
HERMAN:
Crying

*Happiness, happiness, great happiness.
Sorrow, sorrow, great sorrow.
Tears fall and the heart softens by itself.
Why does a great being cry?*

KOAN

Whenever Herman returned home from a trip, his mother cried with joy from the moment she saw him. Whenever he left home again, his mother cried with sorrow. Herman was deeply embarrassed by her crying, especially when she cried at the airport in front of everyone.

Each time she cried, Herman would say, "Mom, please don't cry like that. If you keep crying like that, I won't come home anymore." But still his mother cried.

One day, Herman found himself crying, too.

REFLECTION

When meditation is practiced regularly, emotions often arise unbidden. You may experience anger, sadness, loneliness, and, not infrequently, a deluge of tears.

Many students say to me, "Something is wrong with my sitting."

"Why do you say that?" I ask.

"Because I am crying," is often the response. Meditation releases emotions—it is not a dry practice. When you allow the feelings to surface in meditation, you will experience a natural releasing and cleansing. A student who cried whenever she saw me once said, "Why don't you teach me something?" I replied, "You need to cry. Your body-mind is healing itself." Crying prepares the ground for sprouting the seeds of awakening.

Meditation reveals your humanity. You learn to live in the skin of the human being that you are, doing what human beings do: feeling anger, loneliness, and sadness; laughing and crying. It all seems so wrong, so awkward, depending upon the feelings that you've repressed due to familial or cultural conditioning or the depth of trauma you've experienced. Crying is a natural and healthy human response to life.

Does crying make you uncomfortable? Do you suppress your feelings? You are in big trouble when your meditation practice has at its base an image of a serene meditator who is removed from the fray of human emotions. Can you let go of that image and find the natural place for feelings and emotions within yourself, or are you molding yourself into your image of what a meditator looks like? Where is the place for feeling in spiritual practice?

Herman was a determined and rational man who had set his sights on becoming an engineer. Although he felt deeply, he did

express his emotions freely. His mother's emotional freedom embarrassed him; he tried to change her and distance himself further from his own feelings. How about you: What is your strategy? Zazen, sitting still and open, is deeply healing. It continually amazes me how much is revealed and released in the simple act of sitting still in receptive awareness, open to everything. Sitting is fundamentally all-encompassing: This very body-mind breathes in the whole universe and breathes out the whole universe. You yourself are being breathed by everything: Where is there for anything to be hidden? Practice allows you to not fear emotions; emotions are energy, not repressing them makes you strong and resilient.

Meditation practice gives us the gift of feeling directly, without our habitual methods of interference. Through sitting, you develop stability, spaciousness, and a disciplined attentiveness. These three qualities together enable you to sit in the midst of strong emotions without acting out or repressing them. You learn to feel directly what is arising in your body: the tightening of muscles in the abdomen, the surge of heat in the chest, the warm wetness in the eyes. The conditioned mind is quick to go into a story about what is happening. Can you interrupt your narrative and let the story obscure the actual sensation arising in your body? Can you feel the energy directly? This is not to say that circumstances and reasons are unimportant, but rather that when you take the backward step and just feel the experience directly in your body, your response is often more appropriate to the situation. Herman engaged in an elaborate strategy around his mother's crying. One day, he found himself crying with his mother—a beautiful shared experience. It is one thing to cry alone in our room, quite another to cry together. I remember that after my root teacher, Taizan Maezumi Roshi, died, my dharma brother, Rabbi

Don Singer, said, "Now we know the sangha will survive because we have all cried together."

Finding himself crying with his mother, Herman realized that he did not have to try and change her. There was nothing to fix. As he realized that her tears expressed her love for him, his natural tenderness and vulnerability arose. How about for you? Tell me, how does an awakened person cry?

Do you experience your emotions directly as raw energy, or do you try to escape them by acting out, repressing, or telling stories about them? Do you succumb to an image of a rigid meditator who is beyond feeling?