

COMMUNICATION *“Without any intentional, fancy way of adjusting yourself, to express yourself as you are is the most important thing.”*

Communication is very important in Zen practice. Because I cannot speak your language very well, I am always seeking some way of communicating with you. I think that this kind of effort will result in something very good. We say that if you do not understand your master’s words, you are not his disciple. To understand your master’s words, or your master’s language, is to understand your master himself. And when you understand him, you find his language is not just ordinary language, but language in its wider sense. Through your master’s language, you understand more than what his words actually say.

When we say something, our subjective intention or situation is always involved. So there is no perfect word; some distortion is always present in a statement. But nevertheless, through our master’s statement we have to understand objective fact itself—the ultimate fact. By ultimate fact we do not mean something eternal or something constant, we mean things as they are in each moment. You may call it “being” or “reality.”

To understand reality as a direct experience is the reason we practice zazen, and the reason we study Buddhism. Through the study of Buddhism, you will understand your human nature, your intellectual faculty, and the truth present in your human activity. And you can take this human nature of yours into consideration when you seek to understand reality. But only by the actual practice of Zen can you experience reality directly and understand in their true sense the various statements made by your teacher or by Buddha. In a strict sense, it is not possible to speak about reality. Nevertheless, if you are a Zen student, you have to understand it directly through your master’s words.

Your master's direct statement may not be only in words; his behavior is likewise his way of expressing himself. In Zen we put emphasis on demeanor, or behavior. By behavior we do not mean a particular way that you ought to behave, but rather the natural expression of yourself. We emphasize straightforwardness. You should be true to your feelings, and to your mind, expressing yourself without any reservations. This helps the listener to understand more easily.

When you listen to someone, you should give up all your preconceived ideas and your subjective opinions; you should just listen to him, just observe what his way is. We put very little emphasis on right and wrong or good and bad. We just see things as they are with him, and accept them. This is how we communicate with each other. Usually when you listen to some statement, you hear it as a kind of echo of yourself. You are actually listening to your own opinion. If it agrees with your opinion you may accept it, but if it does not, you will reject it or you may not even really hear it. That is one danger when you listen to someone. The other danger is to be caught by the statement. If you do not understand your master's statement in its true sense, you will easily be caught by something which is involved in your subjective opinion, or by some particular way the statement is expressed. You will take what he says only as a statement, without understanding the spirit behind the words. This kind of danger is always there.

It is difficult to have good communication between parents and children because parents always have their own intentions. Their intentions are nearly always good, but the way they speak, or the way they express themselves, is often not so free; it is usually too one-sided and not realistic. We each have our own way of expressing ourselves, and it is difficult to change that way according to the circumstances. If parents can manage to express themselves in various ways according to each situation, there will be no danger in the education of their children. This, however, is rather difficult. Even a Zen master has his own way. When Nishiari-zenji scolded his disciples, he always said, "Go away!" One of his students took him

literally and left the temple! But the master did not mean to expel the student. It was just his way of expressing himself. Instead of saying, "Be careful!" he said, "Go away!" If your parents have this kind of habit, you will easily misunderstand them. This danger is always present in your everyday life. So as a listener or a disciple, it is necessary to clear your mind of these various distortions. A mind full of preconceived ideas, subjective intentions, or habits is not open to things as they are. That is why we practice zazen: to clear our mind of what is related to something else.

To be quite natural to ourselves, and also to follow what others say or do in the most appropriate way, is quite difficult. If we try to adjust ourselves intentionally in some way, it is impossible to be natural. If you try to adjust yourself in a certain way, you will lose yourself. So without any intentional, fancy way of adjusting yourself, to express yourself freely as you are is the most important thing to make yourself happy, and to make others happy. You will acquire this kind of ability by practicing zazen. Zen is not some fancy, special art of living. Our teaching is just to live, always in reality, in its exact sense. To make our effort, moment after moment, is our way. In an exact sense, the only thing we actually can study in our life is that on which we are working in each moment. We cannot even study Buddha's words. To study Buddha's words in their exact sense means to study them through some activity which you face moment after moment. So we should be concentrated with our full mind and body on what we do; and we should be faithful, subjectively and objectively, to ourselves, and especially to our feelings. Even when you do not feel so well, it is better to express how you feel without any particular attachment or intention. So you may say, "Oh, I am sorry, I do not feel well." That is enough. You should not say, "You made me so!" That is too much. You may say, "Oh, I am sorry. I am so angry with you." There is no need to say that you are not angry when you are angry. You should just say, "I am angry." That is enough.

True communication depends upon our being straightforward with one another. Zen masters are very straightforward. If you do not

understand the reality directly through your master's words, he may use his staff on you. "What is it?!" he may say. Our way is very direct. But this is not actually Zen, you know. It is not our traditional way, but when we want to express it, we find it easier sometimes to express it in this way. But the best way to communicate may be just to sit without saying anything. Then you will have the full meaning of Zen. If I use my staff on you until I lose myself, or until you die, still it will not be enough. The best way is just to sit.