

## The Unknowing Mind

- Daishin Alfredo Malagodi

Zazen is the heart of Zen practice. It has been taught without interruption by Shakyamuni Buddha and his successive teachers. Through time, many diverse currents within the sangha wanted to interpret the words of the master placing emphasis on different aspects of his teachings. Some tend toward compassion, others toward emptiness, others toward respect of precise codes of conduct and still others toward analysis of the nature of phenomena, of the mind and much else. The Zen school that we represent looked from the outset with profound interest to silent meditation as the tool to capture the “profound experience of liberation from existential suffering” that here in the west we improperly call *Enlightenment*. Teachers of the past and present have spoken often and in many different ways about the state that we should reach during zazen and then take into our daily lives. Some definitions are no-mind, beginner’s mind, the I-don’t-know mind, action without action and the unknowing mind.

When we want to investigate the mind, we apply the serenity that Buddhist systems of introspection bring in meditation. It is an excellent tool to create that quiet mind that we may call the unknowing mind. What is meant by the unknowing mind? It is not the nature of a seeker that busies himself in order to gain something. Instead it is the manifestation of a tendency not to dwell on anything, not to believe anything as absolutely true, and then not to form opinions and certainties. Only if you have this mind can you truly remain open to everything that surrounds us. Only if you have this mind can you “be with everything” and go beyond the concepts of samsara and nirvana, which can then of course be used to justify an ethic or to describe a state, however indescribable, but can be experienced only by one who has realized this unified mind. As the Diamond Sutra says:

“What do you think, Subhuti, is it possible for an individual we call Arhat to consider that he has attained the state of Arhat?”

Subhuti responds: “No, Honored One of the World, there is nothing that exists independently that can be called Arhat.”

If an Arhat permits the emergence of a thought concerning the attainment of the state of Arhat, then he is still attached to the idea of a self, of a person, of a living being or of a period of an existence.

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, great contemporary teacher, exhorted his disciples saying: “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, in the experts there are few.” This concept expressed in the words of Suzuki Roshi, conveys the state of no judgment or better of no pre-judgment, which students of Zen should come to develop, an unconditioned mind open to every new experience that life can offer. Because the root of our suffering lies in locking into our expectations, not being able to welcome the other or accept difficulties and differences, not understanding that life is not the small island that our ego has created by infiltrating our ideas, our religion, political opinions and everything that appears to be permanent. Life is instead a vast sea that includes and embraces everything, even other islands.

Because the point is exactly this, the Satori, a Japanese term indicating Enlightenment, is something that adheres to life; it is not separate from it. Working, eating, being a parent or child are phenomena closely tied to zazen, which is not a time to be at peace awhile in the evening after work, but a means to develop a mind that does not separate, that does not choose, and does not question whether something is just or not. Simply practicing meditation as it has been taught to you and practicing the development of a non-judgmental perspective, you can observe how your way of relating to problems and people will change, and then how your attitude will change the problems and people around you. If these changes are positive for your life, you will welcome and cultivate the practice. On the other hand, if you are not ready or your practice is insufficient, you can decide whether or not to continue this way, but the bud of this experience will continue to flourish in your hearts.