

PP: If someone pulls the plug on this man who is in a coma, does he have sufficient consciousness so that he will have some emotion inside, like anger or happiness?

SS: This consciousness is like half-tree, half-animal. In this consciousness there is no like or dislike; because they don't have like or dislike, they cannot create any karma.

PP: So will this kind of person have a good rebirth, because they have no karma when they die?

SS: They are dying with no karma in that moment but they may have very strong consciousness (residue) from this lifetime. That consciousness is like mercury; it may separate into different "globs" like mercury does; sometimes these globs remain separate, but sometimes they may join with similar consciousnesses and be reborn as a strong personality like Gandhi or Hitler.

If someone is dying and taking so much energy, it is not incorrect to allow them to die. But if they are not taking other people's energy, why die?

PP: Nowadays many people have problems with drugs and drinking. What kind of karma is this? How can these people be helped?

SS: Sometimes it may be before-life karma, but sometimes it may be because of doing "together action" with others: "I don't want to use drugs or alcohol, but my friends say, 'you try,' and so I do that." This kind of mind already understands that drugs or alcohol are no good. So if they want to fix their mind, they can fix it with meditation. But if they don't care and are only interested in having a good time, they cannot fix it. Your mind makes everything. Buddha said, "All things are created by mind alone." So your mind creates sickness and you fix your sickness with your mind. That's interesting, no?

PP: Yes. Thank you very much. □

What is Your Original Face?

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The word "recovery," according to the dictionary, means regaining something that was either stolen or lost. From a spiritual point of view, what you are actually recovering is your perception of something that you already possess. The thief is yourself, disabling you from seeing what you already possess.

Case number ten in the Mu Mun Kwan, "Cheong Sae is poor," illustrates this idea: A monk, Cheong Sae, approached Zen Master Chosan and said, "Master! I am poor and destitute. Please help me!" Zen Master Chosan, without hesitation, just called out the monk's name: "Cheong Sae!" And the monk, without thinking, responded, "Yes, sir!" Zen Master Chosan then said, "It is as if you have already drunk three bottles of the best vintage wine in China, and yet act as if you have not even wet your lips."

One way of talking about this story is in terms of "emptiness" and "fullness." The monk presents himself as "poor and destitute," having nothing. Translation: I have emptied myself completely of words, ideas, opinions, and even a feeling of self. I am completely empty. In that sense, this statement is also a Dharma Combat challenge.

Chosan's response, "Chong Sae!", and the monk's reply "Yes, sir!", are both immediate and non-conceptual. Thus, the monk throws away the last vestige of holding. In spite of his presentation of himself as "empty," the monk was still holding one thing — this idea of emptiness. This holding disappears in an act of spontaneous response: calling/answering, inside/outside, myself/universe all come together in a complete experience of fullness, or healing. Total emptiness was a prerequisite for his awakening.

Basho's famous enlightenment haiku points us in the same direction. Sitting by a pond, he is asked by the Zen Master to give something of his own words, rather than the regurgitated words of the Buddhas and patriarchs. Basho is stuck. He sits there for a long time in a sense of stillness or vacancy. All of a sudden, a frog jumps in the pond. Basho's mind opens up and he says: "Still pond, frog jumps in. Splash!" Still pond, or emptiness, comes to life in the momentary perception of "Splash!", just as

it does in Chong Sae's "Yes, sir!" Emptiness and fullness are then two sides of the same coin.

If we say, like Chong Sae, that we don't have anything, even that idea of not having anything must be taken away. And it's taken away by just perceiving clearly the sounds of this world, moment by moment. That's why the Bodhisattva of Compassion is represented as the one who hears the sounds of the world. Compassion manifests as hearing with one's whole being, without hesitancy, without ideas, without holding.

Another famous Zen story is about two monks who were travelling together in the rainy season. They came to a small creek, overflowing with heavy rains. There they saw a lovely young girl in a silk kimono, unable to cross. One of the monks offered to carry her across on his shoulder, and did so. The monks walked on silently for a long time, until the other monk could not restrain himself and said, "We have precepts about not touching a woman. How could you so blatantly carry that girl on your shoulders?" The first monk replied, "Oh! I put that girl down a long time ago. Why are you still carrying her around?"

Substance abuse and addiction are usually associated with holding — the holding of particular images and their concomitant feelings. This is where a lot of the current "inner child" work is being done. When a person is holding on to some internal image of a bad or abandoned or rejected child, it has become part of their idea of who they are, part of their self-concept. The strategies to reverse this syndrome — to heal the individual — include "re-parenting" the inner child by visualizing a more positive kind of relationship.

In psychotherapy there is also a focusing on what might be the person's need to keep holding onto this negative imagery. Are they fearful of what growing beyond these images brings? Or, are they holding onto some sense of "a bad parent or bad family is better than no parent and no family" and the fear of giving the whole thing up?

The Alcoholics Anonymous approach to the same problem is very interesting because it makes use of the paradox of power and powerlessness. In AA and other twelve-step programs, people publicly state: "I admit my powerlessness over alcohol" (or over drugs, food, etc.) But in this admission of powerlessness and the declaration that they are giving themselves over to a higher power, a certain sense of control or power emerges. In this way, a sense of false pride and humiliation (which is the opposite of false pride because what goes up must come down eventually) is transmuted into a feeling of humility and connectedness to a power greater than oneself — be it the group, community or sangha, or some universal principle such as God, Buddha or Nature.

As helpful as all these other approaches are — and oftentimes quite necessary — Zen attacks these issues somewhat differently. For instance, while inner child work is very connected with a person's family context, the Sixth Patriarch asked "Without making good or bad, in that moment, what is your original face before your parents were born?" The last line is a very interesting and powerful intervention in healing and recovery. What is your original face before any ideas, images, feelings that you have been carrying like so much baggage? When investigating "What is your original face before parents were even born?", we are thrown back on our most primal, original self. If we get a glimpse or recognition of that, we attain one instant's sense of total freedom, uncolored and unhindered by our mind and history. There is nothing to heal; we have returned to our original self.

Getting a sense of that freedom also gives us a vantage point from which to approach the inner attitudes that we are carrying around. It does not mean we have no ideas or images to work through; we simply have a gravity point from which to proceed.

Another provocative implication of this kong-an is that time goes not from past to present to future, but, psychologically, from present to past. If you touch the moment where you perceive your original face before your parents were born, then you can also see how you give birth to your own parents! If you are having a moment of unencumbered freedom, and then begin to step back into the mental and emotional attitudes of better or worse, should or should not, good or bad, valuable or not so valuable, at that moment you are giving birth to a relationship with authority figures and parental edicts. At that moment, you give birth to your parents — whether your real parents or little bits and pieces which you extracted from them that sit in your mind-belly, giving you a lot of indigestion.

When you perceive that, you begin to take some responsibility in the present for what you are carrying around. This sense of responsibility gives you a tremendous sense of freedom, and hopefulness, and a way to work with all of these things. From a Zen standpoint, we are most interested in, "What was your original face before your parents were born?" or, as Zen Master Chosan said to Cheong Sae, "It's as if you had already drunk three bottles of the best vintage wine in China and, yet, why do you act as if you haven't even wet your lips?" We all need to be careful that, after tasting the best vintage wine in China, we don't slip back into acting as if we were poor and destitute and have not even wet our lips.

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