Philosophies of Happiness

Chapter 10 Dogen and Suzuki: Supplementary Notes

1. Translations into English have appeared since the 1930’s, the first of which was Reiho Masanuga’s *The Sōtō Approach to Zen*. In 1983, Kosen Nishiyama, John Steven, and collaborators completed a four-volume, ninety-two fascicle version. Kazuaki Tanahashi and a team of translators produced a new two volume version in 2011 under the title *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dōgen’s Shōbō Genzo* (Boston: Shambhala, 2011). In addition to this new *Treasury*, I will refer to several excellent translations in the notes below, among them those of Norman Waddell and Masao Abe, first published in the journal *Eastern Buddhist*, and then gathered in a volume titled *The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002). *Moon in a Dewdrop* is a very useful collection translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi and a team of translators. The notes are excellent, and include a list of other translations. Francis Cook has translated two collections of essays in *Sounds of Valley Streams* and *How to Raise an Ox: Zen Practice as Taught in Master Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō* (Los Angeles: Center Publications, 1978; Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 1999). Thomas Cleary also has two collections with interesting notes, *Shōbōgenzō: Zen Essays by Dōgen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986) and *Rational Zen: the Mind of Dōgen Zenji* (Boston: Shambhala, 1993); as does Hee-Jin Kim, *Flowers of Emptiness: Selections from Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1985.  I will also include the translation of Tr. Rev. Hubert Nearman, O.B.C. (Mount Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 2007), as it is a complete translation that can be accessed and downloaded for free on line.


75. Tanahashi: “In attachment, blossoms fall; in aversion, weeds spread,” “Analyzing the Fundamental Point” (*Genjokoan*) in *Moon in a Dewdrop*, 69; *Treasury*, 29; Waddell and Abe, “In Spite of this, flowers fall always amidst our grudging,” *Eastern Buddhist*, 133; “Yet for all that, flowers fall amidst our regret and yearning, and hate weeds grow apace,” *Heart of Shōbōgenzō*, 40; Cook: “However, though this is the way it is, it is only this: flowers scatter in our longing, and weeds spring up in our loathing,” *Valley Streams*, 65; Hee-Jin Kim, “Still do flowers fall to our pity, and weeds grow to our displeasure,” *Flowers of Emptiness*, 51; Nearman, “Yet even though this is the way things are, we feel regret at a blossom’s falling and we loathe seeing the weeds envelop everything,” 32.

83. “You have gained the pivotal opportunity of human form. Do not let your time pass in vain. You are maintaining the essential function of the Buddha Way. Would you take meaningless delight in the spark from a flintstone? Form and substance are like dewdrops on the grass, destiny like the dart of lightening—vanishing in an instant, disappear in a flash.”

Waddell and Abe explain that spark from a flintstone is a metaphor often used to describe the brevity of human life. Dōgen, “Universal Promotion of the Principles of Zazen,” Waddell and Abe in *Eastern Buddhist* 6 no 2 Oct 1973: 121-6, at 126; *Heart of Shobogenzi*, 2-6, at 5. I have used their translation. Tanahashi translates, “Having received a human life, do not waste the passing moments. Already upholding the Buddha way, why would you indulge in the sparks from a flint? After all, form is like a dewdrop on the grass. Human life is like a flash of lightening, transient and illusory, gone in a moment,” “Recommending Zen to all People,” *Treasury*, 909; *Enlightenment Unfolds* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), 34. Francis Cook, “General Recommendations for Doing Zazen: “Now you have
acquired the essential, which is a human form. Do not pass over from the light to the shadow [by pursuing other matters]. Take care of this essential instrument of the Buddha’s Way. Could you really be content with a spark from a stone [when the blazing sun is shining]? And that is not all: your body is like dew on the grass, your life is as brief as a flash of lightening. Momentary and vain, it is lost in an instant.” Cook, *How to Raise an Ox*, 67.

Suzuki’s notion that “every existence is a flashing into the vast phenomenal world” also calls to mind a verse at the end of the Diamond Sutra:

> All conditioned things are like a dream, a phantom, a bubble, a shadow, like a dewdrop also like a flash of lightning. We should seem them thus.

I thank Shohaku Okamura for this reference and his translation of this verse from the Chinese translation of the Sutra. He also offered Red Pine’s translation of the verse from the original Sanskrit:

> As a lamp, a cataract, a star in space an illusion, a dewdrop, a bubble a dream a cloud, a flash of lightning

While it is not clear that Dōgen quotes this verse in his writings, Dōgen does use images of a dream, a dewdrop, and a flash of lightening, and Suzuki has here followed him.

86. The image of firewood and ashes is borrowed by Dōgen from Nāgārjuna. Dōgen’s image comes from a famous passage in the first fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō*, "Genjo-koan," one of Dōgen’s most famous discourses:

> Firewood becomes ash, and it does not become firewood again. Yet, do not suppose that the ash is future and the 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. This being so, it is an established way in buddha-dharma to deny that birth turns into death. Accordingly, birth is understood as no-birth. It is an unshakeable teaching in Buddha’s discourse that death does not turn into birth. Accordingly, death is understood as no-death. Birth is an expression complete this moment. Death is an expression complete this moment. They are like winter and spring. You do not call winter the beginning of spring, nor summer the end of spring.

The beginning harkens back to Nāgārjuna’s discussion of fire and fuel in chapter 10 of the *Discourses on the Middle Way* (the *Mālamadhyamakakārikā*); fire is neither totally identical with nor totally separate from fuel. Dōgen expands on Nāgārjuna, however, by bringing in his fascinating and distinctive notion of being-time. We have seen that Dōgen develops the notion that time is not separate from being: “the time we call spring blossoms directly as an existence called flowers. The flowers, in turn, express the time called spring. This is not existence within time; existence itself is time.” Just as we might say that every existence is an expression of Buddha nature, every event is an expression of being-time. “Living beings are time. Buddhas are time too.” Here, Dōgen extends this notion to birth and death. Spring is an expression of being-time and fall is an expression of being time. Each event is independent; spring does not turn into summer, nor does fall turn into winter. Likewise birth is an independent event, as is death. *Zen Mind*, 105.

87. In “Control,” Suzuki alludes to the Japanese art of *wabi sabi*, the beauty of imperfection. Japanese artists make creative use of imperfection, seeing the beauty in that which is not perfectly symmetrical. Suzuki asserts that to live in the realm of Buddha nature means to become aware that one is dying moment to moment. Everything is continually changing, and thus losing its balance. All in nature is thus losing its balance against a background of perfect harmony, and that is its beauty. The Buddhist
worldview points out that all in nature is impermanent and in constant transformation. The Hindu worldview, the backdrop of the Buddha’s teaching, taught that behind this realm of continual change, of birth and death (samsāra) is an eternal, unchanging realm of the Self (atman), which is the supreme spirit (brahman) at the heart of all reality. Rejecting this inherited view, the Buddha asserted four noble truths. In the first truth, the Buddha asserted instead that all is unstable, impermanent, changing, and thus unsatisfactory or off-kilter (dukkha). The second truth asserts the source of our unhappiness: clinging or craving (literally: thirst (tanha). And the third noble truth asserts that there is a way out of impermanence, which is nirvāṇa, the cessation of the flame of desire, hatred, and greed, which fuels one’s grasping onto this impermanent reality. Thus while the Buddha asserted that all was impermanent and changing, implicit in the Buddhist path is the notion of something that is uncaused and unchanging. The Buddha refused to say what nirvāṇa is and what happens after one has extinguished the flame of existence. But as Buddhism grew farther from its Indian roots and the need to differentiate itself from its Hindu roots diminished, the notion of a still and ceaseless Buddha mind or Buddha nature arose. However, Dōgen, Suzuki’s inspiration, is adamant that Buddha nature is not a reified reality, precisely because there is no distinction between samsāra and nirvāṇa. Our job is to experience the fact that impermanence, the changing world of birth and death, is itself the Buddha. This view is in the backdrop of Suzuki’s call to see the background of perfect harmony behind the world in which all is continually losing its balance. All does appear to be suffering (dukkha), but this world of suffering, of losing our balance, is the way we exist and discover essential Buddha nature.

Zen thus irreverently emphasizes the disorder of life, like ancient painters who consciously strove for disorder, and found instead that there is always an arrangement of some order. Therefore the best way to respond to our thoughts, which seem to be in disorder, disarray, and out of our control, is simply to observe them, just as it is more effective to simply observe people and give them space to do what they do rather than trying to control them. Likewise we should view our thoughts as if they are people or independent energies that cannot be controlled by suppression, but must be given space to roam. Zen Mind, 31-33.