

Zen Sunday - 28 March 2021

Zazen - 7:30 am

Today, for this day of zazen, I want to make a very brief return to Master Dōgen's *Gakudō yōjin-shu*. This title means: "To encourage the mind to study the Way". It is the Mind that is studied, not the individual 'me'.

In its great simplicity, the *Gakudō yōjin-shu* is a pearl among all the teachings of Master Dōgen. Please read it again.

This text of the *Gakudō yōjin-shu*, which Master Dōgen wrote at the age of 43, joins and completes the *Fukanzazen-gi*, which means "For the universal dissemination of the principles of zazen", which he wrote at the age of 27, on his return from China. These were undoubtedly the two teachings that inspired Master Keizan to write the *Zazen yōjin-ki*, "Recommendations for the practice of zazen" which I have been commenting on every Saturday morning since the beginning of this year.

These teachings are the foundation of Zen practice. They focus on what *Shikantaza* means, practice without an object, simply sitting. In these three texts we are only talking about the attitude of the mind during zazen. Master Dōgen invites us to go beyond words, the known world and the illusion of awakening to recognise what shines in us beyond name and form, beyond the aggregates, without relying on anything.

By following these teachings in our meditation, we are led to understand and realise that we are not the name, the body and all that changes.

Like a wave that realises it is the ocean. By realising this, it can no longer know anything other than the ocean.

At the very start of his discourse, Master Dōgen quotes Nāgârjuna, the 14th Indian Patriarch of our Sôtô Zen lineage, the incomparable specialist in emptiness, who declares: "*The mind that meditates on the appearance and disappearance of things, that considers the impermanence of the world, is called the Mind of Awakening.*"

Many times I have recalled this fundamental statement of Nagarjuna in my *kusens*. It means that when we contemplate impermanence, without trying to grasp anything in it, we naturally come back to our still heart, to the ocean where the appearance & disappearance of waves, of things, takes place. We return to the Mind itself, the Ocean of the Dharma, the Treasury of the Eye. Impermanence is seen as a dream that appears in the Mind, in the ocean of pure Awareness of Self Presence.

That which witnesses and contemplates impermanence is consciousness. When this consciousness joins the ocean it disappears of its own accord into the original Consciousness, the pure Being beyond being and non-being. This is the heart of the three teachings I have mentioned.

If we think carefully about Nagarjuna's statement, we can only make it the root of our practice. Naturally, without effort, we allow ourselves to be absorbed by the Mind of Awakening, which contemplates impermanence and the individual 'me' melts into the ocean of Emptiness.

"In this contemplation," Master Dōgen continues, "there can therefore be no question of self and mine, nor of self-love or self-interest."

So if we practice being deeply attentive to the appearance of things, without identifying with them, we realise that they disappear without a trace. In this way we can abandon attachment

to the idea of obtaining something, becoming important, recognised, rich or enlightened; we overcome the illusion of the 'me' and 'mine' and the suffering that arises from attachment to this illusion.

The whole posture produces this detachment from our illusions by constantly resituating us in Presence, the breathing, the observation of sensations, perceptions, the vision of impermanence. To see the impermanence of the body is to realise that we are not the body, and that in itself is simply to be.

"The Truth is the fact of being of beings," says the Buddha. In our practice, it is not a matter of awakening to anything, but of realising that we ARE Awakening itself, the Ocean of Emptiness.

Zazen - 10:00 am

"The person who trains themselves to forget the 'me' and 'mine', even if only for a moment, becomes intimate with the Mind of Awakening," Master Dōgen continues. *"It is attachment to the 'me' that is the cause of all our errors."*

This illusion of the 'me' produces identification with this ephemeral body and it is this that produces confusion and suffering. If you realise that you are not the body, then you ARE. This is simple to understand and difficult to realise, but it is the path to liberation.

All that we see and feel of the body is impermanence and movement. *Shikantaza* is keeping still, not grasping anything of this impermanence. Just contemplating it. We are witnesses to this play of impermanence that appears at every moment in the Mind. All we have to do is allow ourselves to be absorbed in this silent contemplation of impermanence.

The only peace we can find is to return to the luminous Source of this Mind. This return is a

surrender. It is an unconditional acceptance of all that IS, that expects nothing and doesn't seek a special knowledge. All voluntary practice or all desire for knowledge can be compared to single rays of sunlight. The number of these rays is infinite. Let us find the Source of these rays and everything will be perfect.

"As soon as one surrenders to practice, realization appears," says Master Dōgen. *"I have never heard of any benefit being obtained without studying, nor any realization without practising."*

We mustn't think that our efforts will produce enlightenment or that they will enable us to develop special capabilities. Nor that we will be able to understand the Supreme Reality through the ordinary mind. We do not practice to acquire new ideas, but to divest ourselves of false ones.

Concepts like the Original Source, the Ultimate Reality, the Absolute Principle or Buddha nature are like soap to clean away false ideas. We cannot get anything. What is important for us is to consciously experience the simple fact of being.

It is the teaching of *Shikantaza* which is realised as Presence. It is ungraspable, untraceable, beyond all knowledge.

"It is before Awakening itself that one must obtain realisation," writes Master Dōgen. *"Only then will we understand that the raft, the skilful means, were no more than the dream of a past night, and we will abandon the old views which made us mistake a creeper for a snake."*

To study and practice is to realise.

"It is," says Master Dōgen, "to attune the mind and body to the Way and it is to discover peace. One can only achieve agreement between conduct and the Way when the mind ceases to grasp and reject, when it no longer even desires to get anything."

For us who are the children of the Buddha, the Way is to follow his example, not to think of ourselves, nor to think of fame or profit, even less to think of obtaining a reward in this life or in another, or again of some miraculous power. *"It is only for the sake of the Dharma that one must practise the Dharma."*

"To practice Dharma is to understand that it cannot be obtained either by thought or by the absence of thought." To understand that, we must plunge into the silence of our own Mind, disappear into pure Presence and forget the 'me'.

This is what the Buddha and our Masters did, contemplating the body and mind, abandoning all identification with what is impermanence.

Shin jin datsu raku.

For Master Dōgen it is, *"to shed body and mind"*. And he also says that it is *"to master the body and mind"*.

Can we do this? And *WHO* does this?

Zazen - 3.15 pm

I finished the previous kusen with the question: *"How to master the body and mind?"*, a question that Master Dōgen asks. And I added: *"Who does this?"*

To master the body and mind is a way of translating *Shin jin datsu raku*; to strip oneself of identification with the body and mind. To go beyond, one metre above the top of the pole.

First of all it must be understood that the illusory 'me' cannot master anything at all. Being a creation in the mind, it is in constant turmoil. It does not have the skill to understand its still Source.

'To master' means to *SEE*. Seeing requires no effort; it is the very quality of Consciousness. To *SEE*, one must agree to no longer cling to anything at all, neither to the body nor to ideas because they are destined to disappear.

All is name and form, and this is only appearance. When we understand the illusion of appearances, during zazen, we lose our ability to give ourselves a name or a form, to take ourselves for a 'me'.

This is the heart of zazen. *"Movement and stillness completely cease to occur and we actualise the fundamental point."*

We examine ourselves carefully to go beyond name and form, limits, knowledge and intelligence. To merge with the ocean. This is what mastery is, for Master Dōgen, and to become a master.

"Didn't the old Master Shakyamuni say, "Going upstream, Avalokiteshvara forgot everything he knew. The old Master Shakyamuni is the Buddha himself. Going upstream means going against the current, to abandon criteria such as reasoning and discrimination, habits, conditioning and the illusion of the separate 'me'. Going upstream "is to be certain that we have always been on the Way and that there is neither increase, nor decrease, nor error."

To conclude this day, I recall once again this recommendation of Master Dōgen in the Fukanzazengi:

"You must therefore learn the turning-around that directs your light inward, to illuminate your true nature. The body and mind will fade away of themselves and your original face will appear."

Avalokiteshvara [Kanjizai Bosatsu] completely and definitively accomplishes this turn-around and merges with the ocean. He realises the emptiness of names, forms and the 'me'. For this purpose he sits in quietness and thus actualises his own nature-Emptiness.

For Avalokiteshvara, the mere fact of existence is love itself, the great compassion of the Buddhas. It is in *THIS* that he allows himself to disappear for the sake of all beings.
