

DOGEN'S COSMOLOGY OF SPACE AND THE PRACTICE OF SELF-FULFILLMENT

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A significant portion of modern Dogen studies has focused on one particular essay of Dogen from *Shobogenzo*, called *Uji*, or “Being-Time.” Dogen's writings about temporality seem intriguingly modern. Much has been written about Dogen’s “Being-Time” including Steven Heine’s book, *Existential and Ontological Dimensions of Time in Heidegger and Dogen*, and Joan Stambaugh’s *Impermanence Is Buddha Nature*.¹ In his discussions of “Time is existence and existence is time,” Dogen writes about the different aspects of time, conventional and multidimensional.

In addition to time, Dogen’s view of space is critical to understanding his teachings. I want to discuss here the meaning of space in Dogen’s writings. Dogen’s writings about space both reveal his view of the nature of enlightened reality, and have implications for the role of spiritual practice and faith for Dogen. I will look at a number of references to space in Dogen's writing and consider their implications.

Grasping Space

Dogen discussed extensively the old Zen encounter dialogue texts. Even if he did not conduct formal koan training, in the sense of a particular koan curriculum as in some of Rinzai Zen (and some of medieval Soto Zen, for that matter), Dogen comments on the old stories of the Ancestors in a great deal of his writings. One such writing about space is *Shobogenzo Koku*;² “*Koku*” means “space.”

He begins this essay with a story about two Zen masters, Shigong Huizang (n.d.; Shakkyo Ezo in Japanese), and his younger Dharma brother, Xitang Zhizang (735-814; Seido Chizo in Japanese). Shigong asked, “Do you know how to grasp space?”

The younger brother, Zhizang said, “Yes I do.”

Shigong asked, “How do you grasp it?”

Zhizang stroked the air with his hand.

Shigong said, “You don’t know how to grasp space.”

Zhizang asked, “How do you grasp it, older brother?”

Shigong grasped his younger brother’s nose and yanked. It might even be read that he stuck his finger in the younger brother’s nostril before pulling.

Either way, Zhizang yelled in pain, “You’re killing me! You tried to pull my nose off!”

Shigong said, "You can grasp it now!"

Before discussing Dogen's commentary on this story, we may note that the ordinary idea of space is as a kind of empty container, just as our conventional idea of time, disputed by Dogen in *Uji*, is of an objective temporal container. But for Dogen, space is form itself. Space is your nostril, and your nose around it. Dogen says, "Space is one ball that bounces here and there."³ About Shigong saying, "You can grasp it now," Dogen says, "It is not that space and other space reached out together with one hand. No effort was needed for grasping space. There is no gap in the entire world to let space in, but this story has been a peal of thunder in space." Dogen adds:

You have some understanding of grasping space. Even if you have a good finger to grasp space, you should penetrate the inside and outside of space. You should kill space and give life to space. You should know the weight of space. You should trust that the buddha ancestors' endeavor of the way, in aspiration, practice, and enlightenment, throughout the challenging dialogues is no other than grasping space.⁴

This "killing space and giving life to space" is one theme in Dogen's writings about the nature of space. Space is not just the air between things; space is things themselves. Until his nose was pulled, Zhizang apparently thought that space was just the empty air. With the immediacy of experience of his own painful nose space, the reality of space could finally be grasped. For Dogen, space is not an abstraction, but rather, it is concretely physical, and not apart from the dynamic effort of aspiration and practice.

The Resounding of Space

One of his basic writings about space that clarifies this is a story that Dogen tells in a couple of places. He related the story in 1244 in an essay in *Shobogenzo*, "Turning the Dharma Wheel," or *Temborin*.⁵ A couple of years later he told a slightly different version of it, recorded in Dharma Hall Discourse 179 in volume two of his Extensive Record, *Eihei Koroku*, which is the version I will refer to here. Dogen quotes the Surangama Sutra, saying, "The World-Honored One, Shakyamuni Buddha, said, 'When one person opens up reality and returns to the source, all space in the ten directions disappears.'"⁶ After this quote from the Buddha, Dogen goes on to give a list of other comments on this saying, or other versions of it, by various renowned Zen masters. Wuzu Fayen (1024-1104; Goso Hoen in Japanese) said, "When one person opens up reality and returns to the source, all space in the ten directions crashes together, resounding everywhere." A successor of Wuzu Fayen, Yuanwu Keqin (1063-1135; Engo Kokugon in Japanese), who wrote the

commentaries in the Hekigan Roku, *Blue Cliff Record*, used this lush image, “When one person opens up reality and returns to the source, in all space in the ten directions, flowers are added on to brocade.” One of Yuanwu’s successors, Fuxing Fatai (n.d.; Bussho Hotai in Japanese) said, “When one person opens up reality and returns to the source, all space in the ten directions is simply all space in the ten directions.” That version offers a fine image for realization of space as the suchness of reality, just as it is.

Then Dogen quotes his own teacher Tiantong Rujing (1163-1228; Tendo Nyojo in Japanese), who first referred to the original line in the Surangama Sutra by the Buddha. Tiantong Rujing said, “Although the World-Honored One made this statement, ‘When one person opens up reality and returns to the source, all space in the ten directions disappears,’ this utterance cannot avoid becoming an extraordinary assessment. Tiantong is not like this. Tiantong says, ‘When one person opens up reality and returns to the source, a mendicant breaks his rice bowl.’”

There is a question in all these various utterances about the effect of awakening. How does awakening affect not just the person who is awakening, and not just the other sentient beings around him or her, but what is the relationship between awakening and space itself? This is what these varying statements are about. Dogen's teacher said that when that happens, when one person opens up reality and returns to the source, a mendicant “breaks his rice bowl.” This might be interpreted as an expression for a monk fulfilling his practice, no longer needing to pursue their mendicancy. But Dogen himself said, “The previous five venerable teachers said it like this. But Eihei has a saying that is not like theirs. ‘When one person opens up reality and returns to the source, all space in the ten directions opens up reality and returns to the source.’”

This is a key statement for Dogen about the nature of awakening, transcending all the previous evocative utterances. When one person opens up reality and returns to the source, he states that all space in the ten directions itself also opens up reality and returns to the source, space itself becoming an expression of awakening. Clearly, Dogen is talking about a level of reality and a realm of awakening that goes beyond psychology, and even humanness. There are some writings by Dogen about material that might be interpreted in terms of psychology. But this level of space itself awakening, and its enlightening function, is existential, or cosmological. He looks at reality in a way that is quite different from conventional thinking, and from how spiritual practice is usually considered.

The Entire Space in Ten Directions

I will briefly mention a sampling of Dogen's writings about space. Another such text by Dogen is actually the first thing I heard by Dogen, when my first teacher, the Japanese Soto priest Kando Nakajima, lectured on it. This is a writing from *Shobogenzo* called *Ikka-no-Myoju*, "One Bright Pearl."⁷ Dogen tells a story about the Chinese master Xuansha Shibe, (835-908; Gensha Shibi in Japanese), who said, "The whole universe in ten directions is one bright pearl." The "ten directions" is a standard Buddhist phrase referring to the four directions, the four intermediaries between them, and up and down, representing ALL directions, and all of space. After hearing this statement by Xuansha, one of his monks asked, "The whole universe in ten directions is one bright pearl. How should I understand that?" And Xuansha said, "The whole universe in ten directions is one bright pearl. What's to understand?" Dogen sometimes talks about space literally, and he also talks about "the whole universe in ten directions" as a way of talking about space in its entirety. I believe Chozen Bays will be discussing this essay in her presentation later.

This idea comes up again in the next writing that I will mention by Dogen, which is *Shobogenzo Juppo*, "The Ten Directions."⁸ In this essay, the basic sayings Dogen discusses are by the Chinese master Changsha (d. 768; Chosha Keishin in Japanese), who makes a number of statements about "the whole universe in ten directions." Dogen relates that Changsha said, "The whole universe in ten directions is the eye of a monk." Dogen adds, and comments on, these other statements by Changsha: "The whole universe in ten directions is a monk's everyday speech. The whole universe in the ten directions is a monk's whole body. The whole universe in ten directions is the brightness of the self. The whole universe in ten directions exists inside the brightness of the self. In the whole universe in ten directions, there is no one who is not himself."

This is not quite psychology, either, but Changsha is talking about the self and the relationship of the self with space. In Dogen's commentaries to the line, "The whole universe in ten directions is a monk's eye," Dogen says, "The whole universe in the ten directions in its ragged and jagged state is Gautama's eye organ. The whole universe in the ten directions is one among a monk's eyes. And going beyond this, there are limitlessly abundant eyes."⁹ The abundant eyes is a reference to the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Avalokiteshvara (or Kannon in Japanese). In one of his main iconographic forms, Avalokiteshvara's whole body has a thousand hands, each with an eye in its palm, so as to more fully witness and consider the diversity of suffering beings.¹⁰ Here Dogen describes the whole universe in the ten directions as

filled with eyes, and itself an organ of compassion. Dogen does not say so directly, but the implication is clear that the whole universe in ten directions, all of space, is itself the functioning of compassion.

Dogen responds to the statement by Changsha, "The whole universe in ten directions is a monk's everyday speech," by saying, "Does anyone know that a great person who is free of thought transforms the body and transforms the brain within the stream of this speech, and transforms even speech in mid-speech? The correctness in word and straightness in speech of the ocean's mouth and the mountain's tongue is everydayness. Thus, even if we cover our mouth and ears, the ten directions are this real existence."¹¹ Dogen is linking space, and this vision of the universe, not just to our seeing, but also to discourse. He sees the whole universe as expounding the dharma. The everyday sounds of oceans and mountains provide transformative voice, even when we cover our ears.

To the statement by Changsha, "In the whole universe in the ten directions, there is no one who is not himself," Dogen says, "So among individual excellent instructors and individual concrete fists, there is no instance of a ten directions who is not him or herself. Because of being itself, each individual self is totally the ten directions."¹² Dogen says this on a level that is not just talking about awakening, but talking about the nature of self and the nature of reality. In the advent of this integrated vision of the entirety of space, each individual can completely be him or herself. However, when Dogen is talking about "self," he is also talking about "no-self" and emptiness. That is part of the joke in all of this talk about space.

Space and Emptiness

I was talking with Michael Elliston last night, and Michael commented that Dogen does not seem to have a sense of humor. I think this is a common, and understandable, impression from a lot of Dogen's more philosophical essays, or his writings about monastic practice rituals. But with the *Eihei Koroku* that I am involved in translating now, it is not so unusual for me to break out laughing at some of the things that Dogen says. But it's kind of like you have to be there. (Audience laughter) In this work, Dogen gives often brief dharma talks to the monks he was training in the last period of his career at Eihei-ji. In many of them he is talking about koans, and poking fun at the old masters. There is a kind of irony to it; you have to learn the language to get it. Even when translated into English, one has to become familiar with the style of discourse to understand the irony, and the playfulness in which Dogen is

engaged. One of his main forms of playing and humor is punning. All of this talk about space involves a particular pun.

This pun is with the character “*ku*,” which can be translated as “space,” or “sky,” but also as “emptiness.” This *ku* is also the second of the two characters in “*Koku*,” the *Shobogenzo* essay (mentioned previously) translated as “Space,” the first character *ko* meaning “vacant” or “empty.” When he uses this character *ku*, sometimes in context Dogen is clearly talking about space, about spatial dimensionality, or simply about the sky. But often he is also, simultaneously, giving a teaching about emptiness. The same character that is translated as “space” can be translated as “emptiness.” In fact, this is the same character that is used in the Heart Sutra passage that some of you know, in Japanese, “Shiki fu i ku, ku fu i shiki. Shiki soku ze ku, ku soku ze shiki.” In English this means, “Form does not differ from emptiness, emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness, emptiness itself form.” The “emptiness” in that statement is the character *ku*. But in many contexts I have been discussing, it means simply “space.”

When Dogen discusses space, he is often also talking about the nature of form. So these words, emptiness and form, need to be unpacked, because “emptiness” is a technical term in Buddhism. It does not mean “nonbeing,” although it is very easy for us to hear it in terms of being and nonbeing. Emptiness is not the absence of form; rather, in Buddhism emptiness is the nature of form. Technically speaking, emptiness is the lack of inherent, substantial existence of any particular form, and of all forms. This emptiness points to the interrelatedness of forms, which brings us back to space, which is the texture of this interconnectedness. So Buddhism teaches that, “Form is itself emptiness,” or, “The whole universe in ten directions is space.” And yet, we must realize that space, or emptiness, is not about grasping air, as in the first story from Dogen I discussed about Shigong testing Zhizang, and then pulling his nose. Space is your nose, and your nostrils, and your eyeballs and everything else, the chairs, the rug, and all the objects in front of us. So we may think of space as “out there,” the distance between the Earth and Mars, or other galaxies. And now modern science tells us that there is some small amount of matter in the space between galaxies. So matter is itself space. But space is beyond matter and non-matter; space includes both.

When Dogen talks about understanding space there is a kind of word play, he is also talking about the realization of emptiness. This realization is not just an abstract description of the nature of reality, but also a spiritual teaching that is being presented. There is an active practice implied by this realization, which has to do with “awakening,” the prime directive in

Buddhism. So Dogen talks about, “Killing space and giving life to space.” Space is very much alive for Dogen. Dogen encourages his audience to realize what this means, to be alive. Space has some impact, has some agency. There is a dynamic activity to the space that Dogen is talking about, and we are part of that activity. We are included in space.

The Flowering of Space

The next essay from *Shobogenzo* I will peek at is “Flowers in Space” *Kuge*, which has sometimes been translated as “Flowers of Emptiness.”¹³ But in our context it is legitimate to translate it, as Nishijima does, as “Flowers in Space.” This text proceeds from a quote from the Surangama Sutra where Shakyamuni Buddha says, “It is like a person who has clouded eyes, seeing flowers in space. If the sickness of clouded eyes is cured, flowers vanish in space.” The usual conventional understanding of this statement in Buddhism is that our eyes are clouded by our karmic obstructions, so we do not see clearly. We see flowers in space, sometimes translated as “cataracts.” Our eyes have cataracts. We cannot see clearly because of the veils over our eyes, and we see delusory “flowers in space.”

Dogen’s comments characteristically turn that understanding upside-down. He says:

There are the flowers in space of which the World-Honored One speaks. Yet people of small knowledge and small experience do not know of the colors, brightness, petals, and flowers of flowers in space, and they can scarcely even hear the words, ‘flowers in space.’ Remember, in Buddhism there is talk of flowers in space. In non-Buddhism, they do not even know, much less understand, this talk of flowers in space. Only the buddhas and ancestors know the blooming and falling of flowers in space and flowers on the ground, only they know the blooming and falling of flowers in the world, only they know that flowers in space, flowers on the ground, and flowers in the world are sutras. This is the standard for learning the state of buddha, because flowers in space are the vehicle upon which the buddha ancestors ride. The Buddhist world and all the buddhas’ teachings are just flowers in space.¹⁴

Conventionally, “flowers in space” are an image of delusion, illusion, and non-reality. But Dogen is affirming that all the buddhas’ teachings are just “flowers in space.” The supposedly illusory space flowers are exactly where buddhas teach, “The vehicle upon which the buddhas ride.” And even the Buddhist scriptures are flowers in space. He says further, “By practicing this flower of space, the buddha-tathagatas receive the robes, the seat for teaching,

and the master's room, and they attain the truth and get the effect. Picking up a flower and winking an eye are all the Universe." This is in reference to Shakyamuni holding up the flower and Mahakashyapa, considered the First Ancestor of Zen in India, smiling. Dogen says, "Picking up a flower and winking an eye are all the Universe, which is realized by clouded eyes and flowers in space. The true Dharma eye treasury [that is "Shobogenzo"] and the fine mind of nirvana, which have been authentically transmitted to the present without interruption, are called clouded eyes and flowers in space."

Dogen has turned a conventional image for delusion totally upside down. "Bodhi, nirvana, the Dharma-body, selfhood, and so on, are two or three petals of five petals opened by a flower in space." And then he quotes this line I mentioned above, "Shakyamuni Buddha says, 'It is like a person who has clouded eyes seeing flowers in space; if the sickness of clouded eyes is cured, flowers vanish in space.'"

Dogen also says, which may be relevant to this conference:

No scholars have clearly understood this statement. [Laughter] Because they do not know space, they do not know flowers in space. Because they do not know flowers in space, they do not know a person who has clouded eyes, do not see a person who has clouded eyes, do not meet a person who has clouded eyes, and do not become a person who has clouded eyes. Through meeting a person who has clouded eyes, we should know flowers in space and should see flowers in space. When we have seen flowers in space, we can also see *flowers vanish in space*.¹⁵

So Dogen is not just talking about space, but the "flowering of space," and the flowering of space includes this conference, and the Dharma. Zazen and the whole Buddhist project is just a "flower in space" for Dogen. This is typical of Dogen's sense of humor, or at least he is playing with our usual understandings, and even the usual understandings of Buddhist scholars and teachers. It is exactly amid the space flowers that buddhas awaken and produce more space flowers. Dogen is also reaffirming, in a very deep way, this issue of nonduality that has been discussed here.

Usually we think of nonduality as opposed to duality. Dogen often refers to nonduality, and we usually think this has to do with getting past duality, getting past our discriminating mind, seeing through the dualities of form and emptiness, this and that, good and bad, right and wrong, all of the conventional dualistic illusions. But in his discussion of the flowers of space, Dogen is clearly talking about the nonduality of duality and nonduality. This nonduality is not about transcending the duality of form and emptiness. This nonduality is not the opposite of duality, but the synthesis of duality and nonduality, with

both included, and both seen as ultimately not separate, as integrated. In the “flowers in space” of the buddhas’ teaching, “space” is not empty space, “space” is our activity and our life, the dialectical synthesis of form and emptiness.

Dogen also adds in *Shobogenzo* Kuge, “People who understand that flowers in space are not real but other flowers are real are people who have not seen or heard the Buddha’s teaching.” He is saying yes to everything, and cutting through duality and nonduality, right in our everyday life. “The everyday speech of a monk is the whole universe in ten directions” is a kind of a nonduality that goes beyond our conventional idea of nonduality. He is describing the ontological and cosmological awakening of the natural world, and the impact of space itself.

Dogen’s Varied Influences and the Mahayana Sutras

The diverse influences on Dogen feed into his writings about space in various ways. I think that one of the more interesting issues in Dogen studies is to look at where Dogen’s teaching came from. In the history of the modern popularization of Dogen as an icon, one idea was that Dogen represents a great Japanese philosophy that comes full-blown out of Japanese soil. But very clearly, Dogen refers frequently to the Chinese Zen Ancestors, and the whole koan tradition. Steven Heine’s book, *Dogen and the Koan Tradition* offers a very good explanation and description of how Dogen is carrying on the koan tradition.¹⁶

Of course another influence is the native Japanese poetic tradition. Steven Heine talks about that in *The Zen Poetry of Dogen*.¹⁷ As Dogen was Japanese, his rhetoric, his poetic style, and philosophical approach come out of both the koan material, which he comments on extensively, but also out of the great literary tradition in Japan, in which he was very well versed. But yet another influence is the whole Mahayana tradition of the bodhisattva, the “awakening being.” You can see this in his many quotes of various sutras. The image of “Flowers in Space” recalls the Flower Ornament Sutra, the Avatamsaka, which also talks about space and buddha-fields as full of flowers, as well as jewels, birds, and the land itself all preaching the dharma. The Mahayana sutras provide a tradition for this way of speaking about space, but as usual, Dogen turns it a little bit.

The Lotus Sutra is also a very significant influence on Dogen’s rhetorical style, a style of proclaiming the Dharma. I will just mention one of the several stories particularly relevant to space in the Lotus Sutra. Dogen refers to the Lotus Sutra in an essay in *Shobogenzo* “The Lotus Dharma Turns the Lotus

Dharma” *Hokke-ten-Hokke*, which is devoted to the Lotus Sutra.¹⁸ Dogen quotes the Lotus Sutra more than any other sutra in his writings, but this essay, particularly, is focused on the Lotus Sutra. Just to give the background, he starts with a story about the Chinese Sixth Ancestor, Dajian Huineng (638-713; Daikan Eno in Japanese). Somebody asked about the Lotus Sutra, and the Sixth Ancestor, who according to the traditional lore had never read any of the sutras but understood them intuitively, said “You do not know the Lotus Sutra.” And then Huineng said something like, “Awakened people turn the Lotus Dharma, deluded beings are turned by it; with deluded beings the Lotus Dharma turns.” So there is this kind of play about “turning” or “being turned by” the Lotus Sutra.

A passage in this essay relevant to space goes, “Vulture Peak [where the Lotus Sutra was preached] exists inside the stupa and the treasure stupa exists on Vulture Peak.” That is a reference to a story of an ancient buddha who shows up in the Lotus Sutra in his stupa, or reliquary, kind of hanging in mid-air above Vulture Peak. He comes to hear Shakyamuni, the historical buddha of our age, preach the Lotus Sutra. But it is also said that this ancient buddha always appears whenever this Lotus Sutra is being expounded. Dogen says about this, “The treasure stupa is a treasure stupa in space, and space makes space for the treasure stupa.”¹⁹ Space makes space for this relic of an ancient buddha. So for Dogen, again, space is not just an object in a dead, objective world. Space is active and alive; “space makes space.” Dogen is turning this Lotus Sutra story a little bit here. He is pointing to the vitality of space. So space is not just outer space. Space is the ground, and this air, and this microphone in Dogen's view of “space.” But perhaps Dogen is also pointing to the particular space activated by a buddha. The space at Vulture Peak is especially potent, allowing space for an ancient buddha in his stupa to hover and listen yet again to the Lotus teachings.

Hongzhi's Empty Field and Meditation on Space

Another contributing source for Dogen's view of space, in addition to the Mahayana sutras and the koan literature of the Zen Ancestors, is his particular link with the Chinese Caodong (or Soto in Japanese) Zen lineage. Of course, some of the koan dialogues are from masters in that lineage. But the most prominent Caodong teacher in the century before Dogen was Hongzhi Zhengjue (1091-1157; Wanshi Shogaku in Japanese), who also talks about space. Hongzhi was a strong influence on Dogen, as he is quoted very often in Dogen's *Eihei Koroku*. Among modern Japanese Soto scholars, there are discussions about which parts of Hongzhi's teachings Dogen most employs. I

discuss this a bit in my book of translations of Hongzhi, *Cultivating the Empty Field*.²⁰

Hongzhi uses the image of an empty field as a way of talking about space. In one place he says:

The matter of oneness cannot be learned at all. The essence is to empty and open out body and mind, as expansive as the great emptiness of space. Naturally in the entire territory all is satisfied. This strong spirit cannot be deterred; in event after event it cannot be confused. The moon accompanies the flowing water, the rain pursues the drifting clouds. Settled, without a grasping mind, such intensity may be accomplished. Only do not let yourself interfere with things, and certainly nothing will interfere with you. Body and mind are one suchness; outside this body there is nothing else. The same substance and the same function, one nature and one form, all faculties and all object-dusts are instantly transcendent. [“Object-dust” is a way of talking about the external, or so-called external, phenomenal world, or space.] So it is said, the sage is without self and yet nothing is not himself.²¹

There is a meditation teaching here in, “The essence is to empty and open out body and mind as expansive as the great emptiness of space.” One can intentionally, in meditation, extend awareness first to the space of the room, then expand beyond to the whole neighborhood, then even to all of space, finally returning back to awareness of this body, and the space around it. A lot of Hongzhi’s writing works through using nature metaphors as a way of depicting meditative awareness. In this section, “The moon accompanying the flowing water, the rain pursuing the drifting clouds,” portrays a “space of space” that is radiant, and luminous, and very natural. He uses nature metaphors to show the naturalness of this “serene illumination,” which is another word for Zazen, for Dogen’s *shikantaza*, “just sitting,” or at least for the source of it in Chinese Caodong.

This meditation on space is also a very traditional Buddhist meditation practice. Hongzhi’s description of the naturalness of it gibes with an experience in my own childhood. A number of participants in this conference have shared stories from their own journeys and experiences with study of Dogen and with Buddhist practice, so I will as well. It seems that a lot of meditation states arise very naturally for us, and that children often have access to them. After years of practice I realized the meditative basis of a few experiences I had as a child. Dae Gak spoke about “listening to sound” yesterday. And I remember, when I was perhaps eight or ten years old, lying in bed just listening to sounds of the house, and trying to listen to “the sound of sound;” I thought of it that way. I

do not know where that came from; somehow it just appeared. Years later I remembered it in meditation.

This meditation on space, though, which is a traditional Buddhist meditation, was the occasion of my first “conversion,” so it was an important experience for me. It is ironic that I am very involved in Buddhist-Christian interfaith dialogue now. I teach Buddhist studies to Christian seminarians at Graduate Theological Union, and I am involved in various Buddhist-Christian dialogue workshops and conferences. But I have never been a Christian. I was raised Jewish. My first conversion was within a year after my bar mitzvah, actually. I was lying on the grass, looking up at the night sky, and somehow I had the insight, or notion, that space was forever, that there could not be an end to space. I had not read advanced physics, but somehow this seemed clear to me at that time. I had spontaneously arrived at a meditation on space. And as I was emerging from it, I had a clear awareness of space as infinite, and it occurred to me that, if there is no edge or end to space, then there could not be a beginning or end to time. And suddenly the idea of a creator-God did not make sense to me. So I converted to atheism. (Laughter) I seriously believed that I was an atheist. That led me into reading Kafka and Dostoevsky, along with Bertrand Russell. But eventually I then converted to pacifism during the Vietnam War, then Marxism, then psychedelicism. (Laughter) Anyway, after all those byways, I eventually found Buddhism. But my first conversion was based on this meditation on space.

So Dogen's Chinese Soto predecessor Hongzhi uses nature metaphors to expound this basic buddha nature teaching, which he presents in terms of the “empty field,” or “radiant space,” that we realize in meditative awareness, in *zazen*, whether we consciously realize it or not. Hongzhi says,

The field of boundless emptiness is what exists from the very beginning. You must purify, cure, grind down, or brush away all the tendencies you have fabricated into apparent habits. [Those tendencies are the clouds in our eyes.] Then you can reside in a clear circle of brightness. Utter emptiness has no image. Upright independence does not rely on anything. Just expand and illuminate the original truth unconcerned by external conditions. Accordingly, we are told to realize that not a single thing exists. In this field birth and death do not appear. The deep source, transparent down to the bottom, can radiantly shine and can respond unencumbered to each speck of dust [each object] without becoming its partner. The subtlety of seeing and hearing transcends mere colors and sounds. The whole affair functions without leaving traces and mirrors

without obscurations. Very naturally, mind and Dharmas emerge and harmonize.²²

This passage includes a kind of meditation instruction about how to see our perception in relationship to space, remaining aware without being caught by all the objects of perception.

Returning to what Dogen does with this unobstructed view of space, Dogen clarifies that space is not merely a dead, objective, external container in which there are forms. Space is presence; space is stimulating; space has power. In Dogen's writings on meditation, he affirms this possibility and reality of awakening space itself, going back to Dogen's saying, "When one person opens up reality it returns to the source, all space in the ten directions opens up reality and returns to the source." Space itself awakens when one person awakens. There is almost a personal relationship, or a meaningful relationship anyway, between each of us and this world of space that Dogen is talking about. It is this resonance between the person sitting and the environment itself that is the realm of Buddha's functioning, as celebrated by Hongzhi, and then further elaborated by Dogen.

Awakening Space and the Self-Fulfilling Samadhi

His discussions of the practice relationship to space goes back to Dogen's early writing about zazen, *Bendowa*, or "Talk on Wholehearted Practice of the Way." I have not been presenting these excerpts in chronological order, but another interesting question in Dogen studies is the shifting of themes and emphases in Dogen's writings. As Will Bodiford was saying, modern scholars are starting to learn more about the actual dates of Dogen's various writings. And I believe that Steven Heine is going to talk about that in more detail in his presentation. But while there are shifting emphases during Dogen's career, there is also very much an underlying consistency, which seems to apply to his engagement with space. All of the passages I have quoted from Dogen about space are written later than *Bendowa*, one of Dogen's earliest and fundamental writings about meditation, which I will discuss in terms of its practice of space.

Dogen says, "When one displays the Buddha mudra with one's whole body and mind, sitting upright in this samadhi even for a short time, everything in the entire dharma world becomes buddha mudra, and all space in the universe completely becomes enlightenment." To say that all space itself becomes enlightenment is a startling and radical statement from our usual view of space, or of enlightenment. Dogen continues:

There is a path through which the *anuttara samyak sambodhi*, complete perfect enlightenment, of all things returns to the person in zazen, and

whereby that person and the enlightenment of all things intimately and imperceptibly assist each other. Therefore this zazen person without fail drops off body and mind, cuts away previous tainted views and thoughts, awakens genuine buddha-dharma, universally helps the buddha work in each place, as numerous as atoms, where buddhas teach and practice, and widely influences practitioners who are going beyond buddha, vigorously exalting the dharma that goes beyond buddha. At this time, because earth, grasses and trees, fences and walls, tiles and pebbles, all things in the dharma realm in the universe in ten directions [the whole of space and all the things that are space: grasses, trees, fences and so forth] carry out buddha-work, therefore everyone receives the benefit of wind and water movement caused by this functioning, and all are imperceptibly helped by the wondrous and incomprehensible influence of buddha to actualize the enlightenment at hand.²³

Because of this mutual resonance, Dogen is saying that not only teachers help the practitioner, but that there is an “imperceptible” guidance and assistance between space itself and the person sitting. Zazen influences not only the people around the practitioner, but also, “grasses and trees, fences and walls, tiles and pebbles.” But because the elements of space then also carry out “buddha work,” they in turn inform and assist the practice of the person engaged in zazen. This is how I understand this passage, which is part of the “Self-Fulfillment Samadhi” *jijuyu zanmai* section of *Bendowa*, and which is chanted daily in Japanese Soto Zen training temples. (Samadhi means concentrated awareness, or meditation).

There is a word in this passage that I did not hear until I lived in Japan, *myoshi*, or another version is *myoka*, meaning “mysterious guidance,” or “incomprehensible assistance.” This refers to the possibility of our receiving benefit from the bodhisattva energy and buddha energy of the world. And then again, it works back and forth; when we sit zazen, we affect the nature of the space. I do not know whether, after you have sat a period in the meditation hall and arise, you feel a difference in the space. This is not scientific or objective, but if you travel to Bodhgaya in India, or certain old temples in Japan, places where people have practiced for a very long time, and walk into that space, you may feel some of the impact of the centuries of practice.

Caring for Space

I think this view of space has some implications that are significant in terms of Dogen's contemporary relevance. This aspect is not all of Dogen; there is the psychological dimension implied his teaching of “studying the

self.”²⁴ But we could call this teaching about space the environmental aspect of Dogen. Dogen is saying that the environment is alive, just like the Native American peoples say that all our relations in the four directions are alive. The trees and grasses, and for Dogen even the lights, the rug, and the chairs, have some spiritual agency.

So for our modern reading of Dogen, for our current contemporary recreation of Dogen, we can see how this relates to Dogen's attention to taking care of the monastery or practice place, and taking care generally of the phenomenal world (which some people have considered “fussiness” on Dogen's part). According to Dogen, the space that you practice in is alive, and supportive, in this level of dharma practice. Taking care of the phenomenal world is the natural expression of the practice of zazen. Gary Snyder says that Zen comes down to meditation and sweeping the temple, and it is up to you to decide where the boundaries of the temple are. There are particular practice places, and then there is the whole universe in the ten directions, and we each work within the limits of the field of space that we are in.

Another aspect is the relevance of this view of space to faith. There was some discussion here yesterday about faith. To add a little bit, my sense of faith in Buddhism, or at least for Dogen, is that it is not belief in some thing, in what Dogen says, or in a buddha image, but faith as a kind of active practice relationship with space. This faith is just taking the next step, meeting each thing. That is because, from this perspective, the dharma world of space is alive. We do receive support when we act from that space of faith.

I will close with one of Dogen's talks to his monks that I translated recently from *Eihei Koroku*. This relates to interfaith dialogue, and also dialogue between scholars and practitioners. Dogen said, “I remember a monk asked Yantou Quanhua [828-887; Ganto Zenkatsu in Japanese], ‘How is the time before the ancient sail is unfurled?’ Yantou said, ‘Small fish swallow big fish.’” Dogen comments:

If you want to understand this situation, listen to this verse by Eihei:
 Small fish swallow big fish;
 A Buddhist priest reads a Christian text.
 Escaping from the net of buddhas and demons,
 Sweep away the dust of the teachings.²⁵

Actually he said a Buddhist priest reads a Confucian text, but I think if he was writing now he would say, “a Christian text.” But he is talking about a space in which all of the things of the world, of space, are engaged directly, without being obstructed by any of the formulations or doctrinal dusts.

QUESTIONS:

Question: Does Dogen's word for "grasping" have the same double meaning as the English word, both in terms of "holding" and "understanding?" You talked about "grasping space."

Response: Yes, I believe so.

Question: I am particularly interested in what you just said about being assisted by the "ten thousand things" in our practice, and the notion of faith. Something was mentioned yesterday, that is the connection between faith and trust. I wondered if you could speak to that trusting ourselves, and the practice of trusting the "ten thousand things."

Response: Yes, this is trusting the world to give us what we need, no matter how painful it is. It is also taking refuge, returning to the world, returning to our place in the world. A point I did not discuss is the etymology of the "Self-Fulfillment Samadhi," with Dogen's teaching about space itself becoming enlightenment. The etymology of *jijuyu*, or self-fulfillment, is literally, "the self accepting its function." When each of us takes our place, receives our particular unique function or role in the world, then that active acceptance becomes the fulfillment of the deeper self that is not separate from the things of the world. There is an intimate relationship between self and the world, and all of that is involved in "faith," in trusting both ourselves and the world. But this does not mean mere passive and unquestioning acceptance of everything. The practitioner's own active response and participation in the world, based on precepts and on principles of acting to benefit and awaken all beings, is part of the dynamic space that Dogen is expounding.

Question: Conversely then, concerning *myoshi* or *myoka*, if that is the world's response, can that be considered as like that prickly term, "grace?"

Response: Well, it is certainly analogous. I am not a perennial philosopher. I think that when we do interfaith dialogue it is really important to see the differences as well as the commonalities in various traditions. But of course, the fundamental commonalities in our spiritual experiences are clear. So yes, provisionally, this certainly is reminiscent of the idea of grace.

Question: *Myoshi* seems to have caught a lot of our hearts, and I would just like to hear a couple more examples of how *myoshi* or *myoka* is used.

Response: This idea of *myoshi* is the basis for the whole practice that lay people do, of going to the temples, and making offerings, chanting, and bowing to buddha and bodhisattva statues. Even Japanese college students call on Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, for help on their tests. But the other side of *myoshi* is that there is a responsibility; it is not just one-way. It is our practice that activates the response from the phenomenal world. So we have a responsibility to the world and to space, and with our responsive and aware practice, assistance can arrive from the awakened space.

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ENDNOTES:

¹ See Steven Heine, *Existential and Ontological Dimensions of Time in Heidegger and Dogen* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985); and Joan Stambaugh, *Impermanence Is Buddha Nature* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990).

² See Kazuaki Tanahashi, editor, *Enlightenment Unfolds: The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Dogen* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), pp. 201-204.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203.

⁵ See *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁶ Taigen Dan Leighton and Shohaku Okumura, trans. *Dogen's Extensive Record: A Translation of Eihei Koroku* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, forthcoming), discourse 179. Dharma Hall Discourses, or *jodo*, literally "ascending the hall," were the major form of presentation in Song China Chan temples. They were often quite brief, given in the Dharma Hall with the teacher on the high seat on the altar and with the monks standing. Apparently they were the form favored by Dogen, since he nearly stopped writing the longer essays of *Shobogenzo* after 1244, but continued using the formal *jodo* talks, which were recorded in *Eihei Koroku*, in training his monks at Eiheiji until his death in 1253.

⁷ See Thomas Cleary, trans. *Shobogenzo: Zen Essays by Dogen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), pp. 57-63.

⁸ See Gudo Nishijima, and Chodo Cross, trans. *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo*, Book 3 (Woods Hole, Mass.: Windbell Publications, 1997), pp. 185-190.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the iconographic forms of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, see Taigen Daniel Leighton, *Bodhisattva Archetypes: Classic Buddhist Guides to Awakening and Their Modern Expression* (New York: Penguin Arkana, 1998), pp. 159-176.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 188, with revisions by the author.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹³ See Cleary, trans. *Shobogenzo: Zen Essays by Dogen*, pp. 64-75; and Nishijima, and Cross, trans. *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo*, Book 3, pp. 9-21.

¹⁴ Nishijima, and Cross, trans. *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo*, Book 3, p. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁶ Steven Heine, *Dogen and the Koan Tradition: A Tale of Two "Shobogenzo" Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

¹⁷ Steven Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dogen: Verses from the Mountain of Eternal Peace* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1997).

¹⁸ Nishijima, and Cross, trans. *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo*, Book 1, pp. 203-220.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 217-218.

²⁰ Taigen Dan Leighton, with Yi Wu. *Cultivating the Empty Field: The Silent Illumination of Zen Master Hongzhi* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2000, revised and expanded edition; original edition published by North Point Press, 1991), pp. 16-23.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²³ Shohaku Okumura and Taigen Daniel Leighton, trans., *The Wholehearted Way: A Translation of Eihei Dogen's Bendowa with Commentary by Kosho Uchiyama Roshi* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1997), p. 23.

²⁴ In his celebrated essay, *Genjokoan*, "Actualizing the Fundamental Point," Dogen says, "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 minds of others drop away." See Kazuaki Tanahashi, editor, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, originally published by North Point Press, 1985), p. 70. This basic practice of the study of the self can be interpreted psychologically in various teachings elaborated in traditional Buddhism, as well as in Dogen's writings.

²⁵ Leighton and Okumura, trans., *Dogen's Extensive Record: A Translation of Eihei Koroku*, Dharma Hall Discourse 192.