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KI

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An un-dated teisho, most likely delivered in the mid- or late 1970s, made available to Sydney Zen Center in a xeroxed form.

This text addresses some of the most fundamental and delicate religious issues.

Therefore, it should be read, quoted and analysed in a mindful way.

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KI

Teisho by Taizan Maezumi Roshi

Generally, when we talk about sitting zazen, we divide it into three parts: disposition of the body, breathing, and controlling the mind.

And, regarding the disposition of the body, most of our postures could be improved. One way to do this is for you to sit in front of a mirror and check how you sit. Then try to sit better.

What I want to emphasize today is the breathing, and also what we call 'ki', a sort of spirit or energy which is very important. I want you to contemplate on this aspect and raise ki.

We say 'kikai', lower abdomen, ocean of 'ki'. Somehow, in the Orient, this ki, this flow of energy, was found a long time ago. Lao Tzu talked about it long before Buddhism went to China. In Taoism they talk about this ki. And they talk about 'Shi', aspiration. Mo Tzu, one of the earliest Taoists said, "Aspiration is the boss of the body. And the 'ki', or energy, is the thing to fill up the body." Your body should be filled with this ki.

Those who are working on the koan Muji can especially utilize this 'ki'. Work on Muji as if Mu itself were 'ki'. First, concentrate in the lower abdomen, then let that 'ki', Muji, permeate all your body gradually. Then let that 'ki' flow nicely throughout your body.

Harada Roshi (Yasutani Roshi's teacher) explained about sitting posture. Sit with this spirit, and even during severe cold in winter, after sitting a while your body will start getting warm. You can do that when you start letting 'ki' flow smoothly throughout your body and especially through the lower abdomen. Very soon you start feeling that warmth. And sit with such energy and strength that if anybody casually touches you, sparks fly. It is that kind of intensity...Yet it's not physical tension...Just let the body really sit well. With 'ki', you can have that strength. And in order to do so, we should

have proper breathing. We can almost say breathing is the key.

It fascinates me that the etymological implication of spirit is 'to breathe'. Nowadays we have a different implication about spirit. But the original implication is 'to breathe.' There is an energy, or spirit, which flows along with the breathing. Even in China, over 2000 years ago, this was practiced.

And 'ki' is not only that which flows within ourselves, but also that which flows in the entire universe. Then, we match our 'ki' with that 'ki' of the universe, and we become as strong as the whole world.

Now Chang Tzu says an interesting thing about this 'ki'. He says that when 'ki' is disturbed and upset and scatters, it becomes scarce within the body. Literally he says 'kinan tatsu'. Tatsu means stand up, the opposite of sitting. So, let 'ki' sit, and don't let it scatter outside yourself.

This reminds me of the very primary aspects of sitting. I often talk of the analogy of spinning the top. When the top is really well spun, it stands straight. But even standing in one place, it wobbles if it's not well spun. It's not quite stable even though it's standing. When it spins well, it stands spinning. And when it really spins well, it becomes almost as if the top here just standing still; we can see the shape of the top as if it here motionless. And such a condition is called 'to sit.' It's kind of an interesting analogy.

In our sitting the same thing happens. When we sit, when we make ourselves sit, in a way it's sitting. But in most of our cases, it's almost as if... even though the top is standing... it's wobbling. Even though sitting, it's not really sitting. Mind is running around; sensations; emotions; feelings.....wobbling.

But when we really sit, even the inner organs are well settled down, and yet, very active.

(Nowadays, both in Japan and this country, this effect of sitting is being re-examined by scientists, especially the psychologists and biologists. And they're finding out all kinds of interesting results of sitting. So, just for the purpose of making ourselves healthy, sitting is highly recommended).

Chang Tzu says more about this. He says that when 'ki' is standing and exposed externally, then internally the 'ki' becomes scarce. And when 'ki' rises to the head, you become easily upset. It's an interesting observation. This was said over 2000 years ago by Chang Tzu and it's also true today: When we have tension most of the energy is up in the head. Then we become more sensitive and we're more easily upset. And when the 'ki' is down and stays there you become forgetful. In other words, the ki's not quite well circulated.

Now, when 'ki' gets stuck somewhere in the middle, not up and not down, then you get sick. And that fascinates me: We say sickness. And in Japanese we say 'byoki'. I think that word is derived from the original Chinese: byoki. 'Byo' means illness or sickness. So byoki means sickness of ki'. And I read someplace that over one third of our illness is caused by sickness of ki. Maybe it's more than that. That's very interesting. In this country, for instance, culture is so complex and so high pressure that 'ki' can't flow, and most of the time our 'ki' really stays up in the head. Then we get very easily frustrated

and become upset. And being in that condition for a long time, we can easily see what happens: it becomes neurotic. Even further: it becomes psychotic. Then we lose the balance. So let that 'ki' flow.

Then how to let that 'ki' flow? Breathing is a very effective way to do it. There is a Taoist saying, that the true man, the most healthy man, breathes with heels, and that the common people breathe with the throat. In other words, ordinary breathing tends to be very shallow, but the most healthy people breathe with the heels. By breathing in that way, that 'ki', the spirit, the breath, circulates all over the body. As a matter of fact, they have two kinds of breathing. One way is to let the breath circulate from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet. You can do it even while standing, or while lying down. And how to do it is simple: Breathe in from the heels; then let that breath, that inhalation, go up along the back of your legs and spine, and then let it come up to the top of your head. Then when you exhale, let that breath go down along the front part of your body, into the toes. Then breathe into the heels again. Another method is to move the circulation in smaller circles. That is to say, go through the lower abdomen to the head and from the head to the lower abdomen. Actually, this is the kind of breathing that we do in sitting. But since, in sitting, the heels are very close to the lower abdomen, if you want, you can breathe through the heels.

We speak of 'joriki', the power of stability. This kind of energy is raised by 'ki'. So I want you to pay extra attention to how you can raise this 'ki' and make your sitting stronger.

From time to time I hear those who are in charge of the zendo encouraging you to sit strong. But that doesn't necessarily mean physically to tense up. Sitting in a tense way, you can't really let the 'ki' flow in your body. Then it gets stuck someplace because you're straining yourself, even if you're concentrating. It's nice to let the 'ki' flow with the breath. But if you ignore it, the 'ki' tends to get stuck: in the head, in the chest, in the stomach, and so forth. That's not good. Then you physically get sick. I notice a number of people complain of pain around the stomach... definitely from strain...The 'ki' can't flow. Or, like a headache: Definitely if you concentrate just up in the head, blood circulation gets poor and you start getting headaches. So have good disposition of the body and let it balance by itself. Then breathe nicely, to circulate. Short breath is OK. Long breath is OK. Try to let it circulate nicely, and when you concentrate well you can lengthen your breathing. And then let it really settle down. Actually, when you really do that, mind, the conscious mind, is also very well controlled. That's why counting the breath is very highly recommended: It is effective. But it should be practiced properly, otherwise the result is less than it could be.

So, sit well, breathe well, and raise this 'ki'. It will make your sitting stronger, and make your practice better.

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