

The Quality of Being

" When you do something, if you fix your mind on the activity with some confidence, the quality of your state of mind is the activity itself. When you are concentrated on the quality of your being, you are prepared for the activity. "

The purpose of zazen is to attain the freedom of our being, physically and mentally. According to Dogen Zengi, every existence is a flashing into the vast phenomenal world, and each existence is another expression of the quality of being itself. I saw many stars when I was in the car this morning. The stars I saw were nothing but the light which had traveled at great speed many miles from the heavenly bodies. But for me the stars are not speedy beings, but calm, steady, and peaceful beings. We say, " In calmness there should be activity; in activity there should be calmness. " Actually, they are the same thing; to say 'calmness' and to say 'activity' is just to express two different interpretations of one fact. There is harmony in our activity, and where there is harmony there is calmness. This harmony makes the quality of the being, but the quality of the being is nothing but its speedy activity. Because there is some harmony in the speedy activity we can feel its quality.

When we sit we feel very calm and serene, but actually we do not know what kind of activity is going on inside our being. Because there is complete harmony in our systematic physical activity we feel the calmness in it. Even if we don't feel it, the quality is there.

So for us there is no need to be bothered by calmness or activity, stillness or movement. When you do something, if you fix your mind on the activity with some confidence, the quality of your state of mind is the activity itself. When you are concentrated on the quality of your being, you are prepared for the activity. Movement is nothing but the quality of our being. And when we sit the quality of our calm, steady serene sitting is the quality of the immense activity of being itself.

'Everything is just a flashing into the vast, phenomenal world' means the freedom of our activity, or of our being. If you sit in the right manner, with the right understanding, you attain the freedom of your being, even though you are just a temporal existence. Within this moment, this temporal existence does not change, does not move, and is always independent from other existences. In the next moment another existence arises; we may change to something else. Strictly speaking, there is no connection between I-myself yesterday and I-myself in this moment; there is no connection whatsoever. Dogen Zengi said, "Charcoal does not become ashes." Ashes are ashes; they do not belong to charcoal. They have their own past and future. They are an independent existence because they are a flashing into the vast phenomenal world. And charcoal and red hot fire are quite different existences. Black charcoal is also a flashing into the vast phenomenal world. Where there is black charcoal there is no red hot charcoal. So black charcoal is independent from red hot charcoal; ashes are independent from

firewood; each existence is independent of every other.

Today I am sitting in Los Altos. Tomorrow morning I shall be in San Francisco. There is no connection between the 'I' in Los Altos, and the 'I' in San Francisco. They are quite different beings. Here we have the freedom of existence. And there is no quality connecting you and me; when I say 'you', there is no 'I'; when I say 'I', there is no 'you'. You are independent, and I am independent; each exists in a different moment. But this does not mean we are quite different beings. We are actually one and the same being. We are the same, and yet different. It is very paradoxical, but actually it is so. Because we are independent beings, each one of us is a complete flashing into the vast phenomenal world. When I am sitting, there is no other person, but this does not mean I ignore you. I am completely one with every existence in the phenomenal world. So when I sit, you sit; everything sits with me. That is our zazen. When you sit, everything sits with you. And everything makes up the quality of your being. I am a part of you. I go into the quality of your being. So in this practice we have absolute liberation from everything else. If you understand this secret there is no difference between zen practice and your everyday life. You can interpret everything as you wish.

A wonderful painting is the result of the feeling in your fingers. If you have the feeling of the thinness of the ink in your brush, the painting is already there, before you paint. When you dip your brush into the ink you already know the result of your drawing, or else you

cannot paint. So before you do something the being is there, the result is there. Even though you look as if you were sitting quietly, all your activity past and present, is included; and the result of your sitting is also already there. You are not reacting at all. All the activity is included within you. That is your being. So all the results of your practice are included in your sitting. This is our practice, our zazen.

Dogen Zengi became interested in Buddhism as a boy when he saw the smoke from an incense stick, burning by his dead mother's body, and he felt the evanescence of our life. This feeling of the evanescence of life grew within him and finally resulted in his attainment of enlightenment and the development of his deep philosophy. When he saw the smoke from the incense stick, he felt the evanescence of life and he felt very lonely. But that lonely feeling became stronger and stronger, and flowered into enlightenment when he was twenty-eight years old. And at the moment of enlightenment he exclaimed, "There is no body and no mind!" When he said "no body and no mind," all his being in that moment became a flashing into the vast phenomenal world, a flashing ~~which~~ including everything, ~~which~~ covering everything, and ~~which~~ ^{with} had immense quality in it. Even though it is just a flashing, all the phenomenal world is included within it. It is an absolute independent existence. That was his enlightenment. So, starting from the lonely feeling of the evanescence of life, he attained the most powerful experience of the

quality of his being. And he said, " I have dropped off my mind and body. " Because you think you have body or mind, you have lonely feelings, but when you realize that everything is just a flashing into the vast universe you become very strong, and your existence becomes very meaningful. This was Dogen's enlightenment, and this is our practice.