

Awakening: Saint Petersburg Talk

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In the passage from his upcoming book *Pure Vision*, Sandó Kaisen discusses the nature of awakening in a classical metaphoric way of the Japanese Sótó Zen tradition.

Dear Audience,

Everything derives from our spirit. However, this spirit is not limited to us because it is also in everything, and there isn't a place from which it is absent. It is because we have reduced it to our little existence we call human that we search for it outside as Spirit, other and impenetrable.

You are running after what might be the best method to bring about your encounter with the divine, but you refuse to recognize this Spirit as your own. If you acknowledge this fact, then you won't be missing anything nor will anything be in excess. What you miss comes from the constant cravings you try to gratify by material or spiritual devices. Once rid of the first, you throw yourselves heart and soul into the second. Now, there are several sorts of errors:

The severely confused have lost their way in astrology, the art of divination, of symbolism, strange signs and magic. Some have convinced themselves that awakening can be obtained through reading, studying, philosophy and all the modern techniques that the world has instrumentalized. Others believe that the accumulation of merits, charity, prayers, rituals, subservience to Gods, Bodhisattvas and other Buddhas will lead them to awakening. Still others have thrown themselves body and soul into extreme practices. Without using the subtleties of their spirit, they stupidly repeat the errors of others or practice the Way according to their own interpretation, going astray and refusing the help of enlightened beings. Even though their approach appears to be sincere, they only transmigrate within the meanders of their limited comprehension. Lastly, others, as they do not obtain the object of their desire, eagerly look for a guru, and then for another, hoping the miracle will come true. Some, discouraged and disappointed, return to the materialistic world and pursue their desires on another level. Appropriation is what they all have in common. One wants something and wants to be sure of possessing it. This principle is valid for material questions as well as for spiritual questions.

Man is the greatest builder of crutches. But when death will come, on what crutches shall we lean?

Dear friends, when we walk, the entire universe walks. If this is so, what can I lean on?

Is there anything someone else can do in my place? Eating, defecating, walking, breathing, thinking, sleeping, sitting, moving this body, moving the spirit? I am alone in sickness, in suffering, in old age and death. There is no place,



About the author

Sandó Kaisen (1952) is one of the main representatives of the Sótó Zen Buddhist schools in Europe. It was spread through Europe in the 1960s thanks to the efforts of Master Deshimaru. The main practice of this school is the sitting meditation – Zazen, during which the position of the body, the respiration and attention are important. Master Sandó Kaisen introduced himself to the East of Europe in 1990. Since then, his books have been published there and people could have come to see him on several lectures and introductions to Zazen he has given there, and learn about him from various press articles and programs on the radio and TV. Master Sandó Kaisen transmits only one thing “from my soul to yours”: to break through the shell of habits and securities that imprisoned the being, to touch the Way and make it real in pure consciousness of the body, so that we can understand the Spirit of Unity.

no time when I am not alone. We have invented notions such as friend and enemy, love and hate, good and bad, but no one can live my life in any of its details. And lastly, there is neither “this” nor “that”. Life is such as it presents itself and such as it is, we must receive it. Good and evil have nothing to do with that, and the notions of friends and enemy have no place here, because everything that happens is a projection of the spirit. But in reality, there is no spirit which is mine or

other. With this understanding, all phenomena are the wonderful manifestation of the original Spirit. When I walk, the solitude becomes that of myriads of existences in one only presence. This uninterrupted current is the natural pace of all the vacuity-phenomena and, in this movement, there is perfect coincidence.

Like an echo, we can respond to circumstances.
Everything, then, echoes itself.

*As the mountain echoes
The white eagle,
The dark river echoes
The pilgrim trees.*

As long as you are attached to the notions of “realization”, “illumination”, “ordinary” and “Spirit of the Buddha”, you are losing your way on secondary tracks. You must leave the road that keeps you away from the great liberation. One must stop believing to be on a path, as wonderful as it may be, stop adopting a “special” attitude that defines you as a seeker, a disciple or a master. It is not necessary to define oneself, to want to convince, or have the desire to save anyone.

To say the truth, I have nothing to offer you, in the same way that the sun has nothing to offer the sun.

I have shown you the posture of zazen which my own Master showed me, so that you will actualize what you have always been. But if, after I have left, some come and talk to you about the life of the Buddhas as a goal to seek, or a state to reach by I don't know what kind of spiritual practice or other prayers, don't let yourselves be deceived by such words and don't fall into the thousand nets of ignorance.

When, suddenly, clouds unveil the transparent sky of the Reality, you discover that both subject and object are “you” and, this way, you obtain the mysterious, inexpressible comprehension. Finally, what counts before everything else, when one thought mingles with another, is to not be concerned with either of them.

Dear audience, for many years, I have done nothing else but transmit the Dharma of peace and happiness.

Once comfortably seated in the posture, let the body relax, shoulders released. Become “one” with the breathing, but not in a continuous way. Let the inspiration run its course and then disappear. Let the expiration run its course and then disappear. Leave the spirit aside by not participating in the actions of the thoughts. So, this way, they come and wear out

freely. Do not look for any particular state of mind. Become one with the posture and the breathing.
The spirit will then calm down of its own accord, becoming lucid and clear.

Do not focus on limpidity.

Do not fix your mind anywhere, on vacuity or anything else. Do not fabricate the natural. It installs itself naturally. To be vigilant does not depend on any special or voluntary concentration. Lucidity is present where there is calmness. Do not look for peace, it is where lucidity resides. There is no sacred action or anything to venerate, no prayer to address, no sainthood, no mobility or immobility. And, lastly, surrender to one's ordinary spirit.

Clouds in the sky and water on the earth.

The state of Buddha has no fixed form. If one becomes fixed on the sitting position or on the spirit, one will not harmonize with the Principle.

Some masters have said: “*The zen has nothing to do with the sitting position, lying or standing.*”

How true were those words! At the time, they were meant for those preoccupied with the sitting posture and seeking the Buddha there; unaware that the Buddha has no particular form. By sitting in the posture, we trace the Buddha sitting, by standing, we portray the Buddha standing.

To abandon all concerns is the fact of sitting with nothing special in mind, letting go of everything and, especially, abandoning even what we have abandoned...

Question:
But I have heard one has to make a great effort to awaken?

Answer:
One should not be on the alert in the manner of a hunter looking out for his prey. To be awake is simply to do what there is to do with the greatest simplicity, and a spirit of awareness. Awakening takes its source in the Spirit. If the spirit is free from all obstacles, awakening lights up of itself. It does not depend on effort or no effort. It is your own spirit!

The Buddha, is it enlightenment?

It is your own spirit!