

First Things.....

They say the first thing one learns in a Zen monastery is to put one's shoes straight and at least in Japan there is always a sign to that effect right at the front door. It is even said that this is the first koan assigned to a trainee because if this point of first mind can be thoroughly understood the whole point of Zen training can be accomplished.

Too many people think that the whole idea is to regiment one's life as if the army would not do a better job of teaching this. No, no, no, a thousand times no! The purpose of the first koan is the calm and compassionate consideration of others, of all beings, always including oneself. Indeed, this is the point of mindfulness training as well.

To watch what one is doing as well as what one's mind is doing is the perfection of Bodhisattva practice. This manifests in the smallest of ways. When we take the time to replace the toilet paper roll that has run out, when we place our empty tea cup down carefully where it will not be knocked over, when we put down the toilet seat when we are done peeing, we benefit beings by helping to free them from the miseries of frustration, anger and judgmental mind. So easy and so wondrous!

Our ability to see what needs to be done and to do it arise out of the practice of mindfulness and calm compassion and it is this that makes the life of a community, whether of one, two or twenty-five possible.

This is why the putting of one's shoes straight is the first thing.

in gassho,

HKoten