

Everyday Life is the Way

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We had two ordinations last week - Jukai (Taking of the Precepts for Lay Person) last Saturday and we had Tokudo (Taking Vows as a Monk), so I was thinking about what this is, how we come to this practice, and what all of this means. I'll approach this discussion with a Koan from Case 19 in the Mumonkan:

Joshu asked Nansen, What is the Way?

Nansen answered, Ordinary mind is the Way.

Joshu asked, Does it lead to any direction?

Nansen replied, To seek it is to lose it.

Joshu asked, Then how can I know if it is the Way?

Nansen answered, The Way does not depend upon knowing, and does not depend upon not knowing. Knowing is illusion, not knowing is blankness. If you can achieve the unquestioned Way, it is like vast emptiness and boundless space. So, how can it be this or that?

At these words, Joshu became enlightened.

That was the translation of the Koan by Aitken Roshi, and now I want to read one by Myogen Sensaki.

Joshu asked Nansen, What is the Path?

Nansen said, Everyday-life is the Path.

Joshu asked, Can it be studied?

Nansen said, If you try to study it you will be far away from it.

Joshu asked, If I do not study it how can I know it is the Path?

Nansen replied, The Path does not belong to the world of knowing, nor does it belong to the world of not-knowing. Knowing is delusion and not-knowing is confusion. If you want to reach the True Path Beyond Doubt, place yourself within the same freedom as that of the sky. How can it be called good or not good.

At these words Joshu was enlightened.

I like to refer to Sensaki's translation although Aitken's translation is often used. I have pondered ordinary mind for many years. *Ordinary mind is the Way*. I've got no struggle with the notion of ordinariness and that the Awakened Mind is quite ordinary, totally natural – I prefer the word natural to the ordinary for the Awakened Mind. I think my struggle comes with *Ordinary mind is Zazen*. Or that if I allow my ordinary mind to just

be my ordinary mind in Zazen , I don't necessarily make effort. The mind of Zazen, is the mind of Zazen and ordinary mind is ordinary mind. I see it more like that.

But I don't struggle so much with *Everyday-life is the Path*. That becomes very clear for me and I see this in talking about one deciding to become a monk. That is everyday-life, one enters the Dharma as a lay person or as a monk, takes the Precepts, and everyday-life is the Path. Everything we do is everyday-life, we work with all that is before us, we deal with ordinary things, we go to the market, take care of the car, rake the leaves, cook, engage with those people around us - all this is everyday-life and all this is ordinary.

But this everyday-path of the monk is a little different from how lay people live, or it should be. The taking of Okesa is a very serious engagement. We don't truly realize the extraordinary meaning of the Robe. We can't exactly comprehend it and yet it is the deepest symbol of Zen. We know that to look on it is to notice that there is something very extraordinary about that which is ordinary.

Everyday-life then in wearing Okesa is the Path that Dogen speaks about. It is the Path of Zazen, the Path of entering practice as the Awakened Mind, there is no separation of practice and Awakening. To walk in the door, to sit on the cushion, all this is the Awakened Mind, even if we don't realize it. It isn't that Zen is separate and we are over here doing everyday-life. Everyday-life is Zen, and Zen is everyday-life. Zen is simply life. When we truly live in the Dharma that is Zen. When we sit on the cushion, that is Zen. These are not separate things. Engaging in this everyday-life, this Zen everyday-life is the life of Okesa.

“So, if you try to study it, you'll be far away from it,” Nansen said when Joshu asked can it be studied. Well we actually cannot study Zazen, we actually cannot study Zen directly. If we look head on at Zen, it disappears. We cannot find the texture of it, we cannot find the meaning of it, because it is the life that we are doing. And of course it is happening in every single moment. We can't see it, we can only live it, truly experience it. We can only be the totality of it, the function of it. So, we don't look directly at Zen, the same way that we do not look directly at Enlightenment, we cannot. Truly it disappears if we try.

So, we can't say that we study Zen. If you try to study it you will be far away from it. And Joshu goes on he says, *if you don't study it, how can I know this is the Path?* That also comes because we are searching for the Path, we're actually hungry for the Path, and don't even know that we are on the Path.

So, Nansen replies, this, *the Path does not belong to the world of knowing, nor does it*

belong to the world of not-knowing. Knowing is delusion and not-knowing is confusion. This is a rather delicate matter then. If we engage in a kind of knowing in which we are rigid or fixed, we miss the point entirely, that is to engage in a dark tunnel-like attitude toward Buddhism or toward Zen. We can't know it, and we actually cannot not know it either - because we cannot comprehend it, we cannot perceive the totality of the Awakened Mind. We can neither know it nor not know it. In a moment we can really come to be as the sky present and moving, open, spatial, not clinging. *If you want to reach the True Path Beyond Doubt, place yourself within the same freedom of that sky.*

When a person takes on the Okesa, and begins practice wearing the Robe, we refer to that person as an Unsui, a wandering cloud. One not-knowing, moving about in the Dharma. Simply moving across the sky in the simplicity of what the sky is. Simply open and there, all of us. And we receive the sky in all its conditions. It is open and it is the same for all of us. Not discriminating. The sky is equal to all of us. Has different expressions in different parts of the world and it moves openly and is even for all of us. *Place yourself within the same freedom of that as the sky.* Not asking about itself, not observing itself, simply being.

We don't call the sky good or not good. It is simply the sky. So, one who wears the Okesa becomes a wandering cloud, moving in this freedom of the Dharma, opening up and learning the freedom within the Okesa, While at the same time, if we observe the Okesa from the outside, looking at the Okesa we see all of the forms of practice and it looks quite tight, and then at the same time it's an extraordinary freedom – that we cannot entirely comprehend. Ryokan-san calls it a life that is most complete and free. In moving about as a cloud, we learn to release ourselves from the boundaries and the blaming of perception and the notions of closed mindedness that hinder us from true experience of freedom.

Joshu was Awakened when he heard about the sky. So everyday-life is as the sky moving openly in that freedom. This confidence in the Path is perhaps disconcerting for us. When we are young we are concerned about the Path, we don't know what we are going to do with our lives, we're looking for the way to go, we don't know what to study, we don't know what kind of curriculum to take up in school. So, it's many choices that we have to make in youth and we look toward studies that are a very different kind of path than Nansen is talking about.

This Path that is about living the invisible, we can't name, we can't see ahead for how to go. It is like being caught in a fairy tale in which we enter the forest and the night comes and we can't find our way. In the beginning the practice may be like that. We have wandered into this dark forest, we don't know where we're going, we don't know what it

means, and it's somewhat frightening. We have strange and new experiences. Are we going to make it out of there or are we ever going to see daylight again? Is there light that actually comes into the forest, am I going to feel okay about being here? So many things like that come up in this invisible gateway that we walk through.

But I think that there is not a study, but a confidence that comes when we are willing to take a step and then we take the next step, we realize that we don't necessarily crash into any wall. We are rooted in MU, we are rooted in Emptiness from the very beginning but we don't see it. The Path that we take in practice is so extraordinarily wide. So, once we step one step into it, we actually can't get off – which might be actually scary too.

We are on that Path, we are going that Way. That Path will always feed us, the Dharma will always feed us, like the entirety of the sky is just the Dharma. This of course is what Nansen is talking about. Place yourself within the same freedom of the Dharma, the sky. Once we take one step, the Dharma will always feed us. The Dharma will always protect us, the Dharma is always there, like the sky. Even if we don't recognize it, it's the underpinnings. We can't miss.

We don't really know what we are in for when we receive the Okesa, or in Jukai, when we put a Rakusu on, we don't really know what that means. But we know that something extraordinary has happened to the ordinary. The Okesa and Rakusu are so warm that we are just totally heartened by it, in the warmth of the Dharma. So, we go forward in that Way, we go forward into the forest without knowing whether daylight is ever going to come. Somehow we make it through, again and again we keep stepping in that Way and again and again the dawn comes and we seek our way and we take another step. We take some more steps, and that's just everyday-life. I mean, we think that we know daily life, and we say, “I'm going to go to the post-office, to the library...” we've got all these things lined up. We live in that kind of knowing trying to make ourselves feel safe but we really don't know. We go about everyday-life pretending that we know. We can go about those activities in a new way, in a way that relieves us of the sufferings that we invent everyday.

Student

I have been thinking a lot about this exact subject, that “ordinary life.” Because, I think I went through easily thinking I deserved a reward for anything that was hard. Sometimes the burden of that fell upon my family and friends to notice when I needed that reward or that encouragement or what have you. And now I see so much more that the ordinary way is just me, and there is nothing wrong with it and I don't need confirmation by someone telling me that is all OK. And part of that was being ordinary. I could not swallow the idea that I wasn't going to make a difference in the world. And now I just kind of say, if I make a difference, great, if the difference isn't known to me, that's OK

too.

Teacher

Well actually what we do in the world is none of our business. We're supposed to do the best we can, but we're not supposed to look at it. We can't see the wake, you don't see the wake that you are making with how you live your life - and we're not supposed to. That's why when the wake comes we're dead! That's the meaning of it. Other people look at our lives for us and we don't get to enjoy that. We get to enjoy other people's lives and look at the wake of others. Ours is none of our business.

Student

And that's a huge relief. I don't have to orchestrate and worry and plan, I just have to let it come to me and just do the best I can. You spoke about the steps, seeing your way through the dark forest and even being afraid is OK. I can live an ordinary life and just stay in this spot and everything I need to awaken or enlighten in the world is like that. I was always aware of something that might push me off the right path.

Teacher

Yes, you can't fall off.

Dogen tells us that in the Genjokoan. It isn't that we decide we are going to be enlightened, so we sit down and say, "Now I'm going to see the Truth!" It's not like that! We wait, and the myriad things come forward and the more we are totally ordinary the more the world that we see is extraordinary. We don't have to call it extraordinary, but it is. It is a totally Dharmic realm. It comes to us.

Student

We don't have to do anything special.

Teacher

Yes, but we have to make effort. We do have to practice well, we have to have clear mind. We have to make effort to recognize the needs of the people around us, and care for them. We have to come to the cushion. We have to be the heart of Zazen. If we do those things, the myriad things will come forward. Dogen Zenji, Shakyamuni Buddha, everybody promises that we'll awaken if we do that kind of effort. The doing of that is itself Awakening. We will Realize. There is Realization within the field of Awakening.

Student

I really do see what you're saying. The Way is the Way, I like this perspective where you know that you're doing it from the heart, and not from a frightened heart from this sense of...

Teacher

...of confirmation, a place of confirmation in ourselves. Well we don't do it unless we have that, we don't take Okesa unless we have that Bodhicitta seed, that confirmation that has grown in us, that knows that it can't go any other way. So you know that your life will never be satisfied unless you go that Way. It's one of those things, it's the same as putting on the Rakusu, you know that you have to wear it, you know that you have to do that.

There is almost a feeling of urgency about it, you know that you don't want to die before you get that done.

Student

The compassion develops in this idea that there is no hesitation in being.

Teacher

That's right, we learn to not hesitate. You mind your own business about yourself, you are not your own business, so that if you see somebody you don't start and think "I wonder if I should do that?" If it's direct and if it's right you just go for it. You just do it. So you live in that way, like the sky, Just freely doing. Important gates.

Essentially we can say that wherever we are is our total relationship at that time. Right now there isn't anybody else in the world, I mean, except in our minds which we do have, we know we're going to go home to our family, we're going to pick up our jobs and those things are going to be there. But right now, we are all of existence, right here, that's it.

And we are given everything in each moment. There is no need to think that any moment is incomplete or we don't have the totality of the entire sky before us.

Student

Most of my life, I wanted to figure out a way to see something sacred in everyday-life. To have that awareness and I couldn't do it. Only through practice here I see that is what it is, I don't know how to say it, it is like you said it's all right here. There is nothing I need to look for. It's all right here and it's so rich. In this period we had the ceremony on Saturday, for the past few weeks people were saying "aren't you nervous, you're excited?" O yes, but beyond that I have the sensation of being in a huge wide river and the current is just carrying me along. There is no way, I could get away even if I wanted to. And it's thus, thus, what is happening. I'm just very grateful.

Teacher

If we carry up the concept of the sacred, we make something that we expect these inanimate or animate objects to live in a particular way to satisfy us, and it can't be done. So we give up that perception and then we discover everything already is the sacred.

Student

You were talking last week about perception, and how that actually is too much, it's extra

Student

I really appreciate the translation that you're holding, more so than the one in the book. Mainly the word that I keyed on was Life, "a living verse mind." What we've been talking about in terms of rivers and flowing and you can't get out of. You can't get out of life ! This is it ! Whether it's cutting vegetables or driving to work, this is what it is, this is what's happening.

Teacher

That's good !!

Student

I'm thinking putting bowing cloth down. Bob can put the bowing cloth down, open the

bowing cloth or there is just the opening and there's no work for that.

Teacher

What happens is that the bell rings and it's time to put the bowing cloth down. So the bowing cloth takes you. Takes you down to the bow. So, the bell bows us...As we practice we stop thinking, oh I am doing this, we get relieved of that and soon the mind is just as the sky.

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