

## Naturalness

There is a big misunderstanding about the idea of naturalness. Most people who come to us believe in some freedom or naturalness, but their understanding is what we call *jinen ken gedo*, or heretical naturalness. *Jinen ken gedo* means that there is no need to be formal – just a kind of "let-alone policy" or sloppiness. That is naturalness for most people. But that is not the naturalness we mean. It is rather difficult to explain, but naturalness is, I think, some feeling of being independent from everything, or some activity which is based on nothingness. Something which comes out of nothingness is naturalness, like a seed or plant coming out of the ground. The seed has no idea of being some particular plant, but it has its own form and is in perfect harmony with the ground, with its surroundings. As it grows, in the course of time it expresses its nature. Nothing exists without form and color. Whatever it is, it has some form and color, and that form and color are in perfect harmony with other beings. And there is no trouble. That is what we mean by naturalness.

For a plant or stone to be natural is no problem. But for us there is some problem, indeed a big problem. To be natural is something which we must work on. When what you do just comes out from nothingness, you have quite a new feeling. For instance, when you are hungry, to take some food is naturalness. You feel natural. But when you are expecting too much, to have some food is not natural. You have no new feeling. You have no appreciation for it.

The true practice of zazen is to sit as if drinking water when you are thirsty. There you have naturalness. It is quite natural for you to take a nap when you are very sleepy. But to take a nap just because you are lazy, as if it were the privilege of a human being to take a nap, is not naturalness. You think, "My friends, all of them, are napping; why shouldn't I? When everyone else is not working, why should I work so hard? When they have a lot of money, why don't I?" This is not naturalness. Your mind is entangled with some other idea, someone else's idea, and you are not independent, not yourself, and not natural. Even if you sit in the cross-legged position, if your zazen is

not natural, it is not true practice. You do not have to force yourself to drink water when you are thirsty; you are glad to drink water. If you have true joy in your zazen, that is true zazen. But even though you have to force yourself to practice zazen, if you feel something good in your practice, that is zazen. Actually it is not a matter of forcing something on you or not. Even though you have some difficulty, when you want to have it, that is naturalness. This naturalness is very difficult to explain. But if you can just sit and experience the actuality of nothingness in your practice, there is no need to explain. If it comes out of nothingness, whatever you do is natural, and that is true activity. You have the true joy of practice, the true joy of life in it. Everyone comes out from nothingness moment after moment. Moment after moment we have true joy of life. So we say *shin ku myo u*, "from true emptiness, the wondrous being appears." *Shin* is "true"; *ku* is "emptiness"; *myo* is "wondrous"; *u* is "being": from true emptiness, wondrous being.

Without nothingness, there is no naturalness – no true being. True being comes out of nothingness, moment after moment. Nothingness is always there, and from it everything appears. But usually, forgetting all about nothingness, you behave as if you have something. What you do is based on some possessive idea or some concrete idea, and that is not natural. For instance, when you listen to a lecture, you should not have any idea of yourself. You should not have your own idea when you listen to someone. Forget what you have in your mind and just listen to what he says. To have nothing in your mind is naturalness. Then you will understand what he says. But if you have some idea to compare with what he says, you will not hear everything; your understanding will be one-sided; that is not naturalness. When you do something, you should be completely involved in it. You should devote yourself to it completely. Then you have nothing. So if there is no true emptiness in your activity, it is not natural.

Most people insist on some idea. Recently the younger generation talks about love. Love! Love! Love! Their minds are full of love! And when they

study Zen, if what I say does not accord with the idea they have of love, they will not accept it. They are quite stubborn, you know. You may be amazed! Of course not all, but some have a very, very hard attitude. That is not naturalness at all. Even though they talk about love, and freedom or naturalness, they do not understand these things. And they cannot understand what Zen is in that way. If you want to study Zen, you should forget all your previous ideas and just practice zazen and see what kind of experience you have in your practice. That is naturalness.

Whatever you do, this attitude is necessary. Sometimes we say *nyu nan shin*, "soft or flexible

mind." *Nyu* is "soft feeling"; *nan* is something which is not hard"; *shin* is "mind." *Nyu nan shin* means a smooth, natural mind. When you have that mind, you have the joy of life. When you lose it, you lose everything. You have nothing. Although you think you have something, you have nothing. But when all you do comes out of nothingness, then you have everything. Do you understand? That is what we mean by naturalness.

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