



What is the Self?

Unmon said to the assembly, "Medicine and sickness mutually corresponds to each other. The whole universe is medicine. **What is the self?**" (Koan: **Blue cliff record: case 87**)

Unmon trained under the descendants of Matsu and Shih-tou, studying with Mu-chou, he would finally receive transmission from Hsue-feng. One said although it was hard to approach him, he had the "hammer and tongs to pull out nails and wrench out pegs", a reference to pulling out from all any reliance upon, thoughts, concepts and mental constructions.

Unmon is well known for his **questions**, there is a questioning which arises from curiosity, intrigue and ignorance, but there are questions that penetrate deeply into the core of our existence. Unmon would often ask the assembly a question and offer a response to his question- you are left to become the answer itself.

Someone asked Unmon, "It is said that one should not leave home (to be a monk) without one's parents' consent. How would one then be able to leave home?"

The master said "shallow!"

The questioner: "I do not understand."

The master, "Deep!"

Zen is in accord with the classic insight of Indian Buddhism that of 'dependent co-arising' for every action and thing is mutually related. This is the basis of Karma, ***what you do and what happens is not separate.***

We are not being confronted with **punishment of reward**, but the reality of life being intimately entwined as Unmon states 'mutually corresponding'. **A stray dog** is never a stray dog, it asks for care and in turn it offers companionship. If not companionship it asks for you to accompany it to safety, to a place of shelter. You and the stray dog are intimately corresponding. Can any of us really say such and such should not have happened, the happening is never separate from our life? The full presence of every occurrence is actually the embrace of life itself, irrespective of good or bad, right or wrong. On first reading it might seem Unmon is saying 'the universe is medicine **so what is your and my sickness?**' If we were to take this approach it would be quite revealing, for the answer is Self as separate is a sickness. What then, and how then does the universe heal the sickness of self as medicine?

How might you and I be brought home to what is essential, what continues to meet us in every moment. **LOOK!**

The whole universe is medicine! **Separation is the sickness**, but the universe refuses to harbour separation, if we act and believe it is so, it is not the universe which inflicts us, for it is the medicine.

Unmon is lifting the gaze of his hearers, you may know and feel the power of sickness, and you may be shrinking under the weight of ignorance, blocked by the limitation of your gaze, what is the medicine? 'Ask yourself **what is the self**' the universe is fully and completely open, what is peering back? What corresponds with you?

Please be careful this is not a philosophical answer, there is actually no figuring out required. The universe as medicine has arrived before the question is posed. Here Unmon cuts through all our attempts to place ideas on top of each other. **What is the self?**

Hakuin 17th century Zen master offers a comment "*when you pass through the impenetrable, there is no lingering; the whole universe is your guts..*"

When you have a shower you need soap. When you have a bowl, you need a spoon. When socks are put on, shoes are needed.

How and where do you meet this Self? One looking, One peering back, is there any separation here?