

Before Thinking (Dharma Talk 68): “A Jewel in Bright Light”

Presented by Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi
Zazen-ji, September 14, 1991

People are always so kind to us. They always give us such good advice. One song in the Shoyoroku has a little bit of advice for us. He says, “A jewel in bright light outshines its edges.”

Other people tell us the same thing when they say, “Who gives a fuck what you think? Who do you think you are?”

People are so kind to us. They help us so much.

Can you live like a jewel in bright light so that inside and outside both arise in the radiance, the brilliance, the integrity of experience as it is, instead of the way that we think it is, the way that we fear it is, the way that we hope it is?

Life itself is so helpful to us. We erect our barriers, our boundaries. We scan and map out our territory and mark our borders, and life, so gently, so kindly, tears apart all the boundaries to show us that they don't work and that they are not necessary.

Life is so full of life: colours and forms and sounds, thoughts and feelings. How is it that you experience any of these? How is it that you experience your world? What is your world? What is it that you are experiencing and who is it that experiences?

We can manufacture all kinds of versions of the world, but none of them seem to work very well. Life is too full of life for that. Sometimes it bubbles forth a happy, mad, chaotic dance of cells growing cancerous in the belly and bone, the way my Teacher died. Sometimes life is so full of life that it cries.

All of our experience is an experience of change, of impermanence, of dynamic growth. And the more that we allow ourselves to recognize this, the more that we find that everyone is always helping us to realize this. Everything is always helping us to realize this. Our states bounce back at us. Our strategies collapse. Our victories reveal themselves to be petty failures.

When we understand the hope and fear that motivate our strategies, can we understand that experience as it is beyond hope and fear? There are no victors and no victims. There is only the strength, and clarity, and integrity, and honesty, and joy that unfolds naturally, spontaneously, is the very meaning of our experience.

In this practice we must unfold our experience as it is, even past that point. What is it that you are experiencing? What is this body, this mind, this world, these thoughts and feelings. How do you know anything at all?

To realize this, we must practise this. We practise our experience as it is, seeing the ways in which we shut off bits and pieces of it, try to manipulate it into forms and patterns that we remember, or that we expect. In this practice, we allow the moment to cut us open like a knife—the blade which cuts self and other

simultaneously.

The reason for our desperation, our silliness, our humourlessness is because we feel so separate from our world. And we feel separate from our world because that is the only way that we can maintain the illusion of a self that is doing the thinking, doing the feeling, doing the seeing and hearing. Practice and realization are both the same process—the process of becoming the life that is living you.

So then there are two bits of advice this morning: Who gives a fuck what you think? And, a jewel in bright light outshines its edges.

Please, enjoy yourselves.