

5. talk perception 2 – more vijnanas, skandhas

Good morning again, thanks that you are all here again today for my fifth talk.
last talk I spoke about the six kinds of dust and I want to start with a poem by Dogen Zenji:

“The way the patriarch’s coming
From the West,
I transmit to the east.
Yearning for the ancient ways
Catching the moon,
Cultivating the clouds,
Untouched by the worldly dust
Fluttering about
A thatched hut
Snowy evening, deep mountains”

This is the poem Sankyō-no-ge (Verse of the Life in the Mountains)

“Yearning for the ancient ways
Catching the moon,
Cultivating the clouds,
Untouched by the worldly dust”

And this is what we practice, to get untouched by the worldly dust and especially here in the ango, the residential practice, is a place where you can see this worldly dust very clear, the whole schedule is made for this, that’s why I’m here.
But now I want talk again about how the concept of the Vijnanas and the five skandhas can help us to see the worldly dust clearer

Today I talk about the next Vijnanas, 6 are left, but first I want to come back to the first two Vijnanas and how they are connected.

Last time I ended my talk with the story about my ex-inmate and what it means when we give space to listening.

This story about listening exemplifies that all four embracing bodhisattva actions are always interrelated. For example, on the one hand, I give my time, attention and fearlessness, which is the first of the four bodhisattva actions. On the other hand, I use the second of the four embracing bodhisattva actions, loving speech, repeatedly while the other person tells his story, to support him and thus go deeper. Both of these acts taken together make up beneficial action, the third of the bodhisattva actions, because they serve to help the other person open up and help me practice listening. When all of these come together, the fourth bodhisattva action, "identity action," appears, because true listening only occurs when I give up my identity and

fully engage with the other person.

Just as the four embracing actions are not separate, the senses are also never separate, we always feel with the whole body, not separated into senses.

By the way, there are people whose senses are not separated in principle, I would like to mention something – “synesthesia” is an ability to link one sense with the other, when you perceive letters as colors, or sounds for example.

Dogen said hear with the eyes - In addition, I would like to tell you about a beautiful experiment of psychologists, at the University of Wisconsin: In an experimental arrangement, two different things are shown to each of the two eyes - to one a kangaroo – and to the other a flickering, moving pattern

we perceive the moving pattern - most of us – but when the word kangaroo is said in the ear, most of us also perceive the kangaroo!

If no picture of the kangaroo is to be seen the words do not have a large measurable influence.

The story of the young man, from my last talk, also shows how our resistances arise and how we create a space to allow them to be there, so that we can accept the world as it is, we can see it as it is and not through a lens of resistance on which we build a concept. We can learn to face our own vulnerability and embrace it - which is one of the great powers of zazen and repentance.

Now we move on to the next vijñana, the nose and the nose consciousness - 'The nose is aflame. Odors are aflame.' the smelling sense.

With every breath we also smell - nothing is more memorable than smelling - we breathe in everyday about 23000 times and about 12.5 cubic meters of air - and every time we smell. It is insanely difficult to name what we smell, mostly there are several terms in our heads, even feelings, earthy, woody, floral, sweet, poisonous, wonderful, for example when we test perfumes - or terms like disgusting abhorrent, or “like a wet dog” when we smell Gomasio. Smelling is the most immediate of all senses - 5 million olfactory cells in the nose give impulses directly to the olfactory center, these cells are renewed every 30 days.

During my flight to Bloomington I read a new scientific article and scientists found the specific smelling cells in the whole body and organs. Isn't this amazing? , we smell with the whole body and Jeff told me after my last talk that it is the same with tasting cells! This supports my previous statement that we always use the whole body.

And when it comes to smelling there is no intermediary, it is a direct connection to the brain, no construction, like in seeing and therefore it is an important dharmagata.

The smelling is the sense with the best memory- we all know this - we enter for example a house or a room and already we are caught in a sensory space - the memory comes rushing at us and everything that is connected with it - in an incredible speed the five skandhas create a world that has nothing to do with the here and now - i think with smelling we are the most

involved in our entanglements - it doesn't have to be negative - it can also be beautiful memories.

“He was conscious of a thousand odors floating in the air, each one connected with a thousand thoughts, and hopes, and joys, and cares long, long, forgotten!”

This is a quote from “A Christmas Carol” by Charles Dickens

Smelling is immediately connected with emotions, there are no states in between, there is no construction process, like with seeing – When we smell we decide unconsciously and in the moment the distinction whether there is danger or not, whether enemy or friend, from the first impression - we categorize immediately on the basis of the smell, for example when we meet somebody, if we like her or him or not. We do this on the basis of his body odor, consisting of the breath, the sweat and the dead skin particles and its components that surround us – these are made up of a lot of microorganisms, which are nowadays mostly washed off by our oh so good hygiene, always cleaned, several times daily, including tooth brushing.

In Toshoji, one of the senmon sodos in Japan, the training tempels, there is as far as I know a daily bathing ritual, in Japanese monasteries washing is an important ritual, I think it also serves to learn hygiene rules - but all people use the same bath water - there is by the way the theory - that until the beginning of the 20th century there were no allergies, because most people bathed in public bathhouses. Thus the microbiomes had exchanged in a very special way and thus have given people a special kind of protection, in Toshoji it is still like this, everybody in the same water.

In the sangha of Zentatsu Baker there were rules during a sesshin not to shower or bathe and not to use perfumes - many confused this with no hygiene at all, and so they didn't wash themselves and also didn't brush their teeth - sometimes it was a very big challenge and one had to be asked to break the rule.

The origin of this rule is quite banal, in Green Gulch there was no running water and so Baker Roshi quickly decided not to shower .

But in the intimate setting of a Sesshin we can learn to deal better with the original smells of the others with whom we are together most of the time, we learn to smell and accept each other better.

Now we come to the fourth Vijnana, the tasting sense / taste.

And this is strongly connected with smelling, we cannot accurately identify a taste without smelling and also without seeing it. You can try this out very easily, just hold your nose while eating and close your eyes. You can identify nothing, only the texture, if it is soft or hard.

I once had a wine store and I had to taste many wines. Smelling and tasting belong together and these two senses are also very closely connected via the throat.

In Oryoki, we chant, "The five colors and six tastes of this meal are offered to the Dharma and the Sangha."

The six tastes are: sweet, sour, bitter, salty, mild, and spicy.

Dogen gave us clear instructions for the Tenzo in “the Tenzo kyokun” how to cook the meals and how they should taste, it's about getting to know the true nature of things.

Our industrialized food is already far away from this, a lot of food today already needs flavorings to remind us of the true nature of the food. This is how reduced the natural taste is by now through the industrial production of food. Because of these artificial flavors our taste sense is already very confused and therefore the reduction is a very good way to learn to taste better again. Fasting has always been part of the monastic context in East and West as a proven means to learn this and I know from personal experience how well it works and how intensively you can taste again afterwards.

In Germany and Austria we have a TV station in cooperation with France called “ARTE” and like the name already says it mostly about culture, documentaries and so on and there I saw a documentary about Japanese Zen gardens. The main character was a very famous garden architect, and he also has a famous Soto Zen monastery. One day his son came for a visit and the father asked him: “How is your stay now at the training temple?” And the son answered: “Father the hardest part is that we get so little to eat, but after one and a half years I got used to it.”

To taste the true nature of food is important. In German “food” is called “Lebensmittel” which literally means: “Means to life” or “Resources to life”, so the true nature of the resources of our live.

We often forget this and so it is very good to remind ourselves like we do it here and this is the activity of monastic practice, of leaving the normal household.

I talked about “Ma” the space in between and about Akasha the fifth element, all about the yogic culture. Now I want to bring in a little bit of our western culture, about pausing to let the world emerge, the ambiguous appearances that become visible in wonder, amazement or boredom

Merleau Ponty says: "We constantly forget the fluid and ambiguous appearances and go through them directly to the things that are presented by them". And Paul Cézanne, master of contemplative lingering, once said: “He could see the scent of things”

This slowing down of the modern world is what we do in zazen - we are slowing down and contemplating, in the 16th century Michel de Montaigne, the famous philosopher already describes the loss of idleness, which was degraded by Protestant thinking to laziness.

Walter Benjamin called deep boredom: The “Dream bird that incubates the egg of experience” – and in a way we incubate our eggs in zazen.

We come now to the end with our five organ sense consciousnesses

We can explore our body millimeter by millimeter with our practice. In our zazen we can explore

each cell, and we have a lot of them, and each moment new ones are born and old ones die. But not only inside our body. Very easily we can see this on our skin, on the dead skin particles, when we touch and lightly run our fingers over it. If we hold the hand up in the sunlight we see the dust that we produce thereby.

....."Catching the moon,
Cultivating the clouds,
Untouched by the worldly dust"....

Now we come to the last of the five organ vijnanas, the touch.

The skin is the biggest organ - the skin has millions of sensory receptors per square centimeter - which have sensations - millions of sensory impressions per minute - this is the best example of how we can always perceive only a small part of the whole picture - and how significant it is where our attention goes in each moment!

Touch is the fifth stream of experience. That's another word we can use for the Vijnanas, the term in Buddhist psychology for consciousness, and remember it is used more as a verb, in the sense of becoming conscious.

Touching, feeling, sensing - being touched - a very wide field - at birth, when we leave the womb through the birth canal the microbiome of the mother is transferred to the child, that's why cesarean children are often more prone to allergies or similar diseases - today cesareans are often already applied artificially - 30 percent of births are cesarean and more than half of them are planned, probably also because mothers are getting older and babies are too big and will not fit through the birth canal.

Prematurely born babies, when placed on bare skin, develop better, this is called the kangaroo method. Jeff can tell us a lot more about this.

And touching is important for hormone production, for example Oxytocin is called "the connection hormone" and there are investigations if one is caressed very slowly - the Oxytocin production increases around a tenfold - and so this is a special therapy method it is called the Rosen Massage - Oxytocin produces the feeling of the empathy in us - awakens sympathy and weakens aggression - after this discovery was made, scientists believed that it could solve many problems - but the cool thing is - oxytocin is very volatile, lasts only 20 minutes, which means it has to be produced again and again - moment by moment - so it needs to be produced constantly to stay connected - the other fascinating thing is that oxytocin is also produced in the heart, but mainly in the hypothalamus. A very fascinating field, I have found studies that support the theory that meditation and spiritual exercises as well as Qigong and Tai Chi practice increase the production of oxytocin.

But there are also people who can't stand any touch at all, and now I'm not talking about butterfly children, but people who recall bad memories at every touch and are reminded of an old trauma, I have already met a few in my pastoral care.

We learn about the world by touching it, and I can see that very clearly now with my grandson, whom I miss very much, he is now 10 months old.

The German word for “understanding something” literally means “to grasp something” “etwas begreifen”. And this means to touch something in the sense of: to dive into the world of that thing.

Now we finish the five sense consciousnesses, those five functions that are connected to bodily organs.

These five sense consciousnesses have no capacity to refer to past and future, that is they are completely momentary and lead to reality, true perception and that is why I have presented them in such detail, because we can refer to them at any moment and they can serve as a kind of anchor, in every moment.

The Rinzai Monk Ikkyu Sojun, who lived in the 15th century, said:

“Every day, priests minutely examine the dharma and endlessly chant complicated sutras. They should learn how to read the love letters sent by the wind and rain, the snow and moon.”

The five sense consciousnesses are also called the five types of preliminary consciousness and are always accompanied by the sixth consciousness, the thinking mind and this is a Buddhist specialty, the mind is seen as its own perceptible field.

And here I have to bring in the five Skandhas or the five aggregates

First 1. is “Rupa – Form/materiality” – second 2. is “Vedana -sensation, Feeling– third 3. Is “Samnja -perception” – fourth 4. Is “Samskara – mental formations – also called embodied conditioning or associations, impulses – and fifth 5. is “Vijnana – consciousness

all of them will be described later in detail.

For now it is important, that the first five vijnanas refer to the first Skandha, the form. And the first five vijnanas are connected to bodily conditions and the following three Vijnanas are connected with mental conditions.

The sixth Vijnana is called Mano consciousness, The word "Mano" can be translated as mind or sometimes spirit.

The sixth vijnana is the source of thoughts, concepts, of all mental events. It is the source of our thinking. Mano represents the intellectual functioning of consciousness.

And it is also a synonym for Citta, Citta is translated mostly as mind, but more in a kind of master of the mind, or more the forest, not the tree, the seventh Vijnana is called Manas and is connected with the ego. One translation of manas that I found is “arrogance” or something in the direction of “making up the mind” and the eight vijnana is called Alaya and it is also connected with Citta. Citta points more to the totality of mental phenomena.

And as we discussed last time in the question and answer part, the translation of "Citta" or "Mano" as mind is not sufficient, we in the West see the concept of mind as something non-physical, only as a mental entity, which exists separately from physical perceptions - we are in contact with the outside world through the sense organs in a dualistic view of the world, we divide the world into subject and object, the word object has its roots in "the other". This is Western thinking, with roots in the Greek philosophy.

According to the teachings of Abhidharma, the mind is not a separate entity residing in the human body, the objects experienced by it are not objective reality, they are mental constructs based on the perception of the phenomena.

What's more, in Sanskrit you can find 43 distinctions of what we call mind and in the Abhidharma there are in total 52 factors of mind associated with consciousness, there are 89 classes of consciousness - which can be further classified into 121 classes.....the 52 factors of mind arise and disappear simultaneously with consciousness, have the same object and physical basis.

A very complex system and I can't get through this Abhidharma thing, this system is really too complex and confusing for me.

And in German it is much more difficult, because mind is translated as "Geist" and this means also Spirit, but also Ghost, very different to mind, which also means intellect, thought, opinion, to be careful, and so on.

Anyway, we have to emphasize that what we do here is a bodily practice, we explore everything linked with our body to escape from our disembodiment, from our alienation when we are too much in our brain or mind

Uchiyama Roshi says in "The wholehearted way": "When the word mind is used in Buddhist texts, it often means the living life experience that I have spoken about. This is what the word mind means when Dogen talks about what has been correctly transmitted in Buddhism. "One mind is myriads of dharmas" means that the one mind contains the myriads of dharmas, or my life experience of the world. This is the meaning of mind and dharma in Buddhism." Uchiyama called it : simply life itself.

Let's get back to Mano consciousness, the thinking consciousness.

The function of Mano consciousness is on the one hand (1.) perception and on the other hand (2.) imagination.

Mano perception arises simultaneously with the previous five kinds of consciousnesses. Its function is to make more exact distinctions and clearer recognitions of the sensation. The second function of Mano Vijnana is imagination, which arises independently from the other five kinds of consciousnesses.

This (2.) imagination or conception is divided into three types:

(2a.) The first type consists of memories of the past and imaginations of the future,

(2b.) The second type consists of dream consciousness distant from reality, and (2c.) the third type is intuitive consciousness, which reveals itself in a concentrated awareness state, like in samadhi.

According to Buddhist logic, we can understand an object by consciousness in three ways:

1. real understanding
2. Conclusory or comparative understanding
3. and wrong understanding

the first way, the real understanding, is through the previously mentioned mano perception and intuitive consciousness. Mano perception and intuitive consciousness are real understanding in the present, nothing is added.

In Shingon School, this way of understanding is described as "The true awakening of the five buddhas at the instant of sitting", an interesting doctrine, says Uchiyama in "The wholehearted way". Shingon school calls the first five consciousnesses "the function of wisdom as action" and Dogen Zenji does this in a way too.

"Wisdom in action", that's why I'm emphasizing the first five vijnanas so much.

But before we draw this conclusion between vijnanas, skandas and bodhisattva action, I would like to

talk about the other two ways of understanding:

(2a.) First, Memory and imagination and

(2b.) second, Dream consciousness. They are both partially included in what I previously called "conclusory or comparative understanding" and "wrong understanding". These two are the discriminating mind.

I know that one cannot really understand this, I hope I have opened it a bit. But I think this structure, this framework is important for us to understand how our being is conceptualized, how we function. When I cut my becoming into small pieces, into slices that become thinner and thinner, then I can recognize all this and when I recognize how my mind is functioning, I can put it in this framework to understand my egocentered ignorant being better. I give all the myriad things space to realize that this is not really me and so I can let it go.

We stay aware and in permanent connection with the object we perceive.

Let me explain this with the example of the spider that came closer and closer to the wall in front of my eyes the other day after I started zazen, I talked about it in my second talk, I think. In my mind I see the spider and at the same time I notice a fear arising inside me, just as if I would see the spider right now, but instead of going into the fear I remain in connection with the spider, the object of my perception, I maintain this field of perception in my awareness, concentrate on the field perception and thus remain in this intuitive perception and sure the fear is still there and I give space for it, so the fear can be seen and embraced, but I don't cling to it, I stay aware and open the hand of thinking.

Try to stay aware in this field with the object and recognize your thinking and don't get caught by it, stay in this intuitive perceiving.

But you can apply this to any action, also to the ones you like and that satisfy you, for example washing dishes, seeing a cup and noticing what a wonderful pattern the cup has, I like it so much, and so I get attached, and here is the beginning of suffering, not that I like the pattern, but in getting attached to it, the suffering starts.

That's how we divide the world up and separate ourselves and suffering starts, and for example when the cup breaks our suffering increases.

I know this sounds all so technical, but the more you practice it the more it will change and become inherent.

And I hope the whole concept is becoming more understandable after the next talk about the Skandhas, so please be patient.

You know what comes after patience?

Patience....

And now the transcripts of the talk are also online, so maybe it is possible to get a better understanding by reading.

“Catching the moon,
Cultivating the clouds,
Untouched by the worldly dust”

Let us proceed with the sixth mano consciousness.

The sixth mano consciousness relates to all objects and to all beings and makes them its content. It has independent functions but relates to the sensations and contents of the first five consciousnesses. They all work in relation to each other and are impermanent.

It is thus related to the second and third skandha.

The Mano consciousness and the five sense consciousnesses, influence the second Skandha, and can produce feelings of “good”, “bad” and “neutral”. You can also translate it differently and more emotionally, In Sanskrit it is Sukha - pleasant - Dukha - painful - upekka - neutral – and I often feel that we are constantly caught in one of these conditions. And for sure, we want to avoid pain.

The sensation always arises in the manifestation of the Mano consciousness in connection with objects and other circumstances. I will talk about these circumstances later when I come to the Skandhas. Hopefully, it will become clearer then.

But first we have to finish the vijnanas.:

By the way, the consciousnesses we have gone through so far are not a development or discovery of Buddhism alone, the first five existed already before, in the fifth century, in the Indian Samkhya school, the sixth consciousness was added in Hinyana Buddhism. The seventh and eighth consciousnesses are a development of Mahayana, which went deeper in their exploration. People found or created terms for a deeper and inner consciousness: namely manas vijnana and they also created an explanation for a supra-individual consciousness, the Alaya vijnana. The reason for this development may probably be found in a kind of idealism of Buddhism.

Alaya is a necessary concept. We need it in order to explain certain phenomena.

One of them is that in reality not every good cause has good effects, as we know, or sometimes no effect at all. And also without the Alaya Vijnana certain states of consciousness could not be explained, such as unconsciousness. And there is an idealistic view in Buddhism that says that there must be something that exists without interruption and where it comes from. There is also the concept of Buddhanatur, around 50-100 years before Asanga and Vasubandhu were born, the concept of buddha-nature came up in the Paranirvana Sutra and the Lotus Sutra and was then direct referred to in the Tathagatagarba Sutra.

Buddhanature and Alaya vijnana are different concepts, they complement each other, but are two different things. The important thng is tht we don't own Buddhanature, it is more a state,for me it is a gate through which we can experience our true nature or reality.

We just had the Genzo-e about Buddha nature, and if you want to dig into this theme, please watch this 3 parts of Shobogenzo Bussho.

Let's look at the seventh consciousness – it is called Manas consciousness or ego consciousness. In principle it is does not mean Ego consciousness, but rather inner consciousness,

The idea is that it acts as a link between the first six and the 8th consciousness in order to more precisely define and understand the contents of the first six consciousnesses, always in the sense of an individual empirical experience, but not in an egocentric way.

But through the strength of our own egoistic will, our individual side dominates the empirical truth that lies in the sensations of the first 6 consciousnesses, which is therefore often lost.

We all know that our own ego is always in delusion, in darkness, Kokoro no yami - darkness of my heart, this is often used as a metaphor for our delusion.

Our intellectual skills belong to the sixth consciousness, all what appears there is not linear in time. The seventh consciousness, in contrast, is temporally uninterrupted and thus forms the linear stream of consciousness in a timeline which we perceive as "I". It fakes a false "I" and, what is more, grasps this idea of "I" as an individual property.

And here we have our main issue, this Manas consciousness builds our "stream of what we call life", the things that we identify with, and like I said in my former talks, we have to cut these things with the sword of our wisdom into very thin slices. This way,we can see our deluded ego

part, the attachment to it, and this is like: “Ah this part is my ego , ok, now I know, but that’s not really me I don’t have to believe this anymore”

We can throw the staff over our shoulder, turn around and move on to the myriad peaks of the mountains, like in Koan 25 of the Blue Cliff records, where the hermit says

“Cut” and here comes the next dharma and again we say “cut”, like I told you with the noise of the keys in prison, here is the crossroads. This is the place where we can cut off our attachment to the Kleshas, our dormant energies are awakened.

Now we finally arrive at the eight vijñana – the Alaya Vijñana - the Transcendental. for me, this is the great mystical concept that is not really graspable.

The word was initially translated in China as consciousness that cannot be destructed or deleted. It was mentioned by Hsüan -tsang at the beginning of his translation of the text on Vijñanas as a „store consciousness” and this means there is something undestroyable.

In the whole Buddhist concept of seeing the world we often talk about the real truth and I think this concept of Alaya is created to explain where this truth is born.

It is a kind of storehouse where everything that we can experience is stored from beginningless beginning to endless end in the future. We can find everything there and we awaken it to our reality with the spark of our attention in this specific moment, and now the next moment and so on. It’s the big universal kettle, our senses give attention to the sensations and the spark ignites, manifestation happens.

Alaya vijñana contains all seeds for this, they are called Bijas, which means in Chinese language seed or core, also called “causes “ and defined as energies, or specific mental attachments that come to action.

Thus the Alaya vijñana is the origin of all phenomena and at the same time the substantial basis which receives everything again. Everything becomes again a cause which causes a further development.

The Alaya consciousness is a soil that contains its own original seeds that sprout and develop outside as well as inside of ourselves, until finally a new seed falls so that on this fruitful ground the plants never die out. In this sense it is really a storehouse consciousness.

But there is also a different level too, because it is not only transcendence, there is a relation to the individual I, that’s why the Alaya vijñana has another function, the possibility to collect elements of the seventh vijñana.

It is the mother soil of everything, of all causes and all results, from which everything that is real – reality - follows.

As already mentioned, the syllable "VI" means separate, more precisely something like "removed" or " migrated", “branching off in Chinese translations it is also called “false”

By the way, there is a ninth consciousness, the Amala vijnana or Tathata vijnana, which is also called truth consciousness and is free from any ego-centeredness. It is the logical follow-up to alaya vijnana, but I have found little to nothing about it.

If we are searching for the "True Reality of all things", searching for the wisdom, the wisdom from the other shore, "Prajnaparamita", then the vijnanas can serve as a basis to find this wisdom, a basis in which we find a clear structure of how our consciousness arises, how our existence, our being here and now arises.

The Alaya vijnana is a logical and also empirical explanation which, by the way, modern science cannot really offer until today. I am constantly studying the latest theories of consciousness research, and for me the problem of science is, as Merleau Ponty says, that science does not attend to the objects of its research, which is what we do in zazen. We have the possibility to see zazen also as a kind of research laboratory, in our whole physicality and our spirituality, our physical and mental existence, in the connection between body and mind.

Taken together, all eight vijnanas leads us towards seeing reality as it really is. In the concentration on the phenomenal absorption of the first five vijnanas and the empirical intellectual processing in the sixth, we find the basis for this wisdom. We find it when recognizing and letting go of our egocentricity in the seventh vijnana and we return to the roots in the eighth vijnana.

This process is accompanied by the mutual development of compassion. The more we recognize the connecting threads of the relationships of all things, the more we can find liberation.

When we turn manas, the seventh vijnana into wisdom, then all the vijnanas change to support this wisdom and we are able to become free from this loaded state about which I talked at the beginning of the vijnanas and this is the big shift, everything turns and becomes in a way enlightened.

And maybe we learned now a little bit more about how our five skandhas get filled, most of the time we are not aware what is happening to us. But maybe this becomes clearer next time when I talk about the Skandhas.

Thank you