

Not Moving Is the Way

WHEN I WAS YOUNGER in practice, I longed for someone to just tell me what to do. I thought there was a way and that I just couldn't find it. Now years later, I know that practice is the process of realizing there is no way, that each of us is the way. Therein lies the mystery.

This may sound like a contradiction, but a teacher waits for a student to develop confidence in *herself* to find what her *self* (judgments, attitudes) is. I had to discover and confess to myself my own judgments and opinions before I could learn that discriminations are illusory. Sometimes we hesitate to name our opinions and values. I had to be willing to own a self before I could drop it.

My earliest aspiration was to be extraordinary. At the same time, I aspired to be ordinary. I came to practice with both aspirations; they coexisted. The vision of an ordinary, simple human life, going to work every day, being a responsible citizen, maybe a parent, was deeply embedded. Simultaneously, the vision of an extraordinary me was also inside. Being extraor-

dinary meant being better than others; being ordinary meant being one with others. It has taken a long time to realize that practice is not about proving one or the other, but about becoming whole, finding the integration of the two.

One of the extraordinary things about Suzuki Roshi was how ordinary he was. It takes time to be willing to be that ordinary, to walk in the direction of Buddha. This practice of sitting here—letting in our fears, our doubts, our resistances, our denial—is walking in the direction of becoming complete. In addition to watching the contents of mind, we watch the nature of mind—our mind objects and their flowing, like the tide.

A student recently said, “Now I understand why it’s important not to move. When you move, you don’t find what you are moving away from. When you sit still, you experience what you want to avoid.” When you sit still, you experience the nature of mind, as well as the objects of mind. This is the practice of taking the backward step. Wanting to be extraordinary is signing up to do this sesshin. That’s walking forward. Walking backward is sitting here for five days wondering why you came, taking refuge in that confused, restless mind.

Going forward is intentional. It skips happily over the details. Walking backward, you’re trying not to stumble or fall off a ledge. Walking backward attends each step.

We don’t really know how to walk forward any more than we know how to walk backward. We think we know how to make a certain kind of effort, accomplish our goal. But when our knee or back gives out or our spirits flag, that’s when real effort begins. In our parenting group someone said, “Practice is when you can’t walk away from your crying child, no matter how frustrated you are.” When you can’t get away from your

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difficulties, the deeper practice begins. Once a teacher told me, "Do the job but take yourself out of the situation."

How do you take care of your child and yourself at the same time? How do you carry the responsibility and take yourself out of the situation? How do you go to sesshin for seven days and be invisible, while being head of the kitchen or directing the meditation hall or serving? How do you do things in a way that makes space for everyone?

Whatever arises invites our attention. We trust sitting because what has brought us here is something deeper than any of us knows. We make a big space in our mind and body, so we can feel our heart deeply and not deny it. We hear our own mind clearly. If our mind is raising a ruckus, we listen to that too, allowing all of it in without reservation. That may mean noticing that your heart is broken, that you can't breathe in the lower part of your body, that your shoulders are crunched, that your lips are tight, that your jaw is jammed. The backward step listens deeply: we were hurt, we were scared, we feel betrayed. Let those energies in, let them go. The nature of mind is movement. You have to let the thoughts in, in order for them to move.

A friend recently underwent a series of medical tests. When he returned to work after ten days, he found that a coworker had written a paper for publication about their work together. Feelings of betrayal came up because he was in charge of the work. But because he was also paying careful attention, he saw that nothing had actually prevented him from writing it up. He was able to see how his action or lack of action cocreated the situation, and he was able to accept responsibility for his part. That was a stretch.

LOVING THE WORLD AS IT IS

I'm sitting here and can only see the room from this perspective. Those of you who are sitting there can't see the room from here. It's inevitable that we will all have partial views. That's what we call being a self. We experience according to a limited self. Our practice is to keep witnessing limited self. Gradually I learn that even though I can't see from any perspective but this one, I can include other perspectives, understand that others have their own perspective, and each is just as true and real as mine, even if we're having a disagreement. That's a stretch of the heart muscle.

Practice is always on the fulcrum between wanting to get out of deluded self and seeing it arise more and more clearly. In *Opening the Hand of Thought*, Uchiyama Roshi says something like, "Practice is not to get out of the self, but to study the delusions of the self."

Going forward or falling backward are both movements of the Buddha way. Our mind swings out to attain something: I will not move this period. I will not move my legs. I will not take seconds at lunch. Then we watch what we actually do. Sitting here with difficulty we may learn more than sitting here in bliss. Anyway, we don't have a choice.