

## **Rinzai Zen: An Introduction to Practice**

*From a Soto-Rinzai Dialogue with Daigaku Rumme & Jeff Shore, held at the Hartford Street Zendo of the San Francisco Zen Center, January 13, 2007. Below is a revised version of the Rinzai part of the discussion. It is hoped that eventually the Soto part of the discussion will also be published.*

**Introduction by Judy Hoyem:** I'd like to introduce Jeff Shore. Jeff lives in Kyoto, Japan where he has practiced for over 25 years at Tōfukuji Rinzai Zen monastery as a layman under the master and head abbot Keidō Fukushima. Jeff is also Professor of International Zen at Hanazono University in Kyoto. He is just coming to the end of a one-year sabbatical from his university, during which he has traveled throughout Europe, South America and the United States giving lectures and retreats.

The second speaker, Daigaku Rumme, is a disciple of master Sekkei Harada of Hosshinji Soto Zen monastery in Obama, Japan, where Daigaku has lived over 27 years as a monk. He currently resides at the San Francisco Zen Center and works as a staff member of the Soto Zen Mission of North America.

Each will give a short talk describing the practice of their respective traditions. It is hoped that this dialogue will reveal not only the differences between the two traditions, but the common essence.

**Introduction by Daigaku Rumme:** Good afternoon. It's great to see so many people here. I'd like to say thank you to Jeff for taking time out of his very busy schedule to be with us this afternoon, as well as to Judy Hoyem who was very instrumental in bringing us together today, and to Myo Lahey of the Hartford Street Zendo for generously providing the space.

I think this is a unique opportunity to speak about Soto and Rinzai Zen. I was just talking on the phone the other day with a mutual friend of ours, Victor Sōgen Hori who lives in Montreal. One of the distinguished Rinzai priests here in North America. He said, "I wish I could be in San Francisco."

We're going to speak about 30 minutes each, then there will be plenty of time for questions, comments and so on. I hope everyone enjoys it, thank you. We'll begin by sitting together in zazen...

**Jeff Shore:** It's a great pleasure and an honor to be here. It is out of mutual respect for our traditions – I myself am here partly out of a desire to better understand the other tradition. I look forward to learning much from Daigaku today, and also from all of you.

What is koan practice in Rinzai Zen? One good way to clarify this in a brief talk like today is to look into where the koan comes from, where did it originate? For example, though it's not usually spoken of in this way, what was Gotama Buddha's koan? What was his *genjōkōan* – the koan manifest there and then?

Many of you are familiar with the basic meaning of the Chinese characters for the word koan. It's often described as a public document, a legal term. But very simply, in the present context let us consider it as a religious problem in the form of an ultimate challenge. To put it bluntly, what was Gotama's **problem**? What drove him to leave home, to leave everything, finally to sit under the Bodhi Tree? What was Dogen's *genjōkōan*, what drove him to China? What was Rinzai's *genjōkōan*? (I will use the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese masters since it is more familiar to you. No disrespect whatsoever is meant to the great Chinese tradition.) What about the Japanese Zen masters Bankei, or Hakuin – what was their *genjōkōan*, what drove them?

There is little time to go into detail today. But if you can at least get a taste of what a living koan really is, the rest can follow naturally. In other words, once you get a sense of what a koan truly is, then you can begin to see how, and why, it gradually developed into its present state – and the problems associated with it. If we cannot see what a koan is for us here and now, is it any wonder that the koan systems appear bizarre?

Let me begin with an example from the early Pali canon of Indian Buddhism, the story of the young man Yasa, son of a wealthy merchant in what is now Benares. One night, after being entertained by his entourage, he happened to fall asleep at his seat. His entourage of servants, musicians and the like were no longer needed, so they also fell asleep in their places, some with musical instruments still in hand.

For whatever reason, in the middle of the night, Yasa all of a sudden wakes up. He looks around and is shocked at what he sees. Living the good life with whatever he desired right at hand, he now finds himself waking up in what seems like a cemetery. You can see why, can't you? Here are the same people he had just been enjoying himself with a few short hours ago. But now one of the young women, sound asleep, has her legs sprawled out in front of him in a most inelegant manner. Another is drooling in her sleep, another snoring loudly.

The veneer of his comfortable, pleasurable existence has been suddenly stripped away and something underneath or beyond it has been revealed. Confronted with this other side of life, the impressionable young Yasa is shocked and disgusted. He says to himself at this point, "What distress indeed, what affliction indeed!" Rather old-fashioned English, perhaps in keeping with the ancient Pali. He had a glimpse into the first noble truth of Buddhism, that all conditioned existence is subject to "suffering," as it is often poorly rendered in English. I prefer "dis-ease." In other words, self cannot come fully to rest in being – whether we are prince or pauper.

Yasa then gets up and leaves his mansion, intent never to return. He happens to come upon Gotama Buddha sitting in meditation. Remember, this is not a Zen story; however, according to the Pali canon, Yasa walks right up to Gotama, no introductions, no beating around the bush, and simply and directly states what could be called his *genjōkōan*: What distress indeed, what affliction indeed! In the vernacular of my Philly youth, "What a drag! Major bummer. This sucks."

How does Gotama, at that time and place, for that young man Yasa, respond? How do we respond? Gotama responded, "This here is not distress. This here is not affliction." Hearing this, Yasa could take encouragement. Yasa removed his gold-gilded slippers and sat down to be instructed by Gotama. Naturally, Gotama did not use the direct and immediate method of Zen. Rather he taught a gradual teaching. But in a short time Yasa, still a layman, became an arhat, an awakened one. A precious story for us here today.

Do you see? There, in that brief exchange between Yasa and Gotama, is Buddhism in a nutshell – and, if you have the eye, Zen Buddhism, as well as the *genjōkōan*. To make it unmistakably clear: Where is Yasa when he says what he says? And where is Gotama when he says what he says? Making this crystal clear under our own feet is what genuine zazen is all about.

Now let me introduce a traditional koan. It is a crucial one. For it presents the beginning of the Zen tradition before there was any Rinzai or Soto Zen. It is the legend of Bodhidharma, the 6<sup>th</sup> century Indian Buddhist monk considered the founder of the Chinese Zen tradition. Very simply, he was sitting in a mountain cave in China facing the wall – which seems to be why, to this day, Soto monks sit facing the wall rather than each other. A Chinese monk approaches and pleads, "I am not at peace. Master, please give me peace." How does Bodhidharma respond to this living *genjōkōan*? Here and now, how do you respond?

Bodhidharma was himself sitting in zazen at the time. He did not, however, suggest doing the same. Nor did he ask the Chinese monk how his zazen was

going. Nor did he ask, as has become common in certain circles these days, have you had a *kenshō*-experience yet? He did not say to work hard and have a breakthrough either. How did Bodhidharma respond? "Bring forth the self that is not at peace, then it will be!" Here is the beginning of the Chinese Zen tradition.

The Zen texts do not go into detail, but that Chinese monk, in response to Bodhidharma's challenge, must have looked deeply and carefully into the matter: What, where exactly is this self, this source of my dis-ease? Is it inside of me? Outside of me? In the in between? Finally he realizes it, returns to Bodhidharma and responds, "I have searched for it thoroughly, and it is, finally, unattainable." At which point Bodhidharma naturally replies, "Now it is truly at peace!" As many of you know, this monk went on to become the second patriarch of Chinese Zen. I won't take the time now, but it can all be unpacked right here as well.

Instead, let me turn to an exchange between another monk and the early Chinese Zen master Sekitō, held in high regard by Soto Zen. Sekitō stated that mind itself is Buddha. This was when the statement was still fresh, before it became a catchphrase. It is usually rendered in English as something like "Mind itself is Buddha." But what is Sekitō really saying? Mind or self, the same Chinese character used in the previous exchange with Bodhidharma, is used here as well. Sekitō is declaring that that mind, what we call self, is actually Buddha, which is the awakened mind. To put it bluntly, "Mind itself is Buddha" is really challenging you to realize nothing less than "You are awake!"

You can well imagine, can't you, the great doubt that arose in the minds of the monks listening to Sekitō? One monk responded to Sekitō: But what about salvation, Nirvana, the sacred practices and goals of Buddhism? This monk probably left his home and family, had his head shaved, made the arduous journey to Sekitō's monastery, studied the sutras, practiced meditation and so forth. Perhaps he thought he was about ninety percent of the way there. But now Sekitō, with one statement, has pulled the rug out from under him and all his precious practices and goals.

How does Sekitō respond, at that time and place, to that monk's *genjōkōan*? What about liberation? Sekitō responds, "Who binds you!" He answers a question with a question: a question that can put an end to all questions.

Is this so different from Bodhidharma's challenge – or, for that matter, Gotama's response to Yasa? I'll leave it there for now.

The most famous koan may be the "Mu" of master Jōshū. Very simply, a monk asks whether or not this dog has Buddha nature. In other words, is it awake, free of all dis-ease? A good question, at that time and place. And it is asked in a natural way for a Chinese monk, in terms of the concrete things around them rather than abstractions.

The monk is not just asking a theoretical question about the essential nature of animals. He is probing, just as we must do, what is my real nature? Do I really have this pure, peerless awakened nature? – Sure doesn't seem that way to me!

Commentaries make clear that the monk already knew, just as the master certainly did, the technical answer to that question: "Yes." Mahayana Sutras make clear that all beings have – or, as Dogen puts it, are – Buddha nature.

However, at that time and place, for that monk, Jōshū responded, "Mu." I render it as "Nope!" The point is, to what exactly is Jōshū saying "Nope"?

Perhaps I should briefly introduce the story of Rinzai, the father of Rinzai Zen, to show what happens when a *genjōkōan* is brought to life and then brought to its conclusion. Very simply, the monk Rinzai is sitting in a samadhi or concentrated oneness so deep that he can't even formulate a question. (Suggestive, isn't it? We have all kinds of questions, don't we?) So, he doesn't go to meet the master, Ōbaku. The head monk is astute, so he asks Rinzai how long he's been here at the monastery. Three years, replies Rinzai. Have you gone to see the master? Not once.

Why not? I don't even know what to ask. So the head monk suggests he go and ask about the ultimate point of the Buddha Dharma — a standard question similar to What is the ultimate truth? What is Zen? Who is Buddha? and so on.

Rinzai obediently does as he's told, but before he can finish asking the question, the master Ōbaku strikes him! Rinzai does this several times, and each time the master hits him before he's done. Why? Finally Rinzai despairs, feeling there must be some karmic obstruction. To make a long story short, Rinzai ends up visiting a master known as Daigu. Rinzai explains that he had asked his master Ōbaku several times about the Buddha Dharma, but the master would just hit him. Rinzai concludes, "I don't know where my fault lies." Daigu responds: "Why, Ōbaku was exhausting himself with grandmotherly kindness, yet you have the nerve to come here and ask where your fault lies!" With that, Rinzai falls through. How does he express it? Rinzai's statement upon awakening is usually translated accurately enough as something like, "Oh, there's not much to Ōbaku's Buddha Dharma!" Another rendering, "Is that all there is to Ōbaku's Buddha Dharma?!" Rinzai had been desperately seeking this superb, peerless Dharma of his master. And what does he finally find? This is how I put it: "Ah, there's nothing to it!" **That's** what he awakened to.

At which point Daigu declares, "Why you bedwetting little devil! You just came here saying you don't know where you were at fault. Now you say there's nothing to it. What exactly have you seen? Speak, speak!" Without hesitation Rinzai gives Daigu a couple of good pokes in the rib. Rinzai is not the man he was just a moment ago. Daigu concludes by shoving Rinzai away with the words: "Your business is with Ōbaku. I have nothing to do with it."

"There's nothing to it!" – That is the awakening of Rinzai, the father of Rinzai Zen.

Now to bring it all home as simply and clearly as I can: The koan – to be real – must be our own burning and immediate question, our own living problem. The one that must be asked, and must be resolved, at that time and place. That is how I see the genuine *genjōkōan*. If we are pouring ourselves fully into the practice, eventually we can't get away from it. That's why it is so important to have the koan with you constantly, whether sitting, working, or resting. As the practice matures, you can't escape it – it's there like it or not, whether you think about it or not. Pursued properly, the koan comes to contain all. It's no longer simply **my** problem.

From outside, koans can appear abstract and bizarre. But from inside there is nothing more immediate, direct, and concrete. Nor is it merely a problem of the intellect, although it is often mistakenly presented that way. Not only the intellect, but emotion and will are corrupted by ego-self. It is not a problem of some part or aspect of self; as Gotama, Dogen and others have made clear, it is the problem of the total body-mind complex, in other words, self in its totality.

Thus, koan Zen has a reputation for being very severe, very uncompromising. Frankly speaking, however, when you give your self fully to the practice, I don't see how you can avoid where it leads. It is, finally, not only "unattainable" but also unavoidable. It's just a matter of our sincerity and devotion to practice.

What actually happens in the real koan practice of Rinzai Zen? When self exhausts itself in this search or struggle, self in its totality **freezes**. In other words, it can no longer submerge or immerse itself in seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, thinking, feeling, and so on. In contemporary parlance: already been there, done that. The activities of self in their totality are recognized as no more than a symptom of the dis-ease.

If you meet with a genuine Zen master, he serves as an impenetrable wall, rejecting anything and everything that smacks of self, whether intellect, emotion, or will. In a sense it's an artificially created situation for what in earlier times had occurred naturally. It forces you to clearly, concretely recognize that **there is nowhere to go**. Eventually self, body-mind in its totality, freezes: you can still

walk, talk, and perform daily functions. But there is no more any "outflow," as the Buddhist term puts it.

How to describe it? All is gathered into one, and frozen. No longer any inside or outside. When **this** resolves – **dissolves** – practice truly is realization, as Dogen is fond of saying. Recall Rinzai: "There's nothing to it!" And the Chinese monk who became the second patriarch: "I have searched for it thoroughly and it is, finally, unattainable."

Rinzai Zen has come to stress the need to actually [*striking floor*] **attain** that unattainable: decisive and conclusive. Not merely a matter of will or resolve, but of something much more basic. Otherwise it's a matter of endlessly going in and coming out of states of mind and so on – an obvious symptom of the dis-ease itself.

What happens when the koan is realized? We really don't attain anything. There is nothing to attain. We don't gain a thing. I would say, on the contrary, we lose one thing: the **separation**: the separation from the world, from others, and from who we really are. That is all. We separate from the separation. Or better yet, the separation itself falls away of its own accord. Then for the first time we really know what this thing is [*pointing at his feet*].

Ego-self mistakenly thinks that since it gets involved in duality, if it can somehow be without duality then it will be free of dis-ease. Nonsense. When we actually see all the way through, it is obvious: Self doesn't **have** this duality or separation; self **is** this separation. What Dogen and others call "body-mind" **is** this self-as-separation. Now I ask all of you, what then is Dogen's "body-mind fallen off"?

Once again, self **is** that delusion of separateness. Thus, self can't have or generate what is called the great doubt of Zen; it can only **be** it. Finally self comes to be that great doubt. When self is fully consumed in that doubt, it cannot help but dissolve. And when it dissolves, **there can be no doubt**.

Let me quickly add that this does not solve all the particular problems of the individual, nor does it make you perfect. We must be careful here.

The first koan is to come to this – decisively. Why, then, are there so many other koans? They are in a sense secondary, not necessary. The other koans in the present systems are to make sure that it is worked out in every aspect of life. But if the first koan is not decisive, then we end up learning how to surf the waves so to speak: We learn how to "answer" or "pass" the koan – like passing gas – without getting to the bottom of ourselves once and for all. This is a problem and a danger wherever koan Zen is not used properly. It is a pervasive problem in Western Zen centers, but it is not absent in Japan and elsewhere.

I trust you now can see that, taken all the way, almost anything can become a koan. On the other hand, any formal koan, if it is not taken as your own immediate problem, is not a living koan. If there were more time I would speak on the details of koan practice and the koan systems. But if you have gotten at least the gist of what a koan really is, the rest can follow naturally. And if you have questions, we can go into more detail during the discussion. Thank you for listening so intently.

## **Discussion**

**Jeff Shore:** We are here to understand better the common ground of Soto and Rinzaï and, indeed, of Buddhism and humanity. But that does not at all mean mixing things up. On the contrary it means being completely clear about the legitimate differences and distinctions. We're not trying to lump everything together and say it's all the same: that's worthless. It's less than worthless. That's what in Buddhism is called "false sameness." By going to the depth of our respective traditions, we really can come in contact with the other tradition.

**Questioner:** How does sitting meditation in Rinzaï Zen differ from the practice of Soto? Is it sitting with a focus on the koan, is it not entertaining any discursive

thought?

**Jeff Shore:** I've already touched on the development in terms of a natural koan emerging and taking over. So maybe it would be helpful to respond by looking at how koan Zen developed and what it became.

It's a simplification, but basically koans developed because people were no longer coming with their own living problem. For example, according to the legend, the second patriarch came and stated: I am not at peace – master, please give me peace! He didn't need a whole lot explained to him. But eventually *Chan*, that is, Chinese Zen Buddhism, became more or less the state religion, so all kinds of people were coming to practice this religion for all kinds of reasons. They were rarely coming anymore with that burning question.

So what did the masters do? They could have just thrown them out – on occasion they did! But the standard Rinzai explanation is that when someone came without a real problem-question or doubt, out of "grandmotherly kindness" the master had them take up a traditional koan to help them plumb the depths. So a master might guide the disciple by saying that when asked whether or not a dog had Buddha nature, Jōshū responded "Mu!" Now **be** that!

Zazen, "sitting Zen," is very important here. In the *rōhatsu*, the most intense week-long retreat of the year, in Rinzai monasteries in Japan we sit about eighteen hours a day for seven days, without lying down. This retreat is usually held the first week of December, in commemoration of Gotama Buddha's sitting under the Bodhi tree and awakening. Zazen is very important in Rinzai Zen.

The point is to sit with, as, the koan. But if it is a given koan assigned from the outside, we must first cement ourselves to it, be one with it. Bring Jōshū's "Mu!" to life. Make it our own.

Here is where meeting with the master in *dokusan* or *sanzen* can be so valuable in Rinzai Zen. This is a significant difference with Soto Zen. In Rinzai Zen there is no discussion with the master in this formal meeting. There is only the koan. The master is there as a kind of a great wall, an impenetrable barrier. At the same time he is completely open, in a sense expecting. But he will accept nothing but utter selflessness. Out of great compassion he remains a wall that self cannot possibly scale, a gateless barrier.

Why? To help the koan burn through you, exhaust you. That is what goes on in genuine zazen. The popular criticism that in Rinzai Zen one sits and thinks about a koan misses the point. Face it: If you're thinking about a koan, then you're not doing Rinzai practice. Thinking about a koan, feeling, emoting, having insights about it has nothing to do with it and will naturally be rejected by any master worth his salt.

The first necessity is to actually **be** (*striking floor*) the koan. But in the beginning you are still struggling to be one with it. You are still separate from it. If one continues on without interruption, eventually that separation is gone. There can be no separation. Then the koan starts to come to life. It sounds strange, but when you're eating, the koan eats; the koan lays down to rest.

That state of no-separation, however, is not yet awakening. In a sense we can say that at this point the practice has become effortless. But it is far from complete. Thus, even then, the master remains an immovable wall. Why? So that even this oneness can fall away.

Although I have stressed the importance of zazen, it is worth noting that no one has ever awakened simply by sitting. Why? Dogen was awakened when the master hurled abuse and struck the monk sitting nearby for falling asleep. Even Gotama himself, according to the Zen tradition, awakened upon looking up at the morning star. There must be a discrete event in which, how to put it, **no-self realizes itself**. Practice then truly **is** realization, authentication, as your tradition puts it.

Not just the master's, but the single eye of the senior monks is constantly on you as well, so that you don't lose focus even for a moment. This is also probably different from Soto monastic practice. There's a kind of macho-rigor, at least in contemporary Rinzai Zen. And it can be abused. But the point is to help the beginner maintain a constant grip on the koan. Not lose it for a moment. Then, eventually it becomes constant. A constant samadhi in which all has been gathered into one. Then it can all fall away.

Otherwise some focus and solidifying occurs, but then it melts away. Then builds up again. Then melts away again, and so on. This is not practice but inconclusive, indecisive, endless mental masturbation.

Does that help?

**Questioner:** Thank you. You have answered a larger, more important question than the one I asked.

**Jeff:** My apologies. (*General laughter*)

**Questioner:** Without discrimination, is there awareness of any kind? And without awareness, is there discrimination of any kind?

**Jeff:** In a sense it's a good question, since it gets to the crux of the matter: As long as there is that kind of awareness, the problem still exists. The solution is not, of course, to be simply **unconscious**. Awakened persons don't walk into walls.

How are they aware? What are they aware of? Perhaps that's a way of rephrasing your question. Obviously in a sense they are aware. But not quite in the same way that ordinary self-consciousness works.

I described the preliminary state in terms of there being no separation – not no awareness, but no separation. What does the term "Buddha" mean? An awakened one. (Not **the** awakened one, because we're all Buddhas.)

Awakened from what? It's a metaphor. Awakened from the dream, or nightmare, of samsara, which includes our ordinary daily life, our reflective self-conscious existence in its totality: thinking, feeling and willing.

It's a good metaphor: To wake up doesn't mean to become someone else; I don't cease being Jeff and instead become a Buddha. Nor does all awareness simply cease.

On the contrary, we wake up to what we truly are and have always been. But we can't reflect on that! It is not only unattainable, as already mentioned. It is also "unreflectable." And that is what every koan presents us with. Every koan is unreflectable. It cannot be grasped, let alone resolved, by reflection or self-consciousness.

Struggling with a koan in Rinzai Zen is not a matter of getting rid of consciousness per se. Initially it is a matter of, how to put, realizing a samadhi or seamless focus in which there is no separation, no division, between the-one-who-is-conscious and that-of-which-it-is-conscious. It's amazing, but that is not a matter of things merging together. No, the full beauty and dignity of each and every thing only starts to become really clear in this **selfless awareness**.

**Questioner:** It's clear: in Soto Zen, *shikantaza* or "just sitting" is non-attainment. Got that. Jeff, in koan practice is there attainment?

**Jeff:** You say you've got *shikantaza* non-attainment. Do you?

**Questioner:** I'm glowing, aren't I?

**Jeff:** That alone will not do.

**Questioner:** A simplistic explanation that I've heard, and even repeat myself, about the difference between Soto and Rinzai deals with attainment. Is that accurate?

**Jeff:** No. That's why I stressed what Rinzai realized: There's nothing to it! That's also why I stressed the beginning of the Zen tradition with Bodhidharma; what did the second patriarch come to?: I have searched for it thoroughly, and it is, finally, what? What is it, finally? **Unattainable!**

**Questioner:** Rather than attainment, let me use the word striving.

**Jeff:** In beginning practice, striving is most helpful. But finally that won't do either.

**Questioner:** We heard that in Rinzai Zen you actually strive. Is that accurate?

**Jeff:** Striving alone will not do. However, not striving, not doing anything, will not do either. Correct? **There's** the real barrier – and the real entrance.

**Questioner:** Strive to reach the point of non-striving?

**Jeff:** That won't do either. Do you see? When you really get up close, neither one will do. There's the entrance. Right there is the entrance to the real koan. Simply sitting with your self, will not do. But sitting trying to attain some kind of enlightenment will not do either. Any Rinzai master worth his salt will never put up with that. Why? I ask you why?

There's the real koan. And it has nothing to do with Soto or Rinzai, does it?

**Questioner:** I think I'll stop trying to explain the difference and instead go and find a Rinzai teacher! Thank you very much.

**Questioner:** The difference I heard was that Soto is for peasants and Rinzai is for soldiers.

**Questioner:** I heard that the Rinzai people are jumping for the fruit and the Soto people are just sitting under the branch until it falls on them.

**Jeff:** I believe here today we've already gone beyond that.

**Questioner:** So we should stop telling that story too?

**Jeff:** Thank you.

**Questioner:** What you say brings up for me the question of effort without desire. In Soto Zen, *shikantaza* requires effort, but without conscious expectation. Is that in line with what you are saying?

**Jeff:** In terms of a simple process, in the beginning of Rinzai practice one is trying very hard, working at sitting properly, and so on. Making that samadhi, that oneness, constant. Otherwise the practice will never reach its natural conclusion. Not only in zazen, but maintaining that mind in the activities of ordinary life. As a process it takes a great deal of will and determination; for some people it's more of a struggle than for others. But certainly without that we can't begin to practice and

actually discover what is what.

In the beginning there is inevitably still an element of self. The self is trying to become one. As a process it needs, in a sense, to do this. Actually that's because it's already two. When all has been totally gathered into one, where there's no inside or outside, then finally that oneness can fall away. Here's the problem: People then think they've awakened. They haven't awakened, they've simply entered true oneness. Here's where Rinzai Zen warns us that we must practice even harder. Why? Get there and see!

It **is** effortless at that point. But that doesn't mean you don't practice. What eloquent Zen master spoke of it as blood, sweat, and tears? – Oh, sorry, that was Winston Churchill. (*General laughter*) Here is where it's helpful to have someone with a clear eye. If not a teacher, then real Dharma brothers and sisters to work it through.

**Questioner:** What is the importance of a specific teacher for a specific individual?

**Jeff:** One's zazen must be the ultimate teacher, one's life must be the ultimate teacher. However, relatively speaking, at a certain point in our practice, it can be very valuable – almost necessary – to encounter someone living Dharma. If that person is worth their salt, there will also be a point when they refuse to let you turn them into "the teacher."

You can often learn a lot about a teacher by seeing what they let you turn them into – and what they won't. Over 25 years I've practiced with a Rinzai master. And yet, I cannot stress enough, he never taught me a thing in *dokusan*, the private interview. As it must be.

Who, after all, was Gotama Buddha's teacher? Who was the teacher of his awakening? **That** is true awakening – and that is available to us all.

### **Summary & Conclusion**

**Jeff:** I deeply appreciate this precious opportunity. I trust it's clear that I'm not interested in converting people to Rinzai Zen. That's not my point. I am a fundamentalist in the sense that I urge people to get to the bottom of what they call themselves. I have no doubt you can do that in Soto Zen through genuine, thoroughgoing *shikantaza*. I know for a fact you can do it in Rinzai Zen. There are many other ways as well. Rather than push some particular school or sect, I beg you, if you are serious about the great matter of birth and death, to once get to the very bottom of what you call yourself. Then work from there.

**Judy:** Let's end with a period of zazen.