

To Polish A Tile

" When you become you, zen becomes zen. "

Zen stories or koans are very difficult to understand before you understand what we are doing moment after moment. But if you know exactly what we are doing in each moment, you will not find koans so difficult. There are so many koans. Recently I have talked to you several times about a frog, and each time everybody laughs. But a frog is very interesting. He sits like this too you know. But he doesn't think that he's doing anything so special. When you come and sit here you may think you are doing some special thing. While your husband is sleeping, you are here practicing zazen ! You are doing some special thing, and your husband is lazy ! That may be your understanding of zazen. But look at the frog. A frog also sits like this, but he has no idea of zazen. Watch him. If something annoys him, he will do like this (making a face). If something comes along to eat, he will eat (imitating a frog snapping at an insect), and he eats sitting. Actually that is our zazen. We are not doing any special thing.

Here is a kind of frog koan for you. Ba-so was a famous zen master called the horse-master. He was the disciple of Nanaku, one of the sixth patriarch's descendents. One day while he was studying under Nanaku, Ba-so was sitting practicing zazen. He was a big man of great physical build; when he talked his tongue reached to his

nose; his voice was loud and his zazen must have been very good. And he was sitting like a great mountain. And Nanaku saw him sitting like a frog. Nanaku asked, "What are you doing?" "I'm practicing zazen," Ba-so replied. "Why are you practicing zazen?" "I want to attain enlightenment; I want to be a Buddha," the disciple said. Do you know what the teacher did? He picked up a tile, and he started to polish it. In Japan, after taking a tile from the kiln, we polish it to give it a beautiful finish. So Nanaku picked up a tile and started to polish it. Ba-so, his disciple, asked, "What are you doing?" "I want to make this tile into a jewel," Nanaku said. "How is it possible to make a tile a jewel?" Ba-so asked. "How is it possible to become a Buddha by practicing zazen?" Nanaku replied. "Do you want to attain Buddhahood? There is no Buddhahood besides your ordinary mind. When a cart does not go, which do you whip, the cart or the horse? Which do you whip?" the master asked.

Nanaku's meaning here is that whatever you do, that is zazen. True zazen is beyond being in bed or sitting in the zendo. If your husband is in bed, that is zazen. If you think, "I am sitting here, and my husband is in bed," then even though you are sitting here in cross-legged position, that is not true zazen. You should be like a frog always. That is true zazen.

Dogen Zengi commented on this koan. He said, "When the horsemaster becomes the horse, zen becomes zen." When Ba-so becomes Ba-so, his zazen becomes true zazen, and

zen becomes zen. What is true zazen ? When you become you ! When you are you , then no matter what you do, that is zazen. Even though you are in bed, you may not be you most of the time. Even though you are sitting here, I wonder whether you are you in its true sense.

Here is another famous koan. Zui-kan was a zen master who always used to address himself. " Zui-kan ? " he'd call. And then he'd answer. " Hai ! " " Zui-kan ? " " Hai ! " Of course he was living all alone in his small zendo. And of course he knew who he was, But sometimes he lost himself. And whenever he lost himself, he would address himself, " Zui-kan ? " " Hai ! "

If we are like a frog, we are always ourselves. Even a frog sometimes loses himself, and he does this (making a face) ! And if something comes along, he will eat it (snapping). So I think a frog is always addressing himself. I think you should do that also. Even in zazen you will lose yourself. When you become sleepy, or when your mind starts to wander about, you lose yourself. When you become painful, " Why are my legs so painful ? " you lose yourself. Because you lose yourself, the problem you have will be a problem for you. If you do not lose yourself, then even though you have difficulty, there is actually no problem whatsoever. You just sit in the midst of the problem; when you are a part of the problem, or ~~when the problem is a part of you,~~ there is no problem, because you are the problem itself. The problem is you, yourself. If so, there is no problem.

When your life is always a part of your surroundings -
in other words, when you are called back to yourself,
right here - then there is no problem. When you start
to wander about in some delusion which is something apart
from you, yourself, then your surroundings are not real
any more, and your mind is not real any more. If you, your-
self are deluded, then your surroundings are also a misty
foggy delusion. Once you are in the midst of delusion,
there is no end to the delusion. One after another you
will be involved in deluded ideas. Most people live in
delusion, involved in their problem, ~~how~~ to solve their problem.
But to live is actually to live in problems. And to solve
the problem is to be a part of it, or to be one with it.

So which do you hit, the cart or the horse ? Which
do you hit, you yourself, or your problems ? If you start
wondering which you should hit, that means you have already
started to wander about. But when you actually hit a
horse, the cart will go. In truth the cart and the horse
are not different. When you are you, there is no problem
of whether you should hit the cart or the horse. When
you are you, zazen becomes true zazen. So when you practice
zazen, your problem will practice zazen, and everything
else will practice zazen too. Even though your husband is
in bed, he is also practicing zazen. ~~When you~~ practice
zazen ! But when you do not practice true zazen, then there
is your husband, and there is yourself - each quite different,
quite separate from the other. So if you yourself have true
practice, then everything else is practicing our way at the
same time.

That is why we should always address ourselves, checking up on ourselves, like a doctor (tapping himself). This is very important. This kind of practice should be continued moment after moment incessantly. We say, " When the night is here, the dawn comes. " It means there is no gap between the dawn and the night. Before the summer is over, autumn comes. In this way we should understand our life. We should practice with this understanding, and solve our problems in this way. Actually just to work on the problem, if you do it with single-minded effort, is enough. You should just polish the tile; that is our practice. The purpose of practice is not to make a tile a jewel. Just continue sitting; that is practice in its true sense. It is not a matter of whether or not it is possible to attain Buddhahood, whether or not it is possible to make a tile a jewel. Just to work, just to live in this world with this understanding is the most important point. That is our practice. That is true zazen. So we say, " When you eat, eat ! " You should eat what is there, you know. Sometimes you don't eat it. Even though you are eating, your mind is somewhere else. You do not taste what you have in your mouth. As long as you can eat when you are eating, you are all right. Don't worry a bit. It means ~~when~~ you are you, yourself. ^{I-xxx}

When you are you, you see things as they are, and you become one with your surrounding. There is your

true self. There you have true practice; you have the practice of a frog. He is a good example of our practice. So when a frog becomes a frog, zen becomes zen. When you understand a frog through and through, you attain enlightenment; you are Buddha. and you are a good wife or daughter. This is zazen!