

## NOT KNOWING IS MOST INTIMATE

1. Very early on in our childhood we are taught that there are only two acceptable answers to any question: yes or no, it is this or it is not this, it is right or it is wrong, and so forth. Any kind of what adults call waffling can get you a whack on your fanny or a lecture on being truthful. This is not a sensible teaching the child is receiving; it is a response coming from the adult's anxiety, impatience, narrow mind or just plain ignorance. It teaches the child to close his mind to all the possibilities inherent in each moment and to reduce the richness of life to "safe" formulae.

We have all been deeply effected by this conditioning, if not from our parents then by our teachers or peers there is no escaping it. An important aspect of Zen training is freeing ourselves from the cage this conditioning has trapped us in. For instance, most koans are directed at liberating us from our mind trammels and from our bodies' enchainment in rigid "correct" responses to conditions.

When the adult responds to the child with anxiety, impatience, and so forth, he communicates his insecurity and fearfulness along with his narrow mind. This is, in effect, setting us up for an inability to experience the intimacy of relationship with all beings which is the natural condition of life.

2. The koan I want us to consider tonight is one of my favorites. I've talked about it a couple of times in the past but it seems that every time I look into it I find a deeper resonance with it in my life. That is true of most koans but it is especially true of this one. It is Case #20 from The Book of Serenity, Dizang's Not Knowing:

*Dizang asked Fayan, "Where are you going?"  
Fayan said, "Around on pilgrimage."  
Dizang asked, "What is the purpose of pilgrimage?"  
Fayan said, "Don't know."  
Dizang said, "Not knowing is most intimate."*

Why do you do what you do? Why do you say what you say? Why do you think what you think? If you assume that, of course, you can give a definitive answer to any of those questions, you need to do a lot more shikantaza. On the other hand, of course there is a sense that you do know what you are up to, but that is a very superficial kind of knowing.

Wansong, the teacher who wrote the commentaries for each of the koans in The Book of Serenity reminds us that what Dizang means by not knowing is beyond knowing or not knowing as we usually understand those expressions. He quotes these famous lines spoken by Joshu's teacher, Nanquan, "The Way is not in knowing or in not

knowing. Knowing is false consciousness, not knowing is indifference," and then comments that you must, "just affirm totally when affirming, but don't settle down in affirmation; deny totally when denying, but don't settle down in denial."

Now, that is the kind of "Not Knowing" we are talking about here. The moment you settle down in either knowing or not knowing you cut yourself off from the truth of this moment in the ever changing, ever flowing phenomena that express the truth moment by moment.

3. But what did Dizang intend when he said, "Not knowing is most intimate"?

Intimate has a very special connotation in Zen parlance. It signifies the direct, unmediated experience of just what IS. There is no I and no independent phenomenon: there is just, as Joko Beck put it, "experiencing, experiencing, experiencing" moment by moment of the flow that is reality. It is not, most definitely, the processed, dualistic concoction that passes for reality in our conditioned discriminating mentation. There is no separation of experiencer and experienced. The minute we "know", we have separated ourselves from this flow of experiencing and are living in our imagination of the past. That is what Nanchuan meant when he said that "knowing is false consciousness." Why then did he say that "not knowing is indifference"? Here he is referring to our failure to establish intimacy with what is by retreating into our ignorance, our "comfy nest" that is, indeed, our prison.

The "Not Knowing" that opened Fayuan to a deep realization of his true nature is a stepping into the universe of all possibilities, of infinite meaning, infinite activities, the doorway to freedom. It is the fearlessness of accepting that there is no place for man to rest his head, and furthermore, that there is no need for that imagined place of security. It is the place from which we always step forth on our pilgrimage through life, the place that is "no place."

4. The poem that Hongzhi wrote to accompany this koan throws more light on this matter.

*Now having studied to the full, it's like before  
Having shed entirely the finest thread, he reaches not knowing.  
Let it be short, let it be long stop cutting and patching;  
Going along with the high, along with the low, it levels itself.  
The abundance or scarcity of the house is used according to the occasion;  
Roaming serenely in the land, he goes where his feet take him.  
The purpose of ten years' pilgrimage  
Clearly he'd turned his back on one pair of eyebrows.*

I don't want to try to "explain away" this poem; it is for you to wrestle with it. But I can clarify a few of the references to old Zen lore.

Sengzhao wrote, "The non differentiation of all things doesn't mean that you add to a duck's legs and cut a crane's legs, level mountains to fill valleys, thereafter considering them no different."

And as for eyebrows, Wansong relates this amusing story,

*"Mouth asked nose, "Eating is up to me, speaking is up to me—what good are you that you are above me?" Nose said, "Among the five mountains, the central one occupies the honored position." Nose then asked eyes, "Why are you above? Eyes said, "We are like the sun and moon truly we have the accomplishment of illumination and reflection. We dare ask eyebrows, what virtue do they have to be above us?" Eyebrows said, "We really have no merit; we are ashamed to be in the higher position. If you let us be below, let the eyes look from above what face holes are you?" Everybody knows the useful function, but they don't know the useless great function."*

- *Joko Dave Haselwood*