

ARTICLE

Five Diamond Points: The First Point

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The following is a transcription of a Dharma Talk that was recently offered to the community at Lions Gate by Rev. Master Kōten. It is the second in a series on “The Five Diamond Points That Penetrate to the Very Heart of the Matter.” Transcribed by Rev. Aurelian with very minor revisions made for ease of reading.

Homage to the Buddha.
Homage to the Dharma.
Homage to the Sangha.

The Five Diamond Points that penetrate to the very heart of the matter: the soft and flexible mind; the making use of the will to turn the wheel; faith; meditation; and actual experience and realisation of the Unborn.

When Dogen returned from China, he was asked what he brought back with him, and he said, “A soft and flexible mind.” In the instructions of the Third Chinese Ancestor, she says, “Only cease to cherish opinions.” Keizan Zenji says, “Erudition disturbs enlightenment.” And we are urged to observe the Dharma with the naive mind of a child. We all have views and opinions about the world. What is being referred to is using those ideas and opinions in order to understand the foundation of reality. The Truth cannot be grasped in that way. Why? Because it is not our selves.

As Dogen has pointed out, training is not about perfecting the self. “To study the Dharma is to study the self. To study the self is to let go of the self.” Why is this? Because what we call our “selves” is transitory, impermanent, passing away; a warp and woof of threads in a carpet that come together; a coalescing of clouds that come together for a brief time. Many people try to understand this by thinking of a philosophical view of “no separate self,” etc, etc. These are not actually helpful in terms of Buddhist training. One way of looking at it is, instead of talking about “no separate self,” to talk about selfishness. Many people, when hearing the term “no separate self” think it has something to do with interconnectedness with other things; but, if this is not understood, then it is simply an expansion of the ego into the broader world and only serves to crystallise selfishness and the imposition of our views and opinions on other people and on the world in general.

It cannot be too strongly emphasised that if we do not do something about ourselves then our patterns will continue. And if we do not attempt it now, when will we attempt it? And, as Tendo Nyojo summarised the whole of the way in his private instructions to Dogen: “Do not think that

it is easy.” It is not complicated; it does not require a quick and complicated mind. It is why this tradition is called “Farmer’s Zen.” Because it is not about complicating.

To grasp the will and turn the wheel requires effort. We eventually learn what “effort” means, but we cannot learn what it means without applying the effort. This also means to look up when we wish to look down.

Faith, the third of the Diamond Points, is to proceed, without knowing for sure, but not to let the “not knowing for sure” stop one. It is also about not having a critical mind towards the Dharma. Having an investigative mind, a plunging mind, a mind willing to go deeply, deeply into it is important.

The story of the coal, the fire, is very applicable here. The master and disciple were sitting. There was incense on the altar. The disciple asked, “Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?” People often make an incredibly stupid assumption that these people are talking in some sort of mysterious language which, as Dogen points out, they are not. They are quite clear about what they mean to one another. To ask, “Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?” is to ask what everybody knew the answer was. Bodhidharma came from the West to seek a suitable companion to train in the Dharma with. Everybody would have known that. What they are asking is, “Am I such a person? Am I a person of the Way? Am I a person who can understand?” That is the meaning of the saying “Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?” And then all the answers point through the disciple. They have no other meaning than that. But, as Dogen says, do not think that they were engaged in some sort of mysterious wordplay. It makes them look like fools.

In response to the disciple’s question, the master said, “Put some more incense on the charcoal.” Both would have understood the ordinary meaning of this, which is doing the next thing in training with a reverential mind. But in order to do that in those days, they had to get a piece of coal from the fire pit. It could also have been that the coal was in the incense burner, but it actually seems to be more that it was in the fire, the fire grate. And so, the disciple poked desultorily into the ash and said that there was no coal left, no ember. And the master got down from their seat, took the poker, poked to the very heart of the ash and found an ember and held it up and said, “What do you think this is?” At that moment the disciple awakened to the connection between the Teaching and their own daily life and went and bowed to the master and thanked them. And the master replied, “Fortunately it has nothing to do with me.” And this is the nub, the core, of the story. You cannot carry yourself through the gate.

The fourth diamond Point is pure meditation. “The means of training are thousandfold.” There are all sorts of means of training in the Dharma that can help us and be beneficial to us, and we should not disparage them, and they are different for each of the different traditions. But. (Reverend Master Jiyu used to say, “Be very careful with your “buts” and “ands.” Many people took this rather foolishly to mean to never use the term “but.” “But” is used to make a distinction). The means of training are thousandfold. Pure meditation must be done.

Although it is true that the Dharma is everywhere, if you do not practice you will not understand it. As it says in the secret teaching, “The Light of the Lord is everywhere. The palace of the Buddha Nature is within. They desire to go quickly so that their happy union may be soon.” “There is awakening to the Truth, but we have to do the practice that actualises it for us. There is peace and joy forever, but we have to do the training or else we will not experience it.” These are the words of Bodhidharma.

The Fifth Diamond Point penetrating to the centre is experience of the Unborn. Not talking about the Unborn, not speculating about the Unborn. Experience of the Unborn. Shakyamuni says, in his great statement of Dharma Transmission, “O monks, there is an unborn, uncreated, unformed, undying. If it were not so, then there would be no liberation.” And we would be trapped. We would be trapped with our selves forever, with no possibility of change, no possibility of transformation. But, because there is an unborn, uncreated, undying, then there is the actual realisation, experience, dissolving into, making ourselves one with this.

It is not a theory, it is not a game. It is in deadly earnest. It is the sole purpose of our existence. It is the sole medicine for the curing of all ills. It is the sole basis of true peace.

In the story, the master is asked, again, some version of “Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?” And the master says, “The entire universe is one bright pearl.” And the disciple says, “Don’t speak symbolically.” And the master says, “I am not speaking symbolically. The entire universe is one bright pearl.”

You are not far from it. And yet, you must exhaust your ordinary efforts to encounter it. To leap beyond all fear, to change the ordinary understanding, to encounter with naive mind. Then, as Dogen says, “Buddha does all, and we follow and live in that doing.”

Before us, in front of us, enveloping us, we have the possibility of encountering it. As monks, we vow that that will be our sole focus. When we receive the mat, we say, “It will forever guide my robes.” Which means, of course, that we will forever bow.

The Five Diamond Points can be seen as laid one after another along the road towards the centre, or arranged in a circle, each one pointing to the centre in its way. In order to understand this, you have to grasp and penetrate all the way to the centre. Then you will know less than you know now, and encounter...