

Dharma Assembly: The Dragon in His Waters, the Tiger in Her Mountains Part 2 of 3

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Jinmyo Renge sensei (while practising as “Osho”)
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Zazen in the Hatto begins and ends with strikes on the kaishaku and on the rin gong. But true practise is not contained by signals, or times, or events, or actions. True practice is continuous practice. But continuous practice depends upon strong and clear zazen. Speaking to us of strong and clear zazen, Dogen zenji continues his text and says,

“It is realized-practice within already manifest enlightenment. It is the display of complete Reality.”

When we first start practising, as much as we would sometimes like to think that we “do” the practice, that really isn’t what’s going on. It’s true that we do “do” something, in that we (often grudgingly) give up 30 minutes to sit. In truth, we spend far more time than that in the course of a single day wasting time, getting lost in thought, roiling around in contraction and reactivity and redoing tasks that weren’t done properly the first time around because we weren’t paying attention. But somehow, deliberately spending 30 minutes doing the most important thing we will ever do seems such an imposition.

Why should just sitting still for half an hour seem such a chore? Why should we not be able to sit with our experiencing as it actually is and experience that as being all right? Why is it, or rather “how is it” that our experience of sitting can often be so unsatisfactory? Quite simply, it is because we have the sense that practice is something that “we” are doing and so we will do it as we do anything else. And because, as the Buddha pointed out, anything associated with the self is dukkha or unsatisfactory it’s not surprising at all. Especially since true practice is releasing and moving beyond the presumption and illusion of a self that “does” anything when all it really does is interfere with and make anything that “we do” (unsatisfactory).

We come to the practice with all kinds of contraction, but we also have an assortment of ideas about what it is that we are trying to achieve by practising, ideas about what enlightenment would ‘feel’ like. Often, our experience of sitting on a zafu, seeing how we wind ourselves up with contraction and set ourselves spinning off into storylines doesn’t seem to match up at all with our ideas of “realized practice”, “manifest enlightenment” or “complete reality”.

We want instant gratification. I remember what that was like - “I sat for 30 minutes, so where’s my damn cookie?”

It’s a bit like this: Let’s say you and I walk into a very, very messy room that obviously needs to be cleaned up and you look around at all this mess and ask me, “What would this room look like if it were cleaned up?”

So I say, “Shut up and start cleaning.”

And you ask, “But what would it feel like to be in a clean room?”

And I say “shut up and clean.”

And you say, "But I don't like being in a messy room."

So I say, "Look, it's your room. You made the mess. Start cleaning. When the room is clean, you'll know it's clean because you will be standing in a nice clean room. Until then, stop thinking about it, stop talking about it, just do what needs to be done."

In the context of practice, doing what needs to be done is following through with the instructions you have been given and actually doing the practice.

These phrases, "realized practice" or "manifest enlightenment" are literal. But what they really mean is experiential and you cannot experience them unless you do the practice. How long will that take? Well, how long does it take to clean up a room? Not very long if you apply yourself; a really long time if you waste time spacing out, talking to yourself, whining and complaining, or sneaking in a nap in the corner when you think no one's looking.

The Roshi says in the "Jijiyu Zanmai Doka":

*"Samadhi" does not mean any state
of bringing together one thing
with another thing
until there is a wholeness.
It means originally complete.
It means always so.
It means that the Path
and the beginning and end of the Path
are the Path.
It means that there is nothing
outside of the Path.
It means that there are no obstacles
to overcome within this realized-practice.
It means that practice is the realization
of whatever arises as non-arising.
It is unconditional freedom."*

Dogen zenji then says,

"Traps and cages spring open."

In one moment you can be tormenting yourself in ways that only you could torment yourself because you know how to do that better than anyone else. In the next moment, if you actually practice, the state can shift and you can see that there was nothing binding you to that state. Self-image is a process of contraction. It's not your evil twin, and it's not out to get you. It's not that intelligent. It is simply a kind of clenching.

Sometimes we describe this clenching as being much like clenching your hand. If you clench your hand very, very tightly, so tightly that the knuckles turn white, and hold it like that for a minute or so, it will feel very

defined. If you release your grip and let the hand fall open and relax, the sensations will feel lighter and more open, more effervescent. It is the same hand, but you can tighten it to the point of being painful or you can let go. Letting go is not hard. It just requires letting go.

When you are contracted, you are clenching. This clenching creates the sense of there being a some “one” at the centre of experiencing – some “one” who is experiencing difficulty or anger or confusion. Usually we get so caught up in the feeling tone or storyline that is going on that we don’t notice at all how coarse these movements of attention are, or that they are serving another purpose – they are propping up the notion of an “I” who is separate from everything and everyone around it. And so although we say we would like to free ourselves from contraction, the truth of the matter is that we are quite reluctant to really do this because, well....“It’s my cage and I like my cage. I’m comfortable in my cage. I know my cage. So go away and don’t bug me.”

Even the most densely contracted habitual states can open. In each moment of choosing to open to reality, the door of the cage swings open.

Of course, as the Roshi says in the “Jijiyu Zanmai doka”,

*“Self-image will conceive of this
easy and Perfect Path [fn]Saijojo.[/fn]
as an ordeal and journey.
In truth,
it is easier than snapping your fingers or opening your eyes”*

Eihei Dogen zenji goes on to say,

“Grasping the heart of this, you are the dragon who has reached his waters, the tiger resting in her mountains.”

For a long time students will do what they usually do with just about everything: struggle, flail about, re-work instructions to make them fit into what they already assume they understand, and make up their own version of the practice. Simply let go. Release thoughts, feeling tones, and storylines. Release them as soon as they begin to form by opening attention to this moment of present experiencing. If you start talking to yourself, let go of the thought and don’t even bother completing the sentence. If you are picturing other people or situations, this too is a form of thinking. Let go of it by coming back to the breath and open attention to what you are seeing with your eyes. If you are getting caught up in feeling tones, don’t “feel” the feeling tones. Release it by feeling into the sensations of the bodymind sitting. It is through this releasing that the dragon reaches his waters, the tiger rests in her mountains.

Dogen Zenji explains:

“Understand that right here is the display of Vast Reality and then dullness and mental wandering have no place to arise.”

When your practice is very open, when you are allowing yourself to feel into the sensations of the whole

bodymind sitting, opening to seeing and hearing, you and what is being experienced are not separate. Experiencing is spacious and open and in that openness, one is not moving attention towards or away from anything that is noticed. There is just this coming and going of details and any movement of attention is part of the coming and going. There is nothing to “catch”, to get caught in or struggle with; there is nowhere for dullness and mental wandering to arise.

The text continues:

“Looking at the past, we see that transcending common and sacred, or being able to die while in zazen or standing are all rooted in the power of this practice.”

Looking at the past – the Teachings. The countless records of Teachers and students who have come and gone and have left behind a record of what was recognized and practices for the benefit of those who followed. Transcending common and sacred is part of those Teachings as the practice is vast and endless. “Common” and “sacred” are categories people assign to certain kinds of experiences, but any kind of experience you have is arising within awareness of it. What is this Awareness? This is what the practice of Zen is about.

Being able to die while in zazen or standing are all rooted in the power of this practice – the practice of Zen is not limited to the waking state. As practice deepens it is possible to learn to practice with the waking state, the sleeping state, the dreaming state and the states that are experienced during the process of death. If that were not the case it would be a very limited practice, so of course, there are Teachings that address all of these conditions.

The text continues:

“It is impossible for words or thinking to grasp how the old masters could seize the moment for disciples with a finger, pole, needle or mallet, display Actuality with a whisk, a fist, a staff or a shout.”

A Teacher Teaches continuously, but is the student’s attention open enough to receive what is being offered? The best Teacher in the world can do little with a student who does not make him or herself available to the Teachings.

Dogen zenji says,

“Practising mystical powers or thinking dualistically about practice and realization don’t help in this either.”

When self-image practices itself, what you end up with is self- image.

The text continues,

“Practice and realization are the deportment of this very bodymind, beyond sight and sound, before thinking and analyzing.”

The bodymind and the practice are not separate. The deportment of the bodymind expresses how your attention is moment after moment. This is why there is such emphasis on the forms in our practice. The forms are how we embody the practice.

Dogen zenji says,

“Since this is as it is, it doesn’t matter if you’re clever or stupid;”

If you believe yourself to be quick-thinking, a fast study, have read a lot of books, know a lot of stuff, that’s nice, but won’t necessarily be an advantage to you when it comes to learning to practice. What does any of that have to do with hearing this sound in this moment? What does it have to do with what is actually recognized in this moment? This moment is alive, constantly changing, so set aside your clutter and pay attention to things as they are. Drop cleverness as it simply gets in your way. You may have learned the ten boomies by heart, but I don’t want to discuss them with you in daisan. What I want to know is whether or not you are opening past habitual structures of attention.

If you believe yourself to be stupid, slow, unable to remember much of what you read after you read it, none of this will be a disadvantage when it comes to learning to practice. Can you feel this breath? Do you hear these sounds? What does this have to do with your IQ? Drop thoughts of stupidity as they simply get in your way. Have you ever heard a wonderful piece of music and while hearing it, appreciated it fully. And then following that, could recall nothing about it? In this practice of recognition, there will be moments in which you understand the vastness, the timelessness, the beauty of this practice and then a moment later, understand nothing. That does not mean that you are stupid. It means that you are learning.

Dogen zenji then says,

...“the distinctions distinguish nothing. Whole-hearted practice is the Way.”

It does not matter in the least what you think you know about yourself or anyone else. Thinking that you are clever, thinking that you are stupid - none of your storylines and opinions matter. Whoever you think yourself to be is only how you see yourself when you are seeing things in that way. Opening attention past habitual structures of attention, they become transparent to reality. Traps and cages spring open.

The text continues:

“Since realized-practice cannot be stained, progress into the Ordinary.”

In the Roshi’s translation notes, he quotes this exchange between Zhaozhou and Nanchuan:

“Zhaozhou asked Nanchuan, “What is Awareness?”

Nanchuan said, “Ordinary mind is the Way.”

Zhaozhou asked, “Well, should I move along with it or not?”

Nanchuan said, “Once you intend to move forward you have already gone astray.”

Awareness does not move, nor is it still. Such categories simply do not apply. You and all beings and all experiences come and go as the display of Awareness. You cannot be separate from it. All that you can do is get out of the way. Drop all of your strategies and open attention right now to what is already the case. Feel into the sensation of this breath; feel the tanden, the sensations of the whole bodymind sitting on the zafu and open to seeing and hearing. Practise this moment with the whole bodymind.