

Lecture 15: A Direct Pointing to the Mind (Of Man) - Edited Version

Today we are dealing with the third line of our verse, 'Direct pointing to the mind,' and hoping to find there an answer to the question with which we concluded last week's talk - the question of what, according to Zen, we are to depend on, if there is to be no dependence on words and letters. Like the two previous lines of the verse, the line with which we are now concerned appears, at first sight, to consist of a quite simple and straightforward statement, something that everybody can understand. But this is not so. Before its meaning can become clear to us there is, in fact, a certain amount of obscurity to be resolved. This obscurity is not due to any vagueness on the part of the unknown composer of the verse, much less still on the part of Zen itself, but is simply the result of a characteristically Chinese attempt to pack the maximum amount of meaning into the minimum number of words. The meaning of the line can be clarified by a consideration of three questions, all of which are interconnected.

What is meant by 'mind'? Why does Zen insist on pointing to the mind rather than to anything else? What is the significance of direct pointing?

First of all, the meaning of the word 'mind'. In the original Chinese, this is *hsin*. When I was in Kalimpong the hermit friend about whom I told you in the first talk once gave me a detailed explanation of the nine principal meanings of the word in Chinese literature, including Buddhist literature. Fortunately, in the present context, we do not need to concern ourselves with all of these. Broadly speaking *hsin* corresponds to the Indian (Pali and Sanskrit) word *chitta*, which it usually translates. *Chitta* is mind in the widest and most general sense of the term, emotional and conative, as well as intellectual and rational. Some scholars, however, prefer to render *chitta* or *hsin* by 'heart', others by 'soul'. Suzuki, for instance, in some of his early works, such as his *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* and his translation of Ashvaghosha's *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* regularly translates *chitta* as 'soul'. Both renderings are apt to be misleading. In this context *chitta* or *hsin* is not heart as opposed to brain, in the sense of intellect, but rather the totality of mental life and activity which includes them both. It is more like the psyche in the Jungian sense of the term. Similarly *chitta* or *hsin* is not 'soul', because this term has, in English, connotations which are quite foreign to Buddhism. Today we are therefore sticking to 'mind' as the best working equivalent of both the Chinese and the Indian term. In any case, at this stage of our enquiry it is unnecessary for us to pay much attention to subtle differences of psychological terminology, and the general English term 'mind' will serve our purpose quite well.

Having warned us not to depend upon words and letters, that is to say on second-hand knowledge of Reality, Zen tells us, as it were, to depend on the mind. This answers the question with which we were left at the end of last week. Zen declares, in effect, depend on your own mind. That is to say, depend on yourself, for psychologically speaking the mind is the self. Don't look without, don't allow your attention to be distracted by the multiplicity of external phenomena. Look within. This idea is of course not peculiar to Zen. It runs through the whole of Buddhism. In the *Dhammapada*, for instance, the Buddha declares that self-conquest is the greatest of all victories, that the self is its own refuge, its own master, and that purity and impurity depend upon one's own self. Here attention is clearly directed to the subject of experience rather than to its objective content - to the feeling, knowing, willing mind rather than to the external universe. Similar in spirit are the maxim inscribed in the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, 'Know thyself,' and the Tao Teh Ching's saying, 'He who knows others is wise; he who knows himself is enlightened.' In pointing to the mind, and suggesting that we depend on that rather than on anything else, Zen gives the well-known idea its own special emphasis.

This emphasis is by no means superfluous. Indeed it is necessary at all times. People who have reached a certain level of maturity, or who enjoy a certain amount of leisure, tend to become bored and dissatisfied. They become bored and dissatisfied with their jobs, with their wives and families, with books and theatres, with radio and television, with work and with play, with the society to which they belong and the age into which they have been born, with laughter and with tears, with poetry, music, and art, with the face of nature and the form of man. Eventually they become bored and dissatisfied with themselves. In this state of boredom and dissatisfaction, of weariness and disgust, even, they start vaguely searching for something - they know not what. Giving it a name, they call it Truth, Reality. Others speak of it in terms of peace, happiness, ultimate satisfaction. Yet others make use of a specifically religious terminology. They speak in terms of God, salvation, Enlightenment, and so on. They even speak in terms of Zen. But however different the ways in which they speak of that for which they are searching, they all agree in searching for it outside themselves. Sometimes, of course, they find what they are looking for and establish a relation of dependence on it. They then think that they have succeeded in their quest, that boredom and

dissatisfaction have been dispelled. But in reality they have failed. All that has happened is that they have fallen victim to a projection.

As a psychological phenomenon projection is quite familiar to us. In order to avoid having to recognize, and possibly come to terms with, something in ourselves, we unconsciously attribute it to other people. This repressed and projected factor is usually something that we experience as unpleasant or bad, something of which we are ashamed or afraid. We may be, for example, cold, hard, and selfish, completely lacking in warmth and affection. So we criticize other people for being like this. We complain, sometimes with bitterness, that our friends and relations are unkind and unsympathetic, that they trample upon our feelings, that they do not love us. We may even attribute feelings of coldness and hostility to the universe as a whole. All that we are really doing is projecting on to other people, or on to the outside world, our own personal defects. This sort of psychological projection goes on the whole time. Though extreme cases are rare, an element of projection enters into almost all our negative assessments of other people. If we are watchful we can often catch ourselves out. Just as another experiment, in the course of the coming week try to discover what it is you most dislike in others, what you most often criticize and condemn them for. A little elementary self-analysis may reveal that those very qualities are hidden in the depths of your own mind and that in criticizing others in this way you are, in fact, unconsciously criticizing yourself.

Not only bad qualities but good ones too can be projected. These are not things of which we are ashamed or afraid, but capacities existing at a very deep level which we have so far been unable to develop. Sometimes we may be unaware of the possibility of developing them. We project, for example, the quality of love. Feeling the need for love, but being unable to develop it within ourselves, we try to find it outside and receive it from there. In other words we project. Good though a quality may be in itself, the projecting of it, however, is bad inasmuch as this projection stands in the way of full self-integration. In the case of love we cannot, in fact, truly receive it until we are able to give it, and we cannot give love until it has been developed.

It is possible to go even further than this. Projection is not only psychological but spiritual. All men are capable of developing their vague glimmerings of understanding and their intermittent impulses of kindness into the supreme wisdom and infinite compassion of perfect Buddhahood. All are capable of gaining Enlightenment. But we do not do this. Instead, we project our own potential Enlightenment as it were outside ourselves, on to another person, on to the figure of the Buddha for instance, and then proceed to establish a relationship with it, that is to say, to worship the Buddha, or at least to venerate him as the supremely wise and infinitely compassionate teacher. This does not mean that the Buddha was not Enlightened, or that the Buddha-ideal of our religious imagination is nothing but a projection, even a spiritual projection. It means that in the last resort we have to satisfy our need for Enlightenment by developing it within ourselves rather than by becoming parasitic on the Buddha's Enlightenment. Not that spiritual projection has no place at all in the religious life, or that faith and worship are all wrong. Spiritual projection represents a very important stage, and as such it has its legitimate place in the total scheme of spiritual development. But ultimately it is a hindrance.

Zen, which adopts the absolute standpoint, therefore points to the mind. It calls for a complete withdrawal of all projections, positive and negative, psychological and spiritual. It says, 'Depend on the mind, depend on yourself.' Within this context Enlightenment could be defined as the complete absence of projection.

So far we have considered Zen's pointing to the mind in a very general way. The time has come to be more specific. Zen points to the mind - but to which mind? Mind exists on many different levels, many different planes; it has various aspects, various functions. For instance there are the perceiving mind, the thinking and considering mind, and Absolute Mind. To which of these does Zen point? In a general way, of course, it points to them all, to mind as distinct from matter, as distinct from the external world. But specifically it points to Absolute Mind. It points to the Mind beyond the mind, to the Buddha-nature within, and tells us to rely upon that.

At this point our first question, 'What is meant by mind?' starts overlapping the second, 'Why does Zen insist on pointing to the mind rather than to anything else?' Mind is the point of contact with Reality. Absolute Mind is Reality. In pointing to the mind, therefore, Zen points to Reality, points to Enlightenment, which is the experience of Reality, points to the Buddha-nature. This is why it points to the mind in preference to anything else.

We can now see more clearly the nature of the connection between Zen and meditation. We can understand why Zen is the Meditation School. Contrary to what is sometimes thought, meditation is not just a matter of concentration exercises successfully performed. Meditation may be defined as the persistent and methodical attempt to see Reality within. Ordinarily our attention is directed outwards, towards the world.

When we take up the practice of meditation, however, we learn to withdraw our attention from external objects, to disengage the senses from their respective stimuli, and to centre attention within. This attitude of withdrawal finds expression in the posture normally adopted for meditation, when we sit with legs folded beneath us and hands resting, one above the other, on top of the crossed ankles. The eyes are closed, representing the exclusion not only of visual stimuli, but of all sense impressions whatsoever. With practice it becomes possible to keep the mind centred within for longer and longer periods. This eventually results in a permanent shifting of the centre of attention from the external world to the mind itself, so that even when we are engaged in external activities a degree of inner recollection and awareness persists.

The next step we have to take is to make the mind progressively purer, clearer, and more luminous. That is to say, having turned from the external world to the mind, we now have to turn from the lower mind to the higher mind. In the general tradition which Zen shares with all other forms of Buddhism, this progress is represented by the four rupa-dhyanas, or states of meditative consciousness associated with the world of form, and the four arupa-dhyanas, or states of meditative consciousness associated with the formless world. These are usually regarded as together constituting one continuous series.

The first of the four states of meditative consciousness associated with the world of form consists of the five psychic factors of thought, both initial and sustained, rapture, bliss, and one-pointedness. In the second of these states thought is eliminated, and in the third, rapture. In the fourth, bliss is replaced by equanimity. One-pointedness is the only psychic factor which remains constant throughout. Indeed, it grows in intensity as the other factors are eliminated and it absorbs the energy invested in them.

The four states of meditative consciousness associated with the formless world are known as the Sphere of Infinite Space, the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness, the Sphere of No-thingness, and the Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-perception. These names tell us very little about the real nature of these states, which represent still higher and more refined experiences of one-pointedness and unification.

Even when the ascent has been made from the lower to the higher mind, and the eight states of meditative consciousness have all been experienced in their fullness, the limits of meditation have not been reached. The eight states are relative or mundane in character. They are not absolute, not transcendental. Reality has not yet been seen. Having turned from the lower to the higher mind we must finally turn, therefore, from relative mind to Absolute Mind. As relative mind and Absolute Mind are, from the standpoint of the relative mind, absolutely discontinuous, this transition can be brought about only by means of a kind of existential leap from the one to the other. There is no longer any question of a path with clearly marked steps and stages. The path that we have so far followed ends at the brink of an abyss, and from here we have no alternative but to take a leap in the dark. Taking the leap, we find ourselves in the midst of the Void. Darkness changes to light. Suddenly and mysteriously, relative mind is replaced by Absolute Mind. This Absolute Mind is not subject as opposed to object, nor can it be itself the object of thought. Rather, it is that pure, brilliant, and transparent awareness within which the distinction of subject and object does not exist. The goal of meditation has now been reached. Reality has been 'seen'. In pointing to the mind, Zen has pointed to Reality, to Enlightenment, to Buddhahood.

Having understood what is meant by mind, and why Zen insists on pointing to the mind rather than to anything else, we come now to our third and last question: What is the significance of direct pointing? This is not very difficult to see. Direct pointing means referring everything back to the mind itself - referring it, in the first place, to the thinking and perceiving mind rather than to the object of its thought and perception. It means throwing the disciple back again and again on his own personal problems and his own individual resources. It means refusing to go from Hampstead to Highgate via the whole universe. The latter is, of course, just the sort of detour that people love to make. Despite protestations to the contrary, they do not really want to get to Highgate at all. They do not want to face up to the challenge of existence. They want to avoid it.

There are many ways in which this can be done. One of the most popular ways, especially in Western Buddhist circles, is by asking questions. Now you may have been thinking that people ask questions in order to dispel their doubts and clear up mental confusion and arrive at the truth, and admittedly this does sometimes happen. But most of the time people ask questions in order not to receive an answer. A real live answer is the last thing they want. Even if they got it they would not know what to do with it. Probably they would feel like a small boy playing at hunting lions and tigers in the garden who was confronted by a real live lion or tiger escaped from the zoo. So they go on asking questions. What is the nature of nirvana? How can the law of Karma operate when there is no permanent self? What is the evidence for rebirth? How shall we know that we have gained Enlightenment? Where does ignorance come from? Can one really desire not to desire? How is it possible to be fully aware, when awareness means being aware that you are aware, and so on ad infinitum? Has a dog Buddha-nature? Why did Bodhidharma come from

the West? To questions of this kind Zen gives no answer, at least it does not answer them on their own terms or from their own point of view. Generally, it prefers to put a counter-question, saying, in effect, 'Why do you ask the question?' Or, more challengingly, 'Who is it that asks?' In this way the exchange is at once placed on an entirely different basis. From being abstract and theoretical it becomes concrete and existential. The questioner is forced to realize, however dimly, that far from being motivated by a disinterested 'scientific' desire for the truth he is influenced by factors of which he is largely unconscious and that what he is really trying to do is to escape from the truth.

Most people, of course, resist this realization. Their own motives are the last thing they are prepared to scrutinize. But Zen does not let them get away with it so easily. By one means or another, with the help of slaps and shouts if words fail, it drags them back from philosophy and religion and psychology, even from Zen, and compels them to look where perhaps they never thought of looking before - at their own mind.

This is just what each one of you should do. Otherwise this talk will have been wasted. What I have said should be taken, however, as being itself a direct pointing to the mind. Take it as a talk about direct pointing to the mind, and you will miss the whole point.