

Transmission Speech

BY ZEN MASTER JI KWANG

Dharma transmission speech given on 27th April 2012 in the Berlin Zen Center at the dharma transmission of Zen Master Ji Kwang from Zen Master Wu Bong.

(Hits the floor with the stick)

The nature of dharma is complete. So we hear in the Avatamsakra sutra.

The nature of dharma is the name for universal nature, which actually has no name, no words, no speech.

The whole universe is made of it. If the nature of dharma is complete, then all this is complete. That means you are complete, and you, you all, me too. We are all complete.

(Hits the floor with the stick)

Everything that appears is an illusion. So we read in the Diamond Sutra.

All illusion! You, you, you all. Me too. All of us – illusion.

(Hits the floor with the stick)

Which do you prefer? The Avatamsakra Sutra or the Diamond Sutra? Completeness or illusion? But take care: if you say completeness, this implies directly something incomplete. And if everything is illusion, it cannot be complete anyway. So what is correct?

KATZ!

Many faces in this room. Talking and listening.

Since our mind is usually quite complicated and we think a lot, and since life is quite an awkward thing anyway, I think we experience ourselves rather as incomplete. But it is also no illusion to us. It feels real. We are alive! Life is sometimes intense and magnificent, and sometimes it is difficult and even hurts. There are sorrows, there is grief, there are problems. We have doubts and self-doubts. Everything seems so real.

This is one side but there is another side as well, and we know that one, too: sometimes we experience deep and great peace and great love. There is a feeling of freedom and completeness. Sometimes we wake up. This is the other side.

And I think I may be right to reckon that our life oscillates between these two poles. Maybe not with a vast amplitude in our safe western lives – but sometimes really a long way down. We reach high peaks and sometimes fall into deep troughs. Life is laughter and tears. It cannot be avoided. This was a very important experience for

me! That life contains all this, and that it is OK: to allow myself to fail, to allow myself to not succeed, that suffering appears, that self-doubts arise. It is OK! Because all great questions and the big doubts are important for our life. We all practice with one question – you all know that: What am I? Is this not the most profound doubt one can have? It is like our tool to advance and to grow and eventually wake up.

Nevertheless, it is related to suffering and we don't like that. Usually we treat our problems like a disease we want to get rid of. Buddha as a young prince had the same questions and doubts like us. It is no surprise that, after having attained enlightenment, the very first thing he realized and declared was: Life is suffering. We suffer, because we hold onto things which are changing and passing, which return to emptiness even though we love them so much and don't want to be without them. Including our individuality, which is so important to us. Everything seems to lead into nothingness. How can we bear this?

We all have our themes. I have my theme as well. The question which always profoundly shakes me is: "Where has everything gone?" The wonderful moments, the people we once felt connected with, the great feelings, people who have died. Where has it all gone?

I am sure many of us have the same questions. The fact that all is impermanent is the basic realization of Buddhism.

But we continue to practice. We go one step further. This is crucial.

One sutra, which you all know by heart, says: "The Bodhisattva depends on Prajna Paramita and the mind is no hindrance." This points to a possible solution: Prajna Paramita, which gives insight into the completeness of the universe and into the completeness of our true nature – the highest form of wisdom. If we wake up, the consequence is a mind which has no hindrance and which is no hindrance. That is our Zen practice!

Maybe you are asking yourself now: this guy Roland here in front of us – has he attained that? And then you realize that this cannot possibly be true. Sometimes he is short tempered, and angry, and he also finds mistakes and is vulnerable and sometimes maybe hurtful as well. Highly visible: hindrances in mind!

Let me tell you three stories that are important in this context and have had a strong impact on me.

The first story took place in 1993/1994 in Korea, in winter, at Shin Won Sah temple. I participated in the Kyol Che there, Namhee and Arne were also among the participants. Zen Master Seung Sahn visited us five times in total, including at the beginning and the end to give Dharma talks. Each time he came and saw me, he yelled at me and said, "Don't check!!" The first time I thought, "Well, what is this? What does he mean?" I didn't realize that this was checking too. The next time he came I had done a lot of bows and greeted him and opened the door for him. He saw all of us, he saw me, he looked at me and said, "Don't check!!" I felt so ashamed in front of the others. We are holding by checking and through our likes and dislikes, and our mind becomes a hindrance. In any case, that time in Shin Won Sah I had a sharp-eyed teacher who pestered me vociferously for three months to not check, to not hold, to do nothing. I am not sure whether this has left a strong effect. But in any

case I am not bothered so much any more when life tosses me to and fro. Somehow I always get back on my feet.

The second story took place in Korea as well. I was in hospital. I had had a breakdown. Later it turned out that everything was not half as bad as it seemed, but I was in hospital. The telephone rang. I picked up the phone. It was Zen Master Seung Sahn: "What's happening?"

"Yeah, well, I don't feel so well and... but I also attained some great experiences and insights! I found out that everything is an illusion. Zen, too, is a construct and an illusion we need to overcome. We have to throw it all away! This whole Zen world, too!"

He replied, "Ohhh, now you are very, very clever. Now it is important that you become completely stupid. Very important! You must become a stonehead!"

So, in a deep crisis I had a sharp-eyed teacher who told me not to rely on my knowledge but to think with my belly instead. I am not sure whether this has had such a big impact, but I was released from hospital soon after, and after all I realise one thing: since then I haven't had such clever thoughts any more.

The third incident took place about three weeks ago in Paris. We had a kind of commune, a teacher's commune. Three days, ten teachers: practice, eat, drink, talk. We did everything on our own: cook, do the dishes, dry them. I probably laid the table fifteen times. One time Zen Master Wu Bong joined me. We were laying the table: plates, spoons, forks. Zen Master Bon Shim had cooked lasagna. So I asked Zen Master Wu Bong, "Do you think we should put kimchi on the table, accompanying this Italian dish, lasagna? (Kimchi is this Korean pickled, spicy cabbage.) He replied, "Doesn't matter, the main thing is that the kimchi is in my belly after the meal!" I think this was the best sentence during the whole meeting. I have a sharp-eyed teacher who taught me again and again to believe in myself and to just do it.

These three stories have one common point. And this is the biggest treasure I have ever found in my life, which has saved my life and is saving my life up to this very moment. It is the most important gift from my teachers which I and every one of you – all of us – already always possess.

This treasure is identical with the nature of this whole universe. (*Hits the floor with the stick*) That point. If we keep this mind (*hits the floor with the stick*) which doesn't hold anything – "Don't know!" (*hits the floor with the stick*), then this moment becomes complete (*hits the floor with the stick*), then we are complete. Then everything is complete. And then it is not difficult to understand what is necessary to do and how we can help this world.

It is a weird thing: despite having always already arrived, already having everything, the truth lying in front of us, we are, nevertheless, still always on our way, looking for something that we are still missing. At the same time everything is here. We have to wake up. This is our Zen practice. And it is important to have companions. To be a Zen Master, a Zen teacher, for me means to be a companion.

Last but not least, I have a gift for you: once a bright monk in Korea asked me,

“Which is more important: student or teacher?”

So I ask you: which is more important: student or teacher?

(Various answers come from the audience: “teacher”, “student”.)

If you say student, I will hit you thirty times!

(More answers from the audience; one student hits the floor.)

Only that?

(The student hits the floor again)

Good, not so bad.

If you say teacher, I will hit you thirty times, too. If you say both, then I will hit you sixty times! And if you say neither, then I hit you 120 times! One day, find a good answer. Next time.

Can you see that?

(Raises the stick over his head)

Can you hear that?

(Hits the floor with the stick)

Complete.

Can you see that?

(Raises the stick over his head)

Can you hear that?

(Hits the floor with the stick)

Great illusion.

(Hits the floor with the stick)

Don't hold anything. Experience the truth in every moment. And help this world.

How?

KATZ!

How are you? Now let us eat, dance and sing.

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