

FINDING YOURSELF

To find true joy under some limitation is the way to realize the whole universe.

Nanyo Echu was a famous teacher and a very good Zen master. He was one of the disciples of the Sixth Ancestor of Zen in China. He didn't have many descendants, so we don't know much about him.

When Nanyo was dying, the emperor asked what kind of tombstone they should make for him, and Nanyo told the emperor's messenger, "Ask my disciples." So before a tombstone was made for him, the disciples had a discussion about it.

One of the students said, "It should be as big as this country. This tombstone should cover the whole realm, 'south of Sho and north of Tan.'"

Another student said, "No—it should cover the whole world."

But I would rather say, as their teacher Nanyo said when he was asked, "Any stone will be good enough; even a small stone is good enough for me."

Which do you like, the whole world or a small stone? Nanyo said, "I prefer a small stone that we can carry or move." If you know what a small stone is, you know that it is you yourself, and that it covers everything. But if you think that you need to see the entire universe in order to see yourself, you will be lost.

You need one small room for yourself. This is very true: when you can really find yourself in a small room, then there is you yourself, and the whole universe is there, and the whole universe makes sense to you. Without your one small room, the whole universe doesn't make any sense. So what you need now

is a small room, and what you will need after your death is a small stone. That is the actual reality, which is always true for everyone.

So I don't talk about the whole universe or some mysterious experience, but just about finding yourself in a small room, or in the strict practice of formal Zen where we say, "You should cross your legs in just this way." Under this kind of limitation, you will find yourself. Your real self is there. But because you discuss whether this room is good or bad, big or small, you lose your real room. Before you discuss, and before you are caught by discrimination or thinking mind, it is your own real room.

So to find true joy under some limitation is the way to realize the whole universe. There is no other way for us to get an approach to the whole universe. When you exist right here, the whole universe makes sense to you before you think about it. It is important to give up your foolish discrimination, or foolish ideas of freedom. This is the way of practice.