

Roshi Sama 07

Set out to accomplish it and you will accomplish it. Don't set out to accomplish it and you won't accomplish it. If you do not accomplish something it is because you have not set out to do so.

Someone recently asked why I became a monk. It was some 55 years ago when I became ordained, but I was still a kid when I vowed to myself that I would always do what really needed to be done, that I would pour myself into whatever was before me to do. I was about 16 years old when happily I was driven to really question myself, to reflect upon myself, asking, "Who is the most good for nothing person around .. the weakest, the laziest, the most useless one around?". I knew deep in my heart that it was I, the weakest-willed one of all. I beat myself over this. There was a time I struggled so hard with this that I actually managed to knock my own jaw out of place. I couldn't stand myself for thinking ill of others .. I couldn't stand it that I would dislike others. I saw myself as so pitiful – my own habits, my own character were unbearable to me.

It was during this period that I climbed the mountain pass and to a high mountain place. It was winter so the trail was deserted except for a Buddha statue at the peak. I would know now who the statue is, but at that time I had no knowledge of, or any particular interest in Buddhism. Even so, before the statue I chanted some lines from a Confucian text that I had memorized .. chanted it before that Buddha. And after that I gazed out over the horizon, over the Pacific Ocean far below. I was standing just on the edge of the cliff. The wind began to gust up toward me from the valley below. I became enveloped by the wind. There I was asking for nothing. I wasn't thinking, or analysing. I was appending nothing, and yet and at that time, I realized that I am supported, am being supported by Heaven and Earth. I was being told – All things are becoming you, nurturing you. Looking at the mountain, the mountain is you. The wide, wide valley becomes you. I realized then that whatever I heard, whatever I saw.. a single breeze.. everything.. is always and forever supporting me, caring for me. At that time happiness gushed from the depths of my belly. My joy was uncontainable. I began to shout at the top of my lungs. My own name rang out over the horizon, over and over. I could not stay still. It was with unsuppressed joy I began to race back down the mountain. It could have been dangerous but my steps were natural, my feet were sure. Da.. Dat..Da.. Dat.. I sped down the mountain with such force. It was my body moving, but not my own body at the same time. I believed that I climbed from the *Roata*[?] and returned to *Atami* where I boarded the train for home. But my world was now changed. Everything was now so intensely intimate. Everything that I encountered was now profoundly close - intimate. I remember picking up a small stone beside the path and carefully holding it and turning it in my hands, as I encouraged it to be strong and steady. Good. Good. It's good. Then I laid it carefully back down in its place.

I returned to the preparatory school where I was boarding. And again, everything had become different. Everything was so much fun. I was filled with energy and enthusiasm for everything. I remember mornings when my

room mates and I would get up and they were slow to get into the day so I would bounce up, fold and put away their futons while they got ready, doing my own last. I would be the last one out to put on my wooden sandals, then I was off and running propelled by joyous energy. My world had changed.

Then the war heated up. Japan was in real danger. I volunteered for special flight service when I was not yet eighteen. The test was very difficult, geared as it was to university students, but I was somehow able to pass. Anyway, my one goal was to be of service to others. At this time my world was still very, very small – limited. I did not have the perspective of being of service to all beings. My perspective was severely limited. I felt I wanted to protect my country. Of course, my father, mother, brother, sisters, teachers, friends. All the people of Japan I wanted to protect and to give myself to do what I could. So I started out willing and ready to sacrifice my life. We all wrote our last words, which were carefully folded and wrapped and kept by the commander of our battalion. I wrote that I was ready to die for my country at any time, even knowing that I could die in training, I feel no remorse. But as it happened there wasn't much training anyway. We were up against a large strong country with powerful arms. Our hastily and poorly built planes were no match in combat with their fine planes. So our battalion was moved to the middle of Manchuria, where the pilots would wait for their orders to fly. Then one by one the pilots would aim for large ships. With just one hit, say a large airplane carrier, one hundred or more planes could be sunk in one blow. So that's what we were studying to do, and it was only five days after my graduation that the emperor announced the total surrender of Japan. This was to be an unconditional surrender, which meant that our country might have to face the very worst. I was miserable because I had been allowed to live while so many others had died.

After this there were many times when I narrowly missed death. Many, many of my fellow soldiers were sent to internment camps in Siberia where they died. But because I worked in the hospital, I was not sent. Many other times my life was spared just in the nick of time. I was always made to be aware that I was protected. Within a year of the end of the war I was repatriated. I was already nineteen then. And the fact that I had been spared while so many others, many of them younger than I, had lost their lives, this lay heavy on my mind. I knew that I could not allow myself to wallow in that weak-minded, indecisive state though – there would be no excuse for that. I had to find out what I could do, what it was in my own power to do to somehow and somehow make it up to all those young men who had given their lives to protect our country.

This was when I was told that there was a very wise man to whom I could take my question. Someone who could help me find the answer, to help me understand the meaning of my life. I had turned twenty years old by then and the man whom I called upon turned out to be a Rōshi, who would be my teacher. I remember he was tiny, very thin, but he had enormous surging power. I openly talked to him of my problem. "I just can't live knowing that there were so many that had to die.. what can I do in atonement?" He answered me, "If you can openly and sincerely listen to me, can do as I

direct, you will be able to solve your problem, all your problems. I will show you what it really means to be alive .. Life. But if you are not sincere it's a waste of time. If you are not earnest and sincere you can go home now". I answered from the bottom of my heart that I will give it all I've got. He gave me permission to stay. From then on I did give it my all. I practiced just as I was instructed. Doing each ONE_THING .. THIS_ONE_THING. I poured my heart and soul into it as I remind you continuously to do yourself. So I noticed for a fact and I can say it to you – complete sincerity: Set out to accomplish something and you will accomplish it. Don't set out to accomplish it and you won't accomplish it. If you don't accomplish something it is because you have not set out to do so. You will suffer weak-mindedness. At times, you will weaken, you will dodder and droop, but you stand up to it and follow through, just as your teacher instructs you to do. Your teacher is pointing to another world, a world where you are not captured by a muddle of thoughts and distinctions, where there is no room for worries, and anxieties and doubts and thought-mashing. My teacher always said, "All Heaven and Earth – the same root. All the myriad things - ONE".

And by following his guidance in zen practice, somewhere along the way I understood just exactly what he meant... and that is pure joy. All the myriad things – ONE. No separation. No distance. Everything - perfectly intimate. Up until you realize this everything appears different, separate, cut-off from everything else. Then it is revealed to you in crystal clarity: Being, which is beyond distinction. Heaven and Earth – the same root. The Way is perfect, vast like space with nothing lacking, nothing superfluous. In order to see this for yourself you must surrender everything. Give your all to THIS_ONE_DOING. THIS *Shi Tan Te*. Give all. Let go. In THIS_ONE_DOING just naturally arises of itself. DOING gives birth to DOING. And after you have seen it for yourself, there is still only THIS_ONE-DOING. THIS_DOING_GIVING_BEING of itself. Everything let go. THIS_ONE_DOING. And to come to be able to shake your head..yes!.. to LIFE as it presents itself. There is understanding – LIFE makes itself understood.

Anyway, I was able to see, at last, all those young men who had died before me are not gone. Their lives are not wasted. There is no separation, no distance. But once I understood this my teacher cautioned me still more strictly, "Not yet, not yet. Stay with it. Do not try to lay back and rest on your experience. Do not become complacent. Stay with THIS. Always new, always fresh. ..THIS! Carry on, Carry through". He did not allow me to coast or to become arrogant. If I came up arrogant or complacent, he would not tolerate it. He would growl and shout at me to go deeper still. So I continued to give myself to my practice.. more and more and more. I made efforts in ways I would not want you to imitate. Regardless of my rashness, regardless of what I did in practice, the key remains the same for everyone. It is as I always say from experience: You must give your all. Hold nothing. You must become your practice. Be THIS_ONE_DOING. If the beginning is not right, everything you do will be in vain. If the beginning is not right, everything you do will be in vain.

I hurled myself into zazen without knowing anything about ordination, without even considering the possibility of becoming a monk myself. Doing zazen, giving your life to zazen, is what it means to be ordained, to be a monk. I simply tried to listen to every teaching of my teacher without adding in my own ideas. In this way, I could hear his teachings with deep familiarity and respect. So, the teaching never seemed foreign or unreasonable to me. Then, it happened, that I became ill and was blessed to make the acquaintance of an older monk, who took me under his wing and cared for me. That monk skilfully led me to become a monk myself. So, I never thought about whether or not to become ordained. I never looked into it or thought about it really .. it just happened naturally.

With awakening, awaken to the true self. One knows that, you will know that I_AM_ONE with all things in this world. All beings are my life. All beings are perfectly inter-related. ONE with all beings in this world. We are ONE_LIFE. All beings are and have always been my own dear lovely children. This is the mind to which *Shakyamuni* Buddha awakened. It is not artificial, not something created. Not something created through practice. It is your present reality, and it steadily, steadily arises to reveal itself naturally. All beings of the Three Worlds, all being of the Three Worlds, is my life. *Ryokan* could not help but say, "I know not what I trample upon, step by step as I walk this earth. Please forgive and permit me to make this step". All beings of the three worlds are my life. The three realms of the world, of transmigration, the realm of desire, of form and non-form. All beings of the three worlds - my life. One Mind. All worlds throughout the ten directions. All the universe is NOW_HERE. NOW_HERE. This includes every, every, every, everything, the limitless cosmos, only TRUTH, only SELF. How could you find fault with this?

I have talked on and on and on in answer to your question about why I was ordained. The story of my experience in zen practice, so in a sense it is alright to talk to you about it, but there is also a danger here. The danger is that you might get the discouraging idea that my experience was too special. You are wrong if assume that my experience was so very special that you yourself could never hope to experience anything like it. If you think in this way, you are absolutely mistaken. Look at yourself. You are sitting here because you have this deep affinity with Buddha dharma. You are sitting with right mind. Your beginning is sound. If your beginning is not right, every practice you do will be useless. You here are beginning with the right mind of practice. *Shakyamuni* Buddha and all the great teachers before us, started their practice on this same foot, with the firm conviction that all beings are my own children. Their ordination is based in truth: All the three worlds are my life. All beings are my lovely children. This is your own belief. With this conviction, you sit on your cushion now. But of course, you cannot be careless. If you become careless, your beginning, the mind which has aroused the thought of enlightenment, the foundation of your practice will weaken. You have got to keep yourself in line – STAY WITH THIS. The time is only NOW. NOW is good. NOW_HERE you are supported by ALL_BEING. All beings urge you, "Please, go ahead, carry through". We are ONE. The Way is ONE. [?] *Shi Tan Te*, THIS_ONE_DOING is from the beginning selfless.

Together with all beings we attain the Buddha Way.