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## Opening your heart

FOR ANYONE LIVING A SPIRITUAL LIFE, the most important practice is openheartedness. But dealing with life with compassion and kindness is not easy. We tend to live in terms of "me." But if you're interested in the spiritual life, you will have to consider more than just yourself.

All religions emphasize the importance of openness of heart. But very few of us actually practice it in our daily lives. So day after day, year after year, century after century, wise people point this out to us. They know how egotistical we are. But even one person practicing love and compassion is a great source of peace in the world.

Whatever the future brings, we have to continue to seek a world based on the practice of openness of heart. Perfect openness of heart brings into life flexibility, tenderness, and magnanimity. This can't be fully explained conceptually. You can't put your finger on it, but you can feel it. To live this way is what you're really looking for.

Usually we live our lives only in terms of the world we can see. When we do, we emphasize ourselves. We place the "I" first. Even when we take up the spiritual life, we place the "I" first. In other words, we pull everything down to the level of our personal views and feelings. We never forget ourselves. This is why, at bottom, we're often irritated or uneasy. And the more we place the "I" first, the more irritation, uneasiness, suffering, and fear we feel.

What we tend to ignore is the world that sees us. This is not the world you think you see or hear. Nevertheless, you are supported by this world. It is actually the world as it is *before*

## Egolessness

you are conscious of it—before you form some idea about it. If you emphasize yourself, you will completely forget this world that sees, holds, and sustains you.

For instance, since I'm the head of a Zen group, even though my life is my life, my life is not really my life. My life is really the life of all of the group. So, very naturally, even though I don't like it, we set up a schedule for zazen, and lectures, and retreats, and so forth—and I have to follow it. In other words, the group has set me in a certain way of life. In terms of my ego, I don't like it. I'd rather do just what I want to do, and not always follow the schedule.

We all feel this way from time to time. We say, "Don't tell me what I should do!" But we can't take care of our lives very well just based on our personal preferences. There's a big world that sees you. You can't ignore this world. So, even though I might not like it sometimes, the group provides me with this great opportunity to sit zazen. So when the opportunity appears, I feel grateful that I can sit zazen with all beings.

We all have memories and habits and patterns in our lives, and sometimes, even though we feel good, they don't allow us to open our hearts. Intellectually we know we should, but emotionally it seems like we can't. Still, you can do it. Strictly speaking, openness of heart is beyond all speculation. It is the total picture of your life as you live it from day to day.

If you want to practice compassion, you must accept simultaneously the world you see and the world that sees you. You can't judge your life just in terms of what you can see—that is, from your ego-centered perspective. You must practice patience, calmness of mind, and mindfulness. If you don't confine yourself to just your own view of things, these come up naturally. When you just sit down in zazen, you can feel something. Even though you don't know what it is, it just arises, right here, right now.

Compassion is like springwater under the ground. Your life is like a pipe that can tap into that underground spring. When

*You Have to Say Something*

you tap into it, water immediately comes up. So drive your pipe into the ground. Tap into the water of compassion. We can't conceive of what real compassion and openness of heart are, but if you tap into them, you can feel them. If you learn to deal with your life with compassion, magnanimity, and flexibility, you will become very tender, generous, and kind. This is all that is necessary.

We do not need an explanation. No matter how long we ask about why we are so egoistic, we will never find a clear answer. Nevertheless, right in the middle of this "no answer," your life goes on. Even though we don't understand, we can all take a deep breath. We can all practice forgetting ourselves. Forgetting yourself does not mean destroying yourself. Forgetting yourself is just to see yourself from a different angle: the way the world sees you. Then you will see not just your little ego self but your true self, your big self, which includes all beings.

When I was fourteen years old my mother died. The world seemed completely dark. I felt there was no hope for me. Day after day, I cried in my bed. It seemed that the more I cried, the more I tried to reach for her, the further from me she became. So I cried even more. I cried constantly. But, all of a sudden, I stopped crying. I felt my mother had come into my heart. I can't explain it in words. But there was no longer any separation between me and my mother. She was in my heart.

This goes for you, too. There is you and then there is the world. If there is even a small gap between them, we fill it with thought. As long as we create this gap, we will never understand. But in Truth, there is no gap between you and the world. To become one with your object is true openness of heart. This is why we do zazen.