

*"If you can't stop the agitation of your thoughts and distraction by concentrating on the breath," continues Master Keizan, "then evoke a kōan and concentrate on it to awaken. For example, "What is it that comes like this?", "Does the dog have Buddha-nature?", "When no thought appears, is there any fault left?", "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the West?", "The cypress tree in the garden".*

Master Keizan recommends diverting the attention caught up in thoughts, towards a *koan*. A *koan* is an enigma, a case study that has become famous in the Chan school, and which many masters have used for teaching and testing their disciples. The practice of *koans* has as its first function to bring the disciple out of an ordinary state of consciousness. Secondly, it can also help them to deepen and broaden their experience. If we want to try to resolve one of these *koans* during zazen, we should not rely on the mechanisms of dualistic thinking. The resolution of a *koan* can only come from deep intuition and not from discriminating intelligence. The solution is not rational, because it involves paradox. There must therefore be a change in the level of thinking and understanding and even of consciousness. We have to go beyond! The *koan* can indeed get us out of agitation and distraction during zazen, but we have to be really careful not to get absorbed by a new kind of mental chatter which will again take over the space of consciousness.

Master Keizan's proposal to use the *koan* can be confusing for a beginner in meditation. Trying to direct our own meditation through a reflective exercise either takes us away from [meditation] or takes us out of it. And even an experienced disciple, falsely believing himself to be in control of his mind, can get caught up in the thought games and fall back into *Sanran*.

Understand that *Sanran* means leaving the place of silence and peace of open, welcoming meditation, and returning to the world of fictional stories, disturbing illusions and suffering.

But do we need to free ourselves from this? Can we consider thoughts as *not* making up part of Totality? Can we see and accept that thoughts are also the very activity of our true nature? To deny or reject our own thoughts is to contest what is going on within us and this attitude creates a combative, guilt-ridden, frustrating dualism. It is also to blind ourselves to the floating, phantasmagorical, empty nature of thoughts.

Accepting this state of *Sanran*, as it is, allows us to put it into perspective. [Seen] from this observation, it's much easier to focus attention on the very place where thoughts emerge. It is a persistent application that allows us to bring our attention back to the silence **before** thoughts and to remain there. This allows us to leave the world of *Sanran*, without denying it. This detachment is called contemplation.

And without struggling with our thoughts, with ourselves, we naturally return to "**just before**" the appearance of thoughts, that beyond which is space and our true timeless nature. This is the thinking of non-thought, *Hishiryō*, which Master Dogen speaks of in the *Zazengi* and *Zazenshin*.

Master Eno also tells us:

*"When all senseless thoughts are abandoned, nature is fundamentally empty. Practice attention constantly. When it is exercised on the body, it is merit. When it is exercised on the mind, it is virtue. Merit and virtue is to **be** without neglect."*

We must understand with our whole body and mind that what is there, *before thought appears*, and creates a world, is our true face.

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