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Zen Battles. Thich Nhat Hanh

Sometimes the teacher jokes, sometimes the disciple jokes with his teacher like that.

Master Linji was telling us not to think that becoming a person with nothing to do means being lazy! We still need to study and practice; we just need to do so with a joyful spirit. There's no real distinction between sudden and gradual enlightenment. The truth lies in the right Path, the right way of practice.

* Master Linji taught, "My friends, if you wish to have correct insight into the truth, do not allow others to deceive you. Whatever comes to you, either from the outside or within, you should slay it immediately. If you meet the Buddha, you should slay the Buddha; if you meet the master, an arhat, your parents, or relatives, you should slay them. Only thus can you be liberated. Do not allow things to bind you, and you will be free and at ease."

We have to have understanding independent of others. When we say "correct insight," we mean the insight that it is in accord with reality. False perceptions exist and they come from within us and sometimes they are influenced by other people. For instance, Plum Village, where I live in France, is a reality. There are people who like it, who say how beautiful it is. There are people who hate it and say it's a terrible place. Neither is the reality.

When a young man loves a young woman, he produces an image of her. He loves this object of his perceptions more than he loves the woman. He might say, "I'd rather die than marry someone else." Whom do we love? Do we love God? Buddha? Do we love the real Buddha, or do we love an image of the Buddha which we have created? We could be like that naive young man who loves the girl. We don't know who the Buddha is. We make an image of the Buddha and we love that image. We create an image of God and we

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love that image of God.

If we're caught in our perceptions, we'll draw a beautiful picture of the girl we love. But once we've married her, we'll know what she is like; after a few years we'll be in touch with the reality. The image will slowly disintegrate. We may be angry. But the young woman didn't deceive us; we deceived ourselves.

In Vietnam and China, people who come to Buddhist temples often bring offerings of bananas. Sometimes they offer papaya, sometimes mango. I knew a young monk who, when he was still a small boy in Vietnam, thought the Buddha was someone who sat on the altar and never stepped down and who really liked fruit, especially bananas. He'd never seen the Buddha eat a banana; he thought maybe he ate when no one was around. So one night he sneaked out of the house and went to the temple to see the Buddha eat a banana. Hour after hour passed while the young boy waited for the Buddha to put out his hand and pick up a banana. But he never was able to see the Buddha eating a banana.

After that, the little monk was taught that Buddha was just a statue. He was told that the Buddha wasn't in the temple, but was in the western direction, very far away. And he said, "Why is the Buddha so far away? Why isn't the Buddha nearby?"

We might laugh at the young boy, but many of us are like this. We pray for God or the Buddha to help us with a new job or an unfaithful partner. We pray for little things that will make our lives easier. We may pray, "If tomorrow we have a picnic, please may there be sunshine." But at the same time, the farmers are praying, "Oh we haven't had rain for so long. The wheat will die. Please let there be rain." Whom should God satisfy? We have this image of who the Buddha is and we have to cut off the head of that image.

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Master Linji said, "If you meet the Buddha, slay the Buddha. If you meet your parents, slay your parents." These are words that shake the whole world. It's rather terrible in China or any country to say, "When you meet your parents, slay them." But it's not that Buddhism isn't concerned with filial piety. With awakened understanding we can see that our mother and father are present in every cell of our body. We can't take our mother or our father out of us. We are just their continuation.

There are young people who are angry with their parents, and they announce: "I don't want to have anything to do with my father. I don't want to have anything to do with my mother." It means that we have a view of our parents that makes us suffer a great deal.

There are people who are angry with their fathers. They come to the temple, meet the teacher, and they think the teacher is their father, so they are angry with their teacher at the same time as well as their father. We should slay all these apparitions, because they are just our own misperceptions.

Above all, liberation is liberation from wrong perceptions. Most of us start with a wrong view about our own selves and this leads us to wrong views about others, which leads to so much suffering.

Master Linji taught, "Among students who have come here from the four quarters, there has not been a single one who has not brought along with him an attachment to something or other. If this mountain monk is able to recognize that object of attachment, he will beat it straight away. If they describe this object with their hands, I shall beat their hands. If they describe it with their mouth, I shall beat their mouth. If they describe it with their eyes, I shall hit them on the eyes. Until now no one who has come has been able to prove that they have independence and freedom. They are all