

2: Entry Through the Nature (as basis of both the Direct and Gradual paths)

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The birds are singing that it is a good morning, and it is a good morning because the birds are singing. It is a good morning because there is this breath, there is this seeing, this hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, thinking. It is a good morning because there is this world, arising in this moment. Sitting in the midst of this, is practice. And so this morning, we will continue to hear from Bodhidharma Daishi in this text on the *Two Entries and Four Practices*.

There are many Dharma gates but they are all of two kinds: entry through the Nature and entry through conduct.

Right here in this phrase, long before the debate arose as to whether enlightenment was sudden or gradual, Dogen zenji, Huineng, Keizan zenji, and other Dharma Masters have presented a Direct Way which goes back to Bodhidharma's expression in this text, *entry through the Nature and entry through conduct*. There is a direct method, and a gradual method. There are many Dharma gates but they are all of these two kinds. Practising the Direct Way means to pay attention directly to what is arising in Awareness now, waking up to this arising, recognizing that this arising is the display of wakefulness, and practising this moment after moment is the expression of this realization. So in terms of the Direct Path, there is nothing gradual about it. There are no stages. It is just this. The direct method says, "This is Buddha." The Gradual Path, on the other hand, says, "You must become Buddha, and this is how you will do it."

But this effort to "become" Buddha, if we're going to be honest about it, is really just another way of trying to put off being Buddha; just stalling for time. What are you waiting for? How is it that you hear these words? How is it that there is hearing, that there are words? What is it that is aware of this?

This moment has nothing gradual about it. It doesn't sort of inch its way in and then exert itself and then slip out. Its coming and going is the dynamic arising of this experiencing. In Bodhidharma's teaching here, he speaks of entry through the Nature, which means entering into that which has no gate, which has no barrier, which has in fact no entry. *Entry into the Actual Nature*. We can call it Buddha Nature, enlightenment, Things as They Are, but fundamentally it is who and what you are.

And then Bodhidharma says there is entry through conduct. Entry through conduct means to cultivate one's enlightenment through practice, to gradually become Buddha. But if we practise in this moment, and as this moment, then we continually, with each breath, with each action, conduct ourselves as Buddha. We continually enter into Buddha. Bodhidharma, recognizing that many beings are trying to put off being Buddha as long as is possible, takes this view into account and describes entry through conduct. And yet, within his description of these stages, within his description of these four practices of entry through conduct, he continually points back to entry through the Nature, as we will see as we continue to discuss this text.

So the text continues:

Entry through the Nature means the realization of the truth of the Teachings. The basis of this is Great

Faith in the Actual Nature of all living beings, usual people and sages both. The reason it is not manifest is only due to being wrapped in external objects and deluded views.

Entry through the Nature means to realize the Teachings, not to study the Teachings, not to think about the Teachings, but to realize the Teachings. And the Teachings of Buddha Dharma point directly to the mind of each and every one of you; point to this breath; point to this wall, to this stepping, to the arising of this thought, of this moment of fear, this moment of joy. The basis of this, Bodhidharma says, is Great Faith[fn]Daishinkon.[/fn] in the Actual Nature of all living beings.

Great Faith is not a belief in something. Great Faith is not a conviction. Great Faith is not a point of view. Great Faith is practising being Buddha. We say “Faith” because it has this heart quality. And “Great” because it is unconditional. It is not based on being convinced of something. It is as direct as feeling the cold in wintertime. It is as direct as breathing in and out. Great Faith is the basis of realization of the truth of the Teaching.

Great Faith is entry through the Nature, the Actual Nature of all living beings, usual people and sages both. You don’t have to be particularly wise. You don’t have to be particularly good-looking. You don’t have to be particularly successful, or particularly artistic, or particularly anything. You just have to be to be Buddha, to be unconditionally free.

The reason it is not manifest, Bodhidharma explains, is only due to being wrapped in external objects and deluded views.

Only, or merely. Not truly.

A thought comes up, and we think that we have thought it, even though we don’t know where that thought has come from, or where it goes. We pretend that we have thought the thought. We pretend that we are the thinker. And we are coloured by the contents of that thought, as we propagate the next thought, and the next thought, and the next thought, and continue this game of dancing around pretending that we are the thinker, pretending that we are the contents of the thoughts. We bind our experiences together into lumps and heaps, into piles of junk.

We get up in the morning, and once we get over that moment of panic of the first opening our eyes and realizing that there’s a world there, and we collect together all of our thoughts and feelings for the day. We start to ramble around inside of our head, feeling a grudge about this, feeling anxious about that. We wake up in our usual bed, in our usual way, get out of bed into our usual room, and wander around through our usual world for the day, looking for some kind of satisfaction someplace, something interesting to happen to cut through this usualness, this pettiness. Desperately searching for something to make us happy, or at least give us some sense of being alive.

And yet, things are not bound together, nor are you tied. Sounds come and go. Thoughts come and go. The world comes and goes over and over and over again. When a thought comes up it is instantly gone. It is impossible for you to hold onto a thought. It is impossible for you to hold onto a sound. It is impossible to find any place to hold on, let alone to be able to pile things up in ugly heaps.

The world is not usual. The world is amazing. The world exerts itself as world, simply for the fun of it. In our

search for something to make us happy, we pass over this basic joyfulness that is existence. And so the reason it is not manifest is only due to being wrapped in external objects and deluded views. We have a deluded view if we think that the world is the same moment after moment. We have a deluded view if we think that we can hold onto anything. We have a deluded view if we think that we are anything at all. We have a deluded view if we believe in time and space and body and mind and self and other. We have a deluded view if we think that we have to become Buddha. We have a deluded view if we think that we are not Buddha. We wrap ourselves in external objects when we hope that something will make us happy. Wrapping ourselves in external objects does not just mean collecting cars, and houses, and mink coats. Giving up wrapping ourselves in external objects is not as easy as selling your property and going off to live in a cave. Ceasing to wrap oneself in external objects means to come out into the open, to stop hiding, and to come out and play.

Bodhidharma goes on: *If you abandon the false and turn to the true and practise this samadhi of wall-gazing (biguan), you will find no “self” or “other” and that the usual person and the sage are of one essence.*

True samadhi or zanmai is complete practice. It is not fixating on a particular state. It is practising as hishiryo, not just shiryo, thinking, or fushiryo, not thinking, cutting off thought, blanking out into some concentration state. But being hishiryo, before thought, is samadhi, is zanmai.[fn]Roshi is referring to Dogen zenji's phrase in the Fukanzazengi, *It is not a matter of thinking or not-thinking. Be before thinking.*[/fn] It is to stand at the heart of all worlds, to sit as sitting, to live this life, to know this living, to be this living that exerts itself as free of strategy, as free of intention, as free of goal, as a flower opening, as the wind rising. This is samadhi. It is not that we will find no self or other if we simply ignore them through hiding within minor meditational states that might arise in one's practice. Finding no self or other means to recognize Things as They Are, to recognize the radical impermanence of this existing, of this living. To realize and actualize practising the samadhi of wall-gazing you will find no “self” or “other” and that the usual person and the sage are of one essence. This essence is the actual Nature, and it is an essenceless essence. Entering into this Nature, one finds that all forms are formless. There is no self or other to be found, no time, no space, no body, no mind. There is nothing at all.

Abide in this and you will not be swayed, says Bodhidharma. You will then be free from ‘words’ because you will be intimately merged with the Nature and free of conceptual distortion. This is to be at ease, free from activity. This is called ‘entry through the Nature.

Being “free from words” here means, free from trying to talk oneself into waking up, trying to talk oneself out of confusion, trying to think one's way out of thinking. To be free from words means to see what the words of the Teachings point to. In this freedom, there is intimate merging with the Nature, so intimate that there is no merging. There is just this. And this is at ease, free from activity. There is no need to do anything, because nothing has ever been done. There is just this breathing, this seeing, this hearing, this wall, this world. So “no activity” means “complete activity.” It means doing what needs to be done, because there is nothing at all. This is the practice of the bodhisattva. This is called entry through the Nature.

To practise is to enter again and again into our lives. To enter into the open space in which we realize there's no place to hide, and it is the moment of realizing there is no need to hide. Practice is entering again and again into this moment. Practice is hearing the birds singing. It is the singing of the birds.

The birds, the wall, the altar, the floor, and I, all wish you a good morning.