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A DIALOGUE

A discussion between One and Zero

One: A few weeks ago I chanced to visit an exhibition of oriental arts in the K. Museum. Among the paintings, I noticed one which seemed to me quite simple and fresh—a few persimmons drawn in black ink. Though the arrangement of the fruit was monotonous, yet the whole produced a somewhat mystical effect and seemed to lead me into an unknown realm. Unfortunately, however, I could not understand the painter's intention. Therefore, the next day I dropped into the home of a Japanese friend to whom, since I have come to know him, I have been attracted by his rare personality and profound thought.

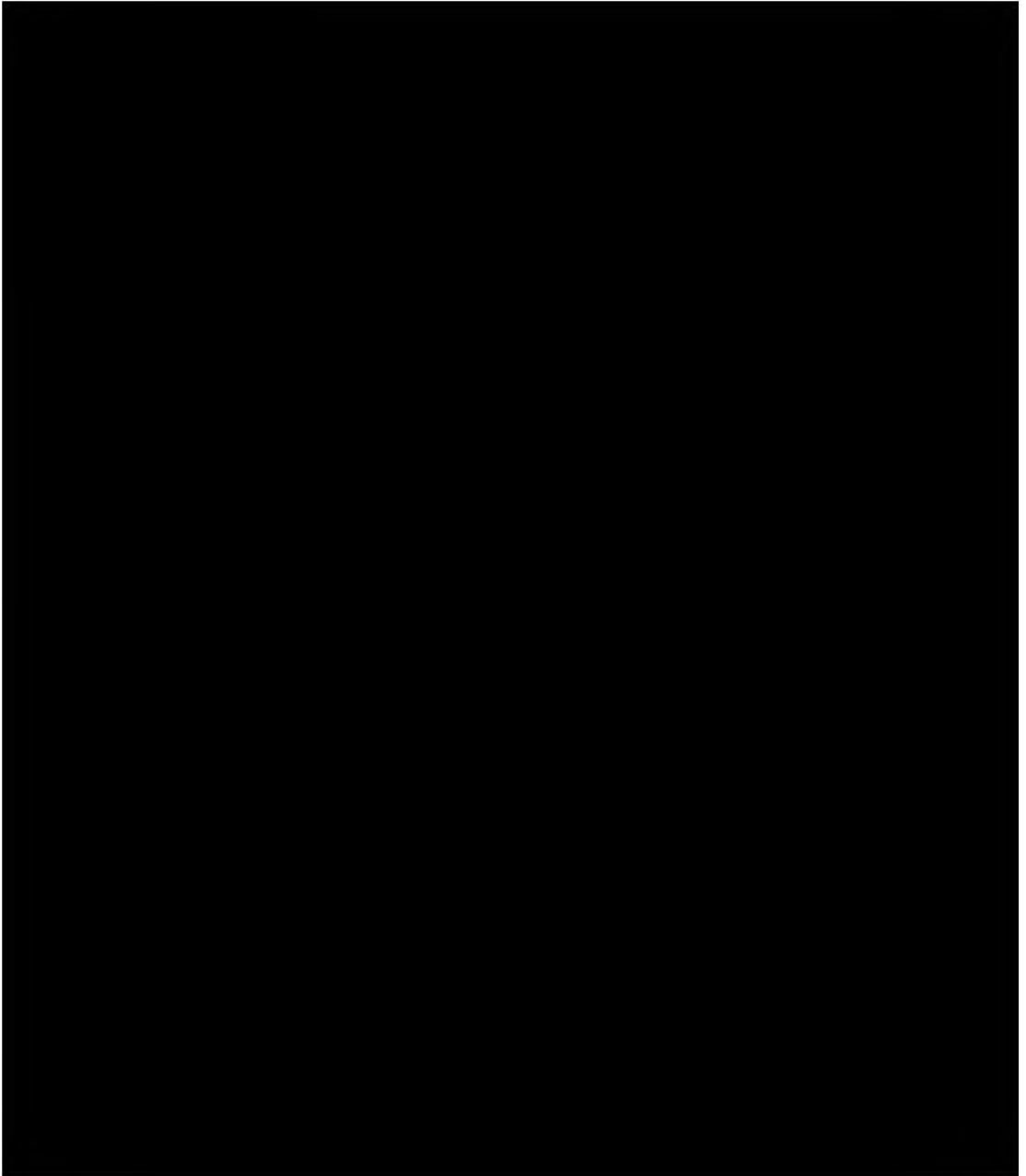
“Do you know the painting exhibit now being held at the K. Museum?” I asked him.

“Yes,” he replied.

“Among the paintings on exhibition there I noticed a black and white drawing, of persimmons, I think. Though it was quite simple, the painting attracted me, but its meaning was beyond my understanding. Since seeing it I have been wondering what it means, what its value is. And I am also eager to know something about the oriental spirit which could produce an art so alien to our styles and traditions. Won't you tell me something about this?”

“Don't wonder about the painting,” my friend replied. “It is useless for you to try to discover the meaning of the persimmons through intellectual understanding. If you attempt to do so, you may be led up a blind alley. You had better cease seeking the meaning outside. But if you really wish to know something about it, you must first of all touch that which you yourself really are. You must begin with the reality within yourself.”

At that time I could not quite grasp his meaning. I have been thinking about what he said to me and, having become confused, have come to you.



Persimmons, By Mokkei (Mu-ch'i), Ryōkōin Temple

Zero: Now I understand the reason for your visit this afternoon. Tell me what is in your mind.

One: I want to know what the persimmon painting means.

Zero: It is just a simple expression of the painter's inner life. The painter is Mokkei, as I remember, a Zen monk who lived during the early part of the Southern Sung dynasty, and who was also a famous painter.

One: Oh, does the painting represent the simplicity of his monkish life, his wearing of black and white clothing? Or do the persimmons, arranged so monotonously, symbolize Zen monks sitting in meditation?

Zero: Absolutely not! You are quite an outsider. The door of the inner life is shut to you, for you are always unconscious of the true fact of life.

One: We generally consider that our daily life consists of material and spiritual elements. Does this differ from what you call the "inner life"?

Zero: You cling to words. When you hear the term "material," you grasp hold of it; when you hear the term "spiritual," you grasp hold of that, too. You are continually deceived by the magic of terminology; you never touch the substance of the fact.

Every fact is alive; each has its own inner life respectively. But, in our daily life, the fact appears wearing clothing; that is, it seldom shows itself before us in its naked state. The clothing of facts is "terminology." Terms stand for concepts, and concepts are far from the inner life of facts. We speak of "spirit" or "matter", and by the mere use of these terms we think we have understood matter or spirit. It seems to me, however, that what we call our understanding is nothing but a mechanical handling of these conceptions according to traditional usage, unconscious though we may be of this. It is like gathering up and handing down clothing when the man who wore it is no longer there. The true man can never be known by making use of his former clothing. The inner life of a fact can never be caught by mere intellectual treatment.

One: Can we see the inner life too?

Zero: Certainly. But first we must once throw off every kind of garment, must free ourselves from the influence of concepts and terminology.

Look! Here on my desk is a white rose in a vase. You see it as white, don't you? Now you must see the flower that is not white, and see the flower that is not a flower, too. It is from here that the inner life of the flower will begin to reveal itself to you.

One : Do tell me more, please!

Zero: You are now observing the white rose. You and the flower are a certain distance apart. You observe the flower; the flower is observed by you. But reverse the point of view to that of the flower. The flower does not know that it is called a white rose. The flower knows no name, no color, no time, no space. The real life of the flower simply goes on within its own unknown mystery. Even the term "mystery" is not adequate to convey what its real inner life is. Listen, here is a story :

The monk Chosei once questioned Master Rei-un :

Chosei: When there is chaos and undifferentiation, what then?

Rei-un: A naked pillar has conceived.

Chosei: When there is differentiation, what then?

Rei-un: It is like a wisp of cloud appearing in the ultimate transparency.

Chosei: I wonder if the ultimate transparency can yield a wisp of cloud or not?

Rei-un did not answer.

Chosei: It so, then anything that has life cannot be there. Again Rei-un did not answer.

Chosei: The instant that the purest transparency is without a single speck in it, what then?

Rei-un: The ultimate reality still ever renews its flowing.

Chosei: What do you mean by "the ultimate reality ever renews its flowing"?

Rei-un: It is just like the everlasting clarity of a mirror.

Chosei: Then, on the path to enlightenment, is there anything to do?

Rei-un: There is.

Chosei: What is there to do on the path to enlightenment?

Rei-un: Break the mirror, then you and I shall see.

Chosei: When there is chaos and undifferentiation, what kind of beings appear?

The Master (Rei-un): It is as if a naked pillar has conceived.①

One : You have spoken about the inner life of the flower and told me an interesting dialogue. But I do not understand the relationship between the two.

Zero: Remember that "rose" is merely the name we give to an unfathomable substance according to our conceptual usage. From the beginning of the universe, however, the inner life of that which we name "rose" has not been conscious of its name. It is clear that any kind of name is nothing but a sign attached from outside by some accident to a material substance of fact. The name and the substance, therefore, are definitely unrelated to one another. The name is a differentiating insignia which assumes the role to bring willy-nilly into the spotlight of the intellect something anonymous that has been dwelling in chaos. But the actor's role always ends in failure; for, whenever that which is anonymous is brought into the light of intellection, its original nature or substance is metamorphosed and takes on a quite different character.

One : Then what you call the real life or the inner life is something akin to "chaos" or "the undifferentiated"?

Zero: That is what I would say.

One : How can I see the real life?

Zero: The only way is to grasp it directly from the inside, without any medium.

One : How can I get inside it?

Zero: Here, right now, you are, aren't you?

One :

Zero: You don't know where you are, even when you are in the midst of the fact. This is because unfortunately you yourself are always repudiating the fact.

One : What can I do about it,

Zero: To put yourself into it, you must first of all see your own real self, which is no other than the true dweller in the chaos. I urge upon you the necessity of discovering your own real self. This is enlightenment. You, however, are not truly aware of your real self, so you cannot see that there is no question but that you are in the midst of reality now.

One : May I ask you about the real self?

Zero: Oh yes, you may ask about it as much as you like. And you may know a great deal about it, too. But though your parent may tell you how you have been brought up since your birth, or a philosopher explain to you endlessly about the existence of the self by means of abstract reasoning—epistemologically, ontologically, ethically, physically, sexually, socially—yet you will grasp nothing of your real self.

One : According to what you say, it would seem that the self is, so to speak, two-fold. Is that so?

Zero: In a certain sense that is true. Buddhist philosophy tells us that man must return to his own real self, namely to non-ego. He must awaken to the fact that the self he normally considers to be his self or ego is a false self, full of ignorance and subject to suffering. He must get rid of this false self and see his real self. This real self is the Buddha-nature within every man.

From my own point of view I might state this as follows. We have our daily life in this visible world in which all things exist in a necessary relativity. This mutual relativity is, after all, ego-centered. The visible world in which we live might be called an ego-centered system. In the network of this ego-centered system everything is named and each name designates an individual ego. You were named "One" by your parent. Under this name you were a student; your school teacher distinguished you from the others as a clever boy. Under your name you got a job in an office; you worked day after day and attained a certain position in society, where you wake up, eat, sleep, talk, love, hate, compete, suffer, desire, dream, become old, and die. When that time comes your name will be put on a tombstone, though you yourself will already not be there.

There is, however, another system which might refer to the real self, that is, the non-ego-centered system. Within this non-ego-centered system you are not you, the flower is not a flower, the persimmon is [not a persimmon, time is not time, space is not space, life is not life, death is not death, love is not love, hate is not hate, competition is not competition, suffering, desire, good, bad, all different kinds of existences, all forms and non-forms, are not themselves. There is only chaos,

the undifferentiated fact that “ever renews its flowing.”

You noticed that you seem to be a “twofold” you, as you spoke of it. The “you” who has a name may be taken as the *rūpa* self. *Rūpa* means ‘form’ in Buddhist philosophy. And the “you” who dwells in the undifferentiated may be taken as the *śūnyatā* self. *Śūnyatā* generally means ‘emptiness,’ but in my view the word emptiness is apt to be thought of as ‘endless void.’ Therefore one must see emptiness as Suchness, as ‘As-it-is-ness.’ As long as you never step into the midst of undifferentiation, the *śūnyatā* self and the *rūpa* self continue to remain at a distance from one another, separate and unrelated. When, however, by your own effort you break the mirror, you will realize your two-fold self to be one actual body. This is the real self. Do you understand?

One : Oh please, let me show it directly! I am really eager to see my real self.

Zero: Hey, One!

One : Yes, sir.

Zero: Hey, One!

One : Yes, sir.

Zero: Hey, One!

One : Yes, sir.

Zero: You blockhead! Where are you?

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