



Blind Man Crossing a Bridge by Hakuin Ekaku (1686-1769)

Exhortations For Those Who Do Rouse The Doubt

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Introduction

Despite all of the preparations you have made for this retreat, you may still feel: “I can’t give myself fully to the practice. Something always seems to get in the way, to hold me back.” If that’s the case: fine. Such thoughts and feelings can dampen your spirit – but they can also provide fuel for the fire. How do you let them inspire and fuel the fire, rather than dampen your spirit? Let us see.

You have practiced zazen meditation. You know, from your own experience, the value of the physical posture, although it doesn’t need to be full lotus. You also know the value of breathing properly to help gather all of your energy into one. [*Demonstrates*] Giving yourself to this simple practice is already so valuable.

But in daily affairs it can be very difficult, complicated, and frustrating. Not because the practice itself is so, but because our minds are so. So we begin by untangling the mental and emotional mess that we are in. It takes discipline and patience. This retreat is designed to help you with that.

Addiction

We all know about addiction to drugs and alcohol. But in a broader sense there are mental and emotional addictions. We are addicted to certain mental processes and emotional states, and we go through a lot of trouble to get them. One way to achieve them is through drugs. Drugs are a gross example of addiction; mental and emotional addictions can be subtler. There are many types of addiction: physical, mental, psychological – even spiritual.

A retreat like this helps us to see the addictive processes that we are stuck in, and to let them go. To recognize and see through them is a first but important step. Once we see clearly the pain that they cause for us and for others, we cannot help but let them go.

Addiction can seduce because we close our eyes to the pain it causes, we just fixate on the immediate relief that it gives. But it doesn't take a therapist or a Zen master to show us that before long it's not pleasurable at all, it's a very painful process. It doesn't work. We go for the quick fix, but in the long run we create pain for ourselves and for others.

Submit

Attending this retreat, we sincerely devote ourselves, with clarity and patience, to see our addictions and let them go. Perhaps the most effective way to do this is to submit. It's an unpopular word nowadays, but I'll use it anyway.

We know how dangerous it can be to submit to the wrong thing. In Zen Buddhism, to what do we submit? We certainly don't submit to our own passing fancies or momentary inclinations. Nor do we blindly submit to another, to some external authority. To what, then, do we submit? We submit – we give ourselves – to the practice.

What is that? Practice is not just a matter of method or technique, on or off the sitting cushion. Practice is thorough inquiry and living truth. There is no need to submit to some external truth, dogma, or teacher. Rather, we submit to the practice, which is a matter of living truth through thorough inquiry.

Confirm for yourself: you don't need to submit to anything or anyone – including me right now! Instead we trust, based on our own experience, in the truth that is revealed as we give ourselves, submit, to the practice. That is what this retreat is for: welcome. In this way, addictions and a lot more are untangled. Not merely by thinking about these things or even convincing ourselves of their truth, but by giving ourselves to the practice and confirming it for ourselves.

It takes time, but as you do it properly, as we are doing here, you can confirm in your own body that this practice is indeed real. Thus you are able to do it completely, to give yourself fully. Then nothing can really get in the way. Whatever comes becomes fuel for the fire of our practice, rather than dampening our spirit.

Far from the end of practice, this is rather the beginning of practice – freed of willful self-effort. And what a tremendous energy and vitality emerges! Now we see why our former efforts were so exhausting, frustrating, and futile. For some people such 'will-full' effort even becomes a kind of addiction, a self-addiction. Desperately fighting my own shadow. Until I've utterly exhausted myself, I may be unable to see what has been supporting me through it all. No problem; there are practices for that too.

Zazen is a wonderful entrance, a marvelous way, to directly experience what is – before separation into something to attain, or accomplish, or break through. I trust you will joyously submit to this marvelous practice and see for yourself.

Confess

*All evil karma created by me,
Due to greed, hatred, and ignorance,
Done with body, mouth, and mind,
I now confess openly and fully.*

Another unpopular word, but confession also can be helpful. We happen to be doing this retreat at a Catholic center, so that word is naturally used here. But confession has played an important role in Buddhist practice as well. Confession is not used in Rinzai monastic life today. However, it has been taken up as part of the Western Zen liturgy. Used properly, it can be valuable. You may have heard or recited one version or another. The pith or pivot of it states:

All evil karma created by me... I now confess openly and fully.

You don't need to confess to someone else, although it can be helpful to do so. The point is to honestly and sincerely confess in your own heart. To confess is first to acknowledge your mistake or wrongdoing. This includes acknowledging the consequences. For example, that you have hurt another. Confession also includes taking responsibility. This may include seeing that it is not done again, apologizing, and so on. Something may need to be done about it.

The confession used in Western Zen circles nowadays mentions:

*All evil karma created by me,
Due to greed, hatred, and ignorance...*

The causes are clearly stated. And they are not just someone else's but our own greed, hatred, and ignorance. Precious to reflect on, isn't it?

Done with body, mouth, and mind...

This includes everything that we do. Not just actions but harmful speech and thought have bad effects and create karma. Be mindful of your actions for sure – but be mindful of your thought and speech too.

It ends:

I now confess openly and fully.

Sincerely confessing, you may find that what is holding you back and preventing you from fully giving yourself to the practice is something in the past that you have not been able to let go. Seeing through this can help you open up, both in your practice and in the rest of your life. [The Western Zen confessions I have seen end with “and purify it all.” This is not in the Chinese-Japanese text.]

All evil karma created by me... I now confess openly and fully.

That's the pivot. Consider it well. If it strikes a chord in you, sincerely confess and then see what needs to be done. I trust you will find this helps in your practice and in your life with others.

Vow

I vow here, now, and for the rest of my life to devote myself to practice.

This includes living a wholesome life, being mindful moment to moment, doing daily zazen, and retreats when possible.

I will do my best to support the sangha-community.

I take responsibility for my actions in body, speech, and mind, and for my own health and wellbeing.

I recognize there may be times when I lose heart;

thus, I vow to continue this practice in all earnestness, no matter what.

I have brought several of these themes together into a simple vow. Since we are now doing this retreat together, you are all invited to recite it if you would like. Vowing first of all to yourself – not making a vague promise to some external authority. It begins:

I vow here, now, and for the rest of my life to devote myself to practice.

This does not mean that you cannot have friends outside Buddhist circles, that you cannot get married or raise children. You will naturally become a better friend, husband or wife, father or mother, brother or sister, son or daughter. But you are vowing that this practice is a central part of your life and that you are committing, submitting, to it. Your loved ones will come to understand this and support you in it once they see that the practice is good. Reciting this in your heart, living it, I trust you will find that your practice and your daily life will go more smoothly.

This includes living a wholesome life, being mindful moment to moment, doing daily zazen, and retreats when possible.

Living a healthy, wholesome life sounds obvious. However, I sometimes meet people trying to practice – yet their lifestyle is destructive and harmful to themselves and to others. Then they wonder why they aren't able to bring it home and heal their wounds. Practice is not something you do for a while on the sitting cushion, then go and badmouth others – like I do! By all means, do retreats as we are doing now. But practice must be carried on moment to moment in our daily lives.

I will do my best to support the sangha-community.

We are not alone. We are supporting and being supported by each other. The *sangha* can refer to the group of us practicing here; it can also include all beings. At any rate, it's not just about me. Consider acknowledging this in a vow.

*I take responsibility for my actions in body, speech, and mind,
and for my own health and wellbeing.*

This helps us to live a wholesome life. And finally:

I recognize there may be times when I lose heart;

thus, I vow to continue this practice in all earnestness, no matter what.

At a crucial point in the practice, it may seem very dark and uncertain. It may even appear that things have gotten worse. Our reference points are gone and we may feel totally lost. It's darkest, just before dawn. At this point we need great trust, with proper guidance as we have here, to make sure our practice is thoroughgoing. To continue on where there seems nowhere to go. Not to despair and give up. You made a vow for a good reason; don't lose it in a moment of weakness! This vow can be a pair of wings to help you on the way when you need it most.

If you feel that you can't give yourself fully to the practice, don't let it dampen your spirit. Let it become fuel for the fire. Patiently give yourself, submit. If needed, sincerely confess your wrongs; it may be what is holding you back. Then make these vows in your heart.

Questions

Participant: What if you feel like there is something done that is irreparable?

Jeff: This practice isn't something magical that makes everything better in an instant. Even though something done may be, as you say, irreparable – it cannot be fixed – that doesn't mean you can't do anything about it. For example, even though the person may be gone or dead, perhaps they have children, perhaps there is something they were involved in that you can contribute to. It's important to acknowledge and be responsible for your actions in body, speech, and mind. But it's also important not to drown in guilt over the past. With eye clear, there is a way to do what needs to be done in the present. In that sense, nothing is really irreparable.

Participant: What about not only taking responsibility for our own role, but the feeling of responsibility for others?

Jeff: In terms of a Buddhist moral or ethical code, the first practical focus is our own responsibility. As you suggest, however, once we truly enter the practice, all beings are included – no one can be excluded. We are not separate from the problems and suffering of others. There is no longer the self-serving thought: "I did this, but I didn't do that."

Linji

Now let me introduce a few statements from Linji [d. 866], a Chinese monk of the Tang dynasty known as Rinzai in Japanese. He is considered the father of Rinzai Zen. The first time you hear them, they may seem far away from our present concerns. As we go through the retreat, however, I trust you will see how intimately connected they are:

*As this mountain monk sees it, there are none who are not of the utmost profundity,
none who aren't emancipated.*

“Mountain monk” is a humble term Linji uses to speak of himself. He’s not a slick city monk in search of fame and honor. What is this mountain monk saying? There is no one who is not utterly free and awake – as far as the eye can see. How do you see this?

One of his most essential statements leaves little room for doubt:

Solitary and free, not bound by anything!

Solitary can seem, to the self, lonely and frightening. This is a very positive kind of solitariness, though. For it is neither bound by, nor separate from, anything.

He also speaks of

Entering the various hells as though strolling in a pleasure garden.

And:

There is no Buddha to seek, no Way to complete, no Dharma to attain.

These are essential teachings of what has become known as Rinzai Zen. I trust you will see, as we go through the week, that they are not separate from the seemingly tame and mundane concerns I have been raising here.

[For quotes, see *The Record of Linji* translation by Ruth Fuller Sasaki, pp. 163, 228, 230, 262.]

Exhortations

During the retreat I will also annoy you with more Boshan [Jp.: Hakusan; 1575-1630], the Chinese monk of the Ming Dynasty whose *Exhortations For Those Who Don’t Arouse The Doubt* was introduced last year. [See “Great Doubt: Getting Stuck and Breaking Through the Real Koan” in the book *Zen Classics for the Modern World*.] This time I will present the first four of his *Exhortations For Those Who Do Rouse The Doubt*. Here he shows what happens when the Great Doubt is aroused, and some of the problems that can occur. This can be a great help as your practice matures and comes to fruition. Thank you for listening so intently.

Spiritual Addiction

Yesterday I spoke of addiction in a broad sense, including mental, emotional, and even a kind of spiritual addiction. What is spiritual addiction?

If our practice is not pure, if it is driven by unhealthy, unexamined desires, it can degenerate into a form of self-addiction. As strange as it sounds, the feverish desire to eliminate your ego can itself be a symptom of the *dis-ease* you are seeking to heal. Obsessively trying to perfect practice can become a kind of sickness. Don’t give up one addiction only to begin another. That is not what Buddha, or Linji or Boshan, is saying. Beware.

We are doing something much simpler here. In the beginning it can seem difficult, but really it is very simple: To let that whole self-delusion come to an end of its own accord. To let it disentangle and

come to its own end. In this way, the impurities in our practice, such as self-centered tendencies and personal hang-ups, are revealed and can melt away.

Giving up these addictions can be like going “cold turkey” – it can be very painful as we are weaned from them. How quickly we forget the pain we were in when we were addicted. But once the addiction is fully let go, it is gone. We may need to take care that we do not fall for it again, but the entanglement that binds and blinds us is clearly gone. And we feel the great release that comes from it. No, this is not the end or goal of Zen practice, but it is a precious perk on the way.

Now, Life Is Living You

Shinran [1173-1263] is a leading figure of the Japanese Pure Land faith and founder of the True Pure Land School [Jp.: *Jōdo Shinshū*]. In terms of numbers, this is the most popular form of Japanese Buddhism. Recently, here in Kyoto and throughout Japan, the 750th commemoration of the death of Shinran was held. This was the motto, found on signs around the city: *Now, Life is living you* [Jp.: *Ima inochi ga anata o ikite-iru*].

It’s a fine translation – but it can sound like an ad for a horror movie: “It’s living inside you!” What is this expression really saying? Pure Land Buddhism is based on the saving grace of Amida Buddha, Amida’s compassionate vow not to enter Nirvana unless anyone who chants his name in all sincerity would be reborn in the Pure Land. The Pure Land is not heaven per se, but an ideal “place” to practice so all can awaken and enter Nirvana. The Pure Land teaching is a marvelous expression of boundless compassion for all.

But it is quite different from the Japanese Buddhist practices of Zen, Tendai, Shingon, and so on. Because these traditions offer practices to awaken, they are called self-power in opposition to the Other-power of Amida, who compassionately practiced for us. Needless to say, once we get under the surface, such terms as self-power and Other-power can be left behind.

The emphasis in True Pure Land Buddhism, however, is different from Zen – at least on the surface. Everything has already been done by Amida. Even their *Nenbutsu* [or *Nembutsu*] chant of “*Namu Amida Butsu*” is not a self-practice. It is a spontaneous expression of thanks for the boundless compassion that saves all. Any sense of myself accomplishing, perfecting, some practice is cleanly eliminated. From the word go, there is nothing for self to accomplish or attain. If anything is required from my side, it is simply to realize that I can do nothing.

Now, Life is living you – this simple expression can help us appreciate True Pure Land Buddhism, perhaps inspire us in our practice as well. *Now* is this present moment, yet it also always has been and always will be. It cannot be contained. The second word *Life* is capitalized. In Pure Land teaching this *Life* is inseparable from Light – inseparable from the saving grace of Amida. How can all beings be set free, except through – as – this boundless, compassionate Light and Life? It is our vitality, the source and significance of our life. *Now, Life is living you*. It could be rendered: *Now, Life is giving itself fully to you*. Not in a way that removes our individuality, but rather in a way that truly fulfills it – rooted in this Light and Life that is the Light and Life of each and every thing.

But often we are not aware of this, are we? We are so preoccupied with our own self-standpoint: what we want to do, or what has been done to us, and the divisiveness this creates. *Now, Life is living you* invites us to shine our light back on its source. Did you bring yourself into existence? Well, some people seem to think so! [*Laughter*] How can we not bow our heads in thankfulness?

This is a precious corrective to incorrect and immature Zen practices rampant nowadays. Obsession with the *hara* and with using the practice to attain something can become a huge self-addiction disguised as spiritual practice. Don't just breathe from the *hara*; breathe from – and to – the very earth that supports you. How could self, powered by its own practice, ever reach some kind of genuine atonement or enlightenment? Some Zen priests assume that Pure Land teachings end where Zen begins; they have yet to see that Pure Land teachings begin where their Zen ends. As one of my Pure Land friends put it: “In Pure Land Buddhism you never get saved and never divest yourself of your ego that keeps you in hot water. And when you realize that, it is a form of salvation.” Shinran reminds us that this saving grace is always here and available – but it only comes home to us when we deeply recognize our own ignorance and greed. Shinran didn't come to this from nowhere. He had spent two decades as a Tendai monk undergoing all kinds of practices, including meditation. If you still feel that you can't give yourself fully to the practice, you might take this teaching to heart, take it as a kind of Pure Land koan: *Right now, Life is giving itself fully!*

Now let's look at the first of ten brief *Exhortations* by Boshan, one of the great Chinese Sôtô Zen masters of the Ming dynasty.

Exhortations For Those Who Do Rouse The Doubt

By Boshan [Jp.: Hakusan; 1575-1630] 博山和尚示疑情發得起警語

First Exhortation

Rousing the Doubt when practicing Zen, one accords with *Dharma-kaya*. Then the whole world is radiant, without the slightest hindrance.

But then you try to take control and can't let it go. Clinging to it like this, the life-root cannot be cut off. Thinking you know the *Dharma-kaya* and acting as if you fully understood it and were benefiting from it, in fact these are all your delusions. The ancients have warned that in true intimacy, words can separate. Because the life-root has not been cut off, you're sick through and through. This is not Zen.

Here you must submit yourself completely and accept whatever comes, without even knowing who does what. As an ancient worthy said:

Let go on the edge of the precipice and accept what comes!

Finish dying, then come back to life and you can no longer be deceived.

If the life-root is not cut off, your arising-ceasing mind will just continue in samsaric circles. And even though it is cut off, if you don't realize the needed turnaround you'll be as if dwelling with the dead, for you have yet to reach the end.

It's not difficult to realize; the problem lies with your refusing to encounter good Dharma friends and teachers. If you did, with one thrust to your weak point you'd directly realize it. Otherwise, you'll be just a living corpse!

“Rousing the Doubt when practicing Zen, one accords with *Dharma-kaya*. Then the whole world is radiant, without the slightest hindrance.” As we will see, the opening sentence is repeated in all of these *Exhortations*. The essential role of Doubt or Great Doubt in Zen practice has already been

detailed, so I won't repeat here. [See "Great Doubt: Getting Stuck and Breaking Through the Real Koan" in the book *Zen Classics for the Modern World*.]

What is the meaning of the Sanskrit term *Dharma-kaya*? Very simply, *Dharma* refers to living truth, and *kaya* means body. "Dharma-body" has become a kind of metaphysical reality in Buddhist doctrine. In Zen, however, it is embodied Dharma – truth embodied. Not the mere concept or idea, but the living fact itself, concrete and actual. This is what Zen practice and one-on-one is all about. It will become clearer as we go through the week.

Once the Great Doubt has been raised, then the preconceptions, mental fixations, and other delusions or "fixed views" as they are called in Buddhism, start to unravel. All that we think we know, all that we think we are, falls into doubt. There was an old Japanese Zen layman I knew who passed away several years ago. He was a Confucian scholar and master of martial arts. He told me that at this point in his practice he didn't know that one plus one equals two. That's how into it he was.

In proper and sustained practice, it does not take long to experience this great undoing. Once this Great Doubt settles and matures, you naturally accord with *Dharma-kaya*, as Boshan calls it. What is this preliminary experience like? As some of you have already experienced, and as Boshan describes here, all is bright and clear, and the delusion of separation is gone. No hindrance whatsoever, within or without. And it is directly experienced as such – it is embodied – not conceived or imagined by the self. So far, so good.

Boshan continues: "But then you try to take control and can't let it go. Clinging to it like this, the life-root cannot be cut off. Thinking you know the *Dharma-kaya* and acting as if you fully understood it and were benefiting from it, in fact these are all your delusions. The ancients have warned that in true intimacy, words can separate. Because the life-root has not been cut off, you're sick through and through. This is not Zen." In the idiom of the American astronaut, we have lift off but we have yet to return home: "Houston, we have a problem." Once the mind-wheel starts churning again, *Dharma-kaya* is distorted into a world that I possess and others must conform to. This is no longer *Dharma-kaya*, but a pale reflection of it in the mirror of self-delusion. This happens when practice is not thoroughgoing.

If this entrance into Great Doubt is turned into something and clung to, even the temporary experience of the dissolution of all hindrances gets corrupted. Clinging to it like this, the life-root remains. This life-root feeds our *dis-ease*. *Dis-ease* is inevitable as long as this basic volitional clinging or desire to be – even to be enlightened – exists.

Just a moment ago, not a hint of hindrance could be found anywhere. Now our very body and mind are a painful hindrance. In each of these *Exhortations* Boshan impales us with this statement about being sick through and through – this is not Zen. Don't mistake profound experiences of oneness for awakening!

What to do at this point? Boshan continues: "Here you must submit yourself completely and accept whatever comes, without even knowing who does what. As an ancient worthy said: *Let go on the edge of the precipice and accept what comes! Finish dying, then come back to life and you can no longer be deceived*. If the life-root is not cut off, your arising-ceasing mind will just continue in samsaric circles. And even though it is cut off, if you don't realize the needed turnaround you'll be as if dwelling with the dead, for you have yet to reach the end."

The verse about letting go on the edge of the precipice expresses the life-root being decisively cut off, coming to its own end. If you need to see further into this, look at Case 41 of *The Blue Cliff Record*, on how one returns to life after dying the Great Death. What is this needed turnaround, this transformation or inner revolution? It is the heart of Zen: when we have **finished** dying, then we can really come back to life. Otherwise, we may indulge and delight in temporary experiences where all delusion is gone. But then self-delusion comes back with a vengeance: we may even think we're the biggest no-self around! [*Laughter*]

Boshan concludes this first *Exhortation*: "It's not difficult to realize; the problem lies with your refusing to encounter good Dharma friends and teachers. If you did, with one thrust to your weak point you'd directly realize it. Otherwise, you'll be just a living corpse!" Boshan warns us severely; yet he also states that it's not difficult. He's right. You have already taken a big step in coming to this retreat, and we have plenty of good Dharma friends here. What more do you need?

This thrust to your weak point or blind spot is like the trigger point for Shiatsu: pressing it, there may be pain. But the **point** is that once it is properly pressed, the painful delusion is released. Thank you for listening so intently.

The Ocean of Emancipation

I trust you are finding fuel for the fire, rather than dampening your spirit. To repeat our Buddhist confession:

*All evil karma created by me,
Due to greed, hatred, and ignorance,
Done with body, mouth, and mind,
I now confess openly and fully.*

And our vow:

*I vow here, now, and for the rest of my life to devote myself to practice.
This includes living a wholesome life, being mindful moment to moment,
doing daily zazen, and retreats when possible.
I will do my best to support the sangha-community.
I take responsibility for my actions in body, speech, and mind,
and for my own health and wellbeing.
I recognize there may be times when I lose heart;
thus, I vow to continue this practice in all earnestness, no matter what.*

Now let's return to Linji. One of his most famous statements was used at Kyoto Station as an advertisement for my Rinzaï Zen-affiliated university:

Just be every situation, and wherever you stand is true. Whatever circumstances come, there is no disruption. Though you bear the influence of past delusions, or the karma of the five great sins, these of themselves become the ocean of emancipation!

The five grave sins are killing your father, killing your mother, killing an *arhat* [Linji replaces this with burning scriptures and images], injuring a Buddha, and disrupting the *sangha*-community. Needless to say, Linji is not suggesting that by holding onto our past delusions or committing evil acts we can achieve salvation. But in the present quote, Linji simply exclaims without explaining. In his published “Discourses,” however, he is asked what is meant by “father,” “mother,” and so on. Linji then turns all on its head by declaring that ignorance is the “father,” greed the “mother,” and so on. Do you really see the delusive nature of your karmic actions, and how they become emancipation itself? If not, what are you waiting for?

[See *The Record of Linji*, pp. 186-187 & 275-276; cf. *Entangling Vines*, Case 32, “Yunmen’s ‘Exposed!’”]

Second Exhortation

Rousing the Doubt when practicing Zen, one accords with *Dharma-kaya*. Then one seems able to draw the world into a vortex and rouse enormous waves at will.

But the practitioner gets attached to this and will not budge however much he is pushed or pulled. Thus he cannot throw himself fully into the real work. Like a penniless person coming upon a mountain of gold: he knows full well it’s gold, but can’t make use of it. This the ancients decried as a greedy treasure guard. Such a person is sick through and through. This is not Zen.

In this state, just throw yourself into it with no regard for danger. Only then will you come to accord with Dharma. As master Tiantong said: “The vast Dharma-world then becomes like so much cooked rice – whatever your nose falls upon, your belly feels full!” Otherwise, you’re like someone starving to death next to the rice bucket, or dying of thirst while surrounded by water. What good does that do?

Thus it is said: “After satori, you must go and see someone worthy.” Just as the ancients went to see good teachers and Dharma friends after their satori and benefited greatly from it. If you adamantly cling to your present practice and refuse to visit those who can remove the needle in your eye and the wedge in your head, you’re a fool who deceives himself!

This is the second of Boshan’s *Exhortations For Those Who Do Rouse The Doubt*. Here he opens with: “Rousing the Doubt when practicing Zen, one accords with *Dharma-kaya*. Then one seems able to draw the world into a vortex and rouse enormous waves at will.” In the first *Exhortation*, Boshan spoke of the world as radiant and without any hindrance. Here is a more dramatic image of all gathered into a whirling vortex. Wavering, wandering mind is impossible here and you feel incredible vitality. Sleep? Who needs it! Food? Ha!

“But the practitioner gets attached to this and will not budge however much he is pushed or pulled. Thus he cannot throw himself fully into the real work. Like a penniless person coming upon a mountain of gold: he knows full well it’s gold, but can’t make use of it. This the ancients decried as a greedy treasure guard. Such a person is sick through and through. This is not Zen.” Boshan repeats a similar pattern of first arousing the Doubt and according with *Dharma-kaya*, but then falling under its spell and tripping over your own feet in the process. If these warnings don’t seem relevant now, they soon will.

You're like a guard for precious treasure: it's right under your greedy nose – but it's not yours. Again, Boshan offers guidance: “In this state, just throw yourself into it with no regard for danger. Then you'll come to accord with Dharma. As master Tiantong said: ‘The vast Dharma-world then becomes like so much cooked rice – whatever your nose falls upon, your belly feels full!’ Otherwise, you're like someone starving to death next to the rice bucket, or dying of thirst while surrounded by water. What good does that do?”

“In this state, just throw yourself into it with no regard for danger.” Well, have some regard for danger. By all means throw yourself into it, but please do so with great care. This retreat is arranged to help you do just that. You do need to give yourself fully, but don't be careless or foolish.

Tiantong, also known as Hongzhi Zhengjue [Wanshi Shôkaku; 1091-1157], was one of the leading Sôtô masters of the Sung Dynasty. Here Tiantong suggests that if the seeking mind really has come to rest, wherever you turn you're satisfied – your belly is full! It's amazing how many Zen expressions involve food. [See for example “Enjoying the Way” in *Zen Classics for the Modern World*.] Does your stomach tell you why?

Richard DeMartino [1922-2013] introduced me to Zen Buddhism in the early 1970s at Temple University here in Philadelphia. Over 50 years ago he lived in Kyoto. Once he was invited to a celebration at the Rinzai monastery of Nanzenji. Zenkei Shibayama was head abbot and Zen master training the monks. During the feast, Dick was seated next to Shibayama. Japanese *sake* or rice wine was also available for the guests, so Dick offered a cup to Shibayama. The Japanese Zen master politely declined, patting his stomach and saying, in Japanese: “No thank you. My belly's already full.” Dick replied: “But you're supposed to be empty.” Shibayama shot back: “Even when I'm full, I'm empty.” At that point I reckon Dick said: “Then I'll have some.” [*Laughter*] Anyway, Shibayama said: “Even when I'm full, I'm empty.” Tiantong said, in effect: “Even when I'm empty, I'm full.” Is this the same or different?

“Thus it is said: ‘After satori, you must go and see someone worthy.’ Just as the ancients went to see good teachers and Dharma friends after their satori and benefited greatly from it. If you adamantly cling to your present practice and refuse to visit those who can remove the needle in your eye and the wedge in your head, you're a fool who deceives himself!”

Boshan seals his second *Exhortation* this way, warning those with some degree of realization to **see** their blind spot and be willing to learn from others. As you find all separation dissolving, things illuminated like never before, it is essential to clearly see what remains and to apply yourself there. One of the great benefits of this retreat and of one-on-one.

Question

Participant: In Zen master Fukushima's biography, he uses the expression “Be a fool.” [See *The Laughing Buddha of Tofukuji*, pp. 14-16 & 53ff.] Boshan is telling us not to be a fool. Is Fukushima saying something like what Rinzai is saying?”

Jeff: “Be a fool” – in Japanese: *Baka ni nare* – played an important role in Fukushima's practice under Shibayama. We are full of second-hand learning: things we've read or heard or thought about. To rouse the Great Doubt and be in conformity with all, we must let go of everything – be a sacred fool.

Otherwise, knowledge and learning can interfere. In other words, there is a point in our practice where we need to be like a fool and just focus on the immediate concern underfoot. Not even think, for example, about “saving all beings.” There is also a time when we serve others. Unlike most monks, Fukushima went to graduate school and even wrote his thesis on *The Record of Linji* before entering the training monastery of Nanzenji. Eventually he got into a bind doing koan practice with Shibayama. Fukushima would quote phrases from *The Record of Linji*. That is not what koan practice is about. Shibayama at one point told Fukushima: “If you’re going to give answers like that, you might as well go back to school!” A devastating criticism for a monk. Eventually all Shibayama would say to Fukushima was: “Be a fool! Be a fool!” We can well understand Fukushima’s predicament. He had acquired so much knowledge – now he was being told to throw it all away. It got so bad that Fukushima asked a fellow monk whether Shibayama Roshi was telling him to be a fool and the monk said: “No, he tells me to study hard.” [Laughter] Which was probably what **that** monk needed to hear. By the way, this also shows why it’s better not to talk about what goes on in such private interviews: what’s relevant for one may not be for another. Boshan, on the other hand, declares that if you cling to your present state then you’re a fool. He means it in the ordinary sense – he’s exhorting us not to be fooled by our experiences or insights. The quotes from Linji are from another place altogether, having nothing to do with foolish or wise, doubt or faith. And so I turn your attention to them again and again. Savor them well.

Third Exhortation

Rousing the Doubt when practicing Zen, one accords with *Dharma-kaya*. Then you see that mountains are not mountains, rivers are not rivers, and the whole world is one, solid [Doubt Block] without the slightest gap.

As soon as discursive mind returns, however, your vision is obstructed and you feel hindered in body and mind. You can neither raise up [the Great Doubt] nor break through it. And if you can raise it up for awhile it may seem to be there, but when you let go it’s gone. Open your mouth yet you cannot exhale, nor can you move freely or change your pace. Either way, you don’t get *this*. At such a point you’re sick through and through; this is not Zen.

Because the ancients were pure and simple in heart, without discursive mind or second thoughts, they could rouse the Doubt to the point where mountains were not mountains, rivers were no longer rivers. Thus their Doubt Block was suddenly broken through and their whole body became the single eye. Then the mountains and rivers are, for the first time, seen as the mountains and rivers that they always were – one realizes where mountains, rivers, and the great earth really come from. Here there’s not the slightest trace of satori.

Precisely here you need to seek out someone who knows. Otherwise, you’ll be lost as if in an endless terrain of dead trees with ever diverging paths. Whoever continues right on through here, without tripping over the roots and branches, [I,] Boshan wants to be a Dharma friend with him!

“Rousing the Doubt when practicing Zen, one accords with *Dharma-kaya*. Then you see that mountains are not mountains, rivers are not rivers, and the whole world is one, solid [Doubt Block] without the slightest gap.” Boshan is paraphrasing part of a famous Chinese Zen expression of Qingyuan: before I started practicing, mountains were mountains and rivers were rivers; when I had made some progress, mountains were not mountains and rivers were not rivers; now that I’ve come to rest, mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers. The first stage is that of common sense and ordinary knowledge: I know who I am! The second, which Boshan paraphrases here, describes the

Great Doubt. That's when a mountain is not a mountain. The third and final stage sounds identical to the first. What's the difference?

“As soon as discursive mind returns, however, your vision is obstructed and you feel hindered in body and mind. You can neither raise up [the Great Doubt] nor break through it. And if you can raise it up for awhile it may seem to be there, but when you let go it's gone. Open your mouth yet you cannot exhale, nor can you move freely or change your pace. Either way, you don't get *this*. At such a point you're sick through and through; this is not Zen.” Even if you rouse Great Doubt, if discursive mind returns you are lost. You're neither here nor there: you're not where you began, but you definitely have not come to the end either. You're stuck somewhere in between. You've yet to arrive **here!** Thus the value of thoroughgoing practice and proper guidance.

“Because the ancients were pure and simple in heart, without discursive mind or second thoughts, they could rouse the Doubt to the point where mountains were not mountains, rivers were no longer rivers. Thus their Doubt Block was suddenly broken through and their whole body became the single eye. Then the mountains and rivers are, for the first time, seen as the mountains and rivers that they always were – one realizes where mountains, rivers, and the great earth really come from. Here there's not the slightest trace of satori.” I take issue with the opening rhetoric of ‘back in the good old days.’ Nowadays we are so full of intellectual knowledge and our discursive mind runs wild, so in some ways it was simpler back then. But we're also at a great advantage: various traditions and teachings are available like never before. Used wisely, they can be of great benefit. Used unwisely, we can get confused and lost. And so could they: there are plenty of examples of the ancients being just as confused and lost as people today. Don't be **fooled** by Boshan and his pretentious talk of the ancients! Eventually it will be recognized that the golden age of Zen in the modern world is beginning now. We are very fortunate. “*These are the good old days*” as master Carly Simon sings. [*Laughter*]

“Precisely here you need to seek out someone who knows. Otherwise, you'll be lost as if in an endless terrain of dead trees with ever diverging paths. Whoever continues right on through here, without tripping over the roots and branches, [I,] Boshan wants to be a Dharma friend with him!” Boshan said at the end of the last paragraph that not even a trace of satori remains. Yet now he says that precisely here you need to encounter someone who really knows. If you don't see why, beware! By the way, Tim Burton should design that endless terrain of dead trees. [*Laughter*]

In an introductory essay, Boshan summarizes and clarifies this initial process of rousing the Great Doubt:

A person intent on practicing Zen doesn't see sky above or ground below, doesn't see mountains as mountains or rivers as rivers, walks and sits without knowing. Among a huge crowd, he sees no one. His whole self, inside and out, solidifies into one Doubt Block and the whole world seems as if drawn into a vortex. Vow never to stop until this Doubt Block has been broken through – this is the essential point of practice.

Question

Participant: Mountains are not mountains, then they suddenly become mountains again – is this just a parable about emptiness? Does Zen use the term emptiness?

Jeff: Certainly it does, but more concrete images are preferred. Emptiness can be misunderstood as an abstract, metaphysical reality. This is a classic example of how emptiness is brought down to earth.

Rather than speaking of all things being empty of self-nature, we find: “Even when my stomach’s empty, I’m full!” If not speaking of food, the natural surroundings express it: mountains are not mountains. Concrete reality that anyone can relate to. Buddhist emptiness is not something behind, above, or below things – that’s just another mental construct. It is the emptiness of **this** [*striking floor with hand*]. Then mountains really are mountains, rivers really are rivers. After all, it’s so concrete and commonplace. The mountain, the river, the floor, the wall. That is quite enough if you really **are** what is. Emptiness in all of its glory. We will take this up further in the fourth of Boshan’s *Exhortations*. Thank you for your question, and for listening so intently.

Fourth Exhortation

Rousing the Doubt when practicing Zen, one accords with *Dharma-kaya*. But then you fall into blank stillness where nothing arises, as if experiencing ten thousand years in one moment of thought. Thus your sensation of Doubt gets stubbornly stuck in the abstract notion of *Dharma-kaya* so it can’t spring to life and function freely. Lifeless and unresponsive, lacking the transformative turn, indecisive and without vitality, as if sunk in stagnant water. Yet you mistakenly take this state for the ultimate. Sick through and through, this is not Zen.

There were plenty like this in Shishuang’s congregation. Even if they die seated in meditation or while standing, they can’t spring to life and function freely. If an able teacher took up his forging tools, the sincere among them would get the point, turn round and breathe free. Then they’d be really human!

If not, even though they understand the words and cut off the ten directions in sitting, what good will it do? As Tiantong said: “Just cutting off the ten directions in sitting, the fish falls short of the Dragon Gate. Leap through and see – the dragon soars up to the heavens!”

Since of old there have been many exhortations to guide us, and plenty of records to instruct us. This is because practitioners don’t go all the way but instead seek to imitate their teachers moving freely among the chaotic crowd. No wonder they have a hard time.

“Rousing the Doubt when practicing Zen, one accords with *Dharma-kaya*. But then you fall into blank stillness where nothing arises, as if experiencing ten thousand years in one moment of thought. Thus your sensation of Doubt gets stubbornly stuck in the abstract notion of *Dharma-kaya* so it can’t spring to life and function freely. Lifeless and unresponsive, lacking the transformative turn, indecisive and without vitality, as if sunk in stagnant water. Yet you mistakenly take this state for the ultimate. Sick through and through, this is not Zen.” In this first paragraph he is clearly describing and hammering away at the danger of falling into dead stillness, of abiding in emptiness and getting stuck there.

“There were plenty like this in Shishuang’s congregation. Even if they die seated in meditation or while standing, they can’t spring to life and function freely. If an able teacher took up his forging tools, the sincere among them would get the point, turn round and breathe free. Then they’d be really human!” Shishuang Qingzhu [Sekisô Keisho; 807-888] was an early Chinese Zen master in the tradition of “silent illumination.” The reference to him and to dying seated in meditation is found in Case 96 of the Sôtô Zen koan anthology *The Book of Serenity*. Very simply, after master Shishuang passed away, the master’s former attendant asked the senior monk about their master’s teaching. Shishuang had used expressions like: “Cease and desist [all activity of the senses],” the above-mentioned “Ten thousand years in one moment of thought,” “Be cold ash, a dead tree,” “Be an old incense burner in an ancient shrine,” “Be a strip of pure white silk.” The senior monk replied that they illustrate oneness, that is, equality without differentiation. The attendant responded that in that case the

senior monk does not understand their late teacher. The senior monk then told the attendant to bring incense. “If I do not understand our master’s teaching,” the senior monk declared, “then I will not be able to die before the incense burns out.”

Sure enough, before the incense burned out, the senior monk died sitting in zazen. But the point of the case is what comes next: the attendant then taps the now dead senior monk on his shoulder and concludes: “Well, as far as dying seated in meditation or while standing, you are not lacking. But concerning our master’s teaching, you haven’t seen it even in a dream!”

I trust you can discern, from your own experience, the crucial point that the senior monk had missed with his empty oneness. It was fatal. Leaving aside whether this event actually happened or not, as a koan case it dramatically – and literally – reveals the danger of **dead sitting**. And it shows that the Zen tradition has been struggling with it since early on. Note that Boshan mentions there were plenty like this in Shishuang’s monastery back in the ninth century.

We have spent days together, nights together, sitting through. Yet if we get stuck there, even at that profoundly unified state of Great Doubt, we are as if dead. Thus Boshan exhorts us to take that further step so that we can spring back to life and function freely.

Returning to Boshan’s fourth *Exhortation*: “If not, even though they understand the words and cut off the ten directions in sitting, what good will it do? As Tiantong said: ‘Just cutting off the ten directions in sitting, the fish falls short of the Dragon Gate. Leap through and see – the dragon soars up to the heavens!’” Boshan again quotes the renowned Sôtô master Tiantong. The stock image is of a carp working its way upriver, then taking a final leap to be transformed into a dragon. This final leap has nothing to do with words and phrases, nor with sitting – even with sitting through.



The final paragraph of section four: “Since of old there have been many exhortations to guide us, and plenty of records to instruct us. This is because practitioners don’t go all the way but instead seek to imitate their teachers moving freely among the chaotic crowd. No wonder they have a hard time.” These “records” are literally “entangling vines” – another name for koans, this expression is also used

as the title of a koan collection compiled in Japan. Grasped improperly, such words and phrases do indeed entangle and restrict. Beware.

Question

Participant: Boshan speaks of “Ten thousand years in one moment of thought” in a negative way, but obviously there’s a positive connotation. Could you clarify this?

Jeff: Yes. There are many expressions like: “Cease and desist [all activity of the senses],” “Ten thousand years in one moment of thought,” “Be cold ash, a dead tree,” “Be an old incense burner in an ancient shrine,” “Be a strip of pure white silk,” and so on. Some of these are Taoist expressions that were taken up by Buddhist meditation masters. When these expressions refer to complete freedom of discursive mind, it’s a positive thing. There’s no discursive thought at all. But there’s the danger of taking this state as an end in itself. Then these expressions become what are called “dead words,” which is what Boshan and others rightly criticize. Probably Shishuang was using them as living expressions; the head monk, however, was not. It’s a perennial problem of breathing life into our words and actions.

Final Day

The Pure Land teaching I mentioned on the second day is like a blind person getting lost, then coming across an old and trusted friend who takes the blind man’s arm and walks him home. A kind and gentle path. Sometimes Zen is not so kind. It can even seem rough and unkind at times. Why does Zen kick your walking stick out from under you, twirl you around several times so that you’ve totally lost direction, then leave you there? [See Zenkei Shibayama’s *Zen Comments on the Mumonkan/Gateless Barrier*, Case 13.] I trust you realize, from your own experience, that only then can you really **see** for yourself. And when you do find your way, there can be no doubt; you will not lose it again:

*As this mountain monk sees it, there are none who are not of the utmost profundity,
none who aren’t emancipated.*

Solitary and free, not bound by anything!

Entering the various hells as though strolling in a pleasure garden.

There is no Buddha to seek, no Way to complete, no Dharma to attain.

What is your response to these statements of Linji? It’s not important, but here is mine: “Thank you, Linji, for your wise and inspiring words. But I would put it this way: without all of you I couldn’t raise a finger, I couldn’t do a thing. How marvelous! We’re always here for each other. How wonderful!”

Is this the same as Linji or different? Something to consider as you travel home.

When I was struggling hard in my practice, I remember coming across expressions about the Buddha Dharma such as: “Let not one drop spill into the world.” I was troubled by this. At the time, it sounded to me like a bunch of ornery old farts protecting their treasure. Spiritual materialism and arrogance. That was because I didn’t understand. I had made them into dead words.

Over the years it dawned on me: “Let not one drop spill into the world” isn’t about protecting the precious Dharma. Do you really think **this** can be harmed or corrupted? To paraphrase Hakuin: A real

teacher never interferes. Not because he is afraid of harming the Dharma. He is afraid of harming the student. “Let not one drop spill” – then all can find it manifest everywhere.

Watching the snow and ice melt outside, the following came to me:

From icicle

drops form and fall

yet never separate

from this at all.

Each drop is its own universe. Let us respect the integrity of each one. Thank you for listening so intently. Please take great care going home.

[End of Part 1]