

## Not Knowing is Most Intimate: De inventing the Self



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### I. "Not knowing is most intimate"

In the Book of Serenity, Case 20:

*Dizang asked Fayan, "Where are you going?"*

*Fayan said, "Around on pilgrimage."*

*Dizang said, "What is the purpose of pilgrimage?"*

*Fayan said, "I don't know."*

*Dizang said, "Not knowing is most intimate."*

For the purpose of the pilgrimage, Fayan could have said anything—for perspective, tolerance, excitement, restlessness, desire for the new, desire for change—but says, "I don't know."

"Not knowing is most intimate." What does that mean? What is intimacy? Intimacy means no separation.

Once you know something, you tend to be locked into what you know. Going with 'not knowing' means that everything can then be known.

### ***Beginner's Mind***

*People say, "To study Zen is difficult," but there is some misunderstanding why it is difficult. It is not difficult because to sit in cross-legged position is hard, or to attain enlightenment is hard, but it is hard to keep our mind pure, and to keep our practice pure in original way. ..., but why I say I want to talk about why it is difficult is because just you came here this morning, getting up early is very valuable experience for you. Just you want to come is very valuable. We say, "Sho shin." "Sho shin" means "Beginner's mind." If we can keep beginner's mind always, that is the goal of our practice. We recited Prajna Paramita Sutra this morning only once. I think we recited very well, but what will happen to us if we recite twice, three times, four time, and more? Then we will easily lose our attitude in reciting -- original attitude in reciting -- the sutra. Same thing will happen to us. For awhile we will keep our beginner's mind in your Zen practice but if we continue to practice one year, two years, three years, or more, we will have some improvement, and we will lose the limitless meaning of the original mind. **In beginner's mind***

***we have many possibilities, but in expert mind there is not much possibility.*** So in our practice it is important to resume to our original mind, or inmost mind, which we, ourselves -- even we, ourselves do not know what it is. This is the most important thing for us. The founder of our school emphasized this point. We have to remain always beginner's mind. This is the secret of Zen, and secret of various practices -- practice of flower arrangement, practice of Japanese singing, and various art. If we keep our beginner's mind we keep our precepts. When we lose our beginner's mind we will lose all the precepts.

- Suzuki Roshi

No separation means understanding that everything-good, bad, and indifferent -- is your life, is enlightenment; even on a vacation there are always ups and downs because of one single fact: you never leave yourself behind!



According to tradition, around 520, Bodhidharma came to visit Emperor Wu in hopes of converting him. Hearing that the emperor was already a Buddhist, there was no need to do so.

During the patriarch's time with the emperor, he started to talk about his building of temples and giving financial support to monastics. He then asked Bodhidharma how much merit he accumulated in the process. Emperor Wu felt that the patriarch might not know about the good deeds that he made, so he pointed them out to the patriarch. The patriarch felt that Emperor Wu was providing his own promotion campaign rather than seeking the Dharma; instead, he wanted to boast of his own merit and virtue. Thinking that the emperor might have been attached to his own ego, Bodhidharma replied,

"Actually, you have no merit and virtue. In truth, no merit and virtue at all."

The Emperor asked, "Well then. What is the main point of this sacred teaching?"

"Vast emptiness, nothing sacred," said Bodhidharma.

"Who are you, standing in front of me?" asked the emperor.

"I do not know," said Bodhidharma.

Bodhidharma originally went to Emperor Wu with the idea of saving him. To the patriarch's dismay, he realized that the emperor was too conceited; he had too high an opinion of himself. Being an emperor was already something, he thought. He had built many temples, enabled people to leave home, given away a lot of money, and made a lot of offerings to the Triple Gem. He thought that he had created a tremendous amount of merit and virtue. Bodhidharma, wanting to shatter the emperor's attachment, replied that he had no merit and virtue at all.

One time, early in my training, my teacher asked me something and I replied, "I don't know." He told me that my "I don't know" was not the "I don't know" of a Zen master. What is the difference? Of what is this intimacy made?

## II Shantaram (by Gregory David Roberts)

*Shantaram* is a novel influenced by real events in the life of the author, Gregory David Roberts. In 1978, Roberts was sentenced to nineteen years' imprisonment in Australia after being convicted of a series of armed robberies which he had committed to feed a heroin addiction. He escaped from prison in broad daylight, thereby becoming one of Australia's most wanted men for the next ten years.

The protagonist arrives in Bombay carrying a false passport in the name of Lindsay Ford. Mumbai was only a stopover on a on the way to Germany, he decides to stay in the city. Lin soon meets a local man named Prabaker, whom he hires as a guide but soon becomes his best friend. Both men visit Prabaker's native village, Sunder, where Prabaker's mother christens Lin with the name *Shantaram*, meaning *Man of God's Peace*.

*"I was thinking about another kind of river, one that runs through every one of us, no matter where we come from, all over the world. It's the river of the heart, and the heart's desire. It's the pure, essential truth of what each one of us is, and can achieve. All my life I'd been a fighter. I was always ready, too ready, to fight for what I loved, and against what I deplored. In the end, I became the expression of that fight, and my real nature was concealed behind a mask of menace and hostility. The message of my face and my body's movement was, like that of a lot of other hard men, don't fuck with me. In the end, I became so good at expressing the sentiment that the whole of my life became the message.*

*It didn't work in the village. No one could read my body language. They knew no other foreigners, and had no point of reference. If I was grim or even stern, they laughed, and patted my back encouragingly. They took me as a peaceful man, no matter what expression I wore. I was a joker, someone who worked hard, played the fool for the children, sang with them, danced with them, and laughed with an open heart ... I was given a chance to reinvent myself, to follow that river within, and become the man I'd always wanted to be ... Prabaker's mother had told me that she'd called a meeting of the women in the village: she'd decided to give me a new name, a Maharashtrian name, like her own ... And because they judged my nature to be blessed with peaceful happiness, Rukhmabai concluded, the women had agreed with her choice for my first name. It was Shantaram, which means man of peace, or man of God's peace ... I don't know if they found that name in the heart of the man they believed me to be, or if they planted it there, like a wishing tree, to bloom and grow. Whatever the case, whether they discovered that peace or created it, the truth is that the man I am was born in those moments ... the better man that, slowly, and much too late, I began to be."*

On their way back to Bombay and after a night out, Lin and Prabaker are robbed. With all his possessions gone, Lin is forced to live in the slums, giving him shelter from the authorities and free rent in Bombay. After a massive fire on the day of his arrival in the slum, he sets up a free health clinic as a way to contribute to the community. He learns about the local culture and customs in this cramped environment, gets to know and love the people he encounters, and even becomes fluent in the local language.

Who are we really? Are we the 'constructed self' (constructed by ourselves and others), or is there also a non-constructed self that may more truly be who we are?

Practice asks us to come to each moment, each person, each situation in a fresh way. Roberts speaks of 'reinventing the self' but from a practice point of view, he actually has the opportunity to 'deinvent the self', allowing no-self to appear in order to be "the better man" that he knew in his heart he was

Do we discover the peace / love in each other and each situation, or do we plant it there to bloom and grow? Do we concretize each other and every situation or do we allow emptiness to arise and be seen?

### III. Poem by Rumi

*All day I think about it, then at night I say it.*

*Where did I come from, and what am I supposed to be doing? I have no idea.*

*My soul is from elsewhere, I'm sure of that, and I intend to end up there.*

*This drunkenness began in some other tavern. When I get back around to that place,*

*I'll be completely sober.*

*Meanwhile, I'm like a bird from another continent, sitting in this aviary.*

*The day is coming when I fly off, but who is it now in my ear, who hears my voice?*

*Who says words with my mouth? Who looks out with my eyes?*

*What is the soul? I cannot stop asking. If I could taste one sip of an answer,*

*I could break out of this prison for drunks. I didn't come here of my own accord,*

*and I can't leave that way.*

*Whoever brought me here will have to take me home.*

"Where did I come from, and. What I am I supposed to be doing? I have no idea:" This is the same as the Zen Master, "I don't know."

Meditation allows for deep self-reflection; this in turn gives rise to scrupulous self-honesty and investigation. This investigation reveals the impermanent nature of self-no-self-which is the meaning of Dizang's comment, "Not knowing is most intimate."

Usually we are stuck in a 'prison for drunks', captive either to either our own beliefs about ourselves or those of others; if we could 'taste one sip of an answer' about who this one is, we could break out of the prison.

What is this prison? Delusion-- the belief in a separate and permanently abiding self, independent of everything else and without change

Mara was a demon who was The Tempter. He is best known for his part in the historical Buddha's enlightenment. This story came to be mythologized as a great battle with Mara, whose name means "destruction" and who represents the passions that snare and delude us.



As the about-to-be Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, sat in meditation, Mara brought his most beautiful daughters to seduce Siddhartha. Siddhartha, however, remained in meditation. Then Mara sent vast armies of monsters to attack him. Yet Siddhartha sat still and untouched.

Siddhartha said "I see you Mara, and you will never imprison me again." Mara claimed that the seat of enlightenment rightfully belonged to him and not to the mortal Siddhartha. Mara's monstrous soldiers cried out together, "I am his witness!" Mara challenged Siddhartha, who will speak for you?

Then Siddhartha reached out his right hand to touch the earth, and the earth itself spoke: "I bear you witness!" Mara disappeared. And as the morning star rose in the sky, Siddhartha Gautama realized enlightenment and became a Buddha..

Suzuki Roshi in Branching Streams lectures: "Buddha's way is the study and teaching of human nature, including how foolish we are, what kinds of desires we have, our preferences and tendencies. Without sticking to something, I try to remember to use the expression "liable to." We are liable to, or we have a tendency to do something. "

#### **IV. De inventing the Self: no-self**

Tendencies are not a permanent part of the self; they are merely what we are 'liable' to do and, without self-reflection, often what we habitually do.

These tendencies (seeds) may have some biological component, but causes and conditions either water the seeds or allow them to die; if watered, they become habitual to the point that they become 'concretized' in our minds (and the minds of others) until we believe these tendencies to be our actual nature.

If we believe these tendencies to be who we are and beyond our control, we will not exert effort to do something else; our belief in a permanent, independently abiding self then becomes the very obstacle that keeps us from liberation: "it is so and therefore cannot be changed"

Sometimes we are fortunate to be in a new/different environment (like '*Shantaram*') where this belief of permanence is shown to be the delusion that it is: we are unknown and our external attributes are not seen in the same way; when others see us differently, we can see ourselves differently (the value of a teacher!)

For most of us, this unusual 'new environment' is only found in meditation practice where-- through intimacy with the self--we can shed our tendencies in the middle of our own belief systems and that of others until we experience no-self.

One difficulty that arises: . .we may feel resistance from others when we begin to change because when we change, all of our relationships have to change.

Rumi understands that nature of this delusion of separation, however: "I didn't come here of my own accord, and I can't leave that way. Whoever brought me here will have to take me home."

We do not 'come here of our own accord', but enter on the river that runs through each of us and the universe ...



Suzuki Roshi visited Yosemite, and wrote of the waterfall in *Zen Mind Beginner Mind*.

*"...the water comes down like a curtain thrown from the top of the mountain. It does not seem to come down swiftly, as you might expect; it seems to come down very slowly because of the distance. And the water does not come down as one stream, but is separated into many tiny streams. From a distance it looks like a curtain. And I thought it must be very difficult for each drop of water to come down from the top of such a high mountain. It takes time, you know, a long time, for the water finally to reach the bottom of the waterfall. And it seems to me, that our human life may be like this. We have many difficult experiences in our life. But at the same time, I thought, the water was not originally separated, but was one whole river. Only when it is separated does it have some difficulty in falling. ...after we are separated by birth from this oneness, as the water falling from the waterfall is separated by the wind and rocks, then we have feeling. You have difficulty because you have feeling, you attach to the feeling you have without knowing just how this kind of feeling*

*is created. When you do not realize that you are one with the river, or one with the universe, you have fear. Whether it is separated into drops or not, water is water. Our life and death are the same thing. When we realize this fact we have no fear of death anymore, and we have no actual difficulty in our life."*

'Whoever'-or whatever-brought me here, will have to take me home. Home is the place where "I don't know" feels perfectly at ease.