

BUDDHA NATURE

Your true nature is beyond good or bad, and it is valuable because it is beyond good and bad. It is valuable because you cannot figure out what it is.



The purpose of practice is to directly experience Buddha nature. Whatever you do, it should be the direct experience of Buddha nature.

When you sit, something may occur in your mind that you think is not so good. Some image may come, and you may think that it is covering your wisdom or Buddha nature. You think that you need to keep your mind clear from these images, and you wish that they were already cleared up.

But Dogen Zenji said that whether or not there are images in our mind, we should not even try to clear them up. We should not want our mind to be pure. When we want to be pure, we are attached to purity, which is not so good. Purity is good, but our practice is to be aware of our true nature, which is beyond pure or impure, so we should not be attached to purity or impurity.

If you understand this point, you will just sit without thinking and without being bothered by anything that comes. When an image comes into your mind, you won't try to escape from it. You will just sit. It will go, and you are beyond it.

In short, do not be attached to your mind when it is pure, and do not try to escape from your mind when it is not pure. If you try to escape from it, you are attached to the purity, and a small ego is still working, trying to push out the evil thought. As long as you are trying to get out of it, you are still occupied by a small self.

The most important point is to acknowledge exactly what Buddha nature is. Buddha nature is not small self; it is big self which is observing what you do and always accepting what you do. Whatever you do, Buddha nature will say, “Ah, that’s good—there is nothing wrong with it.” Enlightenment is to always be aware of that true nature.

Most people have the big misunderstanding that through Zen practice they will eventually attain enlightenment and be completely free of evil. A practice based on this misunderstanding is small practice; it has no big mind, and it is not pure practice. True practice is knowing what Buddha nature is, being aware of it, and doing the practice of big mind.

So in our practice there is no good or evil; it is not a matter of good or evil. So-called “good” and so-called “evil” are created by your small mind. For your true nature, there is no good or bad. Your true nature is beyond good or bad, and it is valuable because it is beyond good and bad. It is valuable because you cannot figure out what it is.

Ryokan was a famous Soto Zen priest. He said that the secret of the Soto way was, “nothing bad.” He was very strict about practice, but he wasn’t concerned about what anyone said, or even with what he himself felt. Whatever it was, he didn’t mind at all. If he was sick, he didn’t mind; if people didn’t understand him, he did not mind at all. If someone was not very serious, Ryokan didn’t mind at all: “nothing bad.” But when Ryokan thought that someone was quite serious or sincere, he minded very much. If a sincere person asked him what the Soto way was, he was very serious. He had a sharp and strict sense of his Buddha nature. Because of that strictness, he could accept whatever life he had; he could accept his poor and humble and unfortunate life. He didn’t mind at all because he had a strict sense of Buddha nature. Our sense of Buddha nature also should be very clear and strict.

We say, “You cannot plant any plants on a stone.” You should be like a stone—you cannot plant anything on it. No good or evil can grow on the Buddha na-

ture, it is so hard and so strict. Good and bad is delusion, and no delusion can grow on your spirit.

We use the Chinese word *shinsatsu* to say that a needle cannot be thrust into a stone. It is impossible to thrust a needle into iron. This kind of spirit is needed when you practice our way. In this way, little by little, you will make progress.