

Monkey in the House of Six Windows

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Sun and clouds and rain. Thoughts and feelings and sights and sounds. Self and other. This and that. Experiences arise and present themselves, always shifting and changing. A blade of grass with a drop of rain dangling from its tip. The sun seen burning through a mass of grey clouds. Waking up in the morning feeling like shit, wandering around throughout the day, bumping into things, grasping at things, pushing things away, coming and going.

The Nirvana Sutra says that usual mind is like a monkey in a house with six windows. There's seeing and hearing, touching and tasting, smelling and consciousness. Through these six windows the world can be seen coming and going. The monkey sometimes thinks that it owns the house and so it just sits in the middle of the floor, waiting for something to enter into its territory, something to come and try to take its house away from it. Sometimes it thinks it senses something so it leaps up off its haunches and lands on a windowsill and peers out to see what's going on out there. Then it hears something and so it leaps off and hangs peering through the window of hearing. Then it smells something, it tastes something, it thinks something; it jumps around back and forth, bouncing madly from wall to wall until it becomes so exhausted it collapses into the middle of the floor again, where it can see through each of the windows, but it can't see anything clearly. It is so exhausted that it goes to sleep for a while; and then something stirs and it's up leaping again from window to window.

Attention crouches inside the bodymind, leaping from sense to sense, grasping at this, grasping at that. In zazen, the bodymind sits; the house sits. The monkey thinks it owns the house and it is still jumping around but at least the house is where it is. From the house's point of view there's this thing inside of it, clawing, jumping, shrieking. Can you feel how seriously it takes itself?

A thought comes up. It is a thought about how the world is; the world is a hateful place, it's a bad place. There's a beautiful flower! I'm itchy. What's that sound? It sounds like a bird. My knee hurts.

The house can sit and allow its windows to be completely open to the world; instead of glass, instead of walls, the house then begins to see the world and realizes that the world is not something outside of it but that the house is arising within the world. We don't need to get rid of the monkey, we don't need to even tame the monkey. We simply need to take the walls of the house down. Then the monkey has nowhere to leap to, has no purpose, it is no longer enclosed. The monkey then realizes that it too is arising in the world.

Moment after moment, out of habit or pattern, attention pulls itself away from this moment of experiencing and leaps into a past moment, or pushes itself into a future moment of expectation, or grabs and clutches at only the smallest part of this moment, perhaps that which is seen, perhaps that which is heard, perhaps that which is thought.

Just leave the monkey alone! Let the monkey do whatever it wants to do. Practise like the house. The house always has its six windows. Can we slide the windows open, allow a fresh breeze to circulate through our rooms? Can we begin to ventilate the musty attic, sweep out the dusty basement? Can we see the ways in which the walls of the house are attempting to keep the world out and trying to keep something in? What's

outside and what's inside? Well sure, there might be that monkey jumping around, but there's also a great deal of space; there's air, there's room. The fundamental quality of a room, beyond its four walls, ceiling and floor is that it's full of space. There's a vastness.

The air in front of your face, behind your back, and resting on top of your head is the same air that passes in and out of your lungs, the same air that stretches over mountain and valley, over the sea. It circles the earth, it embraces the blue of the sky and the shifting of the clouds. There is this bodymind; what is it that is inside the bodymind? What is it that is outside? Outside right now? There's a wall, and there are sounds, the feeling of the hands, and the hokkai-in, the Dharmadatu mudra of things as they are, resting in the lap. Is that inside or outside? Feel the thumbs touching lightly, fingers resting on top of each other like the petals of a flower. Are the hands inside or outside? There's the wall. You see the wall. Is that inside or outside? You see the wall with your mind, you feel the hands with your mind. What is the mind? Is the mind this succession of thoughts and feelings, or is it also seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling? That which is being seen, that which is being heard; is that inside or is that outside? Does this skin of the body enclose something, or does it simply arise, the same way that a sound arises? Is it simply being felt, being experienced, the way that a thought is experienced, the way that a song is experienced, the way that the world is experienced? In experiencing, is there an inside, is there an outside?

The windows, the walls, the house and the monkey all arise within this world. All of the things of your life arise within this living. What is this life? Is there an inside and an outside to life? Even death arises within life. Death is what life does. We breathe in and breathe out. Thirty ants dismantle a caterpillar. The flowers and leaves eat the sunlight. Even death is not outside of life; death is the activity of this living, being born is the activity of this living. But what is it that is born, what is it that dies? Is it separate from this living? What is it that is living each and every one of you? What is it that you are experiencing when you experience something? Whether it's your hand or someone's else's hand, whether it is standing up or sitting down, whether it is waking, sleeping or dreaming, whether it feels good or bad: what is it that you are experiencing? Is it possible for you to experience something outside of experiencing? Is it possible for you to know something without knowing it? Is there ever anything going on but this knowing, this space, this life?

In our practice we might try to do all kinds of things to the monkey; we might try to tame the monkey, we might try to teach it tricks, teach it how to put on a little suit, a funny little hat, learn how to do calculations. We might try to make the monkey chant the Heart Sutra. We might ask ourselves, "How did the monkey get in the house?" Or we might just simply open the doors, open the windows, take down the walls and let the monkey go free.

Zen is this life. Zen is facing yourself as you are. It is seeing how you are moment after moment, so that you can unfold for yourself, directly, who you are. Zen is meeting yourself face to face. Zen is the direct pointing to the nature of experiencing itself, to the nature of Awareness itself. When you meet the teachings you meet the practice; when you meet the practice you meet yourself. You encounter the teachings through words like this, through coming face to face with the teacher in the dokusan room. Can you meet the teacher as he or she is? Can you recognize that the teacher is just Awareness itself, presenting itself? Can you recognize that you are just Awareness itself, presenting itself? Can you meet the teacher as you are and as he is, so that there is only Awareness itself? This is Zen.

We speak of a direct transmission. The teachings and the teacher might point, but it is up to us to look. When we look, when we see, is there anything other than this looking, this seeing? Is there someone to receive

transmission? Is there someone to offer it? Moment by moment, this moment expresses itself. What is it that you are aware of? What is it that is aware? Is there an inside or an outside to your experiencing?

The mind seems like a space with shifting surfaces of thoughts and feelings coming and going in it. Somehow a thought or a feeling can appear to be quite solid and if we attend to it, it seems to have a direction, it seems to locate itself some place. There is this space of mind, the spaces within the body, the space of the room in which this body is arising. Are these spaces separated from each other or is space just space? We tend to believe that space is that which is between objects, but what is the object? If we look very closely, perhaps we will see that it is space presenting itself as the object. If we look very closely here, very intimately, touch without barrier, perhaps we will find that all forms are formless forms. The Heart Sutra says "SHIKI SOKU ZE KU": form, in other words emptiness; "KU SOKU ZE SHIKI": emptiness, in other words, form. It depends on how you look at it, of course, but what is it that's looking? What is it that's experiencing?

I leave you with this experience. This moment of experiencing is completely open. The door stands so far ajar it comes off its hinges. Will you enter? Welcome.