

Ordinary Mind Is The Way:

Cultivating Practice

[From retreat lectures given at Steyl in The Netherlands, February 21 - 25, 2014]

Gathering our energies, we have prepared ourselves for sustained zazen. And also prepared tea, coffee and other things for the retreat. Thank you all. Johan gave an introductory talk last night, opening the way for us.

The other day I had to go to an airport bathroom. It was dark inside the men's room, but outside there was no light switch. Standing there jet-lagged after a long flight, what do you do? When you gotta' go, you gotta' go.

After a few seconds, another guy comes by, walks into the bathroom and – the lights go on! Motion sensors. [*Laughter*]

The same with retreat: As long as we wait outside it remains dark, however much we feel the need to enter. Maybe we're still uncertain, that's fine. But the point is, we proceed. Then the lights go on and things become clear. This is how we enter retreat.

Buddhism is often described as medicine for our dis-ease. What is this dis-ease? Is it really clear to you? Do you know it in your bones? Not the concept mentioned in books, or even the idea illumined through the spoken word. Do you know this dis-ease for yourself, as your self?

And do you know, from actual experience, what the medicine is, what the real cure is, and how to apply it? That's precisely what retreat is for.

If it's not yet clear, all you need do is look right underfoot, directly at your own immediate experience. Is the impatience you feel, and which was mentioned last night, a part of the dis-ease? Or is it pointing the way towards its cure? Is that confusion, also mentioned last night, the result of a fever caused by the dis-ease? Or is it the result of your beginning to see what really is – and how this dissolves your cherished delusions?

Is it the painful, confining confusion that comes from stubbornly holding onto your delusions? Or the liberation that comes from touching and tasting what is beyond them? Please make good use of this retreat and confirm for yourself what this dis-ease really is. And what the cure really is. Sitting through **our selves**, nothing remains. Neither dis-ease nor cure. This retreat is a wonderful opportunity to do just that.

In the beginning it may be a struggle. But sitting through, it's clear that the real problem – the dis-ease – is not the pain or what not. It was you fighting yourself. **That** is the real suffering, isn't it? A humbling, liberating step on the way. Then the practice takes a healthy, natural turn. We can now give all to the practice. Instead of banging heads against the wall trying to will ourselves into enlightenment. It's as if the whole world is now supporting us. Nothing can get in the way of this. Confirm it for yourself.

Freed from the self-delusions created by our own greed, our own craving. As long as we continue to feed those delusions, they will remain, and remain strong. Once we clearly see them, their stubborn grip starts to come undone. That's why we have what in Buddhism is called *bhâvanâ* in Pali and Sanskrit, a very general term for practice of the way, or "cultivation."

How to express it? I grew up in the hippie days of the late Sixties. We spoke of peace and love. Well, that expresses it pretty well, doesn't it?

"A loving heart is the greatest wisdom." I haven't been able to find the quote, but it's attributed to Charles Dickens. Whoever said it, said it well: "A loving heart is the greatest wisdom." The compassion of a loving heart **is** real wisdom. They're not two different things. Wisdom and loving compassion are the two legs with which we walk the way.

Someone once asked: "What is the way?" That is, what is the Buddhist path? The response: "Ordinary mind" or "Ordinary mind is the way." In other words, your mind in ordinary life. Simply doing what needs to be done.

The person who asked the question didn't get it, so he asked another question: "Well then, should I direct myself towards it or not?" How do you direct yourself towards your ordinary mind? The response: "Directing yourself towards it, you only go away from it."

A typical Zen expression. Trying to direct your mind toward it, you're actually going away from it. In other words, to seek it is to deviate from it; seeking is already going astray.

Coincidentally, three Chinese characters that mean the same thing are written on the head monk's incense box at the Zen Retreat Center of Tannenhof outside München: "Seeking itself is going astray." The place where the senior monk keeps the clappers, bell and incense as he spurs the others on in sustained zazen actually states: "Seeking itself is going astray!"



“Seeking itself is going astray”

Finally he's come to the end: "But if I don't seek, how can I know the way?" And so comes the final response: "The way does not belong to knowing or to not knowing. Knowing is delusion. Not knowing is mere ignorance. Once you let go of your fabrications and really realize the way, it is like the sky, vast and boundless. How can there be such things here?" With that, the questioner awakened. To what? Ordinary mind.

Are these your questions? Originally they were the questions of Zhaozhou. Pronounced Jôshû in Japanese, he's the Chinese monk of the Tang Dynasty most famous for his answer "Nope!" (*Wu*, or *Mu* in Japanese) when asked about the nature of a dog. Here in the exchange about ordinary mind, Zhaozhou is the monk asking. At the end of this exchange, Zhaozhou awakens. He goes on to become one of the greatest masters of Chinese Zen. It's even said he lived to the ripe, old age of 120.

Again: What is the way? Ordinary mind. Then, should I direct myself towards it or not? Directing yourself towards it, you go away from it. But if I do not seek, how can I know the way? The way does not belong to knowing or not knowing. Knowing is delusion, not knowing is ignorance. Let go of fabrications and realize the way, then it is like the sky, vast and boundless. How can there be such things (as knowing or not-knowing) here?

Ordinary mind. Is this the mind that asks? Is this the mind that answers? Ordinary or everyday here doesn't mean Monday to Friday as opposed to holidays. It's just **this** – without discrimination – prior to knowing or not-knowing,

ordinary or extraordinary. As plain as the nose on my face. Doing what there is to do at the moment.

Tell me, how do you get into that? Do you need to go someplace extraordinary? Do you need to have a special experience? The response of ordinary mind may sound rather dull, but it's really quite sharp. It leaves no place to linger, no place to get to either. How do you get **into** that? Better yet, how do you get **out** of that?

What is it to become "enlightened"? Is it to stop being one thing – unenlightened or ignorant – and start being something else? Do you see the fatal error? "Enlightenment is when I stop being this and instead become that!" And so self, maintaining its delusions, remains trapped in the web it spins.

It's not a matter of stopping your present way of being and starting another. It is **being undone**. Being itself, undone. In other words, **being without self**. Not dead or lifeless – there's nothing more vital and alive.

Not a matter of being or becoming something else. How to say it: It's our very being – which continues to grasp after something, nothing, anything – undone. In other words, nirvana: a negative expression, referring to extinguishing the painful flames of self-delusion. But there's nothing negative about it at all. Simply let mind "return" to its natural ordinariness.

"But don't I need to be **more** here? **Really** here, **fully** mindful?" That's like trying to put a head on top of the one

you already have. “Well, then I need to be **less** here. You know, no-self and all that. Yeah, I should be **not** here.” Like trying to take away a head that wasn’t there to begin with.

I trust you see that there is no need to seek for a special experience, or some special mind-state or way of being. And yet here we are, sitting our asses off in retreat. Why? To get to our ordinary minds? [*Pause*] What is beyond cultivation, prior to illusion and enlightenment, better and worse? And what needs patient practice, careful cultivation? Is that clear? If it’s not, is it any wonder that your practice is not clear?

About one generation before Zhaozhou, the most zenistic guy of all lived: Mazu. He was the guy who first seems to have used the expression: “Ordinary mind is the way.” The talk in which he mentions it begins: “The way needs no cultivation, just do not defile.”* Indeed. The way does not need cultivation. What does? Do we? And how do we keep from defiling? Mazu gives his own answers in his talk. But I won’t bother you with them here.

*See *Sun-Face Buddha*, Cheng Chien (Asian Humanities Press, 1993) p. 65.

To seek is already going astray, going the wrong way. What do you seek? Do you seek the way? Do you seek something from this retreat? Do you seek something from me? Do you seek something from my words? Do you seek some confirmation? How do you confirm your ordinary mind?

An American professor of religion I knew named Bernard Phillips went to Japan in the 1960s and met with a Japanese

lay-Zen teacher named Shin'ichi Hisamatsu. The American professor had done his homework, so in the midst of the discussion he said: "If you follow any way, you will never get there; and if you do not follow any way, you will never get there. So one faces a dilemma." The response: "Let that dilemma be your way!" Was he revealing the way? Or was he adding another set of chains? Is it clear? Where is this dilemma? Where is it?

Does anyone have a question or concern to raise for the benefit of all? Please feel free to speak up.

Participant: Having a question is also a dilemma.

What is that question which is a dilemma?

Participant: You are asking us to respond. And that's a dilemma.

Is it?

Participant: Yes, because I am not without self.

What then are you?

Participant: I have no idea.

Close enough. [*Smiling*]

You have every right to ask a question. And give an answer as well. If you have a question, ask. No need to feel you're not ready. Your question may help others as well.

You've got a good point, though. Linji says in the very first of his published discourses that as soon as you open your mouth you've already missed it! He's right. But I disagree with him here. I'd rather leave it open for you, especially if there is something you need to get straight about, to get clear about. Everyone is free to ask their question. And everyone is free to respond.

Participant: What is another word for defile?

To stain or make impure. In early Buddhism, getting rid of defilements was central to cultivating practice. Thus I'm challenging you: What is it that is defiled and needs to be purified, and what is it that can never be defiled? This is fundamental to Mahayana Buddhism, including Zen Buddhism. Realizing what cannot be defiled is an essential part of practice. Then we can work from there to cultivate what needs to grow, and to let go of delusions that remain.

Though you may clearly realize that which cannot be defiled, if you are honest with yourself you will likely find that habitual tendencies continue to manifest, for example in certain thought processes or in personal relations. This is a most delicate matter that takes care, patience, a clear eye and a humble heart.

Once our practice is constant, there's no gap – even when we take a break. Thus we can continue refreshed. So don't worry if you need to take a break. Just make sure the practice continues.

Thus, this retreat is valuable, and we should give all our energy to it. It's equally important, however, to bring it to life when we go home and back to work. Is there defilement or not? This is crucial.

If there are no more questions or concerns, thank you very much for listening so intently. And thank you for your questions and comments. Please don't hesitate to speak up.

Good morning!

Yesterday Alice commented that, for her, asking a question was already a dilemma. I trust her sincere modesty was clear to all.

Asking a question can be a problem. But in terms of the process – what we actually go through in our practice – there may be a time when we need to ask. Not **a** question or questions, but **the** question. We cannot help but ask. Not so much to someone else, but first and foremost to ourselves. The question that we are: That is the real koan.

After all, isn't this where Gotama Buddha was when he sat under the Bodhi tree? For some of you, sitting itself is becoming that question; not some question from a book, or something that someone tells you. When clearly formulated as a koan, it can serve as an anchor to keep you focused and prevent distractions. As it was with Gotama Buddha, so it is with us: As long as that question remains, we cannot stop practicing. Handled properly, as we are doing here, this

drives the question-that-you-are to its natural resolution, or dissolution.

Thus practice becomes totally concentrated. This is what a retreat or *sesshin* is for. The Chinese characters, pronounced *sesshin* in Japanese, refer to our entire being focused into one.

Alice's dilemma – *How can I even ask a question?* – is basically the same as Linji's. After three years of concentrated practice, Linji was asked by the head monk if he had gone for one-on-one. Linji replied "No, not once – I don't even know what to ask." That's how into it he was. Then the head monk sent Linji for one-on-one.

As with Linji, you may feel you're not ready. Okay. This is also a good time for one-on-one. Simply give yourself fully to the practice, whether you have been able to precisely formulate your question or not. Sitting itself can be the embodiment of it. Yunmen, who lived about a century after Linji and died in 949, used to say: "Where there's a question, there's an answer."* Indeed: The answer is found at the bottom of the question. Better yet: When the question is gone, so is the answer – so is the very **need** for an answer.

* See *Master Yunmen*, Urs App (Kodansha, 1994) pp. 86-7, 125.

But if you have a real question, then bring it forth! Let it be what it is. Fully. **What's on your mind?** Examine carefully: If there really is no self, inside or outside, before or after, above or below, then what is there? If there really is no

self, what is there? [Pause] *“Penny Lane is in my ears and in my eyes!”*

With feet planted firmly on the ground and your single head screwed on straight, where is there a heaven above to desire, where is there a hell below to fear? Are you heaven bound, hell bound, enlightenment bound? In English, bound means headed for, going in that direction. But bound also means to be confined by or attached to. A good English expression to illumine Chinese sayings such as: “To seek for it is to go astray.” Beware of being enlightenment bound. To be bound **for** enlightenment is to be bound **by** enlightenment. Before mind moves, before it has distinguished enlightenment and delusion, what is it?

Here no one commands, yet we all submit – not to someone, but to the practice itself. No one demands, yet all is given, and all is received, isn't it? This retreat is so solid that whenever I see something needs to be done, almost immediately someone takes care of it. The clear-eyed cultivation in this retreat is amazing. It goes so smoothly it seems to run by itself – although a lot of work is required and many have helped organize and run it. If someone starts to fall, someone's there to catch them. It's wonderful. This is a real sangha, a community of practitioners.

You know the Beatles: *“Penny Lane is in my ears and in my eyes. There beneath the blue suburban skies...”* Do you know the song by the Hollies: “He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother.” One story behind the lyrics is that a boy had been injured and was being carried by an elder child. When they reached town, a man asked: “Ain't he heavy?” The response:

“*He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother.*” Marvelous. Another line from that song: “*No burden is he to bear.*” If another person or a situation is a burden to you, you might look again. It’s marvelous practicing together like this, supporting and being supported by each other, isn’t it?

In the Pali suttas or sutras of early Buddhism, there is a poem of a few pages called the *Khaggavisana Sutta*. It describes the monk as wandering alone, like a rhinoceros. The image is of a powerful, lone rhino going its way without being tempted by what goes on around it. If you’re a true monastic who has left the world behind, you must be like this rhino, completely set and determined, not tempted by this and that.

At one point the poem states that if you find a Dharma Friend, you should practice together. But the basic stance is going it alone, like a rhino. By contrast, in the *Upaddha Sutta* there is an exchange between Ananda and Gotama Buddha. Here Ananda tells Gotama that Dharma Friends are half of the holy life. A powerful statement – and quite different from the sentiment of the monk wandering alone like a rhino.

However, Gotama denies this and instead asserts that Dharma Friends are the whole of the religious life. We should be careful not to take these statements out of context; Gotama then goes on to explain how the Eightfold Noble Path is to be practiced with Dharma Friends. But here and now, in the context of this retreat, consider how you must go through the basic practice alone like a rhino. And appreciate the immense value of practice with Dharma

Friends. They are not contradictory or opposing approaches, but complement each other perfectly.

One of us here has been a Catholic nun for over fifty years. But basically we are lay practitioners. Do you see: Far from being a problem or an impediment, lay life is the ideal place for practice. The life that we are now living is the ideal place for practice!

If you can, spend months or years in a real monastery. It's precious; I did it myself. My teacher in the monastery used to say a training monastery is a greenhouse for practice. It's true. But, I must add, that's not where we end. We have to go beyond that. We have responsibilities that monastics can avoid; we must genuinely **bring it home**. This is not only possible; it's necessary.

Dahui was one of the greatest Chinese Zen teachers of the Sung dynasty. He died in 1163. He developed the practice of what is called introspecting the koan, crucial for the development of Rinzai Zen. In one of his many letters written to experienced lay practitioners, he states: "When has it ever been necessary to leave wife and children, quit one's job, chew on vegetable roots, and cause pain to the body?" He then goes on to say that "leavers of home," that is, monks like himself, "are on the outside breaking in; [laypeople] are on the inside breaking out. The power of one on the outside breaking in is weak; the power of one on the inside breaking out is strong."*

* See *Swampland Flowers*, Christopher Cleary (Grove Press, 1977) pp. 34 - 40.

What he doesn't say here is that, due to the demands of lay life, it **is** difficult for laypeople to really begin and get settled in their practice. Thus, without patience and proper guidance, laypeople tend to **think** they are meditating when they are actually indulging in mental masturbation. Or they sit for a while but eventually give up, thinking: "Who am I kidding; my mind's still going in the same old circles." And so they stop practicing – because they never really got started. Unfortunate.

These are the main problems of lay practice. Precisely why we're doing what we're doing here: Getting truly settled in the fundamental practice. Then when retreat ends, we return to our daily lives without missing a beat. And if we do miss a beat, we recognize it and humbly learn from it. This vast world is our *dôjô*, our place of practice.

As Dahui and other genuine teachers make clear, this is where the real power comes from. Monastics leave the world. In leaving the world, precisely the problems they need to deal with may get pushed aside and ignored. Lay people are surrounded by temptations that must be dealt with, decisions that must be made, and responsibilities that must be kept. Yes!

In the beginning it's difficult. But once we get settled in proper practice, then it is naturally integrated in our daily lives – as it should be. Precisely why we have a retreat like this.

You are not inferior to monastics. Let go of this false notion now and for good! Make no mistake, however: Courage,

patience, and determination are required. You've already made great efforts and sacrifices to attend this retreat. Now continue, moment-by-moment, day-by-day. You have all that you need; make good use of it. At the end of retreat we will go into practical questions of how to carry this into our daily lives. It is not merely a matter of becoming "successful" in what we do. Nor is it a matter of merely attuning our mind or our consciousness, or learning to "answer koans."

As a preliminary practice, it's valuable for the self to gather all into one, for mind and body to be totally unified. But this is often mistaken for Zen. It is not. It is a helpful entrance, no more, no less. To become one, to gather all into one, is very helpful. Not just in doing Buddhist meditation, but in doing anything thoroughly. It is a fatal error, however, to mistake this for Zen.

To illustrate: The ego is like a tiny hole that self-centeredness digs itself into. It's really nothing; for the ego, however, that nothing becomes everything. For example, a drug addict may steal from his mother to get his next fix. He may even kill in order to get several hours of drug-induced pleasure. That tiny hole has become everything to him; meanwhile, this marvelous world and other beings have become nothing.

I'm not blaming drug addicts, but it is as a rather dramatic example of the ego's destructive nature. After all, drugs are not the only things we are addicted to. And that drug addict can turn around and perform an act of kindness. For the ego is not real. However, addicts feel very powerfully, very

painfully, the effects of that delusion. They might even kill for it; and they may kill themselves in the process.

What happens when that tiny hole of ego expands? Then we start to see that it's not just about me. We open up and feel concern for others, for family and friends, for nature and the environment, for the world. This is the tiny ego opening up to become a larger, more rounded self. Wonderful.

In March of 2011, when the earthquake and tsunami hit Japan, I happened to be in Europe. Later I was taking a train to the airport to fly back to Japan. A German couple struck up a conversation with me. When they heard I was on my way back to Japan, they expressed deep concern for my well being. They were afraid the whole country had been devastated and it was not safe for me to return. Compare this with egocentric existence, where such tragedies are only a concern if it directly affects them. Instead, it felt as if the whole human race had been brought together and galvanized by this tragic event. Even now the concern of these perfect strangers brings tears to my eyes. This is the greatness of the human self, centered not in itself but in something greater.

Sustained Buddhist practice begins when we realize the limit even of that self, when we see the remaining roots of our own selfishness. Buddhism is not against self-development. But self-development is not its main concern. Its main concern is naturally being without self.

Does anyone have a question or concern from out of the practice? Yesterday it was helpful not just for the person

asking but for others, myself included, to consider. So please don't hesitate.

Participant: Does this have to do with the difference between intellect and intuition or instinct?

Our practice here is not just a matter of intellect, of course. But it's not simply returning to instinct or intuition either. It's even more basic than that.

I can use my intellect as a means of rationalizing and avoiding concern for others. But intellect can also be used to understand that we do all share a common ground and that we should care about others. Intellect is not the problem – or the solution; it's merely the tip of the iceberg.

Instinct goes deeper. Yet we are not even confined by that. For example, in January 2001 a Korean college student named Lee Soo-hyun died trying to save a drunk Japanese businessman who had fallen on the subway tracks in Tokyo. [*Voice cracking with emotion:*] This young Korean man jumped into action and risked his life to save a Japanese stranger. Despite the tenacious instinct for self-preservation. At that moment – which is this moment – there was nothing else to do. Right there he transcended even his deepest instinct for self-preservation. We don't have to do what he did; but we do live our lives, give our all, like this. A great inspiration. I'm sorry, I'm afraid this is not an adequate response to your question.

I trust you have confirmed for yourselves how, as a process, as a practice, as a discipline, the self gathers all into one. Gathering all into one, all is calm and clear. Eventually, in the process of gathering all into one, we realize that all **is** one. We're not fabricating anything. On the contrary, we're allowing all to naturally return to the original unity that it **is**. We are, so to speak, discovering – for the first time – what is always underfoot.

This is a good turn in the practice, allowing us to give ourselves completely to the practice without the disruption of will. As long as will power is there, we give it to the practice, we exhaust it in the practice, in gathering all into one. Once we realize the oneness that all **is**, things no longer confront us, and we are no longer in conflict with them.

Although mistaken as such by many, this is not the end of practice. In a sense, it's the beginning of real practice. Give yourself to that, humbly confirm it. This is as far as the self can go: Gathering all into one – because it is not one. It finally falls in on itself and then it's manifest, what actually **is** becomes self-evident.

I spoke yesterday of the ego as a tiny hole, as self-centered delusion taken to its extreme, with no concern for anything other than itself. We saw how that can open out and come to include all: Not just oneself, but one's family, loved ones, friends, even one's "enemies."

How far does that go? This is the great challenge offered by Buddhism. I don't want to exaggerate: The ego is this, and the self is that. After all, there is no such thing as an ego.

There is no such thing as a self either – nor is there any such thing as no-self.

Thus, we are not concerned with states of mind that we may go into and out of, even transcendent and very calm, clear states. For they are still *self-possessed*. Self-possessed means to be in control, calm and composed. Literally, however, it suggests being possessed **by** the self, as one is said to be “possessed by the devil.” If we speak of no-self, there is no self to possess, or be possessed by. That is reality, what is real – not another state of mind or way of being.

There are so many statements that make this clear. Yet it’s so far from what is popularly mistaken for Buddhism and Zen, that it bears repeating. To give just a few examples: In the Pali version of the *Maha-paranibbana Sutta* (different from the *Mahayana Maha-parinirvana Sutra*), which details Buddha’s death, he describes the realization of the Four Noble Truths this way: “...removed is rebirth’s cause, the root of sorrow plucked; then ends rebirth.” **The root of sorrow plucked**, that is, the root of dis-ease no longer able to grow or exist. The source of dis-ease undone. He did not speak of breaking off a branch here, pulling off some leaves there.

Another example is verse 154 of the *Dhammapada*, where awakening is described this way: “Oh house-builder, you have been seen through! You will not build this house again, for your rafters are broken and your ridgepole shattered. Having reached the unconditioned, craving has been undone.”

An early Zen poem, quoted in case twelve of *The Gateless Barrier*: “People who search for the way do not realize the truth. They only know discriminating consciousness. This is the cause of the endless cycle of life and death, yet the ignorant take it for the original person.”

Thus a koan can be helpful to keep practice anchored, so that you are not buffeted by the waves of experience and wavering mind states. It can keep you locked into the fundamental point. But please beware that the way koans are used nowadays is far from their original intent. Now they’ve basically been reduced to tools for psychological insight.

Look at *The Record of Linji*, or Rinzai in Japanese. Considered the father of Rinzai Zen and thus of koan Zen. Not once does he mention koans. And when he does mention something like it, he’s **criticizing** it, saying things like: “You chase after the worthless contrivances of men of old, turn to words and phrases and from them create your understanding, inscribe the words of some old dead guy in a great big notebook, wrap it up in four or five squares of cloth and won’t let anyone see it. Blind idiots! What kind of juice are you looking for in such dried up bones?” **This** is the father of koan Zen.

By the way, this is very far from early Buddhism and noble speech, not speaking ill of others. What is noble speech? And why does Zen apparently abuse it so often? Maybe we better look into this before you go home and start calling everyone blind idiots! [*Laughter*]

The point for us now is simply, to let the sitting be the koan that it is. Give yourself fully to the sitting, and there it is. For some people it comes to take a particular form: “What is this self?” “What am I?” “What is this?” “Where do I come from?” “Where do I go to?” It can take many different forms. In simple, colloquial English: “Who is behind it all?”

For some of you I put it this way: “How can a flawed person become a Buddha?” Or: “What is lacking? And what remains?” Right here and now, what is lacking? The other side of that double-edged sword: Moment to moment, in your mind, what remains?

Or: “If there is no self, what is there?” “When all mental activity stops, what’s there?” “How do you polish empty space?” “Carve me a Buddha!” “What is the source?” “When you get satori, what do you get?” “When you’re dead and buried, where is it?” This can be helpful because people often get stuck in their experience, so when you challenge them: “When you’re dead and buried, where is it?” they assume it does not die. But how do they really know this? Don’t be blinded by your momentary insights!

Find the question that you are – that is you – then be it through and through. There’s nothing else. We give all of ourselves, and ultimately it’s sublimely simple. All comes fully to rest, then we see what’s there. Done seeking, then do what needs to be done.

Beware when Dharma or Zen degenerates into **self**-power. On the surface, it’s often very slick and successful; but it is not the Dharma, it is not Zen. It’s tragic when those people

are actually facing death or a real crisis, and they realize the uselessness of their deluded practice. It's a real tragedy for those so-called teachers and their students.

Good Morning. I trust all of you had a good night's sleep. Please be careful, especially if you're driving home; you may be more tired than you realize. It's been a marvelous retreat with a marvelous sangha-community. We have given ourselves – more than we could sitting on our own. Together, we have made a real *dôjô*, a place of practice, for all.

This is not the same as our daily life; we have made sacrifices to be here, for a time leaving family, home, work. We don't practice like this every day. When the retreat ends this afternoon, as Stefan put it, the real retreat begins – back in the world. But we have taken precious time and energy to do this together. When you go back to the world, no need to imitate it. You're not going to be sitting twelve or fifteen hours a day; that's fine. Don't disrupt your daily life, your family life in order to keep some "enlightenment" going. Don't make that mistake. Just as you have thrown yourself into the practice here, when you go back, with joy, throw yourself into what needs to be done there. I trust you will see more clearly what needs to be done, and you will have the energy to do it. And, in the midst of doing it, you will realize the real practice. We are, as Dahui put it, on the inside breaking out, so the power is strong.

Return seamlessly to work in the world, without tripping over your zazen feet. Not just with people you get along with, but with that perfect jerk who drives you crazy! If you're

done seeking, this is where the practice really counts. Next time you encounter that person you consider a jerk, let him be who he is, let him be your teacher. You might learn something.

We began this retreat with ordinary mind as the way. Tell me: How far do you need to go to return to that? And if, in returning to the world, you feel at some point that you have come to the end of this marvelous sangha-community, look again. It doesn't start with you; it doesn't end with you either. Return grateful for those who sacrificed so that you could be here and do this. Return grateful for all.

Participant: I see that we don't need to take back to the world the psychological state that we've developed here. But what about the spiritual aspect, how do we take that back?

You don't have to take it. If it's real, you don't need to take it anywhere. You see?

In *The Record of Linji* there's a story of Linji planting pine trees in the mountains. Huangpo, the master of the monastery, asks him why he does this. Linji responds that it's to make a natural setting for the main gate of the monastery, and also a marker for future generations. After a bit of back and forth, Huangpo approves him, saying: "Under you my teaching will flourish throughout the world." When Linji was still struggling, the head monk had already told Huangpo: "In the future, with training, he is sure to become a great tree that will provide cool shade for people of the world."*

* See *The Record Of Linji*, Ruth Fuller Sasaki (University of Hawaii Press, 2009), pp. 314, 317.

Last summer, for my sixtieth birthday Ruth and the group got a fine Ginkgo tree that we planted here at the end of the last retreat. You can see it from the window of the one-on-one room, growing in the oldest part of this Catholic monastery complex. It's an honor to have it planted there. It's still rather small and frail. Perhaps you feel that your practice is also like that. With patient cultivation, let it flourish.

Thank you again for your precious support. We are all doing this together; we are all doing it together. Thank you.



Planting the Ginkgo Tree

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