

Guidelines for Studying the Way

Part VI; session two of two

I believe we ended last time with accepting that Zen practice is difficult and that difficulty is harmonizing body and mind.

What is this harmony? For me, this harmony is the harmony of learning how to listen to the music of the Oneness of things which is always playing behind our words and thoughts and allowing that music to flow in and through our thoughts and actions. One essential way of doing this is through the practice we speak of so much here which is the practice of not knowing. That means not holding a fixed view about things. To me it is about recognizing that we interpret our world through our own filters and seeing that, we raise our awareness that our views are just that- filters. So we don't consider what we see as "fixed".

Dogen says: **"Brilliance is not primary, understanding is not primary, conscious endeavor is not primary, introspection is not primary, so without using any of those, harmonize body and mind and enter the Buddha Way."**

He is speaking here about living with awareness, that each action is the action of Oneness so we bring together with awareness that which has never been separate.

Then he writes: **"Old man Shakyamuni says-- Avalokiteshvara turns the stream inward and disregards knowing objects, this is the practice of compassion. This is the meaning. Separation between the two aspects of activity and stillness simply does not arise. This is harmonizing."**

Avalokiteshvara is the bodhisattva of compassion so this is about the practice of compassion. We focus on our breathing, one our body. This does not mean "my body" as opposed to "your body". We connect with our felt center. In this way, our "outflow" is not out of balance with the "inflow". My niece says that when I fall into having to multi-task...getting too busy with lists and agendas-- I become too reactive, lose my balance, my mind racing with plans and I end up not knowing who I am.

So our practice is turning the light inward rather than grasping external objects that seem external. Grasping objects means grasping what appears outside. It is based on thinking that there is an inside and outside but there are no objects outside of awareness. This is the trick of the mind. There is the One body expressed in unending expressions.

We simply practice no separation and with this awareness in mind Dogen says: **"Separation between the two aspects of activity and stillness simply does not arise. This is harmonizing."**

I would suggest you think about living your life and practice as the same thing. Drop off the idea of now I'm meditating and still....now I'm not meditating and doing something. Think of one flowing activity. We do not live life in separate segments.

We have explored this a lot here, each activity is zazen, so when you pick your cushion up you are practicing and you should consider how you are living your practice in picking up your cushion or when you bow before you sit down, as well as your awareness when chatting with each other after zazen. This is all one moving activity.

So activity and stillness are not two separate things...if it is different it is because we make it so...one song...many notes...this may not be so easy to realize...so we continually practice.

As Dogen says: **"It is not about being smart or clever or knowing things."** And here he mentions Huineng and Shenxiu. It's too long a story to go into now but I suggest you all take a look at the story of Huineng and Shenxiu. It is in the Gateless Gate. It is the story of how Huineng became the 6th patriarch. He was an ordinary fellow, a simple pounder and sifter of rice in a monastery. I don't believe he even got to sit in zazen very much. But his insight was so clear he knew how to harmonize body and mind. I suppose that harmony occurred as the sifting occurred!

Like so many of us he was not brilliant in the conventional sense. But he had a great intuition in the spiritual sense. He wrote a poem that pointed to there being nothing outside, "no mind no purity, nothing to get rid of."

Dogen writes: **"Being old or decrepit does not exclude you, being quite young or in your prime does not exclude you. Although Joshu first studied when he was over sixty, he became a man of excellence in the ancestral lineage. Zheng's daughter was outstanding in the monastery. The power of Buddha dharma is revealed, depending on whether or not there is effort, and is distinguished depending on whether or not it is practiced."**

To me this is still essentially about making an effort to practice and harmonize body and mind. In my teaching this is very important and what we should be focusing on here at Empty Bowl Zendo. It begins before you ring the buzzer to enter. It is about how you take off your shoes and how you bow when entering.

In the next part he writes about those who studied sutras and who are accomplished in secular texts should all study in a Zen monastery.

When I read this I think of our sesshins. As you know the word "sesshin" means to harmonize body and mind. This practice is beyond being smart and accomplished in the everyday world.

So we'll hold here and pick this up next week. But the point is to practice diligently...so I ask you to consider and show me how you harmonize mind and body. Not only here but at work tomorrow and when you walk the dog and water the flowers.