

## IGNORANCE

Kogen Seiju

According to Buddhism our fundamental problem is a deep, pervasive ignorance of our true situation. The Sanskrit term is *Avidyā*, which means to “not know” or “not see.” It is the basis for Dukkha, the first of the Four Noble Truths; and it is an important principle of Buddhism.

Ignorance is extensively covered in all Buddhist traditions, but do we recognize the ignorance that is distorting our understanding of our own lives? What we need to realize is how pervasive our ignorance is. After all, we may be very successful in our job, well regarded by our peers, etc., so we believe we have some sense of “how things are.” We figure that clearing away our ignorance is a matter of better information or a subtler calculation. We’ll just sit down and “put our minds to it” and sort everything out.

This approach and mode of thinking is part of our profound confusion – rather than clearing the air it only deepens our ignorance. The problem is that we become enamored with the distinctions and sensations that are arising. In an effort to make sense of things we divide and discriminate between our experience and our world. This may lead to conventional success within society, but Buddhism warns that this undermines peace and understanding.

There is a famous line from “The Awakening of Faith” which summarizes the situation succinctly, “Suddenly a thought arises, this is called ignorance.” The distinctions and differences which animate our lives are delusions. We have to realize that, fundamentally, we are NOT clearly seeing what is before us. As long as we believe in our perception of our world, we will be unable to see through our confusion and the conflict it enables. Our discriminating mind dazzles us with its distinctions but muddies the situation and blinds us to the underlying condition. The mind of thoughts, memories, and emotions is too turbulent to reveal the profound peace and harmony of the fundamental ground.

This is when the Zendo is an invaluable resource. The still, silent environment is the nurturing space for our whole-hearted efforts to disappear into our breathing. If thinking is ignorance, how do we realize the moment before thinking? Dharma activity selflessly manifests each new arising moment; however, we cannot manifest dharma activity if we are caught in our subjective busyness. We must dissolve our attaching mind through complete exhaling. Exhaling disappears into silence which effortlessly embraces everything.

There are many teachings to help us dissolve our attaching mind but practicing in a Zendo will always be a straightforward way to proceed. When we unify with our breathing, distinctions disappear into the physical sensations of breathing. The Zendo is one place where we can always let go of everything. Die in your breathing and resurrect as a new self in a new world.