

Spring 2010

“Let the flower of your life force bloom”

Writing on Katagiri Roshi's commentary on Dogen's *Zazenshin*

When I would go up to Katagiri-Roshi's office, at almost any time, he would be studying. He was a diligent student and, by the end of his life, was known as a Dogen scholar. What I really appreciate now is that he digested many texts in the course of his study and would summarize the teaching in his own words. At the time, I didn't understand him: his very thick Japanese accent, the incomprehensible dharma teaching and the spiral style of his talks. Now, twenty years later, with the help of the clarifying efforts of editors, I think his summaries are brilliant. During Rohatsu this year, we studied his commentary on Dogen's *Zazenshin* in his book, *Each Moment Is The Universe*, Chapter 23.

Katagiri Roshi distilled down Dogen's teaching into three important questions:

- ▶ What is form?
- ▶ What is time?
- ▶ How do we live as a human being?

Let's look at each of these questions. Buddhism asks, “What is real?” We construct reality through how we name, categorize, and build stories around each moment. We start to believe in the appearance of things as solid and permanent. We initially don't see the undercurrent of buddha-nature, that which has unity and interdependence. Because we don't see the true nature of our life, we get confused and we suffer.

Ordinary mind thinks life is:	Buddhists move to thinking life is:
Tangible, permanent, solid	Constantly changing, in flux and fluid
Unitary, each object, a separate unit	No centralized self
Independent	Inter-dependent

This transformation in our perceptions really changes how we perceive form and time. We begin to deconstruct our way of seeing the world, and move into a revolutionary new way of seeing the moment without mental constructions.

We stop believing in form as its appearance. In some texts, the translation of “appearance” is “name” or “sign” or “character (letter)”. Because we start to see the ever-changing nature of form, we begin to see the responsiveness of each form to all external influences. Each form is *so responsive* that it becomes impossible to determine where the boundary between internal and external is. We lose the unitary nature of form.

We stop seeing time in its usual way: past, present and future, each having its own existence and each flowing one to the other. We begin to deconstruct the idea of a storyline and the solidity of our “selves” as a being, which is a continuing object through time. Katagiri Roshi says, “This very moment is Time. Time has no solid form, *time is activity itself.*”

The issue of “how do we live as a human being?” is the great insight into what is *practice*. In Dogen’s expression “practice/realization”, Dogen merges the goal “realization” and the “the present moment activity” into one. If there is no future separate from the present moment, anything we do in the present moment is the expression of “enlightenment”, “buddha nature”, awareness, or “suchness”. The ordinary life and the sacred life are completely one. *Form is emptiness and emptiness is form.*

Katagiri Roshi in this same chapter has the bravery to give some admonitions for expressing enlightenment. This definition has nothing at all to do with intellectual understanding or perceptions. Enlightenment as a concept creates a gap that is not “intimacy with the present moment”.

Katagiri Roshi says enlightenment is:

- ▶ To be completely the activity of this moment
- ▶ To have no awareness of subject and object (Self and activity or object)
- ▶ To completely depend on the help of nature
- ▶ To be in your activity, right in the middle of the functioning of the universe with no separation.

He writes further: “Intimacy is not something to discuss – intimacy is activity itself. This is not philosophy – It is something you have to do. The result of activity is not the important point. The important point is activity itself.”

A human being’s question of “how to live?” is answered by becoming one with the activity of the moment and losing the sense of a separated “I”. Even the five skandhas (form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness) are not “owned” by an “I” but are the dynamic functioning of the present moment. Katagiri roshi suggests we *play* with the vivid activity of the moment: the activity, the whole universe in the activity, and our five skandhas.

Katagiri Roshi called this *total functioning*. Within “total functioning”, cause and effect are one simultaneous action of input and output. A human being’s functioning is the simultaneous giving and receiving of information to and from the universe:

- ▶ In complete, sincere, absorption with the present moment’s activity, you give energy to the activity as an object. The present moment activity has something in it created by our own effort.
- ▶ Simultaneously, the object or activity is constantly giving us lots of information about the object. Giving us information on how to behave. The present moment activity has something in it created by the universe’s effort.
- ▶ There is a heart-to-heart communion going on, constantly, in and out, between the subject (self) and the object (the experience).

This experience *named enlightenment* is the merging of your activity with Buddha’s activity:

- ▶ Time becomes supreme time beyond any concept of past, present and future.
- ▶ Place becomes supreme place beyond any dualistic concepts.
- ▶ Person becomes supreme person who is melted into the universe.
- ▶ And this experience is not perceived by consciousness.

This *total functioning* is called the creativity of each moment. Arising and dissolving, every moment is a total creation. It’s completely alive! Merged with this, hosted by time and place, this energy is the energy of your life. You jump into the moment, open your heart to the

moment and allow the flower of your life force to bloom, right here and right now.

You don't attach to an idea of yourself as either form or not-form. Both sides of the coin are impermanent: each appears but in the next moment disappears. Katagiri Roshi said, "This is called Beauty. Form and not-form are dissipated, melted right into the middle of total activity. It is very quiet. Real creativity is manifested in silence."

So, my admonition to you: Please, get out of the *head of understanding*. Devote yourself to the activity of the moment, bringing your body, mind and heart back to this moment, over and over again. Realize your ability to meet everything with a true heart. In each moment, let the flower of your life force bloom.

A very deep appreciation to Katagiri Roshi and to Andrea Martin, editor of Each Moment Is The Universe, for bringing to life the deep dharma teaching.