

Transparent

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The leaves of oak trees outside the Hatto window rustle in the wind. A crow caws, a car passes. Rain falls. As each of these sounds arise within the space of hearing they interact with the space in which they arise and point to the space around them. The Sakyamuni Buddha rupa on the Butsudan points to the space around it. And each of you, sitting on your zafu, point to the space around you. Everything that you see or hear, every sensation you experience points to the space around it. In fact, everything you experience, large or small, points to the space around it. When you feel the heat of summer or the cold of winter or see the sun rise or set or look at the night sky, these may seem vast but they are still pointing to the yet vaster space around them.

Being transparent to experiencing does not mean stepping back, pretending you're not there. Nor does it mean glazing or spacing out. It is not the absence of something; it is meeting the Suchness of experiencing as it actually is, fully and completely. When you meet experiencing as it actually is there is no separation between you and what you are experiencing. And in this I am not just talking about there being no separation between you and the experiences you like. I am talking about all experiencing. In this realm of birth and death there is great beauty as well as great ugliness; there is ease and there is difficulty. There is like and dislike. We want it all to be just 'all alright' for ourselves and for those we care about, all of the time. But it isn't. Everything is impermanent, everything changes. You can try to stand solid and unyielding in the midst of impermanence, but it won't work.

As the word 'transparency' is commonly used, it merely refers to light passing through matter, for example, light passing through a sheet of transparent glass. In the context of our practice, however, we are not talking about light as light waves - light that you can see with your eyes. What is being described is how everything that is known is open to the Knowing that it arises within - if it is known intimately, with the whole bodymind. The knowingness of knowing, the capacity to know, is traditionally called "komyo" or "luminosity", the Luminosity of Knowing. This quality of luminosity is also spoken of as "sunyata" -

emptiness, openness, transparency. Whatever is known is not actually a thing, no matter how you might think of it. In the fact of present experiencing, it is a known, an experience, and is utterly transparent. In reality, everything is already exposed, we are already exposed, but we like to think that we can hide.

What hides is self-image, the image we have of ourselves and the world. It doesn't exist as an entity or a thing. It is created through a process of contraction, but when it is propagated and acted out, it can of course cause great harm. From your own experience you know this because there have been times when you have contracted and have propagated a storyline about yourself or about someone else and then have acted it out with dire consequences. The worst of the things that you have done in your lifetime have been the result of contraction. But even contraction is known and all knowns point to the space around them. The problem is that when we are deeply contracted we become stupid-stubborn and don't want to let go of the lies we tell ourselves about ourselves and about the world.

Now that leads to a question about honesty. Is being transparent the same thing as being honest? The answer is yes and no. It is the same thing as being honest if the honesty we are talking about is unconditioned. If it is conditioned by a feelingtone about being honest, or if what is guiding you is some sort of state or agenda, some kind of result you are hoping to achieve, then that is not complete, transparent honesty. Being honest about experiencing has no agenda. It is also not about being confessional, blurting out all of your thoughts or feelings to anyone who will listen. Being truly honest involves a continuous wordless questioning into what we are experiencing, a questioning with the whole bodymind.

We tend to get stuck on the knowns. We continuously react to what we notice. When we see or experience something pleasant, we want more of it. We grasp after it. When we see or experience something unpleasant, we want to get away from it. We continuously pull and push against experiencing without understanding what it is that we are reacting to or why we are reacting.

Recently, a student asked me about seeing a sunset. It was beautiful and yet, within a few minutes, the perception of beauty changed. The student recognized a kind of perceptual flattening and there was an accompanying discomfort about that. It raised a number of questions about what was being experienced, why there was a sense of detachment and distancing, an inability to fully experience the beauty of the sunset and maintain that experience. It was a very good question.

As a monastic, when I see something beautiful, such as a sunset, or the rippling of water on the stones of the koi pond, or the shadows cast by ivy leaves through the shoji paper on the Zendo windows, there is appreciation of this display of colour and shadow and light. The visual field is very rich. But again, everything we experience is pointing to the far vaster space around it. If you are only paying attention to what is arising within seeing, without feeling into the sensations of the body, without opening to hearing, without seeing the details arising all around the thing you are seeing and the details that arise between you and the thing you are seeing, then you are only experiencing part of the whole. When you open to the whole of experiencing, then a sunset is beautiful but there is no grasping after the experience of it, no trying to freeze it. It changes, you change, and you can allow change because there is the sunset and there is the KNOWING of the sunset together with how you are knowing the sunset, and the luminosity of knowing is all sunsets and sunrises, all days and nights, all moments, all experiences.

When we first start practicing, we think the point of the practice is to notice knowns. We want to narrow and direct attention so that we can just notice this breath. Or just notice that sound. We think that opening

attention is noticing a whole bunch of knowns. We even inventory what we are noticing, sometimes following a kind of mental checklist of details we think we should be noticing. This noticing is merely the darting of attention through random impulse, from this to that, from this thing that is known to that thing that is known. From the sound of someone coughing, to a thought, to the breath, to a fragment of teisho, to an itch, to a pain in your knee, to makyo on the wall, to sleepiness. It's really no different from the impulsive darting of attention that comes up in the rest of your life - a restless drifting and grasping and glossing over, of being interested and then bored, turning attention from one thing to another.

This is why there is so much emphasis in our practice on opening attention to the whole body, not just fragments of it. When you feel the breath at the diaphragm, you need to feel it together with the tanden and your hands and your legs crossed and your spine and neck, head, and shoulder. And you need to open to seeing and hearing. You need to practise this moment after moment after moment, the whole time you are sitting. No one thing is 'the point'. All points point to each other and your practise is to open attention to many details simultaneously. Noticing is not enough. One can sit on a couch with a beer in one hand and the TV remote in the other and notice all kinds of stuff. That doesn't mean one is practising.

At first opening attention to many details simultaneously seems difficult because for most of your life attention has been allowed to follow impulse. Now it is being trained and that requires effort. But the effort you need to make does not require straining. The sensations, the colours and forms and sounds are already present. All you are doing is NOT doing what you usually do - distracting and abstracting yourself, following impulse. Instead you are learning to actually pay attention. When we get out of the way and stop obstructing ourselves, we become transparent to experiencing. There is no separation between seeing and what is seen; between hearing and what is heard; between feeling and sensations that are felt.

Refine noticing into mindfulness, into attention, into attentiveness. When there is a painful sensation in your knees, the best way to work with it is not to pull away from it or push against it in your frustration but rather to open attention all around it. When a thought or a feeling tone comes up, loosen around it. This does not mean to loosen mindfulness but to let go of the stance of a thinker through questioning into it, by not knowing what it is, by complete and open questioning. None of our categories about experiencing mean anything at all. None of our images about experience are what experiencing is. We must abandon all views and simply see.

This is important because we believe all kinds of things about ourselves and about our capacities that simply are not true. When attention congeals and contracts, our intelligence becomes very, very limited. When we open attention, we are able to see past the limitations we impose on our experiencing. We see options where previously we thought there were none. We see ourselves and everything else in a very different light. Instead of the harsh spotlight of fear and struggle, criticism and anger, we can open to the Luminosity of knowing, to wisdom, and let it guide us. In the very first Saturday Morning Dharma Talk I heard the Roshi present, he spoke about the Luminosity of Knowing. It was entitled "A Jewel in Bright Light Loses its Edges", which is a quote from the the "Zenrin Kushu". The Roshi once expressed this as "A jewel in bright light loses its edges. Or in other words, 'Who gives a fuck what you think?'"

You know what? He's right. We shouldn't give a fuck what we think. Why? Because thoughts are knowns. They don't know anything. We think the centre of our intelligence is the bit that does all of the thinking. If that were true, then how do you know that you are experiencing a thought? Where are you knowing that thought from? What are you knowing it with? The Luminosity of Knowing shines through you, through all of

your thoughts, through all of your feelings, through everything you experience, through all that is.

Luminosity is the capacity of Knowing to know.

It is also called the Current of Feeling.

Awake Awareness is Knowing as such, primordially awake, but when “you” wake up to it, then this distinguishes it from Awareness.

“Awake Awareness” is an intensifier as a phrase.

Luminosity is the capacity to know.

Knowns are the radiance of luminosity.

Awareness is bright right through.

Awake Awareness means you’ve woken up to it.

To be transparent means that there is absolutely nothing you can hang on to. It means that none of your thoughts are solid. None of your feelings are solid. None of your views or attitudes are solid.

In 1991, Zen Master Anzan Hoshin presented a series of classes on the 8,000 Line Prajnaparamita sutra. These were recorded but there was a problem with the recording equipment and some of the classes were lost. However, I transcribed as much of them as was possible. The following quote is from Class One.

The Roshi begins by quoting the text as translated by Edward Conze:

*The text: “Then the Venerable Subhuti, by the Buddha’s power, said to the Lord:
The Lord has said, ‘Make it clear now, Subhuti, to the Bodhisattvas, the great beings, starting from perfect wisdom, how the Bodhisattvas, the great beings go forth into perfect wisdom! When one speaks of a ‘Bodhisattva,’ what dharma does that word ‘Bodhisattva’ denote?”*

The Roshi comments:

So here, saying, okay, so what is this thing about Teaching the Bodhisattvas, the great beings or the Mahasattvas? Beginning with perfect wisdom – let’s say there is such a thing as perfect wisdom – how does one actually enter into it? When we are speaking of a Bodhisattva, what does that word actually mean?

In the text Subhuti says: “I do not, O Lord, see that dharma ‘Bodhisattva’ nor a dharma called ‘perfect wisdom.’ Since I neither find, nor apprehend, nor see a dharma “Bodhisattva’ nor a ‘perfect wisdom,’ what Bodhisattva shall I instruct and admonish in what perfect wisdom?”

The Roshi comments:

So basically he is saying – there is nothing which is a Bodhisattva; there is nothing which is perfect wisdom. Since this is the case, who could I Teach about perfect wisdom? So he starts off with basically

cutting down any kind of expectations that Sariputra or the rest of the Sangha might have. They are used to listening to things, finding the right term, the right word and memorizing that and holding that in their minds. But Subhuti is trying to present something else entirely. He is not trying to present a doctrine. He is not trying to explain anything. He is trying to show people how to see clearly; he is trying to display perfect wisdom to people so that they can recognize it, so that they can practice it, so that they can realize it. So one of the first ways of doing that, of course, is to cut down and cut through whatever concepts that people will use to obstruct perfect wisdom. "

Back to the text.

Subhuti says: "And yet, O Lord, if, when this is pointed out, a Bodhisattva's heart does not become cowed, nor stolid, does not despair nor despond, if he does not turn away or become dejected, does not tremble, is not frightened or terrified, it is just this Bodhisattva, this great being who should be instructed in perfect wisdom. It is precisely this that should be recognized as the perfect wisdom of that Bodhisattva, as his instruction in perfect wisdom. "

The Roshi says:

In the recognition that none of one's categories about experience mean fuck all, in the recognition that none of one's images about experience are what experience is, in the recognition that one must abandon all views and simply see - if you can meet this without fear, then you are a Bodhisattva. If you can do this, this is perfect wisdom. There is nothing else which is perfect wisdom. Just seeing clearly, just paying attention openly, just being aware.

In the text, Subhuti then says:

When he thus stands firm, that is his instruction and admonition. Moreover, when a Bodhisattva courses in perfect wisdom and develops it, he should so train himself that he does not pride himself on that thought of enlightenment. That thought is no thought, since in its essential original nature, thought is transparently luminous.

The Roshi comments:

I don't know if you have any sense of this, but these opening passages of this sutra are most extraordinary. They contain the most radical level and orientation of the Teachings. Anything that one finds in the Shobogenzo, in my own Teachings, in the Mahamudra and Dzog-chen, in any of the most advanced level of Teachings, is found here. If you can meet your experience without fear, if you can meet your experience openly, train in this, practice this, practice attending openly, that is really all the Teaching that you need. It says,

And the Roshi is now quoting the text and Subhuti is saying:

It is precisely that which should be recognized as the perfect wisdom of that Bodhisattva, as his

instruction in perfect wisdom. Moreover, when a Bodhisattva courses in perfect wisdom and develops it, he should so train himself that he does not pride himself on that thought of enlightenment.

The Roshi comments:

The thought of enlightenment is the aspiration, the recognition that there is confusion and that this confusion is suffering, that this confusion is caused by grasping, that this is unnecessary, that one can be free. And yet, even if one holds to this as a credential, one is limiting oneself. If there is any thought whatsoever which is not examined, which is not looked into, then there is still confusion and there is still the roots of suffering. We must examine absolutely everything, openly and clearly. We must take nothing for granted: not who we are, not our memories, not what the body is, not what the mind is, not what our little compulsions are telling us to do, not what our tendencies are telling us to do, not what our fear is telling us to do, not what our anger is telling us to do. Not just those, but any recognition that we might have, any moment of insight, any state no matter how coarse or subtle, must be looked into clearly. Looking into it clearly, we see that the thought, in its essential and primordial nature is transparent luminosity. Whatever one is aware of is the display of Awareness.

Luminosity, (prabasvara) means the ability to illuminate, to turn on the lights in a room and see what is in that room. So Luminosity means the ability to know. And so what is necessary is the recognition that thought is no thought. Thought is not an object; thought does not exist on its own; there is no one which is doing the thinking; the thought has no substance whatsoever. The thought is the display of the Luminosity of Knowing, just as a ripple on water is the display of water. From the point of view of the water there is no ripple, there is just water.

Returning to the text. Subhuti now says:

That thought is no thought, since in its essential original nature thought is transparently luminous.

The Roshi says:

That is the whole Teaching, right there in these opening passages. This is extraordinary. If the Buddha didn't Teach this, then he should have. If the Buddha didn't Teach this, then he wasn't a quarter of the Teacher that he should have been.

Perhaps the Prajnaparamita Teachings were Teachings that originally had been given by the Buddha in some context. This is certainly possible in that if we look at the fact that the sutras were fragments of discourses which were compiled together, mainly sets of stock phrases which were built together to form some kind of storyline and that many of these were not written down until many hundreds of years after the Buddha's death and that monks would wander from place to place and sometimes they would meet and they would share and compare little bits of Teachings that they had heard and in this way texts would form. Perhaps the Prajnaparamita Teachings do form part of the authentic body of the Buddha's words, but we really have no way of knowing what the Buddha actually taught.

The remarkable thing here is that if the Buddha did not Teach these, he should have; and that the people

who did compile and present these Teachings did not just simply start their own School. They weren't particularly into any kind of trip. They weren't saying, "Well, look what I've realized and blah blah blah blah blah." They said, "Well here is a tradition which is working - the Dharma - but there are certain points at which people are getting stuck. We don't need to get stuck in that kind of way. We need to go past that." And so they realized that the Prajnaparamita Teachings are the most radical and direct Path and yet they are only really comprehensible in the context of the Gradual Path, only in the context of moment-to-moment mindfulness, paying attention to what is going on, being able to see the process of the five skandhas, so on and so forth. Only when one has encompassed all levels of Dharma is it really Dharma. The radical Path is not something which is completely split off from the rest of the Dharma. It is a way in which the rest of the Dharma can be approached right at the beginning of the Path, or it can be the fruit of the Path, or it can be what one is practicing. But it is not really separate from the Abhidharma Teachings or any of the other things that the Buddha taught. It is not so much a new Teaching as a new view, a new orientation. It is not a doctrine; it is not a Teaching. It is a practice and it is a view.

When I was discussing this just the other day with the Roshi, he pointed out that the line from the Diamond sutra that is on the wall leading to the Shuryo, "Give rise to the mind which abides nowhere" is also a summary of all of this.

Sometimes people will think that they understand these Teachings and think that because they think they understand them, they don't need to sit zazen and to actually practise and embody the teachings. But as Eihei Dogen zenji says in the Fukanzazengi, "Just suppose you become puffed up about your understanding and inflate your little experiences: You think you have seen the truth, attained the Way, recognized the luminosity of mind and can grasp at heaven. You might think that these initial jaunts about the borders are entering the realm of enlightenment but you've lost the Way of complete liberation." It's like just getting the tip of your toe wet - not even the whole toe - because you think it's safer to keep your distance from it. If you really understood the first thing about these Teachings, there is no way that you could justify not sitting zazen.

So, how do you practise this mind which abides nowhere? How do you train in this while sitting here right now on your zafu? Begin by opening attention to what is most true of your experiencing - that you are sitting here; that you are feeling these sensations, hearing these sounds, seeing these colours and forms. And with any thought, any feeling, any storyline that comes up, open past the assumption that it contains what is true. Questioning into experiencing does not mean following and falling into what is noticed. It means opening past it. It means questioning into it by not knowing what it is, by complete and open questioning, with the whole bodymind.

And this will make self-image quake in its boots. But then self-image is at root fear and withdrawal from the inherent openness of reality. That is what the gesture of contraction is, which becomes clearer when attention opens around structures of contraction: fear.

Just see clearly, just pay attention openly, just be transparent.