



## ONENESS, SELF EVIDENT?

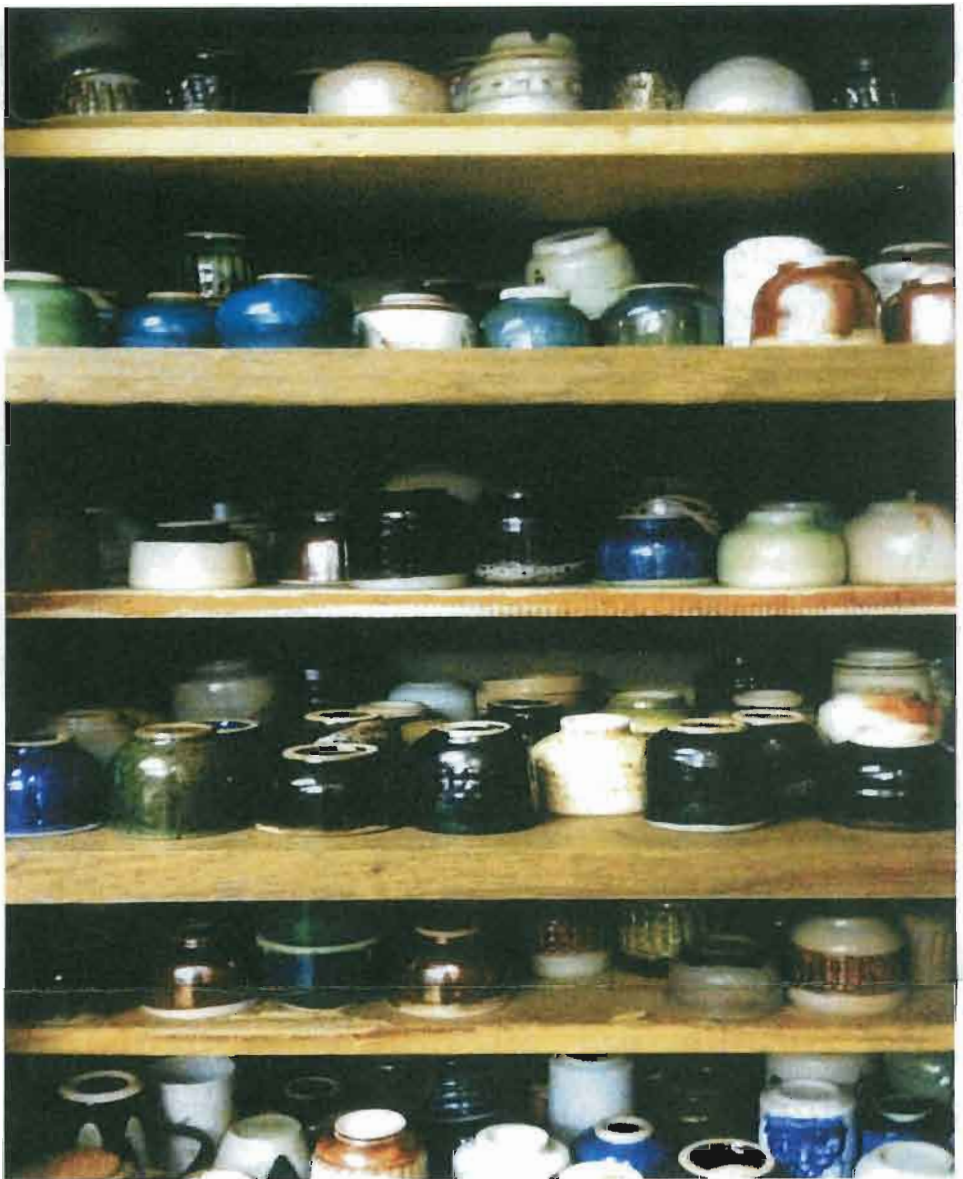
Without thinking too much about it, Oneness would seem to be self-evident. And though we all nod our heads in agreement, we inwardly dismiss it as yet another in our list of agreeable but meaningless words.

*Oneness* or *Interconnectedness* in its usual usage is fairly easy to explain and understand. But in its Buddhist context, it is a very difficult idea to understand, much less experience *karada de*, or *with one's whole being*, as the Japanese expression has it. When the self is king, Oneness can hardly be more than a term to con others and oneself. For Buddhists, Oneness is a statement of fact, a fact we spend our lives trying to understand and experience. It is not a matter of trying to achieve Oneness, but how to see it. In a state or moment of Oneness, the self, and all thoughts connected to

it seem absurd, almost obscene. My needs, my concerns, my talents, my understanding, my visions, ad nauseum. It is not the needs, concerns, talents, understanding, and visions that are obscene – it is the my, my, my, my, my that is so pathetic. It is so in need of holding on to itself that it has to create its own definition of oneness. Our interference with nature is an ego-interference. Our attitude of dealing with nature is thus one of interference, and how to interfere with the least harm to it and ourselves as part of it. It is not for us to do as we please and for our benefit. To experience the interconnected nature of everything, their basic Oneness, is to see how contrary to it we are in our everyday thought, speech, and actions.

Yet, our values are deeply seated in self-interests with little or no

awareness of our connectedness to other living things, groups, people, nations, etc. Our local, state, and national governments spend all their time and our money in figuring out how to remain in office for no other reason than remaining in control. Mega-corporations are answerable to no one, least of all to those on whom they feed. There is very little in our society that seems based on a deep awareness of the Oneness of all things. We use or destroy the animal, vegetable, and mineral world not out of necessity but out of convenience to ourselves. Things are valuable because they are convenient to our comfort. The arts are for the rich who can collect art instead of create it. Our schools cut music, art, dance, etc. because they are looked upon as extras, hence the term extra-curricular. The arts are produced by special people of genius – most often resulting in a profoundly self-centered art thought to be beyond the ken of those who support such artists. If “no man is an island”, why are we so adamantly individualistic. Why is doing it my way the only way? And do we really believe that quick learning is really learning, when any reflection on our lives to this point tells us that learning continues until death, and that at any given point, I am the sum total on everything and everyone that I have come in contact with. Convenient learning is shallow. It lacks patience, perseverance, optimism, and a deeper understanding and enjoyment of Oneness. Convenience is a double-edged sword.



Even our switching back to the use of teacups instead of styrofoam cups caused some initial grumbling because it involved spending more time washing the cups. To our surprise, it reinstated the old benefit of socializing with real living beings. We now move on to coffee cups, using only bamboo waribashi, and perhaps ceramic plates again. We need to re-evaluate the Japanese habit of being prepared by cooking twice what you need. Perhaps not enough is better than too much – especially when you consider that

we are the most obese people on earth. We seem to value anything that is done in excess.

If we could think more deeply on Oneness and Interconnectedness, and this in a more *for example* way than presented here, it might help us to more deeply appreciate the essential religious experience of Buddhism and the Nembutsu – the temporary reality of the ego-self and the eternal, interconnected reality of now.

Nam an da,

Rev. Mas