

One occasion  
One opportunity

Ichigo ichi e

一期一会



"One occasion" refers to one full life span. The Buddha taught that people are born and then they die, and then they are born again--there is a circle of rebirth, again and again. A person's life, one whole life between birth and death, is one meaning of "one occasion."

In the world of the tea ceremony this one occasion is especially important. This encounter takes place only once in this lifetime. No tea ceremony is a repetition of any other. The tea utensils are never identical, nor are the guests. If everything was a repetition of an earlier ceremony, there would be no joy and nothing to look forward to. Each time, the people who gather together are different. The joy at this combination of tea utensils and our everyday life energy is always fresh and always new. This direct perception is deeply embedded in the tea ceremony. This is why both the host and the guests put true effort into preparing and attending the tea ceremony. Right here, on the Path, we manifest that place of the guest and the host becoming one.

Yamanoue Soji, a disciple of tea master Rikyu brought this phrase to life, teaching that from the moment you enter the *tea house* garden until the time you depart, you should respect your host as though this were a 'once in a lifetime encounter'—no matter what tea season it was, whether using a kettle or an open fire, inside the tea room or outside in the garden. For the guests and for the host, every instant was a matter of "one occasion, one opportunity," the host caring for the guests, the guests respecting the host.

The tea master named Ii Naosuke had a deep respect and understanding of tea ceremony. In his work "Anthology of One-time Encounters in Tea", (Satō Ichī'e-shū) he writes that;

"there is deep significance in a single encounter (ichi'e). I speak of the very interactions of chanoyu tea practice as *ichi go ichi'e*, such that, however often host and guest may meet, when aware of how this day's meeting can never be repeated, then it is truly a once-in-a-lifetime encounter. From long before the event the host will be concerned with

a thousand things, exhausting kindness and sincerity in order that there is naught that is discordant. The guests too must understand that it will be difficult to meet like this again, and appreciating their host's plan, no detail too trifling, should participate with true sincerity. This is what is meant by *ichigo ichi'e*. Both host and guests, as they should, always and ever never showing any sign of disregard, that is the very mystery of my anthology of one-time encounters."

Each master's own understanding of tea ceremony is his very own--this is another variety of "one occasion, one opportunity." For example, even if you have tea with the same people, still it is not the same occasion. This is how he taught.

Life is always in flux. Nothing is eternal or fixed.

Will I go first or will someone else go first  
We don't know if it will be today  
We don't know if it will be tomorrow  
Those who are being sent off first,  
Like drops of dew,  
We never know which falls next

This morning a strong young person  
Tonight nothing left but a skeleton  
How pitiful, how foolish

These are the words of Shinran Shonin. In his writings he teaches us the transience of human life.

"Will I go first or will someone else go first." Will I die before them? Will they die before me? It might even be today, I don't know! Or could it be tomorrow?"

The person whom I thought I would be sending off, will they actually go before me? We can't know how life goes. Like the dew of dawn, like the raindrops clinging to the branch, we can never know which will fall first. Will the drop about to fall be first? Or will it follow later? Each one falls eventually, just like each person's life.

In the morning we send off a person with a fine healthy energetic face. In the evening, we might receive them with no life left in them.

Our life energy is immeasurable, but if we think about life's fragility, about the transience of life, there's also melancholy there.

This is true only if you look at the form and don't see the essence. Is the world a sharp place ... a melancholy place? This isn't about the shape or form but about what's within our Mind. Is this a fortunate or an unfortunate world? This is just a matter of Mind.

Then one would have to ask, "Don't they know about the joy of the Buddha Dharma?" We can also put it this way;

A monk asked Master Dairyo, "What is the Pure Body of the Buddha? What is the eternal truth?"

Master Dairyo replied, "The mountain flowers bloom like brocade, The valley streams are brimming blue as indigo."

The mountain flowers appear everywhere, in all directions. They grow up high, and then they fade and fall. The river's waters flow onward; never the same scenery twice. Yet within that changing flow that never repeats, we find no discrimination. Seeing that mountain stream our life energy can be found there. Seeing—it becomes clear that it's not about the world of form, but the world of Mind.

How do we receive this world, in what manner do we perceive it? Here is where the essence

of our life is found.

Time is thought to be something that flows from the past through the present into the future. This is the common way of thinking about time. But if we have a vow with a plan and a goal, we realize the time that goes from the future to the present as well. A vow is raised, and we decide that in our life we want to do this one thing for sure. As we use our life for this vow, it gives our life bright radiance, and each and every thing is used for bringing into actuality this vow and goal. We make effort, and the joy of realizing this goal goes beyond words. This is the time that flows from the future into the present.

But this still involves designing scenery in our heads. Where is the true life energy there? Not in our heads! Our living life energy is truly only present in this very moment, right here, right now. Continuously being in this moment, digging into right now—this is the true life energy.

In Buddhism it's taught that the mind of the past, present, and future is ungraspable. We can't grab hold of these moments.

The mind of the future is not yet actualized, so of course it's not yet real. But what about the mind of NOW? In the time we take to say "now," it's already past. This is why we can't grasp the mind of the present. In talking about the present we've already created a conceptualization about something that's past. We have to see that this "mind of right now" can only be this moment's life energy.

The Heart Sutra says to practice the deep prajna. Does that mean there is a shallow prajna as well? Shallow prajna is just a mental understanding of prajna. Even though we have a body, we have to forget that body completely and manifest Buddha Mind. We understand this with our heads, but that isn't the actual experience of it. If it can't be used, it's only shallow prajna. Deep prajna is that life energy alive NOW, HERE. In deep wonder we perceive it vividly alive as it actually exists. This great wonder has to be experienced directly. About this, Shido Munan Zenji has said, "This deep prajna is to lose track of our body completely." We can't cling to concerns about our body. While having a body we forget it completely. We have to take it this far.

In the Vimalakirti Sutra, Vimalakirti says to the Bodhisattva Manjusri, who has come to visit him because he is sick, "Manjusri, you did so well to come and visit. You came well without any coming and you left without any leaving." In this way Vimalakirti greets Manjusri Bodhisattva. Manjusri Bodhisattva replies, "Yes, that is so. Once I come I do not come twice, and once I have left I do not leave twice. And why? There is nothing that comes and nothing that goes. There is no place to go to and nothing to see." In this way Manjusri answered.

If we look at this rationally, there is no way we can possibly understand what he's talking about. But if we have directly touched our living energy, then it's clear. If we are thinking about our own doings and motions and actions, that is dualistic perception only. That can't be called realization of the true living energy. If we are seeing from a dualistic point of view, that can't be called true seeing. Just as Hakuin Zenji has said in the Song of Zazen, "Whether going or returning we cannot be anyplace else." This is also what the next lines say: "Realizing the thought of no thought as thought, whether singing or dancing we are the voice of the Dharma." In each and every instant and each and every place our total energy is absorbed into what we do. Only then, for the first time, can our deep wonder at life energy be truly experienced. We have to realize it to this point or it's only a world of concepts, and that's of no use at all.

On this point the Sixth Patriarch has said about this "zenjo" or samadhi: "Zen" is to let go of all external strata; "jo" is to have no unaligned thinking within. Zenjo is taught in this way. We have various forms--the form of being a man or woman, of being young or old, of being rich or poor, good or bad. There are so many ways to describe people, but to put aside all of these is

Zen. If we think something is good, we get caught on an idea of good; if we think it is bad, we get caught on what is bad. People are like that. We are happy when praised, but if we're criticized we become perturbed.

If we only think about having a vivid lively form, we become caught on that. No matter what happens in our life, it's only a reflection in a mirror, it's all phenomena. If we aren't caught on each and every thing that happens in our life, that is Zen. If we're not caught on our own form, and not caught on each and every thing that happens to us, then our mind is not moved around. As long as we're caught on our own form and appearance, our mind can't see objectively. Not getting caught is "zen," and to not be blinded is "jo." "Jo" is to be alive and living among all the various forms and appearances of the world and yet not be taken in by these forms.

In our mind there can't be the smallest shadow whatsoever; we can't give attention to any shadow at all. If there's nothing to care about, and nothing to get caught on, living each and every moment not caught on anything, then this is "zenjo" or samadhi.

Because we get caught on form and shape, we get moved around when people praise or criticize us. We get caught when we win and we get caught when we lose. In this manner our mind is always off-balance. To be caught on nothing inside or out, we have to hold on to no division between inside and outside.

It's said that flowing water doesn't become stagnant, while water that doesn't flow can become fetid. Our mind can be always flowing and flowing and flowing, new and new and new. If we stop rather than remaining in transformation, we become attached. It's not that we shouldn't see and hear, but we shouldn't add a small self each and every time. No matter what situation we're in, we don't stop but keep going forward like flowing water. Our true nature is just like this: a pure and clear mind that does not get caught on external things. We see the outside world clearly and vividly, but we don't get moved around by what is there.

This is zazen, and zazen isn't about not hearing, not seeing, and not speaking. It's nothing so difficult as that. While seeing, our mind doesn't stop there. While hearing, our mind does not stop there. While working, our mind does not stop there. We open our eyes and see the world clearly, but we aren't moved around by it. To see it but let each thing go is samadhi.

Regardless of the situation, we can't close our eyes. Eyes wide open, our zazen is alive. We relate to the world without having our mind pulled this way and that way. We don't wobble, we have our own way of being, and we don't get caught on that either. We have to creatively and inventively work on our mind state all day every day. It can't be done conceptually. This is why Shido Munan Zenji said we have to lose track of mind and body completely. "The one who wins has to take the resentment, the one who loses cannot sleep at night, the one who is not concerned with winning or losing is peaceful whether asleep or awake."

For doing koans and entering samadhi this living mind has to be tasted and realized clearly. If we truly use our mind in this aligned way, then moving is Zen and sitting is Zen too. No matter what we do the whole day long, we are in a place of peace. From morning until evening and from evening until morning, our mind is not stopped by any little thing. If we can continue this all day and all night, then eternal life is realized in one moment.

When we live in each and every moment we know each moment's radiance. That is our truth and what makes human relationships work with each occasion being one opportunity.

This is Buddha's teaching of continuous clear mind moments. It is actualized in each sitting and each meeting that will never be repeated. In each and every moment do it completely. In this is the joy and light of life.