

'Intimacy'

Kyosei asked a monk, "What is that sound outside?"

"The sound of rain dripping," replied the monk.

Sei said, "Ordinary people are upside down, falling into delusion about themselves and pursuing outside objects."

"What about yourself, your Reverence?" asked the monk.

Sei said, "I am on the brink of falling into delusion about myself."

The monk asked, "What do you mean, 'On the brink of falling into delusion about yourself?'"

Sei said, "To attain the world of emptiness may not be so difficult, but to express the bare substance is hard."

Intimacy is a life field which is most desired, most fertile and inviting, life enhancing, yet also one which causes us great threat and unease. The mystical traditions value this mind and heart attitude above all others. Intimacy is a willingness to draw close to the hum of life. To see oneself in flow and wholeness as a dissolution of separateness. To inhabit our life in its entirety without splitting? Where is our life, where does it fall?

In this exchange the **falling rain** becomes a way of instruction-this is not a clever device, it is life itself. Is anything casual, where and when does the world arrive for us? Hearing rain is intimate, to know rain as our own life, to enter into the hearing as hearer and rain as seamless life brings us home.

We can say this is what meditation is. On and off the cushion, a non-evasive immersion, a bearing of our life in the moment it arrives, always arriving. We are learning to be intimate with breathing, with every impulse for and against, every moment of noticing. When we find ourselves wandering, pursuing or creating ideals, views and opinions-crafting entertaining ideas of this and that we turn to notice where we are and return to the breath. The sensations surrounding sitting, reluctance to feel or notice, tiredness, soreness, anxiety and the longing itself are embraced. This is the power and presence of intimacy-can I be with this, am I willing to get close to this life? This is training in presence, in intimacy; the summation of practice.

Our interpretations are less intimate than the full embodied experience of what is occurring. We do not have to get it right, or to be eloquent in our naming. The sun on our skin is more powerful than knowing the constituent elements which make for sunlight. Our dog Lucy woke up, our eyes meet and she went into a ritual of rolling, scraping her mouth along the floor, kicking out with ecstatic energy. In this moment she spoke of the sheer delight of being alive un-thought wakefulness. I was captured, not a word, no demands, no

explanations, no regrets or hesitant concerns for what comes next. Zhaozhou was asked **“Does a dog have Buddha nature?” He responded “No”** (Mu) Sei says **“to attain the world of emptiness may not be difficult, but to express the bare substance is hard.”** To be really intimate is the way.

In this exchange between Sei and the monk, how could the monk have responded? How might you and I respond?

Our dualistic mindset functions to divide and separate. From a functional phenomenal point of view, we do name, categorise and delineate our responses and act with a sense of self-agency as self-determination. Sei speaks to the pursuing of outside objects, is our life out there? Is our life established when the right objects of desire turn up or accord with our identifications.

Uniqueness and variety are not enemies of unitive living. We celebrate difference and we give space for the intersections of life. Is any of this separate from us? Practice is a practice of non selection, we cannot pick and choose, the rain falling is not heard without ears to hear, the plants which grow, the food on our plates, the birds bathing in the garden freely arrive. Allowing our minds to be large, our awareness to be wider and deeper and to allow our separating self to soften and fall away connects us. Dogen said **“The ten thousand things come forth and confirm us,”** There is not a moment, or an exchange which is outside. Neither is removing the stream of events and encounters in order to find unity.

Why did Sei respond to the monk **“I am on the brink of falling into delusion about myself”?** Intimacy is lost once we attach to our views our discriminations, remaining in the world of thoughts, being caught with correct definitions and naming is secondary to the immediate presence of falling rain.

The gospel of Thomas: “when you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside and the above like the below... and when you fashion eyes in the place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and a likeness in place of likeness; then will you enter the Kingdom.”

This saying appears strange language as a kind of upside down awareness. In the midst of an ecological crisis, loss of biodiversity, of divisions in race, culture and shared social life, we find an insight into the solutions we need. So with our own personal life we are constantly learning to engage and become close to the influences, and factors which create our life. The closer we become to the wanted and unwanted, the presence and flow of our unique spirit we become alive.

Paul Sanders

The Gospel of Thomas expresses wisdom required to resolve these contradictions, analysis is important, understanding of the roots of illusion are important, most importantly we resolve them as intimacy with the All. A reversal of consciousness which see life as out there, objects to be rearranged, improved, destroyed results in a subject object tension. A sensitive and intuitive awareness of how we form divisions within our mind and a gathering intimacy with this very moment enables us to see the delusions of separation.

The language and instruction of both sayings speaks to the unbinding, unburdening nature of intimacy. Daily tensions and challenges of making sense of meeting the constant arrival of life in all its forms, is not removed. Sei speaks to us, once we fall into divisions of outside, inside, there and here, we lose the seamless streaming of life. He discloses, to talk and speak, to engage is necessary, yet, we so easily move off the moment of intimacy once naming and explanations come into the foreground and take prominence. Once we pursue life at a distance, defined by the objects of mind-something of the vibrant and power of the moment is blunted.

Meditation does not cancel our capacity to investigate, to study, and to understand the factors at work in the phenomenal world; it simply invites us to step outside the realm of constant mental and emotional divisions we create-We inhabit the world we form up.

The rain falling, the calls of the magpie, the roaring noise of a truck, going through its gears, are not outside our mind.

The ice melting, the rising seas, the fires in California, the peace makers, the hungry, the crumbs falling from our plate are not outside our mind. The relief we discover is that our mind is large, immense; this is the Kingdom of God Jesus points to. To enter and awake to this realm simply requires permitting the discriminating mind to soften down, to withdraw its tendency to divide the world up. When the rain falls, when the sun pokes through the clouds, when the angst forms up in body and mind, about the state of our earth, be close to that, as close as it being your own very Self. This is true entering, a most intimate meeting.