

UNDERSTANDING YOUR MIND

What I learned is that you cannot catch your mind when you want to see or be sure of it. When you just do something, and your mind is acting as it is, that is how you catch your mind in the true sense.

Zen is the practice of seeing “things as it is,” accepting “things as it is,” and nourishing things as they grow. This is the fundamental purpose of our practice and the meaning of Zen. But it is difficult to see “things as it is.” You may say you are seeing “things as it is” when actually you are not. I don’t mean that your sight is distorted; I mean that as soon as you see something, you already start to intellectualize it. As soon as you intellectualize something, it is already not just what you saw.

When I was young, I wanted to practice what was true, and I wanted to know the true sense of the mind that seeks the way. I thought that to do something good might be way-seeking mind, so I got up very early and washed the toilet and sink before the others got up. I thought that would be a very good thing to do, but while I was doing it, I was afraid someone would see me. I wanted to do it without being noticed by anyone else. “If someone sees me, that will not be pure practice,” I thought. But even before anyone saw me, my mind was already going wrong. I wondered whether I liked doing it without being noticed by anyone, or whether really I wanted it to be noticed. “Why am I doing this?” I asked myself. I was not so sure of the purity of my way-seeking mind.

When I would see a lamp light up in one of the rooms, I would hide. I thought that someone had gotten up already and might come down and catch me. It seemed as though I was at least trying to do something good with a pure mind, but my mind was not so pure! It was wandering about. I couldn't make my mind pure, and I was at a loss for what to do. I suffered a little bit, and I thought and thought and thought about what I should do.

One day when I was listening to a psychology lecture, the teacher said, "It is impossible to catch our mind exactly. It is especially impossible to know exactly what we have done. The mind that acted some time ago, the mind that belongs to the past, is impossible to catch. And even the mind that is acting right now is impossible to catch."

So I thought, "No wonder it is so difficult for me to understand my mind!" and I gave up trying to be sure of my way-seeking mind. At that point, whether or not people saw me was not my problem anymore. Since then, I have done things without thinking that I was doing them just because they were good.

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To do something without thinking is the most important point in understanding ourselves. Since it is difficult to see "things as it is," we should just practice our way.