

Internal Work and External Work

From a Letter to a Lay Trainee

Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett

This article can also be found on www.OBCON.org

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Dear _____,

Thank you for your letter. It has taken some time to digest the questions you put to me, so I hope this reply is still timely. Keizan Zenji wrote that, "Enlightenment ranges from time eternal and is even now". Because of this, anyone who sincerely looks for the Truth will find it. Buddhism openly says that many Buddhas lived before Shakyamuni. Plainly put, the Truth is the Truth no matter who said it, when or where.

Facing the Truth, however, is a very serious matter. Mystical understanding of religion involves internal experience. Therefore, beware of social religion that measures everything by an external yardstick. Mystical religion does not ignore external responsibilities, but rather views them as part of inner responsibilities yet subordinate to them. It is right and necessary to help others and to make sure physical needs are met, but help should be given with an internal knowledge of what is right, otherwise it becomes do-goodism, which is usually a form of meddling. Also, far too many people do good works to hide from their inner responsibilities. It can be scary to face the Eternal.

You also asked me many questions about training. Remember that as we look within we become more aware of the mess we are in. This increased awareness is a step in the right direction. Before doing this it was easy to ignore the problems, but now you must accept them and then transcend them. You cannot go about improving yourself like an architect, however. That is to apply an external measurement to internal development and will not do you any good at all. Just sit still in the midst of it all and learn to accept it and not get caught in it. Fear, guilt and self-hate are the problems rather than anything in particular you may or may not do. It does no good to condemn yourself because anger arises. It is natural; just sit still within it and try not to let it control you. Hold fast to the Lord of the House. I cannot explain how to keep the mind bright except to say that it is an internal looking up, a raising of one's aspirations in the midst of it all. Faith is essential here. Faith that the Eternal exists and has never turned away from you and is only waiting for you to stop looking down into the mud and to look up at Him to be bathed in His love.

The thing that we try to protect by denying it exists is our own naiveté of heart. It is vulnerable and easily damaged by cynicism or sarcasm. Denying and rejecting are the same in this case. We deny or reject that within us which can get hurt, thereby embracing the cynicism and sarcasm that hurt us in the first place and in turn hurt others.

To all of your questions I have given you the same basic answer which I must simply repeat in different forms. One day you will realise that you have control over your own state of mind. It is like learning to find the controls of a car, but until you do that you must have faith that the controls exist and that you can find them and use them. It will bring great relief when you do find them, but once you do your responsibilities will increase tenfold. I wish you good luck, and I hope that you are well.

Sincerely
Jiyu (Kennett)