

## PAIN, FEAR, AND FRUSTRATION

**S**OMETIMES OUR LIFE SEEMS to go to all kinds of so-called negative extremes. When this happens, how do we take care of our frustrations, anxiety, pain, sorrows, even despair? The point is how do we put balance in our life? What kind of standards do we use?

In the Four Noble Truths, Shakyamuni Buddha speaks the truth of suffering. We know that happiness never continues forever. Ironically, the more happiness we have, the more pain we have when we lose this happiness. Generally speaking, birth and death are understood as the main causes of suffering. Birth, sickness, old age, and death are all suffering. To be born is to live and become sick, to become old. Dogen Zenji tells us that there is a buddha within sickness; there is a buddha in the midst of getting old; there is a buddha within suffering. More precisely, being born is the life of buddha, being sick is the life of buddha, getting old is the life of buddha, death is nothing but the life of buddha. It is the same life as our life. Do not discriminate between the life of buddha and your life.

One of our members recently learned that her mother has terminal cancer. Her mother has not been told of this, so the daughter wrote and asked me, "Shall I tell her or not?" I wrote back a passage from Dogen Zenji, "Birth and death is the life of the Buddha." I don't know what she told her mother, since her mother is not Buddhist. Is it difficult for you to take death as the life of buddha?

Dogen Zenji also said, "When the Buddha is within birth and death, there is neither birth nor death." This is a wonderful koan. If there is no birth, no death, then what exists? Answer me. What exists? Just buddha. We are being born and dying simultaneously. Each moment we are being born and each moment, dying. Instant birth and death. This means that in every moment our life is brand

new. We are living this fresh, new life all the time, and yet we experience so many fears and frustrations.

Of the Four Noble Truths, the fourth, the Eightfold Path, is the most important, for it talks about how we can take care of suffering. In the Eightfold Path, the Buddha begins with right understanding, or right view. This sense of right is not limited to a conventional sense of right and wrong, but means a total or complete understanding. We should understand life and the aspects of life in a proper way. Right understanding is followed by right thought, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration, or samadhi. Samadhi leads us back to right understanding. What is right samadhi? This kind of samadhi is one of the very crucial bases for making decisions. When we have it, we transcend this restricted *I*. If we do not transcend this *I*, we create delusions and we suffer pain, fear, and frustrations.

The Eightfold Path begins with right understanding, which takes care of ninety percent of the pain in life. What makes it right? What is right and what is wrong? In one way or another, all of us have some kind of standard by which we make value judgments, by which we judge whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, adequate or inadequate.

In this regard, there are four aspects to consider when we have decisions to make or actions to take. The aspects are time, place, the people involved, and amount. These could be applied to any situation with our commonsense understanding. For instance, we must take into account the people involved in the situation before we can take action or make certain decisions. We also consider the circumstances, the place, and how much we can do. If we pay attention to these four aspects, we can judge fairly well what to do.

In the *Nirvana Sutra*, we find the Buddha's last sermon on the Eight Awarenesses of the Enlightened Person. It is somewhat similar to the Eightfold Path of his first sermon. I want to emphasize the first two awarenesses: wanting little and knowing how to be satisfied. The first awareness is having few or fewer desires. It does not say not to want anything, but rather to have fewer desires. There is wonderful wisdom here. Want little of the things that we do not have. With just this awareness, our life can be fairly well sustained.

How much should we want? How do we know if it is too little or too much? And what kind of things should we want? In a way, wanting little is a very clear guideline, but it is not easy to achieve. What would be good guidelines for practicing wanting little? You already have everything you need! So it is not a matter of setting up artificial guidelines. Look deeply into yourself. I think you know the answer.

The second awareness is even more fascinating. Know how to be satisfied with the things that we already have. When we think about this, we see that we truly have enough. We have this life. To some degree, we can say that the less we have, the more abundance we have. When we don't own anything at all, we have the abundance of the entire universe. This is the miracle of life, but instead we chase in vain after things. So wanting little and knowing how to be satisfied, we can be peaceful, can't we?

This principle of no gain applies to enlightenment, too. Since we are already it, we need not expect anything. This may be the most important attitude that we can take toward our practice or even our life. We can look at this from two aspects. One aspect is, "Don't expect anything." The other is, "Everything is already here!" What is there to expect? What else do you need? You have everything to begin with. *You don't need to become something or someone else!* You are already complete.

Buddha guarantees this to each of us with no exceptions. This is right understanding.

The last of the Eight Awarenesses is avoiding idle talk. These are, in effect, the last words of the Buddha's teaching. We can understand idle talk as the pursuit of conceptual thoughts or dualistic understanding. If we talk in dualistic ways, our talk becomes idle talk and we cannot have peace. We can even make our healthy body sick by our thoughts and vice versa. In our tradition, zazen is the best means to taste this nonduality, or peace. At the same time, practicing zazen to get something is not an ideal way to practice. Please do not expect any effects from zazen as such, just do zazen. Can you do this? In just doing zazen, zazen contributes to each of us, to the immediate sangha, to the extended sangha, and even further to the Three Treasures of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, which contain everything.

Please consider that your practice is not just for yourself. When you forget yourself, a transformation takes place. Then your life is no longer your life. It is the life of Buddha. Your practice is contributing much, much more to others than you might think. If we must use any basic standard of evaluation, the fact that the life of each of us contains everything is the standard we should use. We make this realization clear through our practice. You are taking care of the dharma at the same time that the dharma is taking care of you.

So when you feel fear, pain, and frustration, appreciate your life as Buddha's life. Being sick, take good care of yourself instead of being upset and frustrated. Getting old? Enjoy it, Buddha is getting old. Have a feast with him! Why not? We have all had painful experiences. Turn your mind around and see how you can take it with the joy of Buddha. Just the way we look at these things can be the difference between heaven and hell. This is not to say there is not terrible suffering in life, but too often a tiny thing becomes a huge thing for us; it almost kills us. And yet, when we look at it from a different perspective, we laugh.

Clarify what life is, what death is. There is a very clear answer. How you appreciate it and how you live it is up to you. Please take care of it.