

This Moment is Your Teacher

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As I said at the beginning of the talk, wherever we are, whatever we are doing, that is our teacher. Most important is our "don't know" mind. When we approach a teacher for help, it is the same. More than just her or his sharp and penetrating words, our own sincerity and openness is most important.

There is a wonderful story about a Korean monk who was very stupid. He was so stupid that he couldn't understand any dharma talks, so he eventually stopped going to them. He couldn't understand kong-ans, so he stopped going to interviews. He had a hard time even sitting Zen, so he felt he was too stupid and didn't sit. So all he did in the temple was working practice, because he could not do anything else.

One day, he went to his teacher and said, "Master, I'm too stupid for anything. Can you help me in some way, tell me something that will help my practice?" So his teacher gave him a phrase as a hwadu, a kong-an, to work with: "mind is Buddha." But because this monk was so dull, he misheard it. What he heard was, "grass shoe is Buddha," which sounds very similar in Korean.

The monk was very confused when he left the Zen master. He thought, "what a difficult kong-an! How can I ever understand it?" Every day he did his working practice, and this question was alive for him all the time, very strong: "what is the meaning of 'grass shoe is Buddha'?"

Then one day he stumbled against a rock, and his shoe flew off. In those days, shoes were indeed made of grass or straw. When his shoe flew off, it landed on the ground and broke. At this, the monk attained enlightenment.

He was so happy that he rushed to the Zen master yelling, "I understand, I understand." The Zen master asked, "what do you understand?" The monk took his shoe, hit the Zen master with it, and said, "my shoe is broken." The Zen master was very happy.

So, we do not need something special, some great teaching from someone. "Grass shoe is Buddha" is not exactly a very wise statement. What we need to do is cultivate the question, the fire, that we all have within, and not let it go out. All the wisdom is already there.

In this moment, it's right in front of us. Wherever we are, whatever we are doing, that's our teacher.

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