

Snow Falling in Moonlight
Odes in Praise of Dogen's Shobogenzo

by **Tai Sheridan**

Published by Tai Sheridan at Smashwords
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Dedication

To the waters of life

*A table, a chair, a bowl of fruit and a violin;
what else does a man need to be happy?*

Albert Einstein

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Introduction

In the snow a single twig of plum blossoms!
The whole universe is plum blossoms.
Dogen

Dogen (1200-1253) is the father of Soto Zen. One of his spiritual legacies, *The Shobogenzo* (The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye), is composed of ninety-five essays on non-dual wisdom, luminous mind, loving kindness, and Zen practice. Dogen's essays express his insights into Buddha Nature, or the Universal Self, a realm of awareness where there is no gap between self and other, doing and being, a plum blossom and the universe.

The odes presented here evolved from the central teaching of Dogen's essays, and are structured and built upon his images. I based my selections on what I thought would be of interest and use to all Buddhists and the public, not only to Zen students. I also chose pieces that would enchant and enlighten.

There is a legacy of Zen poetry that praises all manner of living things. I hope the Odes reveal the wonder and mystery of human life, and open the mind of spiritual curiosity and inquiry.

In Praise of Dogen

you walked
in deep mountains
spring plum blossoms
the blessing

the vermilion petals
you loved well
grace the path
of western gardens

snow falling
in moonlight
the flame
of your vow

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Ode To Moon

tsuki

i whisper praise
to lovely round moon
my own true body
vast endless space
moon in water
rising as whatever

moon not new not old
tonight's moon not yesterday's
you can't count how many
one two a zillion
give up comparisons
settle into now moon

i walk on earth
with mind-moon
full and complete
swallowing everything
mind is moon
moon is mind

subjects objects
meet in moon
moon is moon
living dying the moon
coming going the moon
day night the moon

swallowing the moon
is realizing myself
retching the moon
is going beyond
realizing myself
forever many moons

the cloud and moon
walking together
not starting stopping
beyond beginning ending
in quiet contemplation
a truly lovely moon

Ode to Time

uji

i whisper praise
to the fecund moment
snow falling in moonlight
mountain is time
pine is time
snow is time

once a child
building snowmen
now an old man
scribbling in snow
the child did not
become the man

a snow moment comes
a snow moment goes
it doesn't linger
complete as falling snow
complete as melting snow
only flowing snow

in the middle
of snowfield
i raise an eyebrow
winking at moon
smiling at
moon winking back

when eyebrows
freeze with frost
no winking at her
nor she winking back
winking eye light
a moment's play

wherever i find myself
the wondrous me
not past not future
i am snow
blue pine
time being

Ode to Space

koku

i whisper praise
to skin flesh bones marrow
body of infinite space
nostrils filling with it
space rests in palm
no gap in the fabric

let me play
in vast buoyancy
in gravity of nothing
words from an empty well
every thought space
space every thought

the wind bell
rings in the garden
blown from all directions
from head to toes
i am an open mouth
hanging in space

in the repose
of silent wall gazing
wall is mind
in snow fields
mind a withered pine
every shape sings space

using time well
taking charge of time
each moment space
in out breathing
the heart vein
open door to sky

small stones small
big stones big
no judgment here
infinite spacious mind
seeing only present
true dharma eye

Ode to Cedar Trees

hakujushi

i whisper praise
to cedar tree
many limbed buddha
awake in old garden
straw sandal joshu
a withered old cedar

special teas
won't spark cedar nature
i embrace space
truth seeking mind
learning from children
giving freely to elderly

life is tough
sometimes soup thin
often cold wins out
without profound sincerity
i chase things around
as if separate

when waking at dawn
i dress as cedar
now i am boss
coming going freely
not bound by in out
just being myself

majestic cedar tree
keeps going beyond
not grabbing water
not offending birds
cedar being cedar
is water and birds

cedar springing up buddha
sky falls down to earth
both now together
things common sacred
singing harmonious songs
beyond anything definable

Ode to Face Washing

senmen

i whisper praise
to face washing
bathing dust dirt
renewing total cleanliness
within without
body moon purifying

dignified washing
splashing ultimate body
deep silent pools
washing reality
no thinking here
attuned washing

without a mirror
forgetting height
girth looks garb
washing my face
wet insight
practicing realizing

my body
not pure impure
body bathes body
moon bathes moon
not washing to get moon
washing clean is moon

bathing body mind
within without
earth heaven
past present future
causes conditions
the whole works clean

woven cloth washing face
willow twig cleaning teeth
wonderful grime grease
washing grime grease
washing life blood
india china japan america

Ode to Eyeballs

ganzei

i whisper praise
to eyeballs seeing clearly
one blink two blinks
eye sight seeing
mountains rivers earth
vitaly renewing suns moons

brightness
the real eyeball
the whole dynamic universe
not seeing before after
not preferring
density clarity

eye is sharp
when meeting things
in mutual encounter
two become one
without losing themselves
eye a thunderbolt

already i have
my own eyeballs
yet sometimes i gaze out
as if eyes are elsewhere
this seeking
is eyeballs too

eye begs for itself
eyeballs include
everything everywhere
forgetting inside outside
no sand in eyes
eyes of wonder

gouging out
an old wise one's eyeball
is becoming a person
seeing plum blossoms
in snow fields
the diamond eye

Ode to Mountains Rivers

sansuigyo

i whisper praise
to blue mountains walking
their rhythm my gait
two feet walking
i backward step
into oceans of light

the stone woman
gives birth at night
stone becomes child
child becomes stone
when two mix
each is born

mountain toes
walk on water
free in all directions
mountain sees water
water sees itself
self settles on self

water rises to sky
falling as rivers streams
rushing whirling splashing
stream in a drop
water becoming
a wise person

river is water
mountain is water
water flows
beyond river mountain
beyond form emptiness
no bottling up

once in mountains
no person to meet
waking each day
praising mountains rivers
mountains and wise people
falling in love

Ode to Here Now Mind

soku shin ze butsu

i whisper praise
to here now mind
only budhha always buddha
not brain thinking neurons
not things residing
never certainties

not sitting
a thousand years
even one breath
attaining trying
seeking elsewhere
just here now mind

awakened ones
picking up throwing out
mind weeding
not puffing up
mistaking living
for arriving

mind is fences walls
never wet muddy
open clear present
great inclusion
shapes colors wind sky
precisely this

when mind awakens
heaven falls down
ground tears apart
each thing the whole
the whole each thing
nothing left out

luminous mind
mountains rivers earth
sun moon stars
no adding subtracting
pure bright light
snow falling in moonlight

Ode to Light

komyou

i whisper praise
to luminosity brightness
pure dharma eye
each thing light
self light
universe light

i am lost
when not light
light also lost
standing on feet
holding a friend's hand
both luminosity

east is east
also full compass
home of light
is east
also all directions
listen to brightness

vast light
not blue yellow
red white black gold
beyond ideas
one hundred weeds
utterly clear

going beyond
common sacred
indigo vermilion
of infinite brightness
living dying
light's activity

already i am brightness
not past present future
light gathers itself
becoming each think
now of totality
totality of now

Ode to Truth

doshin

i whisper praise
to truth loving
the luminous moon
the great journey
seeking listening searching
invitations from emptiness

longing for snow
falling in moonlight
a rare calling
some feel deeply
others sleep walk
few circle zen mountain

thoughts slant toward me
body mind an object
forestalling spiritual gravity
when seeing clearly
everything passes
life a slim thread

walking this path
while dreaming awake
i wholeheartedly honor
three treasures
written on my heart
buddha dharma sangha

i sing praise
before during after
now every moment
yes to emptiness
yes to change
yes to everything

i vow to make a buddha
within this lifetime
to fashion out of flowers
incense light snow
silent contemplation
the infinite moon body

Ode to Awakening

genjo koan

i whisper praise
to birds flying
in empty sky
to fish swimming
in endless sea
to all of it

i embrace
body of water bone
body of moon light
old body skin bag
studying self
letting self go

i love flowers
as blooming
as petals on ground
as wild spring weeds
even crowding gardens
always welcome guests

somersaulting in now
frolicking free of myself
water air life
beyond high low
air my breath
water my blood

whether things
be square or round
geometry never confines
fire is fire
ashes are ashes
each the full moon

although freedom
never missing
i practice stillness
breath by breath
commingling things
honing life

Ode to Plum Blossoms

baike

i whisper praise
to plum blossoms in snow
forever buddha's eye
plum blossoms are moonlight
illuminating overhead
illuminating underfoot

plum blossoms
flowers suddenly now
one two three many
each flower always now
spring is flower
flower is spring

plum blossoms
completely wild
unfathomable mystical
flowers wind grass trees
pure intentions
spring fragrance

plum blossoms
all flowers opening
all worlds now
old plum tree
has kindly bequeathed
heaven earth

plum blossoms
buddha here now
turning dharma wheel
eyes completely open
ants grass rain clouds
vital dynamic wondrous

plum blossoms
the boundless expanse
an empty snow field
mind is universe
universe is plum blossoms
inside outside white snow

About the Author

Tai Sheridan is a poet, philosopher, and Zen priest. He transforms ancient Buddhist and Zen texts into accessible and inspirational verse. His *Buddha in Blue Jeans* series offers a contemporary approach to Buddhist philosophy and awakening.

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