

Zoom Zen Day

Sesshin 31 July 2021

Zazen 08:00

The Way of Zen is that of a single intention, a single questioning: "What is my true nature?" To answer this question, the Buddha devoted years of asceticism, before seating himself beneath the Bodhi Tree, determined not to move again until he'd found the answer. And it's that answer that signals his Enlightenment.

The Buddha-Way is the path of awakening - awakening for all beings. It's the vow and *vocation* of the bodhisattvas. It's firstly a way of investigation and knowing. We must endlessly probe our level of understanding, we must drive our mind to its limit. We have to put an end to clinging to the concepts or beliefs constructed by our discriminating mind.

But equally, we must learn to listen to the silence; feel the resonance of our bodily sensations; consciously welcome all perceptions and also study the world of thoughts and their mechanisms; That is, contemplate what lives within us; learn to live the Presence that is always already there.

This is what constitutes the practice of the Buddha. And to be able to focus the attention on separating out useless distractions, we try - before the wall - to embody stillness so as to become aware of that which moves - the impermanence within and around us.

"It's sufficient," says Master Dogen, "to meditate on your present mind, attached to 'me' and 'mine', to pride and self-interest. Attached as we are in this way, how can we reach the stage at which no further thought is produced? Attached in this way, how can we realise the Mind of Awakening? Where do we begin?"

Master Dogen provides the answer: *"In meditation - zazen - to contemplate impermanence is the precondition for the appearance of the Mind of Awakening."*

So, it's our practice now, **now** - with no idea of any goal, without looking for a result. Simply as *it is*, here-now.

"So," Master Dogen continues, "we have to practise forgetting the 'me and mine' - even if only for one moment; so as to create this silent confluence - body, mind, conducive moment - between ourselves and the Mind of Awakening; because it is the belief in a 'me' that is the cause of all our mistakes."

Zazen 10:30

"The 'me'," says Master Dogen, "is the cause of all our mistakes."

We must study this seriously. That's to say, see how it appears in our mind: associated with thoughts, memories and anticipations. Just as in our meditation, it whispers advice, it judges and condemns, grasps, rejects and imagines scenarios - including those which talk about the 'letting-go' of the 'me', of Awakening, of the buddha-nature.

The most important thing the Masters teach is to see and accept things just as they are. So we accept our being caught up in illusions created by the discriminating mind, and not being able to do anything about it.

For example, we accept not being able to do anything other than wish for Awakening, all the while knowing that this very wish - or desire - takes us further away from it.

We understand that this acceptance is, itself also, just a manipulation of the mind - and that there's no way out of it by using the mind. We see this perpetually frustrated wanting which gets us nowhere. We see our inability to find peace, always perturbed by the unending stream of thoughts. That's how it is.

To stop resisting *that which is*, is an expression of wisdom. Everything that passes through us: unkind or greedy thoughts, images, twisted stories, unpleasant sensations, sickly emotions... we let all that be at work in us. That's nothing more than the play of impermanence; it has no enduring reality; it cannot be our true buddha-nature.

This deep acceptance is called: *Shin jin datsu raku* - meaning to cease to identify with what's impermanent, the body & the discriminating mind. We could say: to 'strip off'.

That which can produce this surrender is not the famous 'letting-go' recommended by the many so-called enlightened teachers - but the complete, unconditional acceptance that things can't be other than *what they are* in our mind. And any idea that something is *wrong* with our experience has to be completely left behind,

forgotten. We cannot live anything other than this 'now', *as it is*, at each moment.

This is the practice of zazen. Not relying on anything. And this is what we have to set to work in our daily life. It's in Presence, ordinary, everyday, that subject and object disappear. And that is peace.

"Just contemplate." said Master Dogen in the chapter: **Bussho**. *"Just contemplate. This doesn't involve either the subject who contemplates or the object contemplated. If you want to see your buddha-nature, you must first of all turn the spotlight on the illusion of the 'me' and its arrogance."*

So, our practice is to learn to see with our own Eye-Treasure. *From* our own Eye-Treasure - that is: to meditate.

Zazen - 16:30

Since our birth we've all been exposed to all kinds of conditioning. And from this is formed the belief that we are a separate 'me' - an *ego* - which is our body; which is *in* the body. And that this 'me' has at its disposal a free-will and the ability to control phenomena.

In all the Buddha's teachings, he explained that this 'me' which is in control is an illusion. The notion that this illusory 'me' has free-will collapses in on itself.

Many spiritual teachings advocate abandoning this 'me', the sacrifice of the 'me' - non-doing, non-wanting, letting-go.

But, in fact there is no-one to do all this. These are, themselves, recommendations that

reinforce the idea of a 'me' that can do something.

This belief in a 'me' leads to the formation of a continual tension, of an imaginary or ideal goal that seems unattainable, an intention that remains forever unfulfilled.

But to surrender is to have neither intention nor goal. How do we get out of that contradiction?

It's through practising an honest, meticulous observation that we try to answer these questions: *Is there actually a thinker behind our thoughts? How do we make choices in our lives? How do they develop - these thoughts, emotions, reactions in the face of situations, or others? What do we really choose?*

When we find the answer to these questions; which is to say that the absence of a 'me' is seen, that it is realised that it is an illusion - it becomes obvious that the idea of a free-will is also an illusion. True surrender comes about through this understanding. It is an opening. It's the way of getting out of the contradiction.

We stop resisting the trap of desire, of expecting a result, an awakening; and accept our total powerlessness. We notice, too, the continual self-manipulation that we impose on our life and realise that it is a dead-end.

And we live that experience without trying to avoid our powerlessness, without trying any more. We stay with all that, knowing that the desire masks, hides from us what we truly want. This is it - unconditional acceptance, *Shin jin datsu raku*. It's a bit like jumping into the Void, Vacuity. And this awakening to our true nature isn't a magic trick that makes our ignorance disappear.

So, we take refuge in Présence. For the Presence that we are, everything that arises can be welcomed just as it is. Presence takes nothing for granted. It's not a perfection to be achieved. Let us understand that there's no problem-free life; there is no ideal situation.

To resolve contradictions is to accept what is, in our own Presence- Awareness-Emptiness; to look for nothing more, to live simply; to live the fact of being; to let yourself *be*.

And it's not so easy. To live this in the silence of our posture.

Feel yourself to be. Right at this moment, just *as you are*.

I'll let Master Dogen have the final word:

"To have faith in the Buddha's Way is to be certain that you've always been on the Way; that there's no getting lost, no misconceptions, no gain, no mistakes?"
