

categories of non-knowing and knowing, then what emerges? Something that is neither known, nor not known. Something that neither appears nor disappears. That's why in the Heart Sutra it says no appearance, no disappearance, no purity, no impurity. Stepping beyond all opposite categories just means coming to the realization of what *is*. And the most profound transcendental experience is the most simple fact of what *is*.

How do we perceive what is, moment-by-moment-by-moment? Do we perceive what we are doing, moment-by-moment-by-moment? If we're resenting, do we perceive that in this moment? If we're pressuring ourselves, do we perceive that in this moment? If we're making ourselves afraid in some way, do we perceive that in this moment? How are we killing ourselves in this moment? How are we hesitating from taking one step forward off the flagpole 100 feet in the air? Out of embarrassment? Out of fear of humiliation? Out of fear of failure? Out of fear of being able to negotiate the next step? Little children do not have the same difficulty. Watch them when they start to walk. They get up, take one step, then another. They plop down, get up, walk some more. That's it. It's no big deal.

That's why we have to perceive that "not holding" mind, not holding so tightly to our ideas about what's going to happen next. That's why in the Heart Sutra it says, "When the Bodhisattva perceives that all five skandhas are empty, he is saved from all suffering and distress." Then there is no hindrance and no fear. If you see that all five skandhas are empty, that you are not a self-sufficient independent being at war with your surroundings, then there is not so much to guard here as you thought. There is not so much to secure. Then you can more readily go with what *is* without fear, without resentment.

That's why we practice, to get established and develop some degree of relaxed steadiness of mind. But that isn't the end that we're practicing for. That's just something you need in the practice. Essentially, the point is that original mind, mind which is before thinking, is *already* relaxed, is *already* clear, is *already* radiant and perceptive, so it isn't so much a matter of developing those qualities as a matter of returning to our original self, which *is* essentially those qualities. That's the deeper meaning of "even before the donkey has left, the horse has already arrived." Even to say it's "those" qualities is to put some label on it. It's something that is before labelling. But things such as relaxation or calmness or clarity are not things that you're practicing to develop, from the Zen Buddhist standpoint. Those things are the actual essence of mind energy, and are there the moment you let go of conditioning, clinging to a situation, clinging to an opinion, clinging to ideas.

It helps to understand that all this conceptual framework — good and bad, right and wrong, should and should not — comes from parental and authority figures. So Hui Neng, Sixth Patriarch, asks, "When you don't make good and bad, at the moment, what is your original face before your parents were even born?" Don't think that's something in the past, before your parents were born. At every moment that we get hooked onto the train of making opposites, making conceptual referents, holding opinions, that is giving birth to our parents. Time goes back-

wards, not forward. It goes from present to past. Any moment when we begin to get caught in some chain of associations, and rights and wrongs, and shoulds and should nots, and judgments, and seeing ourselves or the world in limited ways, then that moment is giving birth to our parents. So Zen means becoming an orphan.

At any moment, when you don't make good and bad, what is your original face before your parents were born? Original face means empty, like a mirror. That's why many Zen illustrations use this empty circle. That means empty and simultaneously full. Empty and simultaneously complete, whole. Totality is there in that moment. Meditation is to perceive that, to be with that, then to use that. So how will you know when you've seen the five skandhas face to face? You'll know when you recognize your original face before your parents were born.

Richard Shrobe is a Gestalt therapist in New York City, where he lives with his family. He is Abbot of Chogye International Zen Center of New York. Compiled from talks at Cambridge Zen Center, November, 1986, and Chogye International Zen Center of New York, December 1988 and January 1989.

What is this?

Gray Dharma caterpillar
12 pairs of legs clomp, clomp, clomp, clomp
through the dharma room and out onto the deck
eating everything in sight:

thinking thinking legs hurting
kimchee cricket sounds
da wonderful soups of Do Won
branches stirring up the wind

sitting walking eating sleeping
through days and weeks and months
while leaves turn red and fall
and snow covers the ground

over and over again until nothing
but a Buddha in the night sky
that looks like a Pillsbury doughboy
that eats the dharma caterpillar

burps up — butterflies
with blue black wings and lapis lazuli spots
that skywrites:
WHAT IS THIS?

*David Jordan
Diamond Hill Zen Monastery
Summer Kyol Che, 1989*