

Loving the World as It Is

DOGEN ZENJI DESCRIBES ZAZEN as something like “unfabricated clear seeing, unconstructedness in stillness.” He further describes zazen as self-fulfillment or self-enjoyment, “the self receiving and accepting its function.” The self receives its own freedom, its own contraction and relaxation, absorption and release in the fulfillment of this meditation.

Practice is about penetrating the membrane of mentality that’s between us and our life. It’s meeting something beyond what the mind knows: meeting with our body, our senses, our skin, our ears. We accomplish this when we trust ourselves enough to drop off what the mind knows.

It is unconstructed stillness that receives the benefit of this activity. Because it is unconstructed it does not appear within perception. Hence the deep and subtle work of practice is mysterious, unrecognizable to consciousness.

Recently, I have come to realize that our work is to love the world just as it is. Because our discriminating mind is constantly thinking of improvements for the world—how I

should be, how you should be—to love the world as it is means to completely accept those thoughts and also our regrets about how the world is. Loving the world as it is, is being willing to be in the only world we know.

This is really the point of practice. When we say that everything is suffering, we are voicing the first noble truth, which acknowledges that the reality of our life is fragile, constantly subject to changing conditions. Many of us are experiencing financial, psychological, emotional, social insecurity.

When we find it's not in our power to make our lives safe and secure for ourselves and our families, we begin to become aligned with life as it is. Humility and maturity may arise.

Buddhism is not some special teaching, and enlightenment is not some particular stage that we attain. Our wisdom mind studies the actual life we live—our habits of mind, our desires, our disappointments, our fears, our embarrassments. Studying those phenomenal events opens a gateway to realization. We study our regrets, desires, everything that's unfulfilled. Until we understand the dynamics of our mental life fully, we will be caught by the idea that there is some better state of mind than ours.

Suzuki Roshi called this hope "idealistic practice." He had a wife and children. At one point he had a monk living at his temple in Japan, and his wife was quite worried about this monk and complained to her husband. Suzuki Roshi didn't heed her fears and allowed the monk to stay. Suzuki's bodhisattva* vow was very strong. One day when Suzuki Roshi was away from the temple, this monk acted on his delusions and killed Suzuki Roshi's wife. Upon his return, Suzuki Roshi had to accept his own actions, his own thoughts, his inability to listen to his wife, and his inability to protect his family.

THE TRUTH OF THIS LIFE

The Suzuki Roshi we met, the mature, wise person we knew, was a person who came through experiences like that. Likewise, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh has gone through enormous suffering, enormous pain, which has matured and developed his understanding and his teaching. We have to go through things we've never dreamed we would have to experience in this life, in order to mature.

Sitting in this self-fulfilling and self-receiving *samadhi*,* sitting quietly in unconstructed stillness, is the gift we give to the world, the gift we receive ourselves. It may not feel like unconstructed stillness; it may feel like you are complaining the entire period or being tired, being sleepy. Even that activity can be beneficial, if we are willing to experience and release it without mental commentary.

The willingness to be in this unconstructed stillness of our life doesn't mean only in zazen. We can do it at work, in our relationships with our family members, our friends. This is what the world asks of us.