

Dharma Talk

Fifth Day of Hoepertingen Retreat, August 2018

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I trust yesterday we made clear that in the beginning of our practice we do need determination and willpower. And it needs to be channeled properly. When it is, it exhausts itself, burns itself out. When that is complete, willpower is no longer a problem. But as long as you're poling upstream, so to speak, you need to direct it properly. That is what this retreat is about.

Willpower is by nature pushing against something. It is a force. Use it properly and let it be gone when it is done. Then the real work begins. Proper guidance is crucial here. If we are determined, dedicated, if we have seen the pain and suffering that self-delusion causes, we cannot help but end it. But how do we proceed then? That also is what this retreat is about. Here is where many lose their way. What is needed now?

Risto: It's something we have to do. And we find out by doing it. Maybe we make a mistake, we fail, but we move on.

Jeff: You have everything you need. You've come here with everything you need. And when you leave you will leave with everything you need. Don't waste your time dreaming on your cushion. And when you go back to the world, don't go back dreaming. Wake up. The world is waiting for you. The real world.

All we have to give up is our precious self-delusions. That's all. When that is undone, everything flows back directly from the source itself. Not through the lens of self. Nothing real is lost. The point is to realize what is really here, to really come to rest with what is in front of your face. If you cannot be satisfied with this, you're still deluded. You're still looking for more. The mind has not yet come fully to rest.

In a few hours we go back to the world. Yes you can, you must, continue the practice there. How? Each of us has our own lives, family, work and other responsibilities. These become our dojo, our zendo, our place of practice. The challenges and conflicts we meet become an opportunity for real practice. This retreat practice here and now is precious. But, like the practice behind monastery walls, it's the easy part! This becomes clear when we go back to the world with its difficulties, demands, and compromises. That's the real dojo. That is the real practice. There is where it must come to life and respond to the need of the moment.

Being without self, utter freedom is doing what must be done at the time. Ego-self trapped in self-delusion cannot wrap its head around this: "No! I want to do what I **want**. Not what I **have** to do – that limits my freedom." This is pure ego. "I want to do what I want, not what I have to do." We've all heard children say that. And we've all been that child. But the ego does not really know what it wants, does it? Nor does it want to admit this. "I want this now! But then maybe I like the other one better..." It's an endless, vicious circle, a profound symptom of its dis-ease. It just prolongs the suffering.

Thus what we've been doing here the last several days – not indulging in our self-centered preferences. When this is complete, what must be done is done with joy. This is true human freedom. The ego-self thinks: "I do what I want so I'm free!" But it's not free at all. It is shackled by its own momentary desires and inclinations. It is utterly enslaved. And it suffers for it.

I trust you see clearly the dynamics of this delusive self. In the end, we don't have to do anything about it. Just let it go. We don't fight with it, or try to be stronger than it. It's delusive ego willfully subverting itself. Once we stop feeding it, indulging in it, it cannot continue. It untangles soon enough. Continue proper practice with patience.

This is grown up Zen, not kiddy Zen. You must realize and confirm it for yourself. There is no other way. No one can give you what you need, or take it away. A wonderful saying from the early Zen tradition: "Realization equaling that of the teacher diminishes it by half. Only a student who surpasses his teacher's realization is worthy." This is a sacred Zen expression that reveals what is required of a real disciple. And a real teacher. I have no doubt that each and every one of you in your own way will surpass this. You must.

When the practice is mature there is not even a trace. It is quite ordinary. This is enough. You're no longer seeking for anything extraordinary. Isn't this enough?

Now we're coming to the end of retreat. If anyone has a question or concern from out of the practice, or in terms of returning to the world, please raise it for the benefit of all.

Participant: I don't know what you put in your lectures but they are really hitting home. There was something that was building before the retreat and now it has become clear. If we want the practice to be thoroughgoing, as you say, it seems to me – at least in my case – I can't keep on living the way I have been living. I can't live my normal life and expect to come here for five days to get enlightened just like that (*snapping fingers*). It doesn't work.

Jeff: Six days? (*laughter*)

Participant: There is still a lot of attachment, craving. It seems I need to start unraveling that in my daily life, and make lifestyle changes. My new year's proposal is to be more alert to the things I do in daily life and not to fall into old habits. And learn as I go.

Jeff: Would anyone like to take that up? I reckon it is everyone's concern.

Participant: Be patient.

Participant: Really changing my everyday life, changing old habits, is a very important matter for me. It is hard to change habits at home, at work – for they are extensions of our mindset. But then I am encouraged when I succeed in changing something from within, from my own sincerity. It comes from a good place and it also supports sitting practice. Then it can be very powerful.

Participant: Is this what you meant by facing problems and changing your habits, changing to make more time for practice?

Participant: Yes, that is what I meant. Now I see how a lot of what I do is actually a way of escaping from practice and running from the needs of someone else. I realized I have to change the way I do things. There are some habits so entrenched that I have to take concrete measures so as not to get pulled into them anymore.

Jeff: This has been a wonderful opportunity to solve our problems together by openly working on them. Bringing them up and seeing what needs to be done, together. Thank you. Thank you all.

[transcription by Yvon Rot]