

Daizui's "It will be gone with the other."

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A monk asked Master Daizui:
"When the great kalpa fire flares up,
will it perish or not perish?"

"Yes, it will perish."

"Will it be gone with the other?"

"Yes, it will be gone with the other."

In the mythology of India, there comes a time, in a future so distant we cannot imagine it, when a great cosmic fire destroys everything. What happens then? Will everything be obliterated? This is the question of the monk. Master Daizui's answer is simple: "Yes."

Because we know people die, we can imagine our death. Because we can imagine our death, we can imagine the death of the universe. We all wish that something of ourselves, some personal testimony to our existence, survives our death. We know that the body will perish, but what of that elusive "it"— call it soul or spirit—will it survive the great kalpa fire?

"Will 'it' perish, or will 'it' not perish," the monk asks.

Master Daizui's answer is clear: "It will perish."

Quite disappointed, the monk grasps at a straw:

"Then 'it' will be gone with the other [the body]"

"Yes, 'it' will be gone with the other."

Master Daizui thus delivers the finishing blow, the coup de grâce.

A similar pursuit of "ultimate questions" takes place in the Majjhima-Nikaya Sutra, in a conversation between Shakyamuni Buddha and a disciple, Malunkyaputta. The disciple expresses disappointment that the Buddha has not resolved any of his questions about metaphysics. The Buddha then replies:

"The religious life, Malunkyaputta, does not depend on the dogma that the world is eternal; nor does it depend on the dogma that the world is not eternal. Whether the dogma obtain, Malunkyaputta, that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal, there still remain birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, grief and despair, for the extinction of which in the present life I am prescribing.

"Accordingly, Malunkyaputta, bear always in mind what I have not explained: I have not explained that the world is eternal; I have not explained that the world is not eternal; I have not explained that the world is finite; I have not explained that the world is infinite;

"I have not explained that the soul and body are identical; I have not explained that the soul is one thing and the body another thing....

"What then, Malunkyaputta, have I explained? The origin of anguish I have explained;

"The cessation of anguish I have explained; the path leading to the cessation of anguish I have explained."

The Buddha and Master Daizui bring us down to earth, into the realm of birth-and-death and here-and-now.

A year ago, as the year 2000 approached, there was some foreboding that terrible events would happen-- not because a messiah was arriving, or that a great flood would come, but because our computers would crash and play havoc with our banks, our money, our subway schedules. There was talk of elevators stuck between floors, of airplanes in mid flight losing their bearings. A few people who came to Dai Bosatsu Zendo for the New Year's celebration said that they had left Manhattan for the Catskills "just in case something happened." Our local supermarket in Livingston Manor ran out of water, stove fuel and batteries.

By the time 2001 came along, the whole millenary fever had cooled off. At Dai Bosatsu Zendo, we took turns sounding the big gong in our New Year's Eve celebration. In our winter coats and mufflers and boots, we circled the Bonsho tower, taking turns hitting the gong as we chanted Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo. The sound of the gong moved through the leafless forest and could be heard two miles down the road. Afterwards, we felt we had truly rung out the old and rung in the new.

In our practice, we dream of a fresh start, a new lease on life, where the old is "rung out." We can read Daizui's "Yes, it will be gone," and view it as an expression of this wish:

When the great kalpa fire flares up, will it perish or not perish? [When I practice wholeheartedly and combust myself, will the mind perish?

Yes, it will perish. [Yes, the mind will perish.]

Will "it" be gone with the other? [Will the mind perish with the body?]

Yes, it will be gone with the other. [Yes, the mind will perish with the body.]

"Combust yourself!" we are admonished in the Zendo. "But combust only the bad parts!" our inner voice tells us. We want the best parts to remain, the parts that bear the stamp of our uniqueness, our personality. We want closure, but selective closure. There are times, during Sesshin, or after a "good" period of Zazen, when we feel freed of our anxieties. But the buoyant feeling is temporary; life always catches up with us.

A more evenhanded view of practice recognizes how temporary are our states of mind, and how lacking in clarity our lives often are. I think there are periods when the issues in our lives are about as clear as the recent presidential elections. Who is winning? Is the final count in yet? Many of us feel we are waiting for the resolution, waiting for the count from Florida.

So we practice. We discover, after we do Zazen for months, then years, that practice "leads to the cessation of anguish" in ways that aren't quite so dramatic as we imagined when we started to practice. Every time we practice, we want less from the practice, and not to want is a liberating thing. During this "not wanting," the questioning stops, and who cares then whether "it will perish?" Practice really gives us back something intangible: the absence of preferences, the absence of wanting. The world has always been in front of us, but now it appears vividly in its full colors and sounds because it is freed of our preferences.