

IZAUK BURWELL HOUSE SESSHIN

24-27 OCTOBER 2019

KUSEN

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Secretary/Translator: Heiko Ivan

Kusen 1 - Friday 07h00

We are gathered for these two and a half days to return to our normal condition - the normal condition of the mind. Shakyamuni Buddha invites us by his teaching to return to the normal condition of the mind.

He left us one of his teachings in Ānāpānasati Sutta:

Ana - to breathe in
Pana - to breathe out
Sat - to control
I - the consciousness

To return to the normal condition of the mind through breathing.

Breathing is linked to the mind - Pneuma in Greek, Spiritus in Latin: the breath. Be that as it may, establishing right breathing we bring the mind back to its normal condition.

In zazen, our breathing should be natural. We breathe in - air enters the lungs; we breathe out - air leaves the lungs. It is important for the stale out-breath to be expelled completely - all the stale air right to the end - for us to breathe in fresh air. For breathing out - go to the end; naturally, softly, without making any noise. Rather than forcing, controlling, the breathing - we need to become one with the breathing. To become the breath.

A poem says, 'Zazen: breathing on a cushion beneath an empty sky'.

Breathing becomes right - that is: with soft, long, and deep breathing out - if the posture of the body itself is correct. That is to say without tension in the front or the rear of the body, neither leaning backward nor forward. The head is kept over the shoulders to release all the useless tensions. It is important that we hold ourself exactly vertical. That's to say the fontanelles (the top of the head), the perineum (the point which rests on the cushion) and the centre of the Earth are aligned. - these three points should be aligned so as to be vertical.

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Breathing returns to the normal condition

The air in the lungs must come out fully. The stale air must come out of the lungs and the fresh air go into them.

We need to feel the breath come out from deep below the navel.

If we do not feel the air move seemingly from below the navel then our posture is not correct and we need to adjust it, imperceptibly, to make it truly vertical.

Sitting vertically allows the spine to stretch out like a spring that had been compressed.

When we sit correctly breathing gently all unnecessary tensions go away.

A flame on a cushion under an empty sky.

Kusen 2 - Friday 20h30

To return to the normal condition of the mind is to return to the mind that does not stop on anything.

Through that sentence, the great master Eno entered the way. It is a sentence from the Diamond sutra. Diamond is what cuts all illusion, all the attachments, that gives freedom to our minds. That which enables us to accede to the true mind.

The disciple says to the Master: "I would like to accede to that mind, I'm unable to do it. My mind clings to everything." The master answers the disciple, "Do you hear the sound of the wind in the trees? Enter the way through there."

When the wind of the mind rises, it detaches all the dead leaves and takes them away. Turn towards your original mind, the mind that blows in all directions, that does not offer any answer, but that leaves the mind open to infinity.

True religion is not to know; to face the mystery with an open mind. As soon as you bring your little answers you close the mind. Let the mind blow in all directions.

The mind that blows, carrying an infinity of musics and perfumes. At times a perfume from the past comes up to the surface, a perfume we never smelled before, a music we never heard before. It rewrites the story of our past life.

Before coming to zazen I spoke with the secretary and sometimes in zazen in the total silence I relive a past situation and I see it differently, and with time all that seemed unfair to me, a cause of suffering, all this appears to me as being the work of Buddha. The feelings of anger, sadness, injustice, despair, all these feelings are transformed into deep gratitude.

Our past story keeps being rewritten and it takes us to a feeling of total peace. So please let the wind of the mind blow in all directions. This is how it takes us to peace and non-fear. The lightning of lucidity changes our life for eternity. In the end, we understand that it is always Buddha who meets with Buddha, it is always Buddha who encounters Buddha.

If we are able to renounce what is superficial, we have the chance to access what is essential. To turn away from what is not important is to turn away from every toxic flow nourished by the three poisons and to continue to move forward in the direction of Buddha, facing the inconceivable.

To turn away from every parasitical noise and maintain silence and immobility. I take the words from Keizan Zenji: "So that without thinking about good or evil we easily go beyond visions of the ordinary and holiness." We cross every consideration about illusion and awakening. We abandon the separation, the distinction between ordinary beings and Buddhas. In that state we can rest from the thousands of preoccupations and worries; rid oneself of any relationships without doing anything. The six faculties at rest hold oneself directly in the land of the mind.

Kusen 3 - Saturday 6h30

During zazen the six senses are at rest, the intellect being the sense number six.

Zazen is of a total passivity, passiveness. Even though I don't do anything, there is someone who supports me and maintains me. Even though I don't think consciously, even though the tensions in the eyeballs are released, even though the tensions in the skull, in the cranial box are released, life manifests itself in its total purity. On the other side, all the poisons are burned up, combustion is total; there only remains pure life, pure existence. We need to have faith in a life that is beyond any control from the ego. That is beyond any mental, intellectual grasping. To have confidence in the fact that the mind is always at work, whether we are aware of it or not, whether we sleep or not. Beyond any consideration about what's right or wrong, about what's good or bad.

Let the mind flow freely. That mind that flows immobile in whole eternity, the mind that carries all kinds of phenomena. Traces of the past. Traces of a past that was not lived well. That is to say, traces of a past life led by ignorance, greed and aversion. Let the centuries flow. Let the painful history of humanity flow. And return to the source that is always alive, pure existence. Don't resist. Let everything unwind and find its right place.

Abandon the images you have about yourself. All throughout our life we try to be 'someone'. But deep inside we are not that 'someone'. We are much more vast, limitless, not attached to anything. Sometimes we can say: to be lost in Buddha.

To be lost in Buddha means that is to say not to have any reference to anything whatsoever, to not refer to anything any more. It is the inconceivable freedom. It is perfect wisdom. Open to the whole universe. Of the same nature as the whole universe. This practice can continue, or has a meaning, only if it is at the service of all beings. This practice can stand on its feet only if it is driven by the vow of helping all beings to free themselves. Compassion is the heart of that practice. It is from that compassionate wisdom that we content ourselves with what we have.

This is how every morning and every evening we vow to help all beings free themselves. This is how we vow to go beyond every passion nourished by the three poisons. This is how we vow to see every moment as a door, as a gate

opening to liberation. It is how we vow to continuously practice the Buddha Way, to eternally practice the Buddha Way.

Don't struggle with. Don't fight against. Don't look for. You will only inflame the situation even more. Rather let your Buddha nature take all its place.

Kusen 4 - Saturday 11h30

Continuing with an answer to Patrick's question¹, it is not necessary to put labels on oneself in a way or another: I am a Buddhist, I am not a Buddhist....

That does not make much meaning. The question is: am I as close as I can be to normal conditions? Am I totally alive? Am I totally open, in direct contact with everything that surrounds me? Of course, to be in such a state one needs to maintain and uphold the practice. In zazen we are expected to practice. At times memories come to our mind: situations, faces; some memories are delicious, others are horrible. The point is not to create any link with what appears. Not to create links, that means, not to attach oneself. Not to attach the image to the mirror.

Reality is the images slides off the mirror. This is the normal condition: to let the white clouds slide in the vast empty sky. If we do not pay attention, when the image in our consciousness is pleasant we have a tendency to create a link: this is a manifestation of greed. We want to keep this image in our mind. Afterwards, another kind of pleasant image appears; we want to keep it, again. A mean, disagreeable image appears and we feel repulsion, we have aversion, and we create a link of aversion – we don't want... At the end we are enclosed in this image that we have kept in the mind, in the memory. We create a bubble and in the end we cannot see, in the pure mirror, reality as it is.

It is very important to allow to slide past everything, pleasant or unpleasant. We must not identify ourselves with these images; they are only images. Their destiny is to pass, to glide past by themselves over the true mirror.

So forget the distinction: I am Christian, a Buddhist, an atheist. Just practice. Maintain the normal condition and in the midst of the image, in the midst of aversion, of greed, there is always the pure mind, on which all the images are destined to glide – to pass for ever. We practice is in the middle of hell; using a Buddhist term: of 'samsara'; in the midst of hell we live 'nirvana'.

¹ On compassion in and outside the zen dojo

Live freedom in the midst of every phenomenon, that means all phenomena, in the midst of all images and representations that arise in the consciousness to maintain our mind vast, clear and infinitely smooth. This is necessary to see the others as they are. Dogen has this image – we have to pierce all the skull until [right up to] the sky – all the boxes in which we are enclosed. Very simple to understand, but very difficult to practice if we don't believe that it is the best we have to do.

Just to let pass all the images. In this case, our live and the life of the universe is one. It is the same, one mind.

Kusen 5 - Sunday 06h30

Shakyamuni Buddha said: what human beings can do best is to come together, to sit together and to contemplate. Alone and together, everyone from their perspective contemplates the infinity of the aspects of life that arise. For Buddhas there is no greater happiness. To contemplate life as it unfolds as a mother contemplates her sleeping baby. This mother who stays beside her baby, protects it and gives it all possible love. This is how we practice zazen. Without intervening, we contemplate life that unfolds in its infinity of aspects.

Frances talked yesterday about our relationship with young people and how to help them find their place in this world. As we are doing right now in zazen, to see them as baby Buddhas who arises. To love is to contemplate, to protect, to surround with a second skin; to pay attention to the slightest detail. Like a watchman who watches a sleeping city. The sentinel watches, ready to push away any kind of danger, to warn of any danger.

If a child has not benefited from experiencing this true love, it will be very difficult for that person to know love later in their life. To know love, to live love, to receive and to give. We keep talking about transmission. It's how Love is transmitted. It's how Life is transmitted, the life of Buddha.

We hold ourselves still, vertical, delicately and imperceptibly correcting our relationship with the world, keeping at bay all demons, there is no greater happiness. We then experience the samadhi of pure joy, where we give freely to Buddha and Buddha gives freely to us. Without limits.

We must never forget that every human being we meet is a baby Buddha who requires all our love. This love which Buddha talks about is a benevolent attention, a total presence that cannot bear negligence, that shuns vulgarity, that faces the mystery of every existence.

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