

## On The Intimacy of Not-knowing

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

*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.*

First, I'd like to say that the importance of this kind of talk is that you do it with me. I am not lecturing. I don't know anything that you don't know. I'm not imparting information. I'm inquiring into the nature of my life and your life. And, if as I speak you inquire as I inquire -- from the perspective of our life experience -- then we will together create a place of inquiry. Your inquiry will call out of me what I love most -- and that's the dharma. This is a group kind of practice. But it's not about learning something. It's not about getting information, or learning how to meditate, or anything like that. It's really about inquiry. So that's my encouragement.

Sometimes reading a koan is a bit daunting. The appreciative verse and preface often include words that in the Zen tradition are called "hidden words." Without some background about the meaning of these words it's hard to grasp some of the details of the koan. But the main body of this koan is pretty simple and wonderfully straightforward.

In the Zen tradition, a major part of our practice is the study of koan. The Chinese characters for koan literally mean "the study of the truth-happening-place." The understanding is that the truth-happening-place is the place where we encounter our lives -- this present moment. There is no other place to encounter reality, or truth, than the present tense, in this moment. The study of koan is the study of being with, or being present to, or being intimate with, the aliveness of the present tense. That's the meaning of "koan." This is the foundation principle in Dharma practice.

Whether you're a Theravadin practitioner, or a Tantric Tibetan practitioner, or a Zen practitioner -- truth is encountered in the present tense in this moment.

What we encounter is the aliveness of it, the truthfulness of it, not the thought about it. As it so wonderfully says in the koan, profound talk doesn't help much. It's a great challenge for us to be clear that our cognition and our realization are different things. Our thinking about something and the reality of it are such that it's hard to know the difference. The study of koan, or the study of self nature, your own aliveness, is done by being more than mindful of it. We have to be really intimate with it, as we say in Zen.

When we study koans it's important to keep in mind what we are talking about. It's about you. Koans are just different aspects of you meeting yourself. So, in that sense it's not something that happened a thousand years ago. We take up the different positions of the koan, the different characters, and try them on for size. We become the koan and see it as different aspects of the self.

In this case, we have monk Hogen, and his teacher Jizo. They lived during the 9th to 10th centuries in China during the T'ang Dynasty. Hogen, who became quite a famous teacher, was on a pilgrimage. He was wandering from temple to temple. This is still done today. In Korean temples that I've visited there are formal training periods usually lasting for three months in which you sit and do zazen. Then you have 90 days when you can wander from temple to temple.

Hogen is you and me, and he's out wandering. I don't know about you, but I spend a lot of time wandering around in my mind. When I was younger I also spent a lot of time back in the late 1960s on my motorcycle, or hitching around the country, wandering on pilgrimages. I thought I would find some kind of great freedom doing that. It's so wonderfully naive. But it was quite touching when I reflect on it. I earnestly thought that if I bought a motorcycle, especially if it was a Triumph Bonneville, and I rode around the country -- just went aimlessly wherever I wanted to go -- that I would be wonderfully free. There's a certain loveliness in that naiveté. Needless-to-say, I didn't find freedom that way.

If you sit zazen, or practice any kind of meditation you also spend a lot of time wandering aimlessly. You sit down with the best intention to be present, to be aware of the rising and falling of the breath, or the sounds of the day, focusing on one word as we do in koan study, or reciting a mantra. This is a profoundly challenging, compelling practice. It's the most difficult thing to do in the world. Most of the time we're sitting quietly we're on a pilgrimage in the mind. That pilgrimage also is a kind of wandering, a kind of aimless wandering marked by identification with ongoing thoughts and feelings, reflections and memories. There you are. Sitting there -- like sitting in a train station. Some trains pass through and it's no big deal. But others pass with old friends on board. They wave. And before you know it, you're on the train. And before you know it, you're off the train. Then you're into the hinterlands, traveling, traveling. And if this is during formal practice, the bell rings. And you go, "Where was I before I was so rudely awakened, interrupted by this present moment?" Just as it would be silly to think that back in my wonderful bohemian and hippie days I was free wandering around the countryside, it would be silly to think

that you were free wandering about your own mind in your zazen practice. Yet it's such a compelling habit. And we all do it. What Is This Wandering?

So, I think we can appreciate Hogen when Jizo asked, "Where have you been?" And he answered, "I am wandering."

"What is the purpose of your wandering?" Hogen said, "I don't know."

Since we're trying this on for size, we might ask, "What is the purpose of my wandering in my life, this wandering about?" Or, we could ask essentially the same question in this way: "What is the purpose of my life?" Or, "Do I have one?" Or, "Do I know what it is that's most important to me?" Or, "Do I know what I'd die for? What it is that's most important or vital or alive or true for me that I would happily give up my life for it?" Maybe that's a little dramatic. But for those of us who have been parents and have raised children, there's probably no doubt that we would, in a heartbeat, give up our lives for our children. There would be no doubt. You can see now that this is not a story, not a koan, about some other time.

It's a story about the self and the self manifests in wonderful ways. Self nature manifests itself in the aliveness of the moment. It manifests itself as rocks and trees, as plants and automobiles, as friends and squirrels and fish, as one thing after another. Buddha said it most wonderfully when he attained enlightenment. He said, "How fantastic. How wonderful. How miraculous. One by one, each thing has it. One by one, each thing is perfectly complete."

Koan study is to testify to this. It is complete in that it couldn't be any other way.

Hogen was a young monk who, with some friends, was on a pilgrimage. We, too, are on a pilgrimage. It's called 'this life.' We are moving through this life, or wandering through this life. There are times in this life when something quickens us, something calls us to remember. Something arouses and the way seeking mind quickens the spirit, enlivens us. Hogen is you and me. And he is going through his life. Each one of us have moments in life -- moments of spark or resonance or synapse with something. And that something calls you back to yourself and quickens you and arouses you. And in that moment it's lost, usually, for most of us very quickly. We catch something of great beauty and great importance and great meaning. When I say "meaning," I don't mean meaning as in something to think about. But rather meaning, or truth ... because there isn't anything else. That is, when we say "true, not false," we don't mean true as opposed to false. We mean true because there is nothing else happening.

That might be so here, in Hogen's meeting with this teacher. Of course, the teacher is not necessarily a person. The teacher, and the teaching, is our life. Reflect on a time when you were quickened or enlivened by something someone said to you, when it penetrated the carapace of self. It didn't bounce off, Ping!, like a stone on a frozen pond. But it went Zzzip! and penetrated your armor and found its way through the chink. Or, it might be a sound of a bird. It might be some beautiful music. It might be anything at all. In Zen, we say this is a turning word. Perhaps a friend says something to you, and you actually listen. I don't mean listen in the ordinary sense. But you catch what is being said, there is some synapse. In that moment, you are quickened. There is some kind of innate fulfillment and enlivening. You remember something. You don't

remember something in thought. Yet you remember who you are in the deepest sense. You remember, and you catch it, and you nod quietly to yourself, and you smile. Or perhaps a tear comes to your eye. You are quickened. And even though you don't know how to give words to it, it is true, absolutely true. And you are awakened for a moment or two.

So this is the situation with Hogen: He is on a pilgrimage with his friends and they are wandering in China, visiting temples, and a storm is brewing. They come to a temple to seek shelter. And they have an encounter with the head monk, Jizo. Jizo actually is interesting. In the Buddhist tradition, Jizo is the Bodhisattva of transition. So the plot thickens: transitional space. Jizo is the capacity that we have to be with ourselves or others when we are betwixt and between. That is his name, Jizo. Jizo is the Bodhisattva of the bardo. A "bardo" opens when your former life has dissolved and you haven't yet entered into your new life yet. You're neither here nor there. You're neither sixes nor sevens. You're betwixt and between. You're in that groundless space of not knowing -- right where you most dislike to be. But there you are. Jizo is the capacity to bear and to be with ourselves in those places of transition, where we are in a place of not knowing, or a space of neither coming nor going.

I think most of the time for most of us those spaces of transition -- unless we are remarkably well trained and even then it is a great challenge -- are places that we try to avoid as best we can. When we find ourselves in those spaces of groundlessness, of pure possibility, of really not knowing, the mind says, 'This is what is wrong with you -- and if you stay here nothing good will become of you.' Jizo is the capacity we have to bear this not-knowing, the bardo, the 'in between,' whether we take it quite literally as what happens to us at the end of this life and the beginning of the next, or whether we take it more metaphorically.

That's the kind of Zen that I'm most attracted to. It is not a religious Zen, but the Zen of the moment. There are all kinds of bardo places of 'not knowing.' In the morning, just before you get dressed in between sleep and waking, there is a space of not knowing. You go to the bathroom to seek relief from the hubbub of it all and hide out for a little while, and then you come back to work or to your family life -- there is that space, or bardo. That place of not-knowing, which was Jizo's name, is in the Buddhist tradition revered as a place of pure possibility, a place where if you are able to bear and not take the first incarnation that comes along you might learn something new. In other words, if you come back from the bardo -- that is, from a vacation, or a trip to the bathroom (you can fill it in anyway you like) -- there is this groundless place, the possibility to take a new rebirth, to be a different person in your life. This is the setting of the koan.

Jizo and Hogen have an encounter. Jizo says, "Where have you been? What's it all about Alfie? Where have you been wandering?" Hogen says, "I don't know." There are so many kinds of not-knowing out there. We could say, "Well gee, he's a monk. He's been practicing all those years. How could he be such a dummy and not know what his pilgrimage is about or where he is going?" That might be one kind of not-knowing. We don't know, and we don't have to know, where Hogen was when he said, "I don't know." But it is a place of great exploration if you're willing to explore those places in your own heart, when you don't know.

I remember when I was a kid in school if I said, "I don't know," it was real trouble most of the time. I either hadn't done my homework, or I was stupid, or I was spaced out, or I was unthoughtful, or I was dreaming, or something. It wasn't a place of great possibility in my educational life, I would say. I went to these very fancy boy's boarding schools and Ivy League schools. The place of 'not knowing,' or the place of silence, or the place of that kind of immense possibility, reverence and openness was not exactly revered. As a matter of fact, I was trained to think that I would be happier the more that I knew. The more I studied and the more I knew -- that would make me happy. If it didn't, then I needed to study more in whatever field it was. So, I set off on that road in boy's boarding school. And I thought if I knew more and more and more then I'd get into an Ivy League school. Then, when I went to the Ivy League school, if I studied and learned more and more and more, and more and more and more, and more and more ... the more that I learned the happier I'd get. And if I really wanted to be happy I'd go to graduate school, which I did -- I studied anthropology and religion and read about monks who sit to empty their minds -- I'd know more and more, and more and more, and more and more, and more. So, there would only be like a little tiny little flicker of 'not knowing,' like something running by a window at high speed. It went by. It must have been something but I don't know what it was. Something is going on but you don't know what it is, do you Mr. Jones?

There are many kinds of 'not knowing,' and many kinds of silence, aren't there? There are all kinds of silence. You see what we are exploring now. So many people are uncomfortable with silence aren't they? It's an embarrassment. You know, you go to a party, or you go to meet new friends, or you go to a something or other and there's that kind of awkward silence where everyone is standing around and that kind of dis-ease in the silence? It's interesting isn't it? You see now when we have moments of remembering, when we return to essential nature which is not knowing, which is clear like space and vast and able to reflect what comes in front of it without thinking, the whole thing's upside down isn't it?

If you think about it in terms of fulfillment in your life, when you have been most fulfilled, chances are it's when you have completely forgotten yourself in the activity of just doing something. In a sense you don't even know what you are doing, but you are doing it and a moment later you realize, "Oh my goodness." And a tear comes to your eye. I mean it's like kissing your wife or your girlfriend or your boyfriend. If you're doing the crossword puzzle when you kiss them, it's not going to be a great kiss is it? It might be a kiss filled with knowing but ...

So, Hogen is asked, "Where are you on your pilgrimage?"

He said, "No knowing." Or, "I don't know." There doesn't have to be one meaning to this. There can be myriad ways of appreciating "not knowing" or appreciating different kinds of silence.

When I started sitting here, as you guys were first coming in, there was a wonderful "not knowing" silence in the room. A soft, open, spaciousness that could receive what came into it without judgment, or fear, and that could let go of whatever passed out of it without clinging. In the midst of that silence, in the midst of that spaciousness of mind, when the song Jailhouse Rock arose from somewhere outside and I was sitting here in zazen listening, there was some deep meaning to "Jailhouse Rock." You say, "Damn! Jailhouse Rock! Yeah!" And it's not something that you know cognitively through thinking about it, but it touches you. It 'synapses' with you and you 'don't know' the Jailhouse Rock. When you really 'don't know' in the deepest,

or most receptive, or silent, or open heart of "not knowing" of the Jailhouse Rock the song has meaning. It has great meaning. And it's extremely touching for each one of us. Not that we necessarily like the music.

Or, you go home when you have been away for a long time and you walk in the door, and your mother's been cooking chocolate chip cookies, right? You don't know what it will be like when you get back but you smell chocolate chip cookies when you come in ... Sniff-sniff! You 'don't know' the smell, but in 'not knowing' the smell you're most intimate with it, because there is nothing between you and the smell. Yes? You walk in and you smell those chocolate chip cookies, and those chocolate chip cookies have meaning. The smell is evocative. Each time you've had chocolate chip cookies over your entire life appears in that one moment of smell ... Sniff! And within that moment of smell of the 'not knowing,' or the intimacy of that smelling, you know about chocolate chip cookies. And you can't, say, make a list of how you know. But, you know. You are quickened. You are awakened. You manifest, or realize, one true nature in the smell of chocolate chip cookies.

So how do you realize one true nature, the koan, if we frame it this way? How do you manifest one true nature of the smell of chocolate chip cookies, right? It's quite obvious, isn't it? I mean, this is a no-brainer huh? Sniff! And there it is! Sniff! Or, there it is! The Jailhouse Rock!

So, Jizo's asking: "Where have you been?" And Hogen's answering: "I don't know."

There are so many, many, many kinds of 'not knowing.' And so many, many kinds of silence: rich and different kinds of silence. There's hidden silence, where we're hiding out in silence, trying to avoid. There's fathomless, timeless silence, in which we're in a space of no coming or going, and there is nothing to understand, there is no place to go, nothing to figure out. We've done what needs to be done, because we're home. You're home. There's that kind of silence. And we taste that. And there's that kind of 'not knowing.'

And there are varying degrees and shades of 'not knowing,' from doubt, and skepticism, and cynicism, and negativity (which is kind of the ego's way of 'not knowing' or not trusting 'not knowing') to deep and rich silence.

Now, we don't know where Hogen was, but it was a wonderful presentation, his "I don't know." If you were there at the time and someone said "I don't know" and they said it truthfully, you'd catch something about them. You would know something about them. It wouldn't be a knowing that would lead you to say, "Well clearly, the man's mother was a bit of an overbearing bitch, and I'd say that his father would. ..." Not that. It's a different kind of knowing. You see immediately the genuineness of the person, the authenticity of the person. You see them, and they synapse, poof!

So, this is the beginning of the koan. What does the teacher say to this guy? He says, "Not knowing is most intimate."

"Not knowing is most intimate." What a remarkable thing to say, especially when you reflect on it from our culture. In other words, what's being talked about here is the nature of intimacy --

with anything. And I think it's fair to say that in human relationships it's the one thing that each one of us longs for more than anything else in the world, if we are really honest. It's to be intimate with someone. To love and to be loved. And to know and to be known. We think, 'What is it that makes that which we all long for so desperately possible?' Is it more knowledge? Is it more understanding? Is it more theory? Or, is it something else?

This is what we're interested in in Zen practice, in Dharma practice. What is it that allows us to cut the gap between the observer and that which is observed? It's clearly not some 'thing', is it? What is it that allows you to be 'close with?' Intimacy is often translated as "nearness." What allows you to be close with somebody? It's the absence of some "thing." And in the absence of some "thing" called I-am-this -- how am I? How was I? How will I be, there is the fullness of something else. That's what we are investigating in our Dharma practice and wishing for ourselves and each other, knowing and trusting that this is a practice.

And going deeper into the practice won't happen without practice. Someone came to Hogen and asked, "What is the principle of Zen practice?" And Hogen said "First, you must practice. And, second, you must practice. And, thirdly, you must practice some more."

So, thank you. It's been a pleasure. If you would like to stay and chat, feel free. I'm happy to stay and chat, answer questions, hear proclamations, complaints, thoughts, reflections, or none of the above.... Well then, as we're silent, I have a thought -- that each one of us investigate what kind of silence you're experiencing right now. Anything's okay. Just investigate it. Take a moment.... Of course, if there's a question, that's fine. But if there isn't one, investigate. What is it that's in your silence, what kind of silence?

Woman 1: Grateful silence. Gratitude.

Woman 2: If I may?

Master Bomun: Please!

Woman 2: When you throw that stone and it bounces off the ice and goes ping?

Speaker: Yeah?

Woman 2: The last time you threw a stone and it didn't bounce off the ice it went to the water and it sank in, and it's been with me ever since. Present moment, only moment."

MB: Oh. Yeah, yeah.

Woman 2: Calm. Release. Present moment. Only moment. As I worked with it, it morphed into releasing the past, allowing the future, living eternally in the present moment. And beyond that all I can say is, thank you.

Speaker: Oh, yeah. She's referring to a practice. We're starting a sesshin, or training period. We're going to sit in meditation for seven days, some of us are, or part of seven days. And we do a gatha walk. And the walk that she was talking about involves reciting and repeating on the footfalls, "Calm [step]. Release [step]. Present moment [step]. Only moment [step]." The intention is to find the meaning of calm in synchronizing body and mind in the repetition of the word. So, thank you.

Woman 3: What's the most challenging aspect of Zazen practice for you?

Speaker: Oh, boy! That's a wonderful question! It depends on what time of day you ask me, or when you ask me. Like, whether I've had my coffee or haven't had my coffee. Or, whether I've had a fight with someone, or whether I'm this, or that. But I'll tell you what's the most challenging for me. It's the emotional imperative -- when I meet the emotional imperative. The emotional imperative is the place where you think, "I can't! If I stay here, all is lost." I'll give you a relationship example. You have a really good fight with your significant other and you have that feeling, "If you say that one more time, I'm out of here." Right? Because, it's unbearable; it's unfair and it's unjust. And if you do it again, if you say it again ... it's that feeling. It brings up an imperative and the imperative is, "I'm right and you're wrong and I'm getting out of here." And the feeling of it is a burn, a kind of burn that feels like, "I should not be here and I must leave." I would say that's right at the heart of it. For Zazen on the cushion, or Zazen in life, when you're starting to stake your territory down and have that feeling of righteousness, of emotional imperative -- I would say that's one of the most challenging places to practice in, and also the most rewarding. Rewarding, because the mind says, "If you stay here and listen to this person any longer you're a fool. You're being duped and" ... whatever. You can fill in the blanks, right?

Woman 3: Yep.

MB: Yeah, yeah. So, the mind says, "Don't go into that aliveness, because it's a fire and you will not survive, or you'll be" ... whatever. Right? But the price of admission to go into that bright, burning aliveness is your opinion. The teaching in Zen, in koan study, is that if you are willing to sit upright in the midst of the aliveness of the moment, whatever it may be, you will find a place of great love and understanding. You will find to some degree, some kind of awakening. If you can do it without thinking about it, in the aliveness. But that place is where my deepest conditioning comes up. It says, "No way Jose." My first teacher was Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, I met him in 1968 when I started practicing. And he said a wonderful thing to me that I've always remembered. He said, "I've got some good news and I've got some bad news for you." He said, "The good news is what we're doing is the most wonderful thing and the difficult news is it's not going to get any better. So, your job as practitioners is to find perfect composure in the midst of the way it is. Period. Not to make it better." When you take some hot moments and you try to find perfect composure in the midst of those hot moments -- that's his definition of enlightenment, or awakening, or whatever we want to call fulfillment in human life. I thought, 'Wow! I've got a lot of work to do! I sure as hell don't have perfect composure in the heat of the moment.' But the intention and the direction of it was extremely lucid and clear and also the necessity for practice -- because our conditioning and our reactivity is stronger than our goodness when we get down to it. We sell out all the time to reactivity, to anger and delusion and greed and all of that. And we rationalize it and say, "Well, so and so said that..."

We're "pilgrimageing," but we're in the grip of the unconscious. When you get into it, you see the beauty of practice and the utter necessity of it, and that there is, as Dogen said, "No realization outside of practice and no practice outside of realization." And that's what I said when we all came in -- to the extent that we're willing to be present to whatever it is that's true for us, that's it. And it doesn't matter whether you've been sitting for one year or forty years or have no idea what's on. It's practice. And within the practice you find fulfillment and meaning. And the meaning is not outside of practice. And that's... Thank you guys. I'm starting to embarrass myself now, so... Thanks.

Woman 3: Thank you.

MB: Well, it's very touching that we're not leaving and we're here in this wonderful space, together. Couldn't ask for much more than that, could we?

May all beings be safe, May all beings be happy. May all beings be healthy and strong, and may all beings have ease of wellbeing. Thank you.