

Day of zazen online

Sunday 25 April 2021

Zazen 07:30 - 09:00 am

I ended yesterday [Saturday] morning's *kusen* with this statement which goes to the heart of the Buddha's teaching and our Zen practice:

"The consciousness of things comes and goes; Presence is always there! Pure Presence is what eternally predominates, remains, when consciousness turns towards its Source and dissolves in it. When consciousness is no longer there, only Presence remains."

To understand this and to realise it during zazen is to live the *samadhi* of the Buddhas. It is the moment when all searching ends, when the expectation of a result vanishes, when even the idea of awakening disappears. This is at last to find rest.

To hold yourself in the beyond-words, beyond thoughts, *Hishiryō*, and to live the *samadhi* of the Buddhas - that's our destination, to reach the other shore. We agree to melt into the mystery of *Presence*. It means to give up everything - body and mind. It means forgetting the 'me', abolishing any idea of a separation between ourselves and beings, between ourselves and the original *Source*. It's to take refuge in the light of our own mind. This light is the source from which consciousness is born.

In the *Prajñāparamitā* sutra, the sutra of the Great Wisdom *Hannya*, the Wisdom-Emptiness that we chant after zazen, is written:

"When bodhisattvas enter the Samadhi of Great Wisdom, neither gods nor men can know their thought, for they are no longer disturbed by what is seen, heard, thought or known."

"At the same time, bodhisattvas no longer produce either differentiation or judgement. Thus they teach all beings the Buddha-Way, with great compassion."

The consciousness of things comes and goes, like the things themselves.

Consciousness appears spontaneously in response to what is seen, heard, thought or known. In this sense, it's the fifth aggregate, and we speak rather of consciousnesses: (of sight, hearing, smell, taste and of the mind). Like the other four aggregates that make up the individual, this consciousness is not permanent. It appears and disappears with the things it perceives. It has no existence of its own, and that is why it is emptiness. *Shiki soku ze Ku* declares the *Scripture of Great Wisdom*. With the appearance of this consciousness, the world is seen and known.

When consciousness identifies itself with what it perceives, the erroneous idea is created that an entity called 'the me' perceives. Consciousness sees itself as this illusory 'me', identifies itself with an illusion. Illusion, because this 'me' will also disappear.

The practice of zazen is to realise that we can neither hang on to nor reject any of our perceptions, of our emotions, of our thoughts, nor of the consciousness we have of them. Everything comes and goes continually. When we realise the truth of impermanence, it allows us to forget and to overcome the mistaken idea of this illusory 'me' and to enter into the *Samadhi* of Great Wisdom. This is what the *Samadhi* of Zazen is: then consciousness returns to its source and dissolves into it. And when consciousness is no longer there, all that remains is Presence.

Presence is what is called Great Wisdom in the *Prajñāparamitā* sutras.

This Great Wisdom, pure Presence, is without either form or character. To realise it is to reach the other shore, to be free from "birth and death". To merge with Presence is continuous practice, at every moment. Presence which is neither here nor there, which neither comes nor goes, which is neither felt by the body nor by the mind, but which suddenly establishes itself in the heart of our zazen.

"The consciousness of things comes and goes; Presence is always there! Pure Presence is what eternally predominates when consciousness merges with its source. When consciousness is no longer there, only Presence remains."

Zazen 10:00 - 11:15 am

Awareness-Presence is the light that illuminates all experience. Without it no knowledge is possible. *Truly* listening to *kusen* is an experience that can only be done within Awareness-Presence. For if you are distracted or elsewhere - *Kontin* (drowsiness) or *Sanran* (agitation) - the experience of *kusen* can neither be heard nor known. The perception of the world can only be done in Awareness-Presence. It is that which knows. Zazen calls us, shows us the way of our homeland and returns us to it.

The light of Awareness-Presence illuminates all that we perceive and makes it knowable. This light is equally the very substance of the world; and its nature is transparency and emptiness.

Generally we see the world *out there*, far away from us. We feel ourselves to be separate from it. Yet there is no distance between the world and our perception of it. When we see the mountain, it is within our mind that it appears.

We cannot separate the mountain from the Awareness-Presence that perceives it. They are the same '*transparent substance*', which Buddhism calls *Emptiness*. In the *Prajñāparamitā*, Emptiness is also called *Great Wisdom*.

Master Eno, the sixth Patriarch, teaches in the Platform Sutra;

"That at every instant, thought that is not based on the 'me/I' is the constant practice of Great Wisdom."

As soon as there is thought, Great Wisdom is obscured. For at the very moment that there is thought, there is illusion, - and where there is illusion there can be no reality. It is the spontaneous, immediate, continual practice of Presence that is Real."

We realise that at every moment the world appears in our mind; that the experience we have of it cannot be dissociated from Awareness-Presence. This is to live impermanence. There is only one sole reality, called Buddha. Buddha is Awakening, free from birth and death. But it is also the Ultimate Reality, the timeless nature of beings, our original identity, Awareness-Presence.

The meditation that reaches the target teaches us that everything appears within us and that its essence is no different from our own. Everything is Awareness-Presence.

Zazen 1:15 - 2:45 pm

No *kusen*

Zazen 3:30 - 4:45 pm

Here's a Zen story to finish our practice together today. It is quoted in the *Keisei sanshoku*, chapter 25 of Master Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "The Voice of the Valley Streams, the Forms & Colours of the Mountains".

Kyogen was studying with his Master Isan, who asked him one day:

"You are intelligent and erudite. Can you tell me in one word not what you learned in books, but who existed even before your parents were born?"

In other words, what was your original face before you were born - your homeland.

Kyogen could not answer. He continued to look for the answer in books. Eventually, after a few years, he decided to abandon all his books and burn them, making this observation:

"A painting of a pancake doesn't satisfy hunger. I promise no longer to try to understand the Buddha Dharma in this earthly life through books. I will content myself with simply serving rice to the other monks in the temple."

This he did for many years.

However, Kyogen eventually asked Master Isan:

"My mind is heavy and clouded, and I cannot find the word to explain 'who' existed even before my parents were born. Please tell me."

Isan replied:

"It is not that I refuse to tell you, but if I tell you, I fear that later on you will hold it against me."

Years passed. When Master Isan died, Kyôgen began a hermit's life in the mountains, near the temple where Master Daishô lived and taught. Kyogen lived by growing bamboo, which completely surrounded his hermitage.

One day while sweeping the path, a piece of tile picked up by his broom struck a bamboo. On hearing the sound of the tile hitting the bamboo, Kyogen experienced the Great Awakening.

He took a bath, purified his body, lit a stick of incense and prostrated himself in the direction of the mountain where his Master Isan had lived.

"Great Master Isan, if you had once given me the answer, how could this event have happened now? The gratitude I owe you goes beyond that which I owe my parents."

He then composed this poem:

*"At a stroke, all my knowledge has vanished!
There is nothing left for me to purify in my practice!
Every one of my gestures, each of my acts
accords with the way of the Ancestors.
I will no longer sink into sadness or discouragement.
Nowhere is there any trace.
This is the majestic way that transcends the
voice of the valleys and the forms & colours of
the mountains.
Those who have realised the truth of the
Dharma unanimously call it nature in its
entirety, in an instant."*

It is not possible to realise the Great Awakening independently of the whole of nature, of the voice of the valleys, of the forms & colours of the mountains, and of all beings. It is with the ephemeral body that we must realise the Way. Everything appears and disappears in our own mind, Presence which is our nature.

When the voice of the valley falls silent, when the forms & colours of the mountains fade away, Presence is there still! Timelessly there! Without before or after!

Presence is our true original face, our homeland.

*"The consciousness of things comes and goes,
Presence is always there!
Pure Presence is what eternally remains when
consciousness merges with its Source.
When consciousness is no longer there, only
Presence remains."*
