

Embarrassment

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi
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We could say that zazen is “looking into the mind,” – “kana: looking into”. “Looking into the mind” is not a turning inwards. We look into the mind with the body. We look into the mind with the sounds. We look into the mind with the wall.

Bodhidharma, sitting in the cave near Shaolin temple, called it biguan: just “wall-gazing”, sitting staring at the wall. The wall presents itself without compromise. Experience presents itself without compromise.

But compromise is all that we have ever known. It is all that we have ever done. It is all that we have ever been called on to do. Because, despite what the body was doing: moving here and there picking up this and that, nodding “yes sir, yes sir”, “yes ma’am, yes ma’am” – the mind could always be a secret place, a place of hesitation, a place of cursing and of plotting revenge, a place of creating stories of grand adventures and consolation for the indignities of the day.

So we’ve never had to do anything completely.

But since in Zen practice the whole matter is the nature of experiencing, the nature of the body, and the nature of the mind, the mind can no longer be a hiding place from the practice because practice is looking into the mind with body, looking into the body with the mind, looking into experience with experience.

We have never done anything completely, ever, in our lives. And sometimes it takes months and years and decades in our Zen practice for us to begin to practice completely.

When we do so this is kensho, this is seeing into one’s own nature: When we give up our last hiding place. When we realize that we don’t need to hide. When we realize that there are no barriers. When we realize that we don’t have to be consoled for anything because nothing can ever take anything from us and nothing can ever really give anything to us... because we are all that is.

When we allow the mind to be exposed to the body; and when we allow the body to be exposed to the mind; and when we expose what we think of as ourselves to the whole of our experience, then: in this exposure nothing is walled off anymore. Nothing is separate. And there are no hiding places.

Sometimes when we see how insincere our practice is, when we see how our practice has simply been a set of images, then sometimes we can be sorely disappointed or despair. But we have to realize that seeing that fundamental dishonesty and insincerity is the beginning of the kind of radical honesty that practice calls for.

But one of the last things that we ever want to happen to us is embarrassment.

We don’t want to do anything that we can’t do. Or we don’t want anybody to take a close look at us or anything that we do because then, we’re afraid that they’ll look at us and know that we’re just hollow, that we’re just stuffed with straw.

So we are so afraid of that, that often the beginnings of insincerity as they are seen do not lead to a beginning of sincerity. Instead we simply close down further. Because we’re not quite ready to let go of that

image. But do we have any choice now we've begun to see that it's an image? We've begun to recognize the insincerity? And we've begun to become embarrassed?

To try to pretend that this hasn't happened is like being invited to a party. And you think it's a costume party, so you go dressed like Nero in your toga and laurel leaves in your hair... And everybody looks at you. And you say, "Well, I knew it wasn't really a costume party. I just wanted to do this anyway to show you how stupid I think parties are anyway." You know: trying to escape your embarrassment, you just make it worse and worse. Obviously the thing to do would be to take off the costume and just enjoy yourself.

So can we do that? Can we just take off our costumes and just enjoy ourselves, just sit enjoying experience as it actually is? Can we be without compromise? Can we realize that being without compromise is a joyfulness? That this "looking into the mind with the body" and "looking into the body with the mind" means going beyond inside and outside. "Looking into" means a direct penetration, a direct Knowing, a direct passing through any boundary or barrier.

It's a beautiful morning.

And somehow you're able to breathe; somehow you're able to see and to hear. Somehow, when you get lost in thought, when you become contracted, you're beginning to recognize it. And you're beginning to have more and more choice about how you will live your life.

Good morning.