

CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN YOURSELF AND YOURSELF

WE HAVE A PRACTICE KNOWN as the *paramitas*. *Paramita* means “to have reached the other shore.” Dogen Zenji says, “The other shore is already reached.” In other words, the meaning of reaching the other shore is to realize that this shore *is* the other shore. This life *is* the unsurpassable, realized life. There is no gap.

So if there is purpose to our practice, it is to realize that this shore and the other shore are the same. The purpose is to close the gap, to realize that there is just one shore, there is just one life. *To reach* is extra. Until you realize that this shore where you stand, this life that you are living, and the other shore, the life of the buddhas, are the same shore, you cannot appreciate your life to the fullest.

In that sense we can say that the purpose of practice is no purpose. If we have a purpose, then we have problems. We set up all kinds of goals and we reach for them. But the amazing thing is that the goal is right here! We are on the starting line and at the same time we are already on the goal line. In other words, we are already living the buddhas' life. Regardless of whether we realize it or not, regardless of whether we are new or old-time practitioners, we are intrinsically the buddhas. Yet until we see this, somehow we simply cannot accept that fact.

We get stuck when we try to figure this out intellectually. From the intellectual point of view, the start and the goal must be different. This shore and the other shore cannot be the same. Then what to do? There are as many different paths to realization as there are people. But we can say there are two basic ways. One way is to push ourselves to realize that our life is the buddhas' life. Another way is to simply let our life be the buddhas' life and just live it. In a way, this is the difference between koan practice and shikantaza. But whichever practice you do, the point is the same. *Do not create a gap between your life and the buddhas' life.*

How do we do this? How can we realize the other shore is here,

right now? In other words, how can you become one with breathing, with koan, with zazen, with work, or with whatever you do? Do not play with intellectual comprehension. This is the biggest source of trouble. Unfortunately, we are usually not even aware that we are being intellectual. Simply by being in our heads, we become self-centered. We make others and self separate. As long as ideas are involved, regardless of how fine our ideas are, this gap is there.

So how are you practicing? When you count your breaths, just count breath after breath. Soon you will forget about counting and become the number. When you do shikantaza, just sit. When you do zazen, become zazen yourself. When you work on koan, become the koan yourself. Otherwise, regardless of how much you practice, you will not be satisfied.

The pitfall is always within yourself. Everything is already here with you! This very body and mind is the Way. You are complete to begin with. There is no gap, but you think there is.

Master Joshu asked Nansen, “What is the Way?” Nansen answered, “Ordinary mind is the Way.” If you think ordinary mind is the Way, right there you miss. If you think that our ordinary mind, which is nothing but the monkey mind, cannot be the Way, you also miss. The point is your ordinary mind and the Way cannot be separate. Saying ordinary mind is the Way is not enough, for the word *is* points to separation. So how can you eliminate this separation? How can you realize that there is no separation to begin with?

The most important point is to forget yourself. What we do most of the time is exactly the opposite. We reinforce the self. Always, *I* am doing something. This is the problem; we create this separation. When you truly forget yourself, a very different scenery is revealed in front of your nose. The other shore is where you stand. The buddhas' life is your life. So please, however you have been practicing, really focus on forgetting yourself.

How to close the gap between Yourself and yourself? Please take this seriously as your fundamental koan. Sit comfortably and concentrate well. There are all kinds of things that disturb our practice. We call these disturbances *makyo*. *Ma* means “devil” and *kyo* is “object.” So *makyo* is an object of the devil. Not having enough money could be *makyo*; having

too many things could be makyo. If you are diligent, your effort could be makyo; not expending your energy in the right direction could also be makyo. When you are disturbed, your mind becomes scattered and you cannot concentrate well. Many people become sick simply because they do not know what to do with themselves.

How do we make our lives more orderly? When you stabilize your life you will concentrate better, and when you eliminate all separation you will realize the Buddha's wisdom. Upon his realization, Shakyamuni Buddha declared, "I and all beings simultaneously attained the Way." This is true order, the order of no-order. All dharma comes out of this no-order. Simultaneously attaining the Way is the true order of our life. Our life is being realized right now; not just our life, everyone's life. Buddha wants us to realize this! When we realize this no-order, then so-called disturbing situations are no longer disturbing; they can then be taken as occasions to encourage our practice, not disturb it.

Someone asked me, "How can I really be responsible for my life?" I asked her, "Do you know who you are?" Not knowing, how can you be responsible for your life? The problem is that what our life actually is and our so-called intellectual understanding of what it is are often two different things. Most of the time we are deceiving ourselves, whether we know it or not. Please be careful about this. Shakyamuni Buddha himself said, "Be a torch for your life." In other words, depend on yourself and be responsible for yourself, not as what you think you are but rather you *as the dharma*. This is very important. You cannot depend on your complaints, on your greed, anger, and ignorance.

So close the gap between Yourself and yourself. Carry this wisdom into your daily life and let your life continue in this way. When you close the gap, that is the best way to take care of your family, of your community, of your life. Then your life becomes delightful, not only for yourself but for the people around you as well.

You do not need to lock yourself in a closet to think about this. With beginner's mind, the mind that sees no separation, you can take care of this gap. This awareness can take place at any moment, under any circumstances. We should also appreciate that our practice is not just for this lifetime only. Shakyamuni Buddha talks about his past lives in

the Mahayana sutras. He is not the only one who has had past lives, all of us have had past lives. The more I realize that this practice is not just for this lifetime, the more I appreciate the opportunity to practice together with all of you.

I want you to appreciate your own life, too. Every moment, right now, is nothing other than us, our practice, our life, our realization, our manifestation! Refresh it each moment! Having such a practice not only benefits you and gives you joy, it also inspires others. And vice versa, too. When you live this way, your life will become very different and you will not complain about things. You will become more tolerant and generous. If anything does not go well, you will see this *I* as the responsible person. You will see the other shore as your life this very moment. So regardless of the situation, when you close the gap you can take any situation as the Buddha's life and manage it well.