

Exhortations For Those Who Do Rouse The Doubt

Part 2

*Went pursuing sweet grass
returned following fallen flowers*

始隨芳草去 *Hajime wa hōsō ni shitagatte sari,*
又逐落花回 *Mata rakka o ôte kaeru.*
[See *Zen Sand*, p. 431, #10.415]

A famous Chinese Zen statement. In context, the master of the monastery went out for a walk in the mountains. When he returned, one of the senior monks asked where he had been. Using Chinese imagery and poetic phrasing, he said: “*I went pursuing sweet grass; I returned following fallen flowers!*” The master eloquently expressed the boundless freedom that is always here. Being without self is so – so he naturally expressed it this way.

Case 36 of *The Blue Cliff Record* gives comment after comment on this famous phrase. I would just leave it as: “*Went pursuing sweet grass; returned following fallen flowers.*” If pressed to bring it to life here and now: “*Went searching for my own enlightenment; found it in serving others.*”

A classical Chinese expression, this one from chapter 4 of *The Analects* of Confucius, reads literally:

*Virtuous never alone
always have companions* [See *Zen Sand*, p. 295, #7.354]

Just seven Chinese characters, suggesting goodness naturally finds support all around. Is that because a good person tends to see others as good – to see the good in them? Anyway, in Zen Buddhism it has taken on a different nuance, as we will see.

One of the most common words used in describing Far Eastern religions is non-duality. In the popular idiom, it has become: “It’s all the same.” That’s not non-duality, that’s non-sense. In Buddhism this is called false-sameness. Real non-duality is not ‘Everything is the same’ or ‘not-two-ness.’ It is the living not-two-ness **of the two**.

In other words, when no-self is realized, the true beauty of each thing and the real dignity of everyone are clearly manifest: “*To go pursuing sweet grass; to return following fallen flowers.*” “*The virtuous are never alone, they always have companions.*”

Another well-known Chinese Zen exchange:

*A monk asks: “How can I enter the Way?”
The master: “Do you hear the flowing stream?”
“I hear it,” the monk said.
The master responded: “Enter there!”*
[See D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* First Series, pp. 293-294]

Crystal clear, like the flowing stream itself.

What is being revealed, however, is not specific to hearing the stream. Rather, the point is our immediate and concrete sense experience: the feeling of pain in my knee, the sound of the rain – whatever it may be. There’s no magic in the flowing stream, although it is a classic and effective Chinese image. One term for a Zen monk is literally “cloud-water” [in Japanese pronunciation: *un-sui*]. This is derived from the Chinese: “Floating clouds, flowing water.”

A few lines from a poem by Hanshan [“Cold Mountain”]:

*But today finds me home on Cold Mountain,
Head pillowed by the stream washing my ears.*

Water and streams are overflowing with significance in classical Chinese. Imagine the natural power of that above-mentioned exchange between monk and master. Such ‘flowing imagery’ is fairly universal – we can all get a sense of it, can’t we? No need to imitate it, though.

The point is that our present experience is the entrance into “the Way” – whatever that experience may be. We don’t need a typically Zen experience. Hearing the birds, or the car, outside right now can be that entrance. I trust this is clear.

Second Day

The Buddhist sutras often state that sense experience cannot reveal reality. Sense experience includes seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, as well as thinking, feeling, and willing. To give just a few examples from the Mahayana canon. First, one sentence from chapter 26 that sums up *The Diamond Sutra*:

*Looking for me in form or seeking me in sound,
one practices the wrong way and cannot see me.*

Do you **see**? This quote focuses on form and sound because the visual and aural senses were two of the basic ways that Buddhist meditation was practiced. Reciting or hearing certain sounds, and visualizing certain images. Broadly speaking, sense experience. And yet, self cannot know reality through sense experience.

So what happened to hearing the stream and entering the Way? **This** cannot be grasped by sense experience. Self cannot grasp reality through its senses. Including mind. But keep your eye open! The crux of the problem is not in the senses. They are fine as they are.

From chapter 12 of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*:

Reality cannot be known by intellect or perceived by sense-consciousness.

So how are you going to know it?

From *The Heart Sutra*:

No eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind...

“Hear the stream? Enter there.” Yes! And yet reality cannot be grasped by the self. What you so desperately seek cannot be grasped by the self that is seeking.

Zazen is sitting through that very delusion – the seeking self itself – **let go**. And there it is: “*Splish-splash, I was takin’ a bath!*” [Laughter] Then the inflow and outflow of all our senses are none other than the Way itself. No-self ‘returns to its senses.’

Yet to truly **enter** – not to merely understand, feel, intuit, or experience – is another thing. Self cannot do that. Truly empty of self, “*my cup runneth over.*” Simplicity itself. Yet it’s impossible for self to do. Here is the entrance to genuine practice. The classic Zen term “body-mind fallen away” expresses it well. Body-mind is a simple way of referring to all six senses [sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, mind]. All that could be considered as self. But where, in all of this, is self? Once that little knot has been undone, the Way is entered. That’s why we give ourselves – body and mind – to zazen.

I'm confident that this is found in any genuine religious tradition. Wherever I look I find it. A Belgian friend recently gave me a book on Hadewijch of Brabant, also known as Hadewijch of Antwerp, a Catholic mystic and poet who lived around the time of Meister Eckhart. In her poems she pours out her longing and love for God. She does not talk about practice. And yet, what is practice but the work of love? She says:

*To desire and to love
without the help of sense/intellect
this is necessary;
and then inwardly and outwardly to be
without knowledge
like a dead man.*

[Quoted in Bernard McGinn ed., *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, p. 24]

Yet we don't need religious literature to enter the Way. "*Wake up and smell the coffee!*" [Laughter] We don't really need anything. I'm getting old: my eyes aren't what they used to be. Neither are my ears. My body sure isn't what it used to be. Neither is my mind. Tell me: how do you enter the Way when the senses themselves are failing?

This 'loss,' due to the natural aging process, frightens self. Witness the pathetic attempts by so many to deny their aging. Nature 'knows' what it's doing, however. Young, we are given great strength and stamina, strong memory and mind. Gradually these fade. Another precious gift, for we no longer need them.

The gentle glow of many elderly folk reveals something marvelous that cannot be known when young. The Way is perfectly manifest here as well. It is not a transcendent realm **beyond** the senses – where would such a realm be? But **this** very realm: seeing, hearing, remembering, forgetting – free of self-attachment, free of self-delusion. Then aging, illness, and death are what they really are. What is lacking? Don't wait till you're an old fogey like me to find out! [Laughter]

Third Day

All of our senses are open in zazen. Eyes and ears are open and available. By not artificially closing off either our senses or the environment, we simply and naturally enter the Way. In the beginning, however, our zazen is not yet settled, so sights and sounds tend to be a disturbance. Thus a retreat, where we can give ourselves to patient and proper practice.

It takes maturity to really let go in religious practice. Without that maturity, we end up projecting our desires and delusions onto others. We must be careful about that. It can prevent us from doing the real work. What is my role in all of this? I'm just an ordinary person. If you idealize or analyze the teacher instead of examining yourself, you're not practicing. You're escaping from practice by indulging in such things. Beware of this. I will too.

Some of us are new friends and some of us are old friends. What is it to be a Dharma friend [*kalyana-mitra* in Sanskrit; literally "virtuous friend"]? "*The virtuous are never alone, they always have companions.*" Such friends do not feed the ego-weaknesses and projections of others. Sometimes they provide encouragement and support each other. Sometimes they may say: "You could be wrong. Maybe you shouldn't do that."

I'm not here to feed or support your delusions. My function here is to help you dispel those delusions. You are welcome to get angry with me for doing that – although your energies might be better spent elsewhere! [Laughter] We all need to be open and honest – without that, one-on-one is impossible. We must put down everything when we enter one-on-one. See clearly what you are doing. For some

people, one-on-one is like confronting a wall with no possible entrance. Others experience it as completely open on all sides. Either way, that's something you bring with you. Let it all go – then enter!

Some people try to do one-on-one, but cannot open up. A wall of delusions grows around them. In that case, a kind of disillusion – letting go of their delusions – becomes necessary. If all goes well, they learn and move on: they see the wall they have built, the energy spent holding it up is released, and it collapses. If not, they may end up confused and troubled, unable to really practice at all, although they may be sitting for endless hours. It's best to avoid such delusions from the start. But if they're there, we need to see them and be willing to work through them. Zen practice is simplicity itself; it is also hard work.

In learning zazen, breath is the practical entrance. No mandalas or mantras, no koans or zenistic jargon, no religious principles or philosophical truths. To let go of the circles going round your head, breathe naturally from the belly. Don't follow the breath; be one with it. No need to force it or obsess over it. Doing it properly, soon enough you will be breathing to, and from, the ground itself. Then the practice naturally takes a turn. The enemies you were fighting are gone. Sleepiness, pain, and so on, lose their sting. They're seen for what they are – no more, no less. A great release of tension and a feeling of boundless vitality often arise here. Now the real practice begins.

This retreat is a marvelous opportunity to practice together. Each one of us, however, must take responsibility for our own practice. There's no other way. Each one of us – especially me – must reflect on how to best help others in their practice. I look forward to your frank suggestions. Everyone is welcome to join in these retreats and to work together. “*The virtuous are never alone, they always have companions.*”

I trust you have confirmed that in letting go, the entrance is there. And yet, if one trace of self-willed effort remains, or if self-delusion returns, you end up tripping over your own feet. Thus the value of a retreat like this, where all can practice thoroughly and with proper guidance. Thus the value of Boshan's *Exhortations*. Let us now look at the fifth one.

Exhortations For Those Who Do Rouse The Doubt

By Boshan [Hakusan 1575-1630]

Fifth Exhortation

Rousing the Doubt when practicing Zen, one accords with *Dharma-kaya*. In zazen the point is reached where nothing disturbs, and one feels completely naked and free – beyond grasping.

But then you get stuck there, not knowing how to change freely with time and conditions. Attached to this state, you dare to act as lord and master, stagnating in [what you take to be] *Dharma-kaya*. Sick through and through, this is not Zen.

Dongshan [Liangjie; Tôzan Ryôkai 807-869] said:

*Mountain summit soars, but the crane does not abide.
The tree is lofty, but the phoenix does not reside.*

Soaring summits and lofty trees refer to something extremely subtle and profound. They are not merely dry, lifeless expressions. Likewise, not abiding and not residing refer to something extremely energetic and full of life, rather than something stagnant and still. If not penetrated to this depth, the profound Dharma principle won't be known. And if this liveliness is not reached, the constantly free and marvelous dynamism has not been realized.

One committed to the practice exhausts his mind to the very limit. Then, through encountering a genuine teacher, the bucket of lacquer [ignorance and delusion] is overturned and one can

see through. How can you foolishly hold onto your ignorance and remain satisfied like a crane in its cage or a phoenix shedding its feathers?

As mentioned, the *Dharma-kaya* means **embodied** Dharma, **living** truth. Though the initial coming into accord may not be easy, ultimately it's very simple. Once Great Doubt naturally arises, self-delusion starts to come undone. The delusion-that-you-are unravels, and you embody the living truth. Inseparable. This is the entrance – it's not about mere understanding, states of mind, or experiences. Thus we enter the Way.

“Attached to this state...” It's not a state. When you become attached to it, however, you turn it into one. Boshan is not theorizing, so his text can be confusing if you don't have the eye. In the first paragraph he speaks positively of *Dharma-kaya*. But in the next paragraph he speaks negatively about it as a state. Because, if it is grasped it becomes a state. So I added “[what you take to be]”. Whether you dwell in the joy of your attainment or suffer in the dissatisfaction of your un-attainment, they are both delusive states. One has a little more glitter, that's all.

“*Mountain summit soars, but the crane does not abide. The tree is lofty, but the phoenix does not reside.*” The crane is a symbol of longevity and the phoenix is a symbol of awakening. Boshan continues: “Soaring summits and lofty trees refer to something extremely subtle and profound. They are not merely dry, lifeless expressions. Likewise, not abiding and not residing refer to something extremely energetic and full of life, rather than something stagnant and still. If not penetrated to this depth, the profound Dharma principle won't be known. And if this liveliness is not reached, the constantly free and marvelous dynamism has not been realized.” Finish dying; then fully return to life! That's what he's referring to. Then there's no place to get stuck – no place to abide or reside. There's not even a trace of 'enlightenment.'

The language used to express it is intimately connected with what is expressed. Zen is not attached or limited to words. And yet, properly expressed, language can be a great aid. Throughout my lectures in this retreat, I have offered many examples. Chew on them, digest them, then you can eliminate them. Hakuin [Ekaku 1686-1769]:

*Don't try to tell me my poems are too hard –
Face it, the problem is your own eyeless state.
When you come to a word you don't understand, quick
Bite it at once! Chew it right to the pith!
Once you're soaked to the bone in death's cold sweat,
All the koans Zen has are yanked up, root and stem.*
[Norman Waddell tr., *Zen Words for the Heart*, p. 84 with revisions]

“One committed to the practice exhausts his mind to the very limit. Then, through encountering a genuine teacher, the bucket of lacquer [ignorance and delusion] is overturned and one can see through. How can you foolishly hold onto your ignorance and remain satisfied like a crane in its cage or a phoenix shedding its feathers?” Rather stinging, but these are exhortations, important warnings on the Way. Don't get stuck inside, or outside, the “bucket of lacquer.”

Fourth Day

Sixth Exhortation

Rousing the Doubt when practicing Zen, one accords with *Dharma-kaya*. Then, although unclear, something seems to arise in front of you. Groping after this vague something time and again, it eventually appears right before your very eyes. You then convince yourself that you have grasped the truth of *Dharma-kaya* and realized the true nature of the universe. You don't know that such things are mere fantasies and illusions. Sick through and through, this is not Zen.

If someone has really penetrated this truth, it's a matter of "The world widening to ten feet is the ancient [Mind-]mirror widening to ten feet." Since "Stretching out your body is the spread of the universe," there is not a thing to seek within or without. What on earth do you take to be your body, to be facing you, to exist – what is that vague something?

Unmon [Bun'en; Yunmen Wenyan 864-949] also pointed out this sickness and spoke much of it. If one can clearly see through this sickness, then all three sicknesses will completely dissolve. I have spoken of this to my students: "Innumerable sicknesses are found in the *Dharma-kaya*. Fatally succumb once to this – only then will you realize the root of the disease. Even if everyone over the face of the earth practiced Zen, not one of them would be spared from this sickness." This does not, of course, apply to the blind, deaf, and dumb.

The first sentence is the same in all ten sections. Regarding this first paragraph: if something like this happens and you grasp on to what appears, remember Boshan's warning.

This contrasts with the second paragraph, where Boshan uses two phrases that express what it's like when there is nothing left to objectify or to turn into something. Without a thing to seek, inside or out, what is there?

"Unmon also pointed out this sickness and spoke much of it. If one can clearly see through this sickness, then all three sicknesses will completely dissolve." Sickness is a very general term for any hindrance or delusion along the way – **anything** short of full and complete awakening. This term is used in many different senses and contexts, so beware in your reading. Attachment to the seated posture is sometimes called a Zen sickness. Whatever it is, if we grasp after it and turn it into something, even the noble and lofty can turn into a disease – beware!

"Innumerable sicknesses are found in the *Dharma-kaya*. Fatally succumb once to this – only then will you realize the root of the disease." See why I urge you not to just sit, but to just sit through? Boshan mentions three sicknesses. There are various lists. One borrows from the Oxherding images [See "No Bull: Zen Oxherding Pictures" in *Zen Classics For The Modern World*]: The first sickness is to look for the ox while riding it. The second is to realize the ox but refuse to get off it. The third is to penetrate further but not realize total liberation.

Boshan ends: "This does not, of course, apply to the blind, deaf, and dumb." Is he criticizing the hopelessly ignorant? Or praising those who are free of sense-attachment? Best to read this Zen stuff without using your eyes.

Numberless beings – set free
Endless delusion – let go
Countless Dharma – see through
Peerless Way – manifest!

You see how our four vows, seen by self as something to attain, sound very daunting or overwhelming. They are not. What greater joy than to sit through and see for yourself that there is no self? Then those four little vows almost recite themselves. More importantly, they come to life!

If the realization of no-self is genuine, there's no division with 'the rest of the world.' No-self works in – and as – the world: "The world widening to ten feet is the ancient [Mind-]mirror widening to ten feet." "Stretching out your body is the spread of the universe." Otherwise, another duality is created. That is not living non-duality.

Give yourself fully and joyfully to your practice. Just sit through. At the same time, don't naively think that Zen is going to solve all your problems – as if it were the answer to everything. It's a damn good start, and if it's genuine and thoroughgoing it works itself out in the world. Then, as it's put in

Mahayana Buddhism: “True emptiness [is] wondrous being.” The true beauty and dignity of each and every thing is manifest. “Go pursuing sweet grass. Return following fallen flowers.”

Questions

Participant: Can you clarify what you mean by breathing from the ground?

Jeff: To get out of your head, it is helpful to breathe from the belly. If it's not done properly, however, the chest and the belly can become restricted. I often hear from people who have practiced elsewhere that they get stomachaches, headaches, and other physical and mental problems because they're trying so hard to breathe from their *hara*. Done properly, chest and belly are open and relaxed, and you breathe naturally like this. [*Demonstrates*] Unfortunately, people get obsessed with this practice and pervert it into '*hara-zen*' – a self-powered practice in the worst sense of the term. They're trying to force themselves into enlightenment. It doesn't work and, instead, creates all kinds of other problems. They've gotten out of their head and into their body, but then they get stuck there. Instead, naturally breathe to, and from, the ground itself. As if the whole universe is supporting you in your practice. Then you can avoid these problems.

Participant: Do you recommend reading Zen literature, or should one just sit and do the practice?

Jeff: Practice is the basis – not reading. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't read Zen literature. Throughout these lectures, I have tried to breathe life into Zen literature and show how it can be used in practice. It's not my job to tell you what to read. You must decide for yourself. But I would urge you to read reliable translations and authoritative commentaries. Just read a bit at a time, to confirm what you've realized. Don't greedily seek enlightenment in the words. Instead, let the words nourish and confirm – that's enough.

Exhortations For Those Who Do Rouse The Doubt

Part 3

Monday

Together in this retreat, let us directly discover what really is, and what needs to be done. When I wake up in the morning, I couldn't be more content. And I haven't even gotten out of my futon. This is my present experience. I couldn't imagine myself happier – it's almost depressing! [*Laughter*] During the day, naturally I'm busy with various things. Then at night when I lay my head on my pillow, I may be tired but it's pretty much the same: boundless contentment. Although this is my experience, it's not about me at all. This is everyone's birthright: we are all born this way. What greater joy than to look the other in the eye – and see the original face of the world. To embrace the other as they embrace you. Isn't this what you really are? You don't even need me to tell you this.

There is a simple Zen phrase that brings it home:

The single saucer lamp in the room.

室内一盞燈 *Shitsunai issan no tō* [See *Zen Sand*, p. 196, #5.158]

I suppose it originally referred to a lantern, perhaps candle-lit. Only a single saucer to reflect, so the room is sparsely lit. Comparable to simple electric lights today, with just a single reflecting saucer made of metal or plastic. A very simple lamp, yet its light fills the room.

But why is this a revered Zen expression? From the outside, it may sound trivial or trite. As we go through the week, I trust you will see that it is quite illuminating. For now, I trust you already sense that it has something to do with seeing, with illuminating – **being** what really is. The light is just a light, yet it can also be a metaphor for what mind really is. What does it illumine? What is this light, this energy, that illumines all?

For many nowadays, it's probably the computer screen! [*Laughter*] Virtually every sight and sound is available to us now online. And yet, are we satisfied with that? Are we content with it?

Recently the Japanese government came out with an official statement on the earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011. As you all know, it was a huge natural disaster. However, the Japanese government concluded that it was a manmade disaster. Why? Because the danger of such a disaster was there and was known, but adequate protective measures were not taken. Why? The Japanese government used the term self-interest. I render the Japanese term as “selfish self-interest,” or “self-centered self-interest” because there is natural and healthy self-interest as well. Flying here the other day I heard, for the umpteenth time: “Should the cabin lose pressure, oxygen masks will drop from overhead. Please place the mask over your own mouth before assisting others.” You put on your own first, so you can breathe and then help others: self-interest in the interest of others. Selfish self-interest instead puts personal gain above concern for the other, and profit above safety. The government statement also used the term “safety myth.” In other words, it's basically safe – provided there is not too big of an earthquake or too high a tsunami. Fatally blinded by selfish self-interest.

What does our small, single saucer lamp in the room illuminate? Not much, you might think. But does it turn the other into something to be manipulated for our own profit or advantage? And that in the end hurts not only others but also ourselves. This is a retreat, so I'm not just talking about nuclear

regulatory commissions, electric power companies, or the desire for more and cheaper energy. I'm talking about you and me here and now. Not seeing, not appreciating what really is. Not seeing others, or myself, for what they really are. Thus we endanger all with our self-centered delusions and blind desires.

This craving – even for light – can become a dark and dangerous delusion. How does that happen? Zen Buddhist teaching and practice is all about seeing this for yourself. Have you really seen this in your own actions, in your own intentions? Self, in its delusion, tries to be something – even to be itself or to be enlightened – but it can't, because it isn't. This restless seeking, this craving is doomed to failure. By its very nature, self cannot come fully to rest or be completely satisfied. This is the basis of Buddhism. Confirm it clearly for yourself. Otherwise, as you already know from your own experience, you simply continue in the same confused, painful circles. Thus we gladly entrust ourselves to a retreat like this, as a precious entrance into true rest and ease.

And then see what needs to be done. A worker in one of the damaged nuclear power plants in Fukushima Prefecture was asked why he did what he did – going into extremely dangerous areas with inadequate protection. His reply: “Somebody had to do it, so I became that somebody.” To truly **be without self** we must then turn around without missing a beat and **be somebody** when something needs to be done.

Opening up to this through our own experience allows us to see our own delusions for what they are, and really let them go. Thus to shine a light on the blind spot – to burn through the fatal flaw – of self-centered practice. Beware: craving for some enlightened state is itself a delusion. Obsession with the *hara* or *tanden* or with perfecting meditative power tends to degenerate into self-practice in the worst sense. Such practices need to be done properly and with great care so that willful self-effort naturally burns itself out in the process. Otherwise you may increase self-delusion. Whether you are sitting through the breath itself, or working through a koan, genuine Zen practice reveals the light by extinguishing the flame of self-delusion.

Begin by gathering your energies into one, rather than letting them remain scattered through the senses as they usually are. Zazen is a wonderful way to do this. The very posture of the spine and position of the eyes, the way we place our feet and hands, and breathe – all contribute to the natural focus and concentration. Super human powers are not needed. You have enough energy, once it is gathered into one and properly directed: The single saucer lamp in the room is quite enough.

Tuesday

How do we properly direct the energy and shine the light that we have? First of all, I trust it's clear that the direction is right underfoot. [*Knocks on floor*] It's not a matter of some past or future time, of some other place or culture, but illuminating right underfoot. Not that the problems of the world are unimportant – not at all. But a retreat is the place to clarify the nature of self. Then we return and work in the world to resolve problems there, rather than be a part of them, or make them even worse. This one right here – who is this? That's the question to clarify. Not in your head, but in your very bones. Who is this one, so full of light? Who is this one, trying courageously to solve the world's problems? Who is this one [*louder*] coming to retreat looking for answers?! If that's not clear, you easily trip over your own feet.

Once your question – the question that you are – really opens up, everything is illumined anew. What seemed so confined and confining all of a sudden is seen as marvelously pure and fresh. We have a glimpse of what things really are. The smallest particle of dust seems so fine, so boundless, so wondrous. We will see further into this with the rest of Boshan's *Exhortations*, but we can also find it expressed here:

On a clear day

Rise and look around you

And you'll see who you are

On a clear day

How it will astound you

That the glow of your being

Outshines every star

[*On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner]

Or in these lyrics:

But you know and I know there never was reason to hurt

When all of our lives were entwined to begin with

Here in Spoon River

[*Spoon River* lyrics by Michael Smith]

The problem is that when this happens – when the walls fall away, when the limits we put on things are found to be unreal – we stop there, we get stuck in that ecstatic experience. It then ends up a mere dream – or a badly sung song. [*Laughter*] We may even distort it into a world that we then try to control, and that others must conform to.

How do we practice so as to open up to these experiences as genuine pointers – without getting stuck in them? The natural first step is to give ourselves to the practice so that we can confirm this opening right under our own feet. A retreat is a wonderful way to do this. To see the whole self-centered world that we create is a delusion. Then naturally let the delusion go. Everything that we thought we knew, everything that we thought we were, falls into marvelous, liberating Great Doubt.

Reality is marvelous and liberating. But if self-craving remains, it can seem frightening and unsettling. For what I identify as myself is seen through, seen for what it is. This is very good and true and real – but you've got to let go! Thus we provide the retreat environment so that you can do this properly and thoroughly.

Great Doubt is right underfoot. In more traditional Buddhist phrasing: it is good, it is proper, it is correct, to doubt what should be doubted and to examine whether it is real or not. Delusions deserve to be doubted. If they are not doubted, they maintain their hold on us and we continue to suffer. Through proper practice, the single saucer lamp in the room clearly and naturally brings to light our delusion – the delusion that we are:

In India and China, in the past and the present, of all the worthies who spread this light, none did anything more than simply resolve this one Doubt. The thousand doubts, the ten thousand doubts are just this one Doubt. Resolve this Doubt and no doubt remains.

[See *Zen Classics for the Modern World*, p. 56]

You don't need to blindly believe – even the Buddhist teachings. You don't need to blindly follow – even a so-called teacher. **That** is genuine Zen Buddhism. Let the Great Doubt that is underfoot, that you are, be what it is. There is no greater Trust or Faith. Let that be your Way.

Why wait for another earthquake, tsunami, or other crisis or tragedy, internal or external, to reveal that the ground underfoot is not as firm and solid as you think? Let the Great Doubt open underfoot: Who is this one who knows exactly what I'm saying? Who is this one who has no idea? Who is this one who wants more than anything to help, but ends up hurting instead? Who is behind it all? Illumine that and the essential work is done. Then the single saucer lamp is quite enough. For it reveals that there really are no delusions, there is no place for them to even arise. Don't just follow my words; confirm it in your bones.

Buddhism speaks of samsara, dukkha, the great matter of life and death [or birth and death], and so on. Such terms really refer to the Great Doubt, which has yet to be seen through. It is not a speculative or abstract concern: this I, this me that has come into being and will one day cease – what is that?

Let's now turn to the seventh of Boshan's *Exhortations For Those Who Do Rouse The Doubt*. He is trying to give us some sense of what it is to rouse this genuine Doubt, and warn us of some of the dangers we may fall into if the practice is not proper and thorough.

Seventh Exhortation

Rousing the Doubt when practicing Zen, one accords with *Dharma-kaya*. This is what men of old called: "The whole world is the monk's eye," "The whole world is one's luminosity," "The whole world is within one's luminosity." The Sutras speak of it as: "Within one speck of dust there are infinite Dharma Truths."

But then you grasp that as final and don't proceed further or with proper guidance. Convincing yourself that this is an entrance gate into satori, you fall into a state where you're not really living nor are you finished dying. Sick through and through, this is not Zen.

Even though you reach accord with *Dharma-kaya*, you don't realize that if you can't get free from it you end up falling under its spell. Even worse if you turn it into something and get dragged down by it: unable to fully penetrate, the monkey-mind can't stop grasping after it. Thus you can't finish dying – how on earth can you come back to life!

Begin by rousing the Doubt, then accord with *Dharma-kaya*. According with *Dharma-kaya*, plumb its depths. Then turn somersaults on the edge of a precipice. Back on solid ground, you wave to others and sail downstream as if nothing happened. Only then will you be worthy of guiding others. Otherwise you're but a fraud scratching the surface, not Buddha's true successor.

The *Dharma-kaya* or Dharma-body is truth embodied – living truth. In other words, when you realize what things really are, when the barriers fall away, you are in accord with, not separate from, the *Dharma-kaya*. Then indeed, the whole world is your eye, clear and simple. The whole world is just this! The mental world that we create dissolves. Dissolves into [*knocks on floor*] this. *The single saucer lamp in the room.*

The expressions in the first paragraph may sound bombastic. As a poetic way of expressing the falling away of delusions, however, they are quite natural and to the point. The second paragraph follows a similar pattern as the other *Exhortations*, warning us not to get stuck there. The third paragraph goes into a bit more detail, while the final paragraph uses the dramatic image of turning somersaults on the edge of a cliff – then simply doing what needs to be done. Turning somersaults here is comparable to the image in the fourth *Exhortation*, where Boshan quoted Tiantong: “Just cutting off the ten directions in sitting, the fish falls short of the Dragon Gate.” Leaping through this gate, the carp transforms into a dragon in the same way that one turns somersaults on the edge of a cliff – then goes about one’s business. This final leap is essential. However, it cannot be done by self-will. Self-will is what keeps us chained down. This leap can happen once self-will dissolves.

Questions

Participant: Zen literature mentions the leap from the top of a hundred-foot pole; is that what you’re talking about? [See for example Case 46 of the Mumonkan/Gateless Barrier]

Jeff: Yes. It’s basically the same metaphor. After you get to the top of the pole, you must leap off and, as it’s said, “manifest your body in all directions.” Ascending the pole or the steps of the ladder refers to all the practices that you do. Precious indeed. But once you get to the top, then what? That is where self-will ends. **Here**, where there’s nowhere else to go, is precisely where self needs to ‘get to.’ It’s where self-delusion ends – and where another kind of practice begins.

Participant: What is the relation between Great Doubt and Great Trust or Hope?

Jeff: It’s not just hope, because it’s based on experience. Maybe it’s not clear yet, that’s okay. But you have some sense from your own experience. Not just because of something you’ve read, heard, believe in, or hope for. Great Trust, based on experience: no need for false hopes or blind beliefs. If such things remain, the practice is not yet ripe. Great Trust allows us to give ourselves fully to the Great Doubt underfoot. Great Trust and Great Doubt go hand in hand. They prevent falling into either mental scattering or torpor. As it’s said: “Fully trust, you’ll fully doubt; fully doubt, you’ll fully awaken.” [See *Zen Classics for the Modern World*, p. 48]

When this is lacking, the mind tends to fall into either a dead torpor, or scatter into speculating, dreaming, hoping, and so on. But when Trust and Doubt are firm, mind doesn’t waver at all. So you can really sit through in zazen. That’s one of the great values of a retreat. Why sit hours and hours and hours? Once trust and doubt are firm, it’s perfectly natural to just sit through. If your mind is falling into torpor or scattering, rouse yourself and see what’s underfoot!

Thank you for your questions and for listening so intently.

Wednesday

Zazen is called the Dharma Gate of great ease and joy. It’s true, although it may take some time to confirm. That’s why we take time to learn the proper physical posture and mental attitude. If you are sitting with much pain, check and see that your physical posture is correct. In principle, we do not

move during zazen. Why? Sit still for a long period of time in deep zazen and it becomes clear. You answer your own question by sitting through. But stillness is not the answer to everything. To paraphrase Boshan, mere stillness is not Zen. It is a very helpful entrance, though. Letting the body come to rest in an attentive way naturally helps the mind to do so. Staying still also keeps us from disturbing others. One of the best ways to bring body and mind to rest is through the breath. No need to add a thing; just be one with what keeps us alive – our breath.

Questions

Participant: How much will power is too much?

Jeff: As long as will power remains, use it. But use it correctly. Rather than fighting yourself, pour it into the practice. That's the essential point. You have a strong determination and a genuine desire to practice. You came a long way to be here. So you want to get started, to get this show on the road! Wonderful. But direct your energies properly. Do you want to ask a question about that?

Participant: How do you channel it into your practice?

Jeff: What's driving you – is it clear? It may take some time, but if that drive is genuine, coming from the right place, then simply let go of the delusions and dreams surrounding it. Practice should be done with great care and proper guidance. That's why we practice together in this way. Are you falling asleep in zazen?

Participant: Sometimes.

Jeff: And at other times your mind is scattering?

Participant: I seem to have three states to choose from: mental scatter, torpor, or pain. [Laughter]

Jeff: You're not the only one. I reckon you just summed it up for many. So what do you do?

Participant: Sit through?

Jeff: Now you see the value of your own Great Doubt. What is really driving you? Let your Doubt naturally fuel the practice. Until that Doubt has been resolved, how can you stop practicing? When you're really tired, take a break. But don't stop practicing! That is a retreat. Take a walk or lie down. But maintain the practice. When you lie down, have a nice nap. But allow the focus to gently remain below your belly. And when your nap is over, gently rise with it. Let the practice be continuous. This is much more grounded than mere will power. It's as if the ground itself, the whole world, is supporting and nourishing.

With the pain: when it comes, it's not good or bad. It's pain. Recognize it – hear what it's saying and correct your posture if needed. Sometimes the pain can fuel your practice. Other times you just feel engulfed by it. It's a subtle difference. But it's the same pain. The difference is in your response.

Drowsiness or torpor cannot get in the way, once Great Doubt fuels the flame. Because there is the genuine need for it to come to its own end, to really come to rest. And the scattering: just because you come to retreat doesn't mean that the mental scattering you daily indulge in simply disappears. That's one reason a retreat is as long and intense as it is. Be patient, but not lax. And yes: sit through. Soon enough you will confirm it for yourself.

Participant: When you eat less, your mind is clearer and you are not so sleepy.

Jeff: Yes, when you eat too much, you tend to get sleepy. It's a good point, because when people are not used to doing a retreat and are struggling, they may escape by indulging in food. They virtually drug themselves by overeating, which results in drowsiness. A vicious cycle to avoid. Keep the practice constant in all that you do. When eating as well, don't drop the practice when you pick up the fork!

Participant: You often speak about gathering all into one. [See "Becoming One and Being Without Self" and "Basics of Zen Practice" in the book *Being Without Self*.] Can you give some practical pointers now?

Jeff: Very briefly, zazen is a marvelous way of allowing all to be gathered into one. The breath is very helpful since it naturally brings together body and mind, without adding anything. [*Demonstrates*]

But becoming one is not being without self. Becoming one is the process of the self gathering all into one – so that all can then dissolve. That's the danger of a so-called insight or *kenshō* experience. All has not been gathered into one, and yet we catch a glimpse. Then we confuse that with no-self. A fatal mistake. Thus I don't push you to have such insights. They're no big deal and often end up creating more delusions.

When the apple is ripe, it falls from the tree. Then it can provide nutrients for all, good food for the bugs and worms. If the apple is unripe, hard and still sour, it's not good for anything. Simply and patiently pour your energies into ripening, becoming one, without thinking about when, or what comes after.

Thank you for listening so intently, and for your questions and comments.

Thursday

In Japanese Zen monasteries there is a wooden block called a *Han*. It is struck to announce the time for certain group activities. Versions vary a bit, but written on it is the following, freely translated:

Great is the matter of life and death,

Investigate it promptly.

Change is ceaseless and quick,

Time waits for no one.

Helpful encouragement for us here and now. We have 24 hours left in this retreat. It's plenty of time, if you use it well.

Let's now look at the eighth section of Boshan's *Exhortations For Those Who Do Rouse The Doubt*:

Eighth Exhortation

Rousing the Doubt when practicing Zen, one accords with *Dharma-kaya*. Whether going, staying, sitting, or reclining, it feels like basking in sunlight or being enveloped in the soft glow of a lamp, serenely undisturbed. If you proceed from there and let go of that, it's like the refreshing breeze in the

moonlight by a clear lake. Your own body and the whole world are completely one, all utterly pure, senses clear and sharp. Now you're really convinced that this is the ultimate!

But you can't turn round and take that further step, nor can you return to the world with open arms to help others. You don't even consider consulting with Dharma friends or teachers whether this is really the ultimate or not. In this state of purity you arouse delusions, then assume you have entered the gate of satori. Sick through and through, this is not Zen.

Tiantong said:

Even though the moon shines bright, you lose your way home;

There's no room to doubt, yet try to step forward and you fall.

"Even though the moon shines bright" clearly is none other than "the refreshing breeze in the moonlight by a clear lake." "There's no room to doubt," yet even if you step forward you end up "losing your way" and "fall."

What should practicers do when they get to this point? Simply and easily turn and be transformed from a single blade of grass into a ten-foot tall golden Buddha. Otherwise, it will be like trying to row a boat by hammering down the oars, or trying to catch fish up a tree. Destroy a thousand or a million of their ilk, still you'll commit no crime.

I trust the first paragraph is clear from your own experience. The second paragraph opens by warning us not to get wrapped up in these profound states of serene clarity, but instead to turn around and take one more step, thus to return to the world with open arms – to "enter the market with open hands." [The title of the tenth and final poem of the Oxherding Pictures. See *Zen Classics for the Modern World*, p. 42.]

Boshan then scolds for refusing to meet with Dharma friends. We would not be here at this retreat, however, if we were not willing to be so challenged. We are in very good hands, for this is a great congregation of experienced people. Boshan then warns us that in a state of great purity, delusions can still arise. This point will be taken up in the next section.

In the next paragraph he quotes Tiantong, who he quoted in sections two and four. Tiantong is one of the great Sôtô Zen masters active about fifty years before the time of Dôgen.

The final paragraph points the way through. The final sentence reeks of violence, though I take it as encouragement to destroy such delusions within. This eighth section challenges us to leap out of the apparently free and open space we find ourselves in. How do you respond?

Ninth Exhortation

Rousing the Doubt when practicing Zen, one accords with *Dharma-kaya*. But the moment you distort the *Dharma-kaya* by creating magical and marvelous delusions, then shining lights, flowers and all sorts of esoteric manifestations appear. You then think you've achieved the ultimate and, convinced that you've entered the gate of satori, bedazzle and deceive others with what you've seen. You don't realize that actually you're sick through and through and that this is not Zen.

You should know that these strange visions are fixations of your own [unconscious] delusions, like things conjured up in your mind by demons, or temptations by heavenly beings such as Indra. For example, such delusive visions are found in the Sixteen Contemplations of *The Sutra on*

Contemplation of Immeasurable Life. By devoting oneself to being reborn in the Pure Land, all of a sudden images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas appear, and this is in accord with Pure Land doctrine. But it is not the way of Zen.

The Surangama Sutra mentions this conjuring by demons: when realizing the emptiness of the five aggregates, if there is still some attachment in the mind, demons will immediately appear. The temptations by heavenly beings refer for example to Indra transforming into headless demons and the like to scare the practicing Bodhisattva, but he is not frightened. Then Indra transforms into a beautiful woman to entice the practitioner, but he remains unmoved by desire. Finally Indra appears undisguised and bows, saying: “The great Mount Tai may crumble and the vast ocean dry up, but it is truly difficult to move his mind!” Thus it is said: “There’s a limit to a worldly man’s tricks, but no end to this old monk’s not-seeing and not-hearing.”

If you are really intent on pursuing this path, even if a murderer wields his knife in front of your face, you won’t bat an eyelash. Deep in meditation, you certainly won’t be bothered by illusions. One with the Dharma principle, there is nothing outside the mind. Where is there room for the seeing mind and what is seen?

With psychological insight, Boshan describes and warns us of magical visions and the like that may appear. He naturally uses metaphors and figures of speech that just as naturally sound bizarre to us today. I trust you can see what he is getting at, though. If not, don’t worry about it. Maybe tomorrow or somewhere down the line you’ll find yourself saying: “So this is what Boshan was talking about!”

The Surangama Sutra mentioned in the third paragraph is one of the leading Mahayana sutras also important in the Zen tradition. Boshan kindly explains here that even though one sees through the emptiness of all things, if attachment remains then delusions will appear. He uses a term for demons; today we might speak of it as subjective or unconscious delusions, mental fixations, and so on. Indeed: greedily seeking after enlightenment does more harm than good if we lack the proper foundation in mind and body. The rest of this paragraph describes the stability that is needed. Not-seeing and not-hearing refers to not abiding in the senses, or even in the five aggregates that we take to be a self.

The final paragraph describes the natural result. For some of you, there is still pain, sleepiness, mental scattering at times. Stable and settled in sustained practice, however, I trust you are learning how to use these as mulch, as fuel for the fire. Then nothing can really get in the way. Even misfortune.

Participant: It’s said that after the Buddha awakened, he continued to practice.

Jeff: You mean he continued to meditate, for example?

Participant: Yes.

Jeff: Why would he do that?

Participant: I don’t know. I know why I practice.

Jeff: That’s a good question for you – because, as with Gotama Buddha, your delusions will cease. And yet he continued to meditate. Why? [Pause]

Dôgen put it nicely in the beginning of his classic *Genjô-kôan*: “To study the Buddha way is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by all things.” This much is often cited, but the real point is what follows: “Actualized by all things, your body-mind as well as the body-mind of others falls away. Then no trace of realization remains – and this traceless

realization continues without end.” Easy to misunderstand and pervert this into: “I was deluded, but now the delusions have fallen away so I’m enlightened.” Nonsense.

When body-mind fall away and you realize that nothing is lacking, that’s not where practice ends – it’s where real practice begins. It should not lead to inactivity. On the contrary, when you realize that nothing is lacking, you know what needs to be done. There are always new situations; the further you go, the deeper it gets. In that sense, it goes on forever – Gotama Buddha is still practicing. What about you?

Friday

It’s wonderful to see all of us together forming a strong, solid *sangha* or practice community. We are from several countries and some of us speak different languages, yet we joyfully come together here and at other places, spontaneously forming a *sangha*. Then we naturally go our separate ways, joyfully returning to our homes and families, and our own local *sangha*. Some of us have been doing this for many years; I first came to the Netherlands well over twenty years ago. Heaven knows how many retreats we’ve done, usually twice a year. Some of you have done more practice than the average monk in Japan, although the way we do it here is quite different, and we are finding our way as we do it together. It is not a matter of slavish, blind imitation. Trying to become Japanese or Chinese or Tibetan pseudo-monastics has already been tried. It doesn’t work; frankly, nowadays it is half-dead even in their own cultures. It is certainly valuable to learn, with humility and respect, what other traditions have to teach. But finally we have to bring it to life on our own home ground.

Learn the forms and breathe life into them. The form of zazen, for example, doesn’t need to be full lotus. Most of you are not sitting full lotus, but all of us are doing zazen. We naturally confirm the value of zazen by doing it. We don’t sit hunched over, we don’t sit thinking about it. The same goes for *kinhin*-walking meditation. We naturally put our hands on chest and look straight ahead as we maintain our meditation and refresh ourselves. This helps to keep us focused, rather than walking with arms dangling or eyes looking around in a haphazard manner. There is value in these forms. Learn them and breathe life into them. Don’t blindly imitate.

In the midst of all of this is proper guidance. Boshan in his *Exhortations* often mentions the importance of Dharma friends and teachers. Proper guidance is not blind, absolute authority from above telling you what you must do. Not shining the light on you or for you, but helping you to illuminate it for yourself. Sometimes being a mirror for your light. When necessary, blowing out your lights – so that you can really see. No need to blindly follow. Your own practice must be the final authority. If you do not see it, then it is only natural to doubt. Go right ahead. Genuine Zen encourages such doubt. I trust that is already clear.

I began with a very simple statement about the single saucer lamp in the room. It has been glowing through the week. Sometimes painfully, sometimes with incredible calm and subtly. I trust next time you are sitting blankly in front of your computer screen, you will consider what it is that you are seeking there, what light are you trying to suck out of that screen?

This morning I walked by one of your rooms and someone had left the light on. Is this how you live your life? Is this the single saucer lamp in your daily life – not just on the cushion but in what you do moment to moment?

Great Doubt can sound rather formidable, but it is not. Once you realize your own Great Doubt – the Great Doubt that you are – it is not strange at all. What is strange is **not** rousing it. Because it is clearly there; don't turn away from it! Turning away from it, you have already acknowledged it – but failed to resolve it. Is that how you want to spend the rest of your life?

Let us now look at the tenth and final *Exhortation*. Boshan brings it home in this final section. It's a good conclusion, both for the *Exhortations* and for this retreat.

Tenth Exhortation

Rousing the Doubt when practicing Zen, one accords with *Dharma-kaya*. Then one feels lightness in body and mind, and no hindrance in any situation. But even if one experiences the unity of reality and appearance, and the whole world seems in harmony for the moment, it is not the ultimate. This is where the ignorant, convinced that they've entered the gate of satori, are quick to let go of their Doubt and proceed no further. Because the life-root has not been cut off, they don't realize that even though they may have approached the Dharma, all is still within the realm of karmic consciousness. Speculating with their karmic consciousness, they are sick through and through. This is not Zen.

Without penetrating the Dharma, they have turned round too soon. Thus, even though they may understand deeply, they cannot bring it to life. If only they truly turned round with a living word – then they could patiently cultivate and mature along the riverbank or in forests. Never be in a rush to save others while pride and conceit remain.

In beginning the practice, take great care to rouse this Doubt so that it solidifies into one massive block. When this breaks up on its own, the real one bursts forth and comes to life. Otherwise you only approach the Dharma, then prematurely let go of your Doubt. You'll never finish dying that way, nor will you thoroughly penetrate. Instead you will waste your life in vain. Even if you continue to practice Zen, it will be in name only and not the real thing. Intending to return to the world with open arms to help others – you better encounter a true teacher or real Dharma friend instead. Such ones are great doctors who can help heal fatal ills and offer whatever is really needed. Never let self-satisfaction keep you from meeting them. If you do, it is because you are attached to your own views. In Zen, there is no sickness worse than that.

In the first paragraph, the unity of reality and appearance is a technical term used in the *Five Ranks*. [See *Zen Classics for the Modern World*, p. 64] But that need not concern us here. The point, as Boshan makes clear, is the life-root cut off – instead of prematurely letting go of the Doubt. The difference is decisive.

The second paragraph describes the fault in terms of turning round too soon. Instead, a living word can be used to truly turn round. Don't just mimic Zenistic expressions or you'll suck the life out of them! And never be in a hurry to save others while your own eye is clouded.

The final paragraph sums it up well. Since all of us are here to humbly practice together, I trust that some of his barbs do not apply. But take them in anyway, just in case.

Participant: What does Boshan mean by a living word?

*Jeff: Any word that dislodges delusion and prompts the needed turnaround at that time and place is a living word. "The fire god seeks fire" were dead words for three years when the monk held onto them; those very same words became living words once his Great Doubt was roused. [See *Being Without Self*, p. 115]*

Participant: What does Boshan mean by turnaround?

Jeff: Boshan speaks of truly turning around with a living word. These words are also called turning words. It doesn't even have to be a word. It could be anything, although in the developed Zen tradition it often was a loaded word or phrase that sparked realization. In that sense it is a turnaround, a revolution, a revelation if you like.

You have given yourself on your zazen cushion. This afternoon you'll return to the world; do it in such a way that you don't trip over your feet. As you gave yourself here, give yourself to what must be done out there. If you've realized that nothing is lacking, then when you go back to the world you will know what needs to be done. You'll not always succeed; you'll not always be effective. I often fail. But you'll know what needs to be done, and you'll be able to give yourself to it and learn in the process. Others will not always understand; the desired result will not always come. But that, too, will be the Dharma in its fullness, you'll see.

The single saucer lamp is more than enough. If you have not yet confirmed this yourself, I reckon it will be clear soon enough. Everything is clearly revealed. You don't need a supercharged spotlight. Thank you for your questions and comments, and for listening so intently.

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