

“Firewood becomes Ash. It doesn't become firewood again. But don't imagine that firewood is past and ash is future. Firewood exists in the living expression of the firewood. Ash exists in the living expression of ash. Each has its own past and future. Each cuts past and future.”

I first read these words in Dogen's Genjokoan twenty seven years ago and they have stuck with me. But not in my throat.

On a superficial level, Dogen appears to be refuting the common idea in folk Buddhism of reincarnation. But what he really means to say is that firewood does not become ash. There is not an underlying 'something' which is first firewood then ash then something else. And there is not an underlying something in us which starts as a baby and becomes an adult which becomes an old person and then becomes a corpse.

So we are being invited to think differently. And so, to live and feel differently. Rather than thinking of being as taking place within time, we are invited to think of time and being as two polarities of existence. Sometimes it's as if everything is momentary - all existence is an aspect of this moment. In other moments, time disappears into vast space, which feels eternal.

Duality is like a crack in the vessel of the heart; although we can't see it, something precious is always seeping away.