

Prostrations

The whole grass world cannot be seen

In the snowy field

A white heron is hiding himself

Using his own form

Dogen reverses the usual metaphor for non differentiation, darkness, by using whiteness, snow, instead [very richly, I think], and shows how zazen is an activity [hiding] from moment to moment, not a state. And also, what is hidden and what is apparent is reversed. Activity and Differentiation are hidden, but not erased, and Wholeness [which is usually hidden, but always there] is visible, and by illuminating what is usually hidden, we can see that these are both part of the same 'thing', even though we can only ever express half [as the Genjokoan says 'one half is illuminated, the other is dark'].

The poem is my free translation which differs from the poem in Steven Heine's book of Dogen's poetry, 'The Zen Poetry of Dogen', in which he titles it 'worship', but the word literally means 'prostrations' which I think is more acute. Master Shohaku Okumura (Sanshin Zen Community, Indiana) gave a translation of this poem at Sanshinji Temple, and for him, the most important part of the poem is 'using his own form', and so he reversed the order of the poem, putting the

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winter grasses at the start of the poem, rather than the end. I have re-rendered “winter grasses” as “the whole grass world”, because I wanted to emphasise the wholeness within which differentiation [grasses] occurs, and thus, the non duality of differentiation and One-ness. I also wanted to re-work the first line to infer that the Wholeness of which we are part cannot be ‘seen’, because we are part of it [although it can be experienced], and also [making the same point] to allow the first line to be read by itself, as well as in conjunction with the second line..