

Guidelines for Studying the Way

Part IV

Last Tuesday we looked at Part II & III of Dogen's essay Guidelines for studying the Way where he **states "in the Buddha way always enter enlightenment through practice."** We touched on just how important practice is and the three aspects of Zen practice being daily meditation, establishing and applying our practice in our life and relationships and taking part in sesshin which really can deepen our experience. Please remember that with this essay you can just take one line if it speaks to you and hold it like a koan, walk with it, let it resonate and teach you.

Part IV starts with: **"You should not practice Buddha's teaching with the idea of gain."** As we said last week, we do not practice to gain something special or extra but because we are already enlightened we practice. So often we have an idea that we lack something essential but in truth we don't. We have everything we need. We come through the birth channel whole and complete. But we don't know this at the outset of practice and if we need to take it on faith initially, fine.

So, Dogen says in Part IV: **"The treasure house does not come from outside."** Then he says: **"The practice of Buddha's teaching is always done by receiving the essential instructions of a master, not by following your own ideas. In fact, Buddha's teaching cannot be attained by having ideas or not having ideas. Only when the mind of pure practice coincides with the way, will your body and mind become calm. It is not a matter of believing something, espousing something or saying something is true or not true. It is a matter of harmonizing body and mind. When you harmonize body and mind there is calmness. When body and mind are not at ease thorns grow on the path of realization. " Dogen says, "proceed with the mind which neither grasps nor rejects, unconcerned with name or gain...do not practice with the thought that it is to benefit others."**

So consider our practice of kinhin which is about harmonizing body and mind in walking. In kinhin we don't check out the scenery or look outside. We are not trying to do anything special at all. We are not grasping some special state. Nothing is rejected, nothing is grasped. Our eyes are soft and we are just walking - all ideas of a self that walks falls away, so are not even trying to walk. There is just the walking, with no one in particular doing it.

In our practice whether it is zazen, or kinhin our focus is on the body and our breathing not our thinking. Every time the mind drifts off in a dream thought or our narrative we just bring it back. In this process there is no attachment, no grasping any particular idea. These can include how well we're practicing and how we're going to go home and tell our partner about how they should practice zazen! Or comparing our sitting to someone else's sitting. We start thinking "I am sitting really well and the person in front is moving all around" - this is shoddy practice. I think one of the most important teachings here is don't grasp don't reject.

Why you think Dogen is saying don't even think about practicing for the benefit of all beings? When I read this my view is "just do it" - don't think about why you are doing it. That is yet another idea that makes us feel special even if it is about compassion. It is another ego thought, so when we sit in zazen just by doing so everyone benefits already. So even if it is compassion we want to hold on to we will lose the way, compassion is natural at the heart of practice, don't go making that a goal either.

Next he writes: **“People in the present world, even those practicing the Buddha dharma have a mind which is far apart from the way. They practice what others praise and admire even though they know it does not accord with the way. You should try to quiet your mind and investigate whether these attitudes are Buddha dharma or not. You may be completely ashamed.”**

When a new student comes in to the zendo, one of the first questions I ask is: why are you here? What is it that brings you to this kind of practice? Why now?

Many folks come to spiritual practice because somebody said it was interesting in some way...or there is some belief they will meet a man or woman here (laughter) or they come hoping in some way being a Zen student makes them special.

Some folks continually run around to hear or practice with the latest spiritual guru or spiritual star on the scene rather than to discover who they really are, so I think Dogen is asking us to look at this. I do think most of us entered the zendo with a lot of ego. I know I did but then there was also some pain I was in that needed attention too. He says **“people in the present world”**. So, although he is writing this in the 1400's it applies just as much today.

I gave a talk some time ago and suggested about our zazen that we all ask ourselves in our core what is our secret goal? We practice just to practice but we should try to identify the secret wish we have to gain something or be something special. **Dogen says “do not practice Buddha dharma for your own sake or for name and gain. Do not practice for miraculous effects. Practice solely for the sake of Buddha dharma. This is the Way.”**

So I go back to, we practice because we are enlightened already. We practice to practice. We practice just to know the truth of who we really are. It is already there we just have to look and knowing the truth of who we really are, we practice.