

It takes courage to stop, but it doesn't mean you stay stopped. It's just a matter of stopping for a little while to take a good look at your feet and what's going on around you. In the middle of our struggle for existence we need the courage to stop, even if it's just for a little while. By mustering the courage to stop, you may find a meaningful next step or even a new direction.

Look at your own feet; examine yourself and what you are doing.

Dependent Co-origination and Attachment

I shouldn't say this, but sometimes chocolates taste so good they're even better than satori. . . . If I wanted the chocolates so badly that I pushed others out of the way to get them, that's not okay.

BUDDHISM BEGAN IN India with the enlightenment of the historical buddha, Shakyamuni. His enlightenment experience is really the foundation of Buddhism. I began my college studies with the study of Indian Buddhism, taking on the subject of the Buddha's enlightenment in my first year. I'd like to explain in a few words what it took me a whole year to learn about his enlightenment.

An essential aspect of the Buddha's enlightenment is called dependent co-origination; this was a great discovery. Most of us think that things exist independently. But a thing exists only because of everything else that exists. If you don't understand this, you don't understand Buddhism.

Take the *nioi*, for example. It is a small wooden stick that is a symbol of a Zen master. It is a small stick only because there is such a thing as a long stick. During Zen meditation a senior monk carries a long stick called a *kyosaku*, literally "the wake-up stick." If a monk falls asleep in meditation, the senior monk will hit him with the long stick. I didn't bring a long stick to America. It seems

Americans aren't fond of being hit with long sticks; they seem frightened by it. Still some students overcame this problem and became my disciples.

I no longer bring long sticks to teach outside of Japan because they don't fit well with other cultures. But I do occasionally hit people with my small stick. In the monastery we do koan study. Sometimes monks come up with really stupid answers. It would be awkward to simply say "That doesn't make sense," so I hit them without any comment. But normally I don't use my small stick to hit people.

In any case, let's say that in the whole universe there is only this one short stick. Then we wouldn't need to call it a "short stick." We wouldn't even need to call it "this," because there would be no "that." But in the real universe there are short and long sticks; there is this and there is that. The reason this is a small stick is because cups of water, chairs, tables, and everything else exists. Similarly, let's say that you were the only thing that existed in the whole universe. If this were the case you wouldn't need a term to describe yourself. In reality, there are many people in the world. You exist as you and nobody else because of all the other people in the world who are not you. This is what the law of dependent co-origination is all about.

Thinking about things in this way, we can relax. But when we're thinking about ourselves, we prefer to think we're entirely unique and exist separately from others. Yet we exist only because of everything else in the universe. This applies not only to human relationships but to any relationship. When we say "self and other," we could even mean "me and this glass of water": me as self and glass of water as other.

Shakyamuni Buddha's notion of dependent co-origination isn't just a philosophical matter. Humans tend to be arrogant. In European philosophy we say, "I think therefore I am." This is okay. But Buddhism views matters from a different angle. European philosophy

tends to think that first there's a self, and because of the self, the world comes to be.

But Buddhism teaches that because everything exists, the self comes to be. So when I say that I am here, I'm not just referring to a detached, unique self, separate from everything else; I exist because of everything else that exists. This is why in Buddhism we say that there's no intrinsic nature. The notion of no intrinsic nature is based on dependent co-origination and is called *shunyata* in Indian Buddhism. *Shunyata* is translated as "emptiness." Because everything exists interdependently with everything else, nothing has an intrinsic nature. Everything is empty. If we had to rely on just one word to express all of Buddhism, it would be emptiness. This is the most basic, essential teaching of Buddhism.

It's difficult to understand, isn't it? You can see that Indian Buddhism has a very philosophical bent, but Buddhism is a religion and all religions teach people how to live their lives. If we talk only about things like dependent co-origination and emptiness, it's difficult to find a way to live, but there's another essential concept in Buddhism called *muga*—a state of no-ego. The concept of no-ego is also rather philosophical. But compared to the teaching of dependent co-origination, no self-nature, and emptiness, the teaching of no-ego is more helpful in relation to how to live our lives. By realizing our own no-ego, we try to live a life free from selfishness.

In Buddhism we say humans have 108 different delusions. We're full of delusions. Our delusions can eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner. In fact there are so many delusions, we could assume that everything is a delusion—delusion is understood, in this context, to be the same as attachment. Actually though, in our everyday lives, some attachments are fine, like wanting to study. If we said the desire to study is an attachment and thus a delusion, nobody would go to university. The desire to study is an example of a good attachment. Or take the

Zen Is the Religion of Mu

With respect to the concept of Mu, there is an understanding that everything is nothing, that nothing is everything. . . . If you try to grasp this concept through the powers of the intellect, it's going to be very hard, but if you try to comprehend it experientially, it's not so hard.

ZEN IS THE RELIGION of *Mu*. My interpreter uses the term *Mu* without translating it into English. This is because *Mu* really shouldn't be translated. For a long time, I've considered English to be the language of the world (although the French might not agree). But not every word can or should be translated into English, especially when translation leads to misunderstanding. This goes for the Zen word *Mu*.

When *Mu* is translated into English, it is taken to mean things like "nothing" or "no being." Translating it as "nothing" makes it sound very negative. But in Zen, *Mu* doesn't just have a negative meaning; *Mu* doesn't just refer to nothing. *Mu* means although it is, it isn't, and although it isn't, it is. This is why it's better to leave it untranslated.

With respect to the concept of Mu, there is an understanding that everything is nothing, that nothing is everything. This is a basic Buddhist notion and it is hard to grasp. Japanese students also find it hard. If you try to grasp this concept through the powers of the

desire to make enough money to support yourself and your family. This is another kind of attachment that's fine. There are attachments that are good and attachments that are not. The attachment to study is a good attachment. I prefer to call it a desire, which is something natural. However if you want to do well in school to such an extent that you'll betray your closest friends, then you've gone too far and it's no longer a desire; it's become a delusion. Or in the case of money, if you want it so badly that you'll kill for it, it's a delusion.

So how do we distinguish between desires and delusions? We distinguish based on whether the ego's involved or not! Personally, I'm very fond of chocolate. It's quite delicious. I shouldn't say this, but sometimes chocolates taste so good they're even better than satori. I'm also quite fond of coffee. I don't drink alcohol, but I really like coffee. And I'm fond of bridges. My monks know that I'm fond of chocolate, coffee, and bridges. Once, one of the senior monks asked me jokingly if my fondness for chocolate, coffee, and bridges was a kind of attachment. As a Zen master I answered that such kinds of attachments are okay. The point is that some attachments are fine, and some attachments are not. The issue is whether your ego is involved. If I wanted the chocolates so badly that I pushed others out of the way to get them, that's not okay. The question is whether the ego's wrapped up in it or not. Buddhism talks of a life free from attachment; if you haven't realized this state of no-ego, you can't live such a life. This is the sense in which the teaching of no-ego is so important. This is where the realization of dependent co-origination actually shows up in your life—when you find that you, your ego, and everything you encounter are not independent. You are connected to everything.

ZEN BRIDGE

The Zen Teachings of
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"When the Heart Is Clear, the Hundred Tasks Go Well"
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