

Why Blame the Knife?

Jan Sendzimir

Once during my recent solo retreat I was hurrying between meditation sessions to finish preparing lunch. In my rush to cut up all the vegetables I cut the tip of my left thumb so deeply that it did not stop bleeding for a day. Amid all the pain and blood my mind scrambled for how to fix this mess, and the first answer was to never again use such sharp knives.

But with time it became clear that this was just another way to blame something else and run away from the real problem. Knives are not the problem. They may be very sharp, but they cut exactly where we direct them.

The razor edge of the knife points right at whoever is holding it—at the mind that crams things together, stumbling in a hurry while peering elsewhere (the future, the past).

Why do we not slow down and follow the knife edge right to this moment? Along that edge the vegetable opens, and so do I, as I perceive clearly how each moment is unique. One hundred cuts are not the same as one hundred and one. My thumb can tell you this. It certainly tells me. ♦

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a bodhisattva. Those practices take time and, according to scripture, may take many lifetimes. If you don't have time to go through the stages and instead believe that you can attain your true self, become Buddha and save all beings from suffering, then Zen meditation might be the best choice for you.

How?

When “Why?” and “What?” become clear, the next step is to find out how to do it.

Whenever humans want to learn something, even basic life skills like walking, writing or eating, we need a teacher who will give us some instruction. Meditation is not different. We can't get results without the help from a qualified teacher. Receiving instruction might be the easiest part, but what if it was the wrong instruction or we misunderstood it? The only way to find out is to try it sincerely for some time. I've met many meditators who were complaining that they were not getting results in their practice. Either their motivation was not clear or they received unclear instructions, or instructions were clear but they didn't understand them, or they haven't created a habit of meditating regularly.

If you are reading this article the chances are that you are practicing Zen. The word *Zen* literally means meditation, and in Zen schools we sit meditation a lot. All the Zen schools teach how to have a correct sitting posture and how to breathe correctly. All of this is very important, but Zen is not a “body-sitting” method; it is rather a “mind-sitting” lifestyle.

In our school, Zen sitting means cutting off all attachment to thinking and returning to our before-thinking mind. “When walking, standing, sitting, lying down, speaking, being silent, moving, being still—at all times, in all places, without interruption: ‘What am I? Don't know.’”

Don't-know is our unmoving self-nature, and when we return to don't-know everything becomes clear. Clarity means that our inherent wisdom starts functioning meticulously, “like the tip of a needle.”

As Sixth Patriarch said, “At the very moment when there is wisdom, then meditation exists in wisdom; at the very moment when there is meditation, then wisdom exists in meditation.” They are not two different things.

In the beginning of practice we tend to divide our time into “meditation” and “post-meditation.” It's easier to keep don't-know on the cushion than off the cushion, but our goal is to remove this division and practice “mind-sitting” all the time. If we keep don't-know while walking, that is walking meditation. If we can keep it while eating, that is eating meditation. If we can keep it while washing dishes, that is working meditation. The more we meditate, the more we can keep correct situation, correct relationship and correct function. We are no longer blind dogs but keen-eyed lions, just like Buddha.

One moment of being a keen-eyed lion is better than many lifetimes of being a blind dog. ♦

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