

平常心

Heijō Shin

Ordinary Mind

hei: simple, plain, common, ordinary, flat, level, even, peaceful
jō: common, normal, frequent, regular, continually, always
compound of heijō: ordinary, normal, common, usual, everyday
shin: mind, heart

Mazu Daoyi (709-788) translated by Cheng Chien Bhikshu

The Way needs no cultivation, just do not defile. What is defilement? When with a mind of birth and death one acts in a contrived way, then everything is defilement. If one wants to know the Way directly: Ordinary Mind is the Way! What is meant by Ordinary Mind? No activity, no right or wrong, no grasping or rejecting, neither terminable nor permanent, without worldly or holy. The sutra says, "Neither the practice of ordinary people, nor the practice of sages, that is the Bodhisattva's practice. Just like now, whether walking, standing, sitting, or reclining, responding to situations and dealing with people as they come: everything is the Way. The Way is identical with the dharmadhatu. Out of sublime functions as numerous as the sands of Ganges, none of them is outside the dharmadhatu. If that was not so, how could it have been said that the mind-ground is a Dharma gate, that it is an inexhaustible lamp...

In bondage it is called tathagatagarbha; when liberated it is called the pure dharmakaya. Dhamakaya is boundless, its essence neither increasing nor decreasing. In order to respond to beings, it can manifest as big or small, square or round. It is like a reflection of the moon in water...

The mind can be spoken of [in terms of its two aspects]: birth and death, and suchness. The mind as suchness is like a clear mirror which can reflect images. The mirror symbolizes the mind; the images symbolize the dharmas. If the mind grasps at dharmas, then it gets involved in external causes and conditions, which is the meaning of birth and death. If the mind does not grasp at dharmas, that is suchness. The shravakas hear about the Buddha-nature, while the Bodhisattva's eye perceives the Buddha-nature. The realization of non-duality is called equal nature. Although the nature is free from differentiation, its function is not the same: when ignorant it is called consciousness; when awakened it is called wisdom. Following the principle is awakening, and following phenomena is ignorance. Ignorance is to be ignorant of one's original mind. Awakening is to awake to one's original nature.

Shitou Xiqian (700-790)

Shitou taught: "This ordinary mind isn't expressed by words and ideas." Yaoshan said, "No words and no ideas also have nothing to do with this ordinary mind." Shitou said, "This can't be penetrated further." Yaoshan said, "I'm like a flower growing on a rock." Shitou agreed.

Nanquan Puyuan (749-835) Gateless Barrier, case 19: "Ordinary Mind is the Way" 平常心是道

Zhaozhou asked Nanquan, "What is the Way?" Nanquan replied, "Ordinary mind is the Way."

Should I try to direct myself toward (try for) it?" Zhaozhou asked.

"If you try to direct yourself, you will become separated from it," responded Nanquan.

"How can I know the Way unless I direct myself?" persisted Zhaozhou.

Nanquan said, "The Way is not a matter of knowing or not knowing. Knowing is delusion; not knowing is confusion (blankness). When you have really reached the true Way beyond doubt, you will find it as vast and boundless as space. How can this be talked about on the level of right and wrong (affirmation and negation)?" With these words, Zhaozhou came to a sudden realization.

Zhaozhou Congshen (778-897) translated by James Green

A monk asked, "What is 'ordinary mind'?"

The master said, "Foxes, wolves, and jackals."

Huangbo Xiyun (d. 850) translated by John Blofeld

Q: From all you have just said, Mind is the Buddha; but it is not clear as to what sort of mind is meant by this 'Mind which is the Buddha'. A: How many minds have you got? Q: But is the Buddha the ordinary mind (凡心 bonshin – every, any, ordinary, common mind) or the Enlightened mind? A: Where on earth do you keep your 'ordinary mind' and your 'Enlightened mind'? Q: In the teaching of the Three Vehicles it is stated that there are both. Why does Your Reverence deny it? A: In the teaching of the Three Vehicles it is clearly explained that the ordinary and Enlightened minds are illusions. You don't understand. All this clinging to the idea of things existing is to mistake vacuity for the truth. How can such conceptions not be illusory? Being illusory, they hide Mind from you. If you would only rid yourselves of the concepts of ordinary and Enlightened, you would find that there is no other Buddha than the Buddha in your own Mind. When Bodhidharma came from the West, he just pointed out that the substance of which all men are composed is the Buddha. You people go on misunderstanding; you hold to concepts such as 'ordinary' and 'Enlightened', directing your thoughts outwards where they gallop about like horses! All this amounts to beclouding your own minds! So I tell you Mind is the Buddha. As soon as thought or sensation arises, you fall into dualism. Beginningless time and the present moment are the same. There is no this and no that. To understand this truth is called complete and unexcelled Enlightenment.

Linji Yixuan (d. 866) translated by Ruth Fuller Sasaki

Followers of the Way, it is urgently necessary that you endeavor to acquire true insight and stride boldly [here] under the heavens, not losing your senses owing to that bunch of spirits. [He who has] nothing to do is the noble one. Simply don't strive—just be ordinary (平常). Yet you look outside, searching side paths and seeking help. You're all wrong!... Followers of the Way, as to buddhadharma, no effort is necessary. You have only to be ordinary, with nothing to do—defecating, urinating, wearing clothes, eating food, and lying down when tired. Fools laugh at me, but the wise understand...

Therefore it is said: "When a man tries to practice the Way, the Way does not function, and ten thousand evil circumstances vie in raising their heads. But when the sword of wisdom flashes forth, nothing remains; before brightness is manifest, darkness is bright." For that reason a man of old said, 'Ordinary mind is the Way.'

Virtuous monks, what are you looking for? [You] nondependent people of the Way who listen to my discourse right now before my eyes, [you are] bright and clear and have never lacked anything. If you want to be no different from the patriarch-buddha, just see things this way. There's no need to waver. Your minds and Mind do not differ—this is called [your] living patriarch. If mind differs, its essence will differ from its manifestations. Since mind does not differ, its essence and its manifestations do not differ. As I see it, there isn't so much to do. Just be ordinary—put on your clothes, eat your food, and pass the time doing nothing. You who come here from here and there all have a mind to seek buddha, to seek dharma, to seek emancipation, to seek escape from the three realms. Foolish fellows! When you've left the three realms where would you go?

Changsha Jingcen (d.868):

Once a monk asked Master Changsha, "What is the meaning of 'Ordinary mind is the Way'?"

The master said, "When I want to sleep, I sleep. When I want to sit, I sit."

The monk said, "I don't understand."

The master said, "When it's hot, I cool myself. When it's cold, I draw close to the fire."

Eihei Dogen (1200-1253) – Miracles

The four fruits of the arhats are transmitted only by buddha and buddha. The so-called four fruits are to receive a four-line verse, and this means that eyes, ears, nose, and tongue are undefiled by greed for any existent or nonexistent things. Undefiled means unstained. Unstained means ordinary mind—"I am always intimate with this."

Eihei Dogen – Body-and-Mind Study of the Way, translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi

“Ordinary mind” means to maintain ordinary mind in this world or in any world. Yesterday goes forth from this moment, and today comes forth from this place. While going the boundless sky goes, and while coming the entire earth comes. This is ordinary mind. Ordinary mind opens the gate of the inner chamber. Because thousands of gates and myriads of doors open and close all at once, it is ordinary mind. Now, this boundless sky and entire earth are like unrecognized words, a voice from the deep. Words are all-inclusive, mind is all-inclusive, things are all-inclusive. Although there is birth and death in each moment of this life of birth and death, the body after the final body is never known. Even though you do not know it, if you arouse the thought of enlightenment, you will move forward on the way of enlightenment. The moment is already here. Do not doubt it in the least. Even if you should doubt it, this is nothing but ordinary mind.

Eihei Dogen – Eihei Koroku, Shosan Hogo 2, translated by Taigen Leighton and Shohaku Okumura
Mazu said, “Ordinary mind is the Way.” What is this ordinary mind? You should know that this ordinary mind is visiting teachers and inquiring about the way, seeking Dharma and asking about Zen, putting on robes and eating rice, continuing and ceasing activities, chanting Buddha’s name and reciting sutras, speaking and silence, waking and sleeping, holding attachments and releasing them—all of these are nothing other than ordinary mind. However, how can we arbitrarily abstract [some ordinary mind] from these? (Another) ancient worthy said, “What you have been going through is the Way.” What we have been going through—how is it? It goes on throughout ten thousand kalpas and a thousand lives, when putting on fur and growing horns, arriving and disappearing, turning the head and overturning the body, facing Buddha and saving beings, climbing mountains and sailing oceans, all through the long days and deep months. You should know that this is what we have been going through. If we do not go through this, where could we dwell among the ten thousand miles of white clouds? Having already gone through this, it is right under our feet, so how could we carelessly wish to go beyond our capacity? This is the family style coming from buddha ancestors.

Padmasambhava (8th century) - Self Liberation through Seeing with Naked Awareness
translated by John Myrdhin Reynolds

As for this sparkling awareness, which is called "mind," even though one says that it exists, it does not actually exist. As a source, it is the origin of the diversity of all the bliss of nirvana and all of the sorrow of samsara. And as for it’s being something desirable; it is cherished alike in the Eleven Vehicles. With respect to its having a name, the various names that are applied to it are innumerable.

Some call it "the nature of the mind" or "mind itself." Some Tirthikas call it by the name Atman or "the Self." The Shravakas call it the doctrine of Anatman or "the absence of a self." The Chittamatrins call it by the name Chitta or "the Mind." Some call it the Prajñāparamita or "the Perfection of Wisdom." Some call it the name Tathagata-garbha or "the embryo of Buddhahood." Some call it by the name Mahamudra or "the Great Symbol." Some call it by the name "the Unique Sphere." Some call it by the name Dharmadhatu or "the dimension of Reality." Some call it by the name Alaya or "the basis of everything." And some simply call it by the name "ordinary awareness." (thamal shepa)

Now, when you are introduced (to your own intrinsic awareness), the method for entering into it involves three considerations: Thoughts in the past are clear and empty and leave no traces behind. Thoughts in the future are fresh and unconditioned by anything. And in the present moment, when (your mind) remains in its own condition without constructing anything, awareness, at that moment, in itself is quite ordinary. And when you look into yourself in this way nakedly (without any discursive thoughts), since there is only this pure observing, there will be found a lucid clarity without anyone being there who is the observer; only a naked manifest awareness is present. (This awareness) is empty and immaculately pure, not being created by anything whatsoever. It is authentic and unadulterated, without any duality of clarity and emptiness. It is not permanent and yet it is not created by anything. However, it is not a mere nothingness or something annihilated because it is lucid and present.

Milarepa (1052-1135) translated by Lobsang P. Lhalungpa

Having continuously maintained ordinary mind, I have already forgotten the delusion of ignorance.

Longchenpa (1308-1363) Precious Treasury of Basic Space of Phenomena, translated by Richard Barron

With your conduct unpredictable, you make the final leap into awareness without the slightest basis for determining what is spiritual or not, and so this bare state with no reference point is beyond the cage of philosophy. Whether eating, moving around, lying down, or sitting, day and night you rest in infinite evenness, so that you experience the true nature of phenomena as their equalness. There are no gods to worship, no demons to exorcise, nothing to cultivate in meditation - this is the completely "ordinary" state. With this single state of evenness - the uncontrived ruler has no pride - there is oneness, a relaxed and unstructured openness. How delightful - things are timelessly ensured without having to be done, and being free of effort and achievement, you are content.

Takpo Tashi Namgyal (1512-1587) - Clarifying the Natural State, translated by Erik Pema Kunsang

Meditation practice is known as undistracted ordinary mind. Ordinary mind simply means your mind's natural state. When you try to correct it by judging, accepting or rejecting, it will no longer be your ordinary mind. Therefore, undistractedly maintain the natural state of your mind with a naturally aware presence, no matter how it is or what is perceived or felt. That is simply called 'meditating'. Other than that, there isn't even as much as a hair-tip to adjust mentally by meditating. It is explained in this way: "While there isn't even as much as an atom to cultivate by meditating, you shouldn't be distracted for even as long as an instant." Phrased in another way, undistracted ordinary mind means to keep the way your mind naturally is without being distracted. This being so, as long as your naturally aware mindful presence has not wandered off, it is still the meditation training, whether your state of mind is utterly empty, remains serenely blissful, whether thoughts flow in a rush or manifold perceptions appear vividly. Therefore, you do not need to entertain doubts about these expressions of the natural state. Rather than maintaining a sense of natural ease, there is no point in trying to arrest or block off the flow of thought or perception for the sake of remaining thought-free. The reason is this: various entities such as mind-essence, thought, perceptual experience and so forth do not exist. Rather, they are the unconfined expressions of this single mind, just like the ocean itself is what is seen as waves. Therefore, this natural flow of mind does not differ in quality, no matter how it appears...

Ordinary mind - exactly as it is and during any type of experience - should then be pointed out as neither arising nor ceasing, neither to be accepted nor rejected, neither to be without nor achieved. It should be pointed out as being a self-existing natural purity, a self-liberated openness that is neither distracted nor undistracted, neither remembered nor forgotten, neither experienced nor not experienced, neither realized nor unrealized.

Tsele Natsok Rangdrol (b. 1608) - Heart of the Matter, translated by Erik Pema Kunsang

Spontaneously present since the beginning, yet not created by anyone, this self-existing and self-manifest natural awareness, your basic state, has a variety of different names: In the Prajnaparamita vehicle it is called innate truth. The vehicle of Mantra calls it natural luminosity. While a sentient being it is named sugata-essence (buddha-nature). During the path it is given names which describe the view, meditation, and so forth. And at the point of fruition it is named dharmakaya of buddhahood. All these different names and classifications are nothing other than this present ordinary mind...

Without sinking into dull mindlessness, it is utter brilliance, aware and awake. To recognize the natural face of this ordinary mind, uncorrupted by the meditation-moods of bliss, clarity and emptiness, is known as vipashyana, clear seeing. Unanimously this is the very heart of Mahamudra, the Middle Way, Pacifying, and Cutting (of Dzogchen). So simply recognize that alone!...

Unless you know how to sustain the natural mode of your innate nature, you may keep the posture and gaze, but it still isn't meditation. In short, as long as you embrace whatever you experience with a sense of wakefulness, all you do is meditation training. But if not, though your stillness may be steady, it is only a blocked state of indifference. Therefore, simply sustain the recognition of ordinary mind.

Takpo Tashi Namgyal - Mahamudra, Quintessence of Mind, translated by Lobsang P. Lhalungpa

The Mind's Abiding Nature is said to be Identical with Ordinary Mind

Some uninformed people assume that what is known as ordinary mind is deluded ordinary awareness. This is not so. The Sanskrit equivalent "prakṛta" of the Tibetan term [thamal] has two meanings: an ordinary and a natural state. Here it denotes the natural state. Hence this ordinary mind consists of luminous clarity, intrinsic purity, and a self-existing state that is unmodulated and unpolluted. The Takpo Kagyupa order is not the only one that enunciates the term "ordinary mind."...

Shri Shavari advises: Ordinary mind consists of natural simplicity. Do not distort it through intellectual construction, for the pure nature of mind needs no modulation. Let the mind be in its natural state with no attempt at grasping or releasing it.

The Great Master [Milarepa] proclaims: Having continuously maintained ordinary mind, I have already forgotten the delusion of ignorance.

Je Gampopa affirms: This meditation relies solely on ordinary mind. I have discovered it through the grace of [my guru], the Buddha in a human body.

The Recognition of the Distinctive Characteristics of Ordinary Mind

Many such references to ordinary mind give a few descriptions of its identity. This I will provide. The *Tsokcho Chenmo* of Je Gampopa describes it as follows:

If at this moment one wishes to achieve liberation from the cycle of existence, one must recognize ordinary mind, for it is the root of all things. That which is designated as "ordinary mind" is one's own awareness. Left in its natural state, this awareness remains unstained by any [non-ordinary] perceptive forms, unmuddled by any levels of existential consciousness, and unclouded by dullness, depression, or thought. If one has discovered the identity of that mind one has discovered the self-cognizing awareness. If one fails to gain such an understanding, this ordinary mind remains with the co-emergence of ignorance. However, the understanding of that mind is called awareness, the essence, the co-emergent self-knowing, ordinary mind, unmodulated simplicity, nondiscrimination, and luminous clarity.

Thus Je Gampopa gives the description for identity of ordinary mind and the synonyms for this term. He also makes the comment that the discovery of ordinary mind is superior to most sublime qualities. The aforesaid term "unstained by any [nonordinary] perceptive forms" means that [ordinary mind in its intrinsic nature] is uncorrupted by the intellect's grasp of conceptual formulation or by a supernormal sensation of bliss, lucidity, nonconception, and the like. The term "unmuddled by any levels of existential consciousness" means [this ordinary mind] remains unblemished by greed, hatred, and any passions or by any anxiety about one's immediate or future plans. The term "unclouded by dullness, depression, or thought" means that the mind's abiding nature or its existential mode has not been veiled by the confusing force of dullness or depression, remaining undistracted by discursive thought or sensual incitement. The term "in its natural state" means the essential nature of mind, the inmost disposition, or the existential mode that is undistorted by any concern for acceptance or rejection. Je Yanggonpa comments:

"Nondual awareness" is the [Tibetan] classical term. "Naked ordinary mind" is the naive term used by mendicant mystics. Both mean the same thing.

Nowadays some people, having derived the idea from some odd sayings of previous gurus of this meditational order, construe the term "ordinary mind" to be a pure non-discriminating state and use it as such. They may not have grasped the proper meanings as explained by Je Takpopa and his nephew Gomchung. According to them ordinary mind means the mind in its natural mode, unveiled by any substantiality of dualistic concepts. In a general sense, accepting a state of nondiscrimination and rejecting the discriminating mind [in meditation] cannot be the meaning of ordinary mind and its unmodulated naturalness. Gampopa in his instruction to master Gomchung explains:

In summary, ordinary mind is an unmodulated simplicity, which must be left to manifest freely and unaltered by any exertion of accepting or rejecting it as being positive or negative, empty or not empty, conceptual or nonconceptual, good or bad, superior or inferior.