

A Farmer Came to See . . .

A FARMER CAME TO SEE the Buddha because he heard that the Buddha was a great teacher. He thought that the Buddha might be able to help him. So he told the Buddha his problems: too much rain, or not enough; his wife nagged him too much, and he occasionally would tire of her; his kids didn't show him enough respect. When the farmer finished, he waited for Buddha to speak and ease his life. The Buddha said, "I can't help you. Everybody's got problems; in fact all of us have eighty-three problems, and there is nothing you can do about it. If you work really hard on one of them, maybe you'll fix it, but almost immediately another one will pop up in its place. For example, you're going to lose your family someday, and you're going to die someday. There's nothing you or anyone else can do about it." The man, now agitated, asked, "What good is your teaching then?" The Buddha said, "Maybe the teaching will help you with the eighty-fourth problem." "What's that?" the farmer asked. "Well," said the Buddha, "you want to not have any problems. That's the eighty-fourth problem."

I heard a recent talk from someone whose first encounter with Suzuki Roshi resembles this story. This person brought forth a litany of painful conditions in his life and asked Suzuki Roshi what to do about them. Suzuki Roshi just sat there and chuckled, and when the speaker was finished, Suzuki Roshi suggested he start sitting zazen. He told him, "You're like a clock that's wound up, but you don't know what time it is."

Even though we have the blueprint of the path—impermanence, emptiness,* no substantial self—the *individual* doesn't do it. In our culture we emphasize the efficacy of the individual, but we do not acknowledge or respect the deep underpinnings of our life. We work with what we can see, but underneath the visible are the invisible energies that need time to manifest and become available to us. We can observe the process of an arising self by watching how we crave, then grasp, one-sidedly, for this or that pleasant or unpleasant experience.

At mealtime we smell food coming into the zendo. If our mind inclines toward that smell, we're going to think "delicious" or maybe "tasteless." When we see from one perspective only, our life is lived in terms of push-pull, wanting to take in things or moments that are agreeable, or turn away from what is unpleasant, uncomfortable. Seeing partially is suffering.

The truth and joy of this life is that we cannot change things as they are. When stuck in past conditioning, we ignore the wholeness of existence. Liberation is to see reality without the leaning of the mind, to see wholeness, the process, rather than a fixed nature in any object of mind. The mind will then lean neither toward nor away from things. Moving in accord with circumstances, we do not act *on* things, but *with* circumstances.

Dogen tells us we tend to reject that which is near, close at

hand, and venerate that which is far and unattainable. Whatever seems unattainable becomes a pure mind, an open heart, or something else. What's near is everyday confusion, feeling hurt, wounded, restless, or bored. The practice is not to reject what is near, our immediate experience, nor what is far, our dreams, our passions, our idealizations, but to become proficient in both the near *and* the far. We practice to know all of it in order to not be caught by any of it.

Please use your time to develop an insatiable appetite for inner awareness, to become proficient with this mind. Notice what you are willing to pay attention to. We give you all these practices to push you. If they were easy, they wouldn't be worth doing.