

Introductory Word

ENGO, INTRODUCING THE SUBJECT said, If a man comes to a standstill at some stage, feeling spiritual pride in his enlightenment; he will find himself in a sea of poison. If he finds his words unable to astonish men of lofty spirit, then what he says is quite pointless.

If one can discern the relative and the absolute in the spark of a flint stone, and can apply the positive and negative way in right order; then one is said to have acquired the stage that is as stable as fathomless cliffs.

Main Subject

Attention: The hermit at Lotus Peak took up his staff and said to the crowds, "Look at my old staff. What was the intention of the Patriarchs of former days in using their staffs?"

Since the crowds had no answer, he himself answered, "They did not have to depend on their staffs."

Then asking them what the supreme goal was, he answered for them again, "Carrying my palm-staff on my shoulder, without any companion, I immediately enter the thousand, ten thousand peaks of the mountains."

Appreciatory Word

With dusty eyes and dirty ears this strange old hermit did not even want to stay at the top of a lofty peak. Where is he now: In a beautiful garden full of flowers? By a flowing stream?

If you wonder with twinkling eyes, he is already beyond your sight.

Notes

It was not right for the ancients to be attached to their staffs (practice), or to the top of a mountain (result of practice - enlightenment). For more than twenty years this hermit gave instruction about non-attachment with his staff.

For those who understand this secret, a life of non-attachment, it may be quite an interesting problem. Yet, for one who does not understand this way of life; the question may be a difficult one. Even if a student has a good answer for it, the answer may be as difficult for him as gold dust in his eyes.

Therefore, one day, the hermit himself answered for his students, "Because they did not have to depend on their staffs."

In these circumstances, what is non-attachment?

Once upon a time celestial nymphs poured down many kinds of beautiful flowers on Bodhisatvas and other Buddhists who were listening to Yui-ma's lecture. The flowers which fell on the great Bodhisatvas fell from their robes. However, some of the flowers remained on the robes of the other disciples, no matter how hard they tried to remove them.

One of the heavenly beauties asked these disciples why they were annoyed with the kind of gift of flowers. Sharihotsu said to her that beautiful flowers should not be on the robes of disciples who live in simplicity. It is beautiful to put ordinary fragrant flowers on a Japanese Ukata, but it is not so good to have a pink flower on a priest's robe.

At this the heavenly maids become quite angry saying, "Whatever your liking may be, a flower is a flower and is beautiful. If the flower is good or bad, it is because of your discrimination and not because of the flower."

This statement made all the disciples except the great Bodhisatvas feel very ashamed of their narrow view.

When one keeps his pure mind on some object or movement, leaving its true nature to the object itself, the oneness of subjective and objective occur. Here exists one sole independent activity. Flowers should be left to their own colors and their own graceful movement.

The hermit should use and care for his staff; yet he should neither depend on it, nor ignore it. He should treat the staff the same way he treats his breath in Zazen.

In our Zazen our mind must always be kept on our breathing; the breathing should not be too long, short, heavy, or light. It should be natural. We say our exhale does not come out of the world, and our inhale does not stay in our five skandhas.

This way, when we sit, we become one with one whole world. Here the great activity takes place the absolute independence comes true. That is why the hermit said they didn't have to depend on their staffs.

Setcho says in his Appreciatory Word on this subject, "In the beautiful garden or by the flowing stream, the hermit does not stay. He is already beyond your sight." This is the way we Buddhists should be.