

# Taking Care

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Sometimes we wish our life were easy. Even though we are Zen practitioners we wish our practice were easy as well. We wish that the usual lurching into discursiveness and anxiety would stop. We wish we would stop freezing and hesitating. We dream of an easy and joyful time, where we can see all our patterns or where we don't have any patterns because they are all worn out. We dream of the time when we have mastered the sequence of everything; and everytime we do anything the whole world looks at us in awe and astonishment. We dream that even when we make a mistake, or have overlooked something, the reasons for it are justifiable.

But it is not like this.

As we begin to recognize the depth of the Teachings of the Lineage of our Teacher, Zen Master Anzan Hoshin, we have to begin to face what tendencies are actually present. Sometimes this will require us to lift ourselves from our bed even when every cell seems to want to sink into 5 minutes more of rest. Sometimes this will require us to continue to sweep porches, and wipe stairs in spite of sore backs and tense shoulders. Sometimes it will require us to stop mid sentence, apologize for the garbled information and start again.

Every time however, it requires us to just be honest with this moment and allow ourselves to experience it more completely. However, since we are so misinformed by usual social patterns about the nature of reality, we can end up doing things that don't work at all. We cover up our discomfort and confusion. We hide it. We look into our memories to see if they have any meaning. We console ourselves with thoughts of how this will all work out in the end. We get worried. We want to take a break.

Dainen-ji and the environment of practice is not a social place. It is a place where the Roshi and the Dharma Teachers point to how we can embody the inherent freedom of all experiences rather than being who we tend to be by repeating our usual patterns. We don't need to cover up our discomfort and confusion. How would we cover it up? With what? We don't need to hide our discomfort and confusion. Where would we hide it? We don't need to look into our memories for some meaning. This moment has all the meaning we need, because it is the only thing going on and it is whole and complete. We don't need to console ourselves with thoughts about how it will work out, because the thought will not make it work out. We don't need to get worried by it because that would just be a worry. We don't need to take a break because you can't take a break. Life is continuous and seamless and it has no breaks.

So what we need to do is take care of things immediately around us.

If you are at work, and find your computer covered with dust and twisted at an angle; then straighten it and dust it. If you find yourself at home with a heap of paper on your desk, start by picking up the first one and actually looking at it and deciding if it is useful or not. If you find that you spend hours and hours not feeling the breath and your tendencies to glaze run strong; you should ask for the opportunity to do samu practice. You will have the priceless opportunity to see the mind of the Lineage of the Buddhas and Awakened Ancestors in how the environment of practice is arranged. By taking care and working in this environment, you will be able to see and so to step beyond your tendencies into the real world.

Now self-image has some mechanisms with which it needs to operate.

Self-image needs to avoid the presencing of this moment, to somehow obstruct what is immediately present, for then it can justify focusing on its fantasies, its stories, its claustrophobic orientations around hopes and fears. So at the start we tend to not keep spaces open and clear. For example, we fling shoes in a hallway, let clutter accumulate on a desk, and fill auditory space with random murmuring or the random selections of radio stations. So we must first keep the physical space of our immediate experience clear so that we can notice more about ourselves and how we are. We sweep hallways, clear desks to make clear workspace, and turn off unnecessary radios and TVs. In this way we can begin to feel the feet, and feel the hands and be mindful of our actual experience.

The process of mental and physical contraction loves to have a sense of problem, without actually doing anything about it. It likes to have a few random thoughts about a situation, without thinking it through. So it surrounds itself with incomplete piles of things that are large enough to have feelings about but vague enough to not be informative in any way. For example, it is not difficult to find piles of papers on a desk, on a floor, on a shelf, in a car. Boxes full of barely recognizable stuff. It has a feeling that the stuff is mine, and that it's important, but does not really know what it is. So we need to go beyond this vagueness and actually look at things.

Do we really know what that piece of paper is? Do we really know what is in that closet? Do we really know if those pens work? Do we really know what are those files on your desktop? Don't just mumble to yourself about wanting to clean things up, actually move your hands and pick things up. We need to be willing to face what is here. If the item is of no use throw it away, or put it away and schedule time for further investigation. Once decided that the thing works and have a use for it, arrange it so it displays more about its own function. This means, placing a CD in a CD case so that the titles on the face are readily visible when one opens the case; it means spreading open freshly washed cleaning cloths and making a pile, it means placing a mug so that the handle is visible and accessible.

Self-image focuses on objects and not at the relationship between objects. This only helps it propagate its own feeling of helplessness and anguish when it cannot find all the tools required to do a task; and very quickly uses this to fall into story lines about where else it would rather be. So we can start to look at the relationship between things. Is the sugar spoon placed close to the sugar dispenser, is the dishcloth placed close to the sink, is the chair aligned with the table?

Self-image tends to be occupied by its own point of view. It does not consider who else is in the space, what their needs are, what they want to do; and in turn gets offended when it encounters any inconvenience. So we need too wonder, who else is going to be using this? Will it make things clearer to them? If you don't know, ask.

Self-image is rushing about bustling in its own worldview, seeking experiences that it can use to propagate it's storylines; or avoiding experiences that disrupt them. Here you are, and do it now. Why? Because you are here, and you can see what needs to be taken care of.

Zen Master Anzan Hoshin says in the Dharma Talk, "Beyond Convenience"

*"Our life is not as convenient as the words, names and labels would lead us to believe. It is much richer, much more vast. It is multi-faceted and myriad. It is also very inconvenient in that no matter what we*

*think or feel, not matter how we may name things, people don't act quite in the way we would like them to. The universe does not hold us as its central concern."*

All of this can be hard to do as the tendency to fall into usualness can be very strong. So come to the monastery, place yourself in an environment where people are practicing. Before you do start something, pay attention to how things are arranged in relationship to each other before picking them up. See the how the dishcloth is placed before picking it up, and put it back the way you found it. See how the handtowel is openly spread before rushing to wipe your hands on it and leaving it in a crumpled mass. Attending directly to what is right here, and taking care of it will help to sweep away obstruction. And, really, it's easy.