

Everyday Life is the Path

Joshu asked Nansen: 'What is the path?'

Nansen said: 'Everyday life is the path.'

Joshu asked: 'Can it be studied?'

Nansen said: 'If you try to study, you will be far away from it.'

Joshu asked: 'If I do not study, how can I know it is the path?'

Nansen said: 'The path does not belong to the perception world, neither does it belong to the nonperception world. Cognition is a delusion and noncognition is senseless. If you want to reach the true path beyond doubt, place yourself in the same freedom as sky. You name it neither good nor not-good.'

At these words Joshu was enlightened.

Talk by Norman Fischer here: <http://foxyurl.com/SG3>

This koan reveals a truth that can be disappointing to many seekers. Wouldn't it be great to have some great transcendental experience that enlightened us through and through and made us happy, or at least able to deal with the rest of our life with unperturbable equanimity? But no, it is all so ordinary - just about paying complete attention to our ordinary mundane-seeming lives.

At first glance it seems it should be so easy to be normal and ordinary, but strangely this seems so very difficult for us humans. We spend our lives being discontented with what our life is and trying to improve ourselves in endless ways. We have to show that we are somehow 'special.' Or we want to organise, control, adjust things around us, picking and choosing how they should go, instead of appreciating and embracing and ENJOYING them the way they ARE. Also, as Barry Magid comments,

'we stay continually worried and preoccupied lest some unacceptable or vulnerable part of ourselves remains undefended. Strangely enough, the aspects of ourselves of which we are the most frightened are the very things we have most in common.....)

My teacher makes us do a practice of sitting opposite someone and continuously asking the question 'What does your practice ask of you?' I notice this question makes me feel so uncomfortable lately. It's easy to trot out superficial answers, but

not so easy to reveal what you really feel and think to someone you don't know too well.

When we can 'name things neither good nor not-good' and can accept them as they are we are doing well, but this does not happen overnight - it took Joshu 30 years of practice from his initial realization.

Spring comes with flowers,

Autumn with the moon,

Summer with the breeze, winter with snow.

When idle concerns don't fill your thoughts, that's your best season.

-- Wu-Men