

en teachers; nevertheless, they  
ot just for themselves but also

he practice of the "three train-  
This story is embodying these  
Sunim and Songyong Sunim  
their appearances; because of  
and fearless; because of ethics  
s but the effects these actions

poem of Songyong Sunim:

. Does play have any place  
actionate flirtation?

## 96. Maurine Stuart's Whack

UNITED STATES, TWENTIETH CENTURY .....

**M**YO-ON MAURINE STUART was leading a one-day retreat, and one of her students was soon to ordain as a priest. The student was walking behind Maurine during *kinhin*, or walking meditation, when she saw another woman start to wobble and fall. Without thinking, the student reached out her hand to assist the other woman. Maurine whacked the student's hand hard, twice. The other woman didn't fall.

The next morning, as the student was pouring tea for breakfast, Maurine turned to her, "Do you want to know why I hit you yesterday?"

"Yes," she said.

"You were being too helpful. You have to let people find their own balance. Don't be a crutch for them."

The student bowed deeply.

### GYOKUKO CARLSON'S REFLECTION

Zen is not taught by words and ideas but primarily by relationship. It is dynamic, spontaneous, intuitive, and often baffling. Myo-on Maurine Stuart slaps a hand, hard and twice.

My relationship with my teacher, Jiyu-Kennett Roshi, was full of moments that brought me up short. When I first began working as her attendant, I was doing her laundry one day, and she complained that something had been done incorrectly. I thought she must be talking about somebody else, and only much later did I realize that her comment had been directed at me. Because I was so new in her

service she was being circumspect in her correction. Later, when I had been in her service long enough for the trust to build, she would tell me what I had done wrong without holding back.

Just when I thought I knew what to do and how to do it, there would be a word, a look, or a gesture that gave me pause. At that moment I had several choices: to defer awkwardly while repressing anger and shame, to defer gracefully while letting go of my previous plans, to question my teacher and risk banishment, or to continue stubbornly with my previous course. I have come to feel that there is no perfectly right way to respond to correction, and equally there is no perfectly wrong way. But even doing a very bad job of responding can be the basis for deep learning and a profound turning. Conversely, responding well may be very satisfying but may also be tainted with smugness. Remembering that there is no single perfect way and no completely wrong way makes it easier for me to choose to act and respond.

The first time I read this little story, I went to my old pattern of wondering "Who is right?" Quickly, I saw that that is an unanswerable, irrelevant question. More useful is to reflect on these questions: How willing am I to have my hand slapped, to be interrupted in my present course, to interrupt someone else or to raise my hand? The relationships between students and teachers, and all practitioners with themselves, are where the Dharma comes alive.

The student whose hand was slapped was in training for leadership and a teaching position. If she gets stuck in imitating her teacher, she may, as a new teacher, slap and interrupt without discernment. If she gets stuck in the words "Everyone needs to find their own balance," she may leave everyone floundering without guidance or timely interruption. The art of teaching is to explore the heart and mind of the student with empathy but without entanglement, to be supportive but not permissive. The art of being a good student is to trust that what comes from the teacher could be important, but to remember that sometimes the teacher is just another human being having a bad day.

As I matured in my practice of Zen and came to know my teacher

better, I saw that sometimes in a place of deep compassion and none of us can manifest the perfect response in every circumstance. We are not perfect. We are called upon to be honest with ourselves each moment. To try to be perfect is to lose touch with what it means to be human and humble is freeing.

When our teachers show their vulnerability to the gift given us by old Gautama by first becoming deathly ill in public, fully demonstrating the fragility of our teachers when they belch out their truth that we are all made of the same stuff, we receive the Dharma and pass it on. All of us are called into these dynamic, baffling relationships. We can know what it is to move freely in the world of humanity without fear.

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A newborn baby is completely dependent. Your job is to help that child grow up. How do you know when to let your child make mistakes? Can you let your child

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better, I saw that sometimes the corrections were coming from a  
 place of deep compassion and skill, and sometimes they were not.  
 None of us can manifest the perfection of an enlightened mind in  
 every circumstance. We are not called upon to be other than human;  
 we are called upon to be honest and true, to be as clear as possible  
 each moment. To try to be perfect is overreaching and arrogant. To  
 be human and humble is freeing.

When our teachers show their humanity, it is a gift. This is similar  
 to the gift given us by old Gautama, who demonstrated his humanity  
 by first becoming deathly ill in a very messy way, and then dying in  
 public, fully demonstrating the frailty of the body. It is a gift given by  
 our teachers when they belch or bark or snivel. This gift illustrates  
 that we are all made of the same stuff, and therefore we all can receive  
 Dharma and pass it on. All of us, with all our weaknesses, can enter  
 into these dynamic, baffling relationships and come alive in them. We  
 can know what it is to move freely, making mistakes and facing our  
 humanity without fear.



A newborn baby is completely dependent on her parents. The parents'  
 job is to help that child grow up and leave them behind. How do  
 you know when to let your child or your student make her own  
 mistakes? Can you let someone fall in front of you?