

Zoom Zazen Saturday 23 July 2022

This morning I'm once more taking up the *kusen* on Master Keizan's *Zazen Yojinki*.

He gave a series of recommendations to escape the distraction or dispersion of the mind absorbed in the flow of thoughts, that is to say that they are recommendations on *Sanran*.

To escape *Sanran*, he advises us first of all to pay attention to the breath and if one cannot do this, to reflect on one of the famous *koans* of the Chan school. This allows one to divert the mind from personal stories, but it is of course still to engage the mind in a mental process.

Here is the continuation of his recommendations:

"If distraction still doesn't go away, watch for the moment when the breath ceases to be conscious, [or] when your eyes close to outside vision. It's like the moment before conception of the embryo when no thought is produced! When the impression of the emptiness of the self and of things manifests itself, that will at last be the moment when the dispersion calms down."

Do all you can to remain aware of your presence. As well as being Keizan's exhortation, it is also the one that concludes the *Hannya shingyo* sutra: "*Gya tei, gya tei ... hara so gya tei boji sowaka*": "Quickly, quickly, go together beyond the beyond, to the other shore and save all beings."

Be aware that your practice is the practice of all beings.

Come back to what is **before** a thought is produced, the moment before conception or appearance. It is when thought appears that the world manifests. Before it appears, in the wonderful non-action of meditation, it is the unborn, the unmanifested that stands still, watching the appearance and disappearance. To return to the source of That which looks, to the Treasury of the Eye.

We are not the cause or the producer of what appears. We are only the silent witness, real and eternal, who contemplates. That is to say, *no one*.

When *Sanran* manifests, it is because the world is in motion. And this is the moment when the non-movement of the posture has the power to bring us back to what is before this movement, in the timeless stillness, the moment before birth. This, then, is how we can come out of *sanran*.

During zazen, it is in the *unborn*, in the *before birth*, in the *before the next thought*, that we take refuge. That's where Presence lives. That which witnesses Presence is our *true face*, the *buddha-nature*, the *unborn*. This witness is also what Zen calls *the clear mirror*, fundamentally empty and pure.

"Take refuge in the clear mirror of your own mind," says Master Eno. "On the one hand, false views and illusions will no longer arise, desires will disappear, knowledge will be complete and, on the other hand, material goods and sensual desires will be abandoned. These are called the two true feet of the Buddhas' Awakening."

Sanran is the false belief that there is a thinker within us (or that we are the thinker). This vanishes when we take refuge in the empty mirror of the mind, in the unborn. For this we return to **the time before thought appears**, just before, and learn to dwell there. This is the art of non-action, of relying on nothing.

This is what Master Dogen calls,

"To think from the depths of non-thought."
