

The Five Diamond Points: The Fourth Point

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The following is a transcription of a Dharma Talk offered to the community at Lions Gate in August of last year. It is the fifth part in a series on “ The Five Diamond Points That Penetrate to the Very Heart of the Matter.” Transcribed by Pierre Kohl and edited by Rev. Aurelian, with minor revisions made for ease of reading.

Homage to the Buddha

Homage to the Dharma

Homage to the Sangha

The Fourth Diamond Point that penetrates all the way to the centre is meditation. Not meditation of accomplishment, or meditation of failure, or meditation of stages, or meditation of trying to get somewhere, or of trying to suppress thought, or of trying to have elaborate or wonderful experiences. This is the meditation of letting go, the meditation of no-thing special, the meditation of not trying to calculate, not trying to control, not trying to be somebody.

“The means of training are thousandfold, and pure meditation must be done.” The means of various ways of calming the mind, of controlling the mind, of letting go of the mind are all the thousand ways of training. How we go about keeping the Precepts and the extra Precepts (which I will talk about later) — that is, the various small things that we take upon ourselves as individuals in order to help our training — these are the means of training, and pure meditation must be done.

Pure meditation is not about success. Pure meditation is not about when our minds are empty of thoughts. Pure meditation is simply to sit there. Whatever arises is no problem. Just for the moment, just for that five minutes or that half-hour, drop everything else. When it arises let go of it, just for that period of time. Everything that is of the nature of spiritual experience is included in this, and this meditation is a lifetime’s study. How we understand it in the beginning can be quite different from how we understand it in the middle and later on. This does not invalidate any of the places of understanding.

Pure meditation is not done for the purpose of arriving somewhere or gaining something. You would have all heard this before, except that you need to really understand what this means and

the implication of it. Pure meditation is not easy, but neither is it complicated. It is the basis of all jhanas and contemplations, and it is to this that we return, whatever the nature of our spiritual experiences.

“Pure meditation must be done.” This is not the same thing exactly as doing it in a schedule of every day. One can do mediation every day without actually doing pure meditation, particularly if one spends the time calculating, adding, accumulating, and other things like that. It is an essential point — if not THE essential point — of the whole Sōtō tradition that anybody can do this. This has nothing to do with learning, it has nothing to do with having read innumerable books, it has nothing to do with “intelligence.” We are, rather, practising our inheritance.

The Buddha, and then the Ancestors, throughout time have opened wide the gates to this by practising it among themselves and allowing us to practise it with them. Thus, pure meditation cannot be understood from texts. It is a living tradition. That is why it is said we must cross great distances, climb mountains, enter the forests, and seek those who practice in order to learn from them how to practise. Too much reading from books on meditation beclouds the mind, partly because many people writing about meditation do not understand it at all. As Dogen says, their words are green and unrepentant because they have not penetrated the Matter, because they think it is a form of accumulating, of adding to the self and its possessions. But this is not so at all.

Do not worry — and this is addressed to the laity — do not worry and get yourself all run around because you do not have time. You do not “have time” anyway. Rather, heed the call to turn within, and you will know its benefits. In the morning, even for a second, stop. Look. Sit still. Even for a second, even on the toilet, even on the edge of your bed, stop for a second. Do not launch the acquiring, acquisitive mind as soon as you open your eyes in the morning. Remember throughout the day to stop, to let go of the acquisitive, inquiring, grasping monkey-mind, and rest, just for a split second. Nothing is lost for so doing. Whenever you have a moment — say, when you’re on the toilet — stop. Whenever you have to wait, whether it is for the computer to boot up, or for a meeting, sit still. One of the greatest lay practitioners was a Chinese prime minister who spent all his time in meetings and was frequently waiting. He used all those opportunities to practise and, much to his surprise, gained a reputation as a master of Zen.

Do not pine for faraway mountains. Practice where you are. Throughout the day there are innumerable moments. Stop. Don’t jump to the next moment. At the end of the working day or the end of the work-period, when you shut down the computer or pull away from your desk, stop. Don’t jump to the next moment. Stop. The Buddha Mind is in continuous flow through all

things. How many times have you not taken those words seriously? Do you think that we are joking? Do you think that the ancient Ancestors, both lay and monastic, were superheroes? Do you think that they lived in less complicated times? Everyone throughout history describes their own times as overwhelming and complicated.

I can hear some of you saying, “I don’t know what I’m doing. I don’t know how to meditate.” It isn’t a contest. There isn’t a prize at the end. There aren’t blue ribbons and red ribbons. We are practicing our inheritance. We are manifesting the miraculous activities of the Buddhas and Ancestors. It is not far from you at all.

Particularly if you are working in a job, when the moment for the stopping arises, stop. All your ambitions, all the things you have constructed, your family, will pass away in time. Do not deceive yourself that this is not so. The only thing that will sustain you in the long run is the times you stop; for when illness comes, or injury, or tragedy, or death, you will stop whether you want to or not.

Learning to stop in this way is the most profound of activities. Do not be afraid. Impermanence is simply there. Do not panic. There is nowhere to fall. The flow of the Buddha Mind is everywhere, but we have to do the stopping that allows us to see it. Put aside worry and calculations. The reason you are tired and frustrated is because you are chasing something that cannot be caught.

Stop for a moment. Go deeply and experience the water. You can practice in this way. Your sincerity of mind is excellent. The Buddha Nature erupts into existence. Nothing can stop it. The Buddhas and the Ancestors constantly enter the world to benefit beings. Nobody can do anything about this. Compassion pours forth constantly. Nobody can do anything about them.

Buddhism is called a religion because not only do you have to have faith, but you have to turn around and do something about it. That is why it is beyond having an intellectual understanding. Without practice it is nothing at all. The many “isms” and their form arise and confuse. Do not be confused by another “ism” called Buddhism. Your heart and your courage are excellent.

Homage to all the Buddhas in all worlds
Homage to all the Bodhisattvas in all worlds
Homage to the Scripture of Great Wisdom.