

How Can We Remain Open?

Seekers Group, November, 2015

Many an object is not seen, though it falls within the range of our visual ray, because it does not come within the range of our intellectual ray, i.e. we are not looking for it. So, in the largest sense, we find only the world we look for.

Henry David Thoreau

“Want to know the best advice I ever heard?” “I never learned ANYTHING while I was talking.”

Larry King

One of the monasteries we went to was Sojiji, one of the two head monasteries of Soto Zen in Japan, which was established by Keisan Zenji. I went there to do a ceremony, and a young monk named Shotokusan was my jisha (helper). He was also our guide, so we spent some time with him.

I want to mention two things in particular that were commented on while we were there. The monks were in the middle of training period. Many of them were brand-new monks, and as we walked around the campus from time to time, we would hear a sort of union exclamation of “Hai!” which means “yes” in Japanese. I asked Shotokusan what that was. “Well, this is the monks getting their soji assignments.” They were getting their work assignments and saying “Yes!” and rushing off to rake here and sweep there and do whatever. It sounded sort of like boot camp. So we commented on this among ourselves, that this was sort of militaristic. Then there were comments about what sweet guys there were, these monks who were showing us around Shojiji and the town, who actually took us to lunch and had noodles with us. What really wonderful, sweet guys they were, so accommodating and so forth. To me there was a

direct connection between this training activity of just saying yes, just doing it, and their availability to “just do it” when showing us around, to simply be present, without any grumbling or withholding – nothing held back.

The direct connection between these two things went in straight line with what I had noticed about Abbot Hoitsu Roshi’s ready availability. If you knocked on the door (the family has its own room there), it was, “Hai”, yes, what can I do for you? He would drop what he was doing and turn towards you, and be there, right there. So that in fact, we noticed that we really had to limit ourselves and be sure that we really needed to call on him. Because he was going to respond any time we called on him. Do we really need to disturb his tea, to disturb his dinner, to disturb his time with his family? Do we need to go to him all the time? We began to consider seriously: can we take care of this ourselves, or do we have to ask for help. Because he was never going to turn us away, and that became clear. It was never, “I’m too busy now, come back later.”

Zenkei Blanche, *Seeds of Boundless Life: Zen Teachings from the Heart*

May My Heart Always Be Open

may my heart always be open to little
birds who are the secrets of living
whatever they sing is better than to know
and if men should not hear them men are old

may my mind stroll about hungry
and fearless and thirsty and supple
and even if it's sunday may i be wrong
for whenever men are right they are not young

and may myself do nothing usefully
and love yourself so more than truly
there's never been quite such a fool who could fail
pulling all the sky over him with one smile
e. e. cummings

True enough, we all like to have our own way, and we all have a preference for the people whose views agree with our own. But the divine presence is among us: we must aim for peace, and with that aim in view each of us will have to sacrifice, now and again, his own way of thinking. After all, the wisest of us is not omniscient, and it is a pity to be so sure about your own point of view that you never listen to other people's. Quite possibly you are right; but if you forget about that, and let the other person have his or her way for the love of God, you'll have made the most of the situation.

How often have I heard the truth acknowledged that there is more safety to be found in taking advice than giving it! A person's judgment may be as sound as you will; but if they cannot bring themselves to agree with others when there is good reason, and the nature of the case demands, it's a sure sign of pride and obstinance.

Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*