

Practicing Wholeness

"I CAN'T GIVE YOU anything but my spirit of Zen," Suzuki Roshi told us. "You have to find your own way." He brought us face-to-face with ourselves. We didn't always like what we saw, but when met with wholeness, some part of us wants to stand up.

Though spoken over fifty years ago, Suzuki Roshi's words are still fresh. The late writer Rick Fields said of him: "He brought form to American Buddhism. He didn't bring the *idea* of practice, he brought the *practice* of practice."

He chanted, he bowed, he ate oryoki. The idea of practice is not the same as the practice of practice. The idea of my life is not the same as my life. My idea of zazen is not the same as my zazen. We are directed to meet the moment as it arises, not our thoughts about it. Our mind interferes with meeting the moment as it is. One of the great gifts of Suzuki Roshi's presence and teaching was to encourage us to see things, people, circumstances as they are, rather than as our thoughts about them, and to understand the difference.

What are things as they are? Katagiri Roshi calls it having no

gap between yourself and your object. When there is a gap, our mind plunges into the gap. Then we just meet our mind, not things as they are.

In a *Tricycle* interview with Katy Butler, the architect Christopher Alexander talked about looking for shapes which are pleasing to "God," by which he meant "something deep in the universe, the principle that governs all things." He was talking about wholeness.

"It is necessary to find, in your mind, a blankness or emptiness and let the solution arise from that," he advised. In designing arches, he asks himself, "Which of these is the most fitting gift to 'God'? What would make 'God' smile? Which would make people feel whole when they saw it?"

Concepts always go against the whole, according to Alexander. He says, "No matter how cleverly conceived they are, they almost always work against the Whole."

Easwaran's translation of the *Dhammapada** puts it this way:

Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think. Suffering follows an evil thought as the wheels of a cart follow the oxen that draw it.

Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think. Joy follows a pure thought like a shadow that never leaves.

What we think determines how we act; our thoughts help determine whether our bodies are flexible or inflexible. Noticing our thoughts, and understanding how they determine our actions and relationships, helps us understand that we cocreate



the world we live in with everyone. We cocreate our lives with others. When we understand our life as an interconnected, codependent flow of energy, we realize that we exist in collaboration with the universe, rather than as a separate self, interacting with an independent other. There truly is no "outside." When we love or fight, the lover or enemy is a creation of our mind; we're having a relationship with our mind. One part of our mind is fighting or loving another part of our mind.

We are an energy field interacting with multiple other energy fields, and how we interact internally and externally determines the shape and possibilities of our world. We are also one interconnected planet without shared values.

Buddhism does not give us a solid world to bump up against, but a living, flowing, interactive organism as our shared world. All of us, whoever we are, are an expression of the whole—the causes and conditions that brought our lives into being. This is true for our energy, be it an expression of fear, dependency, resistance, fear, joy, whatever. We are always bringing forth the whole each moment.

A teacher looked at a six-year-old child in her class and thought, "I don't like her; she makes trouble." She saw the child as one who experienced everything said to her as an attack. Moments later, when the child came up to her, those feelings dissolved unexpectedly, and only love shone out of the teacher's eyes. Whatever the child intended to talk about was forgotten. When teacher and student met face-to-face in the classroom, they met in love. How did that happen?

It may have something to do with the nature of the mind, probably with our deep intention. It is probably an expression of our wholeness. If you are a teacher and receive the trust of

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a six-year-old child, that may help you remember your own wholeness and also the child's.

Love is the opposite of anger. Unconditioned love doesn't feel personal; it feels impersonal, just energy coming through us. Anger, on the other hand, feels personal. We have both. Love is the whole that binds us together—what Alexander is talking about and what Zen practice talks about.

What would make someone encountering you feel whole? That is like seeing our "enemy" as our teacher. When we are responding from wholeness, perhaps oneness or wholeness may respond. We sit this sesshin to diminish the claims of our partial selves and bring forth our mind of oneness.

Suzuki Roshi told us, "When you say, 'Yes!' you forget all about yourself, and you are refreshed into some new self. Before the new self becomes an old self, you should say another 'Yes!'"

When we can see things as they are, we are nobody special anymore. You can't see things as they are when you have a self. When you keep saying yes and keep finding a new self, it takes you into the unknown. We keep finding a new self and don't know what that will be. It may feel like freedom.

When you meet Suzuki Roshi or someone like him and his wholeness, you can't go back to your old ways. You want to be like that. It's exhilarating when what you've been afraid of is finally experienced as just this, things as they are. The behavior and attitudes we thought were protecting us are understood, instead, as diminishing us.

Time to let them go.