

You Can't Make a Date with Enlightenment

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The sixth patriarch (Daikan Eno) said that just to dwell in emptiness and to keep your mind calm is not zazen. He also said, "Just to sit in the cross-legged position is not Zen," even though we say that you have to "just sit." If you don't know what our practice is and stick to those words, you will be confused. But if you understand what Zen really is, you will see it as a kind of warning. Now our sesshin is almost ended and many of you will go back home and be involved in your previous everyday activity. If you have been practicing true zazen you will probably be glad to go back to your everyday life. But if you feel hesitant to go back to your everyday life, it means that you still stick to zazen.

That is why the sixth patriarch said that if you dwell in emptiness, and stick to your practice, then that is not true zazen. When you practice zazen moment after moment, you accept what you have right now, and what you have in this moment. You are satisfied with everything you do, and you don't have to complain because you just accept it. That is zazen. Even though you cannot do that, you know what you should do. Then, sitting zazen will encourage you to do something else. Just as you accepted your painful legs, you accept difficult everyday life. City life may be more difficult than your zazen practice. So zazen will encourage you to have more difficulties.

If you understand in this way, that is right understanding. If you have some real taste of practice after seven days of sesshin, without losing your practice it will be a great encouragement to continue your busy activity and you will have a taste of the calmness of your mind even if it is difficult. Not because you stick to it, but because you enjoy it. When you enjoy it, you don't have time to stick to it. So if you have the real taste of our practice you can enjoy it all the time, incessantly. Whatever you do, that taste is not something you have to stick to. It is not something you have to recall. That is true enlightenment.

So even though you think you attained enlightenment, when you are in difficulty and you think you need to recall that experience, that is not real enlightenment because that experience is something you need to stick to. Real enlightenment is always with you. There is no need to stick to some experience or even to think about it. So difficulty itself is enlightenment. Busy life is enlightened activity. That is true enlightenment.



Suzuki Roshi with his wife Okusan

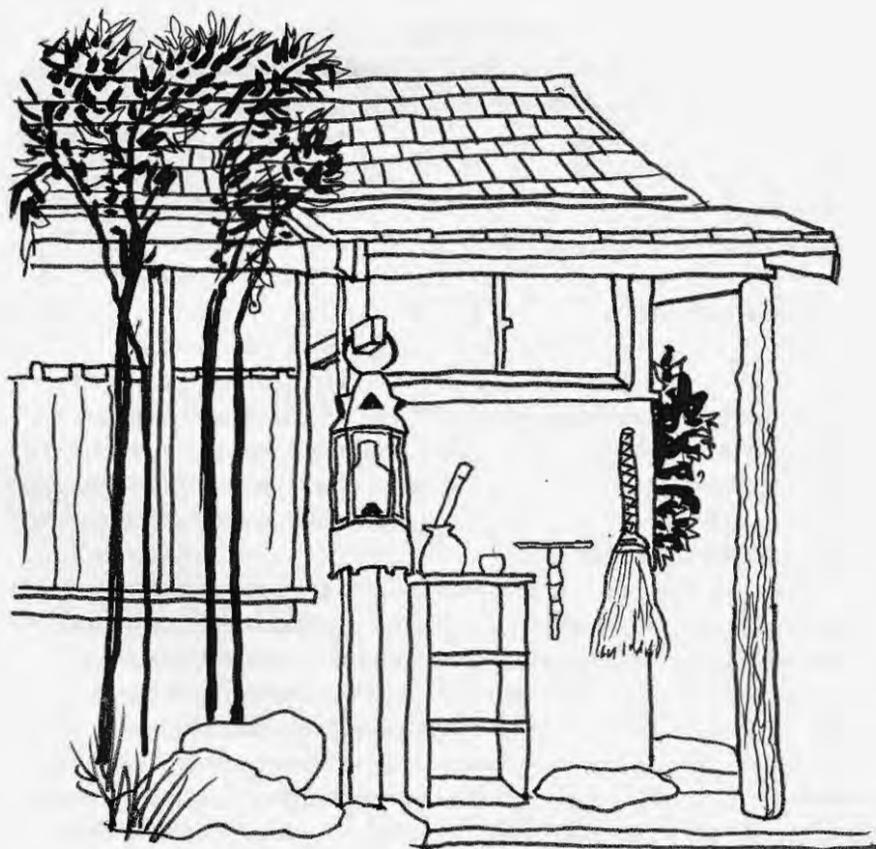
Although you may want to have a taste of true practice, it may be difficult to have it. The only way is just to continue right practice according to the right instruction and the right teacher. That is the only way. If you follow the right schedule in your practice, naturally, someday you may have a taste of it.

Nowadays, young people are making "dates." But enlightenment is not something you can make a date with. If you organize your life, get up at a certain time, take your bag lunch and go to work, then, if you have a boyfriend or girlfriend, you will meet that person without any date. At a certain time she will come to the corner. You usually see her, you know. That is more our way. It is rather foolish to make a phone call. It is troublesome. "Hey, I'm leaving now." If she doesn't meet you at the corner you will be disappointed. If you don't make any date, and if she comes at some certain time to the corner, you will be really happy. It is not a laughing matter. I'm talking about something real.

Not to make any date means not to expect enlightenment, not to stick to some experience. Being encouraged by seeing her even though you don't say anything, even though you don't talk to her, just to have a glance at her is enough. All day long you will be happy. But if you are demanding too much of her, then already it means that you stick to enlightenment.

That is what the sixth patriarch meant when he said that just to dwell on emptiness is not true practice. Originally he attained enlightenment by hearing one well-known statement. Without dwelling on anything you will have this mind. If you stick to something you will lose your enlightenment. Even though you make an appointment or a date it won't work. If you attain enlightenment in that way, it will not be the enlightenment which is always with you and will always encourage you.

This point is very important. After sesshin we should continue our well organized life and have real enlightenment. When you practice hard according to the right instructions of your teacher, then that is how you will have real enlightenment experience.



The abbot's cabin at Tassajara, by Del Carlson