

# THE ESSENCE OF EGO AND THE WAY TO TRANSCEND IT

- WHAT IS OUR MEDITATION FOR ? -

- To Live in Truth -

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Ladies and Gentlemen!

Let me introduce myself as a Buddhist. from Japan, the country of working bees as it is often called. My name is Kido Inoue. It is my great pleasure to take this opportunity to express my view on the essence of ego and the way to transcend it.

Modern technology is to be developed by excellent scientists. In this respect you have rendered invaluable cultural benefits to mankind by bringing together and fostering a lot of researchers from all over the world.

Today, however, the world is faced with the dangerous problem: the consequence of modern civilization, which has been brought about by intelligence, the great virtue of man, may be the devastation of our planet, rather than a great benefit of extremely advanced civilizations. In other words, the future of human beings is endangered. In this juncture, we are forced to reflect seriously on ourselves as inhabitants of the earth. This is why I believe it to be of great significance to clarify radically the essence of human intelligence and ego and discuss with you the concrete and real way to establish not only the ever-lasting existence of human beings but absolute peace on earth as well.

I am a Zen master. Buddhism was born in the East and has a history of over 2,500 years. From the viewpoint of Miahayanist Buddhism with deep and noble spirit, I would like to elucidate the existence of human beings and discuss the way to solve the problems of education in relation to ego.

## **Where Ego Begins**

Human beings began to develop their intelligence when they started to stand and walk erect, which enabled them to adapt more properly to their environment than any other group of animals and to preserve their species and evolve into full-fledged human beings as we know them. Instead of developing their abilities as animals to adapt to the environment, human beings have developed their brains, by learning and grasping the situation correctly and by responding dynamically and relationally to it. Radically speaking, this has been brought about by the human instinct to maintain life and Preserve the species. The human instinct to stay alive is primitive and radical. It is the natural power preceding the human intelligence. When it functions in an extreme way, this human instinct turns into an act of absolutization of selves and negation of others, a desire to stay alive by themselves. This power is the root of ego.

Man is the existence in which both ego and intelligence have grown simultaneously. The reason ego has an awful power beyond the control by intelligence is that it has sprung up as a vital phenomenon. Where Intelligence Originates

We are brought to this world after 10 months and 10 days of fetal life, while tracing all the process of human development for billions of years. We are born into chaos. We do not know any existence, let alone self-knowledge. But we are an existence programmed to live. A baby lets other people know its desires to stay alive by means of crying, and its parents, in turn, try to meet the baby's needs in a quite natural manner as they are programmed to preserve the species. Their act is an expression of love, and at the same time, of the instinctive persistence in the preservation of human species.

Several months later, the baby begins to step out of the chaotic and infinite world into the human world and its various functions begin to separate and establish themselves as eyes, ears, a nose, a tongue, a body, and a voluntary will. In other words, the intelligence enables it to perceive and realize how to see, hear, learn and perceive. In the process of learning a language, the baby learns to understand the meaning and accumulates the information necessary to think. When the baby reaches a certain level, it begins to speak. This means that the baby begins to establish an initial thinking circuit to express itself through the combination of various concepts. This is how the capsule of spiritual and conceptual phenomena gradually brings about the individual sense of existence and the baby learns to become conscious of itself, and others as well.

### **Sensibility and Humanity**

A newly born, silent existence expresses its desire in order to live. Unless the desire is met, it cannot stay alive and the light of life goes out. There is no child that cries because he/she feels comfortable. Living in peace, without any anxiety, he/she need not develop negative psychology such as the sense of loathing, crisis, disbelief, and fear. If the child is not adequately fed, he/she cannot but develop the sense of want, dissatisfaction, and poverty. If he/she is given excessive stimuli, he/she develops a sense of fear, without being able to be self-confident and feel at ease.

The sensibility is a spiritual phenomenon much deeper, much wider and much more influential on humanity. In order to form a beautiful, warm, considerate, kind character that believes and values all fellow beings and has a strong sense of justice, it is imperative to foster the potential pre-consciousness, the origin of such humanity.

For children to go to day care centers or day nurseries is not good for their growth, and also prevents their parents from purifying their love toward the children and highly disciplining themselves as human beings. It, thus, destroys their ties with the children, which would otherwise satisfy and foster the children's mind. Not a few cases of family collapses and children of immature character, a phenomenon taking place in civilized countries which have achieved rapid economic growth, can be attributed to the failure to foster such potential pre-consciousness.

### **Spiritual Development**

We are so made that we feel an appetite and eat when we are hungry. When we have eaten to the full, we lose appetite and naturally cease to eat. To be natural means to be active physically and mentally in a dynamic and relational manner. This gives us satisfaction and achievement, hope and light for the future. This requires us to have resilient rich sensibility underlying our mind. Just as we never know wonder, awe and pride as human beings without knowing shame, we cannot be lofty and noble without natural mind with sound sensibility. Such a quality cannot be created by intelligence. You will never be at the mercy of ego if you have fully developed ethics and know

yourself and what shame means.

Only nature can foster and cherish a natural mind in children. Now you can get hot water at any time if only you turn on the tap. This gives you no interest or satisfaction, nor sense of achievement which you would feel if you chopped the fire wood. You simply do not obtain a spirituality in character. In my seminary, senior disciples chop the fire wood and carefully heat the bath for their juniors. Such a bath implies sincerity, endeavor and dignity on the part of the seniors, and therefore those who take the bath can naturally learn the spirit of appreciation and diligence.

Unfortunately, if there is anything available that you want, there is no need for effort, perseverance nor appreciation, and our spirituality, the core of our character, will decay. You cannot develop your mind and spirit because you cannot overcome persistence by learning to be moved. You cannot acquire self-confidence and richness by learning from your failures, nor can you get supported spiritually by learning a sense of achievement and satisfaction based on your own device and effort. Necessary is the dynamic relationship taking place in such a process, which I will call a "motive for mental development." This is the destiny, karma in Buddhist terminology, which fosters and cherishes the potentialities of all future generations.

In advanced countries, it is no longer possible to develop a sound spirit and mind in children. This is just why an increasing number of people remain immature in their mentality, without any solid spiritual support. This is just why so many young people are absorbed in thinner and drugs. This is just why anti-social crimes are increasingly prevalent. At a time when such a people have become too many to be relieved, if sound and serious citizens have become unable to support their own nation, one outburst of anxiety and skepticism after another will throw the society into a chaos, where greedy ambitions will contend with each other and the naked power, violence and deception will prevail. Once a highly advanced and civilized society collapses and falls in disorder, the evil will become infinitely atrocious and widespread beyond any control.

Needless to say, material affluence will enable us to live a convenient life. In those advanced countries at the summit of civilization, including Japan, three generations have already experienced economic prosperity. As a result, the sense of danger and anxiety is rapidly increasing in those societies without exception. We are facing the degradation of integrity and humanity due to immature mentality. This causes continuing decadence and degeneration in the society in general. It is our overconfidence in civilization and our arrogance that have brought about such a deplorable and aggravating phenomena. The fact human beings have lost necessary conditions for their sound growth means that we are coming into irreversibly worsened state of things. The boat named "state" or "nation" will sink before long, which will inevitably lead to the total elimination of mankind.

Underlying the depth of human beings is the instinct to preserve life and species. The primitive form of this is the absolutization of selves and the negation of others. In other words, we want to live even at the sacrifice of others. It is the education and discipline that put this instinct in the right place and establish a sound order. However, the education I mention here is not one only to expand the amount of knowledge, nor a mere verbal prayer. For intelligence is only capable of analyzing our emotion, sense of justice and crisis, and ethics and manners. It does not give us the ability to feel ourselves, to pray, to hope and wish, to feel awe, or to love. It is not the intelligence that governs spiritual phenomena. Intelligence is only an instrument to be exploited and used for this purpose. It is rather likely to be governed by our emotion and ego.

### **Historic Turning Point**

At an unprecedented historic turning point, the world is now looking to Asia in the East for the solution of problems. If we wanted to take the leadership only to overcome our economic slump, we would be merely trying to seek a new market to sell merchandise. The historic turning point

requires us to change our way of thinking, our value system and tread of thought. Modern rationalism began with the establishment and expansion of individuality and liberty. The convenience brought about by civilizations, however, stimulates our greed and desire to realize ourselves to an unlimited extent. What is worse, great powers intend to thrust their way in the world by means of indiscriminately lethal weapons, that is, nuclear weapons. I should say that they remain as dangerous and hegemonistic empires as ever.

### **The historic turning point calls for transcendence.**

This beautiful ideal of absolute co-existence and universal salvation of total mankind has been handed down to us as part of Mahayanist Buddhism established 2500 years ago by Buddha, Gautama. Confucianism, which was initiated at about the same time in China, will also serve as a way to relieve the earth. These two great teachings tell us that, aware of the fact everything springs from our selves, we should deeply reflect on ourselves and repent of our sins to overcome the trifling viewpoint of persistence in our own existence. Then, what would happen if we transcended our selfish viewpoint, namely persistence?

First comes "Behave yourself prudently." Then comes the search for conditions and environment. This is of course opposed to the Western values which try to change the surroundings with one's self in the center. Therefore, it is natural that you should co-habit with nature. There is no contradiction. Once you transcend yourself, others will cease to confront you. We will become a concurrent entity. Then, we will enter into a new relationship of sharing charity where we cannot help accepting and respecting each other as an absolute existence.

The Western idea of absolutizing one's self and one's own country will inevitably lead to the friction and contradiction with the outer world. With this idea, you cannot believe in complete everlasting peace. This idea is devoid of spiritual width, depth and richness which enable us to purify the consciousness of our nation. It will never be able to emancipate the ever-degrading world of today.

At this critical turning point in history, we need to be aware of our own absolute existence as global human beings. This means to shift our viewpoint from a petty one of confrontation and persistence in the absolutization of self and the negation of others, to a new one of becoming infinite and unified absolute entity. A great outlook on universe, derived from this new viewpoint, will help establish one's character as an independent self and solve the evils from within.

Future generations mean the establishment of absolute entity, which ultimately leads to the salvation of total mankind. It is infinite charity and mercy. It is the wish and dream of humankind. The only way to realize this is self-transcendence and the efforts for it. We must begin with self-reflection and repentance.

This is what I believe should be the leadership to be taken by the East.

### **The Way to Transcend Selves**

Zen meditation \* : the fundamental purpose of Zen discipline is to transcend everything.

To transcend is not to discard everything and detach yourself. It means not to persist in everything while remaining concerned with it.

To transcend times, various ideas, nations, or whatever, means to learn a new outlook on infinite and unified universe by discarding a petty old outlook. Then, you will not be bound to those things. There is no room for "theory" or "reason."

Let me take an example. You must stop wars in order to establish peace. Quite simple. From "theoretical" viewpoint, each side has its own definition of peace and, sticking to the definition, each thinks of it as justice. As a consequence, putting peace aside, they begin to fight for their respective cause, power, and grudge. Transcendence means giving up these "reasons" and the habit of adhering to one's own "reasons." Without causes, we would not be able to kill each other. Peace means stopping wars unconditionally. This is transcendence. In brief, you have transcended yourself. This is what I mean by "transcendence of selves."

We would all become as great a man as the universe itself and be able to live with ease and satisfaction, believing and respecting each other, only if we gave up our own "theory" and our habit of sticking to it. The "theory" requires conceptualization and definition for itself. A consequence can be derived from accumulated definitions, but this consequence is also another definition. It is a small consciousness within the framework of persistence.

You need no definition nor theory in order to have a belief. Theory is unnecessary to respect and love others. Just transcend yourself, and love and believe others. This is a infinite charity, as well as a universe-sized confidence. It is free from everything as there is no definition. Transcendence means freedom because it include everything, without any persistence.

If we are really concerned about the future of our descendants, we must try not to contaminate our earth, which is unconditionally our own world. Any person in any position in the society must make every effort, united with others, to improve his/her own world then and there. If he/she sticks to his/her own standpoint, he/she cannot solve all-embracing problems of human society. On the contrary, the earth will be irreversibly damaged before we can do anything about it.

Now is the time when we should transcend our own persistence, give each other instead of being covetous, cooperate with each other instead of denying each other, and help each other instead of killing each other. This is the way to build a happy future for mankind. And this requires us to be in such a state of mind.

To be sure, transcendence is to transcend your own persistence. Transcendence transforms grudge into love, exploitation into assistance, and disbelief into confidence.

In short, you can transform this world into a life worth living, full of dreams, if you relieve your own spirit. The Western way of thinking puts emphasis on the development of means to realize one's self, and this has helped science and technology to advance so far. Meanwhile, the Mahayanist-Buddhist spirit in the East teaches us to reflect on ourselves before we look to others for some conditions, and to take warning from others' shortcomings.

With this spirit, you can obtain unlimited peace and contentment in your limited life on earth, and thus make others and your descendants happy. You can unite yourself with the great life of destiny, which is the law of the cosmos, and enjoy both life and death by giving yourself to the profound eternal life. While living a limited life on earth, you can enjoy unlimited self-confidence and peace, and become a man of unlimited gratification and charity.

The Zen discipline is the core of the Mahayanist Buddhism. Anybody can do it, and anybody can transcend him/herself. You can realize the great state of mind which I have just mentioned.

### **\*Zen Meditation**

Transcendence means a free world, where you identify yourself with the reality now and here, getting yourself out of the capsule of intelligence and emotion. It is a pure and monistic world, an extreme of simplicity. This is what we call "Zen."

Zen meditation is the practice of Zen. It is an independent world transcendent of everything.

What is important is to simply devote yourself to the Zen discipline and destroy the root of your persistent ego.

Usually we perceive through conceptualization the things passing by, even in a very short period of time, say one millionth of a second. This way, you can never realize the true living reality. You will lose yourself. This is what we call a "reversed vision."

Zen meditation should be done to get rid of this habit of "reversed vision," to become conscious of the truth of nature, and to relieve yourself from your own ego, in other words, to live in truth.

Transcendence means to identify yourself with the reality, to devote yourself purely to the reality, to forget yourself, and to transcendence existence, getting out of time and space. This is what I mean by "transcendence of self."

It is an experience of emptiness (sunyata). It is to be what you are, to be what the universe is ("isness" of a thing). It is absolute. It is a salvation. We call this great state of mind "satori" (emancipation). This is an experience of transcendence.

This is the spirit and resurrection of Buddha himself. The time when you practice Zen meditation is a universe of Zen. This is transcendence.

Zen meditation consists in the concentration of yourself on now and here, the absolute instance, the emancipation of yourself from the past, and the realization of the genuine "now."

Now is always now. Now is transcendent even of Zen meditation. No time cannot be now. Now is the eternal and absolute now. It is the whole universe. Everyone can be so while staying what he/she is.

This great truth is the Buddhist law (buppo). The way to salvation is called "butsudo" (Buddhist way). And this great realization is called "satori" (emancipation).

Then, how can you get rid of your habit of mind?

It is by resisting your old habit that you can rid yourself of idealistic habit of conceptualization and scattered speculation. You must make an effort to prevent yourself from considering various things, and to concentrate on, and go deeply into, the root of concepts and speculation.

Zen meditation begins with the dedication of your all energy to doing this, and with the throwing of yourself into an instant before your brain starts to function. It is an effort to constantly cut off your habit of mind which tends to appear at any moment. The most effective way to free yourself of such a habit is to reduce your pace of action to one tenth what it is, and ever to divert your attention from this, slowly but clearly, without using any conceptualization. This is opposed to scattered speculation. Therefore, the harder you try this, the earlier you can get rid of your habit and the more clearly you can understand your own behavior.

### **\* The Essence of Zen Discipline**

There are some essential points in any discipline. It is desirable that everyone should attain his/her purpose as quickly, surely and easily as possible. In order to be conscious of "now" and emancipate yourself, you should return to the instant "now" without thinking about scattered things. For this, you should only carry on your effort to cut off all worldly thoughts and return home to the instant. You should avoid anything that may hinder your effort, and make your effort as dense as you can. The essential points of Zen discipline are as follows:

(1) Emancipation means the acquisition of Buddha's spirit and the experience of the Buddhist law. You should sincerely hope for purity and happiness, correct human errors, and realize a great love. For this, you must give up any greed, swear to gods and Buddha to achieve your great aspiration to follow the way to the truth. You must respect and love the founders of Zen Buddhism and find the right teacher for you.

(2) Once you have found the right teacher, you should not criticize from a narrow point of view, but devote yourself wholly to the Zen practice under the leadership of the teacher. For you can reach the world of unitary absolute entity. If you should doubt your teacher, you would fall a victim to disbelief and divert yourself from the right discipline. Look at the teaching, not at trivial things about him.

(3) The way to emancipation is not a game of endurance. Giving first priority to endurance and thinking light of the instant is a waste of time. If your legs and foot hurt, you may try to prevent them from hurting. If you are too hungry to make any effort, you may eat something. Even if you try not to fall asleep with a dim consciousness, you cannot get rid of various worldly thoughts. You cannot rid yourself of your thinking habit without concentrating clearly on the present instant and giving up scattered speculation. If you are too sleepy to concentrate, you should sleep just long enough to give up worldly thoughts and concentrate on "now."

(4) Just return to the instant "now" by reasonably abandoning scattered speculation and worldly thoughts. Try to keep yourself from feeling sleepy. Try not to be particular about anything, and not to be too nervous. It is ideal to put your body and mind in a state of flow.

(5) One of the methods of doing this is to twist your body right and left every time you breathe. When you breathe, you are likely to divert from concentration and think about worldly matters even for a moment. It will take time to learn this. Meanwhile, you tend to be idle and think about various trivial things even if you are engaged in the meditation on the surface. This is also a waste of time. By twisting your body unconditionally, you can give up any worldly thought, keep yourself from feeling asleep, and put your body in a good flow.

(6) Keep doing the above. Just concentrate on your present breathing. Concentration should be complete enough to forget yourself. You will soon get rid of scattered speculation and worldly thoughts. Then, there will be no major reason to twist your body, but you had better keep doing this unconditionally, since it is most effective in preventing idleness and concentrating on just one thing to twist your body. Basically speaking, you can overcome the egoistic habit through concentration.

(7) then, you will feel monotonous before long and grasp what you are doing. You can simply walk and simply have a meal. You can see things as you see, without any conceptualization. You can hear as you hear. You can distinguish sensitive stimulation such as seeing, hearing, learning, and perceiving, from the world of idea, which is the function of the mind. Then, you will reach a state of mind without any concept, without any conscious thinking. A unitary world of peace and equality will appear before you. The more concentrated you are on the present moment, the more peaceful, comfortable and confident you feel. But this is not yet the world of emancipation, namely nirvana.

(8) Once you have reached here, all you have to do is continue to the last. The genuine discipline is concerned simply with the present moment, the instant, and the destiny. You already have nothing to think about. You can move, but there is no change. Anything to be thought of will disappear. Nothing is there. There is not even the discipline itself. Only emptiness (sunyata) remains. Still, you do not understand what the emptiness really is and how you will be emancipated. You are still halfway to the great emancipation.

(9) There will be a time when you will be mature enough to enter no-ego (muga in Japanese). Then you will be awakened by the destiny from the outside to learn that your state of mind has been emptiness. Non-ego itself teaches us the world of non-ego. This is the experience of emptiness. This is nirvana. This is the genuine "now" devoid of any connection with the past and, therefore, with your persistence. Just because now is "now," everything slips out of it. This is Buddha's world. He said, "Both sentient and nonsentient beings can concurrently attain Buddhahood. Even mountains, rivers, grass and trees can all enter nirvana." Unless this great awareness comes to you, you are not emancipated. The great awareness of the great reality is the evidence and power of emancipation.

(10) Then, you are entering into a post-emancipation stage. The fact you are emancipated then turns into a great confidence and power, which in turn will get in your way. This is not an ignorance (maya) at all, but you are short of the genuine non-ego since you still have a belief that you are absolutely right. The continuing non-ego means the realization of "All is vanity and emptiness is everything." There is no truth, and every truth in the great truth of the universe. You can understand that there can be a truth of ignorance, but you will really understand even the truth of errors only when you have broken the framework and entered into the genuine great emancipation. The truth is in genuine emptiness. Here, you will reach the same stage with the great founder of Buddhism, Gautama, who realized that "Holy am I alone throughout heaven and earth." Then you will be engaged in the enlightenment and salvation of the world.

### **Koan (Catechetic Question for Meditation)**

There are two great sects in Zen Buddhism, Soto and Rinzai. The Soto school preaches actional discipline and meditation, while the Rinzai school emphasizes the use of a catechetic question for meditation as an approach to the enlightenment. In the Soto approach, the principle is quite simple: teaching by action, learning by action. You must simply act without any theory. You must devote yourself wholly to meditation, and to breathing. Breathing itself realizes your self, and every conceptualization will slip out of you. If you really concentrate on it, you will be emancipated from the origin of your ego.

Devotion to action means that you should simply give yourself, say, to walking, or eating. You should be devoted simply to cleaning when you clean. This is transcendence. There is no ego. Simple devotion will deprive you of your ego. This is the realization on earth of nirvana.

The Rinzai verbal approach is to use theory against theory, to deal with your mind full of worldly affairs. Even in meditation, they try to stick to the idea of "mu (emptiness)" instead of putting meditation itself in the center. They concentrate their whole consciousness on the term "mu" without leaving any room for scattered speculation, thus bringing their mind under gradually increasing unity and control.

Another approach is to stick to a doubt. Asked why the fire is cold - which is a question



impossible to answer through usual knowledge - you will be caught by a deep question "Why?" You will always be asking "Why?" awake or asleep, and your whole mind is occupied with Why?" Thus, you will be so concentrated that you forget your yourself and deprive yourself of your ego.

In both cases, concentration is the essential. Devotion to meditation, devotion to breathing and devotion to the notion of "emptiness" are all instruments aimed at forgetting yourself. The danger of the Rinzai approach lies in the possibility that you will be trapped into an illusory contentment that you have already grasped the truth by using theory. Everything in catechism, including emptiness, is apt to be taught through theory and you are requested to act as if you had grasped the truth. Then, the approach will prevent, not encourage, you from making progress in your discipline.

The catechetical approach is a good way to concentrate your mind and prevent yourself from thinking about various worldly things. It does not follow, however, that the catechetical question is excellent in itself. Simple devotion to breathing is no less excellent. It is the concentration that matters. The method currently used in teaching catechetical questions is decisively inappropriate in that it tends to stimulate conceptualization and intellectual understanding. You can not reach simple devotion, which leads you to transcendence of ego. There will be a decisive difference between our approach - simply devote yourself to breathing-and the current catechetical approach which tries to give one idealistic intellectual stimulation after another.

What is important is to concentrate on just one thing. If you concentrate, both ways will work. Universally speaking, the most important thing is to concentrate, devote yourself on whatever you should do.

Concentration on breathing is the same as concentration on the character "mu (emptiness)" in that they are both a method of concentration when you sit still. If you are moving, it is no less unnatural to concentrate on breathing than on the character "mu" while you are working. If you did this, you would fail in your work, or fall in danger. Therefore, you should concentrate on the work you are doing.

The time will come when you will naturally concentrate on, and identify yourself with, what you are doing. The time will surely come unless you are negligent. And when the time comes, you will enter into a state of no-ego and great ecstasy.

To have a true will is indeed valuable. More valuable, however, is a sustained effort to maintain the will. In concluding my speech, let me pray that you will transcend yourself and enlighten and relieve every corner of the world.

Please allow me to read my poem at the end of my speech.

There will be no such time again as now  
Time comes and flies like an arrow  
Plum blossoms give out fragrance after bitterly coldness  
I am simply getting old without any achievement  
Don't you wonder  
who is this life for?  
There used to be green bamboos in front of the window  
Now I can see only empty space

Thank you very much.

- August 30, 1994, Kido Inoue-