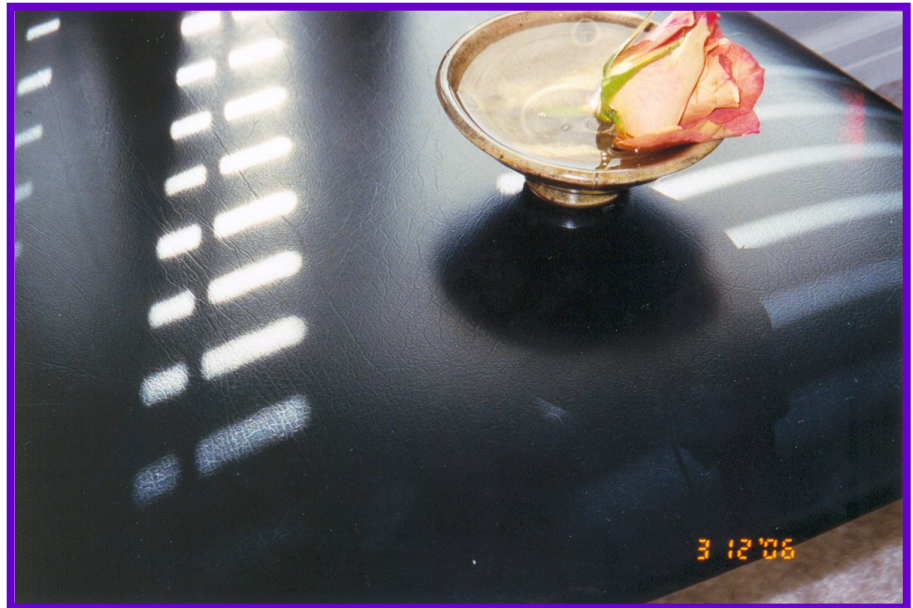


If you
can only
rid
yourselves
of
conceptual
thought,
you
will
have
accomplished
everything.



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Huang Po
"Zen Teaching of Huang Po"
Chinese Zen Master – died 850

Most of us will hear these words and automatically set up the goal of eradicating thought from our minds. Although this may indeed be a worthy goal, it also creates an automatic unconscious hindrance to the very relaxation and presence it is intending to help us uncover. The purpose of this guidance is to help us directly experience the spaciousness that holds thought within it, for this is the place where the “peace that passes all understanding” first begins. But we cannot get there as long as conceptual thought entertains all our attention.

Unfortunately, when the goal becomes the removal of all thought from the mind, we tend to stay tense and rejecting of every thought that arises and passes away in the mind. In this state, we are apt to miss the spaciousness, even when it does shift into the foreground. Like a cat waiting for its prey, we can become hyper-alert to the presence of all thought, and thus miss the spaciousness in which it arrives and departs. Like many seekers, I have despaired of my meditation practices when they seemed to leave me far from a quiet mind empty of words.

“Thought” includes not only words floating through the mind, but also their accompanying feelings, emotions, and images. As Marketplace Mystics, our paths ceaselessly wind through the dilemmas and conundrums of the outer world where conceptual thought, emotions and images are essential to the journey. Does this mean you cannot “accomplish” everything while living in the marketplace, while holding a job, building a portfolio, raising a family, or even working to raise the consciousness of humankind? It would seem it depends on what

“accomplishing everything” may mean. Our understanding of this “accomplishment” will change as we evolve and yet the destination of the spiritual path always remains the same – the traveler’s release from that innate sense of separation from each other, from ourselves, and from God, the Mystery, Love, or whatever is your language for the Source of everything that exists.

There are many ways to “rid yourself of (the power of) conceptual thought”, i.e., its ability to garner all of your attention. When your monastery is the marketplace, the most direct route is by learning to see through thought, emotion, and images as ultimate statements about the reality of your life. Once again the tendency of the mind is to set up purity (no thought) against contamination (thinking, emoting, visioning), forgetting that purity and contamination are themselves concepts and have no reality outside the realm of conceptual thought. So, for the Marketplace Mystic, the goal of “accomplishing everything” is redefined as developing the ability to simply see through the supposed truthfulness of the content of the mind rather than emptying the mind of all content.

Once you develop the knack for seeing through your personal tragedies and comedies, your attention naturally shifts to the spaciousness so graciously holding all that arises and all that passes away. When this happens, you may not have accomplished everything there is to accomplish, but you will have made your life much more workable and available to the Love and Joy that is beyond concept itself.

Until next month when another Reflection will appear, may you find your thoughts and feelings becoming more transparent as you practice shifting your attention from the events in the foreground of your awareness to the empty fullness resting just behind..

Ragini