

LECTURE

BY ZENTATSU BAKER-ROSHI (*From Sesshin Talks April 1974*)

Many of you are fond of the gatha at the end of the Diamond Sutra:

As stars, a fault of vision, as a lamp,
A mock show, dew drops, or a bubble,
A dream, a lightning flash, or cloud,
So should one view what is conditioned.*

This is not just a philosophical statement to aesthetically remind you that all is not permanent. It is a statement of what is actually so, a description of the actual nature of everything if you can look without a hint of accumulation, qualification, hesitation in your vision. It means to be lost without any way to measure anything.

In this sesshin you should not be trying to get through with some measurement, nor with a dependence on putting forth energy or a determination to get through no matter what. Just do each thing in turn without any idea of the next moment. A sesshin should disorder your usual order, take away what you usually rely on, until you find your real strength, until the reality that does not need measurement is manifest in you.

In his introduction to case number two in the Blue Cliff Records, Engo says that, "By comparison heaven and earth are too narrow, the sun, moon, and stars lose their brilliance. No teaching method, blows of the stick, thunderous shouts, can help us attain it. The Buddhas of past, present and future only know it in themselves. Generations of Patriarchs cannot expound it. All the sutras and Buddha's lifelong teaching are not enough to measure it. Even those with clear eyes who have taken on His way of life completely are helpless before it."

We need to be lost, to give up looking for meaning. We need darkness. It would be terrible if it were always light. So forget about night and day, sleeping and waking, near or far, before or after. Forget about where you are. But even though heaven and earth are too narrow, the universe too contracted, "the real way is not difficult, only without discrimination," says Joshu in the Main Subject of this story.

I want to speak for a moment about how we hold our eating bowls. Many of us pick them up using fingers and thumb as if our hand was some kind of implement that works very mechanically. In this kind of relationship the bowl is rather inactive, it is just something you hold with the mechanics of your fingers. But the way we eat in Zen, the way we handle things, the bowl should just rest in your hand. When you use the whole of your hand, the bowl is holding your hand and your hand is holding the bowl. There is some intimacy, some equality and participation of hand and bowl. Do you understand what I mean? It is like saying conditioned things are like a dewdrop. It is the sound of one hand clapping. You must act with everything so thoroughly and immediately that you are the dewdrop. There is no question of trying to make it something, trying to find a substitute.

*Translation by Dr. Edward Conze

In this beautiful spring time, when you see something, grass or flowers, if your yearning is to make the experience complete by finding some substitute in language or experience, if you feel it is not quite complete until you paint it or write it or do something about it—that is suffering. Grass is not green or anything in particular, it is not any interpretation. A drawing is a real drawing when it is independent, its own experience, as ashes are ashes and firewood firewood.

So abandon all hope, abandon any kind of location. It is a wonderful experience to realize that you are actually lost, just swimming. We do not know, here with this beautiful stone Buddha, with each other in this room, where this is. Do you know where this is, where we are? If you think you know, that is not right. When you can transcend these discriminations, here or there, near or far, big or small, before or after, lofty or common, space and time, then the real way is not difficult and you will know your one Mind, your original nature. This is to be really lost, to have no support, to be always found by you yourself, to find the life that does not need any special support, that is really like a dewdrop. In the Perfection of Wisdom in 700 Lines Manjusri states, "When one is not supported anywhere, just that, O Lord, is the development of perfect wisdom." Who is going to keep track anyway, your parents, your friends, your past, you who remember who you were? If things are really as a dewdrop, if you really believe that you must understand and experience everything without reliance on anything else, then there is nothing keeping track, and you can enter the real way.

If you try to pick up the bowl like your hand was a tool, already you are in some contracted world and do not know it. In that Introductory Word Engo goes on to say, "What is the use of specific questions? Even to call Buddha's name is like wallowing in mud and water." It means too much kindness from your teacher also cannot help you. "The word Zen in your mouth should make you blush. Now ponder what Joshu has to say."

The first story in the Blue Cliff Records, you remember, about Bodhidharma and the Emperor, is about how you find a teacher. Its theme is the relative and the absolute, holy reality and ordinary reality. And this second story too uses the theme of relative and absolute. But the second story is about once you've found your teacher, how do you practice with him? What is the relationship?

Studying Buddhism is difficult, because it's to bring it out of ourselves. Sutras, or heaven and earth, or thunderous blows, or your teacher, are not so much. It has to be brought out of you. As Engo says, "What is the use of specific questions?" He's asking, as Dogen did, What is the use of practice? So this story is about your standpoint in practice, your standpoint in relationship with your teacher. It is an intuitive story of our inner voice.

The case begins as Joshu, quoting Sosan's famous poem, says, "The real way is not difficult, it is only without discrimination." At this point Engo says, "What's this old Chinese bringing in his bunch of briars to us today for?" Do you understand? For Joshu to make a statement already is discrimination. Then Joshu says, "As soon as we say anything about it, it becomes little." In Engo's words, "Heaven and earth become contracted." As soon as we say anything, we must

talk about the relative and the absolute. Joshu continues, "This old monk (Joshu) does not reside in cloudless clarity. What about you (you monks, who look up to cloudless clarity, the absolute), what do you say?"

So a monk comes up to Joshu. Maybe he is attached to his teacher being a sage, and Joshu is saying, "I'm not some sage, living in the absolute." Some say this monk is a little out of order, but I don't think so. He's a rather interesting person. He asks Joshu, "If you are not within cloudless clarity, if you don't reside in the absolute, how do you assess it?" A rather clever question. And he also means, what can we look for, how can we take the three refuges and the ten prohibitory precepts and the three pure precepts? What can we look up to, if you're not in the absolute? Joshu's reply is, "I don't know even this." But the monk is persistent. "How can you say 'I don't know' unless your standpoint is the absolute?" Isn't 'I don't know' already the absolute, he implies. And Joshu says, "Your questioning is over. Please bow and go back to your place." Go have lunch, go to bed. Do whatever is next. That is Joshu's way.

In this question and answer you see Joshu taking neither the standpoint of relative nor absolute. At one point he presents something broadside: The real way is not difficult. And then he says, I'm not in the absolute. Here he's presenting something upside down, in some confusing way. He's going against the stream, a boat going against the wind, maybe. And then when he says 'I don't know' he is just drifting—"Oh, I don't know." And the monk is still trying to make the answers fit together. If you try to do so, you'll never have any experience of the multiplicities of our existence or our real relationship with each other. So take the burden off your mind and eyes, and listen, just know the darkness. This sesshin is seven days and nights of darkness.

In the last response, Joshu just changes the context: Finish your bow and go back to your place. He's not slighting the question or questioner, and he's not caught by the framework of questions and answers. He's just taking one or another standpoint, but with some great respect and feeling for the questioner. When the monk makes his first question, Engo comments: "He needs a good thrashing," meaning, some teachers would thrash or be harsh with the person asking the question. And when Joshu says, "Go back to your seat," Engo says, "Some teachers would try to talk their way out of it by logic." But it's not necessary, you know, for question and answer to follow in order to know, to experience what we're talking about. Engo says, "You should know the weight by how it pulls on the hook, not by reading the numbers on the scale."

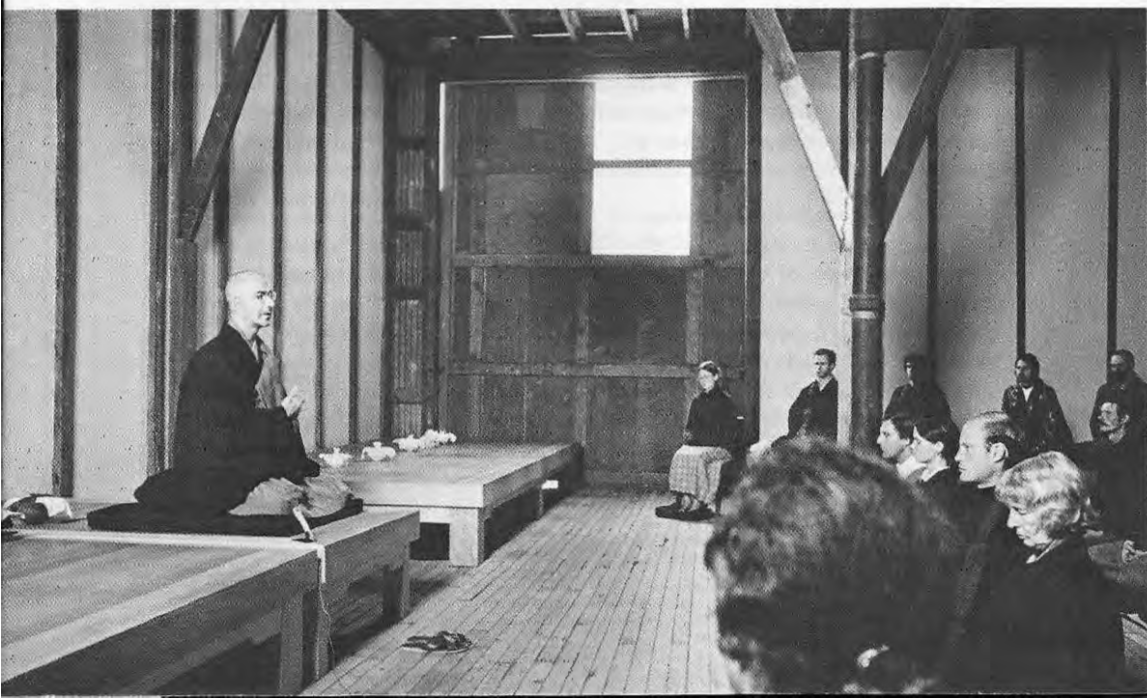
For teacher and disciple to practice together, we need to have some faith or sense of what we are talking about without the need to make it explicit or tie it down. Engo's teacher said about Joshu's way, "He showed us by letting his arms dangle down." Nothing special, no eagle eye, dramatic Zen Master stuff. Just oh, O.K. Suzuki-roshi was very much like that. On the other hand, we don't want too much kindness, "wading hip-deep in mud and water," too much attempt to make some relationship. Maybe to give you an image of Buddha, or feeling of Buddha, he says is too much kindness. Already you have some special feeling of practice, "holy practice." Already it is too much. That is not beginner's mind. The difficulty is that we have too much confidence in our teacher and also too much confidence in the absolute. So you don't have any freedom. Suzuki-roshi pointed this out many times when he talked about this story. The

problem, as he said, is that your teacher is right, but only for that moment. You shouldn't be too attached to it. So in this story Joshu and Engo and Setcho try to make it come out of the student, make it come out of each one of us, including the teacher.

Just put your strength here, in your stomach, and lift up through your backbone. You will realize you do not know where you are or what you are doing, yet even that which does not comprehend, functions. This is not some philosophical statement with illusion on one side and the absolute on the other. You are illusion and the absolute, right now, and something on which nothing can be written. This is not fooling around. There is no ducking. Dogen said, "Address the continuous body of Buddha, and realize the historical Buddha in yourself." Realize how that which does not comprehend also functions. I want you to give up your life in this sesshin, so that you can't remember who you were. Just to sit on your cushion this moment is all.

Setcho said, "The real way is not difficult. Words, phrases point to it. One has many ways. And two ways are not two. The sun rises at the edge of the sky, the pale moon sets. Beyond the porch railing, blue mountains. Cold water. From the skull, no sensation. How can joy arise. From the dry withered tree, a dragon moans. All is not dead. Difficult! Difficult! Relative and absolute. Friends, find out for yourself."

Suzuki-roshi said, "Sun and moon may not be one. Sun and moon may not be two." Engo said about Setcho's poem, "Oh, a double head with three faces. He is selling it retail." What is three faces? This is the utter darkness I have been talking about. Mountain and railing, near and far. What is near and far? Dragons do not live in pure water. Birds' feathers fill the air. Fish stir the water. From the distant, blue mountain, the water is cold.



Kassan Zenne, a disciple of a Dharma brother of our lineage, said, "The monkeys, clasping their young to their breasts, return behind the blue mountain. A bird with a flower in its beak lands before my green grotto study." This famous poem, again the utter darkness. From our stream of blood flowing in utter darkness, a withered tree comes to life, a dragon moans.

As you know, shortly before Suzuki-roshi died I asked him, "Where will I meet you?" And he brought his small hand out from underneath the covers and bowed to me and drew a circle in the air. This is relative and absolute. Which is relative and which is absolute? Where do we meet him? What did he mean? His response is not limited to bowing or moving the covers or his lying there suffering. There is no beginning or end to his response. We always meet him whenever we bow, in everything we do and see.

There is no subject and object, no realm of achievement, everything is as a lightning flash and dewdrop, without merit and demerit. There is no realm in which anything other than a dewdrop can occur, except your own illusion of self. We are not a tub, you know, that we are rinsing out of negative things and filling up with good things. The realm of our actual existence is something like "do not use your hand as a tool."

If you realize Buddhism, it is because you teach yourself. I am temporarily your teacher and you are disciples, but actually, we are companions on the path, teacher and disciple simultaneously. Oneself reveals to oneself, Dogen points out. You possess Buddhism. Buddhism does not exist in these stories. It exists only in your own realization.

So the relationship of teacher and disciple is the real teacher. And the person who realizes Buddhism can be said to unite through practice the mudra of body speech and mind in the realm of intimacy and action. Mudra means, for example, that form of speech in which joy arises. Not that form of speech which most accurately conveys some information or accurately describes something according to our discriminating mind, not the surface of things, not honesty or even naturalness. Speech, action that is free from attachment, free from harming, free from creating. It disappears, and joy arises. This way you become the teachings themselves, the mudra in which enlightenment arises, the Bodhisattva. You are the vehicle of the Patriarchs and the enlightenment of all beings. These vows, these precepts, these mudra, these seals, are what make us a Buddha, a vehicle of Buddhism.

Usually we are caught in the surface of things and without the precepts to remind us how we are caught we try to find an equivalent satisfaction or relief again in the surfaces of things, in an objectification of our experience and an objectification of other beings. You need the precepts when you are already caught, when you have already broken the precepts. The precepts are the reverse of this objectifying process. The precepts show you when objectifying begins, when you have some idea of praising, criticizing, sizing up, possessing, hiding, lying, eliminating, et cetera. So you can see how you create yourself constantly and suffer the accumulation of that creating. If your state of mind is calm and not caught by the treadmill of objectifications, you effortlessly keep the precepts, always in the center of things. This is to recognize everything as Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, rejoicing in the merit of others.

This is the half-lit world left behind. The illusion that we have some control over the surface of things is gone. You have realized how completely we live in the dark, you have relaxed and given yourself over to the precepts, to the refuges, to being a vehicle for Buddhism. You have entered that stream of blood that flows in utter darkness. Blow the lights out and you can feel what is happening. Blow even the idea of a light and a self out and you will feel and know your oneness with utter darkness. How wonderful it is!

The Sixth Patriarch says that when you have discarded outer form and your mind is not disturbed you have realized the unity of the relative and the absolute and Buddhism naturally arises. Joshu was asked, "What would you say to a man who possessed nothing?" "Throw it away," said Joshu. And yet when you have a possibility of not doing something, of letting something go, of giving up an old habit just once, you think "Well it's not of such importance, it is just one small thing, and I am so caught by my habit, this once will not help at all." But this is 50%. If you can do it just when it occurs to you, this is the step on to a new path. This is the true meaning of being on the path, each step to enter a new path. There is no end to the originality, the creativity of a practice like this. Each moment reality is there, the creativity of you yourself.

It is like Buddhism is a time capsule, time spansule. One of those pills that is released little by little. We are each given one and it will go off in us according to our circumstances and ripeness and practice. Suzuki-roshi gave me one and I am passing it to you. It is a pill which lasts forever. Different parts will go off in each of us. Each of us is the whole pill and as we realize ourselves, the pill will be opening according to each's own circumstances and creativity. This is Buddha's own originality. This is a pill infinite in variety, as large and small as everything at once, a pill which we all simultaneously are. This description is straight from the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra makes clear that it is all of us and everything simultaneously that realizes Buddhahood, that is the Bodhi-sattva. This is our realm of intimacy and practice, beyond discrimination and time and space, near and far, before and after.

So we Buddhists do not go into political activity much or make big generalizations because we find that it is through our tiny acts each moment that we enter the new road with everyone. This is to act in zero, to act in utter darkness. Two joined made one, and all joined makes 0. And it is in the 0 in which we act, this utter darkness. Dogen wrote:

This slowly drifting cloud is pitiful
What dreamwalkers we all are!
Awakened, the one true thing,
Black rain on the temple roof.

Stopping the world.

It has come to you before. Moments when your mind and body saw, moments that you remember clearly, but then you lapsed back into unconsciousness. Until you started to practice, until you noticed something again, until you saw a trace of the ox. And now your practice is in this sesshin to awaken that mudra or form which is emptiness, which will bring you back to consciousness.

The problem is the same for us. We may establish a good place to practice here, and a healthy community. But that is not so important, you know. The important thing is that you join this stream of blood that flows in utter darkness. That you continue this stream, continue this way of Suzuki-roshi and Dogen Zenji and Setcho Zenji and Engo Zenji. You actually are doing it.

Suzuki-roshi said, "When I was with my teacher, I usually felt he was really my teacher and I treated him completely as my teacher. But after my teacher died I realized I did not know what a teacher was at all and had not understood him nor what he was trying to show me. But then I felt I knew finally what he was trying to say, I realized his great kindness and effort. But then again the following year I felt that I had not understood. And each year I realized again." It is always this way. The dry dead branches of winter come out in springtime with fresh colors and blossoms. But even in our lifetime it may not come out. Our way may look dead, even for many generations, but when conditions are right it will come out again perfectly according to circumstances. So we should make no special effort to express Buddhism, or worry if we are not a great teacher. We should just take the great pill of the vehicle of Buddhism completely. Suzuki-roshi had no idea of being a great teacher. He just took care of his responsibilities in Japan, of the temples he inherited, repairing them, and humbly continuing his study of Buddhism as a student, until he came to America and saw our great need and shared his realization with us, giving us this great practice to realize ourselves.

This is the wonderful activity and supernatural power of Layman P'ang carrying water and chopping wood. Doing whatever comes to hand. This is Hotetsu fanning himself, ripening the gold of the earth and the cream of the long rivers. This is knowing the transiency of the world and the purity of intention, the reality of utter darkness and our stream of blood.

*Poems beginning and ending the mondo (question and answer ceremony)
at the end of sesshin.*

The ways of Zen are numerous,
Your own single!
Each step a new road.
What is this 50%?

When your pure intention covers heaven and earth
You can trust what occurs to you.
The blue monkeys do not know the mountain
But possess the whole of Buddhism.