

2011-05-30 Genjo Koan

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

This evening I would like to read to you an essay by the Japanese Zen master Dogen. It's one of his most famous essays on Buddhist practice. And he's one of the most famous of the Zen teachers in Japan started a whole lineage whole tradition of Zen called Soto Zen. And it was an essay that he wrote describing his understanding of Buddhist practice, to a layman to a lay person. So rather than focusing on monastics which he was trained, you know, trained to train people in monastery. Here's what he wrote to lay person. It's kind of difficult to understand, it's kind of like not the best to approach it like poetry almost. But the piece has a number of very powerful statements. And even if you don't understand it, all of it some of these statements As you hear them might be interesting for you to resonate inside or see what impact they have as you hear them. The essay in Japanese is called ganja koan. And koan is often in popular kind of people whose idea is a Zen story or enigmatic statement, which a student would practice with sit with ponder sometimes for a long time, and then they'd come to their teacher with an answer and good response and sometimes they pass the coal mine sometimes they wouldn't. Sometimes the function of a koan is a kind of concentration focus, koan's question or the statement the story that gets the mind concentrated and then somehow brings the person to enlightenment. So it's called Genjo koan. The koan also means kind of a colloquial Japanese meaning a Chinese meaning of a public case that we brought in front of a judge. So, like a court case or something, it'd be a case to be evaluated or judged. And but for Dogen in his essay, he doesn't he's he has a different understanding of koan. And rather than the koan being a question to be answered in some abstract way or to be to help guide you to some enlightenment in the future, an answer that you're going to bring, you know, so you know, koans often and these old stories from China that people have put together and just books of koan collection. So rather than that, for him, the koan is, again, Genjo koan, and the word again, Genjo means that which is manifesting itself right now. So it's the koan of what's happening right now. And there was one translator translated into English. This title is the title genjo koan as the issue at hand. And that's where I got the title for this book of mine. So if you ever wondered why I called it the issue at hand, it has this kind of background in my Zen training because of this particular piece and so I'm gonna read you the this.

And here it's called this particular translation translates the title as actualizing the fundamental point and has to do with discovering, practice discovering realization, right where you are. So rather than it's being somewhere else, or someplace else it's right Here. And so in the Soto Zen approach to practice, there's a kind of poignancy and power and dynamic dynamism to showing up and being present for this moment experience. And you don't want to analyze it too much. You don't want to bring in other teachings to it. You want to show up in a full complete way to what's happening right now. And so this is kind of what's implied but again, Genjo Koan. So, Dogen writes, as all things are Buddha Dharma, as all things are within the purview of Buddhism. There is delusion and realization, practice, birth and death. And there are Buddha's and ordinary sentient beings as myriad things are without an abiding

There is no delusion, no realization, no Buddha, no sense in being no birth and death. The Buddha way, is basically leaping clear of the many and the one. Thus there are birth and death, delusion and realization sent in beings and Buddha's. Even so, in attachment, blossoms fall and in aversion, weeds spread, to carry yourself forward, to carry yourself forward and experience myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come forth and experience themselves is awakening. Those who have great realization of delusion are Buddhists. Those who are greatly diluted about realization are sentient beings. Further, there are those who continue realizing beyond realization, who are in delusion throughout delusion. When Buddha's are truly Buddha's, they do not necessarily notice that they are Buddhists. However, they are actualized Buddha's, who go on actualizing Buddha's to study the Buddha way is to study the self. to study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by the many things when actualized by the many things your body and mind as well as the body and minds of others drops away. No trace of realization remains and this note trace continues endlessly When you first seek the Dharma, you imagine you are far away from its environments. But Dharma is already correctly transmitted, you are immediately your original self. When you ride in a boat and watch the shore, you might assume that the shore is moving. But when you keep your eyes closely on the boat, you can see the boat moves. Similarly, if you examine myriad things with the confused body and mind, you might suppose that your mind and nature are permanent. When you practice intimately and returned to where you are, it will be that nothing at all. It will be clear that nothing at all has unchanging self.

Firewood becomes ash and it does not become firewood again. Yet Do not suppose that the ash is future and the firewood past. You should understand that firewood abides in the phenomenal expression of firewood, which fully includes past and future and is independent of past and future. Ash abides in the phenomenal expression of ash, which fully includes future and past. Justice firewood does not become firewood again, after it is Ash, you did not return to birth after death. This being so, it is an established way in Buddha Dharma to deny that birth turns into death. Accordingly, birth This is understood as no birth. It is an unshakable teaching and Buddha's discourses that death does not turn into birth. Accordingly, death is understood as no death. birth is an expression complete this moment Death is an expression complete this moment. There like winter and spring. You do not call winter, the beginning of spring nor summer, the end of spring. Enlightenment is like the moon reflected on the water. The moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken. Although it's light is wide and great, the moon is reflected even in a puddle and inch wide. The whole moon and the entire sky reflected in dewdrops on the grass or even in one drop of water. Enlightenment does not divide you. Just as the moon does not break the water. You cannot hinder enlightenment. Just as a drop of water does not hinder the moon in the sky. The depth of the drop is the height of the moon. Each reflection however long or short its duration, manifests the vastness of the dewdrop and realizes the limitlessness of the moonlit in this moonlight in the sky. When Dharma does not feel your whole body in mind, you think it is already sufficient. When Dharma fills your mind, your body and mind you understand that something is missing. For example, when you sail out in a boat to the middle of an ocean, where no land is in sight, and view the four directions, the ocean looks circular and does not look any other way. But the ocean is neither around nor square. Its features are infinite and variety. It is like a palace It is like a jewel. It only looks circular as far as you See at that time, all things are like this. Though there are many features in the dusty world and the world beyond conditions, you see and understand only what your I have practice can reach. In order to learn the nature of the myriad things, you must know that although they may look round or square, the other features of oceans and mountains are infinite and variety, whole worlds are there. It is not only around you, but also directly beneath your feet and in a drop of water. fish swims in the ocean, and no matter how far it swims, there is no end to the water. A bird flies in the sky and no matter how far it flies, there's no end to the air. However, the fish in the bird have never left their elements when they're active. is large their field is large. When their need is small, their field is

small. Thus, each of them totally covers its full range, and each of them totally experiences its realm. If the bird leaves the air, it will die at once. If the fish leaves the water, it will die at once. Know what water it know that water is life and air is life. The bird is life and the fishes life. Life must be the bird and life must be the fish. It is possible to illustrate this with more analogies, practice enlightenment, and people are like this. Now if a bird or fish tries to reach the end of its element before moving in it, the bird

or this fish will not find its way or its place. When you find your place where You are practice occurs actualizing the fundamental point, when you find your way at this moment, practice occurs actualizing the fundamental point for the place, the way is neither large nor small, neither yours nor others, the place the way is not carried over from the past and it is not merely arising now. Accordingly in the practice enlightenment of the Buddha way, meeting one thing is mastering it, doing one practice is practicing completely, here is the place here, the way unfolds. The boundary of realization is not distinct, for the realization comes forth simultaneously with a mastery of Buddha Dharma. Do not suppose that what you realize becomes your knowledge and is grasped by your Consciousness. Although actualized immediately, the inconceivable may not be apparent. its appearance is beyond your knowledge. Zen master Boucher of Mount Ma you was fanning himself. A monk approached and said, Master, the nature of wind is permanent, and there is no place it does not reach. Why then are you do you find yourself? Although you understand that the nature of the wind is permanent about your replied, You do not understand the meaning of it reaching everywhere. What is the meaning of it reaching everywhere as the monk again, the master just kept fanning himself, the monk the monk bowed deeply the actualization of the Buddha Dharma, the vital path of its correct transmission is like this. If you say that you do not need to find yourself because The nature of wind is permanent. And you have wind without fanning, you will understand that neither you will understand either permanence nor the nature of wind. The nature of wind is permanent because of that the wind of the Buddha's house brings forth the gold of the earth and makes fragrant, the cream of the long river written in the year 1233.

So, before I say something about this, maybe some of you will say something but what was like to hear this anything stand out or strike you or

It's quite lovely this idea that those who have great realization of delusion are Buddhists. Those who are greatly deluded about realization are sentient beings. So many people are pursuing some idea of you know, there's this great enlightenment out there. And if you finally see and understand it, you'll have the keys to the kingdom, everything will be fine. And he says here, that what makes a Buddha is someone who really understands the illusion. So rather than focusing on the light, kind of focus on the darkness, you know, what's really problems? What's going on with you. And then he says, to study Buddhism is to study the self. And even though you'll say there's no abiding self, there's no true essential self. You're still here. And so Buddhism is not discovered in books like reading this. And, but it relates to Buddhism is discovered here by understanding what's going on here with yourself. And so, perhaps your delusion, and to look, where am I diluted? Where am I confused? Where am I attached when my clinging to where's my aversion? And to take these things seriously, and not be dismissive of them. And so there's a, there's a some people, you know, understand this will see that the very thing that they're practicing to overcome, is the jewel is the thing that they can practice with, they think they have to address and meet and so your delusions your confusion, you're clinging Your fears Your hates, even though they're painful. There's something very powerful about turning towards them and practicing with them, being mindful of them, not dismissing them not saying this is bad and terrible, but to somehow wake up to them to really show up here with this, and to see clearly what is there to see clearly all this is clinging to see clearly this is delusion. There, there is a freedom to be found. Many people assume that freedoms be found only by when these things are completely gone once and for all. So he says to study the

Buddha ways to study the self, to study the self is to forget the self. The beautiful thing is if you really go and be fully present for what's here, in an unselfconscious way, then the self, your self consciousness disappears. All the ways in which we identify and judge and evaluate ourselves and what's going on. But it's just it's this tremendous power you show up completely for this thing. You kind of use so completely that you kind of feel like you slough off your self conscious concerns. And then to forget the self is to be actualized they weren't in Japanese actually confirmed. To forget the self is to be confirmed by myriad things. So you don't know who you are. This presents a tradition to say you don't know who you are, until the world tells you who you are. You don't go around carrying some idea that this is who I am and I'm so and so. And, and then prove yourself in the world that he said earlier is delusion. To carry yourself forward and experience myriad things is delusion, to assert yourself in a certain kind of way that look, I'm so great. I'm so terrible and carry stuff away. But that married things come forth and experience themselves as awakening. And here he says When actual, to forget the self is to be confirmed or actualized by myriad things, things will tell you who you are. The world will tell you but show up your manifest. It kind of is kind of what's nice is that some people are frightened by the idea of somehow dropping their self conscious concerns, their attachment to self. And then I won't exist, but you still exist. But you exist this tremendous intimacy, with, with a world where the world kind of comes to you and feels you and moves through you in a beautiful way. Some Western translators have translated this line, to forget the self is to be intimate with all things, though that's not the original.

And then when you first seek a Dharma, you assume that's far away from you. Something distant How could you know me? No, I think they do with it. But actually the Dharma is right here. And then this idea of riding a boat. And you think that you know, you were riding a boat sometimes, like, many of us don't buy boats anymore, but you might have done it on a train or a bus where you kept moving. And but you don't really notice it's moving. It's like you look at it, like a train and see the mountain far in the distance. It looks like the mountains are moving. But you know, you're kind of or that, you know, you're not moving. And so this kind of optical illusion that's common. And so it says the same thing happens with our own body and mind that we think that we are not moving. But all the things around us are. But in fact, if you look carefully, you'll find that everything is in moving, everything's moving, including. And so there's no abiding self, no central thing that stays unchanged. When the Dharma does not fill your whole body in mind, you think it is already sufficient. It's not great. When you don't quite understand what's going on, it's easy to think I got it. You know, this is it. But when the Dharma fills your body and mind, which you really kind of hear fully, then there you understand that something is missing, missing. That this is not bad news. You thought that Buddhism was supposed to kind of give you the final answer once and for all and everything. But actually, you understand something is missing. And then this example of sailing out in the middle of the ocean just seems around the horizon, you know, but the oceans not round it says all these different shapes. So how we see what we see of the world doesn't necessarily provide an accurate picture of what's actually there. And there's with for dog and there's many different perspectives, for looking at any given thing at all. So here's a suggestion is you have one one particular vantage point right now, but don't settle upon that as being what how things are really, truly you can change your perspective and see things from many different angles and he says it's so it's so varied actually what's happening even in a drop of water there myriad of worlds myriad of different things happening. And then this idea that the fish and you know, swims in the oceans always. And if it tries to go beyond the ocean, you know, nothing really happens. Now, if a bird or fish tries to reach the end of its element before moving in it, the bird and this fish will not find its way or its place. When you find your place where you are, practice occurs, is a very strong, very important statement for this young people. When you find out where you are, you find find your place where you are then Practice occurs. And so there's a saying that goes around to be passed in a circle. Sometimes it says, if you want to go from A to B, travel from A to B, be completely a. There, enter this moment, this moment here, enter it fully be it fully. Don't focus, you know, trying to get some other place. focus on studying the

self here being present here, finding your place here, where's your place right now? And sometimes in the Zen tradition, this tradition when they talk about again, Joe Kahn, they say that every situation you're in has a question and the question is, how how do you show up and respond to this particular situation? What's being asked for you in this in this moment in this situation? And so there's always kind of this relaxed kind of discovering what is it? The different you in different different ways with different people what is this situation require? I was at a barbecue for Memorial They today that you know what, what's required here in this situation? And then early in the day I was closing a retreat. And it wasn't the usual treat it was a Family Retreat with all these kids for Ben Memorial Day weekend, a couple of days. And so what's the appropriate place there? What's, what's going on there? How do you show up for that? That situation? And so it's not login not looking beyond yourself not looking some other land some other distance. beautiful palace of enlightenment far away. But how do you show up here? Where you happen to be, and you all have happened to be right at IMC right now. So this is where it's at. But if you hadn't come it wouldn't have been here.

When you find your way at this moment, practice occurs. actualizing the fundamental point for the place the way okay. Here is the place here the way unfolds, the boundary of realization is not distinct. Do not suppose that what you realize becomes your knowledge and is grasped by your consciousness, although actual is actualized immediately, the inconceivable may not be apparent, its appearance is beyond your knowledge. And the final thing about this fan so, the monk says to the teacher, you know, the nature of the wind is permanent. So, why do you have to find yourself and, and this is kind of in this Mahayana Buddhist tradition, they had this idea that you have Buddha nature and that your Buddha nature is kind of always always there, it's kind of permanent. And so, if you already a Buddha had Buddha nature, why would you have to practice? That's what he's saying. You know, what if you already have Buddha nature, why do you have to practice and Zen master every spice Just continues fanning himself. And so the implication here is that you discover you're the practice the truth, awakening for them, maybe the Buddha nature, in doing the practice, it doesn't exist separate from the practice. And so you have to practice, but in the practice, it's found. And so for in this particular Buddhist tradition, they, they have this compound world word called practice realization. realization occurs together with practice. But without practice, there can be no realization. But there's no there's no realization, separate from practice and no practice separate from realization for them, they come together. And so this has to do with shift but it might mean showing up completely, as fully as you can for this moment, this situation And this, this, there's something about this moment, this time this place you're in, that can be your liberation can be your place of profound practice. No matter where you are. It can be at the DMV. It can be maybe tomorrow you have to go to the court and deal with something. Maybe you have to, you know, all kinds of difficult situations. And so the question is, isn't like Oh, how I can get back to retreat, how I can get back to my meditation cushion. Then people say how do you discover it here in this situation right now. And then it ends with

the nature of wind is permanent. Because of that. The wind of the Buddhist house brings forth the gold of the earth and makes fragrant the cream of the long river cream of the long River. I think cream is supposed to be some allusion to Chinese myth or something that They're just beautiful, sweet cream and some river that hadn't. And so he says, you know that because there's because of the nature of practice realization because in your in your practice, you find realization, the wind of the Buddha's house, the permanent wind of the Buddha's practice brings forth all this beauty, gold, all this bell value that what's precious in our life brings forth the gold of the earth, and the fragrant cream, the long river doesn't bring forth you know, real gold, but rather the gold in you the goal that you can do that that's valuable for you. So now, do you have anything you want to say? Would you rather just find your place Please,

I found myself

thinking about how in that story, it sounded a lot like the way the monk wanted to react was just to be immersed in everything so like the sort of the, the dualism of yourself and other things faded away. So you were they blended together instead. And I found myself trying to think about how that contrasts when when we talk about being mindful of everything. Because sometimes when I think about being mindful, I think like, there's always sort of a distance between me watching what I'm doing and being present at the same time.

Great, great, great point. And actually, it's a very common criticism that's end people make of what we do is they'll say it sounds very good. realistic, it sounds very separate from your experience. And it can be that way for people sometimes. Especially some people bring a lot of self into the practice with them. So they're operating as agent who's always watching and doing and, you know, so that agent is very strong for some people, and it's very dualistic very, they can have very strong ideas of what's supposed to happen and, and or what's supposed to was supposed to be happening and what is happening that keeps him separate. Some people think a lot about what's going on, and if they experienced everything by how they think about it, rather. And but mindfulness is as mindfulness gets stronger, it tends to highlight the friction, it tends to highlight the places of tension or attend places of suffering or holding. And if we're keeping ourselves at a distance, that itself is friction that itself has some tension in it. And that tends to fall away with time and so slowly over time, As people practice and show up for what's going on, you know, they realize I'm not quite here for it yet. I didn't quite show up, I need to let go of being at a distance until they go these ideas I have what's going on and let go but thinking about because thinking is, you know, a little bit abstract. And so with time, mindfulness becomes clearer and simpler and simpler. And a lot of these other things separation tends to fall away. And at some point, there's no self practicing mindfulness anymore. Mindfulness is being practiced, but there's no sense in the practicing of it, that there's a self operating and so there's less than less of that separation going on. make some sense. So at the beginning of this piece, Dugan writes You know, he says that when when you know when you when you encounter is a paraphrase it but when you know you're going about your life, just happily, maybe or not And then you learn about Buddhism. And now, because of the Buddhist teachings, you now you understand that, oh, there's a difference between realization and delusion. I'm just living my life before I don't know anything about realization. And now there's really just, you know, enlightenment enlightened people and all that then. And because of that, then there has to be this delusion, right to people who don't, don't understand. So now we have this distinction or this duality. And now there's practice, you know, I didn't I didn't have to practice before I grew up, I was happy I was running around the neighborhood. And now, you know, these, you know, this Family Retreat, and they're telling me to sit down, be quiet and practice, you know, these kids where they would prefer to be playing, playing, playing. And, and then there's Buddhas and sentient beings. There's people who've somehow realized what Buddhism is about, and there's people who haven't, and so here is described. So again, it kind of sets distinction or separation. So that comes with Buddhism. With Buddhist teachings you can, it's very hard to avoid it. But then when you realize that there's no abiding self, there's no eternal, essential self that's in the picture. Then these, these dichotomies or dualisms, fall away, then there is no delusion, no realization, the Buddha, no sentient beings, no birth and death. Now, this is you know, it isn't like you go back to what are your like before you encountered Buddhism, but you've kind of gone further in this dropping of all that stuff. But Dogen, doesn't, doesn't want to remain there. Because that itself allows a certain kind of dualism between being being dualistic and being non dualistic. It's, so that also has certain problem. So the way that Dogen kind of takes it to the next step. He says the Buddha way is basically leaping clear of the many and the one we think clear, clear of the tendency of the mind to, to have to conceptualize, discriminate between all the different things in the world. And, and so and non discrimination non conceptualization non dualism tends to be

non conceptual for you to see a distinction between things, but to stay there is kind of a delusion as well it's kind of partial, it's like only one perspective. So, he says somehow there's leaping clear of both duality and non duality between multiplicity and things are just one or something.

And so, he talks about that. So, there are these possibilities in practice can happen, but then he has this very, very, you know, I think significant or powerful line after this guy very abstract. This summarizes This huge complex issues of that went through Buddhist philosophy for many, many, many centuries, very simple way. But then he adds this at the end. Yet in attachment, blossoms fall in aversion weeds spread. And this is a very rich kind of suggestion, but one of the suggestions here, interpreting this is that no matter what your understanding is, of what Buddhism is, whether you understand it that there is Buddha's and sentient beings where there is practice and realization, but there's no realization, no practice, there's no no dualities. There's no Buddha's, no sentient beings, or whether you find this kind of next higher step of leaping beyond it, where you can live in the world of diversity and live in the world of discrimination. But at the same time, there is no oneness and separation. No matter what, if you're attached. The beautiful blossoms will fall away, will fade away will get destroyed. And if you have an aversion to anything, the weeds in the mind will grow. And this pulls back cause back to kind of really basic Buddhism, the heart of it all, which, you know, you can forget all the philosophy that if you cling, you destroy something really beautiful. And if you push away, you allow something unwanted and maybe harmful to grow and develop. So, the rest of the rest of this essay is, as you know, can be seen for the respective of what it's like to live a life that isn't it has neither clinging in it, or resistance or pushing away. So that was a little Soto Zen primer. So, I hope that was okay for you. Certainly different. And I'll usually do it here. So it's nice to get some different perspectives in this myriad, this wide big ocean of ours so thank you