

4. talk – Dathus – Vijnanas

Good morning and welcome to my fourth talk.

Today we start to deepen this thing we call perception and how our consciousness arises. Last time I talked about energies and now I try to talk about how these energies become a mental formation.

How is our perception, our being or becoming coming together? What does it mean when Dogen Zenji says in Genjokoan: “To Study the Buddha Way is to study the self”

We have to find out how this self is created. To get closer to this we have to observe and investigate how our perception works, how the phenomenal world is coming together to form this thing that we call consciousness or our being or becoming.

How can we get an anchor in this world that is not based on our ideas, on what we think of this world? Manshujri, monju is often, especially in Tibetan Buddhism, shown with a sword in his hands and this sword is there to cut the deluded ideas of this world off and to see the real truth and reality like it is.

There is this stream we call our being – most time of my life I thought this is me – until I started to practice – cutting this stream into pieces, again and again, cutting it into thinner and thinner slices. In a movie, in every second, a minimum of 25 pictures is shown so that we can see it as a stream. Likewise, we need to cut our consciousness in thinner and thinner slices, to see how our being is created in us –moment by moment.

That’s why Manshujri is sitting in the zendo.

Everything we perceive is a dharma. The word dharma has four different meanings, one is the law and literally translated this means “this that lasts” . When we open the bottom of the bucket and fall out of our identifications, when we lose what we call our world, then the dharma is this that gives us hold, that lasts,

In another meaning, dharma is also a kind of unit for what we can experience in a moment – this is not a specific time, it depends on the experience.

In German, “perception” is called "Wahrnehmung", which means: "to take what is true". The word "wahr" has its root, like the English word "truth", in the Indoeuropean “uer”, which means "trustworthy", "faithful".

The English word "perception" has a slightly different meaning, it comes from the Latin word "percipere". "Per" means "thoroughly", "exactly", "carefully" or "completely", and "capere" means "to take", "to take something". So the meaning is more “to take something exactly”

“to take the truth” – is the German meaning of perception – what is holding us, that which lasts?

How can we perceive the truth – perceive without our ideas of something – how can we experience the phenomenal world empty of our ideas of this world?

One of my favorite songs when I was young was “Burning down the house” by Talking heads in 1983, and in a way this is what we do in our practice – the word Zen, like I said already, goes back to the Sanskrit term “Dhyana” and this is in Pali “Jhana” often associated with “glow and burn”.

In the Adittapariyaya Sutra “the Fire Sutra” is said:

“Monks, everything is aflame. What is aflame? The eye is aflame. Forms are aflame. Visual consciousness is aflame. Visual contact is aflame. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on visual contact, experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither-pleasure-nor-pain that too is aflame. Aflame with what? Aflame with the fire of passion, the fire of aversion, the fire of delusion. Aflame, I say, with birth, ageing, death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, griefs, despairs.

'The ear is aflame. Sounds are aflame

'The nose is aflame. Odors are aflame

'The tongue is aflame. Flavors are aflame

'The body is aflame. Tactile sensations are aflame

'The intellect is aflame. Ideas are aflame. Mental consciousness is aflame. Mental contact is aflame. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on mental contact, experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither-pleasure-nor-pain that too is aflame. Aflame with what? Aflame with the fire of passion, the fire of aversion, the fire of delusion. Aflame, I say, with birth, ageing, death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, griefs & despairs.”

When we observe our perception, how does our world go up in flames, how does our individual self set our world on fire?

We have to go back to the source, back to emptiness in the meaning of empty from our individual self, we have to find out, how to go from 1 to 0, back to the edge when or where the spark jumps over, before the fire ignites.

Back thru all our ideas coming out of our karmic circumstances to the source of our perception, back in this specific moment and this starts with a sensation in our body.

Merlot Ponty, the French phenomenal philosopher, which I have already brought in last time, he was strongly influenced by Edmund Husserl the founder of the phenomenological philosophy and Martin Heidegger, he said in : “The Eye and the Mind”

„A human body exists when there is a kind of crossing between who is seeing and what is seen, between who is touching and what is touched, between one eye and the other, between one hand and the other, when the spark of the sensing-sensed is lit, when that fire spreads which will burn unceasingly“

In the 5th century after Christ in India two brothers influenced Mahayan Buddhism deeply, Asanga and Vasubandhu. They came from Hinayana Buddhism but got unsatisfied of the teachings and started to analyse their minds themselves and gave Mahayana Buddhism such a great work.

Asanga wrote 180 Volumes in 18 parts in Chinese translation and part of this is the Yogacarabhumi-sastra, the Analysis and the systemic contemplation of Non self – non Ego – non me. Some other scriptures are also very important, but I will only focus on a few here.

Vasubandhu his brother wrote the Abhidharma kosa sastra and there he analyzed the doctrine of being, very accurately and later he wrote the Vijnaptimatrasiddhi-sastra – translated: Outline of the pure phenomenology of consciousness.

Both brothers had students and they wrote the “10 commentaries of the pure phenomenology” and here, their student Darmapala becomes important, with his text T’scheng-wei-shi-lun in which he explains the interpretation of the systematization of Vasubandhu’s “Outline of the pure phenomenology of consciousness.”

Vasubandhu describes in the 30 verses "The Thirty Verses on Consciousness Only" and in the commentaries, his students very clearly explain how consciousness arises.

In my explanations, I would like to refer to my practical experience and the texts and experiences that have helped me very much.

The Yogacara School takes its name from the fact that in the communities from which it emerged, the practice of yoga played a special role. In this context, yoga is generally understood as the entire aspiration, practice and activity of all the virtues required of a future Buddha, a Bodhisattva. The description of the path that a bodhisattva has passed through has naturally always been the focus of interest in all Mahayana schools.

I would say I’m a beginner in Yogacara studies and Yogacara is a huge thing. And last year I found this amazing book, published in 1932 by T. Yura a Japanese Buddhist scholar who studied philosophy in Heidelberg Germany around the 30^{ties} of the last century. He was a student of William Stern, a very important psychologist and philosopher at this time, for example he was father in law of Hanna Arendt and he developed the first form of the IQ test. I tried to find more from T. Yura, but I’m sorry I cannot find more about him.

Yogacara is called the “only mind teaching” or “Interpretation about only theory of consciousness” and it is a complex classification how our consciousness arises. And it’s made of five orders and 100 classes and diving into it is really a huge thing but I will try it from my point of view.

Another student of Vasubandhu was Dignana, very well known today as a logician and very early in my practice, a quote by him got very important:

“All mental components have physical phenomena and all physical phenomena have a mental component.”

Like I said last week I had a lot of pain in the most impossible places in my body and to get this connection between body and mind, to recognize that the world arises in me not outside of me, get clear to me with this quote.

Paul Valery a French philosopher and poet said: "The ship mind floats and sways on the ocean of the body"

How do these bodily sensations come into our mind, how can we cut our stream of being to get to the ground where the spark ignites?

The Lankavatara sutra, the platform sutra and the Surangama Sutra tell us a lot about how our mind creates this thing that we call the world, our being and becoming.

In the platform sutra Huineng the sixth patriarch wrote the verse on the wall:

"Basically there is no bodhi tree, nor is there mirror and stand
There is not a single thing
where does dust cling"

The translation is from my German book, a translation from Chinese and Japanese sources to German by Ursula Jarand, she is a Rinzai nun living and practicing now in California

Before I go further, I want to tell you how difficult these talks are for me. All my studies I have made in German, with German translations of the old sutras and books. When I started to practice, my English was not really existing and sure with time it is getting better and better, but my studies are most time in German language.

And so I tried to get the right translations in English when I prepared the talks, but for example, to find a version of the Lotus sutra online takes hours, because first I tried to get it for free, but I found only a version that didn't fit to my German translation, so I searched on Amazon and I found one from Cleary, perfect I bought it and: there are only 24 chapters, the 25th is missing ah

And you know how important the 25th chapter is.

So I translated it from my German version.

This is an example, with the platform sutra it was better, but I studied with my German version and the translations does not fit and so I took it out of my German Book and translated it.

And here this one sentence in the German translation is very important: "There is no single thing, where does dust cling", because when we see the true reality of our self, there is no single thing we cling on from our inside!

"It is now me, but I am not it." Says Dongshun in his enlightenment poem.

But when we want to slice our perception into pieces, let's go back to the early Buddhist concept out of the Pali Canon, the Abhidharma Pitaka. There, we find the roots of the Vijñanas out of the Yogachara concept, I will talk about later: The 18 compositional elements or sense areas called Dhatu in Sanskrit, I will do it from the perspective of the 6. Patriarch Huineng.

The 18 Dhatus are:

The 12 ayatanas in Sanskrit inputs or entrances, and the six consciousness fields, or sensefields

The 12 ayatanas are:

six outside, the objects of the sense organ and are also called the six kinds of dust:

the form – the tone – the smell – the taste – the body sensations and – the mindobjects.

Six are inside means the six sense organs and are also called the six gates:

Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind

And together with the six consciousness fields, or sensefields,

the eye or seeing consciousness, the ear or hearing consciousness, the nose or smelling consciousness, the tongue or tasting consciousness, the body or touching consciousness and the mind or thinking consciousness

Together we got 18 very important dharmagates, the 18 Dhatus

Huineng says: "When you see everything without the mind being held, its action penetrating every place without stopping anywhere, then in the midst of the 6 kinds of dust there is neither defilement nor disorder"

The six kinds of dust, or the six objects of our sense organs and how we respond to them are the base for these defilements and are igniting the flame and the fire begins to burn – and the mind poisons begin to work and the sources of these energies are called Klesas - I will talk more about them later

Merlot Ponty says: "The self is a connection between the one who sees and what he sees, it gets between things, it is the body that gets between things."

This space between includes this space that opens up when we get in trouble and our mental horses start to gallop, this is when the klesas start to run.

This is the space between our first sensation and consciousness, this is how the five Skandhas get filled.

Let's observe how we can get closer to this space inbetween

In Yogacara there are eight forms of consciousness, the first five are consciousnesses of the sense organs and the sixth is the mind, the seventh is what we call our Ego and the eighth is the Alaya consciousness.

They are called Vijnanas.

In Buddhist psychology the term also refers to becoming conscious! in Buddhism Vijnana is more of a verb than a noun. It refers to the nature and extent of becoming aware of the phenomena manifested in the six streams of experience.

Vijnana is exclusively the consciousness of the unenlightened being – broken or loaded consciousness it is often called - the syllable “Vi” means also “to separate” - it is in principal a dualistic consciousness.

Please be patient, you will see a whole picture after my sixth talk.

All of the first five consciousnesses need bodily organs and each has his own circumstands in this particular moment, no past, no future – there is no possibility to think - no ability to refer to the past or the future. That’s why it is so important to concentrate on the source of our perception, where the sensation and the space around it is.

Normally we function in feedback loops, to save time, I think, so we can react faster this is important when we get in danger, in earlier days this was important when in the Savanna the Saber Tooth Tiger arises!

But nowadays this is not so helpful – we don’t realize the specific moment – we only have an idea of this moment – it’s not real – it is not the specific sensation we have in this moment. And this creates in a lot of times fear, we are afraid of something that is not real.

And in Sanskrit for example “eye consciousness” it is more of a verb it is emphasizing the process, it is more called “by eyes “ or “thru ears”

Anyway, we will now go through vijnana by vijnana and start right at the eyes vijnana, the eye consciousness, that is located, like all the other organ based consciousnesses direct on the organ.

The process of seeing shapes the becoming of our consciousness the most and this is because we look ahead, in front of us, and see the dangers and can thus protect ourselves. At the beginning of mankind when we still lived in the savannah, this was an enormous advantage, and also today, for example to don’t fall down the stairs.

But seeing is not seeing! It is a process we create:

For example: What makes the red square a red square - we see something and construct our world from it - we have a sense sensation - and with the eye this is best demonstrated - because this sensation is really constructed – first, the light hits our retina and then, it becomes an image that we perceive. It is an extremely complex constructed process –

When the light hits the red square – it radiates back a certain wavelength - then hits the retina,

is sent via the optic nerve to the visual center, then assembled there as an image - and this wavelength is perceived and then we put the the label “red” on it and square.

The painter Paul Cezanne, a contemporary of Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenological philosophy always had great doubts about his vocation, a critic said even in 1905: “It was the painting of a cesspool emptier” this is somebody who empties the latrine, and Cezanne wondered whether the newness in his painting is just the result of a visual disorder!

That means, his view of things was really different - as well as in this time around the turn of the 19th century, many other examples existed with a different view, for example - Pablo Picasso and so on

Later when Cezanne was more stable he said: “The nature is inside”

In the Surangama Sutra, it is said: “We must take care to distinguish between the perception of our eyes and the profound visual perception of our enlightened mind, which is aware of the delusive perception of our eyes.”

It is again the space in-between, how are the things related? I studied architecture and worked in architectural offices. When an architect builds a house, he starts with finding out which needs his customers have, what is needed and then he goes to the building site and sees how he can realize these needs, where is the light coming from, where are the neighbors and then slowly a building starts to build up inside him. It is a creative process of becoming – all conditions are coming together and manifesting into something absolutely new.

In the ideal case it is like this when you want to build a house, the reality is different, normally you take a standard model off the shelf.

When we look closely at the process of seeing we learn how the things are related together, what is in the foreground, what is in the background, we create our three-dimensional world and can get a feeling for this space in between,

When my wife is doing Ikebana, she goes ideally to the garden and looks what is blooming and then she starts to cut and at the same time the arrangement starts to mature in her, how she will later arrange the flowers and branches. Sure, she knows now a lot of rules, and Ikebana has many really crazy rules. The rules are helpful in this process, sometimes, they give us a framework, like our rules in the zendo. These frameworks help us to understand how things are related.

You can see it in the zendo or hato, the altar is a very good example for this. In the middle of the hato, on the highest level is the Buddha, and around this line we arrange everything, also our self. And how we stand when and in which direction we face is also an important thing for our relationship between all people in the room and the Buddha, how we create this space in every single moment is important, especially when we do ceremonies.

When I´m in prisons what happens mostly is that I have to wait, to wait for someone to open the door, because in a prison every door must be closed before somebody new can come in,

there is one action after another, like in Zen. It's to control the scene. So, then you wait for the security check and afterwards you wait for a security person who brings you to the room. Most of the time the room is still occupied, so you wait and when the room is free you have to wait until the inmate is paraded. So, it is a real good practice for learning patience.

And you have a lot of time to practice and one of the practices I often do in these moments I learned from Joko Beck, she calls it "deep looking", to learn how the things are related to each other.

For example, when you sit in a room, looking at the wall to see really each millimeter, each wall crack, each defect in the painting and so on.

This can also be funny: one time I sat in a small room, waiting for the inmate, only two chairs and a table, nothing more and I had to wait and I watched deeply the wall in front of me and I followed each thing I saw and there was a cable coming out of the ceiling and it was very carefully attached to the wall every few centimeters with small clamps, and my view follows this cable, the whole wall down to the ground and on the ground there was a box with a pedal, like for sewing machines and in this moment an impulse came up and I pushed the pedal and: the alarm started – unbelievable loud and all securities outside crashed into my room, and when they saw me, luckily they laughed and said: Oh please not again.

only watching – not thinking

Now we come to the second Vijnana, The ear – the hearing and the ear consciousness, from my point of view the most underrated organ.

Hongzhi said: Immaculate and dazzling, [the field's] limits cannot be seen with the eyes' strength. Serene and expansive, its directions and corners cannot be found with the mind's conditioning.

And at the end of this chapter:

From this field our life arises; from this field it is fulfilled. This matter includes everybody. Just go forward for me and try to see. People who know its truth nod their heads with comprehension.

In my development of practice "field consciousness" is a word that is very important, it's an awareness that tries to be more complete in this world, to become more of a feeling person than a thinking person – like my alarm story shows it is not always the best way – but when I inhale I inhale more than only oxygen and the few other elements in the air, there is something more, I talked last time a bit more about this.

Dogen Zenji said: Eyes hear and ears see

and

Kongzi, better known as Confucius was once asked, "What is the solitude of the mind?" he replied, "Listen with the mind and not with the ears, listen with the energy and not with the mind. Hearing has its limitation in the ears, the mind has its limitation in contact with external things, but the energy is what is empty. The path gathers in emptiness, this emptiness is the abstinence of the mind."

Our normal way of hearing is with the ears, of course, but he says: don't hear with the ears, hear with the mind, don't hear with mind hear with the energy.

"In the Suramgama Surtra, Manjusri speaks of transcendental intuitive hearing, it is for awakening and developing a transcendental hearing ability that is of great importance for every novice.

He goes on to speak of the transcendental sound of Avalokithesvara, which is the pure Brahma sound.

This transcendental sound is like the sound of the drums when it reaches our ear, no difference, and further he says : the nature of hearing is the true reality of passing through!

It is a kind of inner hearing that is talked about here. Hearing beyond hearing or hearing with the heart, this always means the heartmind – there is no separation between heart and mind. Avalokithesvara, the bodhisattva of unlimited compassion, hears the suffering of the world, the emphasis here is also on hearing, not on seeing, tasting, smelling or touching, but on hearing. Of course, this does not mean that the other sensations are not important, but it is also a neuroscientific finding that hearing occupies a much larger space in the brain than other sensations. Scientific Studies say 10 times more.

My prison chaplaincy work is a good place to experience this, for example the sound of keys that one hears during chaplaincy visits in prison. We hear them less and less due to digitalization in institutions, but they are still present in Austrian prisons. Some prison guards still look similar to jailers from the middle ages, with the many keys they carry around, some of them are enormous. Naturally, these keys make a rattling sound when they are carried around, inserted into the lock and turned. The doors, upon opening, creak and squeak, because they are usually made of metal and not always freshly oiled. Immediately after one has passed through, they are locked again. After just a few meters, one comes upon the next door, since there are many security sections in a prison, all of which have to be unlocked and locked again.

These sounds have an effect on us. During such a walk through the prison, we aren't alone, there is usually an inmate and a prison guard with us. Because of the short distances, we often need to stay in very small rooms, usually not even two square meters in size. And then, behind us, the door that was just opened is immediately locked again. The door in front of us, through which one must go on, is not yet open and the guard is looking for the right key on his key ring and does not find it right away. What's more, these passageways are usually very dark, often poorly lit, or altogether dark. Here one can feel what it means to be locked up. To observe one's rising fears in this situation, to recognize that these are all just stories that we are telling ourselves at this moment, is a great practice.

In his lecture on the essence of religion, the philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach devoted a long consideration to the sensory impressions in the formation of religious feeling!

"If man had only eyes and hands, taste and smell, he would have no religion, because all these senses are organs of criticism and skepticism. The only sense losing itself in the labyrinth of the ear into the mind or mind-space of the past and future, the only fearful, mystical and believing sense is the hearing."

There are peoples "among whom no other word exists for God than thunder"; the eardrum is the sounding board of religious feeling, the ear altogether the "bear-mother of the gods" and thus the "organ of fear". But the ear is not only the medial canal with which the gods spread fear and terror, people also used it with the same intention. They intimidated the enemy by shouting loudly or hitting their spears on the shields, which at the same time drove away their own fear.

Scientific research speaks of enormous sense spaces, where noises and sounds have a 10 times larger perception space than pictures. One can make this visible in the corresponding center in the brain.

There are clear findings that seeing and hearing are connected.

If we lose hearing, we also lose the context of life, the sense of balance – like with an acute hearing loss.

Hearing also has a spatial component - we can estimate distances approximately.

In blind people, the sense of hearing is particularly well-developed, blind people use the cane and echo to grasp the outlines of the world.

But it goes even further - Helen Keller, a famous deaf-mute writer from the US was able to recognize the different types of instruments, wind instruments, strings, etc., through the loudspeaker of the radio. through their vibrations.

Some animals hear vibrations through the lungs - frogs and other reptiles too.

Stephen W. Porges teaches here at the University in Bloomington, Jeff knows him very well, and he is the developer of the Polyvagal theory that's become very important in the treatment of trauma in the last decades. Maybe some of you know more and we can talk about it later.

Briefly said, the Polyvagal theory is an extension of the theory of the central nerve system, the Vagus nerve with the sympathetic nerve and the parasympathetic nerve, that regulate how much we activate in excitement. Porges discovered that there are more nerve branches that are important.

What I want to talk about now is the importance of the muscles around the Middle ear bone (Mittelohrknöchelchen) related to trauma, a "trauma can be defined as the emotional, psychological and physiological residue left over from heightened stress that accompanies experiences of threat, violence, and life-challenging events. " (Australian Children Foundation)

That means that the ear muscles are very important in the creation of our emotions.

In a listening experiment, Porges exposed patients to sound. He had filtered out certain background noise that usually stimulates certain muscles in the middle ear channel. By doing

this, he found out that he could reduce 60% of people's auditory hypersensitivity associated with an increase in spontaneous social behavior. Regulation of cardiac rhythm was also detected.

Avalokithesvara hears the suffering of the world – and in the heartsutra we chant at the beginning: “when deeply practicing prajna paramita, clearly saw that all five aggregates are empty and thus relieved all suffering. “

This means for me if we can disengage the sensation from our emotions in our auditory or ear consciousness, we may be able to hear beyond our hearing with our ears or mind.

My first direct teacher Ryuten Rosenblum was very influenced by Katagiri Roshi, at the beginning of Tasajara he spent a few years with him, I heard a lot of stories, one was very influential for me: During a Sesshin, we ate Oryoki in the zendo and Ryuten hit his bowls and shouted: “The world of things” Katagiri Roshi did this in a Sesshin too.

“Hidden in a mountain of form” it is said in the Koan 92 of the Shoyoroku, the Book of serenity.

In the zendo we don't look around, our gaze is always down on the ground and so we train our hearing. Like I said before, our consciousness is shaped the most through our seeing but training our hearing will change how we become aware, how we enter the world.

In our modern world artificial sound is all around, everywhere there is music and artificial noise, in the grocery store, in the elevator, in the waiting rooms everywhere we have sound, also when we drive in the car, or when we go running, everywhere headphones now. Stop this and hear the world as it is and listening to the music of dharma – this is surrounding us the whole time.

But also in my pastoral work listening is of great importance, actually I would like to say it is the most important tool we have.

There was a young man in prison whom I mentored for a few years. When I met him, he was just short over 20 years old. He was serving time for a very serious violent offence, but after his crime he found the Buddhist teachings and practiced very diligently. I cared for him for many years while he was in prison, and when he was released, I did not abandon him, of course. We met regularly. At one of these meetings, we were sitting in a coffee house and once more, he tried to tell me about everything that was bad in his life, again and again, justifying himself and talking, talking, talking. Over and over again, he lamented his suffering to me. I tried to concentrate and to really just listen, but the whole time, all that came up in my mind was advice on how he could immediately improve the situation. As time went on, I became more and more impatient and inwardly resentful because, after all, it seemed like he had possibly understood very little over the years and that perhaps I had wasted my time on him. All this popped up in my mind at the same time, thoughts overlapped one another. But I concentrated on listening, said nothing, just nodded my head in understanding sometimes or said a few loving words. Inwardly, I kept telling myself: "I'm just listening, I'm staying patient, I'm just receiving." But

most of all, the phrase "Not knowing is nearest" helped me stay in the moment. That was the antidote that kept me focused and able to follow his narratives. And so, for a very long time, I said nothing, but simply listened.

After what felt like an eternity, he suddenly stopped talking in mid-sentence and there was complete silence. We looked into each other's eyes for a long time. Suddenly he began to grin and said: "Oh, that's what you meant, now I understand." Though I had not said a single word!

Only listening – not knowing is nearest

Thank you!

If you want to learn more about Ponty, Husserl and Heidegger, I recommend the book: "At The Existentialist *Café*: Freedom, Being, and Apricot Cocktails by Sarah Bakewell."