

# Zazen Sunday - 30 May 2021

## Zazen 07:30

It is written in the Prajñâpâramitâ:

*"No one can attain liberation from Dukkha (dissatisfaction and persistent suffering) without engaging in the path of emptiness."*

It's easy to overlook this recommendation, but it is nonetheless crucial for all beings who are on the Buddha Way. To be on the Way, to 'enter the stream' - an expression from early Buddhism - means to see and understand what emptiness is and to realise the essence of things themselves. This is the whole point of the *Hannya Shingyo* sutra.

This sutra begins with this sentence that we know well and that we often chant and that we sometimes have to repeat thousands of times before penetrating its meaning:

*"The Bodhisattva of Great Compassion, Avalokiteshvara (Kanjizai), through his profound practice of Great Wisdom, sees that the five aggregates are nothing but emptiness and through this understanding, he relieves all suffering."*

Seeing that the aggregates are nothing but emptiness is realised when it is seen that body, sensations, perceptions and mental constructs have no substance of their own, i.e. no 'Me' - and that the aggregates cannot be our true identity. The aggregates which constitute the person are not 'Me'. This truth is naturally realised in the Buddha's zazen that we are practicing today.

The bodhisattva's deep practice of Great Wisdom, zazen, teaches him to discern between what is illusory and impermanent; appearance (*shiki*), and what is true and permanent, the *Real (Ku)*. Great Wisdom is our own inward

gaze during the deep practice of zazen. We enter into recollection in our own nature, i.e. we engage in emptiness, often without ourselves being aware of it.

The inward gaze, which is deep attention to the essence of things, is a gaze that is not affected by any conditioning; that has no cause or intention; and that contemplates things, forms, phenomena, as they are, in their ungraspable wonder. Appearance-disappearance, birth & death, This must be a vision freed from all attachment, and therefore from any idea of a personal 'me'.

The source of this vision is what the Buddha calls the Treasury of the Eye, the name by which Master Dōgen entitles his work, the *Shōbōgenzō*, which is another way of describing that which is our true nature. It is therefore from the Treasury of the Eye that the world is contemplated and not from our discriminating, calculating mind. And it is from the source of the Treasury of the Eye that we can see the emptiness of the five aggregates that constitute the individual. And to see this, we turn our gaze inwards, to our own mind.

The Treasury of the Eye is simply vision without a person who sees. Vision that is silent, luminous, still, contemplative; Presence that is and is not, Emptiness. In this vision is revealed the setting in motion of things, phenomena, illusions, thoughts; of all that appears and disappears unceasingly: "*the incessant Awakening without trace*", as Master Dogen writes.

When the emptiness of the five aggregates is seen, in the still and silent meditation of zazen, two revelations become obvious:

On the one hand, the 'pseudo' reality of the personal 'me' is clearly perceived and seen as illusory. It follows that it becomes possible to

detach oneself from it and forget about it, because this 'me' is no longer of interest, any more than the appearance of the floating clouds stretching in a sky without limits. One can even laugh at having been fooled by this illusion.

On the other hand, the 'emptiness of the sky' (*Ten Ku*, in Japanese, which is my name as a monk) is revealed. This is the very space, without limits, in which appears the grandiose and illusory manifestation - appearance-disappearance - in which the 'me' and all other illusions play their fictitious and ephemeral role.

When we are taught to go beyond words, *Hishiryô*, it means to find the space of the sky and it is to this that zazen leads us.

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## Zazen 10:00

*"When the Law is revealed, that is to say the vision of Emptiness", says Master Dogen, "immediately the original, undefiled state is confirmed, certified."*

The Law, that is the Dharma, the buddha-nature, Emptiness. The discovery of the true Law is what we call meditation. It is the only practice of the bodhisattva that he deploys throughout his day. And it must be seen - without any possible argument - that, at the very heart of this practice, our true identity is Emptiness; whose appearance is the world of beings and phenomena, of unending Awakening without a trace. There, where there is silence, Presence, the absence of a 'me' - there is nothing apart from *that which is*; nothing whatever that could be grasped or rejected. Emptiness in which, however, everything is there.

To see Emptiness is to see what cannot be seen. Which is to say, to see nothing. It is to be the sky itself dressed in floating clouds that it has no intention of grasping or controlling. To refer to the world of the thinking mind to try to grasp this truth is like trying to catch a mirage. Master Yoka (665 - 713), author of the *Shodoka*, the '*Song of Immediate Satori*' writes:

*"The floating clouds of the five skandhas (aggregates) come and go in the limitless sky. The foam of the three poisons (ignorance, greed and anger) appears and disappears on the ocean. Why should we suffer in trying to grasp these illusions?"*

To see like this is true knowledge. It arises naturally, unconsciously, automatically in our body-mind sitting in front of the wall; in the gathered silent contemplation of still and timeless Presence. This knowledge that puts an end to ignorance is liberation. Like Master Yoka, we can then say:

*"I have crossed oceans and lakes, I have passed mountains and rivers, I have visited the Masters, I have sought the right paths, and everywhere I have practiced zazen. But since I found the path to Mount Sokei (where Master Eno, the sixth Patriarch, taught), I know that birth and death are not different."*

*"If you understand perfectly the origin, the principle - Emptiness - you can teach it perfectly. Zazen and Great Wisdom will be in complete fusion without remaining either in Ku or shiki."*

Here and now is our true home. Presence!

To see and understand in the heart of this Presence that which is beyond life and death is to awaken.

The disciple asked his master:

*"I have come to you to ask you to tell me what death is and what life is. Can you teach me?"*

The master replied:

*"You can go elsewhere to receive an answer. Where I am, there is neither birth nor death."*

"Where I am," is always now. It is here where *Ku soku ze shiki* is realised. And this simple seated meditation is the very place of this Awakening. Presence!

*"If you find the Source of this Presence," says Master Dogen in the Genjôkôan, "know that it is actualised with and in your daily life. And there, exactly where you are, you actualise the fundamental point.*

*Practice does not exist beforehand; it only appears now, in this now."*

The *kôan*, our ultimate question about life and death, finds its answer in Presence.

*"So," Master Yoka continues, "enter into the satori of non-birth immediately. Such is the power of Great Wisdom."*

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## Zazen 15:30

The intrinsic and intention-less quality or power of Emptiness is to reveal itself as forms, in perfect unity with them. Emptiness becomes (is) forms, thus *IN*-forming itself of what *It* is - appearing through the interplay of phenomena. Through all living things, Emptiness becomes aware of Itself and the world, as much interior as exterior. This is what Master Yoka writes in this beautiful statement:

*"One nature contains all natures, one existence includes all existences.*

*One moon reflects on all waters, all the reflections of the moon in the water come from one moon."*

So we ourselves have the incredible capacity to perceive the unending play of the impermanence of names and forms. And in meditation we have the often unconscious intuition of an all-inclusive Reality. When this truth reveals itself to us, we know without any possible doubt that there is neither birth nor death. When this one truth that the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and masters teach, becomes conscious - that is liberation.

Emptiness is not different from forms and forms are Emptiness.

Can we feel and perceive this without using words which limit and reduce the nature of things?

This is what zazen teaches if we agree to divest ourselves of any identification with words, forms and also any conceptual idea of Emptiness. To practice direct seeing, direct listening, direct perception, direct feeling, without letting the discriminating mind put words on top of what is seen, heard, perceived and felt; and to remain in the place where the mind is silent?

In the silence, the veil of our beliefs, fears and illusions is lifted to reveal what is invisible, so that we hear what is inaudible, attain what is unfindable - and in this way engage in Great Wisdom to realise the infinite riches of our body-mind.

To conclude this day together, I would like to quote Master Yoka again. He compares our own mind to a mirror, kept clean through our practice of zazen:

*"The mirror of the mind is pure and nothing ever obscures it. By its purity and clarity it reflects the whole universe. Thousands of phenomena are reflected in this perfect jewel which has neither inside nor outside, nor limit.*

*To detach oneself from existence and attach oneself to the mirror's Emptiness is a serious illness. It is like throwing oneself into the fire to avoid falling into the water. To wish to abandon illusions and keep only the truth is discrimination, artifice and imitation.*

*When a being follows only the practice ignoring this fact, he's like someone who adopts a thief to make him his son.*

*Do not seek the truth, do not seek to cut off illusions and understand clearly that both are Emptiness.*

*See this person of satori who has given up study. He neither seeks to cut off illusions nor to find the truth."*

Why does he no longer seek anything?

Because he has understood that he himself is the ungraspable truth, Emptiness in the guise of a perishable form. He is not born and therefore cannot die.

Such is the realisation of the practice of Great Wisdom which takes us beyond.

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