


MONEY

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A lot of the confusion we have in our society right now comes from a lack of understanding about the material world.

In our society, we respect labor. We consider labor to be the most important element in determining the value of things. But labor is not the only thing we should count. Before we count the value of labor, we must think about the various things that are given to us. I think it is the arrogance of human beings that when we pay for something, we pay mostly for the labor that went into it.

When we do so, we ignore the Buddha nature that everything has. If we would notice this point, our system would change a lot.

Of course labor is important, but labor should mean to work on things with respect. That should be the true nature of labor. It is a big mistake to value only the labor that goes into things without having a deep respect for the things themselves. When we work on things with respect, that is our human life in its truest sense.

When we pay for something, we are paying for the labor, and for the things themselves, which were given to us by God or by Buddha. I'm not an economist, but I feel that only when we have this kind of understanding of things will our economic system change.

Money should also be treated in this way. You pay for the work done on things, and money is exchanged for things and labor. But behind money there should be respect for the material things that are given to us from Buddha, and respect for the labor, the effort someone else made.

When you exchange things, you purify things. You may feel that if you pay for something with money, then you don't owe anything to anyone, but there is something missing in that idea. Even though you pay for the labor, there is something which you cannot pay for, and that is the true value of what is given to you by Buddha. By paying respectfully for the things that are given to us, or for the result of someone's labor, the activity of this exchange purifies

our life. Without this idea, even if you pay for the things you get, you still owe something.

Dogen Zenji's idea of everyday life is that we must always have great respect for things, for money, and for labor.

The money is not yours; it belongs to our society. Because you think the money is yours, you may think that money is dirty. But if you think that money is dirty, your understanding itself is dirty, and you are too attached to money.

Someone like me should be allowed to accumulate money in order to be ready to enter the hospital or to prepare for death; a funeral costs a lot of money! I have \$1,000 or \$2,000, but even though that is a lot of money, I may need \$5,000 or \$10,000! But however much it is, to rely on the power of money is wrong. The Buddha did not like that way at all. In his time the money system was not so strong, so he didn't focus so much on money, but he did talk about not accumulating things. He taught that monks should live on the food that was offered to them just before they ate, and not to beg for more food than would suffice for the next meal. I think that is the most important economic point, and I think the Buddha was a good scholar of economy.

The reason for money is to exchange it; we should not stop the flow of money. The Buddha's first principle is that everything changes or flows. Money is not just a symbol; it expresses the value of things that change. Things are valuable because we can eat them or live on them, so the flow of

money should not stop. If money stops flowing, that causes a business depression. If money is going slowly all over our society, our society is healthy.

So money purifies our world. It is not something dirty; it is very pure. It is a very important thing for us to take care of and respect. Because you don't pay enough respect to money, the money becomes dirty. It doesn't matter how much money you have—even if you have very little, you should pay respect to it and you should make the best use of it by using it to help our society.

The other day the temple administrators discussed how we should run the Zen Center. We don't like to say that you should pay some money if you want to come and study with us. We don't like it, but for us that is a part of practice. Just to sit on a black cushion is not the only practice; how we treat money is a very important practice for us.

Most people forget how we survive, and think that one can survive alone in the remote mountains. But the reason you can go to the remote mountains is because of money. You cannot work when you get to the Sierras or the Rocky Mountains! It is very foolish to ignore how we survive here.