

1901, "EVERYDAY SUCCHNESS"
by GORMAN KUBOSE.

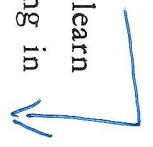
There are many examples of this total enlightenment or satori in Zen stories. For instance, Joshu, a famous Zen monk, studied very hard at the Zen Temple under his master, but he was unable to enlighten himself, and he often questioned the master in a most complicated and agonized way. One day, after such questions, the master merely responded by asking, "Did you eat breakfast?" "Yes, I did," answered Joshu. "Then did you wash the dishes?" Joshu was at once enlightened.

Another story is that of Tokuzan. Tokuzan was meditating in the temple one twilight, and, as it was getting dark, he went outside to meditate where the moon was shining and it was serene and beautiful. His master came by and said, "Oh, you are meditating here. Why don't you come inside the temple?" "It is too dark inside," answered Tokuzan. "Well, I will give you a light. Why don't you come in," said the master. So Tokuzan went inside, where the master lit a candle and told Tokuzan to place the candle on the table and then meditate. Tokuzan thanked him and, just as the master was handing the lit candle to Tokuzan, he blew it out, plunging the room back into darkness. Tokuzan was immediately enlightened, he

attained satori. How? That is up to you; the master merely points the way.

Zen stories are very difficult. As it is said, we learn the hard way. For instance, when I was living in Oakland, I had a friend, Mr. Tagara, who was a very capable man, a very learned person, a community leader. He was a poet, a leading poet, and was able to compose beautiful haiku and waka. He was an able speaker and the whole community looked up to him for leadership and admired him. He and his wife had three children, his business was very good, and they bought a house in Berkeley.

Everyone thought that Mrs. Tagara must be the most fortunate wife to have such an able and good husband. But Mrs. Tagara was not happy. She was also sickly, somewhat neurotic. Why was she not happy despite everyone's guess? Mr. Tagara was a very able man. He was not only very intelligent and a community leader, he was even a very good cook. If she knew one thing, he knew two or three. How could even a very intelligent wife match such a husband? She had done her best to make him happy, but he was never satisfied. "You are clumsy; you could do better," he would say. So through all their marriage, the wife suffered from



feelings of inferiority.

One summer, Mr. Tagara unfortunately had eye trouble. All that summer he went to the doctor, but his eyes became worse and worse. That fall, he finally lost his eyesight. He became blind. You can imagine what a change this was to such a man. He had been so able in every way, but now he could not read a newspaper or go for a walk or even go to the bathroom without asking his wife or daughter to take him. Mr. Tagara had never bowed his head before. Now he had to beg, to ask everything from other people.

Being such an able man, Mr. Tagara had never had good friends. He felt that all his friends were inferior, and he could not appreciate their friendship. He had a very close friend called Yamada, who often came to visit him. But Mr. Tagara would say, "Oh, that Yamada comes again and talks nonsense. I wish he wouldn't come, as I have many books to read." He never appreciated Yamada's visits because Yamada never talked on the same level as Mr. Tagara. Mr. Tagara wanted to read books rather than have mediocre friends come to waste his time. But when he became blind, he could not read a book. When he heard footsteps on the front porch:

"Oh, it is Yamada. I am glad he is coming." And before Yamada could knock on the door, Mr. Tagara would call, "Is that Yamada?" "Yes," Yamada would answer. "I'm so glad you came. What's the news in the world?" Mr. Tagara would exclaim.

Yamada had not changed, but Mr. Tagara had changed. A 180 degree turn.

One day, Tagara called his wife, Yoshiko-san, "Yoshiko, come here." Yoshiko-san thought that she was to be scolded again, so she rather hesitated. "Do you want something?" she asked. "Sit here," her husband said. She sat down. "Sit closer. Sit next to me." Yoshiko-san did not understand why he wanted her to sit close to him. Tagara took Yoshiko-san's hand and all of a sudden there were tears in his eyes.

"Yoshiko," he said, "I realize for the first time what you have suffered for so many years. We have been married almost 20 years. I was so stubborn; I had such a superiority complex. All your years of ill health were caused by my stubbornness. For the first time I understand real kindness, the many services you did for me which I never appreciated before." Both of them hugged each other and cried, a cry of joy. It was the first time the two

of them understood each other.

Since then, new life came into their home, her health started to improve, and he became very humble, yet he did not lose his dignity and superior quality. Friends meeting him on the street would say, "Tagara-san, I am sorry you have lost your vision." "Oh," he would answer, "don't say you're sorry. You should congratulate me on the loss of my eyesight." Everyone was dumbfounded when he said this. "I have lost my physical eye, but I have found my mind's eye. Now I am able to understand what love is. For the first time I notice what friendship is, what sympathy is. You know, a stubborn guy like me, unless my eyes are crushed, is unable to find this new world. I wish you would congratulate me that I lost my vision but found my mental eye."

Mr. Tagara was a completely changed man. He was enlightened. He was enlightened to a completely new world. He had transcended his small petty individualism and was able to see and join in a greater world and oneness of all life. He found himself in a world of love, of friendship. This kind of experience is called enlightenment.

Buddha's enlightenment was comprehensive in all

respects. But we too are able to understand and taste and open our new point of view. Enlightenment was not just Gautama Buddha's, but you too, individually, must find this new perspective of life, this new point of view in your life and in all things. That is satori. It must be yours and can be yours. No one can give it to you. You have to find it yourself. Yes, it is difficult, but it is yours, and there it is. But, in fact, you do not look for satori because you are already in it. You are in that enlightenment; just open your mind and there you will find new light, new perspective.

"How unfortunate," the visitor said. "I have traveled all over Japan, meeting *myōkonin* and receiving teachings from them. I was assured in Shimonoseki that 'Nembutsu O-karu' lived on this island...."

"If you want," the woman said, "I will guide you to Saikyō-ji and you can ask Reverend Gendō about this woman. But before I do, would you stop by my home? I would like to hear what you learned from those devout people you met."

After the visitor told many stories about the *myōkonin* he met in his travels, he began asking about 'Nembutsu O-karu' again. "It's very strange," he said. "I'm sure that I read about O-karu of Mutsure Island."

"Yes, yes," the woman said. "I am Karu of the island of Mutsure. She is right here. But there is no 'Nembutsu O-karu'."

The visitor was very moved by O-karu. He sensed clearly that she was not playing games, and that her behavior and attitude were due to her understanding of herself and Amida Buddha's heart/mind.

My heart/mind
Is like a rough pine.
Lacking polish,
Amida makes me the object
(Of his concern)
All the more.

O-karu's humility and self-denial were not signs of weakness. She was rather, strengthened through Amida Buddha's power, and lived with reassurance and gratitude. She was filled with the compassion of Amida Buddha and with true and real life. She saw herself illuminated and reinforced by the light of Amida Buddha.

How grateful I am!
Leaving it all to

The wind of the Dharma,
I feel
It is always spring.

LATER YEARS:

Most of us are motivated by the conventional sense of loss or gain, love or hate, good or bad, right or wrong and yours or mine. But the world that O-karu came to realize differs fundamentally from that of those who cling to this world. Though she was physically of this mundane world, she actually lived in another world—a true and real world for O-karu. It was true and real because she had awakened to the universal compassion of Amida Buddha and lived actively within Amida Buddha's vow to cause her birth in the Pure Land.

What is not true and real is our heart/mind and everything that we are selfishly attached to. If we are not sensitive to this fact, we will not reflect upon the question of birth and death, but strive only for more pleasure.

O-karu had failed in marriage because of her passionate nature, but through her encounter with Amida Buddha, she experienced the joy of living and being allowed to live. This joy welled out in waves unceasingly from her deep heart/mind and one of the expressions it took was in her poems.

O-karu wanted to share her precious experience, first with her husband, then her five children and the rest of her family. She began with her husband Kōshichi. O-karu must have had a difficult time getting Kōshichi to understand her in the beginning.

We have no knowledge of how she did it, but when O-karu was about forty years of age, she and Kōshichi began attending the regular service at Saikyō-ji every morning, and then having tea with the temple family before return-

ing home.

O-karu told everyone who would listen that she was brought to hear the Dharma because of Kōshichi's philandering, and how grateful she was that Kōshichi had betrayed her. Further, she said, it was Kōshichi's action that caused her to become aware of her own nature and thus realize Amida Buddha's compassion. O-karu considered her formerly unfaithful husband to be her *zenchishiki*, her good and virtuous teacher along the way.

Her first son, Kōnojō, became a devout follower of the Nembutsu, as did her other children. O-karu was especially concerned about her third son, Kamekichi, who had gone to serve at the house of Seishichi Shimoda in Shimonoseki. She used to send him poems, some of which remain today.

O-karu had worked hard and scrimped to save money in order to visit the head temple of the Nishi Honganji in Kyōto. But when she finally saved enough, she gave the money to Kamekichi so he could go instead. She did this because she could talk about the Dharma to her other children at home, and that was why she gave him that most precious opportunity.

Kamekichi brought back some seeds of the bodhi-tree as a souvenir. (Sākyamuni Buddha attained enlightenment under a bodhi-tree at the age of thirty-five.) O-karu was very pleased with the seeds, and planted them in the compound of Saikyō-ji. A large bodhi-tree grew from the seeds O-karu planted, but it withered in 1938. A new bodhi-tree grew from the old tree, and now stands near a monument that was constructed within the precincts of Saikyō-ji in memory of O-karu.

O-karu passed away on the 16th day of the first month during the 3rd year of Ansei (1856), at the age of fifty-six.

O-karu's beloved teacher, Reverend Gendō, passed away less than two years later, on the second day of the twelfth

month during the 4th year of Ansei (1857).

O-karu died of cholera and must have suffered a great deal. Her illness left her virtually paralyzed toward the end of her life. Even in her suffering, however, she was certain that she would be born in Amida Buddha's Pure Land. She left her last poem with Reverend Gendō just a few months before she died:

After I leave this world,
If someone should ask for me,
Tell them I have gone to
The Pure Land,
The Pure Land
Of my dear Amida Buddha.

