



Furnace Mountain

Newsletter

Summer 2010

Realization in the Body

Dharma Talk by Zen Master Dae Gak
March 2010, Furnace Mountain

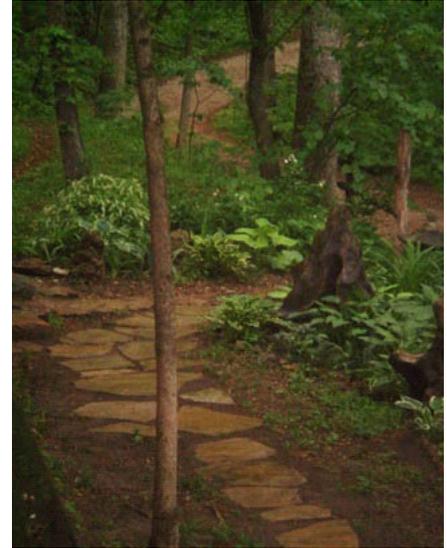
Luoshan asked Yantou, “When arising and vanishing go on unceasingly, what then?”

Yantou gave a shout and said, “Whose arising and vanishing is it?”

This is the last day of our March retreat. It seems short when you have sat for twenty-eight days, it seems long when you haven’t done a retreat in a long while. Is it long or is it short? In another koan Yantao said, “Just this is it.”

Entering back into one’s life is most difficult. Entering back into the marketplace, into your homes and your jobs and your life of schedules, demands and emotional complications, how does one carry the practice forward? Is there a way and is there a value to living some Buddhist practice as the activity of one’s daily life. Always it is said in Zen, chopping wood, carrying water. Zen is no more than chopping wood and carrying water. But really Zen is one more step beyond chopping wood and carrying water. It is chopping wood for your friend and carrying water to your enemy. It is taking care of and helping all beings.

The activity of taking care and helping is to move in the world in a way, to find in one’s own heart as a way of moving, the way of generosity. The way of generosity is quite opposite to how we have been educated, and quite opposite to how the world that we will go back into works. The way of generosity is to live a life that benefits others. It doesn’t mean to live a life that meets the demands of others because others will demand all kinds of things from you that may or may not be possible or even in either of your best interest. Based on our previous experience, our own inner education, we may have all of the aspects of care-taker or martyr or an obsessive need for order or a flagrant disregard for order, that come to bear on what we do.



Walkway in front of the teahouse

Our practice is to raise the question, the doubt, the inquiry, is it possible to live each moment in spite of what arises and falls away, in spite of what comes into the heart as fear and panic, what comes into the heart as disapproval and judgment. Because all of those evaluations are conditioned, learned, products of culture, family, early experience; all subtle processes that we believe are reality but simply the weaving of our own net of history.

So the inquiry that we take up, not only to be able to sit quietly in stillness for half an hour, an hour, two hours, five hours, a day, but to actually take into every encounter is the practice of asking, “What is this?” It is to be enlightened by the sky is blue, the tree is green. It is to be continually brought into realization; to be in effect, the activity of realization itself, seeing the pebbles, walking on the straw, hearing the jet, feeling the damp, cold air, feeling sorrow at someone’s suffering, feeling joy at having found a new friend, feeling grateful for each breath, feeling appreciative for each step, no matter how the body feels and the body feels all kinds of things based on its biochemical moment, its biochemical surges, sometimes it feels good sometimes it feels bad.

When sitting there is a moment when the legs hurt, when the bones hurt, like a knife cutting through the skin. One wants to jump up and get out. One has absolutely no ability to tolerate another moment. And then there is a shift, perhaps even within that sitting and there is a beta-endorphin release and there is a sense of well-being, a sense of being able to sit in perpetuity, and a sense that one could just go on sitting in retreat forever. Then the surge of fear and anxiety comes back and one imagines what is going to happen and how am I going to support myself and where will the next dollar come from, and all of the things that are ordinary in our life that we make primary. Then one comes back to the breath, to the moment, to the realization that this moment is the only moment, that this breath is the only breath that this life is one's only life and that these friendships that one forms are the entirety of sangha.

In the activity of friendship, which is sangha, one is fully supported by the spiritual practice of each other. That means not to take refuge in the other but to take refuge in the dharma itself. What the dharma is, or how one takes refuge in the dharma is that the dharma is none other than your very life itself, the very activity of your life itself. Getting up in the morning, one of the things that you have to do when you get up in the morning, if you sleep in a bed, is that you have to turn and put your feet on the ground. This is called morning kensho; feet on the ground kensho. If you had only one foot and a stub, you would appreciate having two feet. But we take it for granted. To be able to get up, turn in the bed, and put feet on the ground. The activity of the dharma itself which is appreciation is just that; getting in the car and driving to work or getting on the subway or the bus or getting on the airplane or however one gets to work. The activity itself is the activity of the dharma. There is no place that you could find yourself, no circumstance in which you could find yourself, no activity that you are doing that isn't the activity of the dharma.

To raise the famous metaphor, Hakuin says it is like in your hand you hold ten pieces of gold and it is your entire life savings and you are in the busy marketplace and the pathway is dusty and there are people coming and going and a lot of hustle and bustle. You drop the ten pieces. What do you do? You drop to your knees and search with all your might and intensity. This is the practice of the dharma. To realize and take up as practitioners, to have a hint of the primacy of dharma, not the exclusiveness of we are right and they are wrong but the very texture and immediacy of being in the practice of the Buddha-way. It is a kind of certainty, not a doctrine or dogma or belief in, but a certainty in the order

of being itself, which is the only place of freedom. The only place of refuge is in the realization of cause and effect itself. Everything comes into existence because of antecedents, everything goes out of existence because of antecedents. Cause and effect are our life. Samsara is nirvana, nirvana is samsara. There is not a place to get away from, there are not two. That means that every activity of your life is the activity of the dharma. Everything you do whether you are cooking a meal, driving a car, saying goodbye to a friend, saying hello to a friend, everything is the unfolding of this great life of the Buddha. If we know that it is to awaken to that.

If we know that, how careful we would be. The metaphor is like carrying eyes that need to be transplanted. In your hand you have two eyes, delicate and precious, that will give someone sight. If we remember that, everything we do we do as the light itself. Just as if we remember that every word we say is sharing breath, is so intimate that it is actually sharing breath with the other, how careful we would be in what we say. When we are not careful it is because we have forgotten. It is not because we are evil or bad or stupid or wrong or violent or all the condemnations we make of oneself and the other. It is just that we have forgotten.

We wonder why do we practice, why do this? I have a good life, I'm comfortable. I don't make too much trouble for other people. I try to be kind. I do my meditation; try to be sincere. Why bear down? Why dig deeper than that? Isn't it okay? I feel better. I'm happy so then the whole world is happy. Isn't this the best?

But if we dig deeply enough, if we scratch the surface of our own consciousness deeply enough, we know the only route to saving the world is realization in the body of the one who is reading these words. There is no doing anything about. What allows prejudice free relationship is realization in this very body. The activity of practice is to be that and the being that is being the entire world and it can't be touched by the linear mind that says how can that happen and what about all the crime and evil and child abuse and slavery, etc. That is the mind of utopian hope, which still believes in self versus other. To touch what is below that is the only refuge possible and it is our birthright. It doesn't come to you because you were born into a particular culture, class, race, gender, intelligence, alert sensitive capacity; it is everyone's birthright as a human be-

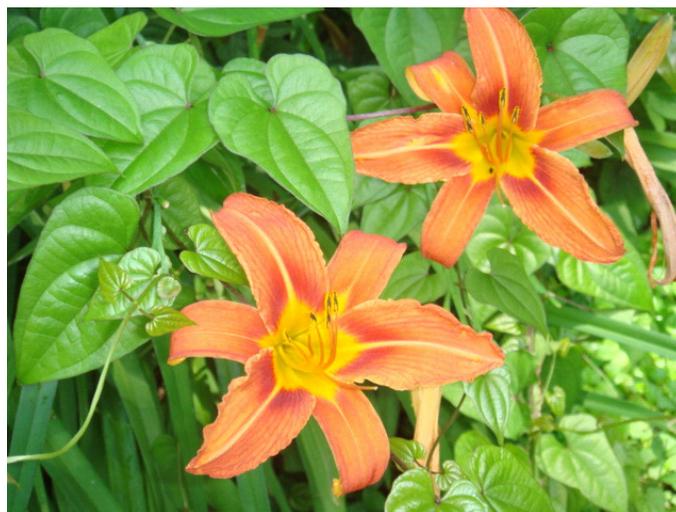
ing. It doesn't come to us through great effort. Who could control a mind that has no substance? Where would you put it in a consciousness that has no place? What could you do to bring it about when at its core there is no time? It is not dependent upon any belief whatsoever, you can call it any name you want and it doesn't matter. It doesn't depend on any belonging whatsoever, belonging to this group versus that group, doing these sets of rituals versus those sets of rituals. It doesn't depend on any agreement. It doesn't depend on any likeability and it doesn't depend on any feeling state that we could have. It is not dependent on anything. It doesn't arise, it doesn't cease and it cannot be brought about. It is our birthright and it is the birthright of everything that comes into existence. That which is born can awaken.

So we go back into our lives of extended sangha, back into our lives of meeting Avalokiteshvara in her various ferocious states. We go back into meeting the teachings of the Buddha in the most unacceptable ways. We go back remembering that this mind, this moment, this breath, this word is the entirety of it. So we take absolute precious care. When we forget we remind ourselves. When we get off balance or lose our way or get paranoid or get mean or whatever we do we always have the capacity to come back. The moment is always waiting. Just as your karma is always waiting, so is your enlightened mind.

Thanks for listening.



Furnace Mountain Gardens



The paranirvana woodland garden



View facing out from the paranirvana garden

Upcoming Retreat Schedule

- 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

From a Member of the Lee Adjustment Center Sangha

I cannot imagine how it would be possible to commit a crime without egocentric thought, and I can not imagine how it would be possible to cut through egocentricity without the practice of meditation.

I have been in prison without pause since 1985. I began practicing Zen in 1999 while in prison in St. Albans, Vermont. I had been involved in Alcoholics Anonymous in prison for a few years, and, as part of that program, I had sought to add a spiritual aspect to my life....

....there was a formidable Zen group established at the St. Albans Prison. The inmates met every morning to meditate as a group and a few people from the Vermont Zen Center's Sangha came up to the facility once a week to sit with us. The teacher, Sensei Sunyana, came up once a month to meditate with us, give talks, lead discussions or meet one on one with the participants.

Unfortunately, in 2001, Vermont's Department of Corrections began sending many of its inmates to facilities outside of Vermont. The Zen group at St. Albans was broken up, and the members were sent to various places. I was sent to a Minnesota prison where I continued to correspond with Sen-

sei Sunyana and some of the Vermont Zen Center's Sangha members. In Minnesota I was able to continue meditating with a small group that a number of Asian inmates had established there. Some of the St. Albans Zen group members ended up in the Beattyville, Kentucky Prison facility. Two of them started a group with the help of Jack, a Buddhist practitioner who lives in Kentucky and was willing to travel great distances and traverse the red tape of entering the prison complex to sit with them.

Later, Kosen Osho and a few others from the Furnace Mountain Zen Center began coming into the prison and some people donated zafus, zabutons and benches. Contact with Zen practitioners from outside of the prison environment lends us direction and helps us reach a more steadfast practice. In addition, it is healthy for us to experience interaction with a community and individuals not associated with incarceration—in prison, we are persistently living under the label of “offender” and relentlessly viewed and treated as less than human. Interactions with civilians who own a different perspective and view us as human beings is a welcome respite and just may, in the end, be what keeps us all sane.... The help of (these) people continues to give us structure and encouragement and hope. It keeps us on a path away from egocentricity, a path away from our criminal pasts.



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