

The Oneness of Two

WHEN WE LOOK at the surface of our lives we make judgments such as "I'm a failure" or "I'm pretty good" or "That was a great period of zazen (or a terrible period)."

Although such views often alternate with each other, they can obscure the deeper truth that the alternation is the reality and that "failure" can lead to a deep healing, "success" to suffering, or a "negative" experience to an opening of wholeness in our lives.

Our discriminating minds surf ordinary consciousness in familiar patterns. To journey below the surface usually requires something unusual, a traumatic event. Sometimes this happens spontaneously, and sometimes it happens through intention, through the will to face the circulating mind until its deeper layers are reached.

The imperative of dropping from the surface to the center arises when life brings us a situation we cannot resolve with our ordinary mind. We can call this situation a koan, something that appears as a paradox. A koan may also be a traditional case

from the historical Buddhist record. Resolution of a koan can give us a direct experience of the oneness of life.

Recently we studied a traditional koan from Cleary's *Blue Cliff Record*,* "The Ultimate Path Is Without Difficulty, Only Avoid Picking and Choosing," to explore the basis of our decision making. In order to experience not picking and choosing, each student selected a situation in his or her life and took on the practice of being choiceless in that situation for one week.

Committing to not choosing in a particular situation can then reveal the wholeness of our body and mind, the wholeness of inside and outside, good and bad. Suspending picking and choosing can allow us to see things as multiple aspects of one reality.

Practicing with the precepts* invariably forces us to confront how we pick and choose.

Most precepts address areas of our lives where self-interest conflicts directly with the interests of others. Precepts provide endless opportunity to catch the wriggling of the body-mind.

Since precepts reveal the endless self-interest of our choices, they are especially helpful in pointing out how the mind makes endless separation into self and other. The precepts of not lying and not speaking of the faults of others point to the places where we consciously or unconsciously distort things; they invite us to examine our intention to misrepresent, or withhold, some aspect of the truth. When we catch ourselves doing this, we might explore an unrecognized intention to cause disrespect or disharmony between people.

We also can discover that violating these precepts usually is done when we speak behind someone's back. Being clear and forthright, speaking from the front, takes courage and confidence.

THE TRUTH OF THIS LIFE

Taking on a vow not to disparage others for one week can show us hidden motivations and apprehensions. We have no idea what circumstances will arise in our life during this week, but we have taken on the discipline of attending to our language, to the verbal exchanges we have with others and also within ourselves.

Realizing this teaching in our bodies, in our thoughts, through our labyrinthian feelings and perceptions, is hard. The mind can mutate like a virus. As soon as you corner it over here, it may move over there. How do you track this mind?

Unless you take a specific practice, a precepts practice or something else, and simply watch the mind squirm—either as stuck or as endlessly transforming energy—we may not notice the wholeness of our consciousness, where the opposites create and depend upon each other. One teacher expressed it: when you think good, the idea of bad is already there.

Understanding Buddhism is not simply reading the teachings, but taking them into the body. The joy of practice is experiencing the release into wholeness when the exhausted mind and ego relax into the truth of oneness.