

Dōgen's Cosmology of Space and the Practice of Self-Fulfillment

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A SIGNIFICANT PORTION of modern Dōgen studies has focused on one particular essay from the *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen's Uji, or "Being-Time." Dōgen's writings about temporality seem intriguingly modern. In his discussions of "Time is existence and existence is time," Dōgen writes about different aspects of time, including the conventional and multidimensional. Much has been written about Dōgen's "Being-Time," including book-length treatments by Steven Heine, *Existential and Ontological Dimensions of Time in Heidegger and Dōgen*, and by Joan Stambaugh, *Impermanence Is Buddha Nature*.¹

But in addition to time, Dōgen's view of space is critical to understanding his teachings. This essay discusses some aspects of the meaning of space in Dōgen's writings. These teachings about space both reveal his view of the nature of enlightened reality, and have consequences for the role of spiritual practice and faith for Dōgen. After presenting a number of references to space in Dōgen's writing, we will consider their implications.

GRASPING SPACE

Dōgen discussed extensively the old Zen encounter dialogue texts. Even if he did not conduct formal kōan training, in the sense of a particular kōan curriculum as in some of Rinzai Zen (as well as some of medieval Sōtō Zen), Dōgen comments on the old stories of the ancestors in a great many of his writings. One such writing about space is *Shōbōgenzō Kokū*,² the very title of which means "space."

He begins this essay with a story about two Chinese Zen masters, Shigong Huizang (n.d.; Shakkyō Ezō in Japanese), and his younger Dharma brother, Xitang Zhizang (735–814; Seido Chizō 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 Dōgen's commentary on this story, we may note that one ordinary idea of space is as a kind of empty container, just as our conventional idea of time, disputed by Dōgen in *Uji*, is of an objective temporal container. But for Dōgen, space is form itself. Space is your nostril, and your nose around it. Dōgen says, "Space is one ball that bounces here and there."³ About Shigong saying, "You can grasp it now," Dōgen 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." Dōgen 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 Dōgen'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 Dōgen, space is not an abstraction, but rather, it is concretely physical, and not apart from the dynamic effort of aspiration and practice. Giving life to space involves, first of all, recognizing its omnipresence and potential impact right in the forms we engage.

THE RESOUNDING OF SPACE

One of his basic writings about space that clarifies this is a story that Dōgen tells in a couple of places. He related the story in 1244 in an essay in *Shōbōgenzō*, "Turning the Dharma Wheel," or *Tembōrin*.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 Kōroku*, which is the version referred to here. Dōgen quotes the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, saying, "The World-Honored One, Śākyamuni 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, Dōgen goes on to give a list of other comments on this saying, or other versions of it, by various renowned Zen masters. Wuzu Fayan (1024–1104; Gōsō Hōen 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 Fayan, Yuanwu Keqin (1063–1135; Engō Kokugon in Japanese), who wrote the commentaries in the *Hekigan Roku*, *Blue Cliff Record*, embroidered the saying with 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.; Busshō Hōtai 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 clear image of realization of space as the suchness of reality, just as it is.

Then Dōgen quotes his own teacher Tiantong Rujing (1163–1228; Tendō Nyojō in Japanese), who first refers to the original line in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* by the Buddha. Tiantong Rujing then 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 [Rujing himself] 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? And the space itself implies all the forms that are space, that is, all sentient beings, whose liberation is the concern of the Mahayana path. This is the import of these varying statements. Dōgen'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 his mendicancy. But Dōgen himself said, "The previous five venerable teachers said it like this. But Eihei [Dōgen] 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 Dōgen about the nature of awakening, transcending all the other masters' previous evocative utterances. When one person opens up reality and returns to the source, Dōgen 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, Dōgen is talking about a level of reality and a realm of awakening that goes beyond psychology, and any anthropocentricity. There are some writings by Dōgen 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 Dōgen's writings about space. Another such text by Dōgen is actually the first thing I ever heard by Dōgen, when the Japanese Sōtō priest, Kandō Nakajima, lectured on it. This is a writing from *Shōbōgenzō* called Ikka-no-Myōju, "One Bright Pearl."⁷⁷ Dōgen relates a dialogue from the Chinese master Xuansha Shibeī, (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 term 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?" Xuansha replied, "The whole universe in ten directions is one bright pearl. What's to understand?" Dōgen 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.

This idea comes up again in another writing by Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō* Juppō, "The Ten Directions."⁷⁸ In this essay, the basic sayings Dōgen discusses are by the Chinese master Changsha (d. 768; Chōsha Keishin in Japanese), who makes a number of statements about "the whole universe in ten directions." Dōgen relates that Changsha said, "The whole universe in ten directions is the eye of a monk." Dōgen 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 psychology, either, but Changsha is talking about the self and the relationship of the self with space. In Dōgen's commentaries to the line, "The whole universe in ten directions is a monk's eye," Dōgen 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, Avalokiteśvara (or Kannon in Japanese). In one of his main iconographic forms, Avalokiteśvara'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 Dōgen describes the whole universe in the ten directions as filled with eyes, and itself an organ of compassion. Dōgen 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.

Dōgen 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 Dōgen 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," Dōgen 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 Dōgen says this on a level that is not just 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 Dōgen is talking about "self," he is also talking about "no-self" and emptiness. That reflects the joke in all of his talk about space.

SPACE AND EMPTINESS

Many Westerners believe that Dōgen does not have a sense of humor. This is a common, and understandable, impression from a lot of Dōgen's more philosophical essays, or his writings about monastic practice rituals. But as I was involved in translating the *Eihei Kōroku*, it was not so unusual that I broke out laughing at some of what Dōgen says. In this work, Dōgen gives often brief dharma talks to the monks he was training in the last period of his career at Eiheiiji. In many of them he is talking about kōans,

and poking fun at the old masters. There is a kind of irony to 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 Dōgen is engaged. One of his main forms of playing and humor is punning. His writing about space involves a particular highly significant pun.

This pun is with the character “kū,” which can be translated as “space,” or “sky,” but also as “emptiness,” that is, the translation term for the Sanskrit “śūnya” and “śūnyatā.” This *kū* is also the second of the two characters in “Kokū,” the *Shōbōgenzō* essay (mentioned previously) translated as “Space,” the first character *ko* meaning “vacant” or “empty.” When he uses this character *kū*, sometimes in context Dōgen 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.” This is the same character that is used in the well-known *Heart Sutra* passage that reads in Japanese, “Shiki fu i kū, kū fu i shiki. Shiki soku ze kū, kū 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 *kū*. But in the many contexts I have been discussing, it means simply “space.”

When Dōgen discusses space, he is often also talking about the nature of form. These words, emptiness and form, need to be unpacked, as “emptiness” is a technical term in Buddhism. It does not mean “nonbeing,” although it is very easy 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 that space, or emptiness, is not about grasping air, as in the first story above from Dōgen about Shigong testing Zhizang, and then pulling his nose. Space is the nose, and nostrils, and eyeballs and everything else, the chairs, the rug, and all the objects before us. Space might be thought of 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.

So when Dōgen 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 Bud-

dhism. So Dōgen talks about, "Killing space and giving life to space." Space is very much alive for Dōgen. Dōgen encourages his audience to realize what it means to be alive. Space has some impact, has some agency. There is a dynamic activity to the space that Dōgen is talking about, and all are part of that activity. All beings are included in space.

THE FLOWERING OF SPACE

The next essay for consideration from *Shōbōgenzō* is "Flowers in Space," Kūge, which has sometimes been translated as "Flowers of Emptiness."¹³ But in our context it is also legitimate to translate it, as Nishijima does, as "Flowers in Space." This text proceeds from a quote from the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* where Śākyamuni 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." With cataracts we cannot see clearly because of the veils over our eyes, and we see delusory "flowers in space."

Dōgen'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" is an image of delusion, illusion, and non-reality. But Dōgen 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. This paradox is in full accord with

the Mahayana principle, enunciated in the *Lotus Sutra*, of buddhas appearing precisely for the sake of awakening beings from the delusions and afflictions of the mundane world. Dōgen says further, "By practicing this flower of space, the buddha-tathāgatas 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 a reference to the legend of Śākyamuni holding up the flower and Mahākāśyapa, considered the First Ancestor of Zen in India, smiling. Dōgen 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 "Shōbōgenzō"] and the fine mind of nirvana, which have been authentically transmitted to the present without interruption, are called clouded eyes and flowers in space."

Dōgen 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 mentioned above, "Śākyamuni 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'."

Dōgen also says:

No scholars have clearly understood this statement. 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

Dōgen is not just talking about space, but the "flowering of space," and of the dharma. Zazen and the whole Buddhist project is just a "flower in space" for Dōgen. This is typical of Dōgen'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. Dōgen is also reaffirming, in a very deep way, the issue of nonduality.

Usually nonduality is considered as opposed to duality. Dōgen often refers to nonduality, and it is usually thought that this is about transcending duality and 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, Dōgen

is clearly talking about the nonduality of duality and nonduality. Dōgen's nonduality is not about transcending the duality of form and emptiness. This deeper nonduality is not the opposite of duality, but the synthesis of duality and nonduality, with both included, and both seen as ultimately not separate, but as integrated. In the "flowers in space" of the buddhas' teaching, "space" is not empty space, "space" is our activity and life, the dialectical synthesis of form and emptiness.

Dōgen also adds in *Shōbōgenzō* Kūge, "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.

DŌGEN'S VARIED SOURCES AND THE MAHAYANA SUTRAS

Dōgen feeds diverse sources into his writings about space. One of the more interesting issues in Dōgen studies is to look at the sources of Dōgen's teachings. In the modern popularization of Dōgen as an icon, one idea has been that Dōgen represents a great Japanese philosophy that comes full-blown out of Japanese soil. But very clearly Dōgen refers frequently to the Chinese Chan Ancestors, and the whole kōan tradition. Steven Heine's book, *Dōgen and the Kōan Tradition*, offers a very good description of how Dōgen is carrying on the kōan tradition.¹⁶

Another influence is the native Japanese poetic tradition, as Steven Heine elaborates in *The Zen Poetry of Dōgen*.¹⁷ Dōgen's rhetoric, his poetic style, and philosophical approach come out of both the kōan material, but also from the great literary tradition in Japan, in which he was very well versed. Yet another influence is the whole Mahayana tradition of the bodhisattva, apparent in his many quotes from various sutras. The image of "Flowers in Space" recalls the *Flower Ornament Sutra*, the *Avataṃsaka*, which also talks about space and buddha-fields as full of flowers, as well as jewels, birds, and the adorned land itself all preaching the dharma. The Mahayana sutras provide a tradition for this way of speaking about space, but as usual, Dōgen turns it a little bit.

The *Lotus Sutra* is also a highly significant influence on Dōgen's rhetorical style of proclaiming the dharma. I will just mention one of the several stories particularly relevant to space in the *Lotus Sutra*. Dōgen refers to the *Lotus Sutra* in an essay in *Shōbōgenzō* "The Lotus Dharma Turns the Lotus

Dharma," Hokke-ten-Hokke, which is devoted to the *Lotus Sutra*.¹⁸ Dōgen quotes the *Lotus Sutra* more than any other sutra in his writings, but this essay, particularly, is focused on the *Lotus Sutra*. As background, he starts with a story about the Chinese Sixth Ancestor, Dajian Hui-neng (638–713; Daikan Enō in Japanese). A monk who had studied the *Lotus Sutra* extensively asked Hui-neng about it. 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 Hui-neng 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 byplay about "turning" or "being turned by" the *Lotus Sutra*, a duality that Dōgen characteristically overcomes by eventually stating that both cases are ultimately just the Lotus Dharma turning the Lotus Dharma.

A passage in this essay relevant to space says, "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 the ancient buddha Prabhūtarātna who arrives in the *Lotus Sutra* in his stupa, hanging in mid-air above Vulture Peak. He comes to hear Śākyamuni, the historical buddha of this age, preach the *Lotus Sutra*. But it is also said that this ancient buddha always appears whenever this *Lotus Sutra* is being expounded. Dōgen says about this, "The treasure stupa is a treasure stupa in space, and space makes space for the treasure stupa."¹⁹ So for Dōgen, again, space is not just an object in a dead, objective world. Space is active and alive, as "space makes space." Dōgen is turning this *Lotus Sutra* story here. He is pointing to the vitality of space. Space is not just outer space, but the ground and air as well. But perhaps Dōgen is also pointing to the particular space activated by a buddha. The space at Vulture Peak is especially numinous and 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 Dōgen's view of space, in addition to the Mahayana sutras and the kōan literature of the Chan Ancestors, is his particular link with the Chinese Caodong (Sōtō in Japanese) Zen lineage. Of course, some of the kōan dialogues are from masters in that lineage. But the most prominent Caodong teacher in the century before Dōgen was Hongzhi Zhengjue (1091–1157; Wanshi Shogaku in Japanese), who also talks about space. Hongzhi was a strong influence on Dōgen, as he is quoted very often in Dōgen's Eihei Kōroku.

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.²⁰

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 out to all of space, finally returning back to awareness of this body, and the space around it. Much 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, luminous, and very natural. He uses nature metaphors to show the naturalness of this "serene illumination," which is another term for *zazen*, for Dōgen's *shikan taza*, "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 uses nature metaphors to expound this basic buddha-nature teaching, which he presents in terms of the "empty field," or "radiant space," that can be realized in meditative awareness, in *zazen*, whether it is cognitively realized 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.²¹

This passage includes a kind of meditation instruction about how to set one's perceptions in relationship to space, remaining aware without being caught by all the objects of perception, as "The subtlety of seeing and hearing transcends mere colors and sounds."

Returning to what Dōgen does with this unobstructed view of space, Dōgen 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 Dōgen's writings on meditation, he affirms this possibility and reality of awakening space itself, going back to Dōgen's saying, "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." Space itself awakens when one person awakens. There is almost a personal relationship, or a meaningful relationship at least, between each practitioner and this world of space that Dōgen is discussing. 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 Dōgen.

AWAKENING SPACE AND THE SELF-FULFILLING SAMĀDHI

His discussions of the practice relationship to space go back to Dōgen's early writing about *zazen*, *Bendōwa*, or "Talk on Wholehearted Practice of the Way." The excerpts in this essay have not been presented in chronological order, but a major issue in Dōgen studies is the shifting of themes and emphases in Dōgen's writings. Modern scholars are learning more about the actual dates of Dōgen's various writings. The complexity and nuancing of shifts in emphasis, style, and mode of teaching throughout Dōgen's life cannot be reduced to simply early and late periods as in some recent stereotypes. But while there are shifting emphases during Dōgen's career, there is also very much an underlying consistency, which seems to apply to his engagement with space. All of the passages quoted above from Dōgen about space are written later than *Bendōwa*, one of Dōgen's earliest and fundamental writings about meditation, which I will discuss in terms of its practice of space.

Dōgen says, "When one displays the buddha *mudrā* with one's whole body and mind, sitting upright in this *samādhi* even for a short time, everything in the entire dharma world becomes buddha *mudrā*, 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. Dōgen 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.²²

Because of this mutual resonance, Dōgen 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 the import of this previous passage, which is part of the "self-fulfillment *samādhi*" *jijūyū zanmai* section of *Bendōwa* that is chanted daily in Japanese Sōtō Zen training temples.

The etymology of the "self-fulfillment *samādhi*" is significant in Dōgen's teaching about space itself becoming enlightenment. The etymology of *jijūyū*, or self-fulfillment, is literally, "the self accepting its function." When each person takes their place or dharma position, receiving their 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 that is involved in what might be called "faith," in trusting both oneself 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 Dōgen is expounding.

There is a word in the previous passage that I had not heard before studying in Japan, *myōshi*, or another version is *myōka*, meaning “mysterious guidance,” or “incomprehensible assistance.” This refers to the possibility of practitioners receiving benefit from the bodhisattva energy and buddha energy of the world. But also it works reciprocally; when we sit zazen, we affect the nature of the space. After you have sat a period in the meditation hall and arise, you might perhaps feel a difference in the space. This is hardly objective or scientific in the usual sense, but if you travel to *Bodhgayā* in India, or certain old temples in Japan, places where people have practiced for a very long time, and then walk into that space, you might feel some of the impact of the centuries of practice.

This idea of *myōshi* implies trusting the world to give what is needed, no matter how painful it is. It is also taking refuge, returning to the world, returning to one’s place in the world. *Myōshi* is the basis for the whole practice of laypeople, going to the temples and making offerings, chanting, and bowing to buddha and bodhisattva statues. Japanese college students call on Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom, for help on their tests. But the other side of *myōshi* 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.

CARING FOR SPACE

This view of space has some implications that are significant in terms of Dōgen’s contemporary relevance. This aspect is not all there is to Dōgen’s writing; there is also the psychological dimension implied in his teaching of “studying the self.”²³ But we could call this teaching about space the environmental aspect of Dōgen. Dōgen 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 Dōgen even the lights, the rug, and the chairs, have some spiritual agency.

For a modern reading and current contemporary recreation of Dōgen, one might see how this relates to Dōgen’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 Dōgen’s part). According to Dōgen, the space that one practices 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 each person 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.

This view of space is also relevant to faith. The sense of faith for Dōgen is that it is not belief in some thing, in what Dōgen 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. One does receive support when acting from that space of faith.

NOTES

1. Steven Heine, *Existential and Ontological Dimensions of Time in Heidegger and Dōgen* (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, ed., *Enlightenment Unfolds: The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Dōgen* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), pp. 201–204.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 202–203.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
6. Taigen Dan Leighton and Shohaku Okumura, trans., *Dōgen's Extensive Record: A Translation of Eihei Kōroku* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004), pp. 198–199. Dharma hall discourses, or *jōdō*, 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 Dōgen, since he nearly stopped writing the longer essays of *Shōbōgenzō* after 1244, but continued using the formal *jōdō* talks, which were recorded in *Eihei Kōroku*, in training his monks at Eiheiiji until his death in 1253.
7. See Thomas Cleary, trans., *Shōbōgenzō: Zen Essays by Dōgen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), pp. 57–63.
8. See Gudo Nishijima and Chodo Cross, trans., *Master Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō*, Book 3 (Woods Hole, MA: 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, *Faces of Compassion: Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1998), pp. 168–184 (revised edition of book previously published by Penguin Arkana, 1998).
11. Nishijima and Cross, trans., *Master Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō*, Book 3, p. 188, with revisions by the author.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
13. See Cleary, trans., *Shōbōgenzō: Zen Essays by Dōgen*, pp. 64–75; and Nishijima and Cross, trans., *Master Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō*, Book 3, pp. 9–21.
14. Nishijima and Cross, trans., *Master Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō*, Book 3, p. 11.

15. Ibid., p. 12.
16. Steven Heine, *Dōgen and the Kōan Tradition: A Tale of Two "Shōbōgenzō" Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).
17. Steven Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dōgen: Verses from the Mountain of Eternal Peace* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1997).
18. Nishijima and Cross, trans., *Master Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō*, Book 1, pp. 203–220. I have also consulted an unpublished translation of this essay by Kazuaki Tanahashi and Michael Wenger.
19. Nishijima and Cross, Book 1, 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), p. 45.
21. Ibid., p. 30.
22. Shohaku Okumura and Taigen Daniel Leighton, trans., *The Wholehearted Way: A Translation of Eihei Dōgen's Bendowa with Commentary by Kosho Uchiyama Roshi* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1997), p. 23.
23. In his celebrated essay, Genjōkōan, "Actualizing the Fundamental Point," Dōgen 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, ed., *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen* (San Francisco: 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 Dōgen's writings.