

[3] Genjo-koan – The Universe Made Real

When we look at the world subjectively, we can find concepts like deluded, enlightened, we can define what is Buddhist practice and what is not, we can give value to life and to death, and we can distinguish between buddhas and ordinary people. But when we look at the world objectively, delusion and enlightenment cannot be found (i.e. are just abstract concepts), buddhas and ordinary people all have exactly the same physical makeup, and life and death are just states of matter. The truth that the Buddha taught is not contained in the area where we analyse and discriminate, and so life is just living, and death is just dying, sometimes we are deluded and sometimes we are clear, some people are buddhas – awake to reality – and others are not. And above all this, things are just as they are, sometimes as we want, sometimes not as we want.

Setting out to make ourselves one with reality is delusion. Reality making ourselves part of it is waking up. People who realize what it is to be deluded are called buddhas, and people who are deluded about what is real are called ordinary people. Some people become clearer and clearer about reality. Some people become more and more deluded. It is not necessary to be aware of being a buddha. We are still buddhas, and we go on experiencing the state of buddha, whether we know it or not.

When we are experiencing the world in front of us with our whole body-and-mind, our experience is direct; it is not dual, like an image reflected in a mirror, or the moon reflected in water. When we only experience one side, we are unable to notice the other side.

The truth that the Buddha taught is finding who “I” am. To find who “I” really am is to forget about “I.” To forget about “I” is to be whole with everything in experience. To be whole with everything in experience is to let go of *my* body and *my* mind, and to let go of the body and mind of the world. This state of being contains no trace of *being awake* and this traceless state is endless.

When we first seek for what reality is, we are looking for it somewhere else. But when we are taught to experience reality by a person who is experiencing reality, it is coming back to our natural state. When sailing along in a boat, if we look at the shore, we can believe that the shore is moving back past us. But if we keep our eyes fixed on the boat, we notice that in fact the boat is moving forward. In the same way, when we try to understand the world around us based on confused assumptions that separate the world into the physical and the mental, it is easy to believe that we have something called a mind, which is enduring. But when we act, we bring ourselves back to this concrete place, and it is then obvious that the world is not centred around *me*. Firewood becomes ash; it cannot become firewood again. But this does not mean that we should only see a process in which firewood in the past becomes ash in the future. Remember that real firewood exists in the present. There was firewood and will be firewood, but past firewood and future firewood are completely different from real firewood in the present. Real ash also exists only in the present, although we can remember ash in the past and imagine ash in the future. In the same way that firewood that has become ash cannot become firewood again, when human beings die, they cannot come back to life again. It is a tradition in Buddhism not to look at life only as a process leading to death. The phrase *no appearance* refers to this instantaneous situation. And the Buddha taught that when we die we do not live again. The phrase *no disappearance* also refers to the fact that both life and death occur just at the moment of the present. Using this instantaneous view of the universe, we can say the same for winter and for spring; that winter does not *turn into* spring, and spring does not *turn into* summer.

When a person realizes what reality is, nothing changes; it is like the reflection of the moon in water: the moon does not get wet and the water is not rippled. Even a small drop of water or a dewdrop on a blade of grass can reflect the whole of the moon’s image. To realize the truth does not make ripples in the person, just as the moon does not disturb the surface of the water. Neither does the person disturb the state of realization, just as the dew drop does not disturb the

moon whose image it reflects. The realization may be as deep as the moon is high. How long does this realization last? We should investigate this in many different concrete situations; in large and small expanses of water and for wide and narrow moons and skies.

When we feel confident that we understand reality, in fact we are far from it. When we are actually one with reality, we often feel that something is missing. For example, if we sail out in a boat far from land, when we look around us, the ocean looks round. We cannot see that it has any other shape. But the ocean is neither round, nor is it square. It has an inexhaustible array of characteristics, and to different species it must present a completely different image. But to our eyes it just looks round all around us. The same is true of all things and phenomena in the universe. There are numerous ways of looking at situations from the ordinary person's viewpoint, and from the Buddhist viewpoint, but we only see and understand what is within our own experience. If we want to know what the natural and uninterpreted state of things is like, we should remember that they have endless qualities besides being a particular shape, and that the universe extends out in all directions. And this is true, not only of things far away from us, but also of a single droplet and of the present here and now.

Our daily lives are an endless continuum of action, but we do not act in a void; our action always takes place in surroundings. The action cannot take place without the surroundings, because the surroundings always appear with the action. Action-and-surroundings are one indivisible whole. Our actions sometimes cover a large range, and sometimes a limited range. But in action we are both limited by the concrete situation, and free in the present moment; we are simultaneously both bound and free. If we were to try to leave the surroundings of our action we could not continue to exist; the surroundings in which we act (objective being) are our life, and at the same time we ourselves (subjective being) are our life.

And we may be able to go further with our description. In action, ourselves and our circumstances are one undivided whole of practice-and-experience. Life is like this. One whole lifetime is like this. If we want to fully understand what the

circumstances are before we act, we will never be able to act, and we will never be able to find our path or our place. But in coming back to this place, our action makes the universe real, and in finding this path, our action is always the state of the great universe made real. This path and this place cannot be described with words like great or small; they are not subjective or objective, they have not been waiting for us, neither have they appeared now; it is just what is in front of us here and now. When we act, we penetrate what we are doing, becoming completely one with it; and performing an action with all our being, sincerely, is to meet reality face to face. The actual state of action is impossible to describe completely using words, because an action manifests itself in oneness – oneness of body and mind, oneness of subject and object, and oneness of the actor and the action. Therefore even though real action always takes place now, it is impossible for us to reflect on it until after it has taken place. Thus we cannot grasp with our mind the total mystery of existence. The real fact at the present moment is not a clear intellectual recognition.

Zen Master Hotetsu is fanning himself. A passing monk asks, *The air is all around us and reaches everywhere, so why do you need to fan yourself?*

The Master replies, *You can understand that air is something that is everywhere, but you don't yet know what "reaching everywhere" really means.*

The monk says, *What does it mean, then, to say that the air reaches everywhere?*

The Master carries on fanning himself. The monk prostrates to the Master.

Really being clear about reality, which is learned from someone who is clear about reality, is a dynamic, not an intellectual state. Someone who says that we don't need to use a fan because the air is everywhere, or that we can still feel the air even without using a fan doesn't know how air really behaves. Because air is everywhere by its nature, the behaviour of Buddhists makes the world a splendid place.

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