

## Not Ignoring Cause and Effect

Source: Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, edited by Kaz T.  
Working with Koans, Baizhang's Fox

"Every time Baizhang gave a dharma talk an old man would always come to listen. He usually left after the talk, but one day he remained behind. Baizhang asked, "Who is there?"

The old man said, "I am not actually a human being. I lived and taught on this mountain at the time of Kasyapa Buddha. One day a student asked me, "Does an person who practices completely still fall into cause and effect?" I said to him, "**No, such a person does not fall into cause & effect.**" Because I said this, I was made to be reborn as a wild fox for five hundred lifetimes. Reverend master, please say a turning word for me and free me of this wild fox body."

Then he asked Baizhang, "Does a person who practices completely still fall into cause and effect?" Baizhang said, "**Don't ignore cause and effect.**"

Immediately the old man had great realization. Bowing, he said, "I am now liberated from the body of the wild fox. I will stay in the mountain behind the monastery. Master, could you perform the usual services for a deceased monk for me?"

Baizhang asked the practice coordinator to inform the assembly that a funeral service for a monk would be held after the midday meal. The monks asked each other, "What's going on? Everyone is well; there is no one sick in the Nirvana Hall."

After the meal, Baizhang led the assembly to a large rock behind the monastery and showed them a dead fox at the rock's base. Following the customary procedure, they cremated the body."

For today I will stop at this place in the koan to work with the main themes, Not falling into cause and effect and not ignoring cause and effect.

In today's conventional language we use the phrase "Falling into", such as falls into a pit or falls into good luck...seemingly without a real cause. Much like its use in this koan, the phrase "falling into" Cause & Effect" - denies causation. There's no personal responsibility, something happens to us, there's no explanation, it just shows up one day, it's random.

However, in classical koan interpretation, this **phrase means not obliterating sense experience**, but returning after initial detachment from the senses, to live in the realm of sense without being blinded by their experience. This is an important distinction that we can test out with our experience.

In Dogen's fascicle titled, "Identifying with Cause & Effect" he recounts the position of Nagarjuna who said, "if you deny cause and effect in the worldly realm, you negate this present life as well as future lives. If you deny cause & effect in the realm of practice, you reject the 3 Treasures and 4 Noble Truths

First part – negate present life as well as future lives...the koan doesn't tell us what happened to the man after he left the wild fox body. It doesn't say he was born in a human or deva realm. So we are not sure of his fate. What we do know is that Shakyamuni said it isn't important or helpful to know about past lives if you don't understand the Buddhadharma. There is no guarantee that the capacity for knowledge of past lives may be the result of wholesome action and therefore be a seed of enlightenment. It could be quite the contrary as seen by the story of the fox.

In terms of Nagarjuna's statement about denial of cause & effect in the realm of practice that he states we reject the 3 Treasures (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha) and the 4 Noble Truths – Truth of Suffering, Cause of suffering is ignorance. It's the way we perceive Reality. We see our mind and body as separate, we see ourselves as separate from others. We deny the interconnectedness of all beings.

So just as Baizhang answered the old man, we can consider his instruction as pointing us in the right direction: Do NOT IGNORE CAUSE & EFFECT.

What does this mean for us in modern day living? Here's some examples, maybe you have some to add:

Examples: Procrastination – gross level...looking out

Being impatient - while driving – element of recklessness moving through heavy traffic thinking we'll be fine and no accident will occur.

Looking in: at the content of our minds – judging, criticizing self or others, experiencing fear, feeling vulnerable, or anxious, paranoid. Any of the afflicted emotions, the hindrances are internal material for investigation.

Following the main case in this koan, Master Nan wrote a verse about his awakening to cause & effect...he said, "Not falling, not blind; for monks or lay folk there are no taboos". To me this is a kind of encouragement to investigate everything that arises in the mind.

At first it might be difficult to get started. How does one examine this issue of ignoring cause and effect?

Suggestion: Listen to our everyday language, how we speak about situations and events. We might hear: "It's not important, it's no big deal", it's fine." That's the opportune time to investigate further. Because, it is not always obvious to us where we are stuck. We might hear our cranky selves and get some sense of our own suffering. How we interact with what follows our annoyance is worthy of a closer look. Just what are the assumptions one has made about Reality? What are the beliefs, our mental formation and our perceptions? These are 2 of the 5 aggregates or skandhas that constitute our humanness. Can we linger longer and peer into the situation deeper? What are the conditions that gave rise to the frustration or annoyance? Are they wholesome or unwholesome? Can you identify the trigger? Is it familiar? Have you seen it before?

Sometimes we need to repeat the suffering to see it more clearly.

So we are back in suffering...came full circle.. Next time the trigger is set into motion, can you gently step back, observe the situation, what just happened? If yes, then you have begun the process of not ignoring cause

and effect. Why's that? You begin to see the story making, your beliefs played out in your movie. Now you can see the conditions that give rise to the triggers and activate the ideas (mental formations) or perceptions that cause a certain, undesirable outcome.

Not ignoring cause & effect implies some responsibility. As practitioners we are willing to face what arises in the mind. This is zazen...the observation of what arises in the mind and the letting go...no judgment, no attachment or grasping...no following the mind streams.

Dogen moves us along further in this practice by saying, "clearly identify with cause & effect". Here there is a subtle shift in meaning, from not falling into cause and effect to not ignoring cause and effect. Dogen is saying one is not separate from everything that is. Embrace our reality, don't deny it.

Once we wake up to what we are up to in the areas of mental formations or perceptions or the ignorance of separating ourselves from what is, we no longer are blind to cause and effect.

Because of this, that happens. A simple, profound statement of a law of nature. We might think as we awaken to some situations, have some insights, that we "won't go there again", but somehow, we find ourselves back in the mud. From what I observe, I believe it's because we actually ignore cause and effect. We don't think "we'll feel the way someone else feels" or that jealousy, or fear is not in our vocabulary, then, the right conditions are presented and, oops, we're in that space of the unthinkable, ....it's the place of the other guy or gal, not us!

So, yes, this happens. As practitioners how can we work this ground and not get discouraged? What can we do? First off, remember Dogen's teaching that life is one mistake after another. Next, be willing to accept yourself as presented to you....don't get into the denial phase. Just allow yourself the space for acceptance to flow in and lighten the weight of what you just experienced. Be gentle with yourself. Then, look more closely using your powers of observation. Look at the conditions that gave rise to mental formation or perception....did you hear or see something that

triggered your idea or belief? What was the topic? Who were the players, what was the setting? Be the detective of your own mind and sort out what transpired. It is through this practice of observing and being willing to dig deeper into the experience that you begin the transformation process. You have to know what you are up to in order to catch yourself the next time, and the next time and the next time. Gradually, we are able to not ignore cause and effect within a particular mind habit...and we are ready to go on to the next habit. The mind is a continuous source of material.

If this mind habit comes up during sitting practice, after you have settled the mind, you can also investigate causes and conditions that give rise to mind habits, to suffering, to delusions. Don't be afraid to ask the questions that probe into your problems. These are Bodhisattva tools. The use of Skillful means is not limited to helping others. You're included too!

Another tool we have are our chants.

Eiheki Koso Hotugammon – formless repentance – reminds us that ancient Buddhas were the same as we. We shall become Buddhas....Study the causes and conditions of our ancestors. Apply the teachings to our lives today. We too will become buddhas. This is the one color of true practice of the true mind of faith of the true body of faith.

From Dogen's last paragraph of Identifying with Cause and Effect: "If you deny causation, endless harm results. Even if you do nothing more than deny cause and effect, this is a disastrous, poisonous view. Immediately clarify all causes and all effects if you want to make the aspiration for enlightenment your priority, and so respond to the boundless gift of Buddha ancestors."

Please study this. Thank you.