

Suzuki Roshi on Buddha-Nature

(from "Zen Mind, Beginners Mind")

To live in the realm of Buddha nature means to die as a small being, moment after moment. When we lose our balance we die, but at the same time we also develop ourselves, we grow. Whatever we see is changing, losing its balance. The reason everything looks beautiful is because it is out of balance, but its background is always in perfect harmony. This is how everything exists in the realm of Buddha nature, losing its balance against a background of perfect balance. So if you see things without realizing the background of Buddha nature, everything appears to be in the form of suffering. But if you understand the background of existence, you realize that suffering itself is how we live, and how we extend our life. So in Zen sometimes we emphasize the imbalance or disorder of life. ('Control' chapter)

If something exists, it has its own true nature, its Buddha nature. In the Pari-nirvana Sutra, Buddha says, "Everything has Buddha nature," but Dogen reads it in this way: "Everything *is* Buddha nature." There is a difference. If you say, "Everything has Buddha nature," it means Buddha nature is in each existence, so Buddha nature and each existence are different. But when you say, "Everything *is* Buddha nature," it means everything is Buddha nature itself. When there is no Buddha nature, there is nothing at all. Something apart from Buddha nature is just a delusion. It may exist in your mind, but such things actually do not exist. ('Nothing Special' chapter)

So it is absolutely necessary for everyone to believe in nothing. But I do not mean voidness. There is something, but that something is something which is always prepared for taking some particular form, and it has some rules, or theory, or truth in its activity. This is called Buddha nature, or Buddha himself. When this existence is personified we call it Buddha; when we understand it as the ultimate truth we call it Dharma; and when we accept the truth and act as a part of the Buddha, or according to the theory, we call ourselves Sangha. But even though there are three Buddha forms, it is one existence which has no form or color, and it is always ready to take form and color. This is not just theory. This is not just the teaching of Buddhism. This is the absolutely necessary understanding of our life. ('Believing in Nothing' chapter)

Everyone has Buddha nature. We each must find some way to realize our true nature. The purpose of practice is to have direct experience of the Buddha nature which everyone has. Whatever you do should be the direct experience of Buddha nature. Buddha nature means to be aware of Buddha nature. Your effort should extend to saving all sentient beings. ('Epilog')

The big mind in which we must have confidence is not something which you can experience objectively. It is something which is always with you, always on your side. Your eyes are on your side, for you cannot see your eyes, and your eyes cannot see themselves. Eyes only see things outside, objective things. If you reflect on yourself, that self is not your true self any more. You cannot project yourself as some objective thing to think about. The mind which is always on your side is not just your mind, it is universal mind, always the same, not different from another's mind. It is Zen mind. It is big, big mind. This mind is whatever you see. Your true mind is always with whatever you see. Although you do not know your own mind, it is there—at the very moment you see something, it is there. This is very interesting. Your mind is always with the things you observe. So you see, this mind is at the same time everything. ('Epilog')

We must have more experience of our practice. At least we must have *some* enlightenment experience. You must put confidence in the big mind which is always with you. You should be able to appreciate things as an expression of big mind. This is more than faith. This is ultimate truth which you cannot reject. So if you have this confidence, this is your enlightenment experience. If you have this strong confidence in your big mind, you are already a Buddhist in the true sense, even though you do not attain enlightenment. ('Epilog')

Many sensations come, many thoughts or images arise, but they are just waves of your own mind. Nothing comes from outside your own mind. Usually we think of our mind as receiving impressions and experiences from outside, but that is not a true understanding of our mind. The true understanding is that the mind includes everything; when you think something comes from outside it means only that something appears in your mind. Nothing outside yourself can cause any trouble. You yourself make the waves in your mind. If you leave your mind as it is, it will become calm. This mind is called big mind. If your mind is related to something outside itself, that mind is a small mind, a limited mind. If your mind is not related to anything else, then there is no dualistic understanding in the activity of your mind. You understand activity as just waves of your mind. Big mind experiences everything within itself. Do you understand the difference between the two minds: the mind which includes everything, and the mind which is related to something? Actually they are the same thing, but the understanding is different, and your attitude towards your life will be different according to which understanding you have. That everything is included within your mind is the essence of mind... Whatever you experience is an expression of big mind. ('Mind Waves' chapter)

(from "Not Always So")

In our practice the most important thing is to realize that we have Buddha nature. Intellectually we may know this, but it is rather difficult to accept. ('Wherever You Are, E is There' chapter)

When monkey mind is always taking over the activity of big mind, we naturally become a monkey. So monkey mind must have its boss, which is big mind. However, when we practice zazen, it is not that big mind is actually controlling small mind, but simply that when small mind becomes calm, big mind starts its true activity. Most of the time in our everyday life, we are involved in the activity of small mind. That is why we should practice zazen and be completely involved in resuming big mind... So in our practice, we rely on something great, and sit in that great space. The pain you have in your legs or some other difficulty is happening in that great space. As long as you do not lose the feeling that you are in the realm of Buddha nature, you can sit even though you have some difficulty. When you want to escape from your difficulty, or when you try to improve your practice, you create another problem for yourself. But if you just exist there, then you have a chance to appreciate your surroundings, and you can accept yourself completely, without changing anything. That is our practice. To exist in big mind is an act of faith, which is different from the usual faith of believing in a particular idea or being. It is to believe that something is supporting us and supporting all our activities including thinking mind and emotional feelings. All these things are supported by something big that has no form or color. It is impossible to know what it is, but something exists there, something that is neither material nor spiritual. Something like that always exists, and we exist in that space. That is the feeling of pure being. ('Resuming Big Mind' chapter)