

This kusen, originally given on 9th October 2021, was further elaborated as part of the Asquins Sesshin, in October. It is now provided here in its final extended form, replacing the earlier version.

The turning round of our gaze is the essential point of our meditative practice. It is also what is called profound vision; that of the Treasure Eye of the True Law, *Shōbōgenzō*. To understand that this Eye is our nature itself revealing itself in the mirror of phenomena.

For this, it is therefore necessary first of all to free the mind from the alienating attraction and frantic agitation it has for the objective content of all the experiences that constitute the theatre of existence.

Secondly, we must also free ourselves from the 'stubborn' fascination with the content of our thoughts and dreams and the unhealthy attachment to our opinions. We need to examine carefully the causes of our views and beliefs and understand the conditioning that drives and manipulates us.

The Buddhist teaching is to accept the obvious, indisputable fact that all these experiences are ephemeral, impermanent and empty and do not bring lasting peace. Each of us can see, thanks to zazen, the truth of things, of the body, of phenomena, but that all this will disappear, without any future, like bubbles or mirages. Why delude ourselves by taking experience to be true?

The gaze turned inwards is to remind oneself of oneself, to remain in oneself. It leads us to letting go, so that we can say: *"This is not me, this is not mine, this is not my self."* This is a very important teaching of the Buddha, which asks us to really examine ourselves to find out what we truly are.

We find it difficult to accept the surrender of our possessions, our illusions and our dreams. We are so attached to the idea of ourself as a free, separate, independent person! In fact we don't want to look the truth in the face!

In the zazen of the Buddhas, the mind turns in on itself and directs its light towards its own essence. This is to face the truth about oneself.

This happens naturally when what presents itself is grasped or rejected. In this *Samādhi*, this concentration without subject or object, it is, in reality, the gaze of the Treasure Eye of the True Law that we let work.

But when we turn to face ourselves, what do we see?

Nothing!

There is space, silence. It's peaceful and empty. Nothing. It is disconcerting, frustrating for the 'me' that is waiting for something.

So, very often we are not interested in this Nothing which seems featureless, limitless, empty.

It is as if, seeing a small blue space in the multitude of clouds that veil the sky, we think that this blue spot is an anomaly! As if we believed that the natural condition of the sky is to be a blanket of clouds within which the patches of blue sky are only temporary appearances.

Clouds, like thoughts, are constantly coming together, floating, merging together and transforming themselves. Nothing lasts from one moment to the next.

It is through the constancy of our gaze, of our attention, that we come to realise that the blue spots in the sky are openings on the limitless expanse of the sky in which the clouds appear and disappear continuously.

Master Doshin, the fourth Patriarch, spoke of the space between thoughts, the space-sky where we are silence, purity, tranquillity and spaciousness. Space where our nature reveals itself, space that *is* our true nature. Space between thoughts, identical to the blue space of the sky.

Dogen says:

"The ignorant wrongly imagine that we see the movement of the sky because of the moving clouds. But the sky does not move. Or they believe the shore to be moving because of the boat moving forward when in fact [the shore] does not move. If it were as these unenlightened

people believe, how would the Buddha's word be possible?"

What must we do to turn our gaze inwards?

Master Keizan declares in the *Zazen Yojinki* (Recommendations for the practice of zazen):

"Zazen is not concerned with discipline, the practice of concentration or wisdom, but all three are included in it."

The advice appears to be contradictory. During zazen, it is recommended not to become attached to anything and only to contemplate impermanence.

This means however that the mind does not get involved in analysing phenomena, sensations, thoughts or perceptions. Simply *look*. This is how [the mind] gains its true natural freedom. We realise this when there is no longer any personal will directed towards [obtaining] a benefit.

To surrender ourselves totally is the *koan* of zazen. It happens when we let go, we no longer have any expectations, but are in contemplation of this Present. It is a total absorption in Presence, in an equanimous gaze which does not discriminate and sees all things as being only the Mind.

We must accept disappearing into conscious Presence, to be the gaze itself, the Eye of the Treasure of the True Law itself, which contemplates. This is the mystery that reveals itself to itself during zazen, in our own mind, ourselves.

To be absorbed in this mystery is Awakening. There is no longer any question of discipline, of concentration, or of discriminative wisdom that has to sort out what is good or bad. It is non-dual and that means the disappearance of the meditator and the object of their meditation. This is also called "*Samādhi*".

There are many stories that evoke the condition of the mind during zazen. Many people already know the *mondo* between Nagaku and his disciple Baso:

At the time when he lived on Mount Heng, in the early 700s, Baso spent his days and nights

immersed in meditation. We might say, he wanted it!

Master Nangaku, seeing him like this, asked him what he hoped to achieve by sitting all the time.

"I want to become Buddha," replied Baso.

Nangaku then picked up a piece of tile and began to rub it against a stone until Baso, intrigued, asked him what he was doing.

Nangaku replied, *"I want to make a mirror out of this piece of tile."*

Baso exclaimed, *"But how can you make a mirror out of a tile? It's impossible!"*

Nangaku replied, *"How can you become Buddha by sitting around meditating all the time?"*

This story teaches that it is "*as it is*", "*thus*", "*just as we are*", that the buddha-nature reveals itself. Master Dōgen teaches in *Inmo*: we are already what we seek. We know very well that polishing a tile will never make it a mirror.

Similarly, to remain sitting, striving to become Buddha, is to maintain an illusory attachment that can find no end, and that leaves us trapped in an endless dream, without the ability to experience the liberation we seek.

Master Dōgen, in the *Gakudō yōjinshu*, always links the word realisation with practice itself:

"As soon as there is practice, realisation appears. I have never heard of any profit being obtained without study, nor the least realisation without practice. It is from our practice alone that realisation is born. Our real treasures do not come from outside. Realisation uses practice."

In the *Genjōkōan*, he adds:

"Those who awaken from illusion are Buddhas, those for whom awakening is an illusion are sentient beings. When Buddhas are truly Buddhas, they don't need to be conscious of it. They are realised Buddhas who continue to actualise Buddhas".

We become aware during zazen that we are already Buddha and that the only reality is this

present moment where we actualise it in our entire posture. From this conviction, the practice of zazen becomes an unceasing journey from here to here; hence effortless and free of illusion. We need to anchor this living experience within the core of our belief and practice.

Many people have thought that, in his response to Baso, Nangaku was challenging the value and necessity of zazen practice. Polishing a tile to make a mirror, this was only to point out Baso's misunderstanding.

So when Master Keizan states that:

"Zazen is not concerned with discipline, the practice of concentration or wisdom, but all three are included."

What does that really mean?

It is necessary to keep the mind free from the demands of the analytical mind, that is the discipline. This leads us to understand that involvement in thoughts reduces the natural freedom of the Mind.

It is necessary to learn for ourselves what it means to "direct the attention towards its source". That is the practice of concentration.

It is necessary to develop the equanimous gaze which distinguishes between what's real, permanent and what is illusory, fantastical. That is wisdom.

Zazen rejects nothing, grasps nothing. The whole universe is included in it. Presence!

We have always lived this Presence because it is what we are, but not being aware of it leaves us in painful frustration. That is why we experience suffering.

There is nothing we can add or take away from Presence. It is the boundless blue sky.

The way of looking which is turned inwards is the way of Zen. It is standing in the very bosom of the Mind, in the blue sky. It is a vision as well as an understanding that must be integrated into our daily, objective life and remain alive in our own body.

"The Great Way," says Master Eno, "flows and penetrates everywhere freely. Why seek to obstruct it? When the Mind does not stop at anything, it penetrates everywhere and flows freely; but if it becomes fixed, then it is stuck."

"The Mind must not be ambiguous and confused when we speak of a right Doctrine."

"To speak of zazen without exerting oneself to have the right mind, that is not to be a disciple of the Buddha. It is only through the practice of right mind that in the midst of all phenomena there will be an absence of attachment, and that is the only practice."

For the mind to remain upright, it must not wander into muddy tributaries. This is what gives the bodhisattva precepts all their necessity and their greatness.

The three pure precepts, which are to do no evil, to do good, and to do it for others, are in fact a single precept which is actualised in practice free from the 'me' and its conditionings. It is by understanding and following them that we can access true knowledge.

Thoughts, emotions, feelings and perceptions have manifested themselves countless times in our lives. But the knowledge through which we see and know them remains one and unchanged, like the vast blue sky. Like the Treasure Eye of the True Law. Presence!
