

Zazen Zoom - Saturday 30 January 2021

In last week's kusen, Master Keizan used the image of the ocean and the waves to explain the indivisible unity of essence and phenomena.

The waves are the ocean and the ocean is revealed in an incessant movement of the waves. No wave can separate itself from the ocean.

Waves are not separate from the ocean but waves are not the ocean. Waves are forms that are born on the surface of the ocean, appearances, ephemeral movements. A wave that remained a wave forever could no longer be called a wave. The wave dies as quickly as it appears. But that in which it appears, the ocean, is always there. The ocean is unborn and never dies, the wave is born and dies.

So it is with beings appearing - disappearing in the space of Emptiness, of Mind. And so it is with thoughts appearing and disappearing, like a shimmer on the surface of Consciousness. The Mind is the Real and thoughts are the appearance of the Real.

This also means that this very person who is practising zazen at this very moment is Buddha. One must not imagine something else beyond this immediate truth, otherwise one misses the target.

Consciousness-Presence!

When the wave knows that it is the ocean, it also knows that it is beyond life and death. When we understand that our nature is not this ephemeral body, which is born and dies, we are freed from birth and death. This is liberation, the Nirvana promised by the Buddha.

In the Lankâvatâra Sutra, the Buddha teaches:

"Whoever can clearly distinguish between the mind and Self (differentiate the play of thoughts from the nature of Mind), attains liberation by seeing the truth. Their negative emotions and fictitious ideas, eliminated through vision and meditation, are all purified. The buddha-nature is found in the skandhas - the aggregates (body, sensations, emotions, perceptions, mental constructions) like gold and silver in rock or ore. The ore must be melted and purified so that the precious metal reveals all its brilliance."

Zazen reveals the luminous radiance of the buddha-nature.

Everything that has a name and a form is born and dies within that which is not born and does not die. This is the truth taught by the Buddha and we must understand it, see it and live it at the very heart of our meditation.

When you come back from the seaside, you say that you have seen the ocean. But, in fact, you have only seen the waves. Our senses only see what appears on the surface. The ocean, the Mind, is invisible, beyond intellectual understanding and beyond what the senses perceive. The senses see and understand only the surface form. The essence, the formless, escapes them, because it is beyond form.

We are also forms that are born and die. The essence has always been there, but we have identified ourselves with our corporeal form. Every day we see the body and this everyday life ends up becoming our truth. Then our mind begins to tremble because the body is destined to die.

What in us is not born and cannot die has identified itself with the waves of thoughts, beliefs, emotions of all kinds. We must clarify this identification during zazen, to see that it is only a groundless illusion, a mirage.

To clarify the illusion is to see and understand the play of impermanence and to understand that the wave cannot exist without the ocean, and that is to awaken. At the moment when we realise that death is in the very nature of the body, it becomes clear that what is beyond the body is never born and therefore cannot die.

Master Keizan explains :

"Water and waves are not separated; movement and stillness are not different. So it is said: 'A being comes and goes, lives and dies as the imperishable body of the four elements and the five aggregates'."

And he ends by declaring:

"Zazen is to go directly into the ocean of Consciousness and thus manifest the body of all the buddhas."

"The natural clarity of the Mind reveals itself and the original light shines on all sides. There is no increase or decrease in the ocean and the waves never return."
