

# 'We just follow circumstance.' — Bhante Bodhidhamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

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I came across this saying from Dōgen Zenji, the founder of Japanese Sōtō Zen. “When the world ends, and the fires blaze unobstructed through everything, and all falls to ruin, we just follow circumstance.” (Kinder Smith) There are two possible ways in which we, all life in fact, could fall to ruin by fire at this present time – thermonuclear war and climate crisis. We have seen from massive earthquakes, most recently the devastation in Turkey and Syria, what the consequences are. Immediate death, long term physical pain and anguish and eventual death, disabled for life and lives filled with grief and despair. And the possible aftermath of political instability and social turmoil. In such a scenario, will we be able to ‘just follow circumstance’. At first this phrase may seem too cool to be true, even callous. Does it mean we have to harden our hearts, stay aloof and save ourselves. Or might that circumstance expand beyond its tight self-centred circumference to embrace the full surround of impact on others. That can only arise from a fearless total acceptance, ‘this is the circumstance now’, the total circumstance of myself and others in this situation, recognising that collaborative effort will produce the best results for everyone. And to mourn shared loss together most healing. In encompassing others, we lose the suffering of self-obsession. In its most exemplary expression to give up one’s life for another. That is a hard ask for the self will be consumed with self-preservation. The more we identify with this human form, the more will the circumference tighten around us. But this will not release us from the fear and despair. Worse, it will magnify it. The self will stand exposed to its essential existential loneliness. Unable to bear the suffering, the self becomes the very fires it seeks to escape. This is the Hell Realm. Is there an alternative? An escape? A refuge? There is an even deeper circumference within us of a different kind, one that cannot be breached. No matter what fires burn within us or outside us once accessed we find ourselves insulated and yet able to ‘follow circumstance’. Both fully aware and mindful, engaged fully in the surrounding situation, we discover the Unshakeable Heart. This is the purpose of our practice: to discover and experience over and over until we settle permanently into that intuitive awareness, Satipanya.

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