

Zazen zoom Saturday 13 March 2021

It is important to return to the last sentence of Master Keizan I quoted last week:

"If you want to end your confusion, you must stop investing yourself in thoughts about right and wrong, and stop letting yourself be caught up in the play of your activities."

This statement goes to the heart of our zazen practice.

We can misunderstand and believe that thoughts about good are meritorious and that we should cultivate them, whereas we should suppress thoughts about evil, those we have about ourselves, others or circumstances. This is not what Master Keizan invites us to understand.

In the world of beings, Samsara, evil and good are produced without any interruption. From time without beginning, it says in the sutras. This is the way it is. And no being has the power to oppose the appearance-disappearance of phenomena, good or bad, or of thoughts, sensations and the world of perceptions.

So there is no point in getting involved in thoughts about good and evil. We must learn to let them be, without grasping them, without imagining that they are our own creation, without identifying ourselves with them.

"There are thoughts," the Buddha taught, "but there is no thinker. The idea of a 'me' that has a character of its own is a misunderstanding. Existence is clarity and emptiness."

It is with a balanced, objective gaze that we must examine thoughts, study them, contemplate them to see their emptiness. Thoughts are like magical illusions, transparent. We believe them to be real, and this is what makes us assume that there is *someone* who thinks. The idea that there is a thinker of thoughts is the false belief that roots the illusion of an independent, free 'me'.

Identified with the illusion of this 'me', for whom life has become an endless wandering, we experience the greatest suffering of all, that of not knowing who we really are.

That thoughts are about good or evil does not change their evanescent, empty nature. We can verify this in our meditation ... Understanding this pacifies us and protects us.

That the Presence-Consciousness which notices the passage of thoughts is not affected in its immeasurable clarity and peace, is also something we can notice and experience during zazen... This observation leads us directly to our true nature, spacious, luminous and empty too.

The bodhisattva Vimalakirti experiences every sensation, although there is nothing to feel. He has all kinds of thoughts, although there is no thinker. To get away from the duality of good and evil, he ceases to resort to the notions of inner and outer, and acts with total equanimity. It is ignorance, disease, that must be eliminated, not phenomena, nor thoughts. And if he can master himself, it remains for the bodhisattva to share this mastery with all beings.

The teachings, the instructions of the bodhisattvas serve to cut off evil at its root in the world of dualism, of good and evil.

"What, then, is the root of evil?" asks Manjusri.

"Grasping," replies Vimalakirti.

"And how can this grasping be stopped?"

"By resorting to the unfindable, for in the unfindable there is no grasping."

"What is the unfindable?"

"The end of dualism."

"What is dualism?"

"The vision of an inside and an outside, which are unfindable."

In our own minds, we end dualism by resorting to the unfindable and by ceasing to *"invest ourselves in thoughts of good and evil, by no longer letting ourselves be grabbed by the play of our activities."*

This is the practice of zazen that Master Keizan recommends:

"The mind free from thoughts and the body motionless, without activity, this is the essential point. You must remember this."

This is how absorption in Presence frees us from grasping. This is what the Buddha teaches when he invites us to disappear in pure consciousness of self.
