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MYOKI:  
*Opening*

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*Mickey, Minnie, Popeye, and Donald Duck:  
Red shorts, white gloves, yellow shoes—  
Don't they always talk the same?  
Oh, boy! That sure is swell! Aw, gee!*

KOAN

Myoki was giving a lecture to her fifth-grade class. Too many snow days meant she had to hurry to finish her curriculum. The students weren't happy about this. Suddenly, out of the corner of her eye, Myoki saw her pupil, Steven, standing upright by his desk. He'd gotten hold of her black sweater and was wearing it down over his thighs, like a short dress. Hands clasped against the side of his cheek, lips pursed, striking an enticing Minnie Mouse pose, he stared straight at her—all in the middle of class.

Myoki had an opening.

## REFLECTION

*The class held its breath as soon as I caught sight of Steven posing like that. Would I get angry? Would I reprimand him? What would I do?*

Ahh, an interruption. Sudden, unexpected, confounding—and calling for a fast response.

You have work that you have to finish—a curriculum to follow, a book to write, a house to build, a child to get to school, a meal to cook, a computer to upgrade, flowers to plant—and you don't want any interruptions. But interruptions happen, so how do you react?

*Gateless is the Great Tao*

*There are thousands of ways to it.<sup>23</sup>*

Is there anything that is not a gate of practice? Every action you take, every situation you face, is an opportunity to experience yourself as whole. How? By plunging into the action or situation that presents itself. What happens when we call something an interruption? The implication is that we were doing something planned, maybe even important, and were unable to complete it because of the interruption. But the interruption is a gate, too.

Many years ago, I worked at the Greyston Bakery as part of the Zen Community of New York, which had its meditation room on the bakery's third floor. One Saturday, deep in meditation as part of a weekend retreat, I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was a baker asking me to come down because of a problem with a wedding cake due that day. Annoyed with this interruption, I followed him downstairs, and on the way

to the finishing room picked up a piece of lemon cake that the bakers had left by the reception and put it in my mouth. The taste of lemon curd was a sudden shock. I came to a standstill, my senses reeling from a cake I had tasted many times before, and my mind opened in a way it had not two floors up, while doing meditation.

Albert Einstein proved years ago that time is an artificial construct, not real, but that doesn't prevent many of us from feeling stressed out due to time. Things happen *on time*, which means that they happen when we'd planned them to. On weekends and holidays, when we're relaxed, I feel that I have *lots of time on my hands*. On the other hand, if there are three hundred school days in a year and we lost many to weather, then my teaching may be a *race against time*.

Other cultures view time very differently. The Native American sense of time is more circular, connecting with the seasons, day and night, and the body's natural rhythms, all of which change continuously.

Have you ever rushed your children off somewhere, hurrying them to change their clothes, wash their face, and get into the car just when they're in the middle of some serious play, leaving them bewildered and angry? Do you feel out of sync with the natural, organic rhythms of life? Do you feel out of tune with the natural world, with sunlit days and dark nights, with seasons of life like youth and old age? We even try to manipulate the seasons through a contraption called Daylight Savings Time.

Interruptions may be life's way of reminding us that things are *time-less*, that changes are happening all the time that are not *timely*, that they have nothing to do with the concept of time, progress, or meeting goals and deadlines.

THE BOOK OF HOUSEHOLDER KOANS

How mechanical is your life? Do you know what your body needs now? Is it food, rest, play? Do you eat because you're hungry or because it's time for dinner? Do you sleep because you're tired or because it's time to go to sleep? Is your practice paying attention to the needs and cadence of your body, and how these intersect with everything else in the universe, or is it looking at your watch, checking the time on your cell phone, avoiding anyone and anything that's not with the program, that's not *time-saving*?

Then Minnie Mouse stands up in your classroom and begs for your attention.

Do you go on as before, pretending you don't see her? Send Minnie to the principal's office? Tell her to sit down so that you could continue with what you were doing? Or is Minnie a gate into not-knowing? Bearing witness, what arises may be spontaneity, may be laughter.

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*If Minnie Mouse were to stand suddenly in front of you, what would you do?*