

This Deepest Self

In *Ten Windows*, the poet Jane Hirshfield writes:

One of [the] more subtle homes is the Ryoan-ji rock garden in Kyoto: wherever in it a person stands, one of the fifteen rocks cannot be seen. The garden's positioned stones remind us there is always something unknowable and invisible beyond what can be perceived or comprehended, yet as real as any other rock amid the raked gravel.

Her beautiful essay reminded me of what one reviewer said about the late poet Philip Whalen: he was not the best of the Beat poets, but his experiments and writing allowed the other poets to write the work they wrote. You might say Philip's contribution is hidden in the work of others.

We live in the lives of others, sometimes acknowledged, sometimes not. These underrecognized connections among us are included in what we call our interdependent existence.

THE TRUTH OF THIS LIFE

We have to practice with someone who is big enough to receive our deepest self, our deepest intention, and turn us to it again and again. This deepest self, our true nature, is hidden in our consciousness, hidden from ourselves.

A true teacher sees our true nature. In seeing and speaking to it, such a teacher allows us to also believe in it, in our openness, receptivity, generosity, nonresistance, loving-kindness.

What is known and not known by us about our inner motivations and intentions is the investigation of practice. We know on one level; we don't know on another.

In her essay, Jane quotes Michael Dickinson on our contradictions: "We are most comfortable being hidden, but we yearn to be seen." I would add, we are quite fearful to see our inner mind. We fear what demons might lurk there.

But the gift of practice allows us gradually to be drawn into the realm of the unknown and, accompanied by a trustworthy friend, to enter there. To allow our consciousness to become transparent to itself requires a calm mind, the stability of zazen mind. We sit zazen to realize there is a deeper awareness existing beneath the active mind. It is the mind of clear observation that is our deeper mind that witnesses our life from the shore of ease, from a posture of unprejudiced attention.

The work of sitting quietly doing nothing, waiting for our deepest experience to show up, is one of the most truly creative actions we can take. It is hidden treasure, covered by the ego's delusions and simultaneously transparent.