

ARTICLE

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Books

Many books come to me from all over the world at different times but there is too much flowery speech used in those supposed to be about Zen in many of them and, when it is not flowery, it becomes esoteric, or metaphysical or just plain rubbish. Sometimes, however, I get a book that has nothing whatsoever, officially, to do with Zen but which gives more of its true meaning than any of the specially written works. This is, of course, because the writer was not trying to write about Zen. Because of this I want to quote you a passage from a book I received as a present from one of you this month. It is called "The Colour of Canada" by Hugh MacLennan, and in it is the following passage, "The breaching of the frontier between Ontario and the West is still the greatest achievement in the history of Canada. In this age of masses and abstractions let it not be forgotten that this was the work of a very few men, that guts and imagination, working together, are the expression of the Divine in human life."

I do not doubt that Mr. MacLennan was referring to the Christian God when he spoke of the Divine, but this does not matter in the least. The expression of spiritual things is the expression of spiritual things whether Christian, Jewish, Mohammedan or Buddhist. Too many people are squabbling over nomenclature and doctrine when they should be looking at themselves and doing what they can to eradicate their own faults instead of criticizing others or arguing about useless philosophies. The important part of this quotation comes at the end – "that guts and imagination, working together, are the expression of the Divine in human life." Mr. MacLennan might just as well have written "Buddha Nature" instead of "Divine."

In a Zen temple everything is done to get the student away from the idea of looking for something special, which he calls enlightenment, and into a frame of mind where he lives purposefully and positively, using every one of his abilities to its fullest extent, for the good of others and himself, thereby expressing his Buddha Nature in his daily life. One of the reasons for giving people seemingly crazy koans is to get them working on something so hard that they eventually realize that to just go about their daily tasks, solving problems as they come naturally and spontaneously with both guts and imagination is, in itself, the full expression of enlightenment.

But man is a proud creature – this is too simple an explanation of the problem of life for him to believe it. So, the wily Zen teacher creates koans, designed specially for one student alone, which satisfies his craving until he is sufficiently religiously adult to realize that he does not need this specific prop any longer. And this process continues until he reaches his spiritual majority. Props should therefore not be despised. They are necessary at some stage in one's development just as teachers are also necessary. The

time comes however, when one realizes that they are not necessary, that one can go on living in peace without any such prop, doing that which is needed with guts and imagination and finding in the doing the expression of the Divine, the True Buddhahood, within oneself. The man who does not find this deeply spiritual place within himself is the one who is proud of his knowledge, his books, his intelligence – the man who is too proud to pick up a spade and dig the garden or a dishcloth and wash the dishes. Dogen Zenji himself despised manual work in comparison to learning when he first arrived in China and was taught the importance of finding the expression of Buddhahood in all aspects of life in one of the loveliest and most famous stories in his life history. Until the west ceases to regard intellectual Buddhism as superior to meditating and manual work it will never make any real progress in Zen and we shall go on having flowery rubbish printed in the name of religion and paying fancy prices to buy books printed on beautiful paper, bound in silk, containing worthless trash. Beauty is, of course, a wonderful thing but let us not sacrifice our true spiritual heritage for the happiness that mere beauty can bring. Even a dog asleep in the sun is happy. They who experience true spirituality have no need of happiness in the earthly sense for they know ecstasy.

Jiyu Kennett

Rev. Master Jiyu still had this book in her personal library at Shasta Abbey at the time of her death in 1996.

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