

THE GARUDA'S DISCERNMENT

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The Third Ancestor in China said, “The first principle, the supreme way, is not difficult. If you just avoid discrimination, then whatever you encounter, that is it.”

According to Dogen Zenji, many people think this statement means that each thing is neither good nor bad in itself, and that there is nothing inherently right or wrong, and so one should just intuitively take the path according to one’s nature. He says they also think that the way to express the supreme way is to draw a circle, thrust a fist, knock the floor with a staff, slap a

student, or give a big shout. To Dogen Zenji, these kinds of understandings are not correct; the people who hold them are still dwelling in the demon cave.

In *Shobogenzo Bendowa*, Dogen Zenji says of the supreme way, “Buddhas and Ancestors appear because of this supreme way, and they do not observe anything but the supreme way. If there is an opening for Dharma, Dharma will appear.”

He also says, “The supreme way is like a big *konjicho*.” Konjicho is an enormous bird, called *garuda* in Sanskrit, that covers the whole world with its wings. This bird is so big that when it beats its wings once over the sea, a tidal wave rises, and the bottom of the sea is exposed. When the bottom of the sea is exposed, the garuda sees the *naga* dragons that live there, some of them still alive and some of them killed by the big tidal wave. The garuda sees them all, but only picks up and eats the dragons that are still alive. It may be the most discerning animal in the world.

Dogen Zenji says that the garuda, in how discerning or discriminating it is, is a good example of non-discrimination. For Dogen Zenji, we practice non-discrimination by strict discrimination; we practice discrimination beyond discrimination, which includes non-discrimination.

You may have discrimination in the realm of thinking mind, imagination, feeling, or emotional activity. You may discriminate, saying “right or wrong,” “good or bad,” “agreeable or disagreeable,” or that you like it or don’t like it.

How is it possible to reach the supreme way that is beyond discrimination and non-discrimination? That is what Dogen Zenji is talking about.

When Dogen Zenji says that the garuda only picks up and eats living dragons, he is talking about our practice right now. His instruction about our practice is very accurate and very strict. It is more strict and more particular than even this big bird is. Dogen Zenji doesn't pick up anything if it is not real; he doesn't practice what is not right practice. He practices only what he sees is correct.

Dogen Zenji's words are not just the usual paradoxical way of speaking about Zen. He has an accurate point, and his whole effort is directed toward our everyday practice. He doesn't ignore anything. That is why we believe in this practice. If we follow this practice, we will have that kind of ability to discern and to ignore nothing.

True discrimination means to discriminate that which can be discriminated. That is, true discrimination is to be able to discriminate between what can and cannot be discriminated, and then discriminate only that which can be discriminated. Once you can discriminate in this way, you should also have some practice of non-discrimination, established by someone like Dogen Zenji who is very discriminating. I think you can spend this life and the next life, if there is a next life, working on this.