

EVERY DAY IS A GOOD DAY

We cannot ignore the ideas of good and bad, long and short, but more and more as we grow up, we must be able to appreciate things as they are.



There is a Zen poem that goes something like this:

When the wind stops, flowers fall.

When a bird sings, the mountain becomes more calm.

Even when the wind stops, a flower still falls. There is no wind, so the flower should stay on; but though there is no wind, the flower still falls. When a

bird sings, it is not quiet or calm, but when you hear a bird sing in the remote mountains, you feel the calmness of the mountains even more.

This poem refers to the feeling of “there is” and “there is not.” There is, and sometimes there is not; and when there is not, sometimes there is. When a flower falls, it is because there is wind, but when there is no wind, flowers still fall. When you see a flower fall, you feel the presence of wind even more than you do when the wind is blowing. When a bird sings, you feel the calmness of the mountains even more than you did when you did not hear any sound.

That is our real and actual feeling of “there is” and “there is not,” but usually we are involved in superficial ideas about “there is” or “there is not.” In our idea, “there is not” means there is no wind, and “there is no sound” means that we don’t hear anything. But, as the poem says, in our actual feeling it is not like that. It may be paradoxical, but our actual feeling is much more true than our usual understanding of “there is” or “there is not.” You cannot say that this is just a poem; this is actual reality.

It is also true that when you have many things to eat, you become more hungry. “There is,” for us, means that there is not; “there is not,” for us, actually means that there is. When there is not much food, whatever you eat will satisfy you. You actually feel satisfaction for the things you have when there is not so much of them. “There is not” is, for us, “there is,” and often the real feeling that “there is” comes for us when “there is not much.”

Anyway, every day is a good day for him. Whether “there is” or “there is not” doesn’t matter. “There is” is good, and “there is not” is also good: every day is a good day. When you understand exactly “there is” and “there is not,” then you have complete freedom from everything, and you can appreciate things in their true sense.

When there is no wind, some flowers still fall—maybe a camellia. In the deep mountains, when you hear a bird you feel, all of a sudden, how quiet the mountain is. Every day is a good day.

Whatever happened to Ummon, it was not just something happening, and it was not just nothing happening. You may say, “nothing happened,” but many things are happening. When something happens, you may feel nothing: the feeling of nothing is happening in the great universe, including the sun and the moon and the bright stars you see in the mountain valley. When you see many stars, you feel the vast emptiness of the sky. You are not just watching stars, you are actually feeling the vastness of the sky.

In short, if you are always involved in the life of “there is” and “there is not”—or “enough” and “not enough,” “good” and “bad,” “right” and “wrong”—then you don’t feel anything in its true sense. But when your mind is very calm—when your mind *is* calmness—then even though you see many things, you can appreciate the vastness of the being in what you see. Then you can appreciate “things as it is.” That is Ummon’s “Every day is a good day.”

I sometimes emphasize the intellectual framework of Buddhist teaching, but the more important thing is to have the real feeling of practice.

Every day we practice zazen. In the summer, morning zazen is very good, but evening zazen is also good, even though the zendo is hot. It is hot, but after sitting when you feel the cool wind from outside, you may feel an indescribable feeling of practice. Evening zazen in the summer is supposed to be very hot, because it *is* hot! But the actual feeling you have in zazen on such hot days is an indescribably good feeling, which you cannot appreciate in spring or autumn. The feeling of the coolness is something you actually feel, more than what you think about it. Even though you know how good evening zazen is, each time you sit, you will actually feel it, "Oh, good!" Every time you sit, your feeling will be refreshed because it is hot. "It is hot" is not actually "it is hot."

When you eat simple food, you will feel the real taste of the vegetables. If you cook with sugar or with too many spices, you cannot appreciate the real taste of the food. When you accept things in a simple way, you can appreciate them more. So we say, "If you can appreciate food, you can appreciate Dharma." If you appreciate the real value of the absolute being of food, you can appreciate the Dharma. When your practice gets to this stage, you are said to be a good Zen student.

Some people are tall Buddhas; people like me are short Buddhas. Short or tall, good or bad, we can appreciate "things as it is," and we can appreciate the value of each being.

We cannot ignore the ideas of good and bad, long and short, but more and more as we grow up, we must be able to appreciate things as they are. Bamboo is good, pine trees are good, oak trees are good, grass is good, darkness at night is good, frogs are good. Everything should be good. That is “every day is a good day.” Also, “nothing” is good: the bare field is good and the dark vast sky is good. We should reach this actual feeling.