

A Lecture on Genjo Koan

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IN OBSERVING YOUR PRACTICE, I notice it is just a small part of your life. You think it may be better to do something else instead of practicing zazen. But our practice is not like that. It is not one of twenty-four hours. If I scold you, you may go. If I give you some candy, you will stay. I dare say you are impossible, like a child. You lack the confidence to study Buddhism as a whole life study. You think you can get away from Zen, from this zendo. Actually, once you enter, that's it. Some day you'll have to come back. I know that. I tried to get out of it many times, but I couldn't.

I may say, "You are bad now." But what is bad? Who is bad? Someone who is good is bad now. Sometimes I say, "You are very good." But someone who is not good enough is good enough. Same thing, isn't it? Doesn't make any sense, "good" or "bad."

In Japan, young people say, "This is *absolutely* good." It is just emphasizing good. But when we say "absolutely good," it is the same thing as "absolutely bad." When we say "absolutely good," it does not mean good or bad. It is something more than good or bad. So in this sense, absolutely good is absolutely bad.

Sometime we say, comparatively, "This is good, this is bad." These two ways of understanding life are necessary. Sometimes we have to compare something to the other. This is very important, but this comparatively good or bad life has created a lot of difficulties. This comparison is the basic attitude of science and philosophy. It intellectualizes our life. When you intellectualize life, it will eventually come to a dead end. That is why we have difficulties currently. Originally it is just comparatively good. We are comparatively better than some people. That's all. But nowadays we say, "Absolutely good." Here is the big mistake. Even emotionally, that is a big mistake. Nothing is absolutely good.

When you say "absolutely good," it does not mean good anymore. It is the same thing as bad. If you understand or feel it in this way, when you say "absolutely good," that is all right. But when you say, "absolutely good" emphasizing something comparatively good, that is a big mistake. You are forcing your way. You are depriving the freedom of others. This is a big mistake. Dogen-zenji says in "Genjo Koan:"

That we move ourselves and understand all things is ignorance. That things advance and understand themselves is enlightenment.

He is talking of the complete understanding of life. What is ignorance and what is enlightenment? What is good and what is bad?

We say "ignorance" or "enlightenment" without knowing what is ignorance and what is enlightenment. But when we say "ignorance" or "enlightenment," we should know what is ignorance in its true sense and what is enlightenment in its true sense. "That things advance and understand themselves is enlightenment." When we have no particular concrete idea of good and bad, we expose ourselves and accept criticism; that is enlightenment.

We may do many things intellectually, intentionally, in the realm of consciousness, but most of these activities are more unconscious activity than conscious activity. What is the true expression of yourself--conscious one or unconscious one? Of course, ninety-nine percent of your activity is unconscious, and that is the true expression of yourself. If you say, "I am right," that is just a small part of your expression. As you understand yourself, we don't know what we are exactly. "Don't know" is right.

Those two statements about ignorance and enlightenment are based on one big understanding of life. Enlightenment is something which will happen to us sometime, and ignorance is something which will come over us sometime. We are a big box including enlightenment and ignorance.

So in our everyday life, there is enlightenment and ignorance. You cannot escape from ignorance to attain enlightenment, because enlightenment is not somewhere else. Dogen says, to know what is ignorance is enlightenment. And to be ignorant about enlightenment is ignorance. Something good is something bad. If I say something is good, that something should be bad. Because it is the same thing if I say, "Good morning. You came on time this morning. That's very good." That means you do not come on time usually. If I scold you, "Why didn't you come on time?" it means you come almost every morning on time. So it's the same thing. We should not be disturbed by the words "ignorance or enlightenment." If we understand ourselves completely, there is no special thing as enlightenment or ignorance. Ignorance is enlightenment, enlightenment is ignorance.

It is buddhas who understand ignorance.

Dogen says, "It is buddhas who understand ignorance"- their own ignorance. Buddha was enlightened about his ignorance, and it is people who are ignorant of enlightenment. So there is no difference between buddha and people--same thing, same human being. But buddhas understand their ignorance, and we are ignorant of enlightenment. But, if I say this, then there will be no need to practice zazen. If we are the same as buddha, why should we practice zazen? When you understand this philosophy or statement just intellectually, you will have this problem.

Dogen continues:

It is people who are ignorant of enlightenment. Further, there are those who are enlightened beyond enlightenment, and those who are ignorant of ignorance.

"Enlightenment beyond enlightenment." If you retain consciousness of enlightenment, you know, that is not good enough. So you should go beyond enlightenment. If you attain enlightenment, that enlightenment means enlightenment above enlightenment of ignorance. So eventually you will go towards ignorance, you know.

When you say, "I have attained enlightenment consciously," that consciousness is delusion. About what have you attained enlightenment? You attained enlightenment about ignorance. What you grasp is ignorance, not enlightenment. There is nothing to understand but ignorance for the enlightened person. There is nowhere to go--enlightenment or ignorance. So if you attain enlightenment, you have to go back to ignorance, because there is no other way for you to go [laughs].

So "enlightenment beyond enlightenment" means conscious enlightenment is not good enough. You have to give up enlightenment at the moment you attain enlightenment. When you actually attain enlightenment, what you grasp is ignorance. When you understand how ignorant you have been--that is enlightenment.

So it is impossible for an enlightened person to forget about enlightenment. It is impossible because you have found something which you have. So how can you forget about enlightenment? You should abide in enlightenment forever with people who have the same nature as your own.

If you think "I attained enlightenment" (although most haven't attained enlightenment yet), "I am the only person who attained enlightenment," that is a *big* mistake. That is just delusion. One didn't grasp anything but delusion. It will soon vanish from memory, from experience.

Even though it looks like we are doing the same thing, there is some difference between the people who attain enlightenment and those who haven't. But for an enlightened one, constant effort will be continued with people wherever one is.

And those who are ignorant of ignorance.

"Ignorant of ignorance" means people eventually will attain enlightenment. Those people who are ignorant of ignorance are just ignorant of their own ignorance. You don't feel that you have the same quality or same nature as an enlightened person. Eventually,

as long as you have the same nature as an enlightened person, once you become enlightened of your ignorance you will be saved.

When buddhas are truly buddhas, they are not necessarily aware of themselves as buddhas.

If there is someone who has attained enlightenment they will go back to ignorance, and although someone is ignorant of ignorance, eventually that person will become enlightened about ignorance. It is not necessary, even, to become aware of your buddha-nature. We have it. The difference is those who are awakened by their true nature, or they are ignorant of ignorance. That is the difference.

So strictly speaking, it is not necessary to be aware of ourselves to be Buddha. Same thing. That is why I say you will come back. Even though you are a thousand miles away from this zendo, you are included in this zendo. With this understanding, whether you are here or not is not the point. Do you understand?

However, you may ask me what is the purpose of practice? I think you are relieved. You have forgotten what you had on your shoulders now. Actually, there is nothing special for you to do. Why then did Dogen-zenji strive for many years, until he attained enlightenment and dropped off his idea of mind and body? He says, "Flowers fall with our attachment, and weeds grow with our detachment." In spite of detachment, the flower will fall. This is life. And if you do not try to understand this point fully, those profound teachings are nothing for us. So actually, it is necessary to practice-to continue our practice in the realm of duality as unenlightened people. We should all be unenlightened people, and we should strive for enlightenment. We should do that. While you are striving for it, you will really understand what Dogen meant. Intellectually you have understood it already. But do you remain doing nothing in a sunny place eating what you want? Can you do that? Can you always lie down in your bed reading some interesting stories? Can you do that? No, we cannot. For a while you can do it. When we are tired of reading, we will go out, or we will work. And if we earn

some money to be lazy, we will come back from work. If you continue your life in this way, you will not find out any meaning in your life.

Someday you will have deep regret with what you have been doing; you will be disgusted with yourself. And you feel unable to help people, or unable to love anyone. You will be completely isolated from this world. So you may care for something good-something which is absolutely true, and try to escape from this world, or commit suicide. This is what we do with our life. But there is a way to resume a deeper understanding of life and work with people without any prejudice, without any discrimination, and help each other with mutual understanding. The only way is to share our joy of a deeper understanding of life with people, and to participate in worldly life with more sincere effort. Then you will be a perfect human being as well as a perfect Buddha's disciple.

A new student who was studying Indian philosophy asked, "I read many books about Zen, and they use the term 'oneness of duality.' But actually, what is 'oneness of duality?'" I had no time to discuss with him the oneness of duality. He understood intellectually pretty well what is the oneness of duality. I wanted to help him, but I knew that it is impossible to help him. Until he suffers, until he tries to find out what *is* the oneness of duality, it will take a pretty long time. By long effort, his understanding will be better and better, until, "Oh, this is oneness of duality." How you reach this kind of understanding is to suffer in your actual life, or to think more about your life, or to practice zazen.

So to practice Zen in a noisy place is itself a very dualistic way, a way of the noisiness of the outside [loud traffic noises can be heard]. Try to be calm. This is the most extremely dualistic way, but in this effort there is, you know, a big hint.

So after all those sharp, profound teachings, Dogen writes:

However, flowers fall with our attachment, and weeds grow with our detachment.

He comes back to our actual life without any thinking, and where we should make our effort.

When we see things and hear things with our whole body and mind, our understanding is not like a mirror with reflections, nor like water under the moon. If we understand one side, the other side is dark.

These three lines are impossible. You cannot do anything with them. It takes a long time to understand this. "When we see things and hear things with our whole body and mind"--without any idea of enlightenment or ignorance--when we *do* something and go beyond ourselves, this is to be enlightened.

"Our understanding is not like a mirror with reflections." You say the moon is in the water, but it is not like that. When you watch the beautiful moon, or waves of water, or calm silent still water, that is the moon. So when you see the moon in the water, that is the moon. When you see the moon in the sky, that is the moon. You don't see the moon on the water. It is impossible to see the moon in the water and the moon in the sky at the same time.

The only way is to appreciate the beauty of the moon in the water or the moon in the sky. But intellectually we say "enlightenment" or "ignorance." It means you are very busy watching. What shall I do? If you sit here, you have a disturbance in your mind. If you are at home, you want to sit. When you sit, your mind is there. When you are there your mind is here, and you are going back and forth. Beautiful moon. Very busy moon.

Dogen says it is not like a mirror with reflection, nor like water under the moon. If we understand one side--sky or the water--or some images in the mirror, we cannot see both sides at once. If we understand one side, the other side is dark. That is two. But usually you want to see the one side only, having some idea or some desire for the other side. So you cannot accept what you are doing. You always have something else in your mind. The perfect way is just to watch one side. That is enough. This is pretty strict. Before

you understand that, you will say this is the perfect teaching. It will take time because you have something opposite in your mind always.

Actually, Zen is something more than just sitting in the cross-legged position. But if you understand something more, you have to practice it in the cross-legged position. There is no other way. One side is enough. You may say, just to sit on your black cushion will not do anything for you. You cannot solve the problems of our life by just sitting. You may say so, but it means you are trying to watch both sides--up and down. Pretty busy. In that way, your practice will not work. If you say, "I have to sit. That's all. Period." There is no need for you to think of the meaning of zazen, even, if you would just sit. That will work out beautifully. This is our zazen.

So one thing is enough. One practice is enough.