

In one of his *Shobogenzo* teachings¹, Master Dogen quotes a saying of Bodhidharma's:

"A five-petalled flower blooms, and the fruit ripens by itself."

The five-petal flower symbolises the seat on which the Buddha is typically depicted as sitting: it is the lotus flower. Sometimes there are far more than five petals.

At this very moment you are sitting on this five-petalled flower and the fruit, realisation, is manifesting itself of its own accord, do not doubt it. No need, then, to wait for anything other than what appears or arises in the *now* of now.

The five petals of a flower is also a way of talking about the five *skandhas*, the five aggregates - the five principles which, according to the Buddha, constitute a human being. Understanding this notion of the aggregates is crucial to integrating the collection of all His other teachings.

First of all, there is our visible form, the body, matter. Then, the second aggregate, this form is sensate - we know this, thanks to the bodily, emotional sensations that we feel. And it is perceptive - thanks to the potential of the six senses. The third aggregate - we can see things, hear sounds, taste flavours, smell odours, touch objects and use our mental capacity to organise our daily life. The fourth aggregate gathers all our intentions, our volition, our mental constructions, the capacity to memorise, to associate circumstances and to respond to them, to organise situations and to project ourselves into the world of the imagination. Finally, the fifth aggregate - there is a specific awareness associated with each of the six senses: the visual, our sense of hearing, taste, smell and touch, and our mental perception.

"And outside these five aggregates, there is nothing else," says the Buddha.

¹ *Shobogenzo Kūge (1243)* - translated as '*Flowers in the Sky*'

"There is nothing else," means that if we see ourselves as a separate entity, independent, with free-choice, or if we imagine a reality or essence outside of ourselves, it is only a supposition without a real basis, it's an illusion. And this includes the idea, which is *only* an idea, that each of us is a 'self' separate from others and from the universe.

When the five skandhas sit on the seat of the Buddhas, on this very zafu, the flower blooms and the fruit ripens by itself. No need to *do* anything. Simply contemplate. This occurs naturally, spontaneously and without effort because the fruit of Awakening ripens by itself. There is no will, for a flower, to bloom. There is no will for the fruit to ripen. In this way, practice is free from any effort of personal will or desire to take hold of anything. Zazen is the *non-doing* through which Awakening is realised. This is the mystery of zazen which we can realise at this very moment in total openness to Everything That Is.

For the fruit to ripen by itself, we need the sun and the rain, the earth and the wind - that is to say, unconditional letting-go of all our expectations and attachments.

Everything is one and the same thing: *"A flower blooms and the world arises,"* writes Master Dogen. This is the truth that the Buddhas know when they sit on the seat of the five-petalled flower.

Simply allow yourself to be; simply open up and blossom. Let life be, and let the fruit ripen of its own accord. This is how *'the flowers bring forth the Spring and the Spring brings forth flowers.'*²

Allow your own heart to open and allow the fruit of Awakening to ripen. This is the teaching of zazen.

² This statement (quoted in *kusen* 21 May 2022) also occurs in *Kūge*