

Class 3: Senshin

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So tonight we are going to finish this series of talks on the Tenzo kyokun. Dogen zenji says:

When we train in any of the offices of the monastery we should do so with a joyful heart, a motherly heart, a vast heart.

These three minds are known as senshin. The first, joyful mind, is “kishin”; motherly mind is “Roshin” and vast mind is “Daishin”. And so that is what we are going to be discussing this evening basically - three modes or aspects of compassionate activity. Dogen zenji says:

A “joyful heart” rejoices and recognizes meaning. You should consider that were you to be born in the realm of the shining beings you would be absorbed in indulgence with the qualities of that realm so that you would not rouse the recognition of uncovering the Way and so have no opportunity to practice. And so how could you use cooking as an offering to the Three Jewels? Nothing is more excellent than the Three Jewels of the Buddha, the Teachings, and the Community of those who practice and realize the Way. Neither being the king of gods nor a world ruler can even compare with the Three Jewels. The Zen Monastic Standards states, “The monastic community is the most excellent of all things because those who live thus live beyond the narrowness of social fabrications.” Not only do we have the fortune of being born as human beings but also of being able to cook meals to be offered to the Three Jewels. We should rejoice and be grateful for this.

We can also reflect on how our lives would be were we to have been born in the realms of hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, or jealous gods. How difficult our lives would be in those four situations or if we had been born in any of the eight adverse conditions. We would not then be able to practice together with the strength of a monastic community even should it occur to us to aspire to it, let alone be able to offer food to the Three Jewels with our own hands. Instead our bodies and minds would be bound within the limits of those circumstances, merely vessels of contraction.

So this thing about being born in the realm of the gods - I think I have discussed it various times: the six realms of birth or the six modes of being, starting with the hell realm. In the hell realm it is said that beings are completely encompassed, completely engulfed with anger or hatred, so much so that it is like fire or like ice and it is extremely claustrophobic. There is no way out of this heat or this cold. This is a state of mind we often find ourselves in. When we are extremely angry our sense perceptions are quite dense and chunky. We are not able to see very clearly. It is almost as if we are being crushed by our own feelings and there doesn't seem to be any way out of these feelings because they seem to be so overpowering, we have invested ourselves so thoroughly in them.

The next realm of being is that of the hungry ghosts or preta. The preta is a being completely consumed by the passion for consumption; someone who has such an overwhelming and massive sense of poverty that they are always trying to fill that poverty. So they are pictured as someone with an extremely large,

distended, bloated belly, a pencil thin neck and a small pin-prick hole for the mouth. So despite the vast, overwhelming hunger that is rumbling around in their stomachs they are unable to feed themselves. They can't fit any food through there. And of course we are often in this state of mind. We want something to take away our sense of frustration, we want something to make us feel better, something that we can consume, which refers to trying to seduce other people into admiring us or giving us something, trying to absorb music - we are listening to music but we are doing so with a sense of restlessness. It doesn't let us even hear the music. But we want to pull that music into us, we want to dance, we want to do something just in order to get away from the sense of overwhelming pettiness and frustration.

The next realm of being is that of the animal realm. This realm is comprised of an attitude which can only see what is right in front of it. This might sound a little bit like being right in the moment, but what is actually going on is that there are almost blinkers so that all that you are seeing is the next meal or whether something is going to threaten you. It is a state of ignorance, of stupidity, of dullness, of simply functioning at our lowest possible level.

The next is the human realm, and we will talk about that once we have talked about the next two realms.

The fifth realm is that of the asuras, or titans or demi-gods and these are states of mind that we can get into where we feel quite powerful but at the same time there seems to be somebody who is a bit more powerful than we. Or we are feeling quite good but not quite as good as we could and so there is an overwhelming sense of jealousy, a sense of trying to overcome something, trying to get back to something, trying to achieve.

And then the sixth realm is the realm of the gods. In the realm of the gods we are completely blissed out, we are completely absorbed in pleasure; this pleasure being perhaps very subtle states of mind gained through concentration or it might just simply be having a new car or "look at that beautiful sunset" and we don't see the sunset, we just get absorbed in our feelings about that sunset. So the main principle of the god realm is absorption within blissful states.

Now the common denominator of all of these states of being, all of these realms of being, is that one is completely engulfed in these things. One is completely engulfed in anger; one is completely engulfed in passion and so on. The human realm is said to have all of the characteristics of these other realms but to a lesser degree. So therefore, we are able to notice that they shift back and forth. Sometimes we feel good, sometimes we feel bad. Our states are being changed from moment to moment and because of this we have the possibility of seeing our situation clearly rather than being completely engulfed by hatred and anger we have some spark of intelligence which can recognize that anger. But even so we tend to circle through these realms throughout our day and every now and then we sort of stumble into the human realm, stumble into the realm of intelligence and get some sort of breath of fresh air. And this is when practice becomes truly possible.

So practice is basically concerned with, first of all, getting us to stay in the human realm rather than becoming completely absorbed in these states at the very least, without worrying about being a Buddha or anything, try to be a decent human being in the first place. And that is the working ground for recognizing the fact that not only are you a decent human being, you are Buddha. But without being in the human realm it is not possible to truly practice.

Now, of course, in traditional cultures these states of being are often considered to be actual modes of existence, actual worlds and if we are born into any of those worlds then it is impossible for us to practice because we will be engulfed by whatever the characteristic of that is. So having a joyful mind is taking a huge sense of joy in just being able to practice, in just being able to see when we are caught up in passion, when we are caught up in frustration, when we are caught up in jealousy. Taking a joy in intelligence and in the ability to practice so that we see all of the things which arise, dwell and decay within our various states of mind as being dharma, things which are teaching us, things which are workable. So this sense of joy is not congratulating ourselves and patting ourselves on the back. It is a matter of getting down to work and doing what we do as completely and fully as possible - when we see, to see as fully as possible, to just see; when we hear, to just hear. And it is from the precision of this quality of "just", this quality of "tada" or "just", that a sense of joyousness begins to come up because there is a sense of not doing anything unnecessary, not seeing anything unnecessary, but seeing what we are seeing and so this provides a sense of groundedness and spaciousness brought together in one moment, at one time. This joyfulness is our ability to work with this again and again and again. So, anything that we do that arises out of this joyful mind furthers this joyful mind and we contact again and again an almost unconditional joyfulness, a joyfulness which is not based on whether we are feeling good or whether we are feeling bad, but a joyfulness of being willing to work with it, being willing to Wake Up, being willing to pull ourselves out of these states, not by grabbing ourselves and pulling ourselves out of them, but simply by working with it fully in that moment to the best of our ability.

Now, going back to making offerings to the Three Jewels. Anything which connects us with practice, with the possibility of working with intelligence and further intelligence of seeing clearly is something which should bring forth not a sense of awe or a sense of worship, but something which brings forth a very natural sense of gratitude.

The eight adverse conditions are situations that would make it difficult for us to practice. For example, never having heard the Teachings; being in a culture which has no reference points as far as practice goes - it is not practice, nobody has worked with these things. Nobody has Woken Up, nobody has seen mind moments, nobody has seen the unconditioned mind mirror. This makes it very difficult to practice because there is no Dharma available. Or we could be born in a country where there is Dharma but we haven't come into contact with it, we haven't come into contact with a teacher. We should also be grateful that we have our eyes and ears and legs that we can cross so that our knees ache when we sit. We should be grateful that all of our faculties function as well as they do.

This life we live is a life of rejoicing, this body a body of joy which can be used to present offerings to the Three Jewels. It arises through the merits of eons and using it thus its merit extends endlessly. I hope that you will work and cook in this way, using this body which is the fruition of thousands of lifetimes and births to create limitless benefit for numberless beings. To understand this opportunity is a joyous heart because even if you had been born a ruler of the world the merit of your actions would merely disperse like foam, like sparks.

A ruler of the world, a "wheel turning king" in Indian cosmology, a cakravartin-rajā is someone who is born with not just a silver spoon in his mouth, but a silver ladle. He is someone of incredible strength, intelligence, dignity, beauty, he has incredible wealth at his disposal and beyond this, he's just a hell of a nice guy. And he is such a nice guy that he is able, say, run a government and everybody benefits. He can bring benefit to everybody. But it is all benefit in terms of what you are eating and what you are wearing and various social

things of this nature, but really never penetrates to the basic question of birth and death. Although practice is not separate from what we eat and what we wear in our social relationships, it questions into what it is that has any sort of relationship at all. What is seeing? What is hearing? What is the basis of mind? What is the basis of existence? And if we don't get to that basis, then we are continually caught within the leaves and branches and never get to the root of what our life truly is. So even if you are someone of such great merit and virtue the things that you do are almost of no benefit because they have only surface value. So you should be damned glad that you are not stuck in that sort of context, that you can actually practice and get to the root.

A "motherly heart" is a heart which maintains the Three Jewels as a parent cares for a child. A parent raises a child with deep love, regardless of poverty or difficulties. Their hearts cannot be understood by another; only a parent can understand it. A parent protects their child from heat or cold before worrying about whether they themselves are hot or cold. This kind of care can only be understood by those who have given rise to it and realized only by those who practice it. This, brought to its fullest, is how you must care for water and rice, as though they were your own children.

The Great Master Sakyamuni offered to us the final twenty years of his own lifetime to protect us through these days of decline. What is this other than the exertion of this "parental heart"? The Thus Come One did not do this hoping to get something out of it but sheerly out of munificence.

This is the main thing about this parental mind: doing what we do, being compassionate, not so that we will be considered as someone who is compassionate and not because we consider ourselves as someone who is compassionate. We talk about the three purities of giving. This is the recognition that inherently there is no self who gives, there is inherently no self in that which receives that which is given and there is inherently nothing which is given. There is nothing to cling to. Just because you were nice to someone once, that moment is now entirely gone and you can't build anything on the basis of that. You can't try to create images of being a wonderful, kind, compassionate person. Instead, you simply must be compassionate from moment to moment and this is so in regards to how we deal with others and how we deal with our own minds and our own bodies. Having some sense of unconditional or unconditioned willingness to see how we are from moment to moment and we can work with that fully. It is not sufficient to just have some image of being compassionate towards ourselves or towards others, we must actually be so. When that moment comes, that is what we must do. We can't say, "Well, I am usually like this and I will probably be quite compassionate then, too." When the moment comes we have to make our choice and we have to do what we do. Once it is done, then there is the next thing to be done.

So when we prepare rice for the Sangha, we don't do so hoping that everybody will go, "Mmmmmm", but we do try to do the best job that we can.

"Vast heart" is like a great expanse of ocean or a towering mountain. It views everything from the most inclusive and broadest perspective. This vast heart does not regard a gram as too light nor five kilos as too heavy. It does not follow the sounds of spring or try to nest in a spring garden; it does not darken with the colours of autumn. See the changes of the seasons as all one movement, understand light and heavy in relation to each other within a view which includes both. When you write or study the character "vast," this is how you should understand its meaning.

So this “Daishin”, this vast mind, is actually ultimate compassion. We start off with a joyful mind, the willingness to work with things moment after moment. And from that a kind, or parental mind begins to grow, a sense of doing things without a sense of gain or loss, but just doing it with an attitude of benefit which arises simply from who and what we are. And from this comes “Daishin”, or vast mind, which is a mind which embraces everything, which is not based on accepting, isn’t based on rejecting. Everything is already included in it. In this mind a pound isn’t light and a ton isn’t heavy. This mind is like a mountain or a great ocean. It cannot be moved because it is not based on anything. It just simply is how we are. It is a mind which includes all of who and what we are; all of what we see: colours, sounds, spring, autumn.

If the tenzo at Jiashan had not thus studied the word “vast,” he could not have woken up Elder Fu by laughing at him.

The tenzo at Mount Jiashan once heard Elder Fu give many lectures on the Mahaparanirvana sutra and Elder Fu was quite good at this. He knew all of the terms, he knew all of the categories. But he had not himself uncovered his true Dharmakaya and so at this the tenzo left and this for some reason brought Fu into recognition of how baseless and petty all of his Dharma practice had been up until this point and so he actually set to work on his actual body, breath, speech and mind, and actually Woke Up. So the study of the word “Vast” by this tenzo is simply that all-embracing whatever it is. This is how we study this word, “Vast”. By seeing that which closes us down, seeing that which opens us up and seeing completely. Seeing it on the basis of great faith[fn]Daishinkon. The recognition of fundamental clarity.[/fn] rather than on the basis of a belief in this or that, a particular logical structure or anything of that nature, but simply seeing it completely. Having great seeing.

If Zen master Guishan had not understand the word “vast,” he would not have blown on dead firewood three times. If the monk Dongshan had not understood the word “vast,” he could not have taught the monk through his expression, “Three pounds of flax.” All of these and other great masters through the ages have studied the meaning of “vast” or “great” not only through the word for it but through all of the events and activities of their lives. Thus they lived as a great shout of freedom through presenting the Great Matter, penetrating the Great Question, training great disciples and in this way bringing it all forth to us.

The abbot, senior officers and staff, and all monks should always maintain these three hearts or understandings.

Written in the spring of 1237 for those of coming generations who will practice the Way by Dogen, abbot of Kosho-(Horin-)ji.

Is there anything anyone would like to bring up?

Our practice really is quite like making a soup – seeing all of the vegetables that we are going to need; cutting them, cleaning them, and then beginning to cook them. And when we are cooking the soup we can’t just throw it on the stove and let it burn. We have to actually reach in there with a spoon and stir and as we stir all of the vegetables come to the surface, all of these various things come to the surface. If we let them settle to the bottom of the pot, they will simply burn. And so, thoughts, feelings, textures of mind, arise, dwell and decay and we stir them and we see them completely and we cook them thoroughly. Once we have

cooked this soup of our practice then with it, we can feed all sentient beings.

We will end with gassho.