

Misha Merrill 07-07-2010



Misha was ordained a Zen priest in 1988 by Les Kaye Roshi in the lineage of Shunryu Suzuki-Roshi of the San Francisco Zen Center. She received Dharma Transmission from him in 1998 and has been leading a meditation group in Redwood City since 1993. She also teaches young children at the Peninsula School of Menlo Park.

Determination and Effort

Before we began the talk, Misha made the observation that *dana*, or generosity, by itself is a path to freedom. There are many different ways to practice generosity, and it can be beneficial to be creative in your generosity.

She had recently received a notification about the Second Harvest Food Bank (<http://www.shfb.org/Page.aspx?pid=191>) which is sponsoring a campaign for feeding school children during the summer when they do not receive free or reduced-price school meals. She will donate her teachers *dana* for this evening to this campaign.

The talk this evening is about determination and effort. When we want to do something, we have determination. When actually carry it out, we are showing effort.

*Talk is always easy
Practice always hard
It's no wonder people try to make up for
their lack of hard practice with easy talk
But the harder they try, the worse things get
The more they talk, the more wrong they go
It's like pouring on oil to put out a fire
Just foolishness and nothing else*

- Ryokan

Talk is like eating a picture of a rice cake – there is no nourishment. There is a story of ancient china about a Minister Shu, who would talk about dragons all the time. One day, a dragon heard about the Minister, and out of curiosity decided to visit him. When

the dragon looked in the window of Minister Shu, the Minister fainted dead away. Talk was no match for reality.

The Buddha teaches us to rely on our own experience.

...don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, 'This contemplative is our teacher.' When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness' — then you should enter & remain in them.

- Kalama Sutta

This is your birthright.

As Ryokan notes, practice is hard, and it's no wonder that people try to make up for practice with talk. This is especially true with people from Western countries. The tendency in the West is to study something, and read all about it, thinking "That's it. I'm done"

Our delusions cover us. When one delusion drops away, and we feel we have made progress to seeing more clearly, we often don't realize that there are many more coverings and delusions to be shed. Ideas and opinions are not reality. Indeed, attachment to ideas prevents freedom.

In the book, *Novice to Master: An Ongoing Lesson in the Extent of My Own Stupidity*, Soka Morinaga relates the story of a London student who had been meditating for 6 to 7 years, and complained that someone had stepped on his foot in the Underground that morning. He was disappointed that he had become irritated, and wanted to know what it would take to find the heart that does not move. His teacher replied that he already had the mind that does not move – the incident had occurred that morning, and he was still carrying it. What he should strive for is the mind that moves freely. We should flow with the tides in effortless effort. Look at the clouds – they do not strive to be anything, they do not battle, they just move.

In Misha's garden at home, a sweet pea fell into a redwood stump. By doing so, it was protected from pests, and flourished. All it needed to do is what it does.

We should practice all the time. When driving, and someone tries to cut you off, if they succeed, you may feel anger. Or, perhaps, you don't let them in. Or, perhaps, you let them in and feel sanctimonious about it. None of these actions are skillful.

What is it that makes us want to be someplace else, or things to be different than they are?

When you take a shower, can you just take a shower and enjoy it without having your mind skitter all over the place? Can you enjoy a ice cream cone, and also accept that every ice cone comes to an end?

The longer we practice, the more coverings fall away. However, there may be a honeymoon period, followed by a plateau during which nothing seems to happen. Can you sustain the effort during that period?

It is not about the circumstances of your life, but in how you meet them. Can you enjoy each moment? We never know how much longer we've got, so enjoy each moment as it comes.

*I have always known
That at last I would
Take this road, but yesterday
I did not know that it would be today.*

- NARIHIRA (9th century)