

Most of us spend a great deal of time and attention trying to control our lives and the lives of others (family). *How we strut and fret, or lead Lives of quiet desperation* are descriptions that are somehow familiar. We want love, respect, attention, sex, money and all the rest. And we do our best to arrange life to secure them. Buddhist practice as suggested by SR considers this challenge from a very different perspective.

To live in the realm of Buddha nature means to die as a small being, moment after moment. Losing our balance we die, and at the same time we develop and grow.

In addition to our grand strategies, there are the daily glosses we assume to reassure ourselves and others that we are on top of things and life is going according to plan. This kind of presentation turns out to be rather uninteresting to ourselves and others, and very repetitious. We want to reassure ourselves and others that things are OK, when they are far from it. When people break through and directly state their condition, it turns out to be a big relief. Toward the end of our lives, when people understand that they have very limited time left, openings can occur, sometimes with and sometimes without words. This evening I will be spending time with old friends: talking about loss.

Things are beautiful because they are losing their balance, all against a background of perfect harmony. This is how we exist in the realm of Buddha. If you see things without an appreciation for the background, everything appears in the form of suffering. If you understand the background, you see that suffering is how we live and how we extend our lives.

Suzuki is quoted as saying: *Our life is like boarding a ship which goes out to sea, and eventually sinks.* Not the kind of prediction or re-assurance that we are looking for. But when you think about it, these words are not only accurate, they are reassuring because they are true & funny. This is an old person joke. It becomes more obvious as we age.

Suzuki describes how we relate to control & suggests how to reconsider this challenge: *Putting dots out of order is very difficult. It's the same way with people. You try to control them, but you cannot. The best way to control people is to encourage them to be mischievous. Then they are under control in the widest sense. Big pasture is the best way to control your Yak. We let people do what they want, but we watch them. To ignore them is not good, and trying to control not much better.*

He then compares these life challenges to the koan of sitting practice, since the intention we develop in sitting is to extend our sense of cultivation from our cushion into all of our daily activity. This effort runs against the grain of our most fiercely held survival strategies. We are trying to maintain at least the appearance that we have somehow managed to keep it together, in the midst of money and romantic challenges, urban

chaos, environmental destruction and global warming. We respond with new investment strategies, better phones and more refined modes of entertainment. Then there is the challenge or relationships..... Buddhism likes to consider things at the source, the everyday experiences of thinking, breathing and body awareness. Trying to get a handle on things, we consider what we are doing moment to moment. This brings us into a new realm: the realm of renunciation and acceptance. Very lofty words, but very difficult to approach. Suzuki once said about renunciation: *It is not a matter of giving up things, it is more like letting things go as they go.* In the realm of sitting & acceptance: Learning how to do things may be workable, but learning how not to do things: that can be rather difficult.

The same approach works for us. In sitting you should not be disturbed by the images you find. You let them come and let them go. Then they will be under control. But although this sounds simple, it is not so easy, and requires some special effort. How to make this effort is the secret of practice. The effort he is referring to varies from person to person. Like our sitting practice, although a very specific form, is responded to by everyone a little differently. For some, sitting upright for extended periods of time may be rather easy. For others, the challenge of keeping a regular sitting schedule or sitting with others is a challenge. In addition to these larger considerations, there are the minutiae of sitting: keeping track of your posture, your mudra, your soft focus, the quality of your breath: these aspects all require a kind of continuous attention/intention. There are other intriguing issues like energy, sleep and time: from one moment to the next, and continuity over time, as well as the challenge of maintaining our practice in the midst of life demands and changing conditions. How do you work with drowsiness and energy, sleep and intention?

When you are disturbed, and try to sit and calm yourself, your effort will not be right effort. The only effort which will work will be to count your breathing, or concentrate on the quality of your breath: inhaling and exhaling. We say concentrating, but concentration is not the purpose of Zen meditation.

These days, many people struggle with sleep, and one of my strategies: Get up, take the time, relocate and sit for 30-40 minutes. Whatever reveries or challenges invade my sleep may be relieved or softened by sitting with my breath and posture for a period. It takes some intention and energy, but my return to bed is often blessed with light, complete sleep and vivid dreams. I don't think we have to concern ourselves greatly with questions of proper meditation or concentration, just attending to posture or breath, counting or sensation, the quality of breath or temperature or sound, all of this is complete.... If we let it be. This is renunciation.

Our purpose is to see things as they are, and let everything go as it goes. This is to put things under control in its widest sense. Zen practice is to open up your small mind. To understand the proper relationship of Zen to your everyday life.

To understand the relationship of sitting to everyday life, it is necessary to sit for extended periods over many years, or this is how it seemed to me. When sitting ceases to be a project,

and develops into a rhythm and way of life, we discover that our relationship with time and/or ways of being with others can open up. Fewer strategies or ambitions, and more pace, more open conversation and settled interest in others.

You have to understand the dynamic of keeping your mind on your breathing and attend to right posture in your Zazen. As you follow the rules of practice, your study should become more subtle and careful. In this way you develop a feeling for true vitality and freedom. In Sitting and extending your experience and appreciation into daily life. Suzuki then goes on to consider the question of Time:

“I want the past to become present” Dogen said: Time goes from present to past. Making the past present is how we experience poetry, and come to appreciate our human life. Poetry is a recapitulation of past experience or wondering that is engaging or concentrated to the point of challenging us or reminding us of experience we didn't know we had. Words illuminate and somehow complete us. Both surprising & familiar.

To experience this is to discover the true meaning of time.

We discover that we are not captive of time, we are not pressured to attain or conform in the same way. *“We just do one thing after another, that's all.”*

In the words of Don Juan: *I have nothing pending.* *This perspective slowly changes our relationship to practice. We can now make sense & appreciate the idea Stated countless times in the Sutras: practice & realization is without end.* This becomes confirmation, not burden. *Time goes from past to present and from present to future. But it is also true that time goes from future to present and from present to past. A Zen master said: To go East one mile is to go West one mile: This is vital freedom, which we can acquire.* We have to be able to look at all sides of the equation, and see our own self limiting ways of thinking and projecting. Life is happening in the midst of our agendas and attitudes, but we can't see the shape of things without getting outside of the stream of our assumptions and patterns. To expose this, we have the rigor of Zen practice, of sitting, oryoki and sesshin.

But this freedom is not found without rules. Young people especially think that freedom is to do whatever they want, that Zen has no need for rules. But it is essential that we have rules, but this does not mean to always be under control. As long as you have rules, you have a chance for freedom. To try to obtain freedom without being aware of the rules means nothing. To acquire this perfect freedom, we practice Zazen.