

Where are we going to? – The ultimate life-direction

This morning some one came to me and asked: “If a demon practices zen meditation, will he lose his demonic nature, or enhance it?”

Very inspiring question! What is the nature of a demon? Who is the demon? Of course, each one of us is! (Though not always). Our endless intellectual development with its ego-centred habits is the very nature of the demon. On the one hand, when we practice zen, our deep silent wisdom (intelligence) is gradually awakening. On the other hand, we are becoming more subtle, sharper, and more sensitive to the movement of the intellect, and our intelligent sensitivity can feel it and control it, as long as our zen meditation is no mind meditation with right posture and mindful breathing. So, the demon within ourselves will remain peacefully asleep. Let us leave him in his bed.

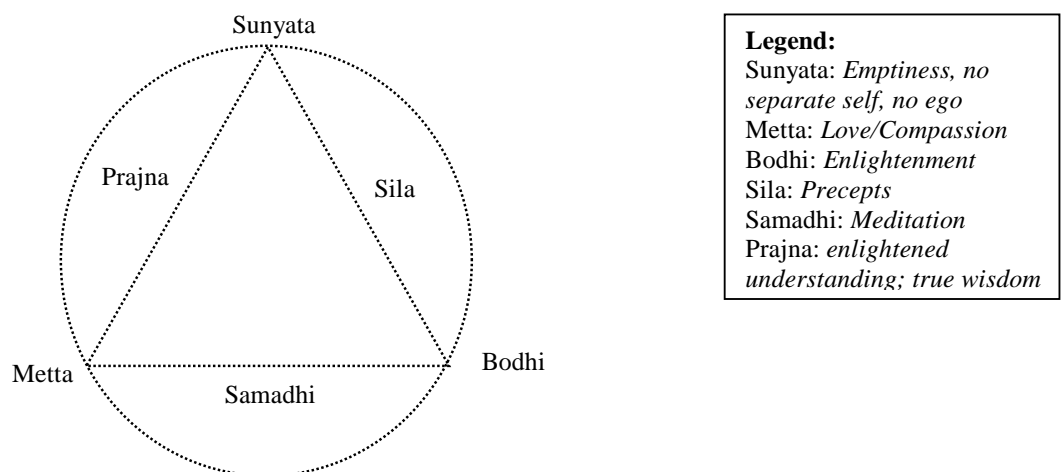
However, our mental/psychological structure and associated habits is not black and white. It is sometimes indescribably mystical, unpredictable, subtle, destructive, miraculous. Our demonic (or compassionate) nature is usually provoked and influenced by our human relationships. We do not even know how many relationships we have, and how deeply and inevitably connected we are with many kinds of “others” – close family, relatives, friends, “enemies”, with strong emotions of love, hatred, obsession, aversion, agitation, jealousy, disappointment, etc.

Depending on our own deepest determination (innermost calling, or vow, towards the ultimate realization of life) one can highly develop one’s own karmic or demonic, or compassionate nature/capacity/intention through zen practice. For example, there was a special Japanese general who devotedly practiced zazen, first within the Rinzai school of zen, and later by himself. His name was General Isshii. During the war between China and Japan, and later during World War II, he commanded a camp in Manchuria containing many Chinese prisoners. General Ishii’s subordinates, under his instruction, performed many kinds of cruel experiments on humans, including live vivisections and germ-warfare. He used the power from his demonic zazen to kill his own sensitivity to fellow human beings and also used it to kill any feelings of humanity within his battalion. So, the quality of his zazen and deepest determination was as it was.

Zen masters are warning us: “If the initial determination (within us) is not right, any and all practices and efforts will eventually be spent in vain”.

If so, how can we know whether our deepest determination is right, or wrong? How can we clarify whether we are deluded, or just in the reality of genuine experience of NOW? What is the most essential quality of open awareness (genuine enlightened understanding)?

To know and to clarify the most essential sensor that Buddha(s) and (our) ancestral masters are teaching and leading us to is - The three ultimate, basic points of the most essential trinity:



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Figure 1: The Ultimate and Basic Trinity

There is no other basis from which to examine, investigate, or to confirm whether our deepest vow-determination is right, perfect, or not. If our daily practices and deepest vow-determination are in the direction of this ultimate and basic trinity, we are in the right way of neither spending our lives in vain, nor heading in the direction of a demon. (If we fix this trinity as an absolute doctrine, it becomes a cold rock, as we human beings have repeated, and are repeating throughout all our histories)

Everything I have mentioned till now is merely a mirage, or the sleep talk of an earthworm if we (I) lack this embodiment and actualisation of THIS NOW. The whole trinity should therefore be proved/examined/personified/manifested in THIS NOW. The whole trinity should be THIS NOW. THIS NOW is the core of the whole trinity.

- Essential quality (an apex of the trinity) and necessary quantity (sides, bases) are both wings of a bird (life).
- The apexes (realization) and sides (basis) are fruit and root: Toward the highest mountain (wisdom, and understanding) go down to the bottomless ocean (love and compassion).

Each apex and each side of the trinity is the necessary nature, essential function and unique meaning. They are an inseparable whole(one)ness of life - THIS NOW. All three apexes and three sides should be one whole body of this univerself. For example:

- (a) Wisdom without compassion is too cold to feel the pain of others
- (b) Compassion without understanding is blind love and cannot function in the real world
- (c) Emptiness without the experience of love is a mere vacant concept with no energy to love anyone or anything in this muddy universe
- (d) Zen without basic precepts is like a very refined and highly developed flower of Buddhism without stable roots. Zen masters without basic precepts are like high demons with zen disease as described in the book "Zen at War"¹.

For the perfection of the Open Way (ZESCO)², this trinity is naturally our basic and ultimate principle.

When a lotus flower opens, all the surrounding muddy water is contained in it. When a fruit has ripened, the roots, tree trunk, branches, leaves, soil, all the surroundings, the whole earth, are all actualized and happy in this fruit (of THIS!). Each of us is THIS!

Falling leaves is a shooting sprout, a shooting sprout is falling leaves.

Hogen

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¹ Victoria, B. Zen at War. Weatherhill, 1997.

² "Zen Eco Symphony Cosmic Oasis" – a permaculture based residential Zen community which is being established in Australia

Question:

Dear Hogen San,

If General Ishii entered practice for one moment, Dogen says, “. . . at the same time the lives of others are achieved, or brought to genuine completion”.

What does this mean, in a very concrete sense, in relation to the lives of his poor victims. Is their terror removed? Are their wounds healed? Is it possible to confirm Dogen’s statement in a very concrete way, for example, is it possible to observe, or directly experience (the effects of) completion on the lives of others, as well as our own?

Answer:

I’ll reply with the following two points:

1. If Ishii entered into one moment of genuine practice, he could not have performed any cruel deeds. His basic attitude and tendency was strongly fixed towards victory in the war, and so even one moment of zazen was used for this purpose only. There was no genuine moment of zazen in his life, not even one tiny glimpse. (Zazen and Dogen and the cosmos are crying due to our abuse of, and misuse of, zazen).
2. Dogen’s statement brings us back to the original oneness of no separation between all beings and one lotus opening. The one fruit of the whole tree – root, trunk, all the branches and leaves, all the flowers, all the seeds – are already realized (embodied) in this one actualization of the fruit. Is this the most concrete proof, or very conceptual or abstract? Is it sleep talk? It depends on the quality of our way (awareness and attitude) towards the meaning of cosmic life.

If one of us opens like the lotus (enlightenment) and could share it with us at a conscious/phenomenal level is a materialistic view containing many separated parts. Even though it is a very concrete matter, the quality of the proof itself is already so different from the genuine experience. Because of all the different qualities of cosmoses of each unique being, one inseparable whole cosmic symphony is made possible – in this sense, Dogen’s teaching becomes deeply acceptable without the necessity of an easy materialistic proof at the conscious/phenomenal level. So, to search for a concrete confirmation within our conscious realm could be a problem of our intellectual habits (attitude).

Whenever anyone experiences the genuine practice that is open awareness (enlightenment), it was, and is, already being shared before he or she intends to share it with us in the conscious/phenomenal realm. Completely at the same time, experiencing is sharing (in the cosmic dimension). Anyone else’s experience and practices are already ours. If any one tries to prove it, it is already second hand (indirect, conscious and intellectual) . Experience (-practice) is, therefore, not anyone’s private happening, but a cosmic happening within each one of us. To prove it in a concrete way gives easy satisfaction to our intellect; to sense it in a direct (no)way makes any other proof an unnecessary extra. (Here is our free choice, too)