't commit there, because if I do, maybe it's not what I wanted" You know, always leaving the field wide open!

Oryoki is a commitment. We have to finish Oryoki when we start. Oryoki, that's the way we do the meal, we enter it and we commit to that practice and then we finish. We really do have amazing commitments that go on in our lives, all the time, these simple things. For me painting or poetry is one commitments. Sitting Zazen every morning is a little bit easier in comparison to the horror of a white canvas, or a white page with no poetry written on it. To put a word down is such a commitment!

We all do have them, we all have commitments we are following. Sometimes because we do them completely we don't notice, how committed we are. We don't notice our practice. When you live in the monastery you don't notice that you live in a monastery, you just live, that's what you do, and that's how it is. Wherever you live, that's how you live, that's what you do and that's your commitment to your life and your space. So, swallowing the Dharma, being the Buddha Body, this is what Dogen Zenji is talking about. Swallowing completely.

Solitary and at the full means that it lacks for nothing.

This coming to Buddha Mind, to Buddha Nature, is really really understanding once and for all, we lack nothing. There is nothing else we have to be, there is nothing else we can be actually. This is it. There is nothing lacking in Existence. Actually we are spiritually incorrect when we think that way, that we lack anything at all. It's spiritually incorrect, it is an affront to the Dharma to think that we lack something. It is the same about any kind of claim that we make about existence. It's spiritually incorrect and that's a very wonderful thing to work with in our lives, to really understand or to notice when we think we lack something or that we must have something, we need to notice that we lack nothing. There is nothing missing.

So, swallowing. Swallowing the Dharma Teaching, swallowing the Buddha Body, comprehending, understanding, digesting the Buddha. We do that every time we eat.

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