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**“If you want to attain intimacy, don't approach it with questions”**

Last week we were talking about *Guishan's* “*You have to find out for yourself!*” and a very interesting line comes into the Commentary: “*If you want to attain intimacy, don't approach it with questions!*”

Most interesting line don't you think! This question of intimacy, this word “intimacy,” and what does it mean? The whole of the koans are questions, and we ourselves come with questions. What then does it mean? “*If you want to attain intimacy don't approach it with questions!*”

The very first meaning of this word intimacy, if we look it up in the dictionary, it will tell us that it is belonging to or characterizing one's deepest nature. That's its very first meaning, about our very own deepest nature. Of course, there are a whole bunch of meanings that go on from there, about relationships. Intimate, but not sexual by the way. The sexual intimation doesn't even come into the dictionary that I use (Merriam Webster) as one of the meanings. It means a deep, relational exchange between people, in which we reveal ourselves to one another, in the deepest possible way.

Of course today, if you say intimacy - not always, but very often - we are meaning a sexual relationship between people. That's a popular cultural take on it. It doesn't necessarily mean that because people have sex together that there is any intimacy at all between them! When we are talking about the Dharma, and we're talking about intimacy, we are talking about our deepest nature.

Dogen Zenji has a chapter in *Shobogenzo* called “Mitsugo.” “Mitsugo” can be translated as ‘secret’, and it can also be translated as ‘intimacy’. Sometimes if we use the word ‘secret’ in what Dogen Zenji is alluding to in this chapter, we can perhaps not get the clear meaning. In a translation where the word ‘secret’ is used, it may imply that the Buddha had some kind of secret language, or when the Buddha held up a flower and Makakasho smiled (the Buddha Transmitted the Dharma to Makakasho) it could imply that there was some secret language between them. That was not the meaning at all. The meaning was that their total heart-mind had understood one another completely. There was no gap between them, there was no separation. So the Buddha could hand the Dharma to Makakasho and Makakasho smiled. Makakasho's smile is not to be misunderstood as though there was some secret going on between them, some secret language.

The chapter title “Mitsugo” can be translated as, “On the Heart to Heart Language of Intimacy.” Dogen Zenji uses different levels of meanings throughout the chapter. For instance, it can indeed mean some kind of secret language maybe one teacher to another, or teacher to student and student to teacher. Only those who truly understand one another would be able to understand what is being communicated. If we had not been initiated into what their exchange was, we would not understand it. So it would seem like some secret language, not necessarily intended to be secret at all.

This kind of intimate language is very natural between us, in our daily lives, in our family relations. One of the distinguishing factors in tribes is the ability to recognize who your tribal member is by a particular language that the tribe uses. Language is the deepest aspect of any culture. So we use a particular language to distinguish where people come from, or who they are, whether they are actually members of the tribe. This practice has been going on since the beginning of language. You know in your own families, who is a member of your family by your language together. An outsider may come and they don't

participate in that same language as you have with your family members.

Dogen Zenji refers to that as “secret” language, because there is an intimacy that occurs in the families, that occurs with people with whom we live our intimate life. There are many things we don't have to explain because we live together and we understand one another at the deepest level, living out our deepest nature together. We don't have to explain so much. We can say a few words to somebody, we are that intimate, and have that be understood. Of course we also get into trouble if we do that sometimes because the communication misfires and we make assumptions thinking that the person understood us when they really didn't. That kind of communication sometimes misses its mark.

But, when we have language as we see in the koans, or when we have an exchange between teacher and student, language can be very intimate and it can use kinds of words that would not be understood by anyone else. That's what Dogen Zenji is meaning, using a secret language that hides meaning from the uninitiated. So there is a kind of protection of understanding that occurs between teacher and student, when they are facing one another and the True Dharma is recognized, eye to eye, face to face Transmission, when it is completely recognized. Somebody who is not initiated would not know. The teacher and student may be talking very plain language, not even talking at all, and yet if we are not initiated into it we wouldn't know the meaning.

Another level that Dogen Zenji refers to is the use of particular language. The Buddha used particular language in a particular way to contrast meaning from usual discourse. He may be referring to something special with a heightened meaning, and will place some emphasis on something to distinguish it from our everyday language so that we understand the meaning and depth of the Dharma.

A language between teacher and student, which they may have together, shows closeness. It arises from being of one mind and heart. When Dogen Zenji is speaking about intimacy, he may be meaning those various levels and usages.

What does this intimacy mean? When it is used? What is Dogen Zenji meaning in this chapter called “Mitsugo”? By the way, Dogen Zenji's Shobogenzo is available to you online for free. Go to the Shasta Abbey website [shastaabbey.org](http://shastaabbey.org) and download the entirety on a PDF file in about two minutes. Then you can read for yourself any time.

So Dogen Zenji says,

*“The principal of intimacy is a principal of closeness. It means there is no gap. It embraces Buddha and Ancestor. It embraces you and it embraces me. It embraces our practice. It embraces those of our generation. It embraces our meritorious deeds. It embraces what is most intimate. Because intimacy resides all around you, everything relies on intimacy. Each thing, or even half thing, relies on intimacy.”*

So where do we begin with that? Where do we begin to ferret out what that is. One thing we know, when Dogen Zenji is speaking of this, he is speaking about our experience of Awakening, our experience of Realization, our opening to the experience of Zazen. When we sit Zazen, there is no gap in our intimacy with all of existence. And Dogen Zenji says whether you know that or not, that is the case. Even if you don't know intimacy, intimacy is around you. And, intimacy is not anything secret. Intimacy is not hiding. Even if you do not know it, intimacy is right in front of you!

As newcomers to practice, we come to this sacred gift given to us by the Buddha, and handed down from one teacher to another, which includes you, handed down from one to another, face-to-face Transmission from the Buddha to this present moment. The seeing intimacy of the Buddha is present at this moment. So we come new to Zazen and we wonder how do we see that? How can we see that? How can we *be* that intimacy, that

truly we hunger for? All of us have had relationships of non-intimacy, unsatisfactory relationships, maybe we have now, unsatisfactory relationships where there is no intimacy. We can't reveal ourselves because we can't really see one another. How do we do that, when we come to practice? Hungry to truly know ourselves, to know our true nature, to know our deepest nature and to want to know that, before we die.

So the Commentary in the koan says, *“If you want to attain intimacy, don't approach it with questions.”* On the other hand, we are told that asking, seeking questions, going into questions, entering questions is the heart of Zen practice. When we do come to Zen practice for the first time, we're also riddled with questions. They're just so many sometimes we just can't deal with ourselves. Yet, *“if you want to attain intimacy, don't approach it with questions.”*

Somehow we have to come to this cushion and place ourselves in this posture of the Buddha and we have to *be* the question, and at the same time not have the questions. This is not an easy thing at all, because we have to stand back and allow, continually allow everything that is before us to reveal itself. The myriad things come forward, and allow all that is before us to reveal itself. Which means in a way to come as an innocent child and to place ourselves at the bounty of Emptiness, and open our hands. In the Commentary right after *“You'll have to find that out for yourself”* we read: *“How touching in a single phrase the old master opens up a path for him to follow.”* *“If you want to find out for yourself,”* means of course...if we want to find out for ourselves we're going to have to cease putting that small self out in front, that small self that continually interferes with intimacy that is waiting, that is waiting and surrounding us moment by moment, forever, eternally.

*“In a single phrase the old master opens up a path, for him to follow!”*

*“If you want to attain intimacy, don't approach it with questions.”*

Listen and wait! Of course in this “Mitsugo” chapter Dogen Zenji is talking about the mind of practice, and the placing ourselves in the threshold of practice. Allowing practice to reveal itself, practice to show us our true nature. Practice will do that all the time. Every gesture of practice will reveal our true nature, if we but step out of the way. In this intimate realization there is no gap between us. Complete heart-mind, complete stepping through the heart-mind. Complete walking through one another, such that we don't know who's who. Can we give ourselves away that completely, that we don't know who is who? This is the work that the teacher and student do together, such that they walk through one another, so that there is seamless intimacy. So that nobody knows, neither one knows who the student is and who is the teacher. Teacher and student completely disappear in that intimacy of walking through one another. Complete recognition. This is also what is said: *“You too are like this, and I too am like this.”* This is the hearts and minds of the Buddhas speaking to one another, in recognition of our true nature. We recognize, you are that! I am that! And there is no difference between us. Well there is difference, there is no distance between us. We remain who we are, and that intimate language that we speak together comes out of our own being, comes out of our own style and our own language and our own way of being. We express ourselves in this make-up of this lifetime. In superb intimacy and recognition of one another in the Buddhadharma.

So that's a little hint at this. Dogen Zenji says. *“Exploring through our training, means not intentionally trying to understand everything all at once.”* As we come new to Zazen, sometimes people come in the door and say, “I don't know how to find the Sutras and don't know this and I don't know that.” Of course we don't! I don't understand everything in practice. I can spend fifty lifetimes and I would not understand all of Zen practice.

*“Not intentionally trying to understand everything all at once. But taking great*

*pains in striving a hundred or even a thousand times, as if you were trying to cut through something hard. Do not fancy that when someone has something to relate to you, you should immediately understand what is being said.”*

In this way, we step back, and we do that really for the people we love. We step back and we wait, and we don't jump on them for what they say. We wait and we try to understand first what they might mean. We walk into a room and we see somebody and we don't jump at them and say “what's the matter, what's the matter ?” No, we wait and we try to assess the situation and quietly see what's going on here, and allow the intimacy of a situation to be revealed so that we don't jump on others. There is no way, we can possibly understand everything about anything all at once. And yet we want to when we come to practice. We expect to get on the cushion, to have some brilliant opening immediately, at least within three or four weeks, and if we don't get it, we give up.

Yet the more we are able to allow, simply allow this moment to be this moment, we can feel the intimacy of the entire surroundings, of everything that is around us. There is no distance between us. There is no time in Zazen. There is no place where we are sitting. There is the myriad things coming forward. If we step out of the way, we have some taste of intimacy. There is no end to the depth, no end to the myriad things.