

CONSTANCY (From *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, pp.83-86)

"People who know the state of emptiness will always be able to dissolve their problems by constancy."

The message for us today is "Cultivate your own spirit." It means not to go seeking for something outside of yourself. This is a very important point, and it is the only way to practice Zen. Of course, studying scriptures or reciting the sutra or sitting is Zen; each of these activities should be Zen. But if your effort or practice does not have the right orientation, it will not work at all. Not only will it not work, but it may spoil your pure nature. Then the more you know about Zen, the more you will become spoiled. Your mind will be filled with rubbish; your mind will be stained.

It is quite usual for us to gather pieces of information from various sources, thinking in this way to increase our knowledge. Actually, following this way we end up not knowing anything at all. Our understanding of Buddhism should not be just gathering many pieces of information, seeking to gain knowledge. Instead of gathering knowledge, you should clear your mind. If your mind is clear, true knowledge is already yours. When you listen to our teaching with a pure, clear mind, you can accept it as if you were hearing something which you already knew. This is called emptiness, or omnipotent self, or knowing everything. When you know everything, you are like a dark sky. Sometimes a flashing will come through the dark sky. After it passes, you forget all about it, and there is nothing left but the dark sky. The sky is never surprised when all of a sudden a thunderbolt breaks through. And when the lightning does flash, a wonderful sight may be seen. When we have emptiness we are always prepared for watching the flashing.

In China, Rozan is famous for its misty scenery. I have not been to China yet, but there must be beautiful mountains there. And to see the white clouds or mist come and go through the mountains must be a very wonderful sight. Although it is wonderful, a Chinese poem says, "Rozan is famous for its misty, rainy days, and the great river Sekko for its tide, coming and going. That is all." That is all, but it is splendid. This is how we appreciate things.

So you should accept knowledge as if you were hearing something you already knew. But this does not mean to receive various pieces of information merely as an echo of your own opinions. It means that you should not be surprised at whatever you see or hear. If you receive things just as an echo of yourself, you do not really see them, you do not fully accept them as they are. So when we say, "Rozan is famous for its misty, rainy days," it does not mean to appreciate this sight by recollecting some scenery we have seen before: "It is not so wonderful. I have seen that sight before." Or "I have painted much more beautiful paintings! Rozan is nothing!" This is not our way. If you are ready to accept things as they are, you will receive them as old friends, even though you appreciate them with new feeling.

And we should not hoard knowledge; we should be free from our knowledge. If you collect various pieces of knowledge, as a collection it may be very good, but this is not our way. We should not try to surprise people by our wonderful treasures. We should not be interested in something special. If you want to appreciate something fully, you should forget yourself. You should accept it like lightning flashing in the utter darkness of the sky.

Sometimes we think it is impossible for us to understand something unfamiliar, but actually there is nothing that is unfamiliar to us. Some people may say, "It is almost impossible to understand

Buddhism because our cultural background is so different. How can we understand Oriental thought?” Of course Buddhism cannot be separated from its cultural background; this is true. But if a Japanese Buddhist comes to the United States, he is no longer a Japanese. I am living in your cultural background. I am eating nearly the same food as you eat, and I am communicating with you in your language. Even though you do not understand me completely, I want to understand you. And I may understand you better than anyone who can speak and understand English. This is true. Even if I could not understand English at all, I think I could communicate with people. There is always a possibility of understanding as long as we exist in the utter darkness of the sky, as long as we live in emptiness.

I have always said that you must be very patient if you want to understand Buddhism, but I have been seeking for a better word than patience. The usual translation of the Japanese word *nin* is “patience,” but perhaps “constancy” is a better word. You must force yourself to be patient, but in constancy there is no particular effort involved—there is only the unchanging ability to accept things as they are. For people who have no idea of emptiness, this ability may appear to be patience, but patience can actually be non-acceptance. People who know, even if only intuitively, the state of emptiness always have open the possibility of accepting things as they are. They can appreciate everything. In everything they do, even though it may be very difficult, they will always be able to dissolve their problems by constancy.

Nin is the way we cultivate our own spirit. *Nin* is our way of continuous practice. We should always live in the dark empty sky. The sky is always the sky. Even though clouds and lightning come, the sky is not disturbed. Even if the flashing of enlightenment comes, our practice forgets all about it. Then it is ready for another enlightenment. It is necessary for us to have enlightenments one after another, if possible, moment after moment. This is what is called enlightenment before you attain it and after you attain it.