

Snow

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This morning the first real snowfall of the year has fallen. To understand snow, you just have to see it, to feel it. If you were to try to look up into the sky and into the clouds to try to discern just where a particular snowflake came from, all that you could do is speculate. The snowflake moves so quickly, twisting and dancing in the breeze, as it falls and settles. It's very difficult to keep your eye on one. But you don't even really have to. All that you have to do is just catch a glimpse of it as you see it spinning and twirling, and you'll have some understanding of a snowflake. You reach out a bare hand, the snowflake melts as it touches the palm.

Thoughts rise and fall. Feelings move like clouds and thoughts fall from these clouds. When we don't understand our thoughts we might look to find some particular reason why we have this particular thought. Some particular reason why we feel the way that we feel. We can never understand a thought or feeling in this way, we can only speculate. To understand the thought, glimpse it as it is. See its movement. See how the feeling moves, not just through the mind, but through the body. Arising in the belly, the back, the chest, the thighs, the calves, perhaps in how the hands are held. The angle of the shoulders. Whether your gaze is soft or hardened. How clearly you hear the sounds. How freely you move, or whether your movements are hindered by the discomfort that arises when the body contracts into the posture which symbolizes the mental state that has arisen.

If you want to understand these states, you must look directly, you must first put aside speculation. One of the first things that you begin to notice when you allow yourself to notice directly, is that thoughts and feelings spring from no particular place. We cannot find a thinker who is giving rise to the thoughts. The thoughts simply arise, the feelings simply arise. Sometimes the thoughts and feelings go together. We also begin to notice that along with the thoughts and feelings, there can be a sense of self, a sense of who and what we are, which tries to base itself on the thoughts and feelings. A feeling of sadness comes up and we start to wonder why we feel sad. Then we look around for some story to tell ourselves, to explain to ourselves why we're sad; or perhaps to justify being sad, or perhaps to make us sadder. Then we feel that we are really "sad" and we define ourselves by the sadness; instead of simply allowing the feeling of sadness to arise and then fall, we grab on to it and we freeze it. We make it as solid as is possible, through thinking about that feeling, instead of directly experiencing the feeling. Then we become weighted down more and more as that feeling becomes denser, as we pile thought upon thought on top of it, just as the snow settles on the flowing stream and the cold of the air begins to thicken the surface of the stream until it becomes quite hard. The snow continues to fall. It piles higher and higher, until you can't tell the difference between the stream and its banks; but still, underneath the ice, the stream is flowing. It moves quickly and it is surging with life.

Despite the weight and density that occurs when we allow our thoughts and feelings to pile up, they are still merely covering the quick and dynamic flow of our life, which is still exerting itself as this seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling as well as thinking and feeling. To understand our thoughts and our feelings, we must see them as they are. This understanding begins to change how they are. When you see a thought arise and see it clearly, then you also see it fall; and then the thought vanishes, the feeling vanishes. Another

thought arises and it is seen clearly, and it also vanishes. When the snow falls in the early autumn and vanishes before it even reaches the ground, it can twist and dance in the sky, but it still vanishes before it reaches the ground. When we actually allow ourselves to directly glimpse the thoughts and feelings that arise, thoughts and feelings show their own nature of impermanence and openness even more clearly.

We then begin to understand that the thoughts and feelings arise for no particular reason, but simply exert themselves through the gathering of conditions and that part of their exertion is to vanish. Thoughts are not meant to pile up. We're not even meant to take them all that seriously. We can only truly understand the beauty of a thought when we can watch it in the same way that we watch that first snowfall, the same way that we watch the exquisite dance of the snow. As we watch the thoughts rise and fall we begin to sense the beauty and dignity of it, because the mind thinks just as the snow falls. There is nothing wrong with the thoughts, but when our seeing is covered by the thoughts and our understanding is weighted down beneath the thoughts and feelings, then our life feels that it is crushed beneath that weight. It feels held still by the pressure. Our understanding is like a fire, like a great heat, like the light of the sun. When we bring this understanding to bear upon our life, then the brightness of our life extends in all directions. Whatever arises, falls. Whatever comes, goes. Then we begin to understand that each thought is always new. Each feeling is always new. Each breath is always new. Each moment has never been lived before. Just as the snowflakes dance and turn and vanish, so does this breath, so does this thought, so does this feeling.

When we practise, we sit with the legs, the knees, the feet, the hands, the belly and back, arms and shoulders, neck, tongue, teeth, ears, eyes and head; and we sit with our thoughts and our feelings. We sit with the breath and with the breath of all of those sitting around us; the sound of our breath and the sounds of those sitting around us; and the street sounds; and the delicate sound of snow falling outside the window.

We sit to understand ourselves. Not to tell ourselves stories about ourselves. Not to explain ourselves to ourselves or to anyone else, but to understand ourselves and through this understanding, to begin to understand our world. To begin to understand what it means to be truly human.

Please enjoy yourselves.