Then when the sun comes out and most people would be working, he relaxes.

Everything smells so clean and fresh! The sky is still overcast, but a break in the clouds allows a thin shaft of sunlight to spotlight a small circle of trees on a distant mountain. The light moves slowly over the ridges and valleys like some celestial being searching for something lost.

I detour by the garden to see how the vegetables are doing. All of them—squash, tomatoes, chard, onions, carrots, cucumbers, parsley, lettuce, broccoli, and cabbage—are trying to climb out of their beds. I dig a hole in the ground outside the garden area. It's damp two inches down. On my way back to the cabin I'll pick some fresh vegetables for dinner. Tomorrow morning I'll pull weeds and cultivate the ground.

By the time I get to the upper meadow, I find that Jack has almost finished splitting a pickup load of firewood. I call to him.

He calls back: "Just in time to help me load the truck!"

In less than a half hour we have the pickup bed filled with a three-week supply of salmon-pink madrone. Here on Marble Peak we are very fortunate to be able to choose between four different kinds of firewood: pine for kindling, madrone for quick hot fires, oak for slow hot fires, and manzanita roots for all-night suckers.

Driving back to the cabin, I tell Jack that the rain has soaked two inches into the ground and ask him if he thinks it's safe to have a fire.

"I was *planning* to build a fire tonight," he answers. Stopping by the garden, I take special care to pick the finest vegetables for dinner. It will be a special occasion. After a long summer fast, Agni, the ancient Indian god of fire, will return to our home to feast on fresh-cut madrone.

A *koan* is a tool which is used to awaken us to our original nature. The practice of *zazen* teaches us the way to handle our *koan*. When we allow a *koan* such as: "Why did Bodhidharma

come to China?" to sink into the depths of our mind, it leads us through the mindful activities of our daily life into our inmost request, our karmic nucleus. The seventeen hundred different *koans* are just seventeen hundred different kinds of tools suitable for awakening different kinds of personalities, or different levels of awareness. Each *koan* leads us closer to the original *koan*, the one at the center of our zen environment.

We are the original *koan*. We are the original question. To know our self is to beg the question. Begging is the way leading to our inmost request and a way of cultivating it. This inmost request is not just a whim of our ego. It is an innate expression of our original nature. It is only because of the activity of the discriminating, dualistic, thinking mind that we are not fully aware of our original *koan*. Strictly speaking, our inmost request is not ours, though we may be something that belongs to it.

Until we awaken our beggar's mind, we will have difficulty awakening our true nature. This is why our zen life pushes us gradually or suddenly over the precipice of our counterfeit life into the nonsupporting realm of reality which early Buddhists called *anitya* (impermanence or transience) and later Buddhists called *sunyata* (emptiness or void). It is the tendency of our human nature to cling to some false idea of permanency. But as long as we hold onto the hope of finding something secure or something permanent, in or outside ourselves, we will not be able to arouse our beggar's mind.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* William James tells about a seventeenth-century Christian woman who embarked upon a life of religious poverty with only one penny in her pocket. But as long as she clung to one penny's worth of faith in her old counterfeit life, God did not help her. It was only after she threw away her penny, and put all her faith in God, that she began to get a taste of God's support. As long as we cling to the idea of something permanent in this life, or the next, we keep a few pennies hidden in the sleeve of our beggar's robe. It is only after we throw away all our counterfeit

coins—only after we give up all absolutes, including the concepts of God, Buddha, and self—that we are ready to settle down where there is no settling down, in the time and place where everything is changing.

It is not easy for most Americans to appreciate the religious spirit of the beggar's mind. The Japanese beggar sage, Tenko-San, said that to be truly independent we must be willing to ask for our bare necessities. Usually we think true independence means *not* having to ask for anything, much less having to ask for our bare necessities. But until we are forced to beg for our bare necessities, we are still clinging to some counterfeit idea of ourselves and the world. Bare necessities are not just food, clothing, and shelter. Bare necessities include what is needed to find and cultivate our inmost request. Jesus was pointing to the beggar's mind when he said: "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." At first, we don't know what to ask for, how to ask for it, or whom to ask. *Zazen* is a way to find out what bare necessities are needed to realize our inmost request; *zazen* is a way to ask for the bare necessities; and *zazen* is the one from whom we ask.

As we practice *zazen* we find it easier and easier, as the years go by, to eliminate things and ideas we once thought were essential to our survival. Actually, most of the things we think are essential to our survival are only essential to the survival of our counterfeit self—our ego. But after stripping away our image of ourself, after clearing away unessential ideas and things, we may discover something essential is missing.

Suppose, as in my own case, we find that solitude and poverty are necessary to find, or cultivate, our inmost request. And suppose they are missing from our life. When we feel—in our guts—that it is impossible to realize ourselves without the bare necessities of solitude and poverty, we awaken in our original nature the dormant power of our beggar's mind. When our

conscious request and our inmost request are fully harmonized, our intuition and our power are expanded.

Necessity is the mother of intuitive power. Dogen Zenji pointed out, in his essay "Genjokoan": "Understand clearly that when a great need appears a great use appears also; when there is small need there is small use; it is obvious, then, that full use is made of all things at all times according to the necessity thereof." The requests of our ego are small needs, but the requests of our inmost request, our karmic nucleus, are great needs, needs that include everything and everyone. Once we awaken our great need, zen life rushes in to make full use of us. Zen life fills us and fulfills our inmost request.

To the ordinary, unawakened mind, the activities of the inmost request may appear egotistical or selfish. When we are not aware of the true nature of our karmic nucleus, it is difficult to understand what pushes us to do certain things. Our thinking mind jumps to the conclusion that whatever we do is done for some ordinary, logical reason. If it is difficult for our unawakened mind to understand our *own* inmost request, it is often impossible for us to appreciate the true nature of the inmost request of another person.

There is a zen story about a Buddhist monk who was also an artist. He charged high prices for his artwork and always insisted on being paid in advance. To the unawakened mind it appeared that this monk was just as greedy and money-grabbing as the most selfish worldling. The monk was called the stingy artist. Years later, however, it was learned that all the money the stingy artist earned went to fulfill three demands of his inmost request: he built and filled a secret warehouse to help the poor people in his province survive famines; he built a better road from his village to the National Shrine; and he built a temple for his master, who had passed away before he was able to accomplish his own inmost request. After the stingy artist satisfied all the demands of his karmic nucleus, he gave up painting for profit and retired to live a simple life in the mountains.

Sometimes we are fortunate to be able to work in the light, or full knowledge, of our inmost request. But at other times we must be content to work in darkness or ignorance. In the case of the artist-monk, we do not know if he realized from the first why he was moved to accumulate so much money. Perhaps he only realized the true nature of his inmost request later on. It really doesn't matter, except to our ego, if we work in ignorance or work in enlightenment. Eventually our inmost request will be awakened and completely fulfilled—if not by us, then by one of our successors.

Sometimes the demands of our inmost request may appear crazy to the ordinary, unawakened mind. When St. Francis of Assisi first awakened his inmost request, he understood only a part of it. He was not yet ready to accept his full *karma*, which was to rekindle the spirit of the whole Christian world. It is the tendency of the religious spirit to fall asleep from time to time, and when it does, a great need is born in human form to reawaken itself. Lama Govinda, a contemporary Tibetan Buddhist sage, expresses the religious situation this way: "When religion grows in age, faith turns into dogma, and experience is replaced by book-knowledge, virtue by adherence to rules, devotion by ritual, meditation by metaphysical speculation. The time is then ripe for a rediscovery of truth and a fresh attempt to give it expression in life." At the time of St. Francis, the Christian religion had begun to grow old and stale, and the inmost request of the age and culture was to arouse the original spirit of Christianity.

At first, Francis interpreted his inmost request as a divine order to rebuild an old church in his neighborhood. Perhaps it was just as well that Francis didn't fully appreciate the magnitude of the task he had accepted. But even though Francis did not recognize the great extent of his inmost request he *did* recognize its great power. There is no questioning the power of our karmic nucleus once it is aroused.

Francis robbed his father in order to get the money to restore God's church. But his *karma* soon caught up with him

and made it clear that the way to appease an inmost request is not to steal, or to borrow, but to beg. Out of the humiliation he experienced from being branded a thief, Francis aroused the spirit of his beggar's mind. He threw away his pride; he threw away his inheritance; he threw away his security; he cut himself off from his old hometown; and he began begging for his bare necessities—not just crusts of bread, but stones to rebuild the old church. Everyone thought he had lost his senses. Everyone except, perhaps, the stones with which St. Francis rebuilt the church. The stones must have known what later Christians found out, that the religious fool is not one that can be judged by ordinary standards.

Tenko-San, like St. Francis, Jesus, and Buddha, reawakened and cultivated the true spirit of religious begging. Tenko-San said that many people believe that it is impossible to engage in missionary work without money. He answered these skeptics by telling them that just the opposite is true; money hinders missionary work. He pointed out that work done by means of money is tainted by money; work done by means of power and position is tainted by power and position. True religion does not depend on money, or power, or position, or even intellectual knowledge. Tenko-San said a true religion is one in which a man with empty pockets is able to show others how to overcome suffering and find true freedom.

Religious begging, as it is ordinarily misunderstood, is an exchange. The monk begs from his neighbors for the bare necessities of life, and in return the neighbors receive a measure of good *karma*. In awakened begging there is nothing exchanged. When the zen beggar realizes that everything and everyone is Buddha-nature—that the enlightened and unenlightened, the sentient and insentient, are only projections of his own enlightenment or his own ignorance—then he knows that everyone from whom he begs is a projection of his own karmic nucleus. Awakened begging deepens and extends awareness. Whatever happens in our begging practice, whether we are helped or frustrated, we are skillfully directed by the in-

nate power of our original nature deeper and deeper into the center of our zen environment. According to an old zen saying, "The Way is not difficult, just avoid picking and choosing." If this is true, then a beggar's life is the Way. Everyone knows beggars can't be choosers.

VII

DROPPING OUT

"There!"

"Where?" Jack asks, stopping the truck.

"To your left about a hundred yards up the side of the mountain." I point to a doe and a buck grazing in front of some chaparral.

"Yeah. I see them now," Jack whispers. "I told you this morning I smelled a deer, didn't I?" He reaches for his rifle.

"Your sense of smell is like an animal's," I whisper back.

"Like a mountain lion's when I'm hungry for meat." He quietly opens the truck door and leaves it ajar. He stands still for a few minutes. The deer watch him with interest but don't seem alarmed. Jack walks up the road slowly, then raises the rifle and fires.

Bam! The head of the buck jerks, and the body collapses and slides downhill about ten feet. The doe, startled by the noise, takes off up the hill but then stops and looks back, puzzled for a moment, before continuing slowly on over the ridge.

Jack bleeds the dead buck and drags it down to the truck. I help him lift it into the pickup. I notice that the bullet hit under the jaw and went out through an eye. There was no suffering.