

What There Is Is Really Enough

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Once there was a sick man, who went for help to many doctors, but they only spread their arms helplessly – they were not able to help him. At last he found a person that we usually call a wise old man. This man was a herbalist. He said: “I can help you. Not far away from here in the forest, in the mountains, grows a medicinal plant. If you only look for it according to my instructions – patiently and carefully – you will surely find it and you will be healthy again”.

So this man, feeling very happy, set off to look for a plant. At the beginning he was alert, patiently and carefully looked around. But as time passed he became less careful – he noticed a lot of interesting bushes and a lot of beautiful rocks and stones and slowly, slowly he forgot about the instructions of the herbalist and finally forgot why he had come to the forest.

This situation is very similar to people practicing meditation. The Big Question weakens after some time. The beginner’s mind changes into the expert mind and our practice reaches a dead point.

When I was finishing a driving course I thanked my instructor and told him that I hoped I would not bring shame on him by causing an accident soon. He answered: “Don't worry! Statistically, accidents caused by beginners happen very rarely. Most of the accidents are caused by people who have been drivers for several years, because they lose their attention and vigilance and think they know what’s what. But you should be careful anyway.”

In one of the kongans, one Master comes to another Master and asks: “In the Mu kongan there are ten sicknesses. How can you stay healthy?” The second Master’s answer is: “I only walk on the sword’s blade”. This kind of vigilance! If you walk on the sword’s blade you must be very careful. If you are not careful you may hurt yourself. So the thing is – the more you practice the more careful you must be.

There is one more teaching, which has not been developed much in this school. Perhaps I will be able to elaborate on it. Dae Soen Sa Nim used to say very often: “Let go of everything”. Great Dogen Zenji taught similarly: “Let go of your body and mind”, which does not mean leaving anything. It does not mean rejecting your mind and body. It means: “Experience your mind and body. Experience, at this very moment, everything that happens to your body and mind...”

Then Dogen continues: “Settle your life in Buddha’s home.” So Buddha’s home is not some Nirvana, which we will maybe experience after hard practice. Buddha’s home is this moment. When somebody says: “Only this moment, only this” – you can approach it in two ways. One way is: “Only this? Is that what practice is all about?” Or you can approach it quite differently.

There is a kongan about it. A man runs away from a tiger. The tiger chases him and suddenly the man falls into an abyss. At the last moment he catches a creeper hanging over the edge. He looks up and sees the tiger, disappointed that it has failed to catch the man and waiting for a good moment to do it. The man looks down and there he sees another tiger with its jaws open wide.

This is the moment of facing life and death. In this moment there is no escape. There is only “don’t know”. And suddenly this man notices a beautiful, ripe, red strawberry. He reaches for it with this “Don’t Know mind” and – Nirvana!

So you can react to this moment with “Only that?” or you can experience it totally, completely. It is possible only when you experience what there really is, not your ideas. This is very helpful, very useful in life. If you really experience life that way, you do not waste your entire energy in creating anything, creating yourself and so on, then you can perceive the situation exactly as it is and react to it.

Now the only thing you must leave behind is schemes like: “After several weeks of Kyol-Che I should think less” (*laughter*) or “After so many years of practice I should have a better life”. Stereotypes like these should be thrown out without hesitation. If you do not follow them then it is possible to experience everything completely. There is no energy loss for a fight – for a fight, because you do not accept this experience, you do not want it. You want a different experience, because “it should be different”.

Dogen said that it is not until the moment of death that you experience complete surrender, only then you understand that there is no escape. There is no need to fight. This is a very important experience – no way out. The experience of Kyol-Che – no way out. In life it is exactly the same. But there is a strawberry. (*laughter*) There always is a strawberry! If you open yourself to such experiences you can feel Nirvana... In a certain moment there is such an experience: what there is is really enough.

– *Translated from Polish by Joanna Sadowska*