

In every Zen meditation hall, there is a "hangi" or wooden board. It is struck with a wooden mallet to make a sound and inform people of various events. The phrase written on this board is said to be one of the greetings used by Zen practitioners when requesting admission to a training hall, but the origin is unknown.

We all have various worries and concerns, such as wealth, the opposite sex, status, ideology, and so on. However, in the end, these are problems that can be avoided. But there is one problem that absolutely cannot be avoided: "life and death." No matter how much wealth or power one has, "death" will inevitably come. Moreover, it is something that comes without knowing when or in what form.

During the Edo period, the literati Sekisanjin is said to have panicked, saying, "Until yesterday, I thought it was someone else's problem, but I can't stand the fact that I'm going to die."

How to live, how to face death, and how to meet it should be one's greatest concern. Only by resolving this issue can one truly say that they have begun to practice Zen. As it is said, "Clarifying life and clarifying death is the great cause and condition of the Buddhist school," and it is indeed a great matter for Zen practitioners.

"Time should be cherished." While thinking there is still plenty of time, it passes by. We must cherish every moment. This world is impermanence itself. There is not a single thing that exists permanently. Things that have form will break, and things that have life will perish. Even though we think life is long, the end is approaching before we know it. By the time we realize it, it's already "too late," and there's no way to make it in time. Once we have set our minds on Zen, we should focus and diligently work on the issue of "life and death" without getting involved in unnecessary things. "Impermanence is swift, and time waits for no one."

It's not just about the issue of life and death. Each of us should have a "path" to follow and a "purpose." We should strive towards it without being distracted by trivial matters.

In Yoshida Kenko Hoshi's "Tsurezuregusa," there is an interesting story. Let me paraphrase it.

A man advises his child, "You are very intelligent, so become a monk, study Buddhism, become a respectable priest, give sermons, and make a living." The child nods, resolves to become a preacher, and thinks, "When I become a preacher and am invited as a lecturer, they will surely come to pick me up on horseback since I don't have a palanquin or ox-cart. If I'm not good at horseback riding and fall off, I'll become a laughingstock. I should practice riding a horse first." And he immediately starts practicing horseback riding. Next, he thinks, "When a Buddhist service or other event is over, the patron will probably offer me sake and other drinks. Wouldn't it be rude to the patron if I'm too unskilled? I should learn some arts." So he starts learning the popular court music of the time.

In this way, he puts his heart into "horses" and "singing," and his skills improve to the point where he becomes quite proficient. He practices even harder to become better and better. In the meantime, he runs out of time to study Buddhism, grows old, and dies. (Chapter 188)

Isn't this a story that hits home? "Life and death are of utmost importance, time should be cherished, impermanence is swift, and time waits for no one." It's a phrase to keep in mind.

—

禪 語

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生死事大 光陰可惜 無常迅速 時不待人
しょうじじだい こういんおしむべし
むじょうじんそく とくひとをまたず
『枯木再び花を生ず 一禪語に学ぶ生き方一』
(細川景一著・2000.11禪文化研究所刊)より

どこの坐禅堂にも「板木はんぎ」というものが掛けてあります。色々な行事等を知らせる為に木の槌でたたいて音を出します。この板木に書いてある句がこの句です。元来は禅の修行者が道場入門を乞う時に述べる挨拶語の一つといわれていますが、出典等は不詳です。

私達には色々な悩み事があります。財産、異性、地位、思想等々、しかし所詮それ等は避けて通れる問題です。ところがどうしても避けて通れない問題は「生死」です。どんなに財産があろうとも、どんなに権力があろうとも、必ず「死」というものはやって来ます。しかも、それはいつ、どんな形でやって来るかわからない代物です。

江戸時代の文人、蜀山人は、「昨日までは人の事と思いしに、俺が死ぬとはこいつは堪たまらん」と慌てふためいたといわれています。

どう生き、どう死を捉えてそれを迎えるかが一番の関心事でなければなりません。この問題を解決してこそ、はじめて禅に参じたといえるのではないのでしょうか。「生を明らめ死を明らむるは仏家一大事の因縁なり」といわれるようにまさに禅者にとって、生死は事大です。

「光陰(時間)惜しむ可し」、まだまだと思っている間に時間は過ぎ去って行きます。一寸、一刻を大切にしなければなりません。この世は無常そのものです。常住、常に存在するものは何一つありません。形あるものは壊れ、命あるものは亡んでいきます。人生も長い長いと思っていても、いつの間にか終わりが近づいています。気がついた時にはもう「遅八刻ちはつくく」、到底間に合いません。禅に志を立てた以上、余計な事にかかわらず専心し、「生死」の問題に精進すべきです。「無常迅速、時人を待たず」です。

何も生死の問題だけではありません。私達にはそれぞれ成すべき「道」があり「目的」があるはずです。それに向かって雑用心する事なく邁進すべきです。

吉田兼好法師の『徒然草』の中にも面白い話があります。その話を意識してみます。

ある人が自分の子供に、「お前は大変利発ゆえに法師となって仏教の勉強をして立派な僧となり説教などして生活しなさい」と諭します。子供は頷き説教師になる決心をし、考えます。「説教師となって講師として招かれた時、自分には興や牛車がないのできっと馬で迎えに来るであろう。そんな時、乗馬が下手で落馬でもしようものなら、それこそ皆の笑いものになってしまう。先ず馬に乗る練習をしよう」と。そして早速に乗馬の練習を始めます。次いで、「法要などが終わった時、施主の人が酒など勧めるであろう。自分が余りに無芸では施主に対して失礼ではないか。何か芸を身に付けよう」と思い、当時流行の宴曲を習い始めます。

このように、「馬」と「歌」に精を出したのでいよいよ腕が上がり、素人離れするほど上達します。益々上手になろうとして練習に励みます。その内に仏教の勉強をする暇がなくて年を取って死んでしまいます。(第一八八段)

身にしみる話ではないでしょうか。「生死事大、光陰惜しむ可し、無常迅速、時人を待たず」、肝に銘じたい句です。

http://www.rinnou.net/cont_04/zengo/091201.html