## ESTHER:

Me, My Daughter, and Five Men

Men, women, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters— Tell me, to whom belongs the Dharma? If you say that True Self is neither man nor woman, What will you do on your honeymoon night?

## KOAN

Esther and her daughter were two females living with five males: Esther's husband and four sons. Esther asked: How can I hear my daughter's voice among five men?

## REFLECTION

Sometimes people write that gender has no place in Zen, that it's an artificial construct in a practice that urges us to realize our lack of an individual, separate self. If there is no such thing as a separate self, what is this thing called man and woman, male and female?

THE BOOK OF HOUSEHOLDER KOANS

Jam not a separate self, and at the same time I am different, I am not a separate self, and so how do you honor the individual voice of each member of the So how do you honor the individual voice and the loud, the standard the soft and the loud, the standard the soft and the loud. So how do you honor the murrel soft and the loud, the shy and family? How do you listen to the soft and the loud, the shy and the noisy? How do you respect the family? How do you listen to the bold, the quiet and the noisy? How do you respect the differthe bold, the quiet and the ent personalities of boys and girls without falling into stereotypes,

Don't we all have our personal preferences? Our society has without dictating preferences?

preferences, too: for the prosperous over the poor, white people over those of color, the young over the aged, men over women. over those of each, the All are equal in their differences. Intuitively, we think that our equality lies in our oneness, but it actually lies in our differences, in the sense that no single "difference" is bigger, more important, or of higher value than any other difference—except according to someone's preference.

Is it easy to raise a daughter in our society? Is it easy to read that millions of female fetuses have been aborted in Asia and millions of girls everywhere left illiterate, uneducated, unfed, and uncared for because they're girls? My mother remembered that in her large, poor family in Eastern Europe, the girls helped their mother prepare the food and then watched as the boys came in and ate; they didn't eat until the boys finished, and then they only ate what was left. For many years, she disliked women, calling them weak and spineless, and she preferred the company of men. She wished to be one of the strong ones, the loud ones, the ones who could eat first.

How do you hear your daughter's voice without succumbing to stereotypes, without expecting her voice to be softer than her brothers', more tentative and submissive? Could she be as loud as they are, as rambunctious and assertive? How long will it take before someone—at home, in school, or a neighbor or friend finally tells her that girls don't behave that way?

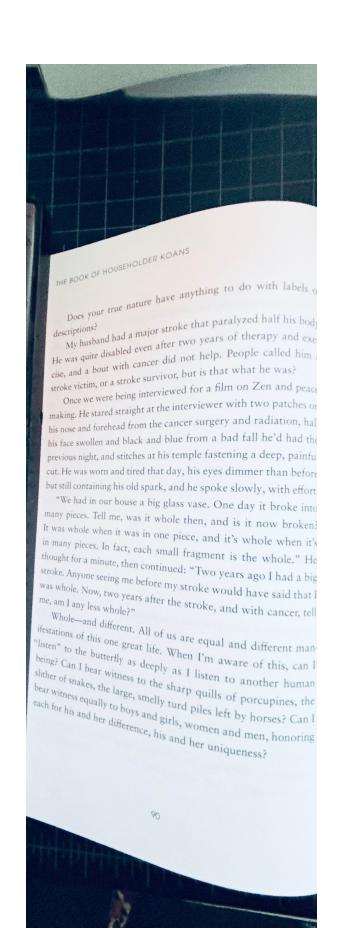
RAISING CHILDREN

Freedom comes out of realizing that every single thing has freedom position, that each and every person and thing is place and position, women, young, old, black, white, plants, one Body—men, women, young, old, black, white, plants, one Body—men, and insentient beings. For this reason, isn't our annals, sentient and insentient beings. For this reason, isn't our annals, sentient and insentient beings. For this reason, isn't our annals, sentient and insentient beings, white and again to the partice to let go of all labels and return again and again to the partice to let go of all labels and return again and again to the partice to let go of all labels and return again and again to the partice to let go of all labels and return again and again to the particle to let go of all labels and return again and again to the particle to let go of all labels and return again and again to the particle to let go of all labels and return again and again to the particle to let go of all labels and return again and again to the particle to let go of all labels and return again and again to the particle to let go of all labels and return again and again to the particle to let go of all labels and return again and again to the particle to let go of all labels and return again and again to the particle to let go of all labels and return again and again to the particle to let go of all labels and return again and again to the particle to let go of all labels and return again and again to the particle to let go of all labels and return again and again to the particle to let go of all labels and return again and again to the particle to let go of all labels and return again and again to let go of all labels and return again and again to let go of all labels and return again and again to let go of all labels and return again and again to let go of all labels and return again and again to let go of all labels and return again and again to let go of all labels and return again and again to let go of all labels and return again and again

The practice is to dwell in that question rather than in the label.
Once you see that the One Body expresses itself equally in all the different forms of life, doesn't honoring one form over another miss the point? If that One Body includes everything without exception, how can you question the value of, or denigrate, any of its expressions?

Nevertheless, it has taken years to uncover the names of female Buddhist nuns and teachers who have taught this precious dharma since the time of Shakyamuni. The names of male teachers have been chanted from the beginning, but only recently have some of us added the names of female teachers as well. Most of the names of women teachers have disappeared into the dust of history, and for this reason, in dedicating our prayers and chants to them, we invoke all Women Honored Ones whose names have been forgotten or left unsaid.

Awareness of how others discriminate or look down on us due to our gender, color, or religion helps us respond appropriately. But getting resentful and self-righteous shows my attachment to the label. It will provide a temporary answer to the question of who I am, but it will not help me sit in the space of not knowing.



RAISING CHILDREN

Look carefully at anything: a pen, a tree, a bottle of water, your bild. Describe it in your mind. Now look again and let go of the words and labels you came up with earlier. Tell me, what remains?