

CASE 45

Four Phrases from the Engaku

Sutra

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Instruction:

That which exists now – manifestation of the essence¹: This all relies on the “right now.”

The family tradition of the essential nature never plans to go beyond itself. If you forcibly create burls and joints, and dare to resort to devices, You do nothing but draw eyebrows on Mr. Chaos and put handles to your meal bowls.

How could you attain peace at all?

Case:

The Engaku² Sutra says:

“At all times, you do not raise the delusive mind.

When there are all kinds of illusory thoughts, you do not extinguish them.

Dwelling in the delusory state of mind, you do not add understanding.

Where there is no understanding, you do not distinguish the truth.”

Verse:

Stately and dignified, carefree and at ease.

Stick your head amid the clamorous place, lower your feet amid the peaceful place.

The binding strings around the lower legs have disappeared: I am free;

The mud upon the nose top is gone – stop trying to chop it off.

Don't be troubled. Medicine fixed in a scrap of paper a thousand years ago.

On the Instruction:

That which exists now – manifestation of the essence: This all relies on the “right now.” The words “manifestation of the essence” (genjô-kôan) are also the title of

¹ Literally: “Genjô – kôan.”

² “Engaku” means the perfect awakening of Buddha.

one the chapters of Dōgen Zenji's *Shōbōgenzō*. The two characters *genjō* mean all phenomena. The two characters *koan* originally meant an official or public document. The laws and ordinances of the government have absolute authority and cannot be disobeyed. In the Zen tradition the word *kōan* is used in the sense of following something that has absolute authority and carrying it out, because it cannot be violated. That means the word *koan* as used in the Zen tradition is not used in any connection with the original meaning. It means the living Buddha Way, the authentic Buddha Way. You could see it as referring to MU. You could see it as the complete manifestation of the Buddha Way. It is our true self, something that cannot be denied and which has absolute authority. But you have to realize it directly, this essential nature, to confirm that it really exists. And having realized it, you also realize that it has absolute authority. All the koans we practice with in the Zen tradition are attempting to make THAT clear, to have us grasp IT. They are known as koans in the sense that they can only be understood upon grasping our true self. This is the reason for first coming to an experience and then examining koans one after another. The words *genjō-kōan* means that each tree, each blade of grass is itself the complete manifestation of essential nature. All phenomena in the phenomenal world are, as they are, the complete manifestation of the essential. This fact of absolute authority is known as the Supreme Way (*Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*), in other words, your true self. The Instruction says that this all relies on the "right now." It is that true self in each succeeding moment. All that we see or hear or apprehend is itself that koan, is the true self. The past or future is not the true reality. The true reality is always right now, and there is nothing other than that. The rest is just intellectualizing. That's the meaning of "relying on the right now." Each individual thing is our true self. If I say it is an "appearance" of the true self, you might assume that there are two different things, the self and the things. But the fact is that, what we see or hear is itself the true self. In the *Heart Sutra* we recite the lines "form is emptiness, emptiness is form." Form can be understood as no other than all phenomena (*genjō*). And emptiness is *kōan*. In the sutra, form and emptiness are connected by the character *soku*, which means "no other than." If you think that form and emptiness are somehow equal to each other, they become two. But that is not the case. Actually, you don't need the character *soku* connecting them; you could say form/emptiness, emptiness/form. This is what is actually meant by the term *genjō-kōan*. I often explain this by holding up my hand. The back of my hand can be understood as form and the palm of my hand as emptiness. But just as there are two sides of the single hand, these are two sides of the single reality. To repeat, other than this very moment now, there is no reality.

The family tradition of the essential nature never plans to go beyond itself. The "family tradition" can be seen as the "scenery," so to speak, of the true self or essential world. But people do not seek for the scenery of their true self in their own body and mind. Actually there is nothing outside. You might think that you are here, and outside you are various phenomena, but that is not the true reality. There is actually nothing outside you. Self and others are one. This fact of oneness is expressed with the word "Buddha nature." If you

think there is a duality, you are mistaken. To say that it “never plans to go beyond itself” is not a reference to our own body and mind or to this body here. It means the entire universe. There is no seeking outside. To realize this true “scenery” of the true self is no easy matter. Recently I traveled to Hawaii where there are several people who are quite advanced in their practice. I wanted to check them to see how far along they were in that practice. If you ask people “what is mind?” they are apt to limit that to something inside themselves. As I just mentioned, however, this fact of oneness might be understood intellectually, but it is not clear experientially. And then people cannot answer this question completely. When you ask them “what is mind?” they are apt to slap their knee and say “here it is.” That’s not wrong, but it’s not enough. They are still thinking it is something other than the world of phenomena. What would you say if you were asked the same question? The phrase that touched off my enlightenment experience was found in the words of Dōgen Zenji: “I came to realize that Mind is no other than mountains and rivers and the great wide earth, the sun and the moon and the stars.” People who have truly grasped this reality are surprisingly few and many express surprise at such a statement. But unless you clearly realize this, you cannot have true peace of mind. If you have time, I suggest a careful perusal of the *Buddha-Nature* (Busshō) chapter of Dōgen Zenji’s *Shōbōgenzō*. This is a difficult matter and not something to be understood lightly.

If you forcibly create burls and joints, and dare to resort to devices, The “burls and joints” can be considered any type of separation between self and others. This is separation in the form of self-other, or subject-object. Although it is actually one, you make a separation. Of course, there are separations and distinctions in the phenomenal world, and it has to be like that. Most people are only aware of the phenomenal world, although existing simultaneously is a world of absolutely no distinctions. If we take the example of my hand, the hand that you can see is the hand in the phenomenal world. But that hand is living my life. There are five separate fingers on my hand, which seem to be completely separate. But they are alive and from the point of view of life, there is no separation; it is the same single life. Zen is always looking at things from the standpoint of life. From the phenomenal perspective, all things might seem to be separate from each other, but from the perspective of the actual world, they are one. This is what is meant by this line of the Instruction. Then we make a distinction between unenlightened beings and Buddhas. When we “dare to resort to devices,” we are attempting some contrivance. As a result, that which is perfect is made imperfect. But this is difficult to avoid. For example, when you practice zazen you are told to become one with Mu. When you have truly become one with Mu, you realize Mu and simultaneously realize your own true self. People ask me how they can become one with Mu. It is a matter of forgetting yourself completely in that practice of breathing Mu in and out. But people tend to try to become one with Mu. This is what is meant here in the Instruction. Such trying or attempts to become one are not necessary. Nevertheless, people tend to consider the matter intellectually, wondering how they can become one with Mu. That only results in a dispersion of their powers of concentration: On the one hand they are practicing Mu and at the same time wondering how

they can become one with it. Then it becomes two. It's surprisingly difficult to be free of wanting or trying. We human beings are always trying to achieve something. But actually you are Buddha just as you are. This very body is Buddha, says Hakuin Zenji. Nonetheless, people still keep trying to become something else. This is exactly what the next line is talking about:

You do nothing but draw eyebrows on Mr. Chaos and put handles to your meal bowls. The words translated here as "Mr. Chaos" (konton) means the universe itself. An ancient Chinese legend says that long ago lived Mr. Chaos. He had no eyes or nose. This is pointing to our own essential nature. Although Mr. Chaos was completely free, the others came to him and tried to bore holes for his eyes and nose and mouth, which resulted in his death. Trying to do such unnecessary things was definitely not to the benefit of Mr. Chaos! The Instruction says that attempting to reach something is the same as boring holes in the face of Mr. Chaos; it's totally unnecessary and useless. Again, to "put handles on meal bowls" means to add something that's unnecessary. The meal bowls are perfectly fine without handles. Handles might all be very fine for buckets when fetching water, but to put handles on such meal bowls is to nullify their function. It is adding unnecessary things to something that is perfect from the start.

How could you attain peace at all? How can you obtain peace of mind in such a way? The author is stressing how we are perfect from the very start. But no matter how many times they're told, people can't believe it. You have to realize it yourself to really understand. Then you realize that, from the very start, everything is OK. If we can simply realize this, then true peace is possible. Every day is a good day. We turn now to the Main Case.

On the Case:

The Engaku Sutra says:

"At all times, you do not raise the delusive mind." What is the "delusive mind" (jap, mōnen)? It means the feelings and thoughts that arise from a feeling of dualistic opposition. Actually, it is one. But then subject and object arise, ideas of self and other, like and dislike...these are all the delusive mind. "At all times" (i.e. from waking to sleeping), we should not raise that delusive, dualistic mind. But even though we are told not to raise the delusive mind, we end up doing it anyway. This might seem like some sort of moral instruction. Then comes the next line:

When there are all kinds of illusory thoughts, you do not extinguish them. If you try to stop them, you become unnatural. This is also something that occurs during zazen. But no matter what thoughts arise during zazen, they are neither positive nor negative. So I tell people not to worry about them, and yet people come to me in dokusan complaining about all the thoughts arising. Even though I tell them it's no real problem, they refuse to believe it. And then they attempt to somehow stop those thoughts. I tell them not to try to dispel the thoughts but simply let them be.

Dwelling in the delusory state of mind, you do not add understanding.

‘Dwelling in the delusory state of mind’ means that there are various thoughts and feelings, such as like or dislike, desire or feeling tired. And then we tend to think about those feelings and judge them to try to understand them. We are constantly observing the movements of our own minds. It is as if there were a second self constantly observing what we are doing. Among those who have slow-going with Mu, persons with this tendency are quite numerous. You might call them introspective. That’s not bad in itself and from one point of view it is helpful in bringing out our abilities. But when it comes to developing concentration of mind, this can be an impediment. That’s because it is like a second self or super-ego observing things and making judgments on them all the time. Human consciousness is a wondrous thing, capable of endless introspection. You introspect on your present self and then you introspect on that introspecting self. It is like two mirrors facing each other. The image from the other mirror is reflected in this mirror and vice-versa in an endless process. That’s how the human mind tends to work. And then people end up criticizing themselves. This line from the sutra is telling us to avoid such a state of mind.

Where there is no understanding, you do not distinguish the truth. Let’s say that judging, discriminating mind comes completely to rest and you become one with Mu. Then you are told “not to distinguish the truth.” In other words, do not say, “oh, this is it!” That, too, is the false way. The sutra says that all such attempts are no good. This is quite difficult advice to carry out. In the Zen world we say “just this” (kore-kore). Recall the words of Zen Master Gantō: “If you want to know the last word, it is just this!” When you stand up there is just that standing up. When you sit down there is just that sitting down. But if you think, “Oh, that’s it,” you’ve already missed it! Even in the case of Christians or persons from the Pure Land sect of Buddhism, I would tell them to let all things be. For example, in praying to the Bodhisattva Kanzeon, you leave everything to the power of Kannon. I tell people that she will definitely not bring about something bad, that it will definitely have a good effect. But even leaving things up to Kanzeon is a kind of attempt or trying. If you are still thinking in terms of leaving things to Kannon, this too becomes an attempt. This is a kind of “understanding” (ryōchi). You must be able to leave things without this trying to leave things as they are. But this is not possible without the experience of satori. Let’s assume, for example, that Amida Nyorai saves us. If you become completely one with Amida, melting into Amida, so to speak, so that you are one, no such attempting or trying is needed. As someone once said in the past, if persons in the Jōdō Sect recite Namu Amida Butsu with all their heart, they arrive at the same destination. Evidently the person went to a Zen center to have the experience checked, or perhaps to a teacher of the Jōdō Shinshū Sect, upon which the following discussion ensued.

“How old are you?”

“The same age as Amida.”

When you hear such a reply, it would seem to be the real thing in terms of experience.

“Where is Amida?”

If you point up to the sky, it’s already a mistake. Then you have a fixed idea of Amida

being up in the sky, as if it were heaven. A lot of people tend to look up in the sky when they hear the word “heaven.” If I were asked where Amida is, I would do the opposite and say that he’s at the bottom of the earth. You must realize that you are always right in the middle of heaven. Then no trying is required any more, and you become truly free. These lines from the sutra are telling us that we must go that same path.

On the Verse:

Stately and dignified, carefree and at ease. The words “stately and dignified” apply to the truly realized person. Hyakujiô Oshô said, “Sitting alone on Daiyû Peak.” There are a number of koans in which Shakyamuni Buddha simply sits completely still. That’s what is meant by “stately and dignified.” The same holds for when you are practicing kinhin. There is the expression “gazing like tiger, walking like an ox.” Your eyes are glinting in concentration like those of a tiger, but you walk very deliberately, step by step, like an ox. But many people are not like this. Instead, they tend to trot along like a little dog. That’s certainly not stately and dignified! It means settled peace of mind, completely free of unrest.

The words “carefree and at ease” also describe the character and bearing of a deeply realized person, not adhering to anything. You could say it is the appearance of absolute freedom. And because that person has clearly grasped the essential world, he doesn’t take a step, even though walking the entire day. He has clearly realized that world. We too must clearly realize that world to become truly carefree and at ease. Recall the lines from the *Shôdôka*:

*There is the leisurely one,
Walking the Tao, beyond philosophy,
Not avoiding fantasy, not seeking truth.*

He or she is completely free. There is nothing you can do but to experience and appreciate this for yourself.

Stick your head amid the clamorous place, lower your feet amid the peaceful place. The “clamorous place” means the place where dharma consciousness is rampant (gosshiki-bôbô). That clamorous place is within you, as one delusive thought after another arises in your consciousness, like clouds arising in the sky. Then you’re told to “stick your head” amid that clamorous place. It’s a matter of introspecting that clamorous spirit. You stare with your mind’s eye unflinchingly at those happy or vexing thoughts arising. Then you realize that there is not a single thing. To “stick your head” means to introspect in this way, “staring” with your spiritual eye at your interior. That is how I understand these words. This holds both for persons prior to satori and those who have already realized satori. For those practicing with Mu who have not yet realized Mu, even when traveling on a train you “stick your head.” People often say to me: “I can practice all right on my cushions, but how is it when I am walking on the street or doing some work? What should I do then?” I tell them to become one with what they are doing when working. They might not realize it now, but when they

realize kensho they will realize that devoting themselves wholeheartedly to their work is the activity of Mu itself. So when you are studying, just study with your full attention. When you are writing something, just write. That is actually the full manifestation of Mu. But it is useless to try to practice Mu while doing something else. It will prove difficult to practice Mu amid the bustle and confusion of downtown Tokyo. You will find that easier to do in a park or place where few people are around. To repeat, this is a case of “sticking your head” as mentioned in the Verse, and this is important both before and after satori. Recall the case of Zuigan Oshō. Everyday he would call “Master!” and answer “Yes!” This is “sticking your head in the clamorous place.” Zuigan continued such practice following great enlightenment.

To “lower your feet amid the peaceful place” is a reference to the perfectly realized person. He or she is always in a peaceful place. But here, too, the words “seeing the master” also apply. The best place to introspect is in the bathroom, staring within with your mind’s eye. No one will bother you there.

The binding strings around the lower legs have disappeared: I am free. These binding strings are talking about how we are not free internally in our heart of hearts. And now those binding strings have all been cut away. Normally it is the three poisons (greed, anger, folly) that are binding us. If you clearly realize your true nature, the strings are cut. How? In realizing that there is nothing at all. Then you are free. You can walk freely.

The mud upon the nose top is gone – stop trying to chop it off. There is an interesting anecdote behind this statement. In ancient times there was the kingdom of Rei in China. One day a man put a daub of white mud on his nose. Then Shōseki, a master axeman, was asked to remove the daub of mud with his axe. Great master that he was, Shōseki swung his axe and with a single stroke removed the daub of mud without injuring the man’s nose in the least. When you realize satori, that “mud on the nose” disappears. There is no need for such dangerous actions as removing it with an axe, since the “mud” has already disappeared.

Don't be troubled. Just calm down, there's no need to be troubled.

Medicine fixed in a scrap of paper a thousand years ago. The “scrap of paper” means the *Sutra of Great Enlightenment*. And on that scrap of paper is the “medicine” or the prescription. How does that prescription read?

At all times, you do not raise the delusive mind.

When there are all kinds of illusory thoughts, you do not extinguish them.

Dwelling in the delusory state of mind, you do not add understanding.

Where there is no understanding, you do not distinguish the truth.

The final line of the Verse has two possible connotations. First of all, it warns us against depending on such written things, saying that such prescriptions written on an old piece of paper are of no use in today’s world. It’s almost as if saying that the sutras are old paper to wipe away dirt. But if there’s no dirt to wipe away, the paper is useless. If you can realize purity, there is no need for such things. It might be an old medical prescription, but don’t rely on such old things, the Verse tells us. That’s one meaning.

The other meaning is that the medicine in this prescription is very effective. Both connotations are correct. Up to when you realize completely, such medicine has its efficacy. But once you have completely realized, you can throw it away. It's just like old newspaper. In other words, we have to realize enlightenment and then go on to wipe away all traces of enlightenment, becoming our original unadorned self, free of guile in a life of "just this" (Japanese: *tada kore kore*). "Every day is a good day."