

Would we all be better off, and would conflict between us be minimized, if all of us adopted a more humble attitude and allowed ourselves to be guided in certain matters by religious leaders and scholars? Is "a little learning," as the poet Alexander Pope put it, "a dangerous thing"? Should we be protected against glutting ourselves intellectually?

## 5.5 *Beyond Consciousness*

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### *Preparing to Read*

An even more radical proposal regarding human thinking comes from Zen Buddhism. There is nothing to do, nothing to understand—the goal is to see what actually is, to become enlightened and have no need to be reborn. As we saw in Chapter 1, thinking cannot get us there. Thoughts lead to other thoughts and keep us awake at night, but they bring us no closer to what is—that can only be experienced. It cannot be taught and it cannot be thought.

The fact is that everything is interconnected, and change is the nature of what is. If you grasp this, you will have learned what this life has to teach and will not have to repeat the process. The interesting thing is that there is no distance between where you are and where you want to be. You are already, at some level, enlightened. It is simply a matter of waking up to what is, and the best way of doing this is by having "beginner's mind." The first time you drove a car you paid attention to everything—you had to—but now most of that experience is automatic. Zen Buddhists think we live much of our lives on automatic pilot, and "beginner's mind" can put us back in contact with what is.

Practice, in Zen Buddhism, is both a route to enlightenment and an end in itself. And practice begins with **sitting** meditation. Our true nature already exists "beyond consciousness," and cultivating a clear and empty mind is a way of helping us recognize it. Zen Master Dogen advocated establishing the practice of sitting meditation, or zazen, in the midst of delusion because zazen offers the "pure, genuine experience of the empty state of mind."

Learning how to rest mentally is the fastest way to banish delusion. The best way to understand Buddhism, Suzuki says, is not to study it but to begin sitting in meditation every day. Thinking, or we might say the "idea of self and object," is not the way to seek enlightenment.

"waking up" & "rest mentally" seem contradictory

## Beyond Consciousness

To realize pure mind in your delusion is practice. If you try to expel the delusion it will only persist the more. Just say, "Oh, this is just delusion," and do not be bothered by it.

WE SHOULD ESTABLISH our practice where there is no practice or enlightenment. As long as we practice zazen in the area where there is practice and enlightenment, there is no chance to make perfect peace for ourselves. In other words, we must firmly believe in our true nature. Our true nature is beyond our conscious experience. It is only in our conscious experience that we find practice and enlightenment or good and bad. But whether or not we have experience of our true nature, what exists there, beyond consciousness, actually exists, and it is there that we have to establish the foundation of our practice.

Even to have a good thing in your mind is not so good. Buddha sometimes said, "You should be like this. You ought not to be like that." But to have what he says in your mind is not so good. It is a kind of burden for you, and you may not actually feel so good. In fact to harbor some ill will may even be better than to have some idea in your mind of what is good or of what you ought to do. To have some mischievous idea in your mind is sometimes very agreeable. That is true. Actually, good and bad is not the point. Whether or not you make yourself peaceful is the point, and whether or not you stick to it.

When you have something in your consciousness you do not have perfect composure. The best way towards perfect composure is to forget everything. Then your mind is calm, and it is wide and clear enough to see and feel things as they are without any effort. The best way to find perfect composure is not to retain any idea of things, whatever they may be—to forget all about them and not to leave any trace or shadow of thinking. But if you try to stop your mind or try to go beyond your conscious activity, that will only

be another burden for you. "I have to stop my mind in my practice, but I cannot. My practice is not so good." This kind of idea is also the wrong way of practice. Do not try to stop your mind, but leave everything as it is. Then things will not stay in your mind so long. Things will come as they come and go as they go. Then eventually your clear, empty mind will last fairly long.

So to have a firm conviction in the original emptiness of your mind is the most important thing in your practice. In Buddhist scriptures we sometimes use vast analogies in an attempt to describe empty mind. Sometimes we use an astronomically great number, so great it is beyond counting. This means to give up calculating. If it is so great that you cannot count it, then you will lose your interest and eventually give up. This kind of description may also give rise to a kind of interest in the innumerable number, which will help you to stop the thinking of your small mind.

But it is when you sit in zazen that you will have the most pure, genuine experience of the empty state of mind. Actually, emptiness of mind is not even a state of mind, but the original essence of mind which Buddha and the Sixth Patriarch experienced. "Essence of mind," "original mind," "original face," "Buddha nature," "emptiness"—all these words mean the absolute calmness of our mind.

You know how to rest physically. You do not know how to rest mentally. Even though you lie in your bed your mind is still busy; even if you sleep your mind is busy dreaming. Your mind is always in intense activity. This is not so good. We should know how to give up our thinking mind, our busy mind. In order to go beyond our thinking faculty, it is necessary to have a firm conviction in the emptiness of your mind. Believing firmly in the perfect rest of our mind, we should resume our pure original state.

Dogen-zenji said, "You should establish your practice in your delusion." Even though you think you are in delusion, your pure mind is there. To

realize pure mind in your delusion is practice. If you have pure mind, essential mind in your delusion, the delusion will vanish. It cannot stay when you say, "This is delusion!" It will be very much ashamed. It will run away. So you should establish your practice in your delusion. To have delusion is practice. This is to attain enlightenment before you realize it. Even though you do not realize it, you have it. So when you say, "This is delusion," that is actually enlightenment itself. If you try to expel the delusion it will only persist the more, and your mind will become busier and busier trying to cope with it. That is not so good. Just say, "Oh, this is just delusion," and do not be bothered by it. When you just observe the delusion, you have your true mind, your calm, peaceful mind. When you start to cope with it you will be involved in delusion.

So whether or not you attain enlightenment, just to sit in zazen is enough. When you try to attain enlightenment, then you have a big burden on your mind. Your mind will not be clear enough to see things as they are. If you truly see things as they are, then you will see things as they should be. On the one hand, we should attain enlightenment—that is how things should be. But on the other hand, as long as we are physical beings, in reality it is pretty hard to attain enlightenment—that is how things actually are in this moment. But if we start to sit, both sides of our nature will be brought up, and we will see things both as they are and as they should be. Because we are not good right now, we want to be better, but when we attain the transcendental mind, we go beyond things as they are and as they should be. In the emptiness of our original mind they are one, and there we find our perfect composure.

Usually religion develops itself in the realm of consciousness, seeking to perfect its organization, building beautiful buildings, creating music, evolving a philosophy, and so forth. These are religious activities in the conscious world. But Buddhism emphasizes the world of unconsciousness. The best way to develop Buddhism is to sit in zazen—just to sit, with a firm

conviction in our true nature. This way is much better than to read books or study the philosophy of Buddhism. Of course it is necessary to study the philosophy—it will strengthen your conviction. Buddhist philosophy is so universal and logical that it is not just the philosophy of Buddhism but of life itself. The purpose of Buddhist teaching is to point to life itself existing beyond consciousness in our pure original mind. All Buddhist practices were built up to protect this true teaching, not to propagate Buddhism in some wonderful mystic way. So when we discuss religion, it should be in the most common and universal way. We should not try to propagate our way by wonderful philosophical thought. In some ways Buddhism is rather polemical, with some feeling of controversy in it, because the Buddhist must protect his way from mystic or magical interpretations of religion. But philosophical discussion will not be the best way to understand Buddhism. If you want to be a sincere Buddhist, the best way is to sit. We are very fortunate to have a place to sit in this way. I want you to have a firm, wide, imperturbable conviction in your zazen of just sitting. Just to sit, that is enough. . . .

Epilogue

ZEN MIND

Before the rain stops we can hear a bird. Even under the heavy snow we see snowdrops and some new growth.

Here in America we cannot define Zen Buddhists the same way we do in Japan. American students are not priests and yet not completely laymen. I understand it this way: that you are not priests is an easy matter, but that you are not exactly laymen is more difficult. I think you are special people and want some special practice that is not exactly priest's practice and not exactly laymen's practice. You are on your way to discovering some appropriate way of life. I think that is our Zen community, our group.

isn't this separating self from object?

Buchen

Be-yi

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But we must also know what our undivided original way is and what Dogen's practice is. Dogen-zenji said that some may attain enlightenment and some may not. This is a point I am very much interested in. Although we all have the same fundamental practice which we carry out in the same way, some may attain enlightenment and some may not. It means that even if we have no experience of enlightenment, if we sit in the proper way with the right attitude and understanding of practice, then that is Zen. The main point is to practice seriously, and the important attitude is to understand and have confidence in big mind.

We say "big mind," or "small mind," or "Buddha mind," or "Zen mind," and these words mean something, you know, but something we cannot and should not try to understand in terms of experience. We talk about enlightenment experience, but it is not some experience we will have in terms of good or bad, time or space, past or future. It is experience or consciousness beyond those distinctions or feelings. So we should not ask, "What is enlightenment experience?" That kind of question means you do not know what Zen experience is. Enlightenment cannot be asked for in your ordinary way of thinking. When you are not involved in this way of thinking, you have some chance of understanding what Zen experience is.

The big mind in which we must have confidence is not something which you can experience objectively. It is something which is always with you, always on your side. Your eyes are on your side, for you cannot see your eyes, and your eyes cannot see themselves. Eyes only see things outside, objective things. If you reflect on yourself, that self is not your true self any more. You cannot project yourself as some objective thing to think about. The mind which is always on your side is not just your mind, it is universal mind, always the same, not different from another's mind. It is Zen mind. It is big, big mind. This mind is whatever you see. Your true mind is always with whatever you see. Although you do not know your own mind, it is there—at the

very moment you see something, it is there. This is very interesting. Your mind is always with the things you observe. So you see, this mind is at the same time everything.

True mind is watching mind. You cannot say, "This is my self, my small mind, or my limited mind, and that is big mind." That is limiting yourself, restricting your true mind, objectifying your mind. Bodhidharma said, "In order to see a fish you must watch the water." Actually when you see water you see the true fish. Before you see Buddha nature you watch your mind. When you see the water there is true nature. True nature is watching water. When you say, "My zazen is very poor," here you have true nature, but foolishly you do not realize it. You ignore it on purpose. There is immense importance in the "I" with which you watch your mind. That I is not the "big I"; it is the "I" which is incessantly active, always swimming, always flying through the vast air with wings. By wings I mean thought and activity. The vast sky is home, my home. There is no bird or air. When the fish swims, water and fish are the fish. There is nothing but fish. Do you understand? You cannot find Buddha nature by vivisection Reality cannot be caught by thinking or feeling mind. Moment after moment to watch your breathing, to watch your posture, is true nature. There is no secret beyond this point.

We Buddhists do not have any idea of material only, or mind only, or the products of our mind, or mind as an attribute of being. What we are always talking about is that mind and body, mind and material are always one. But if you listen carelessly it sounds as if we are talking about some attribute of being, or about "material" or "spiritual." That will be a version of it, maybe. But actually we are pointing out mind which is always on this side, which is true mind. Enlightenment experience is to figure out, to understand, to realize this mind which is always with us and which we cannot see. Do you understand? If you try to attain enlightenment as if you see a bright star in the sky, it will be beautiful and you may think, "Ah, this is enlightenment,"

but that is not enlightenment. That understanding is literally heresy. Even though you do not know it, in that understanding you have the idea of material only. Dozens of your enlightenment experiences are like that—some material only, some object of your mind, as if through good practice you found that bright star. That is the idea of self and object. It is not the way to seek for enlightenment.

The Zen school is based on our actual nature, on our true mind as expressed and realized in practice. Zen does not depend on a particular teaching nor does it substitute teaching for practice. ~~We practice zazen to express our true nature, not to attain enlightenment. Bodhidharma's Buddhism is to be practice, to be enlightenment.~~ At first this may be a kind of belief, but later it is something the student feels or already has. Physical practice and rules are not so easy to understand, maybe especially for Americans. You have an idea of freedom which concentrates on physical freedom, on freedom of activity. This idea causes you some mental suffering and loss of freedom. You think you want to limit your thinking, you think some of your thinking is unnecessary or painful or entangling; but you do not think you want to limit your physical activity. For this reason Hyakujo established the rules and way of Zen life in China. He was interested in expressing and transmitting the freedom of true mind. Zen mind is transmitted in our Zen way of life based on Hyakujo's rules.

I think we naturally need some way of life as a group and as Zen students in America, and as Hyakujo established our way of monastic life in China, I think we must establish an American way of Zen life. I am not saying this jokingly, I am pretty serious. But I do not want to be too serious. If we become too serious we will lose our way. If we are playing games we will lose our way. Little by little with patience and endurance we must find the way for ourselves, find out how to live with ourselves and with each other. In this way we will find out our precepts. If we practice hard, concentrate on zazen, and organize our life so that we can sit well, we

will find out what we are doing. But you have to be careful in the rules and way you establish. If it is too strict you will fail, if it is too loose, the rules will not work. Our way should be strict enough to have authority, an authority everyone should obey. The rules should be possible to observe. This is how Zen tradition was built up, decided little by little, created by us in our practice. We cannot force anything. But once the rules have been decided, we should obey them completely until they are changed. It is not a matter of good or bad, convenient or inconvenient. You just do it without question. That way your mind is free. The important thing is to obey your rules without discrimination. This way you will know the pure Zen mind. To have our own way of life means to encourage people to have a more spiritual and adequate way of life as human beings. And I think one day you will have your own practice in America.

The only way to study pure mind is through practice. Our inmost nature wants some medium, some way to express and realize itself. We answer this inmost request through our rules, and Patriarch after Patriarch shows us his true mind. In this way we will have an accurate, deep understanding of practice. We must have more experience of our practice. At least we must have *some* enlightenment experience. You must put confidence in the big mind which is always with you. You should be able to appreciate things as an expression of big mind. This is more than faith. This is ultimate truth which you cannot reject. Whether it is difficult or easy to practice, difficult or easy to understand, you can only practice it. Priest or layman is not the point. To find yourself as someone who is doing something is the point—to resume your actual being through practice, to resume the you which is always with everything, with Buddha, which is fully supported by everything. Right now! You may say it is impossible. But it is possible! Even in one moment you can do it! It is possible this moment! It is this moment! That you can do it in this moment means you can always do it. So if you have this confidence, this

is your enlightenment experience. If you have this strong confidence in your big mind, you are already a Buddhist in the true sense, even though you do not attain enlightenment.

That is why Dogen-zenji said, "Do not expect that all who practice zazen will attain enlightenment about this mind which is always with us." He meant if you think that big mind is somewhere outside yourself, outside of your practice, then that is a mistake. Big mind is always with us. That is why I repeat the same thing over and over when I think you do not understand. Zen is not just for the man who can fold his legs or who has great spiritual ability. Everyone has Buddha nature. We each must find some way to realize our true nature. The purpose of practice is to have direct experience of the Buddha nature which everyone has. Whatever you do should be the direct experience of Buddha nature. Buddha nature means to be aware of Buddha nature. Your effort should extend to saving all sentient beings. If my words are not good enough, I'll hit you! Then you will

understand what I mean. And if you do not understand me just now, some day you will. Some day someone will understand. I will wait for the island I was told is moving slowly up the coast from Los Angeles to Seattle.

I feel Americans, especially young Americans, have a great opportunity to find out the true way of life for human beings. You are quite free from material things and you begin Zen practice with a very pure mind, a beginner's mind. You can understand Buddha's teaching exactly as he meant it. But we must not be attached to America, or Buddhism, or even to our practice. We must have beginner's mind, free from possessing anything, a mind that knows everything is in flowing change. Nothing exists but momentarily in its present form and color. One thing flows into another and cannot be grasped. Before the rain stops we hear a bird. Even under the heavy snow we see snowdrops and some new growth. In the East I saw rhubarb already. In Japan in the spring we eat cucumbers.

### *Continuing to Think*

The "big mind" or "beginner's mind" that Zen advocates cannot be experienced objectively. You cannot think about your true self by projecting it as some objective thing. Zen mind is always with the thing you observe so it is, at the same time, everything.

This is the knowing that matters, the waking up to our true nature that is the meaning of enlightenment. If we realize that all is interconnected, we have realized our true nature. For this reason, thinking will not be the way to go. Thinking immediately puts us in the world of "this" and "that," of "me" and "other," of "subject" and "object," but these are false distinctions that cannot lead to an apprehension of what is.

It may be helpful to think about how you "know" someone you love. You probably don't think that knowing can best be compared with the kind of knowing needed to know geometry. Of course, you know the person's age, address, height, and weight—but these are hardly the most important things. What you may value most is knowing who they really are, something thought is not likely to reveal. And your knowing comes from direct experience. Just as you would not expect to get to know a person by studying their likes and dislikes from a computer printout, you should not expect to grasp what is by thinking about it.

All of this seems very paradoxical to people whose minds go automatically to the subject/object split. To appreciate what Zen has to offer requires setting all this aside.

If you are trying to meditate and thoughts intrude, the best advice is not to fight them and demand their exit but just to notice them slipping in and allowing them to slip out again. Don't think. Just sit.

### ***Summing Up the Readings***

As we observed at the beginning of this chapter, *how* we think we know is intimately connected with *what* we think we know. If we think knowing is a matter of applying logic and deduction, we will need to objectify what we want to know. The same is true if we take the senses as our starting point and subject knowledge to the experience test. On the other hand, if we seek religious truth or the enlightenment that Zen speaks about, other forms of knowing seem more appropriate.

Our metaphysics (What is real?) will necessarily be linked with our epistemology (How do we know?). Descartes offers an interesting contrast with Jaggar, Maimonides, and Suzuki. All of these thinkers are passionately concerned about knowing, but what they seek to know and how they seek to know it differ considerably. It might be valuable to make a list of what you most want to know and then decide the best method for knowing each of those things. Very likely you will decide that not everything is knowable using only one method. What we might all agree on is Sor Juana's echo of Aristotle's assertion that the desire for knowledge seems hardwired into our human brains.

To fish the world is water. As we look at the fish in the water, we know that the fish has a limited perspective since we believe the world is more than just water. One of the most helpful things philosophy can do, as Alison Jaggar points out, is to give us that perspective. As we look at what we have always taken for granted, realizing that other people do not share our assumptions, our own feelings are often clarified. Although we may come away believing exactly what we believed at the start, the experience of a broader perspective is intrinsically worthwhile. Like a trip to another country (or even another city), mental travel makes us appreciate both what we find in the new place and what we have left behind in the old. When we return, we ourselves are changed.

### ***Continuing to Question***

1. Is there anything in your mind that is not there because one authority or another (parents, friends, teachers, books, religion) put it there? What if some or all of these authorities are mistaken? How can you be as sure as Descartes wanted to be about what you know?

2. How can we identify the hidden assumptions that underlie our emotions? Start listening to jokes as a way of tuning in to judgments being made about individuals and groups in our society. This can turn refusing to laugh at a joke into a subversive activity.