

Genjo Koan—Paragraphs 11–13

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ENLIGHTENMENT DOES NOT DESTROY THE MAN, just as the moon does not break the water. A man does not hinder enlightenment, just as a drop of dew does not hinder the moon in the sky. The depth of the drop is the height of the moon. The period of reflection, long or short, will prove the vastness of the dew-drop, and the vastness of the moonlight sky.

Dogen says that even though we are not aware of enlightenment, enlightenment is present when we practice zazen. If this is so, you may say, there will be no need to take some special consideration in your everyday life or practice. There is no need to study Buddhism, even. So he tried to correct our misunderstanding in this paragraph.

“When the truth does not fill our body and mind, we think that we have enough.” Because you do not know what is the truth, you say there is no need to practice [laughs]. You obtain truth, and everything obtains truth. And everything is Buddha’s teaching. If so, there will be no need even to listen to it [laughs] because we know it. That is a common mistake. But it is not so, because you do not know what is truth.

When the truth does not fill our body and mind, we think that we have enough. When the truth fills our body and mind, we know that something is missing.

When truth actually fills your body, you think that something is missing [laughs]. Do you understand what he means? “Something is missing” means that if you understand the actual truth, it reveals itself in the eternal present. Not only this moment, but also eternally it will continuously reveal itself through our activity. What we do just now is not enough. We have to do another activity in the next moment.

That is the true meaning of “to drop off our body and mind,” or “nothing to grasp,” or Bodhidharma’s “I don’t know” [laughs]. “I don’t know” means there are many things to know. Because I don’t know, I have to know many things. That is the true meaning of truth. Truth is not some particular thing. If I say truth, you think it is some special mathematical theory or scientific theory. But we don’t mean such concrete, static logic by “truth.” Truth is unconditionality or eternal reality. Reality does not take any form. That is why we call it reality. There is no other word for that. So sometimes we say unconditionality. Because it is unconditionality, it takes various conditions. It accepts various conditions. If so, there should be innumerable variety in its form and color.



Suzuki Roshi at Tassajara

When truth fills our body and mind, we know that something is missing.

When we become one with truth, we start to take various activities according to the circumstances because we feel something is missing. So we will start continuous study, continuous practice, because we feel we should study more. When you think truth is some particular theory or teaching, you think that is enough. So you don't want to study. But when you realize what is truth actually, you feel you should do it; then you will start continuous truth—true practice.

For example, when we view the world from a boat on the ocean, it looks circular and nothing else. But the ocean is neither round nor square, and its features are infinite in variety.

You think the truth is some particular thing—some particular, concrete theory. That is exactly the same as saying the ocean is round or square. It is not square or round, there are infinite features. "It is like a palace. It is like a jewel." For a dragon, it may be like a palace. For a fish, it may be a jewel.

It seems circular as far as our eyes can reach at the time.

Dogen had a pretty hard time when he went across the ocean to China. He is referring to the voyage here. "As far as our eyes can reach, the ocean is circular." That is only at that time. When storms come with black, dark

clouds, there is no ocean. We don't know what kind of ocean we will have tomorrow. Everything is like this. Though there are many futures in the so-called "dirty life" or "pure life," we only understand what our study can reach. We say "this is awful" or "this is wonderful," that is our particular understanding—one of many understandings of life at that time. In our study of all things, we must appreciate that although they may look round or square, the future of oceans or mountains are infinite in variety.

So if we actually understand what is truth, we will have this kind of feeling. What we do is not enough. This feeling should follow when you realize the truth. "I am not so good," you may say. Why you say so is because the truth is within yourself. The truth says, I am not so good [laughs]. But if you think, I feel I am not so good, that is a self-centered idea [laughs].

"It is so not only around ourselves, but also directly here." You may look around and say the truth has infinite variety. We have to watch. But that is not right even. The truth is directly on this moment right here. Don't look around. When we say something, we are caught by our statement. When you are standing up, you are standing on the truth [taps the table several times] right now. Don't look around.

It is so not only around ourselves, but also directly here—even in a drop of water.

If someone asks you what is truth, you may say, "I don't know" or you can say, "What is it?" [Laughs.] "What is it?" means you stop and think, you appreciate life in that moment. We live in eternal present, but we know that we are not aware of the present time, even. We are just continuously doing one thing after another.

You are not even aware of your life. But if someone asks you what it is, "Oh, I am doing something." What am I doing [laughs]? This is the answer. What are you doing? "Oh my! I am watching the fish!" [Laughs.] That is the answer. Do you understand? "What am I doing? Oh, I'm practicing zazen." That is true practice. That is true answer. "What is it?" is the answer. "Oh, I don't know" is also the answer. "What are you doing? "Oh, my—I don't know!" [Laughs.]

When you are actually one with truth, things happen in your life in that way. That is true life. The more you discuss what the truth is, the more [laughs] you will be separated from the truth. But it's all right—if you try to answer someone's question, you may say, "Don't be silly, I am just eating." [Laughs.]

When a fish swims in the ocean, there is no end to the water, no matter how far it swims. When a bird flies in the sky, there is no end to the air, no matter how far it flies. However, the fish and the bird do not leave their elements.

It just flies. It just swims. There is no end of the water or sky for the fish or bird. A fish does not realize it's swimming. A bird does not realize it's flying. But where the fish swims, where the bird flies, there is water or sky.

When the use is large, it is used largely. When the use is small, it is used in a small way. Though it flies everywhere, if the bird leaves the air, it will die at once.

So when you practice Zen, you practice enlightenment. Enlightenment and practice are not different. Dogen says, "When the use is large, it is used largely. When the use is small, it is used in small way." But you cannot compare which is large, which is small, which is good and which is bad. So each practice is absolute—each practice is enlightenment itself, as when a bird flies there is sky. There are not two kinds of water for small and big fish. Water is the same.

Though it flies everywhere, if the bird leaves the air, it will die at once.

Though a big eagle says, "I am big enough to fly. So I don't want any more sky." [Laughs.] If he says so, the eagle may die at once [laughs]. So in this sense, there is no big eagle, no small sparrow. Sparrow and eagle are the same. Not different at all. Anyway, they must fly in the air.

Water makes life and air makes life. The bird makes life and the fish makes life.

Water and fish, sky and bird, you may say [are] different, but actually they are not different.

Life makes the bird and life makes the fish. There are further analogies possible to illustrate in this way practice, enlightenment, mortality and eternity.

There may be various dualistic ideas in our thinking, but practice and enlightenment, mortality and eternity are the same in their true sense.

Now here is the problem:

If a bird or a fish tries to reach the end of its element before moving in it, this bird or this fish will not find its way or its place.

True practice will be established in defilement. Before we attain enlightenment—before we are aware of enlightenment, we attain enlightenment. It is impossible for a bird or a fish to know what is air or water before they move in it. So enlightenment should be attained before we are aware of it. [Laughs.] Do you understand? True practice should be established before we attain enlightenment—before we know what is enlightenment. Do you understand? If you move in the practice, you cannot know the end of air or water. As you cannot know what is enlightenment or what is defilement before you practice it, when you practice it, you know, enlightenment is there. If you doubt it, you are trying to know what is enlightenment. You

are a fish [laughs] or a bird who wants to practice, who wants to move in it realizing the end of the water or sky.

If a bird or a fish tries to reach the end of its element before moving in it, this bird or this fish will not find its way or its place. When we find our place at this moment, when we find our way at this moment, the practice follows, and this is the realization of truth.

This is pretty difficult to accept. Pretty difficult to be a fish [laughs] or a bird who just moves in water or sky. Because we are not a fish or sky, we try to know the end of the sky or water before we move in it [laughs]. It may be quite natural for you to want to know what is enlightenment, what is water or sky before you practice or before you move in it. That is why I'm trying to explain what is enlightenment, why Dogen-zenji worked so hard to explain what is enlightenment. But before he wrote so many works to let you know what is water, what is sky, he said you should not wait to understand Buddhism intellectually before practicing Buddhism. That is like a bird who tries to move in sky after he knows the end of the sky.

Of course, we do not ignore the intellectual understanding of Buddhism, or someone who has time to explain it intellectually. It is their duty to explain it intellectually. But for us, it is necessary to start practice so you understand completely what is Buddhism. You will have no time [laughs] to realize what is Buddhism. Thank you very much.

It's good that these Tassajara summer students seem to be enjoying their work because it will soon start up again, with the 2004 guest season beginning in April. Pictured, from left, are: Brenda Eu, Terry Neumann, Hannah Meara, Amy Strother, and Joan Amaral.



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