

Excerpted from Chapter Eleven, Nothing Holy About It: The Zen of Being Just Who You Are

Dogen Said, “TO STUDY BUDDHISM is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self.”

When we forget the self, we experience our nonself nature, which is often referred to in Buddhism as *heartmind*, a word that evokes a sense of boundlessness. It is the mind and heart of the universe, but it also includes our small mind and our constricted heart. If our small ego-driven heart and mind were not included in heartmind, there would be no path to awakening.

THE BOUNDLESS NATURE OF HEART MIND

One is no other than all; all no other than one. Misunderstanding the great mystery, people labor in vain for peace.

—ZEN MASTER SENG-TS’AN

The Chinese Zen master Seng-Ts’an thought about heartmind as being composed of five dimensions:

1. Physical
2. Mental
3. Emotional
4. Openness
5. Full/Empty

OPENNESS—THE FOURTH DIMENSION

For the most part, we tend to experience partial awareness of only the first three components of heartmind. Some people are just naturally aware of their bodily sensations, but often these same people are unaware that they are experiencing the outer world through an intermediary—an inner critic or a narrator. Mentally they are in the Chatterbox Café.* Other people are more aware of their thoughts but fail to notice their underlying mood.

When bare awareness is present, nothing gets left out. We are open to the physical, to the mental, and to the emotional dimensions of heartmind. Openness is the fourth dimension. It’s the disappearing-picture-frame dimension. When the frame disappears, the picture includes everything. We begin to experience this openness as our nonjudgmental, kind attentiveness to the first three dimensions increases. Whatever comes up, we just experience it.

That is where our freedom comes from—the willingness to experience our lives fully, without trying to split off from what is happening. When we resist, we contract, which is a form of imprisonment. We shrivel up in our prisons, and our world gets smaller and

smaller. We see this in the elderly all the time. But it doesn't have to be that way. Suzuki Roshi knew how to live both deep and wide.

One afternoon Suzuki and I were on our way to Tassajara for a Zen practice period. I had been purifying my body so I'd be ready for it, drinking a lot of water, no coffee or caffeinated tea, and eating only fruits, vegetables, tofu, and grains. We were about halfway into our three-hour drive when Suzuki said, "Let's stop for coffee." He pointed to a roadside café that we were coming up on.

I was eager to get to the monastery. It seemed wrong to drink coffee when we were on our way to a practice period. Reluctantly, I pulled in and parked the car. We sat in a booth. When the waitress came over, Suzuki ordered coffee. I ordered water.

As he sipped his coffee, the waitress passed by with a banana split for someone at the next table. Suzuki's eyes grew huge. "What is that?" he asked eagerly.

"A banana split," I replied.

"I want one of those!" he exclaimed.

I sighed and gulped down my water.

When the banana split arrived, Suzuki took several moments to take it in with his eyes. "Just like America," he said, finally. "Everything mixed together."

Then he took a tiny bite of the whipped cream. Next he sampled the ice cream, one color at a time. He looked at the cherry, but he didn't touch it.

Then he pushed the whole thing over to me. "This is for you." How could I resist? I ate the whole thing.

Note:

* the condition "...where our inner narrator mediates for us, rather than interacting with the world directly, we interact with our *thoughts* about the world."

