

## No Pressure to Improve

EACH MOMENT ARISES as a world of echoes. You are sitting with your breath, listening to thoughts, following thoughts, forgetting thoughts—a world of echoes arises.

What would it be like to sit in zazen and go beyond? Think nonthoughts? As soon as they arise, they dissolve, leave no trace. All these thoughts you have been having about your knees or about *oryoki*\* or your family, your job, worries about the future, regrets about the past—as soon as these thoughts come up, they pass. Nothing hooks them.

Although that's actually what is happening, habits of mind reassemble certain thoughts pretty quickly. It's called reenactment. Thoughts repeat themselves again and again . . . unless there really is no hook in the mind.

The thing about reality is that there's no later, there's no next moment when one is going to be enlightened, when one is going to understand nonbeing, where there's no outside, no second moment—only infinite first moments arising as now. If you recognize this as the way the universe is, everything com-

ing and going, not belonging to anyone, that's the universe of not-self, a sense of space. This is the secret to Buddhist practice.

What we are studying is the Mind, not Katherine's mind, but the Mind arising as Katherine. And when Katherine can hear and accept everything that's going on in her mind, she can hear and accept everything that's going on in anybody's mind. Nothing is outside her mind. In that mind there is no pressure to improve Katherine. It is "to be without anxiety about non-perfection," as Sengcan\* says. From that place there's no anxiety about right or wrong, and yet there is complete understanding of causes and consequences.

Someone said recently she has noticed that when she comes close to something important, she veers off. This is an important awareness. What does it take to go straight ahead? To notice the moments when we veer off? How much effort is enough? What's too hard?

Our life can be measured in moments of backing off or going straight ahead—backing off of conflict, difficulty, frustration, fear or a willingness to trust and go with the moment, not because it's comfortable but because it's here.

When we're most completely ourselves, we're most completely free of ourselves. But you can't think about it. You have to completely be the complicated, mysterious being that each of us is, and is embarrassed by. Is there anyone here who's not embarrassed by the completely enigmatic, mysterious being you are? As long as we're embarrassed there's a self there, there's a defense, some resistance. How about being willing to be embarrassed, to be resistant, to be either?

Stop veering off. You have to go into it. You take a little step toward it. Then take another little step. You go as slowly as

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you need to. You might come right in and put your nose down close to it. But maybe you don't want to get that close. You can only do what your stomach can do, so you do it slowly, at the pace at which your stomach and your heart can handle it.

When we get really tight and solid, so does the energy of fear. If you become relaxed and just sit there with fear, inhaling and exhaling, fear is going to relax too. It might change shape. It might get smaller or bigger, but it's never going to be bigger than you because it's your energy. Fear is never greater than our body. So what we have to do, when our heart is ready, and when our mind and stomach are ready, is to get up close inside it, breathe it, smell it. Mind has to bring fear back into the body, because it's the mind that put fear outside. It's the mind that says I am not going to acknowledge that fear or work with it. You allow your consciousness to experience the sensation, and you stay with it. You don't go someplace else in your mind and wish it would go away. You enter the experience with an inhalation, with an exhalation. You feel the coldness, the movement, the solidity, or the dissolution with a quiet steady mind.