

"The path of all buddhas and ancestors arises before the first forms emerge; it cannot be spoken of using conventional views"

This is the first sentence of Chapter 39 of the Shobogenzo. What are we to make of it?

One of the first places the Glasgow Group practiced was an unkempt room in the International Flat, near the University. Nancy did an Introductory Day there in 1991. It was a bright cold winter day. Light flooded through the window, illuminating the dust in the air.

Dogen said that zazen was dropping off body and mind. He claimed he got this formulation from his teacher, Nyojo. But scholars have recently thought what Nyojo - a Chinese master - actually said to the monks practicing zazen was "you should drop off mind dust", and Dogen's creative genius reformulated it, because 'dust' and 'body' are homonyms in Japanese, but not Chinese.

What would we make of someone who was fascinated by the dust: how it moved, where it came from, the patterns it made, and so on, endlessly? If we were to say to this person that the movement of the dust was just the movement of the air, like objects bobbing on water, would it change him? And if it didn't, wouldn't we think we think he was a simpleton?

And isn't the dust of our thoughts, illuminated by practice, absolutely like this? Non practitioners imagine that they spring out of nothing, but they don't. And isn't that fertile 'no-thing', that greater space, within and around and beyond, the path? The presence or absence of dust is neither here nor there. The light illuminates the space. And with it, the dust.