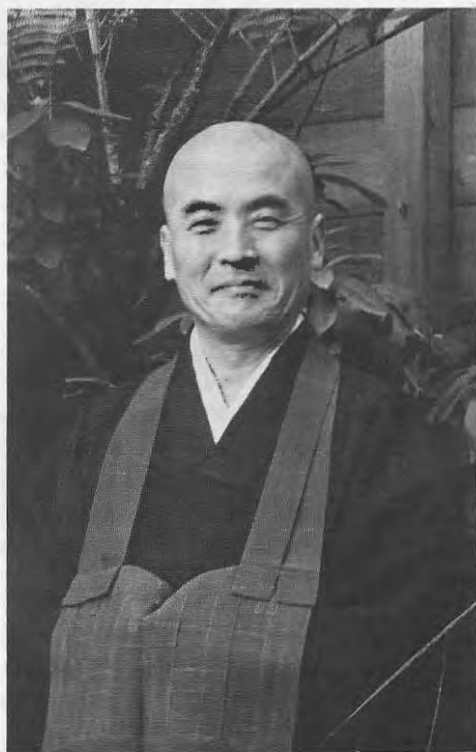


LECTURES



TRUE HEART: Raising the Banner of Truth

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When Nan-yueh ch'an shih (ch'an shih: Jap. "zenji") was practicing under his teacher, his teacher asked him, "From where do you come?" Nan-yueh ch'an shih said, "I come from Mt. Sung." His teacher said, "What is it that thus comes?" Nan-yueh ch'an shih didn't know the

answer, so for eight long years he pondered this question. Then one day it dawned on him, "Even to say it is something, doesn't hit the mark."

I think this is very important. Every day, in every activity we have to think, "What is it that thus comes?" What comes? What comes with what reason? What comes for what? Who comes with what reason? This is a big koan we have to meet day in and day out--otherwise, it's pretty hard to keep our boat on the right course. We slip off course immediately. We make a detour, moment after moment. "What is it that thus comes?" It's a very difficult question, but our outlook on life should be built up in the light of this teaching; then we can know what to do right in the middle of suffering, human life, human confusions. Constantly we have to reflect upon ourselves this way. If we don't, we become crazy pretty easily, we become overly infatuated with good or bad or neutral. So, even though we don't understand what it means, we must constantly ask, "What comes with what reason?"

Please return to your first motivation. Your first motivation is very vague. You don't know what it is, but you want to do it. That's why you say, "I want to know human life with a true heart." What do you mean by "true heart"? True heart is really vague. You can know the true heart, but you cannot pin down what it is that compels you to practice the Buddha Way, or to seek for the truth. What compels you is your first motivation. In that moment, that very first motivation, the Buddha, Truth, true heart can be found. But you simply cannot put any name on it. Whatever name you put on it, it becomes a blur, you don't know what it is.

Even though you come to Tassajara with your first motivation, seeking for the truth, don't you feel that you quickly lose your way? This is because the moment you are here, which is what you wanted, you forget your first motivation and you begin making detours looking for many kinds of courses to take. I want to ask you, what is the basis of why you are here? Your first motivation? If that were true, there would be no struggle. You would just be here and practice steadily. But you don't. What is it? Why do you do this? From the point of view of first motivation, all you can do here is just be as you really are. But, when you are right in the middle of this Tassajara you really wanted, something happens. You seek for peace, but when you are right in the middle of the peace you sought, you lose your way immediately. You seek for something else, and the result is violence, fighting, arguments, squabbles--invariably there are squabbles in your small world, in your small society, and in

the larger society, or even within yourself. In your deep heart, in your true heart, you always seek peace, but when you have it, you don't know what it is. You completely lose the way. That's why you have to constantly come back to the first motivation. First motivation is really pure, clean, and shining. Temporarily we call it Buddha nature. In plain language, maybe we can call it "true heart" or "sincerity" or "truthfulness".

Constantly you have to ask yourself if you are trying to just satisfy your desires. Did you come here to practice the Buddha Way, to lead the life of a priest, or to get priest ordination? That is alright, but it is already slipping off course because that is a course that you are looking for, that you are expecting to take. Basically, what you really want to do is to practice the Buddha Way at Tassajara. That is all you want to do, but then, immediately, you start looking for some new course to set out on: some so-called "priest's life," some spiritual fantasy, or "enlightenment". If you think "enlightenment," right away there is another situation: so-called "delusion". So if you see the delusion, you try to keep away from the delusion and try to keep the enlightenment, or nice spiritual fantasy. But that means you have gone off on a detour. What is real peace, real harmony? What is the Buddha Way?

By becoming a priest, by anticipating or expecting the life of a priest, can you understand the human world, can you understand the Buddha Way? There is no way to understand the Buddha Way, even though you become a priest. As a priest you become more confused and wherever you go it is pretty hard.

Are you attracted to the wonderful food at Tassajara? That's why you come here to practice. Are you attracted to the natural surroundings at Tassajara? Is that why you come here? Or are you attracted to success in life? Spiritual success in life? Or are you attracted to a lazy way of life? Usual human society is hard, so you may practice here because it is easy--you do not have to struggle as businessmen do to be successful, you just follow the schedule. You can just be at Tassajara and practice the Buddha Way in peace and harmony. Are you attracted to this lazy way, this easy-going way? Then, for you, "just sitting" is the "just sitting" you have understood. It is not the Buddha Way. If you practice like this, it is really easy-going. Is this your first motivation? Are you attracted to hard practice, or to neutral practice? You should repeatedly ask yourself this.

I don't think it is necessary to know something which you don't already know. This is not practice for us. As long as you are a



Hill cabin at Tassajara

human being, you are right in the middle of the situation of not understanding anything, because life is vast, because it is the truth. Truth or vastness, or emptiness, is very rich, but you cannot name it. So all you can do is to practice, receive, and accept that full richness. How do you know this? There is no way to know, but you are already there, so first accept this fact. Do not try to poke your head into something in order to know. You should confirm that you are right in the situation of not understanding anything at all. This is the point you have to know. That's why you constantly have to come back to the source.

When Dogen Zenji went to China, he was asked by a Chinese monk, "What are you doing?" Dogen Zenji replied, "I am reading the scriptures." The monk said, "For what reason?" "Because I want to learn about the ancestors' lives, sayings, and activities." The monk said,

"For what?" "I just want to help human beings when I go back to Japan." The monk said, "For what?" "Because it is helpful to human beings; because everyone suffers so much." The monk said, again, "For what?" Then, Dogen Zenji said, "This is my way of life. I want to offer my life to all sentient beings. I want to help." And again the monk said, "For what?" Finally, Dogen Zenji couldn't say anything. This is very important because this monk cross-examined Dogen Zenji through returning to the source, what we are calling "first motivation," "Buddha Nature," "Truth," or "What is it that thus comes?"

For eight long years, Nan-yueh practiced, pondered thoroughly and precisely the question, "what is it that thus comes?" Then, he said, "nothing to hit the mark in words." "In words" means in terms of your understanding, in terms of your thinking. Without words, you cannot think. Thinking and words come together and work together. By your thinking, by your words--if you try to put a name on it--nothing hits the mark. Maybe you can hit the mark sometimes, but it doesn't last for long. Sooner or later you must come back to zero and start again from the beginning. Whatever thing you pick up, whether from the Buddha's teachings (emptiness, enlightenment), or from the usual aspects of human life (love, hatred, passion, emotions), please look at it closely. You can temporarily put a name on it, but the more carefully you think, the more it becomes a blur and you don't know what it is.

When I was nineteen I listened to teishos given by Hashimoto Roshi. I didn't expect to understand what he said, but I really wanted to hear him. People called me crazy. I was young and didn't understand anything, but over and over I listened to him. What I can tell you now is only this point: at that time I felt the truth of what Hashimoto Roshi said in his lecture, but I couldn't put any names on it. He said that, in whatever situation you may be in, in whatever place you are standing right here and now, this is the place in which you have to erect the banner of truth. That's it. I felt this. Whoever I am--whether I am a stupid person or a wise man--doesn't matter. Again and again I listened to him speak, but I didn't understand or remember any of the words. I can tell you about it now, but in those days I couldn't say anything, although I felt the truth in what he said.

But what does this mean? It means that the naked reality of being is full of richness, but you cannot name it, you cannot understand it. Your whole existence is completely embraced by this full richness, just like a baby held in its mother's arms or sitting in its mother's lap. This is the naked reality of all beings. It is not the

point that you should try to understand it. If you want to know, you should know the reason why you cannot know it. That is why, finally, after eight long years, Nan-yueh understood that nothing hit the mark. This means you have to come back to your first motivation.

The Prajna Paramita says, "Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi, svaha." Go beyond, far beyond. "Go beyond" means let's return to the first motivation. This is a really simple life: that is, to erect the banner of life, the banner of truth. This is Dogen's teaching, and also Buddha's teaching. Through this continuing practice, you can understand lots of different courses through the human world: lots of toys, techniques, teachings. Teachings are nothing but toys, if you misuse them. If you don't misuse them, the teachings become pretty nice. Then you can understand many toys, teachings, courses, and techniques for living in peace and harmony. If you don't practice this way, you are completely involved in the big whirl of courses, knowledges, suffering, entanglements, and human relations. You never stand up straight. It's pretty hard. This way is very vague--you don't understand it. But you feel something, because this is your first motivation. You are attracted to it, but you cannot put a name on it, or say whether it is useful or not.

So, the dialogue between Nan-yueh and his teacher continues. After Nan-yueh said that, "even to say it is something doesn't hit the mark," his teacher asked, "Do you think it is contingent upon practice and enlightenment?" If there is nothing to say which hits the mark, why do we do zazen, why do we think about enlightenment and delusion, life and death, etc.? Nan-yueh replied, "It is not that they don't exist, but that they cannot be defiled." Many things exist from moment to moment, but they don't hinder each other, because the basis of existence, total dynamic energy/form, exists before you think of it, and even if you don't think of it. This means that there is nowhere to go: no way to find directions, no way to know what it is, and if you try to know, this is already a detour. Just do your best to take care of here and now with true heart. When practice comes, all you have to do is take care of practice with whole heartedness. Then that moment spreads into the ten directions. That is called infinity. Where are we heading for? What is the target we have to aim at? The target is infinity, or truth, or the vastness of existence, emptiness. It is right here, right now. That is why Nan-yueh said that it is not that practice, delusion, enlightenment, and existence don't exist, but rather that they don't interfere with one another.

The Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng, said, "Only this undefiledness is kept and held by the Buddha ancestors." Yes, this is true; "this undefiledness" means right here, right now. Where there is nothing to find, no directions, no reason, no expectations--we have to be exactly there. Being present right now, right here, with wholeheartedness is completely beyond your speculation--nothing can contaminate it. The practice of undefiledness has been kept and held century after century by the Buddhas and ancestors. "So you are thus now, so I am likewise, so are all successive ancestors in India, in China likewise." Not only by Buddhas in India, China, and Japan, but wherever we follow the Buddha's Way. This is not something to speculate about. You have to be this, you have to do this. If you start to think about it, you immediately begin to dig your own grave.



*Yucca plant
on Tassajara
hillside*