

## MIND BRIGHT...EVER FLOWING

### Rev. Master Seikai

When Rev. Master Jiyu went from England to Malaysia to Japan to train as a monk in the Soto Zen tradition, she was taught how to meditate by an old monk in Sojiji Temple. That old monk didn't know much English but he got the main points of sitting meditation across to her in the following way:

"Like water," wrote Rev. Sansaburo.

"Water only flows one way," I said and he nodded happily and wrote, "Gyate, gyate, haragyate."

"Gone?" I asked.

"No," cried Rev. Hajime and then wrote, "Going, going, always going, like water." He then added, as an afterthought, "Water bright."

Rev. Sansaburo seemed to have become galvanized by something and uttered the first word of English I had ever heard him speak.

"Bright," he cried; he had obviously found several words at once, "mind bright, not dull; bright, bright."

I sat still for a few minutes, thinking hard, then I took the dictionary and found the Japanese for positive and negative and wrote the following;— "The mind must always be bright when meditating, always positive and never negative, looking upwards and not downwards, always flowing on and clinging to nothing just as water flows."

Rev. Hajime read it carefully and translated it into better Japanese for the other one could make no sense out of my attempt. Rev. Sansaburo nodded in obvious delight and wrote, "Good for the beginning, later nothing at all but, in the beginning, there must be brightness and flow with no holding on. When brightness becomes usual one does not notice even brightness." \*

This is the ideal of how to meditate. Whatever appears in the mind, observe it and then let it go. But as anyone who has ever tried to meditate will know, it takes some doing to learn this, to get from the ceaseless, loud chatter of the "monkey mind" to what is described above as bright, positive, flowing water. In case the old monk makes it sound easy, it is not; everyone has to work very hard to find what he is talking about. When sitting in meditation, every time we discover that we have wandered into the past or the future or are thinking idly about this or that, we have to come back to letting go of it—and that is the basis of the flowing water. Not clinging to anything, just letting go.

The brightness described above is not necessarily a brightness one normally associates with light. It is more akin to seeing clearly in the same way that when you wake up in the morning your vision might be blurry, but once you have washed your face with cold water, you can see clearly. Or it is also like taking a jar full of muddy water which, if you shake it up, is simply muddy water,

but if you put the jar down for a while and don't move it, the mud settles to the bottom and then you can see through the water.

The endless crush of thoughts is like the mud in the water. Mud is not a bad thing—after all it is the medium in which the lotus grows, as Rev. Master Jiyu explained in such detail to her disciples. Mud is mud, and we shouldn't despise it but allow it to be useful for what it is good for. All the thoughts we have in which we defend ourselves, think that we have been misunderstood, wish that people would understand and appreciate and love us better—all those ego-centered thoughts potentially can turn into our own inner Dharma if we are willing to let go of their content and just let them be. Don't give them energy, just let them settle to the bottom of the pond and be mud for your own lotus.

The spiritual life is akin to a pond which has water flowing into it. If we meditate regularly with a bright mind, it is like clear water flowing into the pond, which keeps the water fresh. If no water flows into the pond, pretty soon it stagnates. That there is mud in the pond is good, because that is what the lotuses and water lilies are going to grow in, but above all we need to keep the water flowing, and keep it as pure as possible. Too many strong opinions, too much desire for things to be the way we want them to be, too many likes and dislikes—these things will dry up the flow of water unless they are let go of and offered up to that which is infinitely greater than ourselves. If they are offered up within the compassion of the universe (called Avalokiteswara, Quan Yin, Kanzeon, etc.) then they are converted into pure, flowing water.

We have muddy days and clear days. Too much tiredness or fatigue makes it hard to sit with a bright mind and keep the water clear. The habitual breaking of a precept will also have this effect. We have to look closely and often at the struggles in our lives: what are we holding on to or chasing after?; what set of circumstances are we resisting?; why are we not at peace within ourselves? Seeing struggle for what it is—grasping and pushing away, the very same thing that happens with thoughts and feelings in meditation—we can let go of struggle and relax. Most struggle is the futile effort of supporting an ego, an idea of who we are or how we want others to see us. What a relief to let go of it!

Rev. Master Jiyu taught her disciples how to meditate deeply and learn to be fully alive, at one with Unborn, Undying, Unchanging—the Compassion of the Universe. That the world pushes in the opposite direction from this is the condition that we train in, but if we truly long to find that pure, flowing water it will eventually flow through us and will satisfy our deepest thirst and longing to know the Truth of What Truly Is.

Quotation: From the *Wild, White Goose, the Diary of a Female Zen Priest*, Rev. Roshi Jiyu-Kennett, Shasta Abbey Press, Mt. Shasta, CA, 2002, p. 53.

