

## 22. Jiyu-Kennett's Not Bigger, Not Smaller

UNITED STATES, TWENTIETH CENTURY .....



PERSON ASKED, "What is a minor enlightenment?"

Master Jiyu-Kennett said, "A what?"

The person continued, "A minor *kensho*, a minor *satori*?"

Jiyu-Kennett replied, "Enlightenment is enlightenment. Sometimes the glimpses are big and sometimes they are small, but it is still one and the same thing. Don't think that the enlightenment is bigger or smaller."

The questioner continued, "I had the impression that once you got enlightenment, you got it."

Jiyu-Kennett said, "Once you have realized it, you will always know it. But if you don't keep your training up, heaven help you; you'll be worse off than you were before. It's not something that you 'get'; it's not something that you 'keep' for eternity. Training, as Dogen says, is enlightenment. This is why Shakyamuni Buddha always carried his begging bowl and always wore his robe. A lot of people think, 'Why didn't he just sit back and enjoy it?' Enlightenment isn't something you have; it's something you are, something you do."

### HEILA DOWNEY'S REFLECTION

The simplicity and directness of Jiyu-Kennett's answer to this questioner reminds me of my own struggles with similar questions, as well as my teachers' ongoing and compassionate encouragement, sesshin after sesshin. Perhaps I might not have used the exact same

phrases  
was. He

My v  
post-se  
ing koa  
I wante  
what is

With  
these v  
provide  
Why d  
Roshi,  
Dharm  
ouch! I  
are in a

Desp  
only m  
totally i  
another  
my con  
casting

Now  
a way o  
a pinpr  
which v  
clear th  
deepen  
us to a  
our del  
continu  
thinkin  
you do

Some

phraseology—still, I remained perplexed about what “enlightenment” was. How would I know if I had “it”?

My very early years of Zen practice were punctuated by pre- and post-sesshin whisperings centered around kensho, satori, and answering koans. Though the question of “bigger” or “smaller” did not arise, I wanted to know: What is kensho? What is satori? And ultimately what is enlightenment?

Within the realms of perceived mystery and secrecy surrounding these words, it eventually became clear that no other person could provide answers to these perplexing questions. So what was I missing? Why did I not get it? Then one day after an interview with Kapleau Roshi, adrenalin pumping, I rushed down some stairs back to the Dharma hall and bashed head-on into a rather large bell—*boooooom*—ouch! It was immediately clear that the answers to these questions are in action and doing, not explanations and words!

Despite this insight, my discomfort in not understanding eased only marginally as I had to admit that satori and kensho still remained totally incomprehensible, while the more explicable “enlightenment,” another frequently used word, felt more familiar and thus became my companion and mantra. To “enlighten,” or “bring light to,” denotes casting light upon “what is,” enabling one to perceive it more clearly.

Now I would say that kensho, satori, and enlightenment are a doing, a way of life, not things or states, and can be likened to looking through a pinprick hole in a rice paper screen, when all at once we see that which was previously hidden. But unless we continue to meticulously clear the viewing hole, through sustained and ongoing practice and the deepening of our insight, eventually this view will diminish, returning us to a state of darkness, hunger, thirst, and attachments caused by our deluded thinking. With deep gratitude I have to admit that Roshi continuously admonished us with the words, “Less thinking, much less thinking, more hard training!” which concurs with Jiyu-Kennett’s “if you do not keep up the training, heaven help you.”

Some years after I received *inka*, or Dharma transmission, an older

student who had attended retreats regularly came to an interview with me. I asked him, "Do you have any questions?"

He replied, "No!" Then quickly added, "But I want something."

I asked, "What can I do for you?"

He said, "As I am of an advanced age, I am sure not to have many years left in this current form and I would like to attain enlightenment before I die! Can you help me please?"

While not doubting his commitment and sincerity, it was clear to me that his request was born out of delusion, out of "I want." After pointing this out to him and encouraging him to relinquish all "I want" by returning to before-thinking-mind, I poured him a cup of tea, saying, "Remember, in the Lankavatara Sutra the Buddha urges us to just drink the tea, no attainment, with nothing to attain. So, please have some of this hot, sweet, amber-colored tea. Just drink tea!"

After some moments he reached for the tea *very* hesitatingly, all the while looking at me. He sipped, and sipped again. More silence ensued. Then he exclaimed: "I just didn't get it, did I?"

I then said, "The tea was indeed amber colored, but neither *hot* nor *sweet*! Caught up in words and 'I want,' you were unable to taste what is." His "I want" mind prevented him from attaining his true nature and becoming one with what is—in this case: cool, unsweetened tea.

Any glimmer of insight, not bigger, not smaller—even "I just didn't get it, did I?"—has the potential to break the mold of conditioned behavior, benefiting our lives and the world.

As Sengcan, the Third Zen Patriarch, wrote in the *Xinxin Ming*:

Not only here, not only there,  
truth's right before your very eyes.

Distinctions such as large and small  
have relevance for you no more.

The largest is the smallest too—  
here limitations have no place.

What is  
Is it p



What is the smallest experience of enlightenment you have ever had?  
Is it possible that you missed it altogether? What would change in  
your heart if "enlightenment" wasn't a noun, after all?

iew

any  
ent

to  
ter  
of  
us  
ise

all  
ce

Dr  
at  
re  
a  
t  
d