

Know = Am

A monk once said to Dairyo Osho: "The physical body decomposes. What is the indestructible Dharmakaya [body of Truth]?"

Dairyo answered with this verse:

*"Blooming mountain flowers
Are like golden brocade;
Brimming mountain waters
Are blue as indigo."*

Things have presence and, as a result, I can know them. This can be depicted as *Am* → *Know*. In this ordinary viewpoint, the presence of things, their "am-ness" or "being-ness", is independent of my knowing of them. That is, a table is still there even when I turn around and can no longer see it. I can prove this by turning back again: there is the same table, just as I left it. The persistent am-ness of the table enables me once again to know it.

This schema depends upon the assumption that the table I saw before and now is the same table. In the same manner, the person I saw before is the same person now. The river I saw before is the same river now. In this way, we construct in our minds an objective reality of persistent things. Via our naming of these countless things, a sense of constancy and predictability is maintained.

With careful observation, I can see that the *idea* "table"—that is, "something with a flat top and four legs"—is the same for both viewings. But the *actual* table, the precise appearance of it, depends upon my angle of view, the way a particular light is striking the table and even the very time at which the table is seen—whether for the first time or again with a superimposed memory of my having seen it before. This *actual* table is changing moment by moment, view to view.

In this schema, "table" is a verb, a process, not a noun, a fixed unchanging thing. Each time the table is known it's new, different. This is *Know* → *Am*. That is, the process of knowing is intrinsically, causally related to the experience of *this* table, *this* table... Gertrude Stein alluded to this with her famous statement, "A rose is a Rose is a ROSE!" With careful observation, the class "Rose" gives way to this very unique ROSE. A name for something and its actual reality, with this insight, are seen to be related but certainly not identical.

But still—even with this more refined understanding of the impermanent, ever-changing aspect of visible, knowable reality—being and knowing appear to be separated. In other words, the being-ness of this ever-changing objective reality seems independent of the act of knowing of it by the subject. One logical outcome of this viewpoint is the presumption that when I die the objective world remains because its

being is independent of me. Therefore, I am *in* the world and *apart* from the world. The notion that any world would be *in* me and *inseparable* from me would seem absurd, nothing other than a dream-state.

Regarding dream-states: everyone readily understands that the very nature of a dream is that no part of it is outside the dreaming mind. This knowledge of inseparability, however, is almost always hidden from the mind of the dreamer. Only after awakening from the dream can the dreamer grasp its insubstantiality, its production by the mind alone—often with a genuine sense of relief.

The question, then, naturally arises: *Might the awareness of the insubstantiality of the objective world, yet its intimate connection to and dependence upon my own mind, be hidden from my view as well—while I occupy a different sort of dream-state?* This is precisely the viewpoint of Zen, the aim of which is to awaken the life-dreamer—to the dreamer's great relief, as well. When this awakening occurs, the object's *am-ness* and the subject's knowing of it are seen as absolutely identical: *Know = Am*.

Various methods have been devised in Zen Buddhist practice to awaken the practitioner to *Know = Am*, but the most direct of these methods is the koan practice. Koans stimulate the deep wondering, inquiring and doubting that is required—both to deconstruct the solid, stuck, incomplete viewpoint of “I am in the world” and, at the same time, to fuse the subject's knowing-ness with the object's being-ness. An analogy for this fusion-process through koan practice would be: one's body-mind-in-zazen as the crucible, one's attentiveness and deep questioning as the heat, and the koan and one's mind-essence, in a manner of speaking, as the things to be “fused” together.

To give a specific example of how this works, let's look at a method for working on the Mu koan. Through steady and persistent zazen, one strengthens the ability to powerfully focus on Mu as random thoughts increasingly lose their ability to trap and sidetrack the mind. The focus now gently shifts to the hidden side of Mu: its *am-ness*. Like the flip side of a coin, the *am-ness*, *being-ness*, *presence* of Mu is inseparable from the very “form” of Mu, its *sound-thought-feeling* in one's mind: unique and fresh from moment to moment if one's zazen is at once incisive, intense and deeply focused.

This uniqueness and freshness of Mu enables the sudden appreciation of its actual *being*. One can hold both of these together at the same time and flip the coin over and over as well. The form side appears in a particular configuration but the being side has no particular color, sound, smell, taste, touch or feeling. It takes some time to appreciate this “blackness” of the coin's flip side.

Anything that presents itself: moods, feelings, ideas, fears—any of the “skandhas”, in fact—is a “Mu”. Each of these has a form side: its actual, ever-changing configuration in the present moment, fully determined by karma—and a “black” side: its very being-ness.

If you can avoid getting caught by, stuck in, engrossed with struggling against the form side, you can more readily flip the coin over. If you do get stuck, that very stuckness, too, has a “black” side! So, if a strong feeling obscures Mu, let *it* become your Mu of the present moment. See it clearly and flip it over. Avoid getting stuck in the weeds of thinking.

Be persistent and continually look at this “black” side of the coin. Hold the entire coin in your hand by continuing the intense focus on Mu—the visible side. As the focus on *this* Mu...*this* Mu... becomes more immediate, the ability to stay with the invisible side strengthens. Now, gently arouse the question, “*What is the very substance of this colorless, formless being-ness?*” Deepen this inquiry until it becomes urgent and all-encompassing. No one can answer this question for you because that which you are seeking is absolutely intimate. No one else can “occupy” that space of inquiry and, finally, certainty.

As this inquiry continues, you will become aware of the thinnest, most transparent of veils separating you, that is, your mind, from the am-ness of Mu. Yet, this veil is like an iron curtain. Try as hard as you might, you can’t cross through it to the other side. This is a most propitious state, painful though it might be. Persist, persist, and never give up. You will certainly penetrate through, sooner or later.

At that very moment, your “knowing” and Mu’s “being” will fuse together—no separation whatsoever. Then, you will immediately grasp the meaning of “*the oak tree in the garden*” or “*the flowering hedge surrounding the privy*” as the very manifestations of the Truth. Don’t try with your thinking mind to figure this out. Rather, enter deeply into your *not* knowing how to resolve the question. Even if you have the most subtle and profound intellectual understanding of this, it will be no better than a mere picture of reality—in the mind of a dreamer still dreaming the dream of life.

...As Zen master Hogen said to a monk: “*Not knowing is most intimate.*”

...As God said, in answer to Abraham: “*I am that I am.*”

What is the very substance of this “I am”, this am-ness? Don’t think about it! Go straight into the heart of the question. When there’s nothing left but inquiry itself, in other words, *NOT-KNOWING*—right at that moment ask yourself, “What is the *substance* of this NOT-KNOWING?” Then you will know for yourself how not-knowing is real knowing.

Paul Gerstein, Sensei