



MAGNANIMITY:

Life Nestled in the Bosom of the Grandeur of Nature

A Lecture by Katagiri-roshi, given at Green Gulch Farm

Dogen Zenji says in his work that life is like being on board a boat and rowing it. There are two points we have to take into account. The first is that the place where you are is beyond your effort, and the other is your effort in rowing the boat. The question of the place where you are "being on board" is a very important point, but most people don't pay attention to it. What people are interested in is rowing the boat only by means of their own ability and effort, forgetting completely the place where they are. This is a big problem for us. That place where you are is not produced only by your own effort. You must see a broader picture of the place, created prior to your effort, in which you are one with the boat, with the water, with the other shore, with this shore and with the sky and birds. They all co-exist and are interacting with each other. This is the place where you are, completely beyond

your control. You absolutely cannot row the boat without the place where you are. If you take it for granted that you can do something good only by means of your own efforts or that everything can be done only by your own abilities, you become quite egoistic, arrogant and feel forlorn or desolate. You think, after all, that you might as well throw yourself into the water rather than live in failure or in a predicament. This is very common because for years and years you have completely ignored the most important place where you are. That is, where the boat, the other shore, this shore and all sentient beings co-exist. If you believe that life can be entirely controlled only by means of your own power, then death, life after death, and rebirth can be under your thumb. But it is absolutely impossible.

Here is an interesting story from a Japanese novel written by Ryunosuke Akutagawa:

A young man's father died and the young man received lots of money from an inheritance. Unfortunately, he spent all his money and became poor. Then an old man who was a hermit appeared and tried to help him. The old man asked him what he wanted. The young man said, "I want to have lots of money." So the hermit gave him money. Lots of money. The young man lived well with the money for only a few years until he spent his last penny. Then the old man appeared again and tried to help him, giving him money in the same way. Again the young man spent all of his money. Three times the hermit appeared and three times the young man spent all his money. Finally, the old man asked the young man, "What do you want? More money?" But the young man said, "I don't want to have any money this time." So the old man said, "What do you want?" The young man replied, "You are a hermit, aren't you? Please teach me the secret of immortality." The old man was lost in thought for several minutes, but at last he said, "Oh, yes, okay, I will do it. But there is one request. Please listen to this request." The younger man said, "What is it?" The old man replied, "My one request is this: After my death, lots of things will happen in your life. But whatever may happen, in all circumstances, don't speak up. Please keep silent." So the young man agreed, saying, "Yes, I will promise it."

After the old man died, immediately many things happened to the young man. Many fierce animals tried to frighten him into talking. Finally the head of the gods appeared and waved his sword and said, "If you don't speak, I will kill you with this sword. Speak up!" But the young man didn't speak. He kept quiet. It resulted in his being killed with the sword and falling into hell.

Right in front of the entrance of hell there was a guardian. The guard asked the young man, "Where do you come from?" The young man didn't say a thing. "Why don't you say something? What did you do in your world?" Still the young man didn't say a word, so finally the guard became very confused and asked the devils — many devils, red, green, white and yellow devils — to make this young man speak up by any means, because the guard was wonder-



ing who this man was. The many devils came up and tried to make him speak, but he did not say a thing. At last the guard and all the devils and the entire circumstances of hell were completely confused.

All of a sudden the head of the gods had an idea. "Aha! I've got it!" His idea had to do with the young man's parents who were already in hell and whose faces appeared as a human's, yet their bodies were like that of a horse. They were ugly and as skinny as a living skeleton. The god asked the devils to call for the parents. In front of the parents the god said to the young man, "If you don't speak up, I will kill your mother with this sword. How about that?" But the young man did not say anything. He kept quiet because his strong belief was that he could attain immortality only by means of fulfilling his agreement. This was the final request of the hermit, that of keeping silent. That is why, whatever happened, he tried to obey that request. Then the guard and the devils started to torture the parents, cutting their arms, hitting their bodies with a rope, and burning and cooking them in a huge pot with water or oil — just like tempura — human tempura. But the young man's power, his effort, his ability was still strong. He didn't say anything but kept silent right in the middle of his parents' screaming. Finally they were beheaded right in front of the young man's eyes. Yet, the mother said to the son, "Please keep silent. Don't worry about me. If you can be happy in keeping silent, don't worry about me." Then she cried, but the young man still tried patiently to keep silent.

This was a very difficult situation because of his mother's tortured screaming. He couldn't stand up in that situation because his mother completely threw away her own power for her son's happiness. Whatever the reason, she completely forgot herself and offered her body completely to her son. He could not help being deeply moved by the selflessness of her natural compassion to let him carry out his desire. It resulted in his giving up his selfish effort and speaking up.

In this story, "he spoke up" means that he returned to being a human being whose life is embraced by a warmth beyond any speculative effort. Before that he was not human — he had been trying to keep his own life by means of his own speculative power in order to achieve a certain goal. If you believe strongly that you can do anything just by your own power, you really want to accomplish your purpose by hook or by crook. The young man had a lack of human warmth because human warmth can be pushed away into a corner by speculative philosophy where warmth can never appear. That's why he kept silent under all circumstances except when he was right in the middle of his mother's complete compassion, which came from her forgetting herself. Her selflessness did not originate from her own abilities to make an effort. It completely relied on the big rhythm of the universe. Compassion flowed afresh in her breath and then she was able to give her life to her son. "Please keep silent — don't worry about me" was her voice of compassion speaking. So the compassion born of her selflessness brought the young man completely back to human warmth. At that very moment he spoke up.

Then in the story the old man appeared again and told the young man, "You will never be a hermit. If you kept silent in such a situation, I would have killed you because you would not have been human." If one becomes a hermit, one doesn't care about life or death, and thus one is not human but only lives in complete immortality. So the hermit said, "I would have killed you, but you spoke up." This meant that the young man had become human.

This is very important for us. You must be a human whose life is completely embraced by something which is beyond your effort and yet developed by your effort right in the middle of going beyond the self. Most people say to me, "You are Japanese, so your way of understanding is Japanese. I don't understand you because of the cultural differences." This is an example of human speculation, but not real humanity which is beyond your speculative abilities. The real human can exist anywhere as gently and exquisitely as the moon floating in the sky. The idea of the human you must be is much like a piece of paper with two sides or aspects. One is the human we speculate about and the other is the human beyond our speculation. When we completely accept these two aspects, we can live in peace.

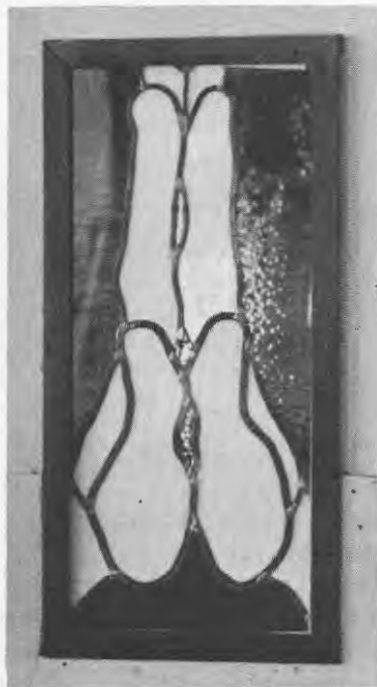
But we are really stubborn and stubbornness lets us believe that we can do anything. This is really arrogant. We believe, for example, that we can get peace through our own efforts. In the past we brought on two major wars, the first and second world wars, and yet we are going to repeat the same thing through our present efforts. How crazy we are! How stubborn we are! Underneath the surface of life, what is going on? Not peace. Not harmony. Always there is irritation and

fidgeting. Your life becomes really irritable. If your life is fidgety, you cannot do something with magnificent ease as though you felt you were nestled in the bosom of the grandeur of nature or as though you felt you were sitting comfortably in a soft, downy cushion. You feel wonderfully at ease while being embraced in the bosom of nature. At such a time you feel relieved. In order to feel relief, you have to be with all sentient beings — the boat, this shore, the other shore — all sentient beings. Understanding is important, but don't rush into thinking you have accomplished your understanding. Please take a little time. Then walk step by step like a turtle. I don't mean you should always be a turtle right in the middle of the freeway in Los Angeles. If you drive a car slowly just like a turtle on the freeway in Los Angeles, a policeman will immediately pick you up. I mean basically that if you really try to do something only in terms of your intellectual and rational understanding or your common sense, custom and habits, then your life can be carried to perfection only by means of your efforts, completely ignoring the place where you are before you row the boat. You have to be on board, with the river, micro-creatures, macro-creatures, the other shore, this shore and the sky. Then you can have a space in which to row the boat. But people don't do that. They are always rushing, rushing, rushing. If you are in a rush to be successful in something, people say what a brave, smart and nice guy you are. But the ground you stand on is very treacherous because there is no guarantee how long your success will last.

When your life sinks to zero, you will have no peace — only confusion to haunt you. This is always happening in the world. So what I want to tell you is: please don't forget that place where you are before you row the boat. First of all, let *your heart* become as soft and magnanimous as if you were nestled in the bosom of the grandeur of nature. Let *your consciousness* work on small things in everyday living, one by one, with attentive consideration. But if you have self-conceit, believing that there is nothing to prevent you from fulfillment by means of your own efforts, you are just like the young man in the novel, keeping silent constantly in order to succeed. Sure, you can do it, but I don't know whether it is an appropriate approach to ultimate being. In one's personal life, it doesn't seem to make so much trouble, but you can become a real troublemaker in public life because of the egoistic texture of your personality, characterized by lust, arrogance and ignorance. If everyone became egoistic, it would provoke war. Killing each other for what? In order to get peace. Under the beautiful flag of peace, we always fight and kill each other, because we are too arrogant. So Dogen Zenji tells us that the Way-seeking Mind (bodhi mind), practice, enlightenment, and nirvana go on in a circle without ceasing for even a moment. In English the Bodhi mind is called the Way-seeking mind, which means the glowing flame of life. Everyone has energy to compete in the realm of art or in the realm of sports. If you want to be an artist, you really need to burn the flame of life in the realm of art. That is how you create a masterpiece. You don't know why or how you are a good artist, but if there is energy strong enough to burn constantly in the realm of art, you will naturally become a good artist. This is the Way-seeking mind. Then if you continue to do this, very naturally, it is connected with practice. You know, between practice and the Way-seeking mind there is something like a magnetic attraction. If you continue to deepen this Way-seeking mind, its depth is exactly connected with the deepening of practice. The Way-

seeking mind is pulled in by practice and turns into practice. The moment you reach the depths of practice, you can no longer touch the real nature of practice with your efforts. If you come close to the profound, there is nothing to know or to do by way of your efforts, because there is something which draws you into enlightenment: the Way-seeking mind attracts practice, practice attracts enlightenment, enlightenment attracts nirvana, nirvana attracts the Way-seeking mind and so on. It all goes in a circle constantly.

Enlightenment means living softly and magnanimously as though sitting in the bosom of the grandeur of nature. This is enlightenment: living in peace and harmony. Nirvana means to live in peace and harmony in a practical way just like a turtle. This is nirvana — a practice which actualizes a peaceful life every day. So the Way-seeking mind, practice, enlightenment and nirvana are all like magnets. They attract each other. Your body, your character and all beings in nature are connected like this. You don't know, you don't understand, you can't touch your own real nature by trying to work out your salvation with just your own effort. Yet if you assiduously work on it, naturally, you are immediately drawn in and merge with nature. You attract the profound depth of your nature. The profound depth of your nature attracts you. Therefore, what you can do practically in your everyday life is to make the optimum living arrangements for inviting the profound depth of being to manifest itself as your life. This is nothing but the process of actualizing the lightness and magnanimity of your heart, which greatly facilitates your own effort, and something beyond your own effort.



*Katagiri-roshi's gassho,
Stained glass
by Narcissus Quagliata*