

MASTER CAT

I had a busy day today. Errands needed to be tended to, and so I tended to them. This took me some time, but eventually I finished all my tasks and found myself with some extra time to spend before my next scheduled activity. So I decided to use that time thinking about what I would say to you this evening. I sat down, took a gentle breath and released it. I would simply allow whatever came to me be my message to you.

The moment that gentle breath was released, one of my cats walked over to me and started to nudge me as cats will do. Nudge, nudge, nudge...I love you, daddy! So I petted the cat and the cat nudged me; I scratched the cat and the cat nudged me; I rubbed the cat's belly and the cat nudged me some more. This went on for a few minutes until the cat stopped nudging me, turned 360 degrees, sat down next to my leg and purred. It was at that moment that I knew what I would say to you this evening; the easy part was that the cat had already said it for me! It was simply up to me, as the student of Master Cat, to translate the Master's message.

It may sound strange for me to call a cat "Master," but in this case the cat was exactly that. The cat, whose name is Oscar, expressed himself directly and without hesitation, and I expressed myself right back to him directly and without hesitation. I wasn't thinking, "Come on, Oscar, I have work to do!" I just petted him back.. This is the Dharma at work, this is life expressing itself directly; this is the master, in this case Master Oscar, demanding that you demonstrate your understanding right at this moment. This time I passed Master Oscar's test...next time, who knows?

I could have shooed Oscar away because I had things to do; I could have said to myself, "Well, I can give Oscar a little of my time," but that didn't happen. It was like a dance: nudge/pet, nudge/rub, nudge/scritch, nudge/stroke, purr-purr-purr...smile! Life is very simple when we allow it to be what it is, when we allow each moment to fully manifest in its uniqueness. Life is much fuller when we get beyond our mistaken impression that it exists for our convenience. Life is the greatest dance of all, so why are we sitting on the sidelines like wallflowers?

If we are truly students of Ch'an, students of the Dharma, students of life itself, then we need to be open to what life is telling us. This is what being a student means, being open...open wide! Much of the time we are very closed to life because we spend most of that time hanging on to what's floating around in our heads instead of noticing what's going on right at our feet; this

has the effect of severely limiting our outlook, which keeps us stuck in the mud of suffering and delusion. It also makes us hesitate, when we should be dancing with life with no hesitation whatsoever. The saying, "He who hesitates is lost" is a very Ch'an-like saying!

Life, just like Master Oscar, expresses itself to us every moment of every day, and if we aren't listening to Master Life...if we aren't petting that cat when it nudges us...then we're not really getting it. After all, didn't the Buddha himself tell us to let the Truth be our teacher? Our life is Truth itself, so why are we ignoring it so much? Whether Truth manifests itself as a cat, a screaming child or a thunderstorm is irrelevant; the question we need to ask ourselves is, "Am I being open *right now*?" If the answer is "yes," then we need to work to maintain that openness; if the answer is "no," then we need to deepen our meditative practice so that we can get beyond our conceptualized views and begin to open up to life itself.

Purr.....!