

Zen Master (Bowman) Bomun

Teisho #2 on

Jizo's Intimacy of 'Not Knowing'

Case 20, from the *Shōyō Roku*, or *The Book of Equanimity*, "Jizo's 'Not Knowing is the Most Intimate:'"¹

Preface to the assembly:

A profound talk of entering the Principle derides the three and rends the four. The broad way of Choan runs seven vertically and eight horizontally. Suddenly opening your mouth to speak decisively, and lifting your foot to tread firmly, you should hang up your traveling bag and bowl and break your staff. Tell me, who is such a person?

The main case:

Attention! Master Jizo asked Hogen, "Where have you come from?" "I pilgrimage aimlessly," replied Hogen. "What is the matter of your pilgrimage?" asked Jizo. "I don't know," replied Hogen. "Not knowing is the most intimate," remarked Jizo. At that, Hogen experienced great enlightenment.

The appreciatory verse:

Right now, investigation replete, it's the same as before.

Utterly free from minute obstacles, one comes to not know.

Short's short, long's long. Cease pruning and grafting.

According with high, according with low, each is even and content.

A family's manner of abundance or thrift is used freely according to circumstances.

Fields and lands excellent, sportive one's feet go where they will.

The matter of thirty years' pilgrimage, a clear transgression against one's pair of eyebrows.

¹ "The translation cited is from "The Book of Equanimity, Illuminating classic Zen koans," by Gerry Shishin Wick, Wisdom Publications.

Already, the second day. We're nicely into the second day of our *sesshin*, our training period. The atmosphere is growing in depth and clarity and energy. I would say that our ship is being launched, slipping its moorings quite nicely.

It's a great pleasure to sit with old friends. What a wonderful thing it is! Isn't it? We go our ways, off on all these pilgrimages, all of these journeys into our lives, and then we come back to this home of homes, this heartland place of practice, and investigate, and reinvestigate.

And, if we're in a difficult, broken place, we are supported to be a person of thusness. A person of thusness is one who is *just like this*. Here in the zendo -- wherever we may be traveling -- we are supported by each other and by our teachers, the people who have gone before us. We practice vigorously and wholeheartedly, plowing this empty field for those who will follow in this way of Zen practice.

I feel enormously grateful this morning to have so many wonderful friends and to have all these different instruments playing in this one band, and to hear the tunes -- the violin and the flute and the saxophone -- everybody's presenting so wonderfully in the space.

And certainly as we go deeper into the practice, into this dimensionless place of practice, we hopefully perforate the shell of our "I am" self and let in a little light and perhaps some more spaciousness.

And we also feel the wonderful way in which everyone here attends, loves, and pays attention. And, hopefully, we are silently and intimately and quietly informed by each other in that way. For me, that's the most joyous and wonderful thing -- to be helped along the way. To have some sense of what it is that's really most important in this life, to honor and cultivate and enact -- since it's quite a difficult thing being a human being.

I'd say it's quite a difficult thing being *me*. I'm sure you at times feel the same way. That you've been dealt a hand of cards that you might not have wanted to be dealt. Things don't seem to always turn out the way we planned or think. Nevertheless that's our hand. And we, as Zen students need to learn how to find some composure in it and to play it well.

As it says in the koan, whether you come from a rich house or a poor house, or whatever house you come from, we are given by the universe, or by God, or whatever words you feel comfortable with using, a certain karma. And that karma is what we have to work with and enact.

I'm feeling very grateful -- since I sometimes feel a bit overwhelmed by my own stubbornness and blockheadedness, as I'm sure you do too -- grateful to have good friends to help me and inform me. Doing what I love and what's most important -- that's a pretty great thing.

So that's what I'm feeling quite deeply this morning. Certainly, as I walk out in the gardens. I do the turtle walk outside, you know. Really slow it down. Slow it down. And go on the forward edge of slower, slower, slower, slower – until I perhaps from the outside, look like I am not walking or breathing. But from the inside, it's quite lively and intense.

But this morning I went off on a zoom walk, a power walk. You know, striding off, firm stride. A power walk. Which was quite wonderful, walking fast through these grounds, through this brightness and the fallen leaves and the cool fall air.

And, boy, talk about being supported by sanga relations! My goodness! Everywhere I'd look and smell and touch and breathe I just ... the presentation's everywhere!

When you have moments like that and realize how you are, how each breath is totally supported by all of these myriad things, you can't help but feel grateful, and you can't help but be determined to enact, to make your own presentation of your own brightness and your own love, to manifest this one true nature, which is so obviously ... well, sometimes it's not so obvious is it? But it's manifesting everywhere we look.

Feeling This Morning

That's how I'm feeling this morning.

Sometimes it's easy to get lost in these feelings. In discussing the jhana practices the Buddha said that while it's important to be absorbed in your practice, in the absorption of the entry into a non-dual world, while joy and happiness and rapture are important and certainly wonderful fuel, it's also important not to get lost in it, to march on with some equanimity and determination to let it go; and go deeper, move more deeply into the practice.

I trust that as we unpack the koan, this wonderful koan that is starting to come alive, we'll see many wonderful entry points in the koan. In the so-called Soto tradition, koan are often examined in quite minute detail, line by line. In the Rinzai tradition, it's often more the spirit of the koan, the liveliness, the energy of the koan, and the doubt that's raised, that is emphasized.

I have been appreciating David's presentation from last night. Especially our walkabout [kinhin] we did last night when we were doing the walking meditation. And I was reflecting on where David comes from. David's a Zen teacher and a life coach, but he comes from an arty background, improvisational dance and pottery, and all of those kinds of things. Last night he was talking about this improvisational theater that he was part of, and of course that's Zen, pure Zen. It's all improvisational theater.

And life is for human beings. Anyway, we have a little bit more room for creative play, I think, or I imagine we do, than perhaps an oak tree or a cat or a mustard green.

They are quite steady in their enactment, a plant, a carrot ... “Get a carrot, not a Brussels sprout!” Remember that song? “That’s why I like vegetables. You know what they’re about.”

But humans, they’re a little bit more complex. Sometimes it’s hard to figure out what we’re about.

What David was saying last night really caught my attention. It was a turning word for me. You know, when you catch a turning word? Something that penetrates your carcass, or your shell, or this sack of skin that we imagine we’re living inside. Something pierces it, and that usually has a certain shelf life, before it closes over. And then you start over. I got pretty good shelf life off of that walkabout.

David said the improvisational theater exercise was to have the whole group as one walking without – if I got it right – without trying to plan where you were going to go, or trying to control where to go. Just to step into space, into spaciousness, rather than away from collision. It’s quite a challenge.

To not have something that’s holding and directing and telling you where you ought to go – you might go *here* to discover *that*, or you might go *there* to discover *this* – stepping into that place of letting your feet take you into some new realm. Of course, there’s the awkwardness and the self-consciousness. But my feet took me into some new realms.

When I was in Cambridge some years ago I studied Gestalt therapy and did this tour of duty as a so-called contemplative therapist. My Gestalt therapist had me do things like that. When I walked back from his office, back to the zendo where I was living, he’d say, “Don’t walk back home the way you usually walk. Walk some other way. Completely some other way home. A roundabout way. Down *this* alley. Stopping at *that* backyard.”

I was quite touched by it. And also touched by and always shocked by how tenacious my “I am” self is and its determination to control everything – to criticize and to talk about, and to evaluate, and to judge, judge, judge endlessly.

You know, it’s sometimes overwhelming and kind of discouraging when you really get deep into this practice and see how much we are in the grip of our conditioning and what a problem it makes.

Must be something good about it – the ego. Since we have one. And one of the things that inspire me about the determination of my ego is that it is – against all odds – determined. Against all odds it marches on relentlessly doing its thing.

And I often think that if I had that relentlessness and determination, and the intention, and the direction – imagine hitching that to my deeper intention to pay attention, or to be with things, or to love and grow and understand. *That* would serve me wonderfully well!

Anyway, back to the koan. We might ask ourselves, what is our intention on this pilgrimage? Of course, there’s the pilgrimage of our life – but *this* pilgrimage of *this* piece of life.

Of course, *this* piece of life contains our whole life in microcosm, as we sit here. But what is your intention in being here? This question and enquiry, and this sense of direction you're setting sail with, is an enormous study in the Buddhist tradition.

A Right Intention

A right intention, as the Buddha said, is the entryway into practice. There's investigation, purpose, and direction in setting our intention – in setting sail in service of, and in manifestation of, what it is that is most important to you.

Of course, it's not an article or a fixed thing. But definitely there is an aroma. There is an aliveness and a spaciousness to the way in which your karma allows you to experience what's most important, most valuable we could say, most true in your life.

That's the entry point into this koan. We are all of the people in the koan. We are both Jizo and Hogen. You are your own teacher, your own guru. And you are also the recalcitrant student, the difficult, stubborn, student.

So we ask ourselves, as Jizo asked Hogen, "Where are you going? What is your intention?"

A wonderful, wonderful question to ask ourselves, to contemplate on, think deeply on -- not just sit quietly with. Although that's important, I think, also.

It's important to actually practice during the retreat this contemplation, this deep quiet thinking on the matter.

We don't make a villain out of thought. I mean, thought is a big problem, isn't it? But I don't want to make a villain out of it.

So what is your intention? What is it that's most important? What has this whiff, or aroma of what is alive, or true, or important for you?

How to use this time really well?

Because we have such support here. We have a lot of big oars in the water. There are a lot of people here who count up years that we've been practicing together. A lot of you guys I've known for almost 30 years now. And we all have been having at it each in our way on pilgrimage for many years.

There's 10 or 15 of us staying daily and reinforcements come and go. But they come. And so we add up the combined number of years of practice and it's quite a thing. So we have this opportunity. There are a lot of oars in the water.

I suppose for you it often doesn't feel like it's anything special, or you're just doing the best you can against rather insurmountable odds and so forth. And actually I suppose it's

good that it feels that way. I feel that way too sometimes – so profoundly humbled by the practice and not wanting to open my mouth and make some kind of proclamation about it.

The other side of it is when I see people I haven't seen in a while, or dharma friends who come in after many years of life, you know, rubbing the rough edges off themselves a little bit, rubbing the rough edges off of all of us.

Each of us in our own way has been really trying to work at being ourselves. You know, pruning away the unnecessary stuff and not trying to graft on too much. Trying as the years go by to live authentically.

Then I look and I see the lines in your face, as I see the lines in my face. And the grey hair. And the teeth that are a little longer. For those of us who are at that stage of life, it's quite a beautiful thing, quite a lovely thing, and an inspiring thing.

What is most important is what is your intention? What is it that is necessary now, as we sit, to go deeply into? What's most important to you? Can you prune away all the crap that's not? Especially at this time?

What is it that's not necessary to think about? And what is necessary to you to know, to follow, to cultivate, and to pursue? To, you know, fixate on.

So, both sides. What is it that's necessary? There are these two sides, these different aspects to necessity.

What comes to mind now is how I started out sort of more on the side of fulfillment -- the brightness and the goodness and the joy and the gratitude and rapture that I feel being with old friends. And the tremendous respect for everyone, you know, working at being a human being.

There's the fulfillment piece, the fullness of it. And the brightness of it. And there's the participation in losses – the other side of human life. Our active participation in loss is a lightness of letting go. Participating in heartbreak, or loss, or whatever it may be. Half of our life is that, isn't it?

As human beings, we progressively enact the practice of manifesting the one who disappears. Just like this. Disappears back to where she came from. We get to manifest coming forward and expressing as best we can, as humbly, as awkwardly, as falteringly as we can, our truth, our one true nature.

We learn and are informed and are driven back to the cushion in those presentations. At least I am. You know, I get enthusiastic and run out to do it, and then I'm ultimately humbled.

We also participate in the other side – the side of having it taken away from us and having it dissolve in front of us. Of having it not turn out the way we wanted.

‘Necessity’ in Zen

The teaching in Zen about these two acts of appearance and disappearance is that they are both opportunities for tremendous learning and growth in love and understanding.

The teaching in Zen is that we are willing to participate in the brightness of it all, the goodness and the beauty, and receive that as a challenge for us and for the other. Or, maybe we feel too unworthy to feel the beauty and the love and all of that. Each side has its own learning and challenges.

On the other side is the letting go – the necessity of letting go, right? The necessity of melting down, stepping aside, and making room for another as a way of growing in love and understanding.

Always when we talk about necessity in Zen we're talking about two things happening at once. We get stuck, always. I get stuck -- I'm sure it's the same for you – on one side or the other. When I get stuck on the side of emotional necessity, or the impulse of necessity, I can get stuck on the side of righteousness.

You know, "Don't you say that to me!" Or, "It's just necessary now that I..." You know, a sense of necessity that is made up by thought. And within that necessity is *big* necessity.

It's very hard, isn't it? I mean, the fundamental teaching in Zen is that we are determined in our zazen, especially while we're here, to sit upright in the center of our experience as the way of enlightenment, as the way of practice-realization.

So, we practice trying to participate in, or to be intimate with, the lightness of the moment as the enlightened way. And our realization comes in from that practice, from both sides.

As we all do, I get lost in the particles and lost in space – if we use particle and space as metaphor. We could use waves and the ocean. I could use ocean water or some sense of the bigness of it all – a larger picture.

So whenever we examine things in Zen, there's always this. We are always playing at looking at relative and absolute, absolute and relative. Or if you (don't) like, big and small, big mind and little mind ... big mind in its particular expression.

And generally speaking, if you're like me you get caught in the particles and lose the bigness of it. Or I get caught in the particular-ness of the experience and lose its vast quality, or its timeless quality, or its interconnected quality, or its big meaning.

Maybe that would be a way of talking about practice-realization, or presence, or presence-*ing* – which is sort of what we work with in ourselves and with others.

All of it is aspects of appreciating, presence-*ing*. You know, the presence-*ing* of an oak tree or the presenc-*ing* of the cat as it scratches at the door and all that goes on inside

when we hear that.

So I think in koan study, which is self-study, and self-study is life-study, and life-study is aliveness-study, and aliveness-study comes in the form of rocks and trees and plants and everything we see – that's our self-fulfilling samadhi. There's the self-encountering itself in the form of itself, growing in love and understanding the more deeply and more intimately it's willing to have that encounter.

That's why shikantaza practice and koan study are really the same thing. What is the intention of your practice?

We enter into this koan. Jizo presented it. It was not an idea, you know. It was straight, "Don't know." He was manifesting his heart when he said, "I don't know."

There's an expression, "When you taste blood, you go for the kill." He tasted blood, but this is not a kill in the sense of killing. He tasted truth and he supported it and honored it and reflected it, and it became bigger and bigger.

That truth of Hogan's -- he leaned into his friend and saw his friend. He lent his energy and aliveness and attention to it. And what was already quite vast and unimpeded and filled with love and possibility became even larger.

Isn't that the way of it? Wherever we are -- we all want to experience thusness. Then be a person of thusness and be so completely.

But this necessity -- what is it that is truly necessary for you on this pilgrimage here?

Is it necessary for you to entertain idle thoughts and fantasies about what you're going to do when it's over? I don't mean this in a scolding or judgmental way. This is inquiry. I'm speaking to myself as well. Is it necessary? Is it really necessary?

The New Age people say (it really grates on me, but it also captures me) "into-me-see." There is something quite right-on about "into-me-see," as corny as it is.

When we look into this practice then, when we look at what it is that is necessary I go down the relationship side of intimacy.

Inquiring into This

I think of the relationships of my life. I think of men and women, relationships over the years, these sort of serial monogamies, and not so monogamous and not so serial -- all of that. There is something that happens -- and of course this is a metaphor for our practice about necessity. There is conflict that arises. Certainly inside of myself, there is, often times, great conflict.

And certainly conflict and difficulty with getting along with other people, especially in committed relationships – as with the self you can't get away from -- or a beloved one or someone you choose to work it out with.

Something inevitably comes up in the inquiry and in the life. As it does on the cushion. Which has to do with necessity. And there is this place in the heart – this is on the side of the letting go practice or the willingness to enter into letting go – the fiery heart of that impulse of "I won't do it, " you know? "I just won't. This is the bottom line." And, you know, "You do that and I'm out of here."

I think the person who has taught me most about that in my life is my teacher, Sasaki Roshi. I often feel I go to him and I just can't do any more. I just can't do any more. I'm at my wit's end. Or, he'll say something that so catches me, or breaks my heart in some way.

And I'll say, "No, that's it." And always, it's not. The necessity is not what I think it is. And always that necessity comes up, that incredible place where you think it's necessary to believe your thoughts. And then there is a great impulse. And then usually, you're kind of acting out. And war reparations and all the stuff that goes on.

So we are in our practice, looking at intentionality and necessity. We are questioning, inquiring into this place of necessity and trying to discover for ourselves the necessity that's inside the necessity. The little necessity says, "You must do this, and if you don't do it, all is lost."

And the fight begins, and the walls are built and the line is drawn and the stones are thrown over it and the nations go to war. We fight with ourselves and we fight with others, because if it's like this, I'm out of here. You know what I mean.

So that too, is a place of great investigation of Zen practice. And here in the zendo when it rises up, the necessity, I really want to encourage each one of us to investigate that place where you feel like it's necessary to act out. And really look into what is it that is really necessary.

You know, a thought is a weird thing because it makes stuff up and then pretends it didn't have anything to do with it -- makes up wild concoctions and then, when the impulse arises and the feelings around the belief systems that we have arise, we start to hiss and foam at the mouth, and do all the things that we do.

Thought quietly steps aside and says, "Shit, I had nothing to do with it. I don't know what the hell is going on here." As though thought did not create the whole situation. As though thought didn't create the problem.

And again, I'm not down on thought in any way. And I think deep contemplative thinking is very, very much a part of Zen practice. But this is another issue.

It's a Thought

I've been quite interested lately in this. On the mountain where I live there's a Buddhist community and a lot of "K"-heads on the mountain, Krishnamurti people, people who study "K." So I've listened to a lot of his talks. And I've been reading David Bohm, this physicist's work, with great interest.

He is in his own way, quite a fierce yogi. He was a thinking yogi. Examining the origin of thought, looking into the womb of "not knowing," this fiery womb of creation. He was trying to see if he could experience where thought emerges from and where it disappears to. Not just the thinking process, but to see where it comes from. How it does its thing and what it disappears into. Not from an intellectual perspective, but from the perspective of pure presence.

And of course, presence can know its manifestation in any form, if it's bright enough and clear enough.

Both Bohm and Krishnamurti seemed to practice ... they wouldn't call it Zen. We say Zen. But I want to get them in our clan, so I say they're really pure Zen practitioners.

They were practitioners of attention and awareness and really went at it and really tried to not black out. They tried to see what the nature of human consciousness is really about. And they hung in there. And looked. And rubbed. And scorched. And polished. And stayed with it.

He tells the story of a woman in his sangha who had a stroke in the course of a practice period that they were in, or some sort of period of dialogue or investigation. And they went in to see her in the morning and she was beating herself up. Having a fight with herself. We all can relate to that, can't we? Really kicking butt, you know, with her fists. You know, really hammering herself.

She had lost proprioception of thought of her body. So she did not know, she couldn't tell what her body was doing, and where it was coming from. She would hit herself and she couldn't tell where it was coming from because she had had a stroke. She had no sense that she was doing it to herself.

Of course it is possible to have proprioception of thought, but it's very challenging. In other words, it's possible to have bodily sensation, or awareness, embodied sensation or awareness of thought emerging, so that you know that you're thinking. And you know that the thinking creates a reality. And the reality creates a set of impulses and feelings. The intention is to be with the brightness of awareness. And you can see, "Oh, this is a thought. It's a thought. Right? Right."

A thought pretends that it's reality. And then we can't tell the difference between concept and reality. And so it goes. It's a huge problem in human life. And actually we're completely destroying the planet over this piece of necessity that has no self-nature.

I don't mean this in a small way or a judgmental way as though I don't do this all the time

as well. I do. And you do. It's very poignant. But at least as dharma students and Zen students we see, or we start to see into this, that the necessity is not what we think it is.

And within the necessity is a greater necessity. And *that* necessity is what we would say is the space of the unconditioned, or the space of the intimacy of not knowing, where all things are resolved. All things are resolved. All things are resolved. All things are resolved.

In practice we're trying to discover through our love, our willingness – not in an idealistic way, but in a very down home, humble way and with the determination of our wonderful, bright, open-hearted awareness and steadfast one-pointedness of mind – that the content of experience is something unspeakably big, wise and loving.

And that any experience – this is koan study and shikantaza study, as David was saying – is completely open to that investigation if you hang with yourself. Completely, of course.

And then the necessity comes up that says, “Well, it's not necessary to do this. What's necessary is for you to follow my thinking about it.” And then we veer off into that, and then farther away. And the pilgrimage goes in these endless loops around the stupa of the self as my dear old friend Neal says.

Loops around. Endless circumambulations around this.

The wonderful thing about those endless circumambulations around the stupa of yourself is that there is a necessity in those endless circumambulations. And we get closer and we wind in and we get closer and closer. Don't we? We get closer and closer. And then we go into the vortex of the blank spots where we are really strongly conditioned. Then phhhiitt! We're spit out. And then we start over again. The same place.

Damn! Just when you were getting close, you know, this phase out! And then you're phhhiitt! spit out again. Well, try again. And then you get close and then you get phhhiitt! spit out again. And in order to get closer to the circumambulation, to the necessity within the necessity of, you know, that *thing*, you've got to really practice hard, vigorously, wonderfully. You have to commit to it.

I don't mean this as “should,” “must,” “ought” – but out of necessity. Because you know what is important. And you know it's going to be a mess because the reactive cycles and the negativity will take you over and you will make a mess. And there will be war reparations and you'll spend your life shoveling shit and cleaning up after it.

So here we are. Back to the necessity. Very, very humbling. And also wonderful!

My wish for us all is that we go ever deeper into the matter. And refresh and re-invigorate ourselves; and be determined; and support each other in this work.

Because the world needs you so badly.

Right?

