

## Where Do You Draw the Line?

*Monk: "It's said that 'Enlightened beings in all directions take one path to Nirvana.' But I wonder, where does this path begin?"*

*[Qian]feng took his staff and drew a line, saying: "Right here!"*

僧因問 十方薄伽梵 一路涅槃門 未審路頭在何處 峰拈起拄杖 畫一畫曰 在這裡

[See *Gateless Barrier*, case 48; *Entangling Vines*, case 146/138]

### Feeding Delusions

Thanks to everyone for your cooperation in bringing this retreat together. As many of you said in the go-around before we began last night, we're here to practice together, to support and be supported by each other. We've been doing retreats in the Netherlands and Belgium for twenty years now, usually twice a year. They are strongly grounded and run very smoothly, so you may not realize how much work went into them. We are very grateful.

With heart, mind, and eye wide open, we begin. Anne-Johan gave us the right direction in his introductory talk last night. I have no wise words to offer. There are no superpowers to be gained here. I have no magic wand to wave to make your dreams come true. We're here simply to wake up and be done with our delusions. The only thing to let go of is our delusions, dreams, and nightmares. They are unreal, so the sooner we let go of them the better.

In other words, we're here to directly tap the source, to directly open up the source of our own strength – which is also the source of all. With that, what else do you need? This is what we encounter when we truly sit through ourselves, when we really do one-on-one.

Do you want to be happy? I suppose we all want to be content, genuinely happy. Buddhism is not just happiness, but “happiness supreme,” as it’s called in the sutras. In other words, not a momentary happiness that arises due to certain conditions, which then ceases when those conditions are gone – creating unhappiness. No, it is happiness supreme, for it is not subject to coming and going. It is boundless joy, not the momentary ecstasy of some experience that comes and goes. It is the unconditioned joy we catch a glimpse of in such conditioned experiences.

Buddhism is release; complete release. Release from everything – yet it’s nothing mystical or magical at all. In mistaking it for something mystical or magical, we end up creating further suffering as we chase after it. In chasing after our own happiness, we create further suffering for ourselves and for others. Is it so? What do **you** see?

Buddhism is happiness supreme, boundless joy, complete release. You might then think: “But how do I get it? Practice hard, have some enlightenment experience?” This is what self, deluded by its self-centered standpoint, does. With our old bag of tricks, we try in vain to attain our goal by the same greedy manipulation. It doesn’t work, does it?

When I was a kid in Philadelphia, we used to go in summer to the New Jersey seashore. We called it the Jersey shore. Sometimes we’d dive off the dock. One day we decided to try and dive in while holding onto a Styrofoam life preserver or boogie board. Trying to dive in with what keeps you afloat, you end up splashing against the water – but you can’t dive in. Self-attached practice is like that; it actually prevents you from diving in.

It's like trying to climb a hill in summer wearing ice skates. The hill is not high; it's not difficult at all. But if you wear ice skates every step is painful, and it seems you'll never get there. Sometimes someone comes to one-on-one proudly wearing such ice skates; I suggest taking them off. They respond: "But they're really fine skates, and I just sharpened the blades!"

In zazen as well as walking, eating, taking breaks, let the practice continue without interruption. In this way we let all go, for good. After all, what conditions are needed – other than what are already provided here? Do you see? Precisely what you're doing now has no conditions. That's what makes it seem difficult at first; it's also why it's so sublimely simple. No conditions are needed for zazen; it's precisely **being without conditions**. Confirm it yourself. Don't pervert it into a condition to meet, a goal to attain, something to possess. There is nothing other than **this**. There is nothing to seek, in this world or the next. There is nothing to fear, in this world or the next. I invite you to confirm that for yourself. That is our practice. Let us naturally give our all to this marvelous practice.

Practically speaking, first we get stable and settled through sustained zazen. This is not just something we think about or do with our mind. It's an embodied practice: as the body becomes settled, mind becomes settled. It takes time, but that's what we're here for. Use the time well. Breath is a natural entrance: it unites body and mind, and we're already doing it. If we're alive, then we're breathing. But often we are not aware of it. Simply return to that which is keeping us alive. No philosophical ideas, no religious dogma, no mantra, no mandala, no koan. What we need to live – the breath. A perfectly natural and simple entrance. Don't **follow** the breath, or you're still separate from it. Simply **be one** with it – **inseparable**.

Thus all comes to be unified. There's a tremendous vitality and energy here, yet it's settled and calm. This is a good entrance.

Let go of the waves of mental masturbation. Let go of emotional suffocation as well; no need to suppress or deny anything. Be open, completely open – but don't turn it into something. **Let it be what it is.** Don't know that one and one are two. In other words, we don't need to go that far – just one, just **be** that one, through and through. “Not knowing that one and one are two” is not due to stupidity or weakness. On the contrary, it's so concentrated that it doesn't even move on to two; just one – and that one contains everything. That's how concentrated it is.

A year ago I introduced this classic metaphor found in zazen manuals: “*To search for the pearl, it's best to calm the waves. It's difficult to find in choppy water. With the water still and clear, the mind-pearl reveals itself.*” [探珠宜靜浪 動水取應難 定水澄清 心珠自現] We're not bringing something into existence, nor are we manipulating anything; we don't need to. Let the waves of mental wavering and emotional turmoil come fully to rest. The precious gem that is, has been, and always will be, clearly reveals itself. This is the essential point in beginning zazen.

Are you sitting in a certain posture while mind goes in the same old circles, stirring up the same old waves? That's why we learn and devote ourselves to proper zazen. It's not difficult. And now we have several days together for sustained practice with proper guidance, so we can really make it clear. Let sense experience unify. Ordinarily our mind wavers, is involved in trains of thought, feelings, sensations, memories and so on.

[*Church bell rings*] With sense experience unified, the bell rings. We see a person walk by. We smell the incense, feel the physical sensations of the body. What about the thoughts and so on in the mind? We don't have to kill them. We don't **do** anything with them. We simply let them be. If they are delusions, they will dissolve of their own accord. That's the ultimate proof. If it's a delusion, it will dissolve. It cannot survive if we stop feeding it. Throughout the retreat, we will go into detail about this.

Please feel free to stand and stretch for a moment. [*Short Break*]

There are many meditative techniques, and they can be very helpful to master. Some of them are like a surgeon's scalpel, very precise. Some people love them and play with them like toys. They're entertaining but can be dangerous, as they tend to prolong the dis-ease rather than allow real healing. In that case, they are more like water for a drowning woman or fire for a burning man.

There's a Zen statement which can be paraphrased: "*The drowning person and the lifeguard are in the same water, but the reason they're there differs.*" [See *Zen Sand*, #20.3] Who is drowning? Who is the lifesaver? Here, together, we're learning to swim. Instead of fighting the water we're in – **that's** what's so tiring and frustrating, isn't it? Thus, learning meditative techniques is very helpful for physical posture, breath, the mind, how to deal with thoughts, and so on.

To learn how to swim, it can be helpful to read a book about different swim strokes, physiology of the body, and so on. Breath is also very important. All of this is useful. But is it actually swimming? Learning about swimming, reading a book about it, watching a master swimmer is all good and well. But it's not swimming.

A retreat is just that: dive in! Test the water if you will, put your toes in and find out. Then dive in – without the Styrofoam. As young children, we learned to swim by first doing the doggie paddle. Like a dog, instinctively kicking to keep its head above water. It works, but is not very efficient. And it's very tiring. We're keeping our heads above water, but we're not really swimming. So we learn to swim properly. When we really dive in and swim, it's the boundless joy of total freedom. What we were fighting against now supports and nourishes.

Dive to the very depths and find out – you're not drowning in the water. [*Desperately doogie paddling and gasping for breath.*] **You're drowning in your own fear, your own self-created panic!**

At bottom – which is right here – is boundless freedom. If we stop trying to escape, stop trying to get **out** of our present situation, and instead dive **in** – right here is complete release. Dive in and confirm for yourself: water nourishes and gives life. What we drown in are our own frightening self-delusions.

If a lifeguard is trying to save someone, the drowning person may desperately grab onto the lifeguard. The worst-case scenario is that both drown. Thus, lifeguards are taught ways to pry the person's hands and legs loose, swim away from them, then approach again. But if the lifeguard can't get away, what is he taught as a last resort?

Submerge. Go underwater – then the drowning person will let go and the lifeguard can try again. This is not just a matter of saving someone else, although this example can be instructive here as well. Dive to the very depths and see: Trying to stay on the surface, to keep my head above water, I only tire myself out. I'm actually

drowning in my own self-delusions – that is, the delusion-of-self. Consider it well.

Buddhism **is** happiness supreme, boundless joy, complete release. It's right here; nowhere else. On the surface, however, Buddhism becomes: "Life is suffering, and the goal of life is extinction." Such a view is not completely wrong; but it fails to fathom the depths. Who is it that suffers, and what needs to be extinguished? Is the life of the self – drowning in itself – painful or not? Isn't it dis-ease to go in endless circles, stir up more waves, then wonder why I'm not at peace?

What needs to be extinguished, **undone**? Nothing, really. But it's a very stubborn nothing, fed and identified with for so long that it seems to be everything! The vast ocean itself seems nothing but endless, tortuous waves. Proper practice with body, breath, and mind, the pearl naturally manifests. Confirm it for yourself.



Good Morning. It's wonderful to be here practicing together. I trust all of us feel the firm, steady undercurrent that connects us. I am talking, while the rest of you are silent. But we are all in deep communion throughout the retreat, even in silence – especially in silence.

As lay people, the fuel or energy for our practice naturally comes from the actual conditions we are in. At first, these conditions may seem as obstacles. As practice matures, I trust you see how those events, problems, difficult relationships and so on, fuel the practice. Then nothing can really get in the way. It's essential to continue this in our daily lives. Otherwise practice tends to become an escape

from the confusion and turmoil. It should not be so. As the practice becomes steady and constant, the things we smack up against, the difficulties we encounter, far from hindering our practice, become fuel for the fire and show us where we need to apply ourselves.

Let delusions be what they are. No need to shoot them down, nor do we need to repress them. Let delusions **be what they are**. If they are delusions they cannot continue long – unless we continue feeding them. They cannot sustain themselves. How do we feed them? By indulging them. Or by pushing them away – which is another way of indulging them. But, you think, they seem to continue forever! Look at what you're doing; you're feeding them, aren't you? Zazen is one very simple and effective way of unplugging delusions, of not feeding them anymore. At the moment, they may seem very real; but soon enough, if we stop feeding them, they dissolve. You don't have to **do** anything with them. Confirm it for yourself.

Yes, it takes time. Delusions don't disappear immediately. After all, we've been feeding them, nourishing them, for years. That's why we have retreat, and why retreat is as long and intense as it is. Soon enough, delusions naturally dissolve. What tremendous energy we have wasted indulging these delusions, delusions that we already know go nowhere! Now that tremendous energy naturally returns to the original unity that it is. It's perfectly normal, no superhuman powers needed, once we let that energy be what it really is.

Then we can confirm that **this** is the end of dis-ease, as the early sutras state. Without doubt, those delusions that had enslaved us and been our whole world have become nothing. With this, we can see, we can be, what really is. And we can work through what remains to be worked through.

If you're having intense pain because of all the sitting, listen to it. Don't indulge it, or try and pretend it's not there. What is it really saying? Where is it coming from? Do you need to adjust your posture or use a different cushion? Do you need to let loose some emotional turmoil underneath? Or do you need to simply sit through?

What are these so-called delusions that we let go of, what exactly is it that we renounce, give up? Do you see what the self's craving and clinging leads to, what a painful delusion it all is? The craving itself, the very attempt to get rid of pain and seek happiness creates more pain and suffering, doesn't it? And even if we possess the thing we crave, does it really bring lasting happiness? Do you see what happens when we seek self-fulfillment by grasping onto something or someone? Do you see how we tend to destroy the very thing we seek to possess? Do such delusions need to be let go? The insecurity that comes from not really knowing who we are – that is let go as well. Thinking that we know – that too is let go. Even our deepest insights are released; we do not hold on to them either.

The anger that may arise; do you see where that comes from, and how to let it go? A few weeks ago my wife and I were in Santa Cruz, a beautiful beach town on the California coast. We happened to walk past a young man who was waiting out on the sidewalk for his friends. He was having a tough time and, just as we happened to walk by, he started shouting: "I hate you all! I hate everything!" Then, looking at us: "And I fucking hate you too!" Didn't even know who we were. Have we seen where that painful anger comes from? Not just in him, but in us? And have we really let it go, released it?

What do we need to rouse, to cultivate, to nourish? We've heard – and used – words like genuine compassion, loving wisdom, but what

is this really? What is loving wisdom towards oneself and toward others? Is it manifest here?

“*The truth will set you free.*” Words of Jesus in the Gospel of John. When Jesus said this, the response was that we are Abraham’s descendants and have never been enslaved, so why speak of becoming free? Jesus explains that he is speaking of the wages of sin, of being slaves of sin. In the Buddhist context we might say we are enslaved by, drowning in, our own self-attachment. And it is indeed the truth that sets us free.

This truth is not abstract at all; it is transformative. In other words, it’s not that I understand some truth, but that the I which understands is itself transformed. The I that takes up a standpoint and asserts itself – that very I is transformed. Rather than *trans-formed* in the sense of changing from one form to another, self itself is *un-done*.

Confirm it through proper and sustained practice. In retreat, the focus is zazen, with sense experience itself naturally unified, stilled, finally undone, dissolved, gone. Then **seeing** what is there. That is the entrance of zazen.

Please feel free to stand and stretch for a moment. [*Short Break*]

### **False Sameness**

Words of old, Buddhist and Zen sayings, what are they for? To confirm, to illumine, for ourselves. Simply to illumine this great matter here and now. One renowned Zen expression of Baso (Mazu in Chinese), which I used in the last retreat: “*The Way needs no cultivation, just don’t defile.*” [道不用修 但莫污染] A farmer cultivates the fields. But the Way does not need to be cultivated. Just don’t

defile it. Do you see what is already whole and perfect – and what we dedicate our lives to?

*“As soon as the initial resolution is made, awakening is fully realized.”* [初發心時更成正覺] This is a basic expression of Mahayana Buddhism. “Initial resolution” is, in Sanskrit, *bodhi-citta*: *bodhi* is awakening and *citta* is the mind. It refers to the initial decision to practice the Way, in other words, arousing the mind of awakening. We have already made that decision or we wouldn’t be here. And yet Mahayana sutras state: *“As soon as the initial resolution is made, awakening is fully realized.”* Do you see its truth? Another Mahayana sutra even states that the initial resolution and final realization are inseparable – but of these two, the initial resolution is the more difficult. Consider this well as you devote yourself to retreat.

*“Now I see that all beings are fully endowed with the wisdom and virtue of the awakened, but due to false views and attachments it is not realized.”* [我今普見一切衆生 具有如来智慧德相 但以妄想執着而不証得] Another classic Mahayana statement, this one said to be Buddha’s utterance upon awakening. Again, very carefully expressed. All is free of self, without self; but due to delusions of self-centered grasping, it is experienced as dis-ease. Is that dis-ease really so? Untangle your self and see!

*“To search for the pearl, it’s best to calm the waves. It’s difficult to find in choppy water. With the water still and clear, the mind-pearl reveals itself.”* Yes, but we don’t stop there, or it can become part of the dis-ease. When we really get to the bottom, for the first time we realize that every drop, every wave, **is** the boundless ocean. Otherwise it’s like desperately trying to doggie paddle, to stay afloat and pretend we’re okay when we’re not. In Buddhism this is criticized

as “false sameness” [悪平等]: literally “evil” or “bad” equality; a toxic, deadly oneness. Like trying to reduce all the waves to some flat ocean in our imagination, or pretend it’s all the same.

*“The drowning person and the lifeguard are in the same water – but the reason they’re there differs.”* The deepest depths and the surface waves are inseparable; they’re not two different things, they’re all water. True. But these things can be, need to be, clearly distinguished for practical purposes, don’t they? The point is, based on what? Based on my own shallow self-deluded view, or based on the boundless wisdom of living compassion?

How do we apply that clear discernment in the world, with each wave? Or do we try to escape from it by staying at the bottom? It won’t do, will it? False sameness is rightly criticized in Buddhism. And it’s rampant in Western Buddhism and Zen. False sameness fails to see the root source of false distinctions in its own self-delusion. Instead, it projects it onto the world and then tries to erase it. It doesn’t work. True distinctions: that’s Buddhism and Zen from beginning to end! Zen and Buddhism have nothing to do with false sameness.

Buddhism has four noble truths – not just one. And the first one is not the same as the second, or the third, or the fourth. All conditioned existence is subject to dis-ease; the root cause is our own craving; there is an end to it; that way is the eightfold noble path. The basic tenet of Zen is said to be *“Not relying on words or letters.”* [不立文字] Is that making a distinction or not?

The Homepage of our Website states: *“When you are truly without self, it is apparent that all is without self. Realizing this, the precious dignity of each and every thing is manifest.”* The dignity of each and

every wave is manifest. Truly being without self reveals that each and every one is without self. Far from **erasing** distinctions, the inviolable dignity of each and every one is manifest. It's **not** all the same! There is no self; never was, never will be. Right here, the precious dignity of each and every thing is manifest, is it not? Precisely because it is not defiled by self-delusion.

The Chinese Zen tradition began when Bodhidharma found his first Chinese disciple. The bizarre legend tells of the disciple cutting off his left arm at the elbow to show he was ready to give his all. But the real point is when he realizes that there is not one thing to attain. The compiler of *The Gateless Barrier*, which includes this case as koan #41, comments: *"In the end, Bodhidharma enlightened only one disciple – and he was a cripple."* [末後接得一箇門人 又却六根不具] This refers to each one of us. We're all cripples. We're all human, with frail, imperfect bodies and minds – just like Buddha and Bodhidharma. And each of us is that one disciple. You, just as you are – are you not a Buddha?

Thank you for listening so intently.

~~~~~

### **Where Do You Draw The Line?**

One grotesque example of false sameness – that all distinctions are merely unreal – is the delusion that all is the same in enlightenment, so I can do whatever I want. You see the danger. There are countless expressions that clarify this delusion, but a few will suffice. First a statement by Hyakujô (Baizhang in Chinese), a leading dharma heir of Baso. It is highly celebrated in the Zen tradition for expressing what is required of us all: *"Insight equaling the master diminishes its worth by half; only insight surpassing the*

*master is worthy of continuing the lineage.*” [見與師齊 減師半德 見過於師 方堪傳授]

If it's all the same, why say that? Why does equality diminish or lessen? Can it really be diminished? [*Pause*] Further, why must one surpass one's teacher? This is not a matter of better or worse, superior or inferior. Thoroughgoing insight is not merely individual. Only someone deeply deluded would think: “I've got it now and it's all the same, so I can do whatever I want!” Consider well, my friends.

This dharma, the living truth, is not merely individual – and yet it's **completely** individual. Completely individual, yet not limited to one. If it is, it's already dead, isn't it? We devote, we give ourselves – to what? To some **self**-inflated practice or insight? To some absolute authority? Question, criticize. Question, criticize me. Fortunately we've already got Guus who does that, and we've got Stefan, Ron, and Karen as well – all of you. I expect nothing less. Then this dharma is really living, vital and true. *“Insight that equals diminishes its worth by half; only insight that surpasses is worthy of continuing this lineage!”*

Diving to the depths where all turmoil is gone – you can see the temptation, the danger, to get stuck in false sameness, dead oneness. There's a famous poem attributed to the third patriarch of Chinese Zen. Bodhidharma was the first, the guy who cut off his arm was the second, this guy was the third. The opening lines of the poem are often quoted: *“The Great Way is not difficult; just avoid preferences. Never get entangled in likes and dislikes, then it is clearly revealed.”* [至道無難 唯嫌揀擇 但莫憎愛 洞然明白]

*“Just avoid preferences”* – seems the third patriarch prefers not making preferences. From where does he make **that** preference?

Where does he draw the line? And how does this lead to it being clearly revealed? Later on in the poem we find: “*No need to seek truth, just let go of false views.*” [不用求真 唯須息見] Clear enough?

About fifty years ago, D. T. Suzuki’s female assistant, a young Japanese-American I had the pleasure to meet many years later in Kyoto, noticed that Suzuki had a thing about cockroaches. When he saw one in his study, he would chase after it and try to swat it with his slipper. “But *sensei*,” she said, “don’t all living beings have the Buddha nature?” His response: “No, I draw the line at cockroaches!” [Laughter] They eat the glue of his books, he explained, but they’re just too fast for him. She was so inspired by this that when Suzuki died, she wrote about it in a memorial piece. Let me ask you: When he draws that line, where does he draw it from – himself, the cockroach, the glue?

Frederick Franck was a Dutch-American, an outstanding artist, author, and dental surgeon who worked with Albert Schweitzer. He and his wife visited Kyoto several times, and I had the good fortune to meet him. Once a Japanese Zen woman wrote a philosophical piece about the religious overcoming of ethics, including reference to the infamous Zen master Nansen (Nanquan in Chinese) killing the cat. When the master finds his monks arguing over a cat, he threatens to kill it unless they can speak up. Not one of the monks can say a word in response. So he cuts the cat in two.

Frederick Franck’s response: “Why not kill one of the monks?” He doesn’t mean it literally. But he’s got a point. Genuine discernment – all is **not** the same – is essential. Why didn’t the master kill one of the monks?! He did. He cut down every one of them when he cut the cat in two; did he save them – and the cat – as well? Frederick Franck preferred that the cat be saved. Where do **you** draw the line?

The completion of the koan case occurs the next day when Jôshû (Zhaozhou in Chinese) returns from an errand, the master tells him what happened, and Jôshû takes off one of his sandals, puts it on his head and walks out. He didn't need to say a word. Nansen responds: "If only you had been here, the cat could have been saved!" Where did Nansen really draw the line?

I seriously injured my right knee sitting too much full lotus during my last trip to Europe six months ago. Sitting deeply, I could feel the pain – but it's not really a problem. And **that** can be a problem! I should have stopped sitting full lotus, but I stubbornly continued through the rest of the retreats, as well as a sit-through for a few hours straight in the Bavarian Alps with some friends. I'm good at telling all of **you** to listen to your body; I should have listened myself! [*Laughter*]

When I got back to Japan, my right knee was swollen twice the size of my left knee and much warmer to the touch. I asked all kinds of people about it: doctors, physical therapists, Zen masters, and so on. Several said things like: "Forget it; your full lotus days are over. Sit in a chair; these things don't heal." I was careful with it, gave it rest, massaged it, did some mild stretches. Eventually I even took some anti-inflammatory medicine, which also seemed to help. It took months, and I still need to be careful with it, but now I can sit full lotus again.

Daitô Kokushi was a central figure in early Japanese Zen. He had a bad leg and couldn't sit full lotus. When the end of his life came, he took his bad leg and forced it into full lotus – breaking it in the process. He had his ink brush and paper at hand, and some of his immediate disciples had gathered. He wrote his death poem, then

died in full lotus. In Daitokuji, the Rinzai monastery complex in the north of Kyoto founded by him, every year on the anniversary of his death his blood-stained robe and his death poem are brought out and reverence is paid to them.

About fifty years ago, D. T. Suzuki's assistant heard him tell that story about Daitô's death. Suzuki was about 90 years old at the time. She asked him what **he** would do. Suzuki sprawled out one leg and said: "I prefer to let nature take its course."

What was Daitô Kokushi's point in breaking his leg – did he have to do that? What was D. T. Suzuki's point in sprawling out his leg? I am a bit attached to the full-lotus posture; it is an excellent posture for what we are doing. But I will give it up if I must.

I was fortunate to sit through in full lotus. But there's still much to do for all beings, including this [*tapping legs in full lotus*]. When I can no longer sit full lotus, then that also will be a precious teaching for me and for others. [*Bowing, hands in gasshô*:] Thank you, D. T. Suzuki. Thank you, Daitô Kokushi.

Please feel free to stand up and stretch for a moment – or do you prefer to follow Daitô Kokushi? [*Short Break*]

*Participant: For me, the posture I sit in is not so important. Do Zen masters still have some ego about that?*

You mean Daitô Kokushi in breaking his leg? [*Yes.*] Daitô's dead, so we can't ask him about it. But we can ask ourselves. Why did he do it? Was there some ego there? Better yet: Why would **you** do it? Or why **wouldn't** you do it? That's the real question, isn't it? Where, and how, do **you** draw the line?

Vimalakirti was a legendary layman at the time of Gotama Buddha. He was a wealthy merchant with family, but his awakening was so thorough that he would reveal blind spots and unconscious attachments of Buddha's leading disciples. In the sutra, Vimalakirti is sick so Gotama tells his disciples to go pay a visit. Asked about the nature of his illness and when he will recover, Vimalakirti responds that he is ill with the dis-ease of all beings, and that he will recover only when all beings are well. As long as one person suffers, Vimalakirti suffers. This response is revered in Mahayana and Zen circles.

My response: Why didn't he just say he was sick? I mention this because of the Kobe child murders fifteen years ago in Japan. A twelve-year-old girl and a fourteen-year-old boy were brutally killed. Taunting messages were sent to the newspaper. Because of the nature of the crimes, the police were looking for a very troubled adult male. When the culprit was finally found and a police official reported this on the TV news, the whole nation was shocked. For it was a fourteen-year-old boy who went to the same junior high school!

In one of the messages the child wrote: "Only when I give pain to others can I ease my own pain." He turned Vimalakirti on his head. Probably without knowing it. As frightening a statement as it is, how different is it from myself in a moment of blind anger or hatred? What am I doing when I cause pain to others? Am I living out and thus continuing that painful delusion? Confirm, in your bones, what Vimalakirti said: Only when the pain of the other is eased, will my own pain be eased. Now I repeat: Why don't I just say I'm sick and need your help?

Thank you for your question and comments. Tomorrow is the final day, so we'll address the question of how to bring it home. We have a good twenty-four hours left. Use it well. Thank you.



Good Morning! It's wonderful to have practiced together for several days. Now we're coming to the end of retreat. Most of us have struggled with pain at times. Practicing properly, we have been able to see it through.

There was a Chinese monk called Tokusan (Deshan in Chinese) who lived around the time of Rinzai (Linji in Chinese). He was so great that he has been compared to Rinzai in terms of "*Tokusan's stick and Rinzai's shout*." But Tokusan didn't start out that way. He was a scholar-monk, especially of the Diamond Sutra. Hearing of renegade monks in the south preaching nonsense like "mind is Buddha," he decides to go and teach them a lesson. Proudly carrying his sutra commentaries on his back, he makes his way south. Tired and in need of refreshment, he stops at a teahouse. The old woman of the teahouse asks Tokusan what he's carrying and he tells her. She replies that the Diamond Sutra states past mind cannot be obtained, present mind cannot be obtained, future mind cannot be obtained. What mind, virtuous monk, do you want to refresh?

With this simple question, she blew his socks off! Everything he knew – right out the window. To make matters worse, the old lady said that if he can answer her question, then she'd give him the refreshments for free. But if he can't, he'll have to go elsewhere. Now he really hungers and thirsts; a genuine doubt has formed in his mind.

When Tokusan arrives at one of those renegade Zen monasteries, he asks for and receives instruction from the master until night falls. Taking his leave, Tokusan steps outside and notices it's pitch dark. He returns to the master, who offers him a lit candle. Just as Tokusan is about to take it, the master blows it out. Blowing out his lights, Tokusan awakens.

The point is that last night when I went back to my room the electricity was out. So this morning I had the interesting experience of shaving in the dark. I realized that, at sixty years of age, you no longer need to look at yourself when shaving. [*Laughter*]

Let the senses come fully to rest in sustained zazen. "The senses" includes mind and all its activities as well. That is, the activation of the mind that generates self-other, light-dark, illusion-enlightenment, and so on. When the church bell rings, what's there? Do **you** reverberate – or do you sit there in your little world listening to the bell outside? In the beginning it may seem like awareness itself is resounding, but that is still the inside of self-experience, isn't it? Something remains within, listening.

When we really sit through, it becomes clear: it's not a state of mind, it's not a matter of awareness. Light is often used as a metaphor for awareness. But only when our light is extinguished – blown out, as it was with Tokusan – do things illumine themselves. Here the exquisite beauty and inviolable dignity of "the other" is illumined – precisely because the **separation** that we impose on it is gone. Then we really **see** what's in front of our little noses!

In terms of the metaphor of the ocean and the waves, first we settle into the calm, boundless depths where all wavering and turmoil are gone. Then, out of that, sense experience is suddenly

reawakened by a wave of sight or sound – we **come back to our senses**. To put it zenistically, **no-self** comes back to its senses: laughing with pleasure, crying in pain. With this, each and every wave is realized as what it is: the boundless source now flowing back through all of our senses.

Every other also shares that boundless depth. And this is directly realized, not just understood, felt, or intuited. Every other also shares that boundless depth, not by becoming likenesses or pale reflections of yourself, but by truly being what they are. Sitting through to the very depths, you don't get stuck even there. Wisdom naturally wells up as compassion.

Please feel free to stand up and stretch. [*Short break*]

For the last several days you have gotten a sense of continuous practice. Eventually, it's something we are so imbued with that it's spontaneously forgotten – without a trace. Thus it seamlessly **works in the world**. Wisdom realizes that there never was, is not now, and never will be, a self that suffers. And that wisdom, if it's truly wise and alive, can't help but overflow as loving compassion. Realizing that all **is**, at bottom, empty of self, we never deny the actual conditions of felt pain and dis-ease. Consider this well as you return to home and to work.

“Never blind another's eye.” This has been a guiding principle throughout. We don't open the eye of the other. We don't need to. We can help and guide them in various ways, as they can do so for us. But we should never get in the way of others realizing it for themselves.

Please do take care returning home today; you may be more tired than you realize. Just as you threw yourself into the practice here, when you get home throw yourself into what needs to be done there. Return grateful to those who sacrificed so that you could be here sitting on your butt. Recognize that some people may think that's all you were doing here. Hard to deny! You don't have to explain how painful that butt was at times. [*Laughter*] Remember that they were home covering your butt: doing the laundry, watching the kids, and so on. Thus we bow deeply.

*Each and every dharma,  
Consisting of causes & conditions – empty, without self.  
Putting mind to rest, penetrating the original source –  
Thus one is a sramana.*

[一切諸法中 因緣空無主 息心達本源 故號為沙門]

From *The Middle Length Sutra on Origination*. The term “dharma” refers both to any particular thing and to the living truth. What's the difference? “*Sramana*” referred to someone wandering in search of truth, and eventually became a term for a Buddhist monk. Here and now it simply refers to all of us. Consider it well.

To sum it up in my own clumsy way:

*Sun always shining bright  
Moon ever full and round  
Each dark night  
every tossing turning wave  
unbound.*

Sometimes it's cloudy, or the sun has yet to rise; but the sun is always shining bright, isn't it? Half moon, quarter moon, new moon;

yet it's ever full and round, isn't it? Each dark night, just as it is, is unbound, released. I mention it merely for you to go beyond. Thank you all for your questions and comments, and for your support. This is the way we work it out together.

*[A revised version of retreat lectures given August-September, 2014 at Kasteel Mariagaarde, Hoepertingen, Belgium, and in Posticum, Oradea, Romania, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary Spirituality Center, Chester County, Pennsylvania, USA. Thanks to Bruce Stevenson for transcribing.]*