

On Zazen: Sopot Talk

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



About the author

Sandó Kaisen (1952) is one of the main representatives of Soto Zen Buddhism in Europe. He has been publicly active since 1990 through his books, lectures, as well as TV and radio appearances.

Dear friends,

You who have been walking for such a long time on the Way, you should just know this: "No love or hate" or "No good or bad" or also "Do not take sides for or against".

These words have been pronounced by many masters in the past and they will continue to be pronounced as long as there are men and women on the earth. The duality and the strength of attachment at each end of this duality are the cause of many ills and conflicts. If ignorance of our own Nature is cause of suffering, the duality identified to the individual is an even greater one.

This morning, like every other morning, we have fed a great number of seagulls who were paying us a visit right into the room. The hotel was situated on the beach, which facilitated the communion with these huge animals sea mews and seagulls are. The life of these animals of the sea is not that complicated, however they can be very aggressive towards their fellow beings. One thing however is characteristic with animals of a same race: they can fight with each other, but unlike man, they do not kill each other. Among the seagulls, some did not fight but waited patiently for their turn. The stronger ones helped themselves first and only gave their place away, once well-stuffed.

Men do the same. The stronger ones help themselves first. In this sense, man has not evolved very much. With animals, there exists a hierarchy based on the dominant force and the goal is to be respected by the weaker ones. With men, domination also exerts itself through force by sowing the seeds of fear. If these are well watered, fear increases.

Therefore the question is: should one be strong or weak? Does the fact of not imposing oneself, of not fighting back, of knowing how to share, of being patient and refusing aggression really a weakness? What is the right state of mind for the responsible man?

We all possess the answer inside ourselves.

During Zazen, our posture plays a fundamental role, not only because it is awakening or because it procures equanimity of soul and peace. But because we must draw our real character. Not our characteristics, which might be to be bad-tempered or fly off the handle... Or which can take on many other aspects, but the Character of the sky and the earth.

First of all, one should be deeply rooted on the ground whether sitting, standing, or walking. Well-anchored in the soil, feet deeply rooted. That also is to be firmly established in the Way.

Next, elevate oneself firmly towards the sky by delicately pushing the top of the skull upwards. This way you can feel

the great Presence and not let yourself be swept away into the spheres of conceptual or emotional thinking.

When one maintains this attitude of dignity and real nobility, the spirit then takes on the noble frame. And if you think with the noble body, who is thinking? It is the Spirit who thinks.

Ancient texts tell us we should breathe with our heels and move around from the hips while deriving our energy from the low-belly (*hara*), at the level of a point situated about two widths of the thumb bellow the navel.

We must clearly understand that the body influences the mind and the mind, the body. When the spirit controls the body, then the spirit, becoming the body, will be under the control of the body. By experiencing this, one can discover a unity: vacuity-phenomena. Moreover, both being controlled, it becomes impossible to be submerged by negative passions or illusory feelings, impossible to become the victim of the errings of the dream in the dream. By remaining intimate with the body-spirit, one quite naturally becomes united in our fundamental Nature. Residing in it, one no longer commits wrongful acts and one destroys all the sins accumulated since times without beginning.

The firmness of our posture strengthens the spirit, which, liberated from passions and perturbing emotions, becomes

gentle and tender. Because of the Presence, clear lucidity shines of itself.

And so this oneness becomes "character of the sky and of the earth".

If you are too earthy, you become proud, conceited, haughty or aggressive. Too close to the sky will make you dreamy, pensive, crooked, indecisive, calculating and weak. By achieving the disappearance of these two opposites, you will then react directly from your deep Nature, serene, even and spontaneous.

To be really strong means to be deeply rooted in the Spirit which is yours.

The profound Spirit is like the depths of the ocean. It is imperturbable before the waves and any other exterior phenomenon. But most people are like the waves and live under the influence of their own characteristics and those of others. They are unstable in their decisions, victims of their memory's ghosts or else follow the crowds of other ghosts, even if those are in the wrong.

Once this attitude of body-spirit is adopted, it is not sufficient. We must now reflect on interdependency and the impermanence of the world. Because it is not enough to don the armour of the Law without clearly understanding its significance. However, this reflection is not of the intellec-

tual order. It is more a "reflection" in the pure sense of the word. Because, since we are entirely made of the eternal and unique Spirit, the notions of an individual, permanent soul and of total extinction are without foundation.

We must possess the Eye of the wisdom of the Buddha. It is the Eye which perceives the truth-unity of all things. One must know that the least sound, the least vision, are only the Eye of the wisdom of Buddha, the Absolute. The essential substance of the Absolute is a perfect whole, with nothing superfluous, nothing lacking, nothing wanting.

As for phenomena, they don't appear independently, but rest on the environment. They are all interdependent. The same applies to our consciousness. Then, all is impermanent and impermanency cannot grasp the Absolute. Since the Absolute is not a state of being, it is impossible for us to understand it. If one understands that all sentient beings are already with the Absolute, it is then unnecessary to search for it.