



from "The Buddha of Infinite Life" by D.T. Suzuki

On Jodoshinshu Myokonoin:

"...These followers are distinguished by some outstanding qualities. They are generally speaking, good-hearted, kindhearted, unworldly, devoted, and with little formal schooling. They know nothing about scholarship and lack any worldly sophistication. Most noteworthy is that they show no acquaintance with Shin Buddhist doctrines. If they were learned or more sophisticated, their expressions would not come so directly from the heart.

Since they are highly illiterate, they are not spoiled by worldly things. What they feel comes out untainted by intellection. Their thought is touched by sincerity, and this comes through clearly in their writings. But usually they don't do much writing; instead of writing they act, and their acts are sometimes quite noteworthy.

I remember one example. Most of the large Buddhist temples in Japan are located in Kyoto. In the country about two hundred miles from Kyoto lived a very pious man. One day he heard that a huge fire was burning the head temple to which he belonged. He immediately took a large carpet, soaked it in water, and shook it in the direction of the temple which was supposed to be burning. Now, a small fire

can be effectively put out by smothering it with a blanket. If it is a big fire, the blanket itself might be consumed. But when this pious man heard about the fire, he could not help going out and committing himself to the stupidest of all possible actions.

When one's thought processes are intellectual and rational, one can immediately see the futility of such an attempt to extinguish a faraway fire. But when there is no such medium of intellection, grief is experienced at once and one instantly responds. "The fire must be put out", especially when the head temple is burning. When this pious man hears the news, his immediate response without any hesitation and deliberation, is to go out and shake the wet blanket in the direction of the fire.

Such an irrational, impulsive action, from the worldly point of view, is the height of stupidity and absurdity. At the same time, this man's act makes us ponder more deeply. Really stupid? Yes, but also a certain genuineness of heart expresses itself in this act. Immediacy of response, with nothing coming between feeling and action, distinguishes the myokonin of which I speak.

Here is another story from this group of

Shin followers. When a man heard noise coming from his back yard, he looked out and saw neighborhood boys climbing up one of the fruit trees in the yard, trying to steal some fruits. So he went out into the yard and placed a ladder underneath the boys in the tree. He then quietly returned to his house. Is this not a stupid thing to do? The boys are stealing fruits, but the owner does not stop them from committing an unlawful act. This man feared that when the children try to come down the tree, nervous about being caught, they might slip and fall, and hurt themselves. His impulse was to prevent them from being injured, not to save his property from thieves. "Such an act is characteristic of the myokonin. ..."

*Rev. Mae*