
LAURIE:

This. Is. It!

When sharp thorns prick you, go straight on.

When prodded relentlessly, go straight on.

When your partner doesn't get you, go straight on.

When you come to a crossroad, take it!

KOAN

Laurie and Cathy were retired. Cathy did not hesitate to show her disdain for the time that Laurie spent "down there" at the Zen Center. Each time Laurie would leave the house, Cathy, from her perch on the sofa, would say, "There she goes down there again."

One Friday evening, Laurie, laden with luggage from her days away, crossed the threshold into the house. Cathy, still sitting on the sofa, asked, "Well, Laurie, have you found the meaning of life yet?"

Without hesitation, Laurie replied, "Yes, Cathy: This. Is. It!"

Cathy was silent.

THE BO

REFLECTION

The way of Zen is indeed mysterious, its practice even more so to those who are not so inclined. Have you ever fallen short when you tried to explain why you practice Zen or any spiritual practice, sometimes sounding even more self-absorbed than usual? It can be so challenging to your partner when the way-seeking heart arises. Until, that is, your practice takes root and you become a better partner.

There is a famous Zen koan about an old woman who sold tea alongside the path to Mt. Tai, the home of Manjushri Bodhisattva, the exemplar of the highest wisdom. Whenever a monk would stop for tea, he would ask the old woman, "Which is the way to Mt. Tai?" She would reply, "Go straight ahead." After the monk took several steps, she would comment out loud so that he could hear her, "A fine young monk, but he, too, goes that way again."⁷

Who is the "old woman" in your life? Put aside for a time whether you think she or he is enlightened or not. The "old woman" in Laurie's house would prod her, "There she goes down there again to the Zen Center." How many of you have heard these kinds of remarks from your partner? *There he goes again, and me, look, I am home taking care of the kids, doing the yard work, and washing his clothes.*

What was Laurie seeking? What are you seeking? One might think that for Laurie, retired with a comfortable income and her own home, there would be no need to seek for anything more. Certainly her partner thought so. So what propels one person to sit on a meditation cushion for hours and another to sit on the sofa all day? Which one are you? How did you become as you are?

There is a constant dance between people who live together as a couple, each person a unique individual yet intimately intertwined, navigating daily life together. In monastic life, monks and nuns forego singular relationships of husband, wife, or significant other. A householder, on the other hand, positions herself in intimate relationship with another person, within a community of family and friends.

We never know how our lives will unfold; there are no guarantees in life other than birth, old age, illness, and death. Even the best-laid plans go awry. Laurie's way-seeking heart did not arise until after she retired from a job of forty years. When the seeking heart stirs, you are compelled to follow—there is no explaining it to anyone. When ignored, your dis-ease only intensifies. Of course, when attended to, your dis-ease also intensifies for there is no escaping the call to fulfill this deepest of desires to come home to yourself.

How do you navigate this world of relationship when the way-seeking mind arises so strongly inside? The old woman said, "Go straight ahead." But what is straight ahead in the midst of relationships? Can you navigate your way through the thicket of expectations and preferences and still attend to your partner's needs or to the needs of the relationship? Can you find the way to the heart of this life—to where the all-inclusive heart of the Bodhisattva of Nondual Wisdom resides—in the midst of the complexities of the life you are living?

As she plunged deeper into meditation, Laurie learned to traverse the thicket of who she was and to come to peace within herself. You could say that her inner old woman had been satisfied. But as there was no letup at home, she had to wrestle with the "old woman" sitting on her sofa. Finally, her defenses and

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resentments considerably softened, she found herself in a healing acceptance of her partner and their situation together. And so it was that one night when Laurie stepped through the threshold of their abode and the "old woman" asked again, "So, Laurie, have you found the true meaning of life yet?" Laurie responded from the depths of this mystery, "Yes! This. Is. It."

This. Is. It!

Can you make such a confident declaration?

What role does your partner play in your practice? It is said that the present circumstances of your life are the perfect situation for practice. How do you see this?