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THE SERMON OF NO WORDS

THERE is an ancient saying: 'Better an inch of practice than a foot of preaching.' It refers to the sermon preached by the body itself, through action and without speaking.

The sermon of words and phrases is the finger pointing to the moon, the fist knocking at the door. The object is to see the moon not the finger, to get the door open and not the knocking itself; so far as these things do achieve their objects they are well. The object of the Buddha's life of preaching was not to turn words and phrases. The Diamond Sutra compares his sermons to a raft, which is only an instrument for reaching the far shore. The sermon which is an instrument can be discarded after a time, but the real preaching—which is not discarded—is the preaching by the body itself.

As to what that preaching may be, the truth of it is very profound, but in simple language it means that others receive right inspiration from that man. It is said that when a Bodhisattva has continued his spiritual practice for three kalpa-ages he is qualified to be a Buddha. After a hundred ages, his appearance becomes majestic. This does not mean anything outwardly magnificent, but it means that in helping others

the manner in which the thing is done is of first importance, and through the force of his wisdom and compassion there manifests in him a peculiar dignity and tenderness. By contemplating the form of Bodhisattvas like Kannon and Jizo, one's heart becomes somehow softened, but along with that there is something awe-inspiring which cannot be gainsaid. When a man feels it within him all the time, it is naturally reflected in his outward appearance, and love and respect are attracted to him from others.

What gives us inspiration is the sermon of action of the Bodhisattva. He has the power to do it without uttering a word. But it is not to be confined to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. For religious and other teachers, for all who stand in authority whether over many, as head of a household with many dependants, or as employer of a single man or girl, it is all-important.

A sermon is not something said by the Buddha long ago, or prated nowadays from a pulpit. The sermon of words is like a sort of advertising puff; but the real sermon is when the employer acts as a right employer, the servant as a right servant, and so with the merchant and official. All things, dogs and cats, trees and grass, things animate and inanimate, have all so to say their right path, and, so far as they keep to it without faltering, it is the sermon of action.

A poem of Sontoku expresses it: Without voice or incense, heaven and earth are ever repeating the unwritten scripture.

The man called Reibun was realized when he saw the peach blossoms; the man Kyogen when he heard a stone strike against a bamboo. There are instances of men who having matured their spiritual training were then enlightened on seeing the flying petals and falling leaves of autumn. The Buddha himself had his great Realization on seeing the brilliance of the morning star. In the same way the mountains

and rivers and sun and moon and stars, every morning and night, are preaching the sermon to bring us to realization.

We should understand that it is never effective merely to rebuke others harshly. Let each of us keep to his own role and play it properly; then a beauty will manifest spontaneously; high and low will be affected and their conduct will change to harmony and virtue.

Since the self is a creation of the mind and good and bad too are from the mind (or, rather, correspond to the spiritual beauty or ugliness of the man), the first thing is to train the mind. Training produces a charm and power which appear externally and affect others. There are various ways and means in spiritual training, but the first thing is faith. One's faith may be true or false, right or mistaken, shallow or deep, high or low and so on, and Zen master Dogen warns us: 'Do not be led astray to the worship of godlings of the hills or other such, but believe in the teaching of the Buddha and prostrate yourself before the Buddha, the sublime incarnation of limitless power and virtue.'

When this reverent faith bubbles up in us, our everyday sinful nature of itself begins to shine with the light of compassion, and the beauty and power of the true Heart break forth and we move in harmony with the Buddha-light. When this happens the virtues of the Buddha-body are ever in our breast, from head to foot our action is prompted by the Buddha. Such is the life of faith, and in it every incident preaches the sermon of action.

Those who have not light in their hearts are always in darkness, a darkness in which a hundred demons come and go. Under their sway, life goes from darkness to darkness, ordinances of heaven are broken, the way of man is transgressed, and finally one is broken, to suffer the agonies of Hell.

Faith is all-important to man, and it is given to us by

religion. There are different religions also, but in Japan Buddhism has come down in an unbroken stream for well over a thousand years and has deeply penetrated the life of the people. If today the people live in the faith of Buddhism and in the Bodhisattva spirit preach the sermon of action, we not only glorify our own people but demonstrate the sermon of no words to the peoples of the world, and this is the supreme task today.