

Immersed in a Sea of Zen Masters: An Adaptation in the tradition of Zen Buddhism

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Your enemy is your greatest teacher

—Buddhist saying

A young seeker and devotee of the Zen Buddhist tradition goes on retreat after retreat, and engages in Zazen or sitting meditation spiritual practice. The Zen master moves almost imperceptively through the Dojo carrying a hardwood stick. With any groan, sigh, grunt, anxious movement or divided attention or consciousness, the “wake up stick” swiftly and deftly strikes the aspirant with the pure intent of awakening to present moment attention and honoring ahimsa or non-harming. The practitioner, in classic Zen tradition, turns to the Master, bows with folded hands and quietly whispers, "Thank you, Master." This pattern continues for the entire session of three to four hours. The Zen master is helping the devotee come awake and continue to stay awake.

The story doesn't end here, so here's the rest of the story. After weeks, months, years or decades possibly, a fundamental shift in the one engaged in Zazen meditation slowly occurs. There sometimes comes the day when the inner silence of Presence, the still peace of equanimity and Being itSelf is embodied in the authentic liberated self. This presence is palpable. After some number of extended sessions over a number of days without any false physical movement, second-guessing or inauthentic behavior, and no use or need to use the stick, the Zen master approaches this one at the conclusion of the meditation time while readying to leave. Quite inconspicuously and almost unnoticeably, the Zen master bows to the aspirant who deeply bows back. Then very quietly the Zen

master whispers in this one's ear, "You are welcome to continue Zazen in your own space and you are welcome to come share Zazen here." Again bows are exchanged. In departing it slowly dawns upon this one that this is graduation day. All dross has been surrendered and all that remains is the Self. This is That and That is This. The inner perfectly aligns with the outer and the outer perfectly mirrors the inner. Resonance occurs.

Each of our Zen masters and teachers, almost without exception, are our nearest, dearest, hardest and most challenging people in our lives, and they will remain difficult for us until absolutely nothing sticks in our craw. Instead of being reactive or hating, being resistive or oppositional, the opportunity is to pause and see that each encounter is in all honesty a healing moment or our awakening. It may be an awakening to some attachment, animosity or closed-mindedness on our part. It may be an awakening to grow through and beyond an old childhood hurt, unworkable belief, false identity or untrue story. It may be an awakening to see all instigating arguments and rudeness as purely a cry for love, attention, understanding and belonging, and to find our compassionate, kind-hearted love for this one and so directly express it. It may be the opportunity to set a clear limit or policy with all the depthless love you can find for a wounded soul in front of you.

Usually it takes so little to make a huge difference in our own lives and those we are privileged to touch. The crossroads: see through the ego-mind's lenses of frustration and condemnation, or be willing to look through the True Self's lenses of kindness, growth and blessing? The first is a common story; the second is nearly unheard of. There are no "how's", methods, techniques, practices or formulas to be free, since we already are free. Sage Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma or Ammachi) says Love is her only method, manifesting as patience, fierceness and compassion in any situation and many

spiritual teachers speak of all methods and approaches being traps. The only path is the pathless one each being authentically traverses moment-by-moment life-long. When can we see every single being on our path as our teacher, Zen master, and blessing?