

Zoom Zazen - Saturday 30 July 2022

In an earlier *kusen*, Master Keizan recommended us to remedy *Sanran* - attention absorbed by the flow of thoughts - by fixing [the attention] on a *koan*.

I would like to return today to this *koan*, among the best known in Chan, "*What is it that comes thus*" because it concerns a really important point in zazen practice.

Nangaku visited Master Eno, who asked him, "Where do you come from?"

Nangaku replied, "I come from Master Songshan's house."

Eno then asked him another question: "*What is it that comes thus?*"

Nangaku did not know what to answer. He decided to stay with Master Eno until he had clarified this question. This took him eight long years.

This question does not concern the province or the city from which Nangaku came, nor does it concern his name, his age or his civil status.

"*What is it that comes thus?*" is in fact: "Tell me what your true nature is". Nangaku's answer could have been, "No one comes, no one goes!" referencing the unborn, the Buddha-nature, the original face before birth, the native land. But Nangaku was not ready!

This *koan* can also help us to illuminate our awareness during zazen.

We focus on the question "*What is it that comes thus?*", and in this manner we practice the *koan* itself, in the silence before the appearance of what comes and goes. The answer to the *koan* is not of the order of thought. It is what Master Dogen calls the practice that carries itself in itself without ever being defiled.

We learn with the whole body and mind to remain, without effort, in silent Presence, our place of residence from the start, without allowing ourselves to be absorbed by *sanran*, the thoughts of all kinds that invade us and distract us. Keeping the gaze, the attention, in the silence or the space which is found between thoughts. To stand in total openness to *That Which Is*, without either grasping or rejecting anything. This is the art of non-doing that qualifies true objectless meditation, *zazen*.

To do nothing, while directing the attention to the silent space before the next thought. To dwell in an intention-less gaze that does not know itself to be looking. Or, to put it another way, to return naturally to "just before" the appearance of thoughts. This is *Hishiryō*, beyond-thought, the limitless space of our true, timeless nature.

There is no longer any struggle with thoughts. They are seen as evanescent smoke, without substance, empty, and left aside.

After his eight years' reflection, Nangaku replied to Master Eno: "To try to explain Buddha-nature is to miss the mark completely!"

The moment the mind tries to clarify, it confuses, distances itself from the immediate vision, misses the mark. Thought always comes *after* the experience, *after* the direct perception which is inseparable from *That* which, in us, observes and that which is observed. Body and mind Unified.

"So, can you tell if there is practice-realisation?", asked Master Eno again.

Nangaku replied, "It is not that there is no practice-realisation. It is *That* which can neither be defiled nor explained in words." One cannot describe Awakening in words.

Eno concludes, "This unstainedness [purity] is what the Buddhas protect and care for. I am *That*, you are *That* and the Patriarchs of India are also *That*."

In our meditation, which frequently moves back and forth - from thought to thought, from dreams to fictional stories - the question "*What is it that comes thus?*" has the power to bring us back into the heart of *zazen*, where we can see things disappear the moment they appear. Why would we want to latch onto something that has not come into existence and treat it as if it were real? When this truth unfolds in our understanding, clarity illuminates us and no longer leaves our mind - and *whether there are thoughts or not* is no longer an obstacle to meditation.

To sit facing the wall and do nothing is to protect *That* which cannot be defiled. This purity is our true nature. To take refuge in it and to protect it is the practice of the Buddha.
