

Zoom Zazen, Saturday 15 May 21

Let's go back to Master Keizan's *Zazen Yojinki*.

Regarding the teachings of the Elders, here's what he recommends:

"Although they were given to clarifying the mind, do not read them too much, nor study them obsessively, as this can scatter the mind. Anything that absorbs the body and mind can be a cause of illness."

Master Dōgen puts it another way:

"Even one who has read wonderful treatises on gradual teaching or sudden teaching, or who has received the transmission of exoteric or esoteric doctrines - if he has not yet given up attachment to fame and profit, to the accumulation of knowledge, to the illusion of a 'me' - he cannot be said to have conceived the mind of Awakening."

To engage in Awakening is to meditate on the impermanence of things and to see their emptiness. It is all a matter of wisdom and discernment. That's not to say one shouldn't progress in understanding the teachings. Many practitioners think that study is unnecessary, but that's like making a journey without a map. It's easy to get lost! Teachings cannot replace practice with body and mind relaxed, in the silence of the dojo; but they can direct the attention to what it's important to grasp to reach the heart of zazen and the understanding of the Way.

In the *Genjo Koan*, Master Dōgen quotes this statement from the Buddha himself:

"As soon as one engages in practice, realization appears. It has never been heard of that the slightest benefit has been obtained without study, nor the least realization without practice."

The Buddha taught a doctrine that allows us to understand the ultimate meaning of existence and to follow the path that leads to this truth. The bodhisattva path is the path of knowledge by which it is possible to know the very essence of things, their illusory and transient nature, their emptiness.

This is the way to end the suffering of human beings. It would be presumptuous to think that it's useless to study the teachings of the Buddha,

because they only talk about the truth that we can realize within ourselves.

Endowed with great humility, the Buddha - and all the masters - never delivered dogmatic teachings:

"Only accept what I say," said the Buddha, "after you've examined it for yourselves; don't accept it simply because of your respect for me. Those who have nothing other than faith in me and affection for me will not find ultimate freedom. But those who have faith in the truth and practice with determination - they will find the path to enlightenment. You must travel the path yourselves; the Buddhas only teach the Way."

In following the teachings, we can - in our meditation - return to the Source of our own sensitivity, and dwell in *It* - beyond the shifting words and the restless 'me'. It is there that truth is immobility and silence, Presence, and it is there that we can see how it sets itself in motion, becomes form, takes on appearance, and plays out the spectacle of appearance-disappearance, of birth and death. Our breathing itself testifies to this truth, as does every one of our thoughts, feelings and emotions.

The teachings of the Buddha and the masters are the indications that allow us to find by ourselves this motionless truth which is emptiness. We must follow them without falling into a dogmatic attachment.

During zazen, we live the ultimate teaching - timeless Presence, at the very heart of the posture. Zazen, it's to live the mystery of being, to enter the stream, an expression much utilised in early Buddhism. There is neither *before* nor *after* in the flow of the river. Whatever the place or the moment, in the course of the river, it is always Presence.

Referring to Master Wanshi, Master Dōgen repeats this wonderful image in his *Genjo Koan*:

"Fish swim in the water and as far as they go, the water has no limit. Birds fly in the sky and as far as they fly, the sky has no limit. Since time immemorial neither fish nor birds have ever left the water and the sky."

From the beginning, we remain in Presence; it is our natural environment, our homeland. We *ARE* Presence itself at the very heart of life.
