

You Make, You Get

Dealing with Fear, Anger and Depression in These Difficult Times

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The subject of this talk is dealing with fear, anger and depression in these difficult times. The reason I made notes for the talk is that I was afraid if I came here and tried to wing it I would bumble, and then I could get angry at the directors for inviting me to come and embarrass myself, and when I went home afterward I could feel dejected and depressed. “What kind of Zen teacher are you?” So I made notes. If it were only that easy to deal with anger, depression and fear in other situations.

We can approach working with fear, anger and depression from three different angles. The first is awareness (you could also call it wisdom perspective or clear seeing). The second is cultivating a steady, not-moving center, as one does in formal meditation practice, and the third is selfless action in the world.

In one of the Buddhist scriptures, the *Hua Yen Sutra* (in English, the *Flower Garland Sutra*), there is a short passage that is often quoted: “If you want to understand all the Buddhas of the past, present and future, then you should view the nature of the universe as created by mind alone.”

“Created by mind alone” is not a philosophical point about whether everything is inside or outside or whether outside even exists. The point is that we experience everything in our minds, nowhere else. Our feelings are registered in our minds; sounds are registered in our minds. If there were no consciousness, ears wouldn't be functioning, eyes would not be functioning and so on.

Everything occurs in our minds and unfortunately most of the time we are coloring reality with our own mental constructions, imagination and fabrication. We make things. And when we're making things we are very far away from reality as it is.

Some friends of mine went to Korea and were traveling around to various Buddhist temples. At one temple the abbot wrote them a Chinese calligraphy. It said, “You make, you get.” (I believe that in written Chinese the pronouns are inferred. Literally the characters were “Make, get.”) In the Indian tradition, both the Indian Buddhist tradition and the Yoga Vedanta tradition, an example given for how we make or imagine something and ignore reality is of someone walking down a country dirt road at twilight and suddenly seeing what ap-

pears to be a snake right in front of them. The person jumps back in fear, but then as the snake is not moving at all, he gets a little more courage and investigates until he says, “Oh! This is not a snake at all. It's a piece of rope. The snake only existed in my imagination.” But even after I perceive that the snake is only in my imagination, there is still my heart beating fast and the fear that doesn't subside immediately. All this has to do with the activity of ignorance. Ignorance is not so much a thing as an active ongoing process of ignoring things as they are and generating my own version of them.

Once, the Dalai Lama was answering questions and someone began to ask, “Your holiness, I know the self doesn't exist . . .” The Dalai Lama stopped him immediately, saying, “It's not that the self doesn't exist. It's that it doesn't exist in the way you think it does.” (That gives new meaning to the question “Who do you think you are?”) We create a small “I,” which is a construction based on images we hold of ourselves, conceptions and ideas we hold of ourselves. In some way we imagine this I-ness, this constructed self, as being totally independent and self-sufficient and of course none of us are totally independent and self-sufficient.

As soon as I generate this notion of myself, this “I,” I also quickly generate a notion of other. So there's self and other, subject and object, inside and outside. As soon as we have inside versus outside, the possibility of threat or distrust begins to arise. The threat that arises can be toward external things—for example, “I don't trust you.” It can also be toward parts of ourselves, like our emotions. And sometimes we relate to our emotions as if they were something other than our self, and that becomes problematic. So as soon as we have inside, outside, self and other, there is the possibility of fear and anxiety. Usually when we have self, other, inside and outside we start to make good and bad as well. And with good and bad, self-judgement and comparisons arise—for example, “I'm good, you're not so good” or “I'm not so good, you're great.” Expectation and disappointment also arise when we make these things. Depression is to some degree based on these mental constructions and the emotions that go with them. Anger is in many instances a reactive emotion, on top of fear, disappointment or hurt. If you come over here and

step on my toe suddenly, I may get angry at you and bark like a dog, but fundamentally the problem is that my toe hurts. Sometimes, however, we experience a righteous anger that arises from some perceived unfairness going on in the world.

This raises the question of what kind of attitude we should cultivate to investigate all of this, and how we should keep our mind. Zen Master Seung Sahn's English was limited, and many times he would make up short aphorisms with which to teach. One of the aphorisms he had about meditation was simple: "Don't make anything. Don't hold anything. Don't attach to anything."

First, we start making something, then we begin holding on to it. There is a book by a Japanese Zen master, Kosho Uchiyama, titled *Opening the Hand of Thought*, which is an interesting idea. We make something and we hold it. If we really hold it we start clinging to it and getting attached to it. It's easy to say "Don't make anything," but we're always making something with our mind. So there really is a prior step to "Don't make anything," and that is to ask ourselves "What are you constructing, what are you holding, what are you clinging to?" We can begin to see through what we've made and let go of it. But this is something we would need to cultivate on going: Look clearly. As it says at the railroad crossing: "Stop, look and listen." Your life depends on it. The quality of your life depends on it.

To really perceive and see clearly, you need to cultivate some sense of a not-moving center. To be able to see clearly, you need to slow down; you need to steady your attention; you need to have some degree of quiescence. There are two metaphors that are sometimes given to represent this unmoving center. I remember the example given by Swami Satchidananda of a pendulum. The pendulum is swinging back and forth but there is one point that is never moving. That is one example

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Calligraphy: "You make, you get," Byok Am Sunim

of this not-moving point. If you are going to watch the swinging and not get swung off at some moment, you need to have a not-moving point. Another example sometimes given in the Zen tradition is of a wooden doll that you might see in a store in China, Korea or Japan that sells practice items, malas and incense, and so on. This wooden doll is in the form of the first Zen patriarch, Bodhidharma, sitting in meditation. The bottom of the doll is rounded and its center of gravity is in the belly. In the United States we used to have blow-up dolls in the shape of Bozo the Clown or some animals. Each of them had a sandbag or some kind of weight at the bottom of the doll. The Bodhidharma dolls are also weighted at the bottom in the way they're carved. If you push Bodhidharma over this way, he comes back to center quickly. If you push him that way, he also comes back. No matter which way you push him, he quickly comes back. As much as you move the doll, there's one point at the center of the movement that's never moving.

These images can be helpful as metaphors for meditation practice and cultivating that kind of unmoving center. If you are the kind of person who frequently gets too flooded and

inundated by things (thoughts and feelings) and easily begin to lose your balance, then the idea of the pendulum point may be a helpful image: pull back a little bit from things and see them from your unmoving center.

For me the Bodhidharma doll is a more helpful image because I am by temperament a little removed, a little aloof, a little shy. So most of the time it's helpful to know that when I step into the world I'll still have a feeling that no matter how the world moves me and I move in the world I can still keep my balance. Of course, none of us is all one way or the other, so for any of us either of these images can be helpful at times.

There is a story in one of the Buddhist scriptures.

In the story there are two characters who are called bodhisattvas. In the Buddhist tradition the term *bodhisattva* has two meanings. If you go to a Buddhist temple, you'll sometimes see three figures on the altar. The Buddha is sitting in the middle. The Buddha represents the original, not-moving, pure and clear consciousness or mind. On either side of the Buddha you'll see two other figures that represent the different qualities of the enlightened mind. For example, one might represent compassion, or skillful activity, and the other might represent primal nondual wisdom. These figures are called bodhisattvas. They represent universal qualities of enlightened being, the way in the Hindu tradition, the Ishtadevatas are viewed as qualities of self-realization or divinity. But a bodhisattva can also mean anyone who is practicing the dharma path of cultivating selflessness. A bodhisattva can even be someone who is very much a beginner if their intention is "My practice is not just for myself but for all beings."

Back to the story: All the buddhas come together for a meeting, and the bodhisattva of nondual wisdom, Manjushri, shows up to come to the meeting, but he can't come in for some reason. Just at that moment all the other buddhas disappear, returning to where they came from, and Manjushri enters. Close to Shakyamuni Buddha is a woman sitting in deep samadhi. Manjushri says to the Buddha, "Why can a woman sit so close to you and I couldn't even come in?" The Buddha responds, "You wake her up yourself and ask her." So Manjushri walks around her three times, snaps his fingers and nothing happens. He then takes her in the palm of his hand and goes up to some heaven somewhere and again nothing happens. The Buddha says to Manjushri, "Even if a thousand Manjushris appeared here they still wouldn't be able to wake this woman up from samadhi, but down below, beyond a thousand thousand thousand worlds, is the bodhisattva Ensnared Light." Now usually we think of spiritual light as radiating and illuminating in every direction, but this bodhisattva is called Ensnared Light and the Buddha

says he is the one who can wake her up. Just at that moment the bodhisattva Ensnared Light emerged out of the earth and the Buddha asks him to wake the woman up. The bodhisattva Ensnared Light goes in front of her, snaps his fingers once and the woman wakes up.

A Zen poem referring to this story says:

One can awaken her, the other cannot;
Both have their own freedom.
A god-mask here and a devil-mask there,
Even in failure, an elegant performance.

A brief commentary to the same episode by Zen Master Seung Sahn says:

Head cannot hold a pen, eyes cannot hear sound,
mouth cannot see the clear sky. Man cannot give
birth to a baby. Hands have hands' job, legs have



Photo: Jiří Hazlbauer JDPSN

legs' job. Understand your correct job. When the rooster crows in the morning the body wakes up.

A commentary by another Zen master is much more brief: "Manjushri can't ride a bicycle." An ancient Zen master posed a question.

Now tell me: Manjushri was the teacher of seven buddhas. Why couldn't he get the woman out of samadhi? Ensnared Light was a bodhisattva of the first stage; why was he able to get her out? If you can see into this intimately, then in the flurry of karma and discrimination, you are a dragon of great samadhi. If you can grasp this completely, you will realize that surging delusive consciousness is nothing other than the greatest samadhi. If you can grasp this point, then for you, this busy life of ignorance and discrimination will be the life of supreme samadhi. What does it mean to be a dragon of great Samadhi? What is it to live a life of supreme samadhi?

Swami Satchidananda says:

The world itself is God. All that is outside us is God. When we dedicate our lives to the benefit of humanity, we have dedicated ourselves to God. Whatever we do can easily be transformed into worship by our attitude. We can do anything and everything as long as we do it with the idea of serving the world at large. We can serve our tables, our chairs and everything around us. As long as we don't pull them mercilessly. Everything should be handled gently.

I received the following teaching from him directly one time. When I was a teenager I used to borrow the family car, and when I would park it in our driveway I was in the habit of slamming the car door. My father would get on my case quite unmercifully about slamming the car door, and I thought he was making a big deal about nothing. So I would ignore him, saying nothing and stewing inside. When we lived at the Integral Yoga Institute, Swamiji had an old Chrysler that Felix Cavaliere of the rock band the Rascals had given him. One day he took a few of us out for a ride in this car. He was sitting in the front passenger seat and I was sitting behind him. The driver pulled up at the Yoga Institute, and when we got out I inadvertently let my door slam. Swamiji said, while pointing to his ear, "I can hear it crying." I took it in. This was my guru, but a minute later it dawned on me, that's the same thing my father used to tell me but I couldn't appreciate it from him. OK, so his delivery was not so good, but he was trying to teach me the same things.

Swamiji continues:

Many of us are interested in instant samadhi. Well,

we can have it right here and now, without waiting for the kundalini to be aroused and move to the crown chakra, if we dedicate ourselves completely.

Once we give ourselves to God we are renunciates; we have nothing to possess. And when we have nothing to possess, we have nothing to worry about. All worry is due to attachment and clinging. The attachment I mean is a mental attachment. And of course worry and clinging is the stuff of either depression or anxiety. So if you have no attachment, you have no worry and you aren't clinging.

And he says this kind of practice is continuous samadhi. "We shouldn't think samadhi means sitting in a corner, forgetting ourselves and keeping the body still like a rock. Real samadhi means tranquility of mind, which is possible only when we dedicate everything to others and are free from all attachment."

One time he told a small group of us, "After you stretch yourself to the limit and bend yourself into pretzels doing asanas and then practice pranayama holding your breath till you burst and can sit in meditation like a rock for a long time, still, in the end, you will just have to surrender." The act of self-surrender is samadhi.

Because this talk was to have an ecumenical focus I will give you the Zen version of this. In the *Compass of Zen*, Zen Master Seung Sahn says

An important part of our practice is our effort. In most Mahayana Buddhist traditions, every morning is begun by vowing aloud together, "Sentient beings are numberless; we vow to save them all." This means that from moment to moment, my life is only for all beings. The name for this is perseverance. It means that whether good feelings or bad feelings appear, in a good situation or a bad situation, whatever condition appears, whether suffering or well, I only try to help all beings.

If one could do that, that is the cure from depression and anxiety, and at any moment where you do that, you are free of those things. He says, "Practice is not only what we are doing in the meditation room. Rather, from moment to moment, what are you doing now? That is correct practice. If you practice with this kind of direction and determination, you attain a not-moving mind. In any condition or situation, your mind is clear like a mirror. The clear mirror never holds anything, and it is never moved by what appears in its infinitely empty face. Then when you see, when you hear, when you smell, when you taste, when you touch, when you think—everything, just like this, is the truth. The name for this is samadhi, or deep meditation. ♦