

4: Entry Through Conduct: According With Circumstances

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Daijozan, January 29, 1989

Good evening.

Some of you might feel relieved that it's evening, and there are only a couple of hours left in this sesshin. But please, do not waste your time by waiting for something to happen, even for this sesshin to end. Instead of waiting your practice out, measuring the time with your breath, breathe this breath, practise this moment, this moment of breath, of sitting, recognizing the mind of Awakening, coming back to the breath in this moment. Tender joints, tender mind. Even the aching of your ankles and knees seem to know something that your thoughts and strategies don't know. They know and they proclaim that it is this moment. So instead of avoiding your aches and pains, simply come back to them. Come back to feeling with the whole body, from crown to toe.

We will continue to hear from Bodhidharma daishi and *Two Entries and Four Practices*:

According with circumstances means: There is no self in whatever arises as the play of causal conditions. Feeling good or feeling bad are both born from previous activities. If I wind up with name and fame, this is in response to past actions; when the momentum of these conditions gives way, whatever I might presently enjoy will decay. Why rejoice about it? Win or lose, let me work with whatever conditions may arise. Awareness itself does not increase or decrease. I will not be swayed by the winds of fortune for I am intimately aligned with the Way. This is called according with conditions.

In the previous practice of the entries through conduct, we spoke of knowing how to answer enmity, being open to our confusion, being open to our doubts and hesitations, being open to our fears, yet without being consumed by them, without becoming attached to them. This is the beginning of maitri or metta, fundamental warmth or friendliness, which is the basis of karuna, or Buddhist compassion.

Coming face to face with ourselves, we find ourselves often scurrying away into a corner just as we begin to get a glimpse. Coming face to face with ourselves often we find only a parade of costumes and tricks. But to see clearly means to see all of how we are, and it is difficult, because we've spent so much time refusing to see or to be seen as we fear we really are. Metta or maitri, this fundamental warmth or basic friendliness, is itself actually an aspect of wisdom, an aspect of clear seeing. It is seeing that gives rise to maitri, and it is maitri that allows deeper and more complete seeing. So maitri is recognizing a game for a game, and perhaps in the midst of the game, recognizing the groundlessness of all games, of all pretences, of all strategies, and the groundlessness of experience itself.

In the first entry through conduct, of knowing how to answer enmity, Bodhidharma advises you to free yourself from holding a grudge about your experiencing and to simply experience what is being experienced, and this is difficult for us, to let go of our attachment to our own pain; difficult for us to free ourselves from attaching blame.

In this next practice, which here is called according with circumstances, we are asked to let go as well of the various ways in which we congratulate ourselves, to let go of our attachment to fame, happiness, and joy. We are asked to let go of our pain, our fear, and also to let go of our ceaseless search for happiness, to let go of hope, so that we can see clearly what is present, completely without distortion, completely without jumping the gun or feeling backed into a corner.

According with circumstances, Bodhidharma points out, begins with the realization, or at least the understanding, that there is no self, no entity in either the observer or what is being observed, in the experience or in the experiencer. That is to say, there is no experiencer. There is no experience. There is simply the display of experiencing. There is no knower, nothing which is known. There is simply the unfolding and opening of this process of knowing: Knowing the Dharma, knowing a cup of coffee, knowing a friend, knowing the feeling of the sun on your cheek, and knowing that whatever arises is the play of causal conditions. That is to say that everything interacts, everything arises together, that each thing makes every other thing what it is.

And so having developed some ability to feel our own pain without avoiding it and without attaching to it, having uncovered the possibility of not being afraid of our fear, we must look very closely at what is arising. We must understand that just as we place blame, we also try to take or give credit.

People will take credit for the silliest things. They will say thing like, "Well, I've been able to grow a beard since I was twelve," as if they have somehow had something to do with that. They will place credit on somebody else for making them feel good, for making them feel confident. They will think that it is they who are thinking the thoughts that are arising.

Whatever arises simply plays itself out. It simply, at some point, gives way. So Bodhidharma says, *Why rejoice about it? Why lament over it?* This doesn't mean don't pay any attention to it, hide yourself from it, become withered and dry by avoiding pleasure, avoiding joy, but simply give and take no blame, nor credit.

Win or lose, may I work with whatever conditions may arise. The arising of these thoughts and these experiences, directly in this arising, directly in what we are experiencing now, we can unfold and experience the Way itself; we can establish our practice there. We can clarify these vital questions of: *Who is it? What is it?*

Directly, in whatever is present, the Actual Nature of experiencing presents itself, sometimes as wall, sometimes as breath, sometimes as floor, as attention skips from one to the other. But although attention might become lost in a thought, might be mindful, Awareness itself does not increase nor decrease. Just as no matter how many objects are shown to a mirror, this showing does not wear out the mirror, the mirror doesn't lose anything when it reflects a hand, and then a face, and then a field of swaying grass, and then the sun, and then a bird. It does not lose anything each time it reflects. It does not gain anything either. The reflections arise and then are gone. No matter how many clouds fill the sky, the sky is still open in all directions.

Bodhidharma says: *Why rejoice about it? Win or lose, let me work with whatever conditions may arise. Awareness itself does not increase or decrease. I will not be swayed by the winds of fortune for I am intimately aligned with the Way.*

Being intimately aligned with the Way is to be intimate with our own selves, intimate with our own

experience, meeting whatever arises fully, openly, with complete maitri. Can we be so intimate with ourselves, so intimate with our experience, so intimate with our world that we can live free of guilt and blame, and credit and searching? Can we simply live our lives that much? One doesn't need to hide in the lotus posture, facing a wall, in order to avoid the winds of fortune by searching for some subtle blissful state and attaching to that and being Buddha. Being Buddha is to realize the nature of the arising of all experience. To practise this is to align oneself with the Way, whether facing the wall in the Zendo, or facing a friend, facing one's own fear.

Sitting in this Zendo we sit in the place where we can allow ourselves perhaps to begin to experience this maitri, this freedom from hope and fear. So do not come here to hide. Come here to understand and release your deceptions. The ways in which you perhaps have been deceived by others, perhaps the ways in which you deceive others. But regardless of whether we regard our conditioning as social conditioning, or the conditioning that arises through our own habits, the truth is that there is simply conditioning. There is simply living one's life as one was, instead of as one is: living one's life on the basis of memory and expectation, and deceiving oneself about one's life.

Practice is simple honesty. Honesty with the breath, honesty with the moment, honesty with one's own motives, honesty with the coming and going of the ten thousand dharmas, honesty with the fact that this is Buddha, honesty with one's own fundamental freedom. Which can only be seen through being honest about one's myriad deceptions. As we sit, knees aching, mind aching, somehow our heart begins to ache. Somehow our heart begins to beat. Somehow our heart begins to break through its armour. And we can feel the currents of the open air. This aching of the heart means opening the ways in which we isolate ourselves from others, the ways in which we isolate ourselves from ourselves. This ache is the recognition of the boundaries that we have drawn, that we have enclosed ourselves in. And this ache is the beginning of the recognition that there is no barrier.

Dogen zenji in *Fukanzazengi* says, *traps and cages spring open* when you realize that *there is only Dharma here*. There is only this moment. There is only this seeing, this hearing, there is only Buddha in all directions. There is only the vast wealth and spaciousness of our lives. A vastness so without limit, so without boundary, that we felt we had to limit it somehow, we had to hide from it, because we didn't know what to do with it. And so we drew these boundaries. We set up these walls. We lost ourselves within hope and fear.

But the aching of our heart stirs in the midst of our confusion. And we begin to recognize, truly recognize, that the recognition of confusion is the germinal stirring of wisdom, of clarity. And that this clarity is present in just simply attending.

Through simply attending, we free our attention from structures and barriers and boundaries and habits. We can release projections and transference, blame and credit. And we can come into our lives as they are, and realize this single bodymind, right here and now, whole and healed. And when we can stand up and truly stand up, and sit down, and truly sit down, then we can also question into and unfold the actual nature of this body and mind, and realize that "Oh shit..." it's even vaster than we thought. We call this dropping body and mind.[fn]Shinjin-datsuraku.[/fn]

There is never any place to hold to in this practice. Every time that you think you've thoroughly penetrated, you've just begun. And so now, let's begin again. Don't wait. Don't wait for your knees to feel better. Don't wait for your mind to feel clearer. Don't wait for your life to come up upon you and give you a hand with your

living.

Here is your life. Here there is this seeing, this hearing, this knowing which arises as this very world. To penetrate into the nature of this world, just see, just hear, just practise like a blank wall, blank because it is featureless, free of strategy, not because it is blank of thought, blank of experiences. This biguan, this shikantaza, this realization of the display of emptiness and Awareness, is as close as this breath.

So what are you waiting for? Perhaps you're waiting for your image of what this Actual Nature might be, just as you wait for something to come along and make you feel better, just as you wait your lives away.

Please, let's begin again, with the freshness of this breath.

Please, enjoy yourselves.