

WHERE IS THE HINDRANCE?

OUR LIFE IS USUALLY SO HECTIC that we quite easily lose ourselves. Zazen is a wonderful opportunity to face and closely study ourselves. In a way, it is almost a joke to have to find out who we are or to realize what our life is. Our life, this life, is already in realization. It is already manifesting, so what is there to look for? When we look for something, Buddha calls this delusion. Unfortunately, this is what all of us do in one way or another.

There is an interesting koan in the *Blue Cliff Record*, a dialogue between Master Kyosei and a monk. The monk asks, "I want to peck from the inside. Would you please tap from the outside?" When an egg is ready to hatch, the chick inside pecks at the shell. The mother hen senses it and taps on the outside. When it is time, just a little tap on the outside breaks the shell and the chick hatches. If the shell breaks too soon or too late, the chick dies. So the monk said, "Please tap from the outside." Master Kyosei asks, "Will you be alive?" The monk answers, "If not, I'll be ridiculed." Master Kosei replies, "You also are one of those in the weeds."

What is the point of this koan? "I am ready, please let me come out." Where is the shell? Where is the hindrance? What is keeping you imprisoned? There is an expression in Japanese, "Without a rope, people bind themselves." You do not think you are completely free, so you practice trying to liberate yourself. But what is binding you? Look around you. Nothing is binding you, and yet you cannot see it. You feel as if you are bound by something. Buddha calls this delusion. Your mind is not in the right place.

In our practice we hold sesshin, an intensive Zen retreat. *Sesshin* means to join or unify the mind. It can also mean to put the mind in the place where the mind belongs. Of course the mind is already

unified or in the right place, but nevertheless, we practice in this way. How do you put your mind in the right place? Where is the right place? *Right here* is always the place. This place or space of right here extends endlessly throughout the ten directions, the whole universe. This limited place of right here becomes universal, the existence of the cosmos. It is not limited to a particular race, culture, or country. And *right now* is the time. The infinite time span from past to future is reduced to this very moment, right now! Vice versa is also true. The moment of right now contains all the beginningless past and the endless future. It is universal.

For instance, one of the most important dharmas is the law of causation, of cause and effect. Everything is the cause of something and the effect of something. So in one way or another, everything is connected. The Japanese word for “karma” is *innen*. *In* is a direct cause or causes, and *nen* is an indirect cause or causes. All of these direct and indirect causes are present for each action.

We say “cause and effect are not two separate things” or “cause and effect are one.” For example, when the teacher rings the bell, the student goes to *dokusan*, or interview. The conventional way of seeing this is that the ringing of the bell is the cause, and the effect is that the student goes into the dokusan room. But in Zen we say that the world is completely interconnected, that everything happens right here, right now. So the student goes into the dokusan room not just because the bell has been rung but because of all actions—not just actions in the past but actions in the present and future, too, because time is just a mental concept. Everything we do affects everything in the world. For this reason, none of us can do anything just by ourselves. Think of all the direct and the indirect causes that have influenced us.

So the action of the student entering the dokusan room includes the ringing of the bell. But the ringing of the bell also includes the action of the student going into the room. That is what we mean when we say that cause and effect are one. Every action is complete in each moment as both cause and effect, for each action is both the cause of other things and the effect of other things.

In a way, right here and right now, space and time, are all abstractions. What makes space and time real? You, your very being

as you are gives space and time significance. It is easy for us to understand that without space and time we cannot survive. The reverse is also true. Without our very being, no space, no time, no history, and no world exist. In other words, our very life itself is the process of the creation of the world, of everything.

This is what I mean when I tell you all the time to take good care of yourself, according to the position you have and the work that needs to be done. In doing so, you extend your practice into your daily life, unifying everything as is. If this is not happening, then make this your practice. Nothing is binding you. If you feel that something is binding you, what is it? How do you take care of it?

Please have deep conviction and trust in yourself to be truly Yourself. There is no other way. By doing so, you will have a very deep confidence and respect for yourself. Going one step further, since the life of each of us contains everything, taking care of yourself is taking care of everything else, do you see?