

Always Take One More Step

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From a Dharma talk on 23 July 2008, during the Summer Kyol Che at Warsaw Zen Center.

Student: How can we destroy the peace that occurs during sitting?

PSN: Destroy the peace? The Head Dharma Teacher will help you out! (*Demonstrates two hits with the stick.*) But why do you want to destroy the peace?

Student: Because there is just this, and this is not enough.

PSN: Because it isn't the real peace yet. Don't make a division between peace and activity. Be in harmony with every situation. When you are sitting, it's alright, it's just sitting: you are completely in it. When you are walking, you are walking 100%. When you are eating, you are eating 100%. When your mind is completely in harmony with the surroundings, that's the real peace, and there is no escape from this peace – no need to escape, because this is the natural function of your mind. Ah! I almost forgot: ask someone "How can I help you?"

Student: Is prajna the effect of this peace?

PSN: Prajna is not an effect of anything... But when you discover prajna, the effect of it will be authentic life. Prajna is the original clarity of your mind and the primary function of your mind. So when the substance and the function come together in one, then this is complete, this is prajna.

Another student: The ship of wisdom?

PSN: Well, if you like ships, it's okay.

Student: Does it (prajna) happen when it (meditation) shines – when it has this special quality? ...

PSN: Sometimes the peace is some sort of trance. When that happens, check your eyes and check your ears – check your senses. When your eyes and your ears sense clearly, then it's okay.

I know, during long periods of sitting something like nodding off or taking a quick nap appears. Then just straighten up, and take a couple of deep breaths. Bring your mind back to your belly. When we fall asleep we lose our

center; so straighten up slightly, let your center go back to its natural place, then you will re-establish contact with your primary energy.

When your primary energy circulates freely, real silence and real brightness appears, and very precise functioning of your senses also appears. Everything is clearly seen and heard. Dae Soen Sa Nim taught us: "Keep your mind vast and clear as space, and act as precisely as the tip of a needle." When these two things are present in your practice, keep that. In meditation we should find the balance between relaxation and effort.

Another student: When we hear from monks in deep meditation, sitting for years, they are not clear any more? ...they don't move any more... that is not meditation in our sense?

PSN: This *is* meditation. But one more step is necessary. Our way of practicing means that one more step is necessary. If you achieve samadhi, take one more step. If you understood something, take one more step. This means, put it down.

Somewhere in the Diamond Sutra it says: "Keep a mind that does not alight at any point." This is why, when someone only sits, they very quickly become a stone. Maybe everybody will admire them for the great sitting, but this is a stone's Zen. What is the use of such a person? You can use them for hanging clothes out in the sun to dry!

So whatever happens, you must take one more step. There is a kong-an, which is also a very well-known saying in the east: "If you climb to the top of a 100-metre mast, how can you take one more step?" This is correct Zen meditation: always take one more step from this point.

Sometimes people really want to solve this kong-an. They have difficulties with it for months or years, only dreaming about attaining it. Then some day (*clicks fingers, hits floor*) - Yes! Bingo! The teacher will say, "Okay. So I have another question for you, and another mast." (*Laughter.*)

This means you cannot live without a question. A question is absolutely necessary. You must have a goal in front of you, then your mind does not fall asleep. So we have formal kong-ans which are in the books, the whole collection; we also have the kong-an of everyday life. Every encounter with another human being, every situation, is a kong-an for us.

That is why when you only sit high in the mountains – you only sit – then at a certain time (I am not saying this is wrong) but at a certain time, your kong-an becomes unclear. It so happens that the mind evolves in places where it cannot digest. That is why we say the answer to a kong-an is very important indeed, but the question is even more important. "Don't Know" with the kong-an is more important.

The mind has to go crazy, otherwise it will never open. ...

So the Dharma is for everyone. Buddha said the Dharma is like a rain cloud. If the rain is falling, all the plants are happy and every plant realizes its potential hidden in the ground. So everyone can use that, and realize their true nature.

So it is really important to have a question. As I said, our mind opens the most in the place which it cannot digest. If we cannot digest something, we cannot grasp something, we start to penetrate an area that is unknown to us, and we start growing strongly.

It is bit like a sportsman who is given a very high hurdle that they cannot jump over. And they can get really frustrated that they cannot jump over: they will curse and get really angry every day, but they are trying and trying even harder. And the hurdle that they cannot jump over becomes their friend. Because of it, their strength increases. So when one day they jump over, everyone is really happy and claps – bravo! But the sportsman is through, in this moment. That is why it is necessary to put the hurdle even higher. That is Zen. And that is one more step.

Zen Master Linchi, when he was leaving this world, wrote a poem, a *gatha*:

Because the human mind tends to fall into ignorance,
it has to practice constantly.
Even the sharpest sword
requires constant sharpening.

So if it was true for the great Zen Master Linchi, it is even more true for us. Let's not forget that. Try, try try.

Dae Seon Sa Nim taught us that this try-mind is better than Buddha, is better than a thousand bodhisattvas, is better than enlightenment. It really in itself already is enlightenment. So let this try-mind be the driving force of our Kyol Che. For those who are leaving the Kyol Che in the course of the programme, may this try-mind never leave them. There lives the real spirit of our practice: so cultivate it. That is all – cultivate it. Thank you for your attention.

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