

## Guidelines for Studying the Way

### Part II and Part III

Dogen begins the second part of his essay with a very straight ahead statement. He say's **"Once you see or hear the true teaching you should practice it without fail."**

When I read this I thought of the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng who was instrumental in the development of Zen in China. His father died when he was quite young so he was raised by his mother. He helped earn a living and providing for his mother by selling firewood. It is said that one day he was selling wood by the side of a road and heard someone chanting the Diamond Sutra. He heard the phrase "no mind, no abode, here works the mind." This really caught his attention and he inquired more about it asking the man where he got such a chant. He was told he heard it from Master Gunin of Mount Obai. Hui-neng became determined to meet him. He set plans in place for someone to look after his mother saved up money to hold her over and set out on his journey of discovery.

So when you hear a teaching that resonates inside, that opens you to something vital you should step forward, hold it close and try to follow where it wants to take you. Don't turn away.

In this section Dogen also uses the image of a wise ruler who listens to advice from his servant.

Dogen writes, **"One phrase offered by a loyal servant can have the power to alter the course of a nation. One word given by a Buddha ancestor cannot fail to turn people's minds. The unwise ruler does not adopt the servant's advice."** In my view here the servant of course is the Buddha and the many great men and women teachers that came after offering wise teachings about how to put an end to suffering. The wise ruler who listens is you and me. We are who Dogen is talking to in contrast to the unwise ruler whose self-centered ideas get in the way of listening to the teachings of the dharma. This is also us isn't it? Perhaps when we listen but we don't hear, we look but don't see.

Dogen's say's in the section **"In the Buddha Way you should always enter enlightenment through practice. A worldly teacher say's through study one can gain wealth. Buddha say's through practice there is enlightenment. It is unheard of that without studying someone should earn wealth or that without practice someone should attain enlightenment."**

Dogen is not speaking about wealth as having a great personal portfolio here but the rulers of his time, where leaders having knowledge and studying create a prosperous nation, that if you don't study your people won't prosper, so likewise we don't just practice for ourselves but for all beings. When we practice the Way everyone benefits.

I want to say more about his statement about entering enlightenment through practice. We say the enlightened state is already here and now but we must practice to see it, to realize it.

Our words and actions are the expression of the absolute. Yet not knowing that we search for it elsewhere until if we're lucky a good friend or teacher points us back to ourselves to discover it.

I heard a few weeks ago a section from the Wizard of Oz where Dorothy is asking Glenda the good witch of the north for help to get home. Glenda says "Oh dear you don't need my help, you've always had the power to go home". Dorothy says "I have? Why didn't you tell me this before?" "Well dear" Glenda says "you wouldn't have believed me, you had to learn it for yourself." "It's true" Dorothy says, "I've learned that everything I need is right in my own backyard, if I just want it hard enough."

The experience of realization is inside practice and practice is not only formal Zen practice on the cushion, which is vital, but the expression of it in our life of work, and relationships. Realization is "inside" practice. You don't have to get it. When we practice diligently the experience of the interconnectedness of things will bloom and can begin to be lived out. Dogen calls this "**After enlightenment.**"

**"Study can be superficial or profound, students sharp or dull, but it doesn't matter and it has nothing to do with good or bad luck, accumulated study earns wealth". If you were to gain realization without practice how could you comprehend the Tathagata's teaching of delusion and enlightenment."**

Reading this it really does not matter how our practice goes. There is no "good" or "bad" zazen. We should leave these dualistic notions behind and just continue practicing. Doing so good things can happen, less suffering can happen. We practice even in the midst of our delusion and doing so realization is there, freedom is there. If you don't see it begin on faith.

Dogen then says "**If you arouse practice as though climbing the steps of enlightenment not even a speck of dust will support your feet, you will be as far from true practice as heaven is from earth. Now step back and leap beyond the Buddha land**".

The Buddha land is not a far off place or some distant possibility. It is here inside this moment so instead of thinking as we ordinarily do to step up or forward Dogen says to "**Take a step backward and leap beyond the Buddha land.**"

Just stop grabbing. Just stop thinking you lack something and so you have to be more and better and different. Instead look deeply at what you are doing now, what you are actually seeing now. See the flying bird, feel the stinging rain on your face, notice the blooming Mock Orange rather than in some far off notion. If you look deeply without having to know or grab you can see life very differently. So when Dogen suggests taking a step backward - to me means coming back to being present or turning to presence.

-Sensei Ray. June 2014