

Guy Mokuho Mercier

Weekend Sesshin

15/16 December 2012, Bristol

Zazen, Saturday - First kusen

Simply to remain in awareness of the present moment, it's very simple. It's a journey in which one has already arrived. There is no need to look for anything. Simply see that which appears in each moment and that which goes, also. If we remain open, everything can teach us the Way - *everything*. Each thing reveals the mystery of the presence of life which appears now. To remain open is to remain without judgment, without referring to our past experiences or to our conditioned beliefs. Just like a child who's just been born - open to all that presents itself in their field of perception.

Sometimes there are things that disturb us. Thoughts appear to take us far from this consciousness of the present moment. Or a problem in the body, like a pain in the knee for example, or an emotion which makes us unhappy. But all this teaches us; all this reveals what we keep hidden in our consciousness. So simply remain open, sense, breathe consciously, or rather be aware: be conscious of your breathing. We simply contemplate the landscape of our thoughts and sensations, our perceptions, all that flows in our immobility, in our stillness.

When we recognise all that appears within us and we remain open to this, we remain open as much to those things that appear negative as to those things which please us, without distinguishing. We are in acceptance: acceptance of *That which is*, of *That which comes thus*. Nothing is added to *That which is*. And we cut off nothing from *That which is*. This is what leads us naturally to experience non-duality. Body and mind are one. The universe and I are one. All beings and I are one. This is what the Buddha exclaimed the morning of his awakening, the anniversary of which we celebrated a week ago: the 8th December. To be one with all things - this is awakening. It is simply to remain open to all that is, without rejecting or grasping.

When you come out of thoughts, come back to your posture; to your feelings (sensations), whatever they are, and find once more the awareness of your own presence: the awareness of silence, beyond noise, feelings of space not limited by thoughts.

* * *

Keep the head straight, upright. It's as if you want to relax upwards towards the sky from the top of the skull.

Zazen, Saturday - Second kusen

So, to meditate is simply to remain in the sensation of remaining in the present. With a total letting go, not seeking to add something or taking something away from *That which is*. In the language of Dogen this is translated in the words *Inmo* or *Nyoze* – in English: *As it is*. All the teaching of Zen is in this *Inmo*, in this '*That, as it is*'. And you can understand this, realise this in your posture *as it is now*. Whatever the judgment is that you carry to your meditation, it is *That which is now*. It is the buddha-nature revealed in this simple sitting; revealing itself in this simple sitting. It's simple, indisputable, and this leads us to accept all that comes. It leads us to lift ourselves out of the traps of thought effortlessly. We can understand that to return to the present moment, ungraspable, facing the wall, we don't need to make any effort. That it is exactly where we are that life unfurls, that life arises. If we understand this, we can reconcile ourselves with things as they are. We trust once more in life. Life - presence - does not catch us. We can't catch it. We can't lose it.

And when we are simply sitting in front of the wall, *That which is* already there reveals itself. It's magic, it's mysterious, it's obvious. So this meditation is just observing, regarding *That which is*, that which arises within us and around us. Without seeking to grasp it, without seeking to reject it. We can of course become aware of our mechanisms of thought. We can become aware of our hopes: that which we wait for, our wishes; that which we imagine to be awakening or peace, or happiness. We can observe that which returns to us regularly in our thoughts. The idea of a lack, or a feeling of doubt, or recurring desires. We can see that we always try to struggle for something, or against something. And this hides the perception of the present, and puts to the background the fullness that is the *Now*.

So, to dwell in this presence, which is also silence, is to experience something which has no beginning or no end. It's also to accept not knowing. And it's learning to listen and hear the wisdom that arises with life. In this awareness of the present moment, we have simultaneously arrived and not arrived – never arrived. We can't separate that which we are from *That which is*. And that which is now, is perfect, as it is. That which is now is the exact actualisation of awakening. So no need to await for it to come into being. It's always already there.

Master Dogen wrote in the Genjokoan: "Here is the place, and the way is everywhere". We can't distinguish a limit to realisation. So don't think to attain it is to have understanding or to be caught up in awareness. The manifestation of awakening is beyond our understanding. It's always already there. Simply remain open to this.

Mondo

Q: I could really relate to the teisho before when you talked about it being an imperceptible thing when your mind goes off track. The question for me is - I get resentments, and they can take hold of me, and I feel I've hated and resented. So my question to you is, what would your advice be as to the best way of dealing with resentment?

A: Accept it. Find out where it comes from, why? Resentment is a kind of anger turned against oneself and we don't understand the cause of it. And sometimes it is something unconscious which is demanding to come out. So we must let it come out. And we see the resentment, we accept it, we look at it, we welcome it and we let it be. Sometimes we understand why it's there, and sometimes we don't. Ok, patience, welcome, acceptance. Sometimes, these can be things we've kept within us for a very long time. It could come from habits or conditioning from long ago, from childhood. So, one must let that come up. It's self-therapy. Anyway, is that your question?

Q: Yes, I think resentments tend to focus on people, and it's a kind of projection onto people, and they come back and come back. But acceptance, yes, as soon as a resentment arises, that's for me when, if I can catch it ...

A: Yes, you catch it when it ... Pshhh ... but this is not the cause, it does not come from outside of you. It's just something you feel about you, that people show you, that projection is ... you make the cause outside of yourself, but in fact the cause is there. And other people just show you something, a reflection of yourself. And so resentment is something you don't want to accept from yourself, so you give the responsibility to others. So see that in action even if it continues to appear, and sooner or later you will see that the other one is not the cause of it.

This is something you have to deal with, your acceptance and welcoming. Most of the time we accept what is pleasant, you know, love and being kind with people, 'Hello' with a child, 'Hello'; and we like this and we don't like that. But this is the same, it is something which belongs to life. And we have to, 'Yes, this is it' ... so accept and see, because we cannot reject. If you reject, things become more resistant or more violent. If you accept it, it's OK.

Sometimes you have to accept being angry, and very ... even violent, but take care not to hurt people, you know. But sometimes, it has to go. If you refuse to express what is inside, what kind of emotion it is, you make it deeper and stronger. So sometimes you have to accept being - according to morality, or the duality between good and bad - you have to accept being like this, which is sometimes difficult. Really difficult sometimes, to accept our bad side, the dark side of the moon!

Q: Thinking about the pot & the frog¹, and thinking about myself as the frog - putting myself in the context - I've really been considering a lot recently what makes me, kind of, swim out of hot water. And it's a real sense of loneliness that comes from very deep within that makes me want to do zazen with others; also to do it with myself, not to feel that sense of loneliness; to kind of get out of the pot. Am I making sense? ...

A: Loneliness, seen by the discriminating mind, is something ego - our ego, our 'I' - does not want to accept. We don't want to accept such loneliness and so on. But loneliness of the buddha-nature means unity with everything.

Q: Yes, it's beautiful

A: Which is completely beautiful; which is awakening, you know. The 'me' and human beings are one. This is really ...

Q: It's lonely, it's very lonely ...

A: ... because there is only *one* consciousness, *one* buddha-nature. So this is not sad; this is completely beautiful. But loneliness or solitude seen by the mentality is something more separate from others, from the universe. it's "I'm on my own, I'm a poor little thing, nobody loves me". You know this kind of loneliness is built by the mentality. So you have to see it, just to see it; to see this feeling of being alone, to see it.

Q: .. but it's heavy, it's heavy ..

A: But you're never alone! This is just imagination. You're never alone. This is just an illusion, a delusion, to see oneself alone. This is the main illusion: being separate from the universe, from the energy, from the consciousness, from other people, from humanity. This is the kind of egoistic shell that makes you separate from others - it does not exist really. You have to see that. And how to see that?

Q: Zazen ...

A: You have to welcome everything which has been retained in this personality - in this human being - and let it go. And when it's free of any kind of limitation, you feel one with everything; there is no loneliness. It does not exist, really. When you look at the sky with the moon and the stars, you feel *one*, you feel ... Hah! ... You feel fantastic.

Q: But something still moves to want to connect with another human being. Yes, there's still a movement to want to connect.

A: Want to connect? But limited? Where is the limitation? Who limits? This kind of a feeling you feel for humanity and you feel for the universe, what is

¹ This observation seems to allude to the legendary belief that a frog placed in a pot of water that is gradually heated up will allow itself to be boiled to death rather than escaping from the hot water

this kind of limit? This barrier that we impose on ourselves? Andnd coming from our way of thinking; coming in our thoughts; coming in our habits of being separate - the other and me are different. From this postulate, we decide that we are alone. But if you remove the postulate, who is alone? You're never alone. In your true nature, your true nature is not you as a wife, as a man, as a person. Your true nature is everything, so you can't be alone. You are everything. You can't be alone. The poor human being says: "Oh, I am alone ..."

Q: ... that experience cannot be explained to anybody else ...

A: No ...

Q: So in that instance, I can have that experience and then go home to my husband and not be able to communicate that in my life. How weird, it's a very lonely path in a lot of ways.

A: No, don't worry. You cannot explain what you feel, what you live. Of course, this is beyond words. How could you explain? But you don't need to explain. You just have to *be* it. And people will understand, will say: "Oh, Julie. Something has changed. She looks happy. Even when she's sad, she looks happy." [laughter] Just don't be in the space where mind, discriminating mind, separates things. Be beyond that. This is our practice, this is meditation. Sometimes we come back into the world, and look, you know, thinking, thinking ... And suddenly you come back to freedom, out of the thinking mind, and the discriminating mind, which separates things, which makes you believe you are the thinker, that you are a continual, permanent identity as a body - which is wrong! The body changes all the time, your mentality changes all the time. What does not change? You have to find that. And when you find that, there is no loneliness anymore.

Q: And change still goes, and struggle still goes on, and loneliness still comes up ...

A: But it's not you ..

Q: [laughs] That's the practice then, isn't it?

A: Things continue to appear, through you, and with you. But it's not you. It's just a manifestation, just life - through you. Try to find what is the source of life in yourself, what is important really. Your thoughts come and go. You cannot catch them, nothing. But you see that. *Who* sees that?

Q: I can't find anything.

A: It's not your body, it's not your 'I'. It's not your physical 'I'

Q: I can't find anything.

A: So? You are “anything” [student laughs]. You can’t find anything, so this means that you can be anything. You are anything. This has to make its way into your understanding. What you are is *beyond* what you think of it. *Beyond* this body. There is no ‘what you are’. This body cannot be. OK? [student laughs]. You’re never alone.

Q: Thank you.

A: Being alone is just a thought of being alone.

Q: My question is about technique, technique of meditation. The instruction for zazen is to concentrate on your outbreath and your posture, which is very hard to do continuously when your mind follows thoughts, and then you come back to the instruction.

A: For example, what instruction do you follow?

Q: The instruction to focus on your breath or your outbreath, and to focus on your posture

A: And when you forget, you feel angry?

Q: Yes, sometimes I feel a bit angry

A: So don’t follow any instructions ... [laughter all round]. Yes, but it’s You know they say: “You must focus on your breathing until ten.” One – one, two, three [whistles]. Ohh, I was only at three. And then, one, two, three, four, five. Five [whistles again]. And then you never reach ten. So you’re always frustrated, and you just continue to feed your frustration. So instruction does that.

Q: But if you have no instruction?

A: Then you’re free. [more laughter]. You just sit without any tension, and you open your Buddha’s eye, your vision.

Q: But if the Buddha’s eye is clouded? By a constant cloud?

A: Like clouds, well OK. This is ... well. If you always have the blue sky, it’s boring. The clouds make the sky beautiful.

Q: Well, if it’s always clouds [more laughter].

A: England?

Q: Change the country.

A: Yes... But don't try to impose on yourself some way of meditating. I would say the meditation in Zen is meditation on vacuity, nothingness. Just what is the space? Space is not the right word, but what is the space in which those clouds, thoughts appear? Come to be a thought? This is the space which is interesting, in which the thoughts pass through, because the space is always a space. This is what you are. Consciousness. You see the space. Who sees the clouds?

Q: But you're always tempted by the thoughts.

A: Yes, it's a very strong energy. And *Pshoo!* And the limited space, too ... And you believe you are this little space which is thinking. But in what could this activity of thinking occur? In what? In what? It's not something? Where does it appear? In order that a thought comes, is born - you have to be here before. If you are not here, there is no thought appearing. So what is before thinking? Or as Dogen says 'beyond thinking'. Which is not disturbed by the clouds. It is a space. The sky is not disturbed by the clouds. It keeps being the space. And sometimes it's a space in the cloud. But the space in the cloud is the same as the space out of the cloud. Can you see that? That thoughts are only thoughts? You are not that.

Q: So, no instruction?

A: No instruction. Just look at the appearing and the disappearing of things. Just look. It's comfortable. Most of the meditations say, "You must do this, and you must do that." Who does that? Who? You must focus on *who you are*, not on what to do. Because it becomes one more activity, meditation - instead of being a space of liberty and freedom - becomes a space where you have instructions to follow. Which is not meditation. This is just an activity of the brain, or the mind, the thinking mind. This is not useful at all. This has no importance at all. We don't care. We care about this space where thoughts appear, where the need of instruction comes to. You know? Where does it come from? Where do you need to ..? Who told you to follow instructions?

It is said in books, but if you try a few years - I did that - you go nowhere. It does not teach you anything. You don't feel better. So many thoughts, because the nature of thoughts is to come. So they come, all your life they come. But this is not what you are. You are the space in which they appear. And you *are* before they appear, and you *are* while they appear, and you *are* after they disappear. This is what you have to focus on. For example, this space or silence of Buddha's Nature are the same. You just *are*, you know, sitting. And this is silent, but in this silence – doo doodle oo – people talking, singing in the street, you know, the translation, *zut*, the Godo, "Buddha Nature", mmh [laughter].

And where did it appear? In your inner silence. In your inner space, in what you *are*. Really, you are not only this body; it's just as a mechanical transmitter-receiver. Where is it heard really? For consciousness, your true nature, there is no inside, no outside. People think 'there', but you hear them

here. Where is the limit between outside and inside? Because you hear that here, and you say "This is in my head". This is not in your head. You have to find this space where ... and this space has no limit. Where you hear sounds, noises, comes to life and disappears. This is what you *are*, and there is no inside, no outside.

So, no way of following instruction to find something which does not depend on any instruction. You just like ... you know when you go fishing and suddenly 'Shit' your tackle gets caught. This is what you do with instructions. But when you follow your breathing, you come back to ... This is not to follow your breathing. The instruction is to bring back your attention to *Now*. To the consciousness of *Now*.

And if I say, "Look at your breathing or sensation", this is to bring back ... this is not an instruction. This is something you can do or not do it, I don't care. But feeling life here where you are, this is what is important. So, but this is really important, your question. Because many people decide that awakening is this. You know, for example, one day I find a '*Phew*', so I am going to try to find it back, you know, to bring it back to my present meditation - which is stupid because it limits your meditation.

So don't have any kind of a goal. Yes, of course, at first, but it's also method. Zazen is not a method, it's not a technique to be better. It's just what it is when you practise. This is reality when you practise and you must understand this, because everything depends on this understanding. And then when you go out, you go out and reality is what you do, is the present moment. But zazen is fantastic because you just see it in front of you. Being in front of the wall, you see 'This is it, now'.

Instructions, we don't care. This is it. This is it, now. Rules, we don't care. But when we make the ceremony, this becomes a reality; the reality becomes the ceremony. So we do it totally, and then we have a drink. And we drink it totally, because this is reality. And then we drive, and this is a reality, so we drive. The reality is only the present moment. So, be *That*, or be *This*. I don't know ... instructions, [whistles]. Instructions are something which it makes you feel guilty for not following. And it's .. boring. We know what guiltiness is in our occidental western civilisation ...

Q: We think, "Oh I tried this instruction and it didn't really work, so I'll try another one".

A: yes, you can try all your life long and forget what is important .

Zazen, Saturday - Third kusen

At the end of the mondo we talked about thoughts. It's very important to understand that thought is deeply discontinuous, and we can really see this during zazen. And in general, we think that the flow of thoughts arises continuously, like a flowing river.

But if we observe it well, we can discern between two thoughts, a space. Sometimes imperceptible, sometimes larger. And we can see that the contents of two thoughts which follow each other are sometimes in relation and sometimes not at all. But we keep an idea that there is an entity which thinks, a 'me' which thinks. 'I' think. If we observe it even more attentively, we can see that each thought comes *thus* It comes by itself, without us trying to make it happen.

In this thought there are images, words which are related to our past stories. But we don't really choose the subject of our thoughts. Sometimes we give them energy, we entertain them. So, all this flow of thoughts has no real continuity. But the fact that we believe it does is Maya – illusion. And it is this illusion which gives us the impression of being separated from others. To be an entity, thinking, different from other entities. So Maya, this illusion of being a thinking entity, chains us to becoming the idea of being someone; something different from others. To have awakening, to be a master, to be a special person.

So during zazen, we can light the light, and see clearly this illusion of the discontinuity of thoughts. And when this illusion is seen, reality reveals itself in all its simplicity. That which we *are*. And we understand, we realise what impermanence truly is. Impermanence isn't only the fact that we will die, or that we change each moment - but it is the process of appearance and disappearance which comes into being in each moment for all phenomena. And because these phenomena can only appear and disappear, they are said to be empty. And so the reality of all phenomena is emptiness. And this vacuity, this *presence*, this present moment in its ungraspability. Our true nature.

And all that I have told you is another summary of the Hannya Shingyo. *Ku soku ze shiki, Shiki soku ze ku*. All phenomena are emptiness. Emptiness is all phenomena.

Zazen, Sunday - First kusen

A disciple asked the master: "What can we do when the millions of things - of phenomena - present themselves suddenly?" Which happens to us all the time. Many, many things come at us. So this question of the disciple is quite a normal one. What can we do, faced with all the phenomena? The master replied: "Don't try to control things." It's a massive teaching. But can we understand this?

So Buddha, before the morning satori of the 8th December, sat for this long night, and was visited by Mara, the Prince of the Demons, who sent all his army of demons to incite the Buddha to stop meditating. Mara even sent his daughters to try to seduce the Buddha. "Don't waste your time meditating like this! Make the most of life. You can abuse my daughters if you want. Make the most of it."

The Buddha's response is that which is the basis of our practice. Don't move, don't try to control, to respond. In our own meditation, we can see how we search constantly to try to make things correspond to our ideas, our desires. We want awakening to be like we think it should be. We would like life to be nothing but happiness, but nonetheless everything happens differently. Life is expressed from moment to moment, without asking for our opinion.

Thoughts arise in our mind without our really having any control over their contents. So, what to do? Don't try to control things. In other words, be open to *That which is*. Dogen said: "Let come into being that which comes." Don't do anything. This is meditation: in front of the mystery of the appearance and disappearance of things. It is to become this very mystery. Just *That which is*, now. I am sitting, the Godo speaks, cars pass in the road outside. Everything is peaceful. Each one of us is the very place where the mystery of awakening reveals itself. No need to look far away. No need to wait. No need to search. It's already there, in each moment. And when we accept this immediate openness, spontaneous, which arrives in each moment within us - this is how we follow the invisible track of Buddha. It's invisible because it's not open to our mental understanding.

The mystery which reveals itself is our own experience, our own breathing, the emergence of thoughts in this mind. Invisible because - naturally, unconsciously, automatically - this Way of Buddha is followed by all beings. In the *Shobogenzo*, Dogen says: "The one who is not a fish does not know the heart of a fish. The one who is not a bird cannot find the trace of a bird." Which is to say that the bird recognises naturally the path of the bird. And the fish knows the heart of a fish. And the Buddha always recognises Buddha. And each one of us is Buddha. When we sit, when we bring our gaze back to ourselves. When we return to our posture in the present moment. We place our steps in the steps of Buddha. In the footprints of the Buddha. It doesn't take effort. It doesn't require instruction - rules - simply to turn one's gaze towards one's own inner light. This is what our practice is.

Don't seek to control. Simply be open, welcoming, receptive. Practise a gaze that does not judge, that does not grasp, that does not reject. The gaze of a child, open to all that is new, to all that is now.

Now, is the only reality. It's shared with all beings, but no one can possess it, grasp it. *Now*. We melt into the Now. To be only present. Without searching to grasp it, to control it. Without manipulating it oneself. Simply to be this moment. Fleeting. Which holds everything, all that is.

Zazen, Sunday - Second kusen

When birds migrate, they spontaneously find their route. This is what Dogen quotes in the Bussho chapter of the *Shobogenzo*. Bussho, meaning buddha-nature, our true identity.

Dogen says: "The bird clearly sees the path of the thousands of birds that have gone before. And when it sees this, it naturally follows the path." It no longer asks questions. It's in peace, in security. And Dogen adds: "This applies also to Buddha. The Buddhas see spontaneously the paths of the Buddhas." And if we have come to this dojo, it is because we have seen this path.

If we sit on a zafu facing the wall, it's because we know the tracks of the Buddha. It's not a matter of intelligence, nor of understanding. It's just intuition, without mistake. Buddha recognises the path of the Buddhas. Just stop wanting to control. Stop the resistances. Abandon grasping and rejection. Remain simply open. Furthermore, Dogen adds: "It's by being aware of your own tracks of your footsteps, of your own experience of life, that you uncover the tracks of the Buddhas."

We actualise the way of the Buddhas simply by being aware of our own presence. And this meditation is the very place where we actualise naturally, unconsciously the mystery of the presence, where it reveals itself spontaneously. No need to make an effort, it's always already there. There's no progressive approach. This is what the Bussho chapter says: "Awakening - nobody gets closer to it, or further away from it." It's a great comfort to hear and understand the teachings of Dogen.

In meditation we observe the simple fact of being. We are the mystery which awakens in each moment. Simply return to our posture, to our uprightness, to awareness of our sensations. This is what following the tracks of the Buddhas is. So we accept to not move in front of the continual demands of Samsara. Samsara, the world of straying, which always seeks for futile happiness and fleeting happiness, ephemeral objects. Simply be aware of the tracks of our own steps. Be one's own light. Illuminate oneself in one's own heart.

To conclude. Practising the way of the Buddha is to dwell in the awareness of the present moment - in the *presence*. To consciously use one's attention. Sometimes, that requires endurance on our part, perseverance, patience. This is the practice of the Paramitas. And sometimes we fall. Then we get up once more by taking support from the present.

This is daily life. Awareness of the tracks of our own footsteps. When we are in the present, nothing is insurmountable. Dogen explains this in this way: "It's when you neither love nor hate that you find yourself in the very heart of Buddha."

Cease judgment. Don't speak of it. Free yourself, and let go of your body and mind. Fling yourself into the house of Buddha. The house of Buddha is zazen. It's *presence*. Let Buddha initiate you, let zazen initiate you. Simply follow without effort and without anxiety.

And then you will cut through the vicissitudes of Samsara. And you will be Buddha, undeniably. Who can be against that?
