



Furnace Mountain

Newsletter

Spring 2010

The Mind of Not-Knowing

Dharma Talk by Zen Master Dae Gak
February Retreat 2010, Furnace Mountain

I thought we could look together at Case 49 from the **Book of Serenity**, *Dongshan Presents Offerings Before the Image*.

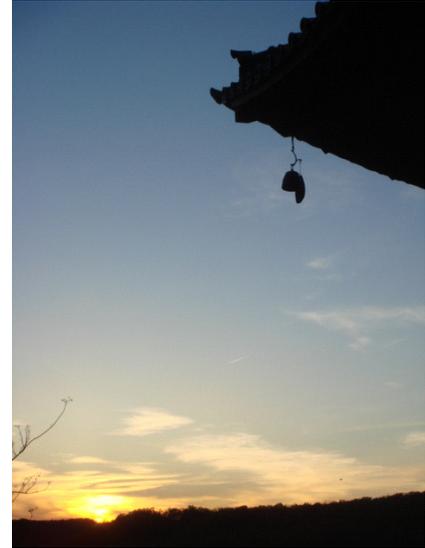
As Dongshan was presenting offerings before the image of Yunyan, he retold the story from before about depicting the reality. A monk came forward and said, “When Yunyan said ‘Just this is it,’ what did he mean?” Dongshan said, “At that time I nearly misunderstood my late teacher’s meaning.” The monk said, “Did Yunyan himself know it is or not?”

Dongshan said, “If he didn’t know it is, how could he be able to say this? If he did know it is, how could he be willing to say this?”

When Dongshan took leave of Yunyan, Dongshan asked, “After your death, if someone asks me to describe your reality, how shall I reply?” After a while Yunyan said, “Just this is it.” Dongshan sank into thought. Yunyan said, “You are in charge of this great matter, you must be thoroughgoing.” Dongshan left without saying anything more; later, as he was crossing a river he saw his reflection and then for the first time was thoroughly enlightened.

Zen started as Chan in China when Bodhidharma came from India to China to transmit the dharma. Bodhidharma was a dharma heir to the Buddha, a prince. If you look at the archetype of the character of Bodhidharma, whether he actually existed or not, he may have existed in some form that has been embellished, but nonetheless he represents an archetype, a symbol or metaphor that covers a wide understanding. Mother is an archetype, father is an archetype. Bodhidharma represents the archetype of unconventionality. He wore rags. He was a hobo. Likely he hitched a ride on a boat that was bringing spices from India to China, and got off looking very ragged, unlike the prince that he was. At that moment he met the emperor.

By that time Buddhism had become quite strong in China and the emperor had converted all of China to Buddhism and had built temples, monasteries and schools with Buddhist underpinnings. And probably word preceded Bodhidharma that some special emissary was coming. Bodhidharma got off the boat



New bells hang at the front of the temple

and the emperor was there to greet him. The emperor met this guy with a beard and long hair and blue eyes. Legends or koans or teachings like this are in fact a mandala of our own mind. So the story of Bodhidharma in its retelling and shaping represents a single mind, describes your mind, my mind.

We have aspects of mind that are iconoclastic like Bodhidharma, we have a sense of the unconventional as a path. We also have the mind of Emperor Wu who wants merit for what he has done. Emperor Wu approaches Bodhidharma and says, “You are the Buddhist guy. I’ve built temples and stupas, and schools and monasteries for Buddhism. What merit do I get?” Bodhidharma says, “No merit, clear like space.” This didn’t go well with the emperor who was used to having his way. If he said “kill that man” the guard would come and chop off the man’s head. That was the kind of power leaders had and continue to have in the sense of the dominant culture; cultures where one personality dominates many. Bodhidharma who does not live by dominant culture, did not bow down and ask for the emperor’s blessing, and didn’t come with gifts or great fanfare. He just said, “No merit, clear like space.”

The emperor looked at him and said, “Who are you?” From the mind mandala of the story this is our hwadu, this is what each of us is asking in this practice. This is the same question in different form that Dongshan asked Yunyan. Dongshan asked Yunyan, “When you die, what

should I tell people is your reality?" Yunyan paused for a long time and then replied, "Just this is it." Dongshan later realized his teacher's words and had some mind opening and wrote the following poem:

Just don't seek from others or you'll be far estranged
from Self
I now go on alone, everywhere I meet it.
It now is me, I am not it.
One must understand in this way to merge with
things just as they are.

So this very interaction between Dongshan and Yunyan was born from the interaction between Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu.

Emperor Wu represents our conventional, opinionated, assuming mind that we carry. Each of us carries a kind of righteousness with us, preserving a point of view, preserving a sense of self that is completely non-existent. There is no place in Zen practice whatsoever for anyone who is not willing to get off their point of view. This is the meeting between Emperor Wu and Bodhidharma. Emperor Wu is saying, "What do I get out of this?" Emperor Wu is in the exchange mode, this for that, which is where most of us live. We live in anger, resentment, sadness, defeat because the exchange is never fair. We are disappointed continually because the exchange is never fair. We never get back a good interest on our generosity. Even though raised in Christianity we are taught that generosity is like bread cast out upon the water; we throw out a loaf and we get a couple of pieces back. So we live in resentment of the fish who eat it.

To enter into the possibility of getting off one's point of view is the only practice in Zen; to get off of whatever one is holding. To let go of whatever one is holding is the only fundamental practice that we continually come up against. In our narcissism it is appalling that we believe that the world should go according to our values and that we are the measure of what is right and wrong. This was Emperor Wu: I've done something and I should get something back. It is not fair.

Growing up I had an older sister. She is two and half years older than me, so young enough to have overlapping interests and old enough that she got privileges before I did. My mother was always concerned about fairness; if one got something the other got something. Nothing is fair. One gets more than another. One gets more suffering than another. Into each life some suffering comes. Why does one who is good and kind and loving suffer with misfortunes of health, misfortunes of economy, misfortunes of relationship? The first step, the baby step toward realization is the baby step out of fairness, out of the practice of the commerce of doing this in order to get that. When one is willing and able and trusting enough to take this first step, then one steps forward into the possibility of genuine intimacy, genuine relationship, genuine friendship, genuine realization. But we don't. We hold back.

It has been said that we are willing to give up absolutely everything except for the belief that we can't come to full and total realization. We are willing to give up everything, our opinions,

our ideas, but the single thing we hold onto the longest is the belief that we are not capable of complete and total annutara samyak sambodhi. We believe that it is something that has been given or allowed to the ancients or to a special, elite group. We hold in our consciousness that it has to do with some kind of rigorous self-denial that we are incapable of. We believe that we are unworthy in some way. In that holding we lose sight of the fact that that belief is the barrier and not anything else. So we live in this realm of commerce, of fairness, of exchange; you do this and I'll do that. If we are in relationship it is I'll cook, you do the dishes, or I do the dishes this time, you do them next time. We go through our whole life measuring what is fair and what is not.

So Emperor Wu says to Bodhidharma, "Who are you?" It is likely he said it with some anger of "Don't talk to me like that, with this clear like space." And Bodhidharma answered, "Bu Shik." It means without knowing; not knowing. The legend is that he crossed the Yangtze river and entered a cave and practiced for nine years. This is a man who came from India, having fully attained awakening, having received transmission, so there was no reason for him to practice so intensely except that China was not ready to receive his teaching. So his practice was not for his own benefit, his own ease or accomplishment but for all of China and for that matter for all of time and all of us.

Emperor Wu went to his advisor and asked, "Who was that guy?" His advisor said that was Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, the very avatar of the Buddha himself. Emperor Wu said, "Oh my gosh, I made a mistake. I will send an emissary to go and bring him back." The advisor said, "Even if you send your entire army and all of your townspeople you can't bring Bodhidharma back." Humpty Dumpty.

This was a dialogue between Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu.

What we are reading today is a dialogue between Dongshan and Yunyan. Dongshan studied with Namchan for many years and had already received transmission as a Zen Master. Dongshan came to Yunyan with a kind of rawness, a kind of openness, a willingness to do whatever it takes to realize, to open. Most of us keep a toe out, keep something in reserve. Sometimes it is just the complaint. Dongshan came completely open and asked what should I tell people after you are dead, was your way. Yunyan said, "Just this."

This is exactly Bodhidharma's teaching to Emperor Wu. Bu shik, without knowing. It is exactly the same. It is the teaching that Buddha transmitted to Mahakasyapa when he held up a flower and no one understood but Mahakasyapa who smiled. In that flower holding and smile, two minds met and the dharma was transmitted. Mahakasyapa didn't say, "What's he up to, what's the gimmick, when is he going to talk?" He saw it. He saw the Buddha's boundless compassion. He realized the inseparability of self and

other. This is the same exact meeting that Dongshan and Yunyan had. Exactly the same. That is why we say transmission from mind to mind.

You can't get there carrying the luggage of your old mind. This is why when Yunyan said, "Just this is it," Dongshan said "At that time I nearly misunderstood my late teacher's meaning." What he is saying is that I was on the verge of thinking that I understood. I was on the verge of thinking that I had gotten what he meant. You know how a moment happens and something breaks open for you and immediately the mind rushes in and wants to interpret and categorize and understand it relative to the ten thousand things, relative to openings other's have had, relative to what you have read, relative to what you think others are experiencing. That is what Dongshan is saying. At that moment, that was the moment of awakening, that was the moment of transmission and I almost missed it by thinking that I understood it.

It takes enormous heart, a compassionate heart, to be willing not to know. To be willing not to know what is fair and what is not. To be willing not to know what is awakening and what is not, to not know what the meaning of life is, to not know absolutely anything. Because it is only from that mind that possibility arises. Suzuki Roshi is known for saying, "In the expert's mind the possibilities are few, in the beginner's mind they are boundless." There is no sprout of love or compassion or concern except from that mind.

From the mind that believes that he or she already understands or believes that he or she has accomplished something, there is only the possibility of a dominant culture, of better and worse, of "one has it and one doesn't." In the mind of conclusion and resolve there is no possibility of meeting in genuine friendship because one meets carrying opinions and assumptions. In the knowledge full mind there is no innocence and so there is no joy and no compassion.

But in the mind of not knowing all things are possible.

Thanks for listening.

Landscaping Appeal

Over the past few years many improvements have taken place at Furnace Mountain - remodeling the lodge, and upper cabin, building the bathhouse, new cushions and bells for the temple, and new tables, chairs and bowl sets for the dining room, to name just a few.

Now there is time and energy to invest in upgrading the landscaping, with emphasis around the teahouse and the new bathhouse. We are looking to purchase rhododendrons, azaleas and some small evergreens for these areas.

If you would like to contribute to this effort, please mail your contribution, marked "landscaping" to Furnace Mountain.



The dining room with new tables and chairs and bowl sets for four-bowl style meals.

suppose you worked most of the day

suppose you worked most of the day
breaking up sod with a pick ax
sinking the blade end
into wet grass and clay
lifting up and hearing
the root ends give way
over and over

afterwards you drove nails
into two by fours for a frame
until soreness finally overtook you

suppose you did this without a thought
that you were doing it

then at sunset a cardinal came
to the locust branch above your head
to check your work

what do you call that
when a cardinal is singing
and a dozen red worms wriggle
on broken sod and the air smells like dirt
and the sunset has purpled the clouds
and there's the solid wood
of a hammer handle still in your hand

J. Prasse
December 2009

Upcoming Retreat Schedule

- May 1– 8** Weeklong retreat at Furnace Mountain led by Zen Master Dae Gak. Beginning Saturday, May 1st at 6:00 pm and ending Saturday, May 8th at 12:00 noon. Cost \$420
- June 11-13** Introduction to Zen Retreat at Furnace Mountain. Beginning Friday evening at 4:30 p.m. and ending Sunday at 1:00 p.m. Cost \$120
- July 8-11** Retreat at Furnace Mountain led by Zen Master Dae Gak. Beginning Thursday evening at 6:00 p.m. and ending Sunday at 1:00 p.m. Cost \$180
- Aug. 5– 8** Retreat at Furnace Mountain led by Zen Master Dae Gak. Beginning Thursday evening at 6:00 p.m. and ending Sunday at 1:00 p.m. Cost \$180
- Sept. 9-12** Retreat at Furnace Mountain led by Zen Master Dae Gak. Beginning Thursday evening at 6:00 p.m. and ending Sunday at 1:00 p.m. Cost \$180
- Oct. 9-16** Weeklong retreat at Furnace Mountain led by Zen Master Dae Gak. Beginning Saturday, Oct. 9th at 6:00 pm and ending Saturday, Oct. 16th at 12:00 noon. Cost \$420
- Nov. 11-14** Retreat at Furnace Mountain led by Zen Master Dae Gak. Beginning Thursday evening at 6:00 p.m. and ending Sunday at 1:00 p.m. Cost \$180
- Dec. 10– 12** Introduction to Zen Retreat at Furnace Mountain. Beginning Friday evening at 4:30 p.m. and ending Sunday at 1:00 p.m. Cost \$120

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

Lee Adjustment Center Sangha

The Lee Adjustment Center is a medium-security prison in Beattyville, KY, about a 40 minute drive east of Furnace Mountain. For about a year now, I have been sitting once a month with a zen group within the prison, 10 or so men who come together every Saturday to practice meditation. We sit for 2 hours on a Saturday afternoon in the prison chapel, a windowless room with strip lights and a concrete floor. Most of the men in the group are serving long sentences, and I have

been startled and moved by the seriousness and dedication of their practice. They have almost no access to resources at all, so I'd like to ask the broader Furnace Mountain sangha for support: if you have anything you can donate to the group, it will be truly appreciated. In particular, they need buckwheat-filled zafus, meditation benches, dharma books, CDs and DVDs. If you think you can help in any way, please let me know. Thank you. Kosen.



Furnace Mountain
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