

being asked to give up my humanity and my personality. There may have been some such flavor to the teachings I heard, but I think I exaggerated it out of my own fear of the teaching of “no-self” and my own need to do it “right.”

Eventually, I took ownership of my own practice, as Jiaohan does, and came to an understanding of liberation that includes my own emotions, views, and personality. In her verse, Jiaohan tells Yuanwu that one may struggle like hell, fight with the fearsome beast that emptiness (the void) can represent, and arrive at a profound understanding—and yet there is still sand in the eye.

What is this sand? I think it represents our small self, our humanity. We must include this small self within our profound understanding of the “Big Self” that includes everyone, or we fall off into one-sided practice. So we must practice everyday life, but with the mind of emptiness. We need to include our emotions and views in our practice so as to see their emptiness.

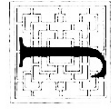
I have found that my life works when I do not try to suppress emotions or deny that I have views. When I deny them, they just sneak up on me later and cause problems.

Years ago, when I was first at Tassajara Zen Mountain Monastery, I had a friend from Mexico. He taught me to make *budin azteca*, an enchilada casserole. Not long after, he died of AIDS. That summer, I made *budin azteca* for the Tassajara guests. As I cooked, I thought of my departed friend. I felt heavy, as if I were moving through molasses, but I just kept going. Guest dinner must be served at 7:00, no matter what! I suffered all afternoon. Had I allowed myself to feel the pain, to really physically experience it, I would have been able to let it go rather quickly. This is the emptiness of emotions. They arise, abide, and pass away, but only if we allow them to arise in the first place.

It is human to have emotions. However, it is our practice to not let them have us. In the years since that experience at Tassajara, I have learned to pay attention to my breath and my body. When I'm suppressing something, my body feels heavy and my belly feels tense. Then I know to stop, breathe, and ask myself, “What is this?”

Jiaohan's Sand in the Eye

CHINA, TENTH-ELEVENTH CENTURIES



JIAOHAN WAS the niece of a high official of the Song dynasty. When she was young, she decided not to marry or bear children and she set her heart on the way of Chan. She experienced a clear awakening at the words of Master Yuanwu Keqin as he spoke to the assembly.

Later, Yuanwu said to her, “You should go on to erase your views—then you will finally be free.”

She answered in verse:

The pillar pulls out the bone sideways;
the void shows its claws and fangs;
even if one profoundly understands,
there is still sand in the eye.

ZENKI MARY MOCINE'S REFLECTION

I would like to have known Jiaohan Roshi. I don't know if she would agree with my understanding of her verse, but I think she would support me in offering my own interpretation. In this koan, she stands up to her teacher and effectively disagrees with his instruction. He tells her to erase her views. She says there will still be “sand in the eye.” I understand her to be saying, “I will still be a human being.”

When I began practice I struggled with what I took to be the instruction to suppress emotions. I heard that I would find equanimity by not having views, or emotions, and it seemed to me that I was

Sometimes an answer is readily apparent, sometimes not, but simply noticing and breathing always helps me to find some equanimity.

We need to understand that we are hard-wired to process our direct experience with words and concepts. We cannot get rid of this “sand” in our eyes.

I need the mediation that words and concepts provide. This is necessary “sand” that must come between me and my direct experience in order for me to function in the world. All is indeed “One,” and sometimes I may have an unmediated experience of this oneness, but still, for practical purposes, I must separate my “self” from the table and see the table as an object, in order to avoid stubbing my toe on its leg.

Jiaoan reminds us, then, to accept the koan of our lives. We do need to engage in the profound struggle to realize emptiness. She says the pillar pulls out the bone sideways. Difficult! A drastic removal of our usual support!

At the same time, we live in the realm of emotions, views, and concepts. But—we do not need to be caught by them. Let us meet Jiaoan right here.



Is it possible to get rid of all thoughts and views? If so, how can you decide what to make for dinner without them? Can tears be an expression of deep understanding? Did the Buddha cry at the sight of suffering?