

NO TRACE

" When you do something, you should burn yourself completely like a good bonfire, leaving no trace of yourself. "

When we practice zazen our mind is calm and quite simple. But usually our mind is very busy and complicated, and it is difficult to be concentrated on what we are doing. This is because before we act we think, and this thinking leaves some trace. Our activity is shadowed by some preconceived idea. The thinking not only leaves some trace or shadow, but also gives us many other notions about other activities and things. These traces and notions make our minds very complicated. When we do something with a quite simple clear mind, we have no notion or shadows, and our activity is strong and straightforward. But when we do something with complicated mind, in relation to other things or people, or society, our activity becomes very complex.

Most people have a double or triple notion in one activity. We say, " To catch two birds with one stone. " That is what people usually try to do. Because they want to catch too many birds they find it difficult to be concentrated on one activity, and they may end up not catching any birds at all ! That kind of thinking always leaves its shadow on their activity. The shadow is not actually the thinking itself. Of course it is often necessary to think before we act and make preparation. But right thinking does not leave any shadow. Thinking which leaves traces comes out of your relative confused

mind. Relative mind is the mind, which sets itself in relation to other things, thus limiting itself. It is this small mind which creates gaining ideas and leaves traces of itself.

If you leave a trace of your thinking on your activity, you will be attached to the trace. For instance, you may say, " This is what I have done ! " But actually it is not so. In your recollection you may say, " I did such and such a thing in some certain way ", but actually that is never exactly what happened. When you think in this way you limit the actual experience of what you have done. So if you attach to the idea of what you have done, you are involved in some selfish ideas.

Often we think what we have done is good, but it may not actually be so. When we become old, we are often very proud of what we have done. When others listen to someone proudly telling something which he has done, they will feel funny, because they know his recollection is one-sided. They know that what he has told them is not exactly what he did. Moreover, if he is proud of what he did, that pride will create some problem for him. Repeating his recollections in this way his personality will be twisted more and more, until he becomes quite a disagreeable stubborn fellow. This is an example of leaving a trace of one's thinking in mind. We should not forget what we did, but it should not leave a trace. To leave a trace is not the same as to remember something. It is necessary to remember what we have done, but we should not become attached to what we have done in some

special sense. What we call 'attachment' is just these traces of our thought and activity.

In order not to have any traces, when you do something, you should do it with your whole body and mind; you should be concentrated on what you do. You should do it completely, like a good bonfire. You should not be a smoky fire. You should burn yourself completely. If you do not burn yourself completely, a trace of yourself will be left in what you do. You will have something remaining which is not completely burned out. Zen activity is activity which is completely burned out, with nothing remaining but ashes. This is the goal of our practice. That is what Dogen meant when he said, "Ashes do not come back to firewood". Ash is ash. Ash should be completely ash. The firewood should be firewood. When this kind of activity takes place, one activity covers everything.

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So our practice is not a matter of one hour or two hours, or one day or one year. If you practice zazen with your whole body and mind, even for a moment, that is zazen. So moment after moment you should devote yourself to your practice. You should not have any remains after you do something. But this does not mean to forget all about it. If you understand this point, all the dualistic thinking and all the problems of life will vanish.

When you practice zen you become one with zen. There is no you or no zazen. When you bow, there is no Buddha or no you. One complete bowing takes place, that's all. This is nirvana. When Buddha transmitted our practice

to Mahakasyapa he just picked up a flower with a smile. Only Mahakasyapa understood what he meant; no one else understood. We don't know if this is a historical event or not, but it means something. It is a demonstration of our traditional way. Some activity which covers everything is true activity, and the secret of this activity is transmitted from Buddha to us. This is Zen practice, not some teaching taught by Buddha, or some rules of life set up by him.. The teaching, or the rules should be changed according to the place, or according to the people who observe them, but the secret of this practice cannot be changed. It is always true.

So for us there is no other way to live in this world. I think this is quite true, and this is easy to accept, easy to understand, and easy to practice. If you compare the kind of life based on this practice with what is happening in this world, or in human society, you will find out just how valuable is the truth Buddha left us. The truth is quite simple, and practice is quite simple. But even so, we should not ignore it; we must discover its great value. Usually if it is too simple we say, " Oh, I know that ! It is quite simple. Everyone knows that. " But if we do not find its value it means nothing. It is the same as not knowing. The more you understand our culture the more you will understand how true and how necessary our teaching is. Instead of criticizing our culture, you should devote your mind and body to practicing this simple way. It may be all right for the people who are too attached to our culture to be

critical. Their critical attitude means they are coming back to the simple truth left by Buddha. But our approach is just to be concentrated on simple practice and simple understanding of life. Anyways there should be no traces in our activity. We should not attach to some fancy ideas or to some beautiful things. We should not seek for something good. The truth is always near at hand, within your reach.