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Who Is This? by Rev. Daishin Morgan

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“If we are not our thoughts and feelings, then what are we? I find this to be a crucial question that is at the heart of the meaning of zazen.”

I have found that one of the first lessons living in a monastery reaches is the need to clearly see the difference between one's feelings and the situation in which they have arisen. It often happens that new monks have difficulty getting on with each other. This is not surprising as monastic life can be very intense, especially as there is no private space and very little opportunity to get away from the pressures. The new monk has to sit in the midst of his or her feelings rather than run away from them. When resentment arises, the monk is taught not to blame the other person but to look directly at their own feelings. It can seem very unjust to be asked to do this, when the other person is patently doing something they should not. Even so, one's first duty is to take responsibility for one's own resentment and not be concerned with what others are doing. This principle is the same in all modes of life.

To be able to separate the two components—the issue that has arisen and your feelings about it—enables you to get your priorities clear. The monk has committed himself or herself to training and this has to come before everything else, despite the natural tendency to get locked in and blame the other person. The issue at stake is always secondary to dealing with an afflicted

state of mind. In the heat of the moment, when we feel our personhood has been encroached upon or attacked, that is the very time—indeed the only time—when we can turn resentment around. Then what started as a petty argument can become a truly life-changing moment. This is to bow to the situation. Bowing is the opposite of complaining about how difficult it is. Such sincerity enables a trainee to see what is good to do, because his or her mind is no longer afflicted by resentment.

When sitting in zazen, we have to regard our thoughts and feelings as secondary in importance in the same kind of way. If they are our first concern, then we will go endlessly round and round in circles. A question we have to address is, "Are we our thoughts and feelings?" Clearly, they are a significant component of our experience of life, but to identify with them is a mistake. If we do, then we have no stability but are blown about by every breeze that comes along. For if I feel uncomfortable, then "I" am uncomfortable. That need not be so; one can be quite aware of uncomfortable feelings but remain sitting within the unmoving pure mind of zazen.

If we are not our thoughts and feelings, then what are we? I find this to be a crucial question that is at the heart of the meaning of zazen. When I am having trouble trusting myself to the sitting, I find it helpful to ask, "Who is it that sits?" For this strategy to be part of one's zazen and not simply a technique or method, it is vital to make no move to answer the question other than to look where the question is pointing. It is as if I were to ask you, "What is that behind you?" The only real way to know is to turn round and look for yourself. The question merely serves to bring what is important to your attention. No words, theories or methods are needed other than turning your head. Just so in zazen, "Who is this?" When you look into your heart, any thoughts or feelings are secondary matters that you can leave to take care of themselves.

I experience this as largely a matter of not doing rather than doing. There is nothing to get hold of in response to this question of "Who?" Each seeming level of "me" turns out to be another thought or feeling that passes. I seem to be made up of fleeting thoughts and feelings, some stay for a while, others pass very quickly. That thoughts and feelings arise is not a problem, so long as I do not add my volition to them. What I see is how I interrupt the looking with unnecessary movements of the mind. All my volition needs to be taken up with the act of looking/being. I cannot stand apart from what is seen and name it; I can only be it. I can be the sitting person and that person is sitting Buddha. This involves letting body and mind fall away, that is to let go of all conceptions of myself and the world and just sit. What is left is zazen doing zazen.

Zazen or enlightenment is not about finding a particular state of mind, for all states of mind are fleeting and cannot be relied upon. When you know who is sitting, you know sitting Buddha. This expression is a bit strange; why not say sitting like a Buddha? I prefer to say sitting Buddha because there is nobody sitting like a Buddha; there is just sitting Buddha. That Buddha never stops sitting, but we must awaken to her presence—not that sitting Buddha is either male or female.

Original Enlightenment

Sitting Buddha is another way of speaking about Buddha. Nature or the nature of enlightenment. We usually conceive of living the Buddhist life as a path going from delusion to enlightenment, as is implied by referring to it as the Way. In the Zen tradition, there is another view which stems from the understanding that Buddha Nature is not subject to coming and going; it is not born and does not die. Buddha Nature, therefore, is not something we acquire through training. The spiritual life in zen is realizing Buddha Nature in the present moment. Because all beings are

enlightened from the very beginning, this way of understanding Buddha Nature is called original enlightenment. We have nothing missing, we cannot be separate from the truth—realizing this is not so simple. We have to awaken to our original nature, our enlightened nature.

In a very practical way, this means that in the course of our training we need to look at what we have, rather than focussing on what we believe we lack or need to understand. I spent many years in training believing that my purpose was to become one with the Buddha Nature. By doing so, I saw myself as missing something I needed. I was always trying to look ahead of myself, hoping and praying that what I believed I needed would come over the horizon. As I tried to move forward to meet it, I pushed it away in front, of me. I have come to see this mode of training as based upon inadequacy. It takes a lot of faith to practise zazen. However, the faith I am talking about is faith in one's true nature, not faith in something outside of yourself. It is to believe that at the heart of your being there is that which is complete—the source of compassion and wisdom. If you can trust your own being, then you are already realizing your true nature. To mistrust it is absurd, and to be caught up in mistaking thoughts, feelings and emotions for the truly indestructible one, the one who experiences all these things, who is this?

News from Rev. Kinrei

For the last seventeen years, a constant and very cheerful presence at the Priory has been our beloved cat, Jet. She finally succumbed to her many serious health problems and died on January 25. Jet had been having difficult and life threatening health problems for many years. She recently had been doing better but then in mid January she became progressively weaker and weaker until she died quietly in the middle of the night. We held her funeral on Sunday, January 27 and the Priory was filled

with all her friends from the Sangha. Jet had a very bright and positive nature with a deep trust and affection for her many human friends. She will be missed.