

The geese know no confusion

Kari ni meiri no I nashi

雁無迷離意



This phrase is found in a couplet:

The geese know no confusion
Water does not intend to reflect shadows

In Japan it is common to see geese flying in the autumn sky at evening, without limit, without hurrying. This autumn scene is very familiar to the Japanese. To see the geese perfectly harmonized in flight touches us deeply in our hearts and in our awareness.

"When it starts to get dark you come home from playing! The birds all go home in the evening too! That bird at the front is the dad, and the bird at the back is the mom! Aren't they all well behaved?" As children we were taught by the geese in these ways.

In autumn the geese fly south to avoid the oncoming cold, and then with the warmth of spring they return. This migration is a natural way of protecting their lives. They do not go against the natural way of existence and engage in blind, unnecessary movement.

Without thinking about shining it shines,
the moon
without thinking about reflecting it, it reflects
the Sarasawa pond.

When water is calm and clear, without fail the moon in the sky will be reflected there. Whether the water is that of a pond, a lake, an ocean, or a muddy puddle, if it is still, then without fail the moon is reflected. Yet the water has no intention of reflecting something; it is not trying to produce a reflection.

As it says in the Zen phrases, a mirror reflects just what comes to it. If a Westerner stands in front of it, it becomes and reflects a westerner; if a Chinese person comes before it, the mirror manifests the form of a Chinese person. There is no intention there. Each thing is manifested just as it is, and then when it departs, there is nothing remaining. This is not only about water but about the mind that each and every one of us has since birth.



Even though scientists have shown that while in the womb we already are in some ways influenced by our brain capacities and our heredity, when we are born our essence remains pure. Yet immediately after birth we are touched by so many external stimuli, coming through our senses, influencing all of our brain cells and being absorbed and stored.

From sixteen months of age, we are able to perceive "one." This is prior to an understanding of good and bad; one could say that this is the mind of God. God gives the rain to both the good and the bad. The compassion of the Buddha is the same. The vow of Amida is to liberate all beings, regardless of age or wealth; every single one who seeks liberation will be liberated regardless of their status. This is the true vow.

At around two years only the mind understands "two," and when "two" is understood ego perception comes into being. When awareness of self comes into play, awareness of good and bad arises as well. We want to be thought well regarded, and we don't want to lose. We can calculate what is better for us. A human being as an individual is born from here, and from here also come science and religion and social manners and common dualistic ideas about how things are. It is frequently said that our mind as it is cultivated in our first three years is the mind with which we live for one hundred years. At three we have already created the base from which we will live for our entire life.

How we will live in society comes from this base. Our challenge and struggle in being human begins from here. From here begins our deep struggle in wanting to improve and not give up and to seek without ceasing and at the same time from here arise those possessive emotions that want to protect our own ego and world. With these emotions we want to both push away and be above others. We want to improve ourselves, and we hurt others to make ourselves central in everything. Intensely seeking out and pushing away simultaneously. Living with this two-edged sword, both sides of which cut simultaneously, is the challenge of being human, and for liberating people from this dilemma we have religion.

We cannot throw our ego away completely, but decline ownership of it and return to our origin prior to our ego. To awaken to that is the subtle flavor of zazen. When we forget our physical body and loosen our egoistic and extraneous thinking, as our body and mind become quiet, for the first time we can receive this world as it actually is. No matter how evil or stupid someone is, if they do zazen and realize that world of one, they can see things exactly as they really are, as one living whole truth. If we can receive this and accept it, then even while living in a world of discrimination we can support all people and forgive everything that happens.

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To not be separated from the true way of things is the true nature of our mind. While being in the world to forget ourselves completely and become one being with the other person: this is our true original quality.