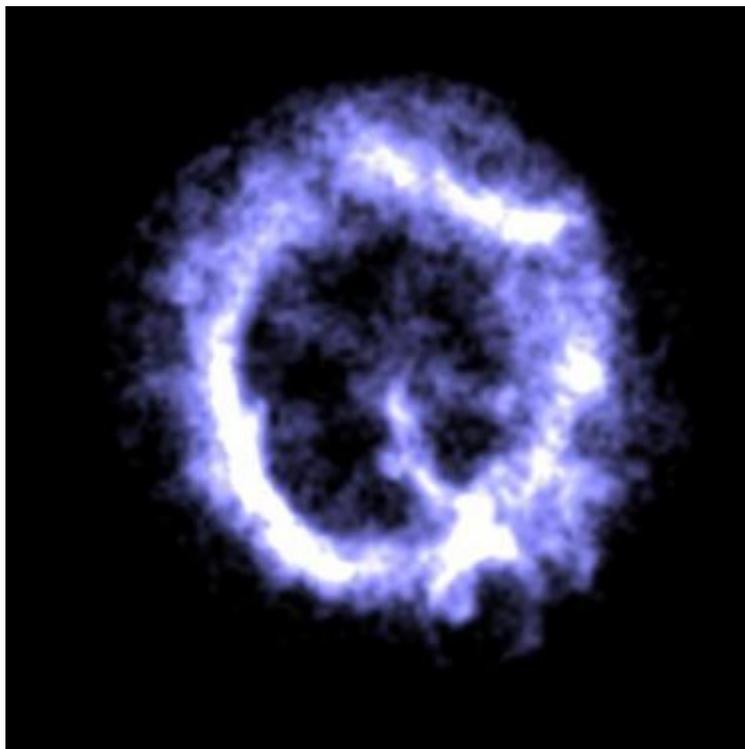


# Simple Minded

by Ven. Jinmyo Renge sensei (Presented While Training as “Ino”)  
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Simplicity is not so simple. For example, there is nothing simpler than sitting in zazen. There's not much that we need to do. We just sit with our ears over our shoulders, nose over the navel, aligned. We feel the movement of the breath, the sensations of the body. We pay attention to the details of our experiencing. And, as Zen Master Anzan Hoshin has said, we watch our minds run down the wall. It is simple, but we often don't experience it as simple. So why is that?

The reason simplicity is not as simple as we think it might be is because our thoughts and the ways in which we think are themselves so complex.

Anzan roshi often speaks about simplicity and richness — and complexity and poverty. He points out that reality, experience, is very simple, very straight forward and yet at the same time is very abundant, very rich. Our thoughts and storylines however are so entangled that we wind up with a great deal of complexity, but this complexity tends to simplify and reduce our experience. And so our thoughts tend to be like cartoons.

When we choose the limited views of our simple-minded thoughts over the richness of reality, we delude ourselves. For example, compared to seeing someone's face, a caricature of it is a poor imitation. The differences between the reality of seeing someone's face before us and a cartoon-like thought image of it is vast - all the details of colour, texture and nuances of expression. I had an experience recently which will illustrate my point.

Now there's not much that is simpler than walking through a door. If somebody else is trying to walk

through the door at the same time, then you pause and get out of the way. But people get into power games about who is going to do what.

The other day, the Roshi and I were at a computer store. We were just walking out, just moving into the doorway, when a young man barreled in and then just stopped right in front of us. The Roshi paused momentarily to see what he was going to do. He came straight at us, just trying to push everything in front of him. He was determined, not even to get into the store, but just that we were going to get out of the way because he was there. So, we moved to one side and let him rush through. The Roshi looked at me and couldn't help but laugh aloud and I just couldn't help it either. It was all just too obvious.

So there is this disparity between simplicity as it actually is and the simple-mindedness that people have when they are wrapped up in their stories and are therefore unable to deal with what is going on. The mind needs to become truly simple-minded, as simple as reality is and then to be open to that richness. But because there is that disparity, because there is that gap or distance between how people usually are and what's really going on, it is very much like the structure of a joke.

It's quite simple to understand how a joke works. It works on two different levels. It leads along a certain plane and then there is a level shift and it is that level shift that we find to be funny. Now, although it is very simple to explain a joke, that explanation wasn't particularly funny because although we can understand the structure and what is generally true about something, it is the details that are actually fun.

How self-image is, is a kind of joke because it thinks that **this** is what is going on. And it is not. And so, often, when the Roshi encounters this he just can't help but laugh because he gets the joke. He sees who we are, that how we are is an avoidance of the richness of who we are, and how ridiculous the suffering we impose on ourselves is. Much of the time, when he begins to laugh under those kinds of circumstances, the other person begins to laugh too, even though they don't know why. Actually, at the moment that they are laughing they do know why, but later on, when they try to think about it, they don't understand anymore.

The simplicity of zazen shows us how to explore the details of experiencing and through this practise, we begin to really have fun. We begin to realize a freedom from taking the mechanisms of self-image seriously or personally. And we find that when we release them, and allow ourselves to pay attention to our lives as they are, things can become very simple. When things are allowed to be simple, we have much more fun. Our understanding changes and our humour changes.

When we become stupified by the patter of our patterns, instead of continuing to follow along with it or struggling against it, we begin to get the joke. Perhaps we might laugh, or grin, or cry. After all, when we recognize how caught up we were in nonsense a moment ago, it can be a little embarrassing. But to who? Who do we think we are when we take that stance seriously? Then we realize that this is another pattern. Ack! What now? Should we laugh, be a good sport about it? Would that be the right "Zen" kind of thing to do?

It is not a matter of laughing at our own expense. It's more like releasing grasping and avoidance and stepping past complexity. You don't have to do anything about the patterns. Simply sit. Simply walk. Simply talk. Simply listen.

Sitting shows us that this moment is simple. This simplicity is richness and abundance. And it also shows us that the complexity of usual mind equals poverty and simplification.

I think that usually if someone were to say to us, "Oh, you are so simple-minded" it would be an insult. It would mean that we are something like foolish or half-witted.

But you know, in the context of practice, "simple-minded" might well be said as praise.

But our practice is beyond praise and blame. It's all much simpler than that.

Have a good morning.