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Hello, everyone! How are you doing?

The hot days will continue for a while, but the season is gradually turning toward autumn.

Last month I wrote about "introspection," and this month I would like to think about "encounters and awareness." We encounter various things from the time we wake up in the morning. Our encounters are not only with people, but also through our six senses (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind) we receive many stimulations from the environment around us.

The smell of freshly brewed coffee, the noise of the traffic and the emergency vehicle siren, the news and programs on TV, and other things that we take for granted will naturally pass by us without being etched in our minds if they do not 'catch' them in our minds and hearts.

Even if encounters occur, if we do not 'catch' them with our eyes or our hearts, they will just end up merely passing by. However, when we are seeking for something in our minds and hearts and live our lives with an awareness of the issues at hand, we will be touched by various encounters that will lead us to awareness.

In the Opening Verse of the sutra, there is a passage that says, "But all who see, hear, recognize, and know the sutra shall approach enlightenment ." When we have a mind that is always seeking the truth, things that we see, hear, and/or touch will lead to a realization that will strike a chord in our hearts.

After Shakyamuni Buddha attained Supreme Perfect Awakening, he wished to share his awakening with the five bhikkhus with whom he had once practiced and was walking on the long way toward them. At one point, he came upon a bhikkhu who was seeking the Way. As Shakyamuni Buddha was walking toward him from the other side of the road, his indescribably divine appearance caught the eye of that bhikkhu, whose name was Upaka. And as he passed by, he called out and asked, "Your radiant appearance is admirable, but under what master did you train?" At the time Shakyamuni Buddha firmly replied, "I have no master, but am the only one who attained supreme awakening on my own." To that, Upaka then said, "Perhaps that is so " and he walked away is the story.

If, at that moment, Upaka had unwaveringly beseeched Shakyamuni Buddha to teach him about that awakening, he would have been the first disciple of the Buddha. However, his heart was not truly seeking, and although they met, their paths merely crossed. The phrase, "Sentient beings without a karmic connection are often difficult to deal with" is said to have originated from this incident.

The results can vary greatly depending on the way we look at things, such as what our eyes see but do not see, or what our ears hear but do not hear.

Once, Magellan, the explorer, sailed across the South Pacific in search of a new route and arrived at an island. He landed on the island with around ten men on a small boat from a fleet of four ships. The islanders were surprised but warmly welcomed the group.

The inhabitants of the island left behind a picture from that time said to be painted after the fact.

The painting clearly depicts the scene of Magellan and his party getting off the small boat and walking with

their backs to the sea to the place where people were gathered. However, for some reason, the painting did not depict the large fleet of four ships anchored offshore. A psychologist later interpreted the painting as follows:

Perhaps the people of the island could understand the small boat in which the group boarded, but the four huge sailing ships anchored in the background were something they saw for the first time and far beyond their awareness. Even though they could see with their own eyes, they could not understand what they were and could not retain it in their memories.

This is a story that explains the difference between perception and awareness, but it is also something that we often encounter in our daily lives. In Buddhism, the word "Law of Causation (cause, condition, effect, and recompense)" is used to describe "our encounters and our awareness through those encounters." The word "cause" refers to oneself, "condition" refers to the objects we come into contact (also considered opportunity), and "effect and recompense" refers to the reactions and actions that occur as result of the encounter between cause and condition.

If we think of this in terms of multiplication ($2 \times 2 = 4$ or $2 \times 3 = 6$), we get an interesting result. If you (the cause) are '10' and the object in contact (condition) is '2,' then the result is $10 \times 2 = 20$. However, if you (cause) are '0' and the object in contact is '10,' then the result is $0 \times 10 = 0$. In other words, if you have zero desire and zero interest, no matter how large the number, the result will be zero, and it will be the same as "merely passing each other" or missed opportunity by Upaka with Shakyamuni Buddha.

Conversely, it is said that Newton discovered the law of universal gravitation when he saw an apple fall from a tree. Even with a trivial phenomenon like an apple falling from a tree, Newton's daily research must have provided him with a clue that led to his discovery of the law of gravitation. Perhaps his inquiring mind was '10' and the falling apple might have been about '2.' However, $10 \times 2 = 20$ was a great achievement. Even a trivial encounter can lead to a great realization, depending on the way the recipient's mind works.

Depending on our daily concerns and what we seek, there will be differences in our "encounters and realizations."

So that we do not lose our opportunities like "Upaka," let us sharpen the 'antenna' of our hearts and minds and devote ourselves this month.



Gassho

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