

Depth of Mind

(A Two-Day Retreat)

IN THE ESSAY "Valley Sounds, Mountain Colors," written in 1240, Dogen tells us (and it is still true today): "There have been many who have been concerned with fame and gain in the study of the Way. . . . You should know that there is a disease for fame and gain among practitioners of the Way." He also writes in *Enlightenment Unfolds*:

Do not forget the aspiration that arises when you first seek the Way. . . . You do not seek dharma in order to be respected by others. You do not look for respect or gifts. . . . Even though that may happen, it should not be your primary intention. . . . But foolish people, even those with Way-seeking mind, quickly forget their original aspiration and hope for offerings from humans and devas (celestial beings). . . . This is a hazard of practice.

There's an uncomfortable question about progress that comes up for many students after some years of practice. We

often feel disappointed that we continue to recognize in ourselves the reactive patterns we bring to practice.

"We have to have patience with no results for a long time to do this practice," one of my students said, "and then miraculously, something happens!" That something may be an opening, a willingness; we may notice our reactions soften. We may find ourselves seeing through our reactions, even as we express them.

We need to find the motivation for restraint or a new response, at the same depth of mind as where our habits originate. The wish to respond differently must be as deep and strong as the habitual response. The path to that depth arises from seeing, again and again, how we repeat ourselves—and vowing to do it differently. And that means at the deepest level, to see how we interpret and define the world, how we project fear or distrust or anger into the world. At the most basic level we must start by recognizing how we create the world we live in. How hard is it for you to change your world? Your perceptions, your beliefs?

We start by watching thoughts and feelings, and in extended sittings, like today's, we sometimes have the opportunity to experience the space in which these thoughts and feelings arise. We might find ourselves stepping back from the contents of the mind to the space in which the contents are arising. We ask, who is thinking?

Gradually we enter the space in which the contents of the mind play. Immediately we have a different perspective on this thing we call "I." What is "I"? What is this? The point of practice is to ask this question.

We are so much more than our identification with our

story, with a certain part of our mind that keeps repeating itself.

You will find gradually through your sitting practice that the learning that comes out of sesshin is not something that you can even say. You don't recognize it. But it might be the learning that will sustain your entire life. The patience that we develop through sitting here period after period, sustaining our effort, trusting our body and mind, is the effort that becomes the foundation of our life. In the future we'll say about something that arises: "Well, that wasn't so hard; it wasn't as hard as sitting through a sesshin."

The three days of *tangaryo** at Tassajara was the hardest thing I'd done up to that point, sitting all day, three days, no bells, just experiencing moment after moment after moment, nothing to do but know the moments—our life passing like that. In my early days of practice, my first successful effort to hold my posture through forty minutes without adjusting my legs was a great achievement.

Was it my mind that was strong, or was it my body? Please find out whether it's your mind deciding what to do or your body. Can you differentiate? When we have a sensation, can we watch it without reacting, even when it starts to scream? Is it the mind screaming? Is it the body screaming?

Here's a little story from the Buddhist teacher Stephen Levine from his book *A Gradual Awakening*. Someone who had an awakening experience said, when asked if she was just bragging about an experience that someone else hadn't had: "No, it wasn't the knowledge that came out of it, or the wisdom or even the peace. What was really important for me about this experience was that I was worthy to have it."

HOW THE UNIVERSE THINKS

One of our deeply shared convictions about ourselves is that we are unworthy. It is a separating experience. You feel everybody else is more worthy than you, going someplace and doing something, and you're isolated by your sense of aloneness. The truth is that probably our isolation and separation is our deepest, most common experience.

Such a feeling is deeply shared, and we are embarrassed to talk about it. The community awakens together. As soon as one person comes out of his or her shell, all of our shells begin to crack, and possibilities previously unknown become available to us. That's true in sesshin. The schedule gives us our boundaries, and we find that we don't like to meet our boundaries. We would like to have boundless mind. The point of the schedule is to allow people of different rhythms and tendencies to move together through this rather straightforward yet complicated event.

Please pay attention as best you can to the rhythm so that we can start and end together.

It's what we call a practice.