

Zazen Day Saturday 7 August 2021

08:00 Zazen Kusen

During sleep, when we sleep, we *are*, but we are not aware of our presence. It is also the same when we are absorbed in the game of thoughts. We are absent from our own presence.

Every morning, when we wake up, we have the impression that we are opening our eyes to a world to be explored, conquered, where we will have to fight, control, dominate. But this is not the right vision or attitude, the truth is not like that. In reality, the world reveals itself to us each morning, in our own minds, *as it is*.

We can welcome it with a fresh, curious, benevolent gaze, even if the circumstances or situations seem difficult or unfavourable. Or we can complain about this so-complicated world where nothing is done to ensure our happiness and criticise others.

In fact, as soon as we wake up, existence penetrates us through all our senses. We immediately, unconsciously and without any effort adhere to our quality of perceptive being.

Through all our senses we perceive life and thus become aware of the Presence. Whatever we look at, hear, taste, touch, we have, in fact, no other choice but to perceive. There is no effort to make in order to perceive. There isn't even any possibility of doing otherwise than perceiving, seeing or hearing what we are perceiving, seeing or hearing. The same applies to everything that is in the realm of thought.

The observation we can make every morning is that we are the open, empty space in which the world appears. Emptiness thus reveals itself to itself in our own mind, in total oneness with the world of phenomena: It is "*Ku soku ze shiki*", as soon as we wake up.

We are life and at no time can we get out of it. Nor can we escape impermanence or birth and death.

So how can we still believe in the illusion of control by a 'me' that's so vulnerable, fragile and fickle?

From the moment we wake up, there is Presence. There is no one who is Presence. There is just the observation that the world appears in the mind, is perceived. This is something we can verify in our own experience. It's an obviousness that the discriminating mind quickly comes to obscure, by overlaying perception with words and interpretations.

So observe and feel what is going on in you on awakening, before the discriminating mind begins to stir. This is the very practice of zazen: to observe, to look without intervening and to feel, to perceive.

Then a question arises: "Who perceives Presence?"

Of course, it is the mind that questions. But in silence, when the mind is absent and all is silence, "we know that we *are*" and the question of knowing who perceives no longer has any meaning. For the Presence that we *are*, the 'me' is not a problem, just an appearance without substance, like a hallucination or a dream.

To awaken to our own nature is to learn to be at peace with phenomena, circumstances, situations, others. We welcome them with kindness, without classifying them. For the Presence, all experiences are equal. Even those we don't notice ourselves doing are no different from those we do with the conscious heart.

Simply, any experience lived fully, in full consciousness, manifests the love of Vacuity experiencing itself in itself. And when we consciously participate in this blossoming, in this *production*, the relative is dressed in the qualities of the absolute, peace, welcome, joy, freedom, spontaneity; and the ordinary becomes the extraordinary.

The Buddha therefore recommends:

"Be all attention in the experience of the present moment. The way to liberation consists of training yourself to live in this present without projecting yourself into the future."

10:30 Zazen Kusen

One could say that Zen is simply saying yes to *that which is*. In each now that we live, just sitting in the dojo or involved in the world of activity.

Saying yes to *that which is* does not mean to adopt a strategy or to try to meet a spiritual recommendation, or making efforts to let go.

That which is cannot be other than what we see 'in the process of being'. And therefore cannot **not** be! This is in fact an obvious fact in the face of which there is only one right attitude: acceptance. Zazen leads immediately to this acceptance.

The 'me' is not willing to recognise the evidence of Presence because it can only unfold in the dimension of time. In the pure, timeless Presence, the 'me' disappears, and it is thus that its inconsistency and emptiness are revealed to us.

The true surrender to which the practice of Presence leads us is not the loss of something but the opening to '*what is*', *as it is*. To surrender oneself is to welcome unconditionally *that which is*. And in this unconditional acceptance there can also be fear, refusal, resistance, anger, meanness, and all that comes from the conditioning of our "self". Nothing can be outside of *that which is*. This is the understanding that zazen reveals to us.

In this unconditional welcoming, there is the understanding that all "*that which is in the process of being*" is the play of impermanence. There is the understanding that our will to control and direct things is, in fact, a disharmony with the truth of *that which is*.

This is the basic teaching of the Buddha himself:

"Consider the world as empty, and stop thinking of yourself as an entity that actually exists. This is the way to overcome death."

This understanding-seeing of the impermanence and vanity of the 'me' leads us to that acceptance which is true surrender. During our opening to *that which is*, the mechanism of grasping lets go of its own accord. Being aware of '*that which is*' frees us, even if we are going through a painful experience. Wanting to end suffering does not mean refusing *that which is*. The Buddha says:

"They see clearly, those who see life as it is, always being and ceasing to be. They accept it wholeheartedly and do not despair, and thus it is that they begin to know the unconditioned."

To say yes to suffering, to say yes to relief, is to be in agreement with what is lived, felt, experienced. This is true intimacy with things, *as they are*.

Master Dogen calls it the actualization of the fundamental point, *Genjô kôan*, in which:

"Flowers wither despite our love and regret, and weeds spring up despite our aversion and rejection." ¹

This intimacy with things allows us to see them in their truth and experience them fully. We inhabit the Presence in which all is equanimity and where the vision of the incomprehensible mystery of being unfolds in our minds.

14:30 Zazen Mondo, not translated

16:30 Zazen Kusen

In the Satipatthāna sutra, (Sutra on the Foundations of Mindfulness) the Buddha teaches about sensations:

"If a being has given up the tendency to greed in pleasant sensations, the tendency to aversion in unpleasant sensations and the tendency to indifference in neutral sensations, he is called the one who is free from unhealthy tendencies, one who sees clearly."

If one feels joy without knowing the nature of the feeling and if one is prone to greed, one will not know deliverance."

¹ K. Tanahashi (Ed), *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, Zen Master Dogen's *Shobo Genzo*, (2012), p.29 renders this succinctly as: 'Yet in attachment blossoms fall, and in aversion weeds spread.'

If we know pain without knowing the nature of the sensation, prone to aversion, we will not know deliverance.

And even neutral feeling, if one is to cling to it out of attachment, it will not free from perpetual wandering."

We must therefore know the nature of sensations, and also the nature of perceptions, of mental constructions. This is our path of investigation. It's to taste life!

To know one must experience, taste, smell in an open consciousness that does not shut down the experience of tasting or feeling by judgment or by commentary.

It's like trying to describe the ingredients of a dish that you eat while blindfolded. You have to go to the heart of the sensation, without *a priori*, without judgment, to feel and welcome each flavor, each perfume, each texture in their very essence, their nature.

Also study the emotion we feel, the joy, the lightness, the strength... To do this is to live fully and consciously the reality of existence. It is really about having an existential experience and seeing how emptiness produces itself in forms, sensations, flavors and emotions.

On the contrary, when we are driven by greed, we eat quickly and without taking the time to chew, savor, smell, and also to be grateful. It is then an experience in which we deny life, a dead experience that maintains the illusion of the conditioned 'me' and one which is attached to fleeting pleasures.

What is felt can only be fully felt in an open and welcoming awareness. This is also how our gaze turns anew to Presence. Because beyond all experience, our fundamental nature is permanently present.

We can even say that it discovers itself, tastes itself, savours itself through all the experiences we have. And when the experience is tasty, do not deprive yourself of savouring, of enjoying, without - for all that - creating an attachment.

The Buddha continues his reasoning to its logical conclusion:

"If the practitioner experiences a pleasant sensation, they know that it is impermanent and that one should not get attached to it, surrender to it, and they feel it as one who is not hampered by it.

If they are vigilant and thus practice mindfulness and clear understanding, they will penetrate the nature of all sensations. Having done so, they will, in this very life, be free from all defilements, all corruption and all passions."

What is said about sensations also applies to all aspects of our body and mind, to everything seen, felt, perceived, thought. To all that constitutes the world of sensory, emotional and spiritual experiences.

The unconditional acceptance of *that which is* is the teaching of zazen which only knows the yes; a yes which also welcomes the no. This is what Master Deshimaru called, "to become intimate with ... yourself".
