

“What is the Most Important Thing”? **December 2006 newsletter**

The following is a dialogue between Suzuki Roshi, author of “Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind” and a student:

Student: “What is most important for Zen students?”

Suzuki Roshi: “The most important thing is to find the most important thing”.

How do we find the most important thing? For many of us the sense of 'the most important thing' is an intuition that we are here for more than making our daily bread, finding security or even our own enjoyment. No one else can really answer this question for us; it requires digging deeply into our own soul/spirit life.

The challenge of our everyday life is that so many urgent yet not fundamentally important items vie for our attention. Our daily 'to do list' always seems to make things other than 'the most important thing,' most important! How often do we create an extreme inner pressure- physically and mentally- as if we might die if that e-mail, phone call or other task were not handled immediately? How often is this really true?

Now, it is of course helpful to be responsive to the needs of others and take care of 'what is on our plate'. The questions are: what do you devote yourself to and what is the center of gravity of your life?

For those of us who have the luxury of being relatively free from concerns for food, shelter and warmth, a profoundly spiritual/human question is toward what will I dedicate myself to today? Amazingly, the busiest of people can almost always find time for that which is truly important.

If we look at the great traditions, from west to east, we will see different words for the same qualities. In the west, Truth, Beauty and Love are often used to express the highest and deepest transcendent qualities. In the east, these same values are often called Wisdom and Compassion. In essence, all paths point toward something larger than the self. They ask us for dedication to a practice as well as to a devotional attitude that becomes foremost in our life. This is called being on a path.

Those most moved by truth might become monks, scientists or philosophers either professionally or in another way. Their passion will be toward true understanding and meaning, not merely ego gratification.

Those most moved by beauty will thrill in the dance- i.e. the various manifestations of life through form, color, sound, pattern etc. Artists, naturalists and mathematicians are often taken by this quality.

The lovers amongst us seek the deep connection that only happens when the veil of our separateness lifts. Sometimes this is expressed as dedication to others in the form of service, care-giving, parenting, etc. Sometimes this appears as devotion to God, Life, the planet or something else that is 'larger than self.'

At a deep level, though we can relate to all these doorways and they are not at all separate, some are more resonant than others for each person. Whichever quality most ignites your soul, it is essential that your life have ample opportunity to express, practice and dwell in this arena. Without this expression, there will always be a lingering sense of dissatisfaction, the feeling- “is that all there is?”

Whether one resonates with spiritual or secular language the question is the same: am I remembering the most important thing? Deeply investigating this question might be a doorway to the most important thing!