

## Shobogenzo Chapter [11] – Uji

### Time-Present: A Modern Interpretation

[29] A buddha of old said:

*Time-present is standing on the mountain heights.*

*Time-present is sinking to the depths of the ocean.*

*Time-present is an angry demon, time-present is a buddha.*

*Time-present is a formal ceremony, time-present is the temple compound.*

*Time-present is an everyday person, time-present is pervading the whole Universe.*

[30] Time-present means that time is the present and the present is time. The state of buddha is always made real at a time, and because of this, the state is illuminated by the light of the present.

But we must also study time as 24-hour time this day. Anger has its time, and so it is 24-hour time. 24-hour time is relative; although we can't be sure if one period of 24-hours is longer or shorter, or faster or slower, than another, we still say that a day lasts for 24 hours.

And although we never doubt our ability to clearly trace the passage of time, we cannot be sure that we know clearly what time is. As ordinary people we have many doubts about many things, but our doubts are not always the same; they are always changing. But although this is true, every one of those changing doubts is a time-present.

We understand that the Universe consists of all the things contained in this world. We must also understand that all the people and things in the Universe have their time-present. Just as individual things are independent of each other, so individual time-presents are independent of each other. This means that many people can want to find the truth at the same time, and there can be many times at which a single person wants to find the truth.

This is true, not only of wanting to find the truth, but also of actually realizing the truth, and actually practicing a Buddhist life. This person I think of as myself is a "person" that I put together at one time-present. We can apply this thinking to everything in the Universe. This kind of intellectual analysis is the starting point of Buddhist practice.

But a person who has clarified their real state sees only each thing, each thing, each thing, and lets go of understanding the nature of each thing. And at that moment, time-present contains the whole of time, and that time contains all things. Thus the whole of existence, the whole Universe, is present at each moment of time. Have a quick look to see if you can find any part of the Universe that has escaped from this present moment.

But until we study the Buddhist view, it is normal to think that "time-present" means at one particular time we become angry, and at another particular time we become a buddha. We imagine events as parts of a journey, as though we were crossing a river or walking over a mountain pass. And although we feel fairly sure that the mountain pass or the river are still present back there where we crossed them, we have already passed them and moved on to be illuminated by the present, leaving them behind in the far distance.

But this is not the only way to think about it. At the time when we are crossing the mountain pass, or crossing the river, we are present there, and so time is present there. Time cannot elude the present. Accepting that time does not appear and disappear, the time when we are crossing the mountain pass is also a real time-present. And even if time were to appear and disappear, the time when time is actually present is also time-present. Then how can the time when we are crossing the mountain pass or crossing the river not be swallowed up in the time when we are illuminated by the light of the present. How can we say that the time when we are crossing the mountain pass or crossing the river does not spew out this present brightness?

Although the angry person is an event in the past, and the buddha is here today, we can also think of time as if going up into the mountains and looking out over thousands of peaks, rather than seeing time as passing. The time-peak when we become angry is then a time-present, even though it seems to have receded into the past. And the time-peak when we become buddha is also a time-present, even though it seems to be back there. Then a pine tree is a time-present, and a bamboo thicket is a time-present.

Seeing time simply as flowing away is not enough. Thinking that the only property time has is the ability to flow is not enough. If we think of time only as flowing away, then there must be gaps between the instants of time-present as they pass. Ordinary people only see time as something that flows away, and this is why they do not experience time-present, and have not heard it explained. In actual fact, all the things in the whole Universe are time-presents

that are both continuous and separate. Real time is always time-present, and so it is always this time-present.

But time-present can also be thought of as a process. Time proceeds from today to tomorrow. Today proceeds back to yesterday. Yesterday proceeds on to today. Today proceeds on through today. Tomorrow proceeds on through tomorrow. Although time can be seen as a process like this, times arriving do not pile up on top of times past, neither do they extend out in a continuous line. And for this reason we see that Master Seigen's life was made up of moments of time-present, and so were the lives of Master Obaku, Master Baso, and Master Sekito. Both I and the external world exist in time-present, and so practice and realization of the truth exist at time-present. All our daily struggles are also at time-present. People have their own views today, and they think these views are produced by their own causes and circumstances. Although they think their views form the basis of, and are based on, their experiences, they are not the basis of their reality. They themselves are only reality presenting its results at this time-present as causes and circumstances.

People do not see reality itself as being this time-present – what exists at this moment – and so they feel that the state of a buddha is not time-present, but a state that they must make efforts to attain. But even the moment in which they make their efforts and reject the state of buddha because they cannot see that it is their state is also time-present – it is the time-present of a person who has not realized who they are. It is time-present that causes the hour of 12 o'clock and the hour of 2 o'clock arranged as they are today as they rise up and drop away at their place in the Universe. Two o'clock is a time-present; 6 o'clock is a time-present; living beings are time-present; buddhas are time-present. The concrete time-present of being angry makes the whole Universe real. The concrete time-present of being a buddha makes the whole Universe real. The time-present in which the Universe makes itself real is called perfectly real. The state of buddha which wants to search for the truth, practice zazen, attain the truth, and enter the balanced state to make the state of buddha real, exists at time-present. It is making perfectly real that the whole of time is the whole of existence, with nothing left over. But since something left over is just left over, even making the whole of time-present only half real is making half of time-present wholly real. Even the times when we seem to be blundering along heedlessly are at time-present. To leave those heedlessly blundering time-presents as they are is to see that they have their own places as time-present. The vivid state of being in our own place in the Universe is time-

present. We should neither confuse it with not being present, nor force it into being present.

We suppose that time just passes away, and do not understand that time never arrives. Although our understanding itself is time-present, our understanding of time does not influence circumstances. People see time as coming and going, and there are few people who see it clearly as time-present here and now. Then how can it be easy for them to get the time to attain the truth? Even among those who see time as what is present now in the Universe, who can express clearly what the ineffable something is that they have already got? And even among those who have long been asserting that they have it already, none of them have stopped groping around trying to find out who they already are. But leaving these people to their time-present, even attaining the truth and the balanced state are just time-present that appear to come and go.

[38] In short, time-present is always made real without ridding ourselves of hindrances and delusions. The benevolent forces that appear to the right and left of us are the time-present of our wholehearted efforts in this moment. All the living beings of the lands and oceans are also the time-present of our wholehearted efforts in this moment. All the beings in this world and other worlds are also the time-present of our moment-by-moment wholehearted efforts. Our practice teaches us that without our own moment-by-moment effort in time-present, nothing could ever be made real, or continue from one moment to the next.

But we should not understand that this momentary continuance is like the wind or rain sweeping from East to West. The whole Universe is progressing from one moment to the next; not static, but also not continuous process. An example of this momentary progression is Spring. It has many different aspects, the passing of which we call the progress of Spring. But our practice teaches us that the passing of time from moment to moment involves no external object.

For example, momentary Spring passes through a process that we call Spring. But the passing is not Spring itself; we just think of Spring as the movement of momentary Spring through the process Spring. But Spring is made real at every time-present in the process of Spring. We need to come back to this again and again. In discussing the momentary passing of time, if we think that there are only individual things that change on the outside, but that there is some real unchanging entity that passes from moment to moment moving

through all worlds and all times, we are becoming lax in studying Buddhism in our practice.

- [40] One day, at the suggestion of Master Sekito Kisen, Master Yakusen Igen asked Master Baso Doitsu a question: *“I have more or less understood the meaning of Buddhist theory and its classifications. But I want to ask you what was Master Bodhidharma’s purpose in coming from India to China?”*

On hearing this question, Master Baso Doitsu replied, *“At one time-present he was moved to raise his eyebrow and wink, at another time-present he was not moved to raise his eyebrow and wink. At one time-present, to raise his eyebrow and wink was right, and at another time-present, to raise his eyebrow and wink was wrong.”*

When Master Yakusan heard these words, the whole of Buddhism became clear to him, and he said to Master Baso, *“When I studied with Master Sekito, I was just a mosquito sitting on the back of an iron ox!”*

- [42] No-one else could have uttered these words of Master Baso’s. The eyebrow Master Bodhidharma raised or the eye he winked may indicate a mountain or an ocean, because the mountains and oceans and his eyebrows and eyes are one whole. Being moved to raise an eyebrow he sees the mountain. Being moved to wink, he rules the ocean. Being right has become part of him and pulls him in. Being wrong is not always not doing, and not doing is not always wrong. All these are time-present. The mountains are time-present and the oceans are time-present. Without time-present the mountains and the oceans would not exist. We cannot deny that time-present *is* the mountains and the oceans here and now. If time-present decays, so do the mountains and the oceans. If time does not decay, nor do the mountains and oceans. It is from this truth that the bright star appeared to Gautama Buddha, the state of buddha appeared, his ability to see the truth appeared, and his acknowledgment of Mahakasyapa appeared. All *are* time-present. Without time-present nothing could be here and now.
- [44] Master Kisho from the Sho region is a descendent of Master Rinzai and the successor to Master Shuzan Shonen. On one occasion he preaches to the assembly:

*At one time-present will is present but words are absent.  
At one time-present words are present but will is absent.  
At one time-present both will and words are present.  
At one time-present both will and words are absent.*

- [44] Both will and words are time-present. Both presence and absence are time-present. Before the moment of absence has ended, the moment of presence has come. Before the will has left, the words arrive. To be present does not mean that something has arrived. To be absent does not mean that something has left. Time-present is like this. Presence is just being present, it is not being absent. Absence is just being absent, it is not being present. The word “will” describes will itself, and depicts will as an object. The word “words” describes words themselves, and depicts words as an object. The word “description” describes description itself, and depicts description as an object in time-present. Descriptions describe things, but a description of a thing is never the thing itself. When I meet a person, a “person” meets another “person.” When I meet myself, a manifestation meets a manifestation. If there were no time-present none of this could happen. In summary, will is one time-present that makes the Universe real. Words are one time-present in the balanced state. Being present is just the time when everything is here and now. Being absent is just the time when a fact is not here and now. This is how we should understand and make ourselves real.

Although this poem is how one master of the past expressed himself, I feel moved to express my own understanding:

*Will and words being half present is also at time-present.  
Will and words being half absent is also at time-present.*

We can study the situation like this:

*He was moved to raise his eyebrow and wink in half of time-present.  
He was moved to raise his eyebrow and wink in the jumble that is time-present.  
He was moved not to raise his eyebrow and wink in half of time-present.  
He was moved not to raise his eyebrow and wink in the jumble that is time-present.*

To experience arriving and leaving like this is to experience time-present. To experience being present and being absent like this is to experience time-present.

### **Shobogenzo Uji**

Dogen wrote this chapter at Kosho-horin Temple on the first day of winter in 1240.

Ejo copied the chapter during the summer sesshin in 1243.

Eido wrote this interpretation for the winter sesshin 2004.