

Living in Vow: Shifting

March 14, 2009

In zazen we actualize the reality of the self. Here, ‘actualize’ is not being used in the sense of putting some potential into operation, but rather means to allow the functioning of that which is always being manifested.

Normally we base our lives on thought, always discriminating and dividing everything into this and that based on our thinking. However, in zazen we let go of our thoughts. Uchiyama says “to throw out thought and not tie one phenomenon to another constitutes being prior to thought. Hence, it is to be before the separation of things into this and that. When we are practicing zazen we exist before separating this moment from eternity or subject from object. In zazen we do not lose consciousness; since life is being vigorously manifested, all things are reflected, and it is not a losing sight of self here and now. It means that self here and now is eternity, the Big Self in which this moment is one with eternity.”

Living every day by surrendering to zazen, being protected and guided by zazen, means to live having a direction – that is, living without being pulled around by the thoughts and emotions rampaging inside of us. At the same time, this means to live aiming at enacting the unity of the present and the eternal. For Buddhist practitioners, our direction is here and now. This life direction is referred to as vow.

Over time through regular practice we develop “magnanimous mind”. What is magnanimous mind? It is how we see others when we experience the reality of life itself. This reality of the Universal Self is Self connected to all things. Through it we live that life of the Self which has no limit and is devoid of any other (outside) people or things so no matter what happens we are always living out the life of Self which is only Self.

In other words there is a shift in our perspective.

So the shift is away from the “I” to Big Mind...the Self that is connected to every form in the entire world. The book, Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree is an excellent instruction into observing and seeing the “I” functioning in one’s life. The emphasis is on the functioning of “I” “me” and “mine”. It is a very skillful text that draws awareness to the functioning of the ego. The

intent in Buddhist practice is not to kill the ego, rather to allow other aspects of true self to manifest. The universal view of my life is egolessness.

In Dogen's Time Being fascicle he says that "the self setting itself out in array sees itself. This is the understanding that the self is time." "...The way the self arrays itself is the form of the entire world. See each thing in this world as a moment of time."

In the array, from the perspective of the Universal Self, whatever is arising in our lives here and now is the content and functioning of our lives. There is "just this" that includes the past and the future. There is only living out the reality of ever-present life. In the cultivated field all beings are equal in their essence.

Picture of Arhats with a saying, "No matter how tearful your life is, dry your eyes and just keep going....."

So how do we keep going?

If we consider that everything we encounter is our life, with the attitude and perspective of the Universal Self taking care of life we aim at giving life to all things, all situations, all people, all worlds. It is the natural functioning of magnanimous mind in which we enable the flower of life to bloom in every encounter.

In several of our chants there is reference to the "ten directions". Just what is the ten directions? The whole ten direction world is nothing but Universal and the whole ten direction world is nothing but the whole ten direction world.

The Zen phrase: Jippo hekiraku naku The ten directions are without walls (p.93 The Zen Koan)

In other words, wherever you are living is a palace; and there is no palace that is not an appropriate place to practice the Way. It's the reason why Bodhidharma came from the West. He neither had doubt or fear, because he was living the "world of saving deluded living beings", the world of vow.

Book of Serenity, Case 67, The Flower Ornament Scripture's "Wisdom" this CASE is presented:

The Flower Ornament Scripture says, "I now see all sentient beings everywhere fully possess the wisdom and virtues of the enlightened ones, but because of false conceptions and attachments they do not realize it."

Thus, this wisdom is within each of us. In the Commentary to this Case the instruction is: If they gave up false conceptions, then omniscience, spontaneous knowledge and unhindered wisdom can become manifest.

How do we "give up false conceptions"? In zazen we become intimate with our thought patterns, our desires and aversions, our ideas and perceptions and our feelings. As Bodhisattvas we have an understanding how the mind works, how the mind appropriates so quickly that we often do not see the grasping occurring in the split second. We need to recognize and identify trigger words and situations that will support us in this practice and bring awareness to what we are up to.

And, we need to cultivate stopping practices: following the breath, taking a deep breath, recite a mantra: Gate gate paragate, parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha. Sometimes just a breath and a pause allows time for prajna (wisdom) to arise instead of the conditioned mind reacting in the same old way.

Our ancestor Zen master Hongzhi offers this practice instruction:

The cultivated field, all beings are equal in their essence.