

New Year's Message 1999 - Number 45
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Congratulations for this New Year of 1999. This is the last year of the decade of the 90's. Next year we begin the first year of 2000. Then we will welcome the 21st century.

In this time of change and transition with the low condition of the economy of the world we are also facing a time of hard to face miserable conditions all over the world. We have become so many people with insecure minds and the reasons for that are growing and growing.

People deeply concerned about the challenge of the Y2K problems, the possibility of the ruin of the economic system, and the depletion of all of their belongings, are overnight shuddering in great insecurity.

Also, at the end of last year, the population reached 5.9 billion people. Every year the population is increasing by 86,000,000. This means that in ten years we will be seven billion people and in ten years following that ten billion people will be the population of the earth. This enormous population will face a crisis of food and water and along with the earth's global warming problem. Our life is being threatened by many challenges. This is making our minds one level more insecure and unstable.

Every day 22,000 babies are dying. Even in this world where science is so advanced, still today there are many problems which can not yet be resolved. There are the 100,000,000 who are struggling with wars; we need to liberate them. Not only these people in direct conflict, but for the economic and food balance needed to support 5.9 billion people, what will we do to supply these needs? We are unresolved in all of these questions.

And there are still more serious problems. The weaker people of the world, the sick and the elderly, what about their aid and liberation? What can we do for them? The insecurity of these problems and the things that are being destroyed leave a huge shadow. They are serious problems that have to be looked at straightforwardly.

With this kind of a time at hand, last year there came to Sogenji many various hospice and terminal-care-giving visitors. One right after another they came to visit and from these experienced specialists we learned many things. Listening to and borrowing their wisdom the people training at Sogenji feel deeply their own responsibility in the meaning of their training and essence.

From Washington and Oregon we were visited by our friend and hospice leader Lee Paton. From Seattle's One Drop Zendo we welcomed our friend Ed Lorah, and from Australia came Ian Gawler of the Gawler Foundation. Ian was himself a cancer patient, at which time he had one leg amputated. With a further cancer bout he was given only 3-6 months to live, yet with diet and meditation and loving support he was able to spiritually recover in a miraculous way from his illness. He is a person of actual experience and from it he teaches and guides many, many people who are in their terminal phase of illness. Using this experience and liberating with deep spiritual awareness is the way of work and mind of Ian Gawler.

If we summarize the experiences of these specialists in care giving, we see that the living actuality of what the Zen person realizes in training is the fundamental essence that gives life to a true care giving person. For the caregiver of someone who is terminally ill with death right in front of them, the true meaning of being alive has to be known clearly. There is a need to sharply and clearly cross-examine and realize this source point, the actuality of it.

It is said that all human being's sense of existence comes from three varieties of awareness. One is that of directly perceiving the fact of physical existence. The second is to directly perceive one's existence through society and in relationships. The third is the sense of existence, which is

connected to our goals, our values and our deepest faith. It is said that our direct sense of existing is felt from these three things.

When humans are born they have no knowledge and no standard of values. We are born only with a sense of physical existence. Eventually a baby will grow and the mother and the father and the baby will develop a connection as well as a connection with others and the larger society. There is a relationship with family members and others in society, friends with whom they play, friends at school, and also the acquaintances that are made from working at a job in society. There are also the values learned by living in society, the traditional customs and patterns of ways of doing things that also become second nature. In the essence of all of these combined one individual person becomes who they are.

Within this is developed that human flavor that only a human can possibly have. This essence becomes what we are. Our goal and standards in society and our deep faith are interwoven with these and this sense of existence is all one person's human quality. All blend together to make up one person and are blended in a very complex way. Everyone has their own characteristics. Each person's existence develops gradually. People then get sick and die and these three senses of existence, which have supported a person, gradually scatter and disperse.

For the physical body, as in cases of AIDS or cancer or in dying people, our pain is not only physical. The very first to be challenged is our sense of existing from a social sense of existence. We can no longer go to work and can no longer enjoy socializing with other people. Along with that we can perhaps no longer see friends and family. We are alone in our solitude, isolated and separated from the world. Economically we often tap our money supply and the money we earn lessens. From this angle we are insecure about the future as well. We also lose that deep determination we had about what we lived for in society. We learn of our symptoms and our deep actual essence is tested by the oncoming death, our decaying essence that eventually comes, without exception. For this reason, the care giver's work is not only about relieving pain and making people comfortable, but of the unraveling of a human's very existence: how can it be less painful and miserable?

We try to understand the meaning of the way that we have lived, but if we do not we can't give care to someone. At the same time our physical body is more and more limited and inconvenient, and eventually the death time comes closer. That which we were originally afraid of becomes a real practical challenge. That which we didn't ever want to talk about we end up needing to talk about and those who will share these talks become necessary. About one week before death the patients themselves know of their world after death in various ways and they begin talking about this, the professionals teach us. This it is not only their personal problem, but also the family's way of talking to them is of importance as well. Their own insecurity becomes one step deeper so the family has to be taken care of as well. It needs to be handled in such a way that after the person has died the family can get back on its feet as soon as possible. Care for the family has to be considered or it is not true care for the dying person.

People who are experienced in the field say that hospice work is not about what you can do but is rather about being there, like air. There are not going to be only kind and gentle patients. Among them there are some people who will be very demanding and judgmental. They may say, "You seem so kind and listen to everything I say so carefully, but in fact you don't understand anything that I am talking about. There is absolutely no way you could understand what I am saying. Have you ever been sick? Or has anyone close to you ever been dying under terrible and extreme circumstances? Someone who has not had that experience cannot possibly understand what I am going through!" There will be patients who are severely cross-examining in this way. How would you respond to a question like this? There are those who hesitate and are stopped by such a comment. With such a comment or doubt one's own meaning of living has to be understood from one's own experience on the matter, especially in the case of a person of training. That is the ideal caregiver, I believe.

Our training has to be directly and deeply experienced to know the existence of a human being and be able to realize another person's way of being, and to see how we receive it and accept it. This is our actuality of training, the very training itself.

Recently there was a group of women doing a workshop at Sogenji. They were a particular group of nurses. It was a group from Okayama Ryogo Center Hospital. There are fifty beds in this hospital and this hospital is a special hospital for automobile accident victims who are unconscious or in a coma. In this of lack of consciousness the patients can't express their feelings or needs; that state which is called a human vegetable is a close description of what their essence is like. Of course very few leave the hospital alive, although the majority of the patients are in their fifties. Meanwhile, there are 200-250 other patients waiting for these fifty beds, people who want to go there but can't. In today's medical world as long as someone is alive they are guaranteed treatment; as long as they have life and are breathing they receive medical aid.

Because of this the very natural act of dying is not allowed to happen. The problem here is that for those who are extremely unclear in their consciousness, the essence of the state of the mind of their nurses becomes a matter of serious importance. If the patient could respond then they would be able to communicate with them, to know their joy, to know if the person is angry, or uncomfortable, because there is would be some reaction. When there is nothing like that whatsoever, only giving maintenance and protection of their situation, everyday has a very severe quality. After working for six years in any hospital you would be considered a veteran. Yet after six years, like people who have just begun work, these nurses are still doubtful about their own essence. Sometimes they become very melancholy and so unsure that they get lost in hopelessness. There are many people who quit their work for just these reasons. When these patients who have no hope of returning to health but are continuing to be alive are visited by their family they have a luster in their complexion that is different from usual. Even in someone who can't speak and has no power to see, who cannot give an actual response or act at will, shows a little tiny difference. That means that their response capability is not zero. The family comes and there is that slight and subtle response. For one who is watching continually, this is noticeable. For the caregiver their work is their source point.

There is a person of training at Sogenji who was working in hospice work in Chicago. Doken Koji is his name. He said that the care giving to elderly people is most liable to result in burn out. Last year on the news in the United States on December 6th, a study was reported saying that people who do care giving work have an immunity level in their blood which is 20-40 % lower than most people. Especially those who take care of the sick and the elderly work under the most severe conditions. At the same time they are generally subject to light depression. This is true in the majority of caregivers.

At this time training dojos that can give support to these caregivers are very necessary. In the field of care giving those who encounter burn out, who will support them? Today the national government is already overwhelmed with the expenses of the people who need the medical help. It cannot also provide the support for people who are the caregivers. A place for the people who are so active in the care-giving field and who are having a hard time within that job is very necessary.

In China in the Tang dynasty there lived Tanshu Dogo San no Enchi Zenji about whom there was this story. Dogo San no Enchi Zenji lived from the year 769 until the year of 835. Zengen was his disciple, Tanchu Zengen Chuko Zenji. Zengen was Dogo Zenji's student. One day Dogo Zenji was asked to pay a visit to a person who had just passed away and he took Zengen with him to the funeral. Zengen at that time had been pondering for a long time about "This body which has lived, this 'me', what is the essence of this???? What is this thing which is me? This is my body. I can feel with my eyes and ears and nose and skin, but these will all eventually decay. What is there within all this which doesn't decay? Does it come forth again or not? What is it to live?" Zengen was always examining what it means to be alive. Dogo took Zengen to the place where a deceased person was being honored and Zengen saw this person right in front of his own eyes

and finally spoke this great doubt out loud to his teacher. This deceased person was lying right there when Zengen asked his teacher, "Is this person alive or dead?" This is how he asked. Later, the problem was also brought up by Engo Zenji. "Don't sleep!!!!!! Are you alive or asleep!? Don't look away!!!! Look at your own footsteps!!!!" This is how Engo Zenji critiqued it, truly serious, honest, and sincere in his questioning.

If people see death then they will look at this question seriously, not just be sad and confused without examining what life is. If we look at it from that angle we can see that Zengen was honestly just real as can be. He was looking at the central point directly. Because he was still dividing things into two paths of living and dying Engo critiques him in this way.

Dogo Zenji received his disciple's question and answered, "I won't say alive and I won't say dead." This is how he answered him. Zengen heard this as a very lukewarm sounding answer. "I won't say alive and I won't say dead" A truly half-assed answer of no essence at all is how Zengen heard it, but that was not the essence of Dogo Zenji. Dogo Zenji's essence has not a bit of slackness in it. These were not two; for Dogo Zenji this was not a dualistic answer. Right in front of his eyes the actuality was directly perceivable and without the slightest doubt he answered unswervingly.

The tree in front of our eyes, is it alive or dead, this tree in spreading full leaf? The moon, which shines so brightly, is it dead or alive? The water flowing in the valley, is it alive or dead? There was no such division of awareness for Dogo Zenji. "I won't say alive and I won't say dead" The moon shines brightly and the healthy tree in front of our eyes is silently and constantly moving into the sky, the water right in front of us flows always and this is the truth with no slackness to it.

But Zengen still didn't know this state of mind and so he said, "Why do you refuse to answer?" When asked this Dogo Zenji said, "Won't say, won't say!"

>From Zengen's point of view it was as if he hadn't answered and had begged the question. He felt that his teacher was refusing to answer him in a straightforward way. But Dogo Zenji's Mind had not a gap in it. No matter what separation might appear to occur, a flowering in front of our eyes, that radiance of the shining moon above: where is there any gap in these? The water flowing at our feet, where is there any separation or division in that? All existence is perfect, each and every one, piercing through the delineations of past, present and future; they express truth always for the first time.

The past and future, if we mix and blend them that is NOT the present. While having a past and a future we cut them both away and the clear eye that sees from there directly is the eye that cannot be deceived. It is not about escaping or not escaping. There is no such separation there. The truth as the truth with no slackness anywhere. Zengen and Master Dojo were as far apart as heaven and earth. Zengen could not understand Master Dogo's state of mind and again asked him the same question on the way home from the funeral. "Master, why don't you answer me honestly when this is my training's most central point? Why do you keep running away from it? If you don't answer me I will hit you!" This is how he demanded. Dogo said, "Go ahead and hit me if you want but I won't say. If you want to hit me, that is up to you, but you can't say what you can't say. If I say it, that is only dualism. You cannot deceive the reality! The thing is the thing itself and you can't say anything more than that. You can't say alive and you can't say dead."

Alive, sick, dead, past and present and future, people all separate these and are deluded and confused by them. Dogo Zenji was looking at Zengen's awakening. What is the true original source of what is aware of this??? Is it alive or dead?

There is nothing you can do about such a big dissonance in state of mind and finally Zengen socked his teacher with a great blow. The teacher was so determined to bring his student to enlightenment and had his life on the line for his awakening. Zengen also was seeking to realize

true existence and was not going to back down-he was deeply serious. They were really seeking and examining to the core and this is how it has to be. But a disciple hitting the teacher was a great problem. Dogo Zenji understood Zengen's essence but people around them didn't. Probably Zengen would be thrown out and so his teacher let him run away in secret. He left his teacher and clarified his truth continually while doing pilgrimage and struggling constantly. After many years alone continuing his work, one day in a small village temple in which he was staying there was someone reading the Kannon Gyo or Kannon Sutra. He was listening leisurely when they arrived half way through it to the place where it said that Kanzeon took the form of a monk when she liberated an ordained person and then to enlighten and teach the rich person she took the form of a rich person. To teach a child she took the form of a child, to liberate a sick person she took the form of a sick person. Kanzeon Bodhisattva, for her there is no life or death, she just manifests a body to the living. With everything she is she lives and with everything she is, she dies, with no gap at all. When caring, she was Kanzeon. That who is receiving the service and care is also Kanzeon. This is Kanzeon meeting Kanzeon. But if here the emotions enter we lose track of the way of truth.

At these words Zengen suddenly came to. "Dogo Zenji did not refuse to answer me! He was telling me that to separate life and death when there is no such separation was the mistake! Dogo Zenji's true life without any extraneous thoughts, he was telling me not to separate them." Finally he knew that he hadn't seen that. For the first time he understood his teacher's true meaning when he had said, "Even if you want to know it can't be said!" Zengen knew his teacher's true mind for the first time and with that joy he went to tell his teacher, but Dogo Zenji had died and was no longer in this world. It was truly a sad and sorrowful thing.

Sekiso Keisho Zenji, who was the successor of Dogo Zenji, lived from 809-888. Zengen went and asked him the same question that he had asked his teacher. Sekiso Zenji gave the exact same answer. "I won't say alive and I won't say dead." Again Zengen asked the same thing he had asked Master Dogo, "Why don't you tell me what I ask!" But Sekiso Zenji answered in the same way, "you can't say what can't be said." Zengen then knew clearly and sharply from his own experience what was being said.

Later Dogo Zenji and Zengen Zenji's case was looked at by Setcho Juken Zenji. To this case he wrote the following poem,

"Rabbits and horses have horns Oxen and rams have no horns
Nary a hair, nary a wisp Like mountains, like peaks.
The golden relics still exist right now
With white foaming waves flooding the skies, where can they be put?
There's no place to put them
Even the one who returned to the West with one shoe has lost them.
Rabbits and horses don't have horns oxen and goats having them is natural."
Setcho Zenji is saying - living or dead? - to this monk Zengen who has asked this.

Many people look at death and life where there is none, and where there is no self and other they recognize a self and other, arguing over profit and religion and dividing and separating. Over something that doesn't exist they want something which is only a brief scenery with no truth in it. Dogo Zenji said "can't say it's living." Dogo Zenji was not saying it about something so simple and shallow-his state of Mind was one which came from having actually experienced that deepest root where it all comes forth. That life energy with no gaps, the actuality of realizing that.

Like a mountain like peaks.

Not caught on the superficiality of 'to have or to not have'-but that actuality which comes from the experience alone. Kanzeon Bodhisattva's eyes-with these to do care giving. Here Kanzeon is seeing Kanzeon. The sick person's insecure mind is my own place where I will be ending up eventually. You know that essence of the sick person and the dying person's essence - to see it clearly with an unswerving and warmly receive them and with the eyes which know where it all

goes, to pluck out the person's insecurity and receive them with essence which comes forth naturally; here there is no question about living or dying-or having or not having-not the tiniest speck of any of that left behind whatsoever. The Kanzeon mind that fills the whole universe is what receives that insecurity of one who is about to die.

The problem on hospice is that of over-all care. Not a cure but a real caregiver. Complete care is physical and spiritual, social, economic, and religious-all of that. The person's whole character in all its facets is received and accepted. Total Care. This is hospice base. The mind which is not separating heart and body, but embracing each person's whole total being. The eyes which can do that are those which can give everything and throw about all division. When we realize the true source of all awareness we can really do this for the first time. To be able to guide caregivers and help them to be supported in their awakening we need a dojo where this can be done. To build that dojo even one day sooner is important.

This is not about something for one lone person of training but for all the people in society. To know the true way of being one's true self is our training. When human truth awakened to by all of us then the 6 billion will be supported by that. This is what I feel is of the greatest importance.

After 1999 this dark and suffering society to enter the year 2000. With what view will we enter it? If we let go of this source point we cannot look at it with any expectation of light. We should clarify this mind and within the difficult situations in society see clearly and with passion as Bodhisattvas who can awaken as much as possible.