

A monk paid a visit to Seppō and said to him, "I understand that when a person reaches the stage of a Sravaka (one who hears the Buddha's teaching) he sees his Buddha Nature as he sees the moon at night, and a person in the stage of a Bodhisattva sees his Buddha Nature as he sees the sun at day. Tell me how you see your Buddha Nature?" For an answer Seppo gave the monk three blows with his stick. The monk went to another teacher, Gento, and asked the same thing. Gento slapped the monk three times. (Iron Flute)

Most of us, having undergone training for a while, soon come to know that the three delusions of greed, anger and ignorance arise from nowhere else but the mind, and as we gradually begin to realize that all suffering comes from these same three causes, it is as though we are looking at the moon, but somehow seems remote and beautiful in the night sky. This is the stage of sravakahood.

Working in the kitchen, one is often in a better position to see the manifestation of the three delusions. Even better so, if one is an assistant trainee who is completely green! I remember how when I first began work as a trainee in the kitchen, especially during the first few sesshins, I would moan and fume to myself, because I had to slog it out in the hot kitchen while everybody else sat in Zazen or listened to Roshi give a lecture. Why did I have to do all the work; surely if I were to do more Zazen or listen to Roshi's lectures, why I would be a much better person. Couldn't one of the other monks do it? This was getting to be more and more like some kind of punishment! How I hated it! No one appreciates me working here, why should I bother about them! Too bad if the meal turns out to be late, let them suffer too! See how they bubble up, greed, anger and delusion, one after another. The cutting of the vegetables becomes an endless and boring chore, and the full moon of autumn is seen as something remote and unobtainable in the misty sky.

The Tenze in a Zen monastery is usually one who has considerable experience in all matters pertaining to the Truth, and as such should be able to cope with all situations as they arise. As well as washing rice, preparing porridge and cooking vegetables, he should be able to point, nudge or shove the new trainee into a better position, where he or she is able to catch a better glimpse of the moon. I remember on another sesshin how the prior would come out half an hour or so before the meal was due to be served -- I would be in a constant fret by this stage because I knew the meal was not going to be ready on time. He would glare at me and try to engage me in conversation so that I would become distracted from my work. Then up again they would appear, the dreaded three delusions! Gradually I found out that these were perfect opportunities for training. But this can only be done if and when the trainee shows a strong desire to come to grips with his or her own self. It would be wrong and a waste of time to push a trainee who has no inkling to be pushed! At first, the trainee may feel like Dogen, who in his "Tenzokyokan" said that "In the beginning my characters were one, two, three, four and five." This is like a person in the above koan who has reached the sravaka stage. Then later on, Dogen goes on to say, "And now they include six, seven, eight, nine and ten," which is going even further on, into the Bodhisattva stage.

The path of the Bodhisattva is endless, and it is bright like the sun at mid-day. Sometimes snow, clouds or rain are seen to obscure the path, but like the Buddha Nature which dwells within everyone and everything, it can never be completely obscured. We cannot blame the snow, cloud or rain, for through the power of Zazen, everything is seen to be subject to the same law of change.

Further on in the "Tenzokyokan", Dogen refers to the three attitudes of mind, of gratitude, love and generosity, which should be developed in all trainees. I see these three aspects as being the reverse and positive sides of greed, anger and ignorance. By starting as a trainee in the kitchen, we are given an excellent opportunity to express our gratitude to the community by serving them as well and as best as we can. Also there arises the perfect opportunity to see ourselves as we truly are, and should we wish to truly train, we will find that there are many ways and means by which to do so.

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