

## DIVERSITY AND THE “RIGHT WAY”

I HEAR FROM MANY OF YOU how hard it is to have faith in the fact that we are the Way ourselves. Our so-called ordinary life is the way of difficulties and troubles. So what makes everyday life the way of the buddhas and ancestors? Do we live as human beings or as hungry ghosts in hell? Who among you can accept your life *as is* as the Way of the buddhas and ancestors?

Our senses perceive external phenomena through the six consciousnesses of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The seventh consciousness is the ego-conscious awareness, the consciousness that perceives life from our own ego-centered point of view. The eighth is the storage consciousness, which perceives all experience from beginningless time to the future, and the ninth consciousness is the so-called universal consciousness.

So how do we perceive this ordinary life?

Let us look at the five senses of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, which we use to perceive external objects. Even in the first stage of perception, are you perceiving the external world *as is* or as it comes through your five senses? There are all kinds of sounds, sights, sensations, and feelings. How are you perceiving them? And how does the sixth consciousness, the mind, function? For example, when all of us are listening to the same song at the same time, are we hearing the same thing? Some of you are annoyed by it, some are enjoying it, maybe some just notice the singing, and some are hardly paying any attention. Even at the earliest stage, we are already not perceiving things in the same way. We are already noticing and reacting to certain things differently according to our experiences, both direct and indirect. So already at the first stages there are big differences in the way we perceive things.

I like the word *diversity* because it captures all these differences. How are you reacting to this diversity with your discriminative mind? No two persons react in the same way. Every reaction is different. Our discriminative consciousness, the consciousness of the ego, involves literally billions of differences. The more sensitive you are, the larger the differences seem. Each of us has different experiences based on our varying cultural, religious, and racial backgrounds. Such a diversity! All these experiences are stored in the storage consciousness. These experiences are not only those that take place after we are born but also those from beginningless lives that we have all gone through.

We have only been human beings some fourteen million years. Our past lives in one way or another have been influencing this life. How much are we truly aware of these things? When we talk about our everyday life, our ordinary life, what kind of life are we talking about? We may think that our way is ordinary, but each of us is looking at it in an extraordinary way, with biases based on our own experiences. How can we understand this everyday, ordinary life? How much can we say that the way / perceive is the right way?

Dogen Zenji tells us to forget ourselves. Are we instead reinforcing ourselves by the way we think and believe? Are our perceptions trustworthy? If something disturbs you and you express your anxiety about life, are you trusting your life as the Way itself, as the dharma itself? Your life is the same as the life of the buddhas and ancestors. Do you truly believe that? And believing in this way, can you really forget yourself? If you cannot forget yourself, what you are believing in is not the Buddha Way but something of yours that is troublesome.

How can we deal with this difficulty of our undivided life, our life as the Way, being chopped up into all these differences? All of us, as we are, are everything; we should not miss this point. When we realize it, then all this diversity—including these dichotomies of good and bad, right and wrong, male and female, night and day, life and death, whatever—is nothing other than the undivided Way manifesting as our ordinary life. Let the so-called body and mind go, unconfined by one's own thoughts. Our perceptions confine us, so how to be free? How to let ourselves function *as is*?

This undivided life of the buddhas and ancestors is manifesting as difference, as diversity. Please focus on how to appreciate this undivided and diverse life meaningfully and how to contribute in some way to decreasing the pain around us. Let us have more and more mutual respect and appreciation for each other, forgetting our own confinement in this unconfined life. I more than believe that you are the dharma yourself, that everyone and everything is the dharma itself. Please take good care of it.