

The Koan Appears Naturally
Rev. Master Basil Singer
Seattle Dharma Refuge

One of our most frequently recited scriptures is Great Master Dogen's *Rules for Meditation*. During a recent retreat one line really stood out for me: "The koan appears naturally in daily life."

A definition of "koan" that deeply resonates with me is by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett in the 1976 edition of *Zen is Eternal Life*: "Any spiritual barrier or fundamental problem in one's training which one needs to face, penetrate, clarify and transcend."

What came up for me during the retreat was how true this has been for me in my life. What also came up is how training in meditation and the Precepts has naturally helped me recognize the things that were causing me dis-ease and pulling me out of stillness. These things were putting a block on the magnificent flow of the Eternal with Its unconditional and non-judgmental love and kindness. Realizing and opening up these blocks through training has really helped bring peace in my life.

One thing I needed to face and transcend was the "koan of overeating," which is a problem many people have. Sometimes I would experience waves of feeling very disoriented and inferior, like a "stranger in a strange land." Without being aware of it, a spiritual dimension—a connection to Something Greater than myself—was missing from my life. I tried to treat this spiritual pain by indulging in overeating. Without being consciously aware of it, I somehow thought that overeating would help my situation, or at least make me feel better.

As happens with virtually every attempt to "fix" spiritual pain with external sources, this actually caused me more problems. I became overweight, and that created health problems. As my life progressed with this "koan" I tried many other things to help ease the feelings of dis-ease. Nothing really worked, until I started my meditation practice. That helped me be mindful of these waves of thoughts and emotions and to bring them to my meditation and to the healing flow of the Eternal.

Another way I tried to cover up my spiritual pain was by constantly *complaining* and having a very *judgmental* attitude. Training helped me see that complaining and judgmentalism caused a hardening of my heart, and that this created a barrier to experiencing the flow of the love and compassion of the Eternal. When I was able to see this clearly and work on not being a complainer, this was a big revelation.

I wrote a poem when I was able to see this and I would like to share it:

Complaining is Suffering

When we go with this attitude

We complain, complain, and complain

Not realizing that we are pouring gasoline on

The fire of our suffering.

When we finally say *enough!*

We can accept, meditate and be still.

Doing this, we can let the Water of the Spirit

Douse that fire of our suffering

Then we see that complaining *is* suffering!!