

Time, Space, and Being
Dogen's *Being-Time* and Katagiri's *Each Moment is the Universe*

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Uji
Being Time

For the time being, stand on top of the highest peak.
For the time being, proceed along the bottom of the deepest ocean.
For the time being, three heads and eight arms.
For the time being, an eight—or sixteen—foot body [of the Buddha].
For the time being, a staff or whisk.
For the time being, a pillar or lantern.
For the time being, the children of Zhang and Li.
For the time being, the earth and sky.



Ten thousand images reclaiming past, staking out future,
Totally exert every incompleteness.
All one in the splendor of Being;
This Magic Moment.

—Taigen Dan Leighton

Thinking about time is never easy. St. Augustine said that he knew what time was until someone asked him to explain it. When he was asked to explain it, he used Aristotelian logic to discuss things like what God was doing before he created the universe. Dogen's approach is much more radical. He says that it is impossible to understand time by *thinking* about it because thinking always creates a gap. He says you must *experience* time as the pivot of nothingness, as a universal functioning of energy. Katagiri, in his commentary on Dogen, tells us that it is "very hard to put [these things] into words, but through experience [we] can understand [them]. Understanding the Dharma intellectually is okay at the beginning, but we need to allow it to *penetrate our skin, muscle, and bone*."

Without this experience of time there is always gap between us and others; between us and the universe. And the best way for us to experience the source and nature of time is in our Zazen. Buddha says in the Kalama Sutta: Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is

in a scripture. When you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome and wrong and bad, then give them up. And when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome and good, then accept them and follow them. There is no truth outside our own experience. So when faced with seemingly impossible questions like what is time or does a dog have Buddha nature we need to find a way to experience the question with the whole of ourselves and see what appears. We need to sit so we can experience the truth of the Dharma which is really the truth of ourselves.

Many years ago, my first teacher likened our practice life to a laboratory. He suggested that we take a teaching as a scientific postulate and not as an axiom and try to verify it or not with our sitting practice. Zen is not about doctrines or beliefs or even faith, it is about direct experience of reality as it is. If Buddhist teaching says that all beings in the universe appear and disappear in a moment. If it says that all life is transient, constantly appearing and disappearing, constantly changing then we have to find out if this is verifiably true. Nothing more and nothing less is asked of us

Our common sense understanding of ourselves and the world around us is dependent on our experience and understanding of time and space. How could we think about anything without considering its time and space? Our sesshin was scheduled to start at 5 PM at Jikoji and so we all made plans and got into our cars to arrive in Los Gatos before 5 PM on March 11. But are there deeper dimensions of time and space? Modern science, especially String Theory postulates that there could be as many as ten or eleven dimensions of space-time.

So, what happens if our usual understanding of time (past, present, and future) and space (various points in the world) is radically altered? If our understanding of time and space is changed, our views of who and what we are is changed. Dogen says that is so because time must be understood in deep interrelationship with all sentient beings. *Each moment is all being, each moment is the entire world. Reflect now whether any being or any world is left out of the present moment...Time itself is being. You are time. Mountains are time. Oceans are time.*

So, what is time? According to Buddhist teaching everything exists together simultaneously in a moment. We usually think that time is separate from beings, but there is actually no separation. Being and time work together. When a moment begins all beings temporarily appear as independent beings in the stream of time and seem to have their own independent existences. When a moment ceases, all beings disappear, but they do not go away. They are interconnected seamlessly in timelessness. When a moment begins life is form and when it ceases it is emptiness.

But since our practice is about experiencing things and not thinking about things, we need to find a way to experience what Dogen is talking about. In my own practice I have tried to use my breath as a way to experience what Dogen is saying. At first, I tried to imagine that my life was appearing out of nothingness on each in-breath and that it was disappearing on each out-breath. After a while, I was able to go deeper. My body took over and each in-breath *felt* like it was gathering life and each out breath felt as if it were letting go of life. There were no thoughts, there was just a full bodied sensation of things appearing and disappearing.

During each in-breath life was appearing and during each out-breath it was disappearing. I became more and more interested in the out-breath, the letting go of things, the letting go of myself, as it were. I followed my outgoing breath in the same way that I follow the echoes of the three bells before each Zazen period. And I began to sense something quite unexpected. As I followed my outgoing breath into nothingness I began to sense that my usual boundaries of self and other were disappearing. I began to sense the boundlessness of self. To put it another way, as my out-breath came to its conclusion, I sensed that there was nothing separating me from the universe. I was the universe! Dogen would say that I occupied the whole of space. He would say that I was experiencing being as space. This timelessness is a formless, functioning energy that links the whole universe without any gap.

But then being reappears as time in the next breath, the next moment. Dogen says that this is the movement of our life. We live at the pivot of nothingness. In the present moment our lives appear out of nothingness. In the words of the Judeo Christian tradition: *creatio ex nihilo*.—creation out of nothing—*At the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth / when the earth was wild and waste / darkness over the face of the Deep*. Here, I should add that during the years, as my Zen practice deepened, I found myself reading the opening verses of Genesis almost daily. And throughout my daily life I would find myself returning to the phrases that seemed to be coming not from the bible but from myself.

Next, Dogen tells us that we need to be present at the source of time. He says that time does not flow from the past to the present to the future. The past no longer exists—it is memory and the future is yet to exist—except as plans and expectations. That is, the past and future are merely thoughts created by our ego centered consciousness. But what about the present? He says that if you look closely at the present it too does not exist. Imagine an hour glass. The sands on the top represent the future and the sands at the bottom represent the past. The grain of sand that is at the middle of the glass is at the present. But imagine magnifying this grain with a microscope and you will see what we previously thought of as the present is composed of what sand has yet to drop and what has already dropped. Now, think of

Zazen as a powerful electron microscope. If we look very carefully at what we understand as the present moment, we will see that it is filled with thoughts of what was and what will be. The real present has no content; it is formless.

So what is the real present—this very moment, right now? It is the full aliveness that exists at the cusp of nothingness before your thinking takes over and creates an imaginary world. You have to have an aha! moment of the isness of the present—experienced as immediately as the burn you feel when your hand touches hot water.

So, in a way, our life begins at the pivot of nothingness which then becomes what Dogen calls the twelve hours of the day. For a split instant we touch real time which is really no-time or zero time, as Katagiri calls it, but we cannot really see it until it manifests as the stream of time, which is our life as we usually experience it. When we are present at Zero time, we are calm and tranquil, but we cannot stay there. The pivot of nothingness continually manifests as the twelve hours of the day and we become busy. Our life is the movement from zero time to twelve hours, from quiet tranquility to busyness. Or as Dogen puts it, we swim at the surface but our feet touch the bottom.

The twelve hours of our day-to-day lives are filled by thinking of how things were or how they will be. The contents of our present are just pictures or imaginations of things that are not. They fill the vacuum of the nothingness that is the source of time and of ourselves. But when this vacuum gets overfilled, when our life becomes too busy we long for the tranquility of zero time. Having tasted the silence and tranquility at the pivot of our lives we long for it. And that is our practice. We constantly return to our zafus each morning. And sometimes we make the special effort of continuous sitting that we are making this weekend.