



Furnace Mountain

Newsletter

Fall/Winter 2009

Sitting on the Bodhi Seat

Dharma Talk by Zen Master Dae Gak
September 12, 2009, Furnace Mountain

A monk asked Master Hang Yang of Yang, “Dai Tong Jisong sat for ten kalpas in the meditation hall, true dharma did not appear so he did not attain buddhahood. Why?”

Hang Yang said, “Good question.”

The monk persisted, “He sat in the meditation hall. Why did he not attain buddhahood?”

Hang Yang said, “Because he would not become Buddha.”

So the questions we ask are: Why did he not become Buddha? What is the meaning of becoming Buddha?

This is a koan to confront the religious seeking mind, the mind that wants to attain something. One way to frame the distinction between Zen and other religions is that in Zen there is no dogma or doctrine or belief system.

The activity of practice is to continually see into that and to continually see how self forms in response to, or in association with, the arising of things. The mistake in human consciousness is the belief that there is a sense of fixed being that moves along like a seed or a leaf on the river of existence, the river of time. There is the mistaken view that there is something that comes into the world and that something then lives in the human body and then the human body dies and that something does something else, somewhere else, or comes back from somewhere else. So typical religious practices or religious beliefs take up that something.

One of the religious beliefs of Western culture is psychology. We are all quite psychologically sophisticated and we have a psychological belief system and we pray at the altar of self. Sometimes self takes the form of a big guy somewhere making decisions, an executive self. We have some belief that there is somebody, somewhere in time or space who is pulling the strings and we pay homage to



that. That would be the religious or spiritual aspect. The more mundane or daily aspect of this religious practice of psychology is to pay homage to the small self. In that we believe that our feelings, perceptions, impulses, consciousness are something that are fixed outside of time and that move in some way. We believe that there is this little person somewhere in the middle of our brain, or a soul, or a self that is evaluating and deciding; a computer that is somehow an actual being that runs the equipment of tongue, arms, ears body, mind, nose, skin, liver, all of that. We call that I or self or me and believe it is a separate entity with will.

We worship at the altar of that self because we live in fear and guilt and shame, which can be the fundamental motivators in all religions, although they don't have to be. Exaltation, rejoicing, appreciation, blossoming forth can also be the activity of spiritual practice. But typically the activity of religious practice is to be managed by shame, guilt, and fear and to behave in certain ways so that this small self, rather than the guy in heaven, will treat us okay.

Can we consider the possibility that the tyrant of self, whose power is emotional unhappiness, is an illusion?

Our past sends us messages and tells us about right and wrong and those messages manage us. We do this because it feels good and we don't do that be-

cause it feels bad. Then, because some things that feel good sometimes have disastrous consequences we have morality that overlays that so then we feel bad. You know how all of that works.

Doing good and bad is not so interesting, but what is interesting is this command central, the sense of homage to an entity that we believe is within ourselves, within our being and we live by it. We get our feelings hurt extremely easily, we get our feelings hurt all the time. We hurt others' feelings as a way of manipulating and getting what we want. We live in this religion of feeling and measuring our sense of well-being by feeling. Yet, if you have ever been sick, had the flu, or you've had a stomach virus and you're lying in bed and thinking something terrible has happened, or you wake up with some shame or depression, you might begin to see that the morality of our religion of feeling is quite arbitrary and not usually accurate and the physiological effect can trigger emotion. I know that each of us sitting here is at times filled with some panic or dread or unhappiness and it probably has to do with pain or fatigue. Yet the religion of our self turns it into a morality. We live by the religion of our emotional states and we divide the world into those who are in our congregation because they make us feel good and those who are in an alien religion because they make us feel bad.

Then we take up our practice from that same mind and we believe that if we sit carefully and sit upright (not that we shouldn't sit upright with poise and grace) but that if we do so within the religion of emotional well-being, we will feel better, we will get something, we will be better off. The religion of self, the high-priest or priestess says, of course, why would you do it if it didn't have some value? Why would you ever take up something if you didn't get to heaven? What is the point if you are not going to get to salvation?

So our practice, our way, is to not take any doctrine whatsoever, to not take any dogma whatsoever; not the dogma of your own emotional conditioning, because she is relentless, not the doctrine of thousands of years of Buddhism, not the doctrine of sitting will get you something. Total skepticism; just sitting. This is the point of Dai Tong Jisong. Just sitting. You don't say just sitting, already Buddha; it is too much. Just sitting.

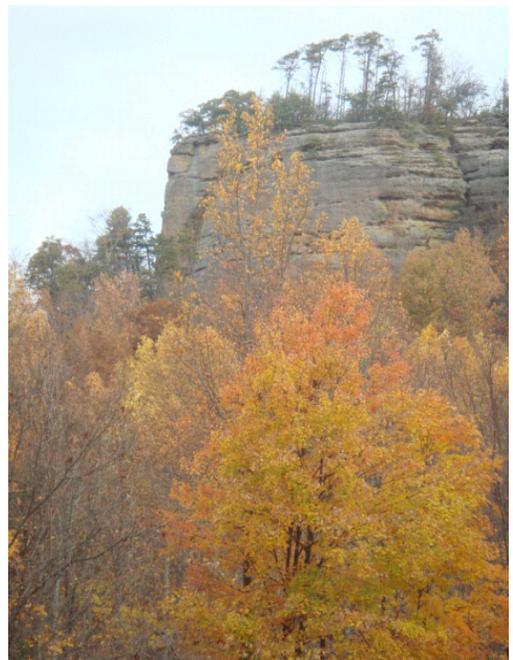
It is to have faith not in a doctrinal principal but to have faith in the actuality of your being itself. In that there is no separation; there is no one who

prays at the altar of self or other. One activates or actualizes the function of being human and that is the greatest spiritual gift to all beings; to come forward as the self; not to believe that you are a self but to come forward as a self and self appears as function.

You can't hold it in the mind if you try. You want to nail it down and plan your life around it but that is more religion in the service of the self. The self wants to figure out the activity; if I pray, if I work this out, I will then get something.

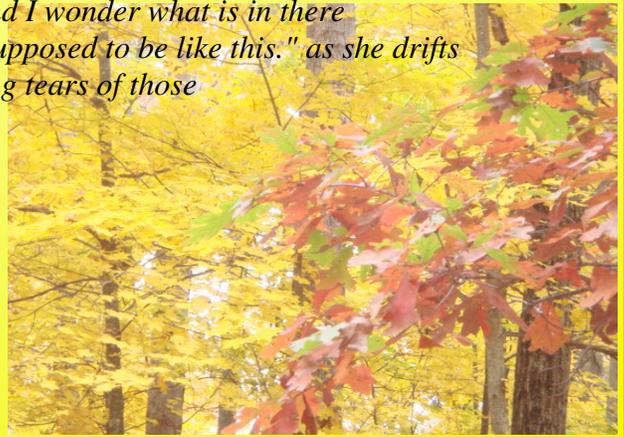
Dai Tong Jisong is the great one who everywhere and always has completely realized sunyata, emptiness, no-self, the fact of no fixed anything. We look into that and it is an amazing teaching. It is spine chilling, it raises the hairs on the back of your neck. To enter into the possibility of everywhere and always no self, nothing abides and our life is completely meaningless. Do we have the courage to step into that? See how the mind fights it; how the hell can it be meaningless, what a bunch of crap, it has got to be meaningful. There has to be some meaning in life.

This koan is looking at that. It is saying Dai Tong Jisong wouldn't become a Buddhist, wouldn't become a Buddha. The easy way out is to say, already Buddha. But it is deeper than that. It is always, everywhere the realization that there isn't anything fixed. From this perspective you see how when you get aroused, your emotional imperative is sparked and your reactivity comes. Seeing it, you don't believe it. It is that simple. You don't take up



*The trees are what is left when nothing else is known
and the old man river just keeps on flowing through the minds of those left behind.
As we move through the passages of our lives, from one hope to the next
and everything is nothing but the dreams continue to push on.
As they sit around the room in states of not knowing and I wonder what is in there
and in a single moment of clarity she says. "It wasn't supposed to be like this." as she drifts
back into the trees and the river flows with never ending tears of those
left behind.*

Poem written by sangha member, Karen Bowmer,
after visiting her mother who has Alzheimer's.
Old Man River was playing on the sound system
at the nursing home.



arms against it but you don't believe it. I don't mean this as a strategy, but one sees. When you see it, awareness is curative. You see it and you ask yourself, how many years? Eventually you see if this wire touches that wire it throws sparks and it doesn't mean anything, it is just conditions, there is no religion in it, no self in it, it is just the past, just karma meeting karma, co-dependent disturbance.

Dai Tong Jisong Buddha is the one who everywhere and always has no self, sees through the fallacy of religion, the religion of personal self, of psychology, the self-theory of needs. Not that we don't have needs by our conditioning but that needs are somehow fixed and primary and that if we trace, if we look carefully, if we enter into we see that there is nothing even at the center of what appears to be a desperate need. We rely on absolutely nothing because Dai Tong Jisong is sitting right where you are on your cushion, just where you are.

What happens when we take up this kind of practice is the god of small self doesn't like it. The wizard doesn't like it and as you sit and build some energy and there is the possibility that you begin to crack open and see that one has been living by an amazing mistake, that most of how we live and how we behave and how we relate to one another is a mistake, the god of small self raises a storm that is almost impossible to tolerate. The god of small self mediates his or her disapproval through your emotional shame and regret, fear, anxiety and panic.

We face that. We have the courage to genuinely sit in

the face of it. That is what we take up in this practice and there is no greater gift to one another. If you see your friend deep in it really struggling, that struggle is for you. When your god of small self comes and raises the dust of shame, guilt, fear, anger, hurt, entitlement, raises it so that it is a cloud so thick and penetrates seemingly to the marrow of your bones, you sit upright in it and remember to step forward.

There is the fundamental shift of realizing that whatever you do you no longer do it for yourself. The very activity of your life is for others, is for all beings. The shift occurs when one realizes there is no meaning, no freedom. The name for that is intimacy and the label we put on that is love. And it is our natural way.

We take this up not as an intellectual game, not as an understanding but to be a true person of inquiry we take it up as life and death itself. To be on fire, to set oneself on fire, to take this up with a passion of life and death, that is our way. This practice is all in and if you feel up against it then you are doing it right. If you feel really desperate then you are doing it right; if you are pissed and you want to go home then you are really doing it right. If you haven't had the thought, what was I thinking in signing up for this then you are not doing it right.

You sit upright in the face of the god of small self who will continually in unbelievable ways try to undermine your clarity, and you are none other than Dai Tong Jisong.

Thanks for listening.

Upcoming Retreat Schedule

- Dec. 11-13** Introduction to Zen Retreat at Furnace Mountain. Led by Kosen Osho and Jigetsu Osho. Retreat begins Friday evening at 4:30 p.m. and ends Sunday at 1:00 p.m. Cost \$120
- December 31** New Year's Eve sitting. 7:30—midnight. Please call to register if you are interested in participating. (donation requested)
- Feb. 1– 28** Month Long Retreat. Beginning Monday, February 1st at 7:00 pm and ending Sunday, February 28th at 12:00 noon. You may come for all or part of the month. (\$60 per day, \$420 per week, \$700 for two weeks, \$1200 for the month.)
- March 11-14** Beginning 6:00 pm on Thursday, ending at noon Sunday. Cost \$180
- April 8-11** Beginning 6:00 pm on Thursday, ending at noon Sunday. Cost \$180

To register for retreats, send an email to furnacemt@aol.com or visit our website: www.furnacemountain.org



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