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INSIDE-OUTSIDE notes from a lecture at Esalen Institute

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*(edited by Tim Buckley)*

There is a story of a student doing zazen. The teacher comes by and says "What are you doing?" And the student says "I'm practicing to become a Buddha." A little while later the student looks around and sees the teacher rubbing a tile. "What are you doing?" he asks. "Trying to make this tile into a mirror", the teacher says. One implication is that if you don't know that you are already a Buddha no amount of sitting will make you one. The first *kensho* is a full experience of this fundamental, underlying wholeness, and this is really the first step in practice.

If you say "Who am I?" you're seeking some link with what you might be. In Buddhist terms I think it is seeking your identification with all things, not

just with a group or with a collective unconscious, but with every movement of the cosmos itself; everything at once is identifying you. "Ecology" means, essentially, "linking", and Buddhism is a profoundly ecological way of looking at things. To give you an idea of this ecological kind of thinking, here is something called *Genjo Koan* from a book by Dogen Zenji, one of the perhaps two major figures for Zen in Japan, and one of the major figures in Buddhism:

To study Buddhism is to study ourselves. To study ourselves is to go beyond ourselves. To go beyond ourselves is to be enlightened, identified by all things. To be enlightened, identified by all things, is to free our body and mind and to free the bodies and minds of others. No trace of enlightenment remains. And this no-trace continues endlessly.\*

Another aspect:

When a fish swims in the ocean, there is no end to the water, no matter how far it swims. When a bird flies in the sky, there is no end to the air, no matter how far it flies. However the fish and bird do not leave their elements, the air and the water. When the use is large it is used largely. When the use is small it is used in a small way. Though it flies everywhere, if the bird leaves the air it will die at once. Water makes life and air makes life. The bird makes life and the fish makes life. Life makes the bird and life makes the fish.

This is an analogy for practice, enlightenment, everything; total interpenetration of identity, or reality.

If you wanted to have one statement which explained all of Buddhist philosophy, you'd say "everything changes". And when you see that everything changes, you see that everything is in interrelationship, is interdependent. Again, Dogen says, referring to *zazen*:

If we watch the shore from a boat it seems that the shore is moving. But when we watch the boat directly, we know that it is the boat that moves.

In other words, if you watch yourself directly in meditation you find that it's yourself that moves.

If we examine all things with a confused body and mind, we will suppose that our self is permanent. But if we practice closely and return to our present place, it will be clear that nothing at all is permanent.

This kind of thinking emphasizes interrelationships, or we can even say fields. You are creating time and space each moment. The universe is an infinite number of centers, and each of us is one of them. So we are creating the universe each moment. Your actual life is you now, and what you choose for the next moment is your actual life forever. This is not preparation. Are you actually doing what your inmost nature wants? How can I convey to you the immediacy and freedom of this now—this universe you are about to make as beautiful as you want your life to be. Why don't you just give up now! I'll enjoy it too. As Dogen says, "The bird makes life, water makes life." Each of us is creating the universe each moment. You are free. It emanates from you. The question of "Who am I?" is not a question of you alone, but of your relationships with, realization of, and inclusion of the Whole. But you really do not have to do anything, just smile and be at one with what is manifesting as you and everything.

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\* translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi with Robert Aitken

A simultaneous step in Zen practice is to begin freeing yourself from karma, to stop creating karma. By karma we mean, generally, hang-ups, or something like that. I think basically karma means forms. As long as you're creating karma you cannot get free from it, because you're producing it faster than, or at the same rate at which you can destroy it. To stop creating karma can be as simple as not taking pencils from work, or not treating people in a negative way. You may say, "Not all karma is bad." But the idea of "good" karma is misleading. It may help your life if you have much good karma, but it is not being free. That is why Bodhidharma answered the Emperor's question about the merit attained through good works with, "No merit!" How to do everything fully now is the point so that, as is said in Buddhism, "cause seals cause" (cause cause is more accurate than cause *and effect*). This means that in each act you create the universe, it means that you have not tried to accumulate or possess something through your activity and thus left the dishes unwashed. If the act is complete, the dishes are all put away. This is the level at which Zen practice begins—by washing the dishes, by hanging up your coat. This is the life in a Zen monastery. It is the most immediate level or way in which you can begin your practice. It is not different from finding yourself free and whole and present in each moment.

Karma is sometimes called "attachment". People usually think of attachment in its simple sense, like attachment to status or money, success or sex, things like that. Actually, I think that a more basic kind of attachment is the way in which we, on an immediate level, respond to things. Just as in the problem of hanging up your clothes or washing the dishes, on all levels of activity you will find many problems or resistances or interferences. In your thinking and doing you will find your culture and your language interfering by giving you definite ideas about things that are supposed to exist, that are presupposed to exist like time and space, inside and outside, up and down, consciousness and unconsciousness, good and evil, past, present, and future, etc. Such things do not exist. They are just categories to help us think about and explain things.

Most of us think "Well, there's of course up and there's down, there's inside and there's outside." Actually, those distinctions don't really exist. For example, I was walking along a few years ago, going back to the warehouse where I was working. I had a cigarette package or a candy wrapper in my hand, and as I was going over some railroad tracks I just threw it down. I walked a couple of steps and then I had a kind of flash, a funny feeling. On the first level it was "I threw that down there and it's not going to be cleaned up. It'll just sit there. I ought to throw it down on the floor of the warehouse where it'll be cleaned up." And I immediately realized that the problem was that I had an idea that there was an outside where you're free and an inside where you behave a certain way. And I saw that there is no such thing as outside-inside. There is no natural or un-natural. It was quite a big experience for me.

One thing you find when you go to Japan is that they have very different distinctions about what inside and outside are, what up and down, time and space are. Different ways of thinking about things that are so basic that the

Japanese people end up having a different kind of mind, a different kind of game, from us. The way they put things together, the way the information comes from the environment and is organized in their own being is rather different from the way we organize our experiences, our information. So the question of how you free yourself from karma is, on a more basic level, how do you free yourself from your own society? How is your society catching you? How is your language catching you? And how do you make the forms of your society, the forms of your thinking, of your desires, of your own being, of your own universe (wholeness), become your own practice, an expression and realization of Buddha nature, of formlessness, of your own enlightenment?

When an individual is trying to break through, shall I say, to a deeper level of consciousness in the context of a traditional society, he is trying to find his own way. But when a society is in transition, as I assume Western society and perhaps the whole world is, what is happening in society is trying to manifest itself in the individual; and what is happening in the individual is one way of changing the society. So we are both caught by and at the same time freeing our society too if we can free ourselves. Society too must see its original face. But the only way to practice is to turn your attention to what you are actually doing.

If it is possible for there to be so many forms, so many variations of "inside" and "outside", then it means that the mind is really quite free from "inside" and "outside", that you can manifest in your own activity what, in Buddhism, is called Great Function. Now, when the sun shines on the ocean its light actually penetrates the whole ocean. But when you look you only see the reflection in one place. Our activity should be like that. When you really do one thing with complete attention, and your awareness is completely in that one thing, your activity penetrates everywhere. Your practice, your every activity should express the formlessness that makes everything possible. Great Function is activity greater than just your own ego: your ego can cover everything. When they say "kill your ego", they really mean that your ego covers everything, that you're identified by all things. This is enormous freedom.

One of the easier ways to "break through", to rediscover your identity with all things, is to practice zazen. Our practice must extend beyond some idea of a "universe", because that word only names the physical material aspects of the whole. So Buddhism uses phrases like "mind only" or "consciousness only" or "awareness" or "emptiness" in order to suggest the larger dimensions of reality. But these terms are misleading too. They will lead you to look for something. The whole point of zazen is to know what the universe is through our own being. It's really the short-cut and easy way. When you sit still, finally your consciousness fills your body. When it fills your body it is very easy to be aware of the consciousness around you. In fact, finally your consciousness doesn't seem to be limited to your body. It seems to extend to birds, sounds, or whatever happens. Dogs barking can be barking inside of you. When you have that kind of center it is very easy to sense the interrelationships between things, to know that you *are* the whole, and to realize what your responsibility is.