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COMMENTARY BY MASTER HENRYU WAKI ON MODEL SUBJECT #19 FROM THE BLUE CLIFF RECORDS

Zen may be said to be the practice of training our mind to make it deep and open enough to accept the various aspects of existence as they are. When this kind of perfect acceptance takes place, everything will be left according to its own nature and the circumstances. We call this activity the Great Activity. Reality can be said to be the bed that is deep and soft enough to accept everything as it is.

When you accept everything, everything is beyond dimensions. The earth is not great nor a grain of sand small. In the realm of Great Activity picking up a grain of sand is the same as taking up the whole universe. To save one sentient being is to save all sentient beings. Your efforts of this moment to save one person is the same as the eternal merit of Buddha.

For a person who wants to understand Buddhism logically, it may be difficult for him to understand why he should study over and over again stories such as are collected in the Hekiganroku (Blue Cliff Records). Yet, when a student realizes how difficult it is to incorporate into his daily life what he learns in these stories, he will acknowledge the necessity of practising zazen and reading. This practice and reading will in turn encourage him to read these stories over and over again. To do this over and over means perfect acceptance. Finding out the significance of everyday activity is the Great Activity.

Today's Problem

In Japan we call this era of civilized life the "instant age" because of the prevalent idea that quick solutions to problems are possible without difficulty. This idea takes many forms — instant coffee, instant Sukiyaki, operations for physical disease, pills for mental illness. In spite of all the benefits from our civilization, it is difficult for people to remain strong enough to be happy physically and mentally. Why? Perhaps because a most important point is missing.

Support from without is sometimes too strong, sometimes too weak, sometimes only partial, and sometimes harmful to other parts. The operation must be successful and in addition the patient must survive.

The important point is to arrange ourselves from inside. Orientation from our inmost nature is wanted. The problem is how to make use of our civilization and not be ruined by it. The solution to this problem is Zazen; by sitting we have to resume to our own nature and by Great Activity we should acquire absolute freedom.

Main Subject

Attention — Ryuge asked Suibi, "What was Bodhidharma's intention in coming to China"?

Suibi said, "Pass me the meditation chin-rest." (When a Zen monk sleeps in zazen posture, he rests his head on a wooden board called a zenpan or chin-rest.)

Ryuge handed Suibi the chin-rest and then Suibi struck Ryuge with it. Ryuge said, "If you strike me, I will let you. But, after all, that was not the intention of the patriarch coming to China."

Ryuge later visited Rinzai. He asked Rinzai, "What was the intention of Bodhidharma in coming to China."

Rinzai said, "Pass me the meditation mat." No sooner had Rinzai received the mat than he struck Ryuge with it.

Ryuge said, "If you strike me, I will let you do so; but that is not the Patriarch's intention in coming to the west."

Interpretation of the Main Subject

According to the Appreciatory Word of Setcho, the compiler of these stories, Ryuge was struck because he did not understand why Suibi wanted the chin-rest and Rinzai asked for the meditation mat. Their treatment of Ryuge was in the realm of Great Activity and helped Ryuge understand Bodhidharma's Zen. There are no regulations in the Great Activity. A chin-rest and a meditation mat can be used for scolding slaps.

This power of Great Activity should be acquired by meditation (sitting quietly). There was no other intention in Bodhidharma's coming to China.

For Ryuge, who practised Bodhidharma's Zen, there was no need for outside help. He could understand the Great Intention of Bodhidharma, Suibi, and Rinzai; but he knew that these intentions had nothing to do with his own Great Activity. In other words, he was enlightened in Bodhidharma's Zen.

A long time after this event, Ryuge said in his answer to a monk, "I do recognize the Great Activities of those two Zen Masters, but that has nothing to do with Bodhidharma's Zen."