

I

Moral Education

I WAS BORN in the twenty-ninth year of the Meiji era (1896). This year, 1956, I am an old nun of sixty years. For forty years I wandered in search of the Way. And though in this time I traveled about, visited teachers, and received many kinds of instruction, I was by no means able to attain the final peace; the cares of life still troubled me. What I wanted was the Way of Truth, the Way capable of ending all suffering.

Thus I came to Tokyo and, through a wonderful karmic link,¹ came to receive instruction at Taiheiji Temple; what's more, I received the guidance of Yasutani Rōshi. Every month I was permitted to attend *sesshin*² at Shinkōji Temple in Saitama Prefecture. At the second *sesshin*, I am happy to say, I obtained the real essence of Buddhism; that is, I realized that to which the living Buddha's teachings refer. Though I say this, I don't mean that I realized the great, broad, deep, and far-reaching Truth in its entirety. I just realized a part of it—I found the door leading inside. But in that moment of realization, that which had been bound up inside me for many years was suddenly and completely released. As in the parable of the rich man and his destitute son,³ in which the son wanders about for years before returning home, I too have now finally struggled back to the door of my home. I am happy that I can now take the first step in practicing real Buddhism. I am infinitely grateful. In my inadequate way, I would like to write a little now

~ JOURNEY IN SEARCH OF THE WAY ~

about my meager experience. Please excuse the objectionable passages. I will begin with what motivated me to seek the Way.

When I was young—until the age of twenty or so—I was no good at all. I was a real devil! Why was I like that? Of course this was the result of my karma, but what additionally spurred on that bad karma was, first and foremost, the contradiction between my elementary school’s curriculum in ethics and the everyday life of the adults around me. During ethics period in school we were made to listen to all sorts of lectures in “moral education” and were prevailed upon to “be good” and “tell the truth,” and so on. When I went home, however, I found lies and deception. One moment a guest would arrive and my parents would say sweet words to his face and play up to him, but when he left, instantly, like a hand turning over, they would bad-mouth and ridicule him. Such events were not unusual. I wondered if this went on only in my home; but no, whatever home, whatever adult—even my respected schoolteacher—all were the same. I didn’t know what to make of it. “What is this all about?” I asked myself. “Oh, I get it! As a subject of study, the morality we learn in school is best just drummed into the head, like a recording. But life and morality are two absolutely different things. The reality of everyday life is built on lies.” It got to the point where the question of truth and falsehood ceased to enter my mind. This was my elementary school period.

With these attitudes, I entered Girls’ High School. I went to the Public Girls’ School, which took as its motto “Good Wives and Wise Mothers.”⁴ Every Monday morning the principal would assemble all the students in the auditorium and give a talk. It was always bound to be scrupulous and exhaustive instruction for the benefit of the future good wives and wise mothers. At the conclusion of the talk he invariably added a

word of advice: be careful with members of the opposite sex. According to this advice, the male of the species is nothing but a fearful wild beast with gnashing fangs that will swoop down upon any young girl he fancies. How could a girl concerned with her future prospects sacrifice herself to this beast? Don't be careless! Don't go near them! Don't look them in the face! Such were his stern words. He would then give some concrete examples. I was subjected to these lectures every week for four years until graduation. The aim of this grandmotherly kindness was to cultivate the flawless good wife and wise mother and to preserve her virginal innocence until marriage. In my case, however, things turned out just the opposite.

I absolutely couldn't stand men! A man to me was some kind of disgusting jet-black panther. What was marriage? What was a good wife and wise mother? Wasn't she the prey of that despicable panther? Was there ever such a contradiction? Was there ever a speech so degrading to us? Was he saying that right now men were like wild animals to us, but that later—when we married—they would become blessed, godlike beings on whom we should rely? How absurd! I felt very indignant toward the principal's speeches. At the same time, a fierce resentment blazed up in me toward "them"—those beasts who gobbled up the pure virgins. I was especially disgusted with charming men; I imagined that their charm would cause even greater injury to the virgins. I cursed those men as the bitterest enemy: "I put the evil eye on you! I wish you would drop dead!" My heart's desire was to directly approach this dreadful beast, twist him around my little finger, and toss him over my shoulder. I wanted to deliver a shattering blow.

At that time, my life revolved around the world of literature. After graduation from Girls' High School, I went to Tokyo, dreaming of becoming a writer. I stayed at my uncle's house and became the student of a certain novelist who was famous at

the time. But my feelings toward men had not changed. I selected a target, devised a plan of attack, and steadily began to carry it out. My chances of victory were quite good, I thought. "He's bound to fall for it!" I told myself, thinking it would be easy for me to knock him speechless. I had faith in myself.

But what a mistake! At the critical moment, *bang!* the bottom fell through. The one whose luck gave out was not he but I: I got pregnant. At that time, unlike now, abortion was a terrible thing. I was afraid of being punished if I had one. My future prospects were pitch black. What could I do? I didn't want to hold on to him just to finish him off. Since things had turned out like this, I no longer cared about his state of mind. He was in love with me, but that was not at issue for me. It was unnecessary even to think of marriage.

My studies meant a lot to me. But I was pregnant. I returned to my parents' home, alone and without purpose. My parents were poor farmers in a mountain village in Hokkaido. I was an only child. My parents' sole desire was to make something of me, with their limited means. To do this, they had sent me to an exclusive girls' school and had even gone so far as to send me to Tokyo to advance their desire. But this parental love had never once gotten through to me and touched my heart.

Meanwhile, I just grew more and more fretful. But since in this case I certainly reaped what I had sowed, I couldn't complain. My parents seemed to have vague suspicions about my extraordinary bodily condition but deliberately avoided referring to it. I wanted to be severely scolded, condemned and thrown out, or told to go kill myself. But I was going to have to be the one to bring the subject up, somehow or other. I too kept silent.

Every day the three of us silently arose, and silently we went to work in the fields. As for me—with my body, which couldn't be more shameful, and my face, which one could

~ JOURNEY IN SEARCH OF THE WAY ~

hardly bear to look at—I just wanted to crawl into a hole and disappear. Looking like a barrel whose hoops were about to burst, and in a condition of utter despair, I was incapable even of dying. I could do nothing but sit back and watch my shame grow. I felt wretched, miserable, ashen—as if I were traveling alone at night through an endless wilderness, wearily dragging one foot after the other.

One day I went as usual to the fields, working and getting covered with dirt. From a distance, my father urgently called my name. I went to see what he wanted and found Father squatting at the edge of the field, gazing intently at something. A moment passed. I felt a little strange squatting quietly by my father's side. Absently, my eye caught his line of vision. There was nothing but a single weed growing there. Softly, Father began to speak.

“I've been watching this for some time . . . it's quite interesting. . . . Look! A winged ant is crawling up the weed. It climbs up, little by little . . . it seems to want to reach the top. Oh, it fell! There—it's climbing again! For some time now it's been doing this over and over again.” Just as he said, a winged ant was climbing up the weed and falling, falling and climbing up again.

“Here! Climbing again! Look, it must be tired now. When it's tired, it stretches its legs and beats its little wings up and down like that. That's how it restores its energy. Then, when it's rested, it starts climbing again.”

Father continued to speak without taking his eyes off the brave little insect. I too inadvertently became intrigued. I stared at it intently for quite a while. Suddenly, it hit me—I understood what my father was getting at! It was unbearable! I quickly got up and left his side. I ran to the shady side of the field where no one could see me and fell down wailing. I cried and cried in anguish.

~ JOURNEY IN SEARCH OF THE WAY ~

“Oh, Father, I understand; I really understand! Do you love me so much? I’m so unfilial! ⁵ Do you still cherish such hope for me, when I am so disgusted with myself? How unworthy I am! But how grateful! I’m sorry! Oh, Father, from now on I promise to be a filial daughter! I promise to make you happy!” I determined to repay my father’s love, no matter what. Just then, an iron shackle was broken and at once a broad expanse of light burst upon the world.